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The Blue Wall of Conformity: The Experiences of Marginalized Police Officers

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Intersectionality describes the lived experiences that are uniquely shaped by an individual's intersecting identities. Understanding these experiences and how they vary from context to context can be insightful for society in understanding mechanisms of oppression. Police departments have historically upheld toxic masculine standards that lead to discrimination against society and those within their walls. This paper seeks to understand why marginalized officers commit to the police subculture and behave in similar fashions as their privileged counterparts despite being discriminated against on and off the job and experiencing job stress and dissatisfaction. I argue that marginalized officers commit to the culture because of the costs of choosing their marginalized identity over their police officer identity.

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THE BLUE WALL OF CONFORMITY: THE EXPERIENCES OF MARGINALIZED POLICE OFFICERS

The police are an organization that has faced many criticisms throughout its history. Looking back at America's history sheds light on the problems that have faced society with the police being no exception. The domination of white males has always been documented in America's history. White males, often aided by White women, started the legacy of racism, colonialism, sexism, and homophobia and are figures who continue to dominate society as a result of this deeply embedded history (Williams Jr, 1989). Modern policing in the United States began in the 1830's and 1840's where White men continued to utilize their power and the power awarded to them as officers (Brucato, 2020). Corruption plagued this agency as these individuals had high status as officers but also as White men. Race and gender play a key role in how society is structured and how individuals behave. The social structure gives meaning to identities such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and religion which determines appropriate behavior for mainstream society.

The police have evolved as society has progressed over the decades. The rise of the civil rights and feminist movements have helped groups of individuals become less marginalized and for the social structure to change. Although this change is slow moving and working to reconstruct the social structure that is deeply embedded with systemic oppression is difficult, society has evolved and is working towards equality. The police have subsequently worked on battling the corruption initially seen on the job and have become a more diverse profession. There were tools put in place to check the police's power and society has condemned unjust behavior of the police (Bayley, 2008). The workforce has also expanded to more racial and

gender groups. White males are still prominent figures in the police but with national scrutiny on the organization, racial and gender affirmative actions were set (Lott Jr, 2000). Diversifying the police force is believed to ease the tensions between the police and community (Brown & Frank, 2006). The police force has become the most diverse it has been with different identities representing officers. Some departments need more diversity compared to others as police agencies have battled with a lack of police officer recruitment and retention, especially for ethnic minority officers (Waters et al., 2007). Overall, the police have made changes addressing the corruption and diversity of their work force.

However, the police still face many criticisms. The pull towards a more diverse work force was to ensure the proper representation of the community, which is hypothesized to not only give equal opportunity, but to reduce the issues of police brutality towards minority members (Waters et al., 2007). The Black Lives Matter movement has shed light on the malpractices of the police, often white men, towards minority individuals, specifically Black people (Phelps et al., 2021). Systemic racism has been highlighted as the cause of the brutality and making appropriate policy as well as increasing ethnic minority officers was seen as a way to combat the racism embedded in the police. The goal is to share the power with White men, who have abused their power historically and to the present, with those who have been oppressed and who may act to benefit society in more just ways.

Police officers and individuals can hold many different identities that can influence the way they behave, and the way individuals behave towards them. Race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and religion, to name a few, are socially constructed and hold weight when determining how they are positioned in society (Robinson, 1999). The identities of individuals who join the police force must be understood in the context of society and the police subculture

environment if we are to understand how identities may influence police officer behavior. This paper will take an intersectionality approach to understanding how a police officer's demographics shape their policing behavior. Identities and identity selection are complex ideas that must be discussed in detail to fully capture how appropriate behavior is chosen by officers.

HEADING 2

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Intersectionality is a term coined by Crenshaw (1991) that describes how identities intersect to create unique lived experiences. Those that have multiple identities that are at the margins of society, such as being Black and a woman, are hyper-oppressed and have more unique experiences than White women and Black men. Intersectionality proposes that identities are not additive and instead interact to create a new experience that does not equate to the total of oppression from each marginalized group. Identities mutually construct one another and intersect to determine the barriers individuals face (Carastathis, 2008). It is best to analyze the experience of Black women as not the products of sexism and racism, but how sexism and racism interact to create an original experience.

Identities and the meanings we give to social constructs such as gender, race, and class are determined by those who have the most power in society. The social structure determines who is in power and who continues to face inequalities. Structural intersectionality describes how an institution's policies and practices foster inequalities among some members of society (Durfee, 2021). Those that have historically been in power, White men, are most influential to these institutions as they were founded on their goals and needs and not those from oppressed groups. Therefore, the deeply embedded structure places White, rich, men in a position to continue to oppress others in order to retain their power that they see as privilege. Those that are not one of the powerful identities such as White, men, of a high socioeconomic class, and Christian among others face challenges in a social structure that is not designed for their needs. Those that have multiple marginalized identities face unique challenges as their identities create even more of a barrier of their needs and wants being met.

Looking at the feminist and antiracist movements can also help in further understanding the experience of Black women through an intersectional lens. The 1960's and 70's can be categorized as a crusade for equality. The Civil Rights movement flourished and gained traction with its goals of changing the social status of African Americans (Morris, 1999). The Feminist movement also sought equality for women who wanted to escape traditional gender roles and ultimately be given equal opportunities and experiences (Ginsburg & Flagg, 1989). However, these movements may have different goals than directly stated.

The antiracist movements have been geared toward Black men specifically and their goals. Likewise, the feminist movements have goals that more align with White women. Carastathis (2008) claims that Whiteness and maleness are always assumed unless otherwise specified. The strategic silence of the antiracist and feminist movements concerning Black women helps these movements succeed as they are tackling either racial or gender discrimination rather than the hyper oppressed position of Black women (Crenshaw, 1991). The movements highlight uniformity in their struggles and one size fits all solutions when Black women face unique challenges (Moon & Holling, 2020). Black males are seen as more legitimate for equal rights to White males because of their maleness and White females are seen as more legitimate because of their Whiteness (King, 1988). Moreover, Black women have been and continue to be silenced in equality movements because of their hyper marginalized status. Movements that were created to eliminate the patriarchy and racism actually perpetrated its notions by excluding the rights of Black women.

Intersectionality and Victimization

Black women are the group that is first mentioned in Crenshaw's (1991) original piece concerning intersectionality. Black women are put in a position where they are faced with hyper

oppression because of their race and gender. Black women are understood differently than White women and differently than Black men. These women have a unique stigma that can be explained through the lens of intersectionality. Crenshaw (1991) describes Black women's social position as the "location that resists telling". Black women are often put in the position to choose which identity they want to identify as and must adhere to an either/or proposition.

For example, Black women have chosen to adhere to their racial identity versus their gender identity because of public scrutiny. In the peak of the #MeToo movement with the allegations of sexual assault by Bill Cosby and R. Kelly, Black women were put in a position where they must choose which identity to stand by. Black women felt that they had to stand by R. Kelly, despite the video evidence of his misconduct, in order to maintain their status in the Black community (Leung & Williams, 2019). In doing so, Black women turned their backs on their gender identity and the struggles that women face. Black women could not show support for the Black female victims of R. Kelly's assault if they wished to not be scrutinized. However, in the case of Bill Cosby's allegations, the standard set by the #MeToo movement was to support female victims. In other words, the movement only supported White female victims. The social status of Black women causes them to minimize the victimizations of fellow Black women. Their social position also asked fellow Black women to support the Black male perpetrator if they wished to gain some form of acceptance from the general public.

Black women are placed in a position where they cannot embrace their full identity. They must choose in what situations to enact their identities in order to adhere to the standards placed upon them. They are put in a lose-lose situation that replicates the oppression they are facing. Black women must continue to appease their male counterparts but also should appease their White counterparts. The inability to choose both identities force Black women to replicate the

oppression they face and continue a cycle that sees no end. It will not be until the unique experiences of Black women are understood and supported will they have a chance at changing the social structure that deemed their intersecting identities as severely unequal.

The experience of Black women is a clear example of how intersecting identities effect behavior and status. Other racial minorities, as well as those who have other marginalized statuses such as low socioeconomic status, LGBQT+, and not of the Christian faith, face similar challenges to those of Black women with specific experiences based on the different stigmas and bias placed on their identities. These individuals are most vulnerable to victimization because of their overrepresentation in unfavorable spaces as well as the stigmatization placed on their identity. Over 25% of transgender people are victims of assault with Black trans women making up the highest proportion of homicide victimization for this group (Momen & Dilks, 2021). Youth of color are disproportionately victims of dating violence (Roberts et al., 2018). Women are more likely to have experienced severe physical abuse and other abusive behavior than men (Nixon & Humphreys, 2010). Those that are marginalized by society are disproportionately placed in contexts that are most conducive of crime compared to those that hold more privileged statuses.

Individuals who have marginalized identities are more likely to have less resources to address their issues and seek help (Emmen et al., 2013; Gates & Newport, 2012). Escaping into a more privileged role is difficult for those who have generations of family members who have been met with the same oppression (Wightman & Danziger, 2014). Cycles of disadvantage plague those who are born into a family that is unable to provide them with the resources to have a better social standing. People who are unable to have the proper means to succeed may be placed in education systems that expose them to violence and labeled as ‘trouble’ (Altun &

Baker, 2010). However, the space in which marginalized individuals often live is only part of their vulnerability to victimization.

The stigma and bias placed on identities as discussed in the earlier part of this sections is a reason why marginalized individuals face higher risks of victimization. Perpetrators of violence, which are often men have cited sexist, racist, and homophobic reasons for their offending behavior. Hegemonic masculinity can be a root cause of many crimes committed. Hegemonic masculinity is the belief that men are superior to women (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Men who adhere to hegemonic masculinity must choose to actively adhere to masculine norms in a social context if they seek to display their dominance in the most influential way. Men, especially White men, feel entitled to many aspects of life including sexual access to women. Women are believed to be at the disposal of men, and they believe that women should act in accordance with male standards. When men feel that they are being deprived of their 'right' to the bodies of women, they feel justified in committing crime to correct that wrong (DeKeseredy et al., 2019).

Toxic masculinity can be seen as an extension of hegemonic masculinity. Toxic masculinity takes a step deeper into hegemonic masculinity and hyperbolizes its opposition to femininity. Violence is seen as an acceptable and masculine way to claim their superiority and they use the symbol of females as weak and docile to promote their power and authority (Haider, 2016). Men who wish to subscribe to toxic masculine ideals must distance themselves from symbols of femininity if they wish to be viewed as masculine. This can entail showing no emotion except those that are acceptable such as anger and emphasizing physical strength. Toxic masculinity wishes to show superiority to women and other marginalized groups by displaying traits that are hypermasculine and far away from anything feminine.

White men specifically have been found to claim that they are the real victims of sexual assault, and that male-on-female sexual assault is exaggerated (DeKeseredy et al., 2019). DeKeseredy et al. (2019) also found that most men who showed traits of aggrieved entitlement were not supportive of making communities safer and equitable for women, sexual minorities, and ethnic minorities. White men have dominated society and their entitlement to power and privilege allows them to justify perpetrating inequalities against those who are marginalized. Furthermore, those that are most at risk because of the disadvantages that place them in spaces prone for criminal behavior are also further at risk because of the entitlement of white men to their victimization.

The White men who have created a system where they are to benefit the most has placed marginalized members in spaces that are most at risk for crime. These white men also justify their criminal behavior towards marginalized groups because of the social status and stigmas they have placed on the groups as well. Space and social structure construct each other to create an environment where oppressed groups are victimized and continue to be held inferior. Marginalized individuals, especially those with multiple marginalized identities, are not inherently born to be victims. It is because of the overrepresentation of these individuals in spaces of disadvantage that intersects with the social structure that assigns disadvantage to their identity or identities that those who are hyper oppressed face more violence than other groups.

As mentioned previously, those that have marginalized identities disproportionately have a lower socioeconomic status (Emmen et al., 2013; Gates & Newport, 2012). Low socioeconomic status confines individuals to disadvantaged places such as disadvantaged neighborhoods and schools. These places are conducive of crime which places marginalized individuals at greater risk for the consequences of concentrated disadvantage than others

(Chamberlain & Hipp, 2015). Marginalized individuals are also more at risk for violence and crime because of their socially constructed identity. Those that are not confined to disadvantaged areas still face risks of victimization based on their statuses. The social structure assigns meaning to marginalized identities that hold them inferior to their privileged counterparts. The patriarchy and white supremacy aim to hold privileged individuals at a superior status and to continue discrimination against marginalized groups (Sultana, 2010; Williams & Land, 2006). While discrimination may include implicit actions such as ignoring the needs of marginalized individuals, it can also include violence against these individuals. Therefore, marginalized groups are more prone to victimization because they are more likely to live in disadvantaged areas and they have a social status that is targeted by privileged ideologies such as the patriarchy and white supremacy.

Minorities in Policing

Looking at oppressed individuals especially those who are hyper oppressed is interesting when understanding their role in the police force. Minority members have likely faced at least some forms of discrimination throughout their lifetime with some facing extreme forms (Waite, 2021). The police have been highlighted for their abuse towards minority members of society. Police brutality towards Black men and women has been shown on the news and examined in research (Carbado, 2017). The deeply embedded police subculture has shown that it discriminates against women and LGBTQ+ individuals (Martin, 1994; Zempi, 2020). Yet, with the strive for more diversity in police departments, many have seen increased numbers of minority officers.

It may be expected that minority individuals could change the culture of the police force as well as show different policing behavior. Those that have been oppressed throughout their

lifetime may have a special compassion that prohibits them from replicating the victimization to other minority groups (Ba et al., 2021). Therefore, the diversity of police departments could change the quality of behavior of police officers. Minority officers such as women, ethnic and racial minorities, and LGB individuals may be less likely to use excessive force on citizens and eliminate some of the problems the police are criticized for today. We would expect that the diversity of officers, because of their lived experiences through oppression, would decrease the oppression of minority members in society by the police. Ba et al. (2021) describes how minority individuals are less likely to harass members of the same social group because of the principles described by Fiske (2002). Fiske (2002) discusses how individuals have biases that cause them to favor their own group consciously or subconsciously. Individuals feel comfortable with others who share their in-group membership. Furthermore, marginalized officers may be more inclined to show support for their respective in-group individuals rather than show hostility to groups that have been oppressed by the police.

HEADING 3

INTERSECTIONALITY AND POLICE BEHAVIOR

Affirmative action decrees have increased ethnic and racial minority and women officers in police departments which has advanced research on their actions. Affirmative actions were put in place to not only ensure equal opportunity to all citizens but to change the negative notions of the police (Lott Jr, 2000). Increasing ethnic and racial minority and women officers is seen as a way to bridge the gap to their respective communities and, especially for ethnic and racial minorities, build trust and legitimacy between the police and communities. However, research that explores the relationship between officer characteristics such as race and gender, have uncovered what may not have been anticipated and hoped for (Sun & Payne, 2004; Rabe-Hemp, 2008). Diversity has advanced in the policing profession, but other anticipated benefits may be lacking.

African American male officers are a group that have frequently been studied (i.e., Brunson & Gau, 2015; Brown & Frank, 2006; Sun, 2003). Their maleness makes them seen as more qualified candidates for police work by departments as masculine ideals are emphasized within the culture. Yet, their status as a racial minority is expected to alter their way of behaving compared to White males. The discrimination that Black males face in their day to day lives, especially from the police, would likely cause Black officers to wish to not perpetrate the same prejudices against their own racial minority as well as others who have faced similar challenges. However, research has shown that an officer's race has no impact on police behavior or at times ethnic and racial minority officers have behaved more extremely than White officers.

One key area explored in research is arrest data. Riksheim and Chermak (1993) found that individual officer characteristics had little effect on arrest decisions which included officer

race, attitudes, and gender. Sun et al. (2008) described coercive police behavior more generally but nonetheless found that officer race had no significant effect on police behavior. Both sets of articles explained that the key influence in officers' arrest decision or coercive behavior respectively was suspect demeanor. Suspects who had an aggressive or unfavorable demeanor and those who were intoxicated were most likely to face arrest or coercive action (Klinger, 1994). It appears that environmental factors play a much stronger role in officer behavior than individual factors such as officer race. On the one hand, consistency across police officers in decision making appears favorable as situational components should be what determines officer behavior. On the other hand, if one of the purposes of recruiting more racial and ethnic minority individuals to become police officers was to eliminate actions that were unjust and to be fairer to those usually targeted by the police, then the goal was not met. Racial/ethnic minority men were proposed to stray from their White counterparts in behavior in order to correct their corrupt behavior. But if research describes the similarities and consistency in behavior, we must dive deeper into why this group is subscribing to the same ideology as the individuals who discriminate against minority communities.

In contrast to the above-mentioned literature, there have been some findings that ethnic minorities not only are less lenient towards minority citizens but are more harsh than White officers. Brown and Frank (2006) found that African American officers were more likely to arrest male suspects, African American suspects, and juveniles than White officers. Latino officers have also been found to give more traffic citations to Black drivers and non-White officers significantly ticketed White, Black, and Latino drivers (Gilliard-Matthews, 2017). Racial and ethnic minority officers may respond more harshly to racial and ethnic minority citizens than White officers which is in complete juxtaposition to the goals set forth for diversity in police

departments. The lived experiences of racial/ethnic minorities do not affect their behavior on the job like would be expected and in some cases have been found to cause more coercive actions. Being a police officer must have some effect on the way racial/ethnic minorities view their identity and their role as an officer.

Likewise, female police officers also show little difference in behavior compared to their male counterparts. The most salient factor that influences officer behavior as mentioned above is citizen demeanor. However, some studies have found that female officers do behave differently in some areas. The introduction of women into the police force was met with the same prejudices that prevented their presence in the workplace historically. Women in police departments originally had female oriented tasks such as handling cases with juveniles, female victims and suspects, and the community (Felkenes & Schroedel, 1993). Women were believed to have skills that confined them to only work with select populations rather than the more brutal and manly tasks given to male officers. Although times have changed and women are given the same responsibilities as men, female officers are often still assigned to roles that are believed to be better handled by women. Female officers are more likely to be assigned to community policing (Rabe-Hemp, 2008) and to school resource officer positions than men (Kelly & Swezey, 2015). Community policing opens the door to many different behaviors as police officer interact with the public and aim to build relationships with communities. Rabe-Hemp (2008) also described how female officers were less likely to use force than male officers, but this could be accounted for because of their higher likelihood of being a community police officer. Community police officers are less likely to use controlling behavior which could explain why there is a difference between female and male officers' use of force and controlling behavior.

Women likely bring different skill sets to the police profession as they are raised

differently than men. The social structure confines women to more feminine standards such as caregiving and compassion whereas men are held to standards of masculinity such as strength and power (Blackstone, 2003). Although the social structure can confine women to inferior roles, women's special skills sets can be utilized within police departments. Sklansky (2005) explains that there are mixed findings on the differences between male and female officers, but female officers were more helpful in domestic violence cases. Women can be utilized in different facets of police work that can prove beneficial to society and police departments' sufficiency. Women officers may behave differently when confined to specific roles, but also behave similarly to male officers when given more 'masculine' roles.

Difficult to find was differences in police officer behavior between racial/ethnic minority women and other officers. Women officers have at most made up 25% of police departments which leaves less room to study women officers and more specifically racial/ethnic minority women officers as the population size is so small (Sklansky, 2005). Racial/ethnic minority women officers are lumped into the studies concerning ethnic minority male officers and White female officers without special attention to their contribution to the policing profession. This may be because of the challenges they face in their path to policing. Non-White females face similar challenges to White females in employment opportunities, but they are less likely to complete academy training and are the most dissatisfied with their profession (Felkenes & Schroedel, 1993). Felkenes and Schroedel (1993) also found that non-White women face a greater degree of discrimination than White women and ethnic minority men. Racial/ethnic minority women face similar challenges to their racial/ethnic and gender counterparts but also face unique challenges at their intersection. They appear to have more obstacles and stigmas that make becoming an officer more challenging. However, there are again no extreme differences in

their behavior from White male officers as shown in the previously mentioned studies discussing women and ethnic minority men.

Little to no research has been conducted on the behavior of LGB officers. The acceptance of gay and lesbian statuses in the police force was similar to that of women and ethnic minorities. Gay and lesbian police officers may be able to bring greater credibility to their respective communities and the police (Sklansky, 2005). But, with the findings discussed above, LGB officers likely behave very similarly to white male and other officers. There is some evidence that ethnic minority, female, and gay and lesbian officers do improve the overall quality of policing but there is also evidence that there is no difference in the quality (Sklansky, 2005). For example, LGB officers have described that community policing is more effective because their representation in the police force has gained the police more respect from LGB communities. However, there is also evidence that suggests that more diversity has made no difference in public perceptions of the police. It is likely that ethnic, gender, and sexual minority officers are utilized for their special skills and the ties to their communities in their police work. This could determine differences in their behavior as they are given different opportunities than White male officers. But it also appears that these minorities do not differ to a great extent in traditional police work (Sklansky, 2005).

Understanding why minorities do not have different behavior than White male heterosexual officers is important if we wish to rectify the problems in policing concerning police brutality. Having a diverse police workforce is proposed to eliminate the toxic White male culture that is embedded in the profession. However, the same victims of White male privilege are perpetrating the same behavior as their offender. Those that would be believed to have special compassion and attention to discrimination appear to adhere to the same standards

set by their oppressor without challenging the victimization of their communities. There must be a reason why ethnic, gender, and sexual minorities behave similarly to White male officers despite their negative lived experiences with White men. In the next section, police officer stress and workplace discrimination are discussed to further paint a puzzling picture into the behavior of minorities in the policing profession.

HEADING 4

INTERSECTIONALITY AND POLICE OFFICER STRESS AND DISCRIMINATION

Police officers face unique stresses in the workplace that many occupations do not have to handle on a day-to-day basis. The visibility of police work and the public's high scrutiny of the career has made the job more stressful as criticism is frequent (Collins & Gibbs, 2003). Police officers have consequently created a strong subculture that allows them to gain solidarity between officers and protect against the public's negative comments. The police subculture has created an atmosphere of solidarity among officers that poses many benefits such as a safe place for officers to do a dangerous job and evoking a feeling of support (Thomas & Tufts, 2020). However, the police subculture has many negatives that have caused toxic ideals to prevail over the years and strays away from the public's interest in accountability.

The police subculture shares many ideals with toxic masculinity that could explain police brutality and the blue wall of silence. Police officers are expected to appear independent, strong, and invincible (Malmin, 2012). Officers are expected to keep silent about their issues and the misconduct of others to not only conform to police solidarity, but to also not appear emotional. Police officers are to show their strength in a dangerous job in order to appear masculine and be accepted by the subculture.

Some common characteristics found in police subcultures that can be linked to toxic masculinity are "mission, macho, cynicism, authoritarian conservatism, social isolation and defensive solidarity, racism, sexism, and an 'us/them' division of the social world" (Zempi, 2020). The solidarity of the police subculture is in place mostly to protect the interest of White heterosexual men (Walker, 1985). The toxic masculinity standards that have followed the profession are still enlisted in the subculture that is present today. Officers who have at least one

marginalized identity face discrimination in departments as White males are prioritized and minority officers are left to do whatever is necessary to gain acceptance into the White heterosexual male subculture.

With a system that has historically been racist, sexist, homophobic, and anti-immigrant, police departments today still have major issues of discrimination. Black individuals are one of the groups that have faced discrimination as police officers. Martin (1994) found that 24% of Black men officers described being victims of racial discrimination whereas 61% of Black women officers reported racial discrimination. Black people have less opportunities to advance in the police profession but are also discriminated against by their colleagues. Martin (1994) continues to describe how Black men fit the traditional police model more than Black women because that are viewed as physically strong, street smart, and masculine. Black men and other racial minority men may be discriminated against as police officers, but they also do have some privileges as they follow the highly valued masculine ideals ascribed to police officers.

Women on the other hand, are not viewed as possessing masculine standards and are discriminated against because of it. White and non-White women face additional barriers because of sexism and racism. 68% of Black women officers and 80% of White women officers were discriminated against because of their race or sex (Martin, 1994). These numbers are far higher than Black males and White males which highlights the prevalence of sexism within departments. White women are encouraged to prescribe to the ideals of "piety, submissiveness, and domesticity" whereas Black women are portrayed as "mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients, and 'hot mommas'" (Martin, 1994). None of these attributes are what define a 'good police officer' as described by the toxic masculine police subculture. Therefore, all women must face the challenges of fighting their sexist stereotypes to be accepted by the culture. This often

leaves women in a difficult place as they are forced to choose which identity to ascribe to: police*women* or *police*women (Martin, 1980). Either way, women are fighting an uphill battle to be accepted as police officers because of sexist stereotypes.

Black women have a unique position in police departments. As mentioned above, Black women face sexism and racism in departments, but they also face unique challenges because of their intersectional identity. Holder et al. (2000) describes Black women as being in triple jeopardy. They explain how Black women face sexual and/or gendered racism that is neither experienced by their White or male counterparts. Black women face specific stereotypes that regard them as less female and as less Black than White women and Black men respectively. Black women are portrayed as hypersexual compared to their pure White counterparts (Harris, 2020) and are invisible when issues of racism are addressed for the benefit of Black men only (Patton et al., 2016). Black women hold a status in police departments that is unfavorable to all groups. They neither meet the standards of strength set forth by the masculine standards and are also too sexual and impure to hold the same status as White women. Moreover, Black women must fight against their triple jeopardy in police departments as all groups benefit from their oppression.

Black men are accepted in most part by the White male hierarchy and must choose to stay silent and even perpetrate discrimination against women, more specifically Black women. If Black men wished to hold their fragile status, they must ally with White men to resist the integration of Black women (Martin, 1994). In the same vein, White women must partner with White males to gain acceptance. White women are placed in a position where they must compete against non-White women for favorable positions within the culture and department. The push for more women representation within the police force puts pressure on White women to

compete with Black women to ensure their dominance (Kandiyoti, 1988). White women are often more critical of other women as they must appear to be in congruence with toxic masculinity in order to succeed. Therefore, there is no space for women or Black women to unite.

Black women are again put in a position where they must choose which identity to adhere to. They cannot go against Black male officers for their silence as that would be turning their backs on the Black community. They also cannot go against White female officers because that further perpetrates their own sexual discrimination. Black women are stuck in position where they must face extreme battles in being a police officer. Going against the standards set forth by the subculture would eliminate the notion of a unified us/them mentality. Women may feel pushed to join forces and work together to eliminate the oppressive work environment. However, this would create an us/them dichotomy within the department which jeopardizes the solidarity advertised by police departments. There is only one way for ethnic, gender, and sexual minorities to succeed in police departments: endure the discrimination you may face, accept toxic masculinity standards, and prove your allegiance to the culture by perpetrating the same discrimination that you face.

LGB individuals also face discrimination in the police field. One value of masculinity is that men should act in accordance with masculinity standards and women should adhere to feminine standards. Compulsory heterosexuality describes homosexual relationships negatively because they believe it makes men less masculine and women less feminine (Rich, 1980). Therefore, homosexual individuals face discrimination as police officers because they go against their gender stereotypes that are prioritized by the toxic masculine culture. LGB officers are in a unique position as they must choose between disclosing their identity to their colleagues or

keeping it a secret.

On the one hand, officers who were not out at work felt that they were immune from homophobia (Smith et al., 2015). However, these officers described that the 'false front' of their sexuality came with psychological costs which made their job very stressful (Goffman, 1963; Powers, 2014). On the other hand, those that are forthcoming of their identity were faced with discrimination and hostility (Zempi, 2020). LGB officers must choose between the psychological tolls of silence or the psychological tolls of discrimination. Zempi (2020) also found that lesbian officers were more accepted than gay officers. Gender and sexual orientation intersect to determine what is accepted in the hyper masculine atmosphere of police officers. Those that are more aligned with their masculine standards do not face the same amount of hostility towards their identity.

Discrimination is very damaging to an individual's psyche and can be especially damaging if an individual faces discrimination every day at their occupation. Of the group of racial, gender, and sexual minority participants who described their discrimination, some felt "extremely depressed by their experiences, whilst others felt demotivated and had lost enthusiasm for their work due to what might be termed occupational burnout or emotional exhaustion" (Zempi, 2020). Officers who are unwelcomed to their workplace and culture can be stuck in a very damaging environment that produces high levels of stress. Those that have a single or multiple marginalized identity or identities are therefore more at risk of job stress and dissatisfaction as they are exposed to more discrimination.

Marginalized groups may experience different levels of stress depending on their experiences in the police culture. Some groups have more occupational stress than others. For example, women have reported higher levels of stress than men and African American women

reported significantly higher levels of stress than their male counterparts (Harr & Morash, 1999). Stress levels varying among different groups can depend on the discrimination they face on the job by their colleagues and the appropriate coping strategies used. Coping strategies can vary between groups as certain strategies may be successful for one group, while damaging to another. Caucasians report using the coping strategies of expression of feelings and coworker camaraderie more frequently than African Americans (Haar & Morash, 1999).

Moreover, stress levels vary depending on the discrimination one faces but also varies depending on the coping strategies that are most successful for them based on their status. The code of silence within departments especially applies to those that face discrimination as they are expected to stay silent about the biases and prejudices they face in exchange for some form of loyalty (Zempi, 2020). White men are most likely to have their voices heard and actions to be done to help eliminate their disadvantages if they face them (Haarr & Morash, 1999). Other groups must strategically cope with the stress they endure on the job by their workplace culture in order to psychologically be able to continue on the job and to appease their work environment so that their job experience does not become more harmful than it already is.

In summary, police departments face the same challenges that society has been working to resolve. Prejudices and biases are prevalent among the career that embodies everything hyper masculine and criticize everything that is not. The expansion of diversity in the police field has helped minorities be represented in a domain of power. However, the representation still comes at a cost for minority officers. Those that hold marginalized identities can face severe discrimination in the workplace by their colleagues and supervisors. Discrimination is also different for different groups. For example, Black women are placed in ‘triple jeopardy’ where they face unique challenges based on the intersection of their racial and gender identities. Those

that are not White, heterosexual men face alienation and ridicule in their work environment.

Discrimination that is experienced in the day to day lives of individuals at work can be extremely harmful. Those that are most likely to face discrimination are therefore more likely to be stressed and dissatisfied with their occupation. Racial, gender, and sexual minorities report higher levels of job stress. Coping strategies also vary depending on acceptable behavior awarded to specific identities by the social structure. Those that have more privilege are more likely to express their emotions as they may feel that solutions will be handed out. Those that face more discrimination and prejudice are more likely to cope with their stress through other means as they may believe their acknowledgement of the stress and stressors will negatively impact themselves and their career.

Furthermore, racial, gender, and sexual minorities largely behave similarly to their white, male, heterosexual counterparts. However, these groups are most exposed to discrimination by their colleagues and experience subsequent high levels of stress on the job. Minorities buy into the work solidarity that police departments thrive on and behave in similar fashions in order to be accepted by the culture. But these groups are the ones who continue to be faced with exclusion and discrimination on the job that leads to stress. It appears that marginalized officers do not benefit from subscribing to the toxic masculine notions of the subculture, yet they continue to do so. We now turn to a more detailed discussion of the police subculture to better understand conformity and identities.

HEADING 5

PREVAILING POLICE IDENTITY AND CONFORMITY

Most work environments have some type of culture that describes appropriate and valued behavior as well as behavior that is not tolerated among its people. The police are no exception, and they have a subculture that has been uniquely curated to protect officers and their interests or at least those who hold the most power and privileges (Rose & Unnithan, 2015). Socialization occurs when individuals learn of the organization's cues and boundaries which for the police, involves the adoption of a "strong consensual bond developed by the felt hostility of the public" (Britz, 1997). The police are in a special position where they are awarded power in order to protect the public, but they also face criticisms as they are exposed to the public. A strong bond in police departments is therefore the most salient and significant value among police officers.

Culture can be viewed as a tool kit whereby members can employ stories, rituals, and world views in different ways and at different times (Swidler, 1986). In police departments, officers have informal norms that guide behavior to be in accordance with their culture. Cultures prescribe what actions should be behaved in certain contexts and times, it is not just a set of behaviors across time and place. The subculture has gained its legitimacy and authority from the beliefs that generations of police officers have provided collective wisdom composing the subculture (Shearing, 1981). Tradition can be highly valued among police officers as it holds on to power dynamics that have historically been strong.

There are many aspects that make the police subculture so prominent and strong. Police officers are faced with danger on the job as well as public criticism. The public hostility towards police officers plays a key role in how officers perceive their work environment and colleagues. Van Maanen (1973) describes police work as lonely and friendless. Police work has also shown

to create job burnout. Job burnout can lead to suicide, alcoholism, subjective health complaints, and other psychological stressors (Stuart, 2008). The public's critiques of police work, although can be warranted, appear to facilitate a cycle of solidarity among police departments. Police interpret public criticism as unavoidable as officers learn that mistakes are inevitable because of their work environment (Marier & Moule, 2019). Therefore, solidarity is taught and perceived as the only means to avoid the harsh loneliness assigned to them as officers by the public.

Solidarity and loyalty are not fundamentally negative values or behaviors. However, in. the case of police officers, these notions can have negative consequences. When danger strikes the job, it is important that officers feel that their colleagues have their back in order to reduce stress of danger (Rose & Unnithan, 2015). But solidarity and loyalty can also prescribe silence to misconduct by fellow officers. The solidarity that police officers have is not expected to wavier in instances where there is police misconduct. Police officers are expected to provide testimony that corroborate their colleague's innocence despite it contradicting the truth (Skolnick, 2002). If officers fail to show their loyalty in court, officers are labeled as 'rats' and may face social consequences such as exclusion. Exclusion may be detrimental to police officers as they perceive that loyalty within police departments reduces risks to their safety while on the job (Chin & Wells, 1997; Cancino & Enriquez., 2004; Westmarland, 2005).

The Knapp commission is an example of police misconduct that shows how deeply integrated the notions of loyalty and the blue wall of silence is. The Knapp commission was created to investigate the misconduct within the New York City Police Department (Chin & Wells, 1997). They found that the falsification of testimony, documents, and police records were the most common forms of police corruption. The code of silence is used as a tool by officers to show their loyalty to their fellow officers. Failure to do so can result in workplace criticisms that

make the job more dissatisfying and more dangerous. A striking comment by a detective in their testimony in the Knapp commission was “the honest officer fears the dishonest officer and not the other way around” (Chin & Wells, 1997). Officers must have a strong sense of loyalty and solidarity if they wish to be accepted within the culture. This could be one reason why marginalized officers who are discriminated against allow their perpetration to continue.

Marginalized officers are placed in unfortunate circumstances as police officers. They must ascribe to the police subculture if they seek solidarity, avoid isolation, and have perceived protection. But marginalized officers are then forced to stay silent about their own victimization within police departments. The loyalty and solidarity they are awarded in return for theirs have unique caveats that include prejudice and biases as acceptable behavior towards them. Minority officers choose to have loyalty towards the toxic culture for many other reasons as well. Racial, gender, and sexual minority officers can face double marginality when they become police officers. Double marginality describes how those who are marginalized because of their racial, gender, and/or sexual minority identity are marginalized further by their communities when they become officers (Sklansky, 2005). The larger social structure has oppressed these groups and they are then criticized by their own groups for joining an organization that is viewed as perpetrating their oppression. They can ultimately be viewed as traitors which makes their isolation from the public even more severe than other officers.

Understanding the police subculture is very important in understanding the actions of police officers especially those who are marginalized. The police subculture continues to be prominent and highly influences officers’ behaviors. Tradition and the comfort of an us/them dichotomy that is emphasized from generation to generation of police officers can explain how a toxic subculture can be seen throughout the years. Isolation must be avoided if officers wish to

feel some comfort and safety on a job that has real danger and danger that is exaggerated to create fear and solidarity (Kappeler et al., 2015). How do minority officers cope with the discrimination they face by their colleagues while still behaving in the same fashion as their oppressors? Marginalized officers must understand their social identity and construct their self-image in a way that allows them to find a perceived comfort in their profession and minimizing the discrimination they face.

Identity and role performance are two perspectives on how one can understand the social world. Symbolic interaction theory proposes that individuals learn how to identify and behave towards objects based on interactions with others (Stryker, 1968). In the case of identities, individuals form identities and sets of behavior for given contexts based on the social meaning attached to them by society. Although certain identities may be visible, individuals still have the power to manipulate the way they are viewed and perceived by themselves and others. For example, at the time of Jim Crow laws, African Americans faced severe oppression that excluded them from being viewed as equal members of society (Dahis et al., 2019). Black people had a difficult time making a living, becoming educated, and avoiding insults and worse regularly. Mixed race individuals who had lighter skin tones were given an incentive to pass for white. Those that cut ties with their Black family members and became associated with White people were able to be identified as White and avoided discrimination. Although racial identity is largely visible, individuals can still construct their identity, albeit often at a price of emotional stress, in order to gain incentives or avoid persecution.

Another example of constructing a favorable identity is male nurses. Male nurses are often ridiculed for entering into a profession that is seen as feminine (O'Connor, 2015). Male nurses are questioned on their gender and sexual identity, and they must choose how to act if

they wish to influence their perception. In O'Connor's (2015) study, he found that male nurses described their choice of becoming a nurse as a haphazardly happening circumstance. Male nurses emphasized leaving a dead-end job and described how they fell into a career of nursing afterwards. They emphasized this to avoid the perception of altruistic desires which is associated with spoiled masculinity. They also choose to highlight that their career allowed them to be breadwinners and have a good salary which would adhere to more masculine standards and avoid femininity. The stigma that follows male nurses caused them to create identities that were more favorable to their self-view and to avoid social ridicule.

Marginalized officers are placed in a position where they must construct their identity carefully in order to obtain the benefits they desire or reduce the potential harm they may face. Officers may have multiple identities that they align with such as their racial, gender, sexual, and occupational identity. However, Stryker (1968) describes how individuals have a salience hierarchy. Multiple identities may be present, but individuals have a hierarchy where they choose which identities to commit to the most based on rewards and reduction of costs. I argue that the nature of police officers and the police subculture make individuals choose their occupational or police officer identity over all others. This results in officers accepting the discrimination they face on the job as well as behaving the same as the officers who perpetrate their oppression.

Individuals have a high commitment to the police identity because it offers them rewards. Commitment to an identity occurs by being rewarded and having a positive evaluation of their identity as well as having ties to others with the identity that create a comfortable "we-ness" (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). The police identity awards individuals a sense of solidarity that can be rewarding for individuals despite the discrimination that may take place. Accepting discrimination and maintaining the police identity creates the perception that they are a part of an

organization that supports them despite causing emotional distress. What makes the police identity so unique is that the commitment to the identity can be largely based on avoiding consequences. Marginalized officers are placed in a position where if they do not choose to have their police identity as most salient, they will face backlash from multiple arenas. As described above, if police officers choose to speak against their fellow officers or do not corroborate stories they will be labeled as a 'rat' and traitor which can further minority officers' discrimination and isolation in the department.

Minority officers also do not gain many rewards from choosing their marginalized identity over their police identity. Double marginalization can cause officers to be criticized from their communities because of their choice in occupation (Sklansky, 2005). Officers are then placed in a position where they can choose to have their marginalized and once supported identity as their most salient identity and face stressors from their community and police department or they can choose to prioritize the police identity where they can avoid severe oppression and gain some sense, although it may be false, of support and inclusion. Marginalized officers therefore are more likely to ascribe to the toxic subculture of police officers and to abide by their standards and precedents of behavior. The police identity offers more rewards in the form of less costs than could be given if the police identity is not chosen as most salient. Marginalized identities do not offer the rewards needed for a strong commitment as they are isolated from their community and occupation.

The strength of the police subculture allows officers to understand clear forms of behavior that are acceptable and unacceptable. The retaliation that one may face if they choose to act in accordance with other norms or standards is severe. Danger is highly emphasized within departments despite it often being rare to face (Rabe-Hemp & Schuck, 2007). The fear that

officers perceive highly influences their commitment to the police identity. The solidarity and loyalty that is perceived to be necessary can persuade officers to relinquish other identities and act in accordance with the police subculture. The small rewards of perceived safety in their commitment to the culture as well as the fear of further consequences and discrimination that they already face causes marginalized officers to commit their loyalty to the police identity above all else. Commitment to the identity means performing to the standards set by the police culture and as such marginalized officers will show little to no difference in their behavior compared to their privileged counterparts.

HEADING 6

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to prevent marginalized officers from being trapped in an occupational culture they feel they must subscribe to despite facing discrimination, policy should be implemented that eliminates toxic police subcultures. The foundations of the police subculture are rooted in toxic masculinity and to tackle that battle is a daunting and difficult task to say the least. The patriarchy is so deeply embedded in the social structure that reforming this aspect of society would take extreme amounts of work and time. A starting point could be education (D'angelo & Dixey, 2001). Raising young men and women to acknowledge the privileges they may possess and the oppression that others may experience in their lifetime is a step in the right direction. The patriarchy thrives on ignorance and oppression. Education could help create future activists that work to take down disproportionate power structures. By implementing curriculum that involves understanding intersectionality, youth may better understand the complexity of oppression within our country. Raising children to have compassion for those that are oppressed could prevent young girls and boys from buying into toxic masculinity ideals that describe the superiority of white men.

More diverse police officers could also change attitudes within departments if accompanied by specific training strategies. Implicit bias may be corrected or at least addressed if police departments are more diverse (Ammons-Blanfort et al., 2023). Working alongside individuals who look different then oneself and have different lived experience could educate ignorant or bigoted officers. Brewer (2000) uses the contact hypothesis to explain how intergroup prejudice can be reduced. She claims that "interpersonal contact between members of the respective social groups under conditions that promote equal-status, cooperative, and

personalized interaction" could reduce discrimination. Putting privileged officers in training situations where they must work together with marginalized officers and have equal status may eliminate the toxic subculture that prescribes discrimination. Social interactions may help shape the cognitive biases individuals possess and create a work environment where marginalized individuals do not face prejudice. Eliminating stereotypes cannot only cause the police to act more justly to all citizens but it could also reduce the discrimination that occurs within police departments.

Lastly, departments could take different approaches to their training. Training such as sexual harassment training has been adopted by departments but is often unsuccessful because of a lack of organizational support (Rawski & Workman-Stark, 2018). Training can often be undermined when those in control decide that it is pointless and useless. Training could benefit from taking a different approach. A sense giving perspective may help view training as less threatening while still advocating for accountability (Rawski & Workman-Stark, 2018). For example, trainings can include positive roles such as an upstander who intervenes to stop harassment and an individual who takes accountability for their mistakes. Also, addressing that workplace harassment can be a complex topic because of acceptable behavior outside of work being inappropriate at work can help produce an environment that is less intimidating for individuals to learn and change.

Changing the police subculture likely takes many intensive steps. Toxic masculine notions are so deeply embedded into the culture that there are likely no easy solutions. Education can be a step in the right direction if we wish to attempt to change future generations for the better. Continuing to advocate for more diversity in police departments could reduce public criticisms that contribute to the blue wall of silence and eliminate some toxic notions within the

department. More diversity could also eliminate implicit bias that contribute to workplace discrimination as well as oppression in society. Training can be framed in a way that is more successful in eliminating workplace harassment. Future studies should further discuss ways in which the deeply embedded patriarchy can continue to be dismantled vis-a-vis policing.

HEADING 7

CONCLUSION

Police officers are put in the spotlight as their job requires them to protect the public and find justice. However, their exposure to the public lands them in a position where they face isolation from their criticisms. As a way to cope, the police subculture advertises solidarity and loyalty for its members. This loyalty is not felt the same from officer to officer. Marginalized officers face discrimination within the workplace because of their social statuses. An intersectional framework describes how those with marginalized identities live experiences that are uniquely oppressive as they have identities that interact to cause greater oppression than other groups. Minority officers in police departments face unique challenges in their workplace because of the discrimination they face. The discrimination they experience is met with the expectation that they must cope with it and stay silent. As one can imagine, this leads to high levels of emotional stress and job dissatisfaction.

Those that are most vulnerable to oppression within society also face the same challenges within police departments. Becoming a police officers may even further marginalize these individuals as they face discrimination in the workplace and double marginalization from their community. Minority officers are then placed in a position where they must choose what identity to adhere to that provides them with the most benefits or in other words, the least amount of discrimination. The police officer identity is a way for minority officers to perceive that they are safe and connected to a group despite their oppression in their day-to-day work lives. The subscription to the police identity can explain why minority officers behave the same as other officers when the opposite would be assumed to occur. Minority officers choose the police identity and therefore must meet the standards set by the police subculture if they wish to reap

the perceived benefits of their loyalty. The behavior of minority officers abides by the toxic subculture and in doing so, continues their own victimization of oppression in and outside the office.

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