

Spring 2019

# Predicting College Students' Career Interests To Be a Police Investigator Rather Than a Patrol Officer

Alyssa Viator

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PREDICTING COLLEGE STUDENTS' CAREER INTERESTS TO BE A POLICE  
INVESTIGATOR RATHER THAN A PATROL OFFICER

by

Alyssa Claire Viator

A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate School,  
the College of Arts and Sciences  
and the School of Criminal Justice, Forensic Science, and Security  
at The University of Southern Mississippi  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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May 2019

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## ABSTRACT

In the field of criminal justice, much research has been dedicated to investigating policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, there is a lack of research regarding predictions of career preference among college students, more specifically, millennials. This study was designed to fill that gap in the literature by examining interests in police patrol careers. The methodology involved included multiple regression as a way to potentially predict career preference for a police investigator rather than a patrol officer. The results provided promising results for the overall understanding of career preference for millennials. This study also provided crucial discussions for policy implications and future research recommendations.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. Charles Scheer for his mentorship and guidance throughout my time at The University of Southern Mississippi School of Criminal Justice Graduate School program. I would also like to thank Dr. Lisa Nored for her continuous support through the demanding thesis process. I also owe Dr. Laura Gullede many thanks for her insight into my thesis research. Their guidance and support have provided me with abilities and tools to further my research academically and professionally. I owe a great debt to all of them.

## DEDICATION

For my parents, Carolyn and Wesley Viator and my grandmother, Rita Dye.

Without their continuous support this would have never been possible.

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## CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Problem

The career orientation of individuals in the Millennial generation should be of great interest to criminal justice researchers and leaders. This research study investigates why Millennials may pursue careers in police investigations rather than police patrol. Because of the lack of research in current police applicants' desires to pursue careers in investigative work rather than police patrol work, this project is of potential interest.

Recruitment among the Millennial generation is considered to be the most challenging obstacle facing police chiefs today (Smith, 2016). According to Willis (2016), there are flaws within police departments of selling patrol work and helping new generations understand career ladders in general. Eidhoff & Poelzl 2014's study (cited in Turgeon 2015) describes the career ladder as a set of hierarchical levels young graduates and mid-career professionals seek as they carry the task and responsibilities of their job (Eidhoff & Poelzl, cited in Turgeon 2015). Despite the differences between careers in business and criminal justice, they share the assigned tasks, desirable attributes and incentives offered for three job levels: entry level, mid-level, and upper level (Turgeon, 2015). All job markets, even law enforcement, constantly search for short, medium, and long-term employability from generation to generation (Lyons, Schweitzer & Ng, 2015, cited in Turgeon 2015). Turgeon (2015) asserts that each level position (entry, mid, and upper) requires certain job qualifications that include specific tasks and incentives necessary for the intended employer. For example, King (2005) identifies five hierarchies of police organizations: skills hierarchy, rewards hierarchy, seniority hierarchy, status hierarchy, and authority hierarchy. Evans 2013 (cited in King 2005)

article classifies skills hierarchy as the different levels of competencies or skills within each police organization (Evan, cited in King 2005). These skills can include a wide variety of abilities, like excelling in high-speed driving and use of firearms, computer, budgeting, and talking to citizens (King, 2005). Beckmann's 1978 notes (as cited in King, 2005) describes rewards hierarchy as the allocation of employee rewards among each police department. Seniority hierarchy revolves around the classification of officers gaining prestige based on the passage of time regardless of promotion or assignment status. According to Stone and Form (1953, p. 150, as cited in King, 2005) status hierarchy refers to the different distributions of social honor. Simply put, police officers differ in their status, thus resulting in the formation of a hierarchy. Lastly, authority hierarchy is built on the formal distribution of power. Each hierarchy described above is inextricably linked and stitch together the police organizational career ladder (King, 2005).

Another persistent problem police departments face is the advancement of officers to investigative roles without having proper training, thus generating fear regarding the overall effectiveness of police and their ability to deal with crime (Kingshott et al., 2015). According to Horvath, Meesig and Lee (as cited in Kingshott et al., 2015), police departments across the United States have expressed concern about the little investigation training their investigators and patrol officers receive. This problem has the potential to correlate with the inaccurate information provided to potential police recruits. If patrol officers and investigative officers are not equipped with proper training techniques, then they are not prepared to correctly explain the detailed duties of their job, thus resulting in an effective recruitment strategy.

In order for police departments to effectively recruit in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, law enforcement officials must focus on techniques to better recruit qualified applicants. With that being said, more attention needs to focus on research that searches for the best strategy to address law enforcement recruitment challenges. One such effort (Castaneda & Ridgeway, 2010) has examined career attitudes of existing police academy recruits.

### *Statement of the Problem*

One area of concern among police departments is the recruitment of candidates joining police academies without knowledge of the realities of police and investigative work (McCafferty, 2003). College students' perceptions and realities of police work and investigations are inaccurate and are affecting recruitment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Haarr, 2001; Smith, 2016). Accurate knowledge given to potential candidates about the harsh realities of police work could assist police departments in effectively recruiting the next generation of cops (Smith, 2016). Walker (2018) suggests that the first step in managing unrealistic police expectations is further examination of Millennials' career choices. Increasing our understanding of the Millennial generation can help police departments create immediate, contemporary, and relevant recruitment plans for years to follow (Smith, 2016). Recognizing, assessing and addressing the problem of recruitment among Millennials is only the beginning of the challenges law enforcement leaders face (Walker, 2018).

Choosing a career is one of the most important decisions facing undergraduates during the past few decades. Thus, it is crucial that they understand the factors that influence their career preference (Bubic, 2017). Lack of awareness about job specifics, the career ladder, and their ability to explore their career-making skills can hinder their

cognitive information processing when choosing a career (Peterson, Sampson, Lenz, & Reardon, 2002). Furthermore, Turgeon (2015) suggests that lack of awareness of the career ladder lies with insufficient education within universities and colleges, thus suggesting they don't offer enough courses on the subject. In order to improve efforts to train, attract, hire, supervise, retain and upgrade aspiring professionals, business professors and employers must recognize the new job reality facing the newest generation entering the workforce (Weeks et al, 2014; Turgeon, 2015). Nonetheless, (Lyons, Schweitzer & Ng, 2015) suggest that from generation to generation short, medium and long-term employability goals have changed, therefore each job level (entry-level, mid-level, upper-level) requires certain qualifications and tasks from the employer (Turgeon, 2015). Finally, better awareness of the career ladder could allow for better management of marketing and sales within that organization (Turgeon, 2015).

Studies assert that misrepresentations of investigations could be due to the 'CSI effect'. 'The CSI effect', emerged by Cather in 2004 (as cited in Littlefield, 2011), can be described as the influence of fictional and/or reality television crime programs (Huey, 2010). Littlefield (2011) asserts that television is blamed for constructing forensic science authoritatively, thus confusing the relationships between forensic science and police. The authority problem of forensic science creates confusion between the role of the police and CSI's (Huey, 2010). Mopas (2007) dubs the 'CSI effect' as giving viewers inaccurate representations of the use of forensics in criminal investigations and suggests that the perceptions of forensics are intensely distorted. Romanticizing forensic science and investigations is thought to have sparked interest among undergraduates to pursue careers in that field (Jackson, 2009). Not only is the 'CSI effect' misrepresenting

forensics, it is also misrepresenting other careers in law enforcement (Huey, 2010). While forensic scientists are experts at collecting DNA, ballistics, tool marks and blood spatter, police investigators must also have a general understanding of the diverse nature of forensics (Gottschalk & Holgersson, 2006: 184). Further, Huey (2010) notes that a further element of detective work is what illuminates the desire to become a detective. Henry (2004: 202) suggests that the public fascination surrounding police investigators is their understandings about human nature and life and death. To conclude, police officers and their organizations continue to worry about the unrealistic representations of police work and the 'CSI effect' offered by the media (Huey, 2010).

*Purpose of the Study.* Current research regarding police patrol careers is largely anecdotal and lacks empirical evidence. Further examination of college students' expectations and attitudes toward police patrol careers has the potential to expose flawed perceptions of careers in law enforcement among millennials, more specifically, what impacts college students' career choice of working in patrol or investigations. Moreover, in order to provide accurate information about the investigative process, criminal justice researchers and leaders must conduct substantial statistical data (Greenwood & Petersilia, 1975). In response to the disconnect between perceptions of policing and the realities of the job, this study aims to investigate potential predictors for career choices among college students and provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between realities of police work and recruitment through the use of a survey dispersed to university criminal justice students. The research findings from this study has the potential to serve as valuable information that can assist law enforcement agencies in

successfully targeting respected applicants for future employment (Scheer, Rossler, Papania, 2018).



## CHAPTER II – LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the different career expectations between generations that have emerged from one police organization to another could potentially illuminate the demanding nature of the job and the effect it has on potential police recruits. Due to the increasing demand for science and technology occupations, criminal justice majors have skyrocketed, thus causing students to pursue careers within the field of criminal justice (Rabe-Hemp et al., 2013). Potential police recruits are currently obtaining criminal justice degrees while learning about patrol techniques, communication skills and leadership tactics without actually being exposed to the reality of police patrol careers. College can be a significant period for undergraduate students and many experience difficulties in engaging in the behavioral and adaptive mechanisms of career preference (Fouad et al., 2016). While criminal justice students learn about law enforcement careers, potential recruit candidates perceive police work as being similar to social work, therefore causing disinterest in patrol work and interest in detective work (Rabe-Hemp et al., 2013). Much research on policing has been inspired by public health analogies and has led university students to perceive police as treatment providers rather than agents of criminal law enforcement. Perceiving police officers as public health officials and treatment providers can influence university students to pursue careers in investigative work rather than patrol work (Wood et al., 2014). Along with the increasing demand of criminal justice careers, students can be persuaded towards investigative work because of police procedural shows. The allure of these criminal investigative shows can generate a tremendous impact on undergraduate students pursuing a career in criminal justice. However, questions have been raised on whether the depictions of police investigative work in

these shows are reality (Huey, 2010). Along with unrealistic depictions of criminal justice careers and no experience with law enforcement, another problem persists: the changing of police culture because of the retirements of the Generation X cohort. In the coming years, one of the biggest obstacles police organizations will face will be the retirement of their older police officers and their replacement by the Millennials. In order to effectively manage and entice the new cohort of Millennials, police organizations across the country must provide a clear understanding of the different work values between generations (Twenge et al., 2010). Failure to do so can create confusions about the reality of the police and investigative work. Because Millennials will be the majority of law enforcement officers in the next decade, their different outlook on job expectations has the potential to further widen the gap between generations and cause shifts between the ranks.

Past studies suggest that the Millennial generation has new political worldviews that sets them apart from the generation who came before them. Unlike their elders, Millennials continue to face gender and racial disparities, discrimination against sexual minorities and widening disparity amongst classes despite declarations to end workplace violence (Milkman, 2017). Milkman (2017) analyzes social movements, the undocumented immigrant movement, the Occupy Wall Street movement, protesting sexual assault movement and the Black Lives Matter movement and she asserts how the four movements reflect how the Millennial generation varies amongst other generations through their different social and organizational characteristics. Literature suggests that because of the selfish, narcissistic and disengaged attitudes of Millennials, their generation and the older generation often disagrees on a variety of issues, such as

capitalism and the rights of minorities (Milkman, 2017). Using Beinart's 2013 (as cited in Milkman, 2017) term "political generation", Milkman (2017) suggests that Millennials comprise of a new generation that differs from activists of other generations. According to Kalleberg (2011), new technologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century deeply shapes Millennials' lives, thus intensifying their worldviews of profound subjects. Following the Great Recession, there became a rise of gratuitous and divided employment, thus generating millennial activism among college graduates. These waves of political protest illuminated how history has shaped millennial experiences and opinions (Milkman, 2017).

Mannheim's theory of generations (1927, 1944) suggests that generations are formed by historical and sociological processes and depends solely on what provokes the social and cultural processes surrounding the generations. Mannheim (1927: 298) furthered his theory and pointed out that, unlike their elders, young people in every era are vulnerable to many triggers because their experiences and worldviews are still changing. Because Millennials are able to sympathize with certain social movements so quickly, this allows them to accelerate their social and cultural attitudes and form their own generation style (Mannheim, 1927: 309). Different from their elders, Millennials and their cognizance regarding the youth around the world allows them to be closer to current problems and be passionate about radical change (Mannheim, 1927; 300-301; Jaeger, 1985). Mannheim's assessment of generations provides us with essential insight into new social activities happening and how they are historically shaped by newly created generations. He suggests that the Internet and the Great Recession triggered social and cultural movements for the Millennials just as the Great Depression triggered the Old Left in the 1930s and the New Left during the Vietnam War in the 1960s. The Great

Recession and the expansion of the Internet provided Millennials, especially those with a college education, with the means to voice their opinions (Milkman, 2017). Mason (2013) notes the amassed levels of education among the Millennial generation and argues that Occupy Wall Street and other social movements were supervised by graduates with no future, thus shedding light on explanations about what triggers them.

### Influence of the Millennial Generation

As noted in previous studies, the Millennial generation has the potential to influence future law enforcement leaders (Wilson et al., 2013). With each generation entering the workforce, new and different attitudes, values and expectations are set in order to establish boundaries and failure to acknowledge such differences can result in miscommunication and misunderstanding and ultimately create an unworkable atmosphere (O'Bannon, 2001; Economist, 2009). Younger generations are constantly recruited by older generations because of their considerably different attitudes, values and expectations (Economist, 2009). Past literature suggests that Millennials demand good pay and benefits, rapid advancement, challenging work, good work/life balance, and contributing to society (Ng et al., 2010). Ng et al. (2010) build on past literature and contrast how millennial career expectations are displayed in their work-related choices and career decision making. Past literature suggest that Millennial career expectations are unrealistic and have no connection between performance and reward. However, much research looks at young workers in other countries rather than North America (Ng et al., 2010).

Ng et al. (2010) identified five prevalent themes among Millennials and their career expectations: work/life balance, good pay and benefits, advancement

opportunities, meaningful work experiences, and a good work environment. Work/life balance for Millennials entails them choosing to make a life instead of make a living (Zhang et al., 2007). Emphasis on making a life comes from them witnessing their parents, the boomer generation, work long hours and have frequent layoffs (Loughlin & Barling, 2001). The Corporate Leadership Council (2005) also asserts that the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> have caused Millennials to consider prioritizing their personal lives over their professional ones. Millennials fulfillment for good pay and benefits can expose their need for feedback from their high-ranking supervisor (McClelland, 1965, p. 7). Rapid advancement and promotional aspirations appear to be highly expected for Millennials (Ng et al., 2010). Thus, Erickson (2009) suggests that Millennials worry when pay raises and promotions fail to happen after six months of work. Past studies also indicate that officers who are motivated and aspiring have the passion to ascend through police ranks can allow for more engagement in the police culture (Gau et al., 2013). As well as being motivated, officers who have educational experience can enhance their aspirations because it can give officers confidence in their policing skills (Kakar, 2003). However, officers who have higher education can have feelings of disillusionment after realizing the realities of police work do not match their goals and ambitions (Gau et al., 2013). A more recent study found that the most motivational factor among the Millennials was pay and those with high needs for achievement demonstrate their sense of entitlement within their generation (Corporate Leadership Council, 2004; McClelland 1965, p.7) Meaningful work experiences for Millennials consist of them looking for meaningful and fulfilling work rather than just a paycheck (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002; Yang and Guy, 2006). The Corporate Leadership Council (2005) suggests that

Millennials are continuously looking for work that goes beyond making money. They also suggest that Millennials do not tolerate easy work and perform inadequately in non-rigorous work environments. The last theme among Millennials and their career expectations is a nurturing work environment. Lowe et al. (2008) and Lyons (2003) claim that Millennials grew up in an era with assigned group projects and presentations, therefore emphasizing the fun and social part of work. They also like to collaborate with workers they respect and hope to form lifelong friendships because they strive for an atmosphere that is always accessible for feedback (Corporate Leadership Council, 2005; Corporate Leadership Council, 2004). To summarize, the Millennial generation has the desire to conquer the world and it is expected that they change jobs several times during their careers in order to search for meaningful and respected work (Ng et al., 2010).

#### Understanding the Different Generations

As we enter the new era, another generation enters the workforce and challenges the generations that came before them (Smola and Sutton, 2002). Failure to coexist in the same workforce could lead to organizational and managerial conflict between the generations, thus creating hostile work environments (Fyock, 1990). Kupperschmidt (2000) suggests managers can increase productivity, innovation and corporate citizenship among employees simply by understanding the different generations. Past literature suggests there is a changing world of work among managers of past generations and failure to acknowledge such change can create misunderstanding, miscommunications, and mixed signals (Fyock, 1990). Labeling old and new generations have become extremely important as a society in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century because of the changing work values of all occupations. Even though there is major inconsistency among the labels, labeling

the generations can help understand the relationship between age and work values (Smola and Sutton, 2002).

Kupperschmidt (2000) better defines a generation as a group that shares the same birth year, age location, and significant life events during major stages of development. A generational group can also share historical or social life experiences over the course of their life, thus distinguishing one generation from another (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Jurkiewicz & Brown, 1998). The Greatest Generation, those born before 1928 and prevalent during the Age of Reagan, is considered to have “saved the world” and fought and won World War II. The Silent Generation, those born between 1928 and 1945, are considered to be the children of the Great Depression and World War II. The term “Silent” can refer to their traditional and civic dispositions. The two most prevalent generational groups in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workforce are considered to be the Baby Boomers and Generation X. The Baby Boomers generation refers to the spike in pregnancy after the end of World War II and suddenly ended around the time the birth control pill became available. Generation X, those born from 1965 through 1980 is often described as confident and entrepreneurial loners. The Millennial Generation, the most recent, refers to those born after 1980 and is considered to be the first generation to enter the new millennium (Pew Research Center, 2010). With the retirement of the Baby Boomers and Generation X nearing, the Millennials will enter the workforce and will demand more than the previous generations (Smola and Sutton, 2002). As previously mentioned, this demanding nature of the Millennials is likely from an advanced education and a need succeed after struggling to find jobs during the Great Recession. Frustration from the Great Recession has forced the Millennials to strive for their own economic futures.

Millennials are considered to be our nation's first "connected" generation and have stepped in an age of new technologies and social media. They are considered to be the most distinct and diverse generation, therefore allowing them to easily get along with their elders (Pew Research Center, 2010). However, managing the Millennials is easier said than done. According to Jennings (2000), with their elders craving a boost in salary, better financial options and flexible work hours, the Millennials crave more. Therefore, Millennials are constantly changing the culture of law enforcement and has the potential to change how everyone perceives it.

More interactions with citizens and law enforcement can increase the understanding of how police uphold norms and values. For example, if someone was treated fairly by a police officer, then their satisfaction with police will be overall positive and vice versa (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Tyler, 2006). This demand for police officers in the past 30 years has dramatically increased due to Millennials and their need to fight crime and solve problems. Policing can have a promising future, but it proves no easy task. As more "Baby Boomers" are nearing retirement and the "Generation Xers" ascending the ladder, the Millennials are waiting to be recruited in law enforcement. The Millennials are proving to show initiative within the field of law enforcement and show they can adapt in any environment. Even though each generation possesses different characteristics, Millennials are consistently showing patterns of their dominance in the field (McCafferty, 2003). However, managing the Millennials proves to be a difficult task considering the fact that they strive for more, unlike the generations before (Smola and Sutton, 2002).



## Patrol and Detective Work

Unlike the generations before, the Millennial generation has been heavily influenced by media in our society. Rather it include television shows of police investigative work, video games like Grand Theft Auto or news reports of real-life crime, Millennials are constantly plagued by television programs that effects their perceptions of the role of patrol officers and investigative work (Huey, 2010). The media has a way to unrealistically portray detective work, thus creating confusion among the expectations of detectives and the investigative process (Stenross and Kleinman, 1989). Public fascination with detective work is suggested to stem from an individual's human nature and their feelings with matters of life and death (Henry, 2004: 202). This fascination with criminals has not only intensified the unrealistic images of investigative work, but also perceived the nature of the police investigator's professional role as far-reaching (Huey & Broll, 2013). The type of knowledge possessed by investigators is so sacred within police culture that it is considered to be a powerful force when solving individual cases. (Ratcliffe, forthcoming and Ericson & Haggerty, 1997: 317). Ericson (1983) notes that citizens' lack of knowledge or awareness about police investigators accords with their interactions of fictional police programs. Investigators' identities are at risk once victims and other citizens acquire knowledge of police work through the television and causes obscurities with the self-image of the police (Huey, 2010). Criminal justice researchers and professors are continuously bombarded with unrealistic questions about becoming a crime scene investigator (CSI) or a criminal profiler because of the failure of television shows to accurately portray the harsh realities of what police investigative work demands. Television shows habitually glamorizes police and investigative work

and fails to include the 'dirty work' elements of policing, thus drawing attention to the highly sanitized versions of police work (Huey & Broll, 2013). The term 'dirty work' was first created by sociologist Everett Hughes (1958 [1951]) to include the duties associated with elements of physically, socially or morally obnoxious to those outside the field. According to Hughes (1958 [1951]), 'dirty' tasks entails those that generate humiliation of one's self-worth (p. 49). In reference to Hughes (1958 [1951]), Ashforth and Kreiner (1999, p. 416) assert that even though individuals appreciate those with 'dirty work' jobs, they usually still remain distant from those who do it. Furthermore, even though patrol work can be seen as 'dirty work', investigative work has instead become a 'glamorous crime-fighter engaged in the identification and chase of dangerous and malevolent criminals', thus creating captivation and appreciation (Innes, 2003, p. 21).

With more individuals pursuing investigative roles without desiring to be a patrol officer, scholars must look at the different tasks performed by each officer. Patrol officers are perceived to be similar to social workers but are often faced with far more dangerous tasks (Meyerson, 1991). Van Maanen's 1974 (as cited in Paoline, 2003) book asserts that the environments of policing are often way more critical than they seem and states that once a policeman is in uniform, he enters a certain environment where he is forced to manage the community he patrols. Patrolmen are faced with hostile and unpredictable circumstances, therefore creating terror and anxiety of those who wish to join (Brown, 1988, p.9). Unlike other professions, police officers are unique because they are given the authority to harm others when confronted with danger and under any circumstance are expected to maintain their power (Muir, 1977, p. 37 and Manning, 1995).

Unlike patrol officers, investigative officers are at a lower risk of facing danger on a daily basis, therefore making individuals attracted to becoming a detective rather than a patrol officer. However, the media tremendously distorts the public's perception of investigative work and creates unrealistic expectations of their responsibilities. The main stereotype of detectives that the media distorts includes the one in which all detectives apprehend their suspect. Another stereotype of detectives highlighted in the media is the image of investigators working cleverly and imaginatively with deceitful criminals. In reality, criminals are rarely crafty as they are depicted in the media and are rarely capable of working together with investigative officers (Greenwood and Petersilia, 1975). The media's depiction of patrol and investigative officers can alter potential recruits' perceptions of their roles and influence their decision of career preference because their tasks are portrayed as fun and invigorating. As well as working in the field, investigative officers are expected to perform tasks that are required for their particular organization, but also obey the rules of the criminal justice system (Ericson and Haggerty, 1997). Policing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century can be a difficult task due to the unrealistic expectations of the investigation process portrayed in the media. Fictionalized images portrayed by the media serve as an occupational strain for investigative officers, thus creating difficulties between the expectations of the job and recruitment (Huey, 2010).

#### Theoretical Framework Used for the Study

Noting the purpose of this study, Social Cognitive Career Theory provided the best insight into predicting college students' career interests to be a police investigator rather than a patrol officer. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), anchored in Bandura's (1986) general social cognitive theory, focuses on variables such as self-

efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals, and how these variables coexist with environmental aspects of the person to help shape career preference (Lent et al., 2000; Lent et al., 1999). Bandura's (1986) Social cognitive theory provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between these variables and how they can influence individuals' (college students) career choices (Zikic & Saks, 2009). Lent et al. (2000) reviews past research on barriers to career development and attempt to link social cognitive career theory to variables in career making processes. Lent et al. (1994) draws from Bandura's (1986) traditional social cognitive theory and hypothesize that person, environment, and behavior variables affects and individual's career preference. In addition to reviewing past literature Lent et al. (1994) divide social cognitive career theory into two theoretical frameworks: (1) cognitive-person variables such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals that help individuals practice personal control within their career making process and (2) additional variables such as sex and race, environmental features, and specific learning experiences influence their interests in career preference. Noting social cognitive career theory, career preferences are influenced by both objective and perceived environmental factors. Objective factors can be identified as those that include the quality of exposure to educational experiences and availability of financial support to those pursuing specific training options, thus potentially affecting an individuals' career preference (Lent et al., 2000). Moreover, perceived environmental factors include those that are not seen as past or present environmental influences, but rather how individuals personally perceive the environment. Thus, influencing their own personal agency in career preference. Additionally, career development theorists must consider all aspects of objective and

perceived environmental factors to make sense of how they influence an individuals' career making process (Lent et al., 2000).

Even though social cognitive career theory was offered almost 20 years ago, its original model has been the focus for many extensions and applications. For example, the original model aimed at explaining interest development, choice-making, and performance and persistence in educational contexts, but recent efforts have been made to cultivate the nature and function of the theory (Lent et al., 2000). As noted earlier, social cognitive career theory is mainly concerned with the gravitation of individuals to specific career preferences (Lent & Brown, 2013). The original model Lent et al. (1994) presented was intended to focus on the universal processes and mechanisms that express an individuals' career preference. However, they extended their original model and added a specific choice and self-management model. The choice model is concerned with self, experiential, and contextual factors that promote specific career choices such as, computer science or home repairs. The self-management model focuses on factors that lead people to assert behaviors that help in their own professional progress like self-asserting, job-finding and negotiating job transitions (Lent & Brown 2013). Also, the career self-management model is intended to address gaps in the original model and to primarily focus on the adaptive career behaviors that individuals use for their own career achievements. Career adaptive behaviors refer to the constructs such as, career process skills, competencies, meta-competencies, self-regulation, coping skills, and adaptive performances (Betz & Hackett, 1987; Griffin & Hesketh, 2005). These adaptive career behaviors are associated with Savickas's (1997, 2013) concept of career adaptability in that the choice and self-management model are concerned with individuals' dependence

on self-regulatory processes, social resources, and dispositional inclinations in change adaptations (Lent & Brown, 2013). In addition, adaptive career behaviors are related to discussions of specific strategies because of an individual's coping techniques with specific challenges such as, proactive, reactive, tolerant behavior, positioning behavior, influence behavior, and boundary management (Lent & Brown, 2013; Griffin & Hesketh, 2005; King, 2004). Noting social cognitive career theory, Lent and Brown (2013) are more concerned with the original cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social-contextual processes that assist or deter career preferences.

Heavily influenced by Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, social cognitive career theory conceptualizes that job search and school-to-work transition is a process that progressively unfolds throughout years spent in school (Lent et al. 1999). Super (1980) asserts that work transition and the career making process are inextricably linked because of the preparatory periods and the work-life adjustment roles between the two. Lent et al. (1999) emphasizes the importance of successful work transition between students and how assistance of school-to-work transition might begin well before college years and continue into the workplace (Blustein, Phillips, Jobin-Davis, Finkelberg, & Roarke, 1997; Fouad, 1997; Worthington & Juntunen, 1997). From a social cognitive career theory perspective, effective goal-setting skills among students are key predictors of career preference. Social cognitive career theory also identifies goals, when they are clear, specific, stated publicly, held with strong commitment, set close in time to intended actions, and divided into sub-goals, as having great impact on an individuals' ability and willingness to facilitate their goals into actions (Lent et al., 1999, p. 306). Thus, an individuals' career attributes and aspirations during college are an expansive terrain for

researchers to explore. Furthering social cognitive career theory, this study aims to apply that theory and examine potential criminal justice career preferences among college students, more specifically what may or may not impact their career choice of becoming a patrol officer or investigator.

## CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

### Research Objectives

This research examined potential criminal justice career choices among college students, more specifically what may or may not impact their career interests of becoming a patrol officer or investigator. Examining college students' potential career choices in police work can expose the possible challenges in marketing and recruitment of patrol work by police departments, as well as varying generational expectations of careers in policing and career ladders by law enforcement in general. To address this gap in literature, this study seeks to examine influences on college students' choices to pursue careers in police patrol or investigate work.

### Questions and Hypotheses

The Police Patrol Careers survey included two distinct statements that reveal college students' desire to pursue careers in either police patrol or investigations. This study isolated those two statements and compared their results to determine how many students want to (a) be a patrol officer, but not an investigator; (b) be an investigator but not a patrol officer; and (c) be both a patrol officer and an investigator. Furthermore, this study used these two statements as dependent variables to determine possible predictors in career orientation.

These hypotheses were selected because of their theoretical relation to career choice for future criminal justice career fields.

Research hypotheses for this study are:

- (1.) Fear of police patrol work (expressed through variables measuring expectations and knowledge of actual patrol responsibilities) and fear of the



police academy training (expressed through variables measuring expectations and knowledge of academy

- (2.) Interest in investigative careers is related to one's knowledge of, or potential misunderstanding of, the realities of the police career ladder.

### Procedure

This study utilized data from “Interest in Police Patrol Careers: An Assessment of Potential Candidates’ Impressions of the Police Recruitment, Selection, and Training Processes”, a 2018 analysis of police career choices conducted by Scheer, Rossler, and Papania (2018). Criminal justice students at five universities were surveyed with a questionnaire that ranged from interest in police patrol careers; impressions of the police recruitment process; as well as police training and use of firearms. Survey items were designed to examine career interest, expectations, and attitudes of police patrol among a diverse group of college students. Perceptions were measured utilizing a Likert scale ranging from one to five, with a “neither agree nor disagree” option as the middle value to assess responses to 99 statements about criminal justice careers and feelings regarding many aspects of patrol recruitment, selection, and training processes.

Scheer, Rossler, and Papania (2018) sampled university criminal justice students for two main reasons. First, criminal justice students were selected because of their interest or disinterest in police patrol careers. Second, it was assumed that students enrolled in criminal justice classes had some understanding of the application, selection, and training processes regarding careers in police patrol. The survey strategy did not exclude potential police career candidates in fields unrelated to criminal justice, thus resulting in diversity of students enrolled in the courses surveyed. Other majors reported

by survey respondents included forensic science, public safety management, social sciences, and undecided.

### Independent Variables Used in the Study

Eight independent variables were selected because of their theoretical relation to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory and social cognitive career theory as well as their relation to the selection of career choices among college students. Each variable was chosen because of their potential theoretical relation to career choice and the fear or unawareness surrounding academy training, firearms, and defensive and fighting tactics associated with patrol and investigative work.

#### *I am afraid of police academy firearms training*

This specific variable was chosen to assess fear surrounding police academy firearms training. Noting social cognitive career theory, Zikic and Saks (2009) assert that certain variables can influence an individual's career preference. Thus, an individual's decision to pursue a career in law enforcement, more specifically a career in patrol, may be influenced by the presence or absence of fear of firearms. This independent variable has the potential to highlight certain areas within the police academy that generate fear for potential recruits: (1) fear of firearms, (2) fear of failure with firearms training.

#### *I am afraid of police academy physical and defensive tactics and fighting training*

This variable was chosen because of general interest surrounding academy training. Perhaps, there are fears of being an academy cadet. This variable has the potential to highlight why students lack interest in becoming a patrol officer. It also has the potential to better understand the specific reason recruits are afraid of police academy physical and defensive tactics and fighting training: fear of failure.

*I am afraid of being around firearms*

In conjunction with the variable: I am afraid of police academy firearms training; this independent variable was chosen because of the overall fear surrounding firearms. Lent et al. (1994) hypothesized that person, environment, and behavior variables affect an individual's career preference. As such, those who may have a deep-rooted fear of firearms, as influenced by their beliefs, environment, and behaviors around firearms prefer careers unrelated to patrol.

*I do not want to be responsible for shooting someone in any situation*

Many potential recruits confront internal personal belief systems during training and transitional aspects of the job. This variable was chosen because of the relevance to realities of police patrol and investigative work. Potential recruits often perceive investigations as a "desk job" with little interaction with criminal. This is simply inaccurate (Greenwood & Petersilia, 1975). The RAND Study (Greenwood & Petersilia, 1975) unique in its examination of the criminal investigations process, provides valuable insight regarding the daily routine of investigative officers. Greenwood and Petersilia (1975) note that investigators not only write reports, gather and document evidence, are involved in post-arrest processing, they are also involved in incidents that require action. Therefore, the interest in becoming an investigator rather than a patrol officer may purely be based on inaccurate perceptions about the true nature of investigative work/role.

*Being around criminals would frighten me as a patrol officer*

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory notes that variables coexist with environmental aspects of the person to influence selection of career preference. Therefore, this variable was chosen because of the fear associated with dealing with

criminals on a daily basis while being a patrol officer. However, literature suggests potential recruits lack accurate knowledge regarding the realities of police patrol and detective work (McCafferty, 2003). Accurate knowledge given to potential candidates about the harsh realities of police work could assist police departments with effective recruitment and development of officers more aware of the description of law enforcement officers (Smith, 2016). Greenwood and Petersilia (1975) (The RAND Study) addressed this issue and the contradiction between perception and reality. Detectives, more often than not, are often in close contact and interaction with criminals and not isolated from the scene. Thus, this variable has the potential to obfuscate an individual's career preference for investigations.

*I am afraid of physical fighting and hand-to-hand combat associated with patrol work*

Based on social cognitive career theory and Savickas's (1997, 1993) concept of career adaptability, individuals possess certain adaptive career behaviors and coping skills while on the job (Lent & Brown, 2013). Therefore, this variable was selected because of its relation to fear or unawareness of the realities of police patrol work. Because literature asserts patrol officers regularly deal with violence and known threats to the safety and health in their area (Jackson & Stafford, 2009), this variable has the theoretical potential to explain why potential recruits would not want to pursue a career in patrol.

*I do not want to deal directly with people who are injured or physically hurt*

This variable was chosen because of its theoretical relation to social cognitive career theory based on the notion that perceived environmental variables have the ability to alter an individuals' career preference. Like other police responses, what officers do

when they face domestic violence situations is likely to be grounded by their cognitive, affective, behavioral, and social-contextual processes that enable or deter certain judgements (Lent & Brown, 2013). Trujillo and Ross (2008) provide crucial literature on police responses to domestic violence and how they are strongly influenced by those decisions. Including this variable in the study has the potential to highlight why university students are hesitant towards a career in police patrol work.

*On-the-job shootings involving police patrol officers occur frequently.*

As noted earlier, social cognitive career theory is mainly concerned with the gravitation of individuals to specific career preferences. This research aims to understand why college students are interested in a career in investigative work rather than police patrol work. Therefore, this variable was chosen primarily because of the inaccurate information surrounding on-the-job-shootings. Based on past and present literature police use of force has transpired into one of the most controversial aspects of policing (Klinger et al., 2015). Furthermore, it is known that the media depicts on-the-job-shootings happening more often than not, however, Klinger et al. (2015) provides insight on one of the most sophisticated studies of civilians killed by police officers. But, their study provided no insight on how many civilians were killed, therefore making it impossible to know the generalizability of their findings. This study could potentially provide crucial information pertaining to college students' perceptions and whether fear of on-the-job-shootings influence career preference.

#### Data Analysis

Multiple regression was selected as the statistical method because of its ability to make predictions of a variable based on the value of two or more other variables. Simply

put, multiple regression has the ability to predict an outcome of eight independent variables from the study rather than just one. For the purpose of this study, multiple regression will work because of the exploratory nature of the research project and its ability to test hypotheses positing relationships among variables.

According to Orme and Buehler (2001), multiple regression is a resourceful and dominant method that can statistically model the simultaneous effects of more than one independent variable on a dependent variable. Each independent variable in the study is of great importance due to the combined potential to explain the two dependent variables. Furthermore, multiple regression can contain any combination of nominal, ordinal, or interval level independent variables. This simply means that nominal, ordinal, and interval levels of measurement represent particular levels at which an outcome is measured (Salkind, 2017). Finally, multiple regression is useful for the purpose of this study because of its diverse and experimental nature (Orme & Buehler, 2001).

Multiple regression provides wide-ranging insight on which decision-making can be based (Dror, 1971; Lindblom, 1968). Perhaps the most important function of multiple linear regression is the attempt to predict possible consequences of certain policy decisions (Porter et al., 1981). For the purpose of this study, predicting why college student's express preference for investigative careers rather than police patrol could potentially help law enforcement officials recruit candidates who are better fit for law enforcement, in general, and for a particular agency. By examination of the fitted models, multiple regression has the ability to generate predictions when faced with what consequences can be anticipated to result from policy interventions that modify certain variable values. However, some limitations present itself when using multiple regression.

The main one being that some multiple regression techniques are misleading. Inferential and technical difficulties are almost always encountered when predicting policy recommendations from multiple regression models (Porter et al., 1981).

## CHAPTER IV – RESULTS

### Statistical Analyses

First, descriptive statistics were conducted in order to provide a complete representation of the sample. Next, a model summary was completed and assessed in order to address adjusted R square values of the dependent variables when evaluated with the independent variables. Finally, given the exploratory nature of the study, two separate multiple regression analyses were completed in accordance with both dependent variables in order to fully test hypotheses.

Table 1 provides descriptive information about each variable included in the study. In this table, N is comprised of all individuals who answered the question and a valid percent are of those who strongly agreed or agreed to the question. As seen in Table 1, 85.5% of 768 individuals strongly agreed or agreed they would enjoy being a detective or investigator. However, only 39.1% of 767 individuals strongly agreed or agreed they were interested in patrol. Individuals who did not want to be responsible for shooting someone in any situation made up only 27% (n=768), while only 7.4% (n=766) strongly agreed or agreed they did not want to deal directly with people who are injured or physically hurt.

The remaining six independent variables were coded due to their negative directionality. “Being around criminals would frighten me as a patrol officer” consisted of 11.3% (n=769), “I am afraid of being around firearms” (9.9%, n=769), “I am afraid of physical fighting and hand-to-hand combat associated with patrol work” (12.2%, n=767), “I am afraid of police academy firearms training” (5.2%, n=768), “I am afraid of police



academy physical and defensive tactics and fighting training” (8.3%, n=767), and “on-the-job shootings involving police patrol officers occur frequently” (19.4%, n=769).

*Table 1*

*Descriptive Statistics of Included Variables*

Variable	N	Valid %
<b>Dependent Variables</b>		
<i>I would enjoy being a detective or investigator</i>	768	85.5%
<i>I am interested in a police patrol career</i>	767	39.1%
<b>Independent Variables</b>		
<i>Being around criminals would frighten me as a patrol officer</i>	769	11.3%
<i>I am afraid of being around firearms</i>	769	9.9%
<i>I do not want to be responsible for shooting someone in any situation</i>	768	27.0%
<i>I am afraid of physical fighting and hand-to-hand combat associated with patrol work</i>	767	12.2%
<i>I do not want to deal directly with people who are injured or physically hurt</i>	766	7.4%
<i>I am afraid of police academy firearms training</i>	768	5.2%
<i>I am afraid of police academy physical and defensive tactics and fighting training</i>	767	8.3%
<i>On-the-job shootings involving police patrol officers occur frequently</i>	769	19.4%

Table 2 below is comprised of R square and adjusted R square. R squared indicates the variance amount of the dependent variables that is accounted for by the independent variables. As seen in Table 2, I would enjoy being a detective or investigator produced an adjusted R square of .050 and is reflective that the predicted independent variables explain 5.0% of their decision in choosing a career in becoming a detective or investigator. Similarly, the other dependent variable, I am interested in a police patrol

career, produced an adjusted R square of .196 and suggests that the control variables explain 19.6% in deciding a career in police patrol.

*Table 2*

*Model Summary*

Variable	R Square	Adjusted R Square
Dependent Variables		
<i>I would enjoy being a detective or investigator</i>	.060	.050
<i>I am interested in a police patrol career</i>	.204	.196

Tables 3 and 4 are comprised of the coefficients and indicates the significance of each independent variable on the dependent variables. Regression results of Table 3 indicate only two independent variables are significant; being around criminals would frighten me as a police officers (p=.000) and I do not want to be responsible for shooting someone in any situation (p=.009). The significance of these independent variables suggest that they are a significant factor in choosing a career as a detective or investigator. Thus, the remaining six independent variables are not significant and do not contribute to the career prediction of becoming a detective or investigator.

*Table 3*

*Coefficients*

Variable (I would enjoy being a detective or investigator)	Significance
Independent Variables	
<i>Being around criminals would frighten me as a patrol officer</i>	.000
<i>I am afraid of being around firearms</i>	.067
<i>I do not want to be responsible for shooting someone in any situation</i>	.009
<i>I am afraid of physical fighting and hand-to hand combat associated with patrol</i>	.131

Table 3 (continued)

Variable	Significance
<i>work</i>	
<i>I do not want to deal directly with people who are injured or physically hurt</i>	.606
<i>I am afraid of police academy firearms training</i>	.532
<i>I am afraid of police academy physical and defensive tactics and fighting training</i>	.302
<i>On-the-job shootings involving police patrol Officers occur frequently</i>	.052

Regression results of Table 4 indicate that the selected dependent variable, interest in a police patrol career, produced three significant independent variables. I do not want to be responsible for shooting someone in any situation ( $p=.000$ ), I am afraid of physical fighting and hand-to-hand combat associated with patrol work ( $p=.000$ ), and I am afraid of police academy physical and defensive tactics and fighting training ( $p=.001$ ) are all statistically significant factors in an individual's choosing of a police patrol career.

Table 4

*Coefficients*

Variable (I am interested in a police patrol career)	Significance
Independent Variables	
<i>Being around criminals would frighten me as a patrol officer</i>	.831
<i>I am afraid of being around firearms</i>	.348
<i>I do not want to be responsible for shooting someone in any situation</i>	.000
<i>I am afraid of physical fighting and hand-to-hand combat associated with patrol work</i>	.000
<i>I do not want to deal directly with people who are injured or physically hurt</i>	.110
<i>I am afraid of police academy firearms training</i>	.192
<i>I am afraid of police academy physical and defensive tactics and fighting training</i>	.001

Table 4 (continued)

Variable	Significance
<i>On-the-job shootings involving police patrol officers occur frequently</i>	.124

## CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Revisited Hypotheses

The purpose of this research was to develop a general understanding of law enforcement career preferences among college students. Theoretically, this information could be used to inform better recruitment, training, and management strategies. The following section offers discussions for the statistical findings. In order to determine a basic framework for this study, it was necessary to postulate hypotheses regarding career preference among individuals with an interest in law enforcement. Two hypotheses guided this study.

- (1) Does fear of police patrol work and academy training influence preference for an investigative career when compared to a police patrol career?
- (2) Are career interests in investigations related to knowledge of, or potential misunderstanding of, the realities of the police career ladder?

The results indicated that an individual's career interest in patrol is heavily influenced by their fear of shooting someone in any situation; fear or lack of awareness of physical fighting and hand-to-hand combat, and fear or lack of awareness of police academy physical and defensive tactics and fight training. Similarly, an individual's career interest in investigations is influenced by the desire to avoid shootings as well as fear of being around criminals as a patrol officer. Those two variables support the hypothesis that career interests in investigations is related to the misunderstanding of the police career ladder. Though the remaining variables were not significant, the control variables explain 24.6% of a career preference for investigations and patrol.

## Discussion

### *Independent variable #1: I am afraid of police academy firearms training*

Descriptive statistics recognized that 5.2% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were afraid of police academy firearms training. Though not significant ( $p = .532$ ), research suggests that police academy training is the first confrontation with a law enforcement organization, thus generating fear of police procedures, policies, and practices (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Martin, 1998). Historically, law enforcement training has mirrored paramilitary training, therefore teaching recruits to engage in all aspects of their environment (Vander Kooi & Palmer, 2014). Social cognitive career theory offers an explanation of fear of police academy firearms training. Lent et al. (1994), suggests that fear can be rooted in an individual's self-efficacy, therefore questioning or doubting their individual abilities and whether or not they can "do it." In this regard, "do it" refers to success in police academy firearms training.

### *Independent variable #2: I am afraid of police academy physical and defensive tactics and fighting training*

Descriptive statistics found that 8.3% ( $n=767$ ) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were afraid of police academy physical and defensive tactics and fighting training. Multiple regression analyses indicate this variable was only statistically significant ( $p = .001$ ) with one dependent variable: I am interested in a police patrol career, thus highlighting the fear surrounding police training. Mahoney's 1996 dissertation (as cited in Vander Kooi and Bierlein, 2014) suggests that law enforcement training has the tendency to mimic military training, therefore triggering apprehension among potential recruits. Possible reasons this independent variable was statistically

significant with only one dependent variable offers speculation about an individuals' self-efficacy. Social cognitive career theory suggests that self-efficacy, when provoked by obstacles, establishes one's choice of actions in the future. According to Hackett and Betz's 1981 study (cited in Lent et al. 1994), self-efficacy can be a predictor of career choice or preference (Hackett & Lent, 1992; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991; Sadri & Robertson, 1993).

*Independent variable #3: I am afraid of being around firearms*

Descriptive statistics uncovered that 9.9% (n=769) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they were afraid of being around firearms. Though not statistically significant in either regression models, this variable remains important for the overall explanation of an individuals' career preference. Social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994) suggests that an individuals' environment and behavior influence career path. Thus, a deep-rooted fear regarding firearms formed as a result of individual belief, environment, and behaviors around firearms are linked to their career choice.

*Independent variable #4: I do not want to be responsible for shooting someone in any situation*

The descriptive statistics of this independent variable revealed the largest valid percent among the other independent variables. 27% (n=768) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they did not want to be responsible for shooting someone in any situation. Both coefficient regression models produced statistically significant numbers (p=.000, p=.009), thus making it the only independent variable to produce statistically significant numbers with both dependent variables. One possible reason this variable proved significant with both dependent variables could be due to the political recruitment

against police violence. Gross and Mann (2017) assert that the Ferguson effect, public anger at police brutality of African Americans, proved politically powerful, thus breeding concern of the overall effectiveness of the police. However, independent variable number eight “on-the-job shootings involving police patrol officers occur frequently” was not statistically significant, therefore suggested respondents are aware of misrepresentations of shootings in the media and this variable is more related to fear of responsibility. Also, Pitel, Papazoglou, and Tuttle (2018) offer another potential reason this variable was statistically significant with both models. They assert that when officers are exposed to life-threatening situations, they are at potential risk for mental health problems. Papazoglou’s 2013 study (cited in Pitel, Papazoglou, and Tuttle 2018) suggests that an officers’ accumulation of life-threatening stress could hinder their ability to cope with the trauma. Noting social cognitive career theory (Lent & Brown, 2013), fear of responsibility is directly related to coping mechanisms. Thus, suggesting that taking on new responsibilities causes difficult coping mechanisms that can obstruct resiliency (Lent and Brown, 2013).

*Independent variable #5: Being around criminals would frighten me as a patrol officer*

Descriptive statistics revealed that 11.3% (n=769) of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that being around criminals would frighten them as patrol officer. This independent variable was statistically significant (p=.000) with only one dependent variable: I would enjoy being a detective or investigator. Simply put, this result implies that the likelihood of the relationship between these two variables is caused by something other than chance. Based on this statistical finding, it is likely that the student is unaware of the true nature of investigators but understands the expectations of a patrol officer. In



revisiting King (2005) and his five hierarchies of police organizations: skills hierarchy, rewards hierarchy, seniority hierarchy, status hierarchy, and authority hierarchy. Each hierarchy described above is inextricably linked and stitch together the police organizational career ladder (King, 2005). The statistical significance of this variable exposes the flaw within police departments in explaining the true nature of the career ladder to potential recruits.

*Independent variable #6: I am afraid of physical fighting and hand-to-hand combat associated with patrol work*

Descriptive statistics revealed 12.2% (n=767) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed they were afraid of physical fighting and hand-to-hand combat associated with patrol work. This independent variable was only statistically significant ( $p=.000$ ) with one dependent variable: I am interested in a police patrol career. This finding raises questions about respondents' expectations and realities of police patrol and investigation careers, thus suggesting perceptions of investigative careers is inaccurate. Similarly, investigative work is as rigorous as that of a patrol officer. Misleading depictions of investigators suggest detectives do not engage in physical fighting and hand-to-hand combat (Greenwood & Petersilia, 1975). This finding also raises questions concerning the overall effectiveness of criminal justice professors in teaching their students the realities of investigative officers. Also, another reason why this variable was statistically significant could potentially be due to the physicality of certain career paths as a barrier. Birzer (2003) states that police and paramilitary training mirror each other and create a warrior-like attitude. Similarly, Satterfield's 1986 article (cited in Birzer 2003) points out that many recruits have a difficult time adapting to the similar training structure of the

military. Police-training programs are based on three things: following the military training model, recruits proving themselves, and screening out unqualified candidates (McCreeedy, 1983, p. 32, cited in Birzer 2003).

*Independent variable #7: I do not want to deal directly with people who are injured or physically hurt*

Multiple regression analyses indicated that 7.4% (n=766) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed they did not want to deal with people who are injured or physically hurt. Even though the model did not yield significant relationship, this variable proved to be significant when explaining the amount of variance in the dependent variables that is accounted for by the independent variables. As noted earlier, research reveals that police patrol officers are one of the first responders to domestic violence situations and play a crucial role in victim support and treatment services. Thus, causing hesitation among an individuals' career preference for patrol (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1996; Felson, Ackerman, & Gallagher, 2005; Hovell, Seid, & Liles, 2006; Maxwell, Garner, & Fagan, 2001, 2002; Schmidt & Sherman, 1996, cited in Trujillo and Ross 2008)).

*Independent variable #8: On-the-job shootings involving police patrol officers occur frequently.*

Descriptive statistics found that 19.4% (n=769) of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that on-the-job shooting involving police patrol officers occur frequently. Both regression models produced numbers that were not statistically significant, but this variable is still of great importance for future models. Their opinion regarding shootings could potentially be swayed by the unrealistic or exaggerated media portrayals. Recent research suggests that the media's coverage of officer involved shootings are often one-

sided and linear (Carson, 2014). High profile cases, like the one in Ferguson, Missouri tend to spark outrage across the nation, thus generating fear among potential recruits (Carson, 2014). Sullender's 2010 article (cited in Carson 2014) suggests sensationalism of police shootings is responsible for the proliferating hatred among law enforcement officials across the country. However, this statistical finding of the respondents suggests the opposite. The significance of this variable implies that the university students in the sample conceptualizes on-the-job shootings as not occurring frequently, therefore leading me to believe they are aware of the unrealistic images of the police generated in the media. However, statistics of the other variables indicated a lack of awareness of the role of police investigators. Thus, suggesting that university professors either inaccurately provide descriptions of police investigators or there are no descriptions of investigators provided within the classroom. Though the majority of the respondents in the sample were criminal justice majors, these results indicate students are considerably more aware of on-the-job shootings than the role of police investigative officers.

#### Interpretation of Results

This research has illuminated college students' perceptions and realities of police work and investigations. More specifically, those variables that influenced them to pursue a career in investigations rather than police patrol, in patrol rather than investigations, or in investigations and patrol. Because much research on millennials and career preference is largely anecdotal and based on popular opinion rather than scientific evidence (Carson, 2014), this study proved to be promising for the overall understanding of career choice among college students. For the purpose of this study, multiple regression proved the best statistical analysis tool because of its ability to make predictions. Of all the tables, Table

2 provided the most promising results because it has the explanatory power to predict career choice among college students with the selected eight independent variables. The dependent variable in Table 2, “I am interested in a police patrol career”, produced an adjusted R square of .196 and suggests that the control variables explain 19.6% of college students’ career decision in police patrol. “I would enjoy being a detective or investigator” produced an adjusted R square of .050 and indicates the control variables explain only 5% of their decision in choosing a career in investigations. This finding indicates the independent variables can better predict an individual’s career in patrol rather than investigations. Although both adjusted R square values aren’t as high as expected, the eight independent variables can still explain some of the variability of the model. Regardless of the adjusted R square values, the statistical significance of “Being around criminals would frighten me as a police officer” (p=.000), “I do not want to be responsible for shooting someone in any situation” (p=.009), “I do not want to be responsible for shooting someone in any situation” (p=.000), “I am afraid of physical fighting and hand-to-hand combat associated with patrol work” (p=.000), and “I am afraid of police academy physical and defensive tactics and fighting training” (p=.001) are extremely valuable factors when predicting an individual’s career in investigations or patrol.

### Implications for Future Research

This research has indicated that fear of police academy training, fear of firearms and fear of police patrol work can explain some of an individuals’ decision to choose a career in investigations rather than patrol. However, further examination into career interests among college students should be completed in order to fully explain the allure

of investigations. Also, future research should include perceptions of federal agencies because of the popular opinion that police recruits join as a stepping stool to eventually work federal. While this research used social cognitive career theory as a framework to predict college students' career interests to be a police investigator rather than a patrol officer, future research should examine other potential theories that could further explain the relation of fear to police work.

Future research should also include more majors unrelated to criminal justice. The majority college major demographics of this study were criminal justice (60.3%), thus assuming they have some knowledge of the job. Inclusion of other majors could illuminate the overall perception of police patrol and investigative work from the perspective of majors unrelated to criminal justice. Also, more attention should be given to more variables that could better predict career interests among college students. Finally, future researchers should also examine the gender demographics of this study to highlight the different perceptions between men and women who want to pursue a career in law enforcement. Doing so could highlight why women are more disinclined or inclined to pursue a career in law enforcement than men. The expectations of this study were to provide new information to future researchers who hope to understand specific career interests in law enforcement among college students. Further examination in this area would be an effective tool in ultimately determining why college students prefer certain career paths. Further, more research in this related field could provide better results for law enforcement agencies to effectively recruit in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Policy Implications

The results of this study suggest some policy areas that should serve as concerns for police chiefs and universities. First, actual representations of police patrol and investigations need to be addressed within the classroom. Professors are well equipped with knowledge of law enforcement careers and need to communicate that information accurately to their students. Additionally, universities should require all students to participate in internships within their desired field. Secondly, police chiefs across the nation should visit multiple universities and target students for possible internships with their department. Furthermore, their involvement with potential recruits could have lasting impressions, therefore leading to better implementation of recruitment strategies. If departments are having trouble recruiting the millennial generation, what better way to understand their expectations by visiting the classroom.

## Limitations of the Study

While the survey was large and diverse in nature, several limitations are acknowledged. While the student population at each university was largely diverse, expanding the surveys to universities in the Midwest and West, such as Texas and California could yield more informed results. Another possible limitation included the large number of criminal justice majors (60.3%, n= 454). Expanding the survey to greater numbers of non-CJ majors could provide insight into non-CJ perspectives in career interests and potential relationships between academic major and career choice. Another limitation of the study was the lack discussions or round tables on source of fear with police agencies. Discussing sources of fear with law enforcement officials could aid in better policy implications for the future.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provided promising results among millennials interested in a law enforcement career. The statistical significance of the four independent variables suggest that college students are unaware that detectives deal with criminals as often as patrol officers, fear of shooting someone in any situation is greater than their need to fulfill a career in investigations and patrol, students are unaware that detectives must go through the police academy along with their patrol counterparts (suggests that there is a misunderstanding in the police career ladder), and there is speculation surrounding the involvement of detectives and hand-to-hand combat.

Because of the growing wave of millennials in the workforce it is crucial to include them in future research. Their inclusion in research is crucial for law enforcement leaders to fully understand the obstacle of recruitment. Ignoring their career expectations and set of principles will only hinder law enforcement agencies to effectively recruit the newest generation entering the workplace. It is the hope of this study that the results provided will spark interest for researchers and law enforcement leaders who seek to effectively predict career preferences among millennials.

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