'How do you give up being black?'
The idea of race in the work experience of black RCMP Officers in Nova Scotia

by

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Table of Contents

Abstract v

Acknowledgements vi

Chapter 1: Introduction 1

Chapter 2: Literature Review 7

Chapter 3: Methodology 42

Chapter 4: Data and Analysis 50

Chapter 5: Conclusions 103

Works Cited 113

ABSTRACT

Police reform advocates have continually stressed greater minority recruitment as a solution to the continuing tensions between certain minority groups and the police. This proposed solution is an example of how the contemporary racial situation works to structure and affect individual lives in new and increasingly subtle ways. Two very separate issues – police and minority group conflicts, and diversity within police forces – are conflated by the idea of race, and thus 'race' becomes a prominent aspect of the day-to-day job experience for minority police officers. This thesis explores how ideas about the meaning of race affect the occupational lives of seven black members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Nova Scotia. It looks at how race works in officers' decisions to join the RCMP, white racism, black marginalization, officer attitudes towards the black community, and how black officers both use and are used by the idea of race. 'Race' is an unstable complex of different social meanings, and the experiences of black RCMP officers in Nova Scotia illustrate the increasingly complex ways in which its ideas can work to structure, represent, and define our social lives.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis will examine how the idea of race affects the occupational experience of black RCMP officers in Nova Scotia. At the beginning of the 21st century, race still plays a fundamental role in structuring our social world. The meaning of race, however, has always been subject to processes of interpretation, contention, and revision. Race is an unstable complex of different social meanings. Although social scientist have been emphasizing that race is a social construction for decades, there has been a persistent lack of critical consideration on how to conceptualize the phenomenon of race in mainstream approaches to race and social research on race-related subjects. For various reasons, race is too often undertheorized and this can have profound political, social, and material consequences. If race is a social construction, then research on race-related subjects needs to move beyond flat descriptions of race and racism and take into account the multiple ways that the idea of race can impact individual lives.

Perhaps nowhere today is the idea of race more powerful and conflictual than in relations between minority groups and the police. There is a clear pattern of racial differentiation in police practice. Young black males, in particular, are disproportionately subject to the exercise of police power, and this contributes to the low regard in which police are held in many black communities. In order to ease these tensions, police reform advocates have stressed greater minority recruitment as the solution to the conflict between the police and the various communities they serve. Greater minority recruitment is thought to be the solution both to the historic exclusion of minority groups from Canada's police forces, and to the continuing tensions between certain minority groups

and the police. This proposed solution is an example of how the contemporary racial situation works to structure and affect individual lives in new and increasingly subtle ways. Two very separate issues – police and minority group conflicts, and diversity within police forces – are conflated by the idea of race, and thus 'race' becomes a prominent aspect of the day-to-day job experience of minority police officers.

This thesis will explore how race affects the occupational lives of black members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Nova Scotia. I wanted to examine how the multiple expectations and assumptions made about race, combined with the existence of deep and enduring tensions between black communities and the police and the RCMP's attempts to address these tensions, affect the daily work experience of black police officers. Subsequently, I interviewed seven black RCMP officers about their work, their race, and about when and how the idea of race becomes important in their work.

Becoming a Black Police Officer explores the officers' encounters with race and racism during their lives and how the idea of race influenced their decisions to join the RCMP. All of these officers strongly identified as black Canadians, and were very proud of what they perceived to be black history and culture. Their motivations for joining the force were varied; however, the idea of race became a factor in every officer's decision. Some had to deal with negative reactions from friends and family members. Others mentioned the symbolic importance of never having seen a black police officer and the subsequent pressure of racial representation. Moreover, some black officers specifically wanted to join the police force because of discrimination they witnessed growing up, or because of a belief that they could help resolve police minority tensions. In various ways, joining the police is a racialised decision for black officers.

In *Black Officers and White Racism* I consider the significance of the racist abuse black RCMP officers encounter during their encounters with the white population. Black police officers are often subject to racial slurs on the job, and they rationalize this abuse in several different ways. Some of the officers seemed resigned to the inevitability of this type of abuse, some claimed to be amused by it, and others believed that their police training prepared them for these types of attacks from the people they are charging or arresting. It is apparent that the officers' power and positions of authority mitigate the effect of this abuse, but the potential for white racist abuse is still an additional burden faced by black police officers during the normal course of their day.

Black Police Officers and the "Black Community" is divided into two parts. The first section – *selling out?* – deals with the negative comments made to black officers by black individuals. The officers I interviewed were subjected to racialised abuse both from black individuals whom they were charging or arresting, and from random individuals who were not necessarily subject to any police action. Also, the black officers from outside of Nova Scotia felt that they were somewhat marginalized by the indigenous black community and the black officers born in Nova Scotia detected some resentment in their home communities. The officers were much more strongly affected by these negative comments from other blacks than they were from the abuse they faced from whites. Particularly disturbing for them was the implication that being a police officer is somehow inconsistent with being black. The officers were particularly hurt that they could be treated this way by their "own people." The idea of race works just as powerfully on these officers as it does on those who would criticize their decision to join the RCMP.

The second part of this section explores the black officers' attitudes towards the black community. The occasional tensions between black officers and black communities in Nova Scotia cannot simply be reduced to the comments of a few individuals. It is part of a larger phenomenon that seeks to define the meaning of blackness, and the officers themselves are implicated in this racial project. Black officers are proscribed for their supposed disloyalty to the race, but at the same time seek to impose their ideas about proper racial behaviour for blacks. The officers I interviewed displayed more than a fair amount of ambivalence towards the black community. They expressed feelings of frustration, anger, and bitterness, but also an understanding and a desire to improve relations between blacks and the police. The black police officers' comments reflect the complex and ambiguous nature of race and modern day race relations.

The officers I interviewed believed that the media is the primary cause of tensions between black communities and the police. In *Race, Policing, and the Media*, the officers talked about how they believed the media exacerbates racial tensions and tensions between the police and the black community. The officers claimed that the media always looks for the sensational story and that often means playing up race. They gave examples of situations where they believed that the media exaggerated racial tensions, stigmatized blacks and black communities, and created many of the misunderstandings between police and the black community.

Black Officers, Race, and the Police Organization notes the significance of the idea of race in a black police officer's occupational and organizational experience. The first part of this section deals with the experiences the black officers had during training,

and their interactions with their colleagues and supervisors. While the vast majority of their experience in the RCMP had been positive, many of the officers noted occasional tensions because of the comments others had made. Particularly disturbing to these officers, was the allegation that they were only there because of employment equity policies and correspondingly, the allegation that white men were no longer being admitted to the RCMP because of its desire to recruit women and minorities.

The second part – *the institutional uses of race* – demonstrates how the RCMP uses the idea of race and its black officers to fulfil certain institutional goals. The officers I interviewed felt that black members are often stationed in places with a high minority concentration, with the automatic expectation that they will be better able work effectively with the local population. Some officers also claimed that they were encouraged to participate in undercover or drug work, and that this resulted in them not receiving the same training and experience as their fellow officers. Tokenism is another challenge black police officers face. The RCMP does not hesitate to showcase its black members, and some of the officers resented their race being used as a public relations tool.

Tokenism is a problem that is amplified for female black police officers. In *Race, Gender, and the Police Organization*, the female RCMP officers I interviewed spoke of the interaction between being a black and a female member. These members felt that they were both used for and constrained by gender stereotypes. Additionally, some of black male members who strongly rejected any claims that black police officers were given special treatment, spoke openly about the advancements and special privileges they felt have been given to women. The idea of race intersects with the idea of gender, and

black female police officers face the added occupational strain of both the potentials of interpersonal and institutional racism and sexism in their day-to-day experience.

The final part of this section – *using race in the institution* – demonstrates that while the RCMP can use a black police officer's 'race' as a form of social capital, individual black officers can potentially use the idea of race for their benefit. The officers I interviewed spoke of situations when they believed that other black officers were to quick to claim racism in their interactions with colleagues and where other black officers used racism as an excuse for not being accepted on certain courses. None of the officers denied the existence of racial discrimination in the RCMP, however, and this led to black officers being very sensitive about the racial claims of others. The officers did not want to see valid claims of racial discrimination dismissed because of the spurious claims of others. Additionally, some of the officers counselled other black officers to make sure their work records were exemplary. This was not only to protect them if they ever alleged discrimination, but also because black officers worried that the performance and behaviour of other black officers would reflect on them. This is the effect of tokenism, and just one added occupational strain attributable to the idea of race.

This is a thesis about the idea of race. Policing is not only a convenient, but also an important site to study how race works in the 21st century. 'Race' works in far more complex ways than the debate over racism (or lack thereof) can explain, and exploring the occupational lives of black police officers allows us to appreciate the nuance, insecurity, and dynamic nature of the concept. The experiences of black RCMP officers in Nova Scotia demonstrate how the idea of race continues to structure our social, political, and occupational lives.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Race and Policing

Police and minority conflict

Any serious conflicts with the state, employers, laws and regulations, policies and conditions are inevitably displaced to the police (Hall, 1979/2000). In Canada, while all citizens benefit from police protection, they do not benefit equally. Research argues the police do not deliver the same protection to persons of class and racial minorities as they do to the privileged members of society. Additionally, police encounters with lower-class persons often involve punishment. Both the inadequate protection of the less privileged as well as over-policing of lower-class communities in regulatory zeal contribute to the low regard in which police are held by these communities (Forcese, 1999, p. 3-4). There is a clear pattern of differentiation in police practice. Young males, especially minority and economically marginal males, are shown to be disproportionately subject to the exercise of police powers (Reiner, 2000, p. 127; Hall, 1979/2000). Moreover, the police seem unable to remedy the situation to any significant degree, if not for the sake of these communities than even for the reason of securing their own legitimacy (Hall, 1979/2000).

In Canada, there have been criticisms of police across the country in regards to encounters with minorities. Dennis Forcese (1999) claimed that immigration of the 1980s from so-called 3rd World countries has introduced a cultural diversity encompassing race, religion and customs that Canada has not previously experienced. Over the last decade, police have been subject to public criticism for their treatment of

minority members, and blacks in particular. Several suspect police shootings in 1989 further dramatized these relations (pp. 47, 56-59). Between 1988 and 1991, six of the fifteen victims of police shootings in Toronto were black. Five of these six were youth and all were unarmed. In Montreal the police shot eight men to death between 1987 and 1995. These eight included four black men and three Hispanics (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Roes, 1995, p. 122).

Because police work, with its dramatic and sometimes tragic outcomes, operates in a fishbowl for public scrutiny, it has become the focus of minority group and intellectual attention, frustration, and criticism. Some have claimed that the police have become a "whipping post" for a society working out its multiracial tensions (Forcese, 1999, p. 57). One critique implies that the differential exercise of police power against the socially disadvantaged is a product of bias, stereotyping, and the amplification of the deviance of certain groups. Others argue, however, that this unfairly vilifies the police. The claim that the differential exercise of power reflects not only discrimination but also the varying deviance of different social groups (Reiner, 2000, pp. 124-125).

Forcese (1999) claimed, in defence of the police, that minority criticism of police is often discriminatory and biased itself. He claimed that police might face hostility and non-support because they represent a system in which minorities occupy a disadvantaged position. Often, these problems are associated with people who distrust and fear the police because of their previous experiences, which are unlike those faced by most middle-class Canadians. Thus, incidents involving police and minority group members invariably come to be viewed as racist whether true or not. Forcese believed that these many unfounded complaints have the consequence of erecting greater police

defensiveness and solidarity (pp. 57- 58). Of course the opposite is also true, and the wholesale rejection of police discrimination by policing organizations has the effect of creating greater anti-police sentiment among minority populations.

Police Occupational Culture

In trying to explain this conflict, some theorists claim that an understanding of how police officers see the social world and their role in it is crucial to an analysis of what they do (Reiner, 2000, p. 85). Much work on police discrimination has centred on the idea of a police culture (Waddington, 1999). Reiner claimed that there are certain commonalities in "cop culture" across several places and periods that arise from elements of the police role and that can be discerned as distinctive to their occupational culture (pp. 87, 105-106). The two principal roles in shaping police culture are the ideas of danger and authority. These roles give rise to cultural traits including sense of mission, cynicism, suspicion, and isolation and solidarity (Reiner, 2000, pp. 88-91). These attitudes, some claim, lead to police having hostile and suspicious views of the minority underclass (Reiner, 2000, p. 99). Over time, police officers develop strong feelings and beliefs about the attributes of individuals. These beliefs are often based on factors such as appearance and racial background. When taken collectively, these beliefs can produce a bias in police officer behaviour that results in unequal treatment for cultural and racial minorities (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Roes, 1995, p. 119-120).

Looking at police culture, it is important to note Forcese's (1999) somewhat problematic contention that since most police officers in Canada have been recruited from white working-class and lower middle-class backgrounds, there is no reason to

expect them to have attitudes other than those associated with such backgrounds. These attitudes include distrust of immigrants, minorities, and outright racism. (p. 61). This unfairly vilifies the working and lower middle-class; however, who are themselves collectively subject to greater police punishment. A more appropriate statement may be that many studies have indicated that police officers are not significantly different from the general population in terms of attitudes about race and ethnicity (Walker, Spohn, and DeLone, 2000, p. 106). Police culture is thus often viewed as societal culture amplified by officers' authority.

The point Forcese is trying to make is that police culture, however conceived, has a limited use for exploring the dynamics of the tensions between police and minority communities. Janet Chan (1996) claimed that idea of police culture has simply become a convenient label for the range of negative values, attitudes and norms among police officers. No culture exists in a vacuum. No culture is free-standing. Chan claimed that the problem with the way police culture is currently formulated is in its insularity from, "the social, political, legal, and organizational context of policing." A homogeneous, all-powerful conception of police culture is too simplistic, and relies more on its "condemnatory potential," than on a considered analysis of police work (Waddington, 1999). Peter Manning's (1997) insightful dramaturgical approach to police work illustrates how what we believe to be a police subculture can really be in part attributed to the expressive elements of policing. Very little of a police officer's time is actually spent doing criminal law investigation or crime control. According to Manning, this fact contrasts sharply with public conceptions of what the police do. Hence, much of the talk within police circles is an attempt to mediate the public and private meanings of police

work (p. 24). Research does suggest that there is a disjunction between police prejudice and discriminatory behaviour. It cannot be assumed that police prejudice translates into behaviour expressing it. Nor can police culture be assumed to be monolithic and unchanging. Ultimately, while attitudinal characteristics of prejudice and bias may result in differentiation and discrimination, they need not (Reiner, 2000, pp. 85, 99, 125).

This mention of police culture is important for the study of 'black' police officers though, because the perceived effects of police culture have often been referenced in studies of minority police officers. Some have claimed, usually in passing and with little empirical corroboration, that minority officers are socialized into the police culture and this alone creates tension and distance between them and the ethnic communities of which they are ascribed members (e.g. Forcese, 1999, p. 133; Walker, Spohn, DeLone, 2000). The studies have, however, been more concerned with evaluating the effectiveness of these officers in solving tensions between minorities and the police, thus also relying on the idea of police culture solely for its "condemnatory potential."

Robert Reiner claimed that it is both necessary and sufficient to explain the police outlook on ethnic minorities and other issues by the police function, and the circumstances of police work. This is more pertinent for examining conflict between police and segments of the population than an analysis of the peculiarities of individual and/or collective personalities (Reiner, 2000, p. 100). The police represent authority in society. They are the "disciplinary arm" of a law and order society. This authority is backed by the right to use legitimate force. Their task is the emergency maintenance of order, not the creation of its preconditions. Moreover, the pressure to produce results in policing easily leads to violations of suspects rights (Hall, 1979/2000; Reiner, 2000, p.

88, 113). Thus, the social map of the police is differentiated according to the power of certain groups to cause the police problems. The least powerful elements of this map (i.e. minorities and the poor) come to be viewed simply as "police property" (Reiner, 2000, p. 106). Hence, in order to understand conflicts between police and elements of the population, it is necessary to review some of the structural, functional, organizational, and informational characteristics of policing in Anglo-American societies (Manning, 1997).

Structurally, for example, P. K. Manning (1997) claimed that the police are not only the most visible representation of the presence of the state in everyday life, but also a representation of the potential of the state to enforce its will upon citizens. They are organizationally and legally bound to apply sanctions against persons and elements of the population of a politically defined region where the probability of retaliation by persons other than those being acted upon is low. Additionally, the police are not given the responsibility of evaluating the moral status of a population; they are to be concerned only with violations of the criminal law. Above all, however, the police are information dependent. They depend on citizens to provide information and co-operation. In lieu of this, they must engage in greater proactive methods of policing. This proactive policing increases the amplification of the power of the police and the effect of a police occupational culture (pp. 97-100).

Police also must act as translators who mediate and negotiate the meanings of informational transactions between citizens and the legal system. Rapidly advancing technological capacity is increasingly patterning police practice. Visual technologies in particular have had an enormous impact on police practice (Manning, 1997, p. 102). This

becomes especially relevant in examining issues of police and racial conflict when the emerging market society and its impact on crime and crime control is taken into account.

Richard Ericson and Kevin Haggerty (1997) explained that in response to the urgings of other institutions police use racial and ethnic classifications to understand problems and to risk-profile populations. In particular, police multicultural units select those who are in the 'other' category for more intensive scrutiny of the problems they experience and pose. These units also engage in extensive intercultural networking to foster knowledge of problems specific to racial and ethnic groups (p. 8). In each area of risk they construct the 'Other', the population that is to be determined, analyzed, and regulated and thereby brought into being as a social reality (p.120). In these ways, police think and act in ways that are responsive to racial and ethnic classification (p. 282). Racial discrimination is embedded in the classification schemes employed by the police and the risk institutions to which they report (p. 282). Essentially, the police begin risk-profiling populations according to ascribed identities that seem relevant to security provision (p. 291).

Collectively, these characteristics of police work reveal contradictions in the police role that lead to the differential application of justice. For example, the police are in theory apolitical, but they function in a public political arena and their mandate is politically defined. Inevitably then, enforcement is to the advantage of the privileged in society and it is their property and favoured lifestyles that are protected (Manning, 1997, p. 109). This is just one of many contradictions inherent in police work that demonstrate how is necessary to understand the police function, and the circumstances of police work in order to explain police conflicts with the poor, 'blacks', and other ethnic minorities.

Racialised Policing

Conflicts between minorities and the police involve complex issues of power, structures, and the police function. Regardless of this, however, police reform advocates have stressed greater minority recruitment as the solution to conflicts between minorities and the police. They believe that the symbolism of a more representative police force is seen as a valuable step in decreasing tensions (Forcese, 1999, p. 133). This was made clear in a 1989 report on race relations and policing prepared for the Ontario Solicitor General (Lewis et al, 1989). The Lewis report clearly identified the lack of visible minority police officers as one of the primary causes of tensions between minorities and the police. Lewis speciously argued that "A multiracial, multicultural police force will not only police our society better, but will greatly improve its own acceptance (p. 68)." Mylene Jaccoud and Maritza Felices (1999) reviewed the justifications put forth for taking deliberate steps to increase the representation of visible minorities on Canada's police forces. They concluded that the primary motivations were to increase efficiency in terms of communication, ease tensions between minority communities and the police and to help increase the credibility of the police. According to Jaccoud and Felices, the political will to recruit visible minority police officers came not from employment equity legislation, but from a series of reports and studies throughout the 1970s and 1980s that suggested the way to ease police-minority group tensions was through greater minority recruitment. They concluded that police agencies in Canada were "not so much concerned with correcting systemic discrimination and social inequalities as with… the

maintenance or restoration of social cohesion, the appeasement of racial conflicts, the organization's increased productivity, improved performance and image."

This proposed solution to such a complex issue sets the context for examining of the way that the idea of race works to affect the working environment of black police officers. Two very separate issues – police and minority tensions, and diversity within police forces – are conflated by the idea of race. Because race is akin to family membership, 'black' police officers are suddenly supposed to be a solution to complex conflicts largely rooted in the economic and institutional structures of society. The multiple expectations and assumptions about race, combined with the existence of enduring tensions between black communities and police in Nova Scotia and the RCMP's sincere attempts to ease this tension, place black RCMP officers in an interesting position. The idea of race becomes a prominent aspect of the day-to-day job experience for these officers, and this offers us a chance to examine how the idea of race works to play such a fundamental role in structuring and representing black police officers' lives.

Black Police Officers

Although there have been many empirical studies of black police officers in the United States, few have had sample sizes large enough to allow for any generalizations (Beard, 1977). Most of these studies note, however, that a history of discrimination against black police officers and reluctant change created in large part by the emergence of black officers as an organizational political force in the 1960s was responsible for greater efforts to recruit more black police officers (Leinen, 1984, p. 22). In the mid-sixties, the push to recruit black police officers occurred with the rationale that "the

ethnic makeup of the police should be representative of the population at large. This was based in large part upon the notion that such representation would serve to enhance communication and understanding between police and the diverse groups they served (p. 53)." There was also the added bonus with the notion that black officers could serve as effective undercover narcotic agents (p. 53). The politicization of black police officers through the founding of the Afro-American Patrolman's League provided some opportunity to counter the resistance and racism directed towards black officers (Jacobs & Cohen, 1978). And the black public at the time campaigned for more black police officers with the feeling that they would be more understanding, more tolerant, and more considerate (Cooper, 1980).

As was just noted, this push was fuelled more than anything else by what has been termed the "identification hypothesis" (Britton, 1997). This hypothesis suggested that African-American and Hispanic officers would be more effective in dealing with the black community. Correspondingly, most of the work on black police officers was preoccupied with assessing the extent to which black officers are living up to this expectation. Many authors have noted that both the qualitative and quantitative literature is characterized by its inconsistency and contradiction. Although studies that claim that the identification hypothesis has proved infeasible, there seems to be no consensus and evidence about whether or not black officers help reduce tensions is all "sketchy at best (Decker & Smith, 1980; Bortolussi, 1994)."

Among the authors who have claimed that racial identification or "ethnic match" as it is often referred to in Canada (Weinfeld, 1994) is effective, James D. Bannon and G. Marie Wilt (1973) stated that black policemen have helped to improve services to black

citizens. They claimed that the police officers they interviewed did not express any loss of black identity, cared more about equality in law enforcement, and believed that black policemen without question have greater rapport with black citizens and provide them with better service. Bannon and Wilt continued to say that black police officers are a "part of the black experience," by stressing "the commonness of being black" and therefore the black policeman "understands the subculture and its problems." The claim that black police officers are tougher in black residential areas was "because they are more concerned about making the area safe for their friends, family, and neighbors." Similarly Kelly and West (1973) contended that shared biography between police and the policed is important in the maintenance of good relations. Their study found that race was the single most important criterion in distinguishing police who were responsive to the needs of the black community from those who were nonresponsive. Bannon and Wilt concluded that, "Integration and increases in numbers of black officers should not be attempted as ends in themselves. Rather, they should be viewed as one way of solving some law enforcement problems in Detroit."

James Jacobs and Jay Cohen (1978) directly disputed Bannon and Wilt's claim by showing that black citizens do not necessarily prefer black policemen to whites. They pointed out that many black police officers hold negative attitudes towards some segments of the black community. Jacobs and Cohen hypothesize that the black police officers' marginality within the police and their desire for acceptance forces them to temper any affinity they may have for "their own race".

John Cooper (1980) was similarly critical of black officers, claiming that "to ingratiate themselves with white colleagues, ghetto people become strangers to black

officers (p. 111)." Cooper stated that "the police are disassociated from the community, the people and their culture (p. 79)" and that it "is well known that black police officers over the years, have been harder on blacks... than white officers (p. 110)." Cooper draws on the theme of alienation in his analysis of black police officers, claiming that they symbolize "the black who has been accepted by white society." According to Cooper, black officers are made to feel superior to other blacks. In order to maintain this position, however, the black police officer must prove to be a "good policeman in the traditionally accepted sense," and this means discriminating against black citizens (p. 125). "It is not whether the black cop wants to identify with the blacks of the ghetto, society makes the identification for him (p. 127)." Scott Decker and Russell Smith (1980) conducted an attitudinal survey of 2, 984 individuals in fourteen large cities across the United States. They found that there was no significant correlation between the number of black police officers in any given location and black citizens' attitudes towards the police.

What all of these studies have in common is an overarching concern with evaluating the relationship between black police officers and the black community. The actual experiences of black officers are invoked, but usually as a means of explaining either their affinity for or alienation from the black population. There is an unstated assumption that there is a correct way to be 'black' – a common black experience that shapes attitudes and behaviour. Black police officers either provide better service because of this, or are socialized out of it during their work. Either way, there is little consideration of how the significance of race is experienced by individual black officers, and how their own ideas about the significance and meaning of blackness influences the

way they interact with the black public. Few studies have made the actual day-to-day experiences of black police officers the centre of their analysis.

One exception is Stephen Leinen (1984). Leinen interviewed a number of black officers in New York City and used this data, combined with his own experience as a former police officer, to offer a far more complex picture of the race-related pressures black officers face in their daily work experience. Leinen claimed that the problems black officers face include issues of recognition, support from supervisors, and favoritism (pp. 57,60, 63). Also, he pointed to a lack of support from senior black police officers and civil servants. "Blacks occupying positions of authority often found it necessary, and at times even politically expedient, to play down or to turn their backs on issues of concern to their brother officers on the job (p. 70)." Many black police officers resented the "enforced segregation" that resulted from their task assignments. The result of sending black officers to "ghetto communities" was a disproportionate exposure to potentially violent and dangerous conditions. Furthermore, rewards and promotions ended up going to officers who were working in less hazardous areas (pp. 79-81). These combined factors created a sense that overqualification and conformity are preconditions to black advancement in the workforce (p. 88).

Leinen did note that most of the officers he interviewed believed that their working relationships had improved considerably over the years. This improvement was the result of increased contact with white officers, less isolation from other black officers, and measures like human relations training aimed at improving the relationships between police and the black community (pp. 106-110). Much conflict remained, however, due to issues of exclusion, racist incidents (including a number of police shootings of off-duty

black officers), and white colleagues attitudes and prejudices towards the black public (pp. 117-125).

Leinen approach also allowed him to appreciate the individuality of the officers. He noted that some officers felt that black police officers were more effective because they had more trust and respect from black citizens. Others thought it was a form of discrimination to make that assumption in the first place. Some even rejected the idea that there was any kind of affinity between black officers and the black public (pp 167-174). Most of the officers believed that factors other than race should be taken into account when making assignments. They believed that flexibility, understanding, and a desire to improve relationships were things that should be considered in addition to race (p. 180). This, Leinen believed, was significant because "contrary to our initial expectations, the great majority of black policemen in the study defined their role in the black community in traditional police terms (p. 197)." "Black policemen, for the most part did not perceive themselves as more effective crime fighters than white police, rejecting the notion that there was any relationship between race and quality of service (p. 197)." By detailing the experiences of black officers within their occupational structure, Leinen produced more nuanced account of how race works within a policing context.

In this vein, Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977) wrote a classic text detailing how situations in the workplace often attributed to gender differences are really the products of organizational pressures and varied responses to these pressures. Her work is useful for examining how black police officers can be affected in an organizational environment that is still overwhelmingly comprised of white men. Kanter claimed that, "It was rarity and scarcity, rather than femaleness per se, that shaped the environment for women in the

parts of [an organization] mostly populated by men (p. 207)." Much of Kanter's analysis centres on the issue of tokenism. A token becomes a symbol of how women can do – a stand-in for all women (p. 207). Kanter noted that tokens become representatives of their category and that they are essentially symbols. "Tokens get attention. One by one, they have higher visibility than dominants looked at alone; they capture a larger awareness share (p. 210)." In the organization she studied, Kanter claimed that women were often deliberately thrust into the limelight and displayed as showpieces (p. 213). According to Kanter, the result of this tokenism is the fact that it loads all of the individual's actions with extra symbolic consequences. They receive the burden of representing not just themselves, but their category, and their performance affects the prospects of others (in this case women) in the organization (p. 214). Kanter also explores the consequences of this. The women were measured against yardsticks. They were evaluated by their colleagues and superiors in terms of how, as women, they carried out the mangerial role and how as managers they lived up to images of womanhood (p. 214). Also had to deal with the extension of consequence (p. 215). The resulting performance pressures generated a set of attitudes and behaviours that appeared sex-linked, but can be understood better as situational responses, true of any person in a token role (p. 221). "Tokens are simultaneously representatives and exceptions. They serve as symbols of their category, especially when they fumble, yet they are also seen as unusual examples of their kind, especially when they succeed (p. 239)."

Kanter concluded that the burdens carried by tokens in the management of social relations likely resulted in psychological stress (p. 239). This tokenism is a significant issue for black police officers. Like Leinen, Kanter offers a more complex view of the

organizational pressures can shape experiences of gender, race, and other social statuses for the individual thrust into the position of being a representative.

This is the impetus for Simon Holdaway's work on minority police officers in Britain. Holdaway (1997b) claimed that the relevant criminological literature, there is an absence of critical consideration of how we can most adequately conceptualize the phenomenon 'race'. According to Holdaway, there is a lack of debate about the theoretical foundations upon which most of the empirical studies of race and crime are based. He reviewed previous work on race and criminological subjects that used standard regression analysis. These studies were usually concerned with assessing the extent to which racialized factors were part of an explanation of offending and victimization rates. Holdaway claimed that regressions analysis' rationale lay in the fact that many 'extra-racial' factors affect offending and victimization, and that they must be distinguished in order to express statistically the extent to which race is significant. The problem with this, according to Holdaway, is that these studies make the assumption that race is an object that can be studied, a discrete factor.

Holdaway claimed that residence, class, and other variables are factors that should be related to the history and racialised segregation of black and Asian people in Britain. For example, if inner cities are high crime areas and large numbers of blacks and Asians live in these areas, we must ask why they settle in these inner city areas in the first place (i.e. the historical processes that led to these patterns of residence.) Race cannot be isolated as a discrete statistical variable, failing to take into account the historical and continuing social structure, cultural and other constraints that sustain racialized relations. Yet at the same time, some argue that measuring by race and ethnicity is unfortunate but

necessary to assess the extent of discrimination in the justice system, housing, etc. (Walker, Spohn & DeLone, 2000, p. 8). The problem this, according to Holdaway, is that it misses the increasingly more subtle manifestations of racism – the concept of race is undertheorized.

Holdaway (1997a) said that the notion of 'race' as a social construction has become commonplace in sociological literature. From this consensus then, "the sociological research task has been to map the ways racialized phenomena are constructed and sustained, within and between societies." He noted that scholars like John Rex (1981), Howard Omi and Michael Winant (1986/1994), and Robert Miles (1993) have long implied that different forms of race are "constructed and sustained within everyday life through rational calculations of choice; an interplay of structural factors and actors' definitions; and through ideological representations." Their ideas, however, have not advanced studies to the extent that social scientists are regularly describing and analyzing processes that sustain and reproduce ideas about 'race' within mundane settings. "Studies about the social construction of 'race' that make links between theoretical ideas and empirical research, especially at the level of work organizations, are lacking. This type of research remains as a significant gap in the race relations literature." Holdaway also noted that when 'race' has been researched with reference to work organizations, attention has generally been given to the development and implementation of race and equal opportunities policies:

> We know next to nothing about how mundane relationships and common place phenomena are racialized within organizations; next to nothing about how power is articulated and negotiated to construct and sustain relationships that fulfil the intended or unintended purposes of social

> exclusion; and next to nothing about essential and phenomenal forms of social exclusion based on racialized categories.

Alternately, Holdaway attacks "cultural studies theorists" for overtheorizing race. While he did not provide as in-depth a critique as for regression analysis, he claimed that authors like Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy give too much attention in their writing to the importance of political speeches, newspaper, and popular culture. Holdaway, (1997b) criticizes cultural studies theorists and Gilroy in particular for a lack of conceptual clarity: "Gilroy, for example, assumes that the category 'black' and an associated consciousness of race are in equal measure applicable to Asian people. All are one."

This is an oversimplification of Gilroy's work, and Holdaway's general dismissal of cultural studies theorists lead to significant gaps in his study. First, policing organizations are not isolated from society. Political speeches, newspapers, and popular culture strongly affect the constructions and significance of race within any workplace. The impact of the media, especially, should be considered in any analysis of race and policing.

Second, while Holdaway rightly focuses on the work of John Rex, and Omi and Winant's Racial Formation perspective, he tends to neglect the fact that minority officers are active participants in the process of racialization. While offering a far more nuanced view of the way that race works in an organization, Holdaway's data does not explore how minority officers respond to racist banter, team membership, and stereotypical thinking in their constabularies. Holdaway objects to the objectification of race, and yet the minority officers in his work become simply objects – the passive recipients of racism.

Third, he does not explore how individual black officers can have different experiences, opinions, and ideas about the significance of race, or how measures taken to address racial inequality can create new racial formations and new pressures in the workplace. These are all issues that a careful consideration of writers like Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Thomas Holt, Patricia Hill Collins and others would have emphasized. Below I will review Omi and Winant's racial formation perspective and how it combines with the cultural studies critique on race to offer an interesting framework for studying the occupational experiences of black police officers.

Race in the 21st Century

For over three decades, sociologists, anthropologists, and others have emphasized that racial and ethnic distinctions are socially constructed (Amit-Talai & Knowles, 1996). In fact, many black writers and intellectuals (e.g. James Baldwin, Amiri Baraka, Anna Cooper, W. E. B. DuBois, Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James, Claudia Jones, Malcolm X, etc.) had raised these issues generations ago (West, 1990; Gilroy, 1993, pp. 6, 13). Contemporary theorists as well have pointed out that race is a process and, more importantly, that the fictitious idea of race can have powerful consequences. But as we noted earlier, most research on race related subjects has been slow to respond to these developments in the theory and conceptualization of race. Often, if for no other reason than that of simplicity, approaches to race and the study of race-relations remain dogmatic, essentialist, and static. Many authors have expressed a profound dissatisfaction with some of the more popular approaches to the study of race and racism. Vered Amit-Talai and Caroline Knowles (1996) said, "pick up one of the mountain of

readers on race and ethnic relations in Canada or the United States, flip to its table of contents, and in most cases you are likely to find the very categories we were supposed to have left behind." They added that there has been a persistent lag between what is commonly known as "ethnic studies" and the theoretical developments in the social sciences and humanities. Philomena Essed (1991) has also pointed out the shortcomings of sociological theorizing on race (pp. 7-8), and John Comaroff (1996) stated, "It is difficult not to be struck by the banality of theory in conceptual discussions of ethnicity and nationalism." He added, "How many times, for example, is it necessary to prove that all ethnic identities are historical creations before primordialism is consigned, finally, to the trash heap of ideas past?"

Most texts today do acknowledge race as a social construction; however, Paul Gilroy (1997) criticized the superficiality involved in the "pious ritual in which we always agree that 'race' is invented but are then required to defer to its embeddedness in the world and to accept that the demand for justice nevertheless requires us to enter the political arenas that it helps mark out." Two popular Canadian texts exemplify this problem. Unequal Relations (Fleras & Elliott, 1996) and The Colour of Democracy (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Roes, 1995) both define race as a social construction, and they both mention the work of scholars like John Rex (1981), who have explored the implications of class and racial construction. After this, however, they continue on to drift into essentialist concepts of race and in particular ethnicity, in what are otherwise fascinating discussions of race and racism in Canadian society. Henry and Tator go so far as to provide a list of the "various racial groups [that] make up the Canadian

population" and an explanation of who falls in which category (including an "Other" category for those of "mixed racial heritage") (p.323).

In these texts, there is no discussion on how the Irish became white (Ignatiev, 1995). There is no mention of how Hispanics were classified as white until "Hispanic" became a census category less than 30 years ago (Goldberg, 1997). These texts don't wrestle with the fact that, in Canada the very idea of 'black' or 'blackness' is destined to always be, "messy and contested (Walcott, 1997, p. xv)." In fact, a report by the McGill Consortium for Ethnicity and Strategic Social Planning (1997) doubled the population of Canadians "with Black origins" by adjusting the census count to include the population "that is likely to be Black, even though it has not explicitly reported this (p. 11)."

Similarly, the 1990 United States census that allowed individuals for the first time to report identification with more than one race was bitterly contested. Some on the not-so-far right wanted to informally maintain "one-drop" rules of racial classification, ignoring miscegenation by defining it away, and many on the left warned that this would lead to an even greater census undercount of African-Americans (Perlmann & Waters, 2002). The McGill Consortium thought it was necessary to include these non self-identified Blacks because, "the implications of using this approach in identifying the Black population are profound in terms of understanding communities, as well as in terms of these communities' claim to public resources and opportunities (p.11)." All of these issues fit squarely into a racial formation perspective.

Racial Formation

The concept of racial formation was introduced in the mid-1980s (Cha-Jua, 2001). Sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant were asked to provide a statement on race for a series of books on critical social thought (Driver, 1988), and accordingly, they defined and outlined the emerging theory of racial formation (Omi & Winant, 1986/1994). Omi and Winant's racial formation perspective was not entirely unique. It was the result of a historical review of the literature on race, ethnicity, and nationalism in the United States and an attempt to provide some degree of coherence and continuity to the popular and academic discourse on race through a "fundamental rethinking" of the current literature (Omi & Winant, 2002).

Their primary concern was to develop a framework that could serve to explain how and why "the concept of race continues to play such a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55)," by developing a conceptual framework for analyzing race and racism in the United States (Cha-Jua, 2001). In their opinion, "mainstream approaches to racial theory and racial politics had become an embarrassment (vii)." Particularly in North America, reductionism was and is a common tendency in popular racial theory (p. viii). Omi and Winant cited a tendency to treat race as a mere manifestation of some other more important social relationship or alternately, to analyze race as if it were an independent variable, not affected by other signifiers such as class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or geography.

Perhaps more significantly, in the public discourse on race, "there is a continuous temptation to think of race as an essence, as something fixed, concrete, and objective.

And there is also an opposite temptation: to imagine race as a mere illusion, a purely ideological construct which some ideal non-racist social order would eliminate (p. 54)." According to Omi and Winant, neither of these positions proves very effective for combating racism.

Racial formation theorists claim that "race" is really an unstable complex of social meanings and that racially defined groups are active participants in the struggle over the meaning and significance of racial classifications. Omi and Winant (1994) show that it is a category that has been constantly transformed not only in the United States, but around the world by political struggle (p. 55). Racial formation is "the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed." Racial formation, and by extension race, is a process of projects that seek to represent and define the significance of race (p. 55-56).

Racial formation makes the link between structure and representation through the idea of racial projects. Racial projects are central to Omi and Winant's racial formation approach. Racial projects are the ideological manifestations of structural inequalities, the everyday experience of race. Racial projects include "large-scale public action, state activities, and interpretations of racial conditions in artistic, journalistic, or academic fora, as well as the seemingly infinite number of racial judgements and practices we carry out at the level of individual experience (p. 61)." It is through these projects that our ideas about race come to seem like "common sense (p. 59)." Omi and Winant state: "Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of her own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation. Race becomes common sense (p. 60-61)."

Initially, Omi and Winant were criticized for not defining race (see for example: Nagel, 1988), but really, they were quite clear. Race is defined as "a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies (p. 55)." Race is an unstable composite of social interpretations (Cha-Jua, 2001). Not only does it not exist outside of these interpretations, but it is defined by them. The meanings of race are in constant flux because they are determined by political struggle (Cha-Jua, 2001) Race, and any racial category for that matter, exists only as the sum total of the various projects that seek to define and articulate its significance. Race, and, by extension blackness, is the result of changing and competing conceptions, categorizations, and interpretations of "race" (Cha-Jua, 2001).

John Comaroff (1996) defined race and ethnicity in terms of a process, describing it as having its origins in relations of inequality, and being constructed in an interaction that "involves struggle, contestation, and, sometimes, failure." According to Comaroff, the making of any racial or ethnic identity occurs in the minutiae of everyday practice. It occurs in the routine encounters between the "ethnicizing and the ethnicized." Once they have been constructed, ethnic identities may become extremely influential. The force with which they can be expressed often makes them appear natural, essential, or primordial, but the conditions that give rise to a social identity are not necessarily the same as those that sustain it. Identity politics surrounding an ethnicity can and do undergo dramatic changes and reconceptualizations.

Paul Gilroy (1987) put forth a similar theory of race formation that offers an even more dynamic account of how both the racializers and the racialized are involved in the process of determining the meaning and significance of race. According to Gilroy,

"race" is an open political category that can accommodate various meanings, which are in turn determined by political struggle (p. 38, 39). It has to be socially and politically constructed, of course, but race formation focuses more on the elaborate ideological work that is done to secure and maintain different forms of racialization. Gilroy claimed that this recognition makes it important to compare and evaluate the different situations in which race becomes politically pertinent. Like Omi and Winant, Gilroy claimed that race formation is a continual and contingent process related to the various political forces that define themselves and organize around the idea of race (p. 38). As an example, Gilroy mentioned how the meaning of race underwent a significant shift in Britain in the 1970s. Previously, the category black was often used loosely to signify people of both African and Asian descent. It was encouraged to foster a sense of Afro-Asian unity. Eventually however, 'black' became confined to people of African heritage (p. 29). Elsewhere, Gilroy (1998) explained that when it comes to the visualization of race a great deal of fine-tuning has been required throughout history.

One analysis that could be characterized as indicative of a racial formation approach would be Don Clairmont and Dennis Magill's (1976) essay on Africville. Clairmont and Magill claimed that in the late 1960s and 1970s, black awareness and militancy developed in Nova Scotia, attempting to address injustices and improve socioeconomic conditions in order to effect a greater control over the destinies of black people in Nova Scotia.

In this context, Africville became central to the new black consciousness. "No longer is it something to hide, to dissociate oneself from; rather, it is something to understand and appreciate." Africville became a symbol of how black organization and

solidarity were necessary to protect against the denigration and destruction of the black community in Nova Scotia. "In its death Africville has taken on a new meaning as blacks have come to realize that the historical developments there are of deep significance in understanding what has happened to black social life elsewhere in Nova Scotia." In a racial formation context, this reclamation of Africville is clearly a racial project. The destruction of Africville becomes symbolic, and Africville is used to define and articulate the significance of race to the extent that it defines blackness in a Nova Scotian context.

The Cultural Studies Critique

In a reflection on their development of racial formation theory, Omi and Winant (2002) mentioned that sociologists had been slow to embrace their ideas. "Somewhat to our surprise, our earliest 'fans' were from other disciplines." They noted that their approach really surfaced during the emergence of "cultural studies" in Britain and the United States, "and was taken up by scholars exploring the importance of discursive practices in the formation of various social identities." This is not surprising considering the primacy of the work of W.E.B. DuBois to both racial formation theory and cultural studies theorizing on race. In 1903, DuBois wrote the seminal text on race and race relations into the 20th century. The Souls of Black Folk, written in part as a stinging indictment on sociologists who "gleefully count our bastards and prostitutes" and a guide explaining what actually is required to study race in America, is still considered one of the most relevant texts on race. DuBois wrote:

> We seldom study the condition of the Negro today honestly and carefully. It is so much easier to assume that we know it all. Or perhaps, having already reached conclusions in our own minds, we are loath to have them

> disturbed by facts. And yet how little we really know of these millions, – of their daily lives and longings, of their homely joys and sorrows, or their real shortcomings and the meaning of their crimes! All this we can only learn by intimate contact with the masses, and not by wholesale arguments covering millions separate in time and space, and differing widely in training and culture.

We are now in a time when social and political climates insist that we must question more than ever how we see race and how the signs and symbols of racial difference became apparent (Gilroy, 1997). Contemporary racial theorists are also demanding that we explicitly recognize that race is a social construct, abandon essentialist arguments, and be more sophisticated in our analyses of what about race and racism has changed and what has stayed the same.

It has been documented countless times that our modern conceptions of race did not emerge until the rise of Europe and the Europeans' arrival in the Americas (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 61). Also, both natural and social scientists (e.g. Graves, 2001; Holt, 2002, p. 11; Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55; Ridley, 2003) have long discredited genetic descriptions of what we commonly identify as race. But now, we are now less sure than ever about what defines the supposed cultural particularity of race that some still claim (Gilroy, 2000, p. 178). As Paul Gilroy explained, "there is no raw perception dwelling in the body," and "when it comes to the visualisation of 'race' a great deal of fine tuning has been required (Gilroy, 1997)."

Writers sometimes grouped under the broad label of cultural studies have pointed out that the boundaries and identities of what we commonly identify as race are increasingly uncertain (Amit-Talai & Knowles, 1996). There is a new order and intensity to the global interactions between people of supposedly different races (Appadurai,

1990), making the borders and zones of cultural difference even more porous (Giroux, 1993). Race today is characterised by a series of contradictions and incoherences (Holt, 2002, p. 6), and "the relationship between identity and being 'black'," in particular, can no longer be said to be "fixed, static, or secure (Giroux, 1993)." The elaborate cultural and ideological work that must go into producing and reproducing a racial category is more visible than ever before, leading Gilroy to conclude that now "the idea of race has been stripped of both its moral and intellectual integrity (Gilroy, 2000, pp. 20-21)."

Stuart Hall, in a 1992 article titled, *What is this 'black' in black popular culture*, outlined the changes that have fuelled this new uncertainty regarding the meaning of race and by extension racism. He claimed that now, we are witnessing a displacement of European models of high culture, combined with the emergence of the United States as the single world power and centre of global cultural production and circulation. Additionally, cultural consumption has undergone a dramatic shift towards the popular (he noted, however, that what is considered high and popular culture always varies over time), and this corresponds with a renewed fascination with cultural, racial, and ethnic difference. There is nothing we love more today, Hall stated, "than a certain kind of difference: a touch of ethnicity, a taste of the exotic, as we say in England, 'a bit of the other.'" The old narratives of racism and Eurocentric domination become a bit too simple in a society where 'blackness' is often simultaneously both valorized and demonized. Thus, in any examination of blackness, we have to begin by asking what the notion of black actually means.

Elsewhere, Hall (1989/1996) noted that there was a moment in Britain when the term 'black' was "coined as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and

marginalization in Britain and came to provide the organizing category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic identities." The idea of a "black experience" didn't replace other ethnic and racial identities, but it became the dominant theme in a cultural politic that sought to challenge, resist and transform societal representations of black people. Patricia Hill Collins (1998) pointed out a similar moment in America in the late 1960s where Black Nationalism and "the search for a heroic national identity or 'Blackness' that could serve as the basis for a reenergized political activism," emerged. Collins claimed that the Black Nationalist paradigm became influential among African-Americans disenchanted with the persisting discrimination, black powerlessness, and poverty that plagued the United States (p.159). The designation 'Black' moved from a term of insult to a location for identification, solidarity, and activism.

Hall believed, however, that by the late 1980s black cultural politics in Britain was entering a new phase where the "extraordinary diversity of subjective positions, social experiences and cultural identities which compose the category 'black'," could no longer be suppressed. Since 'black' is purely a politically and culturally constructed category, the immense diversity and the different historical and cultural experiences of black subjects weakened the "necessary fiction" that any politic based on the idea of a 'black experience' must entail. Hall stated: "You can no longer conduct black politics through a strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject." He also pointed out that we must also recognize that the idea of race has always worked in conjunction with categories such as class, gender, and ethnicity. Too often, however, contemporary Black Nationalist

politics have evaded these issues in favour of viewing blackness as some type of familial relation (Collins, 1998, p. 161, 164; Hall, 1989/1996).

Paul Gilroy (1993) challenged the "cultural insiderism" that is often produced by an absolute sense of ethnic difference and the continuing lure of ethnic absolutisms produced by both blacks and whites. According to Gilroy, racist, nationalist, and ethnically absolutist discourses orchestrate relationships where racial, cultural, and national identities falsely appear to be mutually exclusive. Gilroy questioned not only the boundaries of English, but also of African-American cultural studies. In America, the lure of a narrow vision of ethnic particularism and nationalism is a significant problem (pp. 1-4). And Gilroy pointed out that although blacks do not monopolize a sense of cultural and ethnic particularity, there are too often strong tendencies towards ethnocentrism and ethnic absolutism in modern black cultural theory (pp. 30-31).

Gilroy attributed these tendencies to an aspiration to acquire a supposedly authentic, natural and stable 'rooted' identity as the premise of a 'racial' self (p. 30). He located it primarily within the authoritarian tendencies of those who attempt to police black cultural expression by expressing disappointment with the actual cultural choices and patterns of the mass of black people. The cultural elite here, Gilroy claimed, were often black intellectuals and academics who viewed themselves as some sort of vanguard (p. 213), and often focused their work on the supposedly contaminated world of black culture evidenced by choices of hair styles, popular music, and western clothing (p. 32). Gilroy claimed that many of today's black intellectuals have succumbed to the lure of romantic conceptions of 'race', 'people,' and 'nation' (p. 34). The idea of Black Nationalism "promises a Black utopia to those who join in Black consciousness

movements dedicated to liberating the African motherland and re-establishing a long lost Black homeland (Collins, 1989, p. 188)." Thus, when black critical knowledge becomes institutionalized, it usually involves the construction of exclusively national canons such as African-American studies or Caribbean literature (Gilroy, 1993, p. 33). This can have some profound material and practical consequences.

In the political arena, an elite often uses this racial nationalism to provide commentary on the special needs and desires of black communities. Gilroy argued that there is, however, an increasingly problematic relationship with the black poor on behalf of whom this elite claims entitlement to speak. Essentially, this elite constructs a "phantom constituency" of black people to argue for concessions that may end up benefiting only a small segment of the black 'community' (p. 33). The experience of marginalization of the black poor is used to benefit the black middle-class. For example, Patricia Hill Collins (1998) stated that, "If I were attending my former Philadelphia high school today, the least of my worries would be fixing the curriculum to be more inclusive of African-American women's experiences. While my academic colleagues and I wax on about the relative merits of sociology, postmodernism, and Afrocentrism, far too many children continue to suffer and die (p. 190)." But, according to Gilroy, the idea of a national interest is invoked as a means to silence dissent and censor political debate when any of these incoherences and inconsistencies are raised (p. 33). Those who question the priorities of this politic receive the condemning label of 'Uncle Tom' or 'sell-out.' There is what Gilroy considers an embarrassing link between the practice of blacks who comprehend racial politics through an essentialist standpoint and the activities of the racist right who approach the dynamics of 'race', nationality, and ethnicity through

similar equations (p. 34). Gilroy's work provides many poignant examples of the way that the idea of race can work in political, academic, and social spheres.

Gilroy, Thomas Holt, Stuart Hall, and many other theorists have claimed that there is now a new opening to difference that force our analyses of race and racism to be more nuanced. Hall (1992/1996) emphasized that this opening is most evident in the cultural sphere. He also noted, however, that there is a new backlash and resistance to difference among the white majority. As Holt (2002) pointed out, there is often a simultaneous idealization and demonization of blacks in the North America (2002, p. 6). The popularity of music forms like hip-hop has led Gilroy (1994) to discuss the "unforeseen planetary change on our side." But, while black popular culture is being embraced and consumed by whites at an unprecedented level, decreasing support for public institutions, increasing public apathy, and deindustrialization have had a devastating impact on a large segment of the black population. Both Gilroy and Collins draw on William Julius Wilson's (1979) work to point to the fact that poor and working class African-American communities are increasingly "plagued by drugs, violence, substandard housing, underfunded schools, AIDS, and a constellation of heartbreaking social problems (Collins, 1998, p. 190)," while at the same time, the black middle class is creating for themselves new economic, cultural, and social opportunities. Collins pointed out the irony in the fact that the texts of African-American women like Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker are being increasingly circulated and celebrated in the same institutions where African-American enrolment is dropping.

Overall, this new ambiguity over the meaning of race and the manifestations of racism force any analysis of race and racism away from the same static racial analysis. Hall stated:

> There is a kind of 'nothing ever changes, the system always wins' attitude, which I read as the cynical protective shell that, I'm sorry to say, American cultural critics frequently wear, a shell that sometimes prevents them from developing cultural strategies that can make a difference. It is as if, in order to protect themselves against the occasional defeat, they have to pretend they can see right through everything – and it's just the same as it always was.

Of course, it is not the same as it always was. Race and racism are, "always historically specific," and "determined by the economic, political, social, and organizational conditions of society (Essed, 1991, p. 12)." Hall compared the competing claims of "victories won," to, "the eternal story of our own marginalization," stating that, "I'm tired of those two continuous grand counter narratives." Instead, we are more accurately in a constant struggle over cultural hegemony where lines become blurred and cultural purity is a myth. As Hazel Carby (2001) pointed out, it is important to be aware that what we often too easily regard as the, "signifiers of blackness only tangentially relate to those people designated as black. As racial signifiers and, in a complex formation of signifiers, as racial ideologies, both white and black have to negotiate their relation to blackness as it is defined in particular historical moments." Arjun Apppadurai (1990) also explained that with the media's global reach, the lines between what is real and what is fictional become blurred and steady points of racial reference are difficult to find. Culture, thus, increasingly becomes a matter of constant choice, justification, and representation, and any certainties are quickly frustrated. Hall (1992/1996) concluded by

stating, "it is to the diversity, not the homogeneity of black experience that we must now give our undivided creative attention."

So, race is unstable and it is a complex of different social meanings. What is perhaps more useful in social research, is to start looking at how the idea of race works to play such a fundamental role in our society. As we mentioned earlier, Omi and Winant (1994) pointed out that everybody learns their own version of the rule of racial classification and we then tend to think of race as "common sense." But race is not common sense, and we are left with the problem of defining something that varies not only across geography and time, but also from individual to individual. Holt (2002) pointed out the difficulty of trying to define a concept that is by its very nature, "chameleon-like (p. 8)." He claimed that conventional understandings of race and racism are simply inadequate when they try to describe all aspects of the contemporary racial situation (pp. 4-5).

Comaroff (1996) claimed that, "Our task as social scientists, it follows, is to establish how the reality of any identity is realised, how its essence is essentialised, how its objective qualities come to be objectified (Comaroff, 1996)." Descriptions of race are pointless. Instead we need to study race in a way that "conveys the dynamism and contingency of the phenomena (Holt, 2002, p. 27)."

Holt suggested that the idea of "work" could meet this requirement. He suggested that "the plasticity of race and racism as concepts and its parasitic and chameleonlike qualities as practice means that we cannot define or catalogue their content. It is better to ask 'what work does race do?' (Holt, 2002, p. 27)." This become practically important

when we look at policing and the way the idea of race has been used in a complex and often conflictual relationship.

In what follows, I will look how race "works" in the lives of black RCMP officers in Nova Scotia. Using the racial formation framework provided by Omi and Winant, the goal will be to identify the various "racial projects" that seek to define and articulate the significance of race in the officers' organizational experience. It is through this endless series of racial projects that race works. The idea of race works powerfully in the lives of these officers. A racial formation approach, combined with an appreciation of the issues raised the cultural studies critique of 'race,' allow a portrait of these officers that may reveal some of the more complex and subtle manifestations of race and racism in the 21st century. The multiple expectations and assumptions made about race affect the daily work experience of black police officers in profound and complex ways.

Chapter 3: Methodology

I interviewed seven members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Two of the members were female, and the other five were male. They ranged in age from mid-twenties to mid-forties and had served with the RCMP for between two and twenty years. All of the officers lived within the Halifax Regional Municipality area, and the interviews were conducted either at their individual detachments, or at the Aboriginal and Diversity Policing Services (ADPS) office in the RCMP headquarters. I used a semi-structured interview format in order to elicit rich, detailed material that sought to discover, rather than simply categorize the informants' experiences on particular topics and in particular situations (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 18).

In order to gain access to the officers, my graduate supervisor contacted RCMP superintendent, and forwarded him a letter I had written, stating my research goals. After briefly speaking with this superintendent, my letter was forwarded to the APDS office. Approximately three weeks later I had a meeting with the head of the APDS and the officer who was the black community liaison. They readily agreed to assist me. I did, however, have to consent to a background check. We immediately discussed a strategy for contacting and interviewing individual members, and after some discussion, we decided that the best course would be for the APDS to contact the approximately 18 black members in the HRM area for consent. As individual officers consented to be interviewed, their contact information was forwarded to me and I was left to arrange an interview. In all, almost every officer responded. A couple of officers, however, initially agreed to be interviewed, but then rescinded because of time or other considerations. I

had also met a number of RCMP officers in May of 2001 at a community event held to honour the contributions of black RCMP officers both from and serving in Nova Scotia. This added an extra degree of familiarity to a number of my interviews.

My first interview was arranged by the APDS to ensure that the content was acceptable. I was to interview a specific officer who I was assured had considerable experience and would be happy to help. This officer was to suggest any changes I should make in the interview guide. They explained that this was not keep a tab on me, but to help make sure that my research progressed smoothly. As I was informed: "If you go into an interview and you say or do something that's really offensive, within two days there won't be a black officer in Nova Scotia who will talk to you." The interviewee agreed that my questions were fine and should not create any problems.

As I mentioned before, I used a semi-structured format for the interviews. Because I had no previous experience interviewing police officers, I did not want to simply obtain answers to the questions that I thought would be significant. Rather, I wanted a "verbal grand tour (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 197)," that would inform me of their day-to-day experiences on the job, and their attitudes towards their work, colleagues, superiors, and community members. I also believed that this would help me to further appreciate how the "organization characteristics (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 110)" of policing affected these officers. I did, however, use an interview guide to try to focus the interviews on the "social relationships" and "social practices (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, pp. 103, 106)" that pertained to the idea of race, as this was my primary research concern. So while the interviews usually progressed according to the story the officers wanted to tell, there were specific questions I made sure to raise. Thus, after the

officers told me where they were born, I asked if they experienced any type of racial tension or racism in their communities. I also asked if their childhood friends were primarily black, or white, and how they saw the idea of an African Nova-Scotian, or African Canadian community before joining the force.

I asked the individual black officers about their motivation for becoming a police officer, the recruitment process, and the way their friends and family perceived their decision to become an RCMP officer. Next, I had the officers describe their training experience, and specifically asked if they felt that they were treated any differently than white and/or male recruits. I asked the officers if they experienced any type of animosity, racism, or sexism from their fellow recruits, and encouraged them to elaborate with specific instances or stories.

I also asked the officers about their day-to-day work experience and social environments. Here, I probed the interviewees to reveal what aspects of their work they enjoyed the most (and least), where they focused most of their activity, what types of encounters do they have during a work day, and the nature of their interactions with colleagues, superiors, and community members. The officers also told me what they did when they were not working, who their friends were, and the organizations to which they belonged.

Then, I began to focus more explicitly on the idea of race. Many of the questions for this section were adapted from Charles A. Gallagher's (2000) study on white identity construction. During my research I quickly became less interested in having individuals philosophize on what blackness meant to them (although I do still recognize the importance of this) and more concerned with the more sociological question of how they

use and are used by the "idea of race." So, although I wanted to avoid a heavy focus on identity construction, I still found Gallagher's framework incredibly useful towards getting at the idea of race and eliciting rich examples of racialised encounters from the officers. Thus, I asked the officers how they defined themselves ethnically and racially, when they were conscious of being black, and in what situations were they forced to think about being black. Alternately, I also asked the officers when they where conscious of being a police officer, and when they were conscious of being specifically a black police officer. I asked the officers whether they considered one of these roles more important than the other, and when they would consider one role more important than the other role. Interestingly, all of the officers either rejected this question or claimed not to understand it because 'black' and 'police officer' are not mutually exclusive categories. Far from being a useless question, however, this revealed one of the major focuses of my thesis – the fact that others too often treat the two as if they were.

I also asked the officers about black culture, police culture, how being black is similar and/or different to being white, Aboriginal, or Asian, their class background, and the importance of gender in policing. In the rare case that it was not previously addressed, I mentioned to the officers that the media has often represented police and black community relations as particularly divisive and asked if the media plays in role in exaggerating, influencing, or perpetuating this relationship. Finally, I gave the officers the opportunity to raise any issues that I may have neglected.

The interviews lasted on average about three hours, with the shortest being just under two and the longest lasting almost six hours (albeit with frequent interruptions and cigarette breaks). All of the officers were extremely co-operative and helpful and the

only barrier I ran into was the inability to conduct them all as quickly as I would like because of their busy schedules and the occasional last minute cancellation because of weather or other circumstances beyond control.

Methodologically, an interesting issue was the idea of racial matching or the debate over racial insiders and outsiders in qualitative research. Troy Duster (2000) pointed out that the issue of access must always be recognized in the study of race. Somewhat ironically then, I had to ask how my 'race' might have affected my access to the police officers and ability to do this research. France Winddance Twine (2000) reviewed arguments in the debate over racial matching. She claimed that proponents of matching black interviewers to black interviewees believe that it produces a more adept interviewer because the interviewer is able to share a part of "the black experience" that a white interviewer simply could not understand. Unfortunately, this is simply racial essentialism masquerading as pragmatism. Twine noted that the idea of racial matching was seized upon by many who were more concerned with opening up the social science research community than with the issue of whether white people could study nonwhites. While the intention here may be admirable, this can be problematic. The under-representation of blacks in academia and incompetent research on black subjects are two very separate and important issues. Hazel Carby (1996/1999) insisted that we always realize that an absence in a field of knowledge is not the same problem as a lack of diversity in faculty or student bodies.

Ultimately, Twine worried that the insistence on "racial matching may contribute to the marginalization of black scholars relegated by the logic of racial matching to studying only those of the same race." Arguments against racial matching, however, are

often equally limited and essentialist, tending to focus on the potential barriers and biases that can result from racial "insiderness (Twine, 2000)." Twine suggested that a more critical approach would recognize that race is not the only relevant "social signifier," and that race is just one factor in a relationship that may be complicated by other statuses such as age, class, and gender. Howard Becker (2000) also noted that "to say that someone is black or white or Asian does not tell you much about that person anyway. These groups, far from being monolithic, are internally differentiated by class, gender, and along a variety of other axes," adding that you can never actually tell what a person's race will be because racial classifications vary not only by geography, but sometimes from individual to individual. Someone who is considered white in one context may be black in another. This is not to say that 'race' is not an important consideration in the interviewer/interviewee relationship, but that its importance cannot be taken for granted. Becker claimed that race is acted on from moment to moment and is activated when participants invoke (or fail to invoke) it in relation to other distinctions that are deemed more relevant.

I approached this study with the idea that my 'race' could work in two ways. First, I anticipated the participants might feel more comfortable talking to another black person who could relate to their experiences. Second, I worried that the officers and the RCMP might be uncomfortable if they perceived me as a young black male with a chip on his shoulder and anti-police sentiment (however justified). This concern proved groundless. The RCMP and the individual officers eagerly agreed to participate and offered me all the assistance I needed. Was I granted more access because of my race then? I suspect that I was. I felt that my initial application letter and meeting at the

APDS officer were received more favourably and access to the officers was facilitated because I was black. When it came to the individual interviews, however, I felt that my race was far less important than might have been expected. The rapport I developed with the officers probably had more to do with my policing ignorance and earnest inquiries than with the colour of my skin. My race did play some part in the interviews, but usually in conjunction with other factors. For example, I could sympathize with some of the officers about moving to Nova Scotia's racial atmosphere from another province. One officer and I developed a friendlier relationship because we were both Ghanaian (or close enough.) Another officer also had a white parent and we joked that our light skin did not seem as out of place in Nova Scotia as it might in other provinces. These examples, however, had more to do with rapport, and I cannot seriously claim that they affected the content of the interviews in any way.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and through the informed consent of both the individual interviewees and the RCMP. In regards to the individual officers to be interviewed, written consent was obtained. The officers were allowed the option of removing themselves at any stage of the research, and no deception was used. Given that the interviewees were drawn from a fairly small sample population and therefore easily distinguishable, the anonymity of their remarks was carefully maintained. Pseudonyms were used during the transcription process. The "key" to these names was kept separate from all audiotapes and transcriptions, which were kept under lock-and-key. The officers were informed, however, that because of the small sample pool, some

of their colleagues (e.g. other black officers in Nova Scotia) could potentially quite easily identify their comments. No compensation was offered for the interviews, nor did I receive any compensation. As Dalhousie University was my only organizational affiliation, I was not subject to any conflicts of interest in conducting this project.

Chapter 4: Data and Analysis

Becoming a Black Police Officer

Before anything else, I wanted to know if and how the idea of race influenced the officers' motivation to join the RCMP. As we will see, although the officers' reasons for joining the force were varied, they all were aware of the significance of their race and its implications for their career choice. The first officer I interviewed had grown up in a Nova Scotian community in the 1960s and 1970s and experienced a significant amount of racism. His community was racially segregated, and his family grew up in a black neighbourhood that was known at that time as "the Hill." He explained the racial climate in his youth:

> Where I grew up, that's where they put the dump. They go by, how you want to call it, 'environmental racism'. Okay, environmental racism as you probably well know is when you put things that aren't socially acceptable in areas that cannot fight you – the areas with the least voice. Being the black community up on the Hill, we had the least voice, so that's where the dump went.

After graduating high school, this officer had joined the army. When he left the army, he went to university and received a bachelor's degree in commerce. Before joining the RCMP, he had had a number of various careers. Becoming a police officer had never seemed a possibility for him because:

> I had never seen a black doctor in my life when I was 17 years old. Black doctors? Black dentists? You know. There were no black teachers in my school. There was only one black police officer in town. There were no black fire fighters. Pretty much 95% of the black men that worked, worked for the town. That where my dad worked. My mom cleaned houses.

Becoming a police officer didn't seem to be a realistic goal. The officer also mentioned that his family had been very poor, stating that in his home, "running water was me running to the well to get water."

This officer essentially joined the RCMP on a whim. He decided to apply one day when he was sitting with a friend who knew some people in the RCMP. He explained:

> We were sitting down having a couple of cold ones and had to head to the liquor store because we ran out. So we were talking about the RCMP and high-speed chases and kicking doors and making arrests and it sounded great. We got his sister to drive us to the liquor store and on the way there he says, 'You should drop off an application.' So I get an application. I filled the thing out and I took it back in. Couple of weeks later they call me and say, 'You're writing the exam.'

While his good friends generally supported his decision to become an RCMP officer, he did experience some negative reactions from other people in his community. His mother was not happy. She was not happy; however, because when the police car pulled up to their house, she thought her son was being arrested:

> My mother first found out when she was doing the laundry in the kitchen and a police car pulled up in the yard. At that point she started yelling at me – what did I do, what did I do? I told her that I didn't do anything, but by the time the police officer got to the door she basically almost had to pull her off me. They were there to do my background check. That's how she found out. I can still see her. She went ballistic.

The officer added that she still was not thrilled about his decision to become a police officer, explaining that she thought it was dangerous, and that as a member of the black community, she had a justifiable distrust of the police.

The second officer I interviewed also experienced a significant amount of racism growing up. He was born in Nova Scotia, but spent a significant part of his childhood in

South America. His parents were both from Guyana. This meant that his conception of race and racial heritage was quite different than in North America. He explained:

> I have six different nationalities in me. So, am I a black man? To Canadian standards yes I am, but to Guyanese standards I'm not black. I have everything from German to Scottish to black Dutch. I have East Indian on my dad's maternal side and I have Native South American Indian. My mother's grandfather was a German soldier. In WWI he defected from the German army and came to South America and married and had some kids. When he died, his son, my mother's father, was contacted periodically by aunts in Germany saying that, 'Your estate has been passed on, come back.' Apparently from somewhere one of our ancestors was a German baron, but my grandfather, my mom's dad didn't go back because he said, 'This is my home and I don't want anything to do with that. I don't know you. You're not my people.' So I have a lot of German in me and from my mom's mother you have the Portuguese and Scottish and Native South American Indian, the Amerindian. My dad's dad was black, a very dark man, and my dad's mother – her parents were from India. Quite a mixture.

When his family moved back to Canada, however, he quickly realized that he was considered black, and he experienced a significant amount of racism because of it:

> I didn't have many friends as a little boy because I found that a lot of people would tease me because of colour. You would hear the 'N' word, and one guy called me a coon. I had to go home and ask mom, 'what does he mean by calling me a coon?' I didn't know. You would fight every day, or they would try to fight me everyday, and I faced a lot of that since I was nine. Going up to my teen years I had a lot of resentment because of that.

Unlike the first officer, he did not become a police officer coincidentally. Nor did he explicitly express any racialised motive for joining the RMCP. For this officer, the simple fact was that, "I wanted to get into the RCMP. I've always wanted to be a police officer ever since I was about fifteen."

The third officer I interviewed was also born in a Nova Scotian community. He grew up in a racially segregated community in the 1960s and 1970s, in an area

nicknamed, "Nigger Island". He recalled a lot of racial name-calling and fighting during his youth, and noted that no black members were allowed at the local golf club. Like the first officer, he also grew up poor, and his home had no indoor plumbing. After finishing high school, he had started working to be able to afford university. He had considered joining a police force, but had not thought of the RCMP because he had never seen a black RCMP officer. He did apply for the RCMP, however, through a white friend's encouragement. The officer claimed that his family was very supportive of his decision to join, but he received a lot of criticism from the black community and his black friends.

The fourth officer I interviewed was born and raised in one of Nova Scotia's historic black communities. He was encouraged to apply to the RCMP by one of his friends who had applied and not been successful. While he claimed that race did not explicitly factor into his decision to become a police officer, he did note that much of the motivation came from his desire to be a role model for many of the black youth in his community.

The fifth officer I interviewed became a police officer because it seemed like a good career opportunity. He explained that, "It was a spur of the moment thing. While I was going to university some people that I played rugby with that were RCMP officers suggested that I go write the exam." He emphasized that it was not something that he had previously considered, claming that, "I was in university for three years before it came to mind." Also, while he had experienced some alienation growing up in a mainly white community, race and racism had not influenced his life to any large degree. For this officer, race was a question of pride. He was proud of both African Nova Scotian history, and of his Ghanaian heritage. His family was skeptical about his decision to

become a police officer at first, because it seemed to be a dangerous occupation and they wondered how serious he really was. Soon they came to accept his decision. This officer noted that the primary appeal of the RCMP for him was the flexibility and the opportunity it allowed him to pursue many different interests. "The way I saw it was as an opportunity that I could start off with and if I wanted to go into a different field I knew that there were lots of options that you could pursue in the organization," he said.

Officer six was born and raised in Ontario. She had lived in a few different communities, and had only experienced racial alienation in one medium-sized town where there were few other black people. "You could count on one hand the black people that were in town. That changed me a lot. Whereas I had grown up with a good self-image, that changed in my early twenties. I felt like I stuck out," she explained. When she was explaining her reasons for becoming a police officer she said, "I just kind of evolved into it. I didn't go around saying that I wanted to be a Mountie when I was a child. It was the farthest thing from my mind. It was more out of an economic need." Before she became a police officer she had been working as a civilian in an RCMP detachment, but decided that she would write the entrance exam when "I literally looked at some of the members and said, 'I can do that. I know I can do what they do.'" Her mother was not very happy with her decision to become a police officer because of the danger involved. The officer claimed, however, that "my friends thought it was really cool."

Race was a factor in her decision to become a police officer. She claimed: "I have to admit that a little bit of me thought that I'd go and help the situation." Since Ontario has its own provincial police force, she decided that she wanted her first posting

to be in Nova Scotia "because there were a lot of black people there." She thought, "Well this is great! There are black people in Nova Scotia. I'll come to Nova Scotia." Amusingly, her first posting ended up being in a rural all-white fishing community. She did, however, describe it as one of the best experiences of her life.

The final officer I interviewed wanted to be a police officer from a young age. Her desire to become an officer was explicitly racial, stemming from her experience of "seeing the ways that black people were treated in Toronto. I wanted to be a police officer to make a difference for my people." This officer had grown up in the Jane and Finch area of Toronto and exclaimed:

> Oh boy, did I see a lot of racism there. I saw a lot of injustice towards our people from the police. I also saw a lot of violence, drugs, and prostitution. That's what it was like for me growing up. The building we used to live in was where the drug dealers all hung out. You had to walk by them. When we first moved there it was weird for us, but after a while it doesn't bother you anymore because you don't notice them. They're not bothering you; they're fighting with themselves. We used to watch the gang fights on our balcony.

She explained her childhood experience and also claimed that, "Black people in Toronto don't like the police – justifiably I think," later going on to explain that Toronto police are simply "assholes." She recalled one incident where she heard a police officer say of someone he had just arrested: "He's just a fucking nigger isn't he?" When she did join the RCMP, the officer explained that she received a very negative reaction from her mother's side of the family to the point where she stopped telling them. She claimed, however, that her mother, brother, and sister offered her a lot of support.

These officers are a diverse group, and their reasons for becoming police officers were varied. However, the idea of race had affected them all long before they joined the

RCMP. They were all adamant about the fact that they not only considered themselves black Canadians, but that they were also very proud of what they perceived to be black history, culture, and the black experience in Canada. While our conversations revealed that they all had normal career aspirations, it was clear that becoming a police officer has an added significance for a black person.

Policing is a racialised occupation for a black Canadian. In a racialised society, becoming a police officer poses some unique considerations. Some of these officers had to deal with negative reactions from friends and family members who had a justifiable distrust of the police. Others mentioned the symbolic effect of never seeing black people in any positions of power. Another officer mentioned wanting to become a police officer because of an experience growing up witnessing police abuse. And, a few of the interviewees honestly believed that they could help resolve the long-standing tensions between black and the police. This is how the idea of race works to affect the occupational experience of black police officers in Canada. Becoming a police officer involves a series of racial projects. Imagine a white officer expressing a wish to join the RCMP to become a role model or to ease tensions between the police and a certain social group. It may happen, but it would not be required. As we will see, however, this quickly becomes part of the job expectation for a black police officer in Canada. This diverse group of officers all have had very similar racial experiences in their day-to-day experience as police officers. These experiences demonstrate how powerfully the idea of race can work within communities, organizations, and individual lives.

Black Officers and White Racism

All of the officers that I interviewed told stories about facing discrimination during their childhood, before joining the RCMP, and in their professional careers. Three of the officers specifically singled out Nova Scotia as a place with racial tensions unlike anywhere else in Canada. Two of these officers mentioned the suspicion with which blacks in this province are treated. They mentioned, among other things, being followed in stores when not in uniform. One of the officers said:

> When you're black, the minute people look at you they treat you different. People treat you different out here. I've noticed different treatment when you get served. I have floorwalkers following me all the time. And I notice it because I know what to look for. I have police officers following me when I go to the liquor store. White people don't have that.

This officer was originally from Toronto, and she pointed out that the racial atmosphere in Nova Scotia is completely different than in Canada's most multicultural city. She also emphasized that as a police officer, she knows when she is being treated as if she were suspicious, pointing out that her husband, who is white, also had noticed the difference.

Another officer, who emphasized Nova Scotia's exceptionally high level of black-white racial tensions, attributed these attitudes to the largely rural composition of Nova Scotia's population. He said of many people in the province that:

> They refuse to realize that there's different types of people in the world whether in colour or attitudes. There are just some ignorant people. Over time that will change as they have more interaction with people from different cultures. If you think of someone from a small all-white community and the only interactions they have with black people is at the mall or on TV – all they see are the ones that they don't actually have any interaction or relationship with. That lack of interaction, combined with what they're told – they base their feelings on that and things won't unfold in a positive light. What you have to do now is implement the education so they're not growing up ignorant and they understand the different people of the world.

He believed that some of the backward attitudes in rural areas are due to ignorance and a lack of real interaction with people of other cultures. According to the officer, people in isolated rural areas are not educated to Canada's multicultural existence. In his mind, race works to indicate cultural similarity or difference. None of the other officers viewed the racism they experienced as a product of cultural ignorance though. They tended to view white hostility simply as a product of anti-black racism.

The officers spoke of their experience with race as black police officers. One officer pointed out that whites often react with surprise when they see black officers, saying, "When I was in uniform and you see the whites – they look at you kind of different. They're surprised to see you. You'd never see two blacks in uniform in a police car years ago. You see that now and you get looks." These were not looks of resentment, however, they were looks of surprise, and the member stressed that "the whites" were usually quite pleasant. Another member pointed out that white people would treat her differently once they found out she was an RCMP officer:

> I've experienced so much racism out here but once they know you're a police officer everyone is your friend. When they know you're a police officer they treat you differently. When I first came here we lived in an apartment building. I tried to say hello to everybody. People wouldn't say hi to me, but when they knew I was a police officer they would talk to me all the time. That happened a lot.

This officer believed that the racial animosity she experienced in her apartment building disappeared once people found out she was a police officer. This corresponds with Matt Ridley's (2003) discussion of race as proxy for, "coalition membership (p. 266)." Ridley argued that people mistakenly believe that race acts as an indicator for a set of distinctive attitudes and beliefs, and this often leads to people subconsciously distancing themselves

from others who look different. Basically, Ridley claims that a lack of serious interaction with those of different 'races', forces people to resort to antagonistic racial stereotypes. Research lab experiments showed, however, that once people are given, "another, stronger clue to coalition membership (p. 266)," race becomes unimportant. Being a police officer seems to fulfil this requirement (at least temporarily), demonstrating, the flexible and dynamic nature of race and racism. Race provides some indication of character. Nobody wants a neighbour with a chip on his or her shoulder, the proverbial "angry black person". As the officer experienced, however, black police officers are deemed acceptable.

Of course, this isn't always the case. Another officer described case of mistaken identity. "I had a complaint laid against me when I was working here and I said, 'I don't even work there any more.'" The complainant had mistaken another black officer for him and had filed a complaint with the RCMP. The member explained, "I worked in that area before I came here. They saw a black guy, and they made the complaint against me. They had to go back and tell them that I left there four years ago. Try again." The fact that the two officers looked nothing alike made no difference. It was a black officer and so it must have been him.

In addition to these slights and crude stereotypes, all of the police officers had experienced a significant amount of racist verbal abuse. Most of the officers seemed to view this abuse as either totally irrelevant, or as only a slight annoyance. One officer said that intoxication accounts for almost all the racist comments he hears. What did people say when they were drunk? "Nigger this, Nigger that, Coon, Jungle Bunny – all of the

above." The officer went on to explain, however, that these insults had little affect on him (although they may have had quite a significant affect on the fate of the individual):

> I have the power. At the end of the day brother I'm going to be walking away with a smile on my face. You had your moment. You looked good if front of your friends 'till I asked you to get in the car and then you spend the next day and a half in jail. Then once I throw your ass in jail I go to your friends and tell them that I would have drove him home if he had just kept his mouth shut. They know I would have. Silly bastards.

He seemed almost amused by this type of racist abuse. He rationalized these comments as irrelevant because ultimately, he was in the power position. Fleras and Elliott (1996) argued that, "the essence of racism resides in the unequal distribution of power." They continued to explain that, "racism is about power and its abuse." Ironically, however, they go on to argue that this means that minorities cannot be racist. They lack the, "capacity for harm since minorities lack the power to put hateful slurs into practice (p. 66)." But here, a black officer does have power – the power to remain insulated from the damaging effects of racist remarks, and also the power to take punitive measures against the offending individual. As Omi and Winant (1994) point out, "unless one is prepared to argue that there has been no transformation of the racial order over the years, and that racism consequently has remained unchanged – an essentialist position *par excellence* – it is difficult to contend that racially defined minorities have attained no power or influence… (p. 73)." What is interesting about the previous and following examples, is that we see a situation in which the importance of race and even racism can be rejected when the power equation is reversed.

One female officer dismissed racist insults just as easily: "You get called 'nigger' a lot. 'Bitch,' 'pussy,' every name. It doesn't bother me. You have to consider the

source and who's calling you that. Someone who is drunk and you're taking to jail? That doesn't bother me." So it is clear that not all racist invocations are the same (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 73; Gilroy, 1999); the standard definitions (and exemptions) of racism simply no longer suffice. Omi and Winant explain, "For many years now, racism has operated in a more complex fashion than this (p. 73)." Race operates in a complex fashion here, because these black police officers have power, and can thus dismiss irrelevant racist taunts as being directed at their position as a police officer.

At most, the officers viewed these attacks as inevitable. This type of abuse is expected and they are trained to handle it. One member indicated that it is simply a defence mechanism:

> The only defence that they have is their mouth. So what do they do? They call me a nigger. 'You fucking nigger. Nigger, nigger, nigger, nigger, nigger.' They want to get a rise out of me. I'm saying, 'Man, I've heard that word before, think of something else.' You lock them up in cells – I might be out on the road – all night long they're screaming, 'Nigger, nigger!'

He added that the next morning these individuals often apologize. Claiming that he readily accepts their apologies, the member added, "but you can't tell me they're not prejudiced or racist. Yes, they are. They can't convince me otherwise."

One officer drew an important parallel between racism from the civilians they are dealing with (their "clients"), and potential racism from other RCMP members. While the latter would be (and is) a far bigger concern for black members, the former is slightly more than simple annoyance:

> With clients you're fair game. I've been called all types of nasty things, but that's what training was for. If my colleagues or supervisors were to say those things it would be a whole different ball of wax, but the people

> we deal with it's part of the job. Nobody likes it, but it's one of those things that is out of our control. That's part of life.

Again, the power dimension is essential. 'Race' works as just another insult for people being subjected to the power of the law. The officers' professionalism demands that they dismiss it. The officers I interviewed had various ways of rationalizing the racist insults they often encountered in their interactions with white citizens. Some were resigned to its inevitability in a racist society, some claimed to be amused at what they saw as a last resort for offenders, and others resorted to their role as a police officer, claiming that training prepared them for these types of attacks. It is clear that the officers' power and authority mitigate the effect of racist abuse, but this abuse is still an additional burden on black police officers. As we will see later, the potential for discrimination from colleagues is something these officers take far more seriously.

Black Police Officers and the "Black Community"

Selling Out?

In contrast to the negative comments made by whites to black RCMP members, the negative comments made by black individuals are quite significant to them, especially when they seem to suggest that these officers are somehow violating a code of blackness or are something less than black. This is where the significance of identity and the idea of 'race' become powerful. The different officers perceived four distinct forms of marginalization from black individuals. First, some members claimed to receive negative comments while ticketing or charging a black person for an offence. Second, all of the members received insults from random black citizens who were not necessarily subject to

any police action at the time. Third, the four members born outside of Nova Scotia claimed to be marginalized because of the fact that they were not considered African Nova Scotian. Fourth, two of the members born in Nova Scotia perceived some racially-tinged resentment from other blacks after being accepted into the RCMP.

On one level, the racialised comments that some blacks would make to the black police officers charging them are not all that different from the standard racist abuse they receive from whites. The significant difference, however, is that while the officers easily dismiss or rationalize white racism in these situations, they were visibly much more upset at the negative comments that blacks directed at them. Returning to Comaroff's (1996) definition of ethnicity, the officers' 'black' identities are very important to them, and any perceived challenge to this is quite hurtful. One officer expressed incredible frustration at this, noting that while people are often initially very happy to see a black officer, they become abusive as soon as they realize that they will be charged:

> You stop a guy for speeding and it's, 'Hey, what's up brotha? How you doin' man? You gonna give me a break here brotha; what you sayin'?' 'No man, I'm charging you.' 'Man, fuck you man, you friggin white man. You nothin' but a white man disrespecting.' Should I be putting up with that when I have to do my job, when they're breaking the law? Should I have to give them a break because they're black? They're going to pull the race card with me? They're going to use race with me?

He was disturbed that someone would dare suggest that race had any influence in this interaction, and that he was somehow in league with the white oppressor. Another member, while less incredulous, also seemed to be bothered by this much more than he was by the easily dismissed (or at least rationalized) white racist insults:

> Sometimes they'll use it against you and make slurs like, 'You're not black,' or stereotype you because of your work. Essentially you're doing

> a job that you have to uphold the law and if they choose to break the law there's nothing you can do about that.

The implication of these comments is that being a police officer is somehow inconsistent with being black. Still, the remarks the officers received in these occasions can be attributed the same motivation as the racist insults from whites.

Perhaps more disturbing, are the instances when these officers were insulted when they weren't necessarily laying charges or even intervening in a dispute, because these could not be written off as a defence mechanism. One of the female members described this, saying that she was often labelled an "Uncle Tom," or a "traitor." She explained that she found these types of comments extremely annoying, claiming, "It's bad enough getting it from whites, but when you're getting it from your own people it's wrong."

One member felt that these comments were undeserved. He had believed that he had a positive relationship with the black community, and so was mortified when he was still randomly treated with hostility:

> Somebody calling me a 'white nigger.' You can't respect that; you can't. I haven't done anybody wrong. I could understand if I was a S.O.B. and I was very selfish and I didn't care and I put people down and I hurt people. I could understand that I would deserve some of that, but I didn't deserve it.

Again we see how the idea of race works in the day-to-day experiences of black police officers. These seemingly unprovoked attacks demonstrate the deep hostility (whether deserved or not) that some black individuals hold towards the police, and the power of the idea that black and police officer are mutually exclusive categories. Because of a history of inequality, racism, and exclusion, being black and being a police officer are seen as antagonistic identities.

One member was quite indignant at what he perceived as the questioning of his racial authenticity. He had often been told that he was, "working for the white man," and that he was, "not black," but what really bothered him was the suggestion that he had had an easy life free from issues of racial and class discrimination:

> 'What do you know about this or that?' or 'Did you grow up poor?' 'You make this amount of money' – blah, blah, blah. Those sort of things. They have no idea who I am. They don't know about my background. Because I didn't grow up down the street from them they don't know that my father grew up in a village, and it's through his hard work that I ended up in the position I am. I wasn't always in the position I am. I also lived in bad parts of different places. I lived in the south side of Chicago. Someone can't tell me that I didn't (or someone didn't) suffer for me to get where I am.

The idea that they had had easy lives or that they had never suffered the violence of racism was the source of frequent annoyance for the officers. The very ideas that we can define race, or catalogue its contents, inevitably leads to an increasingly frustrating battle over experience and authenticity.

The complexity of race and authentic racial identity is also evident in the intraracial distinctions and divisions that some of the officers experienced. There is often a delicate politic between Indigenous blacks – the descendants of the Loyalists, Maroons, and refugees from the war of 1812 – and those who have immigrated to Nova Scotia more recently. Tensions occasionally develop between these two groupings. Some attribute it to a sense of parochialism, or ethnic particularism on the part of Nova Scotia's indigenous black population. Others characterize this tension as a legitimate response by African Nova Scotians to the tendency of immigrants to be condescending, and to capitalize on employment equity and other programs provided to remedy Nova Scotia's history of discrimination against its black inhabitants. This is significant because many

of the black RCMP officers serving in Nova Scotia are from other provinces. The officers I interviewed who were not born in Nova Scotia often felt that members of the black community discriminated against them because they weren't considered 'indigenous,' or 'African Nova Scotian'. One officer said, "It was almost as if I was being stereotyped twice. Even though I was black it was almost as if I wasn't black enough because I didn't have a black Nova Scotian name and I didn't live in a certain community." This officer was not born in Nova Scotia, but moved here at a young age. He went on to explain why this perception of him as an outsider is problematic:

> You still have the same issues that you deal with and sometimes even more so, because you don't have the support of other black people in your community. Just because someone doesn't recognize the name it doesn't mean that I don't know what they've gone through. I've lived here for over twenty years, and it's almost as if there's a double segregation that you feel.

What makes this example even more problematic than the others is the fact that the officer was raised in Nova Scotia and considers himself African Nova Scotian. To borrow from Gilroy (1993) – while his family may not have the same "roots", they travelled similar "routes", and he feels particularly connected to the history of racism and exclusion experienced throughout the black Atlantic. Another member (originally from Ontario) expressed a similar sentiment. She also did not understand this differentiation between indigenous and non-indigenous blacks: "black is black is black," she said, "We're all fighting the same battle; we all have to stick together."

The distinction between indigenous and non-Indigenous black in Nova Scotia can have some very real career consequences. According to the interviewees, there are certain positions in the RCMP that are reserved for black members born in Nova Scotia.

This policy was initiated at the request of the Black Advisory Committee. The Black Advisory Committee meets with representatives of the RCMP on matters relating to the relationship between the police and the black community, and apparently recommended that a liaison position in the Aboriginal and Diversity Policing Services office should only be open to members who are Indigenous African Nova Scotian. This is an especially contentious issue:

> Even in the RCMP we're not equal... There are positions for indigenous blacks. Only an indigenous black person can take that position. If you were born in Nova Scotia, but grew up in Toronto and then at twenty-five years of age came back to Nova Scotia but yet I've been a police officer for ten years, they're saying that you would be in a better position for that job than me because you're an indigenous black person. You have your own organization and black people within your organization treating you like you're second-class. That's wrong. All of us from away feel like that.

Another member echoed these statements, claiming:

> I'm not born here and I'm not considered a black Nova Scotian so at this point in time I'm not eligible for [the advisory position]. I don't blame anyone for that, and I understand the rationale behind why funding was given for this position... What bothers me about this is that if I had my own choice I would have gone back to my own home province. I was trying to get back to Ontario, and staffing wasn't willing to send me there. So, I'm not from here and I can't go back to where I'm from, but I also can't reap the benefits of being in that position. You won't let me leave, but I'm not good enough to be a Nova Scotia. I think that's significant, and there are a lot of black members in this province who are not from Nova Scotia.

This points to the contrasting ideas of blackness between the police organization, black officers, and some members of Nova Scotia's indigenous black community. Inconsistencies are put on display. The RCMP seems to think that any black member is good enough to bolster the relationship between the police and blacks in Nova Scotia. The black officers from outside of Nova Scotia claimed to believe in some sense of unity

and commonality between all blacks in Canada (and sometimes North America). "I really want to be a part of this," one officer said, "I might not have been here since the 1700s, but I'm here now and I'm probably going to be here for a long time." Some black individuals, however, believed that Nova Scotia's indigenous black population has a unique history, experience, and culture that should be considered. Although all three groups have noble intentions, the ambiguous idea of race (three very different racial projects seeking to express, define, and articulate the significance of race) creates complications and frustrations that are not easily resolved.

Non-Nova Scotians were not the only black members who felt marginalized by other blacks though. Two of the three officers born in Nova Scotia spoke of the negative reception they got when black community members discovered they had joined the RCMP. "There was some resentment about me getting in amongst some people in the black community," one member said. He went on to say that, "You would think that a lot of people on my street would be supportive, but they weren't. They wanted to see failure; they wanted to see you fail. It's because people feel that maybe you've gained something, or you're going to get something more than they have." The other member also claimed that, "Some people didn't want to see you getting ahead." When I asked him how people expressed this resentment, he explained that many people stated that he would never get through the training, and others would revert to common critiques like, "Oreo," "working for the man," and, "Uncle Tom." These officers both saw this resentment as a driving force. The first officer said, "No matter what, I was going to be successful, partly because I wanted to show the people that were being negative that yes, I was successful." The other officer expressed similar sentiments:

> It was a driving force when things became bad throughout my training. A lot of things kept me going. First off, it was coming home and hearing black people tell me, "Told you that you couldn't do it." Oh no, that can't happen man. You'd have to shoot me and I'd have to die out there on the ground in Saskatchewan because I'm not coming back to Nova Scotia as a failure. It's not going to happen.

What affects all of these officers, are racialized comments from those whom they would like to imagine on their side. The idea of race works just as powerfully on them (albeit in a different way) as it does on those who criticize their choice in becoming a police officer. One member explained, "I expect that I'm going to be treated differently because I'm black. That will never change. I have a problem when my own people are doing it to me. It's wrong. I think that is wrong." The idea that they have violated some code of blackness hurts these officers: "I've been called Oreo, I've been called Uncle Tom, I've been told that I sold out – that I'd given up. I said, 'What does it mean to give up being black?' How do you give up being black?"

Officers' Attitudes towards the "Black Community"

As a direct result of this marginalization, most of the officers I interviewed seemed to have a somewhat ambiguous relationship with black communities in Nova Scotia. The occasional tensions between black officers and black communities cannot simply be reduced to the comments of a few individuals who believe that black and police officer are mutually exclusive categories. The officers themselves are implicated in the racial project that attempts to define what black is (or should be). For example, one officer expressed what he believed to be a source of these tensions:

> It's a shame, but the majority of people in the white communities versus the majority of people in the black communities, the white treat me better.

> I could be wrong. Maybe my perception is off by a mile, but I feel that I'm not accepted by a few blacks. The majority of whites would accept me more or be nicer to me.

He seemed to sincerely regret his perception that whites accepted him more, but this perception was perhaps more grounded in the corresponding treatment he expected from blacks and whites, than in what he actually experienced. White racism is expected, so experiencing acceptance from the vast majority of white individuals was surprisingly positive. The perception of being excluded from the family of blackness, however, was the opposite of what was expected and therefore far more troubling.

Some of the officers reacted with anger to the notion that they were somehow now outsiders by virtue of their occupational choice. Often this was expressed through denigrating statements about the stereotypes or representations of blackness they oppose. One officer spoke at length about how he feels black communities must change in the new millennium:

> We have to get rid of our prejudices against the white population. A lot of blacks have prejudices against whites, and yet they'd be the first ones to scream prejudice. Being black in 2002 means that when blacks are trying to succeed, the ones that aren't succeeding shouldn't try to put them down. The children today should not look towards their rap idols and basketball stars as the be all and end all. They should be realistic and look at their lives and say, 'How can I be successful?'

Central to this officer's comments, is the idea that he had made something of his life. He had grown up working class, experiencing a great deal of white racism as a youth, and therefore believed that anyone can "make it" if they try hard enough. He claimed that while he initially had prejudices against whites because of these experiences with racism, he had been able to overcome this bitterness. Throughout the interview, however, he came back to his indignation over the fact that certain blacks have questioned his

blackness. He said, for example, "They called me the, 'white nigger,' because I've done something with myself and that's jealousy. I've got off my arse and I go out and I work." This was a type of sentiment expressed by many of the officers, thus making them complicit in a type of racial project that seeks to proscribe proper behaviour for blacks. It also makes them active participants in an interactional process that can exacerbate tensions between blacks and the police.

Another officer expressed similar negative sentiments when he was commenting on the occasional assertion that he was a "sell-out":

> Why? Because I speak English? People understand me? A couple of these people when they're talking to me I'm thinking, 'Whoa, you got to slow down, you got to speak English man,' because cutting of your 'H's' and cutting off your 'R's' and thinning out those 'T's' isn't doing it for me. 'Sup, 'sup, 'sup (laughs). Ebonics. Get away from me with the Ebonics. Speak English. You went to school the same way the rest of us do. If you want to teach it as a second language, go ahead. But, let's try English as a first language because you can't speak that damn stuff either. We've had some quarrels and arguments over that... I never stopped being black, I just didn't want to act like a rapper.

Like the previous member, he seemed to believe that the unfavourable treatment he experienced from certain black individuals had more to do with his success as a "black man" than with his role as a police officer. As will be seen later, however, most of the other officers were quite positive that they are sometimes disliked because they are black police officers, and not because they had achieved a success that they believed that most other blacks had not.

A number of the officers directed their negative comments towards black youth. One officer said, "Am I impressed by the rappers? No. Why don't they let me in [to nightclubs, etc.]? Because you look like Sam the bagman with the big baggy pants on

and the big baggy shirts and your glove on crooked. You can't look in a mirror and put your hat on straight? Give me a break." He continued this tirade on black youth, exclaiming, "They think they got the world by the ass. They are the ones, from mid-teens up to about thirty, with the bad attitudes. They're giving me as a black man a bad rep." In his view, younger children and older community members were almost always positive. He believed that it is the young black males who are creating negative stereotypes of all blacks. Another officer pointed out the reasons why he feels black youth are in a precarious position:

> I feel really bad especially for the teenage kids that wear the baggy clothes and everything else. There are a few of them that are really decent kids. They just dress that way to hang out with the boys. They don't mean anything, but the image that they're presenting, it doesn't help us. It doesn't help the black communities. I strongly believe that. I strongly believe that… The white community doesn't fully interact with them. There's a fear there and plus there's an ignorance on the part of the black kids. They need to come out and see the world, instead of being at home seeing the pimps. They've got the big cars, the rocks on their finger, and the chains hanging. They've got wads of hundred dollar bills. That's what they see. What do you think they want to do when they get older? That's what they're going to do. Don't get me wrong, there are white people that do it too, but as a black man it makes me sad. Somebody does something wrong it reflects on me and my children.

Here, the idea of race interacts with youth. In one sense, the fact that two RCMP officers beyond their thirties would be critical of the attitudes and clothing styles popular among youth is not surprising, but both of these officers seemed particularly bothered by the fact that what black people (especially youth) do will reflect on them. Later on in the interview, the previous member added:

> It bothers me to see young black men and women get arrested. I'm harder on them simply because of the stigma that's attached to blacks and crime – prostitution, drugs, pimping, you name it. Whatever they do reflects on

> every black person. It reflects on us all, especially when the community knows about it. It reflects on all of us.

Obviously, the impudence and rebelliousness that (should) characterize youth are not available to blacks. The integrity of the race is at stake.

Other members took a different approach to black youth. One of the younger members explained that he often counsels black youth, telling them that, "if they want to get into the RCMP they have to have a clean record, because if you have a record, you can't get in." He understood that young people will do bad things, and saw it as a part of his responsibility to warn them of the potential consequences. Another older member said that he was a strong advocate of community policing. He expressed some dismay over the fact that he believed police officers are often too hard on youth. He continued:

> I've been there. I know some of the struggles they've encountered. I'm a firm believer that young people will make mistakes and if there's any opportunity whatsoever to use discretion I think that it's incumbent on a police officer to use that authority; because, I know that you can change the course of somebody's life with the stroke of a pen. If I'm dealing with a young person and I can deal with the situation any other manner than through the criminal justice system, then that's the road I'm going to take.

Unlike the previous officers, he had more of a structural analysis of the youth problem, claiming that black youth are not engaging in behaviour that is much different than their white counterparts. For various reasons, however, he believed that black youth were more likely to get caught. The officer claimed that depending on how these situations are handled, the youth could be set on a path towards more criminality. Thus, he was a strong advocate of officers finding alternative means of resolution for minor offences such as vandalism.

Adding to the notion of the ambiguous relationship between black RCMP officers and black communities, was the fact that almost all of these officers seemed to understand why certain black individuals or communities held negative opinions of the police. One officer said, "The point of the matter is that there's distrust in general towards the police, so it really doesn't matter who it is that's going into the community, there's just a general distrust." He claimed that an officer's race will not shield him from a negative reception. Echoing the statements of another officer who claimed that there have been many white officers who have had wonderful relationships with black communities, he explained:

> If you get an individual that's not willing to make things work, you're going to have problems and the community's going to hate that particular officer no matter what colour he is. We've had black officers from Cole Harbour go into black communities and there's as much hatred toward the black officer as there is toward anybody else who goes in there.

The dominant theme here is that there is an onus on individual police officers to work towards developing positive relationships with the various communities. A perceived racial solidarity is not enough. Most of the other officers made similar statements. Even the one member who had previously reacted so negatively to being labelled a "sell-out" showed some understanding, saying, "Well, you got to understand, the black community in Nova Scotia is very apprehensive about the police."

One of the female officers explained the added responsibility that all police officers must expect when dealing with black communities:

> There is a large segment of the black population who have been treated very badly by the police and so are not very trusting of us. Unfortunately that's a load I have to bear. I can't change history. I can't change the fact that the RCMP stopped somebody because they were black. I didn't do it,

> but that's part of the legacy that I have to face. They're looking for answers as well. There's an expectation that you'll do some talking.

While she didn't relish this role, she understood its necessity. She understood that the legacy or "folk myth (James, 1998)" of police discrimination leads many blacks to feel apprehensive towards all police officers. The other female officer agreed, saying, "A lot of people are afraid [of the police] and I can understand where they're coming from." The idea of race (and racial solidarity) works here to the extent that black officers are asked to explain instances of police abuse. Another member explained:

> Word spreads very quickly if there is a new black member in a town. A lot is asked of you in terms of explaining the wrongs of other members. A lot is asked of you. You are the one that has to explain. You are asked to explain and to make things different and that is difficult. You still have to work within the constraints of the law and policy. There is still a job that we need to do. The black community doesn't always see it that way, and I think it comes from the fact that traditionally they have been treated very badly.

Black officers feel that black communities treat them initially with some critical scrutiny. They are often tested or subjected to some form of testing. As much as the officers might like it to, being black doesn't automatically make someone "right-on" in black communities' eyes. When it comes to police officers, the communities do not accept the simple reversal that puts, "in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject (Hall, 1989/1996)." This is an essentialism that is easily dismissed by a community that has many justifiable apprehensions when it comes to interacting with the police.

However, it must be said that all of the officers I interviewed had had many positive experiences with members of the black community. These officers seemed to really enjoy the exuberant reception they often received as black Mounties. One of the

officers said, "It's great because I've gone to a lot of black functions and people are really proud that there are these black police officers. It really is a proud moment." Another was profoundly affected by an interaction she had on a school visit:

> There was a little black girl who was so excited to see a black female Mountie. She couldn't believe it when she saw me. That kind of thing is very powerful. You change a lot of people's lives without even knowing it. I spent a lot of time talking with her.

The other female member commented that when she first started working she received a positive reaction because, "To see a woman black police officer was amazing for them." One of the male members spoke of an experience during Operation Show and Tell (an event held in 1995 to honour black RCMP officers in Nova Scotia). He said, "There was an old fellow that was crying there. I asked him why and he said, 'Son, I never thought I'd live to see thirty black officers walking down Cherry Brook road.' No lie. At that point you know that you are making a difference." And finally, another officer explained the pleasure he receives from young children's reactions to black police officers, saying, "The really young people, they got your cop card and they want you to sign it."

While it is unfair to attribute these comments to, "the residual narcissism of the black middle-class (Gilroy, 1996)," what these comments have in common is in the association of pride in their accomplishment with the idea of racial representation. The idea that these officers represent social progress for black people in Nova Scotia is also very powerful. This does create a potentially dangerous racial myth, however. It works like this: the system is racist and blacks are expected to fail. Therefore, any black person who 'succeeds' has overcome the odds that cause so many others to 'fail', and should be praised accordingly – an ironic twist on Social Darwinism. Combined with their more

negative comments which attributed their treatment in black communities to jealousy rather than anti-police sentiment, I sometimes got a sense that a few of the officers I interviewed had an almost automatic expectation that all blacks should be extremely proud of them.

There were, however, two comments that best captured the ambivalence between black RCMP officers and the black communities where they often serve. One officer concluded our interview by explaining:

> I found that [abuse from individuals in the black community], but I also found that there's a lot of people in the black communities that I've come to love. I really respect a lot of them. These are the people that want their community to be a better place. They're the ones that are preaching to the younger people saying, 'Listen, you can do it – be the best you can; follow your dreams.' They're the ones that care. Those are the kind of people I respect, as opposed to, 'look what the white man's done to me.' I've found it hard to be accepted by some, and very easy to be accepted by others. It went both ways.

Another member echoed this sentiment:

> The community right now, I feel, is trying to take back their community from some of the people that are controlling it. We've got 5% bad, 5% that don't care, and 90% that are good citizens. The 5% that don't care are controlling the situation.

These comments are indicative of the coexistence of opposing attitudes, and opinions the officers I interviewed displayed. Nothing (negative or positive) was ever said about blacks or the black community without a series of qualifications, reservations, and stipulations. The officers frequently contradicted themselves, but far from being a negative reflection on them, their comments, opinions, and attitudes further demonstrate race has an, "unstable complex of social meanings (Omi and Winant, 1995, p. 55)," that continually defies any and all assumptions and expectations.

In summary, the black police officers that I interviewed reflect the complex and ambiguous relationships they have with the black communities that they both police and represent. Their experiences suggest that the idea of race works powerfully in black police officers occupational experience. There is a constant tension in which the officers both seek to define their idea of what should be proper racial behaviour for other black people and are themselves proscribed by others for their disloyalty to the race.

Race, Policing, and the Media

It is important to note that the officers I interviewed believe that the media is probably the primary cause of the tensions between black communities and the police. The members believed that media reports are often inaccurate and sensationalist. The media creates fear and misconceptions between police and black communities and stigmatizes blacks. As one officer explained:

> Before I became a police officer I took for gospel what was in the paper. I've realized that you have to take fifty percent of what the media says and believe it and fifty percent don't believe it. I've been in so many incidents where you read it and think, 'Holy shit! It didn't happen like that. Where did they get that from?' I don't believe a lot of what the media has to say. They tell you what you want to hear. You want to hear it was a race riot.

The idea that "race" is a story that sells was a prominent concern for the members. The media frustrated these officers both as black individuals and as police officers. One officer explained that it makes it, "hard because you're fighting against those stereotypes," from all sides.

Most of the officers claimed that the media looks to sensationalize race-related stories. According to one of the female members, the media in Nova Scotia looks to race

simply because nothing else happens. She said, "I think that a lot of the problem is that around here there isn't a whole lot that is front page news." She mentioned the number of times that she had seen a family of ducks crossing the street on the front page of the local paper. Another officer explained:

> They're looking for the sensationalist story. They've painted the RCMP as a bigoted organization; they've painted North Preston as a community that's downtrodden. It has certain problems. The RCMP has certain problems, but that's not even the issue. The media's painted a lot of negativity into this whole thing. North Preston is used as the card. They're playing the card, and not all but a lot of people there are buying into it. That's where they run into a problem with me because I don't buy into the card and it's pretty hard to play the card against me. The race card over all. The media is playing it and trying to get mileage out of it.

He believed that the media manipulated tensions, blowing them completely out of proportion. The officer also added, however, that some members of the black community buy into these representations, and this forms the basis of their dislike for the police. He believed his presence as a black police officer complicates the media's simple narratives of criminal blacks and racially prejudiced police.

One of the officers agreed that the media sensationalizes tensions between blacks and the police, adding however, that they often also contribute to the stigmatization of blacks and black communities by singling them out for special attention. He explained:

> If something happens in an elementary school in Cole Harbour, and the same thing happens in North Preston, the media will do that story on North Preston because it's North Preston. They're targeted and maybe it's because of the mistakes that the criminals and people in the community have made in the past that have caused trouble and media attention, but the media now – anything North Preston they'll jump at big time. North Preston sells.

The "mistakes" that the officer referred to involve a series of confrontations between some residents of North Preston (an all-black community in rural Nova Scotia) and the

RCMP. On July 16, 2001, 20 people in North Preston surrounded an officer investigating an anonymous complaint about an arranged dogfight. His car was pelted with rocks, resulting in cuts to his face and an injured shoulder. Then, on October 5, 30 young people swarmed officers responding to a traffic accident. Someone threw a beer bottle that smashed the windshield of an empty cruiser. On October 16, another officer claimed that 40 to 50 North Preston residents swarmed his police car, forcibly releasing a young woman he had detained for riding on a possibly stolen ATV without a helmet. The RCMP spokesman was careful to claim to the media that the incident stemmed from, "a very few people that make it bad for everybody." He added that, "It only takes one or two… It's not just in North Preston. It's in any community you go to," and stressed that the RCMP has a good relationship with residents of North Preston. The Chronicle-Herald story on the incident opened, however, by saying, "For the second time this month – and third time in three months – North Preston residents have made life miserable for Cole Harbour RCMP officers (Jones, 2001)." Later, North Preston residents, and the area's MLA contended that it was actually only 4 or 5 youths who had surrounded the officer (Brooks, 2001).

The racial subtext for these stories stemmed from a 1996 incident in which hundreds of residents engaged in a tense nine-hour stand-off with the RCMP (Jones, 2001). The sensationalizing of these stories annoyed most of the officers. While not denying the seriousness of some of these incidents, many pointed out that this reaction to the police is not unique to North Preston or to blacks. One officer pointed to the predominantly white community of Spryfield, saying, "Look at the white people in Spryfield and the Halifax Regional police. You think they love each other? Ha! It's just

that way," suggesting (hesitantly) that class may have more to do with police tensions than race. To make their point about the media, many of the officers pointed to an incident a number of years ago in a Cole Harbour high school. Reports of racial brawls in the school made national news. Later, however, the fights were revealed to be somewhat blown out of proportion, and primarily based on competition over drugs and a girlfriend. One officer explained, "They said it was about a snowball. A white guy threw a snowball and it just took off from there. It became a big racial thing, and it made the media. The media blew it out of proportion." Another officer wondered what makes stories about conflicts in Nova Scotia involving blacks so attractive to the media:

> The question I ask people is, 'If there is a cafeteria brawl in a school in Edmonton or a school in Surrey does it make national news?' No it doesn't. It makes national news in Nova Scotia because the media has, in my view, taken this whole situation and blown it out of proportion. I worked in a place where there have been drive-by shootings, there've been stabbings, there've been murders in schools involving young people, and it doesn't get the attention that they get in Cole Harbour for a snowball fight. Is it the media feeding this, or is it something more than that? I suppose different people would debate that till the end of time. I think it was just blown out of proportion.

The members believed that the media creates misconceptions and fear, both of the police and of blacks. "There's a lot of misconceptions, and some of that's through the newspaper and stuff like that," said one member. An officer claimed that media reports influence whites towards an unfounded fear of blacks. He said, "By reporting these stories they aid in promoting fear of the communities with the white population." "It's terrifying," claimed another, explaining that our primary exposure to other races is through the media. She added, "That's where we learn to interact with people. The media are responsible for continually portraying people in a negative light or in a way

that makes people afraid." The media engage in a series of racial projects that continually define our "common sense" understanding of race. One of the male members stated that people often cross the street when they see him approaching. He also attributed the blame for this fear to a media that sensationalizes racial conflict and black crime. One of the young officers who grew up in a small black community right next to North Preston said that the media was responsible for the stubborn persistence of racism in Nova Scotia. He said:

> "Every time something's in North Preston the media shows up and points the finger and labels it racial. That's why Nova Scotia's so bad for racism is because the media always plays it as a black and white issue. It's not always a black and white issue!"

A member claimed that, "I think that the media can make things appear worse than they are," adding, "Sometimes the media might make the problem." Another officer talked about the calls she received after the media reported a story about black males coercing women into prostitution. "I remember getting a lot of calls where their white daughters were going out with a black guy and they thought they were pimps," she said. The media aids in creating the moral panics that stigmatize black youth in particular.

Beyond creating white fear, the officers believe that the negative opinions that many blacks have of the police are due to media reporting. Reports of racial profiling, in particular, was a sensitive issue for one of the female members. She blamed the media for the way it handled the issue of racial profiling in Toronto:

> I know how I am with people, so to make a blanket statement like, 'The police do racial profiling,' really bugs me. I know I don't do that and I'm a police officer as well. Is it happening? Yeah, I think it is happening, but not from me and not from all of us.

While none of the officers denied the existence of racial profiling, they quickly dismissed any ideas that it was a systemic feature of police forces.

Finally, it is important to note that some of the members believed that the media not only fuelled racial tensions, but also racial opportunists. An officer claimed that sometimes individuals or organizations "fuel off" of media attention to racial issues. He said that the media allows people to become racial spokespersons, which makes the situation worse:

> I've heard of groups that have said, 'We're going to do this to get on the front page of the paper.' They were proud to get on the front page of the paper before for doing something, and they do it to get in the paper a second time. ...That's just to show how much influence the media can have on people. Because they were successful at getting in the media for acts they've done before, they've said to people that, 'We're going to do this to get in the paper.' That just shows the effect that the media has on some people.

The officers I interviewed believed that the media is the primary cause of tensions between black communities and the police. The media exacerbates tensions between blacks and the police by providing the simplistic and sensationalized images and representations that inform and create prejudice and misconceptions of both black people and communities, and the police.

Black officers, race, and the police organization

I want to be careful not to overstate the frustrations that black RCMP members experience at work. By and large, the officers I interviewed were very happy in the RCMP, and indicated that they generally had excellent relationships with their fellow officers. As one officer said, "Once you've gone through depot, and you come out into

the field and you do a good job, the members will accept you." Another officer emphasized: "I have no problems with colleagues. No problems." A number pointed out that there are specific policies that forbid discrimination, and any officer who made racist statements would be disciplined. One member explained:

> I'm in an organization where if a colleague came up to me and said, 'you fucking nigger,' I could go and file a complaint against that member. A file would be made up and a reprimand would be in order. Whether they would be forced to take some cultural sensitivity training or whatever, it would become common knowledge and it doesn't look good because it goes on their permanent file.

According to this officer, the RCMP today, takes overt discrimination very seriously. The officers I interviewed definitely do not think of the RCMP as a racist organization, nor did they think that discrimination in the organization is rampant. However, it is important to draw attention to the inevitable race-related strains that all black officers feel, and to note the significance of race as it affects their occupational and organizational experience.

All but one of the officers stated emphatically that they faced no discrimination of any kind during their training in Regina. They stressed the team atmosphere that developed during their time at depot, and spoke fondly of the misery that everyone was equally subjected to. Sometimes 'race' was used humorously. One officer, for example, was nicknamed "Eddie Murphy" by his corporal, but he suggested that it might have had more to do with his outrageous sunglasses than with his colour. One of the older members was referred to with racist terms by his instructors:

> In the first couple of weeks they called you names like nigger and boy and whatnot because they wanted to see how you would react to it. It was the role that they were playing at the time. After the first three weeks when

> they realized that there was no reaction it stopped, and there was nothing more that I can even remember throughout the rest of training.

But, he pointed out that his instructors were simply trying to prepare him for what he would encounter when he started working, and insisted that there were no racist intentions involved:

> If they had wanted to weed me out as a black person at depot it would have been very easy to do so given the policies that were in place. I felt that they were there to help you, the system was there to support you, and if you did well you were going to make it through.

However, he did point out that this training method would not be allowed in today's more racially sensitive climate.

One officer did claim to have experienced a significant amount of racism at depot, stating, "I know some of the people in my troop did treat me differently." While claiming that there was nothing that was outright racist, the member noticed, "more exclusion," explaining that people, "would do things and you find out about it afterwards." She spoke of how a picture that she kept by her clock was frequently turned around when she would return, and mentioned a couple of instances where someone tampered with the possessions in her closet:

> Someone was actually tampering with my pit, but I never stopped to think that it was racism until my corporal said, "Maybe someone's targeting you because you're black.' She said to bring it up with the girls in my troop. I did that, and I never said that I thought it was racism, but I said that this is what the corporal thought. Then rumour went around that I thought people were after me because I was black and all that bullshit.

The member pointed out that she didn't accuse anyone of racism. Her instructor was the first person to point out that it may have been because of her race that she was being targeted, but when she tried to address the issue she was labelled a troublemaker.

Because she had dared to bring up the idea of race, she was met with further racially-tinged animosity.

Some of the officers spoke of a number of instances after training where their fellow officer had made racist comments. Sometimes these comments were benign. For example, in the May, 2002, an event was organized to recognize black RCMP officers who were either born or are serving in Nova Scotia. This event drew a number of dignitaries, including the provincial Lieutenant Governor and the Federal Commissioner of the RCMP, but some white officers did not approve:

> The Spirit of Unity was probably one of the higher points where I've felt the whole thing kind of come together. I know a lot of white members just cringed at that but, 'too bad guys.' They said, 'Well when do we get our day?' I said, 'Well, you got your day: he's the Commissioner, he's the Deputy Commissioners, he's the Commanding Officers, he's the Inspectors. You guys have your day. If your host home or if your Irish community wants to put on a day for you brother, go fill your boots.' But the black Nova Scotia society had decided that they wanted to celebrate their heritage and our black heritage within the RCMP. If you don't like that, too bad. I don't care. Truthfully, I really, really don't care.

Another member had a similar experience:

> We have every year when the black police officers born in Nova Scotia come back from across the country – Wonderful. I loved it. Some of the white guys though: 'Hey how come the white guys can't get together and do a big thing with the Commissioner?' I said, 'Yeah but guys, you don't understand.' 'Why? Why are you getting preferential treatment?'

The officers took some offence to the fact that white members made snide remarks about this event, which they believed was very important symbolically, both to them and to the black communities where some of them were born and raised. Some white members perceived that race was the basis for what they saw as a "special privilege," but black members believed them ignorant to the importance of race in an organization that had

both intentionally and unintentionally excluded visible minorities for so long. This represents what is perhaps one of the biggest racial impasses today – since racism is generally frowned upon, how do we appreciate its historical and continuing effect (the work that the idea of race has done) while at the same time undermining its very concept?

Sometimes the officers I interviewed took these race-based resentments more seriously. One of the members recalled his first posting, where he was quickly informed that he would be judged according his status as a black person:

> My trainer at the time confided in me that there was a black person in the detachment prior to me being there, and I was reminded in no uncertain terms that this person didn't do well, wasn't well liked, and basically was forced to resign from the organization. That was the first thing that was thrown at me when I first got to the detachment: 'We had a black person here before, and he didn't perform well, so watch what you do and say because we're watching.' I felt that as a black person and as a black member I had to work that much harder to show that I was capable of doing this job and that I was going to do a good job.

At his first posting, he was thrust into a position where he was expected to fail. He felt pressure not only to prove that he was capable of doing the job, but that black members were capable of becoming good RCMP officers. Race, here, is much harder to negotiate than it is when dealing with a drunk calling you a "nigger."

Another officer spoke of the racist comments colleagues sometimes make about people they had just arrested:

> One of the things I find is that some members would come out and they'd say, 'Black asshole.' We all refer to some of the bad guys in derogatory terms behind their backs, but I've never arrested a white asshole, whereas they've arrested black assholes. I've heard them come out of the cell area and say, 'That black so and so.' I said, 'Whoa guys, I've arrested tons of white people in this community and put them out back. Did you ever hear me come out and refer to them by race?' I said, 'You know what, I'm offended by that; I don't want to hear it again and if I do hear it again, you

> and I will have a talk.' And they knew exactly what I meant by a talk (laughs).

Although he told the story in a very light-hearted manner, he was offended by the idea that the other officers thought it important to specify that the "asshole" in question was "black." And, he quickly grew more serious:

> I'm not going to put up with that. I didn't put up with that growing up, and I'm not going to put up with it from somebody I work with – a co-worker. Citizens, society, I've got to put up with it and I've been called that many, many times and it's like water off a duck's back. But, these are supposed to be my colleagues; these are supposed to be co-workers; these are supposed to be backup; these are supposed to be my friends and if you think that way, then I've got a problem. I've got a problem with that. You've got a bigger problem, but I've got a problem with that because my life could hang on you getting there fast and not thinking about what colour I am.

He worried that these negative and possibly racist attitudes that some members have towards "black" criminals may extend to him, and that he could not fully trust a colleague so ready to make this negative racial distinction. Once again, race works to organize human bodies into essentialised categories of attitude and behaviour, and once again race becomes an additional contextual issue that black officers have to deal with in a way that questions their fundamental racial and occupational identity. While saying "black asshole" might seem very insignificant to the white officers in question when it relates to their feelings towards this particular black officer, he must deal with the uncertainty regarding their assumptions about black people and how quickly they can be ascribed to him.

One member claimed that it is really the older members that are the problem. Younger members, he believed, were far more accepting of racial diversity. While he had heard some negative comments from older members, he was more often told of their

comments and attitudes by younger members who did not share these beliefs. He explained:

> The majority of the division is older members, so there's a lot of members who have twenty-five years plus service. They've been around for awhile, and some of them are old-school in their thought. If you think that the first black members was in '69, that's not that much longer than some of the members that are still here. On occasion you'll here of remarks that – I've walked in on some things. Just knowing that there's people who still think like that and there always will be is hard, but there are a lot of good people in the organization that will speak of something like that. You learn through second-hand information how some people feel – their biases or dislikes of some people.

These types of comments and attitudes, however, are increasingly marginal within the organization. For the most part, they are rejected by both black and white police officers. Within the RCMP, the work of the idea of race is far more insidious.

By far, the most common race-related conflicts that these officers have with their colleagues stem from the assertion that they are in the position they are primarily or solely because of their race. Every officer I interviewed spoke out emphatically about the suggestion that they were any less qualified than are their white co-workers. Some spoke of feeling resentment from their fellow officers. One member said:

> The only type of resentment that I may encounter is that if a position comes up, some people may think that I got it because I was black. But I would like to hope that they think that I got in this position because of what I could offer as opposed to the way I look. I find some resentment because of me being there because I'm black.

He added that every time a black officer is promoted there are some who grumble that the RCMP is trying to improve its image. The officers inevitably must deal with this stigma. The most troubling example of this is the story of an officer who was promoted to a media relations position. Despite the fact that this officer had been a radio and television

host and personality before joining the RCMP, some white officers complained that he had been given the position because the force wanted a black face as an official spokesperson. Another of the members said he becomes quite defensive if anyone seems to suggest that he had been given an unfair advantage. He explained:

> There's always the perception that visible minorities and women are getting ahead faster than anyone else in the organization, or that all the RCMP are hiring now are black people or visible minorities. When you look at the numbers, I always say to people, 'If all we're hiring is black people, then show me where they are because they're certainly not represented in the numbers. I simply say to people that my record speaks for itself and I'm willing to put my service file up against anybody's at any time.

It was not unusual for the officers to quote percentages and numbers of black or visible minority officers in the RCMP as evidence that others are overreacting when they claim that only women and minorities are being hired. The fact that they have these numbers so readily available shows that the idea of race and the politics surrounding it have a powerful influence on their day-to-day experience as police officers. Race becomes an added occupational pressure.

Some of the officers were annoyed by the constant assertion by white people who were applying to the RCMP, or who had applied and been rejected, that their race had or would negatively affect their chances. One said:

> You always have the feeling that people assume that you're in the position you are because of your colour. Talking with people that are applying now, they say that, 'I don't have a chance because I'm a white male and they're not going to hire anyone because they're trying to hire minorities or they're trying to hire women.' They're making excuses for why they're not successful, but if you go to Regina the bulk of the population in training are white males.

Another member agreed, mentioning the insecurity that both black and women members sometimes feel:

> One of the things that is hurtful is that there was a real push to recruit black people. So, a lot of white people who were perhaps deserving of getting in – white males specifically – were not getting in. I also wrote the test, went through the hoops, and became a member, but people will say things like, 'You got in because you're a black female.' That's not why I got in at all. I got in because I worked hard and I trained and I applied like people have for generations before me. I don't like feeling other people's resentment. I've heard it enough times and it really used to bother me, but now I just look at my accomplishments. This is something women tend to do too. We tend to think that we were lucky or in the right place at the right time as opposed to feeling proud of the accomplishments we've made. Once I learned to feel better about myself, I accepted that I was here because I worked my ass off. Why he isn't, I don't know. I can't take responsibility for what an organization does. The majority of people who are out there are still white males, and that's fine, but that's who is still getting in. We just added a little bit of coffee to the cream.

Interestingly, a number of the officers expressed some sympathy for white male applicants who were rejected when they may have been just as qualified as a female or minority candidate. But, these members claimed that these employment equity policies were necessary to achieve a more diverse RCMP, and they also accused detractors of greatly exaggerating the extent to which they were disadvantaged. Nevertheless, the stigma exists, and aside from making justifications, the primary way that the officers I interviewed handled it was by making sure that they proved themselves just as capable as any other officer.

The push to diversify the RCMP was regarded by most of the officers as a necessary strategy to correct the results of the deliberate historic exclusion or women and minorities, and the myriad of reasons why a disproportionately smaller number of women

and minorities apply. One member explained why employment equity practices are necessary in today's RCMP:

> Those are the opportunities that black Nova Scotians never had in the past. For whatever reasons, certain people in certain positions prevented them from being successful. Hidden bigotry? Yeah I think there is some that's prevented the whole situation from coming forward. We are one hundred forty-two years old and our first member was in 1969. 1969, that's thirty-three years ago. The first black Nova Scotians joined the force in 1970 or 1971. We at least got in before the women did. They got in in 1973/1974.

He identified both historic exclusion and hidden bigotry as reasons why progress towards diversifying the RCMP had been slow. He continued:

> People in the force say, 'That's not fair!' But, it wasn't fair that they wouldn't let us in in 1942 when they said to send the exams to Ottawa and we'll correct them and tell them that they failed. It's not fair when you sent the first black member in 1951 to depot with a message that said, 'fail him,' and they did. Is that fair? If you had corrected the problem back then, we would not even be sitting here having this discussion. But it has to happen at some point or it's never going to happen. So, sorry, but today's a new day. Those are the issues that we bring forward. Now the government of Canada is saying this is a new day. The RCMP, the federal public service, the DND – you have to diversify.

This is a story that a number of the officers mentioned. Apparently, an old memo was recently uncovered and circulated regarding two black individuals who wanted to write the RCMP examination in 1942. A message was sent to Ottawa to ask whether they should be permitted to write the exam. The head office in Ottawa responded, instructing them to allow the candidates to write the exam, but if they passed, to send the results to Ottawa for "clarification." Not surprisingly, upon "clarification" they were failed. After it was discovered, this memo had been passed around to many of the black members in the organization and it provided them an added reminder of their significance and responsibility. The symbolic importance of this story is testimony to the shared anxiety

that black officers feel about their occupational status in a historically exclusive institution.

Another officer was so passionate about this issue that he went through the numbers step-by step. He is worth quoting at length:

> They feel that I'm an equal but they don't feel that we should be given any preferred treatment. We're not given any preferred treatment. The only thing we're given is the opportunity that we never got in the past. Just sheer numbers, in Nova Scotia this year there will probably be fifteen hundred white males that will write the exam. There will probably be one-hundred black males/females that will write the exam. If you take 90% as a pass what are you going to come up with at the end number? Out of the hundred black male/females who wrote you got ten. Out of the white males that wrote, not even white females, you got one hundred fifty. One out of five passes the interview so that means that you've got two black people and thirty white males. Now we cut it in half and you got fifteen black males and one black person. Tell me what's fair? That means we're going to put one in a year. That means in a decade you put in ten. No. Can't. Now you got to say the pass mark is 90 for each side. Any visible minority that gets that you're going to go in a separate pot so you're not competing against that big number over here. Guys say that's not fair. Well no, as a white male, as an individual it's not fair. It may not be fair. But as white male as a group, it's fair. You just got to beat the 1499 other white males that are in front of you (laughs). So you can't worry about these five positions that they've allotted for black males -- or black people period. Don't look at me and don't whine because you're getting a fair shot. You may not think so because your mark here was bigger than this guy's mark here and he got in and you didn't. Well, we had smarter black guys back in 1941 and they took your brother and your cousin and your father and your grandfather because they didn't want this guy. Not you as an individual, you as a group. Trying to get that into them, they just can't visualize, "Well it's against me because I never got in." No it's not against you man, it's not even against anybody, it's saying that as Caucasian males, you cannot control the RCMP because they do, and they will for years.

His comments addressed a number of interesting issues that all the officers mentioned. First, blacks were historically denied the opportunity to be in the RCMP. Second, while the employment equity policy may not be fair to some individuals, it is the best policy to

achieve some statistical equality. Third, the RCMP has to diversify more quickly than it has in the past, and considering their proportion of the population, putting black officers on a "level playing-field" will not achieve a significant change soon enough. Finally, an overwhelming majority of white males who are rejected are not rejected because their positions are being given to less qualified minorities.

The officers overwhelmingly justified RCMP recruitment initiatives in terms of employment equity legislation. Carol Agocs, Catherine Burr, and Felicity Somerset (1992) pointed out that the goals of Canada's Employment Equity Act were to eliminate employment barriers and prevent discrimination, remedy the effects of past disadvantage and discrimination, and improve the representation, access, and distribution of designated groups in the work force (p. 2). These are the issues that the black officers I interviewed raised. None of the officers justified employment equity on the grounds that it could ease police-black tensions or that they would be more effective policing black communities. Easing tensions was a burden that not all black officers wanted to accept. The organization, however, seemed very eager to use black members to further this goal. In this way, two very separate issues – police/minority group tensions and diversity within police forces are conflated by the idea of race.

The Institutional Uses of Race

The officers I interviewed felt that black members are used to some extent by the RCMP for their race. Two of the members pointed out that blacks are often stationed in areas with a high minority concentration, and are more likely to be sent to situations where racial tensions might arise. One of the female members noted that in certain

communities, "[black officers] are very much used in terms of them sending a black member to do certain things. She believed that while the RCMP has good intentions, the tendency to send them to deal with "black" situations creates unfair expectations. Another member questioned the effectiveness of automatically posting black officers to communities with large black populations:

> How many black members are in Cole Harbour, and why are they in Cole Harbour? Well, it's the largest black population in Nova Scotia. Okay I buy that, but I worked fifteen years in a white community. I worked fifteen years in a white community and you're telling me that a white member can't work in a black community? They can't do the same job? I can teach them about the culture, but if they're a good police officer, and I've known a lot of good white police officers that worked in the black community without a problem. They worked there without a concern, because they were just good police officers and they knew how to deal with people.

He believed that matching black officers to African Nova Scotian communities was an easy (and often ineffective) solution, adding that just as there have been white members who have become popular in black communities, there have been black members who were largely disliked. All but one of the officers I interviewed believed that being black did not automatically ingratiate a member to the black community.

Another situation in which black officers are used concerns drug or undercover work. A few of the interviewees spoke of being encouraged towards or informed that they would be welcome in undercover. Stereotypes aside, the problem with this is that officers in undercover do not receive the same well rounded on the job training as members assigned to other divisions. One officer spoke at length about his experience here:

> It was fun, but it hurt me. It hurt me career wise in that as an undercover operator you don't get the operational background. You don't get to be

> the file manager; you don't get to learn how to do an investigation. You're out there buying drugs and doing all that kind of stuff. You're considered a tool, the same as a wiretap or an informant would be considered a tool. You're a tool to be used by the investigator.

He went on to explain the career consequences of being used in this way:

> When you come out of undercover work you don't know any of the tools. All you know is that you were one of the tools. So, it's a whole learning process and what they tell you then is that you can't move forward because you don't have the background. They put me into UC work because I'm black, so now they owe it to me to take me out of UC work and teach me how to use these tools along with the tools I have available. I didn't know how to do a file, or how to do an investigation because all I did was buy drugs. That's all I did. The RCMP, or individuals within the RCMP saw an opportunity to use somebody and they used him. Right or wrong, they did. I wasn't the only black member that felt that we were being used because of our colour or ethnicity.

While black members are considered valuable or desirable for undercover work, they may have other career aspirations and resent their abilities being reduced to their race.

The charge of tokenism is another challenge that black RCMP officers face. A diverse police force makes the organization look good, and the RCMP doesn't hesitate to showcase its minority members. It is therefore not unusual for minority officers to be in highly visible positions. One officer said that, "Pretty well my whole career I've dealt with being black in some way, shape, or form." He went on to explain:

> My ethnicity has taken me right through the force and put me in different positions to work with black communities in Nova Scotia and Canada, as well as other visible minority communities. I've met with Sikhs, I've met with Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, ah Jesus, you name it. I've been to Mosques. There are not too many things I haven't seen as far as those things go.

The officer was being used by the RCMP as a representative for not only blacks, but for all visible minorities. He was considered "close enough" to be put on display to ethnic communities. Tokenism or public relations is one of the reasons why some of the

officers I interviewed believed that such a high proportion of the nation's black RCMP members were in Nova Scotia. Two of the officers mentioned that black officers often have trouble leaving. "Why is it that when black people want to leave the province they have to fight it?" asked one, mentioning two instances when black officers had to file grievances in order to leave. The other officer explained why blacks are kept in Nova Scotia and in the public eye:

> Where we are is on the front lines because it is a pat on the RCMP's back to say: 'Here you are, a black member!' It's tokenism in its truest form. They want me in the public eye. It's another reason why they don't want me to leave the province. They get two points for me – they get a female and a black member.

This member believed that the RCMP is showcasing her as a black person and as a woman in order to improve their public image in a province where the relationship between blacks and the RCMP was particularly strained.

Race, Gender, and the Police Organization

Both of the female members I interviewed quickly drew a parallel between race and gender when it came to this tokenism. One of the officers explained, saying, "I find I face more barriers because I'm a woman in this force as opposed to as a black member." She believed that once you prove yourself as a black member, the other officers will accept you and your career potential will not be hindered by your race. As a woman, however, you are always subject to being used by the organization. The other female officer explained, "they perceive you as weak. They maybe won't include you in certain things." The members felt they were used and constrained by their gender. The first claimed, "Female members get slotted into positions where often the higher-ups feel they

would do best." Her colleague agreed, adding, "They try to use you and they try to overprotect you." This is the source of considerable frustration for both. One of the officers elaborated:

> The female issue really concerns me. If you push too hard, you're considered a bitch, and if you don't push hard enough you end up getting nothing – you stay where you are. I choose to run the risk of being called a bitch. It's a hard one for female members and I think the colour barrier makes it even harder. Decisions tend to get made about you.

Unfortunately, sometimes the male officers did not see the parallel. One officer expressed frustration over the fact that black officers had not made the same gains in the organization as female officers:

> Today the highest ranking black officer is an inspector, and the highest ranking female is a deputy commissioner, which is second only to the commissioner of the RCMP. So, what do you say? We started before you and we're still behind you. Why? Political will. No doubt. This stuff is not new news to anybody because I will say it in public. Why are women ahead of black members? Political will. They've decided that they wanted the women to succeed and they have. Not saying that they're not good, just they wanted the women to succeed. And at some point they'll want to give black members the same opportunity. They're starting now but it's a slow process.

There is some basis to the idea of political will, but black members include black women, and for all black members, the idea of race is gendered in a complex and sometimes conflicting way. Another male member specifically addressed the issue of black females in the organization. He claimed that:

> I don't think black females in the organization are treated a lot differently than anybody else. I think that women have had far more advancements in the mounted police than men have. If you look at women compared to visible minorities they've made a whole lot more advancement. When I say that I look in terms of the rank structure. Right now we have a female member who is a Deputy Commissioner, and we have a number of Superintendents, Inspectors. In terms of visible minorities -- and I'll speak

> in terms of black members because that's what I know -- we have two black Inspectors and that's in the last three years. When I look at when the first women were allowed in the force, 1974, and the first black person who joined the force in 1968, overall have they advanced in leaps and bounds above visible minorities or in particular blacks? Yeah. I think that's a political thing. I've heard rumblings that over the years there's been some very poignant questions asked in the House of Commons about what is being done for women in the RCMP. In an effort to advance women there's been programs and things put in place for the benefit of women. In the last few years we've seen some programs for visible minorities: there's special programs in Regina where there designated for visible minorities or for women and that was to provide a jump-start for a lot of their careers. We haven't seen the same advancements for visible minorities compared to women.

These comments added legitimacy to one of the female officer's claims that, "There's an old boy's club when it comes to the black members." As Essed (1991) pointed out, race is gendered. The idea of race always works with the idea of gender, and black women often have to deal with both the potential for racism from white females and the potential for sexism from black men. This is another added occupational strain on the day-to-day experiences of black female police officers.

Using Race in the Institution

While the RCMP uses a black police officer's race as a form of social capital, officers can also potentially use their race in an organization that takes racial discrimination (and allegations of discrimination) quite seriously. Race has a special meaning and status in the organization. Some of the officers I interviewed spoke of situations when they believed other black officers used their race as an excuse. One officer spoke about being able to disagree with her colleagues about certain racial issues

without labelling them racists with the implication that some other black officers are a bit quick to cry racism:

> You don't ram your beliefs down other people's throat. I wouldn't want to be taught that way, and no one I know wants to be taught that way. If we can still work together and agree to disagree that's fine. I also don't use my colour as a crutch. I don't do the victim thing.

She believed that it is unfair to assume that other officers are racist simply because they disagree with her on issues like employment equity and diversity training.

Other members spoke of the potential (or tendency) for black officers to use race as an excuse. One officer believed that black officers can take advantage of the RCMP because it is so sensitive to diversity issues:

> I think there's the potential for black members to feel like they can cry racism when it's not really there, knowing how much trouble that would drum up for supervisors. There's the potential to use it when it's not really there. For instance, I don't get on every course I apply to get on. The reason I don't get on it is not because I'm black; it's because of number of years, etc.

A number of the officers echoed similar statements, explaining that anyone accused of racial discrimination in the RCMP would be dealt with very seriously and a report of racial discrimination on an officer's permanent record would hinder the officer's career.

Similarly, the other officer spoke of black officers using race as an excuse when they were not given a promotion, or accepted on certain courses:

> I think a lot of members feel that they're owed something without doing the time. I think that once you do the time and you see other people getting things and you're not getting it, then it's time to complain. But, if you don't have the background for a certain position then you have no right to complain. I think that too many people are using black as an excuse. You need to do your time first before you can complain and realize that it is because of your race. What have you done? What have you done to shine above everybody else?

This member does not deny the existence of racial discrimination in the RCMP, but just believed that if can too often be an excuse for officers not getting ahead as quickly as they would like. This sentiment – it can be racism but it isn't necessarily racism – was shared by all of the officers I interviewed. Race works in an ambiguous way, and its most frustrating aspect today is often the debate and anxiety experienced over trying to determine whether something negative is racist or not.

Two older members both addressed this dilemma. They spoke of instances where they stressed to younger black officers to make sure that any claims of racial discrimination were well founded. Otherwise, they were told, it would reflect badly not only on the individual, but on all black officers. In a sense, their statements display the paradoxical nature of modern racism. They must display a degree of skepticism towards allegations that black officers would be denied equal opportunity, but also readily accept the predominance of the racism inherent in the idea that the actions of one individual will reflect on all black police officers. Collective black guilt becomes something to be avoided not by attacking the racist premise on which it rests, but by insisting that black members be beyond reproof in their claims. One of the older members explained that he informs other black officers of their responsibility to the rest:

> I tell the black members, 'You have a responsibility to yourself, to the other black members, and to these new black members who are coming. You have a responsibility to do the best job you can, so that somebody doesn't get the stupid thought in their mind that black members are like this or like that.

He makes it perfectly clear to individual black members that they have the additional responsibility of representing all blacks in the RCMP. He added that in Nova Scotia,

there have been enough good black officers that when somebody screws up, their supervisors will know that, "it's not because he's black, but because he's just damn lazy.'

The other member said that while he feels that black officers are sometimes too reluctant to come forward when they have been discriminated against, the reality of the situation is that they must make sure any allegations (and their records) are solid:

> When I'm dealing with the black members I always tell them, 'You got to make sure that your house is in order, because if you take on the organization on any particular issue, the one thing that will always come back on you is your performance.' You've got to make sure your house is in order before you start jumping and screaming and getting on the bandwagon. If it's not, then that's the first thing that's going to get shoved down your throat.

None of the officers denied the existence of racial discrimination in the RCMP, but they did not want to see valid claims of racial discrimination dismissed because of the spurious claims of others. Counselling other black officers to make sure their work records were exemplary was not only to protect the officer if he or she ever alleged discrimination, but also to protect the reputation of all black police officers. The officers worried that the performance and behaviour of other black officers would reflect on them. This is where the importance of Kanter's (1977) work on tokenism becomes apparent. Because of their small numbers, each black officer becomes a symbol rather than an individual. They become representatives for how well all blacks can perform in the RCMP. This is just one final occupational strain that black officers face that is solely attributable to the idea of race.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

The meaning of race always has been subject to processes of interpretation, contention, and revision. 'Race' is an unstable complex of different social meanings and is in fact defined by the process of trying to articulate its significance. These meanings are ascribed to individuals, but are constantly being contested. Race is the product of the intersection of many different variables, some of which seek to deliberately articulate its significance. The different meanings that black officers, the black public, and the RCMP give to the idea of race intersect, interact, and compete, and can have profound consequences. This research demonstrates that race 'works' in numerous and complex ways in the lives black police officers in Nova Scotia. Social scientists, the public, and policy makers understand and theorize race in ways that can have profound political, social, and material consequences. If race is a social construction, then research on race-related subjects needs to take into account the multiple ways that the idea of race can impact, shape and define individual lives.

Race and racism are inseparable concepts. Attempts to engage racism are influenced by the way we think about race and the way we think about race is affected by our multiple attempts to engage racism. In the never-ending racism debate, the way we conceptualize race can create problems. Paul Gilroy (1992/2002) has shown how antiracist discourse and practices can often end up mirroring the very racism that we are supposed to oppose. Similarly, this thesis shows how attempts to ease racial tensions and incorporate racial diversity in the RCMP can increase, rather than decrease the racialized stress of the black police officers caught in the middle.

This thesis explored how the idea of race affects the occupational lives of black police officers in Nova Scotia. The multiple social and occupational expectations and assumptions made about race when combined with the existence of deep and enduring tensions between black communities and police, affect the daily work and personal experiences of black police officers. Its purpose was to reveal how the complexity of race works in lived experience. If I wanted only to focus on racism directed towards black police officers from their white colleagues and the policing organization I could have. Simon Holdaway's work on the racism and social exclusion faced by black and Asian officers in England reveals the subtle processes of racialization minority officers experience from their colleagues. Alternatively, if I wanted only to find examples of black police officers being mistreated by black communities I would have. Heather MacDonald (2003) claimed that black police officers in the United States are "god-fearing" citizens who are abused and maligned by black populations in her book about police and race.[1] But if we starting from the idea that race is a social construction, research should then attempt to draw out the nuance, ambiguities, and ambivalence that truly characterize race-relations. This is one of the advantages of looking at racial formation – how race works. I will consider how some of the issues raised in my research correspond to Omi and Winant's racial formation theory, and the critique on race offered by cultural studies theorists.

[1] Ironically, in another chapter MacDonald argues that police and minorities have a wonderful relationship and it is the liberal media that attempts to create problems.

Race and becoming a police officer – "to make a difference for my people"

Robert Miles and Rudy Torres (1996) argued that social scientists should not transform the idea of 'race' into an analytical category by using it as a concept. They claimed that considering race at all legitimates and reinforces the widespread public belief that race's exist because it implies that race has some causal influence. Miles and Torres thus refuse to attribute any analytical status to the idea of race and do not use it as a descriptive concept. However, some of the officers in this study embraced the concept of race (or more specifically blackness), and it had an important influence on their choice to become a police officer.

The black officers' encounters with race and racism during their lives meant that the idea of race actually influenced their decisions to join the RCMP. All of the officers in this study were proud of what they perceived to be their black history and culture. Negative reactions from friends, never having seen a black police officer, the pressure of representation, and a desire to mend relations between blacks and the police are just some examples of how joining the police was a racialized decision for black officers. Thus race, though a social construction, was a major causal factor in their decision to become a police officer. This is why Omi and Winant's (1994) racial formation approach is useful in examining the work that race does. They argued that race may be only an ideology and the product of a history, experience, and knowledge of racism, but once the idea of race becomes "common sense" for each individual, it can have an important effect that transcends a simple racism analysis.

White racism – "You have to consider the source"

The fact that black police officers are often subject to racial slurs on the job is an occupational strain that cannot be rationalized or dismissed. But verbal abuse from whites did not on the surface seem to bother most of the black police officers I interviewed. This was an unexpected response. While it was claimed that the officers' training prepared them to expect and handle abuse, there is something more to their apparent indifference to these attacks, especially when compared to their sensitivity to comments by fellow officers and black individuals.

Perhaps the officers' power and positions of authority mitigated the effect of such abuse. Additionally, the claim that we cannot analyze race and racism apart from other social phenomena becomes important. Stuart Hall (1996) insisted that race articulates with other phenomena, meaning that we must be more thorough in our assessments of what motivates racism. According to the officers interviewed, the racist attacks they experience are usually last ditch efforts to save face. In other words, they believed that this abuse was primarily directed at them as police officers, but articulated through race. Racism then, articulated the fear, annoyance, and powerlessness that the individuals being arrested or charged may have felt. This is not to say that the individuals were not racists, but that their racism was not the only motivation for their remarks. Racism, in this context, could not exclude, exploit or make these officers feel inferior in any way. It could not subordinate their power as police officers. Understanding this seemed to insulate the officers from the pain and degradation we normally associate with racism. But while officers were able to rationalize these kinds of racist encounters, they do still

represent an additional source of disrespect and status assaults that black officers must face.

Race and the black community – "How do you give up being black?"

'Race' was much more powerful when it came from negative comments made to black officers by black individuals. The officers I interviewed were much more strongly affected by negative comments from other blacks than they were from the abuse they faced from whites because they contained the more powerful and not so easily dismissed implication that they were "race traitors". Somehow, by becoming police officers, they were seen to be denying or betraying what Hall (1989/1996) referred to as the hegemonic "black experience". The black officers' race was an important part of their identity, and any perceived challenge to this, particularly from their "own people," was a hurtful reminder they were viewed by some as sell-outs and race traitors. This suggests that a black officer's acceptance of the police role places him or her in a complex and often tenuous relationship with individuals within the black community. Unlike their white counterparts, black police officers must incorporate conflicting ideas about race into their personal and occupational identity.

Race and the black community – "It reflects on me and my children"

Officers sensitivity to comments made by black individuals and the fact that they phrased their concerns in terms of "peoplehood", shows how racial typologies work just as powerfully on officers as they do on those who would criticize their decision to join the RCMP. For example, the black officers' attitudes toward black communities

demonstrated that they were also part of the racial project that seeks to define the 'correct' meaning of blackness. Black officers were criticized for their supposed disloyalty to the race, but at the same time they also sought to impose their ideas about proper racial behaviour. Many of the officers made negative statements about people they believed were perpetuating negative stereotypes or representations of blackness. There is an uncomfortable link between what motivates someone to call a black police officer a sell-out, and what motivates a black police officer to be more critical of black offenders because he or she believes that this individual's actions reflect on all blacks. These ideas of race and racial representation suppress and ignore the diversity and different subjective realities that characterize individuals in the black diaspora. As Gilroy (2001) points out, aspirations to define and acquire an "authentic racial identity" can often create authoritarian tendencies concerning the content of "correct" black cultural expression. Political and social necessity too often leads us to believe that black people should act one way or another under the threat that anything else might undermine the solidarity required to effectively fight racial discrimination. In the face of these pressures, the relationships between black police officers and members of the wider black community simply reflect the increasingly complex and ambiguous nature of race and race relations in the 21st century.

Race in the policing organization – "Here you are, a black member!"

The RCMP uses the idea of race to meet specific institutional and public policy goals. This institutional construct is significant in black officers' occupational and organizational experiences. The RCMP's has attempted to recruit and hire more minority

police officers through the logic of employment equity. However, this has created a situation where a major concern for many black officers is a perception that somehow black officers are less qualified. The perception that "you got in because you're a black female," or "I don't have a chance because I'm a white male," was particularly hurtful to the officers I interviewed.

Additionally, some officers felt that black members were often stationed in places with a high minority concentration under the questionable assumption that their presence would ease tensions between police and black communities. Some black officers also mentioned feeling that they were selected to participate in undercover or drug work simply because of their race. Finally, some of the officers believed that the RCMP, for good public relations, puts its visible minority police officers on display. Having highly visible black officers demonstrates the RCMP's commitment to diversity, but at the same time makes some the officers feel like black tokens. Blackness thus becomes an institutional commodity that can be used by the RCMP to assuage criticism and fulfil institutional and policy requirements. The irony here is that attempts to incorporate diversity can actually exacerbate racialized tensions. Employment equity, and the extent to which it is misrepresented and misunderstood, can create race-based resentments among some white officers and the white public. Alternately, justifying employment equity on the premise of ethnic match can leave minority officers feeling used and limited in terms of career mobility.

Race and gender in the organization – "I choose to run the risk of being called a bitch"

These frustrations were amplified where race intersected with gender to shape the occupational experience of black female police officers. The female officers I interviewed drew parallels between the idea of race and the idea of gender. Female black police officers were annoyed that as women they were sometimes perceived as weak. One member claimed that the barriers she faced based on her gender superseded any perceived racial barriers. However, some of the black male members disagreed, claiming that women officers in general have advanced more quickly in the RCMP and to higher positions than black members. Constructing this dichotomy – women members as compared to black members – is a subtle expression of how race is gendered. Articulations of blackness too often only consider the challenges faced by black men. So as black male police officers can be used by the organization and have to deal with the constant potential for race-based resentment from their white peers, black female officers face the additional burden of gender-based marginalization and resentment.

The burden of representation

Modern institutions and organizations take overt racial discrimination very seriously. This creates a situation where black officers believe that other black officers can use the idea of race to their own benefit – the proverbial race card. The officers I interviewed often expressed some anxiety that the actions of other black members would reflect on them. A particular fear was the idea that someone could falsely claim racism and that this would then undermine any legitimate claims of racial discrimination. This is the burden of tokenism. Black officers are placed in a position where they feel that they

must worry about the actions and abilities of other black police officers. The burden of representation means that the actions of any black officer will reflect on the race and by extension them.

How race still matters in the 21st Century

In general, the experiences of black RCMP officers in Nova Scotia provides further evidence that race is not a simple uniform category or identity, but one that works in increasingly subtle and complex ways. Black officers, the RCMP, the media, and individuals within the black community engage in a series of racial projects that seek to define the nature and significance of race. These definitions are often contradictory. "The fundamental, time-worn assumption of homogenous and unchanging black communities whose political and economic interests were readily knowable…[has] proved to be a fantasy (Gilroy, 1994b, p. 1)." This thesis focuses on the experiences of black RCMP officers and how their formulations of race interact with those of an organization trying to incorporate diversity and ease racial tensions, and a public trying to address continuing issues of police discrimination and neglect. The results can be problematic. For example, at a recent meeting between police and community members in Halifax's North End, the chief of police for the Halifax Regional Municipality frequently responded to complaints of officer rudeness by emphasizing the number of black officers recently hired and the efforts being made to recruit more. Ironically, the one black police officer in attendance was at one point asked whether he considered himself to be a black man or a police officer first. When he responded that he was a black man he was then asked if he was willing to state publicly that he works for a racist,

"white supremacist" organization. The complex historical and structural nature of racial inequalities in crime, punishment, and policing are ignored in favour of simplified race-relations and sensitivity measures. The burden for resolving both historical police/minority tensions, and the blame for its failure are then increasingly thrust upon black police officers, adding another aspect to the racialized occupational stress they experience.

'Black' and 'police officer' are two distinct identities for the officers I interviewed. While the officers were proud of the symbolism inherent in being a black police officer, and while many had a sincere desire to help improve relations between blacks and the police, black officers possess no inherent extra-ordinary qualities. The 'Black police officer' does not exist. Attempts by various actors to construct this can create new tensions and new problems. A simplistic approach to race-relations has consequences both for the communities that are deprived of more comprehensive solutions to their concerns and for black police officers who can end up feeling used by organizations, restricted in terms of career mobility, and placed in high-stress policing situations where they are expected to perform better than their white counterparts. Police and minority group conflicts and diversity within police forces are two very separate and important issues that must be addressed, but there is a tendency to conflate the two under the celebratory guise of multiculturalism. Institutions and public policy, like social scientists and the general public, must appreciate the dynamic, nuanced, and contradictory nature of race in order to find real solutions these problems.

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