TOO BLACK FOR THE BLUES... TOO BLUE FOR THE BLACKS: AN EXPLORATION OF BLACK POLICE OFFICERS IN THE ERA OF BLACK LIVES MATTER

Kayla Preito-Hodge

University of Massachusetts Amherst

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TOO BLACK FOR THE BLUES...TOO BLUE FOR THE BLACKS:
AN EXPLORATION OF BLACK POLICE OFFICERS IN THE ERA OF BLACK LIVES MATTER

A Dissertation Presented

by

Kayla Preito-Hodge

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Department of Sociology
Too Black for the Blues…Too Blue for the Blacks: 
AN EXPLORATION OF BLACK POLICE OFFICERS IN THE ERA OF BLACK LIVES MATTER

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By

KAYLA PREITO-HODGE

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DEDICATION

To my Nephew “Ace.”
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This dissertation could not have been completed without the support of my family. Thanks Mom, for letting me turn your kitchen into my office, and for cooking for me day in and day out. Thanks to my eldest nephew “Ace” for being my constant motivation. Thank you: To my Bootayah. To my Jaysie. To my Henny. Naji. Aunt Selma. To my sisters: Mari. Markhira. Marqietta and brothers: Lief. Vel. Kell. Khalil. To my sister friend Kelly Giles. To my Celeste. Ava. To Granny. Unk. Bread. Thank you Christopher for pushing me. To Ryan. Khiry. To those who spent countless days and nights with me in the library. To those who reminded me to eat and take breaks. To those who constantly reminded me of who I was and who I was becoming. To those who have lost their lives at the hands of police violence. To those wrongfully incarcerated. To my participants. To Don, who believed in me and this project from the very start. Jon, Joya, and Tony, for constantly supporting me. Katie Young. Patricia, you pushed me those last few months. Andy. Brian. David. James and Ember for helping me with my NSF application. Rob Vargas and Professor McGuffey, for both serving as examples of who and where I wanted to be. The National Science Foundation. To the DuBois’s, Patricia Hill-Collins’s, and Ida B. Wells’s of the world. To the Black Panther. To the artists whose music kept me motivated and sane. To me for fighting through it all. And last but certainly not least. To my great-grandmother Marie, whose very essence has filled me with love, gratitude, intellect, and an unwavering appreciation for my people.
ABSTRACT

TOO BLACK FOR THE BLUES... TOO BLUE FOR THE BLACKS:
AN EXPLORATION OF BLACK POLICE OFFICERS IN THE ERA OF BLACK LIVES MATTER

SEPTEMBER 2020

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Directed by Professor Donald Tomaskovic-Devey

The 2012 murder of unarmed Black teen Trayvon Martin etched into the American conscience, the undeniable history of race and policing. While Martin was not in fact killed by police, the legitimation of neighborhood watch by law enforcement as well as law enforcements’ handling of the case from start to finish has been seen as emblematic of the lawfulness of state-sanctioned violence against Black bodies. Since Martin’s death, there have been countless other Black boys, girls, men, and women killed by police and civilian vigilantes alike. Waves of protest and civilian uprisings against the unjust practices of law enforcement and racialized police violence more specifically, have prompted widespread calls for revolutionary police reform. While some cities have responded by decreasing police budgets as well as disbanding local police forces, others have focused on more traditional reform efforts such as increasing racial diversity and community policing. The existing literature on police reform efforts yield mixed and inconsistent findings, especially as they relate to increasing racial diversity. In three interconnected papers, my dissertation tackles the issue of racial diversity in police forces. I draw on 48 qualitative in-depth interviews with Black police officers in a large urban
police department to explore the ways racial diversity may or may not be valuable in the quest for more equitable and less violent policing practices across races. First, I find that the inconsistencies in the existing literature may be explained by these studies lack of consideration of a more diverse Black experience. Second, I show that Black officers also vary in their responses to racialized police violence, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and the blue lives matter agenda. Utilizing DuBois’s conception of double consciousness and the veil, I find that all Black officers possess a double consciousness that enables them to see the world through both a Black racialized lens and blue organizational lens. Third, I draw on racialized organizational theory (Ray 2019), relational inequality theory (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019) and inequality regimes (Acker 2006) to reveal that police departments act as racial projects that perpetuate inequalities both internally and externally.
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PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

The 2012 murder of unarmed Black teen Trayvon Martin etched into the American conscience, the undeniable history of race and policing. While Martin was not in fact killed by police, the legitimation of neighborhood watch by law enforcement as well as law enforcements’ handling of the case from start to finish has been seen as emblematic of the lawfulness of state-sanctioned violence against Black bodies. Since Martin’s death, there have been countless other Black boys, girls, men, and women killed by police and civilian vigilantes alike. The overspill of almost a decade’s worth of anger and frustration has resulted in what some have coined as the American Spring. Waves of protest and civilian uprisings against the unjust practices of law enforcement and racialized police violence more specifically, have prompted widespread calls for revolutionary police reform. While some cities have responded by decreasing police budgets as well as disbanding local police forces, others have focused on more traditional reform efforts such as increasing racial diversity and community policing.

While the impacts of more radical calls for change such as police abolition and defunding have not been documented in the social science literature, it is clear that traditional reform efforts (e.g. racial diversity, community policing, professionalism), as evidenced by the persistence of racialized police violence, have not worked. The existing literature on police reform efforts, yield mixed and inconsistent findings, especially as they relate to increasing racial diversity.

In this dissertation, I take on the issue of racial diversity in police forces. More specifically, I explore the experiences of 48 Black police officers in a large metropolitan
police department (henceforth: The Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) to better understand how and why racial diversity may or may not be valuable in the quest for more equitable policing practices across races.

Chapter 1 offers a glimpse into the policing experiences of Black police officers in an attempt to disentangle the mess of existing literature. Findings show that Black officers’ responses to racialized policing practices, are influenced by situational and contextual factors, as well as these officers’ views and valuation of their Black racial identity. More specifically, I find that the presence of white officers, the race of the command structure, age, and citizen threats of violence, among many other factors, influence the way officers respond to police violence more generally, and racialized police violence in particular. Based on these findings, I developed a theoretical model called the Black and blue typology that helps group Black officers into three categories: racially conservative, racially neutral, and racial justice oriented. I also utilize the conceptions of Active versus Passive representation, drawn from the theory of a representative bureaucracy, to help identify when and how officers respond to their competing identities.

Chapter 2 explores Black police officers’ perceptions of the Black Lives Matter movement and the blue lives matter agenda. I utilize DuBois’s conception of double consciousness and the veil to further understand the implications of policy recommendations that aim to increase officer racial diversity. I maintain that racial diversity is undoubtedly a key feature in creating a more demographically representative organization, however racial diversity alone may not alter the patterns of police violence due to officer adherence to the underlying police culture. Findings reveal that all Black
officers possess a double consciousness. This double consciousness allowed officers to see the world through both a racial and organizational lens. Double consciousness, in this sense, acts as a protective mechanism for officers whose authority and legitimacy in the community are challenged by claims put forth by the Black Lives Matter movement. Officers defensiveness of their police identity as well as justification for violent police practices often relied on a competitive victimhood narrative that draws on intra-racial community violence to justify police behavior. I find that officers support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement was a result of their understandings of the mission of the organization and their acknowledgement of the prevalence of violent policing in the Black community.

Finally, Chapter 3 explores the ways racial inequalities are maintained and reproduced in the police department. I offer an empirical account of the ways anti-Black racism are embedded within the organizational and cultural norms of the police department. I draw on contemporary theories of organizational inequalities, namely Relational Inequality Theory (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019), Racialized Organizational Theory (Ray 2019), and Inequality Regimes (Acker 2006), to explore the organizational dimensions that maintain racial hostility among officers as well as the traditional “good old boys” network. Findings show that Black officers are subject to continuous organizational rituals that distinguish them from white officers. These racial distinctions uphold a racial project both within the department and in the community, that leads to the further marginalization of Black bodies regardless of organizational affiliation. This racial project is maintained through five organizational practices: recruitment and hiring, promotions, neighborhood and case assignments, officer
complaints of racism, and organizational responses to internal review board decisions regarding accusations of racial discrimination.

The final chapter outlines policy implications for each empirical chapter and provides historical context to traditional approaches of police reform in three notable police departments: Philadelphia, Chicago, and Ferguson, MO. I find that recent as well as historical reform efforts established in these departments by federal consent decrees have largely failed due to departments’ non-compliance with change. I also highlight the mayors of these cities' responses to the current state of American policing in the wake of the deaths of Ahmaud Aubrey, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. I end with a call for reform that echoes sentiments put forth by police abolitionists. More specifically, I call for reform efforts that would require officers to be accountable to the community they police instead of the department and the city government. I also call on measures that would hold both police and legislators accountable for the proposal and enforcement of laws that disproportionately impact communities of color.
CHAPTER 1

A SEAT AT THE TABLE

Introduction

Blacks sell drugs and involve themselves in criminal behavior instead of a more socially acceptable lifestyle because they’re uneducated, they’re lazy, and they’re morally bankrupt.--Former Black Milwaukie Sherriff, David Clarke

In the wake of officer-involved homicides of unarmed Black citizens Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, the United States has confronted, yet again, the issue of race and policing. Their deaths mark a long history of racial violence by local police forces and add to long list of unarmed Black civilians killed by police within the past five years. Both deaths caught widespread attention and resulted in international protests and massive civilian unrest in cities such as Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Louisville, and New York—to name a few. While the impact of civilian unrest is still unfolding, political leaders across the country have called for sweeping police reform. For example, in Los Angeles, Mayor Garcetti vowed to make a $150 million cut to police budgets days after citywide rioting. In Pennsylvania, Governor Wolf introduced reforms that would implement a number of oversight boards and committees in addition to reviewing officer education and training.

Other leaders have called on changing police departments from the inside out. These calls have focused on, among other things, hiring practices, racial diversity, and implicit bias in departments (see Keating and Uhrmacher 2020). Officer racial diversity is an age old, and probably the most popular solution used to address the issues of racialized police violence and police legitimacy. Claims of racial diversity as a means to decrease racialized police violence rely, at least partly, on the assumption that Black officers will
act as purposeful and responsible representatives of the Black community in pursuit of Black American group interests. The veracity of these claims is often derided by Black conservatives who spew identical rhetoric as White right-wing politicians. For example, former Black American Milwaukie Sherriff David Clarke’s claim to fame was accompanied by his avid support for Donald Trump, his denunciation of the Black community and community policing, and his proclamation that “Black Lives Matter.” While Clarke is not alone in his provocations, his positionality highlights a rather important empirical dilemma of intra-group variability among Black law enforcement officers specifically, and studies on the Black community more broadly. The conflation of the Black racial identity as one, specifically among Black police officers, has ultimately led to a hodgepodge literature filled with mixed and inconsistent findings (Legewie and Fagan, 2016; Nicholson-Crotty, Nicholson-Crotty & Fernandez, 2018). Admonitions to increase officer racial diversity tend to assume monolithic racialized experiences, and thus focus primarily on the compositional or visual representations of race within organizations (Ray, 2019; Hurtado, Alvarado, & Guillermo-Wann, 2015; Berrey, 2015) rather than the institutional and cultural barriers that generate these racially hostile environments. Racial diversity claims, in this sense, take for granted the actual experiences of Black police officers, including both the impact of the Black racial identity, intersectionality, and Blue organizational expectations on police behaviors.

This study examines how officers racial and organizational identities impact reported policing strategies and deployment, interactions with Black civilians, community relations and outlook, comradery within the department, and overall representation. I develop the Black & Blue typology to account for the identity and
contextual variation that influence Black officers’ reported behaviors and interactions with civilians and colleagues. The Black & Blue typology is also grounded in and inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois’ conception of Double Consciousness and The Veil among Black Americans (Du Bois, 1903). Additionally, I draw from the racial identity, social identity, and organizational identity literatures to anchor my theoretical contributions.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with Black police officers of a Metropolitan Police Department, a large urban police force located in a hyper-segregated community, I find that Black police officers routinely report experiencing an inherent conflict in the demands of the police organization and their status and positionings as Black men and women. More specifically, I find that Black officer substantive representation was often influenced by the relational context (i.e. if White officers or White supervisors were present) and the situation (i.e. whether or not there were imminent threats posed to officers). Ultimately, this study interrogates common conceptions of “the Black experience” (Kelley, 2001; Unnever & Gabbidon, 2011), bringing a more nuanced racial analytical tool grounded in DuBoisian thought to the study of Black Police officers (see also Dukes, 2018). This research also makes contributions to the larger study of race by highlighting how situational and contextual factors interact with race and other demographic characteristics (i.e. gender, sexuality, and class) to influence behavior. Findings from this study have implications for police departments hiring and screening policies, organizational racial accountability structures, and future empirical studies on Black law enforcement. Ultimately, I call for a more thorough interrogation of the structure and culture of policing as well as the political, economic, and leadership factors that generate, or at least, tolerate, racialized and violent policing practices.
Blacks in Policing

Historically, the representation of Blacks in policing was dependent upon Black officers’ willingness and ability to control crime and the Black population in segregated communities (Alex, 1969; Dulaney, 1996). Police violence and the subsequent Race Riots of the 1960s in major metropolitans such as Detroit, Harlem, and Philadelphia threatened the political stability of the country as well as the police rule in many Black urban settings. With the state’s inability to contain Black civil disorder, martial law was ordered by President Lyndon B. Johnson, crippling Black Americans efforts to resist police violence.

In 1967, President Johnson’s administration produced The Challenge of Crime in a Free Society Report which detailed, among other things, police-community relations and police legitimacy. According to the report, public attitudes towards the police and law were being shaped by police behavior. In other words, police legitimacy was dependent upon the way’s officers interacted with community members. However, in various sections of the report, the administration failed to hold police departments accountable for the police violence enacted on African-American communities and the riots that later ensued, instead asserting that riots were “spontaneous outbursts, set off more often than not by some quite ordinary and proper action by a policeman” (p.37). The normalization of racialized police violence in this report is mirrored in the current state of policing in the United States and the utter disregard for Black life by many police officials and civilian vigilantes.

In the 1960s, police and public administrators came to see the recruitment of Black police officers as fundamental to the maintenance of social control in African
American communities. According to Alex (1969), "The recruitment of Negroes into the department is not simply opening up jobs to all members of the community, but also a political necessity for pacifying the negro community and winning the support of its members” (p.27). As such, consent decrees or legal agreements between the federal Department of Justice and local police forces were implemented during the 60s and 70s throughout the country to increase the representation of Blacks in policing and Black civilian’s perceptions of police legitimacy.

Even with the implementation of consent decrees forcing departments to racially integrate, the overall representation of Black officers in local police departments in the United States has remained stagnant at about 12% throughout the late 20th and 21st centuries (i.e. 1997-2013), with great variation in the distribution of Black officers in individual cities (Kennedy et al. 2017; Reaves, 2015). In light of the murder of unarmed Black teen, Michael Brown, by a White police officer in Ferguson, MO, and the subsequent rise of the Movement for Black Lives, there has been yet another push to increase officer racial diversity in departments across the country. In 2015, President Barack Obama established the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, which sought to address the issue of police legitimacy and crime reduction in communities of color. Similar to the Johnson Report, the Task Force’s final report lacked a serious critical perspective on racialized police violence specifically and police violence more generally. The historical continuity between these two documents and their emphasis on police legitimacy and community-police relations, ultimately reinforces the efficacy and legitimacy of state-imposed violence, especially in communities of color. Empirical studies on the relationship between officer race and police legitimacy have found that
Black civilians view minority officers more favorably and objectively when stopped (Cochran & Warren, 2012). However, studies on the impact of officer race on police violence have yielded mixed and inconsistent findings (Legewie & Fagan, 2016; Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2018).

**Determinants of Police Behavior**

Scholars have offered up several explanations linking police behaviors, attitudes, and misconduct to officer demographic characteristics and larger organizational determinants.

**Racial Explanations**

Advocates for increasing racial diversity among police have held that Black officers respond to Black citizens in more positive and affirmative ways because of their shared racial and cultural backgrounds, which presumably enables these officers to respond accordingly to the needs, wants, and expectations of Black civilians (Dodge & Pogrebin, 2001; Lasley, Larson & Brown, 2011; Pogrebin, Dodge & Chatman, 2000; Sun & Payne, 2004). Gau and Paoline (2017) find that Black and Latino officers held more expansive views of their role orientations, viewed citizens more favorably, and were more likely to believe that citizens in marginalized communities deserved quality police services, compared to their White officer counterparts. Similarly, larger studies on race and the criminal justice system have found that the presence of Black criminal justice officials disrupts racially disparate outcomes in the criminal justice system (Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2017; King, Johnson & McGeever, 2010; Legewie & Fagan, 2016; Boyd 2016). For example, King et al.,(2010) find that Black-White sentencing disparities were attenuated as the presence of Black lawyers in the county studied increased. Relatedly,
Legewie and Fagan (2016) find that increasing Black police officers in a department mitigates Black racial group threat, indicating that group threat is an important driver for officer-involved homicides and community-police relations.

Findings from LeCount’s (2017) study, reveal that Black officers shared similar racially liberal views as Black civilians, while White officers scored more racially conservative than White civilians. These findings suggest that the effect of police culture on Black officers, at least on racial attitudes, may be distinct from that of White officers. Another interpretation of these findings suggest that racial integration may, at the very least, encourage Black officers to police in more racially conscious ways than their White officer counterparts. Research has also found that Black police officers experience racism in similar ways as their Black civilian counterparts (Paul & Birzer, 2017; Wilson & Wilson, 2014; Barlow & Barlow, 2002; Sklansky 2005; Bolton & Feagin, 2004; Wilson, Wilson & Thou, 2015), providing further support for LeCount’s (2017) findings.

Bolton and Feagin (2004) provide the most recent comprehensive study on Black officers racialized experiences in police departments. Drawing on the narratives of 50 law enforcement officers from 16 Southern law enforcement agencies, Bolton and Feagin provide an illustrious depiction of the depth of institutional and organizational racism. Findings reveal that Black officers not only experience racism from their White officer counterparts, but that their legitimacy as authority figures within the community is often called into question by White civilians. Further findings reveal that Black officers face organizational barriers that limit opportunities for career advancement and job mobility.

Relatedly, Dukes (2018) argues that Black police officer’s experience a double consciousness, resulting in the formation of various psychological and behavioral
adaptation strategies (i.e. ritual, retreat, rebellion) to the police occupational culture. Findings reveal that these strategies helped many Black officers disassociate themselves from their fellow Blue brothers as well as the organization in its entirety in response to racially marginalizing policing practices (Dukes 2018). Wolfe and Piquero (2011) find that racial and ethnic-minority officers in the Philadelphia Police Department held weaker adherence to the “code-of-silence” than White officers and were 93% more likely to have only one versus two or more complaints filed against them when compared to White officers. Additionally, scholars, policymakers, police administrators, and political pundits have suggested that interactions between officer race and citizen race, influence citizen perceptions of legitimacy and cooperation with the police (Cochran & Warren, 2012; Haider-Markel & Joslyn, 2017; Legewie and Fagan, 2016; Riccucci, Van Ryzin & Lavena, 2014; Sklansky 2005; Theobald & Haider-Markel, 2009).

Others have found that officer race has little or no impact on decreasing police use of force (Menifield, Shin & Strother, 2019; Nicholson-Crotty et al., 2017). For example, Menifield et al., (2019) find that Black and Latino suspects are killed at similar rates by nonwhite and White officers. Other scholars have found Black officers to be more coercive and less sensitive to the needs of African Americans (Alex, 1969; Brown & Frank, 2006; Leinen, 1985; Palmer, 1973; Sun & Payne, 2004; Wilkins & Williams, 2008).

Accordingly, Sharp (2014) finds that Black officer representation does not mitigate the rate at which Black civilians are arrested for non-violent “order-maintenance” offenses, although Black political representation in cities does. These findings may ultimately suggest that in cities dominated by White political
representatives, incentives—or the lack thereof—from the top down, may compel Black officers to more strongly adhere to their occupational “Blue” identities. Correspondingly, scholars have found that city officials’ (i.e. mayors, police leaders) race directly influences racial hiring practices, patterns, and overall representation in local police departments (Kennedy et al. 2017; Willow & Cohen, 2017; Zhao & Lovrich, 1998). Thus, the racial composition of city and police elites may be more important than the racial composition of the rank and file of police officers.

Together, these findings suggest officer race alone may not alter patterns of violent policing. To this end, I argue that the intersectional experiences (e.g. race, class, gender, sexuality) of Black police officers as well as larger organizational factors such as leadership, culture, and organizational accountability structures must also be considered in the conversation of diminishing violent policing.

The Organization and Other Determinants

Organizational scholars have maintained that individual actors do not exist independent of the relationships in which they are embedded (Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019; Armacost, 2003). Organizational explanations of police behavior locate police misconduct and discretion as byproducts of the police organizational culture and department administration. A number of organizational determinants have been found to influence officer behavior including the size of the organization (Eitle, D’Alessio & Stolzenberg, 2014), leadership (Jacobs, Christe-Zeyse, Keegan & Polos, 2008), the departments policing style (Chappell, MacDonald & Manz, 2006), and the organizational culture (Ingram, Terrill & Paoline, 2018; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011), among many other factors. By examining police misconduct as a byproduct of the “Blue”
organizational culture, scholars have captured the larger organizational factors (e.g. leadership, department policies) that ultimately influence police behavior instead of the individual characteristics that are said to shape the “bad apple.” For the purpose of this analysis, Blue police culture is defined as the languages, behaviors, and perspectives that unite police regardless of race. This culture is typically regarded by scholars as being guided by a warrior-like mentality (Sierra-Arévalo, 2019) that is overwhelming insular, racist, sexist, and homophobic (Moskos, 2008a; Moskos, 2008b).

Organizational theorists often regard behaviors and decision-making within organizations as a function of the hierarchal relationships that exist among social actors (Schein, 1985; Armacost, 2003; Ray, Ortiz & Nash 2018; Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019;). According to Schein (1985, pg 361), “organizational cultures are created in part by leaders, and one of the most decisive functions of leadership is the creation, the management, and sometimes even the destruction of culture.” As such, Terrill, Paoline, and Manning (2003), find that the style of policing promoted by top management ultimately influences the number of use of force incidents in departments. Further, findings reveal that police behavior (i.e. coercion) is also a byproduct of individual officers’ beliefs and commitment to the traditional blue culture. Specifically, the authors find that, officers who were more apt to identify with traditional blue values were more likely to engage in force than officers who did not. Ultimately, these findings point to larger organizational cultural explanations for individual officer behaviors; namely, the legitimation and existence of an organizational culture that prizes aggressive policing. Similarly, Wolfe and Piquero (2011) find that officers’ perceptions of organizational justice are strong predictors of officer code of silence attitudes. More specifically,
findings reveal that increases in perceptions of organizational justice led to lower levels of engagement in officer misconduct. Further findings reveal that peer to peer association also informs police misconduct (see also Ouellet, Hashimi, Gravel & Papachristos, 2019). Existing literature also documents the connections between officer use of force, police unions (Alpert & Macdonald 2001) and internal affairs units (Eitle et al. 2014). Together these findings suggest that larger organizational accountability structures may permit and indeed encourage officers to behave in ways that are racially biased, overly aggressive, and outright violent.

Acker (2006), introduces the theoretical concept of inequality regimes as “loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within a particular organization” (p. 443). As inequality regimes, police departments across the country reproduce inequities in the treatment of both Black citizens and Black officers. Schuck and Rabe-Hemp (2017), find that greater intersectional inequality (i.e. race, class, and gender) was associated with higher order maintenance arrests of Black citizens. If police administrators and politicians are truly committed to hiring and retaining more Black officers, serious attention must be paid to the racial inequalities that exists within the organization of policing. The question then becomes, how serious and committed are particular police organizations at addressing the issues of police legitimacy and racialized police violence? And, are departments willing to make the cultural sacrifices necessary to foster more equitable treatment of both Black citizens and Black officers? It is imperative for departments and policy makers to be intentional in creating measures to increase racial accountability among White officers,
so that the responsibility of equitable police conduct in Black communities is not left solely on Black police officers.

Racialized police violence, police legitimacy, and police violence in general are conjoined issues that cannot and should not be viewed as separate agendas. The Black community’s support for police departments and government across the country is contingent on state and local police departments responses to state-sponsored violence campaigns that target Black communities across the nation (Drakulich, Wozniak, Hagan & Johnson 2020). The need for more Black police officers, especially in larger Black urban settings, is clear. Questions surrounding Black officers, police legitimacy, and racialized police violence should then focus on measures of both officer voice and accountability within the organization. In order to address these issues, however, police departments and policy makers must first focus attention on mending the historical and contemporary legacies of systemic and institutionalized forms of racism within police departments.

In addition to organizational determinants, scholars have found that the behaviors of criminal justice officials are largely shaped by situational and contextual factors (Clair & Winter, 2016; Sun, Payne & Wu, 2008; Worden & Shepard, 1996). For example, Clair and Winter (2016) find that judges strategies for dealing with racial disparities were largely influenced by judges’ general understandings of racial disparities as well as what they believed appropriate conduct in particular situations. Similarly, Sun et al. (2008) find that situational factors were strong indicators for police officer coercive behaviors.

While scholarship has documented the impact of officer race and police culture on various policing outcomes, there have been very few recent comprehensive empirical
studies on the thoughts and experiences of Black law enforcement (for most recent, see Bolton & Feagin, 2004). With growing concerns around racialized police violence and policy proposals pushing for hiring a more representative police force as a means to decrease racialized police violence and increase police legitimacy, the perspectives of Black police officers are paramount. The current study investigates how Black police officers come to understand themselves in relation to their roles and responsibilities in a predominantly White police department with a strong history of racialized police violence. My primary objective is to understand how Black police officers’ racial identities and other police organizational factors influence the ways officers understand racialized police violence, the Black community, and the police department.

My analysis moves from an abstracted view of Black police officers as change agents to a situational and context specific view that accounts for racial identity variation and situational determinants for Black officers’ reported behavioral and decision-making patterns. My findings lay the groundwork for the Black and Blue typology (BBT) which elaborates the contextual and situational constraints Black officers face in their daily interactions. The BBT ultimately enhances explanations of officer racial diversity and necessitates a larger racialized organizational (Ray, Nash & Ortiz 2018; Ray 2019) critique to address the issue of racial discrimination in policing.

**Research Design**

My data consists of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Black police officers in what I refer to as “the Metropolitan Police Department.” The interviews are a part of a larger project on the experiences of Black police officers and the data for this analysis were collected between June 2016 and December 2017.
The Metropolitan Police Department

The Metropolitan Police Department ("MPD") is a large police force located in a hyper-segregated Black community undergoing gentrification. Demographically, the city serves a majority racial/ethnic population (>60%), with Blacks making up approximately 40% of the total population. The city is among the national leaders in poverty, unemployment, crime, and incarceration rates.

Multiple federally mandated consent decrees to increase the department’s racial diversity have been issued to the MPD, and recent departmental recruitment efforts have turned attention specifically to hiring officers from more “diverse” backgrounds. However, the department has remained predominantly White and male, with all officers of color, and Black officers in particular, making up approximately 40% and 30% of the department, respectively. Nonetheless, several of the executive leadership positions are currently held by both Blacks and women.

I chose the MPD as a site of study for several important reasons. First, the MPD is located in a large democratic urban city with a sizeable Black population. Using Samuel Walker’s (1992) Equal Employment Opportunity Index to measure racial diversity compliance efforts in police departments, the MPD scored a .7 out of 1.0 in terms of racial representativeness. Additionally, the MPD has maintained a reputation for scandal, fraud, and overt forms of racism. In 2017 alone, the department racked up close to $10 million in payouts for civil cases involving excessive force and racial profiling. The department has seen major decreases (-60%) in the number of officer-involved shootings and homicides between 2007 and 2015, but was involved in a number of high-profile officer-involved homicides shortly before and throughout the duration of this
study. In fact, between 2016 and 2019 the department was involved in over 40 officer involved-shootings and homicides, and between the years 2007 and 2019 the department was involved in well over 400 officer involved-shootings and homicides. The overwhelming majority of the victims were Black (80%), male, and the average age of suspects was 20. Although the department isn’t racially representative of the city’s population, some of the highest-ranking commanders are Black (i.e. Chief, Deputies). Despite Black leadership, there have been a number of Internal Affairs investigations for overt forms of racism in the department, and a number of officers in this study reported routinely encountering racism from their colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates.\[2\]

Finally, the department was recently hit with additional consent decrees for evidence of racial profiling and was recently subject to a Department of Justice investigation for the excessive use of deadly force.

**Interviews**

This article draws on 48 interviews with Black police officers. All officers identified as native born African American. I employed a respondent-driven sampling technique to diversify my sample and recruit participants from various precincts and divisions across the city. I recruited officers by calling, texting, and/or approaching officers at community events. My initial contact was a retired police officer who served more than 20 years on the force. This officer provided the contact information for several other police officers, including the president of the local Black police association, who provided assistance with the recruitment of other Black officers. Through the connections made, I was also invited to various community events put on by the association, where I
personally recruited officers who then provided the contact information for other potential participants.

Officers varied in occupational rank, time on the force, and age. Four respondents were retired, and 41 of the 48 reported being from the city the police department served. This analysis includes the narratives of 22 women and 26 men. Although my data are not representative of the overall Black population in the MPD, these data are equipped to document the various thoughts and experiences of Black police officers in the department.

On average, interviews lasted about one and a half hours each. Interviews took place at various locations throughout the city, with quite a few taking place in officers’ homes, and one interview was conducted over the phone. Each interview followed a semi-structured list of questions. The first set of interview questions were designed to understand respondents’ motivations for joining the department, their overall role orientations, and their views on various departmental policies. More detailed questions were then presented which probed for more identity related responses and officers’ experiences with representation as well as discrimination. Included in this part of the interview were questions such as, “what does it mean to be a Black (wo)man on the police force and in society,” “do you feel that your race and gender have ever influenced the ways you police the community,” and “do you feel that your race and gender have ever influenced the way you were treated by civilians or colleagues.” The interviews were concluded by asking respondents whether “you feel like there is a lack of Black officers in the department, and if so, what could the department do to recruit more Black
officers,” these questions sought to probe for officers’ understandings of racial placement and their demographic representation in the department.

Analysis

Each of the interviews were coded using the qualitative research software ATLAS.ti. The theoretical coding scheme emerged inductively, and transcripts were reviewed several times to identify emerging themes and categories. Pseudonyms were assigned to each of the interviews, and all identifying information was extracted from the data. Transcripts were first coded using officers’ explanations of their racial and organizational identification. Second, I coded the ways Black officers conceptualized their roles in the communities they policed as well as in the MPD. Third, I coded how officers spoke and responded to questions around racialized police violence and racial profiling. Fourth, I coded instances of passive and active racial and organizational representation and the strategies and language used to justify these actions.

Representation, in this sense, is derived from both Mosher’s (1968) conception of representation in the theory of Representative Bureaucracy as well as Clair and Winter’s (2016) conception of interventionist vs non-interventionist strategies to combat racial disparities. Active representation refers to the idea of officers actively engaging their identities in ways that furthers a common goal in either their racial or occupational community. Passive representation on the other hand, refers to the symbolic representation of Black police officers in the police department or in the community. Table 1 contains definitions of different constructs that emerge in this paper.

Additionally, I strategically accounted for Black officer identity variation (i.e. Conservative, Neutral, Racial Justice oriented) to illustrate Black officer dimensionality.
Officers who were characterized as *Racially Conservative* typically drew on politics of respectability and discounted the impact of structural barriers on Black livelihood and success, drawing instead on “Bootstrap” and token narratives. Those characterized as *Racially Neutral* often understood the impact of race and racism but also admitted not being primarily interested in Black politics. Finally, officers characterized as *Racial Justice* oriented were those knowledgeable about Black history (beyond slavery), the impact of race and racism, and those who saw themselves as fighters against Black oppression in the police department. Diagrams were used to hone in on the emerging themes that linked officers’ racial and organizational identities to their interactions with the community. These diagrams inductively summarized the data and ultimately helped generate the Black and Blue Typology (BBT) which will be unpacked in the next section.

**Analysis and Results**

**Black and Blue in the Community**

When asked whether being Black impacted the ways they policed the community, nearly all officers interviewed acknowledged that race and gender played an influential role in their policing strategies. When probed, officers commonly reported that being a Black man or Black woman provided access to the community and advantages during interactions with Black community members, which they reported, were often absent for non-black officers. Three themes emerged in officers’ descriptions of this advantage: (1) language, (2) an understanding of the culture, and (3) an understanding of the systemic issues that plague the Black community. These understandings were influential in the role-orientation officers embodied (i.e., Conservative, Neutral, Racial Justice) and the type of representation they enacted (i.e., active and passive). Most officers’ narratives
included a combination of both their racial and organizational values, which was largely influenced by contextual (e.g. the presence of non-Black officers; presence of Black officers; presence of supervisors) and situational factors (e.g. the behavior of citizens; imminent threat posed).

**The Black and Blue Typology**

Based on these findings, I argue, in order to understand the impact of Black officer representation, we must first understand the experiences of Blacks Americans who choose policing as a career: What are their motivations for joining? What are their commitments to their racialized community? And, how do they perceive their race and gender overlapping in their everyday work life? Evidence from this study inform what I identify as the Black & Blue Typology (BBT), which helps identify under what circumstances officers are primarily active or passive in the representation of the communities in which they serve. Again, active representation refers to the idea of officers actively engaging their Black racial identity or Blue organizational identity to interact with civilians and colleagues alike. For example, an officer would be labeled active in their racial representation if s(he) reported using their position and identity in ways that aimed to disrupt racial disparities in the criminal justice system.

Officers who are passive may place less salience on their Black racial identity or organizational Blue identity. For instance, an officer who is passively Black will not use their racial conscious or positionality in the department to disrupt larger racial structures during interactions with Black civilians, though they may see and understand these interactions as problematic. Because Blackness is not a monolithic category, active and passive racial representation may be expressed very differently in departments serving
middle-class Black communities versus lower-income Black communities—this may be attributed to the varying needs and expectations of the said community. For the purpose of this analysis, Blackness is defined by the needs of a low-income, hyper-segregated Black community plagued by high murder and incarceration rates.

Generally, fixed categorization often assists in general claims making about groups, behaviors, and values. However, simple racial and organizational categorization, as evidenced here, often misses the variation in experiences and behaviors that are shaped by situational and contextual factors. Table 2 summarizes some contextual variation in the expression of the Black and Blue identities I observed among Black police officers for three situational factors. Officers racial identification varied from Conservative to Neutral, to consistently committed to racial justice. Conservative officers drew on politics of respectability to talk about the Black community, denied the existence of racialized police violence, and rejected the claim “Black Lives Matter.” Racially Neutral officers saw value in the Black Lives Matter movement, identified with the plight of Black marginalization in America, but often rejected the idea of a moral responsibility for the Black community. These officers often identified strongly with the community policing philosophy but often reported that they were just doing their jobs in the face of racially biased policing. Racial Justice-Oriented officers fully embraced the statement that “Black Lives Matter” and admitted being avid supporters of the movement. These officers often spoke about using their racial consciousness to police the community in more culturally sensitive ways. They also reported using their positionality within the department to combat historical legacies of racism (e.g. racial profiling, system avoidance for minor infractions).
Table 3 provides a list of additional contextual and situational factors that may also influence officer behavior. These factors were extracted from the narratives and were recurrent across respondents. Like the presence of White officers, I find that an officers age, rank, and the race of the citizen involved informed the ways officers reported responding during interactions. Further evidence from the interviews reveals that Black and Blue are not the only identities officers deploy. For example, I find that gender works like race, in that the display of active femininity in the hyper-masculinized police space is heavily shaped by situational (e.g. whether or not there is a female victim) and contextual factors (e.g. presence of male officers). Relational contexts permit the racially neutral officers to be actively Black in some instances, while passive in others. Relative to policy recommendations that maintain that increased officer diversity will mechanically lead to better police relationships with minority communities, my research suggests that active Black identity mobilization is both biographically and organizationally contextual.

**Active Racial Representation**

Common accounts of active Black representation included using personal race consciousness to dial down conflicts with Black citizens and using officer discretion to cut alleged Black offender’s breaks for transgressions they deemed trivial (e.g. loitering, littering, expired stickers). Active Black representation refers to the idea of officers employing their racial consciousness in ways that furthered a common goal of more equitable policing outcomes in the Black community. Officers commonly reported being able to “relate” to Black civilians in the city due to their upbringing. Rayshawn, for
example, explained that growing up in a poor community assisted in his reaction to and perception of Black offenders. He recounted:

I've lived in those environments, it helps me in my policing when I approach these same individuals that are doing these same activities in this community. It gives me a different perspective y’know because the people that I know that used to do those things, they come from broken homes. They come from circumstances which may have influenced their behavior. I think being black makes me question why things happen […] versus […] a White officer that may have grown up in the Suburbs that doesn't have the same insight that I have. I think it benefits me. - Rayshawn

Similarly, other officers reported that being Black provided them an understanding of the needs and expectations of Black community members. The ability to listen and talk to people, was seen as an invaluable tool in policing poor Black communities. Many officers cited that being able to talk to people in respectful ways and listening to what they had to say, assisted in deescalating situations they believed would have been quickly escalated by a White officer in a similar situation.

I understand how to relate. And I find that an invaluable weapon in policing… invaluable. You walk up and don’t take ya night stick out, don’t take anything out, just walk up and y’know what man, ‘no go ahead, finish tellin’ ya’ whole story.’ And they like, ‘huh? you not tellin’ me to shut up , you not tellin’ me to put my hands on the car, you not tellin’ me to…’nope I’m listening, go ahead and finish, and then they start to calm down and then you start to listening…and then it’s okay okay okay. So, diffusing the situation by just being straight up. -Eddie

By being “straight up” or being able to relate, officers commonly reported that they rarely encountered consistent resistance from community members, and that there was a mutual respect often present between the community and the officers who viewed mutual respect as integral to police work. One respondent even claimed that Black officers as well as women officers were less likely to be killed in the line of duty as opposed to White male officers due to the differences in how they behave and treat civilians during encounters.
Officers categorized as actively Black, some or all of the time, also commonly adopted maternalistic or paternalistic views of the community. Many saw themselves as not only policing the community, but they also reported investing a considerable amount of time and energy making themselves part of the community. This in turn, reportedly, helped increase civilians’ perceptions of police legitimacy and procedural justice (Bradford, 2014; Cochran & Warren, 2012; Tyler, 2004; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004). For instance, several officers recalled encounters where citizens thanked them or apologized for noncompliance, even after they were arrested or had spent time in prison. However, I find that officers’ conception of respect was, at times, at odds with racial consciousness and instead interwoven with traditional ascriptions of the Blue police culture. For example, Brandon recalled an incident where a citizen did not comply with his order to clear the corner, and instead responded with insults,

Now you got my attention. ‘Get off the corner.’ Now I get out the car, I’m taller than him. He was probably like 5’8. Now I’m taller than you and bigger. He gives me his back and eats the food ‘Get the fuck outta here, I ain’t going nowhere.’ Now I go from cop to Nigga [...] He literally saw me and apologized…we had a good relationship up until that point [...] he wouldn’t have apologized to no White cop.- Brandon

Embedded within this narrative is the concept of code-switching (Debose, 1992). According to social identity theory, individuals strive to create and maintain a positive social identity. By acknowledging that “he wouldn’t have apologized to no White cop,” Brandon hints at the unspoken cultural “street code” (Anderson, 2000) of respect that is often thought to guide the principals and inter-personal relations of individuals in lower-income Black communities. At the same time, I find that Black officers who believe they are acting in racially appropriate ways, commonly hide behind the guise of the code of the street which subsequently allows them to cross professional boundaries and justify
their abuse of authority by locating their reactions as culturally apt. If Black citizens perceive Black officers as more legitimate in their actions, then interactions between Black civilians and Black officers could possibly increase compliance, decrease conflict, and increase perceptions of legitimacy (Cochran & Warren, 2012; Langton & Durose, 2013; Weitzer & Tuch, 2004), even if officers are violent towards citizens.

Gender also likely played a huge role in the outcome of this situation. Most women officers reported not wanting to get into physical altercations with male suspects and resorted to using their “female” and “maternal” ability to “reason” with suspects and gain compliance. On the other hand, Black policemen expressed that their physical appearance and stature were often enough to make a suspect think twice about resisting. In both instances, Black officers are consciously engaging their intersecting identities and using them in ways that benefit them and the larger police organization.

Racialization and Representation

Very few officers reported interacting with White citizens due to their assignments to predominantly Black disadvantaged communities. Segregated neighborhood assignments appear to be part of the departments continued racialization process for Black officers. Racialization refers to the process by which officers’ race becomes salient in social relationships and is generally regarded as something the powerful do to the less powerful—though racialization can also occur as a political strategy for empowerment by less powerful groups (Garner & Selod, 2015). In policing, this process ultimately reinforces the racial hierarchy in the department by using the symbolic representation of Black officers to highlight their visibility in Black communities and to subsequently increase Black civilians’ compliance and perceptions of
police legitimacy. According to Tyrone, Black officers are often sought out by supervisors to resolve conflict among Black civilians,

Some [Black] people listen more to Black cops than they do to White cops. [...] Black cop is going to intervene more. Not only that, you also have Black cops who honestly feel a certain type of way because, in this department [...] if you’re Black… and a White cop sees something a Black person does, they look at it like y’all all Black [...] so you as a Black cop you feel embarrassed, like yo how you gone do this? You as a Black person represents me, I’m a Black cop, at the end of the day I’m still Black. For a Black cop to get a little more hostile and greasy, he’s not doing it because he’s an ass hole, he’s doing it because he’s tryna let you know like look[...]you’re embarrassing me.

In the above quote, racialization acts as two-fold: not only are White officers projecting a process of racialization onto Black officers through assumptions around what Elijah Anderson (2012) refers to as the iconic ghetto, but we can also see Black officers attempt to disprove stereotypical characteristics by subsequently racializing and chastising Black civilians to act in more ‘respectful’ ways. Apparent in this narrative is an ascription to what scholars have identified as a “linked fate” (Dawson, 1995; Sanchez, Vargas & Valdez, 2016; Fields, 2016) whereas Black officers see their “fate” and reputation within the police department as being tied to the behaviors of Black civilians. This concept of a linked fate allows officers to adopt a convenient racial framework that leads them to believe that they are acting in the best interest of the community, when in reality their behaviors are influenced by White acceptance. To this end, it appears that the gaze of White officers may actually alter the behaviors Black officers employ during intra-racial interactions, making those who may seek Blue acceptance more aggressive in their policing tactics, at least with Black civilians.

When Black officers reported interacting with White civilians, these experiences were often coupled with racial epithets, questions of legitimacy, and denials of service:
[T]he call was for a fight on the highway and the Black guy was like ‘yo, he being disrespectful [...] you need to get him for I whoop his ass.’ So I'm lookin' like this nice little old White man over here sittin' on the ground? And I went over there like “sir, so what happened what’s the problem?” and he’s like, “get the fuck away from me you nigger bitch.” I was like “Oh no! Kick his ass! I won’t arrest you. He just callin’ people niggas, fuck him up!” - Tisha

By challenging White civilians’ overtly discriminatory behaviors and ideologies, even officers who’d previously denied or downplayed the impact of racism in the department elicited an active racial consciousness. In response to racial de-legitimation and requests for White officers, Black officers denied services and racial preferences to racist White citizens and went toe to toe in arguments. Barring instances involving racist behavior, officers reported treating White civilians in the same manner that they treated all civilians. These examples illustrate how Black officers use their “seat at the table” to disrupt the larger hegemonic racial hierarchy within society and the police sub-culture that all too often privileges White Americans.

Officers who reported joining the department for more social-justice oriented reasons (i.e. to impact positive change in the communities they policed), also reported being the most active in their resistance to traditional Blue culture. Many recalled having to police some of the professional behaviors of their White officer counterparts. These officers commonly reported speaking up “in real time” against discriminatory and outright racist behaviors their colleagues enacted on civilians. “In real-time” refers to officers speaking out against or preventing instances of brutality and discrimination during an encounter. Brandon, for example, recalled an incident where he almost got into a physical altercation with a White officer for attempting to lock up a Black man for a robbery, without substantial evidence. He explained,
There are cops that will literally be like, ‘well we’ll let the courts sort it out’ and lock somebody up. I almost punched a [White] cop in the face before, ‘nah I’m not lockin’ him up,’ ‘what do you mean?’ she doesn’t even know, sorry ma’am you said you not sure? I’m not just lockin up this random Black dude because he fit with the description, he don’t got a gun on him nor do he have her stuff on him[...] I’ll let 100 guilty men go before I lock up an innocent man. It’s enough real crime in the city – Brandon

Additionally, Jerome reported saving a Black teenage boy from being beaten by White officers for stealing a bike,

[White officers] were going to beat him up. I was like, it ain't happening on my watch! I stopped him, and I took him to the ground, and I put him in the wagon. And I stayed there because I didn't want anybody messing with him. And they [White officers] felt like, he stole a bike, he's gotta pay. He's a kid. He was stupid. He'll pay one way or another, but it's not worth that anymore. I was saving the kid. I was saving them from getting in trouble, too. And I'm saving myself a bunch of paperwork. - Jerome

The quotes above outline the complex roles Black officers play in the policing organization and provide some support for policy recommendations that aim to increase Black representation on police forces. Jerome and Brandon’s interventions display a clear moral commitment to ensuring racial equity in policing practices and behaviors in the presence of white officers, at the same time they illustrate the limitations in the structure of the criminal justice system which is often at odds with officers’ good intentions. Actively Black officers commonly reported correcting and altering the behaviors of White officers, even in the face of organizational cultural norm violations and the potentially dangerous consequences that could follow. When probed about why an officer would knowingly risk their reputation and career, these officers often reflected on personal experiences with racist policing practices and exclaimed that it was their “duty” to ensure that members of the Black community were protected and respected.
Not all officers interviewed expressed the same commitment to policing the Black community. Black police officers who actively police in racially conscious ways that are suitable to the immediate needs of the community may potentially increase racial accountability among White officers, at least, in the presence of actively representative Black officers. At the same time, organizational demands and situational and contextual factors may often be at odds, even for the most well-intentioned officers. These findings, in many ways, demystify the mixed literature on Black officers. On the one hand, Black police officers may be more sensitive to the needs of Black civilians’ (Gau & Paoline, 2017; LeCount, 2017) dependent upon their social location (i.e. geographic origin, upbringing). On the other hand, these same officers may be just as or even more coercive than their White officer counterparts due to the demands of the police organization and underlying warrior culture (Sierra-Arévalo, 2019). It appears that experiences with disadvantage and continued marginalization in society may ultimately provide some Black officers with a more comprehensive view of the community and the structural limitations that often plague Black inner-city community relations. At the same time, I find that officers’ experiences with disadvantage and marginalization, which could lead to more racial sensitivity and cultural awareness, are the very factors used to weed out applicants during recruitment.

**Racial Passiveness**

I identify officers who reported being bystanders in the face of racially biased policing as passive in their racial representation. According to Mosher (1968), passive representation refers to the visual or compositional representation of race within an organization, without regard to whether these social actors challenge the existing cultural
norms in the organization. In other words, passive representation is primarily concerned with the number of Black officers in a department rather than how these officers are actually diversifying police departments in terms of behavior, culture, and commitment to the Black community. Passive Black representation was observed most frequently among officers who reported that their racial identities had no impact on the way they policed the community—interestingly, these officers were also classified as conservatives and neutrals.

Many officers who failed to react in real-time during instances involving racial discrimination attributed their failure to intervene to the fear of institutional retaliation. Samira, a 10-year veteran on the force described witnessing her White partner racially profile Black men for wearing hoodies in the cold winter months. While Samira recognized these instances as problematic, she did nothing during or after the encounter to prevent future instances from playing out in a similar manner. Upon probing, Samira expressed that her silence was the result of institutional norms, that if violated, came with detrimental consequences. Samira also reported frequent issues with her White male supervisors and acknowledged that she was frequently “picked on” and written up for very minor technical infractions. When probed, Samira revealed that she had recently spoke out against one of her White commanding officers and as a result felt that she was being bullied out of the department.

Of course, Black and Blue are not the only intersectional tensions faced by officers. Race, class, gender, and sexuality, or the culmination of all of these identities, impact representation. In one instance, Tisha, a lesbian and seven-year veteran of the
force explained that her failure to actively represent a citizen was the result of the Blue united front,

White officer [...] Y’know stopping a pedestrian on the street he was Black, but he also happened to be gay. So Y’know being in that situation, you got this cop and you’re a cop so you’re supposed to have the cops back and then you have this gay guy… and you’re supposed to… not necessarily not supposed to have his back but [...] now you’re in this awkward position because you on the fence because it’s like I’m gay and I know how it feels when people say certain stuff [...] but then you’re a cop so I gotta own up to that professional side and just do my job.

Tisha’s narrative highlights the struggles many Black officers face in attempts to become active in their racial representation. While one might characterize this interaction as primarily passive regarding sexual orientation, I argue that Tisha’s implicit understandings and centralization of race makes clear the apparent contradictions that are often present for Black officers. In most instances, Black officers’ passiveness implicated them in the toxic Blue culture, even if they didn’t necessarily agree with the actions of the officer. While Tisha was aware of the problematic behavior and showed remorse for her passiveness, her actions ultimately unveil the realities of organizational solidarity and boundaries. Black officers, like all other officers, are expected to uphold the cultural “Blue code of silence” in the face of injustices. Many officers revealed that going against this code or even challenging the authority of another officer, especially in the presence of civilians, could potentially result in being blackballed by the department, which came with potentially harmful consequences (e.g. not being backed up in dangerous situations by other officers, undesirable details, non-working vehicles). According to Kiesha, officers who spoke out against their comrades faced serious ramifications,

Not showing up, not backing up, they could’ve been given an order, not to do it. Now keep in mind, they ain’t gonna outright say it, but if you cool with the supervisor [...] your supervisor will let it be known that we, as a group, have a[n] issue with that officer.
Black officers’ passivity may largely be attributed to these intimidating tactics. I argue that this coerciveness may also indirectly encourage Black officers to perform in less racially just ways and participate in more aggressive behavior, which in turn can directly impact citizen perceptions of police legitimacy. In this regard, Johnson (2006) argues “the black officer is free to express the latent authoritarianism that is desired by the profession by abusing Blacks and Hispanics in much the same way as White officers” (p. 8). Black officers are discouraged to challenge the underlying Blue culture while simultaneously being subject to social and political pressures to be racial representatives of the Black community. As a result, Black officers’ willingness and ability to help mitigate the tumultuous relationship between the police department and the Black community may be inhibited by their nets of accountability (Schwalbe, 2000; Schwalbe, 2005; Hollander, 2018) within a White racialized organization (Ray, Ortiz & Nash 2018; Ray 2019).

While I can’t draw strong conclusions about the relative frequency of passive representation, I can conclude when it is more likely to happen. Interview accounts suggest that passive representation is most prevalent among officers who were not from the city, those who did not express strong commitment to the community they served, those who were classified as racially neutral or conservative, those who were not ranked above patrol, and those whose motivations for joining the force were financially driven. Importantly, situational and contextual factors were shown to influence passivity (i.e. the presence of White officers, the demographics of the command structure). Even officers with strong racial justice identities were sometimes passive in the face of these situations.
Blue Organizational Representation

Complete identification with the traditional Blue policing identity was the least common pattern observed among respondents. Officers who were arguably the most active in their racial representation revealed that an activation of the Blue identity had much less to do with embracing the underlying culture of policing as opposed to the situational requirements of the job. According to Brandon,

Us vs. Them supposed to be moments, it’s not supposed to be how you are all the time. Moments as in: I’m getting jumped. Then it’s us versus them. Like if you’re fighting for your life, that’s different, but not[…] it can’t be with everything.

For Brandon, being Blue is synonymous with survival, which entails one of the basic features of the job: backing up officers in danger. By understanding Blue as situational and dependent on officer safety, Brandon and officers like him, are disrupting the current racist culture within the department as well as altering their overall outlook of the community by consciously embracing Blue situationally. Accordingly, Sklansky (2005) maintains, “minority officers […] will help fragment the police sub-culture and to build identity-based bridges to groups outside of law-enforcement” (p. 1234). Reinterpreting Blue as situational, enables a transformation in the power dynamics between the community and the police, which could ultimately lead to healthy community-police relations. More specifically, if officers’ perceptions of their duties and citizens change in a way that treats and views citizens in a more humanistic fashion, departments and communities may begin to see increases in legitimacy, procedural justice, and distributive justice.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that conflict and intergroup tensions arise when an individual perceives that s/he belongs to two distinct social groups. The individual
generally favors the more dominant in-group in efforts to maintain a positive social identification. For Blacks in policing, in the current socio-political context, this tension has been exacerbated. Findings reveal that racially neutral officers and those who self-identified as being a part of the “Blue brotherhood”, more readily defended Blue culture. This finding was most apparent when probing officers about highly publicized officer-involved homicides, shootings, and the Black Lives Matter movement:

The situation in Baltimore was exaggerated. Okay I’m a criminal, I’m running from the cops, honestly, he died on his own will. If you honestly kept up with the story […] they’re not charging the cops. The cops got found not guilty because he was alive when they got him. What he does in the backseat of the car or the van that’s on him. -Tyrone

Black Lives Matter, I think, is going to lose some momentum […] I get that most recent it has been a lot of black incidents but there are a lot of incidents that just don’t go recorded so, in my perspective, I think that it’s all lives matter, not just black. It’s just a sad situation that lately that’s what has been happening, but I don’t think that it should be something that they should be promoting. -Shakirah

These officers also drew on traditional perspectives of Black respectability, internalized racism, and cultural explanations that reinforced the criminalization of Black Americans. These problematic assumptions and ideas are representative of the symbiotic relationship that exists between police departments and many Black communities. Implicit in both of these officers’ understandings is the devaluation of Black life which is emblematic of the larger organizational culture and a criminal justice system that presumes wrongdoing and guilt of Black Americans before trial.

Johnson (2006) identifies Black officers as having to “buy-in” to the culture of policing in order to fit in. Both Tyrone and Shakirah exemplify this “go along, get along attitude” that is often necessary for many Black officers to effectively perform the racially marginalizing duties of law enforcement. Surprisingly, there were no notable
differences in the number of female and male officers who engaged their active Blue organizational identity. However, Black female officers often reported a lower threat threshold to activate their blue identity, partially due to their physical stature as well as stereotypical associations of gender placement in the organization. Black women officers were heavily criticized by other Black policewomen, Black policemen, and White policemen for an active display of the Blue identity. These criticisms often drew on common tropes and controlling images such as the angry Black woman, jezebel, and the butch (Collins, 2002; Rubin, 2013) to describe Black female officers who were arguably, performing Blue.

Only five of the 48 officers’ narratives fully aligned with the traditional Blue policing identity. These “true blues” held similar ideological perspectives on Black life, policing, and Black officers. Earl, a retired police officer who joined the department under a federally mandated consent decree at the end of the Black Power Movement, was extremely knowledgeable about the systematic marginalization of Blacks in America and lived through the entire Civil Rights Movement. However, Earl’s motivations for joining were rooted in his desire to attain steady employment after the Vietnam war, as well as his desire to avoid mistreatment by the police, “I said, hey. I’m gonna be one of them now, so I don’t gotta take that crap! Y’know I got tired of cops [harassing] me.” By embracing becoming one of “them,” Earl openly endorses the “us versus them” mentality and the organizational socialization that nurtures the Blue policing identity. This quote also highlights his knowledge of the disparities present within policing and exemplifies a key feature in system avoidance (i.e. becoming a part of the system).
Shabazz, a third-generation Black officer who had 16-years on the force, denied the total existence of a Blue culture stating,

Now, that terminology is actually a TV terminology, and it's so many different concepts. One of the concepts can be that you don't go against your brother officer, sister officer, which honestly, that doesn't really happen these days and times. It's really, it's a terminology that's blown out of proportion when it comes to T.V. and media, the blue line or whatever they want to call it.

This denial of Blue serves as a form of protection and defense against any open critique of the sub-culture and helps demonstrate the strength of the Blue code of silence.

Throughout the interview, Shabazz expressed very socially conservative views on race, while at the same time expressing pride in his police affiliation. While this does not take away from the authenticity of his Blackness, it does highlight the nuances that are present in the Black racial identity and experience (Fields, 2016), and further illustrates how active racial representation is context specific and must be reflective of the wants and needs of the community being served.

Throughout the interview, Shabazz commented disdainfully towards the Black community and the Black Lives Matter movement and lacked a critical perspective on police when it came to officer-involved-homicides or general abuse. At one-point in the interview, Shabazz also denounced the idea of Blackness as a means for marginalization and instead asserted that it was used as a cultural crutch that produced and attempted to excuse Black mediocrity and failure. In the quote that follows, Shabazz reinforces the traditional Blue perspective of “us versus them” while denouncing the Black Lives Matter movement,

That's how come the Black Lives Matter movement is going to continue to dry because it points a negative finger at the police department [...] But somebody's going to have to be smart enough, meaning the police, and start going out educating these people on what our policies are.
Unpacking this statement, it’s important to point out that Shabazz believes it is officers’ responsibility to be “smart enough” to explain policies on police behaviors to unknowledgeable civilians. Shabazz failed to provide any critique of the policing profession or identity. I suspect that his active Blue representation is not just a part of his own experience during and after academy training, but his representation and ideological perspectives are likely a byproduct of his primary police socialization which reflected his father’s and grandfather’s roles as Black police officers during and after the Civil Rights Movement.

To further muddle the understanding of Black police officers, findings reveal the possibility for Black officers to be simultaneously conscious of their racial marginalization, true in their blue orientation, and be community oriented. This was the case with Otis, a retired police officer who now runs a community oriented non-profit organization. Throughout the interview Otis bragged about his aggressive policing style, acknowledged his racial marginalization in the world and in the department, and talked a great deal about his efforts to better the Black community. At one point in the interview, Otis admitted to voting for a candidate that was in opposition to his racial and community interests but was endorsed by the local Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) chapter. While this may not be surprising given his intersectional identities (Black, man, police officer, from a low-income community) it does illustrate the complex tensions that arise for many Black policemen and women in their quest to identity reconciliation.

Four of the five true blues reported multiple instances where their policing identity did not protect them from racially biased policing practices both within the department and in the field.
But that was a learning curve for me, 'cause it taught me that even [...] after you found out I was a police officer, you're still willing to treat me terrible. Not saying I should be treated any different, but at this point, you know your threat level is a zero. But you still treated me terrible. What are you doing to the black men out there that you're stopping that's not police officers? If you're going to treat me like this—God only knows what you're doing to these guys out here you're stopping. That was my whole argument there. But I was really upset.-Shabazz

Cop stopped me, all kinds of cops came, because this cop he was a racist a real racist, he stopped me and I showed him my badge. Usually, you just go after you show the badge. That guy called all these cops because I refused to show him my badge a second time so he called his supervisor [...] they did a job on me [...] his racism was in the law because I didn’t have my helmet on. It’s all about the pen. Now if I had my helmet on he wouldn’t have stopped me.-Earl

Both narratives illustrate a sense of disbelief in the treatment they received from their colleagues as well as their implicit or subconscious understanding of Blue. Officers who refused to adhere to traditional notions of Blue and those who adopted alternate understandings, did so because they realized that their racial realities took precedence over Blue, especially once the uniform was taken off. For many officers who acknowledged racial group hardships, an inherent identity conflict arose when discussing issues involving race and policing.

According to Hunt (2010), the organization of policing is a matrix of subcultures where members “share different orientations to the job and in which different normative orders are dominant at different times” (p. 7). Findings from this study suggest that an activation of Blue representation was often situational, occurred at different points throughout officers’ careers, and was in some ways influenced by their racial orientation (i.e. neutral and conservative). Ultimately, a broader interpretation of Blackness is necessary to understand the impact of Black police officer representation on metropolitan police forces throughout the United States.
Discussion and Conclusion

Policy recommendations seeking to increase racial diversity in policing largely ignore the racial realities of Black officers. Drawing on interviews with Black police officers between 2016 and 2017, in this analysis I employed the concept of the Black & Blue typology to describe the variation present in Black officer representation. My findings reveal that Black representation in policing is multifaceted and non-additive. While findings lend some support to policy recommendations and previous literature on Blacks in policing (Alex, 1969; Gau & Paoline, 2017; McElvain & Kposowa, 2008; Sun & Payne 2004), they also illustrate the utility of DuBoisian thought and the Black & Blue Typology in studies on policing. Black officers’ responses to Black civilians, equitable policing practices, and racialized police violence is contingent on officers’ perceptions of and relation to the Black community being served, organizational factors (e.g. White supervisor), as well as non-departmental factors (e.g. gaze of the citizen).

This study illustrates a need for expansion in the current conceptions of representation in the policing profession. Black officers, like all other officers, are subjected to an intense process of organizational socialization and are widely affected by ongoing processes of racialization. I argue for the abandonment of the “bad apple” perspective that often dominates conversations around police brutality and use of force. Moving toward broader institutional and organizational critiques will prove much more useful in the assessment and application of policy recommendations that seek to address the issue of police legitimacy, procedural justice, racial representation, and racialized police violence specifically.
This research does not come without limitations. First, the data acquired from the interviews are not nationally representative of the entire Black police officer community. Instead, results may reflect experiences of Black officers in larger urban police departments located in predominantly Black and Latino communities. It seems likely that police organizations will vary in their openness to active Black representation as well as the degree of required or expected Blue solidarity and should include perspectives of Black citizens on Black police officers. Future research might include samples of smaller departments where Black officers and Black civilians are not the racial majority to further understand how organizational dimensions may hinder or help in pursuit of decreasing racialized police violence. If the findings from this study are expanded in cities with similar characteristics, it would lend support to the idea of reframing police diversity hiring initiatives in ways that are more racially empowering while diminishing notions of a monolithic Black experience.

Findings from this study should inform policy conversations around police department hiring practices, understandings of racial diversity, and larger racial accountability structures. Hiring practices and policies are established to weed out unqualified applicants. However, I find that officers’ experiences with disadvantage and discrimination, the characteristics that make them arguably the most qualified to serve disadvantaged communities, are the very factors used to weed out applicants during recruitment. Prior arrests, police encounters, familial relations, and credit checks (Wilson, Dalton, Scheer, & Grammich 2010) are just a few of the many factors that continue to discount suitable Black applicants from the pool of eligibility. Additionally, this study illustrates the need for larger racial accountability structures in police departments for the
benefit of citizens and officers. These accountability structures will ultimately assist in disrupting existing organizational cultural norms that protect White supremacy and legitimate the abuse of and discrimination against racial minorities.
### Table 1

Useful Constructs Related to Race and Policing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue Police Culture</td>
<td>Organizational culture or informal rules that exist among police officers. This culture is documented as insular in nature and serves to shield officers against claims of misconduct, brutality, and other crimes. Blue is a comradery that unites officers in spite of racial, class, and gender differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racialized Police Violence</td>
<td>The emergence of racial disparities in police use of force and treatment of citizens. Officer employment of force is constituted by the race of the individual rather than the resistance encountered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Legitimacy</td>
<td>The endorsement or belief of civilians that police authority is legitimate and entitled to be obeyed within a community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural Justice</td>
<td>Civilians perceptions that decisions and discretion within the police organization are fair and just. Individuals who perceive that police are not procedurally just may hold negative views about the police organization in its entirety.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad Apple Perspective</td>
<td>The belief that issues (e.g. unethical behavior, police violence) within police departments are related to individual officer behaviors as opposed to the larger organizational makeup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Good Ole Boys’</td>
<td>An informal network of familial and friendship ties through which White male officers use their positionality to provide favors and protections to other White male officers.</td>
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</table>
Table 2

The Black and Blue Dynamic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Orientation</th>
<th>Situational and Contextual Factors</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Presence of White Officers</td>
<td>Racist White Citizen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racially Conservative</td>
<td>Actively Blue</td>
<td>Actively Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racially Neutral</td>
<td>Passively Black</td>
<td>Actively Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Justice-Oriented</td>
<td>Actively Black</td>
<td>Actively Black</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Additional Situational and Contextual Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departmental</th>
<th>Non-Departmental</th>
<th>Personal Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White officer present</td>
<td>Gaze of Citizen</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black officer present</td>
<td>Racist White citizen</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Civilian Gender</td>
<td>Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division/Neighborhood Policed</td>
<td>Civilian Temperament</td>
<td>Relatability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td>Threat of Violence</td>
<td>Place of birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal/Work-related Stress</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Religiosity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ENDNOTES

[1] This measure is calculated simply by dividing the total number of Black officers in the department by the total Black population in the city. A score of 1.0 indicates that the department is fully representative of the Black population. (See Walker, S., & Turner, K. B. (1992). *A Decade of Modest Progress: Employment of Black and Hispanic Police Officers, 1983-1992*. Department of Criminal Justice, University of Nebraska at Omaha.)

[2] While I highlight a few of these encounters, a future article will explicitly focus on racism within the department.

[3] I oversample female officers relative to their population size in the department.

[4] Due to contextual specification, certain types of Blackness are defined as being more active than others, even though here, I acknowledge that this specification does not seek to authenticate a certain type of Blackness over another.

[5] This is not an exhaustive list of factors that shape officer behavior however, but it does illustrate the most common factors reflected in the findings.
CHAPTER 2

BEHIND THE BADGE AND THE VEIL: BLACK POLICE OFFICERS IN THE ERA OF THE MOVEMENT FOR BLACK LIVES

He [Mike Brown] was a big guy, he was black, he's charging at 'em, he's in the certain neighborhood or whatever so he has I guess he [white officer] has thoughts like "Shit, he gonna do something to me. He gonna whoop my ass, he gonna whatever." And it's so unfortunate, that that young man had to lose his life because the bottom line is, the officer was afraid.—Kiesha, Detective

You have a person coming towards you and you're in a vehicle, you have a better advantage, because that vehicle would be a weapon. So I don't know, I can't fathom other than he was more afraid of that black man than to think that his life was threatened, when you not only had that vehicle, and you have an army that you can call to come and back you up that just a small retreat would have a resolved that a different way. Not to just get out and just start shooting people. I mean sometimes when we get into this institution we start thinking that we have to go gung-ho in a situation. And you don't. And I don't know some cops just don't think that they have to back down, they think backing down is cowardice. When it's not.—Tina, Retired Patrol

Introduction

On July 18, 2016, then Black Milwaukee sheriff, David Clarke, faced a crowd of cheering Trump supporters at the 2016 Republican National Convention (RNC). Clarke, a controversial figure in the Black community and an avid supporter of, then presidential candidate, Donald Trump, held the podium tight as he addressed the sea of Make America Great Again posters, “ladies and gentlemen” he announced, “I would like to make something very clear[...]blue lives matter in America!” The crowd exploded in applause and chants of “USA.” Prior to his RNC address, Clarke’s conservative platform was garnered through his boisterous opposition to the Movement for Black Lives, President Obama, and the Black community, as well as his “tough on crime” agenda and unrelenting support for Donald Trump and law enforcement officers across the country. While Clarke’s reign succumbed to accusations of plagiarism and too far right
ideologies—even for archconservative politicians—his position highlights the state of contemporary policing in the United States. For Black law enforcement officers, there is undeniable turmoil that exists between one’s racial and organizational identities. A double conscious that enables them to see and oftentimes experience racial inequality, but an organizational affiliation that grants, arguably, unyielding power in the name of social control.

As policymakers and police administrators have struggled to find viable solutions to the police legitimacy crisis, racial diversity, as a means to increase police legitimacy, emerged, once again, as a blanket recommendation to ease police-community tensions (Keating and Uhrmacher 2020). While racial diversity is undoubtedly the most attractive solution and a must in agencies across the country, policy makers must first acknowledge the police-legitimacy crisis within Black and minority communities (Tyler 2004), the prevalence of intra-racial group diversity and conflict (Marques and Yzerbyt 1988; Forman 2017; Malone 2018) and its implications for both officer diversity and policing outcomes. Additionally, considerable attention must be paid to the racial accountability structures, or more accurately the lack thereof, in police departments that permit the racialized state of policing in contemporary American society. Figures like David Clarke ultimately complicate narratives of racial diversity as a means to increase police legitimacy in predominantly Black communities.

Attitudinal and perceptual data have revealed that many Black police officers view the issue of race and racism more seriously than White officers (Morin, Parker, Stepler, & Mercer 2017; LeCount 2017). At the same time, research on Black police officers’ impact on various policing outcomes (e.g. arrest decisions, use of force, etc.) has
been inconclusive, sometimes pointing toward better, worse and most often no difference in police behavior based on the race of the officer. This study uses the Black Lives Matter movement, high-profile officer-involved homicides, and the Blue Lives Matter countermovement to frame Black officers’ perceptions of and responses to one of the most pressing issues in contemporary American policing: racialized police violence.

Drawing on 48 interviews with Black officers from the Metropolitan Police Department, I explore Black police officers in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) and the Blue Lives Matter agenda. Specifically, I examine how Black police officers understand themselves in relation to both movements as well as how they navigate their racial and organizational identities during this hyper-visible racial moment in American history. Findings reveal that Black officers’ perceptions of racialized police violence and BLM was conditioned by their valuation and perceptions of the Black community. All officers possessed a form of double consciousness, or an internal conflict, that enabled them to see, experience, and understand racism and at the same time be a part of an organization that consistently reinforces the racial hierarchy among officers and citizens.

I find that, while acknowledging the problem of racialized police violence, many officers immediately condemned and/or critiqued the Black Lives Matter movement for its failure to incorporate and acknowledge intra-racial Black community violence. To this end, Black officers seem to have developed a double consciousness (Dubois 1903), where both their racial and organizational identities are in constant conflict, but also compartmentalized in order to perform the daily task of policing predominantly Black
communities. Officers condemned BLM for its failure to be critical of the Black community which was subsequently used to justify police abuse.

Utilizing the theoretical concept of double consciousness as well as theories on organizational identities and inequalities, this study interrogates the role of Black officers in perpetuating racialized police violence. I use these theories to explore how Black officers navigate their competing identities when responding to two symbolically opposed movements: The movement for Black Lives vs. the Blue Lives Matter agenda. This research makes contributions to the existing literature on race and policing and incorporates theoretical and racial perspective, which is rarely accounted for in the literature (although see Bolton and Feagin 2004). These findings necessitate a more thorough interrogation of the organizational sub-cultures and policies that maintain racial hostility. Ultimately, I call for greater organizational accountability structures, that should inform how police leaders respond to the issue of diversity, racial integration in departments, and policing in communities of color.

**Blacks in Policing**

The legacy of Black Americans in law enforcement is one shaped by racial discrimination, violence, and conditional inclusion (Dulaney 1996; Alex 1969). Traditionally, the recruitment of Black Americans by local law enforcement agencies has been dependent upon Black officers’ willingness and ability to conform to the existing Blue organizational cultural norms (Alex 1969; Dulaney 1996). Every time there is a rise in active Black resistance to racial oppression in the form of social movements (i.e. Civil Rights Movement, Black Power Movement, and the Black Lives Matter Movement) Black representation in all branches of law enforcement has been perceived by white
elites as essential to the maintenance of social and community control. For example, during the Black Power Movement, Black C.I.A agents were recruited to infiltrate the Black Panther Party, which ultimately assisted in “neutralizing” the Party and its operatives (Hersh 1978). Commenting on the initial recruitment of Black police officers in response to the demands of the Civil Rights Movement, Alex (1969) concluded, "The recruitment of Negroes into the department is not simply opening up jobs to all members of the community, but also a political necessity for pacifying the negro community and winning the support of its members” (p. 27). Contemporarily, racial diversity and Black officer representation is often highlighted by political leaders and some police administrators as integral to building positive police-community relations (President Task Force on 21st Century Policing 2015). Recruiting black police officers is seen as essential to police legitimacy, especially during times when the ethics, decisions, and authority of law enforcement are challenged by the larger public.

Racial diversity advocates argue that Black officers may respond to Black civilians in more positive and effective ways due to shared cultural identities and perceptions of a “linked fate” (Fields 2016; Sanchez, Vargas & Valdez 2016; Dawson 1995). Findings from Gau and Paoline’s (2017) study reveal that Black and Latino officers viewed citizens in disadvantaged communities more favorably and were more likely to believe that these citizens deserved quality police services compared to their white officer counterparts. Research has shown that Black officers hold more racially and socially liberal views than White officers (LeCount 2017; Morin et al. 2017). For example, in a national survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (Morin et al. 2017), findings reveal that Black and White officers differed significantly in their thoughts on
racial progress in the United States. While 69% of Black police officers reported believing the U.S still had some work to do to ensure racial equity between Black and White citizens, approximately 92% of white officers believed the country had made the necessary changes to ensure Blacks equality. The survey also found that approximately 57% of Black officers, but only 27% of White and 26% of Hispanic officers believed that officer-involved homicides of Black citizens were signs of larger social issues.

While majority of Black officers in this PEW study drew on societal explanations to account for the disproportionate impact of police violence on Black citizens, a significant portion of Black officers (43%) reported that officer-involved homicides of Black citizens were isolated incidents (Morin et al. 2017). These findings suggest that nationally, Black officers are virtually split in their thoughts and ideologies on racialized police violence—the same issue that has necessitated a call for their increased representation in departments across the country. Together, these findings illustrate a disconnect between officers across racial lines, at least in terms of their thoughts and ideologies on racial progress, deservedness, and racialized police violence. These findings may also suggest that the effect of the Blue organizational culture is heterogenous among Black officers which may possibly lead to differences in policing outcomes among Black officers in Black communities. Findings from the current study support the heterogeneity argument, illustrating that Black officers’ double consciousness is informed by their valuation of the Black community as well as their power within the police hierarchy.

Scholarship examining the impact of Black officer representation on policing outcomes (i.e. arrests, use of force) has explored behavioral differences between Black
and non-Black officers (Sharp 2014; Kennedy et al. 2017; Willow and Cohen 2017; Zhao and Lovrich 1998; Brown and Frank 2006). For example, Menifield, Shin, and Strother (2018) find that Black and Latino civilians are killed at similar rates by white and non-white officers. In contrast, Lewegie and Fagan (2016) argue that racial diversity in police departments mitigates group threats, which may subsequently decrease the number of Black citizens killed by police. Other scholars have found that increasing Black officer representation does not alter arrest patterns of Black citizens (Brown and Frank 2006), although Black political representation in cities does (Sharp 2014; Kennedy et al. 2017; Willow and Cohen 2017; Zhao and Lovrich 1998). Inconsistencies in the literature may point to varying sampling and analytic strategies, variability in Black officers’ behaviors by geographic location and time, and the presence and prevalence of double consciousness among Black officers.

Together, past research reveals perceptual and behavioral differences both between and within racial/ethnic group and highlights the imperfections of blanket calls for increased police racial diversity. In the next section, I overview organizational explanations for differences in officer behaviors.

**A Blue World**

Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt (2019) define organizations as the “socially constructed spaces in which individuals’ efforts are coordinated to jointly accomplish a set of tasks to fulfill some goal or set of linked goals” (2). They go on the describe organizations as inequality regimes with internal cultures as well as class, raced, and gendered divisions of labor and routine practices. It is well documented that American policing incorporates racialized practices and cultures, and that the policy prescription of
increased racial employment diversity targets the attendant threat to police legitimacy. These calls for increased racial diversity will shift the division of labor, tasking Black officers with policing Black citizens, and ultimately change the face of violent policing as opposed to the practice itself.

As organizations, police departments exercise the social control function of the state more generally. There is ample documentation that police organizations nurture a Blue occupational sub-culture that equips officers with the language, understandings, and behavioral expectations of the “Blue brotherhood.” Blue is said to unite all officers in spite of racial and cultural differences and is seemingly insular in nature and antipathetic to outsider critique. Blue culture is bound by a code of silence that protects the camaraderie and is noted by multiple scholars for its warrior-like mentality and racial intolerance (Alex 1969; Muir 1977; Moskos 2008; Sierra-Alvero 2019).

The emergence of the Blue Lives Matter agenda, as a countermovement to the Black Lives Matter movement, sought to protect the legitimacy and efficacy of Blue culture and law enforcement officers across the country, while at the same time diminishing claims of anti-Black racism and racial bias in police practices. This competitive victimhood narrative played on the dangers of police work to gain support for legislation that would consider the homicide of an officer by a civilian, a hate crime. While police work is undoubtedly dangerous, this victimhood narrative often creates a divide between police and the communities they serve and, in many ways, overstates the prevalence of non-accidental officer deaths. In 2019, a total of 90 officers were killed in the line of duty across the entire United States, and 48 of those deaths were caused by felonious or non-accidental acts (Bureau of Justice Statistics 2020). In the same year
police officers killed 1098 citizens, 114 of whom were alleged not armed. Sierra-Alvero (2019), argues that officers’ commemoration of death of other officers, both locally and nationally, connects individuals to the broader Blue occupational culture—superseding jurisdictional boundaries, strengthening cohesion among officers, and forming a national blue united front. This national comradery has been essential in promoting the false victimhood “war on cops” narrative, which has aided in the formation of the Blue Lives Matter agenda and devalued the legitimacy of Black citizens claims of racialized police violence.

**Blue Culture and Black Bodies**

The relationship between Blue culture and the Black community is one marked by violence, exploitation, and discrimination. With the rise in active Black resistance to White oppression during the Civil Rights Movement, political objectives, and later legislation, turned attention to law and order political agendas and crime control in Black communities (Alexander 2012; Forman 2017; Gilliard 2018). The newly declared war on crime and drugs further legitimated aggressive and exploitative police practices within the Black community—practices that have persisted across the decades (Alexander 2012; Forman 2017; Gilliard 2018). In 2019, Black citizens were 24% of those killed by police in departments across the country—a rate that was almost double that of their relative population size (13%). Blacks overrepresentation as targets of police use of force extends beyond lethal force and has been shown to inhabit almost every possible aspect of police-citizen encounter. According to data gathered by the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), from 2003-2019 Black pedestrians have been consistently overrepresented in the NYPD’s reported stop data. Findings from their analysis show that from 2014-2017,
Black pedestrians accounted for 53% of stops. Of those stopped, 68.7% resulted in a pedestrian being frisked and of those frisked, only 5.7% resulted in weapon recovery. Perceptual data also reveals disparities. In a 2019 nationally representative survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, approximately 84% of Black Americans and 67% of all adults surveyed, reported that Blacks were treated less fairly than Whites during police encounters. The findings from both studies seem complementary, suggesting that both at the departmental level as well as the civilian perceptual level, Blacks are disproportionately represented in various policing outcomes (e.g. stops, use of deadly force) and treated unfairly during police encounters (See also Fryer 2016; Warren, Tomaskovic-Devey, Smith, Zingraff, and Mason 2006). These findings corroborate findings from studies on implicit bias that show police associate Black civilians with criminality, even if no crime-related objects or scenarios are detected (Eberhardt, Goff, Purdie, Davies 2004), and ultimately underscore the complicated history between Blacks and policing.

As a result of this complicated history, it’s not always apparent how the Blue united front translates across racial/ethnic categories. Dukes (2018) argues that Black officers adopt various psychological and behavioral strategies (i.e. ritual, retreat, rebellion) to the police organizational sub-culture due to their experiences of both a double-consciousness and routine anti-Black racism by White officers. Bolton (2003) finds that Black officers face various organizational barriers that limit job mobility and at the same time are constantly surveilled and scrutinized by white officers who routinely call into question their legitimacy and decision-making abilities. Black officers have also reported not being backed up during volatile situations (Dodge and Pogrebin 2001),
racially profiled while on and off duty (Wilson and Wilson 2014) and treated as incompetent on the job (Bolton and Feagin 2004). Ultimately, scholars have found that Black officers experience racism in similar ways as their Black civilian counterparts (Paul and Birzer 2017; Wilson and Wilson 2014; Barlow and Barlow 2002; Sklansky 2006; Bolton and Feagin 2004; Wilson, Wilson, and Thou 2015). These findings suggest Black officers are, to some degree, on the margins of the Blue organizational culture, and thus subject to white officers’ racism. Scholars examining the effects of prolonged exposures to racism on Blacks have found negative impacts on both Black psychological (e.g. internalized racism, depression) and physical well-being (e.g. cardiovascular disease) (Kwate, Valdimarsdottir, Guevarra, & Bovbjerg 2003). These findings are important in context of Blacks in policing with regard to how the stress of racism and the everyday stress of job might impact policing behaviors and outcomes. In the next section, I overview Du Bois’s conception of double-consciousness and its relation to Blacks in policing.

**Double Consciousness**

The idea of double consciousness was proposed by sociologist W.E.B DuBois (1903) to describe a state of conflicted racial and social consciousness among Black Americans. DuBois wrote about the psychological warfare of twoness Black Americans faced being Black in a White society. At the core of this duality is the struggle of Black oppression and White supremacy—a reality Black Americans must combat in attempt to create a true personhood.

Within the world, Black Americans are hidden behind what DuBois identified as “the Veil,” or the condition whereby Blacks are masked behind the color line and visible
to whites only as a reminder of a problem (Morris 2015). In the 21st century, this invisibility has arguably morphed into a hypervisibility whereby Black bodies are constantly surveilled and scrutinized as criminal by white onlookers. Today, as evidenced in the cases of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmuad Aubrey, the veil of Blackness still provides justification to some of the most white-imposed heinous crimes. Double consciousness may therefore be interpreted as a tool for survival in a white world. Psychological interpretations of double-consciousness yield attention to how double-consciousness affects the development of the Black racial identity and strategies aimed at self-definition and self-preservation (Davis 2005).

The frame of double consciousness has typically been used in empirical studies on race and citizenship (Davis 2005; Johnson 2017; Lyubansky and Eidelson 2005). According to Davis (2005), double-consciousness is “generated from practices of exclusion and alienation that prevent African-Americans from being considered “real Americans” (158). Johnson (2017), explores the relationship between Black Americans double consciousness, American patriotism, and an “axis of identities.” Findings reveal that Black Americans often construct diverse patriotic profiles that may conflict with their Black racial identities—highlighting intra-group diversity. Further findings suggest the type of patriotism participants embraced was contingent upon their identification with American history and values, their understanding of racial inequalities, as well as their attachment to their own Black racial identities. Lyubansky and Eidelson (2005) find that greater societal and racial acculturation was linked to stronger group identification. Black Americans who were more involved in Black culture were more likely to reach less favorable judgements about their national group identity, than Blacks who were not as
acculturated or those who were simultaneously involved in both Black and American cultures. Together, these findings suggest that many Black Americans are impacted by a double-consciousness that prompts a social-psychological negotiation of identities in efforts to maintain a positive social identification (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

The frame of double consciousness has been applied in one prior study on race and policing. Dukes (2018) finds that Black officers adopt various psychological and behavioral strategies (i.e. ritual, retreat, rebellion) to the police organizational culture due to their experiences of double consciousness and racism within police departments. He argues that ethnic boundaries intrinsic in the Blue culture, systematically exclude and alienate Black officers from full participation in the professional goals and objectives of the police organization. Findings reveal that these strategies further segregated Black police officers from the existing police occupational culture as well as from their fellow White officers. The current study builds on the existing literature on race, policing, and double consciousness to explore the depths of Black officers’ perceptions. I draw on interviews with these officers to untangle the relationship between their racial and organizational identities as well as their group loyalties. I utilize Duboisian thought to account for conflicts in officers’ identities and to understand many officers’ justification of conflictual beliefs.

The Metropolitan Police Department

The Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) is a large police force located in a hyper-segregated Black community undergoing gentrification. Demographically, the city serves a majority racial/ethnic population (>60%), with Blacks making up approximately 40% of the total population.
Multiple federally mandated consent decrees to increase the department’s racial diversity have been issued to the MPD, and recent departmental recruitment efforts have turned attention specifically to hiring officers from more “diverse” backgrounds. However, the department has remained predominantly white and male, with all officers of color, and Black officers in particular, making up approximately 43% and 33% of the department, respectively. Nonetheless, 75% of the top leadership positions are currently held by both Blacks and women. Throughout the rank-and-file, policewomen make up approximately 22% of the force, while policemen comprise of about 88% of the force—revealing grave disparities in terms of race and gender representation in the department.

I chose the MPD as a site of study for several reasons, most notably for its reputation for racial bias and high levels of police violence. The MPD is located in a large democratic urban city with a sizeable Black population. Using Samuel Walker’s (1992) Equal Employment Opportunity Index to measure racial diversity compliance efforts in police departments, the MPD scored a .7 out of 1.0 in terms of racial representativeness. Additionally, the MPD has maintained a reputation for scandal, fraud, and overt forms of racism. In 2017 alone, the department racked up close to $10 million in payouts for civil cases involving excessive force and racial profiling. The department has seen major decreases (-80%) in the number of officer-involved shootings and homicides from 2007 to 2019 (YTD). This decline matches the national downward trend of officer-involved homicide in larger U.S. cities following the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement (Sinyangwe 2020). However, the department was involved in a number of high-profile officer-involved homicides shortly before and throughout the duration of this study. Between 2016 and 2019 the department was involved in over 50
officer involved-shootings and homicides, and between the years 2007 and 2019 the department was involved in well over 400 officer-involved shootings. The overwhelming majority of the victims were Black (80%), male, and the average age of suspects was 20.

Although the department isn’t racially representative of the city’s population, some of the highest-ranking commanders are Black. Despite Black leadership, there have been a number of Internal Affairs investigations for overt forms of racism in the department, and many officers in this study reported routinely encountering racism from their colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates. Finally, the department was hit with additional consent decrees for evidence of racial profiling and was subject to a Department of Justice investigation for the excessive use of deadly force.

**Interviews**

I draw on 48 interviews with Black police officers. I defined Blackness broadly to include all groups within the African Diaspora. I employed a respondent-driven sampling technique to diversify my sample and recruit participants from various precincts and divisions. I recruited officers by calling, texting, and/or approaching officers at community events. My initial contact was a retired police officer who served more than 20 years on the force. This officer provided the contact information for several other police officers, including the president of the local Black police association, who provided strong support in the recruitment of other Black officers. Through these connections, I was also invited to various community events put on by the association, where I personally recruited officers who then provided the contact information for other potential participants.
Officers varied in occupational rank, time on the force, and age. Four respondents were retired, and 44 of the 48 reported being from the city the police department served. This analysis includes the narratives of 22 women and 26 men. These data are equipped to document the various thoughts and experiences of Black police officers in the department.

On average, interviews lasted about one and a half hours each. Interviews took place at various locations throughout the city, with quite a few taking place in officers’ homes, and one interview conducted over the phone. Each interview followed a semi-structured list of questions. The first set of interview questions were designed to understand respondents’ motivations for joining the department, their overall role orientations, and their views on various departmental policies. More detailed questions were then presented which probed for more identity related responses and officers’ experiences with active and passive racial representation on the job, as well as experiences of discrimination. Included in this part of the interview were questions such as, “What does it mean to be Black?” “What does it mean to be Blue?” “What is the role of police officers in the community?” “What are your thoughts on the Black Lives Matter Movement?” “Do you identify with the Blue Lives Matter group?” “What have been your experiences as a Black police officer in the department and in the community?” “How did you feel when the Fraternal Order of Police came out in support of Donald Trump for President?” These questions probed for officers’ understandings of racial placement and their demographic representation in the department.

Each of the interviews were coded using the qualitative research software ATLAS.ti. The theoretical coding scheme emerged inductively, and transcripts were
reviewed several times to identify emerging themes and categories. Pseudonyms were assigned to each of the interviews, and all identifying information was extracted from the data. Transcripts were first coded using officers’ explanations of their racial and organizational identification. Second, I coded the ways Black officers conceptualized their roles in the communities they policed as well as in the MPD. Third, I coded how officers spoke and responded to questions around racialized police violence and racial profiling. Finally, I coded instances where Black officers spoke of the Black Lives Matter movement and the Blue Lives Matter agenda.

**Findings**

All officers acknowledged the existence of racism and racial discrimination within the department, however, officers varied in their support of the Movement for Black Lives’ claim that “Black Lives Matter.” Officers responded in three ways to questions around racialized police violence and the Black Lives Matter movement: All lives matter; Black lives matter; and blue lives matter. Officers’ narratives often included a combination of at least two of these emergent themes, suggesting the presence of a double consciousness for all officers regardless of their support or opposition towards the movement. This double consciousness appeared in all officers’ narratives to varying degrees, with the double consciousness enabling some officers to be aware of racialized issues within the profession, while making others hyper-critical of the Black community.

**In Defense of Blue Culture**

Black officers’ valuation of Black Lives Matter and Officer-Involved homicides of Black citizens illustrates the persistence of double consciousness, especially among those who oppose the movement. For Black officers, double consciousness is not simply...
Black and white, but is complicated by an organizational affiliation that amplifies the power of white supremacy and anti-Black racism. All Black officers ascribe to this organizational affiliation regardless of their dispositions towards the BLM and the Black community and police violence more broadly. However, not all officers employ or ascribe to Blue in the same ways. The total ascription to Blue by respondents was the least common finding. Findings show that officers’ employment of Blue rhetoric was most often situational, and officers’ responses were somewhere in between the two extremes of Black and Blue. These in between officers often acknowledged disparities that exist within the department and the treatment of the Black community, while at the same time justifying police actions in cases involving deadly force. For other officers, Blue was simply seen as a tool of survival in the field, which allowed them to be critical of the ways police behaved toward Black Americans but also use aggressive policing tactics when they deemed them appropriate (i.e. life or death situations). In this section, I find that double consciousness acts as a protective measure for Black officers’ whose power and authority within the organization and in the community are challenged by the claims put forth by the Black Lives Matter movement. Officer’s defensiveness of the police identity and culture as well as public scrutiny relies on victim blaming and creating counter-victimhood narratives, that centers the war on cop rhetoric.

Black officers’ perceptions of Black Lives Matter and officer-involved homicides were informed by their understandings of the purpose and goals of the movement as well as their perceived relationship to officers involved in highly publicized shootings and homicides. Many of these officers expressed empathy and sadness for white officers involved in homicides of Black citizens. They believed media accounts often
sensationalized officers just doing their job. Speaking on the role of the media in reporting officer-involved homicides, Tawanna reports,

I think the media hypes it up too much. It wouldn’t be as broad or as noticeable, but they seem like to hype it up. […] They’ll show the police officer doing something, but they won’t show what the suspect did before the police officer did what they did. So, they kind of make it hard for police. And I think that’s why I think some people don’t like police because what the media shows […] I just think it’s kind of unfair for a lot of cases because they don’t have the police aspect, they only have the civilian.

By blaming the media, Tawanna, and many Black officers like her, shift blame away from the police department, ultimately minimizing the reality of police violence, and instead focusing on the media’s role in creating police-community tensions. Other officers reported believing that fear was the driving motive behind White officers’ decision to engage in overly aggressive behaviors. When fear was used as a justification, officers almost always brought up the Mike Brown and Eric Garner cases, both of which involved stereotypical imagery of a large Black man with super strength engaging in criminal activity. To this end, white officers were said to fear for their lives—justifying the use of deadly force, even for the smallest crimes. For example, Kiesha expressed,

He [Mike Brown] was a big guy, he was black, he's charging at 'em, he's in the certain neighborhood or whatever so he has I guess he [white officer] has thoughts like "Shit, he gonna do something to me. He gonna whoop my ass, he gonna whatever." And it's so unfortunate, that that young man had to lose his life because the bottom line is, the officer was afraid.

Similarly, Shabazz reported,

Garner. That Situation was totally blown in the wrong direction. These officers wasn’t 6’9” three-hundred pounds. He was. So, it’s like we can be taught everything […] but if I get a monstrous guy inside here, all these tools I got right here is gonna be toys for him. So now I’m faced with a situation, do I allow him to disarm me? ‘Cause he can, ‘Cause he’s much stronger than me. Do I allow him to disarm me and possibly hurt myself and others? Or do I dissolve of the threat altogether?
Both Kiesha and Shabazz draw on traditional notions of Black criminality to justify the level of force used in the homicides of Eric Garner and Michael Brown. The justification of fear ultimately helps develop a competitive victimhood narrative which shifts blame away from the officer and on to the victim. This competitive victimology ultimately serves to protect the blue organizational culture and paints officers in a heroic light while criminalizing and diminishing the credibility of the victim. Shabazz’s quote is rather revealing of this when he questions, “Do I allow him to disarm me and possibly hurt myself or others?”

The concept of fear was also described as stifling to officers’ ability to do “good” police work. Some officers spoke of police officers’ fear of being involved in a homicide with a Black civilian, even if the homicide was “justified.” According to Eddie,

You make sure you write this. A lot of white police officers are terrified of shooting a Black kid right now. Even a Black kid that may be committing a crime where he deserves that deadly force that is used against him. They are terrified. And not even with the white officers, the Black officers are too. They know the media attention on a shooting is gonna destroy you.

Officers who reported that fear was a hindrance for job performance almost always centralized the material costs to officers if held accountable. As Eddie noted, “soon as you pull that trigger, you think to yourself, I can lose my job, I’m gonna lose my house, I’m gone lose my car, I’m gonna lose my wife, I’m gonna lose my kids. Guys in the district gone think I’m gun happy. I’m not gonna have the same respect that I used to have, gotta go talk to a psychiatrist. You gotta talk to internal affairs, nothing but lawyers.” Other officers argued that this fear would subsequently lead to more deaths of officers and more crime because police would be constrained from doing “good” police work. These findings
suggest that greater organizational accountability coupled with social influences may act as a deterrence for officers use deadly force (Kalev, Dobbin, and Kelly 2006).

In addition to criticizing individual-level incidents of officer-involved homicides, some officers expressed negative dispositions towards the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM). Most often, this view was informed by officers’ misunderstandings of the movement and its purpose. Namely, officers criticized BLM for its lack of attention to intra-racial community violence in the city. For example, Tyrone expressed,

They’re going around talking about Black Lives Matter. You got Detroit, you Chicago, you got Cali...tons of Black on Black crimes a lot matter of fact. Chicago, over this weekend, 60 people shot, six dead. Like yah mean, like so [...]it matters but why you guys killing each other, why you guys robbing each other? Why you guys steal from each other?

In this quote, Tyrone rhetorically connects Black Lives Matter protestors as the perpetrators of intra-racial community violence and simultaneously distances himself from the movement and the Black community. Tyrone’s remarks also divert attention away from state-imposed violence—a form of violence that the Black Lives Matter movement almost exclusively focuses on. Similarly, Shabazz argued,

I’m still trying to find the good in [Black Lives Matter]. I say that because, Lil’ Ron been killing Paul, Mike, and Tyreke […] for years. Nobody in the community. Nobody marching. Nobody signing petitions. Nobody doing none of that. We are one percent. Police officers in general. We’re one percent of the cause of death in Black communities. […] If one of my cops call you today and just do something to cause someone’s death, they’d be marching. […] Probably like six homicides this month. I don’t think we had any marches yet.

Ultimately these findings reveal a disconnect between the mission of the Black Lives Matter movement and some Black officers’ understandings of its purpose. Both Tyrone and Shabazz defend police actions and Blue culture by minimizing the level of police violence and its impact on Black life and Black community relations. These officers also
fail to acknowledge the grave disparities in the level of violence used against Black citizens by police. According to a 2019 report published by Mapping Police Violence, nationally, Black citizens were three times more likely to be killed by police than Whites, and 21% of Black victims were unarmed when they were killed, compared to 14% of White victims. Black officers’ opposition to BLM was also informed by their belief that the movement promoted racist ideologies by claiming that *only* Black lives matter.

Even officers who had experienced racism and discrimination in the department spoke out against BLM. For example, Otis, a retired MPD officer reported that White officers threatened to kill him and that he was ostracized in the department for testifying against two White officers who planted drugs on a Black teenage boy. Shortly thereafter in the same interview, Otis expressed his disdain for the Black Lives Matter movement and even reported voting for a political candidate who was endorsed by the local Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) chapter for their pro-police views, tough on crime agenda, and anti-Black Lives Matter sentiments. While Otis believed these things would harm the Black community, he was also opposed to voting for a candidate whose campaign endorsed BLM and promised to increase police accountability. These findings reinforce officers’ endorsement of Blue organizational culture and reveal a stark disconnect between officers’ racial experiences and organizational identities. Otis’s opposition to Black Lives Matter was also rooted in his belief that BLM was a violent group and that protests of officer-involved homicides were not an issue in the city. According to Otis,

> You know, Black Lives Matter. I don't have a problem with you protesting, as long as you're not coming in to fight the police. You got the right to free speech and all this other stuff, but what’s happening somewhere else, and it's not happening here, I just don't think we should protest here for what's happening
over there. You should protest here for what the problems are here. You know what I'm saying? If you got police brutality here or whatever, I don't have a problem with you protesting. I'd just like for you to be peaceful and orderly.

The idea that police violence should be met with peace is a popular consensus among law enforcement officials. Officers consistently casted Black Lives Matter protestors as overly violent, aggressive, racist, and disrespectful towards police authority. These negative descriptions of BLM and protestors again highlight the competitive victimhood narrative that is often used to justify violent police actions—if protestors attend rallies and officers are physically harmed, then the justification of forceful encounters are taken for granted. The preceding quote is indicative of this competitive victimhood narrative as well as many officers’ passiveness towards racialized police violence. While Otis argues that protests should reflect the issues embedded in the immediate community, he neglects the fact that the department was subject to a federal Department of Justice investigation for the excessive use of deadly force just two years prior, and that there were well over 40 officer-involved shootings during that same period. To invalidate claims of racial bias and police violence when factual evidence proves the contrary, Otis, and many officers like him, reinforce organizational Blue solidarity that is resistant to self-reflection and civilian critique.

Together, these findings shed light on the presence of Black officers’ double consciousness. In this regard, double consciousness seems to act as a protective measure for Black officers’ power and position within the organization. Even though many of these officers reported experiencing and/or witnessing racial discrimination, harassment, and abuse by white officers, this did not stop them from justifying the actions of white officers involved in homicides of Black citizens. Arguably, officers’ defense of police
actions illustrates the functionality of blue socialization and the persistent need of double consciousness for Black officers to perform the duties of policing.

**Not Just Black or Blue…But All Lives Matter Too**

Though many officers defended police tactics and Blue culture, most officers did not readily defend the Blue Lives Matter agenda. The few officers who did defend Blue Lives Matter were those who trivialized the idea of promoting that certain groups’ lives mattered as well as those who were stuck in an identity conflict between their organizational and racial identities. Raheem was one of those officers stuck in the middle.

When I first met Raheem, I took note of two distinct band bracelets that decorated his wrist. The first was a deep blue bracelet with white bold lettering that spelled out #BLUELIVESMATTER. The other was a black band bracelet also with white bold lettering that said #BLACKLIVESMATTER. When probed about the bracelets, Raheem reported that he believed that the Blue Lives Matter agenda was a racist trope to counter the Black Lives Matter movement, but that he was able to separate the racism from the statement “blue lives matter” because all lives matter and blue was a part of his identity. The all lives matter rhetoric was not always unpacked in this way. Most often officers became seemingly defensive against the statement that Black lives mattered and argued that all lives mattered not just the Black ones. According to Tawanna,

Not only black lives, all lives matter. To just say black lives, that's not broad enough because I think all lives should matter. Not just black people. Everybody life matters. [...] To me, I’m a say most of like the younger blacks, they just have a problem with authority. They don't want to be told what to do.

Tawanna’s narrative reveals another dimension of Black officers’ opposition towards the Black Lives Matter movement and rhetoric. By stating that “they just have a problem with authority,” Tawanna highlights the fact that officers’ authority and legitimacy in the
community are challenged by claims brought about by the Black Lives Matter movement and protests. For Black officers this may be particularly challenging due to their marginal status and hyper-visibility within the department, which undoubtedly makes them subject to more scrutiny from white officers. Therefore, Black officers anti-BLM sentiments may also be rooted in officers desire to distinguish themselves from Black people who see policing as an issue within the community. Accordingly, Tyrone commented, if “a white cop sees something a Black person does, they look at it like y’all all Black […]so you as a Black cop you feel embarrassed […]You as a Black person represents me […]you’re embarrassing me.” Black officers’ opposition towards the Black Lives Matter movement and rhetoric may in fact be rooted in their desire to distinguish themselves from those complaining about racialized police violence as well as their desire to maintain power within a department, community, and world where they are truly disadvantaged. Additionally, Tawanna’s quote is especially revealing of officers’ disposition towards outside critique—instead of acknowledging the legitimacy of the claims made by young Black people, some Black officers deny the validity of their claims altogether, in spite of damning evidence against the department and the larger police community. While most officers did not explicitly support the Blue lives matter agenda, they did endorse Blue police culture and oftentimes ideas around the war on police.

In Defense of Black Lives

Most Black officers were not opposed to the movement and/or the statement that Black Lives Matter. Black officers’ endorsement of BLM was shaped by their ability to objectively see the movement outside of the protests many of them policed. This objectivity is vital in policing and illustrates the utility of double consciousness in
creating a more fair and representative police force. Many officers were able to support
the claim that Black Lives Matter because they too had been subject to forms of police
violence and abuse or had been the perpetrators of abuse and were therefore able to
acknowledge officer wrongdoings for what they truly were.

Generally, officers who expressed support for the movement or those who
acknowledged racialized police violence as an issue of race and racism within society as
well as in the department, were those who had, to some extent, experienced the negative
effects of growing up in the inner-city. Many of these officers reported witnessing and/or
experiencing police violence and racially discriminatory policing practices, and many
reported experiencing racism in the department from their supervisors and colleagues.
Officers who acknowledged the practice of racialized police violence often criticized
their colleagues for denying the existence of violent police practices and behaviors. For
example, in speaking about high-profile officer-involved homicides and specifically the
Freddie Gray incident in Baltimore, Ratisha argued,

In just about all of those cases, I think the police were absolutely wrong. And not
because I’m Black, but because I believe in the law. I’m funny like that […] that’s
when that blue line, we all believe in blue. No, we don’t because it was wrong
[…] like what happened in Baltimore with that guy who broke his neck. Y’all
know what y’all did, and we as the cops know what you did ‘cause we know what
we do.

In this quote, Ratisha acknowledges the reality of police violence, excessive force, and
Blue culture and at the same time acknowledges her own participation in these violent
activities. Shortly before rationalizing the Freddie Gray case, Ratisha reported taking a
domestic abuse suspect on a similar “bumpy ride” and used this insight to speak on the
Freddie Gray case “y’all know what y’all did” she reports. A bumpy ride refers to a
police practice in which officers place a suspect in the back of a paddy wagon and
intentionally hit potholes and bumps in the road to ensure the suspect is injured for their transgression. Ratisha ultimately rationalizes her own participation in these activities by arguing that the “right way” to do a bumpy ride is to have the suspect buckled in so that there is no serious injury caused. Other officers reported similar narratives, which ultimately helped shape their empathy towards the Black Lives Matter movement as well as their acknowledgement of racialized police violence. These findings reveal that not all Black officers are fully integrated into the police organization’s subculture. However, all Black officers, regardless of their disposition towards BLM, possess a double consciousness that enables them to navigate the terrain of the police department as well as acknowledge racist policing.

This double consciousness was even present when officers lauded the efforts of Black Lives Matter as well as the media for bringing national attention to police violence and officer-involved homicides of Black citizens. Jamal argued that the hyper-visibility of officer-involved homicides was a good measure to hold police accountable for their actions. At the same time, he acknowledged that police departments training efforts could never prepare officers for live situations in which officers must resort to deadly force.

Jamal, for example, reports,

You can take me to the police academy, and we could learn in a room, and I know if I mess up, I’m still going to get up and go home. When it’s a live situation and people are shooting at you live, nobody can train you for that. I just think that what it did do, it made police departments across the country rethink their policies and procedures and tactics when dealing with people in certain situations. I think video is a good tool for police and the public because it holds both parties accountable.

While Jamal is pleased with the attention on police departments and the increased levels of accountability, he also empathizes with officers involved in shootings and homicides.
Because of Black officers’ dual status as Black men and women in law enforcement, they must often toe the line between their racial and organizational communities. In the spirit of DuBois, Black officers are gifted with a second sight that allows them to constantly see the world and situations through their own eyes as well as the eyes of other officers. While this second sight is beneficial to understanding officer behaviors, it could also potentially undermine efforts to combat racialized police violence, namely because it often provides justification and legitimation to officers claims of fear and self-defense and simultaneously allows Black officers the opportunity to be neutral in the face of discrimination.

With regards to officers’ views on the Black Lives Matter movement, several respondents reported frustration towards their fellow Blue brothers and sisters due to their criticism and lack of knowledge of the movement and its purpose. For example, Brandon, an officer who’d been involved in a homicide recalled,

Even cops don’t know how Black Lives Matter started. And I tell them, it didn’t even start with the cops it started about the justice system. And I ask them, and they’ll say, ‘oh it started with Mike Brown,” no it didn’t. It started with Trayvon Martin, it had nothing to do with the cop, but how the system fucks us. And they just, ‘oh well that hands up don’t shoot shit is bullshit.’ Okay. But then a guy got shot with his hands up on video. Like the kid had a train, that you can see on camera and your eyes are better in person than on camera. So, I don’t wanna hear it, this stuff keeps happening. In South Carolina, if there was no camera, that would have been under the rug, that cop would have been found a justified shooting on paper, because there’s no body-cameras and nobody else around.

Brandon’s efforts to explain Black Lives Matter and other popular movements that centralize the Black experience constitutes a level of race work many Black Americans are forced to undertake in the workplace (Wharton 2009). This emotional labor (Hochschilds 1983) of navigating a white organizational space to counter hegemonic narratives that deny the existence of race and racism is challenging for Black officers.
Brandon’s view is especially interesting because he’s one of the few officers in the study who’d been involved in a homicide. At the same time, Brandon’s involvement in this shooting did not jade his views and interpretation of how police violence is racialized nor his views on the necessity or importance of the Black Lives Matter movement.

At the other end of this conversation, Alexis, a commanding officer whose uncle was killed in front of her by a White officer when she was a child expressed similar frustration about police departments’ denial of racialized police violence,

When you have something like this happening with Trayvon Martin, even though he wasn't a police officer, but it was the way the police department handled [it]. When you have Ferguson, all of that is something that was bound to happen because technology put it in your face. You can no longer say it doesn't happen. Hopefully, when we keep evolving as a police agency, organization, law enforcement across the country, and we have conversation, and it gotta be true, real conversations. You can't be sitting here, go in a room and just sit there. You gotta talk about what's actually is really faced. I know some people have negative views about Black Lives Matter. Now, what Black Lives Matter's to me is that, for years, if something happened in the black community, it wasn't that important.

Among officers who viewed Black Lives Matter favorably, there was a consensus that these issues were not new to the Black community nor single instances of police violence but were instead a series of issues that had been denied by police departments for decades. Alexis’s view is particularly important because she is someone who has been directly impacted by an officer-involved homicide and is also a Black commanding female officer. This multi-layered status further complicates the concept of double consciousness and provides Alexis with insight from various perspectives that forces her to see far beyond the organization. Alexis’s engagement with the community was reportedly shaped by her experiences as a Black mother and as someone who lost a family member at the hand of a White police officer. She reported putting these identities at the forefront of her interactions with young Black men in particular and the Black
community more generally—allowing her to navigate Black communal relations more easily. Together, these findings reveal the benefit of a multi-layered consciousness that centers Blackness and officers understanding of the purpose and mission of BLM.

Both Brandon and Alexis were able to empathize with the Black Lives Matter movement and officer involved homicides. Brandon’s perspective is particularly revealing about the benefits of objectivity, sensibility, and relatability among Black officers. Brandon was an officer involved in a homicide but was still able to show a level of empathy partly due to his experiences growing up in the community as well as his experience of being involved in a homicide. He maintained that his policing principles were bound by respect for the Black community, and that his interactions with Black males in particular crossed professional bounds in a way that Black males could still relate to him. Alexis’s policing style on the other hand was shaped by her witnessing an officer-involved homicide when she was a child, which made her hyper-vigilant about the ways she engaged community members.

Officers support for Black Lives Matter was also rooted in their ability to separate the overall message of the movement from individual protestors. Many officers reported their dissatisfaction of the negative messages they believed protestors propagated during rallies. “Pigs in the blanket, fry them up like bacon” “die pigs” and “fuck the police” were commonly mentioned by officers in their opposition towards the movement. Officers often reported that the leaders of the movement did a poor job of leading protestors in a non-violent and respectable fashion. Others argued that it was not BLM protestors, but violent anarchist groups with their own agendas blending in with BLM
protestors. Raheem spoke at great length about his experience policing Black Lives Matter protests,

To tell you the truth, it’s not even so much the Black Lives Matter that gets violent. Ninety percent of the time, it’s always some small anarchist group that shows up. It’s not hard to spot, especially in Black Lives Matter groups. You’ll have about 75-100 Black people and then you’ll have 15-20 White people that are out there supporting. Then you’ll have about five to ten white people with bandanas, all dressed in black. They come out like they’re in uniform […] they’re just kinda sitting in the crowd and then they whip a brick through the window and then the crowd erupts […] and now everyone’s getting locked up.

Raheem’s description of the anarchist groups leaves one to speculate who these white groups are and their overall purpose of infiltrating protests. During the George Floyd protests, reports surfaced that white supremacist groups and anti-government groups such as the proud boys and boogaloo bois infiltrated peaceful protests and subsequently starting the riots and civil unrest in cities throughout the country (Sardarizadeh and Wendling 2020). Additionally, recent reports of police departments’ ability to penetrate the Black Lives Matter organization through social media and protests only adds to the mystery (Fulwood III 2018; Morales and Ly 2019). The few officers who were able to separate BLM protestors from the movement also expressed frustration with the inability of Black movements to thrive without interference from Whites and the government. For example, Jaquell expressed,

I feel everything our people fight for with Black Lives Matter or Black Panther, just gets shot down. So, I think it's okay. I don't know if all their points is valid, but hey, if you're fighting for something, that's good to me. So, if you feel someone was killed and there wasn't no justice or injustice, then to fight for it, you gotta right to do that.

Both Raheem and Jaquell’s narratives illustrate some Black officers’ defensive (or support) of the Black Lives Matter movement as well as the protests. In the previous section, I spoke about Raheem and the identity conflict he endured as a result of being
both Black and blue. In Raheem’s quote, this identity conflict or double consciousness is even more apparent. Raheem is able to endorse BLM and defend the movements legitimacy but is also able to maintain that Blue lives matter. These findings suggest that Black officers’ double consciousness is ever-present. Black officers feel the tensions within both identities, but many reported that they aligned more with their racial identities because their occupation was not apparent once they took their uniform off—a thing that they could not do with their race (Harvey Wingfield 2013).

Black officers’ inability to remove Blackness from the presentation of self also drove their understandings and support (or lack thereof) for the Blue lives matter agenda. Even officers who criticized Black Lives Matter and were supportive of white officers involved in shootings did not so readily defend the Blue Lives Matter agenda. For example, Eddie, the officer who argued that White officers were terrified of shooting a Black person—even if justified, argued,

The Black Lives Matter movement is a legitimate response to police misconduct. The Blue Lives Matter movement is just a cheap knockoff to undermine the real issues that minorities go through. Certain police have racist tendencies and are trying to silence the voices of real Black victims of police misconduct. They’re saying Blue Lives Matter because they want to instill that stereotype that Blacks hate the police.

This tension between Black and Blue are apparent. On the one hand, Eddie empathizes with officers involved in shootings, on the other he understands the complexity of the issues of race and racism in policing, and thus endorses the Black Lives Matter movement, denounces the blue lives matter agenda, and supports blue culture. This double consciousness reveals an identity conflict that all Black officers possess. All desire feelings of empowerment, and for some, the police identity provides that. For others, making a difference in the Black community and intentionally working to reduce
racial disparities in policing provides them a sense of empowerment. While all officers are made aware of their outsider status in the department, some have been fully coopted into the organization and thus reinforce the underlying tenants of blue culture.

**Conclusion**

In this article, I draw on Dubois’s conception of double consciousness to demonstrate how Black police officers perceive the issue of violent policing and align themselves with competing reform movements. Consistent with existing conceptions of DuBois’s theoretical insight, my findings reveal that double consciousness oftentimes acts as a protective measure for Black officers trying to make sense of themselves within an organization whose foundations are entrenched in white supremacy. The policing identity provides all officers, regardless of race, a form of coercive power and authority not yielded to the average civilian. For Black officers, this coercive power is coalesced with a racial identity that largely marginalized. As a result, an identity conflict arises for officers who are conditionally empowered by the police department; so long as Black officers integrate well within the existing organizational culture and are complicit to white officers’ racism they remain in power. Findings from the present study illustrate that all officers, regardless of their disposition towards the community, possess a double consciousness. The employment of these consciousnesses vary by officer and is largely situational. Findings show that the magnitude of officers Black racial or Blue organizational consciousness is conditioned by their personal experiences with race and their experiences as police officers. Officers responded in three ways: Blue Lives Matter, All Lives Matter, and Black Lives Matter—often in combination.
With regards to the Black Lives Matter movement, I argue that officers’ double consciousness allows them to be critical of the profession and therefore supportive of the movement. Respondents who supported the movement were those who had, to some degree, experienced and witnessed racialized police violence, as well as those who experienced racism in the department. Double consciousness was also employed in ways that was protective of the existing status quo. I find that most officers were caught between consciousness and therefore justified police actions and culture, but at the same time affirmed BLM as a legitimate response to racialized police violence. Officers who believed that BLM posed a threat to their role and authority as officers commonly rejected the statement that Black lives matter as well as the movements claims of racialized police violence. Respondents often criticized BLM for its lack of attention on intra-racial group violence as well as protestors “violent” tendencies towards officers. These officers most often rebuttal that “All lives matter,” not just the Black ones. Full fledge support of the Blue Lives Matter agenda was the least common finding among officers, and this support was often employed with the “all lives matter” rhetoric.

Together, these findings show the utility of DuBoisan thoughts in studies on race and policing. Results from this study have implications for legislation that seeks to integrate Black officers within the existing white racial frame of the police department. More specifically, these findings should challenge current conceptions of diversity by police administrators and policy makers. While racial diversity is an absolute must in police departments across the country, existing hiring requirements must transform in ways that incorporate a diversity of Black perspectives into the department, not just the ones that reaffirm the legitimacy of the existing power structures within society. Further
research is needed to examine how this double consciousness plays out in departments and cities with less and even more Black representation than the MPD. Current calls for police reform will undoubtedly benefit from conversations that explicitly highlight the existing white racial regimes that exist within the departments.
This measure is calculated simply by dividing the proportion of Black officers in the department by the proportion population in the city. A score of 1.0 indicates that the department is fully representative of the Black population. (See Walker, S., & Turner, K. B. (1992). *A Decade of Modest Progress: Employment of Black and Hispanic Police Officers, 1983-1992*. Department of Criminal Justice, University of Nebraska at Omaha.)
CHAPTER 3

DO THESE BLUE LIVES MATTER?

In August 2015, a group of Black and Latino officers from the New York Police Department (NYPD) filed a formal class action lawsuit against the NYPD claiming racial bias and discrimination. The 12 officers named in the lawsuit alleged that the NYPD employed a quota driven system that required officers to meet fixed numerical arrest goals each month. These quotas, they argued, were used to maintain racially discriminatory policing practices (i.e. stop and frisk)—a practice that had been ruled unconstitutional back in 2013 and reaffirmed in 2014 by a New York district court judge. As a result of their non-compliance with the now illegal practice and subsequent whistleblowing efforts, these minority officers were punished and retaliated against both formally and informally. Many reported being placed on desk duty, assigned undesirable details, and being written up for very technical minor uniform violations. In spite of overwhelming evidence of the department’s retaliatory actions (e.g. audio recordings, write-ups), the department’s administrators and leadership vehemently denied the allegations, calling the accusations “bullshit.” In the end, a federal judge dismissed the officers’ claims of discrimination, arguing that the way the quota laws were written, the group was unable to sue the department and instead were advised to file complaints of discrimination internally. While the NYPD 12 were not the first officers to speak out against racially discriminatory policing, their story helps to illuminate the practice and process of organizational inequalities in the police department.

Ray (2019) identifies racialized organizations as operating under four central tenets: 1) enhances or diminishes the agency of racial groups; 2) legitimates the unequal
racial distribution of resources; 3) accept whiteness as a credential; and 4) the separation of formal rules from organizational practices is racialized. The police act as gatekeepers to a criminal justice system that disproportionately targets communities of color (Neusteter, Subramanian, Trone, Khogali, and Reed 2019). As occupiers of these “raced” communities, police organizations operate under the guise of state-sanctioned control. Historically and arguably contemporarily, this control has been driven by white-supremacist ideology and values that aim to further marginalize these “raced” communities. While scholarship has largely documented the contentious relationship between Black citizens and police departments (Brown 2019), and to some extent, the impact of Black police officer representation on various policing outcomes, much less is known about the interracial intra-organizational interactions.

The police department is a petri dish for racial inequalities and thus an ideal site to study race and organizational discrimination. This chapter examines the ways racial inequities are maintained and reproduced in a local police organization—exploring the process of racialization that differentiates Black officers from non-Black officers. Racialization refers to the process by which fixed racial meanings and categories are assigned to individuals, even if these categories are inconsistent or incongruent with self-identification (Gans 2017; Omi and Winant 2014). This process ultimately influences job mobility, access to department resources, policing and social-psychological outcomes, as well as intra-organizational interactions.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with Black police officers of the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), a large urban police force located in a hyper-segregated community, this research considers the relationship between Black police officers and the
police department. My analysis incorporates the perspective of Black police officers to help identify if and how the police department is a racialized organization with durable inequalities.

I identify several practices through which racialized organizational inequalities are maintained including: hiring, tenure and promotion, segregated neighborhood assignments, avenues of recourse for reports of racial discrimination, and quotidian processes of othering. My findings shed light on the organizational processes that maintain inequalities within police departments and, I argue, subsequently inform police-community interactions. In this respect, I move beyond the “bad apple perspective” which situates officer misconduct and racism at the individual level and instead provide a more copious view of the organizational dimensions that generate inequalities. This research makes contributions to the existing literature on race, organizations, and policing and may help shape public policy by encouraging police departments to develop racial accountability structures that would make police organizations accountable to both Black officers and Black citizens.

Organizational Inequalities

Sociologists theorizing organizational and employment inequalities have produced a large literature on the organizational reproduction of racial, gender, and class inequalities (Wooten and Couloute 2017; Alfrey and Windance Twine 2017; Acker 1990; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019; Ray 2019; Ray, Ortiz, and Nash 2017; Harvey Wingfield 2013; Royster 2003). Traditional organizational scholars have often identified inequalities at the individual level, often missing, the organizational formations and hierarchies that generate and reinforce racial and other distinctions. Likewise, scholars of
race and ethnicity often focus on inequalities at the individual and state level unconnected to material structures (Burke 2016). Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt (2019) argue that individuals do not exist absent of the relationships in which they are embedded. Likewise, Ray (2019) maintains that organizations are not race-neutral entities, but instead are racial structures with schemas connecting organizational rules to material and social resources. According to Acker (2006), all organizations have inequality regimes, which she defines as, “loosely interrelated practices, processes, actions, and meanings that result in and maintain class, gender, and racial inequalities within particular organizations” (443). In this sense, racialized inequality regimes are meaningful for both individuals and organizations (Wooten and Coloute 2017).

Examining inequalities in organizations from an intersectional viewpoint and as connected to relationships allows scholars to focus on how categorical distinctions (i.e. race, class, gender), when bound to organizational hierarchies and divisions of labor, provide organizational opportunities for inclusion, exclusion, and exploitation (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019).

Scholarship has identified overlapping mechanisms through which inequalities are reproduced and maintained. For example. Ray (2019) maintains that cultural schemas and material resources generate and reproduce inequalities in organizations. Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt (2019) argue that material inequalities are distributed through processes of social closure and exploitation, while the cultural and interactional ability to make successful claims steers those processes. Acker (2006) argues that the categorical distinctions of race, class, and gender identities in and of themselves reproduce inequalities through various textually informed practices. These practices include the
organization of formal and informal work, hiring practices, and division of labor which are all shaped, according to Acker, by individual identity. For example, racial discrimination privileges White workers over Black workers (see Royster 2003 on hiring and treatment on the job) while sexism privileges male employees over female employees in racialized and gendered contexts. In sum, racialized organizational inequalities are maintained through a set of relationships between actors and the organizations they inhabit. In this paper, I utilize racialized organization theory to study the disparate treatment of Black police officers and the overspill of these inequalities within predominantly Black communities.

**Racialized Organizational Theory**

Using the U.S. military as a site of study, Ray (2018) argues that the frame of diversity inadequately addresses the organizational and racial realities that shape individuals' experiences of race and discrimination in the military. Racialized organizational theory was developed to illustrate that racialized social systems reproduce elements of the racial hierarchy. Ray (2019) identifies racialized organizations as operating under four central tenets: 1) that enhances or diminishes the agency of racial groups; 2) that legitimate the unequal distribution of resources; 3) Whiteness is a credential; and 4) the separation of formal rules from organizational practices is racialized. According to Ray, Nash, and Ortiz (2018), racialized organization theory relies on the premise that racial schemas guide organizational formations, hierarchies, and internal processes of credentialing. Ultimately, they argue that through recruitment, hiring, promotion, and organizational contexts (broadly defined), the police organization should be recognized as a racialized organization. In the sections that follow, I identify
the elements within the existing literature, that satisfy Ray’s conception of racialized organization theory.

**Blue Culture**

Inequalities in the police organization are maintained and legitimated through organizational socialization processes. Police culture, also known as Blue culture, is widely known for its insularity, warrior-like mentality, and resistance to outsider critique. This culture is said to extend beyond racial, cultural, jurisdictional, and geographical bounds, and provides officers with a sense of unification and comradery in departments across the country (Sierra-Alvero 2019; Moskos 2008a). This “one for all and all for one” mentality is rooted in police organization’s para-military structure and the states’ ability to rally support by branching bits of power and funding to individual actors and departments in the name of public safety (Balko 2013). In this regard, scholars have argued that police culture incorporates aspects of white supremacy and anti-Black racism (Williams 2015). Police actors regularly legitimate the racialization of crime, guilt, innocence, and thoughts around deservedness (Ray, Ortiz, and Nash 2017). This has been apparent in the racial profiling literature (Welch 2007; Warren, Tomaskovic-Devey, Smith, Zingraff, and Mason 2006) as well as larger studies on the disproportionate impact of the criminal justice system on predominantly Black communities (Vargas, Preito-Hodge, and Christofferson 2019; Clair and Winter 2016). While studies have thoroughly documented the unequal treatment of racially marginalized citizens by police, much less is known about the inter-racial and intra-organizational disparities that exist among officers.
In spite of a shared organizational affiliation and identification, inequalities exist within the police organization as they do in all organizations. At the very basic level, the hierarchical rank-and-file structure of police departments make them inherently unequal. Scholars who have centralized the experiences of officers of color, and Black law enforcement officers in particular, have found that White officers treat Black officers in similar ways as they treat Black civilians (Paul and Birzer 2017; Wilson and Wilson 2014; Barlow and Barlow 2002; Sklansky 2007; Bolton and Feagin 2004; Wilson, Wilson, and Thou 2015). For example, findings from Paul and Birzer’s (2017) study reveal that White officers associate Black officers with Black criminality. Further findings reveal that Black officers are often subject to racial profiling and harassment while off-duty by white officers. Charbonneau, Spencer, and Glaser (2017) find that Black off-duty officers were significantly more likely than White off-duty officers to be mistakenly killed by other on-duty officers. Findings also reveal that non-white on-duty officers were overrepresented among victims killed by police during situations involving crimes and disputes in progress than White on-duty officers, who were more likely to be killed during planned team operations (i.e. drug raids) by friendly fire. Ultimately, these findings illustrate Black officers outsider status. That Black officers aren’t granted the same organizational legitimation, protections, and respect as white officers suggests that organizational mechanisms and social processes are at work reproducing inequalities in police departments.

Scholarship has also revealed that Black officers are subject to racially hostile working environments (Wilson and Wilson 2014; Bolton 2003; Bolton and Feagin 2004) and overt forms of racism (Dodge and Pogrebin 2002). Bolton (2003) argues that Black
officers face organizational barriers that limit opportunities for career advancement and job mobility. Further findings reveal that Black officers are often surveilled and scrutinized by white officers who routinely call into question Black officers’ decision making, policing abilities, legitimacy, and positionality within the department. Intersectional scholars on race, gender, and policing identify a double marginalization for Black female officers (Dodge and Pogrebin 2002; Martin 1994; Texeira 2002). These identities equip Black female officers with intersectional experiences of discrimination perpetrated by Black male officers, white male officers, and white female officers. Texeira (2002) finds that Black female officers often fall victim to sexual predation in police departments by their male colleagues. Approximately five percent of her respondents reported experiencing sexual assault from white male officers, and 18% reported being inappropriately touched by both White male and Black male officers. Many of these Black female officers reported not filing complaints or resisting their abusers advances due to fears of organizational retaliation, which they believed, would result in the termination of employment, assignment to undesirable details and equipment, or making the sexual advances worse (Texeira 2002).

Larger studies on whistleblowing efforts in police departments document similar findings for officers who speak out against departmental practices. Ultimately, these findings highlight a lack of organizational support in police departments for officers to make claims of corruption and discrimination and reinforces what scholars have identified as the Blue code of silence (Moskos 2008). These findings also reveal the potential material and social consequences that could dissuade officers from filing formal complaints of discrimination in the first place.
Research has also reported some behavioral differences between Black and non-Black officers in arrests (Brown and Frank 2006; Sharp 2016), the employment of deadly force (Kennedy et al. 2017; Menifield, Shin, and Strother 2018; Legewie and Fagan 2016; Hong 2015) and officer dispositions toward the community (Gau and Paoline 2017). This body of literature, while informative, is filled with mixed and inconsistent findings. Inconsistencies in the literature may be attributed to differences in research sampling techniques as well as individual organizational variation in departments across the country. According to Menifield, Shin, and Strother (2018), Black and Latino citizens are killed at similar rates by non-white (i.e. Black and Latino) officers and white officers. Kennedy et al. (2017) find that increasing the representation of Black police officers leads to fewer excessive force complaints (see also, Hong 2017). Further findings reveal that in counties where police departments are less racially representative there was a lower proportion of officer-involved homicides of Black civilians. Nicholson-Crotty et al. use two years of crowd-sourced data of the 100 largest U.S. cities to explore the relationship between officer-involved homicides of Black civilians and the percentage of Black officers in a department. Findings for the 2014 data reveal no significant relationship between percent Black in a department and officer-involved homicides of Black citizens. In the 2015 data, finding show a positive and significant relationship between the percentage of Black officers in a department and fatal encounters of Black citizens—up until about 50%, at which the percentage of Black officers becomes associated with fewer fatal encounters of Black citizens.

A Chicago study (Sekhon 2017) found that Black officers were more likely to be involved in shootings while off-duty than on-duty. The author uses the proximity to
violence argument to explain these findings. In other words, because Black officers may live in closer proximity to Black neighborhoods where concentrations of crime and shootings are higher, Black officers are more likely to resort to the use of deadly force while off-duty. Further findings reveal that Black officers were significantly underrepresented among uniformed on-duty shooting and slightly overrepresented among plain clothes on-duty shootings. These findings suggest that specialized crime control units (i.e. narcotics, gang) requiring officers in plainclothes might attract the most aggressive officers or that Black officers are more apt to be involved in these units because of their ability to “blend in” neighborhoods.

Other studies on racially disparate outcomes in the criminal justice system have found that Black criminal justice officials behave in almost identical ways as their white counterparts (Steffensmeier and Britt 2001; Sun and Payne 2004; Clair and Winter 2016). Steffensmeier and Britt (2001) find similarities between Black and White judges sentencing patterns, although Black judges were slightly more punitive in their sentencing decisions than white judges. At the very basic level, these findings may suggest that self-selection into the profession may stimulate biases. In other words, if Black individuals who apply to become criminal justice officials hold views consistent with the existing social order, then change in terms of equitable outcomes is unlikely.

Additionally, these findings may suggest that substantive or “active” Black representation in a racialized criminal justice system might be inhibited by strong organizational identification and socialization. Black officers, like Black judges, may be governed more by their law enforcement training rather than their personal experiences with Blackness. In contrast, others have found that increasing the representation of Black
criminal justice officials produces more racial justice within the criminal justice system (Schuck and Rabe-Hemp 2017; King, Johnson, and McGeever 2010; Legewie and Fagan 2016; Hong 2017; Hong 2017; Boyd 2016). For example, Legewie and Fagan (2016) argue that Black racial diversity in police departments mitigates group threats, which may subsequently decrease the number of Black citizens killed by police. Cochran and Warren (2012) find that Black and minority officers increase African American citizens perceptions of police legitimacy during traffic stops. Together, this hodgepodge literature may point to varying levels of racial regimes present in police departments across the country; some that allow Black officers to act as change agents within the community, and others that do not. To this end, findings may suggest that beyond symbolic representation, Black officers, in departments with less inequality, may indeed possess some substantive or “Active” representation in Black communities, which could potentially lead to less police-enacted violence. At the same time, Black officers who do find themselves in departments with strong racialized inequality regimes, may be subject to stronger organizational socialization and expectations, leading them to enact violence on Black community members as would any other officer.

The present study centralizes the experiences of Black police officers and examines these experiences through a frame of racialized organizational inequalities. Drawing on in-depth interviews with Black officers, I explore how the organizational practices of othering contribute to racialized organizational inequalities for Black officers.
Research Design

Data for this chapter consists of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with Black police officers from the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD). The interviews are a part of a larger project on the experiences of Black police officers and the data for this analysis were collected between June 2016 and January 2018.

The Metropolitan Police Department

The Metro Police Department (MPD) is a large police force located in a hyper-segregated Black community undergoing gentrification. Demographically, the city serves a majority racial/ethnic population (>60%), with Blacks making up approximately 42.6% of the total population. The city is among the national leaders in poverty, unemployment, crime, and incarceration.

Multiple federally mandated consent decrees to increase the department’s racial diversity have been issued to the MPD, and recent departmental recruitment efforts have turned attention specifically to hiring officers from more “diverse” backgrounds. However, the department has remained predominantly white and male, with all officers of color, and Black officers in particular, making up approximately 43% and 30% of the department, respectively. Nonetheless, several of the executive leadership positions are currently held by both Blacks and women.

I chose the PPD as a site of study for several important reasons. First, the PPD is located in a large democratic urban city with a sizeable Black population. Using Samuel Walker’s (1992) Equal Employment Opportunity Index to measure racial diversity compliance efforts in police departments, the MPD scored a .7 out of 1.0 in terms of racial representativeness.[1] Additionally, the PPD has maintained a reputation for
scandal, fraud, and overt forms of racism. In 2017 alone, the department racked up close to $10 million in payouts for civil cases involving excessive force and racial profiling. In multiple ways the department is much like other police forces in large racially segregated U.S. cities.

The department has seen major decreases (-80%) in the number of officer-involved shootings and homicides between 2007 and 2019 (YTD), but was involved in a number of high-profile officer-involved homicides shortly before and throughout the duration of this study. In fact, between 2016 and 2019 the department was involved in approximately 55 officer involved-shootings and homicides, and between the years 2007 and 2019 the department was involved in well over 400 officer involved-shootings. The overwhelming majority of the victims were Black (80%), male, and the average age of suspects was 20. Although the department isn’t racially representative of the city’s population, some of the highest-ranking commanders are Black (i.e. Chief, Deputies). Despite Black leadership, there have been a number of Internal Affairs investigations for overt forms of racism in the department, and some of officers in this study reported routinely encountering racism from their colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates.[2] At the peak of this study the appointed Police Commissioner, resigned after reports surfaced of him ignoring a Black female officers claims of sexual harassment. Finally, the department was recently hit with additional consent decrees for evidence of racial profiling and was subject to a Department of Justice investigation in 2014 for the excessive use of deadly force.
Interviews

This chapter draws on 48 interviews with Black police officers. Blackness is defined broadly to include all groups within the African Diaspora. I employed a respondent-driven sampling technique to diversify my sample and recruit participants from various precincts and divisions. I recruited officers by calling, texting, and/or approaching officers at community events. My initial contact was a retired police officer who served more than 20 years on the force. This officer provided the contact information for several other police officers, including the president of the local Black police association, who provided strong support with the recruitment of other Black officers. I was also invited to various community events put on by the association, where I personally recruited officers who then provided the contact information for other potential participants.

Officers varied in occupational rank, time on the force, and age. Four respondents were retired, and 44 of the 48 reported being from the city the police department served. This analysis includes the narratives of 22 women and 26 men.[3], these data are equipped to document the various thoughts and experiences of Black police officers in the department.

On average, interviews lasted about one and a half hours. Interviews took place at various locations throughout the city, with quite a few taking place in officers’ homes, only one interview was conducted over the phone. Each interview followed a semi-structured list of questions. The first set of interview questions were designed to understand respondents’ motivations for joining the department, their overall role orientations, and their views on various departmental policies. More detailed questions
were then presented which probed for more identity related responses and officers’ experiences with active and passive representation, as well as discrimination. Included in this part of the interview were questions such as, “what is racial profiling? And, have you ever experienced it?” “What does it mean to be a Black police officer?” “How are your relationships with other officers in the department?” Have you ever felt that you were discriminated against for your race and/or gender? The interviews were concluded by asking respondents whether “you feel like there is a lack of Black officers in the department, and if so, what could the department do to recruit more Black officers,” these questions sought to probe for officers’ understandings of racial placement and their demographic representation in the department.

Each of the interviews were coded using the qualitative research software ATLAS.ti. The theoretical coding scheme emerged inductively, and transcripts were reviewed several times to identify emerging themes and categories. Pseudonyms were assigned to each of the interviews, and all identifying information was extracted from the data. Transcripts were first coded using officers’ explanations of their racial and organizational identification. Second, I coded the ways Black officers conceptualized their roles in the communities they policed as well as in the MPD. Third, I coded how officers spoke and responded to questions around racialized police violence and racial profiling. Fourth, I coded instances of passive and active racial and organizational representation and the strategies and language used to justify these actions. Diagrams and flow charts were used to disentangle the various processes that served to racialize and marginalize these Black officers.
Findings and Analysis

Throughout the interviews, officers frequently revealed the obstacles they faced being Black within the police department. These obstacles of unequal treatment ranged in severity from micro-aggressions to outright physical and bodily harm. Several organizational processes were frequently identified as generating the unequal treatment of Black officers by their fellow White officers and the police department in its entirety. In this section, I discuss these organizational processes and their applicability to racialized organizational theory. I find that the MPD has maintained a racial project both within the community and in the department through five organizational practices: recruitment and hiring, tenure and promotion, neighborhood and case assignments, officer complaints and compliance, and organizational responses to internal review board decisions.

Recruitment and Hiring

Police Departments have increasingly faced challenges recruiting and hiring Black people. These challenges, which are deeply embedded in the historical context of racialized policing (see Alexander 2012), may reflect Black racial group attitudes and dispositions towards law enforcement (Waters, Hardy, Delgado, and Dahlmann 2007), disproportionate levels of police contact and violence against Black people (Rios 2011; Alexander 2012; Forman 2017; Schenwar 2016), as well as organizational discriminatory hiring practices and culture (Bonner and Johnson 2017). Among officers in this study, there was a lack of consensus on the departments’ current racial representation and racial diversity outreach and recruitment. While some officers believed that the department had done its due diligence in creating a more representative workforce, others criticized the department and its leadership for failing to recruit and hire more racially and ethnically
diverse officers who were from the city. According to Eleanor, a highly ranked officer with more than 25 years on the force comments,

A lot of things were done to keep young Black men off this job. A lot of things [...] I mean there was no need for the polygraph. Y’know you polygraph a person doesn’t mean a damn thing [...] The way the person is investigated is ridiculous, and you’re not getting better officers. Like even with the college credits, that eliminated a great deal of individuals who would be pristine candidates, but because you put another bump in the road, you’re diminishing your numbers. So that’s why when we go to the academy graduation, you see one Black guy out of 50 or two Black guys out of 50 or none. And Black females, forget about it. I been to three graduations where there no Black folks. None. Between the physical requirements, which are insane, then you have the college credits, then you have all the nonsense with if you got a [criminal identification] number, how did you get it? All of those things. [...] Say you were god forbid arrested when you were 19 or 18 for y’know smoking weed on the highway [...] now you got an arrest for a stupid little thing, but now that might get you kicked out the process. So many things get people kicked out of the process, what you gone end up with?

Within this narrative, Eleanor identifies the organizational process of social closure (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019) that continue to disqualify Black applicants during recruitment and hiring. Social closure refers to the organizational mechanisms that exclude some actors from opportunities, positions, and access to organizational resources based on their out-group and in-group status.

Social closure is a key mechanism in the maintenance of racialized organizational inequalities and as evidenced by this quote, particularly disparaging to Black recruits. Other officers also cited the departments polygraph tests as an obstacle for Black applicants. Like Eleanor, many Black officers believed these tests were biased, especially towards Black officers. The polygraph test was reinstated in the departments hiring process in 2011 and was implemented to promote the “integrity” of future officers. Literature on the reliability of the polygraph test has overwhelmingly argued against its use (Stanley 2018. For example, the National Academy of Sciences argued that the
polygraph test could lead to the unnecessary loss of competent and highly skilled workers in organizations like police departments, because of false positive polygraph exams (National Research Council 2003). Brandon talked about his experience with the polygraph test noting its inherent racial bias. When probed, Brandon revealed that he failed the polygraph test on his first attempt on a question that asked if he’d ever sold drugs. Brandon was immediately disqualified and told that he would have to start the process over again if he was still interested, to which he obliged. These findings confirm previous research on the inherent racial biases present in polygraph testing (Stanley 2018) and the prevalence of stereotype threat in the distribution of these tests by white investigators to Black applicants. These tests often weed out Black applicants for stereotypical associations of Black criminal behavior (e.g. drug distribution, theft, and drug use) and are a part of the departments continuous process of racialization for Black officers and applicants.

Additionally, prior records or Criminal Identification Numbers (CIN) are used as a mechanism of exclusion from hiring. An analysis of the MPDs 2019 stop-and-frisk data reveal that significant racial disparities have remained for Black citizens since the department entered a federal consent decree nearly a decade ago. Black residents are less than 50% of the total population but accounted for more than 70% of stops recorded by MPD officers. Further analysis reveal that Black citizens were about 50% more likely than Whites to be stopped by police, and a high percentage of these stops were made for quality of life issues (e.g. public consumption of alcohol). These findings suggest that Black civilians are disproportionately targeted by police and are more likely to be
stopped, frisked, and possibly detained for low level offenses, which would subsequently increase their likelihood of having a CIN that would impact eligibility.

Echoing Eleanor’s narrative, many officers attributed the lack of diversity to the department’s previous college credit requirement that barred many, otherwise qualified, Black, Latino, and working-class candidates from applying. According to Saniyah, a moderately ranked officer,

Well our last police commissioner […] started the [college] credits and it really weeded out the minorities, because a lot of us don’t get our degrees […] but because of that we did 8 years with the numbers dwindling, now it’s becoming more white because of that. […] I have a girlfriend that’s a postal worker, she don’t got her degree, but she wanted to be a cop, why she can’t be a cop? She’s a good law-abiding citizen. So just because you don’t have the [college] credits you can’t become a police officer.

Apparent in Saniyah’s criticism is the long-lasting effects this recruitment policy change had on the overall diversity in the department approximately eight years after its implementation. While the former commissioner argued that these policy changes merely reflected his desire to raise the caliber of officers, the effectiveness of these policy changes have been debated among the rank-and-file, especially as they relate to racial diversity hiring and retention. There was, of course, a loophole around the college credit requirement, and officers who served in the military were (and still are) granted extra points during the application process.

The institutionalization of residency requirements, or the lack thereof, for recruits is another dimension within the recruitment process that leads to greater racial disparities among officers. According to the official requirements of the department, recruits do not have to live within the city prior to joining the force but must establish residency within six months of becoming a police officer. After five years on the force, officers are then
allowed to move outside of the city to neighboring suburban counties. These requirements vastly open up the pool of eligibility and arguably depletes recruitment efforts within the city limits, especially racial diversity efforts. Many officers complained that these laxed requirements ultimately advantage whites from surrounding counties whose only interactions with Black people have been through crime shows and the negative media portrayals. My respondents reported that this led to more “heavy handed” policing of Black communities by white officers and negative white-black relations within the department and community.

Issues within the departments hiring process were also reportedly located in the makeup of the recruitment division. According to officers, the division was predominantly white with the exception of two Black background investigators. Officers often reported that the lack of Black officer representation in recruitment damaged racial diversity initiatives and continued to allow the ‘good ole’ boys’ club to thrive by “taking care” of White officers’ children and family members who sought to join the force. Black officers reported witnessing and hearing about instances where Black recruits were disqualified for factors that did not work against White recruits. These findings are consistent with the literature on racial discrimination in hiring practices (Pager 2003; Pager, Western, and Sugie 2009) that has found that even whites with a criminal background fare better than Blacks with no criminal background at all.

Together these findings shed light on the organizational mechanisms that serve as barriers for recruiting and hiring more racially diverse officers. Social closure or the exclusion of certain actors from participation in an organization (i.e. the police department) is maintained through opportunity hoarding by White officers and the
subsequent exclusion of Black recruits. By institutionalizing requirements that disproportionately and negatively impact Black (and other working-class) citizens, while privileging Whites and Blacks that hold similar racial ideologies as the existing status quo, the MPD reinforces a racial regime that closely mirrors the ‘good ole’ boys’ network.

**Interactional Racialization and the Organizational Hierarchy**

The distribution of inequality varies significantly among the rank-and-file of the department. Black officers are approximately 30% of the entire force, and their numbers within the ranks vary from a low 19% to a high of 50% in some positions. Fifteen out of the 49 officers in this study were ranked above the level of patrol. To join the ranks or be promoted to specialized units, officers must take qualifying exams and rank high in terms of testing outcomes. Generally, tests are offered every few years and require extensive studying and preparation (a resource now offered by the Black police union). Promotions and transfers to specialized units offer desirable benefits such as steadier work schedules for those in administrative roles, less footwork than traditional patrol, higher base pay, and more authority in the department. At the same time, promotions are accompanied with greater responsibility, greater accountability to leadership, more limited interactions with the community, less overtime pay, and much less action. Most officers I spoke with never consider promotion an option or an ideal position due to the changing roles and responsibilities. Those who had been promoted and those who were in the promotion process generally attributed their movement within the organization to a more senior Black officer. As Saniyah recalled, “I have a lot of [Black] people pushing for me to move up the ranks […] so now that I’m at this rank, they wanna see how far I can go, so
I’m just gone do it. I’m just gone move all way up, and just see.” As reflected in Saniyah’s narrative, the disruption of traditional racialized organizational rituals come as a result of having Blacks in supervisory roles.

Samira, who served 10 years on the force, reported that she was being bullied out of the department due to prejudice and discrimination. According to Samira,

They're prejudiced towards us too, the white cops. I'm like well damn, it's supposed to be blue shirt, blue blood, whatever, but it's ridiculous. From my experience, [...] it's a lot of prejudice in that department. The blue shirts, which are the ones that patrol and do all the work, you barely get respect. [...] Especially from the white male officers or the white male supervisor. For you to progress in it, you had to make rank. You can't progress being in a blue shirt.

Samira’s account is telling of some officers’ feelings of discontent and stagnation in the department due to their inability to impact change. Throughout the study period three officers reported leaving the department to pursue “more fulfilling” careers outside of policing. Another dimension of this quote is the apparent racial discrimination imposed on Black officers by White male officers. Respondents often reported getting constant pushback from White officers who called into question their legitimacy and authority in the department.

Samira’s narrative is particularly revealing of the experiences of Black Blue shirt officers who deal with both peer and managerial disregard and discrimination. Other Black female and male supervisors reported similar treatment from White males who were of the same rank or even subordinate. These findings suggest that the relationship between rank, race, and discrimination is unique for Black patrol officers but not exclusive. Black patrol officers often have little recourse for speaking out against discrimination because of their lack of power in the department. These findings illustrate the organizational legitimation of claims making and social closure. Black officers have
limitations on the types of claims they can make within the organization (i.e. equal treatment) and are therefore denied respect and acknowledgement by both white peers and white supervisors. For Black officers to be recognized as legitimate or make progress in the organization they must make rank. However, as reported by officers who held some of the highest positions in the department, rank still did not grant them full respect and compliance from White subordinates or peers. This ultimately led some officers to leave and others to disengage from the comradery—treating policing as “just a job.”

In addition to race, gender also played a function in officer promotions and movement within the department. According to Jerome, female patrol officers typically have to work harder to prove themselves in the department and among citizens, however they are more readily offered “good jobs” or more administrative roles on the inside. Several officers agreed with Jerome’s sentiments, but pointed out that the intersection of race and gender really determined who got the good jobs versus the more labor-intensive jobs. According to Eleanor,

Black females are treated far different from our white female counterparts…far different. You will be hard-pressed to drive around the city and see white females in patrol cars, but you’ll see sisters. You’ll see Black females in patrol cars. Now you must ask ya'self why. Because they’re treated differently. They’re treated differently by the supervisors; they’re treated differently by their counterparts. They’re treated differently […] differently so they’re [white women] brought inside. They normally work inside they work in the fire squad position and things like that…like they might be on the street for six months, but after that they inside.

Eleanor’s narrative highlights the intersectional experiences of Black female officers.

While white females are taken care of by their male superiors and placed in positions that in many ways protect the fragility of white femininity, Black female officers must work
the more labor-intensive assignment of patrol throughout their career or make rank to achieve more desirable positions. Eleanor also notes that, because they’re [White females] protected, they don’t wanna move from their spot because they’re scared, they’re gonna lose their spot so they don’t test,” and are therefore underrepresented within the higher ranks. These findings reinforce the prevalence of claims making and social closure within the police organization. White female officers’ exclusive claim on fragility and womanhood in the department legitimates the unequal distribution of less labor-intensive jobs. The exclusion of Black women to be viewed in the same way by White male officers ultimately represents a form of opportunity hoarding and claims making that is in fact racialized. The unintentional consequence of privileging White female officers early on in their careers is that Black women are often put in positions to advance through the ranks and even gain power and authority, ultimately breakdown the existing racial regime. At the same time, this practice closely mirrors the disparate treatment of Black women throughout history and draw on racial tropes and controlling images of Black womanhood. These racial tropes see Black female officers as tougher, less in need of protection, and less deserving in the organization, consistent with the militarization of police culture which values toughness and risk taking. Black women are therefore advantaged in Blue culture over white women in the long run, precisely because Black women are not afforded the same protections of white femininity.

**Neighborhood and Case Assignments**

Neighborhood and case assignments are also a part of the department’s continued racialization process for Black officers—representing a form of social closure and diminished agency. While the intent of officer racial congruity with the community might
be a part of the department's effort to increase positive police-community relations, the inadvertent consequence results in a department that is internally racially segregated and that exploits Black officers’ racial identification for the benefit of the organization. All but one officer’s current and last (for those retired) assignment was in a predominantly Black precinct, however ranked officers or those who had been involved in shooting reported moving around at least twice throughout their career. Kareem, a high-ranking officer reported his first and only time ever being placed in a predominantly White precinct was coupled with a number of incidents he attributed to racism. This included being placed on the night shift for two years in a row—a practice that defied traditional cultural norms of the department. Kareem noted it was an “unwritten law” in the department that when officers first make rank, they are made to take the night shift. However, during officers’ second year as supervisors they are allowed preference for the shift they’d like to work—his preference, he reported, was ignored by the Capitan of the precinct. According to Kareem, all of the officers on the night shift were Black, which added to his belief that his assignment was driven by White racism. Alexis, a commanding female officer, reported similar experiences as a rookie. According to Alexis,

Every year, Christmastime, they [White supervisors] would do something where they would make sure that people would spend the day, and they would go home. This is something that, I would see it happen all the time. But I always noticed that the black officers was only working the whole day. But at first you're like, "Wait a minute. Why, we always working all day?" […] They [White officers] would be off […] but always the black people working. I asked the sergeant, I said, "How come I'm always working? This was a few years this has been going on." He said, "Well, 'cause they have families." I was like, "Well, I have a family." He said, "Oh, well I didn't know that." Well, how? I didn't just come from no egg or something. I was like, "Really?" I said, "Oh, okay.” […] What makes him think that we don't have families?” Our families don't matter, like we didn't matter. That was one of the things that you had to deal with.
Both Alexis and Kareem’s experiences represent racial disparities in officer shift assignments. Many officers speculated that White officers, especially White females, ended up in units and on shifts that were more desirable and required less work because of white privilege and legacy practices. It is important to highlight that high concentrations of Black officers did not mean that White officers were totally absent in these same precincts. White officers were posted throughout the city, while Black officers were placed almost exclusively in predominantly Black precincts. Respondents revealed that White officers were overwhelmingly present in predominantly Black communities and precincts, but their likelihood of moving into positions that required less day-to-day interactions with Black communities was far greater. According to Jamal,

> It's funny, when you talk to a lot of people who look like us [Black people], they'll say that those people [White people] tend to get put in pristine places and get moved. Whereas us, we've got to fight and struggle to get there. One of the things they say lately is they need to see more Black police out in patrol. [...] I have no problem with that because you do want to show that person, but why am I getting dogged out on patrol? That's the hardest part of this job, patrol. When you've got the people, who are of a lighter color, they get to be in all these pristine units. You'll be like, yo, are you kidding me?

Jamal’s narrative reveals a frustration with the organizational treatment of Black officers. While he is aware of the need for representation to be reflected in patrol, he also notes that this type of work is the hardest. This ultimately highlights some of the challenges with “race work” and diversity initiatives in policing, namely both the emotional and physical labor that is required from Black officers policing Black people. While diversity is undoubtedly an attractive solution and a must in police departments that have lost the confidence of the black community across the country, the premise of race work requires an unequal distribution of labor for both Black and White officers. Further, Jamal highlights the struggles Black officers face in order to move within the organization,
while White officers are “put” in these same positions that require considerably less physical labor. These findings suggest that irrespective of the value Black officers add to the organization in patrolling Black communities, their representation within the ranks as well as other specialized units, may be considered less essential.

Officers often reported that their racial identity provided advantages when interacting with Black community members—an advantage that was reportedly absent for white officers. According to Eddie, a ranked officer within a specialized unit and more than 20 years on the force,

I understand Black people, I know being loud is not a sign of aggression. I know that being hyped is not a sign of aggression. I know the hand movements and the head movements are not a sign of aggression. I understand that how people act. My own family, if you come watch us watch a football game you gone think a fight gone break out any second in here. Y’know what I mean (laughs) but it’s not…people being civil but they just excited or whatever.

Eddie’s ability to relate to Black civilians provides him an understanding of the expressive characteristics that are often misconstrued by white officers as aggression. Eddie’s willingness to listen to Black civilians highlights the de-escalation tactics many Black officers reported using when interacting with Black civilians. These de-escalation tactics sometimes even led to officers using their arrest discretion to not lock up civilians. According to Eddie “some guys stories was so reasonable that y’know what, I ain’t lockin’ this guy up for that.” When probed about why one would use their discretion to hear Blacks out and make an arrest decision, Eddie reported that “they [Blacks] never really had a voice when it comes to law enforcement.” Ultimately these findings suggest that while Black officer neighborhood assignments contribute to their continued racialization and marginalization in the department, this racialization may aide in creating more racially equitable policing outcomes.
At the same time, it appears that Black officers’ presence and positive interactions with Black community members increases the legitimacy of the department. This notion was further legitimated by Tyrone,

Some people listen more to Black cops than they do to white cops. [...] say if a white cop went and shut down a party. [...] it would be more hell for the white cop than the Black cop. A Black cop is going to intervene more [...] you also have Black cops who honestly feel a certain type of way because in this department if you’re Black and a white cop sees something a Black person does, they look at it like y’all all Black so you as a Black cop you feel embarrassed. Like ‘yo how you [Black civilian] gone do this?’ You as a Black person represent me, I’m a Black cop, at the end of the day I’m still Black. So, for a Black cop to get a little more hostile and greasy, he’s not doing it because he’s an ass hole, he’s doing it because he’s tryna let you know like look you’re embarrassing me.

According to Tyrone, Black officers are strategically placed, and to some extent, self-select, to police the behaviors and respectability of Black citizens. This quote reveals that Black officers often take their negative interactions with Black citizens in a more personal manner due to their outsider status that is highlighted when a Black civilian “embarrasses” them in front of White officers. This inevitable “linked fate” (Gay, Hochschild, and White 2016; Vargas, Sanchez & Valdez 2017) between Black officers and Black citizens ultimately reinforces the racial hierarchy in the police department and exploits Black officers’ racial identity to the benefit of the organization.

Together, these findings suggest that Black officers’ assignments to predominantly Black neighborhoods can serve as a hindrance to their movement within the organization. However, findings also reveal that Black officers’ presence within the community may lead to more equitable policing outcomes for Black civilians. At the same time, I find that White officers’ assumptions of Black officers’ culpability of Black civilians’ behaviors reinforces the racial hierarchy and could potentially lead to Black officers exerting more force during interactions with Black civilians.
Racism Claims and Organizational Responses to Racism

Organizational responses to reports of racism and racial bias serves as an organizational claims-making mechanism. The Internal Affairs (IA) unit in the department processes hundreds of complaints against officers and complaints reported by officers each year. This official process serves as an internal monitoring system for any allegation of officer misconduct. The IA unit is comprised of over 30 Lieutenants and Sergeants who review cases and determine adjudication. Final dispositions for any offense sustained by the Internal Affairs unit are made by the Chief of Police. All but two officers reported that they had at least one IA complaint made against them throughout the course of their career.

Several officers reported that their involvement in IA investigations was due to White officers’ racism. These allegations typically involved White officers using racial slurs against Black officers on the force. Three officers reported being involved in the same incident where a White commanding officer called a Black commanding officer and two patrol officers a racial slur. While an IA investigation took place and the claims were substantiated, these officers reported that the offending White officer was given paid leave for his transgressions. Not surprisingly, some Black officers reported skepticism in the Internal Affairs investigation process, and as a result many reported not filing complaints against White officers’ overt displays of racism. Instead, some Black officers reported handling White officers’ racism informally. For example, Kareem described an incident where a White commanding officer called out a group of Black officers on the shift he supervised,

So, everybody’s Black on the night shift. Everybody on the other shifts are not that color. So, one day I come into the work […] It was something with some
Kareem’s narrative highlights a number of organizational processes that maintain racial inequalities including the use of racially coded language to highlight claims made by white officers of Black officers’ inability to do their job. While Kareem acknowledged that he reported the incident to the Captain and that he could have reported the incident to Internal Affairs, he ultimately handled the incident informally. These findings suggest that formal avenues for reporting racism are often unavailable, intangible, or undesirable to Black officers. Additionally, these findings underscore the legitimacy of claims making and social closure (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019) within racialized organizations (Ray 2019). Though Kareem reported the incident to his Captain, his claim was not validated, which arguably tainted his faith in the process of formally reporting the incident to internal affairs.

Other officers reported more overt experiences with racism from White colleagues. According to Rasheed, a retired Black supervisor who served almost 30 years on the force, as a rookie, his White supervisor frequently used the slur “Nigger” to describe Black people. According to Rasheed,

At the time I was very young and only had been on the police department a year. [A Black supervisor], I kinda talked to him, he told me don’t make a big deal about it because it can kinda hurt your career and your work.

Ultimately, Rasheed did not file a complaint against the White supervisor but reported that the matter was handled informally. Rasheed’s failure to file a complaint was
attributed to both his and the Black supervisors fear of organizational retaliation, which could’ve potentially posed negative impacts on his tenure in the department. Relatedly, Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt (2019) maintain, “When facing powerful opponents, people often fail in their claims. Many claims are never made, are ignored, or are repressed because the cost/and/or probability of failure is too high,” (5). Rasheed’s narrative complicates this idea of a racialized organization and denotes Black officers’ complacency in the racial caste system in the department. Arguably, Black officers are socialized early on in their careers to not only maintain a code of silence, but to also endure White officers’ racism due to fears of organizational retaliation.

Even Black officers who handled white officers’ racism informally were penalized. Raheem, who served six years on the force, faced a similar obstacle when confronting officers both online and within the department about racism, police brutality, and the Black lives matter movement. Like Rasheed, Raheem was also advised by his fellow Black officers on the delicateness of the situation and how to go about “properly” getting his message across. Ultimately, Raheem was fired for a very minor infraction (i.e. breaking the glasses of a suspect involved in illegal arms trading) and faced a criminal investigation for charges that were later thrown out by a district judge. Both Rasheed and Raheem’s narratives are revealing of the differing consequences of going against the existing racial caste within the department. While Rasheed ultimately maintained his status in the department and even moved up in the ranks, the legacy of anti-Black racism was left unchecked, and arguably contributed to a culture of racial intolerance that led to Raheem’s dismissal. Together, these findings reveal organizational mechanisms in place that shield White officers from claims of racial bias. Due to Black officers’ lack of faith
in the Internal Affair’s process as well as their fear of organizational retaliation, racism is often left unchecked in the department.

Conclusion

In this article, I draw on organizational inequality theories to demonstrate how racial inequities are maintained in MPD. My findings contribute to existing theoretical insights on the study of race and policing. Consistent with Racialized Organizational Theory, Relational Inequality Theory, and Inequality Regimes, my research demonstrates that racism is deeply interwoven into the fabrics of the MPD practices. From the process of hiring to firing, organizational decision making is deeply entrenched in underlying assumptions around race and deservedness. I find that the departments’ hiring efforts have historically relied on practices that have disproportionately targeted Black and working-class recruits. Namely, the departments reliance on formal requirements such as college-credit, polygraph testing, and background investigations for Black applicants, have acted as social closure mechanisms for Black recruits hoping to progress through the hiring process. At the same time, the institutionalization of legacy hiring, the good ole' boys’ network, and the departments lack of residency requirements, has undoubtedly aided in the departments existing white racial regime.

After hiring, Black officers’ experiences within the department remain highly racialized and gendered. As a strategy to maintain the existing white racial regime, social closure to non-whites and exploitation of Black officers legitimates the unequal distribution of neighborhood and shift assignment. Findings show that Black officers are often assigned to predominantly Black neighborhoods while white officers are more often placed in less intensive work areas. The argument behind this tactic is that officer racial
congruity with neighborhood assignment will somehow increase positive community-police relationship building, but in reality, only segregates the department and exploits Black officers’ racial identity to the benefit of the organization.

Additionally, respondents reveal that traditional notions of womanhood and white fragility provide protection to white female officers, while Black women officers are made to endure the toughness of the job. The unintended positive career consequence for Black women officers, is that many become much more motivated to move through the ranks to attain more power within the department. Both the formal and informal procedures to report racial discrimination also served as sites of racialization for Black officers. In this case racialization, has short-term negative consequences for black women but long-term advantages relative to white female officers. Of course, relative to white (and Black) male officer’s, consequences are negative – role encapsulation, sexual harassment, and both gendered and racialized micro aggressions are common.

I find that racialized rituals operate within organizational cultures where whiteness, white supremacy, and masculinity are at the foundation. The continuous integration of Black officers into police departments ultimately helps to disrupt existing racial regimes. However, through organizational socialization, the unequal distribution of resources (i.e. shift, neighborhood, and car assignments), and the de-legitimation of Black officers claims of racism, the existing white racial project is allowed to thrive. Black officers who went against the existing white racial regime often suffered and were silenced and/or pushed out of the department. Others often disregarded white officers’ racism or handled racist encounters informally. Those who did challenge white officers’
racism through internal affairs often reported that white officers faced little to no consequence for their transgressions.

Results from this study have implications for social policies advocating intersectional diversity within historically white racialized organizations. In particular, findings from this study should inform how the rhetoric of diversity is perceived, discussed, and implemented in police departments across the country. My analysis moves beyond the “bad apple” perspective which often locates officer misconduct at the individual level, and instead calls for a more thorough investigation into the racialized organizational rituals that give way to existing inequality regimes within police departments. Further research is needed to examine how these racial regimes exist in departments with both more or less racial representation than the MPD and in the city at large. Such studies are important to race relations in this country, where Black people are heavily over-represented in officer use of force, arrests, and other parts of the criminal justice system. Having a more demographically representative police department is undoubtedly a must in police agencies across the country, but the overreliance on actors within existing white racial regimes without dismantling institutionalized and organizational inequalities will only further legitimate racialized practices within these institutions.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings from the preceding chapters illustrate the utility of racialized organizational theory as well as DuBois’s conception of Double Consciousness in studying the issues of race and policing. Findings from Chapter 1 reveal the complexity of Black Americans within police organizations. More specifically, the narratives illustrated in this chapter shatter common notions of the universal Black racial identity. Instead, Black officers are found to be complex social actors that respond to the world based on situational and contextual factors. I present the Black and Blue typology to help untangle when, how, and why Black officers respond in positive or negative ways to their competing identities. To do so, I distinguish between active and passive racial (i.e. Black) and organizational (i.e. blue) representation. Active representation refers to officers actively engaging their Black racial identity or blue organizational identity to interact with civilians and colleagues alike. Officers who are passive may place less salience on their Black or blue identities.

I find that in the presence of racial discrimination from white citizens, all Black officers, regardless of their sentiments towards the Black community, activated a Black racial frame to combat white citizens racism. For example, when Shabazz, arguably the most conservative and otherwise actively blue officer in the study, was called for an emergency response to a white woman's house, she refused service for her dying husband because he and the emergency response team that showed up were Black. Instead of Shabazz complying with the woman’s demands for a white officer, Shabazz and his partner gave her an option: let her husband die or let them in to help. Similarly, I find that
even the most social justice-oriented officers adopted an active blue orientation when they or their blue comrades' lives were at stake. These findings have implications for how racial diversity in police departments should be discussed and acted upon. More specifically, these findings suggest that the general calls for racial diversity may not work in the context of blue. Attention must also be paid to the organizational culture that elicits the recruitment and hiring of prototypical officers who fit within the existing organizational cultural norms. These findings also reveal a diversity in the Black experience that leads some officers better to relate to the community they police than others, and therefore requires a more nuanced interpretation of calls racial diversity in racially troubled organizations.

Chapter 2 builds on Chapter 1 and examines Black officers' perceptions of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM) and its countermovement’s (i.e. blue lives matter, all lives matter. I take Dubois’s double consciousness as my theoretical framework to further argue the complexity of Black officers. Somewhat similar to the findings in Chapter 1, I find that all officers regardless of their dispositions towards BLM possessed a double (arguably triple) consciousness. Further findings show that this double consciousness acts as a protective measure for most Black officers who feel their authority, power, and legitimacy are under attack by the claims put forth by the Black Lives Matter movement. Other officers' double consciousness allowed them to be critical of the profession and hold police accountable for claims of racialized police violence and aggressive police tactics in the Black community. There were also a few officers who outright supported the blue lives matter counter-movement and advocated that all lives matter. These findings also have implications for public policies that seek to merely
increase the representation of Black police officers without regard to organizational changes. Attention must be paid to the types of officer's departments are recruiting and subsequently hold these forces accountable for recruiting officers who are not jaded by their perceptions or interactions with Black people. These results should also inform conversations around community control in police decision making (i.e. hiring) as well as police accountability to the immediate community they serve. There must be a cultural and social shift in the ways we think about police and accountability. A shift that requires legislators, police, and other actors within the criminal justice system (e.g. District Attorneys, Judges) to be equitable in the writing and enforcement of laws.

Chapter 3 utilizes organizational theory to explore the ways racial inequities are maintained within the police department. Namely, I employ racialized organizational theory (Ray 2019), relational inequality theory (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt 2019), and inequality regimes (Acker 2006), to better understand how racialized organizational practices contribute to the treatment of Black officers and the subsequent treatment of Black citizens. Findings illustrate that racial inequalities are maintained through organizational processes of recruitment and hiring, promotions, officer neighborhood assignments, as well as formal channels that dissuade officers from reporting racial discrimination by their white colleagues.

Again, findings from my work casts doubt on the effectiveness of policies calling for increases in diversity recruitment in police departments. While racial diversity is a must in police departments across the country, attention must also be paid to the organizational blue culture that breeds and maintains overly aggressive and outright violent police attitudes and behaviors towards citizens and Black officers. Black officers'
resistance to BLM and the facts around racialized police violence are indicative of the
department’s dispositions towards the Black community and police violence more
generally. Black officers' resistance to BLM leaves one questioning the prospects of
racial justice in the policing profession and the overall genuity of “kneeling” tactics put
forth by police to calm protestors. In the end, Black officers will undoubtedly help
change the face of violent policing and help shape race relations in police departments,
but the prospects of racial diversity as a solution to racialized police violence will likely
be ineffective due to traditional organizational cultural rituals. Ending police violence
requires a complete shift in ideologies and power relations within departments as well as
local and state governments. In the following sections, I highlight three departments'_attempts at reform and end with suggestions for policing reform in 21st century America.

Police Department’s History of Reform: Is Change Possible?

Calls for defunding the police and police abolition has many Americans
wondering what has happened to traditional calls for reform, where less drastic change is
required? Recent Polls show that most Americans oppose the movement for defunding
police, while the majority of Black Americans say they support the move to not only
defund the police (57%) but to also reallocate police funding to preventative community
programming (64%). Some city governments have elevated the concerns of Black
Americans and subsequently proposed and or passed legislation disbanding troubled
departments, ending contracts with police in schools, and budgetary changes that would
increase police spending in the next fiscal year. Other city governments have taken a
lighter-touch approach and have called on age-old reforms that would require
departments to do things like increase racial diversity, revise use of force policies, and
offer officer bias training. Additionally, the Trump Administration has formed The President’s Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice which consists exclusively of law enforcement officers in working groups that focus on various aspects of the criminal justice system (e.g. respect for law enforcement, recruitment and training, Data and Reporting). The Commission, has not however, devoted attentions to racial disparities and discrimination in policing—the most pressing social issue today.

While less change in law enforcement would require considerably less work and burden on the American conscience, at least in the short-term, the sustainability and effectiveness of lighter touch or pro-policing reforms is not evidenced throughout history. I give three prominent recent examples of departments’ attempts at reform.

**Reform Efforts: The Case of Philadelphia**

The Philadelphia Police Department (PPD), like most police departments across the country, has had an exploitative relationship with its Black community. In recent years, reform efforts have been made to increase officer racial diversity, decrease racial disparities in police stops, increase transparency in police practices, and decrease the deployment of deadly force. While the department has made good on some of these reforms, especially those in conjunction with a Department of Justice consent decree (i.e. decreases in deadly force), others have proven a particular challenge. In a recent progress report of the departments’ engagement in illegal stop and frisks, findings show that since the department's entrance into a federal consent decree almost a decade ago, illegal stops and frisks have decreased, but these problematic stops have remained an issue for the department. Racial disparities in these practices have also persisted and “hit rates” of contraband have remained low.
Similarly, two earlier federal consent decrees were implemented back in the 1970’s and the 1990’s to increase the department's racial representation, however the department has continued to struggle with its whiteness. Though people of color make up almost 70% of the city and Blacks in particular make up about 47% of Philadelphians, the PPD has remained majority white (57%). While the department has maintained its commitment to increasing officer racial diversity, recruitment policies have continued to marginalize Black and low-income applicants. Additionally, reports have surfaced of Black officer’s experiences of racial hostility and violence, reaffirming the existence of racial discrimination and the slow change of the cultural underpinnings of this police department.

In the wake of protests over the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, the Philadelphia City Council approved a revised budget which included a $33 million reduction in police spending—a somewhat drastic move from the previous proposed budget that included a $19 million increase in police spending. Additionally, Mayor Jim Kenney has proposed revisions to the department’s current use of force policies as well as the decision-making abilities of the Philly chapter of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP)—which critics have called a longshot. Still, the city has much to do to ensure that existing and future reforms are carried out efficiently and timely.

Reform Efforts: The Case of Chicago

Like the Philadelphia Police Department, the Chicago Police Department (CPD) has also been slow to change. The CPD has a notable history of torture and violence, corruption, and high-profile officer involved shootings and homicides of Black people. As a result of the 2014 high-profile officer-involved homicide of Black teen Laquan
MacDonald, the subsequent department coverup of his murder, and a Department of Justice investigation, the CPD was subject to its first ever federal consent decree for violence and corruption.Outlined in the consent decree were activities and measures that focused on improving use of force policies, community policing, accountability, recruitment, promotion and training, and impartial policing. According to the first-year report measuring the department’s compliance with the activities outlined in the consent decree, findings show that the department has missed approximately 70% of deadlines including important deliverables on use of force policies and bias training.

Throughout the history of CPD, there have been multiple reform efforts made for racial profiling, racial diversity hiring, and the use of excessive force. Evidence of change has still yet to come from these historic efforts, leaving one to question the prospects of reform in the 21st century. Still, Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who has joined a group launching police reform initiatives, has called for lighter touch reforms in the Chicago PD including: increased transparency, community policing, officer wellness programs, and the licensure of local police officers. Mayor Lightfoot has also argued that calls for defunding would only further hurt the prospects of racial diversity in the department.

Reform Efforts: The Case of Ferguson

The Ferguson Police Department gained national attention in the wake of the officer-involved homicide of unarmed Black teen Michael Brown back in 2014. The department was subject to a federal Department of Justice Investigation which found an acute history of racial profiling, violence, misconduct, and corruption. A consent decree was entered in 2016 which included provisions outlining improvements in community policing, revisions to the municipal code, enhancing officer training, limits on officer
engagement with suspects, as well as diversity hiring. Since the implementation of the consent decree, the department has been sluggish with compliance. According to a semiannual report released in January 2020, approximately four years after the ruling, the department has failed to deliver on key provisions including community policing, officer training, racial diversity, and data analytics.

Since the start of the 2020 “American Spring,” Mayor Ella Jones has expressed faith in the department’s ability to improve and has opposed calls for defunding the police. No additional deliverables for the Ferguson Police Department have been added in the wake of recent civil unrest in protest of police violence, which leads to some questions around the future of police reform in that city.

**Is Change Possible?**

The future of policing in the United States remains uncertain. What is clear though, is the need for unconventional thinking and proposals during this national conversation around police reorganization and reformation. The issue of race and policing is an old issue that has yet to find any resolution. Traditional calls for hiring more racially diverse officers, increasing community policing, revisions of use of force policies, and increasing officer training have not proven successful in creating more equitable policing outcomes arguably due to the underlying police culture as well as the militarization of American police forces. Therefore, more radical, rather rational, change may be necessary to move the country forward. The issue of racial violence and anti-Black racism does not occur in a vacuum and is rather a reflection of larger societal ills. However, the power, authority, and immunity yielded to officers by the state has authorized a racial project that appears invested in maintaining institutionalized racism.
Calls for police accountability, defunding, abolishing, and disbanding departments has been met with serious resistance from political leaders as well as law enforcement agents across the country. In places like Atlanta, Philly, Buffalo, and NYC, officers have taken a stance to “back the blue” by walking off the job and praising officers who’ve been recently disciplined for brutality. These officer-centered protests are arguably predictable responses to threats of loss of power, authority, and legitimacy. At the same time, they are emblematic of the prevalence and toxicity of police culture and are reflective of police resistance to change and critique.

Thus, the future of policing requires a total dismantling of the profession as we know it. Police departments operate on the tax-payers dime and should reflect the needs, wants, and best interests of the wider community. And no, not the traditional community-oriented style of policing that has been promoted since the 1980’s, but one that is anti-racist, sexist, classist, ableism, and homophobic in theory and in practice. Intentional efforts should focus on eradicating the militarization of the police, racism, and other forms of oppression rather than pussyfooting around bad apples and implicit bias. The shift also requires a reconsideration of political representation, the prison industrial complex, and various social service programming’s. After all, the police only enforce the laws our elected officials pass into legislation. Accountability is therefore needed at all levels of state control and decision making. At the same time, the aforementioned efforts only scratch the surface of addressing state-imposed violence and abuse, and like all reform efforts, there are always pitfalls and lessons to be learned. However, the current state of policing in the U.S. is not sustainable nor adequate in addressing the social issues of today or tomorrow.
REFERENCES


