'We'll Deal with it Later': African Nova Scotian Women's Perceptions and Experiences of the Police

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Abstract. This case study explores the experiences of African Nova Scotian women in relation to the police. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with Black women living in a rural Nova Scotian community with a well-documented history of confrontations between the police and the Black community. Interviews explored their experiences with the police, their community's experiences with the police, and their relationship with the police. My analysis revealed that participants did not trust the police, felt targeted by the police, and did not feel protected by the police. Their perceptions of the police were shaped by their own interactions with the police – often as Black mothers – and the experiences of the Black men in their lives in rural Nova Scotia. Some had engaged in active resistance and protection of their community. This article explores how anti-Blackness affects Black women directly and indirectly, contributing to the existing scholarship about over-policing of Black communities.

Keywords: Black; African Canadians; African Nova Scotians; Mothers; Police; Perceptions

Résumé. Cette étude de cas explore et centralise les expériences et les rapports des femmes noires de milieu rural en Nouvelle-Écosse avec la police et déplace l'attention ordinairement portée sur les expériences des hommes noirs. Dans une ville avec une histoire bien documentée de conflits entre la police et la communauté noire, trois entretiens semi-structurés ont été effectués entre 2015 et 2016 avec des femmes afro-néo-écossaises abordant leurs expériences et celles de la communauté ainsi que l'état des rapports avec la police. À l'aide d'un cadre théorique qui comprend la théorie critique de la race (*critical race theory*), le rôle des mères noires et leur activisme social, et l'interaction entre le genre, la race et la ruralité, l'analyse révèle que les participantes ne faisaient pas confiance à la police, se sentaient visées par la police, et ne se sentaient pas protégées par les forces de l'ordre. Il est clair que les perceptions des femmes afro-néo-écossaises quant à la police sont fortement influencées par leurs interactions directes avec la police en tant que mères noires ainsi que par leurs expériences indirectes du fait des hommes noirs dans leurs vies en milieu rural en Nouvelle-Écosse. Cet article

interroge les répercussions des expériences directes et indirectes de racisme anti-noir sur les femmes noires, tout en contribuant à l'état des connaissances sur le thème de la présence policière excessive dans les communautés noires.

Mots clés: Noirs; Afro-canadiens; Afro-néo-écossais; Mères; Police; Perceptions

Introduction

Stories of young Black men being assaulted or killed by the police have become a common narrative in American media; the same narrative is present within Canada, albeit to a lesser degree. While these direct physical or verbal altercations are important to discuss and explore, the constant media exposure of these interactions overshadows the experiences of Black women. For example, the significance of the compounded experiences of Black women relative to the police is often overlooked. Their perceptions are often affected by a combination of personal experiences as well as those of the Black men and boys in their lives. This work explores how perceptions of the police among Black women in rural Nova Scotia are heavily shaped by their own interactions with the police – often as Black mothers – and the experiences of Black men they know. It adds to the existing scholarship on the over-policing of Black communities and the relationships between Black communities in Nova Scotia and the police, by focusing solely on the accounts and voices of Black women living in the community of Digby, Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia is home to Canada's oldest Black communities, dating back to the early 18th century (African Nova Scotian Affairs 2019; James et al. 2010; Pachai and Bishop 2006). African Nova Scotians[1] are the largest racial minority within Nova Scotia (African Nova Scotian Affairs 2019), and have historically had been involved in negative altercations with the state and police. This is especially the case for the African Nova Scotian community of Digby, which has had a well-documented history of confrontations with police (CBC News 2013; Humphreys 2013; Mannette 1986). Based on this turbulent relationship between the Black community and the police in Digby, several attempts have been made to improve relations, including community meetings hosted by the police, the creation of committees that include African Nova Scotians and police, and the appointment of external consultants to evaluate police–community relations and conduct workshops with the police and the Black

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1. African Nova Scotian refers to the group of people who are from Nova Scotia and are of the African diaspora. African Nova Scotian, African Canadian, and African American are also interchangeably referred to as 'Black.'

community in Digby (Winbush and Allen 2008). The following discussion is framed by critical race theory, which centers around race[2] and racism while challenging the traditional ways in which the experiences of people of colour are explained (Solórzano and Yosso 2002).

As an African Nova Scotian woman, I must acknowledge the role I occupy, both as an insider and an outsider. I am an insider because I belong to the African Nova Scotian community and I resided in Nova Scotia for much of my life. However, I am an outsider because I am a researcher and I am not from Digby. As a researcher, I play a direct and intimate role in data collection and analysis. By acknowledging my role as a researcher, and the spaces I occupy, I hope to be as transparent as possible with both my research participants and my readers (Dwyer and Buckle 2009).

Context

Experiences of policing among African Canadian communities

Few studies have explored how Black people in Canada perceive the police. A few have explored youth relations with police (Adorjan et al. 2017; Chow 2012), and others have focused on youth encounters with police (Chapman-Nyaho et al. 2011; Giwa et al. 2014; James 1998). Owusu-Bempah (2014) investigated how Black men experience and perceive the police, and found that Black men reported more frequent and hostile encounters with police than other groups. Most studies have yielded similar conclusions: there is a historically negative relationship between marginalized communities and the police that continues to exist. This negative relationship is often viewed from the perspectives of racialized men; the relationships of racialized women with the police, especially in Canada, have been overlooked. This case study addresses this research gap by illustrating how Black women, specifically African Nova Scotian women, perceive and experience law enforcement.

Experiences of policing in African Nova Scotian communities

African Nova Scotians are the largest multigenerational Black community in Canada, with more than 400 years of history and dozens of historical Black communities across the province (African Nova Scotian Affairs 2019; Brigham and Parris 2016; CBC News 2016; Pachai and

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2. There is an acknowledgment of 'race' as a fluid social construct that is constantly changing based on human interactions, context, and history (also see Omi and Winant 2005; 2015). This also applies to 'gender' and 'class.'

Bishop 2006). The Nova Scotia government has discriminated against the African Nova Scotian community for centuries, in terms of limiting access to education and healthcare, employment practices, and housing – and this discrimination is reflected in this population's overrepresentation in the criminal justice system (Black Learners Advisory Committee, 1994; Chiu, 2018; Moore, 2008; Nova Scotia Advisory Group on Race Relations, 1991; United Nations Human Rights Council, 2017; Williams, 2013).

In recent years, considerable attention has focused on the over-policing of Black people in Halifax. In 2017, the CBC reviewed Halifax RCMP and Halifax Regional Police data and found that Black people were disproportionately stopped by police: roughly three times more likely than white people to be stopped (CBC News 2017a; Devet 2017; Julian 2017a). Street checks have been broadly defined as a police technique involving an interaction between an officer and an individual or group of people, but street checks can also involve observation with no communication between an office and an individual (CBC News 2017b; Devet 2017; Quon 2018; Wortley 2019). Some have suggested, both within and outside the Black community, that these street checks are a form of racial profiling, which has led to an erosion of the community's trust in the police and raised questions regarding police legitimacy (Devet 2017).

In response to the CBC investigation, the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission hired an external expert to assess the current situation based on the data and to conduct community meetings, interviews with police leaders, and a public survey (Davie 2017; Julian 2017b; Quon 2018). At community meetings, African Nova Scotians expressed frustration, detailing years of racial profiling and of being stopped repeatedly by police (Davie 2017). The final report was released in April 2019, putting forward several recommendations, which have yet to be fully implemented.

Experiences of policing among the African Nova Scotian community in Digby

The rural community of Digby, primarily based on fishing and tourism, is located on the south shore of Nova Scotia. As in other historical African Nova Scotian communities, few African Nova Scotians live within the town limits of Digby because of overt and systemic racism, which had led to geographical and social segregation (African Nova Scotian Affairs 2019; James et al. 2010; Pachai and Bishop 2006). Most African Nova Scotians in the Digby area live in peripheral historically Black communities, including Jordantown, Acaciaville, Conway, and Weymouth

Falls (CBC News 2016; Pachai and Bishop 2006). This geographical marginalization of African Nova Scotian communities can be connected to discussions of how space is constructed to reflect and maintain unequal social and power relations (Razack 2002), especially as they relate to Blackness (McKittrick and Woods 2007). In the 2016 Census, only 25 people living in within the town limits of Digby (population 2060) identified as Black (Statistics Canada 2018b). The Black communities of Jordantown, Acaciaville, Conway, and Weymouth Falls fall within the broader municipal district of Digby (population 7107), within which 290 people identified as Black (Statistics Canada 2018a).

Several highly publicized conflicts have occurred between African Nova Scotians and the police in Digby. To the best of my knowledge, the oldest documented case was in 1985, when Graham (Jarvis) Cromwell, a Black man, was fatally shot in the back by a white man, who was subsequently acquitted by an all-white jury (Mannette 1986; Smith 2006). In 2002, Brendan Clarke, a young Black man, was physically assaulted by two police officers after a convenience store clerk falsely accused him of using a counterfeit hundred-dollar bill. He was charged with assaulting a police officer, resisting arrest, and causing a disturbance in a public place, and in 2003 he was convicted of causing a disturbance (Humphreys 2013). He filed a suit for assault and damages, which was settled out of court by the federal government for $248,000 in 2013 (CBC News 2013; Humphreys 2013). In 2005, the Digby RCMP Staff Sergeant was accused of making racist comments about Black community members and other officers, and Nova Scotia's highest-ranking RCMP officer, Assistant Commissioner Ian Atkins, later apologized to the Black community in Digby (CBC News 2008). A few months after this apology, off-duty Halifax police officers harassed and uttered racial slurs at two Black men in Digby; this led to a confrontation in which Digby RCMP tasered one of the Black men (CBC News 2008b; Moore 2008). One of the off-duty officers and one of the Black men was charged, causing frustration within the Black community as the RCMP had failed to take into account the racial slurs (Moore 2008). Together, these incidents illustrate the systemic and pervasive racism faced by the African Nova Scotian community in Digby – especially men.

Experiences of policing, social activism, and mothering among Black women

In the United States, considerable attention has been paid to police interactions involving Black males. Lindsey argued that this has led to a " masculine-centered narrative of contemporary anti-Black racial violence"

(2015: 233). Much less attention has focused on Black women, girls, and transgender women who are also victims of state violence (Smith 2016). The #SayHerName movement is using a combination of social media activism, political education, and protests to bring awareness to the names and stories of Black women and girls who have been victims of police violence,[3] with the goal of addressing the erasure of Black women form the narrative of police violence (African American Policy Forum 2015; 2019; Brown et al. 2017). The findings of the present study address the absence of Black women's experiences within the dominant narrative, even within the narrative of anti-racism. The inclusion of Black women yields additional insights related to other aspects of police violence, including mothering and gender.

African Nova Scotian women have been absent from historical narratives relating to state violence (Brigham and Parris 2016; Hamilton 1998). Some research has focused on African Nova Scotian mothers; Hamilton (1998) noted that among these women "mothering" has extended past the family and into the community, referring to their activist work. Several scholars have explored the relationship between mothering and social activism (Bailey et al. 2013; Barnes 2005; Lawson 2012; Sehatzadeh 2008). Bernard and Bonner investigated mothering within the African Nova Scotian community, and concluded that "the absence of formal social structures to address the needs of African Nova Scotians meant that people had to find creative ways of caring for their children" (Bernard and Bonner 2013: 165). African Nova Scotian women have played an integral and intergenerational role in community activism within several organizations (Hamilton 1998). However, to date their contributions have generally been left unrecognized – or rendered invisible. The following discussion presents a conceptual framework that can help explain this lack of attention.

Conceptual Framework

Critical race theory

Critical race theory is the main theoretical framework used in the present study. It frames race as central to the creation, existence, and experiences of social and political structures and policies (Aylward 1999; Delgado and Stefancic 2007; Gillborn 2015; Hylton 2012; Solórzano and Yosso 2002). Critical race theorists assert that racism is an ordinary everyday experience for people of colour (Delgado and Stefancic 2007; James et

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3. See cases such as Sandra Bland, Tanisha Anderson, and Natasha McKenna.

al. 2010). The framework emerged in the United States in the late 1980s in the United States, building on the findings of critical legal studies, questioning the tenets of legal liberalism (Aylward 1999). Black scholars and other scholars of colour were attracted to these findings because they challenged the objectivity of laws that oppressed people of colour, but there were critiques about the lack of discussion about the implications of race (Aylward 1999).

Critical race theory interrogates questions of race through a critical lens, posing questions about race, the continued persistence of racism, and about race relation in liberal and multicultural societies such as Canada (Giwa et al. 2014; James 1998; Razack et al. 2010; Tator and Henry 2006; Williams 2013). It can be used to explore the close relationships between race, racism, and the state, and "the ongoing challenges posed by racial liberalism, which promises liberty, equity, and social justice but comfortably coexists with deep economic and social inequalities and social exclusion" (Razack et al. 2010: 10). It is a race-conscious approach to research, often in relation to education (Huber and Solorzano 2015; Hylton 2012) and the criminal justice system (Chapman-Nyaho et al. 2011; Giwa et al. 2014; Williams 2013). It challenges the idea of "colourblindness" – the assumption that racism no longer exists, and therefore no decisions in society or by government should are based on race (Aylward 1999; James et al. 2010). This is a common misconception within Canadian society and promotes the myth that race has never been a factor in Canadian society and is not currently a factor.

Critical race theorists have been criticized for focusing on legal injustices, rather than challenging the law itself (Treviño et al. 2008). However, critical race theory is still a helpful tool for exploring counter-narratives and "views rarely evidences in social research" (Hylton 2012: 27); in this case, it can provide critical insights about African Nova Scotian women in relation to the criminal justice system.

Critical race theorists often use story-telling to counter dominant narratives that silence the experiences of people of colour (Solórzano and Yosso 2002). The following discussion uses storytelling as a tool to document the experiences of Black women in Digby in relation to the police, and particularly their role as "mother".

Black women's community activism as mothering

The role of mothering is intrinsic to the experiences of the women described in this paper. Black women have their experiences shaped by the hegemonic intensive view of mothering: the idea that mothering should be child-centred, labour-intensive, and that the needs of the child out-

weigh the needs of the mother (Christopher 2012; Nichols et al. 2015). This can be problematic for women of colour, who experience and interpret motherhood differently, with practices that are often "embedded in kin networks that nurture, counsel and heal dependents while participating in the public arena of work and sociopolitical engagement" (Lawson 2012: 823). The responsibility of caring for their children and the larger Black community falls on Black women; the role of mother eclipses all other roles and identities (Bernard and Bernard 1998; Etowa et al. 2017; Nichols et al. 2015).

Some scholars have argued that because of the racial and gendered inequality faced by Black women, the act of mothering can be empowering, providing ways to improve their families and communities (Christopher 2012; Lewis and Neville 2015; Sesko and Biernat 2010). Framing mothering as empowering is valuable – but "Black motherhood is fundamentally a contradictory institution" (Bernard and Bonner 2013: 47). In other words, as Black women try to resist inequitable structures by raising and educating Black youth, they also face pressure to fit into the construct of a "strong Black woman". This concept has been critiqued as a dangerous and isolating myth that sets unrealistic expectations for Black women – from themselves, their family, the Black community, and broader society (Etowa et al. 2017). A study investigating strong Black women and health in Nova Scotia found that "(w)omen described themselves as caring for family and extended family, community members, colleagues and sometimes—in a more abstract sense— their entire race, often at the *expense of their own well-being"* (Etowa et al. 2017: 390, emphasis added). This, the burden of caring for others can take a toll on Black women who mother their children and their community.

Black women may use mothering as a political tool to resist multiple axes of oppression. In addition to the "traditional" acts involved in intensive mothering, they may be responsible for raising social and political awareness among their children and their community (Bernard and Bernard 1998; Bernard and Bonner 2013). For example, Black women who have lost children to gun violence may make meaning out of their loss and feelings of helplessness by engaging in advocacy and activism, reaching out to other mothers, and creating groups for mutual healing (Bailey et al. 2013). This is a good example of Black mothering as political, but also raises a concern: if Black women are able to "tolerate, absorb, even thrive on racism, poverty, and sexism" (Etowa et al. 2017: 391), what is the incentive for social change?

Race, gender, and rurality

The idea of space is important to this discussion. Space influences daily experiences and social interactions, thereby generating and reproducing culture (Thomas et al. 2011). The women in this study live in a rural space, where they face an intersection of race, gender, and place. "Rural" places are traditionally based on agriculture; are often remote and have limited resources (Ward and Brown 2009). Those who live in rural areas tend to be marginalized, because society is predominantly urban: as a result, rural is often defined simply in contrast to urban (Ching and Creed 1997; Thomas et al. 2011).

The experiences of rural women and Black women differ from the experiences of urban women and Black women (Ching and Creed 1997; Norris 2012). Obstacles for women of colour in rural places include job availability, lack of political voice, greater family responsibilities, lower salaries, and transportation issues (Norris 2012). Traditional gender roles are also generally reinforced in rural areas (Sherman 2009), further loading responsibility on Black women. Research has demonstrated that Black rural communities support and rely on each other heavily, exhibiting resilience within a society where they are devalued and discriminated against (Berkel et al. 2009). The following discussion will demonstrate that rurality also shapes the experiences and perceptions of African Nova Scotian women in relation to the police, adding to the body of research conducted within urban settings.

METHODOLOGY

This case study is part of a larger study conducted in rural Nova Scotia. Case studies can capture the lived experiences of participants through detailed accounts, as well as how theoretical concepts apply to their lives. These interviews were not conducted under the traditional steps of a case study. As in a traditional case study, the following analysis uses narratives to explore complex issues in real-life settings (Baškarada 2014; Flyvbjerg 2006; Hyett et al. 2014).

This analysis incorporates critical race theory as well as storytelling, which can challenge the broader narrative and preconceived notions of race and also explore counter-narratives (Solórzano and Yosso 2002). Counter-narratives can emerge from the stories of participants, the existing literature, and the researcher's professional and personal experiences. Some have criticized stories for not representing "legitimate" knowledge, but this positivist approach assumes that legitimate knowledge is objective and universal (Baszile 2014; Razack 1998). In real-

ity, this legitimate knowledge is only partial and storytelling can yield much more nuanced insights (Razack 1998). The African Nova Scotian women in Digby have had few opportunities to share their stories, so this analysis provides a unique perspective in privileging their stories.

This analysis can be classified as a "small-N" analysis, which emphasizes neither the group nor individual and yields contextual knowledge that is both situated and universal(Abbott 2004). The data consisted of three semi-structured in-depth interviews, which were transcribed, and then processed through a three-step analysis: line-by-line coding, axial coding, and finally thematic coding (Charmaz 2004). Line-by-line coding is a superficial and critical analysis that keeps the research close to the data but also helps prevent complete immersion in the participant's experience (Charmaz 2004). Axial or focused coding considers commonalities among all the transcripts and the ways in which narratives intertwine (Charmaz 2004; Saldaña 2016). Thematic coding systemically integrates all existing categories or codes around a central theme, which can be tied to or explained by theory (Charmaz 2004; Saldaña 2016). Coding was an iterative and interpretive process; data were revisited as additional questions and connections arose, leading to a deeper understanding of the material (Bryman et al. 2012; Saldaña 2016).

Interviews took place from November 2015 to May 2016, and ranged from 45 minutes to more than two hours. African Nova Scotian women who had resided in the Digby area were asked about their experiences with the police, if anyone they knew had experiences with the police, their relationship with the police, and their perceptions of the police. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling: I made one contact in Digby, they connected me to others who might be interested participating. Due to the small population of Digby, providing giving the demographics of each participant would preclude confidentiality, so each participant was given a pseudonym and only broad demographic information about the entire sample is provided. Participants were aged 30-60 years and had lived in Digby for 20-50 years; all had strong relationships with their children, and all were involved in community work at some point in their lives. An institutional review board approved the research protocol.

Results

Vicarious experiences

Based on what participants described (— and did not describe), the experiences of Black women in Digby are ignored and often overlooked.

The interviews revealed that participants had primarily experienced the police through vicarious experiences, and that these second-hand inter-actions helped shape how they came to perceive and understand the po-lice. Vicarious experiences, whether negative or positive, are known to have a direct effect on perceptions of the police (Paternoster and Piquero 1995; Weitzer and Tuch 2004). One participant said her relationship with the police was good but went on to describe incidents that were negative. The other two explicitly said that they do not have a good relationship with the police, based on vicarious experiences. They both stated that they did not feel protected by the police, referring to the experiences of their children and the experiences of Black men in the community. Michelle said;

> Personally, I've had some (pause) absolute (pause) terrible relationships with the police, not myself but with [male family member] …. there were times where it really wasn't great.

One participant described not being able to relax when her children were out at night: "As a parent, you know, I took the brunt of what was going on in terms of the anxiety and stress and all that shit, more so than [my children]." Thus, in addition to being aware of the vicarious experiences, they also feared negative experiences; as mothers, they bore an emo-tional burden of the possibility that the boys and men in their lives would be targeted by the police.

Vicarious experiences were paired with direct interactions with the police because of the Black men or boys in their lives. These secondary or subsequent interactions with the police were described as antagonis-tic, threatening, and combative, and compounded existing feelings of distrust, frustration, skepticism, and fear. Susan said, "We are terrorized, we don't trust the police, we don't trust the system." One participant commented that even recalling the incidents her loved ones had gone through and her subsequent interactions with officers caused her anxiety. At the end of the interview she said that having a venue to discuss her feelings about these incidents was cathartic, illustrating the importance of listening to marginalized voices.

Each participant also spoke of the highly publicized cases of dis-crimination on the part of the police, in more detail than what was avail-able via the media. This demonstrates that the experiences of Black men in the community do not affect these men alone; they also affect Black women. Owusu-Bempah (2014) found that Black men and women both viewed the police more negatively and reported more frequent and more hostile interactions with the police than members of other racial groups, despite Black women having few direct interactions with the police.

Overall, the effects of vicarious experiences may help explain why African Nova Scotian women socialize children within their community in certain ways to protect them.

Socialization as a shield

Existing within, surviving, and resisting multidimensional methods of oppression and discrimination gave participants a particular understanding of the police and the world. They said that in response to continuous vicarious experiences of violence on the part of the police, Black community members and parents educate their children on how to interact with the police. They referred to teaching their children about their rights and to comply with officers, and, if possible, to record officers to hold them accountable. This accountability measure was mentioned as they said having proof of officer misconduct was important, and it may ensure officers behave appropriately. Susan said, "we would meet with all the children, Black youth – especially males – and tell them, you know if the police stop you, comply and you know we'll deal with it later." Compliance, followed by advocacy, was a common description of this education. This unsettling ritual is often referred to as "the talk," a discussion with Black children and youth about how to interact with police (Bouchard 2016; Kwong 2016). Overall, the perceived inevitability of the police targeting young African Nova Scotian men led to a form of specialized education.

Participants were both passionate and frustrated with the perceived need for this socialization. Michelle, in combination of exasperation and defeat, said:

> We tell our children you know if you're ever anywhere and you need help you find an RCMP or a police officer, well we can't tell them that, and I can't even tell my [male family member] that…. what I tell them is they should—they're there to serve and protect, you *should* be able to go to them if you need help….but you know as a member of the Black community, someone who has had a not great experience with the police, and knows how Black males are treated, as their [male family member] it's difficult.

Participants also experiences stress from knowing that even this specialized education is not a guaranteed way to keep their children safe: the nature an interaction is largely decided by the police officer.

Based on how participants described this form of socialization, it is primarily aimed at Black young men. There is a distinct absence of young Black women and girls within this education, aside from Black women as educators. If young Black women received this education, it

was only because it is aimed at youth more broadly. This socialization as a shield for young Black men speaks to the assumed criminality of African Nova Scotian men. Again, in stressing the experiences of Black men and the discrimination they face, the experiences of young Black women are lost; this was a consistent theme based on what participants said – and perhaps more importantly, did not say.

Community policing

In marginalized communities like the Digby African Nova Scotian community, members tend to rely on one another for support (Barnes 2005). Participants spoke of relying on the community for childcare, travel, and general support. This sense of community is illustrated by an incident of active community resistance led by a group of parents, primarily African Nova Scotian women. One participant said:

> It got to a point where the community said, 'enough is enough'. Black parents would go downtown Saturday nights when the bar was supposed to close, and police the streets, to make sure that Black youth were safe…. and it was to protect our children because the law wasn't protecting them.

All participants referred to this period. It began one summer: every time the only bar in Digby closed, confrontations between club-goers would result in the arrest and detainment of Black youth. Parents, led by Black women, began to actively protect their youth from police harassment and imprisonment by policing the streets themselves. Participants felt that the police were not there to serve and protect, but instead to target their youth; Susan said:

> They [police] had dogs, dogs target the big Black guy, make no mistake about that, the police drove up and down up and down with the dogs in their paddy wagons and stuff, but it didn't escalate physically, but it was like they wanted it to escalate.

This stark visual account is reminiscent of images of the civil rights movement in the United States. Participants spoke of this period in a pragmatic manner: there was a problem, and they as a community took action to address it, at their own risk. They noted that this tactic worked, the detainment and arrest rates for Black youth decreased. This compelling example illustrates how the Digby African Nova Scotian community actively protected their community, and how they felt unprotected by the police.

DISCUSSION

Vicarious experiences clearly play an important role among African Nova Scotian women: despite rarely having confrontations with the police, interviewees had negative perceptions of police, did not trust the police, and did not feel protected by the police. Awareness of the negative experiences faced by the Black men and boys in their lives shaped how participants perceived the police. Previous research has yielded similar findings:

> Some people who have had no contact with officers view police negatively…. [knowledge of others' negative experiences] may be internalized and "vicariously experienced" by an individual. (Weitzer and Tuch 2004: 308)

These vicarious effects are also similar to the collateral damage to families and communities when a family member is incarcerated. Incarceration, while intended to punish (and supposedly rehabilitate) the incarcerated individual, has wide-spread and intergenerational consequences on that person's children, family, and communities: health issues, changes in parenting patterns, community norms, and changes in informal social networks among others (Foster and Hagan 2009; Gust 2012; Haskins et al. 2018; Smith and Hattery 2016). Interviewees from Digby described these effects in the context of police contact alone, rather than in relation to incarceration. Changes in parenting, community norms, and informal social networks are exemplified by educating Black youth and policing the streets. Both of these examples can be considered forms of "collateral damage" as they are both reactive and proactive responses to being targeted by the police and increased police contact.

Education on dealing with unwarranted police attention and interacting with the police is not unique to the Black community in Digby. It occurs in many Black communities throughout North America, and often falls on the shoulders of Black mothers (Malone Gonzalez 2019). The findings that Black mothers in Digby teach their children about the police adds to the existing literature and helps clarify how the criminal justice system has negatively shaped the lives of those living in Black communities in Nova Scotia. It is also important to acknowledge that as young Black women and girls were absent from this distinct education. Some might argue that mothers, as educators, are accessories in the erasure of Black girls from this narrative, but I caution against this argument. Marginalized mothers, particularly those of colour, frequently have their capacity to parent put on trial (Minaker and Hogeveen 2015; Ritchie 2017). Additionally, a study on protecting Black youth from ra-

cism revealed that Black mothers socialized their adolescent sons and daughters differently: daughters reported their education was focused on stereotypes of Black women rather than police encounters (Berkel et al. 2009). Another study found that when Black mothers were asked about the "police talk" they give to their daughters, they tended to steer the conversation back to Black boys as the primary target for this education (Malone Gonzalez 2019). The interviewees from Digby knew from experience that the police target Black men and boys, and their education of youth reflects this.

The decision to reactively and proactively protect their community can be related to Beth Richie's work on battered African American women and incarceration. She discusses how these women's behaviour is shaped by "historical circumstances *and* contemporary social conditions, events in the public *and* private spheres, and conscious *and* unconscious processes" (Richie 1996: 161, emphasis in original). Black women in Digby actively educate Black youth and police their community because of the experiences they and the Black males in their lives have had with the police. Their "self-policing" may be explained in part by how this Black community has come to depend on itself for support. It faces social, economic, and geographic obstacles that have forced community members to rely on one another for moral and social support, illustrating the significance of community care and extended family (Bernard and Bonner 2013; Sehatzadeh 2008).

It is important to note while spirituality did not come up in interviews, several studies have found that spirituality is an important coping mechanism among Black women in response to racism (Bailey et al. 2013; Lawson 2012), including among African Nova Scotian women (Beagan et al. 2012; Bernard and Bonner 2013; Brigham and Parris 2016). In Black churches in Nova Scotia, women play central roles in fulfilling the "social, economic, and spiritual needs of Black communities, while also fighting for change" (Brigham and Parris 2016: 74). This has extended beyond the church, Black women have led and participated in social movements (Bailey et al. 2013; Brigham and Parris 2016; Brown et al. 2017; Hamilton 1998). In Digby, this kind of extension of community mothering and activism is clear in the education and the active protection of Black youth. Lawson's study on mothers who had lost children to gun violence revealed that some Black mothers chose to turn to social activism to help "mothers' transition from a place of vulnerability and powerlessness to one of strength" (2012: 349). This could explain the acts of Black women in Digby, who are trying to protect themselves and their families and to have agency in what happens to their community.

Conclusion

Drawing from semi-structured interviews, this article has explored the experiences and perceptions of African Nova Scotian mothers, which are strongly influenced by the direct experiences of the Black men and boys in their lives have with the police. These vicarious experiences with the police made participants feel both unprotected and targeted by the police, and led to them to proactively inform and protect youth in relation to police. This analysis focused on a subset of data collected for a larger project including Black men and women. The sample size is small, so a larger, more diverse sample is necessary to draw any broader claims and conclusions. However, the findings offer some insights into the experiences of the understudied population of Black women in rural Nova Scotia. More research is needed to explore how direct and vicarious experiences affect perceptions of the police among rural Black women, and how Black mothers actively resist and protect their communities. This work also raises questions about how vicarious experiences with police may affect interpersonal relationships (romantic, familial, or otherwise) between Black men and women. Limited attention has been paid to the experiences of Black women in relation to the police and the criminal justice system, and this article serves as a starting point for further interrogations of how anti-Blackness affects Black women directly and indirectly.

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