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# First-Line Police Supervisors' Utilization of Criminal Justice Higher Education

Dennis George Hippert

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# First-Line Police Supervisors' Utilization of Criminal Justice Higher Education


by  
Dennis G. Hippert, Jr.

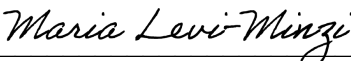
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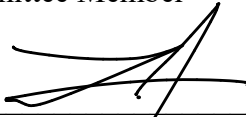
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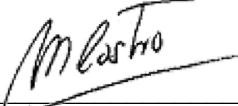
## Approval Page

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## Statement of Original Work

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## **Abstract**

First-Line Police Supervisors' Utilization of Criminal Justice Higher Education. Dennis G. Hippert, Jr., 2023: Dissertation, Nova Southeastern University, Abraham S. Fischler College of Education, School of Criminal Justice. Descriptors: Police Supervision, Higher Education, Criminal Justice, Qualitative

A first-line police supervisor holds a large influence over street-level police officer behavior (Ingram, et al., 2014), but little consistency exists between police agencies regarding the minimum educational requirements necessary to successfully perform the functions of a first-line police supervisor. This study explored the experiences of criminal justice degree holding first-line police supervisors in using the content of their college curriculum to guide street-level officers in acceptable use of force practices, professional communication with the public, and discretionary decision-making. Employing a grounded theory method of inquiry with a constructivist approach, this study utilized semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to examine the ways in which criminal justice academia is translated into practice to address these outcomes of police/citizen contacts.

The results suggested that first-line police supervisors with criminal justice-focused college degrees find practical value of their degrees toward their ability to form and maintain influential relationships with their subordinates, understand and interpret how the activities of their subordinates affect whole communities, and assist their subordinates when engaging in complex decision-making. This study adds to the literature surrounding potential benefits of higher education in policing, specifically at the first-line supervisor level and describes the benefits of college education as a minimum requirement for supervisory roles. Recommendations for future research are included.

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

### **Nature of the Research Problem**

The police shooting of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky and the death of George Floyd while being restrained by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota has permeated public concern and media attention since 2020. Although judgements regarding the appropriateness of these uses of police force were the primary issue of scrutiny, these incidents also served as a catalyst for public concern related to nearly every aspect of routine law enforcement operations. Citizens previously concerned with police effectiveness and efficiency in crime control and crime reduction began to weigh their concerns against their impressions of police ethics and morality, demanding the traditional role of the police remain steadfast while firmly based in a community focus with police priorities aligned with those of the general public.

The public's intent to see their policing conducted with emphasis in concepts of procedural justice and the insistence for immediate change disregards the history of police priorities and decision-making. The values, culture, and priorities in goal setting held by police policymakers and practitioners was formed over decades of direction and influence outside of the agencies, themselves. Crime and crime control has widely been politicized in the United States for over 60 years. The Democratic and Republican Parties have each taken publicized stances against crime and criminals when public opinion and outcry indicated the issue amounted to votes, with both parties converging in the 1990s with "tough on crime" rhetoric and policies (Brown & Silver, 2022).

This push by elected officials to emphasize crime control was viewed as an edict to adopt same or similar priorities by police administrators, either directly by elected sheriffs concerned with voter opinion in their own political races, or indirectly by police chiefs answering to



municipal politicians. The cost of failing to adopt tough on crime attitudes and policies was simply too high, as those sheriffs and chiefs believed their jobs were dependent on it.

Simply put, police were expected to “do something” about the crime incidents politicians and communities were concerned and vocal about. The need to show the public action in crime fighting resulted in an operational emphasis on quantities of arrests made by law enforcement agencies, evidenced in an increase in incarceration rate from 130 per 100,000 citizens in 1980 to 429 per 100,000 citizens in the year 2000 (Schoenfeld, 2012).

In the years since, entire generations of police officers, supervisors, and administrators have entered public service, promoted through the ranks, and retired having only known policing and police priorities based in arrest statistics. Out of the continued emphasis in crime control pushed by politicians arose the “warrior mentality” in which police were groomed to believe they, the intended peacekeepers, were in fact at war with the members of the communities they serve. Police decision makers began to view their neighborhoods and beats as their war zones and in response, armed their agencies in preparation for battle with armored vehicles and other military surplus gear, while adopting a mentality that citizen rights, respectful and protective treatment towards their communities, and adherence to Constitutionally prohibited practices should take a backseat to placing citizens under arrest (Balko, 2013).

Police recruits and students intending to enter the field learn to adopt an “us versus them” mentality at an early stage in their career. Boivin et al. (2020) evaluated the opinions of pre-service policing students and found they have an increased positive opinion of the police when compared to the general public (which is not alone surprising considering this is the line of work they have recently chosen to undertake), and a significantly more favorable opinion towards the police using force on citizens. Perhaps more alarmingly, those recruits acknowledge themselves

as having a different opinion of police and policing when compared to the public, indicating a dissociation from the overall population from the earliest point in their training.

Experienced police administrators understand the importance of community relations and communication with citizens and local stakeholders in crafting an agency's mission and goals. Police agencies disregarding the input of the community lose legitimacy resulting in reduced public cooperation (Cook, 2015). Setting the direction and priorities of the department is perhaps the most important task of a police executive; however, the best possible mission in accordance with the desired outcomes of the community means nothing if the officers conducting the daily necessary police work are misinformed of the priorities, or worse yet, not informed at all. The para-military command structure of American police departments delegates the communication, oversight, and reinforcement of the agency's ideals from the top down. The communication to the street-level officers who are the most visible and most likely to contact the public, is the responsibility of the department's first-line supervisors. In most cases, police agencies classify the first-line supervisor with the rank and title of sergeant.

Nearly 18,000 individual police agencies operate within the United States. These agencies vary greatly in determining the minimum acceptable qualifications necessary to assign personnel to first-line supervisor positions. Some jurisdictions have statewide regulations regarding police officer education. For example, police officers in Wisconsin must complete a minimum of 60 college credits within five years of attaining full time law enforcement employment or risk decertification (Wisconsin State Legislature, 2001). The State of Nevada, 2000 miles west, has no such requirement regarding college credit, requiring only a high school diploma or equivalency for officer level employment (State of Nevada, 2012).

Neither of these examples offers any guidance for educational requirements for supervisory officers, contributing to a wide range of minimum standards left entirely to departmental preference. The two municipal police departments, county sheriff's office, and highway patrol department responsible for policing Washoe County, Nevada perfectly illustrate the discrepancy. Although these four organizations work shoulder to shoulder, many times supervising and directing one another's personnel during tactical operations, the qualifications for attaining those positions hold little similarity.

The Nevada Department of Public Safety, which houses the Nevada Highway Patrol, requires only three years of professional experience as a street-level officer with the agency to be eligible to apply for promotion to the sergeant rank (State of Nevada, 2009). The Reno (Nevada) Police Department lists the minimum requirement for police sergeant as five years of professional experience and a high school diploma or GED (City of Reno, 2019). The Washoe County Sheriff's Office, also in Reno, Nevada, lists eligibility requirements for sergeant promotion as four years of professional experience along with possession of a specific professional certificate issued by the Nevada Police Officer's Standards and Training (Washoe County, 2019), the requirements of which include satisfying varying combinations of higher education credits, college credits, and years of professional experience (State of Nevada, 2013).

Widening the focus nationwide further highlights the lack of consistency among police agencies in minimum acceptable requirements for their first-line supervisors. Variances in the level of experience and education required of a police officer prior to promotion do not have any obvious alignment with the makeup of the agency. The Baltimore Police Department, described as the eighth largest police department in the United States, requires the same high school equivalency of its sergeants as it does its officers (Baltimore Police Department, 2022). An

identical high school diploma is needed for promotion among the 25 commissioned officers in the Collinsville Police Department in Illinois (K. Jackson, personal communication, August 30, 2022). A minimum of an associate degree is required of the 26 officers in the Auburndale Police Department in Florida (Auburndale Police Department, 2018) and the 110 officers of the Joplin Police Department in Missouri (City of Joplin Missouri, 2021).

Municipal police agencies may have a higher education requirement, such as the Charleston Police Department in South Carolina (Charleston Police Department, n.d.), or not, such as the Louisville Metropolitan Police Department in Kentucky (D. Allen, personal communication, August 9, 2022). The same contrast can be found in county level law enforcement, such as the bachelor's degree required at the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office in Florida (Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, 2022) or the associate degree required at the Ramsey County Sheriff's Office in Minnesota (Ramsey County Sheriff's Office, 2022), compared to the afore mentioned Washoe County Sheriff's Office in Nevada requiring no more than high school equivalency.

Among agencies requiring a college degree, no designation is made regarding the appropriate educational focus or course of study. Typically, students interested in a career in law enforcement are steered toward a criminal justice focused degree. Law enforcement practitioners holding criminal justice degrees have generally positive views of the role of their education in preparing them for their career, but this positive view is shared by their peers who hold degrees in other fields (Carlan, 2007). Over 650 schools confer criminal justice degrees, with more than 60,000 degrees awarded annually (Sloan & Buchwalter, 2017), but little is known about the experience of police leadership in using this education in the course of their

profession, specifically which areas of criminal justice curriculum are useful in guiding their professional decision-making and which are not.

As communities' demands for reassessing and updating the role of police in society persist, police supervisors are challenged to adequately process changing metrics of success and communicate these new expectations to street-level officers. Previous research indicates the general value of higher education, not only toward increasing intelligence quotient, but in flexibly adapting to changing goals, recalling information, and problem solving in unique situations (Guerra-Carrillo et al., 2017). The educational experiences of street-level officers have been evaluated against the officers' decision making in using force and making arrests (Rydberg & Terrill, 2010), as well as the frequency of allegations of misconduct (Manis et al., 2008). The first-line supervisor's influence on street-level police officer behaviors in these areas is also well-established (Engel, 2000; Engel & Worden, 2003; Ingram et al., 2014). However, little is known about what education and experiences are most influential in first-line supervisors' guidance and direction toward street-level officers' use of force, interaction with citizens, and low-level discretionary arrest decisions.

Although the outcomes associated with higher education match the expectations placed by the public upon the police in general and the expectations police administrators place upon first-line supervisors there is little understanding of how the content of criminal justice higher education programs is utilized in practice by first-line police supervisors.

### **Background and Significance**

Police executives currently have no evidence-based guidance when determining the minimum qualifications for selecting their first-line supervisors. Without such established best practices, decisions in minimum qualifications made while recruiting and selecting first-line

supervisors are easily viewed as arbitrary and capricious by street-level officers considering promotion. A police chief or sheriff faces this concern to a greater degree when any attempt is made to modify the qualifications without sufficient evidence supporting the decision. The result is an overreliance upon departmental tradition.

In contrast, understanding the influence of criminal justice education in first-line police supervisor practical experience aids administrators in decisions regarding the necessity of such a degree when considering their agency's promotional requirements. Additional benefit exists in the ability of officers considering promotion to understand what a criminal justice higher education will and will not do in preparing them for the role. In response to high profile police use of force, many media and community outlets decried state licensure agencies over the standard for cosmetologists and barbers requiring more pre-service training than police officers (BeMiller, 2020). While this claim has varying validity based upon jurisdiction, devising evidence-based standards for police employment addresses community concerns regarding standards of education.

Police agencies carry the expectation of improving community health and welfare by reducing social harms through a variety of means which extend much further than the historical role of identifying, apprehending, and housing criminal suspects. Communities have growing concerns regarding arresting citizens for minor crimes when officers had been allowed the discretion to resolve this situation through other methods. Over reliance on arrest as the primary method to resolve minor incidents results in decreased community/police relations (Bronstein, 2015). The willingness of a street-level officer to engage in community-based resolutions falling short of arrest, even if the resolution maintains an element of criminal prosecution (such as a

citation in lieu of arrest or a court summons), represents modern philosophies of the current role of police in society.

Citizens are concerned not only with criminal prosecutions but also with the professional manner in which police officers conduct their business (Liu & Nir, 2021). Inappropriate, unethical, and unprofessional behavior by street-level officers damages community/police relations and is commonly documented through formal citizen complaints. Modern police agencies are equally concerned with the attitudes and communications of their street-level officers when interacting with the public as with any other performance metric.

### **Barriers and Issues**

The primary barrier to this study was the participants' willingness to discuss potentially sensitive information regarding their own supervisory performance and the work performance of their subordinates and peers. Police personnel are frequently distrustful of sharing information regarding the operation of their agency with outsiders. This barrier was overcome through emphasizing the assured confidentiality of the data and reporting of the findings. Participants were instructed that they can refuse to answer any questions they are not comfortable with and that their decision to participate in this study would not impact their position or standing with their employing agency.

Potential bias exists in this study as the researcher meets the educational level in the inclusion criteria and has previously held the position of first-line police supervisor. The personal experience for the researcher in the precise areas this study attempts to evaluate and document created a unique point of view from the researcher. Special care was needed to allow themes related to the research questions to emerge naturally and without the influence of the researcher. Additionally, the same emphasis was needed during coding to ensure no bias was

introduced during this phase. A grounded theory research method with a constructivist approach was used to ensure the analysis and results of this study were drawn directly from responses of the participants, while consistently considering the previous experience and potential bias of the researcher. This approach, along with considerable communication with the committee overseeing this study, was used to limit the amount of bias introduced into the analysis by the researcher.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative grounded theory study was to understand the experiences of first-line police supervisors in leading and managing street-level police officers during calls for police reform. Specifically, it examined how they use their knowledge gained from a criminal justice college degree program in guiding and directing street-level officers' use of force, interaction with citizens, and low-level discretionary arrest decisions. The results described themes concerning the perceived usefulness of criminal justice degree programs in preparing police leadership for change management.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Discretionary arrest:* The police officer's action of placing a suspected offender under arrest for a minor crime when lesser possible resolutions (a court summons, citation, verbal warning, etc.) were legal and within policy.

*Platoon:* A small division of a police department grouped together as a result of common administrative factors, such as days of the week assigned, shift hours, geographical responsibility, or supervisor in common.

*Sergeant:* The typical rank of the police first-line supervisor. Within the police agencies addressed in this study, the sergeant supervises the activity of the street-level police officer by



providing daily guidance, mentoring, and minor correction. The sergeant determines daily deployments, work assignments, and short-term goals and priorities for the platoon as a whole and the individual officers within it. The sergeant communicates directives and policy decisions received from the administration to the street-level police officers and is responsible for interpreting how large-scale policy effects the normal duties of the officers. The sergeant is responsible for preliminary disciplinary actions taken against the police officers.

*Street-level officer:* The police personnel responsible for visible community patrol, responding to citizen calls for service, deploying as assigned in tactical law enforcement situations, issuing citations, and effecting arrests.

*Use of Force:* The officer's use of physical contact, with weapons or otherwise, to compel the actions of an uncooperative subject.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

Police agencies worldwide have differing ideas regarding the level and nature of education necessary for effective first-line police supervision. Law enforcement agencies generally follow a pattern of departmental culture and tradition when evaluating candidates for promotion to first-line supervisor positions with little guidance from established best practices based in evidence. Any combination of formal education, specific educational focus, and practical experience may be used to set minimum qualifications for supervisory roles. The goal of this research project is to evaluate how first-line police supervisors who have obtained a criminal justice focused college degree utilize the content of their education when guiding and instructing the officers under their supervision in acceptable use of force practices, the expectations regarding professional and courteous interactions with citizens, and decision making when resolving low-level criminal incidents where the officer is allowed a great deal of discretion.

Overall, research concerning police supervisor education is minimal. Research tends to focus upon street-level officer formal education and its outcomes; however, a growing body of literature indicates the outcomes of street-level police officer behavior are influenced by the traits and behaviors of their supervisors. This literature review will outline the existing research regarding the influential relationship between first-line police supervisors and street-level police officers along with the effects of higher education on policing in general.

Law enforcement agencies regularly evaluate the quality of police officer performance through measures of use of force frequency, arrest statistics, and quality of citizen interactions (often measured only through negative interactions manifested through citizen complaints against the officer). These outcomes may appear in annual performance reviews as well as

informal counseling and motivation sessions between the first-line supervisor and the street-level officer. This literature review will focus on these three areas as police outcome measures: use of force, the factors which precede citizen complaints, and low-level discretionary arrest decision making.

### **Police Use of Force**

Research shows the decision to use physical force during the course of police work and the level to which that force is used varies dependent upon numerous factors. Studies regarding the correlates of police officer use of force decision making generally focuses on four areas: encounter characteristics, officers characteristics, suspect characteristics, and community characteristics (Bolger, 2015). Bolger found encounter characteristics, including the nature and seriousness of the criminal offense, whether the suspect was armed, the level of resistance offered by a suspect, and suspect characteristics, including gender, race, and age of the suspect, are significantly more likely to influence street-level officer use of force than the demographics of the officer or the nature of the community.

In this study, Bolger (2015) identified a subject in possession of a weapon during a police/citizen encounter as the most significant factor correlating to the police officer using force against a citizen. This factor should be of no surprise, as the presence of a weapon is emphasized during police training in acceptable use of force practices. Suspects that were arrested were 4.34 times more likely to have force used against them as compared to citizen contacts where the officer chose some other method of resolution, representing a close correlational relationship between these two metrics of police contact outcomes.

Additional research shows the behavior and level of resistance received from a citizen during a police contact to be the most significant factor in a street-level officer's use of force

decision making (Cojean et al., 2020). Other less important factors influence the officer's decisions in using force, such as officer and citizen demographics, the officer's possession intermediate weapons (such as electric energy weapons), and departmental policies and expectations.

Police officer education level has shown to be a significant factor in use of force decisions. Utilizing data from Indianapolis, Indiana and St. Petersburg, Florida, Rydberg and Terrill (2010) identified the educational experiences of police officers significantly correlated to the frequency of using force. This study grouped subjects into categories of high school education only, some college, and bachelor's degree completion to determine if any group displayed differences in use of force frequency and decisions to search and/or arrest subjects during citizen contacts. Officer education did not influence search or arrest decisions; however, officers with only high school education were significantly more likely to use force than those with some college or a bachelor's degree.

Higher education is also linked to street-level officer theoretical attitudes towards excessive force and abuse of authority along with objective behavioral outcomes. Research shows street-level officers with college degrees are less tolerant of excessive force and abuse of authority from their peers and from the criminal justice industry in general as compared to street-level officers holding only a high school diploma (Telep, 2011). Officers with a bachelor's degree were less tolerant of these digressions than officers with an associate degree. Although this study showed a positive impact from higher education on attitudes surrounding appropriate use of force, the effect was not large enough to justify increasing police officer educational standards to satisfy this purpose.

Police use of force can be influenced in both frequency and severity by the educational and training experiences of the first-line supervisor (Lim & Lee, 2015). In a study of officer use of force practices in an urban Texas police department, the highest level of force used was significantly lower when the officer's supervisor possessed a bachelor's degree or higher and had attended a training course specific to the legalities of use of force.

A limitation of this study was the categorization of the supervisor's education level into only one of two conditions: having achieved a four-year bachelor's degree or not. Although it would have been beneficial to divide study participants into additional groups, such as high school only, some college, and associate degree, the authors were limited in this capacity because over 90 percent of the department's supervisors held an associate degree; therefore, separating the groups in this manner would have created too great a disparity in group sizes. Additionally, supervisor attendance in the use of force training appeared to have a greater influence on the practices of the street-level officers, however the content of this training was not available to the researchers and therefore not evaluated past the basic criterion of having attended or not.

### **Citizen Interaction**

Literature focused in police and citizen interactions generally evaluates factors leading to formal citizen complaints.

Research surrounding citizen complaints against police behavior generally focuses within two areas: officer characteristics as correlates of received complaints and summaries of the nature of the complaints. Citizen satisfaction with police services varies based upon how the interaction was initiated, with citizen-initiated contacts generally perceived more positively than officer-initiated contacts. Citizens' negative impressions of a single police contact has the effect

of creating a long-lasting general negative impression of the police as an industry (Bolger et al., 2021).

McLean (2021) researched the factors considered by citizens in the decision to file formal complaints against police officers using survey data from a convenience sample of 2, 296 adults in the United States. This survey obtained the participants' general feelings toward the police and exposed them to scenarios in which a police officer executed a traffic stop. Differing scenarios included varying levels of courtesy by the officer and outcomes of either receiving a formal citation or not. Participants recorded their likelihood to lodge a formal complaint for each scenario. Respondents believing the officer behaved in an unfair manner indicated a higher likelihood of filing a formal complaint. Participants reporting a more positive opinion of the police in general were more likely to file formal complaints, indicating a citizen's decision to file a formal complaint against an officer relies on the citizen's faith in the receiving agency to legitimately investigate and follow through on it.

Analysis of citizen complaint documentation in eight police agencies evaluated in part whether officer education level influenced the number of complaints received against a street-level officer but found no significant differences in complaint totals between officers having achieved a bachelor's degree and those that had not. This study also included the observation that improper force and discourteous treatment consistently rate as the two most frequent types of complaints received (Terrill & Ingram, 2016). No consideration to supervisor influence was applied to the street-level officers' behavior in this study.

In contrast, Manis et al. (2008) found officers in a medium sized midwestern municipal police department having obtained a four year degree received significantly fewer formal complaints than those not having completed this level of higher education. In addition, those

officers without a bachelor degree were more likely to have formal complaints sustained against them. In this study, only formal citizen complaints were influenced by the officers' education level, with informal citizen complaints not influenced by college experience. Additionally, more experienced officers were less likely to have formal citizen complaints sustained.

### **Discretionary Arrests**

The use of judgement-based discretion by street-level police officers is publicly accepted and expected. The bulk of police decision-making literature pertains to street-level officer judgements in use of force situations, but a growing element of research evaluates police decision making in more routine tasks, such as discretionary enforcement and criminal charging options.

Ishoy and Dabney (2018) investigated the factors surrounding street-level police officers' discretionary enforcement decisions and identified the concept of "blameworthiness" as a significant determinant in arrest decision making. Blameworthiness was described as a combination of the seriousness of the offense and the perceived personal responsibility of the suspected offender. When offenses are deemed serious, officers tend to believe they have less discretion in resolving the situation and affix responsibility solely on the officer's perception of the suspected offender's conscious decision toward deviance. In incidents classified as having lower seriousness of offense, enforcement decisions relied on the perceived attitude of the suspect.

The researchers identified the street-level officers are likely to choose the solution to less serious offenses which can be described as the easiest, either in terms of the amount of work required for the officer to execute the decision or in the amount of time the solution would take the officer away from other required duties. Ishoy and Dabney (2018) suggest much of the

individual street-level officer's discretionary decision making can be attributed to the para-military structure and culture of policing. Under the typical police department structure, officers adopt a compliance mentality where they simply do as they are told based upon supervisory direction rather than actively evaluate and problem solve during low level decision making.

Additional research shows the influence of the first-line police supervisor in street-level officer arrest decision-making. Qualitative interviews of 25 street-level officers in a medium sized police department in the southeastern United States revealed an officer's understanding of the expectations of their supervisors and administrations was the most significant indicator of discretionary arrest decisions (Ishoy, 2016). This result was in stark contrast to the officers' concern with the opinions of their peers' satisfaction with their decisions and the opinions of the general public, neither of which were claimed as significant considerations in discretionary decision-making.

Procedural compliance was also an observed factor in previous research concerning officer decisions in low-level offenses. Interviews of street-level officers indicated a preference for following appropriate predesignated procedures for the type of offense which far outpaced the officer's perceptions of the personal responsibility of the offender when making arrest or non-arrest decisions when either would be an acceptable conclusion (Mendias & Kehoe, 2006). Although procedural concerns represented the primary justification in over half of the arrest decisions in this study, officer responses indicated the intent to preserve peace or to strictly enforce certain laws were minor considerations. The officers involved in this study displayed a complex set of criteria and preferences to determine which enforcement actions to take in specific incidents with high variability between individual officers in decision-making justification.



Research shows police decision-making is also not a static concept, rather it is subject to change over time. 269 police traffic enforcement officers were evaluated at the outset of their careers in their responses to a series of scenarios in which they were faced with routine citizen encounters where they had full discretion to resolve the situation by arrest or by lesser means (Snyman, 2012). These officers were exposed to these scenarios again after six months of active service and experience. Many officers involved in this study reported a more strict interpretation of their roles as enforcers of the law when exposed to the scenarios a second time, indicating some measure of conditioning in this direction while in-service. Although some changes in discretionary ideas were observed, the study realized a lack of consensus among participants in appropriate discretionary decision-making at both points.

### **First-Line Supervisor Influence on Officer Behaviors**

Literature surrounding the first-line supervisors' ability to guide street-level officer decision making relies heavily on dependent variables which are easily measured by police administrations. Outcomes which are easily counted, such as arrest and citation totals or the amount of time officers spend conducting different activities are well represented while qualitative outcomes, such as officers' adoption of modern community-oriented philosophical and theoretical concepts are less prevalent.

First-line police supervisors influence street-level officer behavior in several ways. The para-military command structure of American police agencies creates the expectation of subordinates' obedience and deference to their superior officers. However, the nature of police work in the field being somewhat isolated mitigates a supervisor's influence through positional authority alone. Police officers' decision making in the field is largely conducted with no supervisor present. The supervisor relies on an "exchange" or "bargaining" model of motivation

in which the supervisor provides tangible rewards in exchange for the officers meeting expectations or achieving goals (Engel & Worden, 2003).

Engel and Worden (2003) evaluated police departments in Indianapolis, Indiana and St. Petersburg, Florida and found the street-level officers' perception of their supervisor's priorities in community-oriented problem solving over standard model of policing strategies was a significant factor in the amount of discretionary time those officers dedicated to community problem solving. Within these agencies, officers reporting to a supervisor with an orientation toward aggressive enforcement techniques spent significantly less of their uncommitted time in community-based problem solving. The officers' perceptions of the supervisor's priorities were more influential toward the officers' behavior than their perceptions of the priorities of their peers or even their own priorities.

Supervisory styles and priorities can influence street-level officer outcomes in the frequency of using force and when deciding to arrest a citizen when less intrusive options are available, especially when supervisors who communicate an emphasis on high arrest totals are present and directly supervising the officers' work (Engel, 2000). Although Engel identified four distinct police supervisory styles, empirical research has yet to identify the factors which lead a supervisory toward adopting a specific supervisory style or set of beliefs. It can be reasoned that a supervisory style could lead to variance in officer outcomes, such as a supervisory style emphasizing high arrest totals encouraging adversarial police/citizen contacts, thereby increasing use of force frequency, but this potential effect has not been fully evaluated (Engel, 2001).

First-line supervisors play an important role in the interpretation of policy and the manner in which policy is communicated to and applied by street-level officers. Ingram et al. (2014)

found through analysis of five municipal police agencies scattered across the United States that a first-line supervisor's understanding and support of use of force policies played an important role in the impressions of street-level officers regarding those policies. The communication from the first-line supervisor can distinctly influence whether street-level officers view their agency's policies and administrations positively or negatively and whether officers will support agency initiatives or work against them.

### **Police Education Level**

Literature regarding police supervisor education levels is lacking. The bulk of research in the outcomes of police education is focused upon the education levels of the street-level officers. Calls for police professionalism have not resulted in any consensus regarding the appropriateness of certain levels of higher education, nor any consensus regarding effectiveness of academic education over vocational education, least of all when applied specifically to supervisory personnel.

Cordner (2020) conducted a thorough review of existing literature surrounding higher education in policing in general. The availability of higher education specific to criminal justice and police has increased in the past 50 years along with the frequency of police officers completing college education pre-employment. This has not translated to any increase in higher education standards at the operational level, as the majority of police agencies still only require high school education as a minimum standard. The current standard in the United States is for police education to be driven by academics, with little input from practitioners.

Research indicates only ten American states which require a level of higher education to obtain state level basic police officer certification (Bruns, 2010). In large part, the educational requirements for street-level police officers are determined by individual jurisdictions and at the

discretion of the chief administrators. Bruns obtained qualitative survey data from 36 police chiefs in agencies with a four-year degree requirement and 90 percent of those chiefs supporting maintaining this requirement. Survey respondents reported a belief in their workforce as more professional, mature, and able to handle the complexities of police work when compared to officers in departments without such requirements.

Dominey and Hill (2010) evaluated the benefits of higher education for police officers to determine if a college degree could be deemed “necessary, helpful, or an overindulgence” in creating an effective and modern police officer. The author identified numerous reported beneficial traits of higher education which are deemed to be desirable traits in police officers, such as the ability to analyze complex information and the recognition of most problems having numerous available solutions.

Dominey and Hill (2010) suggest mutual benefit exists when police agencies and practitioners fully engage criminal justice academics in higher education. Benefits to the police include improved cognitive thought, critical evaluation of arguments and abstract concepts, and improved communication, especially with diverse groups, while academics have a direct connection to policing agencies which helps them to remain current in policies, pressures, and expectations of current policing.

More generalized research in the effects of higher education on cognitive thought indicate a positive linear relationship between the two (Guerra-Carillo, et al., 2017). In this study, online assessments of nearly 200,000 participants from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia were evaluated for working memory, flexibility, processing speed, and verbal and non-verbal reasoning. The level of educational attainment was a significant predictor of participant scores on these cognitive assessments with smaller effect sizes between adjacent intervals (such

as high school only and some college or some college and bachelor's degree) compared to scores across significantly different education levels.

### **Criminal Justice Focused Higher Education**

Higher education in criminal justice has grown to become one of the top ten bachelor's degrees awarded in the United States, with over 60,000 degrees issued through 670 schools in 2016 (Sloan & Buchwalter, 2017). As with research concerning the benefits of police higher education, literature regarding differences in effects between higher education specific to criminal justice and all other degree types is focused on the street-level officer. Much of the existing literature focuses on survey data reporting the perceived value of these degrees but does not focus on the experiences of police personnel in leadership positions in the utilization of their course of study.

While not specific to police supervisory personnel, criminal justice degree holders have self-reported a higher perceived value from their educational experiences in critical areas when compared to their peers with non-criminal justice degrees. Police practitioners with criminal justice degrees report an increase in human relations skills, administrative skills, and communication skills above the reported increases in non-criminal justice degree holders (Carlan, 2007).

Although scores related to critical thinking were consistent between degree types, both groups rated their educational experiences as having significantly improved their skill in this area. Carlan (2007) suggests the in-depth knowledge of the criminal justice system's operations and specifics of police practices attained through a criminal justice specific degree integrates with the critical thinking and human relations benefits of general liberal arts education to for a beneficial intersection between academia and practitioner.

del Carmen et al. (2006) examined the differences in opinion of the utility of a criminal justice degree between street-level officers in a municipal Texas police agency having a criminal justice degree and those having a bachelor's degree in any other field. This research identified criminal justice degree holders as generally more favorable toward criminal justice as an academic field, but largely did not identify statistically different responses to questions relating to the content of a criminal justice education. A limitation of this study is the manner in which survey questions were designed to operationalize understanding of academic and theoretical criminal justice concepts. For example, a question requiring the respondent to identify the specific decade in which problem-oriented policing was introduced was used to conclude criminal justice students had not been taught community-oriented topics.

Edwards (2017) evaluated the differences in perceived value in criminal justice higher education between municipal police officers and sheriff's deputies in northeastern Tennessee. While officers and deputies reported favorable perceptions of the overall quality and content of their undergraduate criminal justice education, this study showed the majority of participants believed the focus of such education should be the practicalities of successful job performance as a street-level officer, with reduced or eliminated focus on criminological and social theory. Edwards posits this finding as a result of the officers' and deputies' lack of understanding of the differences between training and education, with the suggestion to criminal justice academics to improve their ability to explain the benefit of a liberal arts education to routine police work.

## **Conclusion**

The research surrounding the education levels of police personnel has yet to establish direct relationships between educational experiences in criminal justice and their practical application. Opportunities for police personnel in higher education have increased over the past

five decades but this has not resulted in any discernable increase in the educational requirements set by police administrations for neither their entry level nor supervisory personnel. Police personnel with backgrounds in criminal justice studies self-report higher perceptions of their skills in human relations, communications, and administration but these themes have not been evaluated to determine how these concepts relate to the requirements placed on first-line police supervisors.

The research identifies a significant impact on street-level police decision making from procedures set by the agency's administration. Street-level police officers tend to behave as they are trained, instructed, and expected to do, proving a great deal of responsibility for those officers' actions lies in the hands of the first-line supervisors and administration. Research specific to the educational experiences of the first-line supervisors and the effect on street-level officer outcomes is limited to evaluations of use of force incidents against a supervisor's attainment of a bachelor's degree. Research surrounding the utilization of criminal justice education by first-line police supervisors represents a significant gap in criminal justice academia.

### **Research Questions**

*RQ1: What is the first-line police supervisor's perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree program when directing street-level police officers in use of force issues during calls for police reform?*

*RQ2: What is the first-line police supervisor's perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree program when directing street-level police officers in professional citizen interaction during calls for police reform?*

*RQ3: What is the first-line police supervisor's perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree program when directing street-level police officers in discretionary arrest decision-making during calls for police reform?*



## **Chapter 3 - Methodology**

### **Strategy of Inquiry**

In this study, participants were asked to describe their experiences in using their criminal justice higher education while guiding street-level police officers in acceptable theory and practice in using physical force to gain offender compliance, professional interaction with citizens, and toward decision making in discretionary enforcement outcomes in low-level criminal offenses.

Although first-line supervisors involved in this study are obligated to follow the individual departmental policies specific to their agency, desired police outcomes and leadership concerns are generally similar between agencies, as are learning objectives between different university and college programs. This study was used to develop a framework of expected ways first-line supervisors are utilizing their educational experiences in their professional roles.

A grounded theory approach was employed because there is a lack of knowledge in the usefulness of first-line police supervisor higher education in the performance of their management and leadership duties (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 83). Grounded theory research was the appropriate strategy as this study aimed to move past simple descriptions of the experiences of first-line police supervisors in these areas and attempted to describe the overarching themes expected in utilization of a criminal justice degree in police officer supervision (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 82).

### **Grounded Theory Research**

Grounded theory is an approach to qualitative research in which the researcher obtains data regarding the individual experiences of participants who have been involved in a common process or action for the purpose of generating an explanatory theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.

82). Data may be collected through existing documentation regarding the process or through in-depth semi-structured interviews of the study's participants. Interviews are conducted with an "intensive interviewing" method, where the interviewer uses open-ended questions to solicit in-depth responses detailing the participant's exact meaning and experience while the interviewer only speaks to guide the conversation and clarify answers (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 56-57) This approach ensures the study data reflects the viewpoint of the participants in their own words.

The researcher systematically analyzes the raw data collected by coding each interview or document line-by-line. Initial coding focuses on the actions and feelings described by the study participant and describes those actions or feelings in short phrases to identify any and all possible theoretical directions of the experiences (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 112-114). The initial codes are further analyzed through "focused coding" to identify which occur most frequently or are expressed by the participants as having the highest importance (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138). The systematic initial and focused coding in grounded theory research assures the researcher has focused on the most significant and recurring experiences of the study participants (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Engaging in the study area in this manner ensures a description surrounding the participants' realities emerges systematically from, and is grounded in, the data without being forced to fit any preconceptions of the researcher (Glaser, 1992, pp. 14-15).

The researcher in this study has previously served as a criminal justice degree holding first-line police supervisor. Glaser (1992, p. 11) states the "requisite conceptual skills for doing grounded theory are to absorb the data as data, to be able to step back or distance oneself from it, and then to abstractly conceptualize the data". The grounded theory approach was ideal for this study as it allowed commonalities in the participants' experiences to emerge directly from the

data while limiting the influence of the researcher's previous knowledge, experience, and prejudices.

### **Constructivist Approach**

Several perspectives exist and are regularly used in grounded theory research. Among the most popular is a structured and systematic approach with the focus on identifying a common or core theme which can be used to develop a theory to explain the process or action under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In the constructivist approach to grounded theory research, the structures introduced by Straus & Corbin inform the methods of research; however, the data analysis accepts the diversity in the participants' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 86). In describing the constructivist approach, Charmaz (2014) argues that the individual realities of the participants in any study are complex and constructed through the lens of their own previous experiences, which is also true of the researcher. As a result, the researcher's point of view is an integral part of the research process, including how the analysis is conducted and which theories emerge. Charmaz states, "constructivism fosters researchers' reflexivity about their *own* interpretations and the implications of them as well as those of their research participants" (2014, p. 240).

Taking a constructivist approach to grounded theory research in this study was critical to acknowledge and accept the researcher's previous experience as a first-line police supervisor. Through this perspective, the researcher constantly evaluates how their own experiences influence their analysis and accounts for those effects, rather than hold the expectation that the researcher can or will act as a completely neutral observer (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13).

### **Participants**

Purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was used to intentionally sample subjects from which specific information can be gathered. Inclusion criteria for this study was first-line supervisors from traditional U.S. law enforcement agencies, possession of an associate, bachelor's, or graduate degree with an emphasis in criminal justice, and responsibility for the supervision and leadership of uniformed street-level police officers at any time after June 2020 (the post-George Floyd era).

Although demographic information surrounding the participants and their employing agencies was collected, this information was not used as exclusion criteria, nor was it used in the subsequent data analysis. Participants in this study represented a variety of personal demographics and represented a wide variety of law enforcement agencies and geographic location, but these variables and any potential influence on the themes identified through this study were outside the study's scope.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The anonymity of the participants was not possible in this study because the identities of the participants to be solicited were attached to the inclusion criteria in the Southern Police Institute database used as the sampling frame for selection. With this in mind, confidentiality of participants became a primary ethical concern. Participants were required to acknowledge and sign an informed consent document prior to engaging in any portion of the study.

Participants were assured that their identities and agency of employment will not be disclosed in the results or discussion of this study. Participants were encouraged to refrain from using actual names of agency personnel discussed. When any participant used specific identifiers for their agency or its personnel, those identifiers were removed from the transcript.

Each participant was assigned a unique number which was used to identify them and their responses throughout the study. The participants were advised at the outset of each interview that the interviews were voluntary and the decision to participate or not will had no impact on their employment status or position in any way. Participants were advised they could terminate their participation at any time. The researcher maintained exclusive possession of the interview recordings. The recordings will be held for a period of five years and then destroyed.

### **Procedures**

Potential participants were identified through the student database of the Southern Police Institute at the University of Louisville. The Southern Police Institute was founded in 1951 for the purpose of integrating academic theory in policing administration into practical application by creating a modern policing college. For over 70 years, the Southern Police Institute, in conjunction with the Department of Criminal Justice at the University of Louisville, has delivered university accredited curriculum to police administrators through its Administrative Officers Course (a 12-week in residence program after which participants earn either 12 graduate level credits or 15 undergraduate level credits, depending on their educational background), as well as non-accredited continuing education programs in assorted policing skills and leadership topics (Southern Police Institute, n.d.).

Students attending coursework through the Southern Police Institute are almost exclusively police practitioners and represent law enforcement agencies of all sizes across all geographical areas of the United States. At the time of course registration, students' names, professional agency, current rank and job title, and contact information are entered into a student database. Historical data surrounding previous students of the Southern Police Institute is retrievable through this database dating back to 1999. The database is updated with over 500

new entries per year as courses are deployed and students complete the registration process. At the time of course registration, every student is advised their names and contact information will be used by the Southern Police Institute for communicating and marketing future course opportunities, as well as news and events surrounding the Southern Police Institute.

The database was available to the researcher through his position as the Associate Director of the Southern Police Institute. Prior to accessing the database for the purpose of conducting this study, the researcher obtained written authorization to solicit participants in this manner from the director of the Southern Police Institute. This database is searchable and was filtered by the researcher to provide a listing of only those students having described their rank as “sergeant” (or variations thereof, such as “sargent” or “sgt”, as the database is populated directly from information provided by the student) between the years of 2018 and 2022. This range of calendar years was selected to best identify those recipients which most likely fit the inclusion criteria while excluding individuals which would not likely be eligible for participation. The filtered list was exported as a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, which was password protected and available only to the researcher.

The list of students was reviewed line by line to ensure each entry adheres to the inclusion criteria of first-line supervisor responsible for the leadership of street-level patrol officers. In rare occasions, military police and private security personnel have been accepted in course offerings from the Southern Police Institute. These entries, along with any others not appearing to fit the inclusion criteria, were eliminated from the list.

Potential participants were solicited by email at the address on file at the time of Southern Police Institute course registration. This email solicitation provided an overview of the purpose for the study, stated the inclusion criteria, and included an internet link to complete a Microsoft

Form to indicate a willingness and intent to participate (see Appendix A). Those interested clicked the link to the Microsoft Form, titled “Criminal Justice Degree Utilization Study Screening Form” asking ten questions to establish a list of interested participants (Appendix B).

Interested parties were asked to provide their first name, last name, email address, phone number, law enforcement agency name, law enforcement agency city and state, a confirmation that they were a first-line supervisor after June 2020, a confirmation that they supervised street-level officers in a patrol function after June 2020, a confirmation they had earned a criminal justice college degree prior to June 2020, and an acknowledgement that they were willing to participate in a face-to-face interview regarding their experiences.

Completion of the online Microsoft Form generated an automated response to the researcher indicating the form’s completion. Interested parties must have answered “yes” to questions 7-10 to be eligible for participation. Parties providing any “no” answer for questions 7-10 were contacted via email to confirm the accuracy of these answers and inform them of their ineligibility if they had purposefully answered “no”. Parties answering “yes” to questions 7-10 were contacted via email to schedule a date and time to be interviewed.

A minimum of 20 interviews were desired for this study; however, interviews were completed until saturation was achieved. 27 responses were received from the study solicitation email. Five responses indicated the respondent did not meet the inclusion criteria. 22 respondents were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview via the Zoom online meeting software (Yuan, 2022).

## **Instruments**

This study used one-on-one semi-structured intensive interviews of first-line police supervisors who held a college degree in criminal justice and were responsible for the

supervision of street-level police officers at any point after June 2020. The initial interview guide was used to organize a standardized list of open-ended interview questions aimed at eliciting rich and detailed responses from the study participants. The initial interview guide was structured with initial, intermediate, and ending questions (Appendix C).

Following each initial answer, follow up questions were asked to clarify responses and ensure the participant's meaning and language were understood. After the fourth interview, the researcher revised the interview guide to include additional questions deemed necessary to provide adequate foundations in the participants' actions in guiding their personnel in their use of force, courteous interactions with the public, and appropriate discretionary decision-making, prior to inquiring how the participants' educational experiences influenced these interactions. The second and final interview guide was used for the remainder of the participant interviews (Appendix D).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data collection was completed through virtual face-to-face in-depth interviews lasting between 23 minutes and 1 hour, 47 minutes. Initial interview questions were open-ended and pertinent to the research questions. Follow up questions were loosely structured to obtain a wide range of ideas and information.

Interviews were conducted via the internet conferencing platform Zoom Meetings (Yuan, 2022). This method was not only most convenient but was necessary to include participants representing a wide variance in geographical location. Interviews were recorded and transcribed through the Zoom transcribing function in the application. The researcher reviewed the recorded interview to ensure the accuracy of the transcription and made corrections as necessary. Participants were given the option to use the video function or to keep the camera function off.



Coding, memoing and constant comparison were utilized between each interview to determine the point at which appropriate saturation has occurred, demonstrated by a lack of new or unique information emerging from later interviews, although no less than 20 individuals were to be interviewed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher determined data saturation had occurred by the completion of the 16th interview; however, 5 additional interviews were scheduled at that point. In total, 21 interviews were conducted in this study.

### **Interview Process**

Interviews occurred between December 6, 2022 and January 25, 2023 and were conducted using the Zoom Meetings internet conferencing software (Yuan, 2022). Video, audio, and a running closed-caption transcript were collected and recorded for each interview. Each interview began with ensuring the participant understood the content and purpose of the informed consent form and each participant was given the opportunity to ask any questions or express any concern with the informed consent. Prior to engaging in the interview, each participant was asked to confirm they understood the interview was being recorded. Participant interviews commenced when the researcher had ensured each participant had no outstanding questions or concerns regarding their participation or confidentiality and gave express permission to record the interview in its entirety.

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview protocol based on the initial interview guide. Participants were asked open-ended questions as they appeared on the interview guide. The researcher rephrased questions as necessary and asked follow-up questions based on the answers provided. After each interview, the researcher evaluated the quality of the questions as written for clarity and effectiveness.

Participants were asked to describe the coursework they completed during their criminal justice college career and asked to specify how that coursework addressed the interaction between the police and the public. Next, the participants were asked to report their length of law enforcement service and were asked to describe their impressions of their current agency's relationship with the communities they serve. The final initial questions asked participants to describe any issues of civil unrest or rioting occurring in their jurisdiction during and since the Summer of 2020 and to describe how the officers in their agency reacted to these issues, both personally and professionally.

To address research question 1, the researcher asked the participants how they describe to the officers under their command what is appropriate and acceptable in use of force practices. The researcher asked participants to specifically state what the participant said to their personnel and asked what methods the participant uses to ensure the officers' understanding of the stated expectations. The researcher asked each participant how their criminal justice degree program influences the direction they give their personnel regarding acceptable use of force practices.

To address research question 2, the researcher first established with the participants that their agency expects its personnel to interact in a professional and courteous manner with the public. Then, the researcher asked the participant to describe how the personnel in their agency learn what is appropriate when communicating with the public and to describe what actions the participant takes to enforce the expectations. The researcher asked each participant to identify the ways their criminal justice degree program influences the direction they give their personnel regarding respectful and courteous communication with the public.

To address research question 3, the researcher asked each participant to describe how the personnel in their agency learn appropriate decision-making in situations where they are allowed

a great deal of discretion in the type of enforcement they will take to resolve a criminal offense, along with the methods the participant uses to ensure their officers are conducting discretionary decision-making in alignment with the mission and vision of their agency. The researcher asked each participant to describe how their criminal justice degree program influences how they provide direction regarding low level discretionary decision making.

The researcher ended each interview by asking the participants to describe how their criminal justice degree program influences their own decision making and to identify the aspect of their criminal justice education they felt was the most important to them. Finally, the research asked each participant to identify ways they believed their criminal justice degree program could be improved to increase applicability to their position as a police supervisor.

### **Data Analysis**

At the conclusion of each interview, the recording and the transcript were obtained from the Zoom Meeting software (Yuan, 2022). The researcher reviewed each interview in its entirety to ensure the accuracy of the written transcript and to make adjustments and corrections as necessary. The researcher uploaded each transcript into the NVivo Qualitative Data Management Software (Nvivo 2020).

Grounded theory coding with the constructivist approach calls for two phases: initial and focused coding (Charmaz, 2014, p. 112). Initial coding evaluated each line or segment of the interview transcripts to identify the specific actions or experiences described by the participant. Remaining open to every emergent concept at this stage of the data analysis was critical to the grounded theory research. As codes emerged and were extracted from the interview data, the constructivist approach required the researcher to evaluate the codes against the researcher's own preconceptions and biases. Initial coding occurred at the completion of each participant

interview and codes were analyzed to determine if gaps existed in the data collection process and to identify ways to fill those gaps in subsequent interviews (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 117-118).

The researcher conducted line by line initial coding of each interview transcript within the Nvivo software to identify distinct themes and concepts in the data. This step identified 181 individual codes which described the responses of the participants. Codes were titled using gerunds wherever possible. During the initial coding, the researcher edited the code titles to improve clarity (such as revising a code initially titled “providing a positive example” to “modeling behaviors”).

Focused coding was the second phase in the data analysis process. Through the process of focused coding, the researcher identified the initial codes which held greater analytical power than other codes. Charmaz (2014, p. 140) describes this process as both comparing initial codes against one another while also evaluating which initial codes may hold enough power to be considered themes encompassing other data points. The focused codes were identified because they could be considered a suitable summary for groups of initial codes or because they held significance when compared to other codes.

Next, the researcher selected focused codes to use as overarching categories. These categories held overarching significance or emerged as themes which summarize the concepts uncovered in the focused codes. Focused codes were analyzed to determine which would fit under the umbrella of an identified category. This process revealed themes among the categories which showed similarity in the way participants provide guidance to their personnel in use of force practices, courteous and respectful interaction with the public, and discretionary decision-making, along with common themes regarding the perceived usefulness of criminal justice focused degrees towards providing instruction and guidance in these areas.

## **Chapter 4 - Results**

### **Participant Overview**

Potential participants for this study were identified through the student database of the Southern Police Institute. A minimum of 20 participants was desired by the researcher. One participant completed the initial screening processes and indicated a willingness to be interviewed, but later stopped communicating with the researcher and the interview did not take place. Although this individual was assigned a participant ID number (Participant 14), no information from this individual was used in this study. Ultimately, 21 participants met all inclusion criteria and completed all steps of the interview process. These 21 participants represent the final sample size for this study.

### **Participant Demographics**

The 21 participants in this study's sample represent a diverse sample of active first-line police supervisors across the United States (see Table 1.). The participants were employed by 17 different law enforcement agencies from seven west, Midwest, and southeast US states. Five participants reported their highest level of education completed as associates degree, ten participants reported their highest level of education completed as bachelors degree, and six participants reported their highest level of education completed as masters degree. While all participants reported a criminal justice focused degree, in accordance with the inclusion criteria of this study, four reported their degree having an administrative or management concentration. 19 participants in this study were male and 2 were female. 17 of the participants were white, two black, and two of Hispanic ethnicity. Participants' years of law enforcement experience ranged between eight and 30 years, with an average length of service of 18 years.

**Table 1***Demographic Information of Study Participants*

Participant ID	Location	Race	Gender	Degree	Administrative Concentration	Service Years
1	KY	W	M	Bachelor	N	15
2	KY	W	M	Associate	N	12
3	WI	W	M	Associate	N	17
4	FL	H	M	Master	N	11
5	FL	W	M	Bachelor	N	30
6	KY	W	M	Bachelor	N	20
7	NV	W	M	Bachelor	Y	17
8	FL	W	M	Master	Y	17
9	FL	W	M	Bachelor	N	23
10	FL	B	F	Bachelor	N	10
11	FL	B	M	Master	Y	23
12	FL	W	M	Master	N	33
13	WI	W	M	Associate	N	30
15	FL	H	M	Master	N	15
16	FL	W	M	Associate	N	14
17	VA	W	M	Associate	N	18
18	NC	W	M	Bachelor	N	8
19	FL	W	M	Master	N	18
20	FL	W	M	Bachelor	N	17
21	FL	W	F	Bachelor	N	22
22	TX	W	M	Bachelor	Y	10

**Research Question 1**

Research question 1 was “What is the first-line police supervisor’s perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree program when directing street-level police officers in use of force issues during calls for police reform?” The methods used by the participants in this study to guide street-level officers in their acceptable use of force practices revealed several common themes.

16 of the participants (76%) described the discussion of case law as the method used to ensure their personnel understood their responsibilities in the proper application of force techniques. Twelve participants (57%) stated they integrated the discussion of departmental

policy into their guidance of acceptable use of force practices. Nearly half of the participants (47%) identified routine roll call briefings as the designated time and place they gave this instruction and guidance. Nine participants (42%) described and emphasis towards limit the force used by instructing minimal force be used in all situations, while six participants (28%) identified an emphasis on de-escalation techniques. Two participants described their use of positive reinforcement through supporting and celebrating the officers they felt had made good decisions in use of force incidents (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Actions Taken to Guide Use of Force*

Action	Number of Participants	Percentage
Discussing Case Law	16	76
Discussing Policy	12	57
Conducting Roll Call Briefing	10	47
Emphasizing Minimal Force	9	42
Emphasizing De-Escalation	6	21
Supporting Good Decisions	2	9

6 of the participants (21%) reported feeling their criminal justice degree program has no influence or benefit toward the guidance they give to their personnel regarding appropriate use of force practices. Those participants stated their guidance and instruction in this area is strictly a result of their professional experience.

*I think my criminal justice background doesn't I mean. I don't know that it really makes much of a difference. I think it's mostly on the job training that I've learned about use of*

*force. I don't think that it's really come from like school. I think it mostly is from the law enforcement realm. (Participant 16)*

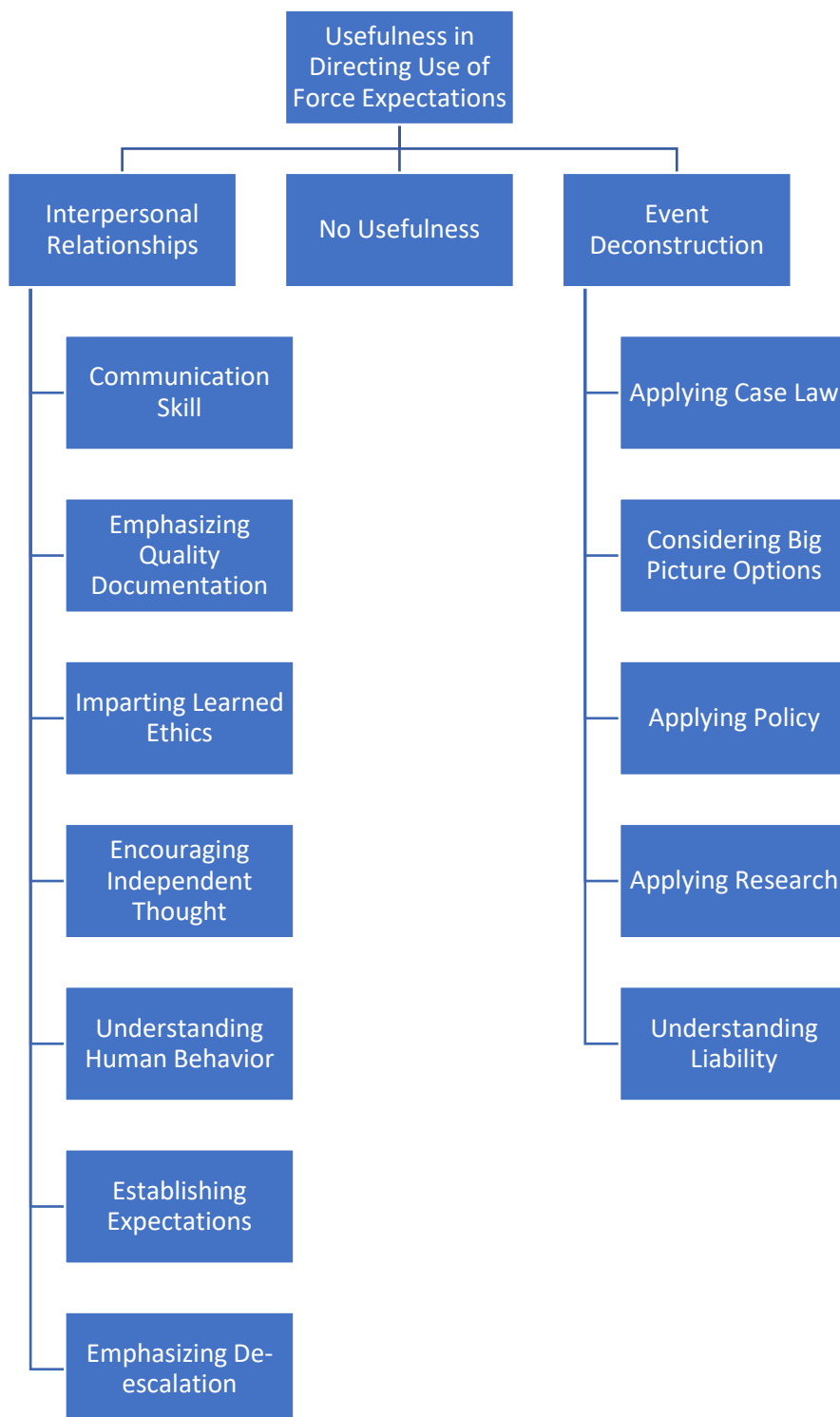
*Most of my things that I learned were probably on the job training you know, working in law enforcement. Of what I learned in college to help, you know, traverse the use of force, not a lot. Not a lot from the criminal justice formal education. (Participant 8)*

The remaining 15 participants reported their guidance in acceptable use of force practices was influenced by one or more topics of study covered in their criminal justice degree program. Through evaluation of the initial codes related to the ways the participants use their criminal justice education to guide personnel in acceptable use of force practices, two overarching themes emerged: usefulness in interpersonal communications and usefulness in use of force event deconstruction.



**Figure 1**

*Usefulness of Criminal Justice Degree in Guiding Use of Force*



### Usefulness in Interpersonal Relationships

All 21 of the study participants described part of their duties as addressing street-level officers to guide their understanding of acceptable use of force practices. 14 focused codes related to the perceived usefulness of the criminal justice degree while first-line supervisors were communicating personally with their subordinate street-level officers and addressing issues and expectations in use of force topics emerged (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Use of Criminal Justice Degree toward Interpersonal Relationships for Use of Force*

Interpersonal Relationship Concept	Frequency
Communication Skill	5
Emphasizing Quality Documentation	3
Imparting Learned Ethics	2
Encouraging Independent Thought	1
Understanding Human Behavior	1
Establishing Expectations	1
Emphasizing De-Escalation	1

### *Communication Skills*

Five participants described skills gained in communication through their criminal justice degree programs as important toward interacting with their personnel. A criminal justice degree was described as useful in participants' ability to alter their communication style depending on the needs of the recipient.

*I would say it kind of let me relate to officers whether you know we're from the same decade or not, or you know, millennials, gen z whatever the case may be, the way I may*

*understand something or feel like I'm support may not be the same, and it's, you know, individual basis so definitely opened up, you know, open communication between me and my officers to understand, and each of them require a different level of attention and guidance. I think that's where my degree helped me as opposed to Well, I told you guys, so...you know some people just need a little bit more. (Participant 10)*

*Through education as a whole, be able to articulate those facts a little bit better or just explain (to) them in a different way. Just have a trouble, understanding something you can, you know, get that knowledge. (Participant 2)*

### ***Emphasizing Quality Documentation***

Three participants described how their criminal justice degree helped prepare them by emphasizing the importance of preparing their personnel to prepare high quality written documentation when use of force incidents occur. Participants are using their criminal justice degree to pass along an understanding of how high-quality reporting will alleviate issues for their officers and agencies as the cases are adjudicated.

*Make a decision, right and be able to articulate it later, on and sometimes these young men and women, they need help articulating things. All the elements are there. They didn't do anything wrong, right, but they haven't been in the job long enough to understand. (Participant 1)*

*A big focus is in proper report writing because that seems to be one of the biggest pitfalls of any law Enforcement agency is just bad reports. So, when anything that you read of any academia is if it's properly documented, there's less issues. Don't let hysteria lead the investigation. You lead the narrative first. (Participant 4)*

One participant related the college experience which requires a great deal of writing, in the form of academic papers and essays, as preparing the supervisor to evaluate the written work of the street-level officer, while also being able to communicate the importance of the documentation across other areas of the larger criminal justice system.

*I think one is writing. Writing has been a huge issue, I think, in our agency. I think in a lot of agencies now is formal writing is hard for people. We see a lot of trainees struggle with being able to document, so I think that that aspect of it and being forced to write papers, and being able to convey your thoughts on paper, is huge.*

*I think that that's part of it, understanding like the process going back to understanding the judicial process from beginning to end. And to understand the impact that your report has like that's the document that's going to carry this whole case and follow it all the way through the judicial process. You have to be able to write good paper and to make sure that it can make it through your defense attorneys, your prosecutors, the judge, and possibly even come back for appeal. Right, like that's the document that supports that. So, having that idea of writing good paper and to understand the...implications of writing that paper, as it has an effect on a judicial system. (Participant 7)*

### ***Imparting Learned Ethics***

Two participants emphasized their use of ethics learned through their criminal justice degree programs in their communications with their personnel regarding use of force issues. These participants described their viewed importance on passing that ethical decision-making curriculum on to their subordinates.

*I don't think I'd be the officer I am today if it was not for my education because the education taught me the values of, you know, how important ethics are. How important*

*our core belief system is. I started looking at an aspect of for ethics because I started a company that dealing with ethics for, as far as from a teaching perspective, because I realized, if it not been for my education, I'd have never had another ethics class than what I had in the Academy. (Participant 12)*

*I think that from my criminal justice classes in in ethics, morality, and culture and what I've learned from you know my 4 years, 4 and a half years, there, you teach them to make good, decisions. (Participant 1)*

### ***Encouraging Independent Thought***

One participant believed a criminal justice education leads to the supervisor encouraging the independent thought of the subordinates.

*Now to make a decision, and if is is if as a supervisor, you try to dictate every situation, your officers are going to be hesitant, and they're going to be hurt. (Participant 1)*

### ***Understanding Human Behavior***

One participant related their ability to interact and communicate with the street-level officers regarding use of force practices to their criminal justice degree through coursework related to human behavior and psychology.

*I would say, in terms of like dealing with my officers and things of that maybe my the psychology courses that are part of the core curriculum. (Participant 10)*

### ***Establishing Expectations***

One participant identified the leadership coursework in the criminal justice degree program as influential while establishing expectations of the street-level officers.

*I think the education that I've gained is about the leadership, because they want to see the structure. They want to see someone that take a stand and pretty much guide (them).*

(Participant 11)

### ***Emphasizing De-Escalation***

One participant pointed to an emphasis on officer de-escalation techniques learned during the course of the criminal justice degree program as an influence in how they relay the same expectation to their subordinates as a preferred alternative to using force.

*I think the verbal judo, a lot that we learned from there is, you know, asking questions, slowing things down, was really huge and trying to gain that voluntary compliance without having to use force.* (Participant 3)

### ***Usefulness in Event Deconstruction***

16 of the study participants described the value of their criminal justice degrees when evaluating case studies in use of force. These participants described deconstructing and critiquing these case studies with the street-level officers as an effective technique to provide guidance regarding the future expectations in acceptable use of force (see Table 4). Case studies were described as being conducted using case law examples, video footage of previous incidents (both covering incidents which occurred within the agency and incidents in outside jurisdictions), and story telling from the experiences of involved personnel.

### **Table 4**

*Use of Criminal Justice Degree toward Event Deconstruction*

Event Deconstruction Concept	Frequency
Applying Case Law	5
Considering Big Picture Outcomes	4
Applying Policy	3
Applying Research	2
Understanding Liability	2

***Applying Case Law***

5 participants described their experiences in a criminal justice degree program as beneficial toward their interpretation and discussion of pertinent case law with their subordinates related to use of force practices. This was presented as using case law as a direct teaching topic, but also evaluating existing case law to forecast how courts may look at police actions in the future.

*I would relate criminal law to your question because, this studying criminal law, you have to know criminal law before you can act out on the street in everyday society, and if you don't know the law. Then you can't get into using any type of force on anybody. For example, Tennessee v. Garner, Graham verses Connor, you need to know use of force. We actually studied that case law in, during college and my criminal justice degree. Case law has a lot to do with how you act out on the street, especially in use of force curriculum. (Participant 19)*

*So I, as far as using force and sharing that with officers, I can show them from my experiences when I started. You know, 16 years ago, some of the things that I saw. we*

*can show them some of the things that some of the court cases that didn't go well for law enforcement, and really had a black eye on on all of us. You know, for a moment literally moments and split seconds that had, you know, a huge impact for all of us. (Participant 3)*

*The street Crimes unit has to deal with the worst of the worst. So we have to, we're told, push the boundary, but do it in the right way. So I know what I can and can't do, and my criminal justice degree prepared me for that, because I know the law, and I will never...get in trouble, because I know what I can and can't do. (Participant 19)*

### **Considering Big Picture Outcomes**

4 participants described using their criminal justice degree to help their subordinates understand problem solving and decision making from an expanded worldview. These responses discussed situations where actions taken may not have been technically incorrect, but also may not have represented the best course of action for all involved.

*I think it developed a higher level of critical thinking, not just check box situations where "Yep, that's policy. It's all good." It's like, yeah, that's policy, but could we have done better? There's a difference between appropriate and meeting policy. In my opinion, certain things might meet policy, but was it the best course of action? And, that college degree kind of helps you take a step back and look at the bigger picture. (Participant 18)*

*My guys wanted to write a search warrant on his house. I called the State Attorney's office. I tried to get a search warrant for his clothing, which would lead to other things. The Judge didn't want to go for it, because the judge said we were just picking on him to get to other things. Which is okay, because that's the law. The law says we're allowed to do that. They were outside the house, and I walked up there, and my guy said...they smell*



*the faint smell of marijuana coming from the house. I didn't smell it. There was a crowd starting to form. There was a girl behind the door with a pit bull that wouldn't come out of the house, his girlfriend. Taking all these circumstances into perspective as a supervisor, knowing the law from when I did my degree and knowing case law, and knowing what I could and could not do. Could I push the issue with the marijuana off my guys, what they were saying? Yes. But me ethically, I did not smell it and I looked at the totality of the circumstances to protect my guys with this crowd forming And I said to myself, is it worth it, or is it not worth it? I went with the not worth it and I walked away.*

(Participant 19)

### ***Applying Policy***

3 participants described using their criminal justice degree when learning the nuances to departmental policy and interpreting departmental policy for use by street-level officers.

*You've had a policy comes out that you know is controversial, and you know that everybody's gonna have a problem with it. It comes to you, and you've got to put the what you? How are you going to do that? Well, I have to understand where the policy came from. I have to understand more importantly than probably anybody else, even in the chief's office. Why do we have this policy? Well, I have to make sure, before I take this to my team that I completely understand it, and if I don't. I'll seek that advice from my lieutenant, major, and higher, if I need to go to. I can't just blindly take it to them, so I would have to prepare. And then, once I've been given an adequate understanding, I'll take it to my platoon and present it as I'm a company man. Now I'm a supervisor.*

(Participant 6)

### ***Applying Research***

2 participants described using the research skills obtained in their criminal justice degree program in their work while providing guidance to street-level officers in use of force practices.

*I honestly would go back to some of the research studies that we're required to read. I mean, you read one of the Tad studies. It was in reference to the I can't think of this city that did it, but it was the...every time a law enforcement shooting occurred in the black neighborhood. The calls for service would dramatically drop within the city of that area because it was judged off police citizen interaction. I attributed a lot of that to lack of knowledge, like if something is properly explained. So, I would say, by analyzing the studies that showed that there was significance of changing and getting ahead of the stories to help justify the actions of why we need to do this. (Participant 4)*

### **Understanding Liability**

2 participants described the knowledge gained in their criminal justice degree program as useful in understanding issues of personal and departmental civil liability in use of force decision-making and using this knowledge to assist street-level officers protect themselves from liability exposure.

*My job as a supervisor is to protect them, and I hate to say they thanked me the next day. I said, we're gonna go out of our way, and then and then here you hear me out on this one. We have a girl behind the door with a pit Bull, we go in there, we kick in this door and shoot this pit Bull... Liability and everybody's thinking liability, even me. I'm thinking liability. (Participant 19)*

### **Research Question 2**

Research question 2 was, “What is the first-line police supervisor’s perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree program when directing street-level police officers in professional

citizen interaction during calls for police reform?” As observed in research question 1, several themes emerged describing the methods used by criminal justice degree holding first-line supervisors when guiding and directing their subordinates in their respectful and courteous communications with the public.

11 participants (52%) described a verbal clarification of departmental and supervisory expectations as their primary method to influence the street-level officers’ public interactions. 10 participants (47%) reported routinely debriefing previous public interactions as a method of instruction for future behavior expectations. 6 participants (28%) described the importance of modeling appropriate communication practices for their subordinates and 3 participants (14%) utilized their agency’s written policies as an instructional tool.

**Table 5**

*Actions Taken to Guide Public Communications*

Action Taken	Frequency	Percentage
Clarification of Expectation	11	52
Incident Debrief	10	47
Modeling Behavior	6	28
Discussing Policy	3	14

8 participants (38%) reported feeling as though their criminal justice education does not contribute to the guidance they provide their subordinates in the manner in which they communicate with the public.

*I don't think it was it was my degree. I think it was from going to leadership classes through FBI LEEDA and their trilogy series, or you know, the rules that I served when I*

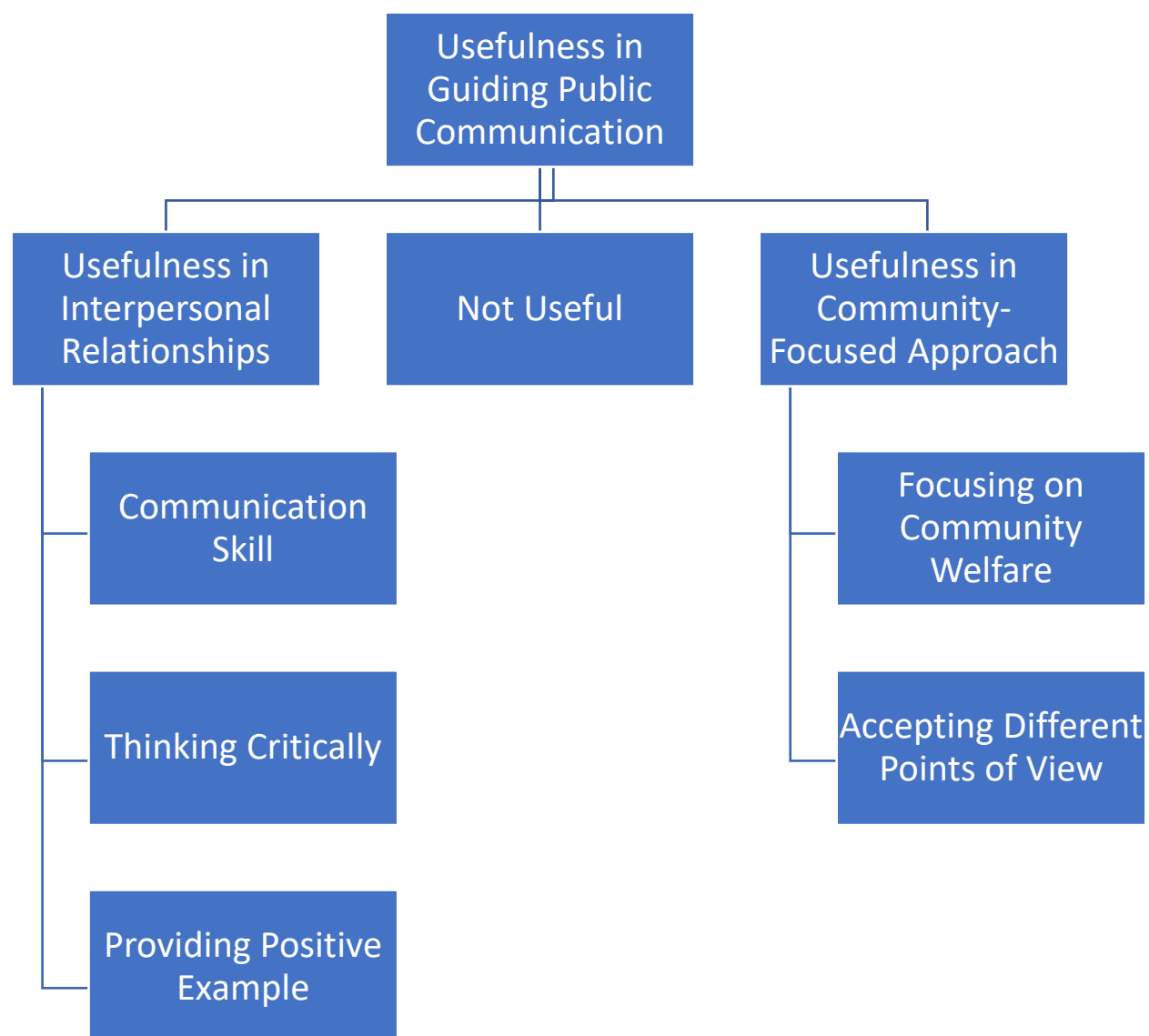
*was in the chief's office, and having to communicate with city government and different organizations outside the Police Department, I think, is what led me to have that mindset.*

(Participant 21)

The remaining 13 participants pointed to one or more aspects of their criminal justice degree program which influences their direction in appropriate public communication. Two significant overarching themes emerged from these responses. These participants describe their criminal justice education as useful in the creation and maintenance of relationships with their subordinates and useful in the adoption and emphasis in a community-focused approach to public interaction.

**Figure 2**

*Usefulness of Criminal Justice Degree in Guiding Public Communication*



### ***Usefulness in Interpersonal Relationships***

Of the participants relating their criminal justice degree to the guidance given to their personnel in respectful and courteous communication with the public, 7 described the influence to their own communication skills when interacting with street-level officers.

**Table 6**

*Use of Criminal Justice Degree in Interpersonal Relationships in Public Communication*

Interpersonal Relationship Concept	Frequency
Communication Skills	5
Thinking Critically	1
Providing Positive Example	1

### ***Communication Skills***

5 participants described their criminal justice education as instrumental in improving their own communication skills, which in turn influenced the way they guide their personnel in respectful communication with the public.

*Knowing how to communicate, you know, your side of the story in a professional and courteous way and even if you have to do that in writing, I think college, you know, my college courses prepared me to articulate my arguments in writing as opposed to just verbally. (Participant 10)*

*The way I see the education it gives you more tools in the toolbox. The professionalism, like all the courses that I took provided me with other ways, like if I have a problem with one of the officers, how to address it. You know there's multiple ways of one on one.*

*There's a group, you know...there's several ways to go about it. (Participant 22)*

### ***Thinking Critically***

One participant described the criminal justice degree program as instrumental in his overall critical thinking ability, which in turn guides his feelings about public communication and the way he communicates.

*Education teaches you more than just theory. And this, then you you're talking about critical thinking, decision making, you know, triaging, allocating resources, all that stuff...it probably plays a big role in that, you know...but a lot of that plays a big part in how I interact with people, how that treat people and how I expect the people that work with me, for me to interact in.* (Participant 15)

### ***Providing a Positive Example***

One participant pointed to the curriculum in his criminal justice degree program as influencing his direction regarding his subordinates' public communication through an emphasis in communicating his expectations and modeling the expected behavior.

*Honestly, Lincoln on Leadership, being amongst the troops and showing them the way. Don't ever expect your people to do something you won't do yourself. Lay out your expectations, mirror your expectations, and demonstrate how you want them to act.*  
(Participant 4)

### ***Usefulness in a Community-Focused Approach***

7 participants described the usefulness of their criminal justice degree program in adopting and maintaining a focus on the community served by the agency when directing personnel in acceptable public interactions.

### **Table 7**

*Use of Criminal Justice Degree in Community Focus in Public Communications*

Community Focus Concept	Frequency
Focusing on Community Welfare	4
Accepting Different Points of View	3

***Focusing on Community Welfare***

4 participants related an emphasis toward evaluation of overall community welfare goals to the curriculum of their criminal justice degree programs. These participants described their perceived benefit from moving away from a strict crime control model of police and community interaction.

*I look back to the community policing classes that I took and stuff like that, and just, you know, interacting with the citizens in a more positive manner. I mean, that...has always stuck with me, that, you know everybody gets in this field for different reasons. I've always had, me personally, I've always been adrenaline Junkie, I love, you know. This is what I've always been into. So you know that class was kind of like, you know, kind of something you never really thought about much. And you know, once you see it in action, and you, you see, you know what it can do to your community. Then. Yeah. So yeah, I mean, I I would say that class has led to helping me, at least with some of the younger officers. (Participant 17)*

*Take a minute to talk to somebody, and then think about the impact you could have on somebody promoting the profession just by giving a verbal warning. It's more than just, you have the most citations on your court docket. It's a lot bigger than just our badge. The reputation we have as police is nationwide. (Participant 18)*



*I also think that community policing was another thing, how we interact with the community and how we were involved with the community talking about this while in college all these experiments that, you know we went through, and you know, so I tend to take all that information and relay that to the Road Patrol deputies and my deputies. And if you're interacting in the community more you tend to get more respect. (Participant 19)*

*So, from what I can remember from the courses that I took. You know we talked about cops, community, oriented policing, and there were other things that were brought up, it just all kind of goes back to these are the people that we serve. This is a this is a career in service. You have to be a polite and respectful person, or you know, because the person that you're arresting today might be the guy that saves you from getting beat up tomorrow by someone else. So, treat everybody the same. Treat everybody nice and polite and respectfully. (Participant 20)*

### ***Accepting of Different Points of View***

3 participants described their criminal justice degree program curriculum as leading them to a more accepting perception of a range of different points of view. These participants placed a high value on the experience they gained through learning about and interacting with cultures apart from their own, specifically the requirement to engage with people from a range of backgrounds and opinions from their own.

*If it had not been for my education, I wouldn't understand the whole meaning behind dealing with people in society. I wouldn't understand how cultures interact with each other. Different belief systems. Because through education I learned there was more cultures than just mine. I learned there were more different belief systems than just mine. I got a big, broad understanding of different societal measurements from each different*

*type of ethnicity that you may encounter and an understanding of it. One of the biggest things I learned was how, looking at our past history, and how blacks were treated back in the sixties and fifties and forties all the way up to today's society, and how different behaviors evolved out of that, and enables us to understand where they might be coming from at times. And that's just something you don't learn, unless you understand it from a book. (Participant 12)*

*I did grow up in South Florida, so I am familiar with, you know, a lot of different ethnicities and cultures and things of that sort. But college just kind of made it, you know, bigger in my interactions. Change in terms of like group projects and group settings. You may not agree with what your classmate is saying. They may spark, you know, some type of emotional debate, but knowing how to communicate. (Participant 10)*

### **Research Question 3**

Research question 3 was, “What is the first-line police supervisor’s perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree program when directing street-level police officers in discretionary arrest decision-making during calls for police reform?”

12 participants (57%) described discussing available options in enforcement decisions with their personnel. 3 participants (14%) placed an emphasis on problem solving, and 2 participants (9%) emphasized community improvement when directing expectations in discretionary decision making. 4 participants (19%) reported a deferral to departmental policy in the street-level officers’ use of discretion, while 6 participants (28%) reported deferral to their agency’s field training officers to influence decision making in low level cases, rather than take the view of this direction being the first-line supervisor’s responsibility.

### **Table 8**

*Actions Taken to Guide Discretionary Decision Making*

Action Taken	Frequency	Percentage
Walking Through Options	12	57
Relying on Field Training Officers	6	28
Discussing Policy	4	19
Emphasizing Problem Solving	3	14
Improving the Community	2	9

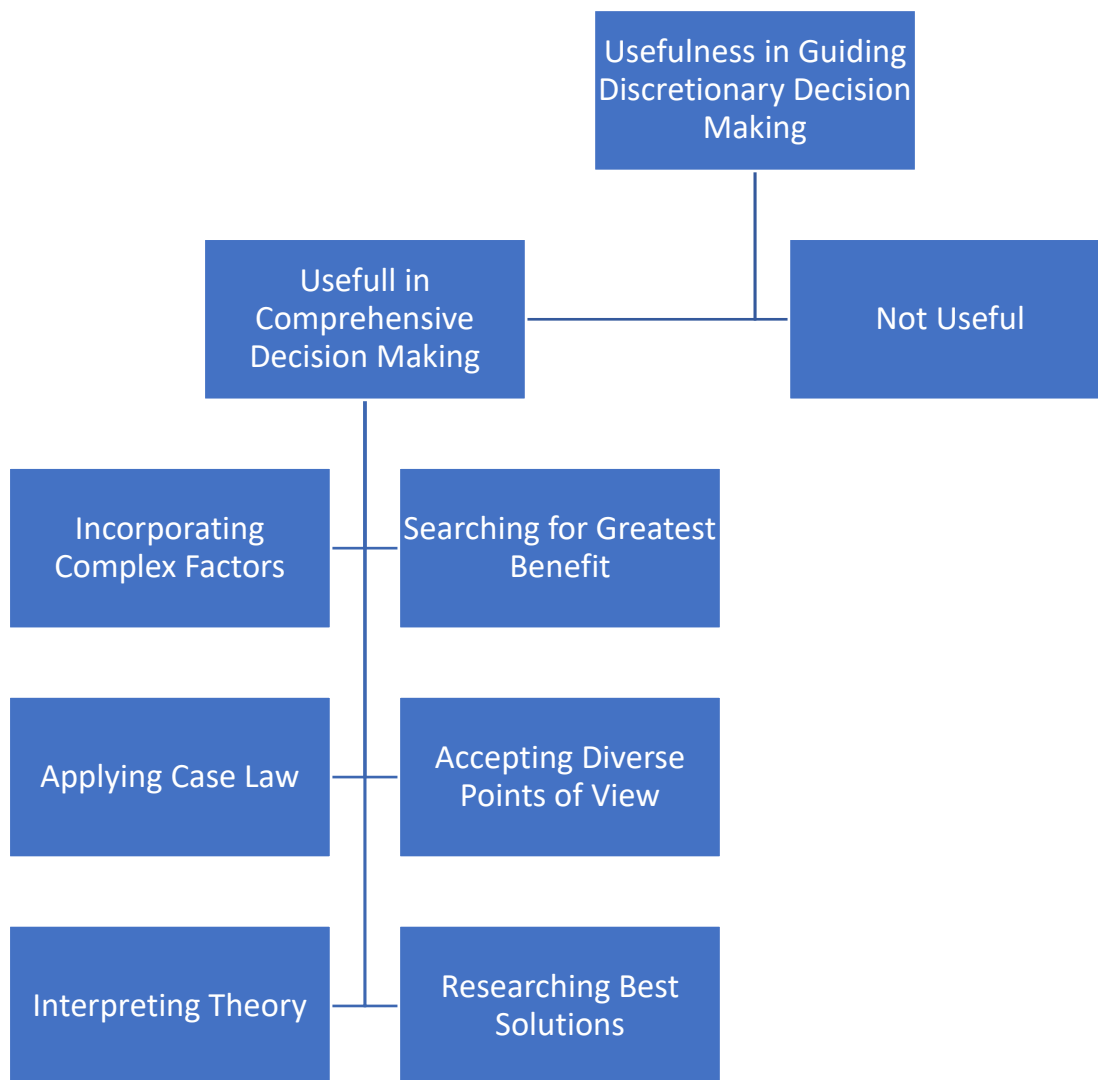
8 participants felt their criminal justice degree program does not influence the guidance they give their officers in discretionary enforcement decision-making.

*The college degree was more academic kind of stuff than...you know what I mean? I mean to be a professor or to teach criminology or whatever. Yeah, that would be great with...kind of that's what we were taught in college, but specifically like being here on patrol and dealing with the stuff I deal with. You know, we really didn't get specific and into that kind of stuff. (Participant 5)*

The remaining 13 participants identified the ways they use the content of their criminal justice education in directing acceptable discretionary decision making in their subordinates. These responses followed a common theme of usefulness in comprehensive decision-making.

**Figure 3**

*Usefulness of Criminal Justice Degree in Guiding Discretionary Decision Making*



***Usefulness in Comprehensive Decision-Making***

13 participants described the usefulness of their criminal justice degree in increasing and improving their ability to communicate how appropriate decision making incorporates a wide variety of factors which must be weighed against each other to determine the best outcome.

**Table 9***Use of Criminal Justice Degree in Comprehensive Decision Making*

Comprehensive Decision-Making Concept	Frequency
Incorporating Complex Factors	7
Searching for Greatest Benefit	4
Applying Case Law	3
Accepting Diverse Points of View	3
Interpreting Theory	2
Researching Best Solutions	1

***Incorporating Complex Factors***

7 participants described the usefulness of their criminal justice education in their ability to inform their personnel to make use of a wide range of considerations when exercising their use of discretion. These responses related to factors related to an individual offender as well as factors related to the criminal justice system and its processes.

*Somebody was shoplifting to feed their children because they recently got laid off versus somebody just shoplifting to go make money and sell the product...and the consideration is, do they go to jail or not because if you take them to jail. and who's going to feed their kids, then versus the person that's just straight up a criminal who's just trying to make a profit. (Participant 12)*

*For years as an officer as on our traffic team and starting out going, "Oh, people are getting tickets all the time." And then I started thinking about to my criminal justice Courses, it's like. Are we just creating a culture of imposing fines on people? Does this*

*one really need a ticket? And as a patrol supervisor. I was supervising this officer had the mind that I did when I first started. Every car is going to the curb getting a ticket. It's like, hey, man like department expectation is not citation, citation, citation, our policy actually states equipment violation, and usually just a talk with somebody is all that's needed. And getting him to see that bigger picture going, I don't care about the amount of tickets you write. If you're stopping a car, look for something bigger, you know, get our high priority crimes off the street; our guns. (Participant 18)*

*Understanding that judicial system, understanding the consequences of your actions, and I think that some of that came from gaining that that knowledge in my degree. (Participant 7)*

### ***Searching for the Greatest Benefit***

4 participants described asking their subordinates to evaluate potential enforcement decisions based on the greatest benefit to the community, rather than on personal or departmental goals, and related that emphasis to the content of their criminal justice education.

*You know you broke the rule. You're going to jail Type of thing doesn't necessarily benefit anybody, doesn't benefit the community, doesn't a benefit the defendant, doesn't benefit law enforcement. (Participant 10)*

*Through my education. I learned that you know things ain't always black and white. There is a gray area that we sometimes have to deal in, and we have to make sure when we make a decision. It's in the best interest of not only the public, but maybe the person that we're dealing with at the time. I think education opened me up to another side of the law that I realized wasn't there. (Participant 12)*

*I think the criminal justice degree helps You see all the factors that go into policing especially because we work for the public and it, the public says, hey, you know what we are okay, in protest situations with property damage. Even though it's against the law. Should we really go out there and it force it when we're going against the public? And just going back to principles on policing, we get our power from the public. So, I'm not saying we do what the citizens want as a blanket statement, but their needs and desires of their community definitely shape our method of enforcement. (Participant 18)*

### ***Applying Case Law***

Three participants use their experience in interpreting and applying case law studied during their criminal justice degree programs when guiding personnel in discretionary enforcement decision making.

*It's because of the specific training and requirements of reading case law and some of these legal classes I took that I'm able to carry that with me forward. So now I take those case law, show it to the deputy after the fact, and everybody at these roll call meetings we have. We all go over the case all together. How is this applicable to what we do daily, and it changes their behavior. (Participant 4)*

### ***Accepting Diverse Points of View***

3 participants related their guidance in discretionary enforcement decision making to an increased ability to recognize and accept the different points of view of citizens with varied backgrounds learned through their criminal justice education.

*But, more talk about like socio-economic impacts. It's why I think that probably helped me, and how I use my discretion. Understand that people come from different*

*backgrounds, and why they may be engaged in the behavior they're engaged in.*

(Participant 2)

*Something I learned from them as well is that there's always 2 sides to everything and that was brought out through education and not through on the job, learning or through just natural knowledge. (Participant 12)*

### ***Interpreting Theory***

Two participants described the usefulness of their ability to interpret policing theory learned in their criminal justice degree program in providing guidance to their personnel regarding discretionary decision making.

*So, I think now we're having officers that come through that don't have a criminal justice degree, some of the training that I've had in my degree program in the scenarios, or that, or procom, whatever it might be. I'm able to help explain that to them and guide them through that because they I mean, they still have to go through the Academy. But they don't necessarily get a lot of the book learning, if you will, that we studied. Some of the sciences and in the human behavior sciences. (Participant 3)*

*I think that has some type of semblance of where, these young men and women are coming from when they make a decision, or why they didn't make a decision in that, in that aspect and I can relate that to one of the many theories that I've learned in in criminal justice. (Participant 1)*

### ***Researching Best Solutions***

One participant found usefulness in their ability to conduct research in effective policing practices learned through their criminal justice degree program in guiding personnel in discretionary enforcement decisions.



*I think that you know criminal justice, field does a very good job of teaching you to research and gives you all of the aspects of this is where you would find case law this is where you would find you know your law this is this is the practice of it this is the Supreme Court. It teaches you all the players, until you were all the Research, the Good Research, can be found. So if I do not know an answer, I have those resources at my disposal to where I can just start googling, and kind of figure it out. Okay. Well, you know we all know that from college, Wikipedia is not a very good source. Unfortunately, some of these kids still use it. But you know, I can skip that. And go to something that's peer reviewed and when I'm reading through something like that something may click. Okay, I remember Professor, talking about you know this case, or that case, or something like that. And I can kind of guide my way through there. (Participant 1)*

## **Summary**

This chapter has described the participants in this study and provided an analysis of the participants' responses to the interview questions. Results revealed the frequency with which criminal justice degree holding first-line police supervisors believed their degree to be useful when providing guidance to street level officers in acceptable use of force practices, expectations in respectful and courteous communication with the public, or proper use of discretion in enforcement decision making. Of those reporting a perceived benefit from their criminal justice education, several themes emerged related to communication ability and an enhanced vision of the role of police in society.

## **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

### **Overview of the Research**

The purpose of this study was to understand the ways in which first-line police supervisors utilize the content of criminal justice college degrees while interacting with the subordinate street-level police officers they are tasked with supervising, managing, motivating, and guiding. Of specific interest was the elements of these first-line supervisors' college experiences which proved useful in overseeing the street-level police officers' use of force practices, the manner in which the street-level officers interact with members of the public, and the decision-making processes of the street-level officers when allowed a high level of discretion in criminal enforcement options.

Participants for this study were recruited through the student database of the Southern Police Institute at the University of Louisville, where they had previously attended one or more training or educational programs related to their positions in law enforcement leadership. Data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews conducted virtually and analyzed based on the relevance to the research questions which guided this study.

This study intended to contribute to the body of policing literature pertaining to effective police leadership and expected outcomes of higher education for first-line police supervisors. Additionally, this study would add to the literature regarding factors influencing street-level police officer use of force practices, effective communication during police and citizen interactions, and the factors influencing street-level police officer decision making when enforcing low-level crime. Last, this study would assist police executives when determining appropriate minimum qualification standards for selecting personnel to fill first-line supervisor

positions along with informing criminal justice faculties' creation and evaluation of program and course curriculum designed for police leadership.

The researcher reviewed literature related to police use of force, citizen complaints against the police, police discretion in arrest decisions, first-line police supervisor influence on police office behaviors, police education levels, and criminal justice focused higher education. The research questions were designed from the review of the literature and the interactions observed between these concepts. Three research questions guided this study:

1. What is the first-line police supervisor's perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree program when directing street-level police officers in use of force issues during calls for police reform?
2. What is the first-line police supervisor's perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree program when directing street-level police officers in professional citizen interaction during calls for police reform?
3. What is the first-line police supervisor's perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree program when directing street-level police officers in discretionary arrest decision-making during calls for police reform?

## **Summary of Results**

The results of this study are the common themes which emerged through analysis of the experiences reported by the study participants in their own words. The results for each research question are discussed in this section.

### **Research Question 1**

What is the first-line police supervisor's perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree program when directing street-level police officers in use of force issues during calls for police

reform? Based on the analysis of the interview answers provided, two significant themes emerged surrounding the participants' perceptions of the usefulness of their criminal justice degree when guiding personnel in acceptable use of force practices: a usefulness in their ability to deconstruct use of force incidents for the purpose of influencing future events and a usefulness in their effective interpersonal communication skills.

Participants described a preference of reviewing past tense use of force incidents as an instructional method to explain future expectations. Officer body camera videos created by the personnel inside their agency along with video footage from events in other jurisdictions were frequently described as the source material for this instruction. The supervisors involved in this study found great importance in deconstructing these past events to evaluate how the officers involved responded and to compare the officer's actions against their understanding of pertinent case law. Additionally, the participants use this same process to demonstrate how the officer would, or would not have, been supported by departmental policy had the incident happened within the participant's agency.

The results of this study indicate a criminal justice higher education is beneficial in the first-line police supervisor's confidence and ability to evaluate the relationship between use of force incidents and relevant case law and policy. This ties directly to the participants' reported skill in communication earned through the criminal justice degree program. The results indicate a perceived high importance in the ability to communicate policy, case law, and future expectations to street-level officers.

These concepts, when working in concert, represent the participants' main perceived benefits to having completed a criminal justice focused college degree. A first-line police supervisor can be well prepared through higher educational experience to evaluate previous use

of force events to identify legal and policy concerns, then use that analysis as a teaching tool for street-level officers aimed at guiding them towards procedurally sound force outcomes through effective and individualized communication techniques.

This result supports the finding of Ingram, et al, (2014) who found that the police supervisor plays an important role in the interpretation of departmental policy for proper implementation by the police officer on the street. Also, this result supports Cojean's (2020) finding of departmental policy playing a role in the street-level officer's use of force decision making. If street-level officers are to make sound use of force decisions based in departmental policy and case law standards, it is crucial they have a firm understanding of related policies and case law. This understanding is cultivated and supported through the communication from their direct supervisor, who is responsible for interpreting the information into useable guidelines.

The sufficient preparation of first-line police supervisors in the interpretation and communication of use of force application expectations is critical, especially in times when public calls for reform in police tactics in this area are prevalent. The results of this study indicate coursework based in criminal justice can provide the first-line police supervisor valid preparation in these critical skills.

## **Research Question 2**

What is the first-line police supervisor's perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree program when directing street-level police officers in professional citizen interaction during calls for police reform? Through the analysis of the results of this study, two themes emerged which describe how the participants view the usefulness of their criminal justice degrees when guiding their subordinate officers' interactions with the public: a usefulness in adopting a community-

focused approach to policing and a usefulness in cultivating and maintaining their interpersonal relationships.

Participants in this study described their beliefs in the benefits of a community-oriented approach to policing and public safety issues, which was founded in the curriculum included in their criminal justice degree programs and supported by their own lived experience in their work. The ability to recognize the benefits to agency initiatives when taking a community-focused approach to problem solving was a stated result of studying the concepts of Community-Oriented Policing through criminal justice coursework.

These supervisors recalled studying these concepts on a theoretical basis while in college and later applying the concepts in practice as street-level police officers, to perceived success, and reported using their own experiences to guide their expectations of their subordinate officers. This result aligns with prior literature describing street-level officers' engagement in community-based problem-solving strategies over standard policing model tactics when they held the belief that this was the preference of the first-line supervisor (Engel & Worden, 2003).

Community relations was a stated concern of the participants in this study. While this concern stems partly from the stated mission of police administrations, the higher education experiences of the first-line supervisors influenced their belief of each individual citizen conflict having the ability to alter the public's support of the police in the larger sense. This wide-view approach directly relating every individual interaction to the overall effectiveness of the police is in line with literature relating a single negative police interaction to a negative opinion of the police overall (Bolger, et al., 2021).

The results indicate the community-focused approach can also extend to individual police citizen contacts by recognizing and accepting points of view from the public which conflict with

the viewpoint of the officer. Results showed the criminal justice degree program influenced the students' understanding of the differences in citizens' reactions to the police based in the citizen's background demographics. Participants stated their criminal justice education helped them to professionally and positively interact with citizens from different races, ethnicities, and religions during police contacts because of a course of study related to how marginalized communities may view the police due to negative police history within those communities.

This result is supported by the findings of Dominey and Hill (2010) where higher education experience improved the street-level officer's ability to communicate effectively and professionally with the public, but specifically to communicate effectively with diverse groups. Dominey and Hill's work also supports the result of this study's finding of the participants' perception of their criminal justice degree improving their ability to engage in interpersonal relationships through effective communication.

The results indicate that the criminal justice degree program can prepare the student in various methods of effective communication. Of particular interest is how the participants use their experience in communicating conflicting opinions during their coursework and their ability to relate that experience to resolving similar conflicts through communication in police and citizen interactions. Participants described how conflict resolution strategies learned while discussing policing issues during the degree program prepared them to engage in similar resolution strategies in their workplace. Having this firsthand experience is useful in guiding street-level officers in acceptable citizen interactions through modeling expected communication behaviors and for providing examples of past successes.

First-line police supervisors can benefit from a criminal justice higher education through an in depth understanding of how police citizen interactions, even on the micro-level, can

critically enhance policing initiatives in communities. Conversely, the criminal justice degree program can outline how negative police interactions with the public can severely damage police effectiveness. The results indicate a criminal justice degree program can prepare the first-line police supervisor to apply the understanding of the effects of a street-level officer's communication with the public toward departmental goals by effectively communicating with the officers under their supervision and the public, alike.

### **Research Question 3**

What is the first-line police supervisor's perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree program when directing street-level police officers in discretionary arrest decision-making during calls for police reform? A single theme emerged regarding the perceived usefulness of a criminal justice degree toward influencing discretionary arrest decision-making: a usefulness in comprehensive decision-making.

The results of this study indicate that a criminal justice degree program is beneficial in cultivating the students' ability to process a wide range of information from multiple sources when evaluating criminal offense enforcement options. The participants in this study described ensuring arrest decision making adheres to policy as a primary concern; however, they expressed a considerable concern for how the outcomes of arrest decisions affect the community when options were supported by policy. This result supports the findings of Medias and Kehoe (2006) in describing policy considerations as more important to a street-level officer in enforcement decision making than their personal preferences in arrest decisions.

Participants described how aspects of their criminal justice degree programs expanded their worldview to be aware of and consider concepts in community-focused outcomes. Considerations in the effects of incarceration on departmental objectives, community wellness,



and the cooperating elements of the criminal justice system are guiding these supervisors in creating and communicating expectations of their personnel in the use of their discretionary enforcement decisions. The results indicate that a criminal justice degree promotes discretionary enforcement actions which provide the greatest perceived benefit to the community above traditionally reported policing metrics, such as arrest and citation totals.

Moreover, this study's results show a criminal justice degree holding supervisor is willing to consider the outcome of enforcement decisions from the offender's point of view, which is in direct conflict with the traditionally conservative crime control model in policing which emphasizes processing offenders through the criminal justice system through arrests and convictions. Participants described a preference toward actively investigating the circumstances surrounding the offender's decision to violate the law, along with a consideration for the negative effects to the offender if they were to be arrested or issued a citation for their actions. Giuffre and Huebner (2023) found citizens greatly alter their behaviors in areas they believe to be heavily policed in an effort to avoid the risk of incarceration or monetary penalties through traffic citations, to include avoid leaving their homes at all. The results of this study indicate a concern that the public's impression of over policing would have a negative effect on their agency's legitimacy in the community, while having limited positive effect on public safety.

Much of this concern was rooted in concerns about the socioeconomic disadvantages recognized in individual contacts, but also entire areas of their communities. The results show the participants learned these community-focused concerns during their criminal justice degree programs, implemented these preferences in their work as individual officers, and then used these concepts to guide their expectations of the street-level officers reporting to them. Engel

(2000) found the first-line supervisor's preferences have a large influence on the street-level officer's decision to arrest or not in low level criminal cases.

This study's results suggest a first-line police supervisor may be sufficiently prepared to guide their subordinate personnel through the processes of complex decision-making in arrest decisions with the overarching goal of community wellbeing at the forefront of desired outcomes. Law enforcement agencies concerned with over policing and mass incarceration in disadvantaged areas of their jurisdictions could benefit from criminal justice degree standards among their first-line supervisors.

### **Limitations**

Criminal justice education provides an overview of a wide range of entities which comprise the criminal justice system in the United States, including police, courts, probation and parole, and legal representatives. This study was specific to the role this education plays in the supervisory experience in policing; therefore, it is not of use in informing how the curriculum prepares agents or supervisors in any other aspect of the criminal justice system. The participants in this study represented a small fraction of the employment demographics of the general population of criminal justice degree recipients.

Additionally, this study's focus was the self-reported lived experiences of the participants in the ways they utilize their criminal justice degrees in practice. Specific outcomes in use of force statistics, citizen complaint frequency, and discretionary law enforcement decision making statistics were not collected from the agencies represented in this study. As a result, this study does not represent any correlation between the participants' experiences and recorded outcomes in any of these areas.

Although this study included participants from diverse law enforcement agencies from various parts of the United States, the results cannot be generalized to the entirety of law enforcement due to the small sample size.

This study did not differentiate between levels of degree attained as it is focused on the generalities and commonalities which exist in criminal justice curricula in the United States. It is reasonable to expect a greater depth of knowledge and understanding as a criminal justice student progresses through levels of higher education; however, delineating and describing how (or if) varying levels of degrees are applied in practice was outside the scope of this study. In contrast, this study focused on the content of the education received, rather than the quantity of education completed.

### **Implications of Findings**

The findings of this study indicate that a criminal justice focused college degree may improve a first-line police supervisor's ability to influence the decision making of the street-level police officers under their leadership toward positive outcomes in citizen interactions. The curriculum of a criminal justice degree program appears to provide the student with an expanded view of criminal behavior and the ways in which a street-level officer's response to criminal behavior can have a large impact on departmental and community goals.

Criminal justice degree holding supervisors appear to employ a preference toward large-scale public safety and community well-being over traditional measures of police performance, such as arrest and case clearance totals. The performance outcomes preferred by the participants in this study mirror the reported preferences of the public, especially in modern times calling for police reforms. Most importantly, the criminal justice degree can prepare the first-line police

supervisor to effectively communicate their expectations in use of force decisions, respectful citizen interaction, and discretionary enforcement decision making.

### **Implications to Police Agencies**

Police administrators concerned with addressing the outcomes of citizen contacts in these areas through the first-line supervisors in their agencies may be well served by maintaining a criminal justice focused college education as a minimum standard for selection and elevation to supervisory roles. Clearly, the general improvement in cognitive ability and mental processing realized through higher education (Guerra-Carrillo, et al., 2017) would be of benefit to police personnel at every rank and assignment; however, other identified benefits to college educational experiences would have direct benefits to the personnel responsible for the supervision and leadership of the police.

Police chiefs maintaining degree requirements for their street-level officers find this standard improves the quality of their workforce through increased maturity and professionalism, along with an increased ability to adequately process the complexities involved in police work (Bruns, 2010). Again, these traits are of significant benefit to street-level police officers, but are considered mandatory traits for first-line police supervisors. The results of this study indicate the participants have realized these exact benefits in practice, solidifying the opinions and experiences in police chiefs' evaluation of college degree holding police personnel.

To this end, it would be tempting to suggest a college degree requirement for entry-level police employment to achieve these desired professional outcomes across entire police agencies. This is ill-advised as such a requirement would severely reduce the applicant field. Furthermore, street-level officers holding college degrees have struggled to find the value in the theoretical aspects of a liberal arts curriculum in their duty assignments, preferring in retrospect their degree

programs had been more focused on practical skills (Edwards, 2017). The theoretical, historical, and strategic understanding gained through a college degree program is more applicable to the role of first-line police supervisors, who determine and deploy platoon-wide strategies, manage performance expectations, and translate policy into useable directives across diverse groups of street-level police officers.

Coupling the benefits to the first-line police supervisor of higher education with research indicating the street-level officer's performance and decision making is highly influenced by the direction and preferences of their direct supervisor (Engel & Worden, 2003; Engel, 2000; Ingram, et al., 2014) fuels this study's primary policy implication: college education requirements for promotional consideration would provide a strong vehicle by which police administrators could realize widespread benefits across an entire agency. This standard would ensure street-level officers considering future promotional opportunities are adequately prepared for the demands of the position prior to taking on the responsibility.

Of course, an increased higher education standard for first-line supervisor roles could create barriers for some street-level personnel due to the time and monetary commitments of attending college. Dedicated police administrators could seek to remove barriers to obtaining higher education through partnerships with local universities and would likely see a high return on investment. In the current study, Participant 7 obtained a bachelor's degree through such an arrangement. He described a partnership between his agency and a university in which the university provided a small tuition discount, was granted access to the department personnel, and conducted classes at department headquarters, while the department allowed on-duty time for personnel to attend. This participant described a large benefit, both to the agency and personally, but clarified he would not have engaged in higher education had this program not been available.

### **Implications to Criminal Justice Degree Programs**

Much of this study's results focus on the perceived benefits of a criminal justice education in areas closely aligned with the overall liberal arts curriculum, rather than a direct result of a course of study grounded in the criminal justice system. Among the participants in this study, only one specifically described how the knowledge of the workings of the entire criminal justice system, gained through the degree program, was beneficial to the work of the first-line police supervisor, but this was strictly focused in how the quality of documentation affects the judicial process. In contrast, many participants described receiving no benefit from studying concepts related to prosecution, corrections, and parole and probation which were topics addressed in their degree programs. This aligns with previous research which was unable to find a clear benefit to a criminal justice specific degree program for police personnel (del Carmen, 2006).

Yet, police personnel default to the criminal justice degree when investigating higher education programs for the benefit of their professional advancement. With estimates of police personnel nearing 800,000 individuals in the United States alone, criminal justice degree program administrators may find unique benefit to the creation of policing specific tracks which address police specific concerns. Integrating the communication and critical thinking skill obtained through the liberal arts education into modern policing concerns of community engagement and evidence-based strategy would prepare police leaders to move the industry toward operations mutually beneficial to communities and practitioners.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Two recommendations are offered to further research the effects of higher education experiences in first-line police supervisors:

1. This study focused on the perspective and perceptions of the first-line supervisors in utilizing the curriculum of their criminal justice degree programs. The participants described a high confidence in their ability to effectively communicate policy and procedure directives to their personnel. Future research could focus on the street-level officers' reception of this communication and the effectiveness of the criminal justice degree holding first-line supervisor from the officer's perspective as the receiver of the communication. This approach would be beneficial as a supplement to the current study to understand whether the first-line supervisors' communication is effective in actuality or only in the supervisor's perspective.
2. Many outcomes of police and citizen contacts are quantified, such as frequency of force used and totals of arrests made and citizen complaints received. The second recommendation is a quantitative study evaluating the influence a first-line police supervisor's education level has on quantitative measures of their subordinate officers' performance. This would connect the content of higher education curriculum to objective outcomes of police officer performance and could identify which educational degree level provides the maximum benefit to these outcomes.

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## Appendix A

My name is Dennis Hippert and I am studying the experiences of first-line police supervisors in the utilization of criminal justice degrees during the course of their work. This study is being conducted in pursuit of a PhD in Criminal Justice through Nova Southeastern University. You are receiving this email because you have attended a course or courses at the Southern Police Institute at the University of Louisville and your rank at that time fit that of the potential participants in this study.

I am interested in learning about the experiences of first-line police supervisors who had earned any college degree in criminal justice prior to June 2020 and were responsible for the supervision of patrol officers between June 2020 and the present. This study can assist criminal justice higher education programs in creating curriculum is most beneficial to the work you do. Inclusion in this study would require your participation in a one-on-one interview over Zoom, which would last approximately one hour. All participant information will remain strictly confidential, and no record of your identity, your agency information, or any other identifiable information will be reported.

If interested in participating, please click the link below and complete the ten-question information form. If you are eligible, I will be in touch through email to set a date and time to be interviewed which best works for you. In the meantime, if you have any questions I can be contacted via email at [dh1766@mynsu.nova.edu](mailto:dh1766@mynsu.nova.edu) or by phone at 502-287-2733.

## **Appendix B**

### **Criminal Justice Degree Utilization Study Screening Form**

1. First Name
2. Last Name
3. Email
4. Phone number
5. Law Enforcement Agency Name
6. Law Enforcement Agency City, State
7. Were you a first-line supervisor (sergeant or equivalent rank) between June 2020 and present? (If yes, continue to the next question. If no, stop the questionnaire here.)
8. Did you supervise law enforcement officers in a patrol function as a first-line supervisor between June 2020 and present? (If yes, continue to the next question. If no, stop the questionnaire here.)
9. Prior to June 2020, did you complete a criminal justice college degree (at any level)? (If yes, continue to the next question. If no, stop the questionnaire here.)



10. Are you willing to complete a virtual face-to-face interview about your experiences (which would take approximately one hour)? (If yes, continue to the next question. If no, stop the questionnaire here.)

## **Appendix C**

### **Initial Interview Guide**

#### **Initial Questions**

1. Tell me about the courses you took during your college career
2. How did your coursework address police/citizen interactions?
3. Regarding your professional career, how long have you been in law enforcement?
4. Tell me about the relationship between your agency and the community
5. Tell me about the “civil unrest” you experienced in your community during and after the summer of 2020
6. How did the officers under your command react to the “civil unrest”?

#### **Intermediate Questions**

1. How have you used your criminal justice college education to guide your officers in issues surrounding use of force during recent times of civil unrest and calls for police reform?
2. How have you used your criminal justice college education to guide your officers in issues surrounding professional and courteous interactions with citizens during recent times of civil unrest and calls for police reform?
3. How have you used your criminal justice college education to guide your officers in issues surrounding their use of discretion when determining which enforcement actions to take for low-level crimes during recent times of civil unrest and calls for police reform?

#### **Ending Questions**

1. How would you describe the effects of your criminal justice degree on your decision-making at work?
2. What would you say is the most important thing you learned in your degree program?
3. Having worked in the field, would you suggest modifications to your degree program to make it more applicable? If so, how?
4. Do you feel having a degree is important to your position?
5. Is there something else you can think of to tell me about how you use your degree?
6. Do you have any questions of me?

## **Appendix D**

### **Final Interview Guide**

#### **Initial Questions**

- Tell me about the courses you took during your college career
- How did your coursework address police/citizen interactions?
- Regarding your professional career, how long have you been in law enforcement?
- Tell me about the relationship between your agency and the community
- Tell me about the “civil unrest” you experienced in your community during and after the summer of 2020.
- How did the officers under your command react to the “civil unrest”?

#### **Intermediate Questions**

- How do you describe to your officers what is acceptable in use of force practices?
- What do you say to them and how do you ensure they understand?
- How would you say your criminal justice education influenced the guidance you give to your officers in using force?
- How do officers under your command learn what is acceptable in respectful and courteous communication with citizens?
- How do you reenforce that with your officers?
- How has your criminal justice education influenced how you approach your officers’ interactions with the public?
- In cases where your officers have enforcement discretion, how do they learn appropriate decision making?

- What guidance do you give to ensure their discretionary enforcement decision making is in line with the agency's goals?
- How does your criminal justice education influence the direction you give in enforcement discretion?

**Ending Questions**

- How would you describe the effects of your criminal justice degree on your decision-making at work?
- What would you say is the most important thing you learned in your degree program?
- Having worked in the field, would you suggest modifications to your degree program to make it more applicable? If so, how?
- Is there something else you can think of to tell me about how you use your degree?
- Do you have any questions of me?