Revision help

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Background of the Problem

According to Berry and Gross, "black women are sprinkled throughout the History of the United States before 1619" (2020). Although there were very little black women mentioned during that time, their presence ignited fear or praise depending on whom came across them (Berry and Gross, 2020). In 1620, more black women arrived in the United States as slaves, often times being abused and exploited on slave ships arriving to the United States or on slave plantations once sold (Berry and Gross, 2020). For hundreds of years, black women were used and abused – often raped by slave masters bearing mulatto children or nursing slave masters children by feeding them (Berry and Gross, 2020).

After the abolishment of slavery came other historical black women such as Ida B. Wells, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Mary McLeod Bethune and Madame CJ Walker who defied the odds by being educated well-mannered, and wealthy. As the Civil Rights movement progressed, other well-known black women such as Coretta Scott King, Shirley Chisolm and Rosa Parks were civil rights warriors who marched, fought and stood up for black women's rights. No matter the era, the situation, or the movement, black women played a huge part in United States history and culture but remain undervalued and underrepresented. "Among the most oppressed and marginalized, Black women in the United States have nonetheless routinely defied otherwise near all-encompassingly negative messages denying their right to be, to push back and demand more" (Berry and Gross, 2020).

Discrimination wasn't just a generalized experience with black women. Black women specifically experienced discrimination in the workplace. Historically, women have suffered discrimination at every level of employment. The struggle for women's rights and gender equality began and has remained an integral topic of discussion in society (Jelin, 2019). Gender equality is a worldwide movement that aims to raise the importance of women's work (León, 2016). Women currently receive more college degrees than men and are the key breadwinners in 4 out of 10 households (Administrator, 2013). Regardless of the positive accomplishments that women have achieved in the workplace, acceptance from their male colleagues remains an obstacle. Women obtaining entrance into male-dominated occupations requires heavy mandates. Those mandates introduce complex barriers; institutional barriers are set in place after they participate in the male-dominated occupations, and women are not granted chances for promotion or progression (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007, p. 20).

(Promotion background information)

Statement of the Problem

Many women-focused and minority-focused recruiting campaigns have failed so far, and there is a lack of adequate data on BLACK policewomen's perspectives following more than a century of policing (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2005). The proposed laws on self-defense and "stand your ground" should consider women viewpoints and need to maintain women representation in law enforcement effectively

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(Dempsey et al., 2015). There has since been pressure on police administrators to launch more effective and thorough recruitment efforts nationwide to attract more women to the force (Fernandes, 2011). BLACK women employed by different federal law enforcement agencies struggle to advance in their careers due to occupational barriers (Yu, 2015). Due to those limitations, BLACK women's rise to senior-level leadership positions continues to decline due to the existing "good-old-boys" network, the glass-ceiling structure, and the unconscious bias toward women of color (Hirsch, 2009). "Good-old-boys" network refers to the informal system of friendship and communication in which men support other men by providing support and information, thus replacing their influence.

The number of qualified women police officers is in question. The number of women police officers is gradually decreasing (Haake, 2018). Women are also significantly underrepresented at all levels; in rural regions, the number of women police officers is even smaller, if not nonexistent. Women made up two percent of all police officers in 1972, but that figure rose to 14.3 percent between 1990 and 1997 (Haake, 2018). According to the National Center for Women and Policing (NCWP), gender participation in law enforcement fell by almost two percent in 2001. Women make up just 15% of the law enforcement population in the United States today (Ellis, 2017). Examining these problems could lead to new insights into how to minimize officer burnout and turnover and potentially increase recruitment efforts onboarding more women, specifically black women.

Data shows women are underrepresented in law enforcement and the number of women joining the field has become stagnant (Shjarback et al., 2019), it is crucial to examine women's positions in the sector. Studying all women officers' work satisfaction in particular could explain why women are choosing not to enter the profession, nor advancing when entering the profession (Morin et al., 2017, p. 11). Similarly, examining years of service can reveal why male officers or white women officers receive tenure when BLACK women do not.

BLACK women police officer research focuses on marginalization (Patten et al., 2016). An inquiry into women police officers' marginalization found only a few previously completed trials. The bulk of the study about women police officers` marginalization is focused on how marginalization impacts women. The marginalization of women police officers and crime rate with women are both factors of interest as obstacles to women integration in policing (Reckdenwald & Parker, 2008). Because there is a lack of women police officer's, there is also a lack of presence to potentially help decrease recidivism with women. Reckdenwald & Parker (2008) conclude that women can face gender-based discrimination. Few researchers have recorded black women officers' perspectives that have been suppressed.

In the 1980s, the historically male-dominated sector of law enforcement started to recognize women's participation (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). Women police officers had gained representation in law enforcement, allowing for researchers to investigate their experiences (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007).

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Christina Williams
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Christina Williams
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Women police officers had gained representation in law enforcement, allowing for researchers to investigate their experiences (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007). However, literature on the contributions of Black women police officers remains contradictory to whether there is truth in the matter and out of date. The majority of policing-related studies have focused on the rise of women in police agencies and the obstacles they face, including sexual assault, gender disparities, exclusion, physical disabilities, recruiting efforts, and tension faced after entering the area. As a result, women officer attrition is high and recruiting rates to remain low, credible reports of women's law enforcement experiences can be minimal. Although women are fairly capable of doing most police work, unequal recruiting and hiring procedures hold women out of the discipline (Seklecki & Paynich, 2007, p. 20).

Understanding the challenges that women police officers face in job success, retention, and recruiting. Burke and Mikkelsen (2005) argued that obstacles like sexism, sexual harassment, and representation are frequent allegations made by women officers who wish to criticize conventional law enforcement practices and procedures. Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, as well as the Equal Opportunities Act and the Maternity Act of 1978, were critical in rendering police administrators civilly responsible for the inequitable treatment of female workers (Dodge et al., 2011, p. 700). Despite those laws, women continue to face challenges in gaining full membership in the police force.

Racial disparity in patriarchal systems where men have basic power and control political matters and other social factors such as ownership of property leads to women's subordination and highlights their precarious roles (Reckdenwald & Parker, 2008). As a result, researching women officers' experiences is critical for correctly capturing women's contributions to the law enforcement profession. Studies regularly documents women's feelings of loneliness and lack of access to mentors (Burke & Mikkelsen, 2005). Previous research on police officers have relied solely on men's encouragement and have yet to include women's perspectives.

Purpose of the Study

Since 1972, the majority of research with women in law enforcement, has concentrated on women's job success and skills in law enforcement. Furthermore, discriminatory attitudes have often been a significant subject in such studies (Ritchie, 2016). There have since been contradictory reports on women's current role in law enforcement and the percentage of women of color who join and exit the profession (Ritchie, 2016). Data on the lived experiences of Black women seeking advancement to senior leadership positions in federal law enforcement agencies remains limited (Ritchie, 2016). Women have received little recognition in the world of law enforcement since the passage of the 1972 Civil Rights Act. There is a belief that the limited number of black women police officers is due to a scarcity of eligible candidates (Rabe-Hemp, 2008). However, when it comes to law enforcement, Black women also face internal and external barriers (Rabe-Hemp, 2008). Barriers such as discrimination and nepotism pose a serious challenge to the advancement of black women into leadership positions in law enforcement.

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What are these barriers?

Women officers continue to face opposition, sexual abuse by male coworkers, and a proverbial glass ceiling while attempting to advance in law enforcement careers. Haas et al. (2009) established that though sexual assault is widespread in many masculine organizations, 77 % of law enforcement officers from 35 countries have been sexually abused by subordinates. As a result, affirmative action initiatives have failed to diversify police forces or increase women's participation in the law enforcement workforce (Haas et al., 2009, p. 390). Recent developments in the workforce composition will help police administrators and legislators design strategies and practices that embrace women of color, offer promotion opportunities and recognize their family duties. Also, recruiting programs will give women a voice in the police force and the self-confidence they need to remain in the police force.

Some policewomen have received tenure and promotions; however, years of police experience are a significant variable to examine. According to Hassell et al., years in police work tend to substantially impact work satisfaction (2011). Women police officers feel they are forced to work harder and, in many cases, must pursue further education to demonstrate their integrity while seeking promotion.

Researchers reported that women have a moderate level of regret over their career choices as an indicator of job dissatisfaction (Krimmel & Gormley, 2003). Women's responses to career frustration relates to the fear of abuse and exposure to the disaster that police officers are often exposed to (Krimmel & Gormley, 2003, p. 78). There appears to be various studies on women and their dissatisfaction with this companies or agencies, research on gender disparities in policing is limited.

Research indicates a lack of resources and mentors for women officers. Getting assistance with one's work tasks may help with overall tension, burnout, and psychological issues (Hassell et al., 2011, p. 39). Providing mentors to women in male-dominated fields can make the workplace less daunting and boost overall job performance. According to Woolsey (2010), mentoring will reduce liability by offering tools to support black women officers in handling grievances before becoming more severe. Access to further advisors can also boost the cohesiveness and morale of women officers.

Research Question

Four research questions guide this research. The key questions employed are as follows:

1. What is the career mobility experience of Black women in federal law enforcement agencies?

2. What themes emerge from the personal experience stories of Black women in federal law enforcement seeking a promotion?

3. How has unconscious bias impacted the mobility opportunities for Black women in federal law enforcement?

4. Has intersectionality impacted black women from having a thriving career in federal law enforcement?

Conceptual Framework

Unconscious Bias and Intersectionality concepts serve as the foundation for this narrative research investigation. Unconscious prejudices are common assumptions about certain classes of people that people

Author
You might want to be careful about using prejudice and bias interchangeably, if that was indeed your intent here. Bias is more of a umbrella term for a fixed perspective, whereas prejudice usually refers to conscious attitudes.

Christine Williams

Prejudices, bias, discrimination all seems to equal the same thing

form without even realizing it (University of California, San Francisco, 2017). Unconscious discrimination is much more common than conscious bigotry, and it is often in conflict with someone's conscious beliefs. Such situations may trigger involuntary behaviors and values (Fridell et al., 2016).

Heather Herwitz discusses Intersectionality, a phrase coined by Kimberle Crenshaw, stating "by arguing that the disadvantages that black women endure are distinct from the racism experienced by black men and distinct from the sexism experienced by white women" (2021). Intersectionality is another concept that is essential to this study as it displays another issue that black women face in policing.

Both unconscious bias and intersectionality are concepts with unintentional meanings. Both concepts potentially discuss issues with black women that don't appear to be intentional on the surface. Intersectionality helps to discover a larger issue of inequality. Herwitz states "From its inception, intersectionality has been a tool for conceptualizing structures of inequality and changing them" (2021). Moreover, unconscious bias leads to a deeper and more concerning issue within the police department. When unconscious bias is present, it will lead to occupational segregation, racial harassment, a lack of diversity which constitute as systemic discrimination (Saini, 2021).

Significance of the Study

This qualitative study aims to identify the challenges black women face while seeking advancement into senior-level positions in federal law enforcement agencies. Using narrative research design through interviews, questionnaires and conversations, the study will examine how years of police service, career satisfaction, and mentoring affected black women, their careers and their ability or inability to rise in leadership. Any cases of marginalization or sexual assault identified by the respondents will be identified and examined to see if such incidents affected promotion status and career advancement. Other concerns such as creating a family, testing and other issues will be reviewed and examined while implementing the narrative research design.

According to. This study would increase the body of knowledge by identifying and assessing the living perspectives of black women officers in federal law enforcement. The results can help bring about social change by adding black women officers' attitudes to the literature and highlighting influences and factors that may affect black women officers and their career progress.

Definitions of Terms

Below are definition of terms that may or may not be understood by individuals outside of the field of study (Creswell, 2014).

Career Mobility

An employee's advancement within an organization from one employment group to another with a higher salary rate, a higher-level job title, and in some cases, more and higher-level job responsibilities.

Perceived Bias

A term used to form stereotypes or assumptions about a specific group of people – black women.

Officers

A term used to classify police officers in local, state or federal government. Term can also be referred to as special agent, criminal investigator, or agent.

Plexi-Glass Ceiling

Solid barrier to advancement in federal law enforcement affecting black women.

Personal Experiences

Experiences derived from personal interviews, questionnaires, observations or conversations about day-to-day activities of women in federal law enforcement officers.

Microaggressions

Unintentional acts of discrimination against black women.

Assumptions & Limitations of the Study

The main assumption for this study is policewomen would freely and candidly share their perspectives on their work experiences in advancing their law enforcement careers.

Each black woman being observed must be a full-time, sworn black woman police officer, special agent, or criminal investigator with at least three years of law enforcement experience. Another assumption would find that all women being observed will be honest and transparent about their experiences and relay information necessary to support the hypothesis. Lastly, an assumption can be made that none of the black women observed had any negative experiences while progressing in their careers.

There were a few limitations identified for this research. One of the limitations would be the time-consuming process collecting data from observations from the participants. Another limitation could be the number of black women officers who would agree to be observed. This analysis could help researchers better understand the variables influencing black women police officer work satisfaction in future qualitative studies.

Summary

The proportion of women police officers, especially black women, continues to be disproportionate. The work experiences of black women officers are described and analyzed in this study. Their views of their work are affected by their years of service, career fulfillment, and mentoring. The research results can inspire black policewomen and give women a voice in law enforcement in the United States. The second chapter examines the historical perspective of black women in leadership.