CHANGE IN USE OF FORCE POLICY: THE EXPERIENCE OF OFFICERS

by

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Abstract
In a period of American policing where there are high profile deaths of citizens involving law enforcement officials, law enforcement agencies must find the appropriate balance between what is legal and what is necessary in order to accomplish their mission. Government working groups as well as law enforcement think tanks have recently published extensive reports on the current state of policing in America and what the future of policing looks like. This includes greater transparency and citizen involvement in the policy-making process. However, lost in this discussion is how these rapid changes in policy affect everyday officers on the streets. This phenomenological study fills this deficit in the literature to better understand how these very public changes impact the officers’ professional practice and their views about the public they serve. The three resulting themes were: Police officers’ experiences depend on the confidence they have in their organization, a lack of trust with the community, and there is a new prototypical officer.
I dedicate this dissertation to my son.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The Research Problem

Law enforcement organizations around the world are coming under ever-increasing scrutiny to improve their policies and practices and engage the communities they serve in a more robust manner. In response, many agencies have started to use democratic principles to work with members of the community in the development of new policies. This includes having a more open and transparent process for developing, reviewing, and writing policies as well as seeking input from the community before using new technologies such as drones. Understanding the complexities of these policy changes, particularly significant policy changes like those involving the use of force, cannot be understood by evaluating numerical data alone. Use of force is defined as the application of an amount of effort required by a law enforcement officer to compel compliance by an unwilling subject (IACP, 2001). In practical terms, it spans anywhere from restraint techniques to firing a gun. Changing the manner and situations in which an officer can use their body or a weapon on an individual who is a potential danger to others could be a highly personal and emotional flashpoint for the officers. Because of the raw emotion and the physical nature associated with officers using force, a qualitative approach is the most appropriate to understand the social and political context and how a change in a department’s use of force policy affects those who are tasked with implementing it. Therefore, the overarching research question that I explored using a phenomenological approach was the following: What is the lived experience of police
officers in major American cities through a time of transition in their use of force policy? Additionally, I explored these two guiding sub-questions: Does the political leaning of a city influence the officers’ view of citizen involvement on the use of force policy development process? How does the agency’s leadership contribute to the officers’ experience during the change in use of force policy?

There is a deficit in the literature when it comes to the rich description of officers’ experiences when changes in policing occur (Greene, 2014). Additionally, the research to date addressing the issue of the impacts of major use of force policy changes have focused on the impacts on the community (McCamman & Culhane, 2017; Skogan & Frydl, 2004) or utilize quantitative research methods (Gaub, Choate, Todak, Katz, & White, 2016; Terrill & Paoline, 2013a, 2013b; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017b). When discussing the experience of officers, the only phenomenological study exploring the topic of use of force was completed by Broomé (2014) but was void of discussion on the topic of changes in policy. An ethnographic dissertation by Lande (2010) also took a qualitative approach to the topic of use of force but speaks to how officers learn to use force and does not discuss their views of members of the community weighing in on whether a use of force is appropriate. It speaks, instead, to the officers’ experiences learning to use their bodies to apply force. This study is an important addition to the literature in that the experiences of the officers tasked with implementing changes in policy should be explored to see how it will directly impact them and their willingness to carry out the changes. Additionally, the qualitative aspect provides perspective on why organizational changes or stagnation accompany such a major change in policing policy.
While certain aspects of policing remain the same, law enforcement professionals must continually adapt to change, including how they represent themselves and this profession (Greene, 2000; Mastrofski & Willis, 2010). As it relates to this study, two relevant changes included the increased reliance on civilians to perform research and policy functions and the changing dynamic of how law enforcement agencies are supposed to interact with and include members of the public in policy decisions.

How the Topic Emerged

I currently work for a major American law enforcement agency that is one of the 25 largest city police departments in the country (LEMAS, 2013). My role, and the role of my colleagues, is to develop best practices and efficiencies for the department. Part of this role involves reviewing, writing, and working with various stakeholders to develop the policies that officers must then use in their daily practice as law enforcement professionals. The section that I work in is relatively new and includes both sworn law enforcement officers and civilians that have a unique background in policy development and research. The overarching goal of this research that interested me the most was simply how do we create the best possible policies to ensure officers are safe and citizens have a law enforcement agency that mirrors their community values. The sub-goal involved trying to understand how civilian insight and involvement in the policy process impacts the officers, particularly with such an import policy as use of force.

The intervention of including civilian employees in the policy development of a law enforcement agency was designed to infuse individuals with unique backgrounds and education into agencies to inform the executive staff of what the likely result is of changing a policy or practice and to assist in ensuring law enforcement agencies are
implementing policies and practices that are evidence-based. Previous research has shown that having civilians as part of the planning and research section, the section of the department generally tasked in part with developing and evaluating policies, increases the inclusion of innovative policies and practices (Bond & Gabriele, 2016). These inclusions could help inform chiefs of police or sheriffs on how to improve policies and practices that are in line with the expectations of the general public they serve. These specialized sections can dedicate the time to reflecting on how best to implement and evaluate policies that are likely to create positive outcomes (Cave, Telep, & Grieco, 2015; Schaefer Morabito, 2008). There are no current studies, however, of the officers’ perception of whether the inclusion of civilians in the department to perform these tasks is beneficial, let alone civilians from the general population providing input. The literature prior to this study related to use of force policies focused on how law enforcement agencies can further engage the public in their policy development and decision-making processes (Friedman & Ponomarenko, 2015; McCamman & Culhane, 2017; Rice & Lee, 2015).

Studies Addressing the Problem

The utilization of the community to develop robust policies is not a new idea. The desire to include the community in the policy development process to create a greater diversity of thought around issues facing the community has been recommended for decades (Amsterdam, 1974; Davis, 1975; Moore, Trojanowicz and Kelling, 1988) and has once again surfaced with the emergence of federal efforts by the Obama administration and high profile publications by prominent law enforcement think tanks like the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) in response to recent, high-profile
events, such as the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri; the chokehold-related death of Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York; the death of Freddie Gray after an alleged “rough ride” in Baltimore, Maryland; and the shooting death of 12 year old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio (L.A. Times, 2015; Walsh, 2015).

Few documents have generated more discussion recently on policing than the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing (“Task Force”) (2015) and PERF’s Guiding Principles on Use of Force (2016). The Task Force developed six pillars that were the group’s overarching recommendations. One of those pillars was titled Policy & Oversight, which included a significant focus on the topic of uses of force. The salient point of this section’s recommendations was agencies utilizing the citizens of the communities served to develop policies and that police policies and practices should be open for review by anyone to improve transparency (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). The report released by PERF (2016) focused entirely on the topic of use of force and included 30 recommendations, 13 of which dealt specifically with policy issues. While the PERF document did not explicitly recommend agencies engage the community in policy development, it did stress being transparent about use of force incidents. However, concern from the law enforcement community regarding the PERF report generally focused on changes in suggested concepts, such as de-escalation, more restrictive policies about whether it was reasonable for an officer to choose the force they did, and including the idea of proportionality to an officer’s actions—each of which is defined and discussed in chapter two of this dissertation (Fairburn, 2016; Law Officer, 2016; National Association of Police Organization, 2016).
A recent academic article by Van Craen and Skogen (2017) released after these two documents were published was on officers’ perspectives regarding use of force policies and the role played by citizens and their supervisors. Van Craen and Skogan spoke to the perceived internal procedural justice in the form of fair supervision. The authors utilized a survey to solicit feedback from police officers in Chicago. While the survey, which utilized a Likert-type scale, found that respondents felt strongly that “officers have reason to be distrustful of citizens,” it also found that they were relatively split on whether “it is naïve to trust citizens.” Although the findings were important, the study lacked richness in the data that could be elicited if the researchers were speaking directly to the respondents to more fully understand their concerns or support around certain questions. The willingness of officers to engage and trust the public could speak to an individual’s or agency’s willingness to engage in collaborative, democratic processes with the community in which they serve.

Democratic principles are an important aspect of any government agency, but it is especially important when a change in an agency’s policy will impact members of the community. For the purposes of this research, democratic policing will be defined as police departments allowing the citizenry they serve to actively participate in the policy development review process. As someone who works on public policy for a major American law enforcement agency, I personally reflect on how policy changes could impact the least fortunate in the population. However, there could be significant anxiety around working collaboratively with the public to create policies related to law enforcement, particularly if officers do not feel they have a similar moral alignment to the public (Jackson et al., 2012; Jackson et al., 2013; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017b). In fact,
law enforcement agencies are one of the only government institutions that do not routinely include democratic principles in the development of policy, and when they do, the result is often a change in policy from the original direction created by agencies (Friedman & Ponomarenko, 2015). I find the apprehensiveness puzzling. If other government agencies integrate the diversity of thought presented through community engagement, what makes law enforcement different?

**Importance of the Study**

Police officers have long been wary of including civilians in policy development. This is because law enforcement officials are particularly uncomfortable trusting individuals who are not officers themselves. There is even evidence of divisions within law enforcement agencies wherein certain officers are not seen as “real cops” if they are assigned to administrative roles instead of patrol or higher risk functions (Lande, 2010). If a particular group, in this case police officers, view themselves as different than those not in their role—civilians—they could be less likely to acknowledge the value in the outsiders’ input. If the law enforcement officials updating and changing agency policies are not respected by their fellow officers or if the officers discount the benefit of community input, the policy implications are that officers on the streets are less likely to fully implement the changes.

**Social implications and relevance.** The desire from the community to be involved in the policy development process is only increasing after recent high-profile events in Ferguson, New York, Baltimore, and Cleveland have made their way into the national discussion on race and policing (L.A. Times, 2015; Walsh, 2015). Historically, the oversight of law enforcement by civilians in a given population has generally been
evident in the arrangement of elected officials, such as mayors or city councils, selecting the chief of police and having those individuals serve at their pleasure (Goldstein, 1977). However, there is a strong desire by community members to be active in the development of policy for law enforcement agencies. One such example can be found in Chicago, where the attendance at police-led community meetings was highest in high crime areas and predominantly Black communities (Skogan & Steiner, 2004). This would indicate those heavily impacted by police tactics and presence in their neighborhood are invested in how the Chicago Police Department implements crime strategies. This is important to understand from a policy perspective because if an agency is going to explore increasing community engagement in their policy development process, officers will want to know those community members are active and fully engaged in the process.

**Purpose statement.** Law enforcement agencies are generally one of the most trusted institutions, but current confidence levels are at historic lows (Jones, 2015). While agencies could employ multiple strategies to address the issue of trust, two methods commonly used today include collaborative efforts with citizens and changing policies to be more in line with community expectations (McCamman & Culhane, 2017; Skogan & Steiner, 2004). Consistent with recent recommendations, community advisory boards are one popular method for integrating the community in the policy process (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). However, how does the inclusion of voices from non-law enforcement officials in policy development affect those who are tasked with implementing such changes? And what does feedback from those required to follow new policies or regulations indicate about the potential efficacy and sustainability of new policies and procedures? In light of such questions, the purpose of this phenomenological
study was to holistically explore the personal viewpoints of officers who have worked and lived through a significant policy change regarding what is expected of them when deciding to use and when using force.

The feedback of non-supervisors is an essential element to leading any administrative change, and without it, identifying problems becomes almost impossible (Kettl, 2012). When officers do not feel their input is valued in the policy development process, the concern is there will be a shift toward de-policing. De-policing can occur when officers no longer proactively engage in police work as a result of negative publicity or scrutiny from the community (Shjarback, Pyrooz, Wolfe, & Decker, 2017). This has been especially pronounced with the increase in consent decrees that have been entered into between local police department and the Department of Justice to address inadequacies in policies and practices of the local jurisdiction. Officers have argued that these legally binding agreements decrease their likelihood of proactive policing (Walker & Macdonald, 2008). Developing an understanding of how a shift in a major policy impacts officers in a department tasked with implementing it is also essential information for policy makers. As previous studies have noted, assessing how a change in policy impacts front-line officers can inform future adoption of policies (Gaub et al., 2016). This is especially important when many officers view policy changes as reform efforts forced on them from political pressures or police executives out of touch with the realities of what rank-and-file officers deal with on a daily basis (Bayley, 2008). Much of the discussion surrounding use of force policy changes speaks to increasing the diversity of thought around police policies through the involvement of the community in the process, but are agencies focused too much on including others and not taking sufficient stock in
the concerns voiced by their officers on the streets? This study adds to the growing literature on recent changes in use of force policies (Cave, Telep, & Grieco, 2015; McCamman & Culhane, 2017; Shjarback, Pyrooz, Wolfe, & Decker, 2017; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017a, 2017b) by giving voice to the officers tasked with implementing these changes.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

American law enforcement organizations are going through a transition that includes major changes in policy and the manner in which they engage the communities they serve. While there is now a large body of quality research to support various policy or program changes, there was a period not long ago when law enforcement professionals did not feel their actions could help prevent crime through proactive initiatives; instead, there was a sense that police were in a position to respond to issues only once they had occurred (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Bayley, 1994). This is no longer the case, as agencies all across the United States are looking for how to prevent crime and work with stakeholders in the community to address issues in a more robust fashion than earlier periods in American history. This chapter will explain the current focus on community initiatives in American policing, how the structure of law enforcement agencies affect development, the inclusion of openness and transparency in the policy process, and the current changes in use of force policies being implemented across the country. Lastly, organizational justice will be explored as the theoretical framework for this study.

The Current State of American Policing

With increased scrutiny on law enforcement agencies, there has been a growing need for agencies to further engage the communities they serve as well as develop innovative approaches to issues. Some do not view the transition to new ideas such as Compstat or similar programs to address crime as a vast departure from previous policing principles but instead view it as the next evolution in policing (Weisburd et al., 2002). This specific wording, evolution in policing, has been previously utilized by a major city
chief when discussing the need to change certain policies (R. White, press conference, January 5, 2017). What the evolution looks like can differ based on a department’s current policies, the communities in which they serve, and the resources at their disposal. However, with an increased focus on the actions and strategies utilized by law enforcement agencies all around the county after multiple high-profile incidents, there is some evidence that officers are less willing to proactively engage members of the community (Wolfe & Nix, 2016). One common strategy to engage and build relationships with the community members served by a law enforcement agency is the strategy of community policing. There is not one agreed upon definition of community policing, but for the sake of this study I will use the suggestion of Mastrofski, Worden, and Snipes (1995) that law enforcement officials must be guided by the preferences of the communities they serve.

Few criminal justice strategies are as pervasive in current policing as community policing has become. Over the past decade, a survey in 2013 found that community policing was a component in 68% of local law enforcement agencies’ mission statements (Reaves, 2015). This shift has not been without trepidation on the part of the officers tasked with implementing it. The shift to community policing altered the manner in which officers interact with members of the community, and it put more responsibility on officers to address issues on their own in the field instead of having issues addressed first by higher ranks (Peak, 2015). There were some indications, however, that the major policy shift to community policing was beneficial for officers in regard to their job satisfaction. Adams, Rohe, and Arcury (2002) surveyed non-supervisory officers from six law enforcement agencies in North Carolina and found officers who worked in a
decentralized, community policing model had higher job satisfaction than those who worked in a more traditional police agency structure. Other research has shown that perceived organizational support during a major policy shift towards community policing was a significant factor in organizational commitment (Johnson, 2015). Trust in their organization was a clear theme for officers adjusting to community involvement in the creation of their department’s use of force policy.

The utilization of community outreach could also be a significant factor in the way citizens feel about changes in the use of force policy of an agency. As part of a community policing initiative in Chicago, the department designed a strategy called Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS) that focused on officers being assigned on a long-term basis to a particular area, or beat, and working with local residents and business owners to problem solve the specific challenges in that area. One interesting finding from a review performed a decade after the start of the project was that while awareness for CAPS grew more slowly in minority communities, the attendance rates at routine police-community meetings were highest in predominantly Black communities and in lower-income and higher-crime areas (Skogan & Steiner, 2004). This shows a clear desire by these communities to be engaged in how policing occurs in their city, but will this translate into being informed citizens who can assist in policy development?

Organizational Structure and Policy in Policing

Law enforcement agencies have a paramilitary structure that outlines who reports to whom, how authority is granted, and how operational units are organized. However, as noted above when discussing community policing, some strategies in recent years have placed heavy emphasis on decentralization. These decentralized efforts may be due in
part to historical issues of law enforcement agencies not being viewed as responsive to the concerns of the citizens they serve (Reiss, 1992). There has also been a focus on local control when it comes to law enforcement in America. This is evident in the number of agencies: 12,501 local police departments and 3,063 sheriff’s offices that handle services in municipalities across the country (Reaves, 2011). Making major changes in these organizations can look very different depending on the communities they serve, and while policy changes do occur, the hierarchical structure generally remains the same (Mastrofski, 2006). Reform efforts generally take the shape of policy changes or policing strategies that focus on problem solving or community engagement (Maguire and Mastrofski, 2000; Roth, 2000; Roth, Roehl, & Johnson, 2004).

Empirical evidence suggests community partnerships can be beneficial both to law enforcement and members of the community. In an early evaluation of a collaborative process by Rice and Lee (2015), the Los Angeles Police Department in concert with a local housing authority and community groups have been able to significantly reduce violent crime in a gang-riddled housing complex through dedicated officers who work with the members of the community. Officers have anecdotally reported improved relationships with community members, which has allowed for improved collaborative efforts to increase the safety and well-being of the community. These relationships improve the legitimacy of the law enforcement agency, as previously noted, and make the working environment safer for the officers. In addition to building relationships, organizational changes must also have the appropriate policies in place to provide guidance to officers on the streets.
Democratic Principles in Policy Development

In almost any other public entity when there is a new policy or program being developed the general public has some ability to be part of the process. This could be through public forums where individuals could voice their support or concern, or it could be through working groups that focus significant time on one issue or program. There is a growing movement to see this level of community involvement in policies and programs introduced by law enforcement agencies. Braga (2015) stated that departments should have rich community-centered involvement and evaluations of programs that are “rooted in community engagement, the analysis of crime problems, and the development of appropriate prevention responses” (p. 21). The need to have strong evaluation of law enforcement efforts and utilizing the community to achieve a more robust approach is not a new idea, but strategic evaluation has only recently been integrated into common practice for law enforcement agencies around the country (Moore, Trojanowicz, & Kelling, 1988). This was particularly evident in a study by Weisburd, Mastrofski, McNally, Greenspan, and Willis (2003), which showed departments viewed research evidence as a key decision-making piece when deciding on new strategic approaches. Innovative approaches have started to include more outside perspectives, both from civilians working in the departments and from community members, but these often occur only after political pressure to change.

Political as well as internal pressures have been discussed as driving forces behind changes in law enforcement agencies. Research by Langworthy (1986) suggested the departments that instituted change were more likely to do so based on their own needs as opposed to the needs of those outside of the department. Conversely, the federal
government can incentivize organizational innovation by attaching federal monies to certain initiatives it would like to see enacted (Morabito, 2008; Wilson, 1968). Additionally, the literature has suggested politicians can set the tone and direction for law enforcement agencies (Klinger, 2004; Wilson, 1968). It would be understandable that these outside political pressures are only increasing as the media spotlight intensifies on law enforcement agencies after high profile events such as those seen in Ferguson, Missouri. In this challenging political climate, it should come as no surprise that elected officials are unwilling to lead significant overhaul efforts to change the way in which law enforcement agencies operate out of fear that if crime rates increase they will be blamed for not being tough enough on crime (Friedman & Ponomarenko, 2015).

**Use of Force Statistics**

The use of force is one of the most controversial aspects of law enforcement, yet there is not a national database that can provide detailed, concrete answers regarding the frequency of force, let alone its necessity. This is especially true if the force used was not deadly force. The lack of available data was prominently highlighted by the former Federal Bureau of Investigations Director James Comey when he lamented that *The Guardian*, a newspaper in the United Kingdom, had a better idea of the frequency of use of force by American police than the FBI (Davis & Lowery, 2015). The newspaper found through public sources of information there were at least 1,000 individuals killed by American law enforcement in 2015 and 2016 (The Guardian, n. d.). Their interactive website captures demographic information and disaggregates the data by state. However, *The Guardian* only captures information on use of force instances that resulted in death and does not account for non-lethal uses of force. The only federally-supported data set
that examined use of force to any extent was the Law Enforcement Management and Administrative Statistics (LEMAS) survey, which is sent to departments every 3-4 years. The survey changes slightly each iteration to reflect current issues in law enforcement, and in the 2013 survey, departments were asked a few focused questions on use of force. The LEMAS data set is ideal to use for studying various issues in law enforcement because it is sent to all law enforcement agencies in the country with at least 100 sworn officers, and the 2013 survey had a response rate of 88%, or 2,059 eligible local police departments out of 2,327. However, 2013 was the first year there were questions related to use of force that were not solely focused on citizen complaints. In 2013, the questions focused on what types of force are reportable and the total number of uses of force by the department; it is important to note that there was no detail associated with the individual uses of force, which would be required to have a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Previous studies utilizing the LEMAS use of force data focused solely on LEMAS surveys prior to 2013 with a focus on complaints by citizens (Hickman, 2006; Hickman, & Piquero, 2009; Smith & Holmes, 2014; Taylor, Alpert, Kubu, Woods, & Dunham, 2011). Perhaps the most comprehensive look at use of force came from the International Association of Chiefs of Police (2001), which published findings from data they collected between 1995 and 2000. They defined force as "that amount of effort required by police to compel compliance from an unwilling subject." (p. 1). These data were provided from 564 agencies around the country. Data from 1999 revealed force was used at a rate of 3.61 times per 10,000 calls for service. While this occurrence rate is extremely low, what agencies consider a reportable force event varies greatly. This is because there is not a standard reporting requirement in the United States for uses of force. So, there is no way
to know whether the IACP report over- or under-represents the actual occurrence rate. Additionally, the report did not outline the demographics of the populations served by the reporting agencies or the demographics of those involved in incidents, thereby inhibiting the ability to inform current policy debates.

Regardless of how prevalent the uses of force are—or are not—by law enforcement across America there is still a significant financial cost when agencies do inappropriately use force. In one major northwestern city the payout related to lawsuits topped $3 million dollars in a single year (Sheldon, 2017). Such numbers should cause alarm to taxpayers, and the loss of funds for other needs alone should cause local governments to examine the issue of police uses of force. The research on changes in significant policies, such as use of force or body worn cameras, have focused on the impacts on the community (McCcamman & Culhane, 2017) or the effects of implementing more restrictive policies in order to decrease total uses of force (Terrill & Paoline, 2017). A recent study examined officers’ perceptions of changes in body worn camera policies, but the researchers utilized a survey that focused more on the benefits of the technology and the ease of its use instead of an in-depth examination of how the change in policy impacted the officers on a personal level (Gaub, Choate, Todak, Katz, & White, 2016). However, prior to this research, there were no studies that address changes in a law enforcement agency’s use of force policy and how that change impacted the officers tasked with implementing it.

**Use of Force Policies and Officers**

Law enforcement agencies around the country must develop policies and practices that fit within the confines of the law. One major United States Supreme Court case that
speaks specifically to use of force policies was *Tennessee v. Garner* (1985), where it was ruled unconstitutional for police officers to shoot a fleeing person unless "the officer has probable cause to believe that the suspect poses a significant threat of death or serious physical injury to the officer or others" (para. 8). In reaching this decision, one of the sources utilized by the justices was a doctoral dissertation by Fyfe (1978), which examined shootings by New York City police officers. Fyfe found that, among other things, restrictive policies and review processes decreased uses of deadly force. Additionally, when more restrictive guidelines were put in place, not only did the frequency with which shootings occurred decrease but the overall safety to officers increased as well (Fyfe, 1979). Other seminal works by Fyfe found (a) an increase in officer-involved shootings in Philadelphia during the 1970s increased the frequency of violence exhibited by community members (Fyfe, 1980), (b) the racial differences in officer-involved shootings are often the result of contextual differences, such as neighborhood assignment and not specifically race-based (Fyfe, 1981), and (c) utilizing data from Memphis, Fyfe (1982) affirmed the importance of policy in reducing uses of force and that “police shootings are a consequence of violence in the community and the number of times members of various population subgroups expose themselves to the danger of being shot at by police” (p. 721). Other scholars have also illustrated the importance of policy to reduce the incidences of deadly force.

Gellar and Scott (1992) reviewed data from 13 large local jurisdictions to evaluate the prevalence of officer-involved shootings as well as officer safety considerations, including the utilization of body armor. Their report confirmed the importance of restrictive use of force policies to decrease overall incidences. They also highlighted a
key point not often discussed in the literature: the high numbers of shootings by off-duty officers responding to issues in street clothes. The high percentages of shootings by off-duty officers was also confirmed by White (2001), who believed a change in policy and department culture helped bring down the overall uses of deadly force during the study years. Additionally, Walker’s (1993) book on the history of police actions discussed the discretionary nature of police actions, including uses of deadly force, and the need for strong guidance from the agency’s administration to communicate what is appropriate and expected when using force. As part of the overall discussion regarding the use of force, it is essential to acknowledge that officer behavior and their use of force can influence how citizens will react when they encounter members of the police department.

Some research suggests that the use of force is one of the factors that may influence how the citizens of a community react towards the officers who serve their community. A spatial analysis of use of force data from a major southeastern American city illustrated how force was not randomly distributed but instead was concentrated in areas with higher percentages of minority populations. Interestingly enough, family and neighborhood composition, residents’ mobility, and even violent and property crime rates were not statistically significant predictors of officers having to use force. In the higher minority areas of the city there were greater occurrences of uses of forces, and officers were also more likely to encounter active aggression from citizens towards the officers (Lersch, Bazley, Mieczowski, & Childs, 2008). This could indicate a greater fear, experienced by both the citizens and the officers.

Taking a different approach to examining use of force, among other things, Terrill, Paoline, and Manning (2003) examined police culture and coercive behavior.
What they found after surveying officers from two departments regarding their cultural-based attitudes was that officers who aligned more with pro-police culture were more likely to use force than those who did not share traditional police culture views. Additionally, officers from an agency with a management style that enforced a more aggressive approach to policing were more likely, on average, to resort to using force. Thus, individual attitudes as well as the policies and practices promoted by an agency make a difference in the amount of force used. Additionally, and in line with Lersch, Bazley, Mieczowski, and Childs (2008), if there was greater resistance exhibited by citizens, a greater level of force was exerted. This should intuitively make sense. As law enforcement officers perceive a greater threat to their own safety they are more likely to respond more forcefully. Unlike Lersch et al. (2008), officers in Terrill et al. (2003) were more likely to use force against individuals who were male, non-white, younger, exhibiting signs of impairment, and those who the officers believed to be indigent or from a lower socioeconomic background. However, Garner, Maxwell, and Heraux (2002) found that while police were more likely to use greater levels of force against males, they did not find a statistically significant relationship when it came to the individual’s race.

Examining the topic of use of force policies and officers’ perceptions, Van Craen and Skogan (2017) examined perceived internal procedural justice in the form of fair supervision. The authors utilized a survey to solicit feedback from police officers in Chicago. The site selection of Chicago was especially interesting because it has previously ranked first, in total citizen deaths due to police action, among American law enforcement agencies (Better Government Association, 2015). One would imagine that an officer who works for a department with a high rate of serious use of force incidents
would place great significance on such an important policy. The authors utilized a Likert-type scale survey and found some interesting results from the 714 front-line officers and supervisors who responded. Of particular note was respondents felt strongly that “officers have reason to be distrustful of citizens” (Question 9) but were relatively split on whether “it is naïve to trust citizens” (Question 10). The distrust of citizens could be a significant barrier to law enforcement officials engaging the public in policy creation surrounding the use of force, especially when officers in the same survey felt that the use of force policy was too burdensome (Van Craen & Skogan, 2017). From an administrative perspective, uses of force generally are fewer in agencies where there are effective systems in place to hold police officers accountable (Chevigny, 1995). The clarity and simplicity of policies was one of the key findings by Terrill and Paoline (2013a, 2013b), indicating that law enforcement officers prefer the direction provided by policies that outline what is expected of them based on the actions of an individual they encounter. This could be part of the anxiety experienced by law enforcement officers now asked to focus on concepts like de-escalation instead of simply reacting to a subject’s actions.

One of the key components of the current use of force conversation is the focus on de-escalation techniques. From a policy and training perspective, the current literature supports de-escalation as a way to improve officer and community safety. When it comes to recruiting, selecting, and training officers, research has repeatedly shown that younger, less educated, and less experienced officers are more likely to be involved in a use of force incident than their more experienced and higher educated counterparts (Braithwaite & Brewer, 1998; Lersch & Mieczkowski, 2005; Rydberg & Terrill, 2010; Terrill & Miesczkowski, 2005). This would indicate support for policies around minimum
education levels for police academy applicants as well as providing resources in situations where it is more likely that a serious use of force may occur based on the call, such as requiring a supervisor to respond to certain incident types. Individual agencies have been able to show significant changes when implementing changes to their policies and training surrounding the use of force.

The New York City Police Department (NYPD) has significantly decreased the annual incidents of officers being shot and injured by almost 97% from an all-time high in the early 1970s to the early 2000s. From 2008 through 2010, the yearly average of an officer being shot or injured decreased to 1.6 incidents per year, down from 45.7 incidents per year from 1971 through 1973 (NYPD, 2011). The NYPD was able to do this, in part, by instituting a structured review of every use of force incident, analyzing the factors that led to the use of force, and then using the data to make informed changes to their policies and training to where it is now emphasized that a firearm is only to be used when no other option exists. Another agency, the Dallas (TX) Police Department, saw complaints against the department for excessive force drop from 147 complaints in 2009, to just 13 in 2015 after implementing new training on de-escalation. Additionally, Dallas Police experienced a 40% decrease in officer-involved shootings and a 30% decrease in assaults on their officers (Martin, 2015). This change in policy to include a greater emphasis on de-escalation did not occur in a vacuum; it is worth noting that the department began issuing body worn cameras to all officers during this same timeframe. So, the effects that were observed were also likely due in part to this change in policy and practice.
The personal strain that use of force, particularly deadly force, situations cause the officer(s) involved can have a lasting impact on their personal and professional lives. This burden is only intensified by the probability of civil litigation by surviving members of the decedent’s family (Flynn & Homant, 2000). The use of force, particularly physical force, creates a situation where the officer involved will likely be injured (Alpert et al., 2011), and the use of less-than-lethal force will greatly diminish the chances of harm to the responding officer(s) (Hough & Tatum, 2012). When discussing de-escalation, it is important to also acknowledge that police officers were more likely to be fatally injured by an individual with mental illness versus someone with a prior arrest for assaulting a police officer, and individuals with a history of mental illness were more than five times as likely to kill an officer compared to the general population (Brown & Langan, 2001). This illustrates the continued need for training and policies that address de-escalation and interacting with members of the community experiencing a mental health emergency.

Beyond an increased focus on de-escalation instead of simply responding with force based on resistance or aggression exhibited by an individual, some apprehension surrounding changes that are being proposed around the country to use of force policies could be originating from the suggested language.

Some of the words emphasized by the PERF (2016) recommendations included proportionality, legal, necessary, reasonable, and appropriate. The term proportionality speaks to whether the actions or responses of an officer reflect the action taken by a citizen they are confronted with. Some research suggests officers may choose a lesser force response because of perceived negative outcry from members of the public, should the event be witnessed or recorded (Broomé, 2014). The term is not meant to require that
officers, at the exact moment they have determined that a use of force is necessary to mitigate a threat, should suddenly stop and consider how the public might react. Rather, it is meant to be one factor that officers should consider long before that moment and throughout their decision-making on what an appropriate and proportional response would be.

One might believe that the inclusion of whether or not an action was legal is a simple, objective concept. However, when discussing whether an instance was lawful, there is not a widely accepted definition. The first case law related to the concept of lawful was a ruling in *People v. Jennings* (1973) where there was not a specific definition of a lawful order that was accepted, and a very broad definition was recognized as being too lenient towards police actions. The PERF (2016) recommendations, when discussing developing best practices, discuss legal in the context that an officer might be legally able to react in a certain way but goes further to say that the entire event must be taken into context to examine whether the officer’s action put them in a position where they had to use force. This might cause some concern for rank and file members of law enforcement agencies who believe they are being held to a different standard than the *Graham v. Connor* (1989) caselaw, which states specifically:

> The reasonableness of a particular use of force must be judged from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene, rather than with the 20/20 vision of hindsight.…The calculus of reasonableness must embody allowance for the fact that police officers are often forced to make split second judgments—in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving—about the amount of force that is necessary in a particular situation. (para. 5)

Along the same lines as legal based on the totality of circumstances, necessary examines whether an action was required or needed from an officer given the circumstances. If an action is needed to effect change, then one should take such an
appropriate action. In police situations, the decision of whether to charge someone is weighed against what could otherwise be done to restore order in a particular situation (Schulenburg, 2012). This is the same for actions taken by the officer to control situations. If the action being considered is not necessary in order to bring a resolution to the event, de-escalating could be utilized to decrease the need of an officer to use force.

With the inclusion of the term necessary in policy, the concept of reasonableness of an action was also discussed, both in *Graham v. Connor* (1989) and PERF (2016). Reasonableness is generally spoken about using the standard from *Graham v. Connor* regarding whether a similarly trained individual would act in the same or comparable fashion. However, the concern might be from officers that reasonableness now includes the perspective of the general public. This notion is supported by literature suggesting community consultation and involvement is important if a law enforcement agency wants to implement any program or change into their standard practices (Read & Tilley, 2000). Read and Tilley addressed the implementation of problem-solving measures and how to have positive interactions with the general public about their specific concerns regarding what is reasonable from their perspective, instead of only what is perceived as reasonable by law enforcement personnel.

Appropriate speaks to whether an action taken is suitable or proper based on the evolving circumstance of the event, and proportional is whether the outcome or action taken is commensurate to the reason for the action. In other words, is it equitable? The idea of proportionality is somewhat illusive. However, most individuals can see when a punishment does not fit the crime. The literature describes this in terms of whether the force exercised by the officer in a given situation is appropriate based on the resistance
given by a suspect (Gallo, Collyer, & Gallagher, 2008). This is also consistent with officers wanting clear policies that outline what is expected of them based on the actions of a subject (Terrill & Paoline, 2013a, 2013b). The renewed push through the policy recommendations from PERF (2016) that seek to take a broader look at the totality of the circumstances and the other options, such as de-escalation, available to the officers at the time of a use of force, as well as the recommendations by the President’s task force on 21st century policing (2015) to engage the public more in developing policies, could create a situation of unease by officers tasked with implementing such changes. This could be especially difficult if there is the belief by an officer that his/her agency and supervisors have his best interest at heart.

**Theoretical Framework**

The role of organizational justice, or fairness, in the workplace will be explored as it relates to how officers in this study perceive the impact of a significant policy change on their work and personal lives. Law enforcement officers work within a para-military structure and depend on others within the organization to ensure the safe performance of their duties. Because of this, how officers perceive the organization plays a role in determining to what degree they perform (Shane, 2012; Wolfe & Piquero, 2011). After a factor analysis was performed in two separate workplace settings, Colquitt (2001) supported a four-factor structure for organizational justice that included the constructs of distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice. Organizational justice is useful as a framework for this study because it deals specifically with how employees perceive the fairness of their workplace, which impacts their adherence to administrative policies and can even impact their performance. If officers tasked with implementing a
new policy do not believe the organization has their best interest at heart or is not supportive of their input, there could be a situation where officers are less likely to proactively police.

**Distributive justice.** The construct that has been present in the literature the longest is that of distributive justice (Adams, 1965; Colquitt, 2001; Deutsch, 1975; Homans, 1961; Leventhal, 1976). The premise of this aspect of organizational justice deals with whether outcomes are equitable. In the law enforcement community, there has been discussion around whether policies should be written in an accessible, equitable fashion so that they can be easily understood by all and that policies should be written in a collaborative process with the community (PERF, 2016; President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). This study examined, in part, how this increased equity with the communities they serve impacted their professional and personal lives.

**Procedural justice.** Procedural justice often refers to an individual’s ability to be heard in and have an impact on the decision-making process of an organization. The concept of procedural justice has its roots in the criminal justice system. The seminal work on the topic by Thibaut and Walker (1975) examined the fairness associated with the legal system’s process and eventual verdicts. Pertinent to this particular study, Leventhal (1980) discussed that the removal of bias is an important aspect of procedural justice, and this is likely to be an important consideration of the officers tasked with implementing a new use of policy, particularly if the community has a say in how it is written. In short, do the community members who assist with the development of policies officers must work within have a negative bias towards law enforcement in general?
**Interpersonal justice.** The construct of interpersonal justice was first discussed by Greenberg (1993) who believed the personal concern for the individual held an essential space between the policies of an organization and the eventual outcomes. Original work in the area of interactional justice, which was later disaggregated into the dimensions of interpersonal and informational justice, also put emphasis on respect for individuals involved in an organization (Bies & Moag, 1986). This study examined the interpersonal feelings of respect and personal concern felt by officers regarding their organization and how that impacted their experience during this time of change in major policy. The officers’ feeling of respect could also be a result of how they perceived support from members of the community. Additionally, personal concern speaks to the officers’ feeling of whether their organization cared about their safety, particularly while using force in dangerous situations.

**Informational justice.** This forth construct identified by the factor analysis performed by Colquitt (2001) deals specifically with the extent to which something was explained. Specifically, research by Shapiro, Buttner, and Barry (1994) highlighted the importance of information being presented in a reasonable fashion, timely, and with specificity that would allow it to be understood. Greenberg (1993) also believes information must be perceived as genuine and with sound reasoning for it to be fair. This is relevant to the current study because how information regarding a major policy change is communicated is important when it comes time for officers to implement the change. If there is poor information being passed, it could create increased confusion and anxiety surrounding what is expected.
Organizational justice has been used extensively as a theoretical framework in a criminal justice context. Specifically related to uses of force, the relationship between the public and law enforcement officials has been examined through the lens of external procedural justice (Van Craen, 2016a; 2016b), and is seen as an extension of the perceived adherence to organizational justice principles such as accountability for one’s actions, respect for officers from supervisors, neutrality in their decisions, and allowing officers to have a voice in the process (Van Craen & Skogan, 2017a). Trinkner, Tyler, and Goff (2016) examined organizational justice and officer well-being; Nix and Wolfe (2016) examined how supervisors can reduce the stress placed on officers from changing expectations and pressures from the communities they serve by being “fair, objective, honest, and respectful when dealing with their subordinates in order to communicate that the agency has their back even when it may appear the community does not (p. 17)”; and Wolfe and Piquero (2011) examined the conduct of officers and how that was affected by their perceptions of the law enforcement agency’s adherence to the concept of fairness, to name a few.

The concepts of organizational justice, both within the officers’ agencies and with the communities they serve, will provide the framework for understanding and explaining the phenomenon of officers going through the change in their use of force policy through in-depth interviews. The four factors identified by Colquitt (2001) will be used as the lens through which the answers given by the officers during their interviews will be viewed. Specifically, I was interested in knowing as part of the phenomenon of going through this policy change if the officers viewed the outcome of the policy as equitable, whether
everyone’s voices were heard, if they felt respected as part of the process, and if the need for change was communicated in an appropriate fashion.
CHAPTER III
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As someone who has spent his professional life thus far working to address issues in policy and standards in public safety, I am always looking for ways to improve the process. When developing standards, regardless of professional field, the process one goes through is generally the same. The standards are developed by subject matter experts in a particular field and prior to being finalized must be sent out for public comment from interested parties (International Organization for Standardization, n.d.). Although policies for a specific agency are different than standards to which an entire profession are supposed to adhere, there is often a period of time when the general public can comment or participate in the process; this is true with many professions, with the exception of law enforcement (Friedman, & Ponomarenko, 2015). With this study, I aimed to fill a gap in the literature as it relates to officers’ experiences during the change in their use of force policy, particularly when the recommendations regarding the changes are coming in large part from input from individuals who are not police officers themselves. The overarching research question that I explored using a phenomenological approach was the following: What is the lived experience of police officers in major American cities through a time of transition in their use of force policy? Additionally, I utilized these two guiding sub-questions: Does the political leaning of a city influence the officers’ view of citizen involvement on the use of force policy development process? How does the agency’s leadership contribute to the officers’ experience during the change in use of force policy?
Subjectivity

As the researcher and instrument for this study, it is important to reflect and explicitly outline my own subjectivity as it relates to the material (Creswell, 2013: Peshkin, 1988). My subjectivity is shaped by the place where I grew up, my education, my professional experiences with individuals in law enforcement, as well as my family and friends. These are all important aspects to discuss because they have helped frame the way in which I examine social problems and the diversity of people involved.

I was the oldest of two children to two hardworking, blue-collar, White parents of European descent. We lived in the same house on the north side of Des Moines, Iowa throughout my childhood. This area of town was selected, in part, because it was within the boundaries of a highly-rated school district in one of the suburbs. This school district was overwhelmingly White and, from my perspective, did not present an environment where one generally was aware that there was a larger community with greater diversity of ideas and challenges associated with students being successful in school and feeling safe. Thus, the concerns of a more diverse population never occurred to me at this stage of my life. Students of color comprised less than seven percent of the population, and just over three percent of students qualified for free/reduced price lunch (State of Iowa, 2013). I mention this information because growing up where I did, law enforcement officers were viewed very positively, and I viewed them as blue-collar workers similar to the way I viewed my parents. I viewed them as hard-working individuals trying to make a positive impact on the community while doing the best they could to support their loved ones. I remember officers and firefighters coming into the schools and being received warmly. I also cannot remember a time when someone said something derogatory about
the police or informed me of how I should act if I were to come in contact with one. I saw
the firefighters and police officers as role models, and it fueled my desire towards public
service to make a positive impact on those around me.

Educational attainment continues to shape my subjectivity in several ways. As
someone who has sought degrees from three distinctly different universities, the
experience at each was important to my development as a researcher. My undergraduate
studies were completed at a large, land-grant research university in a Midwestern town
with a focus on serving the needs of those from the mostly rural state. This experience
was one of my first exposures to thinking critically about a group of individuals often left
out of the conversation as it relates to public policy on a national level, rural Americans.
The Jesuit university where I obtained my master of science degree also had a strong
focus on serving others. However, instead of rural Americans, there was a focus on what
most people generally think of as disadvantaged populations, individuals who are poor or
from minority populations. This experience was one of my first real exposures to
focusing on social justice and incorporating underrepresented voices in public policy
decisions. Lastly, in addition to my role as a doctoral student at a state university, I also
serve as a lecturer at the same institution and have exposure to students from diverse
backgrounds. While many of the students are what would be considered traditional
students, there is also a focus on non-traditional students and students from diverse
backgrounds; around 30 percent of the undergraduate population are the first in their
family to go on to college (UCCS, 2017). This experience has increased my exposure on
a personal level to students trying to change their socioeconomic trajectory from what it
might have been if they had not been given the opportunity to attend university.
Lastly, the people I surround myself with certainly factor into my subjectivity on the issue of how changes in policies affect individuals on a personal level. I work for a major American police department as a civilian employee and consider many of the people I have worked with close friends. It is not uncommon for individuals who work in law enforcement to surround themselves only with others in their same field (Lande, 2010) and while the majority of my close friends are not in law enforcement, I do have a number of close friends who work more broadly in a public safety field.

The positive views that I hold for those in public service is part of the reason I wanted to explore this research topic. It is not uncommon to hear about civil unrest related to events such as the Michael Brown “hands up, don’t shoot” case in Ferguson, Missouri, or the case of Tamir Rice, a 12-year old playing with an airsoft gun near a recreation center, who was shot by police officers in Cleveland, Ohio. While these cases are important to learn from, as a society, the current literature does not provide a voice for how these cases from other jurisdictions impact the lives of officers. The perceptions of their lived experiences are an important, under-researched aspect of the policy development process (Gilligan, 1982; Reinharz, 1992). Van Maanen and Schein’s (1977) seminal work in organizational socialization speaks to the employee’s perspective based on beliefs held by those in their work place. Stated another way, police officers build bonds through their training and shared experiences that directly impact their views and reactions to changes in their profession. From a public safety policy perspective, knowing how changes in policy impact the practitioners who must apply what is written is an important endeavor to ensure fidelity to the organization’s philosophy and goals. I
utilized qualitative research methods in this study to fill the gap in understanding why an organization is seeing the change it desires or not.

**Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research strives to interpret the meaning of the other’s experiences in their natural environment through observations, interviews, or reviewing historical documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The use of a qualitative method instead of a quantitative one was chosen to add to the literature by asking why organizations may or may not be successfully implementing a major policy change—in this study it was the use of force—to improve the policy development process in the future. The literature regarding the proposed changes to use of force policies by PERF (2016) and the Task Force (2015) are relatively new, and the research thus far is limited. In order to move beyond current quantitative findings on what factors influence policy decisions, this study’s qualitative approach aimed for a deeper understanding of what is occurring with the phenomena (Creswell, 2014). This in-depth examination of the officers’ perspectives not only fills the current void in the literature but provides a basis for future policy decisions around significant topics in policing through understanding the impacts major policy changes have on the officers tasked with implementation. The use of a phenomenological research design specifically provided the rich detail necessary to understand the officers’ experiences with this change (Moustakas, 1994).

**Qualitative Strategy: Phenomenology**

In order to develop an understanding regarding the perceptions of law enforcement officers’ lived experiences associated with policing in a time of significant change around use of force policies, I conducted a phenomenological study.
Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research used to understand a group of individuals’ subjective experiences. This form of study “emphasizes subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience and knowledge” (Husserl, 1965, pp. 5-6).

Moustakas (1994) described the basis of a phenomenological study as not only focusing on the type of experience itself, but also how the experience was felt by those involved. Husserl (1970) viewed phenomenological research as being about understanding a person’s pure experience and how that forms their views on a topic. I sought to capture lived experience in this research study through interviews. Specific to phenomenology, the components of the Epoche, bracketing, and horizontalization are important to understand.

The Epoche, which is a way of identifying previously held ideas, thoughts, or biases associated with a topic and removing them from reflection on the data (Husserl, 1931; Moustakas, 1994; Schmitt, 1968), is a critical component of phenomenology. I have already described my subjectivity surrounding the subject of officers’ experience that creates the lens with which I see the information. However, I strived for what Moustakas (1994, p. 85) describes as a “new consciousness” surrounding the experience. This simply means that I examined the experience of these officers through an open mind and attempted to free my prejudices associated with the topic. In doing so, I utilized the concept of bracketing to set aside my notions of what it means to be a police officer during this time of rapid transition, as it relates to use of force policies, from my interactions with officers in the major American city police department where I work. Because I am a civilian and not a sworn member of the police department, the idea of setting aside my biases surrounding the topic might be easier than if I were a front-line
officer studying the new use of force policies. This is because a front-line officer may feel a change in such a significant policy could either positively or negatively affect how safe I feel when working. The Epoche fits with the main reduction components of phenomenology: bracketing and horizontalization. Bracketing is focusing solely on the topic and nothing else to avoid distracting the researcher from the experience of the research subjects. Horizontalization is treating every statement made by the research participants equally (Moustakas, 1994). This is different than other traditions that allow the researcher to use their experiences as a guide for their interpretation of the data corpus (Van Manen, 1990). Instead, the focus of this research was on the officers’ experience, and I set aside my own experiences on the topic from the analysis. The reduction of bias and subjectivity from the bracketing process is important because it influences the statements that are identified in the horizontalizing process. These horizons are the descriptions of the experience that will then be used to eventually create the themes that explain the officers’ pure experience of going through the change in use of force policy (Moustakas, 1994).

To reduce the likelihood that my biases and personal subjectivity influenced my evaluation of the data corpus, my reflections adhered strictly to the previously mentioned concepts of bracketing and horizontalization. The art of reflection is used to elicit memories of the original data presented by the research participants and to develop one’s own understanding of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1931). Spending the necessary time to quietly think back on the statements made by officers during the interviews provided a deeper understanding of their overall experience, thus allowing me to identify the meaning of their experience. Additionally, constantly revisiting the information allowed
me, as the instrument of data collection and interpretation, to view the information from multiple perspectives. Moustakas (1994) asserts that some life events are too severe to bracket, and a significant change in a police department’s use of force policy could create such an experience for a researcher who has experienced a transition in policy that is in vogue currently in American policing. As someone who works in a major American law enforcement agency I have witnessed this stress first-hand, though I believe bracketing was not an issue in this instance because a change in use of force policy did not directly impact my day-to-day feelings of safety or the manner in which I go about performing my duties. The idea of bracketing can be somewhat ambiguous, so it is important that I explicitly state how I accomplished this (Beech, 1999). The specific step that I took to acknowledge and put aside my presuppositions was noted through my memoing process (Glaser, 1998). An example of this is when I came across a statement that elicited a previously held idea on a given topic, I included a note in the transcript, so it was explicitly identified as I repeatedly went through the coding process. This allowed me to explicitly acknowledge my ideas in writing so that they could be reviewed repeatedly as I analyzed the data.

Site Selection

Two mountain west cities were utilized for this study, and both are considered to be urban areas based on classification standards from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2012) indicating they have at least 50,000 individuals in a densely populated area. Additionally, the two cities utilized represent very different ends of the political spectrum. Based on research by Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2014), which examined variables such as policies enacted, the individuals who are elected, and the initiatives
passed through elections, one city represented liberal leanings and one represented a conservative political base. The reason for selecting cities with variable political leanings is because law enforcement officials tend to enjoy greater support from conservative-leaning individuals (Brown, 2017), and I was interested in exploring whether the community’s political leanings impacted the officer’s lived experience going through the policy change.

According to 2010 Census data, both cities had an estimated population over 250,000, have police departments with at least 700 individuals (sworn and civilian), and have a median household income was just over $45,000. Both cities have also updated their use of force policies since the Task Force recommendations came out in 2015; the liberal city made significant changes approximately one year prior to the study period, and the conservative city made changes approximately six months prior to the study period. The information specific to the liberal city, referred to in this study as Paris and PPD, includes a median age of 33 years; racial/ethnic composition of the city is 52% White, 32% Hispanic, 10% Black, 3% Asian, and 3% other. When compared to other cities in the mountain west region, this particular city is one of the largest. According to its Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Report (UCR) in calendar year 2016, the agency handled over 4,500 Part I violent crimes (which includes criminal homicide, aggravated assault, forcible rape, and robbery) and over 25,000 Part I property crimes (which includes larceny-theft, burglary, auto theft, and arson).

The information specific to the conservative city, referred to in this study as Lyon or LPD, includes a median age of 35 years; racial/ethnic composition of the city is 71% White, 16% Hispanic, 6% Black, 3% Asian, and 4% other. When compared to the state-
wide data, this particular city has a larger economic impact from the defense industry. According to its Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Report (UCR) in calendar year 2016, the agency handled over 2000 Part I violent crimes (which includes criminal homicide, aggravated assault, forcible rape, and robbery) and over 16,500 Part I property crimes (which includes larceny-theft, burglary, auto theft, and arson).

The city and department demographics and statistics reported are consistent with previous research on use of force incidents (Lersch, Bazley, Mieczowski, & Childs, 2008).

**Participant Selection**

All officers who worked at one of the two law enforcement agencies participating in this research were recruited via an electronic solicitation. The actual number of recipients of the email solicitation was unknown, but the combined authorized sworn strengths of the two law enforcement agencies is just over 2,200. I utilized a purposeful sampling strategy to identify officers who have are knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) and who have information relevant to the research questions (Oliver, 2006). This included police officers and first-level supervisors, sergeants, who were in patrol functions and worked the second or swing shift as they are most likely to utilize force in the commission of their regular duties. Additionally, I included officers who were in administrative roles but had unique knowledge about the policy development or review process.

The total number of participants interviewed for this study was 19; there were 11 officers from PPD and 8 officers from LPD. Table 1 includes the demographics of those involved in the study. All of the research participants from Paris were male, and a
majority identified as White. In Lyon, there were two female officers who participated, and every officer there identified as White. The police officers who participated from Paris were, on average, slightly older but both departments had similar representation for years of service.

Table 1
Participants - Paris Police Department

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
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<th>Rank</th>
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<td>31-40</td>
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Participants - Lyon Police Department

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*YOS= Years of Service, PO=Police Officer, Sgt=Sergeant

Performing a sufficient number of interviews was important to reach a saturation of the data. Data saturation has been described as reaching the point where there are no longer unique, applicable codes being generated (Guest et al., 2006) or one can no longer find “disconfirming evidence” (Kuzel, 1992, p. 41). Even though there was not a consensus in the literature regarding the concept of saturation, there were recommendations for the
number of interviews to reach sufficient data. This number of interviews I completed was more than the recommendation of 15 from Bertaux (1981) for all qualitative research and specific to phenomenological studies. Additionally, it was greater than the recommendations from Morse (1994) who recommended at least six interviews and Kuzel (1992) who felt six to eight was appropriate for homogenous samples. A more recent study by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) showed that there was a saturation of data at 12 interviews. While there are no standards in the literature for how one tests whether or not the interview sample size is sufficient (Morse, 1995), the Guest et al. (2006) article described data saturation as the point where no new codes are developed for inclusion in the overarching themes regardless of how many more interviews are conducted. The lower thresholds identified by Morse (1994) and Kuzel (1992) were used as an initial guide when planning my interviews, per site. Importantly, saturation was not established on the total number of interviews but on when I no longer was seeing new horizons in the data.

Data Collection

In an attempt to understand the lived experience of police officers in two major American cities through a time of transition in their use of force policy, I conducted a total of 19 semi-structured interviews during the months of February and March, 2018. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes to complete, though some were closer to 90 minutes. Additionally, use of force topics were discussed less formally during the entire time I was with the officers during my ride-alongs. Law enforcement officers in this study worked either an eight- or ten-hour shift, and in addition to doing a ride-along with them during their normal shift, I attended roll call or line-up with many of the
officers. I aimed to make the participants feel empowered to tell their own stories through what they felt was relevant input and allowed them to attach the appropriate meaning to their experience (Casey, 1994). For this to occur, my questions were structured in a way that required a direct answer allowing me to understand their unique experience in support of the research question but open enough to allow the respondents to discuss anything they found pertinent to the topic (Quantz, 1992). I attended roll-call or line-up whenever possible to have an understanding of any training points or topics of focus that were being stressed to the officer I was riding with related to use of force. The semi-structured interviews aided in my bracketing of the topic because I was not dictating what my ideas were on the topic with set questions, but I instead allowed the respondent to lead the interview, using my initial questions as a way to ensure we were keeping the discussion focused (Casey, 1994). To aid in this, I started the interview protocol with two “grand tour” questions (Spradley & McCurdy, 1972): “How has the change in your use of force policy impacted you professionally and personally?” and “What role should the public have in creating your use of force policy?” The inclusion of a “grand tour” question allowed me to integrate the information I was looking for in order to answer my research problem and purpose (McCaslin & Scott, 2003). This up-front focus set the context for how the respondents answered the subsequent questions, while still allowing them to tell their own story.

The entire interview protocol (Appendix A) allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the officers’ experience going through this transition using questions adapted from Rudestam and Newton (2007) as well as assisted in answering my stated research questions (Appendix B). The questions were meant to facilitate interviews that
helped tell the stories of each of the interviewees (Kvale, 1996) but were only a guide. Further questions were asked depending on where the interviewee took the discussion. Consistent with Creswell (2013), the interviews were recorded so a detailed review for analysis could be completed at a later time. A paper outline of the questions was utilized during the interviews so I could keep notes for reflection while the interview was happening. These notes allowed me to identify areas that I found profound so that I could pay special attention to that part of the transcript later in the analysis process. The review of these field notes also allowed me to more easily start the coding process by identifying preliminary phrases for later in the process once the review and coding of the transcripts began (Saldaña, 2016).

Organizing, Analyzing, and Synthesizing Data

I performed a line-by-line examination of the interview transcripts to dissect officers’ perceptions by identifying significant statements related to how they personally experienced going through a change in the use of force policy they must work within. I utilized three stages of coding to accomplish this process: in vivo, axial, and pattern. I started by identifying statements in the transcripts and kept memos in the margins about what I believed the essence of their statement was as I reviewed the information. These memos were compared with my notes taken during the interviews as to what came across as profound comments. Statements identified as significant were anything that helped me identify how the officers experienced the change in use of force policy. Once significant statements were identified, I identified codes in the data manually and organized the various codes into a spreadsheet. The data were then re-coded and codified and clustered
into themes of meaning. The resulting themes of meaning were used in chapter four to explain the “how” and “what” associated with the officers’ experiences.

**General approach to coding.** Consistent with Moustakas’ (1994) method of data analysis for a phenomenology, I identified significant statements in the transcripts, discovered horizons in the data by identifying qualities of the officers’ experience, and grouped the data into larger themes or meaning units. These themes were then used to describe the “how” and “what” associated with the officers’ experiences. The goal of identifying the significant statements and meanings was to be able to develop a description of how the police officers experienced this change in policy (Moustakas, 1994). Statements that did not pertain to this experience were not included in the analysis.

An inductive method of coding was utilized to generate the themes organically through review of the data, and I constantly reevaluated the transcripts to ensure the themes were consistent with the officers’ stated experiences (Creswell, 2013).

During the initial read-through of the interview transcripts, I utilized in vivo coding to capture the essence of the subjects’ thoughts. The use of in vivo coding as a first-round method allowed me to recognize the interviewees’ own words in the formation of the officers’ collective experience (Saldaña, 2016). Taking direct quotes from the transcripts instead of developing a code at this stage allowed me to avoid injecting my own interpretations of their comments at this first level. Additionally, the highlighted words or phrases I identified through this method allowed me to more quickly identify comments later in the process to utilize when illustrating the themes that developed in my research. The use of in vivo coding has previously been utilized in practitioner research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Fox, Martin, & Green, 2007; Stringer,
2014) and was applicable to this project in that the findings were based on individuals’ experience in a practical setting and will add to the literature for those fields.

In my second read-through of the transcripts, I paid additional attention to the specific in vivo coding I identified in the first-cycle of coding, but at this stage I advanced the coding toward a more abstract understanding of the phenomenon by using axial coding. Axial coding is the development of a word or short phrase that captures the broader essence of multiple in vivo codes from what the participants stated in order to narrow down the number of non-repetitive, representative codes (Boeije, 2010; Saldaña, 2016). These condensed codes were then utilized to further identify the experience of the officers interviewed.

In my third-cycle of coding, I utilized pattern coding to codify and arrange the data. Pattern coding takes the information from the previous rounds of coding to create explanatory codes as the last step prior to identifying the major themes present in the corpus (Saldaña, 2016). At this last stage, if the code or the phrase did not speak specifically to the lived experience of the officers during this major change in policy and did not help answer the research question, they were excluded from the emergent themes. The individual statements from the in vivo coding were used to illustrate how and in what context the officers’ experiences occurred. Part of this context was describing the environment in which the officers experienced the change in policy.

An important last step in the analysis of the data was the structural description outlining the context in which the officers experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). This textural and structural description of the officers’ experiences was not a singular feeling but instead the collection of different aspects of the experience that create
the phenomenon (Gendlin, 2004). This exposed the officers’ environment while working in uniform as well as their home and family environment.

**Trustworthiness**

As the researcher and tool for the study, I aimed to improve the trustworthiness of my analysis in a number of ways. First, I already stated my biases and subjectivity on the subject at the beginning of this chapter (Merriam, 1988), and while this step alone would not be sufficient, the other two strategies ensured my adherence to bracketing the information from my orientations. Second, during the interviews, I asked the interviewees for clarification on their stated experience so that I would have a complete understanding of what they meant, should a statement be ambiguous. Additionally, member-checking was performed after the officers’ significant statements were coded to ensure I accurately captured their experience (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Third, I used an outside opinion on the interpretations by having a disinterested party review my transcripts, memos, and spreadsheet (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). This outside perspective was done by a similarly trained researcher in a law enforcement agency who served as a checks and balances to ensure my analysis was consistent with what the officers’ transcripts showed as their perceptions.

**Ethics**

As is the case with any research, but particularly important when dealing with interviewees who are providing a window into their lives, confidentiality and informed consent were essential. Law enforcement officials are particularly uncomfortable trusting individuals who are not officers themselves (Lande, 2010). I spent the time to explain the nature and purpose of the research that I was asking the officers to participate in as well
responded to any questions the interviewees had prior to starting the semi-structured interview. This aided in making the research experience open and transparent (Moustakas, 1994). This trust and understanding was paramount if I was to ascertain the deeply personal experiences of these officers who were going through the transition in a major policing policy.

Another component of ethics is to ensure the anonymity of the research participants. Each interview was recorded, and the recordings were destroyed upon transcription. Any identifiable information provided during the interview was de-identified through the use of pseudonyms. The transcription was stored on my password protected computer and only accessible by me. Additionally, the consent forms were collected and saved in a digital file in a separate password protected folder on the same password protected computer. Each individual interviewed was initially identified in transcripts by a letter and a number. The letter, either A or B, indicated which department the officer was from; A for the department in the liberal-leaning city, B for the conservative city. Each participant was asked at the end of the interview what name they wanted to be referred to as in this paper.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

There were a number of changes recently with the use of force policies of both police departments in this study. Paris published a proposed use of force policy approximately one year prior to this study period. However, ancillary policies such as a decision-making model, de-escalation, and changes to reporting requirements had been published. The draft policy that was released was a restructuring of the policies that made up their use of force section of the policy manual. PPD had a specific focus on actions that were reasonable, necessary, and appropriate; appropriate was the only new word added to the policy. Even though reasonable and necessary were part of the PPD’s old use of force policy, there was an increased focus with the new draft. The use of force policy from Paris was the result of a draft put out by its command staff. The department also sought feedback in public forums from community members and police officers, including their union, and had a community panel that provided feedback on how they felt the policy should be written. All published policies for PPD were sent out to the officers through an online, cloud-based document management program called PowerDMS. The reorganized draft use of force policy made public by the department with changes that included the word appropriate, had not been published and put into effect before or during the research period for this paper. However, the Ancillary policies previously discussed, such as the decision-making model, de-escalation, and changes to the use of force reporting requirements, were published and in effect prior to the start of the research period.
The conservative city, Lyon, published an overhaul of its use of force policy approximately six months prior to this study period. This change included a restructuring of its use of force policies within the policy manual and included the addition of the pointing of firearms at civilians documentation policy. There was also an increased focus on actions that were reasonable. The use of force policies were published after the command staff of LPD received feedback from a panel of police officers representing all ranks of the department; there was no known public feedback provided prior to its publication. All published policies for LPD were sent out through PowerDMS and there was a short video explaining the changes that accompanied the document recorded by one of the deputy chiefs of police.

In an attempt to answer the research questions, each question in the interview was designed to solicit multiple aspects of the officers’ perceptions and provide an understanding as to what may make implementing major policies changes in law enforcement more successful in the future. The research questions attempted to develop an understanding of the experiences of a broad range of officers working in the current climate of increased public involvement and scrutiny associated with the way they perform their job duties. The process of transcribing the semi-structured interviews and coding and analyzing the data lent itself to the development of the following three abstract themes:

1. Police officers’ experiences depend on the confidence they have in their organization
2. A lack of trust with the community
3. There is a new prototypical officer
Each of these themes are developed below, including supporting quotes directly from the officers who were going through a change in their use of force policy.

**Police officers’ experiences depend on the confidence they have in their organization**

Police officers work within a paramilitary structure and depend on those who supervise, or have command over them, to look out for their safety and best interest. Because of this, the confidence the participants had in their organization impacted their experience going through the transition to a new use of force policy. This first theme had a number of horizons that were part of the larger organizational context. The horizons were the idea of people they viewed as politicians versus the individuals they viewed as real cops; the concern that changes in use of force policy could create a situation where there was de-policing occurring; the manner in which the policy change was communicated to the end users; and trust that their leaders were doing the right thing.

**Politicians versus real cops.** The most prevalent of these horizons was the viewpoint that people who were not or were no longer real cops were making decisions that impacted those on the front lines tasked with implementing the new policies. Jason from PPD summed it up succinctly when he stated, ‘lieutenants and above make decisions, but the decisions [they] make reflect on the officers, the lowest officer from a rookie to somebody that has 30 years on.’ Jason was a patrol officer nearing the end of his career and had 30 years on the job. He was generally supportive of the changes being proposed by his department and felt that the public’s involvement in the policy development process was overdue. He described reading the policy and thinking, “I didn’t see it as a truck coming down the highway.” Jason further explained that he did not view anything as so significant that it would impact how good police officers performed
their duties. Even though he was supportive, he did acknowledge that the chief of police was a political appointee and had a vested interest in keeping his job. The notion that the chief of police was a political person and not a police officer anymore was discussed by a number of the officers interviewed. For example, Jeff, a sergeant on PPD with 20 years of experience, simply stated, “if you’re a chief, you wanna stay chief.” The quote made it seem like Jeff felt chiefs of police only cared about themselves, but he instead viewed their commitment to change and responsiveness to the community positively. He felt that chiefs of police kept their jobs through improving efficiencies in the department and simply looking to improve. A veteran first-line supervisor, Jeff had spent time in a number of diverse assignments in his time with PPD and portrayed a level of understanding regarding the larger picture that I did not perceive from many of the other officers who generally focused on the issues that directly impacted their role on the department. Brad, a veteran sergeant at LPD with almost 20 years of experience, wondered why police were the only profession where the public wanted to have a strong say in how things are done but did agree that street officers sometimes missed the bigger picture. Brad stated that command officers “have to look at things kind of globally … I think a lot of times the cops have a hard time dealing with [changes] because they look at their piece. They're not seeing big picture.” Part of Brad’s experience at LPD, however, was built on a solid trust he had for the leadership of the department, which was not always portrayed by the officers from PPD. As he described it, “I've had good experiences with our staff, and so I tend to give them the benefit of the doubt. I don't think they're out to screw us.” These positive experiences made Brad more comfortable
when policy changes were made and it made it easier to support the changes to the officers under his command.

The idea that police chiefs are more politician that cop was highlighted by newer officers as well. Mitch, a Paris police officer with less than five years of experience, stated that “even the most hardcore, most pro-cop police chief is still subject to the whims of the municipal government for which they serve. And so, if they want to keep their job, they’re going to do what the mayor’s office wants to do.” There was also the concern by a more senior police officer, Alex, who felt being too tied to what the mayor wants was a bad practice for a police chief because “the mayor takes a look at it from listening to [activists]” and then the mayor tells the police chief what he should do. Scott from PPD also worried about the perception that the lack of authority could create if a chief of police appeared too eager to please the mayor. As a senior officer with more than 15 years on the job, he felt police chiefs in the end had to answer to the mayor and other city officials, stating the chief ultimately has “no real authority.” In addition to being perceived as just another politician, the officers in this study often felt that because of command officers’ progression and advancement in their departments, they are often disconnect with the realities of today’s environment.

Multiple officers from both departments wondered aloud when the last time was that command-level officers were on the road; by road, the officers meant working in a patrol capacity responding to calls or doing proactive police work. Rebecca, a LPD sergeant with over 20 years of experience, mentioned, “If you get command staff who hasn't been on the street for a while and maybe not see the day to day interactions and decision making that officers are subjected to might seem out of touch.” Though,
Rebecca did feel the command staff listened to politicians and the public but did not worry about the changes her department made because she felt they were simply doing the right thing to keep up with the times. Conversely, David, a sergeant with more than 10 years of experience at PPD, felt almost indignant that any command officer would dictate policy to someone who was currently working in a different environment than the one they did more than 15 years prior. David was very firm in his belief that he would not promote too high, so as to be out of a position to help the guys on the streets. He also felt that certain command officers changed who they were if they promoted too high. David stated that you “hear stories about [a specific command officer] when he was a young police officer and how he used to kick ass. Well, now he’s the guy that’s no, no, no. So, how’s that make sense?” The concern that command officers may shift to more of a conservative, more hands-off, approach to policing made some officers feel they were being restricted in how they could address threats. This was evident by one word in particular that has been part of the national discussion and seemed to be worrisome to a number of the officers: proportional.

Perry, a police officer with more than 20 years of experience on PPD, stated that PERF’s concept of proportional— an officer responding to an individual with force based on the type of call for service or the actions of the suspect—scared him. This feeling of being scared or uneasy about the term proportional was also evident with Paul, a police officer with more than 10 years of experience on PPD. He felt the term was ambiguous and created uncertainty for how the department he worked for would view his actions after a use of force, particularly if the outcome was not favorable. He poignantly stated:

As a cop, I don’t fight fair. If somebody squares up with me for a boxing match, I’m not going to square up with them for a boxing match; I might take out my
baton. If someone comes at me with a knife, I’m not going to pull out my pocket knife and go West Side Story on them.

After stating the last part about the knife, the officer put his hand on his holstered firearm to indicate he would draw his gun. In an almost frustrated tone, as he surveyed the neighborhood we were driving through, Paul stated how he deals with so much uncertainty with what or who he will face at any given time. He viewed changes in the use of force policy as another uncertainty which increased the anxiety he sometimes felt. Alex from PPD felt more frustration than uncertainty. The frustration stemmed not so much for where he was at in his career, having left operational assignments where force was frequently used to taking a position that took him off the streets, but instead for the younger officers working patrol functions and the limitations that were being placed on them. He felt it left them in a less-safe position.

From a different point of view than many, Leroy, a sergeant for PPD with more than 20 years on the job felt that officers’ and front-line supervisors’ daily activities were not really impacted that significantly by changes in policy. This was, of course, the opposite of most participants in this study who felt that the changes in policy impacted them most directly “in the field.” Leroy used an analogy to illustrate his viewpoint:

If you're out on the boat with a group of people, and somebody is motion sick, and they're going to hurl, they're the ones who go in the water first, because the waves are the very worst at the very top. As soon as you're only six, 10 feet down even on pretty choppy seas, it's completely still... We are the working drones. We are so far down, it would have to be one hell of a tsunami to affect my life at all.

The point being, that while policies and practices change, the street cop’s job is essentially the same. They respond to calls and make arrests. There might be changes to how that should best be done, but the job is essentially the same.
The difference between experiences of officers in the two departments in this study seemed to be that officers in Lyon believed even though their command staff were politicians more than they were cops anymore, they viewed their actions as what was best for the department moving forward; officers from Paris were decidedly more skeptical of the motivations of those in charge.

**Potential for de-policing.** The next horizon associated with the officers’ experience was de-policing. Some, like Paul from PPD, believed that there had been many major shifts in policy during his more than a decade of law enforcement. The line officers, from his point of view, frequently felt like the changes were going to prevent them from catching the bad guys and that it would result in injuries or death to officers. Change was concerning to experienced officers of both department but others, like Robert from LPD, felt the times required it. He stated some officers felt changing the way they police was “not my job, and we've always done it this way.” His reply was simply, “okay folks, we used to ride horses and you don't see any of those tied up front anymore either, do you?” The predominant experience, however, had to do with the officers’ belief that perception was more important than performing an appropriate police action.

Jason from PPD worried, “if I stop this guy at 3:00 in the morning in the alley and he happens to be anything but white, what’s going to happen?” He provided a scenario as a clear case of suspicious activity, but he believed that the public might view his actions through the lens of a White officer stopping a minority individual. And while it was clear that Jason was concerned how his actions would be perceived, he felt it was the general public, over time, who would be faced with the negative consequences of such hesitation. “The citizenry are the ones that suffer because you’re not out there beating the bushes,
you’re not out there doing what you’re supposed to be doing: taking care of the community.” The most outspoken individual on this issue of de-policing because of a potentially negative outcome was Scott.

Scott provided multiple examples to illustrate for me how de-policing (my words, not his) was already taking shape in Paris. He felt it was more important to walk away from a situation that had the potential to result in a negative outcome versus continuing with a legitimate police action. When faced with this type of a situation, Scott stated that “it ain’t worth it. Don’t die on this hill. Live to fight another day.” Scott even provided an example where he tried to affect an arrest for a potential drunk driver around the time of the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. He stated there were many people with cell phone cameras out yelling that the cops were just stopping this man because he was Black and, in the end, Scott’s sergeant told him to stop the interaction and leave the situation. This upset Scott because he felt a serious violation, in this case an individual driving under the influence, had occurred that required his action. He emotionally described it by saying, “you feel like they’ve taken your superpower away. Your ability to go out there and truly do the job and be what people need you to be.” He felt the PPD only wanted their officers to respond to calls now and just simply take reports instead of being proactive; “Don’t chase the bad guy.” Some of the officers from PPD believed the payouts in previous years for officer-related incidents had created this aversion to anything that could result in litigation. “They really don’t encourage cops to go out there and find the truly bad people that need to go to jail because there’s too much litigation involved,” stated David. Almost every officer from PPD also believed their department
and the city as a whole did not support them and would even turn on them if the outcome of an incident was not viewed positively by the community.

It was not uncommon for the participant from PPD to cite previous cases where the officers involved were within policy but because their actions resulted in an event that caused backlash from the community, there was usually a knee-jerk reaction to change a policy and the city would settle claims out of court. Perry, much like Scott, felt these knee jerk reactions to negative outcome events decreased his “ability to really safeguard citizens.” He felt his department was shifting to more of a guardian mentality than that of a warrior. Perry was concerned that this shift would result in fewer police actions, thus making the city a less safe place to live and work.

At LPD, the department had implemented a policy that was part of its use of force changes that was not initially popular with the majority of officers I spoke with for this study. The specific policy related to requiring LPD officers to complete an abbreviated use of force report whenever one of their officers drew their firearm and pointed it at an individual. After the change had been implemented for a few months, it was Rebecca’s perception that the officers had become less reluctant to implement the change. The problem was department members were concerned that the added documentation would create a situation where officers hesitated when pulling their firearms. “I really don't believe that it has changed their decision-making process when it comes to whether or not to point. I think once guys do it and realize how simple the report is, they will understand it is not a big deal.”

Communicating to the troops. There was a significant difference between how the changes in officers’ use of force policies were communicated to the officers of PPD
and LPD. One was perceived to be heavily focused on what the community wanted while the other was perceived to be a collaborative effort with department members from all ranks. This dichotomy ultimately impacted how the policy shift was experienced by the officers.

Mitch from PPD may have summed up the collective feeling of many officers from PPD when he stated, “the first time I heard about [the use of force policy being updated] was seeing a newspaper article on it… I said, ‘what?’ That was not cool. That was not a good feeling.” The implication was obvious, Mitch, and many from PPD, felt like they were simply told about the change in one of the salient department policies, though this was not a departure from how other policies were released. Officers from both departments discussed how whenever any policy is changed and released, it is done so through PowerDMS. This system requires the officers to read the policy and electronically sign to acknowledge they read it. However, the similarities between how the two departments released their policies seemed to end there.

When a change to a significant policy, as defined by the LPD, was to be released to the officers through PowerDMS, the new policy was accompanied by a short video from one of the deputy chiefs. These videos gave brief overviews of the policy change and often discussed the ‘why’ associated with the policy being changed. This was an essential component, according to Loretta. As will be discussed in the next theme, Loretta felt the newer officers needed to know the why behind a policy change.

The availability of command officers to answer questions associated with a major shift in policy was something Alex from PPD thought should be afforded to the officers on the streets. “We always read this stuff, and do we understand it or a lot of times we
just interpret it, maybe not the correct way?” Alex, feeling the use of force policy was something that significantly impacted the way in which officers operated on the streets, particularly when changes were made that he felt restricted the officers’ ability to use force, believed there should be the availability of someone “to at least answer some questions.” The negative consequence of not knowing the policy well could create a situation where officers become hesitant and will not know “what they can’t do and what they can get involved in.” This idea of fully understanding the use of force policy was highlighted by Larry from PPD, when saying that “none of us [meaning officers on the streets] can write that policy but knowing it and knowing how to best operate within that policy” will provide the officers with a sense of what they can do. For this reason, primarily, Larry preferred policy changes that were more “black and white as to what [the officers] can and cannot do.” Referencing a previous change to the pursuit policy, he felt officers “may not have liked it, [the officers] still knew what the rules were.” Larry described his situation as a sergeant and felt like he did not know how to communicate policy changes to his officer that he did not agree with. In a different approach to addressing policy changes, Kyle, a sergeant from LPD, felt he needed to support the decision of his commanding officers, even if he did not like the manner in which it was communicated. He described, “I think if you have officers that are like, ‘Oh, it was communicated horribly,’ that's not the department doing that. That's a failure from people like me, to not sit down and explain what's going on.” It was important to Kyle that his officers heard about the changes from him directly. Kyle took pride in looking after the officers under his command and felt it was his job to bridge the gap between the command staff and the officers on the street. As Rebecca put it, “if [the officers]
understand why they're doing it I think that they're more apt to do it.” Robert did wonder aloud if LPD was changing policies so frequently that it made it difficult for the officers on the street to understand what the department expected of them.

On the topic of understanding, Scott from PPD was concerned about comprehension of the policy. He, unlike Larry, wanted to see “more gray than black and white…I think our use of force policy now, I mean it literally reads like an encyclopedia.” More than just the possible complexity of the policy, Scott worried aloud that the policy was also just too long. Even with his concerns about being able to read and apply the policy, Scott became most animated when discussing how the policy was released to the officers. He felt disrespected by the department releasing it to the media before having a conversation with the officers. “I thought it was kind of chicken shit,” implying his department’s leadership did not have the courage to address the officers face-to-face to tell them a change in their use of force policy was coming.

Lastly, the way in which the policy is relayed to the front-line supervisors and from them to the officers was a significant aspect of the experience of the individuals who participated in this research. While sergeants who participated in this study from both departments felt it was their job to pass information on policy changes to their officers, their willingness to share personal perspective was the main difference between the two cities. In Paris, it was Jeff’s perspective that the department has “a lot of lieutenants that simply don’t reflect what the chief has prioritized.” This was perplexing to Jeff, who believed the department should always be looking to improve but was generally concerned his officers would be under-trained for the changes. The communication from leaders down the chain of command have to exude buy-in,
otherwise change will be difficult. Jeff, an experienced sergeant with varied assignments within the department, worried that some in the department have a hard time letting go of more punitive policies in place of the current trends in policing. Specifically, he bemoaned the old “lock them up and let God sort them out” mentality.

The importance of training was also a topic of discussion, and if the appropriate training was not being provided, Larry from PPD believed there needed to be a “more widespread effort by supervisors on up to make sure that everybody knows what the changes are, what the expectations are, and what the understanding of the new policy is.” Brad from LPD felt similarly about training and communicating change to his officers. “Part of my job is, right, wrong, or indifferent and whether I like the policy or not, I have to say, hey, here’s the direction we’re going.” While the concerns about communication between the two departments in this study were different, the root concern was the same. The officers’ and front-line supervisors’ main concern was making sure their officers understood the policies and what the departments’ expectations of them were.

**Trust and doing the right thing.** The crux of how officers felt about their agencies was rooted in whether they trusted their department and whether they would do the right thing, regardless of the outcome of a situation. According to Paul from PPD, “If ambiguity is there then you also have hesitation that goes along with it, and you have guys that aren’t going to be sure that they’re going to be covered.” The changes “probably make officers hesitant,” according to Roy. He worried that the continual changes in policy created a situation where officers did not know what the current policy was, particularly in rapidly changing, high stress situations. In addition to possible
confusion, it was not uncommon for PPD officers to worry about the outcome of an event impacting the review of the events.

“The problem is that a lot of things the department does is outcome based and not process based,” Paul opined. As an experienced officer, Paul felt he would react to high stress situations appropriately but worried that less confident officers would hesitate to react for fear of punishment from their department or public scrutiny. It was not uncommon for the officers from both departments in this study to worry about being the next “YouTube star;” the implication being that being part of an event that looks bad will become viral on social media. Officers, such as Perry from PPD, believed that they “could be totally in the right, [they] could be covered by [the law], but the political pressure that comes down on the department or the social pressure from some of the more vocal organization, it could influence the way members of the department decide my outcome.” In an effort to stave off public criticism, Kyle from LPD believed departments should increase their documentation efforts. As he described, “the more information that exists, specific information, identifiable information, not conjecture” the better off officers will be when explaining the use of force. He viewed the changes in policy and documentation requirements as “necessary for the future of [law enforcement].” Said another way, if an officer was involved in a shooting, they would be able to show how many times they have drawn their firearm previously and never fired it. Documentation, to Kyle, was key to maintaining trust with the community.

Others, particularly newer officers with less than five years on the job, felt the political and social pressure as well but were more likely to feel they would be ok as long as they did what they thought was right. “If I’m doing the right thing for the right reason,
or what I believe to be the right reason, then if something comes about it then I can explain why I did it and not have a bad conscience about it or whatever you might say,” stated Roy. Roy, with less than five years of service, was similar to other new officers from both departments who felt the greater the number of eyes on a use of force review, the better. His feeling was the multiple levels of reviews created a stronger case to buffer against possible public outcry. Mitch, another PPD officer with less than five years on the job, also felt if he did the right thing he should be fine. Doing the right thing was a bit of an ambiguous statement but Mitch generally meant if he viewed his own actions as reasonable he should not face discipline. However, he still worried about getting “jammed up” on a policy violation for some minute detail. Interestingly, Mitch described his more liberal beliefs and upbringing when describing his experience through the change in use of force policies, but he still worried that the vagueness he saw in the policy did not give the officers the benefit of the doubt; he felt the policy was written in such a way to benefit the department and city. This skepticism could have been born from a previous interaction with the command staff of PPD where he and other officers expressed some of their concerns but felt like they were not taken seriously.

Mitch had previously been active in providing feedback on policies or issues whenever he was given the opportunity. He described previously meeting with command staff at a roundtable-type discussion but did not feel he or others were heard. So, when it came time to provide feedback on the use of force policy he stated, “[the changes] appear to already be happening.” In short, why would he provide feedback when he believed the command staff had already decided how they wanted the policy to look.
The vagueness in the language was also something that a PPD sergeant, Leroy, worried about. Overall, Leroy believed the changes were “not a big deal” but he worried the language was so ambiguous that, depending on an event’s outcome, “I could get a medal, or I could get fired.” A different PPD sergeant, David, seemed to take pride in policing his own guys to make sure they were doing the right thing, regardless of what the department changed in terms of policies. In an animated moment, David stated the following when discussing the department policing themselves:

If you’ve been around here and you see some cop fucking up, you’re going to go to him and slap him on the back of the head and say, “what the fuck are you doing?” And when they get in trouble… no one is sitting there going, “oh, jeez. I wish they’d do him a solid and take care of it.” No, it’s like fuck you guy. You’re tarnishing the rest of us.

David struck me as someone who would come down hard on the officers under his command, but he did not appear to be supportive of others higher up in the chain of command “Monday morning quarterbacking” his or his officers’ decisions after the fact. He wanted those “fucking up” to be punished, but he was not interested in having his actions dissected after the fact in a protracted manner when he had to react in mere seconds. Most officers from both departments in this research emphatically stated they knew what was right or wrong. It felt to me like they were in disbelief that someone would investigate their actions in a focused manner when they believed they had a strong moral compass and simply were forced to react in a rapidly changing, fluid environment. However, the current climate had caused at least one sergeant in the study, Jeff from PPD, to have additional eyes on an event even when he believed his officer was in the right.
Jeff described for me a use of force incident where one of the patrol officers under his command did everything, in his assessment, appropriately but “because of the times we’re in right now and the scrutiny that we get… I felt it necessary to … have extra eyes on it.” In the end, Jeff knew his officer would be cleared, but he worried not clearing him up front without the additional investigation hurt his standing with that officer; “it kind of breaks down the trust.”

The experience of being investigated for your uses of force also seemed to be rooted in financial concerns for a number of the officers. The concern regarding the financial implications of getting in trouble was something Alex discussed. “If you make a mistake out there or you violate all these policies … you’re looking at a suspension. We can’t afford these suspensions.” Other officers, like Roy from PPD, discussed setting up a trust for the purchase of his house so that it would be harder for someone to go after it, should he get in trouble. Others, like Perry from PPD, described limiting their debts and paying off bills so that in the event they were suspended or terminated, their family would be alright until he got back on his feet.

Near the end of his career, Jason from PPD, strongly felt that increased supervision and training were the key to decreasing negative events and easing the officers’ apprehension for how the department would view their actions, post-event:

It doesn’t matter what the policy is because you know how to make an arrest, you know what you need to make an arrest, and if somebody is going to fight, then you go through your levels of escalation. As long as you follow those, you’re not going to have a problem.

**Theme summary.** In conclusion, the confidence officers felt in their organization’s leadership dramatically shaped their experience going through the change in use of force policy. For some at PPD, the disquietude associated with this change in
department policy felt like the anxiety experienced before any significant change in policy, David stated:

There’s always the people that panic and go, “oh, my gosh, this is going to be so bad. This is going to be so bad. This is going to be so f*cked up. We’re not going to be able to do our jobs. Cops are going to die in the streets.” And it’s just, no. You can’t look at it that way. You just got to be patient and wait-and-see. If it truly is f*cked up and bad, okay fine. Then we’ll address it.

The last part of the quote from David gives an indication that even though he knew officers were reacting negatively to the change, it also indicates that there is enough trust in the organization to make changes if there are truly problems with a change in policy.

For officers at LPD, not a single officer reported feeling anxiety over whether their department would support them if they were reasonable in their use of force. Faced with a use of force event that upset the community, Robert believed his department would “stand up and grown a pair, if you will, and tell people, no, police work is ugly. It isn't pretty.” In other words, he believed his department would take the criticism head-on and defend their officer’s actions. Robert grew up in the area where he worked and took great pride in being from there. As he noted, “I'm very proud in the fact that I grew up in this town…The police department has never had a bad reputation.” He was similarly proud to be a LPD officer. Loretta was similarly proud that her department would routinely ask themselves, “what technology, what skills, what are we doing that can change or improve, and make our lives easier, and not get us hurt, and keep people safer?”

**A Lack of Trust with the Community**

The concept of involving the citizens served by a police department in the development of the policies was discussed in chapter two, however, the findings
associated with this study indicated the support from the officers for this practice was different depending on the department they worked for. One might believe that the department from the conservative community would be more inclined to trust the community members to be involved in the policy development process, but this was not supported by the majority of the participants from Lyon. In Lyon, there was not a community panel nor was there any formal community meetings to address how the citizens felt they should use force, which was not outside of the norm. In Paris, however, there were multiple community meetings with the command staff of the PPD as well as a panel of community activists that were allowed to provide their input. This was unique for PPD and had not been done previously for other policy changes. The officers in this study, whether they supported community involvement or not, felt a level of disconnect with those in the community that wanted to be part of the policy review and development process. The frustration felt by Brad from LPD was emblematic of how many of the officers from that department felt about the community helping to write police policy.

I do get bothered when people pretend to know how to do what I do, and they've never walked in my shoes, and they've never seen the crap that I have to see and deal with the people that I have to deal with. They live in their bubble and then want to give advice, so that is really frustrating. I wish we could go back to a place where we were assumed to be the truth teller and there wasn't so much distrust.

In contrast, police officers from Paris were more likely to support community involvement.

The manner and responsibility for the involvement of the community differed depending on which officer I spoke with, but there was still a consensus that they should be at least considered. Jeff from PPD knew some officers were skeptical of the community being involved in the policy development process for fear their hands as
officers would be tied on certain issues. However, he viewed the public’s involvement as  
a way to “consider more options, more resources for dealing with a situation.” Jeff  
viewed the local and national discussion surrounding changes in use of force policies as a  
human rights issues. This, in part, is why Jeff did not worry about the changes, as a  
whole, because as police officers “we should automatically be treating people with  
dignity and respect.” Brad from LPD worried that the public lacked an understanding of  
what policing was, thus making their input unhelpful. He stated, “I wouldn't expect them  
to say, ‘Hey we need a police officer to help develop our banking policies.’ I don't know  
anything about banking. They don't know anything about law enforcement. They don't  
know anything about use of force.” Larry from PPD felt similarly and believed the  
decisions on law enforcement policies should be left to the police just like he preferred  
his medical treatment to be decided by doctors. From his perspective, he felt the  
community should be involved and care about policing issues because they are the  
recipients of the training and policies of their municipal police department. The  
community’s desire to have the best policing practices was a common topic amongst PPD  
officers.

Mitch believed the department could only be “as effective as the community will  
allow us to be. Part of that is the use of force. I mean, they get to dictate how they wanna  
be policed.” However, he also believed strongly that if civilians were to be involved in  
the development of his department’s policies, there would need to be a “serious  
educational component” to ensure they knew what the realities of policing were and what  
training was provided to officers. Perspective was also something Mitch, a new officer  
with less than five years on the job, stressed as part of the use of force discussion. Mitch
was smaller in stature and felt the fact that he was a police officer changed the discussion around physical confrontations. When discussing a man he arrested on a warrant during my time with him who was 6’5” he stated,

if you had [me and that larger individual] in a wrestling match, or an MMA match, it wouldn’t be a fair fight and everybody would feel bad for me. If he starts punching on me and I shoot him [in my role as a police officer], I can guarantee you I’m gonna be the bad guy in that scenario.

Roy from PPD elaborated on this as well when he stated, “what might look bad in the public’s eyes per se, might be completely legitimate based on what we perceived at that moment.” He then brought up language from the Supreme Court Case of *Graham v. Connor* (1989) and worried that his decision, made in a split second, would be broken down and judged by members of the public who had the benefit of slow motion replay. Roy did view working with the community as essential to increase officers policing in the “right way” as opposed to “getting alley justice;” referring to the practice of officers teaching someone a lesson through physical means instead of through more legitimate means such as simply arresting them for an offense. Still, many worried that lay persons could not fully participate in drafting policies.

David from PPD, a sergeant, wanted the public to be better educated on the type of violence officers routinely encounter. In one of the funnier moments of this research, David, sitting in a chair shook himself side to side with his arms limply flailing at his sides to illustrate how the public viewed what a person must look like when they are attempted to avoid having handcuffs placed on them. Jason, the 30-year veteran police officer from PPD, felt the public had an “obligation to be involved and actually see what officers do.” He was very supportive of collaborative efforts, having been a part of previous partnerships in the past. However, it was also important to him that the
community members who wanted to participate were actively engaged and took feedback from the officers’ perspective in addition to providing their own. This was true with officers from LPD as well. Kyle felt strongly that there was a disconnect and the general public lacked “an understanding … of what use of force looks like, why we do what we do.” Even with that said, Kyle was also supportive of his department reaching out to minority communities that had serious concerns about how the police perform their duties if for nothing else to build better relationships. Trying to find a middle ground during a time where he felt the country was very polarized was an important part of his experience as an officer. LPD officers found hope even when they were skeptical of public involvement.

Loretta felt supported by the community where she worked. “We are very blessed in this community… Are there pockets where, yeah, you go in there and you're never going to get any support.” She then referenced a location we had just left and said, “if I were in a fight [back there], I have reasonable assurance that several of those people would jump in to help me.” The introduction of body worn cameras were well received by most of the officers in this study as something that not only would help clear them against frivolous complaints but would also help show the public what it is really like for officers on the streets. Brad stated, “when [the public] actually get to see [uses of force] happening, I think it's pretty powerful for juries and other people who are maybe a little leery of us using force in any way.”

Providing input was fine with most officers from PPD, but many stopped short of saying they should help write policy. “It’s good to talk with the public about issues, but it’s hard to get input from people who don’t understand the complexities of our job,”
stated Paul. “You kind of get more feelings than policies based on hard evidence.” Paul, an experienced officer with more than 10 years of service to the PPD, worried that very strong emotions by some were driving societal change around policing. He even wondered aloud if his and other departments would be going through these changes had the death of Michael Brown not occurred in Ferguson, Missouri, setting off nationwide protests.

It was the experience of officers from both departments in this study that the public, to varying degrees, wanted to be a part of the conversation surrounding force used by their police departments. The problem, as Leroy from PPD put it, was that even when the general public believes they are informed, they still lack a real understanding of the training and the current literature surrounding use of force: “That becomes a real problem engaging the public when it comes time to look at a public policy.” He, however, also saw parallels with front-line officers and supervisors who were not attuned to the political realities and the liability concerns that command-level officers needed to confront. Interestingly, Leroy felt that even though he worked in a liberal city where the politicians were not always publicly supportive of the police, when it came time to determine priorities they still supported the department. As he described, “there are things they need to say publicly to get themselves elected and reelected, but at the end of the day, let’s look at how the money is spent.” What Leroy meant by this was the political statements did not bother him because the politicians always supported the department in their budget. He then listed off the ways in which the city council and mayor had supported the police, whether it be through new stations, equipment, or an increase in the authorized strength of the department. Not everyone saw it this way, however.
Mitch, a much younger officer than Leroy, believed his department’s leadership served a number of stakeholders, but stated the emphasis [was] not on us. The emphasis [was on] … the community, which is not bad. It’s not that the community isn’t important in terms of being a stakeholder in this. We just seem to be at the bottom of the list.

Mitch felt the end result of this lack of trust between the community and their police department was less proactive policing, “because [officers are] afraid of being the next YouTube star.” Loretta from LPD reinforced this concern when she told me she had a colleague say to her, "Yeah, black kid, he had a knife, I wouldn't pull my gun.” She said he refused to pull his firearm “because he didn't want to be the white cop that shot the black kid.”

Paul from PPD just wished the public knew how much restraint officers showed on a regular basis. He wished the general public knew the amount of times he and those who work with him have been legally justified in shooting someone and instead showed restraint.

You’re going to have an I could have shot them story. You’re going to have a time where it rose to the level of deadly force or you would have been justified to pull the trigger. I have them. I’ve talked with other cops. Every other cop I’ve talked with about this has had them. Not every cop has the, I shot them story. Very few cops have the I shot them story.

Paul then went on to provide his recollection of how few incidents there actually were in a given year where police officers in America actually shot and killed someone. He further elaborated that of those shootings, the vast majority involved justified shootings where the decedent was the aggressor or had a weapon. The idea that officers use restraint was also brought up by a number of the officers from LPD. Robert viewed the use and firing of a firearm as an ethical issue. He wished the general public knew the
number of “situations where we could use more deadly force than we need to, but I think our officers are professional and well trained that that's not the first resort that we go to.” Driving the point home, Robert was proud to say he had never had a sustained complaint against him, from anything ranging from discourtesy to excessive force.

**Summary.** The most common concern from officers about their policies being dictated by members from the public was the idea that the general population just did not understand police work. The common example of public feedback, “why didn't you just shoot the gun out of their hand” was mentioned by Robert from LPD but that or similar examples were frequently provided to me by the police officers in this study illustrating that those outside of law enforcement just do not understand the realities of the job. All of the officers who brought this up explained that shooting a gun out of someone’s hand was not a feasible response because it could not be accurately done. Additionally, they are trained to stop the threat and taking a low-probability shot could not be done in practice. Even with this frustration, Jeff from PPD viewed it as the responsibility of police departments to change the discussion and improve relationships and understanding with the communities they serve.

All these years [the police would] go into a community and they tell them, these are your problems; X, Y, X. This is how I’m gonna fix your problems. Let’s get to work. Right? But how about we invite the public in; tell me your problems, all right. Okay, I’m notating all of your problems. Now, how do you want us to address your problems? What should we prioritize? Same thing should occur with use of force policies. Allow the public a say-so at least.

The sentiment was that police departments need to allow the public they serve to truly identify what issues they are most concerned with and how to address them. This process was accepted by most officers, though they were skeptical and wished they had more authority with certain groups of people. “We work for a society that says this is what we
want. I just wish that they would take more input from us and less input from special interest groups,” lamented David from PPD. His experience was that the community, in general, appreciated the police, but a vocal minority seemed to be able to implement significant change. When discussing a community group put together to assist his department with its use of force policy, David, frustrated, said, “when you have a room stacked with people that are anti-police activists, how does that give a proper representation for the public?” This was echoed by Alex from PPD who lamented, the department “is bringing in people to be involved that are not neutral…They don’t like us in the first place.” The obvious concern was that a group of anti-police activists would implement policies that go against what police officers feel is right.

Conversely, even though most officers from LPD were hesitant to allow the public to be part of the policy development process and preferred the department stay on top of trends to aid in policing themselves, the climate in their city afforded them a different experience as a police officer. This was stated best by Kyle from LPD, “this community is very supportive of law enforcement. I’ve heard, as an example, defense attorneys say multiple times, ‘Don't go after cops on the stand in this community, citizens do not like it.’” Even just in this study, I anecdotally perceived the difference. While doing ride-alongs for this research, it was quite common to have a member of the public thank the officers I was with in Lyon for their service. Johnnie mentioned this up to me during our time together and shortly after the conversation, an older woman came up to the patrol car we were in, thanked him for his service and provided him and me with a painted rock. The rock was painted black with a thin blue line across the middle, a common symbol of support for law enforcement, overlaid by a white cross and silver
writing noting a bible passage from Ephesians chapter 6, verse 16: “In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all arrows of the evil one.” When the woman left, Johnnie looked at me with an ear-to-ear smile, “I told you.”

**There is a New Prototypical Officer**

According to the officers who participated in this study, regardless of the department they worked for, they felt new officers going through the academies are different than those who came before them. Additionally, this new prototypical officer views their experience differently than, as Perry referred to them, the “old heads.” Instead of individuals with more of a military background prior to joining the police department, Leroy from PPD believed there had been an increase in individuals with college educations. The increase in college-educated officers was generally thought of as a positive by members of both departments, but the personalities of those individuals was a point of concern for many.

Scott from PPD stated he used to joke that the department was trying to hire social workers and librarians, “and then there were a couple in a recent academy class.” He felt individuals who were drawn to those types of professions were not strong-willed enough and were too hesitant when confronted with serious criminals while performing police work. He viewed them as too “hesitant to take any kind of action because they’re afraid.” Jason from PPD was very supportive of many changes in approach to situations where force could be used. He supported de-escalation over going hands-on but he too worried about the new officers. Newer officers that may hesitate “might get themselves hurt, might get themselves killed, might get somebody else hurt.” Simply put, he viewed hesitation by new officers as a direct link to the possibility of more officers being hurt or
killed in the line of duty in future years. This concern was echoed by David, a sergeant with PPD, who strongly believed the newer officers who are “more social worker and community service” oriented are “intimidated easier by bad guys.” David felt it was so bad on certain calls that junior officers who should be handling calls directly even though a supervisor was on scene would tend to hang back behind him, in his opinion, to avoid having to interact with certain suspects. Larry from PPD might have summed up the feeling of many on his department when he stated, “we are hiring some very good people, and we are hiring some very intelligent, qualified people. But we also are hiring people who don’t necessarily have the stomach for some of the ugliness that we have to see.” However, Perry and Jeff from PPD did not see the hesitation as a bad thing. Perry agreed that newer officers—those from the “Millennial” generation—were less likely to go hands-on but viewed it as reflective of what the community currently expected from their officers. Jeff supported this and felt it was not hesitation but instead it was the new officers simply exhibiting more patience on calls. Although, some viewed the delays in action by newer officers as a product of too cumbersome policies.

It was common for officers from both departments to worry about their policies being too difficult to understand and apply. “I don’t want [officers] trying to go through the policy in their head. It should be ingrained…the policy should not be a thought when they are executing their duties,” said Larry from PPD. Said more simply by Paul from PPD, “if you give someone an entire book and say okay now make the proper decision with this huge volume of knowledge, it’s like oh shit.” This was also supported by Leroy, who believed his department was giving officers so much information that they have difficulty processing and making a decision; the end result of the mental overload was
new officers looking hesitant. Johnnie from LPD had experience with newer officers who were hesitant but those individuals, in his assessment, were not fit to be police officers and were either washed out during the academy or the new officers resigned because they realized policing was not what they thought it was. Fitness for the job was also discussed by Loretta from LPD who said she would only encourage someone she knew to be a police officer if she felt they had the right personality; the need to be assertive was stressed. The mindset about new policy changes surrounding the use of force was also unique to officers on the job less than five years.

Grant from LPD was fully supportive of the current trends in use of force policies. This included a focus on community engagement, de-escalation, having incidents thoroughly investigated, documenting when officers pointed their firearm at civilians even if it was not used, and the concept of using the least amount of force possible. For Grant, the new policy and documentation requirements were taught during his academy class. So, it is the only thing he has known. He did acknowledge, however, that the increased documentation requirements were not well received by senior officers. However, we're “documenting basically everything that happens in any use of force incident now. I think that just shows that we're taking the steps needed to show … [why] we deemed it was necessary.” This was a common theme amongst LPD officers. Even the more senior officers did not like the additional paperwork but felt the documentation could be used to dispel the myth that they were quick to fire their weapon. Multiple LPD officers viewed the data showing they had pulled their firearm X number of times without firing a single shot would give support to the idea that when they had to fire their gun, it
was “absolutely necessary,” as Johnnie put it. Even some senior officers had come around after the policy had been in place for at least the past six months.

A senior officer who helped train probationary officers at LPD, Loretta sold the idea of documenting drawing a firearm to the other officers by saying, “It's really not that big of a change. If you were doing your job effectively [before], it's just doing your job correctly and documenting it appropriately [now].” Perry from PPD felt some of the resistance to changes in use of force were minimized because newer officers accepted it as how policing is done today. Additionally, the natural turnover of departments played a role; “you don’t have as many old heads that are so staunch.” The point Perry was trying to make was that the older officers who were most likely to resist changes in the use of force policy were retiring and being replaced by newer officers who were more tolerant of the new policies.

**Summary.** The new officers coming through the police academies at both of the departments in this study were different than previous generations, according to more senior officers on both departments. Some viewed them as coming from more professional backgrounds, like Perry, and others viewed the new officers as being from backgrounds more associated with Type B personalities similar to social workers, like Scott. Jeff, though, viewed them as more patient and having progressive views like treating drug addicts as individuals who have a disease instead of criminals who need to be locked up. Regardless of whether the officers’ views of the new prototypical officers were positive or negative, they almost universally agreed that their traits were more in-line with what the public today demands from their officers.
Discrepant Remarks

One aspect that I believed going into this study would be more prevalent was the impact of these changes in policy on officers’ personal life. However, that part of the experience of going through this transition in use of force policies was only mentioned by a few of the officers.

At LPD, Brad, a sergeant with almost 20 years of experience, felt that deaths and serious bodily injuries more than the policies themselves created a concern for him, so much so that he wondered aloud what else he could do professionally instead of working in law enforcement. Roy, a newer officer with PPD with less than five years of experience, worried about the impact on his family if he were involved in a use of force situation that had a negative outcome as viewed by the general public. Roy also provided an interesting comment related to how his parents viewed him being a police officer. He said his dad, who he identified as very conservative, was very supportive and that his mom, who held more liberal political beliefs, was “supportive but she sees all this stuff on the news.” His mom had made a comment wondering if he was going to be a “good cop.” Roy’s response, “Yeah, it's not like why I became a cop to like, oh, I'm gonna go screw people over.” When I asked him how that interaction made him feel, he stated he had never really thought about it.

Scott from PPD reflected on all of the changes to policing, not just the changes in use of force recommendations, and it caused him to check to see if it was feasible to retire. Retirement was also on the mind of Alex from PPD when he was looking for his next assignment with the department.

It was kind of difficult for me knowing I'm only seven years away from retirement that risking the chance of violating all the changes … with the body
worn cameras, with the way you have to handle yourself out there with the new changes of the [use of force] policy. That did play a role in helping me make my decision whether I wanted to go behind a desk and just ride it out or go back to the street, and I chose with those factors and other decisions, also family decisions, it was my decision to come here behind a desk.

The concern, in my view, with senior officers like Alex choosing to finish out their careers in a non-patrol function, even though he enjoyed and wanted to be on patrol, was the institutional knowledge that could be lost if many officers make this same decision.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study was a first attempt to give the front-line officers and supervisors from two large American police departments a voice in the use of force discussion occurring around the United States. Part of the experience for these law enforcement officers was being part of what they believed is a respected profession but having to face the realities of the current social and political climate where confidence in policing are at historic lows (Jones, 2015). The results of this research showed these two agencies employed varying degrees of two recent recommendations to collaborate with the citizens they serve and make changes to their use of force policies so that they were more in line with what their community members expected of them (McCamman & Culhane, 2017; Skogan & Steiner, 2004). PPD instituted a community advisory board process that was consistent with previous national recommendations (President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015), though this was not the case with LPD, which appeared only to solicit feedback in a more casual manner through community meetings. However, these differences could have contributed to how the officers felt about the changes in their use of force policies.

Soliciting feedback from non-supervisory officers in the policy development process was recommended through previous research by Kettl (2012) and again, the approaches from each department were different. PPD officers lived an experience where they were asked to provide feedback but felt it was secondary to the interests of the command staff and public. This was best exemplified by Mitch’s comments regarding first hearing about the change after a news conference and reading about it in the paper;
“that was not a good feeling.” At LPD, the majority of the officers interviewed were aware that their department had assembled a committee of officers from all ranks and assignments to help develop their changes to the use of force policy. Having a voice and believing they would be heard was one of the aspects of the LPD police officers’ experience that was most important to them. Loretta, who had helped draft policies previously and was active in the changes to LPD’s use of force policy believed, and she was not alone, if she had a legitimate concern that she directed up her chain of command, they would listen. Johnnie felt similarly but believed it was not a necessary concern. While he felt his concerns would be heard, he trusted his department would not put him in the position where he would need to voice such a concern up his chain of command. Departments should be concerned about whether their officers feel like their input is valued in the policy development process. If not, de-policing is an outcome that could occur if the officers on the street no longer proactively engaged in police work as a result of scrutiny or not being supported (Shjarback, Pyrooz, Wolfe, & Decker, 2017). As previous studies have noted, assessing how a change in policy impacts front-line officers can inform future adoption of policies (Gaub et al., 2016). For this reason, and others, this research highlighted the importance of policy makers to understand how a major shift in policy impacted the officers in their department who were tasked with implementation. This is especially important when many officers view policy changes as reform efforts forced on them from political pressures or police executives out of touch with the realities of what rank-and-file officers deal with on a daily basis (Bayley, 2008). Such was the case in Paris, where Scott felt the leadership of the department would do anything that “looks good … and keeps them in their job.”
Application to Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework utilized for this study was Colquitt’s (2001) four-factor structure for organizational justice that included the constructs of distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational justice. Organizational justice was useful as a framework for this study because it dealt specifically with how employees perceive the fairness of their workplace, which impacts their adherence to administrative policies and can even impact their performance. In my research, there was a difference in the perception of the officers from the two departments who were tasked with implementing the new use of force policy as to whether they believed their organization had their best interest at heart or supportive of their input.

Distributive justice. This construct addresses the aspect of organizational justice surrounding whether outcomes are viewed as equitable (Adams, 1965; Colquitt, 2001; Deutsch, 1975; Homans, 1961; Leventhal, 1976). In the law enforcement community, there has been discussion around whether policies should be written in an accessible, equitable fashion so that they can be easily understood by all and that policies should be written in a collaborative process with the community (PERF, 2016; President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, 2015). The conversation surrounding equitable outcomes in policy was discussed from the perspective of officers and whether their concerns were heard equal to or above those of the community.

Police officers from PPD, in general, felt like the general public should have a say in how they are policed but the community’s concerns should not trump the safety of the officers. Roy had one of the more balanced approaches when he recognized that while he worked for a liberal city, even a conservative city could have problems going too far in
one political direction. In his experience, finding balance was key. However, officers like Mitch, felt his department focused more on the concerns of the public and less on what officers wanted. This perceived disparity created an experience for him and others where, consistent with previous studies, the officers felt a lack of representation in the process created an environment where they could not correct a problem, should one arise (Leventhal, 1980; Leventhal, Garuza, & Fry, 1980). In a discrepant remark, even though David from PPD did not generally trust his department’s leadership, he did express that the department would correct issues that arose from oversights in policy. This was more in line with the views from Loretta and Johnnie from LPD. Both of these officers believed their departments would take their concerns seriously and address them should a policy that was published create an unsafe environment or be impractical in the field. One example provided by Johnnie was specific to the new policy of documenting pointing of firearms at civilians by police. He stated that when the policy first came out the department required an abbreviated use of force form for each individual who was involved in the incident. “So, if there were six subjects as part of the stop, you had to fill out six forms.” He stated the officers brought it to the attention of the command staff as an unnecessary paperwork burden and they agreed. Now, LPD officers who draw their firearms and point them at a subject only have to fill out one form for the entire incident. This, in Johnnie’s experience, was more equitable for the officers who had to complete the paperwork and the department who wanted to track the statistics.

**Procedural justice.** When the police officers in this study discussed what I interpreted as procedural justice themes, they were often referring to whether they had the ability to be heard and have an impact on the decision-making process of their
department. The concept of procedural justice has its roots in the criminal justice system. The seminal work on the topic by Thibaut and Walker (1975) examined the fairness associated with the legal system’s process and eventual verdicts. In this study, the focus of procedural justice focused on the officers’ views on whether they felt they were part of the development process. Leventhal (1980) discussed the removal of bias as an important aspect of procedural justice, and this was certainly part of the experience for the officers in this study as they were asked to implement a policy where the impetus for change came, at times, from external sources. Interestingly, the input of the community members on the development of the use of force policies did have an impact on how the officers viewed the policies, especially when they viewed the public as having negative views towards law enforcement.

Many of the officers expressed concerns related to citizens’ bias and the department allowing them to have a say in their use of force policy. When Leventhal (1980) discussed bias and procedural justice it was related to being able to suppress such bias; said another way, the decision makers are a neutral party. The decision makers in the context of this research were the command staff who were approving the changes in policy. For officers, they did not want a neutral party. They instead would have preferred their command staff was biased towards the officers of the department. Though, as was outline in the first theme, officers viewed their command staff as more politician than cop.

Alex from PPD viewed the policies being developed as coming down from the mayor’s office, and he worried that the mayor only had his ear to activists. Others from PPD, like Scott, supported this notion and felt the decisions were essentially made at a
higher level and then the chief of police was simply told what direction the department should go. This was a minority view, however, as most PPD officers viewed the command staff as being political in the sense that they were more likely to make decisions for reasons that an officer on the street would not. This disconnect worried the PPD officers. It was their feeling that because the command staff had not been working in a patrol function for an extended period of time they were less likely to know what it was really like working in the “current climate” (David) and were more likely to listen to community activists in order to stay in their position. As Jason put it, “it’s a political appointment, and the people that put you there are politicians, and they're trying to keep their jobs.” Thus, the officers in this study had a low sense of procedural justice because they felt the command staff was not a neutral party when deciding what policies to implement.

There were similar concerns related to bias from members of LPD, but it was not as pronounced. Brad, a sergeant at LPD, had heard multiple times from the officers under his supervision that the department’s leadership made changes that were not good for them. However, Brad saw it as a result of those officers “not seeing the bigger picture.” In other words, the leadership of his department had to consider a number of factors, including the concerns of the community and the liability risk to the department, that the average patrol officer would have no knowledge of. This would create a situation where the officers experienced feeling like their department’s leadership was biased toward individuals outside of the police department. In general, though, officers at LPD felt their command staff was biased toward what was best for the officers.
It was Kyle’s experience that the current administration had taken officer and front-line supervisor feedback more seriously than had previously been the case. “We forget that officers are the ones that are mostly impacted by the policies that we implement, and sometimes we don’t seek their input.” He had, in recent years, seen less of that mentality and felt that the department had a renewed focus on officer input. Having said that, Kyle also described an interaction he had with the chief of his department where he had been given a book to read. The book was a young adult novel that had been given to the chief of police by a defense attorney with the pretense that the chief read it to better understand the concerns and perspectives of minority communities. Kyle viewed this interaction as positive and felt that his chief was embracing of changes in policing. “You have a police chief who very easily could've said, I'm not reading your book. [Instead, he] read the book, and then gives the book out to the people in his staff.” I could easily tell the interaction was one that left a significant impression on Kyle who viewed himself as “just a lowly sergeant.” For Kyle, the willingness to listen to “the other side” was not viewed as a negative.

Robert from LPD made comments that were more common among his colleagues. He did not see an issue with members from the public providing input, but he was “not real comfortable with civilians telling us” what to do. This was particular interesting to me because the officers from LPD universally believed they worked in a city where they saw a lot of support. However, they still did not support civilians having a say in their policies. This leads me to believe it was less of concern related to a bias against policing or policing tactics and more about officers’ belief that civilians “have no clue what [we] do” (Kyle).
**Interpersonal justice.** The construct of interpersonal justice was first discussed by Greenberg (1993) who believed the personal concern for the individual held an essential space between the policies of an organization and the eventual outcomes. Original work in the area of interactional justice, which was later disaggregated into the dimensions of interpersonal and informational justice, also put emphasis on respect for the individuals involved in an organization (Bies & Moag, 1986). For this current study, the interpersonal feelings of respect and personal concern did play a role in how the officers felt about implementing changes in their use of force policies. Specifically, police officers from both departments felt a change in respect for authority figures in general lead to conflict in policing.

Rebecca from LPD saw it as a global issue related to respect. She believed there was “a shift towards a lack of respect for authority figures, parents, officers, teachers, whatever… Before it was our presence was generally all the force we needed.” Roy from PPD also saw this spilling over into other aspects of his job. This included “a police officer’s word being less and less believed.”

**Informational justice.** The fourth and final construct identified by the factor analysis performed by Colquitt (2001) dealt specifically with the extent to which something was explained. Specifically, research by Shapiro, Buttner, and Barry (1994) highlighted the importance of information being presented in a reasonable fashion, timely, and with specificity that would allow it to be understood. Both departments reported using a cloud-based program called PowerDMS to receive and review updates in policy. Additionally, both departments’ officers lamented having to use the system. Officers in this study generally found it to be a poor way to relay changes in policy. The
only difference noted between the two departments’ presentations of changes was short videos that LPD included with some of their policy changes. Greenberg (1993) believed that the information must be perceived as genuine and with sound reasoning for it to be fair. This was evident with officers from LPD when they discussed the new documentation requirements for pointing their firearms. The majority of officers interviewed were initially skeptical of the policy but after having to do the documentation for approximately six months they no longer viewed it as negatively. Interestingly, when discussing how the policy was not that cumbersome for them, they almost all indicated that having the documentation to show they had drawn their weapon X number of times without firing would support them down the road if they ever were to get into a shooting. This was not a conclusion the officers reached independently, they likely were buying into the justification provided by the department’s leadership. Officers in this study who felt the information was communicated to them in a poor fashion felt greater confusion and anxiety surrounding their department’s expectations.

Officers from both departments expressed concern about being able to learn, process, and apply the new policies, and how they were communicated was a major piece of this learning process. As previously discussed, the use by both departments of the same system, PowerDMS, to disseminate policy changes was near universally lamented. Additionally, police officers from both departments worried that the policies “read like an encyclopedia” (Scott from PPD) or the pace at which policies were updated created a negative experience, “the more you change it, the harder it is to remember what the current policy is” (Robert from LPD). Regardless of the specific issue, officers were not easily able to articulate the exact changes in policy or wording used in the policy, thus
decreasing the informational justice officers felt as part of their experience during this change. This highlights an area for improvement by both departments to emphasis and articulate important changes in policy.

**Application to Research Questions**

The research questions utilized to guide this study were chosen specifically to fill a gap in the literature related to police officers’ experiences during the change in their use of force policy, in particular, how their experience was impacted by recommendations being made in large part from input by individuals who are not police officers themselves.

**The experience of officers.** The first research question, what is the lived experience of police officers in major American cities through a time of transition in their use of force policy, focused heavily on the concepts mentioned above regarding organizational justice. The answers to this question were driven by how the officers felt about the department for which they worked. One of those experiences was the belief that the command staff who dictated policy matters were more politicians that they were cops. This viewpoint would not be seen as a stretch to most individuals because elected officials, such as mayors or city councils, generally select the chief of police and have those individuals serve at their pleasure (Goldstein, 1977). Thus, it makes sense when Rebecca from LPD stated her chief’s office routinely has to judge “the political interests [and] evaluate public perception,” or when Jason from PPD stated, “it's a political appointment, and the people that put you there are politicians, and they're trying to keep their jobs.” However, officers held different views on the political aspect of chief-level positions depending on what department they worked for. It was the experience, in
general, of officers from PPD that the political nature of the upper echelon of officers in their department created a situation where they were more likely to support elected officials and the general public over the concerns of the officers of the department. Conversely, at LPD, it was the experience, in general, of the officers there that the political nature was simply something that was part of the job but when there was a tough decision to be made, the LPD officers felt their department’s leadership would side with the officers. The reason for this was not necessarily articulated by the officers but it was just their general feeling. A few anecdotes were provided but nothing was discussed across a number of the officers from either department. Mitch from PPD used the example of the chief of his department releasing news of a new use of force policy to the media prior to him hearing about it, which left him with a feeling that the officers’ concerns or their safety was not the focus of the policy change. Kyle also provided an anecdote to support his feeling when he mentioned a senior member of his department was involved in a foot pursuit “and filled out all the same paperwork I would have been required to do.”

Research by Van Craen and Skogan (2017) highlighted the distrust of citizens by police officers as having the potential to be a significant barrier engagement in the creation of policies surrounding use of force. This was highlighted, to some extent, by officers from PPD, specifically having public committees “stacked with people that are anti-police activists.” The sentiment here from David and repeated by others was simply that the people who were on a specific committee providing input on their department’s use of force policy did not like the police to begin with and would not create policies based on anything but their biased opinions. Though, PPD officers were more likely to
support community input on their policies than their counterparts from LPD. This might be surprising to some considering LPD officers felt more supported by their community, and the city’s conservative leanings matched up with those likely held by the officers (Brown, 2017).

Officers from both departments did share similar sentiments related to what they believed the biggest hurdle was to having active involvement from the community. Officers from both police departments in this study who were concerned with citizen involvement in the policy development process were most concerned with the general public not knowing what it is like to be a police officer or how they safely perform their duties. This belief by the officers was best stated by Leroy from PPD when he said, “the problem is the public has no training in public policy, no training in constitutional law. What education they do have in policing comes from the entertainment industry, and they are very poorly informed on what is legal, what is practical.” This could create a situation consistent with previous research where use of force policies become too burdensome, or there is a lack of clarity because of the citizens’ limited knowledge (Terrill & Paoline, 2013a, 2013b; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017).

**Political leanings.** The first sub-question asked, does the political leaning of a city influence the officers’ view of citizen involvement on the use of force policy development process? This desire to include the community in the policy development process is not a new idea. The benefit, according to the literature, is increasing the diversity of thought around issues in policing (Amsterdam, 1974; Davis, 1975; Moore, Trojanowicz and Kelling, 1988). Jeff from PPD was supportive of this inclusion.

A lot of guys these days think … the public [is] trying to tie our hands. And it's difficult to get the guys to understand, no, nobody's trying to tie anybody's hands.
All we're trying to do is have you consider more options, more resources for dealing with a situation.

He was also supported by Jason, who felt the inclusion of the public in policy development was overdue. Though, more hesitation was shown by Scott from PPD who stated that Walmart did not consult him to develop their policies, and Brad stated that bankers were not asking for his input on their policies. More concerning for some officers was the idea that the general public did not have their interest at heart.

Though a minority view, officers like Robert from LPD worried about the “Facebook experts” having a say in his policies, particularly when he did not view those critics as having views consistent with the majority of the population he served. Mitch was concerned that the general public who was not educated on policing might make policy changes based on what looks bad. These concerns were consistent with previous studies that found increased officer anxiety related to working collaboratively with the community if they did not feel the community members had a similar moral alignment to their own (Jackson et al., 2012; Jackson et al., 2013; Van Craen & Skogan, 2017b). Read and Tilley (2000) discussed the importance of community consultation and involvement when implementing any program or change in standard practices, and some officers, like Kyle from LPD, felt minority communities deserved a disproportionately large voice in the process if they were more likely to be victimized or have higher rates of interaction with law enforcement. A study examining community involvement in Chicago found some support for citizens from high crime areas showing a greater desire to engage the police department (Skogan & Steiner, 2004).

**Agency leadership.** The second sub-question, how does the agency’s leadership contribute to the officers’ experience during the change in use of force policy, focused
primarily on trust and perceived motivation. The perfect example of this was found in a discussion by two individuals, Larry from PPD and Rebecca from LPD, who, when asked about why their department decided to update their use of force policy, both thought it came from a high-ranking member in the command staff. The difference was how they viewed that initiative. Larry believed it was motivated by personal gain, “I believe that [this individual] wanted to rewrite it as a resume builder.” The comment was said in the context of incorporating recommendations from the Police Executives Research Forum (PERF). Rebecca also held the belief that the changes were spearheaded by a command officer to be in line with national recommendations after some very polarizing events in American policing. “I think it was reactionary to what was going on at the time with Ferguson and all those officer-involved shootings that were questioned.” She felt it was important for her agency to always be examining what was happening around the country and thinking about how those events might change the department’s current policies and practices.

These two individuals essentially said the same thing, that the department made changes based on the coaxing of a command-level officer to move the department closer to national recommendations. However, Rebecca viewed it as a positive for the department to move closer to national standards and recommendations, whereas Larry felt indignant about the shift in policy. In the end, their perception was likely based on the trust they had in their organization and its leadership. This trust has been shown to be an important indicator of success associated with a major policy shift, particularly one where the focus is on bringing in the community (Johnson, 2015).
A number of the sergeants in this study from both PPD and LPD viewed it as their responsibility to pass along the salient parts of policy changes to the officers under this command. This is consistent with Van Maanen’s (1983) research illustrating the importance of sergeants in influencing their officers to be in line with the organization’s objectives. The sergeants from PPD wanted their officers to be informed of the specific changes in policy, but sergeants from LPD in this study were more likely to describe supporting the department’s policies to their officers and sharing concerns up the chain of command. Said another way, I felt the sergeants in this study, in general, were more likely to put forth a supportive tone when discussing changes in policy. This likely had an impact on how their officers perceived the changes and contributed to officers from LPD having greater confidence in their organization.

As previously discussed, many of the officers in this study viewed their command staff as more politician than police officer. While the literature does suggest politicians can set the tone and direction for a law enforcement agency, this study has illustrated that it is important for the leadership of a police department to show they still control the policies their department adopts and they support their officers (Klinger, 2004; Wilson, 1968).

Limitations

The limitations associated with this research focus on self-selection bias, social desirability, generalizability, the short timeframe from when these changes were first proposed, and limited participation from minorities and women. All of the participants of this study self-selected to be part of the study. The only factor in their inclusion was my prioritization of officers in patrol functions who worked second, or swing, shift because
those individuals were most likely to have to use force. This study did not, by and large, take into account officers experiences who worked administrative roles and who were removed from use of force situations. It is possible that the officers’ views reflected in this study do not represent the views of the departments as a whole.

Social desirability is a concern of this and any qualitative study where interviews are being conducted. Even though the officers were assured their and their department’s identities would be kept confidential, there is always the chance their responses are closer to what they feel the researcher wants to hear. I was not very concerned about this because I spent a majority of their shift with the officers to build up a rapport prior to asking the interview questions. Additionally, a large number of the officers from both departments, when asked what name they would like me to use for them in the study, stated I could just use their real name; even though they said I could use their real names, I did not.

The generalizability of this study is a third main limitation because this study relied on the perceptions of the officers’ lived experiences from only one region, which may not be representative of the larger police officer population who have gone or are going through a major shift in policy. That being said, many of the themes that were identified by the officer participants mirrored what the previous literature related to policy implementation and organizational attitudes. Additionally, while there was a liberal-leaning and a conservative-leaning city in this study, there was not a department from a politically neutral city from the same region of the United States. Because of this omission, the current study lacks the perspective of a political continuum as it impacts the officers’ experience going through this transition.
Fourth, the timeframes associated with the changes in policies from both police departments in this study create a third limiting factor. The liberal city, Paris, put out a proposed use of force policy approximately one year prior to this study period. However, ancillary policies such as a decision-making model, a de-escalation, and changes to reporting requirements had been published. The conservative city, Lyon, published an overhaul of their use of force policy approximately six months prior to this study period. This change included the policy of documenting the pointing of firearms at civilians. It is unknown how the familiarity the officers develop with the policies over time and the discipline, or lack of, that officers face as a result of these policy changes impact their experience more than the current, brief periods have.

Lastly, there is a limitation related to the demographics of the participants in this study. While law enforcement agencies are predominantly staffed with White males, there could be a difference in the experience of minority or female officers compared to the voices most represented in this study. There were not any females from PPD who participated in the study, and there were very few minorities: two Hispanic males and one Black male. While two females from LPD participated, all individuals from Lyon identified as White. Additionally, the officers’ race and gender were not a focus of the interviews. Because of this, future research would need to examine if minority and female officers’ experiences are unique in any aspect not explored in this study.

Suggestions for Future Research

Because this is the first research to address the officers’ experience going through the current changes in use of force policies, there is much to be learned about this experience and how to improve public policy related to these changes. First, future
studies on this topic should focus on regional difference because the experience for officers in the mountain west may not be representative of those who work in the northeast or in the south, as examples. Additionally, the policies being suggested in those regions might be slightly different to account for local issues that could drastically impact the officers’ experience.

Second, because trust in the leadership of the police departments was such a prevalent theme in this research, future studies should examine what leadership styles contribute positively and negatively to the officers’ belief that their department will support them. The officers in this study from both departments wanted colleagues who did something outside of what was acceptable to be punished. Some in this study worried whether the support they received from their command staff was dependent on the outcome and public response to an event.

Third, whenever there is a shift in policy, a systematic review should always be performed to show whether the change in policy had the intended effect. Changes in use of force policies, based on the participants in this research, have the potential to create a climate where there is less proactive policing and more danger to officers. Only an evaluation of many departments, taking into account different agency demographics, will be able to support or dispel these concerns. However, one major hurdle to this type of a systematic review continues to be the lack of a mandatory federal database on the use of force by law enforcement.

Interestingly, during my ride-alongs with officers from both departments I heard concerns of de-policing and the younger officers not being as proactive, which would increase crime in their estimation. This was not my experience. As previously discussed,
there may have been some social desirability at play simply because I was riding with
them on patrol, but I found every officer in this study to be dedicated and quite proactive
when they were not responding to calls for service they were dispatched to.

**Conclusion**

This study considered the perspectives of 19 police officers from two large
American police departments in the mountain west region in an attempt to understand the
lived experience of police officers going through a time of transition in their use of force
policy. While the officers’ experiences are not meant to be generalized to all officers
from all regions of the United States, this research does provide policy makers with
important considerations when looking to implement a significant shift in department
policy. It is especially worth noting the officers’ experiences were less on the exact words
that were used—many could not articulate what specifics had changed from their old to
new policy—but instead how they viewed the leadership of their department. These
changes in policy are meant to move policing forward and to improve departments’
relationships with the communities they serve. Having an understanding of what that
public engagement looks like and how to improve policy fidelity by the officers on the
street is an important aspect of this transition.

The words I will end with are from a gut-wrenching story I heard while
performing this research. Paul from PPD described a time when he stopped a young, 18
year-old Black man walking down the middle of a busy road late one night. He felt he
had to stop the young man to see what was going on.

I stop him … and I ask him, you got any weapons on you? And he goes, no
weapons but I got two box cutters on me, or something like that. I go, alright man,
you’re not under arrest just turn around for a second, I gotta take those off you to
make sure we’re all safe until the end of the stop. … As I was patting him down
he started crying. He had tears running down his cheeks. I’m like, dude, what’s going on? He’s like, I don’t want to die.

I end with that story because I believe it acutely illustrates the current state of policing in America. A young, minority male is petrified of the police and a young police officer, who by my estimation through spending time with him, is the type of officer a department would want, view a routine stop so differently that one of the young men felt in fear of his life. Too often the conversation is about which side is right or wrong when discussing what policing should look like, and this one interaction captures perfectly a microcosm between the two worlds. I believed Paul when he told the story and how he approached the young man because I watched him approach other young men of color during my time with him. I find it difficult to believe he would have approached this individual in such a way that would leave someone fearing for his life, yet that was still what occurred. The discussion about the use of force by police is meant to address situations such as this one, but from my observation we are a long way from change.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic information:
1. Age of officer
2. Gender
3. Race/ethnicity
4. Education
5. Years of service
6. Current assignment in the department

Prior to being asked the below questions, I will prompt the interviewee to think about the period of time around when their use of force policy was going through an updating process through implementation; the approximate dates will be provided.

Open-ended questions:
1. Tell me about your experience with the use of force policy.
2. How has the change in your use of force policy impacted you professionally and personally?
3. What role should the public have in creating your use of force policy?
4. What role should officers at all ranks in the department have in creating your use of force policy?
5. Why do you think the use of force policy was updated?
6. What do you understand the changes in the use of force policy to be?
7. How was the change in use of force policy communicated to you?
8. What interests or stakeholders do you think leaders of your department serve?
9. What did you think when you heard the use of force policy would be changing?
10. What did you say to those around you about the policy change (work and personal)?
11. How do the political leanings of a city impact the policies that are eventually developed by a law enforcement agency?
12. How do you view the political leanings of the city you serve?
13. How did you feel about the experience of going through this transition?
14. What aspects of the experience stand out for you?
15. How has the experience of going through this change in use of force policy affected you (work and personal)?
16. What changes have you made in your life since the experience of going through this change in use of force policy (work and personal)?
17. What else would you like me to know that we have not already discussed?
### APPENDIX B

**LINKING RESEARCH QUESTIONS, THEORY, AND PROTOCOL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Theoretical Connection</th>
<th>Protocol Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What is the lived experience of police officers in major American cities through a time of transition in their use of force policy? | • Distributive Justice - Was the outcome of the policy change equitable to those involved in the process?  
• Procedural Justice - Was your voice heard as part of the development process?  
• Interpersonal Justice - Did you feel respected as part of the process?  
• Informational Justice - Was the change communicated in a way you understood? | 1. Tell me about your experience with the use of force policy?  
2. How has the change in your use of force policy impacted you professionally and personally?  
6. What do you understand the changes in the use of force policy to be?  
7. How was the change in use of force policy communicated to you?  
8. What interests or stakeholders do you think leaders of your department serve?  
9. What did you think when you heard the use of force policy would be changing?  
10. What did you say to those around you about the policy change (work and personal)?  
13. How did you feel about the experience of going through this transition?  
14. What aspects of the experience stand out for you?  
15. How has the experience of going through this change in use of force policy affected you (work and personal)? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Theoretical Connection</th>
<th>Protocol Questions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. What changes have you made in your life since the experience of going through this change in use of force policy (work and personal)?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Does the political leaning of a city influence the officers' view of citizen involvement on the use of force policy development process? | • Distributive Justice - Does the policy lean too far towards or away from what one group (police or community) wants, or were both sides heard as part of the change?  
• Procedural Justice - Did a particular stakeholder have a disproportionate influence on the policy change?  
• Interpersonal Justice - As part of the policy change, did you feel like the organization and the community cared about your personal safety and wellbeing? | 3. What roles should the public have in creating your use of force policy?  
4. What role should officers at all ranks in the department have in creating your use of force policy?  
5. Why do you think the use of force policy was updated?  
8. What interests or stakeholders do you think leaders of your department serve?  
9. What did you think when you heard the use of force policy would be changing?  
11. How do the political leanings of a city impact the policies that are eventually developed by a law enforcement agency?  
12. How do you view the political leanings of the city you serve? |
<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How does the agency's leadership contribute to the officers' experience during the change in use of force policy? | • Interpersonal Justice - Are there feelings of respect and personal concern between leadership and officers?  
• Informational Justice - Was the change communicated in a way you understood? | 5. Why do you think the use of force policy was updated?  
7. How was the change in use of force policy communicated to you?  
8. What interests or stakeholders do you think leaders of your department serve?  
9. What did you think when you heard the use of force policy would be changing? |
APPENDIX C

University of Colorado
Colorado Springs
Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects

Date: 2/20/2018

IRB PROTOCOL NO.: 18-091
Protocol Title: Change in use of force policy: The experience of officers
Principal Investigator: Matthew Lunn
Faculty Advisor if Applicable: Dick Carpenter
Application: New Application
Type of Review: Expedited 7
Risk Level: No more than Minimal Risk
Renewal Review Level (If changed from original approval) if Applicable: N/A No Change
This Protocol involves a Vulnerable Population: N/A (No Vulnerable Population)
Expires: 19 February 2019

*Note: if exempt: If there are no major changes in the research, protocol does not require review on a continuing basis by the IRB. In addition, the protocol may match more than one review category not listed.

Externally funded: ☒ No ☐ Yes
OSP #: Sponsor:

Thank you for submitting your Request for IRB Review. The protocol identified above has been reviewed according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations. The review category is noted above, along with the expiration date, if applicable.

Once human participant research has been approved, it is the Principal Investigator’s (PI) responsibility to report any changes in research activity related to the project:
- The PI must submit all protocol, recruitment, advertising, and consent form amendments/revisions to the IRB for approval.
  - The IRB must approve these changes prior to implementation.
- If you are a student, please note that it is required to include the IRB approval letter in the library when you submit the dissertation/thesis.
- The PI must promptly inform the IRB of all unanticipated serious adverse events (within 24 hours). All unanticipated adverse events must be reported to the IRB within 1 week (see 45 CFR 46.108(a)(5)). Failure to comply with these federally mandated responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of the project.
- Renew study with the IRB at least 10 business days prior to expiration.
- Notify the IRB when the study is complete.

If you have any questions, please contact Research Compliance Program Director in the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Integrity at 719-255-3903 or irb@uccs.edu

Thank you for your concern about human subject protection issues, and good luck with your research.

Sincerely yours,

Zek Valkyrie
Zek Valkyrie, PhD
IRB Reviewer

www.uccs.edu/irb
Version 1.10.2018