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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Max Ray A. Davenport Jr entitled "Exploring Memorable Message About Law Enforcement." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Communication and Information.

Jenny L. Crowley, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

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Accepted for the Council:
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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

Exploring the Memorable Messages Black American Young Adults Recall about Law Enforcement from Family Members

A Thesis Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Max Ray Amaru Davenport, Jr.

August 2022

Dedication

I dedicate this project to a younger, more impressionable version of myself who dreamed of this moment.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my thesis advisor, Dr. Jenny Crowley, who leads with compassion and understanding. I am grateful for your guidance and leadership throughout this process. Thank you for coaching me through challenging times. I would also like to thank Dr. Courtney Wright and Dr. Quinten Bernhold for their service on my committee. Your scholarly insights were invaluable during this process.

Abstract

Research demonstrates that Black Americans are placed at a higher risk for having negative interactions with law enforcement. As a result, Black American families may engage in racial-ethnic socialization (RES) practices aimed at preparing Black youth for racialized experiences, reducing the psychological effects of racism, and preserving the lives of Black American citizens. Guided by the memorable messages framework, the present study examines memorable messages about law enforcement as recalled by Black American young adults. More specifically, this study examines the specific type(s) of memorable messages Black American young adults recall receiving about law enforcement from sources such as family and media. To begin, I define and review the literature on the prevalence of racial-ethnic socialization (RES) practices within Black American families before outlining the current study. Followingly, I outline the methodology used to retrieve data before discussing the results of this study. Next, I discuss the theoretical implications associated with the findings of the current study before describing the limitations of this study. Finally, I conclude this study by identifying potential avenues for future research on this topic.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The cumulative impact of racial discrimination, police brutality, and the misuse of power by law enforcement agents has fostered a strong sense of institutional distrust among Black Americans (Sharp & Johnson, 2009). This institutional distrust has been deepened by both the prevalence of police-led killings of unarmed Black Americans and the widening disparities in rights, treatment, and perceptions of threat during encounters with law enforcement officers (Jones-Brown, 2000). Historical and contemporary accounts of Black Americans' involvement in the criminal justice system show law enforcement to be an oppressive force against Black Americans, and encounters with law enforcement officers are disproportionately race-based (Black, 1980; Black & Reiss, 1970). For example, Black Americans are at greater risk of being subjected to racial profiling (Staples, 2011), more likely to routinely be stopped by an officer while driving (Tomaskovic-Devey et al., 2006), and more likely to receive harsher sentencing for drug-related offenses in comparison to their white counterparts (Smith & Hattery, 2010). Black Americans' susceptibility to racial discrimination during interactions with law enforcement and police brutality underscores the importance of communication within Black American families intended to prepare young adults for these discriminatory experiences (Chavez, 2014; Lee, 2014; Wihbey, 2014).

Racial-ethnic socialization (RES), which has been identified as a central practice within Black American families, denotes family members' strategic use of verbal and behavioral practices to communicate the social significance of race to children and prepare children for experiences of systemic racism (Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006). Research demonstrates that RES messages facilitate an understanding of racial identity (Nuru & Soliz,

2014) and are effective in preparing Black youth to respond to issues of prejudice and discrimination (Minniear et al., 2019). In fact, research shows that experiences of racism involving police officers shape the RES practices enacted by Black American parents (Blackmon & Thomas, 2014). For example, a study examining Black parents' use of RES messages following the murder of Michael "Mike" Brown, an unarmed teen, revealed that Black parents began to facilitate discussions with their children about race in a broader context and advise their children, especially their sons, to avoid potentially dangerous situations involving police (e.g., advising sons not to engage in protest; Threlfall, 2018). Although previous research has examined the process by which RES occurs within Black families (e.g., Blackmon & Thomas, 2014; Threlfall, 2018), less is known about the various types of RES messages Black young adults receive from family members about encounters with law enforcement specifically.

RES messages that provide explicit instructions on how to successfully navigate police encounters may be *memorable messages* for Black young adults, in that they are remembered for an extended period and have a profound influence on the lives of Black young adults long after they are received (Knapp et al., 1981). That is, RES messages about law enforcement may be particularly impactful and meaningful messages to Black young adults because they are aimed at reducing the number of Black Americans who are fatally killed by the police each year. Nuru et al. (2018) identified memorable messages as "powerful socializing forces" (p. 312). Thus, the present study utilizes a memorable messages framework to explore the extent to which memorable RES messages about law enforcement have implications for the way(s) in which U.S. Black young adults are socialized to conceptualize and engage with police officers.

The purpose of the current study is to identify the various types of memorable messages Black young men and women receive about law enforcement from family members. The present

study seeks to extend existing research on RES and memorable messages in two distinct ways. First, this study extends research on RES to consider the specific types of messages that prepare Black young adults for racist and discriminatory experiences with law enforcement. Although several studies examine Black families' RES practices (Blackmon & Thomas, 2015; Coard & Sellers, 2005; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Neblett et al., 2006; Sullivan et al., 2021; Threlfall, 2016; White-Johnson et al., 2010), significantly less work has examined the communicative process by which socialization occurs and the specific messages that remain influential into adulthood. Second, this study extends research to consider multiple potential sources of RES messages beyond parents, including older siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and prominent figures in the media. Previous research on parental socialization efforts suggests that parents may engage in a variety of mediation strategies intended to curb negative media effects on children (see e.g., Barcus 1969; Brown & Linne, 1976; Hochmuth, 1947; McLeod et al., 1982). According to Beyens et al. (2019), Black parents report utilizing racial depictions in media to socialize their children about race. Findings from this study could deepen our understanding of the ways in which specific racialized events in the media (e.g., the killing of unarmed Black Americans) shape Black family members' use of RES messages and practices (see Threlfall, 2018). Practically, the present study could have implications for strategies and interventions aimed at preserving Black young adults' mental health, because prior research has previously identified the RES process as an effective strategy for combating the negative social and psychological effects of racism and discrimination (Neblett et al., 2008; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). I begin by describing the historical context that shapes the present-day relationship between Black Americans and law enforcement officers within the United States. Followingly, I review studies that describe RES as well as studies that explain the

antecedents of the RES process and outcomes associated with its practice. Then, I review studies that examine the effects of memorable messages in the context of RES before outlining the current study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Black Americans' Racial-Ethnic Socialization and Memorable Messages about Law Enforcement

Despite the notable gains made during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, Black American citizens continue to maintain a marginalized status, especially within the context of the US criminal justice system (Owusu-Bempah, 2017). Research shows that Black American citizens are disproportionately affected by race-based policing, which describes a practice whereby an officer arrives at an enforcement decision, such as the decision to engage a citizen in a traffic stop, based on the citizen's race or ethnicity (Withrow, 2004). Research indicates that Black American citizens are stopped, searched, and arrested at disproportionate rates (Withrow, 2007). Similarly, research indicates that when stopped by police officers, Black American citizens are more likely to be detained for a longer period of time than their White counterparts (Withrow, 2007). Moreover, encounters between police officers and Black Americans are more likely to result in an arrest or a formal citation (Black & Reiss, 1970; Dannefer & Schutt, 1982; Friedrich, 1977). Research also indicates that traffic stops involving Black American citizens are more likely to result in physical confrontation than traffic stops involving White Americans (Withrow, 2007). Finally, data reveal that when stopped by police officers, Black Americans perceive the number of officers involved are more than necessary given the nature of the stop (Withrow, 2007). Although adults are generally involved in traffic stops, research suggests that police officers' racial bias has implications for Black youth as well. For example, Goff et al. (2014) found that police officers demonstrated a tendency to misperceive Black youth's age and consequently, age them by nearly 4.53 years on average in comparison to youth of other races.

Similarly, Goff and colleagues found that police officers perceived Black youth as being more responsible for their actions as a result of their (mis)perceived age.

Beyond traffic stops, police use-of-force remains embedded in racial discrimination and US politics (Italiano et al., 2021). According to Alexander (2012), the impact of police use-of-force is most visible in communities of color. For instance, data show that US police officers shoot and kill Black Americans at twice the rate of White Americans (Wertz et al., 2020). These data are consistent with a number of other studies that suggest Black Americans are subjected to police brutality more than any other racial demographic (Bor et al., 2018; Devylder et al., 2018; Hattery & Smith, 2018). Police brutality refers to any act committed by a police officer that brings harm to, dehumanizes, or otherwise degrades a target, regardless of intent (Italiano et al., 2021). Police brutality includes but is not limited to, false arrests, verbal abuse, psychological intimidation, emotional abuse and manipulation, and physical violence (Alang et al., 2017; Alpert & Dunham, 2004).

Considering the potential dangers associated with interactions involving law enforcement officers, it is imperative that parents provide Black young adults with a wide variety of RES messages to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to successfully navigate interactions with police officers, who are often White. RES messages may be tailored to prevent Black young adults from engaging in high-risk behaviors (Stein et al., 2018). Therefore, in an effort to avoid the potential dangers associated with these interactions, family members may transmit a wide variety of RES messages including messages that provide explicit instructions on how to successfully navigate police encounters or encourage the avoidance of police altogether (Threlfall, 2018). To date, communication scholars have explored the relationship between gendered RES practices and communication (Thomas & King, 2007), the potential utility of RES

messages as risk-aversion during youth's development periods (Stein et al., 2018), and the ways in which specific racialized events (e.g., the murder of an unarmed Black man) contribute to parents' use of RES messages and practices (Blackmon & Thomas, 2014). Yet, relatively little is known about the *specific* and *varied* type(s) of RES messages Black Americans receive from family members about police officers. In an effort to close this knowledge gap, the goal of the present study is to illuminate *memorable* RES messages that Black American young adults recall receiving from family members about police officers.

Racial-Ethnic Socialization

RES refers to parents' intentional use of messages and behavioral practices to filter societal information about race to their children as it pertains to (a) personal and group identity, (b) intergroup and interindividual relationships, as well as (c) their position in the social hierarchy (Thornton et al., 1990). According to Coard and Sellers (2005), RES occurs via a process in which parents assist their children in developing a strong self-concept through the strategic transmission of implicit and explicit messages about the meaning of one's race in a broader, more global context. This process involves parents (a) exposing their children to Black cultural practices, (b) instilling a strong sense of racial pride in their children, (c) transferring knowledge about Black culture to their children, and (d) preparing their children for bias and racial discrimination (Hughes et al., 2006; Lesane-Brown, 2006). Through this process, parents are able to address their race-related concerns with their children directly (Thornton et al., 1990). Similarly, this process allows parents to shape children's attitudes toward and beliefs about race as well as shape how their children understand race and its significance across various social contexts (Murray & Mandara, 2002). Thus, RES teaches and positions children toward ideological discourses concerning race and ethnicity more broadly (Nuru et al., 2008).

According to Hughes et al. (2006), there are four distinct types of RES messages: *(1) cultural socialization, (2) preparation for bias, (3) promotion of mistrust, and (4) egalitarianism*. First, *cultural socialization* refers to messages and practices intended to (a) teach children about their racial and ethnic heritage, (b) promote cultural customs and traditions, and (c) promote children's cultural, racial, and ethnic pride either implicitly or explicitly (Hughes et al., 2006). These messages are aimed at teaching children about cultural values, beliefs, and practices (Hughes et al., 2006). Examples include talking about important historical or cultural figures; exposing children to culturally relevant literature, artifacts, books, and stories; celebrating culturally significant holidays; consuming ethnic and culturally-based dishes; and encouraging children to speak in their native language (Hughes et al., 2006). Second, *preparation for bias* refers to messages and practices intended to (a) prepare children for racial discrimination or bias or (b) provide children with resources for coping with negative experiences such as discrimination (Hughes et al., 2006, 2008). Messages intended to prepare children for bias may include advice about how to overcome racial barriers, warnings about historical occurrences of discrimination, and information about activist movements (Nuru et al., 2008). These messages are aimed at promoting awareness of racial discrimination and providing strategies for coping (Hughes et al., 2006).

Third, *promotion of mistrust* refers to messages and practices that are intended to encourage children to be cautious when engaging in interracial interactions (Hughes et al., 2006). Although there may be some resemblance between messages intended to prepare children for bias and those that are intended to promote mistrust, messages that promote mistrust differ in that they often include explicit instructions to avoid or limit contact with members of dominant groups (Hughes et al., 2006). These messages act as warnings and are intended to emphasize the

potential consequences associated with interracial interactions between Black and White Americans (Hughes et al., 2006). Finally, *egalitarianism* refers to messages and practices intended to encourage children to "value individual qualities over racial group membership," or "avoid mentions of race altogether," (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 757). These messages are aimed at discouraging racial differentiation and instead, encouraging children to value mainstream qualities such as hard work, self-acceptance, and the value of having interracial relationships (Hughes et al., 2006, 2008).

Previous research on the benefits of RES has identified a number of positive outcomes associated with its practice including increased self-esteem, mental health, scholastic achievement, anger management practices, and resilience (Bannon et al., 2009; Constantine & Blackmon, 2002; Davis & Stevenson, 2006; Hughes et al., 2006). Additionally, the RES process has been identified as an effective protective strategy against the negative psychological effects of racism and racial discrimination (Neblett et al., 2008; Stevenson & Arrington, 2009). Thompson (1994) found that self-reported accounts of parental RES were positively linked to racial identity. Similarly, Demo and Hughes (1990) found that Black adults who received RES socialization in childhood felt a stronger sense of Black pride than those who did not. Finally, Stevenson (1995) found that children who reported receiving RES messages had a greater sense of belonging and self-confidence as a result of their racial identity.

According to White-Johnson et al. (2010), RES is a highly contextual process in which parental, child and other external factors (e.g., racism affecting the wider community) influence the frequency, nature, and mode of transmission of race-related messages between parents and their children. That is, parents' RES messages and practices are shaped by individual and group-level characteristics as well as the characteristics of the social contexts in which parents and their

children operate (Hughes et al., 2006). Previous studies examining predictors of RES have identified parental and child demographic characteristics as well as community demographic characteristics as predictors of parental RES practices (White-Johnson et al., 2010). In the sections below, some of the factors that might influence the RES messages Black young adults receive from family members are reviewed.

Influential Factors in Racial-Ethnic Socialization

Parental Demographic Characteristics

Parental demographic characteristics such as age, gender, marital status, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment have been identified as potential sources of variation in RES practices (White-Johnson et al., 2010). Data from previous research indicate that older parents, especially mothers with higher levels of education, are more likely to report engaging in RES practices with their children in comparison to younger parents (Thornton et al., 1990). Parents' gender has also been identified as a potential source of variation in RES practices. For instance, Thornton et al. (1990) found that although both parents were involved in the RES process, mothers were more likely than fathers to facilitate discussions about race with their children. Similarly, Lamb and Lamb (1976) found that mothers were more likely to specialize in the intellectual and emotional aspects of the socialization process. Parents' marital status has been identified as yet another predictor of RES in Black families. Thornton et al. (1990) found that parents who had never been married before were less likely to engage their children in RES practices in comparison to parents who were currently married or had been married previously. Finally, socioeconomic status and educational attainment have also been identified as a predictor of RES. Black parents with higher levels of education and income are more likely to transmit more racial pride messages and messages about racial barriers, which refer to messages intended

to increase youth's awareness of and ability to cope with racial discrimination, to their children in comparison to their poorer, less educated peers (Caughy et al., 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1997).

Child Demographic Characteristics

Children's demographic characteristics such as age and gender have also been identified as potential sources of variation in RES messages and practices (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Caughy et al., 2002; Hughes & Chen, 1997, 1999). Findings from previous research suggest that gender has a significant impact on the type(s) and topic(s) of RES messages youth receive from their parents (Bowman & Howard, 1985; McHale et al., 2006; Neblett et al., 2008; Thomas & Speight, 1999). Bowman and Howard (1985) uncovered that whereas male youth are more likely to receive preparation for bias, racial barrier, and egalitarian RES messages, female youth are more likely to receive RES messages that emphasize racial pride. Similarly, Thomas and Speight (1999) found that parents reported transmitting more negatively-valenced RES messages to male youth than female youth. Despite these trends in previous studies, recent media coverage has increased general awareness of police-led killings of unarmed Black women (e.g., Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland, etc.) and as a result, has highlighted the potential value in transmitting similar RES messages to Black female youth. Thus, one contribution of the present study is to focus on both men and women as targets of familial RES messages.

Additional data suggest that the content and type(s) of parental RES messages are determined, in part, by the child(ren)'s age. Research shows that parental RES messages shift based on the child(ren)'s cognitive abilities, personal experience, and perceived maturity (Hughes & Chen, 1997; Hughes & Johnson, 2001; Umana-Taylor & Fine, 2004). In fact, research indicates that parental RES messages tend to become more complex as youth reach early adolescence and begin to engage more independently across a wide range of settings

including school and work (Hughes et al., 2016; Priest et al., 2014; Steinberg & Silk, 2002). Prior research also suggests that the frequency of parental RES messages is impacted by youth's age. For example, Hughes and Chen (1997) found that parents of adolescent children were more likely to transmit race-related messages to their children than parents of younger children. Additionally, McHale et al. (2006) found that mothers reported transmitting more messages intended to prepare their children for bias and discrimination to their older children rather than their younger children. According to Hughes et al. (2016), this trend exists largely because children develop renewed, more nuanced understandings of complex concepts such as race, ethnicity, and inequality.

Parent and Child Race-Related Experiences

In addition to the various parental and child demographic characteristics that predict parents' use of RES practices, both parents' and children's racial experiences uniquely shape the RES process (White-Johnson et al., 2010). According to Coard and Sellers (2005), race-based conversations between parents and children generally occur in response to specific racialized events or experiences rather than in a preplanned fashion. For instance, a study examining Black parents' use of RES messages following the murder of Michael "Mike" Brown, an unarmed teen, revealed that Black parents began to (a) facilitate discussions about race and race-related experiences amongst their children, (b) explicitly advise their children, especially their sons, to avoid potentially dangerous encounters involving police (e.g.,, explicit advice not to engage in protest, etc.), (c) criticize negative and racist stereotypes about Black men's portrayal in the media, and (d) promote individual qualities that will aid their children in being successful in a racist, mainstream society (Threlfall, 2016). Data from a similar study examining the impact that the murder of Trayvon Martin had on Black parents' RES messages revealed a similar trend.

Thomas and Blackmon (2015) found that following the murder of Trayvon Martin, Black parents began to transmit RES messages to their children that outlined specific behavioral guidelines (e.g., what to wear, how to respond to strangers and authority figures, etc.) and emphasized the need to walk alongside others while in public. Further, when asked "if your child were in a similar situation to Trayvon Martin, what would you suggest he/she do?" parents reported that they would provide their child with specific and detailed instructions for navigating the encounter. One parent, for example, outlined the following instructions: "1. Use your cell phone to dial 911 and report that you are being followed or stalked by a suspicious person and give description where possible. 2. Place your cell phone on audio record. 3. By all means do not physically engage your approacher. 4. Let him know that you have called the police and ask if he can verify his position of authority if any. 5. As a last resort, if you're close to home, run to the house as quickly as possible, and run in a zig-zag fashion in case he decides to shoot at you" (p. 83).

In another study that examined the frequency with which Black and White Americans engaged in family-wide discussions about race, racism, and inequality prior to and following the murder of George Floyd, Jr. in 2020, Sullivan et al. (2021) discovered that whereas Black families indicated a significant increase in their discussions about race, racism, and inequality, White families indicated little to no change in their reports of race-based discussions. Additionally, Sullivan et al. (2021) uncovered that following the murder of George Floyd, Jr., Black parents' concern for their child(ren)'s safety increased tremendously whereas White parents reported no changes in their concerns about their child(ren)'s well-being. Research suggests that parents are more inclined to initiate race-based conversations and transmit RES messages when they suspect that their child(ren) may be subjected to a racist or otherwise

discriminatory encounter (Hughes & Johnson, 2001). Consistent with this claim, research also demonstrates that children who report experiencing racial discrimination more frequently also report receiving more RES messages than those who experience racial discrimination less frequently (Neblett et al., 2006). Similarly, Hughes and Johnson (2001) uncovered that children's reports of racial discrimination were linked to parents' use of RES practices such as the use of messages intended to promote barriers between racial groups.

According to White-Johnson et al. (2010), Black parents' own experiences of racial discrimination also uniquely shape the racial socialization process. For example, research demonstrates a strong link between Black parents' experiences of racial discrimination while in the workplace or in the community and their increased transmission of RES messages aimed at promoting mistrust of their White counterparts and preparing their children to undergo and subsequently, cope with future experiences of racial discrimination (Hughes, 2003; Hughes & Chen, 1997). Similarly, parents' childhood experiences of racial discrimination demonstrate a similar effect on parents' use of RES messages. According to Hughes and Chen (1997), the messages parents recall receiving in childhood are predictive of the messages they later convey to their own children. These messages also have implications for the subsequent attitudes and beliefs children hold about their own racial identity and ethnic-group membership (Hughes & Chen, 1997).

Parental Racial Identity Attitudes and Beliefs

Parents' general attitudes and beliefs about racial identity are largely shaped by their own race-related experiences, both those in childhood and adulthood (Branch & Newcombe, 1986; Thomas, 2000; Thomas & Speight, 1999; Thornton, 1997; White-Johnson et al., 2010). For instance, Thomas and Speight (1999) found that whereas Black parents who had a low salience

of race or exhibited anti-Black attitudes were less likely to facilitate race-based conversations with their children, Black parents who demonstrated a strong connection to their racial identity believed that race-based conversations were a central component of their parenting practices. Consistent with this finding, Thornton (1997) found that parents who had positive attitudes about their belonging to a racial group were more likely to transmit messages to their children that are intended to promote racial pride. Similarly, Thomas (2000) found that Black parents who exhibited a strong sense of Black pride were more likely to adopt and subsequently endorse Afrocentric parenting practices. Finally, Branch and Newcombe (1986) found that Black parents who demonstrated strong pro-Black attitudes were more likely to facilitate conversation about race with children as young as four years old.

As demonstrated in prior research, there are a host of factors including parent and child demographics, parental attitudes and beliefs about racial identity, and race-related experiences that influence whether and how parents initiate race-based conversations with Black youth. Yet, knowledge gaps remain in this literature. Previous research on the RES process examines it more broadly, and much less work has been done to examine the specific types of messages that Black young adults, both men, and women, receive about law enforcement. Additionally, a vast majority of existing research on RES messages is in the context of parent-child relationships, and significantly less work has examined RES messages from multiple family sources. Even fewer studies have considered the types of messages about law enforcement that are memorable to Black young adults and hold significance as they navigate a racialized society and face the possibility of repeated race-based interactions with law enforcement officers.

Considering the negative shared history between Black Americans and law enforcement as well as the increasing prevalence of police-led violence against Black men and women, the

specific RES messages that Black young adults receive from family members about law enforcement may play a significant role in determining how they navigate close encounters with police officers in a racialized society.

Racial-Ethnic Socialization and Memorable Messages

The current study utilizes a memorable messages framework for identifying and examining the types of messages Black American young adults recall receiving from family members about law enforcement officers. Memorable messages can be defined as any verbal message an individual recalls for an extended period of time, perceives to have a significant impact on their life, and regards as being particularly useful during difficult, equivocal, or transitional periods in their life (Stohl, 1986).

The memorable messages literature has an extensive history in communication scholarship. Formal research examining the behavioral impact of memorable messages within the communication studies discipline began with Knapp et al. (1981), who defined memorable messages as brief, verbal messages that receivers remember for an extended period of time and regard as impactful over the course of their life. Although research has shown that memorable messages vary in content and occur in many contexts (e.g., health communication, organizational communication, etc.), research demonstrates that memorable messages share several key characteristics (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2016). For instance, the sources of memorable messages are generally older and of higher social status, and thus well-respected by the message receiver (Knapp et al., 1981). Additionally, memorable messages contribute to the receiver's narrative-sense-making; that is, memorable messages contribute to the way(s) in which message receivers evaluate and make sense of their lives and relationships (Koenig-Kellas & Kranstuber-Horstman, 2015). Furthermore, individuals report memorable messages retrospectively

(Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2016). Although memorable messages may incite an immediate reaction, research suggests that memorable messages are often "pulled forward" for sense-making purposes during difficult, equivocal, or transitional periods over the course of one's life (Medved et al., 2006; Stohl, 1986). Considering the potentially life-threatening nature of interactions between Black Americans and law enforcement, close encounters with police officers may represent a particularly difficult period in which Black young adults need to pull forward memorable messages. This characteristic is what allows message receivers to determine the extent to which a message was impactful over the life span (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2016).

Another characteristic of memorable messages is the perceptivity of the message receiver (Knapp et al., 1981). According to Knapp et al. (1981), message receivers often perceive themselves to be the sole target of the message. Thus, when messages are remembered by message receivers, the reasons are often complex and involve the nature of the relationship between the sender and receiver as well as the nature of the message itself (Knapp et al., 1981). Finally, memorable messages often conform to simple rule structures (e.g., "if/then" scenarios), which contribute to their memorability (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2016).

More recent publications within memorable messages scholarship have extended research to consider the ways in which parental RES messages are linked to the attitudes and behaviors individuals exhibit toward members of specific groups (Hosek et al., 2021). For instance, in a study examining memorable hate messages, Hosek et al. (2021) uncovered that the specific content of memorable hate messages had implications for the attitudes and behaviors that college students directed at individuals of a different race or sexuality. This study surveyed college students generally, not Black students, and examined memorable hate messages that spanned a

wide variety of subjects, not law enforcement specifically. Similarly, previous research on memorable messages has examined the extent to which parental RES messages contribute to youth's understanding of racial discrimination across contexts (or general social interactions) (Nuru et al., 2018). For example, in a study examining memorable messages that Costa Rican youth recalled about race, Nuru et al. (2018) found that Costa Rican youth reported having a greater understanding of historical and contemporary acts of racial discrimination and racism as a result of the RES messages they received from their parents. This study looked at Costa Rican youth, not Black youth, and examined memorable messages about racism generally, not specific to law enforcement. Despite these advancements in the existing literature, little research has been done to identify and examine the *specific* and *varied* RES messages Black American young adults receive from family members about law enforcement. Given the recent spike in the number of police-led killings of unarmed Black American citizens, it is imperative to uncover the specific messages Black American young adults recall receiving about law enforcement in childhood and as well as to understand the utility of those messages in emerging adulthood. To investigate this, the following research question was developed:

RQ1: What type(s) of memorable messages do U.S. Black young adults receive about law enforcement?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

The present study qualitatively examined the memorable messages that US Black young adults have received in the past about law enforcement from family members. Upon obtaining IRB approval, data from this study were collected via 13 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Black young adults about memorable messages they have received about law enforcement over their lifespan. As noted above, few communication studies examine the extent to which the RES messages Black young adults receive about law enforcement are memorable and hold significance as they navigate a racialized society. As such, a qualitative inquiry was deemed the most appropriate methodological approach for this study since it is frequently used in exploratory work (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Participants

Participants in this study were required to be able to recall at least one memorable message they have received about law enforcement over their lifespan. Additionally, participants were required to be between 18-25 years old. Participants were a convenience sample of 13 U.S. Black young adults in the Southeastern region who were recruited through network and snowball sampling. A majority of the sample was female (n = 10, 77%), with 23% male (n = 3). Participants ranged in age from 20 to 25 years old in age (M = 21.67, SD = 1.82).

Procedures

Interviews were conducted via Zoom (n = 11) or Face-to-Face (n = 2), depending on the proximity and availability of the participant; saturation was reached during the 10th interview. The average length of a single interview was 38 minutes and ranged from 23 minutes to 72 minutes. To begin, I asked participants to “recall at least one memorable message that you have

received about law enforcement." Followingly, I prompted participants to "provide as many details about the specific message and the larger conversation as possible. Try to remember their exact wording as well. This can be *any* message you've received about law enforcement, positive or negative, and can be from any source." Questions posed during the interview(s) were mostly open-ended in order to give participants the opportunity to provide ample details about instances in which they received a memorable message about law enforcement. Details, such as (1) who was the source of the memorable message, (2) relevant memories about the larger conversation(s), and (3) specific discourse used during the interaction were all gathered from each participant in the study.

Additionally, participants were asked to what extent the memorable message they received about law enforcement shaped or contributed to their general attitudes toward law enforcement. Participants were also asked to what extent the memorable message they received about law enforcement prompted a change in their relationship with the message source. Finally, participants were asked to what extent the memorable message they received about law enforcement impacted the way they communicate with others about law enforcement.

I conducted, audio-recorded, and video-recorded 13 semi-structured interviews independently. In order to analyze the data from these interviews, I took extensive notes and relistened to all 13 interviews in their entirety multiple times. Notes for each interview were in-depth and included direct quotes from participants. All excerpts from the interviews were quoted verbatim and confirmed against their original recording. Upon completion of the notes for each interview, I relistened to the original recording of the full-length interview while looking for, and correcting errors made during the initial note-taking. Followingly, actual participant names and other

potentially identifying information were removed from the data set and replaced with pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to systematically identify, organize, and offer insight into what makes a message about law enforcement memorable. The inductive approach to this analysis places the data at the forefront of the analytical process; as a result, codes and themes are derived directly from the data set, and what emerges from the analysis closely matches the content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). Themes, according to Braun and Clarke (2012), are the product of identifying and describing the patterns of meaning that exist within a data set. Thus, I employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) process inductive approach to data analysis.

Upon taking extensive notes and verifying them against the original recordings of the interviews, I closely read my notes in their entirety in order to gain a general understanding of the data set. Followingly, I read my notes for a second time and began to develop initial codes for memorable messages that U.S. Black young adults reported receiving about law enforcement. Codes developed for these messages identified and provided a shorthand label for aspects of the data that were relevant to the research question(s) (Braun and Clarke, 2012). The next phase of data analysis involved converting codes into themes. Themes, according to Braun and Clake (2012, p. 82), "capture something important about the data in relation to the research question," and "represent some level of patterned response or meaning in the data set." Themes were derived directly from codes developed during the initial phase of data analysis as a result of noticing the repeated use of similar language and phrases within the data. Upon establishing preliminary themes, I revisited the interview transcripts in order to verify the context and

meaning of the reported memorable message(s) about law enforcement. This was done to ensure that the data was not misinterpreted during the coding process. In addition to developing codes and themes, I also began to create memos that detailed the ways in which the themes work in conjunction with one another to tell a story about the data (Braun and Clarke, 2012). These memos included detailed descriptions of the themes and the criteria for the data to be placed within a given theme as well as included exemplars from the data that illustrated the theme (Braun and Clarke, 2012; Lindolf & Taylor, 2011).

Upon completion of the detailed memos, an additional coder was asked to review the data via a process of peer checking (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in order to confirm or dispute the themes generated earlier in the data analysis process. Prior to engaging in peer checking, I provided the additional coder with a detailed rationale and explanations of how and why each theme was developed. Upon completing the peer checking process, this colleague and I met to discuss any feedback regarding the themes developed by the researcher. Our discussion of themes centered around detailing each theme and providing a rationale for how each theme fits within the broader data set. Largely, we agreed on the assigned themes. However, discussion ensued until all themes (and their respective names) were agreed upon.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The research question guiding the present study sought to gain a clearer understanding of the specific and varied type(s) of memorable messages U.S. Black young adults recall receiving about law enforcement from family members. Results from this study reveal that U.S. Black young adults recall receiving two distinct types of memorable messages about law enforcement. Specifically, the results from this study reveal how memorable messages about law enforcement contribute to U.S. Black young adults' strong sense of distrust for law enforcement. Data from this study revealed that U.S. Black young adults recall receiving two distinct type(s) of memorable messages: (1) *preparation for racial profiling* messages and (2) *promotion of skepticism* messages. Although most participants in this study reported receiving either *preparation for racial profiling* messages or *promotion of skepticism* messages, some participants reported receiving *hybrid* messages which included unique message characteristics of both types of messages recalled in this study. In the following sections, I address the research question guiding this study by discussing each theme and subsequently, explaining their embedded meaning(s).

Preparation for Racial Profiling

The most frequently recalled memorable messages by U.S. Black young adults about law enforcement were *preparation for racial profiling* messages. Similar to *preparation for bias* messages (Hughes et al., 2006), *preparation for racial profiling* messages are aimed at promoting awareness of racial bias/discrimination in the context of law enforcement and often contain advice or instructions for navigating [interracial] encounters with police. Among participants in this study, memorable *preparation for racial profiling* messages contained

specific instructions aimed at reducing their perceived threat to law enforcement. Additionally, *preparation for racial profiling* messages were coupled with negative expressions of emotion which, according to participants, contributed to their overall memorability. For example, James shares:

> [...] when Trayvon Martin was murdered back in 2012, I was a freshman in high school. At that time, I had aspirations of studying law and becoming a civil rights attorney so my mom and I watched the news together often. One day there was a live broadcast from the courtroom appearing on the news. On this particular day, [George] Zimmerman's attorneys were showing images of Trayvon Martin that they had gathered from his social media and were using them to "build their case." [...] I remember my mom getting so angry that she turned the TV off and proceeded to make me throw away every single hoodie I owned out of fear that I would be profiled.

According to James, his mother's emotional response is a distinguishing feature of this memorable message: "It happened so suddenly [...] we had been sitting on the couch together like we always did and I mean out of nowhere she turned the TV off then she looked at me and said "we're about to go upstairs to your room and you're about to get rid of all those hoodies in your closet right now!" [...] I don't think I've ever seen her be more serious than she was in that moment." For James, his mother's intense emotional reaction indicated how strongly she felt about the content being expressed in the message. Emotional expression was a common feature of the memorable *preparation for racial profiling* messages reported by participants in this study. For example, Morgan states:

> [...] After seeing the viral footage of the traffic stop involving Sandra Bland and learning about her "mysterious" passing in 2015, my mom was really worried about me driving

> alone. I had just gotten my driver's license and I wanted to drive to my high school's football game with a few friends. When I asked my mom if I could drive to the game, she started crying uncontrollably and told me repeatedly to call her if I ever got pulled over: "If you are ever being stopped by the police, you need to call me! I don't care what the situation is, call me! [...] these days, it is so important to have witnesses and people who can verify what actually happened. If there is no one who can act as a witness to a traffic stop and explain exactly what happened between someone and an officer, anything could happen. Especially if it's a Black man or woman."

According to Morgan, her mother's emotional reaction largely contributes to the memorability of this message: "My mom doesn't cry very often [...] I can count on one hand the number of times I've seen my mom cry in front of me. So, the fact that she broke down the way she did, in front of me, let me know that she was really scared for my life [...] It also let me know that she loved me." In addition to her mother's emotional expression, this participant views this message as memorable because she considers it a pivotal moment in her relationship with her mother. According to Morgan, receiving this message signaled a positive shift in their parent-child relationship in which both parties felt more comfortable enacting vulnerability. Similar to Morgan, other participants who reported receiving *preparation for racial profiling* messages indicated that displays of negative emotions such as sadness or fear (e.g., crying) both signaled the importance of the message and positively contributed to their relationship with the message source. For instance, Sean shares:

> I grew up in Memphis, TN and the MPD [Memphis Police Department] has a reputation of using excessive force—because of this, my parents have always stressed the importance of doing exactly as the officer instructs. I remember one time [...] I was

> driving my date and I to junior prom. This was the first time I had been allowed to drive without one of my parents or my older sister in the car with me. My dad and I were in the kitchen and he was talking to me about driving safely and making sure I was following all the traffic laws. Well, I wasn't really trying to hear him so I kept on saying "ok, ok." I remember he grabbed my hands [and placed the keys inside of them] and looked at me [with tears in his eyes] and said: "If you get pulled over, look forward, keep your hands on the steering wheel, and remain as still until instructed to do otherwise by the officer and if the officer asks you to announce your movement(s), speak loud and clear and move slowly and carefully."

Similar to other participants who reported *preparation for racial profiling* messages, Sean identified his father's emotional state as the primary contributor to the memorability of this message: "[...] I had only ever seen my dad cry one other time and it was when my grandmother [his mother] passed away." According to Sean, witnessing his father cry was a rare occasion. For Sean, crying indicated both the seriousness and the importance of the content being expressed in his father's message. Additionally, it communicated his father's fear(s) about the prevalence of racism in law enforcement.

Among U.S. Black young adults in this study, memorable *preparation for racial profiling* messages contained specific instructions aimed at reducing their perceived threat to law enforcement. Additionally, these messages were coupled with negative expressions of emotion which, according to participants, contributed to their overall memorability. Within this study, a number of *preparation for racial profiling* messages were related to driving. Memorable *preparation for racial profiling* messages recalled in this study suggests that parents utilize *preparation for racial profiling* messages to communicate their concerns about traffic stops.

Promotion of Skepticism

Promotion of skepticism messages emerged as the second most frequently recalled message by U.S. Black young adults about law enforcement. Among U.S. Black young adults in this study, memorable *promotion of skepticism* messages implicitly or explicitly stated that police were not to be trusted. Additionally, memorable *promotion of skepticism* messages were frequently repeated by the message source, which contributed to their memorability. Within this study, some *promotion of skepticism* messages included specific advice or directives on how to behave towards police (e.g. avoid them, limit interactions, etc.). These pieces of advice, however, were broader in nature and functioned more to teach participants that police are untrustworthy rather than providing explicit instructions on how to behave in a traffic stop (e.g., hands on the wheel, move slowly, call me, etc.). For example, Anita shares:

> Growing up, my father would always tell me: "limit your interactions with the police as much as possible but do not actively avoid them so as to not look suspicious [...] keep your head down and refrain from bringing any unnecessary attention to yourself. Remember, they have the power and control to spin the narrative."

According to Anita, this message was a warning she frequently received about the threat that police pose to Black Americans: "My father would warn me about the police all the time before he passed away. He had been saying this to me for as long as I can remember." Other participants in this study who recalled *promotion of skepticism* messages also indicated that *frequency* contributed to the memorability of the message. For instance, Joelle shares:

> My grandmother grew up in the Jim Crow south [...] one thing she always says to me is: "you gotta know your rights when you're dealing with them [the police]. You gotta stay

on top of all of the changes [in policy] cause if you don't, they will manipulate you and take advantage of you [...] knowing your rights can save your life."

According to Joelle, this message along with other messages she frequently receives from her grandmother contribute to her feelings of distrust for law enforcement: "she will literally call me [randomly] and ask: you been readin' up on them laws they been passin' [in congress]?" For Joelle, these messages serve as reminders to read up on and familiarize herself with changes in local, state, and federal policies.

Promotion of skepticism messages also serve as reminders that despite dominant narratives, "we do not live in a post-racial society." For instance, Maya, who recalled a popular hop-hop song played by her father as the source of a memorable *promotion of skepticism* message, attributed a similar meaning to a set of lyrics:

> The first thing that comes to mind is *Jay Z*'s *99 problems*. It's a song my dad used to play every time we were in the car growing up and he would talk to me about what *Jay Z* was describing in the lyrics. In the song, *99 problems,* he [*Jay Z*] is talking about being racially profiled by the police and how they start acting toward you when you get pulled over and you know your rights. How they start to wonder "*how is it or why is that this [Black] person knows the law?"* In it [the song], he says:
>
> *"The year is '94, in my trunk is raw*
>
> *In my rearview mirror is the motherfuckin' law*
>
> *Got two choices, y'all: pull over the car or*
>
> *Bounce on the devil, put the pedal to the floor*
>
> *And I ain't tryin' to see no highway chase with Jake*
>
> *Plus I got a few dollars, I can fight the case*

So I pull over to the side of the road

I heard, "Son, do you know why I'm stopping you for?"

'Cause I'm young and I'm black and my hat's real low?"

Do I look like a mind reader, sir? I don't know

Am I under arrest or should I guess some more?

"Well, you was doing 55 in a 54

License and registration and step out of the car

Are you carrying a weapon on you? I know a lot of you are."

I ain't steppin' out of shit, all my paper's legit

"Well, do you mind if I look around the car a little bit?"

Well, my glove compartment is locked, so is the trunk in the back

And I know my rights, so you gon' need a warrant for that

"Aren't you sharp as a tack?

You some type of lawyer or something?

Somebody important or something?"

Well, I ain't passed the bar, but I know a little bit

Enough that you won't illegally search my shit

"Well, we'll see how smart you are when the K9 come!"

Jay Z's 99 Problems is one of the earliest messages Maya recalls receiving about law enforcement. For Maya, these lyrics are significant because they describe the common lived experience(s) of Black Americans and highlight the importance of "knowing your rights" as a [Black] American citizen. According to Maya, *Jay Z's* description of racial profiling served as a springboard for more in-depth discussions with her father about the social significance of race,

the prevalence of racism in law enforcement, and mistrust of the police. Maya's recollection of these song lyrics and their connection to broader discussions of race with her father illustrate the effectiveness of the "parental mediation" strategies as described by Beyens et al. (2019) and provide evidence that mediation is used to show youth which aspects of content are "important, useful, and worthy of attention" (Nathanson, 1999, p. 128).

Within this study, U.S. Black young adults who recalled memorable *promotion of skepticism* messages indicated that receiving *promotion of skepticism* messages (a) facilitated/contributed to their distrust of law enforcement and (b) motivated them to maintain social distance in public. For instance, Anita disclosed: "My father had negative experiences with the police in the past and he was intentional about sharing those experiences with me. So, I don't deal with the police. Even when I have to, I try to speak as little as possible and keep the interaction positive." Additionally, these messages urged participants to become knowledgeable of the ongoing changes in policy at the local, state, and federal levels. For example, Joelle revealed: "Believe it or not, I spend a lot of time looking at changes in policy now. Now, when my grandmother calls, we will spend hours on end discussing policy. No matter how big or small the change is, we'll discuss it because even the slightest changes in policy have implications for us [Black people]." Across the data set, U.S. Black young adults indicated that *promotion of skepticism* messages were salient to their understanding of the prevalence of racial discrimination in law enforcement and contributed to their feelings of anxiety when near police. For example, Maya revealed: "Hearing *Jay Z* talk about being racially profiled in song and having my father share stories about his personal experiences with the police [while listening to the song] made me fear the police. Even as a child, I knew that racial discrimination in law enforcement was unique to Black people. Even though I didn't have any direct experience with the police, I knew

that I should fear them." Similarly, Anita shared: "I feel anxious around the police [...] When I'm near them [the police], I'm on high alert. I'm hyper-aware of the actions I take and feel the need to keep a close eye on them [the police] in public."

Hybrid Messages

As previously mentioned, *hybrid messages* encompassed both *preparation for racial profiling* and *promotion of skepticism* messages. Within this study, *hybrid messages* had two primary functions: (a) to outline specific instructions on how to engage with law enforcement in general and (b) to facilitate mistrust of police officers. For instance, Andre shared the following message:

My dad always tells me: "Never argue with them [the police] or seem irritated by their presence. Always be polite and respectful [...] always "yes, officer" or "no, officer" and to never attempt to resist arrest [...] if they think that you don't respect them, it can cost you your life."

The message reported above encompasses unique message qualities associated with both *preparation for racial profiling* and *promotion of skepticism* messages. Whereas the first-half of the message functions as a *preparation for racial profiling* message by providing Andre with specific instructions aimed at reducing his perceived threat to law enforcement (e.g. "never argue with them [the police] or seem irritated by their presence," "always be polite and respectful," "always say 'yes, officer' or 'no, officer' and to never attempt to resist arrest.") ; The latter-half of the message functions as a *promotion of skepticism* message by implicitly stating that the police are not to be trusted (e.g. "If they think you don't respect them, it can cost you your life.").

According to Andre, this is a message that he reflects on regularly and contributes to his fears about potential encounters with police. For example, Andre revealed: "I think about it [the message] every time the cops are brought up in conversation or when I see them in public. I

especially think about it when I hear sirens or if a cop is behind me for an extended period of time." For Andre, this message is a 'warning' from his father to approach situations involving law enforcement with caution and is memorable because it is intended to increase his odds of surviving interactions with police. For instance, Andre disclosed: "My dad warns me about the police often. It used to annoy me when I was younger but now, as an adult, I understand that he's just trying to save my life."

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the type(s) of memorable messages that U.S. Black young adults recall receiving about law enforcement from family members. Guided by Knapp et al.'s (1981) memorable messages framework, this study identified two distinct types of memorable messages that U.S. Black young adults recall about law enforcement: (1) *preparation for racial profiling* messages and (2) *promotion of skepticism* messages. Results from this study suggest that these messages contribute to U.S. Black young adults' understanding of racism in the context of law enforcement. These findings extend research on RES messages and further scholarly understanding of the influential nature of memorable messages. Theoretical implications and implications for future research are discussed below.

Theoretical Implications

Previous research on RES messages demonstrates that the quantity of RES messages outlining specific instructions for navigating encounters with law enforcement increase following viral killings of unarmed Black Americans (Thomas & Blackmon, 2015). Consistent with these findings, results from the current study showcase the way(s) in which RES messages transmitted by family members are influenced by and related to the viral deaths of unarmed Black Americans displayed in media. For example, some participants who recalled memorable *preparation for racial profiling* messages indicated that the message source made references to viral killings of unarmed Black Americans within the conversation. Namely, these sources referenced the killings of Trayvon Martin and Sandra Bland. Previous research on RES messages also revealed that the specific type(s) of RES messages Black Americans receive vary based on gender (Nuru & Soliz, 2014). Consistent with these findings, results from the current study

suggest that family members' use of references to viral killings of unarmed Black Americans is influenced by the gender/sex of the message receiver. For instance, there was a *mirroring effect* between the gender/sex of participants who recalled memorable *preparation for racial profiling* messages and the gender/sex of the unarmed Black American referenced by the message source during the exchange (e.g., a female participant recalled a message about Sandra Bland). Future research could examine the extent to which the target of RES messages is related to the gender of victims of police brutality shown in the media.

The present study identified two features of RES messages that contribute to their memorability: emotional expression and frequency. Results indicated that emotional expression primarily contributed to the memorability of *preparation for racial profiling* messages. According to Nabi (2002), expressions of negative emotions such as sadness or fear may act as heuristic cues that prompt message receivers to perform problem-solving or problem-avoiding actions. Given that the *preparation for racial profiling* messages within this study often contained advice or specific instructions for how to navigate encounters with law enforcement, it could be that recipients of these messages felt inclined to adhere to them due to the negative emotional expression of the source at the time of delivering the message. Results also suggested the frequency with which participants received *promotion of skepticism* messages contributed to their ability to recall them with ease. For instance, U.S. Black young adults who recalled memorable *promotion of skepticism* messages reported receiving the same, recurring message repeatedly. Consistent with prior research, this provides evidence that RES messages serve as useful resources for preparing Black Americans to navigate racialized experiences and respond to issues of prejudice and discrimination (Hughes et al., 2006, 2008; Minniear et al., 2019). Previous research indicates that memorable messages are frequently called upon during times of

uncertainty (Dunleavy & Yang, 2015) and are critical in building resilience (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003). Thus, it is important to note that the informative nature of both *preparation for racial profiling* and *promotion of skepticism* messages within this study could have also contributed to their memorability. Consistent with prior research, this provides evidence that memorable messages are especially useful during challenging times (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2012).

Prior research on RES messages indicates that *promotion of mistrust* messages may emphasize the probability of unfair treatment based on racial identity (Hughes et al., 2006, 2008). Consistent with these findings, results from the current study reveal that memorable *promotion of skepticism* messages urged U.S. Black young adults to anticipate unfair treatment on the basis of their skin color. For example, participants were reminded that encounters involving law enforcement could result in their death. Among participants in this study, U.S. Black young adults who recalled memorable *promotion of skepticism* messages indicated that although these messages are intended to increase their awareness of racial discrimination within law enforcement, these messages have the potential to exacerbate negative feelings such as fear or anxiety when in the presence of law enforcement. Future research could aim to examine the extent to which U.S. Black young adults' feelings of fear and anxiety are directly linked to the memorable RES messages they receive about law enforcement. The prevalence of *promotion of skepticism* messages within this study provided further evidence of the strong and deeply-rooted sense of institutional distrust Black Americans possess for law enforcement.

Additional results from the current study indicated that U.S. Black young adults internalize the memorable *promotion of skepticism* messages they receive about law enforcement from family members and use them to inform their own thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes toward police regardless of whether or not they have had personal experiences with law enforcement.

Prior research indicates that memorable messages may be negatively valenced and contain hate speech (Hosek et al., 2021). Thus, future research could examine the extent to which messages about law enforcement containing hate speech are viewed as memorable and significant by Black young adults.

The present study also advanced the literature on RES messages by considering message sources beyond parents or parental figures. Much of the existing research on RES focuses on parents as the primary transmitters of RES messages to Black youth (see e.g., Hughes et al., 2006, 2008; Peck et al., 2014; Rodriguez et al., 2009; Stein et al., 2018). In the present study, participants identified multiple family members as sources of RES messages, including parents and grandparents. This suggests that RES occurs throughout the family system. Consistent with previous research on *promotion of mistrust* messages (Hughes et al., 2006, 2008), these findings provide additional evidence that Black Americans' strong sense of institutional distrust is passed down from one generation to another (Sharp & Johnson, 2009).

Finally, results from the current study provide evidence that parents utilize depictions and recordings of prominent figures in the media to socialize their children about race in the context of law enforcement. More specifically, these results provide evidence that songs have the potential to function as mechanisms for initiating race-based conversations. Additionally, these results add to existing research about how song lyrics are incorporated into interpersonal interactions (Marwick & boyd, 2014). Although song lyrics were infrequently reported as containing memorable messages, one participant in this study attributed significant meaning to a *promotion of skepticism* message she received while listening to a song played by her father. This finding suggests that music has the potential to facilitate and contribute to Black Americans' understanding of race relations in the context of law enforcement. Additionally, this finding

suggests that messages about law enforcement embedded in popular culture have implications for the type of conversations Black American families engage in. Thus, future research should examine the extent to which messages about law enforcement embedded in popular culture (e.g. in films, novels, music, etc.) are considered meaningful and significant to U.S. Black young adults.

Limitations and Conclusion

Several limitations must be considered alongside the research findings. One limitation of this study is the demographic make-up of participants. A majority of participants in this study self-identified as female (n = 10, 77%). As a result, findings from this study substantially lack male perspectives about memorable messages related to law enforcement. Future research in this area should seek more male perspectives. A second limitation of this study is the researcher's use of language during the data collection phase. When conducting interviews, the researcher used the term "law enforcement" instead of "police" when prompting participants to recall and reflect on memorable messages. It is possible that the researcher's use of formal titles such as "law enforcement" and "law enforcement officers" created a disconnect between the research and participants. In their responses, participants used the term "police" to refer to law enforcement officers. Using language that mirrors that of the participants could have contributed to rapport-building and led to more in-depth responses from participants. A third limitation of this study is that during the data collection phase, participants struggled to think about sources of memorable messages outside of the family. Thus, future research should introduce additional prompts that will encourage participants to recall messages from various sources. A fourth limitation of this study is that a majority of the interviews were conducted via Zoom. This format limited the amount of rich, non-verbal information the researcher could gather from participants.

Additionally, this format could have potentially impeded the rapport between the interviewer and the participant and resulted in the participant providing less detailed responses. Another limitation of this study is the sensitivity surrounding the subject at large. Police brutality remains a sensitive subject for U.S. Black young adults as the number of Black Americans killed by law enforcement continues to climb. As a result, it is possible that participants experienced psychological discomfort while participating in the interview which could have possibly limited their willingness to be open and honest about the extent to which these memorable messages contributed to their thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes towards police. Future research might employ a different methodology to collect data, such as a diary method, to complement the findings of the current study. Another limitation of this study is its limited sample size. Hence, future research should seek to recruit a greater number of participants in an effort to advance these findings. A final limitation of this study is that the researcher reached saturation after the 10th interview.

The memorable messages included in this analysis reveal important information about the way(s) in which Black young adults are socialized to engage with and conceptualize law enforcement. While each theme provided evidence of participants' use of memorable messages to make sense of racism within law enforcement, each theme pointed to consistent patterns of racial socialization across Black American families. To this end, findings from this study reveal common trends in the type(s) of memorable messages family members transmit to Black young adults about law enforcement. The results of this study provide scholarly and practical contributions. First, results from this study contribute to ongoing conversations about the prevalence of police brutality. Second, these results contribute to scholarly understanding of the role of communication in socializing Black young adults to engage with and conceptualize law

enforcement. Finally, these results foster a greater understanding of the growing tensions between Black Americans and police.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Rapport Building / Demographics

· Tell me a little bit about yourself (e.g., What job do you have? Where are you from? What is your family like?)

· How did you hear about the study?

· Why did you decide to participate in this study?

· How old are you?

· What gender do you identify with?

· What is your sexual orientation?

· What is your ethnicity?

· What is your current relationship status?

Family Communication (Broadly)

- What type(s) of conversations do you typically engage in with your family members?
- Would you consider your family to be one that is open to engaging in a wide variety of conversations? Even conversations about 'taboo' or 'controversial' topics such as race and racism?

Familial Racial Identity Attitudes and Beliefs (Parental Racial Attitudes and Beliefs)

- Could you please begin by describing your family's general attitudes and beliefs about race?
- Generally, how does your family talk about racial identity? Positively? Negatively? Do they express indifference?

- In your opinion, would you say that your family demonstrates a strong connection to their racial identity?
- Does your family often share messages with you that promote racial pride? If so, could you provide an example.

Race, Racism, and Family Communication (Parent + Child Race Related Experiences)

- How frequently does your family engage in conversations about race? racism?
- Generally, in what context does your family engage in conversations about race + racism?
- What type of event(s) or occurrence(s) generally spark conversations about race + racism in your family? In other words, how do conversations about race + racism arise in your family?
- Can you think of a specific event and/or occurrence that sparked a conversation about race + racism in your family?
- When engaging in conversations about race + racism in your family, how frequently do conversations about law enforcement arise?

Law Enforcement and Family Communication

- Generally, how does your family communicate about law enforcement? Positively or negatively?
- What general attitudes or feelings do members of your family have and express about law enforcement?
- In your own words, how would you describe your family's attitudes toward law enforcement?
- Would you say that you share similar attitudes toward law enforcement as your family

members? If so, in what ways?

- If at all, how has recent media coverage highlighting the killing of countless unarmed Black Americans affected conversations about law enforcement in your family?
- If at all, how have notable police-led killings such as the murder of George Floyd, Jr. or Breonna Taylor affected or shaped conversations about race, racism, and law enforcement in your family?

Memorable Messages about Law Enforcement

- Can you recall at least one specific message that you received from a family member about law enforcement?
- What exactly was this message?
- What meaning do you assign to this message? In other words, what does this message mean to you?
- Of the many messages you've received about race, racism, and law enforcement, what makes this message stick out to you?
- What family member was the source of this message?
- What is your relation to this family member? (In other words, who is this family member?)
- Tell me about this family member. What is this family member like? What role does this family member play in your life? How do you feel about the role this family member plays in your life? How do you feel about this family member as a person?
- Describe the nature and quality of your relationship with this family member.

VITA

Born and raised in Tennessee, Max Davenport is a native of Knoxville, TN. Upon graduating from Austin-East Magnet High School, he attended the University of Tennessee and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication Studies. While completing his undergraduate degree, he enrolled in the CMST honors program which fueled his desire to attend graduate school. Following his undergraduate degree, he chose to return to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville to pursue a Master of Science in Communication and Information with a concentration in Communication Studies. His research interests include family communication and racial-ethnic socialization practices. Following graduation, he will begin a career in Public Relations with a PR agency based in Washington, DC. He is incredibly grateful for the overwhelming amount of support he's received from faculty as well as his academic advisor and family throughout his tenure as a student at UTK.