WORK LIFE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN LEADERS IN CANADIAN LABOUR UNION ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The work life experiences of Black women leaders in Canadian labour union organizations (unions) are highly underresearched. Though, narratives promoted by unions indicating that unions are built on, and espouse values of, equity and fairness, fight for the rights of all their members across the table to employers and champion the rights of equity seeking groups suggest that these same principles are relevant to the experiences that Black women union leaders endure in their roles. Using the qualitative research method of phenomenology, and theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and intersectionality and everyday racism, the experiences of twenty-three Black women leaders who are currently active or were previously active (now retired) in paid or voluntary roles in Canadian unions were examined to produce knowledge about the distinctive work life experiences of Black women leaders in Canadian unions in order to make this information visible and widely available. Research findings reveal a myriad of ways that structures, policies, procedures, processes and practices disadvantage Black women union leaders primarily based on their race, and result in extremely poor, trauma-inducing and life-changing work life experiences with impacts that extend beyond the workplace.

Keywords: work life experiences, anti-Black racism, work stressors, Black women, labour union organizations

DEDICATION

To Christ Almighty
His grace, goodness and mercies abound beyond our comprehension.

𝄞[1]

To the ancestors, the people who came before me and all the unsung s/heroes
Who believed, were visionaries, stood against all odds, were courageous, fought, shed tears, blood, limbs
and life so that I and others like me could be here today.
Your lives and death were not in vain.

[2]

To the Black women participants in this research
For your wisdom, principles, courage, strength of character, selflessness, acts of bravery, your *tallawah*[3].
For entrusting me with your stories, that I believe will contribute to making positive changes.

[4]

To my mother, stepmother, daughter and the women who have been my anchors and buoys in this
journey called life.

⚨

To those who have shown me kindness, recognized and encouraged the development of my talents.

[5]

With heads held high!
Let us not forget that the acts we do today not only serve to improve our own lives and those around us,
but more importantly, they are for the benefit of future generations.
Always striving to advance, lift up, and elevate each other in comm***unity***.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

learnings. Your time, efforts, knowledge and wisdom are precious and valued. I acknowledge

our shared experiences, while recognizing that there are individual differences in our many and

varied experiences. Continue to be open to learning and sharing your learnings with those

around you. I pray continued strength, integrity, authenticity, collegiality and connectivity to

you in your individual journeys and great successes in your collective efforts. May your gaze

keep forward and straight, while looking backwards to learn from the past and lifting those

behind you, much like the teachings of the **Sankofa**[6] of the Akan People of West Africa.

Thank You! to Dr. Kymberley Bird, Director of the Graduate Program in Interdisciplinary

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agreeing to serve as members of my Supervisory Committee, giving me the space to care for

my health and explore and complete this project, and for direction and support in accomplishing

my efforts.

I also acknowledge colleagues and peers on similar paths who listened, provided their

shoulders, made suggestions, became co-conspirators, and stood up for justice in the moments

that mattered. For healthcare providers who made themselves available to me, and my family

who did not understand this journey, yet allowed me the space to do what was necessary to

complete it.

This project began as a personal journey of discovery officially in Fall 2018 (unofficially

in 2017). As I move through the journey, which is ongoing, I recognize its crucial significance

to reclamation and transformation not only for myself but also for the women who were

essential to this research. Black Women union leaders are often siloed, discounted, rejected,

undermined, alienated, and understanding that these experiences are shared by others in

similar spaces provides validation and comfort in knowing that we are not alone. Moreover, it

reinforces our convictions for remaining true to our beliefs, aspirations and spiritual leadings in working towards a just reality for the people around us, future generations and ourselves. Structural systems are so deeply entrenched that make this work continuous, exhaustive and seemingly impossible to accomplish, but we must work together to support each other and to increase the likelihood of success.

I hope this research is one more step towards so much more for myself, as well as others and, in particular, the next generation of Black women leaders who have aspirations in the Canadian labour movement. May the information contained within serve to edify, inspire and provoke thinking, understanding and action for positive, substantive and transformative changes in the structure and operations of Canadian labour unions.

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PREAMBLE

I do nothing by myself but by the strength of My God!

Hanging on by a thread
To my health
My dignity
My purpose
Myself
A culmination of years of attack on the soul
In everyday experiences
But particularly in employment in Canadian workplaces – paid and unpaid
A barrage of subtle indignities
Inequities
Injustices
By those who believe they are superior to who I am
Their continuous attempts at keeping me *in my place*
Lies and untruths deeply entrenched in, espoused by and perpetrated in education, the medical
industry, laws and legislations, workplace structures and policies
As truth
I was broken yet serving others
In spite of sustained negative health effects
Bruised but not defeated
By the Grace of the Living God
Stepping forward in my truth
Towards my destiny
For His Glory
As determined even before I was conceived
Selah
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I chose to include a Preamble in my thesis in order to allow for the reflection, and

sharing, of some of my thoughts, insights and experiences relating to the subject matter that I

believe are relevant and necessary to this process. A Preamble allows me an opportunity to tell

my own story as it relates to this project in my own words. In doing so, I acknowledge my

alignment with Sandra Harding's (1987 in Margaret Hunter, 2002) theories of producing

knowledge (epistemologies) including that "epistemologies do not exist outside of the people

who construct and use them [and] are situated within political, historical, and economic contexts that can provide power and legitimacy to their knowledge claims" (120; see Paula Gowdie, 2022a). This thesis also demonstrates Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) assertion that "African-American women not only have developed a distinctive Black women's standpoint, but have done so by using alternative ways of producing and validating knowledge" (252). Furthermore, this Preamble allows the creation of a bit of distance, some metaphoric and mental separation from the subject, that helped to facilitate objectivity in my writing and keep the focus of the research on the experiences of the Black women research participants.

A. My Positionalities

Acknowledging my vulnerabilities, I undertook this project in the pursuit of understanding phenomenon related to my person and Black Peoples[7] specific to work, whether paid or unpaid and the workplace, and in this particular instance, in Canadian labour union organizations.

I am Paula Gowdie, born in Kingston, Jamaica, West Indies, with known ancestry of African Nations, South Asia, England, Ireland and Scotland. I am a full-figured[8] woman with melanated skin and identify as a Black woman. I am the child of a Black mother with English ancestry and a father, an Indo-Jamaican man who presented with Indian features and a rich melanated skin tone. I am a daughter, mother, sister, aunt, niece, wife, full-time employed, a spiritual person, published author, graduate student, a workplace advocate and a lifelong learner. I value education and training, but I value even more passing on, or sharing, the knowledge that I have learnt and using that knowledge to help others and for them to help themselves. Part of this process involves ensuring that information, including my own writing, is accessible, i.e., available and easily understood, by anyone at any age, educational level or station in life.

I recognize that despite my social positions, I have been blessed with certain privileges[9] and try in my own ways to use these gifts to make positive differences for others. My interests include supporting people through life circumstances, understanding the experiences of people of racially oppressed groups and women, particularly Black women in Canadian workplaces, the roles that systems and organizations play in the continued oppression of Black women and the effects of racism and oppression. My experiences have taught me that in order to truly understand any phenomenon, one must fully engage themselves in, participate in and involve themselves in related organizations, activities and processes. The irony is that being part of a system can make it more challenging to openly critique said organizations or to effect change as one is constrained by organizational policies, procedures, processes and practices, which is reminiscent of the message in Audre Lorde's speech "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" (1984, reprint 2007).

I am an involuntary settler in Canada, brought here in my youth by my mother because this is the place she was lured to with the dream of a better life for herself and her children. While I did not actively decide to emigrate to Canada, I am grateful for the opportunities I have had, and continue to have, to live, learn, grow, work and play on the traditional and unceded territory lands of the Kanien'kehá:ka, the Mississaugas of the Credit, many Mississaugas and Chippewa bands, and the Haudenosaunee and Wendat Nations.

These same traditional and unceded territory lands are now also home to many Peoples of African origin. While not all Africans who came to Canada were enslaved, for over a 400-year period starting in the 1600s, enslaved Africans were involuntary settlers in Canada who were displaced from their own lands of origin through the transatlantic slave trade and slavery (slave trade). The horrific money making enterprise of the slave trade was practiced and legalized in Canada in 1689 (William Renwick Riddell, 1920:263 in Maureen G. Elgersman,

2013:10; Quebec Factum, at 23-4, 27, 53-4 in Constance Backhouse, 1999:257), and has left a legacy that today still significantly impacts the lives of African Peoples and their descendants in Canada and globally.

Indigenous Peoples and African Peoples have been, and continue to be, subjects of imperialism and colonization.

B. My Involvement in Canadian Labour Union Organizations

I have been in the labour market for approximately forty years and a member of a Canadian labour union for thirty-four years. For the past twenty-eight years, at my place of employment, I have actively participated in my union as a volunteer union leader in various roles, including chairing and participating in several committees simultaneously and working with, and representing, members of my Canadian union on many different issues arising from the workplace. For most of my involvement, I have been the first, and one of a few, active racialized[10] union representatives, and at this time, the member with the longest involvement in the union.

My union involvement includes being a long serving member of the union executive board, a union steward, chair and co-chair of the union's health and safety committee, worker co-chair and a certified worker member of joint health and safety committees, chair of the all unions health and safety committee collaborating with other unions at the workplace on occupational health and safety issues, chair of the joint ergonomics committee, a member of the workplace accommodations and return to work and disability support committees, chair of the decent and stable work task force and steering the first ever union mapping survey, a member of the employer's community safety council and one of its subcommittees, co-chair of bargaining committees, a member of the grievance and equity committees, a delegate to a labour council, provoked research on the experiences of racialized union officials of the union,

advocating for equity, diversity, inclusion and anti-oppressive policies and practices within the union, as well as in collective bargaining, a workplace advocate for the union membership, and working collectively and individually with members. I was also introduced to the Canadian Chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists in 2019 by Dr. Tania Das Gupta.

Though the Union will say that there is union release time and union duty leave[11] to complete these and other union roles, and though occupational health and safety roles and work time are regulated by the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the workplace environment has its own mechanisms for applying pressure to union members to either limit or reduce their involvement in union activism or simply to not participate at all. This effect seems to be more prevalent and relevant to union leaders who are from racially oppressed groups and does not seem to be recognized, acknowledged, understood or addressed by union executives. So, in situations where union leaders are not engaged in full-time paid leadership roles, in order to manage workplace pressures, where possible, many union leaders will use their own personal time to complete union roles and responsibilities[12]. So, in my instance, in addition to the nominal use of union release time and union duty leave, I have used countless lunch hours and personal time, hours before starting and after completing my employer paid work, during sickness, vacations, weekends and holidays to complete union work, all while managing an excessive workload and working long hours and numerous unpaid hours for my employer.

Over the years, differences in the treatment of union members from racially oppressed groups, particularly Black members, in the workplace by the employer and union executives and leaders, became blatantly obvious to me though union executives and leaders seemed oblivious to it. While union leadership may discuss equity with the employer across the table, albeit marginally, the union does not have any policies, processes, procedures or practices that support equity or encourage meaningful involvement by their members who identify with

racially oppressed groups. In fact, though the membership is very diverse, the leadership is

consistently comprised of elected White individuals. Efforts on my part to raise and address

concerns about inequities within the union structure and practices, and to ensure that practices

that are adopted by the union are equitable, consistently fall on deaf ears, resulting in

oppressive practices targeted at me, including one instance of physical violence by a White

male union executive that was not addressed by the union executive board. Though at that

time I had been a member of the union executive board for more than twenty years and am

now the union leader with the longest involvement, I have been ostracized and excluded from

recognition and advancement opportunities, including through subversive practices

implemented during elections. So, while I actively represent and support others on behalf of the

union as a volunteer while successfully maintaining paid full-time employment, the treatment

experienced at the hands of union executives does not align with my expectations for support,

appreciation, fairness or unionism. At the same time, poor work life experiences in my own

workplace resulted in negative health effects, and I was left to deal with the aftermath by

myself. These and other work life experiences left me with mental health and physical health

concerns, impacts that were oblivious to others, especially the specific individuals who

contributed to them. These experiences also left me with many questions about unions,

questions such as my own perceptions about, and expectations of, the *equitable* union, the

reasons for such contemptuous behaviours and treatments, and whether they were specific to

me or were more universal to other Black women who were active in Canadian labour union

organizations. More problematic was the question "are labour unions indeed better positioned

to be fair and equitable and devoid of institutional racism than other non-union places of

employment?".

C. Race and Anti-Black Racism

I completed this graduate degree as a part-time student while working a full-time position with an excessive workload[13], long hours and unsupportive employers, working in various volunteer roles providing support to union members off the side of my desk[14], and maintaining familial responsibilities. There were challenges given the lack of available research about Black women's experiences in workplaces, Canadian or otherwise, and in Canadian labour union organizations, as well as challenges deeply entrenched in academia particularly for peoples of racially oppressed groups, but the subject matter was not an easy one for me to traverse. Unaware to me, by the time I started this journey, I had already suffered negative health effects due to my own work life experiences. I say unawares because as a Black woman, our daily lived experiences bring with them levels of trauma that are often dismissed, and these experiences teach us that in order to survive, we must literally and figuratively pick ourselves up after negative experiences and challenges and keep moving in order to maintain responsibilities, pay the bills and accomplish goals. This practice requires us to not focus on, and oftentimes not acknowledge, and suppress harms that have been perpetuated against us. So, we *eat* or internalize these issues until compassionate others take the time to approach us and encourage us to think differently about these circumstances, to prioritize ourselves and seek appropriate healthcare. Moreover, learning about the horrific historical practices of imperialism and colonization particular to Black Peoples to benefit the greed and wealth of others, and learning of research participants' experiences that mirrored my own in similar and different ways, was triggering, trauma-inducing.

Additionally, though I am a Black woman and experience challenges daily and instinctively knew that race had a huge effect on my life, talking about race and the negative impacts of anti-Black racism is not something I was comfortable doing and especially not with

persons who do not have similar lived experiences or who do not understand the experiences. It is an extremely draining and exhaustive process and can be quite demoralizing. Moreover, speaking about anti-Black racism is not encouraged in Canadian society and certainly not something that is often written about, or taught in the education system or encouraged in the workplace. Neoliberalist societies do not teach us about race and racism, nor are we openly encouraged to speak about it, so individuals affected by it, and who suffer negative health and other consequences, are often left to deal with the issues on their own. Furthermore, unions rarely, if ever, talk about the history of xenophobia, oppression, racism and sexism in the labour movement or acknowledge their existence in their own organizations.

Racism in its many shapes is not taught or discussed in schools and is discouraged by societal colour-blind discourses making race and racism taboo subjects. Also, since arriving in Canada, growing up in a single parent home, survival was the ultimate focus – it was about achieving educational goals despite the many challenges experienced in the Canadian educational systems and working for a living. There was little time, energy or effort to sit down, talk about or understand the underlying issues relating to race and racism as it pertains to Black Peoples and in particular, my own family's history, origins and experiences, and my own experiences of leaving Jamaica as a child and being an involuntary settler in a very white and at the time, alien, Montréal[15], Québec, Canada, that was seemingly devoid of organized Black communities for support and certainly not evident in the spaces in which I lived and traversed.

There is a widely held general assumption that people of racially oppressed groups, because they have particular experiences, automatically know how to effectively articulate their experiences, that they understand the reasons for those experiences and that they are able to effectively advocate for themselves. This is not always the case.

Another widely held general assumption is that based on appearances, people of racially oppressed groups undergo the same experiences, experience situations in the same ways and are representatives of the group, or groups, that they appear to belong to.

I see these, and other, assumptions in play when I am asked questions about my background, about Jamaica, or Jamaicans, as if I am a spokesperson for all Jamaicans, or when I am *the only* (emphasis added) Black person in a very white space, and though my heritage is unknown to the persons in that space, I seemingly have been *appointed* (emphasis added) the spokesperson for all Black Peoples, or when Jamaican colloquialisms are thrown out with a grin, or Bob Marley's name is tossed out as a pearl in a conversation with the expectation that I will suddenly break out in song and a jig or engage in the discussion.

Yet, there are costs, penalties, retaliations, repercussions, consequences to the person who dares to talk about, or raise concerns about, racism even in spheres that claim to be open to learning about different discourses and experiences and spheres that claim to be justice oriented.

Learning to talk about racism is like learning a new language. Anti-Black racism - the impetus for this research topic, and the process of completing this program, required an immersive experience in order to learn about, and understand, racism from its many angles, including the intersections of the other parts of my person and the impacts it leaves in its path. This meant actively seeking, and participating in, workshops, conferences, presentations, talks, writings – academic, commercial or social media, courses, programs, reading anything that was remotely related in order to gain some insight and to *connect the dots*. This has been essential to my ongoing healing process, and necessary given the lack of available information prior to the COVID19 pandemic. Enlightenment produced standards that prevented, and continues to restrict, the stories of people of racially oppressed groups, women and marginalized peoples

from being seen, heard, published, visible, and for their concerns to be addressed (see Gowdie, 2022a).

D. The Journey

The process of completing this degree has also been an integral part of my reclamation and restorative process. Reclaiming parts of me that have suffered the effects of working in psychologically unsafe Canadian workplaces in paid and unpaid positions. Effects that also resulted in delays in completing this thesis.

My faith has been my saving grace. My God is Good and Faithful!

Completing this degree program has not only been a process of understanding Black women's work life experiences in Canadian labour union organizations, it has also been about learning more about myself and Black Peoples, about unmasking and understanding historical occurrences that still impact mine and Black Peoples' experiences today, researching and understanding the theories that provide answers to the silencing and erasure of Black Peoples and in particular, Black women's experiences, grappling with fabrications and falsehoods propagated by the imperialist and colonial machineries that still exist today, trying to reconcile deceit with hidden truths and determining ways forward without drowning in the crushing blows of hatred that systems of domination continue to spread in today's society. More importantly, through this process, I have met, and learnt from, other Black women leaders of Canadian labour union organizations, some who are currently involved in, and others who have retired but still serve to champion and femtor[16] future leaders of Canadian labour union organizations. I am so grateful for having had this opportunity!

At the outset, it had not been a conscious intention to include creative pieces in this thesis. Though, through my experiences, and based on experiences of the women I represent and support through my workplace advocacy work, and experiences shared by research

participants, I was Blessed with pieces to share. Some of the pieces that have been included in this thesis came through my participation in **Women of Courage**, an initiative of CultureLink Services (Toronto), highlighting the experiences of women of racially oppressed groups who emigrated to Canada. Works produced through this program, including mine, were part of an art exhibition that took place at the Gibson House Museum (April 12-May 7, 2023) and Montgomery's Inn Museum (May 10-June 4, 2023). Other pieces resulted from my experiences. I have always had a creative side, but the conditions of the workplace do not allow for, or recognize, creativity unless one is fully engaged in work that allows one the authority to do so. More importantly, the daily lived experiences and work life experiences of Black women *presses down*, *crushes* and *diminishes* creativity. Thus, the creative parts of me were suppressed for many years. I trust the pieces that have been included will resonate and inspire.

Notes

[1] Adinkra Symbols & Meanings (2016-2024). Gye Nyame, an Akan symbol that means "Except God" and references the omnipotence and supremacy of God in everything.

[2] Montego Bay Cultural Centre (n.d.). Jamaican National Symbols. The Jamaican Coat of Arms (1962) – **Out of Many One People**. Features a Taino male and female (or Arawak People who were indigenous to Jamaica) and acknowledges the many cultures who settled in, and inhabit, the country.

[3] Archer, Lyndsay. Blog. "Tallawah is a Jamaican Patois word that means to be strong, fearless, strong-willed, and not to be underestimated. It is pronounced exactly as it is spelled: /Talla-wa/."

[4] Montego Bay Cultural Centre (n.d.). Jamaican National Symbols. The Doctor Bird or Swallow Tail humming bird is the National Bird of Jamaica. The Arawaks believed that these birds had magical powers.

[5] Adinkra Symbols & Meanings (2016-2024). Nkonsonkonson or chain, the Akan symbol to mean unity and community.

[6] Adinkra Symbols & Meanings (2016-2024), https://www.adinkrasymbols.org/symbols/sankofa/. "*Sankofa* is an expression in the Twi language of Ghana whose literal meaning is "Go back and get it!" It is actually a fusion of the two words in the Akan second-person imperative sentence, "San kɔfa!" Its corresponding Akan proverb is, "Se wo were fi na wosan kofa a yenkyiri." To wit, it is not taboo to go back and get something after you have forgotten it. More literally, it means if you forget and you go back to get it, there is nothing wrong with it…The mythical bird effortfully bending its neck to reach back for the abandoned but precious egg signifies the diligence required to take due cognizance of the past to give it its proper place in the present. Sankofa is a gentle admonition that if even in our arrogance we overlook the gems from the past, when we come to our senses we should be humble enough to retrace our steps and make amends."

[7] The word "people" normally means more than one person. However, much like the construction of race, and the use of racial ideologies to create hierarchies, language is used to silence, reduce, minimize, ignore and dismiss marginalized and racially oppressed groups by grouping them into one category, thereby erasing differences. In this

paper, "s" is added to the word, "people", to acknowledge that such categories are comprised of many distinct groups and ethnicities, i.e., this group of "Peoples" is not homogeneous.

[8] The term "plus sized" has been widely adopted to refer to people with a larger physique. However, this term is used to imply that those in larger bodies are not "normal" as they do not fit the standards of fashion and beauty that are commonly considered acceptable and are often juxtaposed against those who are "thin", creating divisions and othering people with a larger physique. I choose to use the term "full-figured".

[9] I reluctantly use the word "privilege" as it is often associated with the self-assigned dominant ruling class, and the privileges I may enjoy are certainly not equivalent to those enjoyed by the dominant class. Though I must admit, the freedoms I have in this time and place that have been afforded by ancestors and civil libertarians who came before me, are indeed privileges that I would not have had access to in a different era.

[10] The words "racialized" or "people of colour" are used in this context to reflect organizational policies and practices that generally collect and reduce persons from differently identifying racial groups into one collective so as to ignore differences. These words may appear in parts of this paper, but I have determined what I believe to be a more apt phrase: "people from racially oppressed groups". While there may be mentions of "racialized", "people of colour", or "racially oppressed groups", the discussion of the paper is primarily focused on Black women.

[11] Union release time (urt) and union duty leave (udl) are periods of time that union representatives can use to be away from their employer's work (paid work) to attend to union business (udl) or to attend to matters that jointly relate to the union and the employer (urt). These provisions are negotiated in collective agreements, and the Union reimburses the employer according to negotiated terms. Oftentimes, these provisions provide a limited number of hours to participate in certain roles or activities only and none in others. Also, many union leaders who are not engaged in full-time paid union work are accountable to the employer for the completion of their paid work. In other words, time taken from their employer paid work to attend a union related meeting, means returning to the paid work to ensure it is completed.

[12] This phenomenon has come to be known as working "off the side of my desk". I was introduced to the phrase "off the side of my desk" by Black women unionists of the Canadian Chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), meaning work that is additional to an existing exhaustive workload and other responsibilities, and is often unpaid.

[13] Quantified, based on the number of hours worked, as equivalent to work normally completed by more than two employees.

[14] See Note #12.

[15] Though Canada has two official languages – English and French, French is enforced as the primary language in Québec. In Québec's culture, language is symptomatic of deeper issues. My siblings and I studied French while in Jamaica, so it was not completely foreign to us when we arrived. However, how language is used in Québec to divide the people was.

[16] Female mentor. Another term I was introduced to by Black women unionists of the Canadian Chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU).

Poem: Pressing Against the Margins

Paula Gowdie
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Black
Woman
This is me as seen by others
Reduced, minimized, dismissed, ignored,
overlooked, undermined,
By their perceptions, fears, ignorance.
Misogynoir,
Microaggressions,
Gaslighting,
Exploited,
Excluded.
Mental stress and other health effects never
acknowledged.
Scientific and legal racism still practised as
truth.
Workplace policies drafted with no real
change.
EDI reviews and reports collecting dust on a
shelf.
But I press, against the margins, daily.
Fighting for my place in history.
Fighting for recognition.
Fighting for my rights daily as a human
being.

But I will not go quietly into the night.
For I was created for great things.
Fearlessly and wonderfully predestinated.
I press against the margins, daily.

I am a Black Woman!
Seizing those qualities with power.
Holding tight to the wisdom of those who
came before me.

With insights learnt through my daily lived
experiences.
Striving to create meaningful, better paths
for those who come after me.
I fight against the margins, daily.

Embrace your differences!
Celebrate your blemishes, your beauty,
every part of you that makes you who you
are.
We are human, not perfect.
Develop your ways of seeing.
Emancipate your vision, your ways of
thinking.
About yourself, your world, those around
you.
Asking questions, seeking answers.
Continuously striving for improvements,
better ways of being as part of the greater
community.
Press against the margins, daily,
Tiring as it seems.

Striving for a better world for yourself, your
colleagues, your neighbours, your children,
grandchildren, community.
For without these efforts there is only
stagnation.
Press against the margins to create
possibilities!
Press against the margins for a better
future!
Press against the margins daily!
Because we were created for great things.

CHAPTER 1: LAYING THE FOUNDATION

A. Introduction

Available research shows that Black women[17] experience racism (race-based), sexism (gender-based), as well as other forms of discrimination. Additionally, and more significantly, race is predominant in the lives of Black women (Kimberlé Crenshaw[18], 1989; Philomena Essed, 1991 in Patricia Hill Collins, 1992; Katherine M. Bell, 2018; Lorne Foster, Stella Park, Hugh McCague, Marcelle-Anne Fletcher and Jackie Sikdar, 2023), and racism and sexism are intricately connected and intersect to complicate Black women's everyday life experiences. As such, race and race-based discrimination, or anti-Black racism, play a crucial role in the experiences that Black women face in their daily lived experiences, including in work[19], employment[20] and in the workplace[21].

The experiences that Black women endure in their work life, i.e., in work, employment and in the workplace environment, and the impact of those experiences that extends beyond the workplace, i.e., their **work life experiences**, are influenced and intensified by their race and gender. E. L. Bell (1990 in Danielle D. Dickens and Ernest L. Chavez, 2018) refers to the discrimination that Black women face as "double-marginalization" (760), which is also experienced in the workplace (Johnnie Hamilton-Mason, Joyce E. Everett and Camille J. Hall, 2009 in Camille J. Hall, Joyce E. Everett and Johnnie Hamilton-Mason, 2012:208) where policies, procedures, processes and practices propagate and institutionalize barriers for women, and particularly Black women. Race-based and gender-based discrimination result in stress that affects the daily experiences of Black women (Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:209). Moreover, the effects of the intersection of race and gender, and particularly how race complicates the daily lived experiences of Black women, are often excluded and overlooked,

and results in the perpetuation of biased evidence and the further marginalization of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989:139-140).

Furthermore, systems of domination, such as racial ideologies, neoliberalism, organizational policies, processes, procedures and practices, scientific racism and legal racism, are entrenched in Canadian society to maintain the subjugation of certain groups of people for the dominance of others. Despite advancements and gains attained through civil rights and social movements, societal improvements and the implementation of Affirmative Action in the United States in the 1960s[22] and the Employment Equity Act[23] in Canada in 1986, mechanisms of oppression are still very much ingrained in societal norms and systems. Workplaces, or organizations of employment, are microcosms of the society in which they exist, employing the same systems of domination and erasure adopted by that society. Labour union organizations (unions)[24,25] – workplaces – employ the use of paid and voluntary (unpaid) labour, and are generally promoted as, and perceived to be, *the* (emphasis added) exception to this rule. Unions also purport to espouse values of equity and fairness, to fight for the rights of *all* (emphasis added) their members across the table to employers and to champion the rights of equity seeking groups, but are these same principles embedded in the structures and policies, procedures, processes and practices of, and practiced in the operation of unions? If so, the work life experiences of Black women leaders[26] who are active in unions would be better and more positive than those of Black women in non-union organizations.

Pre-COVID19 pandemic and the 2020 global racial uprising, literature reviews revealed that the work life experiences of Black women in Canada and globally are highly underresearched, as little research or information is available. Additionally, very little information was available as it relates to Canadian unions and specifically, the involvement of, and work life experiences of Black women in unions. Multiple searches produced a small

number of Canadian Black women union leaders and only one Black woman, Jan Simpson[27], who in 2019, achieved the President's position in a traditionally male-dominant Canadian national labour union – the first Black woman since Canada's formation as a country – 149 years at the time of Jan Simpson's victory.

The COVID19 pandemic, and more significantly, the 2020 global racial uprising, served to create some space for peoples of racially oppressed groups and marginalized peoples, and particularly Black women, to tell their stories in non-academic publications such as Forbes, Medium, LinkedIn, Harvard Business Review, in academia and in some academic publications, though information and research about Black women's lived experiences and work life experiences is still very limited. This lack of available information can be explained in part by the historical silencing of the stories of women and marginalized peoples by using traditional research practices (Marjorie L. DeVault, 1996; Margaret Hunter, 2002). In the interest of consciousness-raising with the objectives of social activism/social change and self-determination (DeVault, 1996; Joan M. Anderson, 2013; Bev Gatenby and Maria Humphries, 2000; Ruth Nicholls, 2009; Gowdie, 2022a), this research investigates this phenomenon by examining the work life experiences of Black women leaders who are active, or were previously active (now retired), in Canadian unions as told by these same Black women.

Using the qualitative methodology of phenomenology and theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and intersectionality, and everyday racism, this research examines questions such as what does available literature say about the work life experiences of Black women in the labour market and how do we explain the lack of research about the work life experiences of Black women. More specifically, questions specific to the labour movement include what are the work life experiences of Black women who are actively engaged in paid and voluntary leadership roles in Canadian union, what factors influence the work life experiences of Black

women in the Canadian labour movement, what motivates Black women to seek and engage in leadership roles in Canadian unions, and what are the impacts of the work life experiences of Black women. Available research will be referenced though discussion will rely primarily on information from North America, i.e., the United States of America (America) and any available Canadian content[28].

This research and research process embrace feminist and anti-racist epistemologies in order to generate stories and research from the standpoint, i.e., experiences of the particular individuals (DeVault, 1996) being researched, i.e., Black women leaders who are active, or were previously active (now retired), in Canadian labour union organizations. In other words, this research aims to contribute to the subject matter by producing knowledge (Sandra Harding, 1987 in Hunter, 2002) about Black women union leaders' work life experiences and their significant impacts that extend beyond the workplace as told by Black women and making this information visible and available to others.

B. Available Literature About Black Women's Work Life Experiences in Employment

Women in general experience gender bias, or gender-based discrimination, in the workplace, where assumptions and prejudices about gender are used intentionally (consciously) and unintentionally (unconsciously) to disadvantage women in various ways. For example, women earn less than their male counterparts (Ontario Equal Pay Coalition, 2022; Kim Parker and Cary Funk, 2017) and often must defer their own aspirations to assume socialized care work for their families and communities, and daily deal with competing priorities of care work and their workplace work ("work-life-balance", Sheffy Kolade, 2022; Sharon Peake, 2021). Regardless of education or skills attained, women are streamed into positions that are classed as women's work, e.g., domestic work, retail work, health care, clerical work or teaching ("pink

collar", Julie McMullin and Josh Curtis, 2017:194-195), their competence is questioned, their work undervalued, and they are judged as being feminine or masculine (Madeline E. Heilman, 2012). They are overlooked for promotions for various reasons, including those already mentioned, but specifically on their prospects of bearing children whether or not they want, or choose, to have children ("motherhood penalty", Rachel Diamond, 2023; Sarah Kaplan in Canadian Women's Foundation, 2022), and are underrepresented in leadership roles (LeanIn.Org and McKinsey and Company, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024).

Black women experience gender-based discrimination but their experiences are *magnified* and *multiplied* (emphasis added) by race-based discrimination daily in all aspects of their lives. In other words, race-based discrimination, or anti-Black racism, complicates all aspects of Black women's daily lived experiences. Stereotypes promote and support the **angry Black woman trope**[29] (Wendy Ashley, 2014:28; Woman Abuse Council of Toronto, n.d.:11) and other tropes that describe Black women as "aggressive, unfeminine, undesirable, overbearing, attitudinal, bitter, mean, and hell raising" (J. Malveaux, 1989; M. Morgan and D. Bennett, 2006 in Ashley, 2014:28), promoted in the media as "tart tongued, neck rolling, and loud mouthed" (V. E. Jones, 2004 in Ashley, 2014:28) and having attitudes such as "rage, control, desperation, materialism, shame, and cynicism" (A. B. Chapman, 2001 in Ashley, 2014:28). Morgan and Bennett (2006 in Ashley, 2014) further elaborate that "the angry Black woman stereotype is pervasive and parasitic; it affects Black women's self-esteem and how they are viewed by others" (28). These same stereotypes influence the treatment of Black women in shopping experiences, healthcare, immigration, entertainment, childcare, housing, the legal system, the education system, financial systems, government institutions, on public transit, in neighbourhoods, automobile transactions and repairs (mechanics) and the general public, in advocating for their families and children, finding work, in the ways in which they experience

employment and in their workplaces and so much more. Afua Cooper (2000) summarizes "Black women […] are reminded of their race in even the most mundane situation" (39). Furthermore, race intersects with gender and other identities that Black women may have to further compound and confound their daily lived experiences (Dionne Brand, 1987; "interlocking systems of oppression", Hill Collins, 1990 in Cooper, 2000).

For Black women, race-based and gender-based discrimination present in the workplace "in the form of stereotypes, excessive demands, an absence of mentoring, exclusions from work [office] cliques, being ignored and/or harassed, and assumptions that they are incompetent" (Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:211; Brand, 1987). Race-based discrimination manifests institutionally, i.e., through "organizational policies and procedures that unfairly restrict the opportunities of Black Americans or that perpetuate advantages or privileges for the majority group" and through interpersonal prejudices, which are "negative beliefs, attitudes and feelings toward Black Americans and actions and behavior that are based on them" (Diane Hughes and Mark A. Dodge, 1997:584 in Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:211). These types of treatment result in work stressors for Black women that not only affect the daily work life experiences of Black women, they also impact Black women's lives outside the workplace and employment.

Available research about Black women's work life experiences includes work stressors, barriers to, and challenges in, employment and health impacts.

1. Work Stressors

Race-based and gender-based discrimination result in work stressors that Black women experience in employment[30] and in the workplace[31]. Work stressors that Black women experience "reflect their distinct history, sociocultural experience, and position in society" (Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:209) "and differ in magnitude and content from those of

White women, White men, and African American men" (C. Jones and K. Shorter-Gooden, 2003

in Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:209). In other words, stressors that Black women

experience at work and in employment are substantively different than those experienced by

others as Black women are more easily targeted and, thus treated differently based on their

race and gender (Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:209).

1.1. Institutional and Interpersonal Work Stressors

Work stressors include Black women earning less than their non-Black counterparts,

being given excessive amounts of work and working longer hours than their non-Black

counterparts (Annie S. Barnes, 1989:5; Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:211; United

Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, 2016). Gender-based and

race-based discrimination influences the type of positions that Black women choose[32], and their

pay rates and the benefits that they receive while employed (D. Brown and V. Keith, 2003 in

Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:209). Race-based discrimination also influences the

type of work that Black women are assigned to including "the heaviest, dirtiest, poorly paid, and

least secure jobs in relation to the work assigned to White workers" ("bias in work allocation",

Tania Das Gupta, 1996:38; Brand, 1987).

Black women often experience harassment or are ignored, are often excluded from

groups and often do not have the support of their managers (Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason,

2012:211). Black women are significantly underrepresented in certain positions, e.g., senior

leadership positions, directors, CEOs, other leadership roles (LeanIn.Org and McKinsey and

Company, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024), and Black women are underrepresented in

certain workplaces, e.g., corporations and academia.

Black women are also more likely to face everyday discrimination and more challenges

to promotion in the workplace, frequently suffer poor work life experiences and are more

inclined to leave their place of employment[33] than non-Black women (LeanIn.Org and McKinsey and Company, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024). Moreover, though Black women's work life experiences are underresearched, recent information shows that the previously outlined conditions remain the same for workplaces in Canada and the United States of America (Camille Lloyd, 2021; Hawa Y. Mire, 2020; Emma Hinchliffe, 2020; Sheila Block, Grace-Edward Galabuzi and Ricardo Tranjan, 2019).

Moreover, Black women experience the "objectification of their hair and their bodies; being the only Black woman in the room; and feeling that their presence and position were being policed" (Serena Robinson and Dr. Lesley Nelson-Addy, 2024:9). Black women also must "constantly 'prove [themselves]', to dispel the myth that [they are] not good enough, because of the way [their] racialised and gendered identity is viewed by colleagues" (Robinson and Nelson-Addy, 2024:11).

Furthermore, these and other work life experiences can have significant physical, emotional, mental and psychological health impacts on Black women, making them susceptible to various health conditions (D. Griffith, H. Neighbors and J. Johnson, 2009; S. Mercer, P. Heacock and C. Beck, 1993 in Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:210; Diane R. Brown, Verna M. Keith, James S. Jackson and Lawrence D. Gary, 2003; David Williams, 1999 in Brea L. Perry, Kathi L.H. Harp and Carrie B. Oser, 2013).

1.2. Coping with Work Stress: Being on Guard and Code Switching

The intersection of gender-based and race-based discrimination, or "double bind" (Shametrice Davis and Kelly Brown, 2017:2), compounds the inequities that Black women face and must deal with daily. Black women struggle against stereotypes and misperceptions evidenced in interpersonal interactions and through organizational structures. They not only expend energy to prove their abilities and value, but they also expend energy in their attempts

to invalidate negative assumptions and misperceptions (Davis and Brown, 2017). They are constantly in a state of being **on guard** while navigating the workplace and practicing **code switching**, setting aside their authentic selves to conform to imperialistic standards of professionalism (Sauceda Kramer and Atkins, 2023; Taylyn Washington-Harmon, 2022; McCluney, Robotham, Lee, Smith and Durkee, 2019). McCluney, Robotham, Lee, Smith and Durkee (2019) elaborate on the reasons that code switching is used in the workplace:

1. "For [B]lack people[s] and other racial minorities, downplaying membership in a stigmatized racial group helps increase perceptions of professionalism and the likelihood of being hired.

2. Avoiding negative stereotypes associated with [B]lack racial identity (e.g., incompetence, laziness) helps [B]lack employees be seen as leaders.

3. Expressing shared interests with members of dominant groups promotes similarity with powerful organizational members, which raises the chance of promotions because individuals tend to affiliate with people they perceive as similar" (3).

Code switching results in significant social and psychological impacts. According to Davis and Brown (2017)

"[a]t some point, the process of working to disprove becomes so automatic that the negative assumptions may become internalized in that [Black women] are unable to separate that which they work against from what they believe about their own abilities […and they] do so with significant implications from mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing standpoints (Hinton, 2009; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012)" (7).

McCluney et al. (2019) elaborate:

"[d]ownplaying one's racial group can generate hostility from in-group members,

increasing the likelihood that those who code-switch will be accused of "acting

[W]hite." Seeking to avoid stereotypes is hard work, and can deplete cognitive

resources and hinder performance. Feigning commonality with coworkers

also reduces authentic self-expression and contributes to burnout" (3).

Constantly being on guard and practicing code switching contribute to the emotional tax

(Dnika J. Travis, Jennifer Thorpe-Moscon and Courtney McCluney, 2016), Black Tax or Black

Fatigue, experienced by Black women in work, employment and in the workplace. Travis,

Thorpe-Moscon and McCluney (2016) describe emotional tax:

"the heightened experience of being different from peers at work because of

your gender and/or race/ethnicity and the associated detrimental effects on

health, wellbeing, and the ability to thrive at work […and] can deplete Black

employees' sense of well-being by making them feel that they have to be "on

guard," disrupting sleep patterns, reducing their sense of "psychological safety,"

and diminishing their ability to contribute at work" (2).

Mary-Frances Winters (in Patricia Sauceda Kramer and Kiana Atkins, 2023) defines Black

Fatigue as "repeated variations of stress that results in extreme exhaustion and causes mental,

physical, and spiritual maladies that are passed down from generation to generation".

2. Streaming Practices

In employment and the workplace, much like in education systems, stereotypes of race

and gender inherent in personal prejudices, laws and organizational policies, procedures,

processes and practices are utilized in employment and hiring practices to **stream** or direct

certain groups of people towards certain activities and outcomes without regard to competence

or qualifications. Anti-Black racism, gender bias and sexism are used in employment and the workplace to stream Black women in various ways.

Historically, Black women were agricultural and domestic workers (Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei in Nina Banks, 2019; Jennifer L. Morgan, 2004:69; Brand, 1987). Post slavery, these types of jobs were in private, or less regulated spaces, with little or no protections and benefits. With the rise of neoliberalism in the global North, in order to support the survival of families, women needed to participate in the labour market. This created a greater need for workers in the home to care for children, to cook meals and do the housework. In the twentieth century, Black women would only be hired as domestic workers (Jacqueline Jones, 1985 in Banks, 2019; Brand, 1987) as racist practices were implemented through laws and various organizations, such as professional associations, governments and unions, to exclude Black Peoples from obtaining good paying jobs. Black women had few options but to seek out jobs that were available to them, which were low paying jobs that involved "cooking, cleaning, and caregiving [… and] mothering" (Banks, 2019; "In Service work", Brand, 1987) and low skilled positions, or positions that require high emotional capital and yield low pay rates and benefits, such as "teachers, counselors, social workers and nurses which are easily phased out" (Elizabeth Nunez, 1978:14 in Barnes, 1989:5; "institutionalised domestic work", Brand, 1987). The West Indian Domestic Scheme (1955-1967) of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration is an example of a Canadian government program that targeted and encouraged single women from Caribbean countries to emigrate to Canada to work as "domestic servants" (Marishana Mabusela, 2021; Government of Canada, 2022). Also, J. Reitz, L. Calzavara and D. Dasko, 1981 in Agnes Calliste, 1996) documented that Caribbean women in the workforce in Toronto, Canada "were over-concentrated in nursing (except in supervisory positions), nurses' aide positions, orderly work and in other segregated occupations" (362).

Additionally, Black women are streamed into certain employment categories and are excluded from particular types of employment, thereby limiting their earning potential, increasing their risk of obtaining work that is more precarious than work attained by men and experiencing increased levels of unemployment (Hughes and Dodge, 1997 and U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 in Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:208). In 2016, the unemployment rate of Black women in Canada was 12.2%, twice the rate of non-racialized women (6.4%) and Black women earned 59 cents to every dollar that non-racialized men earned (Statistics Canada, 2016 in Jen Katshunga, Notisha Massaquoi, Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit, City of Toronto, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and Justine Wallace, 2016).

Moreover, gender-based and race-based discrimination also influence the type of positions that Black women choose[34], their pay rates and the benefits that they receive while employed (D. Brown and V. Keith, 2003 in Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:209). According to Block, Galabuzi and Tranjan (2019), in Canada in 2016, discrimination in the workplace continues to be gendered and racialized,

> "men and women who identified as [B]lack […] had higher unemployment rates
> and bigger wage gaps than the average for all racialized workers […[B]lack
> women: 12.2%, [B]lack men: 12.8% compared to non-racialized men: 8.2% and
> non-racialized women: 6.4%]" (5-6, 11).

According to Sheila Block and Grace Edward Galabuzi (2023), these racialized and gendered gaps persist in Canada.

Furthermore, given that race is used to influence the type of work that Black women attain, to exclude Black women from employment opportunities and high paying positions and to limit Black women's earning potential regardless of education, qualifications or any other achievements, race also negatively impacts the everyday experiences of Black women (Essed,

1991:39 in McMullin and Curtis, 2017) both in and outside the workplace. The ability to have a family and establish and maintain healthy relationships at work and outside of work is just one example of this reality. Race also limits Black women's access to opportunities and services, such as timely and appropriate medical care and health treatments, affordable medication, affordable housing, exercise and other recreational programs, education, childcare, healthy food options, banking, voting/participating in the political arena, safety and security, transportation and much more.

3. Hiring Practices

Aptitude and intelligence tests are used to label Black women as not being qualified for certain positions though no correlation has been found between these tests and their ability to predict individuals' abilities at being successful (Joe R. Feagin and Clairece Booher Feagin, 1978:58 in Barnes, 1989:4). These practices result in more and more Black women working in service and clerical positions (Banks, 2019; Frances M. Beal, 1957 [*sic*]:7 in Barnes, 1989:4; Brand, 1987).

Additionally, the names of job applicants are scrutinized for the way they sound or read regardless of qualifications or skills of the applicants, and names that sound Black or ethnic yield lower call back rates than applicants with White sounding names. Applicants are also evaluated based on the address noted in their application. Greater success rate in attaining employment is attributed to applicants from preferred and wealthier neighbourhoods (M. Bertrand and S. Mullainathan, 2004; W. A. Darity, Jr. and P. L. Mason, 1998). These strategies have resulted in some Black job seekers stripping their résumés of "minority racial cues", a practice known as "whitening the résumé" (M. Luo, 2009b in Sonia K. Kang, Katherine A. DeCelles, Andras Tilcsik and Sora Jun, 2016:470).

Other strategies used to exclude Black women from work, include rejecting/excluding Black women from job competitions after meeting[35] with them and having identified their race, and requiring government licensing, professional certification/specialized training or college diplomas and university degrees (Marcus Alexis, 1974:73-74 and Feagin and Feagin, 1978:55 in Barnes, 1989:4). Also, the concept of "professionalism" is used as a way to exclude Black women from employment and advancement opportunities. According to Leah Goodridge (2022),

> "professionalism is a standard with a set of beliefs about how one should operate in the workplace. While professionalism seemingly applies to everyone, it is used to widely police and regulate people of color in various ways including hair, tone, and food scents.[5] Thus, it is not merely that there is a double standard in how professionalism applies; it is that the standard itself is based on a set of beliefs grounded in racial subordination and white supremacy" (41).

She further elaborated in Janice Gassam Asare (2022) that professionalism is a "mechanism to put people of color in place in the workplace" especially when Black women push back against misogynoir.

Moreover, it is commonly assumed that attaining higher levels of education will improve individuals' rate of success at obtaining employment or promotions and higher pay. However, this has not been true for Black women as the literature illustrates. Barnes (1989) indicate "based on 1960 census data, Reed (1970:22-28) noted that [B]lack female teachers had more education than [W]hite female teachers, 'but lost out income-wise, relative to [W]hite female teachers'" (4). In research conducted by Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason (2012), participants acknowledged that "education and professional training did not guarantee career progression" (214). Additionally, in 1992, 42% of African American employees aged 25 and older had

completed some college, i.e., "some college, an associate degree, or a bachelor's degree and higher". That number had increased to 63% by 2018 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2018). However, the unemployment rate for Black Peoples in 2018 was 5.1% compared to 2.9% for White people (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2019b). Moreover, Foster et al. (2023) found that "Black women are more likely than White women to be unemployed or underemployed, despite having higher levels of education: 8.8% of Black women with university degrees are unemployed, compared to 5.7% of [W]hite women with high school diplomas" (9).

4. Institutional Policies and Practices

Despite the establishment of laws to support gainful employment and fair employment practices, in the workplace Black women experience discrimination based on institutionalized practices and interpersonal prejudices (Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:211). Institutionalized racism is defined as the "organizational policies and procedures that unfairly restrict the opportunities of Black Americans or that perpetuate advantages or privileges for the majority group" (Hughes and Dodge, 1997:584 in Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:211). Institutional racism embeds historical beliefs and assumptions about Black Peoples into approved and endorsed processes of organizations that normalizes prejudices and discrimination, such as hiring practices that advantage the hiring of, or promotion of, White employees over that of Black employees.

Black women earn less than their non-Black counterparts (Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:211; Barnes, 1989:5) and all other employees, including Black men, which is used to "exploit [them…as] an abundant, cheap source of labour" (Elizabeth F. Hood, 1978:46 in Barnes, 1989:4). On October 21, 2016, the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent released a statement of their preliminary findings of their assessment

of "the forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, Afrophobia and related intolerance" faced by people of African descent living in Canada. Some of their findings include:

> "The unemployment rate for African Canadian women is 11% compared to 7% for the general Canadian population and when employed African Canadian women are making 37% less than white men and 15% less than their white female counterparts. 25% of African Canadian women are living below the Canadian poverty line compared to 6% for white Canadian women. By extension their children are living in poverty at the unprecedented rate of 33% for children of Caribbean heritage and 47% for continental African children compared to 18% of [W]hite Canadian children living below the poverty line. African Canadian women and girls are reportedly targeted by the police and are increasingly in contact with the criminal justice system as one of the fastest growing prison populations" (United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, 2016).

In 2016 in Canada, though the participation rate of Black women in the labour market was 66.1%, which was higher than the participation rate of non-racialized women, the unemployment rate of Black women was 12.2%, twice as that of non-racialized women (6.4%), and Black women earned 59 cents to every dollar that non-racialized men earned (Statistics Canada, 2016 in Katshunga, Massaquoi, Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit, City of Toronto, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) and Justine Wallace, 2016). 2022 statistics have provided some improvements though improvements continue to favour White workers. According to Block and Galabuzi (2023):

> "Racialized and Black workers [in Canada] continue to have higher unemployment rates and lower employment rates than [W]hite workers.

Earnings of racialized and Black workers continue to lag those of [W]hite

workers. In 2022, on a weekly basis, racialized men earned 90 cents for every

dollar that [W]hite men earned while Black men earned 77 cents for every dollar

that [W]hite men earned. Racialized women earned 71 cents for every dollar that

[W]hite men earned, Black women earned 68 cents for every dollar that [W]hite

men earned, and [W]hite women earned 80 cents for every dollar that [W]hite

men earned" (5).

D. Parke Gibson (1978:20,22 in Barnes, 1989) further elaborates that "while [W]hite income

comes primarily from employment in the managerial, administrative, professional, and technical

classification, [B]lack income comes primarily from the service workers classification" (4).

Based on racism and sexism, Black women face challenges to attaining higher paying

positions, accessing opportunities for advancement, receiving pay increases and being given low

performance evaluations (Barnes, 1989:5). Black women are also underrepresented in

management, professional and white-collar positions (LeanIn.Org and McKinsey and Company,

2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024). Statistics from the 2015 Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S.

Department of Labor, indicate that although women held 52% of management, professional

and white-collar positions, only 9% of these positions were held by Black women (Freeman

Brown, 2017). The 2019 figures show that 51.8% of women held management, professional

and white-collar positions but only 9.6% of these positions were held by Black women (Bureau

of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2019a).

5. Interpersonal Prejudices

According to Hughes and Dodge (1997:584 in Hall et al., 2012), "interpersonal prejudice

refers to the negative beliefs, attitudes and feelings toward Black Americans and actions and

behavior that are based on them" (211). Interpersonal prejudices manifest against Black

women in the workplace through the treatment of individuals, which is based on perceptions, individual (subjective) interpretations of poorly or vaguely written policies, procedures, processes and practices, racial ideologies, stereotypes, examples modelled by senior leaders in the organization and individuals' own sense of privilege and position in the organization and society in general.

In addition to stereotypes, Black women experience other types of treatment rooted in discrimination in employment and in the workplace, such as misogynoir, racial and sexist[36] microaggressions, gaslighting and racelighting[37], less freedom and rights and terrible conditions of work. For example, Black women are given excessive amounts of work and work longer hours than their non-Black counterparts (Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:211; Barnes, 1989:5), experience poor treatment, a lack of support by their managers, and insignificant work, or what some would call **grunt work**, i.e., work that is perceived to be undesirable or meaningless by others. Black women also experience in the workplace "excessive demands, an absence of mentoring, exclusions from work [office] cliques, being ignored and/or harassed, and assumptions that they are incompetent" (Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:211; Anderson J. Franklin, Nancy Boyd-Franklin and Shalonda Kelly, 2006; Shelly P. Harrell, 2000; Derald W. Sue, Kevin Nadal, Christina Capodilupo, Annie Lin, Gina C. Torino and David P. Rivera, 2008 in Perry, Harp and Oser, 2013). Calliste (1996) also noted that assertive Black women health care workers "are the first to be suspended, demoted and dismissed" (361). These discriminatory treatments can result in poisoned work environments and isolation, as well as negative health effects for Black women (Perry, Harp and Oser, 2013; Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:209).

Racial stereotypes and assumptions that are used against Black women in the workplace include being incompetent and/or intellectually inferior, angry or hostile, loud and unladylike.

As such, Black women often experience harassment or are ignored, are often excluded from groups, often do not have the support of their managers (Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:211) and are "perceived as unfeminine and unacceptable" when responding to acts of social injustice (Ashley, 2014:29). Moreover, Black women are excessively scrutinized and surveilled by their colleagues and employers about the ways they speak, their hair and hair styles, fashions, behaviours and lifestyles. Discussions take place around them as they are spoken over or interrupted while speaking, they are talked down to as if they lack intelligence, and their ideas are co-opted by others without being given any credit. They are gaslighted. They are tone policed[38] and always *on guard*, constantly managing themselves to align with imperialistic norms of professionalism with *code switching* (Sauceda Kramer and Atkins, 2023; Working Chance, 2022; Courtney L. McCluney, Kathrina Robotham, Serenity Lee, Richard Smith and Myles Durkee, 2019; Dnika J. Travis and Jennifer Thorpe-Moscon, 2018; Carol Parker Terhune, 2005). Furthermore, Black women are significantly underrepresented in certain positions and workplaces, are more likely to face everyday discrimination and more challenges to promotion in the workplace, frequently experience poor work life experiences in the workplace and are more inclined to leave their place of employment than non-Black women (LeanIn.Org and McKinsey and Company, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024).

6. Raising Concerns of Anti-Black Racism

Given the historical treatment of Black Peoples and the existing inherent societal norms that promote and support oppression, anti-Black racism in the workplace is often poorly addressed and results in Black women being excluded from participation in work activities, groups or access to promotions, and becoming targets ("marginalization", Essed, 1991 in Hill Collins, 1992:791; Das Gupta, 1996:35). Black women are also treated with suspicion, as being "dishonest and lazy", especially as it relates to illness and disabilities ("lack of accommodation",

Das Gupta, 1996:38) and are heavily surveilled and scrutinized ("excessive monitoring", Das Gupta, 1996:36). Moreover, Black women are used by managers and supervisors to demonstrate to other workers examples of workers who will not be tolerated ("scapegoating", Das Gupta, 1996:36). Das Gupta (1996) elaborates "[w]hat would be seen as "constructive criticism" in White workers is seen as "insubordination" in workers of colour" (35-36).

Black women raising concerns or asking questions are seen as challenging the status quo, challenging the power structure or as being *too sensitive* (emphasis added). They are **racelighted**. These women are now addressed as problems, as *difficult* (emphasis added), "unable to get along with others," or as "troublemakers" (Donna Young, 1992:24 in Das Gupta, 1996:37) and blamed for the challenges rather than treated as victims ("victim blaming", Luke J. Wood and Frank Harris III, 2021:11; "blaming the victim", Das Gupta, 1996:37). Their claims are dismissed or considered misplaced, irrelevant, nonsensical, unfounded ("problematization", Essed, 1991 in Hill Collins, 1992:791). After all, how could employers be racists or implement racist practices when they have hired a few handpicked employees from racially oppressed groups, and specifically, Black women ("containment", Essed, 1991 in Hill Collins, 1992:791; "tokenism", Das Gupta, 1996:40).

Organizational policies, procedures, processes and practices are used to confront the claims of Black women, resulting in "reverse causality (i.e., victim blaming)" (Wood and Harris III, 2021:11). The claims are turned around on the Black women and now the women's work ethics are questioned regardless of their character, the quality of their work, or their work history with their current and other employers. They are silenced and alienated, then wrongfully disciplined or penalized in creative ways by their managers ("containment", Essed, 1991 in Hill Collins, 1992:791), the work environment becomes so toxic that they are demoralized, forced out, or are outright terminated from their jobs (Kira Page, 2018). Unless

Black women are able to effectively advocate for themselves or have champions who understand racism, and specifically, anti-Black racism, and can effectively advocate for them, or assist them in their situation, they try to deal with the issue themselves by *eating* their experiences, i.e., internalizing them, which results in a loss of confidence in themselves and those around them. They become alienated and distrustful and experience negative effects of racism that impact their work life experiences and other parts of their lives, such as their finances, housing, relationships, quality of life, and have significant physical, emotional and psychological health impacts on Black women that renders them susceptible to various health conditions. "The "Problem" Woman of Colour in the Workplace" tool infographic produced by COCo[39] (https://coco-net.org/problem-woman-colour-nonprofit-organizations/) summarizes the experiences that women of racially oppressed groups, including Black women, endure in the workplace:

The "Problem" Woman of Colour in the Workplace

COCo

white leadership

The Woman of Colour enters the organization

tokenized hire

Honeymoon
- the Woman of Colour feels welcomed, needed, and happy

repetitive injury & microaggressions

Reality
- the Woman of Colour points out issues within the organization
- she tries to work within the organization's structure and policies
- she pushes for accountability

denial of racism

Response
- the organization denies, ignores, and blames
- the responsibility of fixing the problem is placed on the Woman of Colour
- People of Colour are pitted against one another

Retaliation
- the organization decides that the woman of colour is the problem and targets her
- the organization labels the conflict as a "communication issue" or claims that she is not qualified or "not a good fit

target & attack

The Woman of Colour exits the organization

Adapted from "The Chronicle of the Problem Woman of Color in a Non-Profit" by the Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence
www.coco-net.org

7. Health Effects of Racism and Sexism

Available research indicates that racism and discrimination affect people psychologically and physiologically. For Black Peoples, "perceived racism is significantly associated with subjective well-being, psychological distress, depression, and substance abuse" (Tony N. Brown, David R. Williams, James S. Jackson, Harold W. Neighbors, Myriam Torres, Sherrill L. Sellers and Kendrick T. Brown, 2000; Tony N. Brown, Verna M. Keith, James S. Jackson and Lawrence D. Gary, 2003; Nicole T. Buchanan and Louise F. Fitzgerald, 2008; Ronald C. Kessler, Kristin D. Michelson and David R. Williams, 1999; Amy Schulz, Barbara A. Israel, David Williams, Edith Parker, Adam Becker and Sherman A. James, 2000; Robert M. Sellers, Cleopatra H. Caldwell, Karen H. Schmeelk-Cone and Marc A. Zimmerman, 2003 in Perry, Harp and Oser, 2013:3). Perceived racial discrimination is also associated with depression and anxiety (M. Berger and Z. Sarnyai, 2015:1-10 in Patricia Coogan, Karin Schon, Shanshan Li, Yvette Cozier, Traci Bethea, Lynn Rosenberg, 2020:7) and poorer sleep quality (TN ZE Bethea, N. Hess, N. Castro-Webb, Y.C. Cozier, L. Rosenberg, 2020 in Coogan et al, 2020:7). Additionally, depression and insomnia (J. Backhaus, K. Junghanns, J. Born, K. Hohaus, F. Faasch, F. Hohagen, 2006:1324-1330 in Coogan et al, 2020:7) are linked to memory impairment.

Moreover, acts of discrimination are associated with "increased risk for hypertension, infectious illnesses, and lifetime history of a range of physical diseases" (Saffron Karlsen and James Y. Nazroo, 2002; Nancy Krieger 1990; Naa Oyo A. Kwate, Heiddis B. Valdimarsdottir, Josephine S. Guevarra and Dana H. Bovbjerg, 2003 in Perry, Harp and Oser, 2013:3). Recent research indicates the increased risk for developing hypertension is also related to discrimination in the workplace (Jian Li, Timothy A. Matthews, Thomas Clausen, Reiner Rugulies, 2023).

Sexism is associated with poor psychological and physiological effects (Perry, Harp and Oser, 2013). Discrimination based on gender results in "psychological distress, anxiety, anger, obsessive-compulsivity, somatic symptoms, and depression" (Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:210; Elizabeth A. Klonoff, Hope Landrine and Robin Campbell, 2000; Hope Landrine, Elizabeth A. Klonoff, Jeannine Gibbs, Vickie Manning and Marlene Lund, 1995; Bonnie Moradi and Linda Mezydlo Subich, 2003 in Perry, Harp and Oser, 2013:3), "develop[ing] low self-esteem, or experience[ing] sexual dysfunction" (Barbara L. Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts, 1997; Melanie S. Hill and Ann R. Fischer, 2008; Holly B. Kozee, Tracy L. Tylka, Casey L. Augustus-Horvath and Angela Denchik, 2007 in Nadal and Haynes, 2012:92), developing feelings of "helplessness, passivity" (Toni Sands, 1998 in Nadal and Haynes, 2012:92), and women being more susceptible to developing eating orders and issues with their body image as they are "objectified in society" (Kozee et al., 2007 in Nadal and Haynes, 2012:92).

Sexism is also related to negative chronic health conditions, i.e., long-term illnesses that significantly impact a person's quality of life, such as "hypertension, migraine headaches and functional limitations" (Linda M. Goldenhar, Naomi G. Swanson, Joseph J. Hurrell, Avima Ruder and James Deddens, 1998; Nancy Krieger 2000; Hope Landrine and Elizabeth A. Klonoff, 1994 [*sic*]; Eliza K. Pavalko, Krysia N. Mossakowski and Vanessa J. Hamilton, 2003 in Perry, Harp and Oser, 2013:3-4).

7.1. Health Effects Specific to Black Women

Racism and sexism intersect to produce adverse health outcomes for Black women. Experiencing gender-based and race-based discrimination is particularly stressful (Y. St. Jean and J. Feagin, 1998 in Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:208) and manifests in various ways, but particularly in health effects for Black women (Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012; Perry, Harp and Oser, 2013; Nadal and Haynes, 2012). Black women are susceptible to

various health conditions, such as "shorter life spans than some other groups; have higher infant mortality rates; suffer higher rates of high blood pressure, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease; have high levels of emotional distress; and have a low sense of general well-being" (Griffith, Neighbors and Johnson, 2009; C. Jones and K. Shorter-Gooden, 2003 in Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:209), and have higher sickness and death rates related to almost all major illnesses than White women (National Center for Health Statistics, 2004 and Gillum, 1996 in Yvette Cozier, Julie R. Palmer, Nicholas J. Horton, Lisa Fredman, Lauren A. Wise and Lynn Rosenberg, 2006).

Specific to Black women, discrimination, particularly racism, has been indicated in negative health effects, such as "general psychological distress, depression, alcohol consumption, poorer perceived health status" (Griffith, Neighbors and Johnson, 2009; Mercer, Heacock and Beck, 1993 in Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason, 2012:210; Brown, Keith, Jackson and Gary, 2003; Williams, 1999 in Perry, Harp and Oser, 2013).

C. The Significance of Work and The Workplace

1. Work

Work, whether paid or unpaid, has significance in people's lives (see Nicholas H. VE Smith, Jean-Phillippe Deranty and Emmanuel Renault, 2018). Alfred Marshall (1961:54 in Smith N.H. VE et al., 2018) defines work or **labour** as "an exertion of mind or body undergone partly or wholly with a view to some good other than the pleasure derived directly from work" (5). In 1999, the International Labour Organization (ILO) coined the term **decent work** to include aspects of work that impact workers inside, and outside, the workplace. Decent work is defined as:

> "the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work
> that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social

protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men" (https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm).

Work serves many purposes. It provides *grounding*, structure, routine and adds a sense of normalcy to peoples' lives (D. Blustein, 2011 in Luke van der Laan, Gail Ormsby, Lee Fergusson and Peter McIlveen, 2023). Work is an anchor, a source of stability that engages mental, physical, psychological and emotional energies of workers and is a source of focus that can be relied on even in difficult times and regardless of the conditions in the workplace or the workplace environment. Also, work, whether paid or unpaid, helps people to realize intrinsic worth and focus their energies outwardly. Work is a mechanism for enacting beliefs and engendering changes, significant changes that could result in positive changes not only for the individual worker, but for others and future generations. Additionally, through work, individuals not only utilize education, skills and qualifications already achieved to successfully complete work responsibilities, they are also introduced to new ideas, develop new skills and qualifications, learn about new processes and technologies, and gain new, or develop already existing, personal qualities or characteristics. Blustein (2011:3 in van der Laan et al., 2023) sums up work as "a central aspect of life, providing a source of structure, a means of survival, connection to others and optimally a means of self-determination" (263). In North America, work is intricately tied to people's psychology and identity (Christine Hodson, 2001:1).

Employment, or paid work, is where workers[40] are normally compensated with money (wages) and sometimes with other types of compensation, e.g., benefits, in exchange for their time and labour. Paid work provides an income to afford basic needs, such as housing, food

and healthcare, financing lifestyles and achieving personal goals (Robert Grosse, 2023). It is also about adding meaning to people's existence by affording them the ability to support their own needs, the needs of their families, to keep them from becoming a burden on the state and contribute to the maintenance and advancement of a society. Volunteer work, or unpaid work, typically involves individuals who do not receive monetary compensation, give freely of their time, efforts and sometimes their own resources to positively contribute to other people's lives, their communities and society, and involvement in volunteer work is often motivated by personal value systems. Regardless of whether work is paid or not, both types of work entail tasks and responsibilities, and to be successful workers must be provided with training and the skills to do the work and the tools with which to do the work.

2. The Workplace

The workplace is often viewed as a secondary community, where relationships and friendships with others can develop, where skills are put into practice and can advance and are used to tangibly contribute to the goals of the workplace and the society in which it operates, and where some workers, e.g., full-time employed workers, can spend a lot more waking hours in a workday than they actually do at their own homes. Moreover, the workplace provides spaces of belonging for workers where they have common goals with the other workers, have an alignment of value systems, can influence changes and advancements, build knowledge of the environment, are familiar with processes and people, and carve out historical evidence of having been there.

The workplace experience is further compounded by practices within the workplace that can either make a workplace psychologically safe or unsafe. The term **psychological safety**, coined in 1999 by Amy Edmondson, is defined as:

"a shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking […] a sense of

confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject, or punish someone for

speaking up. This confidence stems from mutual respect and trust among team

members […] it describes a team climate characterized by interpersonal trust

and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves" (354).

The absence of these conditions from a workplace contribute to a psychologically unsafe

workplace.

The experiences that occur in work, employment and the workplace – **work life**

experiences – are significant to people's perceptions of themselves and others, have

substantive impacts on individuals' mental, emotional, psychological and physical health, and

these same effects flow into other parts of their lives, including their career goals, finances,

homes, families, health, lifestyles and non-work relationships.

D. Labour Union Organizations

According to the Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, University of

Toronto (n.d.), a **labour union** is "an organization formed by workers in a particular trade,

industry, or company for the purpose of improving pay, benefits, and working conditions". The

terms **labour union**, **trade union**, or simply **union**, emit different responses from society;

employers are often weary and suspicious of unions organizing in their workplaces, making

demands that limit their control and authority over their businesses, reducing their ability to

oppress, appropriate and exploit their workers, thereby limiting their ability to maintain their

hold on their capitalist status (Karl Marx, 1867-2); workers often view unions as welcoming and

concerned for their welfare, particularly in the workplace, supporting their continued ability to

produce and reproduce by negotiating living wages, health benefits, retirement plans and good

conditions in the workplace and advocating for protections and legislative compliance in the

workplace. Unionism appeals to workers. It is not just an organization but a movement that is constantly being reproduced as workers must daily deal with issues faced in the workplace, including control mechanisms that are continually implemented by employers in their pursuit of maintaining power over workers (Karl Marx, 1867-2).

It is widely known that labour unions, using the strength of numbers (the collective), negotiate advantageous conditions in employment for workers to elevate the economic status of workers ("self-emancipation", Sharon Smith, 2011; Winnie Ng, Salmaan Khan and Jim Stanford, 2024). It is much less known that unions also campaign to advance issues relating to society in general by "enhancing the level of democracy, inclusion and participation in society as a whole" (Christopher Schenk, 2014:5; Ng, Khan and Stanford, 2024). Through collective bargaining, unions negotiate working conditions, protections and compensation packages, including wages, health benefits, retirement plans and other benefits that are more advantageous to unionized workers than what may be available to non-unionized workers. Also, unions provide "voice", or "collective voice", to their members so that issues can be raised as a collective, thereby reducing or eliminating the risk of reprisals from an employer for individual members (Schenk, 2014:7). Additionally, through political action, unions influence conditions inside and outside the workplace that impact unionized and non-unionized workers, as well as the working conditions and wages of non-unionized workers. For example, unions push for living wages, health care provisions, improved health and safety legislation and employment standards and promote and empower worker engagement in community and civic action (Schenk, 2014; Ng, Khan and Stanford, 2024).

A generally accepted notion is that unions are operated by workers for the benefit of workers, and thus, the expectation is that said workers will work for the interests of all the workers within that organization regardless of their status in society, their identities,

appearances and cultural associations. Moreover, there is a widely accepted perception that because unions confront employers about issues of oppression, labour union organizations are inherently anti-racist. Furthermore, another widely accepted assumption is that unions are inclusive of all their members, and thus, the union structure and leadership roles are accessible to all workers. If these assumptions are accurate, then unions will be more open to, inclusive of, and available to workers from racially oppressed groups than non-union organizations, and more individuals from racially oppressed groups would be successful at achieving leadership positions of authority in unions.

1. A Very Brief Historical Account of The Nature of Canadian Labour Union Organizations

In 19th century Canada, unions were first organized to protect workers who had become ill or had lost their jobs (Desmond Morton, 1982:2 in Marin, n.d.:1). These unions did not last very long as they did not have the legal or economic infrastructure to support long term survival, and the legal system supported employers' restriction of worker rights and powers (Morton, 1982:2 in Marin, n.d.:1; Canadian Labour Congress, 2015). In the mid 19th century, "craft unions" became the new model of the labour movement in Britain and the United States with a focus on organizing skilled workers, such as tailors, shoemakers, printers (Morton, 1982:26 in Marin, n.d.:2). The craft union model came to Canada in the 1860s, and in 1872, the Trade Unions Act was passed by the Canadian Parliament to legalize the organization of unions and workers' membership in unions. However, the Trade Unions Act made it illegal for workers to strike and did not recognize unions as bargaining agents for workers (Morton, 1982:26 in Marin, n.d.:2; Canadian Labour Congress, 2015). Canadian unions finally achieved recognition in federal law as sole bargaining agents for their members in 1943 after many protracted and violent strikes (Canadian Labour Congress, 2015).

1868 saw the rise of a new labour movement in the United States called "The Holy and Noble Order of the Knights of Labor" (Morton, 1982:26 in Marin, n.d.:2) whose purpose was to unite skilled and unskilled workers into one organization. An intense rivalry between the Knights and craft unions ensued and the craft unions succeeded with the formation of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in 1886 (Morton, 1982:29-30 in Marin, n.d.:2). That same year in Canada, a coalition of craft unions and Knights was formed as the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC), which existed until 1956 when the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) was established (Morton, 1982:31 in Marin, n.d.:2). The TLC worked to improve working conditions of workers, but it also called for greater restrictions on immigration, particularly to Asians (Morton, 1982:31-32 in Marin, n.d.:3). Other unions organized groups to lobby "[W]hite politicians to restrict the entry of non-[W]hite workers to Canada [… and] instigated popular violence against them (Tania Das Gupta[,] 1998), such as the Vancouver riot of 1907 aimed at Japanese and Chinese immigrants" (Tania Das Gupta, 2007:183). Additionally, many unions adopted and practiced principles of Jim Crow[41] and fought against the inclusion of Black workers. For example, the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees (CBRE), enshrined their opposition to Black railway men at its inaugural meeting in 1908 and restricted membership to only White men (Sarah-Jane (Saje) Mathieu, 2001:10). The American Big Four brotherhoods of conductors, engineers, firemen, and trainmen also "argued that Anglo-Saxon superiority warranted segregating railway workforces, with immigrants and [B]lack railroaders occupying the least desirable positions" (Amesen, 1602 in Mathieu, 2001:23). The Order of Sleeping Car Porters (OSCP), the first Black railway union in North America, was formed in April 1917 by John A. Robinson, J.W. Barber, B.F. Jones and P. White, porters who were based in Winnipeg (Amesen, 1602 in Mathieu, 2001:38; Public Service Alliance of Canada, 2021).

By the end of the 19th century, Canadian and American unions created alliances (Morton, 1982:35 in Marin, n.d.:3). The Canadian labour movement then went through a period of upheaval. In 1953, the two primary American union organizations - the American Federation of Labour (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) - merged (Marin, n.d.:5) to form the AFL-CIO. This influenced the merger of the TLC and the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) to form the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) (Morton, 1982:76 in Marin, n.d.:5), which is still in existence today.

According to Paul Moreno (2010), "[t]he claim that organized labor has been a force for racial egalitarianism can only be called a myth" (67). Racism and inequality have historically been used by organized labour in America to exclude Black Peoples from organized labour "to insulate their members from competition, to increase the price of their product (wages) and lower its output (hours). Unions do this by "controlling the labor supply", and one of the most convenient ways to do this is to exclude easily identified groups like racial minorities" (G. Becker 1971, R. A. Posner 1984, Reynolds 1984 in Moreno, 2010:69). Moreno (2010) further elaborates that organized labour was hostile to the anti-slavery movement (69) and that "former slaves, excluded from white unions, often had to fight their way into industrial employment as strikebreakers" (67).

Since Canadian labour unions are modelled on American unions, racism, and particularly anti-Black racism, is also part of the history of Canadian unions. Strategies used to maintain exclusion to unions for Black Peoples include (Moreno, 2010):

- "divide and conquer" (68) where violence, power and race were used to justify "defend[ing the] economic privilege" (69) of White workers,
- "wage slavery" (69), i.e., influencing governmental policies to ensure the continued colonization of Black Peoples. "[Abraham] Lincoln continued to say

that he was in favor of "colonization" of the [B]lack American population, and

reassured northerners that free [B]lacks would not glut the labor market and

depress wages" (69), and

- enshrining exclusion in unions' constitutional language and using the legal

  system (73), e.g., "the skilled railroad workers who formed the

  "brotherhoods" […] excluded [B]lacks by explicit constitutional provision until

  the 1960s" (73). During the 1894 Pullman strike, less skilled Black workers

  formed the "Anti-Striker Railway Union" to help break the strike and an

  injunction was issued by the federal court to block Black workers from

  working as replacement workers (73).

Despite improvements gained through civil rights and other social movements, racial

ideology and other mechanisms of control are still embedded in the structures, and practiced in

the operation, of unions today.

2. The Contradictory Nature of Labour Union Organizations

Unions use structures and mechanisms of control employed by capitalists to maintain

access for one group while exploiting and subjugating other groups within the

organization. According to Statistics Canada (2021 in Karl Gardner, 2022) "36% of Black

workers are unionized in Canada-which is slightly higher than the national average-yet racism

remains a major issue" (8). Shauna MacKinnon (2015 in Gardner, 2022) acknowledges the

discrimination faced by Indigenous workers in the workplace and generally in the labour market

(8). Gardner (2022) writes about the harassment, discrimination, and racism that racialized

workers continue to face in Canadian unionized and non-unionized workplaces (8). CUPE

Ontario (2020 in Gardner, 2022) observes that "Black workers continue to face racism in the

workplace and, even more unacceptably, their unions" (8). Das Gupta (2007:182)

acknowledges that though the labour movement has been moving towards anti-racism since the 1990s, many challenges remain that pertain to the structures and practices of unions, including "implementing employment equity within unions themselves, equitable representation in union leadership, advocating for the implementation of employment equity in workplaces, and translating policies into practical procedures" (182).

Competition is inherent in capitalist societies; the bourgeoisie versus the proletariats and workers against workers in their attempts at transformation (McMullin and Curtis, 2017:149) and produces contradictory realities in the experiences of certain unionized workers, particularly workers from racially oppressed groups when trying to gain access to their labour union organizations. Structures and mechanisms of control such as neoliberalism and power, and the contradictory nature of labour union organizations, act as destabilizing agents in capitalism that produce and reproduce "oppressive relations [… The] recursive relationship between power and oppression is actualized in class, age, gender, ethnic and race relations" (McMullin and Curtis, 2017:149), which in turn produces inequality and contributes to the racialization of people of non-dominant groups, including Black women.

The labour union is a bureaucracy, a symbol of the capitalist, that is built on hierarchies and thus mimics the behaviour and practices of capitalists. According to Karl Marx,

"society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources [and] social order is maintained by domination and power, rather than consensus and conformity [...and] those with wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, chiefly by suppressing the poor and powerless. A basic premise of conflict theory is that individuals and groups within society will work to maximize their own benefits" (in Jim Chappelow, 2019).

Unions actively seek after their own reproduction by organizing more workers; the greater the number of members, the greater the economic resources, political influence and economic power the union has to advance their demands (Smith, 2011). Under capitalism, unions are said to be "workers' front line of defense against their employers [… and] vehicles for struggle [that are] crucial to the future self-emancipation of the working class" (Smith, 2011). This, according to Smith (2011), presents a contradiction as "unions both negotiate the terms of exploitation of workers under capitalism and also provide the vehicle for struggle that can prepare the working class for revolution [in the fight for economic "self-emancipation"]". However, though union members pay union dues to belong to a labour union, full-time union leaders control union communications so the union membership is only aware of the information they are provided with and do not necessarily have full insight into the governance and operations of the union. Also, not all union members are provided with the same quality and levels of service or have equal access to the union, which creates divisions within the union membership that weakens the membership and the strength of the union.

Union organizing is a strategy used to reduce competition amongst workers (Smith, 2011). However, capitalism divides workers and forces them to compete against each other; *dividing and conquering* workers is a strategy used by capitalists to accumulate greater wealth. Other examples of this division relate to full-time union leaders, who may have advanced to their roles from a union membership and earn pay and benefits that are often significantly greater than the compensation union members earn. Also, full-time union leaders are now not considered "workers themselves […] The contracts they negotiate on behalf of their members [may] not affect their own salaries and working conditions. If the contract agrees to layoffs, [full-time] union leaders still keep their jobs. If wages are slashed or a speedup imposed, [full-time] union officials will maintain the same salaries and working conditions as before" (Smith,

2011). Additionally, full-time union leaders may not have similar lived experiences of the

membership, and given their status as being set apart from the union membership and not

experiencing the same challenges as their union members while in their leadership roles, full-

time union leaders' understanding of the issues may not necessarily be accurate to the

experiences of the union membership. Yet, full-time union leaders are credited with the

successes gained through the work accomplished by actively involved paid and volunteer union

members. Moreover, in their attempts at retaining their positions, full-time union leaders may

not be inclined to challenge the status quo for the changes that are required by the union

membership (Smith, 2011), which serves to benefit both the full-time union leader and the

employer who gets to hold on to their wealth.

Neoliberalism supports globalization, the migration of people from across the globe in

search of accumulation (Marx, 1867-2), promotes individualism and group protectionism,

increases competition, perpetuates oppression and maintains inequalities that support

capitalism. David Harvey (in Ana Isla, 2015) defines neoliberalism as "a theory of political

economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating

individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by

strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create

and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices" (20). Neoliberalism is an

ideology that was implemented to change human interactions and promote competition (George

Monbiot, 2016:1) across a wider expanse, i.e., transnational "communities" or "global civil

society" (Spike V. Peterson and Ann Sisson Runyan, 2010:231). The interconnected processes

of "roll-back neoliberalism" and "roll-out neoliberalism"[42] "greatly diminishe[s] the rights of

ordinary citizens, particularly low-income people and other disadvantaged groups, such as

immigrants, racial minorities, and single mothers" (Adalberto Aguirre, Jr., Volker Eick and Ellen Reese, 2006:2).

Institutions, such as labour unions, are "tools of the struggle between groups or classes, used to maintain inequality and dominance of the ruling class" (Chappelow, 2019), where "systems of control" (McMullin and Curtis, 2017:149) or tools of domination, such as oppression, power, exploitation and opportunity hoarding (McMullin and Curtis, 2017:149) are implemented for the subjugation of others by dominant groups. For example, in the 19th century, Canadian unions advocated against the inclusion of Black Peoples and others in unions, as well as the immigration of Asians into Canada. Also, the Immigration Act of 1910 enabled the refusal of entry into Canada to "immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada" (Das Gupta, 2007:183-184). The government allowed the immigration of Asians into western Canada to work on the Intercolonial Railway[43] as cheap labour, and "White workers saw Chinese and other Asian workers as a direct threat to their own livelihood and job security, and widespread racism against Asians spread throughout Western Canada" (Morton 2007:54 in Marin, n.d.:6). Asian workers were not supported by any union and were "paid half of the [W]hite man's wages" (Rachel Decoste, 2014; Das Gupta, 2007:183).

Notes

[17] The phrase "Black women" includes "African Canadian women" and "African American women". Several of the literature referenced in this paper are from the American context and use the term "African American" rather than "Black".

[18] A feminist practice is that the first time an author is cited from a particular publication, their full name, i.e., first name or initial, middle name or initial, and last name, will be noted along with the year and page numbers, as applicable, of that publication. Subsequent citations of the same author from the same publication will only reference the last name along with the year and page numbers, as applicable.

[19] Work can be paid or unpaid (volunteer). Alfred Marshall (1961:54 in Smith N.H. VE et al., 2018) defines work or "labour" as "an exertion of mind or body undergone partly or wholly with a view to some good other than the pleasure derived directly from work" (5). See Chapter 1, Section C for a discussion about work.

Smith, Nicholas H. VE, Deranty, Jean-Philippe and Renault, Emmanuel (2018). The Return of Work in Critical Theory: Self, Society, Politics. Columbia University Press.

[20] Employment is work that is paid typically with money (wages) and sometimes with other types of compensation, e.g., benefits, in exchange for workers' time and labour.

[21] Simply defined, a "workplace" is an institution or a location where work takes place.

[22] It is recognized that there are disparities between the various American states in the adoption and practice of affirmative action, as well as the various controversies around affirmative action. However, this will not be specifically addressed in this paper.

[23] The Employment Equity Act was based on the 1984 Royal Commission Report on Equality in Employment by Judge Rosalie Silberman Abella (Clarke, 2019).
Clarke, Marnie (2019). The Employment Equity Act: From Policy to Implementation. https://ciaj-icaj.ca/wp-content/uploads/documents/import/1989/Clarke.pdf?id=1603&1712952316.

[24] The Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, University of Toronto, defines "labour union" as "an organization formed by workers in a particular trade, industry, or company for the purpose of improving pay, benefits, and working conditions". https://cirhr.library.utoronto.ca/research/labour-unions#:~:text=A%20labor%20union%20is%20an,established%20between%20the%20two%20parties. The terms "labour union", "labour union organization", "union organization" and "union" will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

[25] It is acknowledged that historically, different types of labour unions evolved over the course of the development of the labour movement, such as craft unions, public service unions, industrial unions (Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta https://www.law-faqs.org/national-faqs/history-and-development-of-unions-in-canada/general-information-definitions-and-types-of-unions/). The term "labour union" is used in this research as a general reference to encompass all types of labour union organizations, including provincial, national, and international trade unions.

[26] For the purpose of this research, "union leaders" "refers to individuals who are assigned [appointed], credentialed [recruited] and/or elected to a [paid or voluntary] position of responsibility in carrying out activities on behalf of the union membership, whether employed by the represented firm or the union. Union leaders include full-time union representatives, officers, Local and District executive board members, stewards, committee members, or anyone coordinating or delivering a specific service to the membership on behalf of the union." October 19, 2009, Roles and Responsibilities of Union Leaders in HPWO Partnerships, International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. https://www.goiam.org/uncategorized/roles-and-responsibilities-of-union-leaders-in-hpwo-partnerships/.

[27] Canadian Union of Postal Workers Press Release reprinted by Markets Insider (May 17, 2019). Historic Election at CUPW: Postal Workers Elect First Female Black President. "The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) has elected Jan Simpson, a postal worker from the Scarborough local, as the union's new National President. She becomes the first black woman to lead a national union in Canada."

[28] While America (or the United States) and Canada are two distinct countries, their histories are interrelated and intertwined on many levels, including the tendency to adopt and adapt sociological practices, which may in part be explained by the two countries closeness in proximity, i.e., as neighbouring countries, with similar and connected economies.

[29] According to Dictionary.com, a "trope" is "a convention or device that establishes a predictable or stereotypical representation of a character, setting, or scenario in a creative work". https://www.dictionary.com/browse/trope.

[30] See Note #20.

[31] See Note #21.

[32] "Choose" implies freely making a decision for oneself based on one's own interests, desires and needs. These choices that are made by Black women are not real choices and are known as "Hobson's Choices". The Cambridge Dictionary defines Hobson's Choice as "a situation in which it seems that you can choose between different things or actions, but there is really only one thing that you can take or do […e.g.,] 'It's a case of Hobson's choice, because if I don't agree to their terms, I'll lose my job'". https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hobson-s-choice#google_vignette.

[33] See Note #32. In these instances, leaving their place of employment is often not a deliberate choice, or decision, made by Black women; they are "forced" to resign from, not return to, or to find other work due to the unbearable work stressors experienced in the workplace.

[34] See Note #32.

[35] Given the publication dates of the citations, meetings with job applicants would likely have taken place in person. With the advent of, and increased use of virtual platforms post COVID19 pandemic, meetings are now also possible via virtual platforms, such as Zoom, Teams, etc.

[36] Women experience different types of sexism; overt sexism, such as sexual harassment, covert sexism relates to instances that are not intentional or consciously perpetrated though these interactions are received as harmful (Swim and Cohen, 1997 in Kevin L. Nadal and Kristal Haynes, 2012: 91), subtle sexism are interactions that seem to be common place, such as "a female physician who is working at a hospital is assumed to be a nurse or when a high-

ranking female executive is presumed to be a secretary" (Swim et al., 2004 in Nadal and Haynes, 2012:91), benevolent sexism is defined as "a favorable, chivalrous ideology that offers protection and affection to women who embrace conventional roles," while hostile sexism is defined as animosity toward women who are seen to minimize men's power" (Glick and Fiske, 2001:109 in Nadal and Haynes, 2012:91).
Nadal, Kevin L. and Haynes, Kristal (2012). The Effects of Sexism, Gender Microaggressions, and Other Forms of Discrimination on Women's Mental Health and Development. In P.K. Lundberg-Love, K.L. Nadal and M.A. Paludi (Eds.), Women's Psychology. Women and mental disorders, Volume 2, p. 87-101, ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2011. ProQuest Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york/detail.action?docID=820318.

[37] See Chapter 2, Section D for more details about misogynoir, racial and sexist microaggressions, gaslighting and racelighting.

[38] Dictionary.com defines "tone policing" as "a conversational tactic that dismisses the ideas being communicated when they are perceived to be delivered in an angry, frustrated, sad, fearful, or otherwise emotionally charged manner: Tone policing can silence the narratives of oppressed populations". https://www.dictionary.com/browse/tone-policing.

[39] COCo (the Centre for Community Organizations) "is a charitable organization whose mission is to support the health and well-being of community organizations in Québec". https://coco-net.org. "The "Problem" Woman of Colour in the Workplace" tool can be found at https://coco-net.org/problem-woman-colour-nonprofit-organizations/.

[40] Section 1 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act defines "worker" – "[as] any of the following, […except…] an inmate of a correctional institution or like institution or facility who participates inside the institution or facility in a work project or rehabilitation program:
  1. A person who performs work or supplies services for monetary compensation.
  2. A secondary school student who performs work or supplies services for no monetary compensation under a work experience program authorized by the school board that operates the school in which the student is enrolled.
  3. A person who performs work or supplies services for no monetary compensation under a program approved by a college of applied arts and technology, university, career college or other post-secondary institution.
  4. Such other persons as may be prescribed who perform work or supply services to an employer for no monetary compensation". https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90o01#BK0.

[41] "Jim Crow was the name of the racial caste system which operated primarily, but not exclusively in southern and border [American] states, between 1877 and the mid-1960s. Jim Crow was more than a series of rigid anti-[B]lack laws. It was a way of life. Under Jim Crow, African Americans were relegated to the status of second class citizens. Jim Crow represented the legitimization of anti-[B]lack racism […] All major societal institutions reflected and supported the oppression of [B]lack people."
Jim Crow Museum (n.d.). What was Jim Crow? https://jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu/what.htm.

[42] Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell (2002 in Adalberto Aguirre, Jr., Volker Eick and Ellen Reese, 2006:2) describes two interconnected processes of neoliberalism: **roll-back neoliberalism** as "the active destruction or discreditation of Keynesian-welfarist and social-collectivist institutions [...] involv[ing] the retreat from previous governmental control of resources and state regulations, including public services, nationalized industries, and labor and social rights. Also known as privatization, [which] takes many forms, including the sale of public assets, voucher programs, deregulation, cutbacks in public services, and the contracting out of those services to for-profit and nonprofit agencies" (Peck and Tickell, 2002 in Aguirre, Jr., Eick and Reese, 2006:2). **Roll-out neoliberalism** refers to "'the purposeful construction and consolidation of neoliberalized state forms, modes of governance, and regulatory relations' (Peck and Tickell, 2002:37) [, involving] the creation of new trade and financial regulations by international governance institutions, such as the World Trade Organization and the IMF, [...] socially interventionist policies and public-private initiatives that are paternalistic and punitive, such as 'anti-panhandling' ordinances, the militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, new drug laws, and welfare-to-work programs; these policies and programs seek to discipline, criminalize, and control poor and marginalized social groups, who experience the brunt of the effects created by 'roll-out' neoliberalism" (Aguirre, Jr., Eick and Reese, 2006:2).

[43] Boyko, John (2017). Intercolonial Railway. In The Canadian Encyclopedia. Retrieved from https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/intercolonial-railway. The Intercolonial Railway operated 1872 to 1918 as Canada's first national infrastructure project, connecting Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Québec and Ontario, and was a pre-condition for joining the Canadian Confederation.

Poem: Black Canadian Woman: Chained to My Work Chair: Painting a Picture with Words

Paula Gowdie, Women of Courage Art Exhibition, 2023
Work chair, and Photo of work chair, by Paula Gowdie

1
From the crack of dawn to the crack of dawn
Round the clock I work
Stuck sitting in my work chair
Crunch the numbers, deadlines to meet,
Coordinate meetings,
Arrange events,
Respond to client demands,
Focus on detailed work,
Who?
What?
When?
Where?
Eat? When?
Shovel food while I work.
No time to breathe!
No time to break for friend or foe!
Phew! Made it to the washroom just in time!

2
From the crack of dawn to the crack of dawn
Round the clock I work
Paid only 7 hours a day, five days a week.
No overtime pay in the budget, they say.
My work chair my only accomplice.
Telephone ringing,
Emails pinging,
People standing at my door, demanding,
Where is?
When is?
Who has?
No time to breathe!
It's 2023!
Employment Standards Act?
Human Rights Code?
Labour Code?
Employment Equity?
They weren't written to benefit me or those who look like me.

No time to break for friend or foe!
Phew! Made it to the washroom just in time!

3
From the crack of dawn to the crack of dawn
Round the clock I work
Weekdays, evenings, weekends, holidays
Chained to my work chair!
Your employees don't do remote work, you say?
Come see my work log!
When was the company party?
What recognition event?
A colleague's retirement?
New management hires?
No budget for more staff, they said!
Chained to my work chair!
The work must be done!, they say
What about my health?
My life?
My hopes?
My dreams?

4
From the crack of dawn to the crack of dawn
Round the clock I work
Paid only 7 hours a day, five days a week.
Equity, diversity, inclusion are our priorities, they say,
Your health and safety are our priority, they say,
We need to understand your experiences, they say,
In order to make changes.
Going through the motions for appearance sake.
Our emotional labour exploited on yet another committee.
Equity policies?
Hiring policies?

Promotions?
Workplace policies drafted with no real change.
EDI and policy reports collecting dust on a shelf.
We take your health, safety and inequities seriously, they repeatedly say,
But the work must get done!, they say.
Round the clock I work
From the crack of dawn to the crack of dawn

5
From the crack of dawn to the crack of dawn
Round the clock I work
Chained to my work chair.
Don't stay too late, they say,
You still here?, they say,
On their way home to their families.

The work needs to be done!, they say,
We need more front-line staff, I say,
No budget for more staff, they say,
But there is work to be done!, I say.

Alone in the workplace
Winter, Spring,
Summer, Fall
Year after year
Does anyone hear me?
Does anyone care?
Stuck sitting in my work chair
No time to break for friend or foe!
Made it the washroom just in time!
Dehumanizing!

Artist Notes:

Black Canadian Woman: Chained to My Work Chair: Painting a Picture with Words
A commentary on anti-Black racism and specifically, **misogynoir**, in the Canadian workplace. This poem and art installation reflect the experiences of Black women in the Canadian workplace – working conditions that disregard employment standards and collective agreement provisions, such as excessive workloads, which results in heavy demands and pressures so the women are literally ***chained to their work chairs***, unable to take breaks and lunches, eating while working long hours for low pay or free labour, often ignoring their own needs, such as taking washroom breaks until the very last minute, a demeaning process! The objective of this art installation is to inform and provoke conversation, and more importantly, to motivate action to make positive changes to Canadian workplaces to improve the experience of Black women in Canadian workplaces.

Black Canadian Woman: Chained to My Work Chair: Painting a Picture with Words (mixed media: art installation accompanied by a poem in print and the recording of the poem continuously looping on Bluetooth speakers. Poem: 11 x 17 inches, landscape orientation (2 pages); framed or could be 14 x 17 inches (1 page), portrait or landscape, on a framed easel. Art installation: chair in chains, recording of the poem looping on Bluetooth speaker.

Materials:
≈ A work chair. The chair is broken, the material is sweat stained and worn away by years of use, leaving behind the outline of the user's body, the colour of the fabric faded unevenly.
≈ The material of the chair is distressed, with naturally occurring holes appearing due to wear and tear and use of the chair over time, the arm rests torn and bruised.
≈ Chains enclose the chair; held in place with nails, shackles and hooks and represent the pressures and demands of the workplace; these tightly hold the women down and in place, many bound to their work chairs by the workload and long work hours that results in them unable to take breaks, interact with others or even to use the washroom, working until their bladder is about to explode. Rushing to the washroom, they make it just in time to avoid soiling themselves.
≈ The rust on the chain represents the historical impacts of racism and **misogynoir** that Black women experience daily.

CHAPTER 2: THE RESEARCH

Twenty-three (23) Black women leaders[44] in labour union organizations across several Canadian provinces and territories who are currently involved, or who were previously involved in paid and voluntary leadership roles in Canadian unions but have since retired, were interviewed to examine their work life experiences, i.e., the experiences that Black women union leaders endure in their work life, i.e., in work, employment and in the workplace environment, and the impact of those experiences that extends beyond the workplace. Questions examined include what factors influence the work life experiences of Black women leaders in the Canadian labour movement, what motivates Black women to seek and engage in leadership roles in Canadian labour unions, and what are the impacts of the work life experiences of Black women leaders in Canadian labour unions.

This research was conducted during the COVID19 pandemic, so it was not possible to have in-person contact with potential research participants. Research participants were selected from Black women leaders who are currently involved in, or who were previously involved but have since retired from, Canadian unions that the researcher was knowledgeable about, and those who were referred to the researcher by research participants or others known to the researcher (snowball technique). Potential research participants were contacted by email.

A. The Significance of This Research

> "I feel like there is this complex in the world that Black women are seen as indestructible. We can carry everything. We can do everything. We never break down. But we're given zero respect for, you know, we are the strong ones, so White women always want to come complain and cry to us and we're supposed to be their rock. White men always want to fantasize about us, and we're

supposed to be available for their sexual desires. And because of the institution

of slavery and its historical legacy and impact on our community, in a lot of

circumstances we're not respected. And we're also seen as disposable by Black

men. It's like we never get the support that we're expected to give everybody

else." (Participant 16, January 2022)

Black women have been involved in social movements that have served to advance the interests of women globally, such as the Women's Suffrage Movement (Shirley Chisholm, n.d.; Dr. Megan Bailey, n.d.; Rise Up! A Digital Archive of Feminist Activism), the Stonewall Riots that started the LGBTQ and transgender liberation movements, the Me-Too Movement (Gassam Asare, 2021), the civil rights movements in Canada and the United States, e.g. the Black Women's Collective and the Congress of Black Women of Canada[45], Mary Church Terrell, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Harriet Tubman, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Mary Ann Shadd Cary and so many more[46]. Yet, historically, the interests of Black women and their experiences are rarely represented in research or in commercial media publications.

Similarly, Black women leaders in Canadian unions have actively fought for advancements for women's rights, while concerns related to their own lived experiences are not considered or referenced. For example, in a Canadian news article, H. G. Watson (2013) documented proceedings at the women's forum of the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) convention, documenting comments made by several women, including Yolanda McClean, Nicole Wall and Carol Wall. While the article referred to inequities faced by women globally and within unions, there was no mention of the particular issues that Black women face and deal with or even that Yolanda McLean, Nicole Wall and Carol Wall were Black women. Moreover, from 2017 to at least 2020, multiple searches for Black women leaders in Canadian labour unions by the researcher produced very little information about Black women's involvement in

Canadian labour unions. In 2019, literature searches revealed one significant result – that Jan Simpson had achieved the President's position in a traditionally male-dominant Canadian labour national – the first Black woman since Canada's formation as a country, 149 years at the time of Jan Simpson's victory.

This phenomenon can be partly explained by the historical silencing of the stories of women, marginalized peoples and racially oppressed groups by traditional research practices. Black women are othered[47] and marginalized in many ways and their stories are often not recognized as credible knowledge, and thus not widely published or made available (DeVault, 1996; Hunter, 2002; Gowdie, 2022a). The same is true in the labour movement where the involvement of Black Peoples[48] is rarely included or celebrated. This research and research process embrace feminist and anti-racist epistemologies in order to generate stories and research from the standpoint – experiences – of the particular individuals (DeVault, 1996) being researched, i.e., Black women leaders in Canadian unions.

Moreover, this research was provoked in 2017 by the researcher's own experiences, subjectivities and vulnerabilities, such as positionalities and lived experiences (DeVault, 1996; Hunter, 2002) as a Black woman who, at that time, had been actively involved as a leader in a Canadian union for more than twenty-five years, as well as the experiences of Black women she advocated for during her many years of union involvement.

Seeking to understand Black women's work life experiences, literature reviews on the subject matter yielded other materials related to Black women's experience in employment, such as Barnes (1989), Hamilton-Mason, Hall and Everett (2009), Hall, Everett and Hamilton-Mason (2012) and the labour movement, such as Linda Briskin (2006). However, literature reviews yielded very little about Black women's involvement in the labour market, and even less about Black women's work life experiences in labour unions and the labour movement –

Canadian or otherwise. This research aims to contribute to the subject matter by producing knowledge (Harding, 1987 in Hunter, 2002) about the work life experiences of Black women active in leadership roles – paid or voluntary – in Canadian labour unions and making this information visible and widely available.

B. Methodology

The qualitative research methodology of phenomenology is used in this research to examine the work life experiences of Black women leaders who are currently involved in or who were previously involved but have since retired from, Canadian unions from the perspectives of the individuals undergoing the experiences. As such, it is important that research participants are able to tell their stories in their own way and in their own words (DeVault, 1996; Hunter, 2009; Nicholls, 2009). Therefore, in-depth interviews were employed in this research.

Phenomenology is a philosophical methodology or "science" founded by Edmund Husserl and developed by Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre (Chad Engelland, 2020:2; Taylor Carman, 2016:180), and is essentially about understanding experiences from the first person point of view, i.e., subjective, not just the appearances of experiences but the realities associated with experiences (Engelland, 2020:2-3). In understanding experiences, phenomenology's "transcendental reduction" requires us to examine the "relational structures" of experiences by looking *beyond* (italics added for emphasis) experiences and looking *back* (italics added) at the things that make the experiences happen. In other words, consciously and intentionally reflecting on experiences that have occurred and staying engaged in the process of understanding those experiences to find the truth of those experiences by examining and connecting the dots to past occurrences and circumstances that could cause, influence and impact experiences (Engelland, 2020:6-9; Marc D. Binder, Nobutaka Hirokawa and Uwe Windhorst, 2009:3144).

C. Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and intersectionality and everyday racism will be used to examine the work life experiences of Black women who are active, or who were previously involved but have since retired, in paid and voluntary leadership positions in Canadian labour unions.

1. Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality

Born out of civil rights movements in the United States, Critical Race Theory, or CRT, was developed in the 1970s by legal scholars and activists to examine the connections between race, racism and power, the ways in which race, racism and power impact groups in society and ways to change the interactions in order to advance human rights, particularly for peoples of racially oppressed groups. Critical race theory contemplates fundamental issues such as "economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, and emotions and the unconscious […and] examines the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law" (Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, 2023:3).

Intersectionality, which later came to be an essential principle of critical race theory (Bell, 2018:58), is a Black feminist framework introduced in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw to examine the "multidimensionality of Black women's experience", specifically the intersection of gender and race because as Crenshaw (1989) explains, "the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism" (140). At that time, the intersectional experience of Black women was not being acknowledged in antidiscrimination law, feminist theory or antiracist politics (Crenshaw, 1989:139). By examining the discrimination of Black women based only on gender, a "single axis framework" (Crenshaw, 1989:139), the everyday lived experiences of Black women are lost in the analysis where consideration is not given to how race complicates

the experiences of these women, which results in the exclusion and distortion of the lived experiences of Black women, the production and perpetuation of biased evidence and the further marginalization of Black women (Crenshaw, 1989:139-140). Additionally, Black women must deal daily with being female and being Black, which results in a "double bind" for Black women. These "social identities place the Black woman in the position to fight not just one status, but the intersectionality of all labels that lead to discrimination" (Salzman, 2006 in Davis and Brown, 2017:2) but Black women "are often faced with the choice of dedicating themselves to one cause or the other, rather than both" (Crenshaw, 1993; Roane and Newcomb, 2013 in Davis and Brown, 2017:3).

1.1. Racial Ideology

In critical race theory, race has primacy. Human beings function by categorizing phenomenon in their surroundings (Karen O. Solomon, Douglas L. Medin and Elizabeth Lynch, 1999; Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.), and oftentimes, this categorization is formed based on appearance and ideologies, i.e., principles, philosophies, beliefs, ideas, and thoughts, that are disseminated to advance the interests of a particular group of people (Joe R. Feagin, 2001:69). Race was constructed to capitalize on this behaviour.

According to Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2015), the ideology of race was socially constructed to create hierarchies amongst members of society and enable the continued domination of a group of people. Racial ideology supports everyday racism, is used by the state and organizations to establish rules, policies, programs and other structures for the continued exploitation and appropriation of certain groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Carroll L. Estes, 1991; C.L. Estes, K. W. Linkins and E. A. Binney, 1996 in McMullin and Curtis, 2017:109) and in particular, to support and justify the continued dehumanization of Black Peoples post-slavery. After all, if

Black Peoples are less than human, they should not have the same rights and levels of access to services as those who deem themselves to be *human* (emphasis added). Bonilla-Silva (2015) explains racial ideology:

"[racial ideology] is intrinsically connected to domination [...] without racial ideology or prejudice (Bonilla-Silva 2001), Europeans could not have conquered, enslaved and exploited people based on the claim that some people are different (better) than others (Hall 1997). They needed an ideology to convince them that the people they were subordinating were inferior, lesser beings and that Europeans were the "chosen people" (Gossett 1 97; Hannaford 1996)" (76-77).

Racial ideology provides a framework for reproducing racism – processes or methods that are used to maintain inequities in a society and support the continued subjugation of certain peoples for the continued dominance of one group. Bonilla-Silva (2015) explains the process:

"Racialized societies could not survive without ideology as it fulfills five vital social functions, namely, accounting for the existence of racial inequality, providing basic rules on engagement in interracial interactions, furnishing the basis for actors' racial subjectivity, shaping and influencing the views of dominated actors, and, by claiming universality, hiding the fact of racial domination [...] racial domination would not be possible without ideology" (76-77).

Racial ideology was used to construct, justify and prolong the barbaric system of enslavement of Black Peoples for profit in the transatlantic slave trade that was started by the Portuguese and the Spanish and embraced by the English/British and English colonists in the Americas (Feagin, 2001:42). "The enslavement of African women, men, and children not only

stemmed from a desire for profit but also from a concern with developing a scheme of social

control that maintained bond-labor against the resistance of those enslaved. The color and

cultural differences of Africans made them easier for whites to identity [*sic*] for purposes of

enslavement and control" (Feagin, 2001:40).

Several methods are used to maintain or socially produce and reproduce racial ideology,

including hierarchies, i.e., societal, intergroup and intra-group, neoliberalist legislations, policies

and procedures endorsed by the state (government) and organizations, racial stereotypes,

misogynoir, racial microaggressions, gaslighting, racelighting, shadism or colourism, scientific

racism and legal racism. These will be discussed in more detail in Section D of Chapter 2.

1.1.1. Ideologies about Black Peoples and Black Women

Pre-the transatlantic slave trade, Africans were positively perceived by other cultures

who "generally attached far greater significance to Africans' learning, advanced culture, and

nationality than to their physical characteristics", and these same qualities, skills and

developments were used by the Greeks and Romans as models for their own advancements

(Feagin, 2001:71). These same positive perceptions were still present in the early period of

colonial America (Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture,

n.d.). Increasingly, European colonisers in North America were preoccupied with finding low

cost, reliable sources of labour to acquire wealth, which led to the use of forced labour

(indentured servants) and enslaved labour. Various groups of workers were utilized, such as

European indentured servants and enslaved Indigenous Peoples, however African Peoples were

identified as optimal labourers based on their "advanced farming skills, carpentry, and

bricklaying skills, as well as metal and leatherworking skills" and thus, crucial labourers for

colonists' futures. In the early 1600s, "the first [enslaved] Africans were captured and brought

to the American colonies" (Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and

Culture, n.d.) and by the early 1700s, enslaved Africans became a primary source of labour

(Feagin, 2001:40). Feagin (2001) further elaborates:

> "The enslavement of African women, men, and children not only stemmed from
> a desire for profit but also from a concern with developing a scheme of social
> control that maintained bond-labor against the resistance of those enslaved. The
> color and cultural differences of Africans made them easier for [W]hites to
> identity for purposes of enslavement and control. […] Slavery was much more
> than a system of coerced labor. Enslaved [B]lacks were legally subjugated in or
> excluded from all societal institutions including the economic, legal, and political
> institutions. Slavery was a totalitarian system in which whites controlled the lives
> of [B]lack men, women, and children-a total racist society protecting [W]hite
> interests" (40-41).

Morgan (2004:12-49) chronicles ideologies that were created about Africans and,

particularly African and Indigenous women and their bodies, by European men while they

travelled to and from different parts of the world. Narratives about Black women were used to

compare Black women with European women, used to set them apart from European standards

of femininity, used to justify the practice of chattel slavery and the treatment of Black women in

chattel slavery and were used as a basis to entrench these ideals in chattel laws and processes

(Morgan, 2004:14). These same narratives were published, along with images, to disseminate

discourses and instill ideas about Black and Indigenous women to settlers and Europeans

contemplating colonial endeavours and to shape their perceptions and treatment of Black and

Indigenous women (Morgan, 2004:13-14, 19).

The following are some of the narratives that were implanted about Black women; that

they:

- Were monstrous with bodies fit only for producing crops and other labourers [children/future labourers]: having breasts that "hang down below their Navels, so that when they stoop at their common work of weeding, they hang almost to the ground, that at a distance you would think they had six legs" (Englishman Richard Ligon 1657:51 in Morgan, 2004:14),

- Were indispensable to reproduction (Morgan, 2004:26),

- Were sexually available and promiscuous (Morgan, 2004:27, 45),

- Were physically strong and emotionally indifferent for being able to rise after giving birth, clean herself and carry on with daily functions - "they use no Nurses to helpe them when they lie in child-bed, neither seeke to lie dainty and soft…[they…] are of a cruder nature and stronger posture than the Females in our Lands in Europe [Dutch]" (Pieter De Marees 1602: [edition] 6:259 and 23 in Morgan, 2004:30, 31),

- Were savages – "savagery of blackness" characterized in Pieter De Marees writings, such as "very greedie eaters, and no lesse drinkers, and very lecherous, and theevish, and much addicted to uncleanenesse; one man hath as many wives as hee is able to keepe and maintaine. The women also are much addicted to leacherie, specially, with strange Countrey people . . . [and] are also great Lyers, and not to be credited" – his description of the people in Sierre Leon; and that Black women were "shamelesse" because they gave birth while "surrounded by men, women and youngsters". (Pieter De Marees 1602: [edition] 6:251 in Morgan, 2004:30, 36),

- Did not experience pain/could tolerate pain, specifically in reference to childbearing, being whipped or branded with a hot iron (Saidiya Hartman, 1997:51 in Morgan, 2004:40),

- Were "sagging breasted African savages" (Morgan, 2004:42),

- Were animals and practiced bestiality (Morgan, 2004:41),

- Were ignorant and stupid and unable to control their lust (Morgan, 2004:41),

- Were "Amazon women enduring hardships, the likes of which no "lady" could endure" and the "tough, domineering, aggressive matriarch" (Esmeralda Thornhill, 1991 in Das Gupta 1996:17), and

that "Africans are in fact improved by slavery" (Saidiya Hartman, 1997:51 in Morgan, 2004:40).

1.2. Stereotypes

Throughout history, stereotypes have been used to influence the ways in which people create and form ideas, attitudes and beliefs about certain groups of peoples. According to G. Allport (1979:191 in D. G. Solorzano, 1997), a stereotype is "[a]n exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category" (8). Stereotypes are assumptions that are generalized about a group of people, do not consider individual differences and are often internalized as truth. These assumptions are often negative and lack truth (Lauren Green, n.d.; Solorzano, 1997; Ontario Human Rights Commission). For example, Black people are often compared to animals, and are stereotyped as being unintelligent, violent, lazy and unambitious. These beliefs served to justify the treatment of slaves during slavery and the treatment of Black Peoples after the abolition of slavery, including the killing, tormenting and subjugation of Black Peoples (Green, n.d.). Furthermore, the treatment of Black Peoples during transatlantic slavery was reinforced by scientific research that

supported the misperception that Black Peoples are less than human (Green, n.d.), and are objects (Frantz Fanon, 1952) to be bought, used and discarded.

Though transatlantic slavery was abolished in the nineteenth century[49], the effects of slavery and racism are still being felt in today's North American society. In a report to the United Nations General Assembly on August 2, 2019, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent summarized "[t]he legacy of racial stereotypes and negative characterizations of people of African descent, which were created to justify the enslavement of Africans, continue today". Racial stereotypes have evolved, transforming society, and continue to harm people of African descent and violate their human rights" (1). Christina Sharpe (2016) defines this phenomenon as the "Wake: the track left on the water's surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming or moved, in water; it is the air currents behind a body in flight; a region of disturbed flow […i]n the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present" (3, 9).

Racial stereotypes historically created to influence the perceptions and treatment of Black women include (Green, n.d.; Rowina Debalkew, 2022; Daphna Motro, Jonathan B. Evans, Aleksander P. J. Ellis, Lehman Benson III, 2022; Collins Maina, 2022; Paula Gowdie, 2023) include:

- Mammy, developed and propagated by imperialistic and colonialist slave owners during slavery to support the continuation of slavery; the drably dressed but very efficient domestic servant with masculine-like features and mannerisms, selflessly devoted to her masters and their families above her own needs and her own family, who post-slavery evolved into Aunt Jemima,
- Aunt Jemima, who was very much like Mammy, though she was primarily responsible for cooking,

- Sapphire, the matriarch, headstrong, aggressive, disagreeable, argumentative and who overpowers her husband, and

- Jezebel, sexual object to be used and abused at men's whim.

These same stereotypes and more, have been, and continue to be promoted in society through the media, are supported by scientific racism and legalized racism that propagates anti-Black racism, and influences and effects the treatment of Black women in employment and the workplace today through the *angry Black woman* trope.

2. Everyday Racism

Philomena Essed (1991:39 in McMullin and Curtis, 2017) describes racism as "a system of structural inequalities and a historical process, both created and recreated through routine practices" (85) that defines systems of domination, including access to resources by certain groups and the subjugation of other groups (Aguirre, Jr., Eick and Reese, 2006:2). Moreover, Essed (1991:39-41 in McMullin and Curtis, 2017) elaborates that racism is simultaneously "an ideology, a structure and a process in which power, **prejudice**, and meaning are central elements […;] power [is] a process in which certain groups (not individuals) maintain their position of power by drawing on ideologies that suggest there are innate differences between the powerful group and others […] through action or inaction" (85). Therefore, Essed (1991:52 in McMullin and Curtis, 2017) defines everyday racism as,

"a process in which (a) socialized racist notions are integrated into meanings that make practices immediately definable and manageable, (b) practices with racist implications become in themselves familiar and repetitive, and (c) underlying racial and ethnic relations are actualized and reinforced through these routine or familiar practices in everyday situations" (86).

In everyday life, people are categorized by physical characteristics, how they speak, their behaviours, the decisions they make, and these categorizations are based on ideologies and narratives that are disseminated throughout society. For example, Black Peoples are judged by the colour of their skin regardless of education, qualifications, class or any other achievements ("colour prejudice", Sir Alan Burns, 1948 in Fanon, 1952:89). Everyday racism results from creating, recreating and associating certain ideas and behaviours with individuals who possess particular physical attributes, such as skin colour and using power and privilege to actively and inactively endorse and uphold constructed differences between groups of people in order to maintain positions of power. Furthermore, everyday racism continues to exist due to processes of exclusion and subordination such as,

> "racial- and ethnic-based labour-market segmentation […,] the banning of
>
> certain racial minority and ethnic minority groups from organizations such as golf
>
> clubs, not recognizing certain credentials, and ignoring racism, [… and because]
>
> people of dominant groups are reluctant to acknowledge and address their own
>
> racist behaviour [… or] take a stand against racism" (Essed, 1991 in McMullin
>
> and Curtis, 2017:86).

Black women experience everyday racism in three ways (Essed, 1991 in Hill Collins, 1992:791). Firstly, through **marginalization**, which makes them feel left out and insignificant. Strategies of marginalization include propagating ideals of whiteness as normal and acceptable, which results in the exclusion and degradation of blackness, ignoring Black women, not inviting Black women's participation in activities, discouraging Black women from submitting applications for positions or programs that are normally available to whites, and disregarding, discounting or overlooking the contributions of Black women.

Secondly, **problematization** is the act of White people making Black Peoples to be problems to them. Strategies of problematization include assigning negative attributes to Black women, such as being "unreliable, oversensitive, having language deficiencies, lacking motivation and skills, being more prone to shoplift, or generally being inferior" (Essed, 1991 in Hill Collins, 1992:791).

Thirdly, **containment** serves to silence or *contain* (emphasis added) Black Peoples who protest or resist racism. Strategies of containment include denying that racism exists by not confronting racist behaviour or acts or only acknowledging excessive racism, raging against or attacking Black Peoples who raise issues of racism, and choosing a select few Black Peoples to befriend so as to support the claim of not being racist (Essed, 1991 in Hill Collins, 1992:791). Essed (1991:155 in McMullin and Curtis, 2017) summarizes the experiences of Rosa N., a Black woman doctor in a hospital in the Netherlands, who participated in her research:

> "I can never in my life bring up the subject of racism. That just can't be,
> because they'll only trip me up. If you want to say anything about racism,
> you've got to state your case very well. Otherwise…they tackle you and lay down
> a thousand pieces of evidence to prove the opposite, and they make you
> ridiculous" (86).

These strategies reproduce race and racial ideology. Racial ideology presents challenges to Black women getting into the workplace, staying in the workplace and affecting the quality of life that Black women experience while in the workplace.

D. Strategies Used to Maintain, or Socially Produce and Reproduce, Racial Ideology That Impact the Daily Lived Experiences and Work Life Experiences of Black Women

Several strategies are used to maintain or socially produce and reproduce racial ideology, to support anti-Black racism for Black Peoples and to oppress Black women's daily lived experiences and their work life experiences. Strategies employed include racial and sexist stereotypes, misogynoir, racial and sexist microaggressions, gaslighting and racelighting, institutional and interpersonal stressors, the objectification of Black women, intergroup and intra-group competition, colourism or shadism, neoliberalist ideologies and policies endorsed by the government, organizational structures, policies, processes and practices, and scientific racism and legalized racism.

1. Misogynoir

Misogynoir was coined in 2008 by Moya Bailey, a queer Black feminist, and popularized in 2010 to describe "the specific hatred, dislike, distrust, and prejudice directed toward Black women" (Gassam Asare, 2020) that is rooted in racism (Blackburn Centre, 2020). The Center for the Study of Social Policy (2019) further elaborates that misogynoir "can also be understood as the unique oppression experienced by Black women at the intersection of race and gender, in comparison to women of other races. Misogynoir utilizes and reinforces stereotypes of Black women".

2. Racial And Sexist Microaggressions

The term **microaggressions**, originally coined in 1978 by African American psychiatrist and Harvard University Professor Chester Middlebrook Pierce, was used to describe Black Peoples' experiences with racism as "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and nonverbal exchanges which are 'put-downs'" (C. M. Pierce, J. V. Carew, D. Pierce-Gonzalez and D. Willis,

1978:66 in Derald Wing Sue and Lisa Spanierman, 2020:7). Microaggressions have also been

defined as "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color,

often automatically or unconsciously" (D. Solórzano, M. Ceja and T. Yosso, 2000:60 in Sue and

Spanierman, 2020:7). Though historically associated with racism, microaggressions are

experienced by marginalized groups and are associated with "racism, sexism, genderism,

heterosexism, classism, ableism, and other forms of oppression" (K. L. Nadal, C. N. Whitman, L.

S. Davis, T. Erazo and K.C. Davidoff, 2016; D. W. Sue and C. M. Capodilupo, 2008 in Sue and

Spanierman, 2020:7).

According to Derald Wing Sue, Christina M. Capodilupo, Gina C. Torino, Jennifer M.

Bucceri, Aisha M. B. Holder, Kevin L. Nadal and Marta Esquilin (2007), racial microaggressions

are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether

intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and

insults toward people of color" (271). These behaviours often occur "automatically or

unconsciously" (Solórzano et al., 2000 in Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal and

Esquilin, 2007:273) and manifest as "subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures, and

tones…[that] are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous"

(Solórzano et al., 2000 in Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal and Esquilin,

2007:273). "'[M]icroinequities' is used to describe the pattern of being overlooked,

underrespected, and devalued because of one's race or gender" (Solórzano et al., 2000 in Sue,

Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal and Esquilin, 2007:273).

Sexist microaggressions are defined as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral,

or environmental indignities (intentional or unintentional) that communicate hostile, derogatory,

or negative sexist slights and insults toward women" (Kevin L. Nadal, 2010:158 in Marcus A.

Cherry and Melanie M. Wilcox, 2021:107). Eight themes of sexist microaggressions have been

identified as "leaving gender at the door, sexual objectification, environmental invalidations, invalidating women's realities, denial of sexism, assumptions of traditional gender roles, expectations of appearance, and assumptions of inferiority" (A. O. Derthick, 2015 in Cherry and Wilcox, 2021:107).

Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal and Esquilin (2007) defined three categories of microaggressions: **microassaults**, **microinsults**, and **microinvalidations** (273-275). A microassault is a deliberate act, verbal or non-verbal, intended to racially degrade an individual, including calling a person by a racial slur such as Cool** to a South Asian person or by the N* word to a Black person, purposely offering service first to a White person before a person from a racially oppressed group and displaying racist images. Microassaults are privately held beliefs that are often experienced at the individual level unless the perpetrator is publicly provoked or feels safe to express their ideas. Microinsults are unconscious thoughts or actions of a perpetrator that are insulting, insensitive or demeaning to a person's heritage or identity. These include comments and practices involved in hiring processes, such as to imply that a person from a racially oppressed group could not be qualified for a certain position or failing to recognize input from individuals from racially oppressed groups. Microinvalidations are "communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color" (Sue et al., 2007:274-275). For example, telling persons from racially oppressed groups that their experiences are not real, products of their imaginations, or that they are being too sensitive, or declaring to a Black person that one does not see colour.

3. Gaslighting and Racelighting

Gaslighting, a type of psychological abuse that was brought to light through a 1938 play by Patrick Hamilton and popularized in mainstream films, is a phenomenon that utilizes

tools of oppression, such as stereotypes and microaggressions to dominate and maintain social inequities and vulnerabilities. Gaslighting is the deliberate manipulation of circumstances by some individuals that result in others questioning their mental capacities and their realities (Paige L. Sweet, 2022; Wood and Harris III, 2021). As Wood and Harris III (2021) elaborate, gaslighting "causes people to second guess their experiences, emotions, knowledge, judgment, memories and ultimately their humanity" (10).

Racelighting is experienced when people from racially oppressed groups "question their own thoughts and actions due to systematically delivered racialized messages that make them second guess their own lived experiences with racism […,] question their interpretation of reality and wonder if they are being overly sensitive [… and particular to the experiences of Black Peoples, when we] question our own mistreatment" (Wood and Harris III, 2021:11). The messages in racelighting intentionally or unintentionally reinforce racial stereotypes that people from racially oppressed groups are "academically inferior, have lower capabilities, are morally destitute, and are of lesser worth" (Wood and Harris III, 2021 in Luke J. Wood, 2021). Individuals who are racelighted feel invalidated, doubt themselves, internalize feelings of inferiority, and struggle with maintaining their beliefs of their capabilities and sense of self as they start to believe negative stereotypes (Wood and Harris III, 2021:11).

4. Black Women: Disposable Bodies

Colonialists, and colonist slave owners in the Americas, determined that enslaved African women were crucial to the continuation and expansion of the slave trade, chattel slavery and for their profit, so Black women were exploited in many ways for their labour and reproductive labour.

Though Black women laboured alongside enslaved African men in the fields to produce crops (agriculture; Brand, 1987), in order to support narratives of racial ideology and maintain

the money making enterprise of slavery, slave owners forced Black women to primarily do the "backbreaking labor" of field work so as to promote Black women's "supposed ability to labor ceaselessly", while enslaved Black men were primarily assigned to skilled positions such as drivers, craft workers, e.g., wood work and making barrels, and "working in the boiling house" (Morgan, 2004:144-151).

Enslaved Black women were bought for a price. They were stripped of their person, their humanity, and their bodies were seen as the property of their slave owners to be used as they wished. Elgersman (2013), referencing W.A. Spray, 1972:21, indicates "[e]ven though the colonial law of […] Canada […] prohibited slave owners from administering inhumane punishment and from murdering their slaves, slave women were still worked, punished, and sold according to the needs and desires of their owners" (72). Referred to as "increasers" by slave owners (Morgan, 2004:82), enslaved Black women were raped and coerced into sexual relations by slave owners and White men for their sexual pleasure, to produce additional slave labourers to advance the wealth of slave owners (Morgan, 2004:69) and as a means of controlling Black women and men during slavery and post slavery (Patricia Morton, 1996:7-8 in Feagin 2001:46-7).

Also, it was believed that breastmilk was the "ideal nutrition for babies" (Marylynn Salmon, 1994 in Andrea Freeman, 2018:1553), which led to the commodification of Black women's bodies during chattel slavery and post slavery for their breast milk, commonly referred to as "liquid gold" (Freeman, 2018:1553), to breastfeed the babies of their slave owners' wives (or mistresses) and other White women as wet nurses. "A wet nurse is a new mother who is paid or, during slavery, compelled, to breastfeed another woman's child" (Freeman, 2018:1555). Wet nursing was a practice used by the wealthy in England that was continued by English settlers in the Americas.

Enslaved Black women were separated, sometimes permanently, from their own babies to breastfeed and care for White babies (Valerie Fildes, supra note 38, at 139 in Freeman, 2018:1557). Therefore, the benefits of breastfeeding were prioritized for White babies while denying or restricting the same access for Black babies (Treckel, supra note 44, at 51 in Freeman, 2018:1557; Emily West and R. J. Knight, 2017:47). This resulted in "increased infant mortality rates in slave communities, while providing increased protection to White children" (Treckel, supra note 44, at 51 in Freeman, 2018:1557).

Moreover, in the 1600s, many White settlers and Native Americans died from malaria. It was believed that African women's breast milk contained natural immunity for this disease that was transmitted to White babies through breastfeeding (Treckel, supra note 44, at 48 in Freeman, 2018:1557). It was also believed that breastfeeding was a form of contraception, so some slave owners limited enslaved Black women's wet nursing to short periods, e.g., one year at a time, so they could produce new slaves by "raping new mothers" (Freeman, 2018:1556). Furthermore, by using wet nurses, White slave owners could pursue procreating new heirs with their wives (Freeman, 2018:1557).

In addition to the horrific and inhumane conditions and treatment of enslaved Africans (Elgersman, 2013:72; Feagin, 2001), Black women were bought and sold at the discretion of slave owners, separated from their children and men, and bequeathed in wills to the families of White slave owners with or without their children (Elgersman, 2013:73-75; Morgan, 2004:78-85).

Furthermore, Black women were used for domestic labour as house servants or domestic workers in the homes of their slave owners to cook, clean and care for slave owners' children, families and homes and to be available to their slave owners at all hours of the day and night (Elgersman, 2013:71, 80; Feagin, 2001:44) and at the expense of caring for their

own children and men. Since a primary intent of chattel slavery was to heavily control Black

women, men and children for the economic interests of White colonists and slave owners

(Feagin, 2001:41), a deliberate strategy was to prevent Black women from creating and

developing attachments to Black children and men, to disrupt "not only […] Black family bonds,

but […] the mother-child relationship at its most physical level" (Freeman, 2018:1552). After

all, enslaved Africans did not have agency over their lives and bodies and could be controlled,

bred, raped, exploited, tortured, murdered, captured, stolen away, bequeathed, gifted, and sold

by slave owners at any time.

5. Colourism or Shadism

Colourism or **shadism** is a type of racism based on skin tone that is used to divide,

and maintain divisions, amongst groups of people. Hunter (2005 in Hunter, 2007) defines

colourism as "the process of discrimination that privileges light-skinned people of color over

their dark-skinned counterparts" (237). Skin tone discrimination is a byproduct of colonization

and imperialism (Hunter, 2007; Verna M. Keith and Carla R. Monroe, 2016) that operates

generally amongst groups of people in society, e.g., Caucasians and Black Peoples, but more

specifically within groups of racially oppressed people, e.g., within groups of Black Peoples, and

is used to affect everyday life circumstances, e.g., romantic relationships, access to healthcare,

housing, financial opportunities and other opportunities for advancement, such as education,

successfully attaining positions of power and employment (Hunter 2007; Keith and Monroe,

2016).

Colourism is relevant to Black Peoples and other racially oppressed groups with histories

of colonization, such as Latinos, African Americans, South Asians, Vietnamese and Filipinos (see

Hunter, 2007). During colonization, white skin and whiteness were revered by the various

groups to mean "desirability" (Keith and Monroe, 2016:5) and "civility, rationality, beauty, and

superiority" (Hunter, 2007:238). This was juxtaposed against "darkness, especially Blackness, [to mean] marginalization" (Keith and Monroe, 2016:5) and dark skin to "[represent] savagery, irrationality, ugliness, and inferiority (Keith and Monroe, 2016:238-239). The ideals of whiteness, including "Anglo facial features [, e.g., light hair, straight hair, light eyes, narrow noses, and light skin]" (Keith and Monroe, 2016:239-240) were consciously sought after and "those who emulated whiteness culturally, ideologically, economically, and even aesthetically [including, physical features]" were rewarded with privileges, resources and opportunities that were out of reach for dark-skinned people (Hunter, 2007, 238-239).

During the transatlantic slave trade, colourism was practiced on plantations in the Americas by White slave owners (Donald L. Horowitz, 1973 in Hunter 2007:239). For example, enslaved Africans with white ancestry (mixed racial ancestry, i.e., one parent was Black African and one was White) were treated better than their "purely African" counterparts (J. Williamson, 1995 in Keith and Monroe, 2016:6). Light-skinned enslaved Africans were given additional privileges such as "working in the house [(house slaves)] as opposed to the fields [(field slaves)], the occasional opportunity to learn to read, and the rare chance for manumission" (F. James Davis, 1991 in Hunter 2007:239). Also, "a small, but elite class of freedmen was established. These disproportionately light-skinned men and women were early business leaders, clergy, teachers, and artisans, who became economic and community leaders in the early African American community" (G. F. Edwards, 1959; E. Franklin Frazier, 1957; Willard B. Gatewood, 1990 in Hunter, 2007:239). Moreover, in post Civil War America, Black individuals of mixed racial ancestry were primarily the first to gain entry into Black Colleges and Universities (E. F. Frazier, 1957/1962 in Keith and Monroe, 2016:6) and White institutions of higher learning (W. B. Gatewood, 1990; L. M. Perkins, 1997 in Keith and Monroe, 2016:6).

The ideals of whiteness are still ingrained in today's society and are used to promote

beauty standards and influence advancement opportunities to education, positions of power,

wealth, healthcare, romantic relationships and employment. For example, Keith and Monroe

(2016) write:

> "when African Americans, Asians, and Latinos/as fare comparably well within
>
> their ethnoracial group, they tend to have lighter complexions (Allen, Telles, &
>
> Hunter, 2000; Rondilla & Spickard, 2007). Meanwhile, people with dark skin
>
> tones report troubled accounts in sectors such as occupation (Keith & Herring,
>
> 1991), wages (Goldsmith, Hamilton, & Darity Jr., 2006), and romantic options
>
> (Hunter, 2005, 2007) [… Also, i]ncome and occupational differences between
>
> light- and dark-skinned African Americans can be as wide as differentials
>
> between African Americans and Whites (Hughes & Hertel, 1990). […] Darker skin
>
> has been associated with lower income among Filipino American men (Kiang &
>
> Takeuchi, 2009) [… Moreover, a]mong African Americans, light-complexioned
>
> Blacks tend to earn higher incomes (Keith & Herring, 1991) [and] light-skinned
>
> Black women are more likely to marry high-status spouses who earn good
>
> salaries than dark-skinned Black women (Hunter, 2004)" (4-5).

Hunter (2007) adds, "Latinos who identified as white earned about $5000 more per year than

Latinos who identified as [B]lack, and about $2500 more per year than Latinos who identified as

'some other race'" (Fears, 2003) [,… and] lighter-skinned Mexican Americans and African

Americans earn more money than their darker-skinned counterparts (Allen et al., 2000; Arce et

al., 1987)" (241).

Moreover, the ideals of whiteness have been unconsciously incorporated (internalized)

by people across the globe resulting in the "bleaching syndrome" (Ronald Hall, 1994, 1995,

1997 in Hunter, 2007:239) that still exists, is practiced, and sought after in all facets of society, including employment. **Bleaching** practices include the lucrative market[50] of skin bleaching, skin whitening, or skin lightening, products targeted particularly at Black Peoples and other racially oppressed groups and ethnic plastic surgery, or ethnic modification, to modify ethnic appearing body parts to adopt more white-like features. Other practices include seeking after "the life of the leisure class" (Vanessa Jones, 2004; Joanne Rondilla and Paul Spickard, 2007 in Hunter 2007:239), skin bleaching to achieve a lighter skin tone to emulate light-skinned elite individuals who attain powerful positions (Hunter, 2007:239) such as "African American celebrities [who] are typically light-skinned with Anglo features" (Milkie, 1999 in Hunter, 2007:240).

6. Scientific Racism

For centuries in North America, science and the law have been used to legitimize, promulgate, and promote stereotypes and negative beliefs about people of racially oppressed and marginalized groups so as to maintain divisions and differences, support discrimination and maintain structures and systems of oppression. These practices continue today.

Scientific racism was used to promote "polygenism…that human races were distinct species" (Harvard Library, n.d.), that there are biological differences between the races, and in the late 1800s, that Black Americans were "predisposed to disease and destined for extinction" (Harvard Library, n.d.). Eugenics was, and is still, used to promote ideas of superior and inferior races, warnings against mixing races and interracial reproduction, limiting immigration, the intelligence, or the lack thereof, of certain races, the development of intelligence tests (IQ tests) and limiting the birth rates of races deemed to be inferior (Adam S. Cohen, 2016). Though biological differences have been disproven, racism was co-opted in social science to support segregation and other types of anti-Black racism, which are still evident in modern day

North America. For example, streaming practices in North American, and specifically Canadian, education systems that have been proven to disadvantage Black Peoples who are treated according to stereotypes held by teachers and not by the abilities of individuals (Karl Thompson, 2023; Carl E. James and Tana Turner, 2017).

Also, in healthcare, it is widely believed and promoted that Black Peoples have a higher pain threshold, and as a result, Black Peoples are less likely to be given pain medication than their White counterparts (Nicole Mortillaro, 2021; Kelly M. Hoffman, Sophie Trawalter, Jordan R. Axt and M. Norman Oliver, 2016; A. Singhal, Y-Y Tien, RY Hsia, 2016). Instead, Black Peoples arriving at hospitals in pain, continue to be dismissed (Oluwafunmilayo Akinlade, 2020) or are perceived as, and treated as, drug seekers and drug users (Janice A. Sabin, 2020).

Moreover, systemic racism in healthcare is responsible for the high mortality rates of Black women in North America as compared to White women (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023; Ahmedin Jemal, Melissa M. Center, Carol DeSantis, Elizabeth M. Ward, 2010; Onye Nnorom, Nicole Findlay, Nakia K. Lee-Foon, Ankur A. Jain, Carolyn P. Ziegler, Fran E. Scott, Patricia Rodney, Aisha K. Lofters, 2019; American Cancer Society, 2019; Olga Bougie, Jenna Healey, Sukhbir S. Singh in Caitlin Dunne, 2020). Systemic racism in healthcare is also responsible for the increased rates of death of Black women during and after pregnancy, which is more than three times the rate of their White counterparts (Center for Disease Control (CDC), 2019 in Emily Clark, 2021; Population Reference Bureau, 2021; Nina Martin, ProPublica, Renee Montagne, 2017).

7. Legalized Racism

The justice system is often perceived to be "blind", i.e., objective, neutral, fair (Robert L. Trestman, 2018:416). However, the legal system and laws have historically been used, and continue to be used, to legitimize harms to vulnerable and oppressed groups by prioritizing the

66

demands and greed (capitalism) of the dominant group. Some examples of **legalized racism** include:

- "By the 1670s the lives of most people of African descent were severely restricted by the new laws legitimating and protecting slavery. The degradation of this slavery was clear. In one 1671 declaration Virginia's General Assembly put 'sheep, horses, and cattle' in the same category as 'negroes'" (Feagin, 2001:41).

- "Colonial laws early attempted to prevent [B]lack men and women from running away; there were barbaric laws encompassing the whipping, castration, or killing of rebellious slaves" (A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., 1996: xxiii; Lawrence M. Friedman, 1973:72–76, 192–200; Herbert Aptheker, 1943:53-78 in Feagin, 2001:41).

- "[T]he Declaration of Independence (1776) and the Constitution of the United States (1787), were drafted and enacted by 'elite white men' who themselves were slaveholders or had interests in the slave trade and who 'had strong ties to the entrenched system of [B]lack enslavement'" (Feagin, 2001:41).

- In the 1857 Dred Scott decision at the United States Supreme Court, White judges asserted that enslaved Black Americans were "'beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect'" (Dred Scott v. John F.A. Sandford, 60 U.S. 393, 1857:408 in Feagin, 2001:39).

8. Exclusion and Erasure

The stories and experiences of Black women are often silenced (muted), not acknowledged or not recognized as credible knowledge and thus excluded, not published or made available. The same is true in the labour movement where the involvement of Black Peoples, and particularly Black women, is rarely included, acknowledged or celebrated. Instead, representations and narratives about Black women disseminated through the media, movies, television, video games and other sources, or the lack of representation, serve to limit, restrict and contain Black women's options by reproducing racial ideologies. Such representations are examples of "symbolic annihilation, a phenomenon where certain groups are silenced, ignored, or erased in media representations" (G. Tuchman, 2000 in Mahedi Hasan, 2024:256). Moreover, **muted group theory**[51], developed by Edwin Ardener and Shirley Ardener, speaks to power imbalances between dominant groups and certain groups and the ways in which dominant groups "control and shape communication channels, making it difficult for marginalized groups to have their perspectives acknowledged and heard" (Hasan, 2024:256).

Various processes of exclusion and erasure have been used throughout history to omit and erase Black women and their contributions. First, traditional epistemologies and ontologies were developed by men and were based on the experiences of men, and notably White men, thereby excluding the stories of, and dismissing the experiences of women, racially oppressed groups and marginalized groups. In protest of traditional epistemologies, feminist and anti-racist epistemologies were developed and disseminated by feminist scholars to support women, racially oppressed groups and marginalized peoples as credible producers of knowledge (DeVault, 1996; Hunter, 2002). Harding (1987 in Hunter, 2002) defines epistemologies as "theories of knowledge that make basic claims about the nature of knowledge: who can know,

how we know, and what counts as evidence for our claims" (120). Further, Hunter (2002)

argues that "epistemologies do not exist outside of the people who construct and use them

[and] are situated within political, historical, and economic contexts that can provide power and

legitimacy to their knowledge claims" (120). As a result, Black women "not only have

developed a distinctive Black women's standpoint, but have done so by using alternative ways

of producing and validating knowledge" (Hill Collins, 2000:252).

Secondly, social movements, such as the women's movements, while helpful in

advancing women's issues relative to men's issues, can also be harmful because social

movements are singularly focused and do not consider intersectionalities or differences of the

many groups that may be involved. For example, women's movements prioritized the issues of

White women and supported ideals of whiteness, thereby ignoring issues that impact women of

other groups differently, as well as women of other ethnicities, and especially Black women.

Also, through the various tropes disseminated about Black women, Black women are

portrayed as having masculine features and tendencies, being less like White women and thus,

are not viewed as women but more like Black men. As such, Black women are left out of

discussions and activities related to women. Stewart M. Coles and Josh Pasek (2020)

conducted research that showed that Black women "are dually excluded from the superordinate

category of women, and their distinction within the Black community is erased via

underdifferentiation from Black men" (321). Coles and Pasek (2020) refer to these phenomena

as "intersectional invisibility" and "group prototypes" that "fail to recognize Black women as

women or for their unique concerns as Black women [... and] neglect the unique, intersectional

experiences of race and gender discrimination that sometimes distinguish Black women's

experiences of racism from Black men's experiences of racism (Crenshaw, 1989)" (315).

Thirdly, the labour movement was created by White men to secure employment for White men by excluding certain groups of oppressed workers, and particularly Black Peoples, from joining unions (AFLCIO Labor Commission on Racial and Economic Justice, 2015; Mathieu, 2001; Moreno, 2010; Das Gupta, 2007; Ray Marshall, 1964). Exclusion and erasure undermine "[Black women's] credibility and expertise […] send[ing] a message that their contributions are not worth *[sic]* of recognition, ultimately devaluing their work and hindering progress on critical issues such as climate change and social justice" (P. H. Collins, 2004; R. E. Gutsche, Jr. et al., 2022 in Hasan, 2024:257).

Moreover, the narratives created, disseminated and perpetrated through racial ideology about Black women support the continuous reproduction of anti-Black racism that reduces Black women's status and abilities and diminishes and dismisses contributions Black women may make for the advancement of humanity.

E. Research Participants

Research participants were twenty-three (23) women who identify (self identify) racially as Black, and who are leaders currently involved in, or who were previously involved in but have since retired from, labour union organizations across several Canadian provinces and territories[52]. Research participants hold a variety of elected and recruited paid[53] and unpaid executive[54] positions and union staff positions while simultaneously holding other paid and unpaid leadership roles in other union organizations affiliated with their Canadian labour union organization that represent a wide range of industries and workers in the private and public sectors at local, provincial, national and international levels including manufacturing, healthcare, food services, education, retail, construction, trades and utilities, hospitality and transportation services, social services, public administration, professional services and legal services. While

their leadership roles and responsibilities varied and were at all levels of the union, the work of many research participants primarily involved human rights and equity rights.

Research participants were new to the researcher, i.e., though the researcher may have become knowledgeable about some of the participants through research or by referral, they did not have contact prior to the research. Though the researcher would have wanted to provide monetary incentives to research participants, it was not possible. Therefore, no monetary incentives were offered. Having said this, research participants acknowledged the importance of the subject matter of the research and the significance of their participation in this research, and acknowledged a lack of opportunities for Black women to speak about their work life experiences in Canadian labour unions.

1. Activity Status in Canadian Labour Union Organizations

- Eighteen (18), or 78%, research participants are actively involved in Canadian labour union organizations.
- Five (5), or 22%, research participants are retired from Canadian labour union organizations, though they continue to provide education, support and leadership to persons who continue to participate in Canadian labour union organizations.

2. Age

- Two (2), or 8.70%, research participants were born in the 1940s.
- Four (4), or 17.39%, research participants were born in the 1950s.
- Six (6), or 26.09%, research participants were born in the 1960s.
- Eight (8), or 34.78%, research participants were born in the 1970s.
- Two (2), or 8.70%, research participants were born in the 1980s.
- One (1), or 4.34%, research participant was born in the 1990s.

3. Levels of Education

- Eight (8) research participants have completed college; three (3) of whom are in the process of completing an undergraduate degree.

- Eight (8) research participants have completed an undergraduate degree; one (1) of whom is in the process of completing a graduate (master's) degree.

- Six (6) research participants have completed a master's degree; two (2) have completed some postgraduate studies.

- One (1) research participant has completed a doctoral (PhD) degree.

- All twenty-three (23) research participants have participated in, and completed, various professional development programs.

4. Years of involvement In Canadian Labour Union Organizations

Research participants are involved in Canadian unions in executive and union staff leadership roles that are either fully paid, i.e., with a salary and other benefits, partially paid, i.e., union release time away from their employer's position for a few days each week or month that is paid by the union, or volunteer based, i.e., do not receive any form of payment from the union and complete union work outside of normal work hours, e.g., evenings, weekends, etc., in addition to their regular employment position. Many research participants are involved in several leadership roles in unions while simultaneously holding other leadership roles in other union organizations affiliated with their Canadian labour union organization.

Research participants' years of involvement in Canadian labour union organizations include:

- 1-10 years: 5, or 21.739%.

- 11-20 years: 10, or 43.478%.

- 21-30 years: 3, or 13.04%.

- 31-40 years: 5, or 21.739%.

F. The Interview Process

Twenty-three (23) Black women union leaders were interviewed after their signed Informed Consent forms to participate in, and to audio-record, the interviews were received. Research participants were given the option of completing the interview virtually via Zoom or by telephone. Twenty-two (22) interviews were conducted via Zoom and one (1) by telephone as selected by research participants. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

At the start of each interview, participants were provided with opportunities to acknowledge that they read and understood the Informed Consent form that they had signed, to ask questions about the research and to verbally acknowledge their consent to audio-record the interview (which was also included in the signed Informed Consent Form). The researcher then provided an overview of the interview process. Each research participant completed one (1) interview during the period of December 2021 to March 2022, and the duration of interviews ranged from 60 minutes to 178 minutes with an average of 100 minutes.

Participants responded to a number of open-ended questions that were prepared by the researcher in advance of the start of the research project and were used as a guide for discussion with research participants. The researcher's in-depth knowledge of the workplace and union workplace environment and practices contributed to the formation of the research questions (Andrew Clark, Caroline Holland, Jeanne Katz and Sheila Peace, 2009:356). During interviews, probing questions, i.e., follow up questions, were asked by the researcher to ensure her understanding of participants' responses, and participants' responses also prompted additional questions by the researcher that served to expand on the initial question, develop rapport, create a safe space for research participants and encourage participants to speak

about their experiences and ask any questions that they had. The researcher's aim was to build "relationality" with research participants (DeVault, 1996:37; Nicholls, 2009). Other research goals were to create a participatory and collaborative research process for research participants, transparency (DeVault, 1996:38; Nicholls, 2009) and learning from research participants (DeVault, 1996; Hunter, 2009; Nicholls, 2009). Interview questions were not shared with research participants in advance of interviews.

G. Researcher as An Insider

As she prepared for, and during, this research, the researcher continuously reflected on her positionalities, biases and vulnerabilities (DeVault, 1996; Gatenby and Humphries, 2000:90; Nicholls, 2009; Hunter, 2002:132; Lumsden, 2012). The researcher acknowledges insider locations that she shares with research participants. She is a Black woman and a leader (volunteer) in a Canadian union for the past twenty-eight years who undergoes poor work life experiences in her Canadian union and non-union organizations that she believes results primarily from the social constructs of her race. Though, she is cognizant that while Black women are subjected to the same oppressions, there are differences in each person's experiences, and that it is important that each participant is able to tell their stories in their own way, in their own words (DeVault, 1996; Hunter, 2009; Nicholls, 2009).

Notes

[44] See Note #26.
[45] Rise Up! A Digital Archive of Feminist Activism, https://riseupfeministarchive.ca/black-women-in-the-womens-movement/.

[46] Bailey, Dr. Megan (n.d.). Between Two Worlds: Black Women and the Fight for Voting Rights, part of a series on Suffrage in America: The 15th and 19th Amendments. https://www.nps.gov/articles/black-women-and-the-fight-for-voting-rights.htm.

[47] The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Thesaurus @ Cambridge University Press defines "othering" as "the act of treating someone as though they are not part of a group and are different in some way". https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/othering.

[48] See Note #7.

[49] Transatlantic slavery was abolished August 28, 1833 in Britain, August 1, 1834 in Canada (Henry, 2016) and December 6, 1865 in the United States (The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration).

[50] In 2022, the global market for skin whitening was estimated to be $8.8 billion USD. This market is projected to be $13.3 billion USD in 2030. Global Industry Analysts, Inc. (https://www.strategyr.com/market-report-skin-lighteners-forecasts-global-industry-analysts-inc.asp) in Arora, N. and Amin, S. (2024). Analyzing Global Interest in Skin Whitening by Geographic Region. Baylor University Medical Center Proceedings, 37(3), 505–507. https://doi.org/10.1080/08998280.2024.2328448.

[51] Sage Reference and Academic Books (2009). Muted group theory. In S. W. Littlejohn, K. A. Foss (Eds.) Encyclopedia of communication theory, Vol. 2, pp. 668-669. SAGE Publications, Inc., https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412959384.

[52] The specific Canadian provinces and territories will not be disclosed in order to safeguard the identity of research participants.

[53] Paid executive positions are either fully paid, i.e., full-time: a salary with benefits paid by the union, or part-time: partial union release time (urt) away from their employer's position for a few days each week or month, which is paid by the union. Unpaid union roles are completed by volunteers. Volunteer roles are typically completed during lunch hours, evenings, weekends, etc., but may from time to time require brief urt or union duty leave (udl) that is paid by the union. Volunteers complete their responsibilities while continuing their work for their employer.
URT and UDL provisions are negotiated in collective agreements, and the Union reimburses the employer according to negotiated terms. Oftentimes, these provisions provide a limited number of hours to participate in certain roles or activities only and none in others. Also, many union leaders who are not engaged in full-time paid union work are accountable to the employer for the completion of their work. In such cases, time taken from their employer's work to attend a union related meeting or activity, means returning to their employer's work to ensure it is completed.

[54] Executives or executive leaders in many labour union organizations are often elected by the general membership, though they may be appointed by the union's executive board, or they may be recruited. Unions have different positions that sets a hierarchy, where the lower-ranking position is seen to be responsible to higher-ranking positions, e.g., Vice Presidents to Presidents, but that is not always the case. The union's Constitution normally defines each role, the route through which they can be attained and the reporting structure. Also, elected union positions are often not viewed as management positions such as is typical in non-labour union organizations. In other words, there is no one "boss". Each position has a portfolio, is typically a member of the union's executive board, the decision-making body of the union as determined by the union's Constitution and is typically accountable to the union's executive board or council, and ultimately to the union membership.

Reflection: The Irony of Accents for Racially Oppressed Peoples

Paula Gowdie, Women of Courage Art Exhibition, 2023

It is such an irony. Racially oppressed peoples are discriminated against if they have accents. Racially oppressed peoples are also discriminated against if they do not have accents.

I am a woman with visibly melanated skin tones, brought from Jamaica to Montréal, Québec, Canada as a young child by my mother.

As far back as my memory allows, I know that I have never had an accent. This fact has been a source of both pleasure and upset for me, as well as a source of great inquiry by others. I do not have an accent (though linguists may argue differently). To me, it is just a simple fact. It is not something I yearned for or practiced. I just simply do not have an accent. I have always spoken English, was educated in English to speak "proper" English, I communicated in English, was surrounded by people who spoke English. I do recall this being a fascination by school mates and being teased by them about it in my birth country but that was how I spoke and never thought of making changes to it. However, when I came to Canada it became quite a focus for others. "You are from Jamaica. How come you don't have an accent?" "I don't know. This is how I've always spoken. I was always taught to speak the Queen's English, as they say," would be my response. Even the response is problematic – the Queen's English!

The same rhetoric exists even into my adult years. Now living in Ontario, in a metropolitan city with high numbers of racialized communities, my lack of an accent still raises inquiry from others. For example, on one occasion, I called to make an appointment with a Black hairstylist who worked in a hair salon owned by an Italian man. The hair salon was located in a part of the city that is predominantly populated by racialized and marginalized communities. I make the appointment without issue. On the day of the appointment, I arrived at the salon and gave the owner my name. The owner's response was "You are her? But you don't have an accent!" I was not only surprised, thinking why would he have assumed otherwise, after all I made an appointment with the Black hairstylist!, but I was also quite offended.

I have similar experiences in the workplace. I speak with clients by phone, providing details, instructions or support. We speak in depth, laugh and connect on a human level. They are appreciative of the assistance I have provided and the connection we have had and decide to visit the office to meet me and introduce themselves. They arrive at the office and ask to speak with me – "You are her? You are not White! You don't have an accent!" That seems to put an abrupt end to the conversation, and they walk away. Oftentimes, they themselves are from racially oppressed groups, sometimes they are White.

CHAPTER 3: WORK LIFE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMEN LEADERS IN CANADIAN LABOUR UNION ORGANIZATIONS

A. Results and Analysis

Seven primary themes with a number of sub themes emerged from the research data about Black women union leaders' work life experiences that were interwoven with, and underscored by, a culture of violence or a lack of safety for Black women union leaders. Other findings include the ways that Black women union leaders cope with the effects of their work life experiences, as well as their motivations for participating in Canadian labour unions. To hear more from research participants, see Appendix A.

1. Themes

1.1. Black Women in Union Leadership Roles Are Often the First, The Only or One Of A Few

Black women in leadership roles in Canadian labour union organizations are often **the first**, **the only** or **one of a few** in workplaces that are typically and predominantly white spaces, i.e., where union leadership roles are primarily held by White men and White women.

> *"I was the only racialized person on the executive board."* (Participant 19, February 2022)

Also, Black women union leaders do not have femtors or mentors to guide them through their introduction to, and integration into, leadership in labour union organizations. Additionally, regardless of attaining union leadership role(s), they are often treated in stereotypical ways.

> *"I was the first Black member of our executive. At an executive meeting, one of the male executives wanted coffee, and he immediately looks at me to make coffee, and I said, I'm sorry, like, is there a problem with your, like, you make*

your own coffee. So, then you sort of get a reputation that oh, I'm sensitive."

(Participant 2, December 2021)

1.2. Black Women Are Underrepresented in Leadership Positions of Authority in Canadian Unions, Whether Elected or Recruited

There are fewer Black women in union leadership positions who may have similar appearances and share similar lived experiences with the people they represent in the union membership. Also, there are fewer Black women union leaders who could model leadership qualities and skills, act as femtors, help to advocate for positive changes and help to pave the way for other Black women to successfully pursue union leadership roles.

"There needs to be more opportunities for Black women to see other Black women within the union labor movement and be able to communicate and connect with them." (Participant 21, February 2022)

Additionally, fewer Black women in union leadership roles means not having peers or persons within the organization who Black women union leaders can confide in, or who may understand their experiences and can provide necessary supports.

"The higher up you go, the less people you can talk to who understand you and who really get it." (Participant 12, January 2022)

Black women union leaders also expressed being lonely at the top.

"The higher up you go in the union, the more barriers…When you get up there it's lonely, it's lonely." (Participant 19, February 2022)

Moreover, research participants overwhelmingly reported the prevalence of a lack of understanding of the experiences and needs of Black women in the unions, i.e., the intersection of the issues that impact Black women, as well as a lack of desire or initiative to learn about Black women.

"It's important when you look at women's issues, you ensure diversity and not just diversity for Black women but also for intersectionalities of that. There are Black women, there are Black LGBTQ women, you know, give them an opportunity." (Participant 23, March 2022)

Furthermore, research participants reported on the lack of infrastructure to support Black women in union leadership roles.

"You aren't supposed to move up into leadership roles but to stay at the level to do the grunt work. These are the practices and beliefs within the union." (Participant 22, February 2022)

1.3. Black Women Union Leaders Do Not Have Support

Black women union leaders do not have support in attaining union leadership roles, while they are in union leadership roles, for being successful in union leadership roles, and from union executives, other union leaders, union members and union employers including those who are Black or from other racially oppressed groups who are often outnumbered by those who are White.

"To find anyone to mentor you as a Black woman becomes difficult." (Participant 23, March 2022)

"I mean the guys all hung out with the guys and supported one another. I was the first female negotiator at the local level, and I basically had to learn things myself, learn the legislation myself. It was sink or swim and that was sort of the norm for the union, especially when women were starting to take positions. The guys just basically said, well, they want to be here, so they better sink or swim." (Participant 2, December 2021)

The lack of support manifests in many ways. For example, organizational structures and practices of the Canadian union that present inherent barriers to, and do not provide opportunities for, Black women to achieve leadership roles and become successful leaders in the organization include election and hiring processes and training and professional development opportunities.

> *"People are very invested in maintaining the status quo. The board of the union is all White people. Most of the leaders are White. They are gatekeepers. They don't want new people coming on and they don't create the opportunities."*
> (Participant 3, December 2021)

Also, training, mentoring and opportunities to learn about the labour movement and the structures, governance and operations of the union are oftentimes not prioritized or available as part of the organization's structures or practices. For example, the labour union's Constitution and by-laws appear to be equally available to union members of all racial groups but fail to acknowledge or consider the issues that union members of racially oppressed groups, and specifically Black women, deal with daily, such as anti-Black racism.

> *"Our constitution dictates that we have a certain percentage of females, but it says nothing regarding race."* (Participant 12, January 2022)

Secondly, principles of equity are often not embedded within these structures to encourage meaningful involvement by union members of racially oppressed groups, and specifically Black women, or to welcome, support and promote the success of Black women union leaders, nor are principles of equity embedded into the operations of labour unions.

> *"When I first got involved, it was challenging because I didn't really have people to help me along. There was no one to answer some of the questions I had."*
> (Participant 15, January 2022)

Additionally, any mentoring that may occur is often the decision of individuals who assume personal responsibility for doing so (personal choice).

> *"I would be at a conference, holding workshop at night or in noontime or whatever to train people in the Rules of Order because they wouldn't know. They purposely were kept in the dark."* (Participant 11, January 2022)

Moreover, structures are not in place to support or promote being successful in a leadership position. For example, required tools, resources and information are not provided even when requested directly to the union executive board or union employers. This not only renders Black women to the status of being a token but sets them up to fail regardless of personal sacrifices and unending time investments that they expend in order to make their roles successful.

> *"The lack of access to the prior knowledge, to that body of knowledge and information as to the history of the work within my organization. I feel like that sometimes puts you at a disadvantage."* (Participant 20, February 2022)

Furthermore, oftentimes support systems and mechanisms for addressing injustices experienced by Black women union leaders often do not exist, and if they exist, they are often perfunctory or ineffective and support the objectives of the organization rather than truly addressing systemic issues within the organization.

> *"Reporting issues through formal processes takes a really long time and results in a lot of trauma because the onus of proof is on you. There are also impacts on your employment opportunities."* (Participant 17, January 2022)

More importantly, Black women union leaders who raise concerns about anti-Black racism not only bear the burden of the circumstances alone but do so at the risk of being ostracized and

becoming a scapegoat by the same individuals who committed the hostile acts, as well as their cliques.

> "So, when I challenged the union with racism, all my union had to say is we're not supporting you anymore in this position, and I'm out, which is what happened." (Participant 11, January 2022)

Of particular significance, Black women leaders reported a lack of support from union executives, union leaders, union employers and union members who are Black or are from other racially oppressed groups.

> "Lateral violence. You know, the complicity of certain other racialized people, like the model minorities, and they pit model minorities against the Black individuals."
> (Participant 20, February 2022)

1.4. Union Leadership Roles Often Achieved by Black Women Involve Excessive Workloads and Demands, Working Longer Hours and Earning Less Than Their Non-Black Counterparts

The roles attained by Black women leaders in unions often involve excessive workloads and demands, working longer hours than their non-Black counterparts and earning less than their non-Black counterparts. For example, Black women union leaders are often successful in attaining roles such as stewards, health and safety representatives, bargaining negotiators, union organizers, union educators and equity and human rights advocates.

> "We are the work horses, and you get to stick around if you work harder than everybody else. Other than that, you're not really thought of as a brain or a strategic source." (Participant 10, January 2022)

1.5. Black Women Union Leaders' Authority is Often Diminished by Union Executives, Other Union Leaders, Union Employers and Union Members

Various strategies are used by union executives, other union leaders, union employers and union members to diminish the authority of Black women union leaders. These strategies include questioning Black women union leaders' intelligence, often requiring them to justify their ideas, decisions, qualifications and skills to union executives, union employers, union members and colleagues.

> *"I made a suggestion and based on the responses to the suggestion I found myself having to essentially list my qualifications, background, my experiences to justify the suggestion. My White colleagues don't have to give a resume when they speak."* (Participant 10, January 2022)

Black women union leaders' efforts are constantly undermined, ideas dismissed, delayed, reduced, and co-opted by others who assume credit for them.

> *"The executive would defeat any motion related to anti-Black racism or anti-oppression. They'd say, let's save it for next year cause we don't want to rush these decisions. I continue to raise the issues, but there is always some excuse why it could not be discussed during meetings and next year never comes."* (Participant 7, December 2021)

Black women union leaders are mansplained[55] and interrupted when speaking, ridiculed, treated and spoken to as if they were children, disrespected and spoken over while speaking.

> *"The president refused to invite me to meetings, did not speak to me. While at meetings, I would make suggestions, and he would pretend I wasn't there and move to the next person."* (Participant 5, December 2021)

They are also treated differently than non-Black union leaders and unexpectedly, inexplicably, and in some cases aggressively and publicly confronted by union executives, union employers and union members.

> *"I was attacked by White women for addressing a situation involving anti-Black racism for several Black members."* (Participant 13, January 2022)

> *"A question was asked in a meeting that I responded to articulately, very clearly. Yet, the member addressed themselves to the other White participant in the room and it was like, okay, I've got to keep myself together, maintain my composure. Thankfully the White participant, who is an ally, put them in their place, not just reaffirming the same information but acknowledged that I was correct in what I said. It's so frustrating."* (Participant 20, February 2022)

Additionally, Black women union leaders are excessively surveilled and scrutinized by their colleagues, union executives and union employers about work related decisions and recommendations, their hair styles, fashions, how they speak, the tone of their voice when they speak, how they think, behaviours and lifestyles, their relationships and allegiances. Moreover, they are often subjected to approval processes in order to carry out their work, or effect change, and oftentimes approval processes are arduous and rife with practices of stalling, delay tactics and resistance to change.

> *"They scrutinize my expense accounts to another level that is not done to other executives."* (Participant 13, January 2022)

> *"I wanted to put policy in place for diversity and inclusion and was successful. Having said this, what I started out with was not what I ended up with. Initially, they said this is good language, we'll support it, but little by little they carved it*

out so that there was nothing in it, there's no teeth in it." (Participant 1,

December 2021)

Furthermore, research participants spoke about not being able to be their authentic self, being tone policed[56] and always in a constant state of **being on guard** and practicing **code switching**[57], internally managing and constantly changing the ways they present themselves and their behaviours, in order to align with imperialistic norms of **professionalism**, to fit in and be accepted by the group in the moment. They are also in a constant state of evaluating situations, managing internal dialogue with themselves and strategizing about ways to ensure their own success and second guessing their own abilities.

> *"I have never in my life experienced more blatant disregard for what comes out*
>
> *of my mouth than I have in the last four years, including from my colleagues."*
>
> (Participant 19, February 2022)
>
> *"I might see something, hear something, and I talk to somebody, and they're*
>
> *going to stand there and say, are you sure? You sure you see that? You sure you*
>
> *heard that? They second guess you so much so that you second guess*
>
> *yourself."* (Participant 15, January 2022)

1.6. Black Women Union Leaders Experience a Culture of Violence in Canadian Labour Union Organizations

Black women union leaders report a culture of violence where they are targeted by union executives, other union leaders, union employers and union members who are White, and when these issues are raised to the executive board or official complaints are submitted, the perpetrators are not admonished, reprimanded or disciplined by the union executive board, so the perpetrators continue to behave as if it is their legacy to do so.

"It's the berating, the belittling, the questioning. It's having people sort of shake their fingers at you and talk to you in a certain way. It's like their sense of entitlement for treating you in certain ways." (Participant 13, January 2022)

"I was conducting training. One of the delegates that came to do the training was from the north and looked at me and said I don't have to listen to you because you have no experience in the labour movement." (Participant 4, December 2021)

Black women union leaders feel unsafe. They daily experience microaggressions, gaslighting, racelighting, harassment, are ignored and excluded in different ways and experience other types of unfair treatment by union executives, other union leaders, union employers and union members.

"Microaggressions, racism, gaslighting, intimidation on a daily basis, it takes a toll." (Participant 5, December 2021)

"Microaggressions, surveillance, policing, like, people are watching you, your coming, your going, everything." (Participant 13, January 2022)

They internalize the treatment they experience in the organization in order to remain focussed on their goals in the moment and are often shamed, or demeaned, into silence. They are isolated and alienated. In some cases, they are unexpectedly, and without explanations, relocated from their usual workplaces to other unfamiliar workplaces, work groups and locations by union executives and employers, and in other cases, are used as *examples* to intimidate others.

"My portfolio was suddenly changed, my colleagues were moved to one location, I was moved to a separate location." (Participant 22, February 2022)

They become suspicious of people in the environment, unsure of who they can trust.

Additionally, research participants are the subjects of rumours and characterizations circulated through their respective memberships. They are ostracized, are falsely and unjustly accused of wrongdoings and are subjected to unfair court-like trials, e.g., **kangaroo court**[58] proceedings or dispute resolution processes that yield little or no results, or contrary results, for the Black women despite evidence that may be provided.

"They have a thing within the labour movement that if they have an issue with you, they put you through a trial, and you get cast out. It becomes this kangaroo court. There is no fairness." (Participant 15, January 2022)

Moreover, in many cases, instances of reporting unfair treatment to persons of authority in the organization, or submitting complaints through prescribed organizational processes, prove to be ineffective as the Black women are judged differently than their non-Black counterparts.

"A lot of the human rights complaints go nowhere, so what's the point of filing complaints?" (Participant 18, February 2022)

"There are double standards. For example, Black women need to work their way up through elected positions, but that does not apply to other people." (Participant 13, January 2022)

Research participants also spoke of union structures that were not inclusive and seemingly ironclad against changes; union structures that maintain the dominance of the ruling group of people, who are White.

"Unions are microcosms of the broader society. Racism is alive in unions." (Participant 9, January 2022)

*"The union movement was set up by men to deal with issues that men deal with
and situations that men find themselves in. It was never set up to deal with
women and women who work and are parents."* (Participant 5, December 2021)

Union structures, or organizational structures, include historical foundations, the layers of the
organization, the positions involved, governance practices, measures of accountability, or lack
thereof, and policies, procedures, processes and practices adopted by the union. Organizational
practices include those that are **actively directed and sanctioned** by, as well as **inactively
supported** by the Canadian labour union organization.

*"The whole structure is one that is not welcoming and it's a lot of optics and
posturing to the public. It's cliquish and elitist and there's also a culture of
tapping[59] on the shoulder that they're very proud of."* (Participant 7, December
2021)

Additionally, organizational changes made by union executives or employers are often
performative, i.e., they are produced to appease union members or outsiders to the
organization but are not substantive to actually address inequities and systemic issues in the
union and are often short term.

*"Union spaces are not separate from the rest of society. There's that public face,
of yeah, we're all about justice for everybody and workers rights, blah, blah,
blah. Yet within, there are still the very same people that are out there that are
racists in the spaces and racists follow where the power is. They seek out power
on purpose because to implement racism you need some level of power, right."*
(Participant 7, December 2021)

"They may talk about inclusion, but I want to see action, rather than words.

Power is a hell of a thing and people don't want to give up power and that's

power with white privilege." (Participant 4, December 2021)

Also, unions may establish anti-oppressive policies, procedures and processes, but said policies and practices are often perfunctory and lack meaningful measures of accountability. Nonetheless, said policies, procedures, processes and practices are often exploited by union executives and employers, or implemented by union executives and union employers in ways that serve to preserve the status quo, i.e., existing structures and practices.

"There've been lots of situations where people have done and said racist things,

have engaged in behaviors that I would say violated other people's rights, and

yet, they still remain in their positions. And they use the justification 'members

elect us'." (Participant 8, December 2021)

Furthermore, Black women leaders reported an overwhelming lack of accountability within the labour union organization, a non-existence of, or the existence of ineffective, policies, procedures and processes and how policies, procedures and processes were manipulated or suddenly imposed by executives to support and uphold wrongdoing and injustices.

"The Constitution is being violated every single day and there's no one to hold

them accountable." (Participant 7, December 2021)

1.7. Black Women Union Leaders Experience Many Impacts as A Result of Their Work Life Experiences

Research participants spoke of the erosion and consumption of their personal lives by the requirements of their union positions, i.e., the lack of **work life balance**[60], high levels of frustration and exhaustion, as well as other effects resulting from their poor work life experiences in Canadian labour union organizations.

"Being a volunteer, it became a second job so there is no work life balance."

(Participant 12, January 2022)

"You just keep banging your head against doors over and over and over again and yeah, it can take a toll." (Participant 4, December 2021)

Research participants also experience an overwhelming sense of betrayal by the treatment they experience daily, despite the many personal sacrifices they make in their efforts to successfully complete their roles.

"The way I am being treated, it's embarrassing for me to think all these years, the sacrifices I made." (Participant 22, February 2022)

They become demoralized, second guess or doubt themselves and their abilities, become suspicious of everyone, and invest a lot of energy to double, or triple, check their work in a toxic environment.

"I was always a good communicator verbally and in writing. They now have me second guessing myself, my confidence has suffered. Even now I'm nervous."

(Participant 19, February 2022)

They also experience **hypervigilance**[61], i.e., a state of always being on guard, that occurs and develops over time as a result of the many challenges that they experience at work. Moreover, they experience negative health effects, such as psychological, emotional, mental and physical health, as well as other effects that extend beyond the workplace. For example, missing out on their children's formative years, activities and important milestones, missing family celebrations, undergoing the break down, and in some cases, dissolution, of friendships and relationships, disassociations with individuals who previously presented as allies and/or co-conspirators, changes to their finances and lifestyles.

> *"It takes up a lot of your life and there's a lot of challenges. I developed*
> *symptoms of life-threatening seizures from the stress, the pressure and they*
> *made me feel so small."* (Participant 19, February 2022)

> *"A mental breakdown from the harassment and bullying. From the stress, I lost*
> *weight, my hair fell out. You're just being treated in a subhuman manner, and it*
> *took a toll."* (Participant 23, March 2022)

Furthermore, they may decide to leave their union role(s) or step away from any future involvement with their current, or any other, labour union organization.

2. Other Findings

2.1. Coping With the Effects of Their Work Life Experiences in Canadian Labour Union Organizations

Research participants spoke about strategies that they use to deal with racism on a daily basis, strategies of survival, such as rationalizations and trying to "be fair" to their oppressors, burying and silencing acts of discrimination and unfair treatment, e.g., internalizations, reflections, engaging in mental gymnastics by repeatedly and consistently reviewing situations, their activities and responses, strategies to use, who to trust, how to address, where to find support, etc.

> *"I decided, I won't be an angry Black woman, but I'll be a persistent Black*
> *woman. I internalize things. I don't react quickly."* (Participant 6, December
> 2021)

> *"Knowing my own limitations and listening to my stress triggers."* (Participant
> 17, January 2022)

Many research participants credit their faith and spiritual practices, creative outlets outside of their work roles, having a solid social support circle of family, friends, colleagues, co-

conspirators and others, and engaging counselling services and other healthcare providers for coping with their work life experiences in Canadian labour unions.

> *"Like your, your spiritual grounding, carry like a deep-rooted spiritual grounding."* (Participant 11, January 2022)

> *"Having a lot of affirming and supportive people around you."* (Participant 17, January 2022)

2.2. Research Participants' Motivations for Involvement in Canadian Labour Union Organizations

Research participants identified several motivators for becoming involved in Canadian labour union organizations, including values grounded in personal value systems, spiritual beliefs, faith and social justice and being purpose driven to effect positive change for the greater good.

> *"I was just immediately attracted to supporting the underdog and giving voice to the voiceless. That's what I, I thrive on and setting things that are wrong right. Also, if we're in a society, and we're not helping each other then who's benefiting and so it's a mutually symbiotic relationship and that's why I wanted to."* (Participant 12, January 2022)

Research participants are also driven by their personal lived experiences and aspirations for improvements and advancements for this and future generations.

> *"I do this work, because of the negative experiences that I've had, from a child, being a Black woman. And I do this work so that I can try and create a better world, so that my kids, and other kids of color and Indigenous, don't have to have some of the nasty experiences that I have had."* (Participant 16, January 2022)

B. Discussion

Black women must deal with being Black and female in their everyday lives, and the various forms of discrimination that result from these two identities, as well as other identities that they may have. Though research participants reported other identities that contribute to their work life experiences, **race is *the* significant and defining factor with gender being the secondary factor**. Moreover, race intersects with their other identities, i.e., age, disabilities, being a member of the LGBTQIA2+ community[62], languages spoken and having a noticeable accent, and complicates and compounds their work life experiences. For example, Dr. Nicole Washington (in Sheila Callaham, 2022) speaks about Black women experiencing "hyper-vigilance", "being on guard" and the "compounding effect" of ageism, racism and sexism on Black women's mental health and job satisfaction. Furthermore, in the workplace, the effects of anti-Black racism are concentrated particularly when a Black woman is the first, the only, or one of a few in an environment that is unfriendly, i.e., does not make space for Black women or understand issues related to Black women and the historical occurrences that still impact their lives today. In other words, an environment that is not mentally, emotionally, psychologically or physically safe for Black women.

Black women leaders in Canadian labour union organizations are **the first**, **the only**, or **one of a few** in their organization. Data gathered through this research suggests that Black women leaders in Canadian unions, regardless of their roles, or whether those roles are paid or volunteer, undergo many challenges – work stressors – that impact their daily work life experiences, and work stressors experienced by research participants result from stereotypes and misogynoir that are based on the angry Black woman trope. Moreover, research participants indicated that the treatment they experienced in their labour unions were primarily perpetrated by, or not acknowledged or addressed by, union executives and union employers.

These findings are **similar to the experiences of Black women in non-union organizations; however, there are several significant exceptions that result in extremely poor, trauma-inducing and life-changing work life experiences with impacts that extend beyond the workplace** for Black women union leaders.

> *"It is more than a job in some ways and so the pain or the degradation that you face, you carry it more than you would if it was just a job. There's not a clear line between work and your values."* (Participant 10, January 2022)

> *"I was so damaged by the treatment, the anxiety, the fear, it was bad."*
> (Participant 5, December 2021)

The work life experiences of Black women leaders in labour union organizations are significantly intensified by their perceptions and expectations of labour unions and an overwhelming lack of accountability that creates, maintains and reinforces a culture of violence within union organizations and the labour movement. Of particular mention, the lack of support, and at times, hostile behaviours directed towards Black women union leaders by union executives, other union leaders, union employers and union members who are Black or from other racially oppressed groups, a phenomenon known as **lateral violence**, was repeatedly raised by research participants.

Black women union leaders utilize a variety of strategies to cope with the effects of their work life experiences, and despite their work life experiences in their labour union organization, Black women union leaders are motivated to participate in labour unions. They also maintain their belief in the labour movement as a symbol of hope for Black workers. Moreover, research participants were careful about not publicly disclosing their work life experiences in labour union organizations to others outside of their own labour union or criticizing labour union organizations because of the value they place on unions.

1. **The Work Life Experiences of Black Women Leaders in Labour Union Organizations Are Significantly Intensified by Their Perceptions and Expectations of Labour Union Organizations**

Based on the findings of this research, Black women leaders' work life experiences in Canadian unions, and the effects of their work life experiences are significantly compounded and confounded by their perceptions of labour unions, and expectations about equity, fairness, human rights and opportunities to effect change through their unions, which are influenced by narratives generated and promoted by unions. For example, United Food and Commercial Workers Canada (UFCW), in response to the question "Is it Worth Joining a Union at Work?", writes "[u]nionized workers enjoy significant advantages over their non-unionized counterparts, including safer and fairer workplaces, better pay and benefits, more work-life balance, and regular wage increases"[63]. The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) writes:

> "When workers like you organize together and get into union, you build the
> power and rights you need to make life better. Better wages and benefits, better
> job security, better safety at work, better hours, and paid time off to take care of
> yourself and your family: these are all examples of how unions make life better
> at work and at home"[64].

The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL/CIO) writes:

> "When working people come together, they make things better for everyone.
> Joining together in unions enables workers to negotiate for higher wages and
> benefits and improve conditions in the workplace. There are millions of union
> members in America from all walks of life. These individuals know that by
> speaking up together, you can accomplish more than you could on your own".[65]

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)[66] writes:

"[a]t CUPE, we continuously fight for a fairer and more inclusive society. We fight

for fairness in our workplaces, at the bargaining table, and beyond. We fight for

all workers' rights, for tax fairness, for investments in health and education, for

the environment and just transition policies, for international solidarity, and much

more. CUPE strives to reflect the communities we work in. We fight for diversity

and inclusion. We fight for our members of all ages, all provinces, all regions, in

both official languages. We also fight for equity-deserving groups, such as

women, Black, Indigenous and racialized workers, 2SLGBTQI+ people, and

persons with disabilities".

While research participants acknowledge the value of the labour movement for enhancing the

lives of workers in general, and specifically Black workers, their own work life experiences are

vastly different from the sentiments widely espoused by labour unions. The internal structures,

policies, procedures, processes and practices of unions are oppressive to them as leaders

primarily because of their race. So, though they work in their leadership roles to advance the

lives of other workers, they themselves are othered and marginalized by their Canadian union.

"My perception of unionism is analogous to fairness and equity. When I hear

"union", unity, it's uniformed in the application of all the rules and regulations

but working with the union is more than a challenge and definitely not aligned

with this perception." (Participant 1, December 2021)

Prior to their involvement in Canadian labour union organizations, research participants

were generally aware of unions through the involvement of family members or by themselves

simply being a dues-paying member of a union. However, many did not have a deep

understanding of the labour movement, labour unions, their governance processes or

navigating the many unwritten and often, unspoken about, practices within labour union

organizations. Though, they believe in the promise of the organization to be fair, to bargain for good working conditions, salaries and benefits, to protect jobs for their members and to be equitable in their practices towards *all* members of the union. They also strongly believe in the possibility of making positive changes not just for union members in their own labour union organization, but to influence positive changes for workers in general and especially for future generations.

During interviews, it became evident that many research participants were not aware of the historical xenophobic foundation of labour unions, which is not widely known and rarely acknowledged, or talked about, by unions. The labour movement was established to secure employment for White men by excluding certain groups of oppressed workers, and particularly Black Peoples, from joining unions (AFLCIO Labor Commission on Racial and Economic Justice, 2015; Mathieu, 2001; Moreno, 2010; Das Gupta, 2007; Marshall, 1964). Though xenophobia and other types of discrimination in unions was acknowledged by several unions during the COVID19 pandemic and the 2020 racial uprising (see Canadian Labour Congress, 2022; CUPE, 2021), besides issuing statements, providing courses and resources about anti-oppression to their members, and in some cases, adding a few designated seats on union executive boards for Black, Indigenous and racialized members, it is unclear if structural changes have been made within their own organizations to substantively address systemic inequities. Ng, Khan, and Stanford (2024) assert that "[u]nions have a social justice responsibility to prioritize racialized inequality in all their activity - and with much more than declarations of principle, signing petitions, or showing up at rallies. The movement needs to reimagine organizing and activist strategies that centre anti-racist priorities" (9).

Despite the lack of knowledge of the oppressive foundation of labour unions and the labour movement, Black women in union leadership roles are purpose driven to effect positive

change for the greater good. Research participants are motivated by personal value systems, many of which are grounded in spiritual beliefs, faith and social justice. They are also driven by their personal lived experiences and aspirations for improvements and advancements for this and future generations.

> "I am now the first Black leader in my union. I want to make sure that I'm leaving the place better than I found it. I need to make sure that I pave a road and set a standard of expectation for people who are Black. I have to bust all stereotypes and myths, everything. I'm not just doing this for me, and I'm doing it for potentially you and everybody else who looks like me. I feel that responsibility." (Participant 12, January 2022)

2. An Overwhelming Lack of Accountability That Creates, Maintains and Reinforces a Pervasive Culture of Violence for Black Women Union Leaders Within Labour Union Organizations and The Labour Movement

Research findings indicate an overwhelming lack of accountability within, and by, Canadian labour unions that creates, maintains and reinforces a pervasive culture of violence for Black women leaders.

A lack of accountability means that there are usually no mechanisms by which Black women union leaders can safely report complaints without experiencing reprisals from a perpetrator, or the perpetrator's supporters, who are often part of the union executive, or a union employer, and who are empowered and emboldened by the privileges afforded to them by virtue of being a member of the dominant group.

A lack of accountability means that there are no clear, well-defined policies, procedures or processes to handle complaints, unfair practices and inappropriate behaviours or a process to apply and enforce consequences to appropriately address the circumstances or hold

perpetrators responsible for their actions. Instead, Black women union leaders who bring forward complaints with an expectation of a fair process, could find themselves being the subject of an unfair trial-like process, such as kangaroo court proceedings, or they suddenly become a target, or their claim is thrown out as unfounded, without merit, or they are informed that their claim does not relate to any policy, procedure or process that may already exist.

A lack of accountability means that there is no one organization external to the labour union organization where Black women union leaders and union members can safely report complaints related to unfair practices that exist in labour union organizations with an expectation for timely resolutions that will not cause additional harm to them.

These practices result in Black women union leaders being alienated, bearing the brunt of injustices on their own, and in some cases, seeking resolution and restoration through processes that exist outside the labour union organization, such as through human rights commissions. Though such processes cause additional burden and harm to Black women as they are time intensive, the onus is on the women to prove their case, and such cases are added to a queue that could take years before they are heard by a human rights tribunal or adjudicative board. In the meantime, the Black women continue to repeatedly live out the demoralizing experiences until such time as their case is heard, and there are no assurances that they will actually achieve the resolution and restoration they hope for. Also, the Black women must hire their own legal counsel, which causes financial hardship.

2.1. Factors That Contribute to A Culture of Violence in Canadian Labour Union Organizations

Labour union organizations may argue that the policies, procedures, processes and practices they adopt are fair and based on democratic principles. However, the lack of clearly defined policies, procedures, processes and practices with measures of responsibility,

accountability and consequences to appropriately address inequities and injustices and hold perpetrators responsible for their actions, the lack of application, and the unfair and uneven application of said policies, procedures, processes and practices result in additional harm to Black women union leaders.

2.1.1. Organizational Practices

Actively directed and sanctioned organizational practices, as well as **inactively supported organizational practices** continue to sustain the ongoing subjugation, exploitation and lack of safety of Black women leaders in Canadian labour union organizations. Actively directed and sanctioned practices are embedded in organizational policies, procedures, processes and practices that are normally approved by a labour union's executive board or the union's employers. Also, unwritten, unsanctioned or arbitrary processes are practiced by leaders of the organization. For example, organizational policies, procedures, processes and practices do not exist but are suddenly and arbitrarily declared by individual leaders of the organization to seemingly address a situation. These declarations are often made without consultation with the union's executive board or the union's employers, and if consulted, without objections from the union's executive board or the union's employers. Meanwhile, such declarations are often determined to justify other undeclared agendas that were specific to the particular organizational leader (personal agenda).

> "A White elected official who created a lot of issues filed a number of human
> rights complaints. It was laughable because there were no protected grounds
> for such claims. Regardless, the executive committee poured a lot of energy and
> resources into this situation, meanwhile there were real issues that were being
> ignored. Suddenly, we heard about a human rights policy that nobody had ever
> heard of or seen before. They penned something to suit his complaints and

justified it by saying that it was their right to do so as employers." (Participant

18, February 2022)

Inactively supported organizational practices encompass several processes. For

example, when organizational policies, procedures, processes and practices and laws are

breached or used to perpetrate injustices, but there is inaction by the union's executive board

or the union's employers, i.e., they turn a 'blind eye', ignore or fail to address, or the resulting

action does not address the actual situation. Also, inactively supported organizational practices

include the unfair and uneven application of organizational policies, procedures, processes and

practices based on the individuals who are involved in a situation, the pervasive resistance of

organizational leaders to draft policies, procedures, processes and practices, or to embed

principles of equity[67], measures of responsibility and accountability and consequences for a lack

of accountability when drafting policies, procedures, processes and practices, or make

meaningful or substantive and transformative organizational changes to actually address

inequities, systemic issues and accountability.

> *"During elections, a White candidate, on the day of the election, she had a*
>
> *member going around saying vote for her though it clearly says there's no*
>
> *campaigning after midnight, the night before the election. It was brought to the*
>
> *union's attention by others and me. They said oh, she wasn't doing anything*
>
> *wrong. So, I asked him, I said what if I had done that? His response: we would*
>
> *have looked into it."* (Participant 1, December 2021)

2.1.2. A Cursory Discussion of The Influence of Canadian Laws Governing Labour Union Organizations

Canadian labour union organizations are regulated by provincial or federal legislations.

Though, Canadian laws "respecting the legal regulation of union democracy and internal trade

union affairs [… have] been largely one of statutory abstinence" (Michael Lynk, 2002:16). In other words, these laws are limited in the scope of issues that they can address, and their reach in responding to concerns that may be raised. For example, "'[t]he [Ontario] Labour Relations Act is primarily concerned about institutional collective bargaining relationships, the trade union in its role as statutory bargaining agent. The statute does not purport to regulate internal union affairs, nor does it prescribe any general code of democratic practice'" (Lynk, 2002:17). Issues specifically referenced in Canadian legislation concerning labour unions are addressed by the respective provincial labour relations board or the federal labour relations board, otherwise they are addressed through the courts, i.e., common law courts in all provinces and territories with the exception of Québec where they would be addressed through civil courts (Lynk, 2002:17-18). In circumstances where issues are being challenged through the courts, the courts rely on the content of the labour union's constitution as the union's constitution is considered a contract that members of a union enter into with the other members by joining the union (Lynk, 2002:17-18).

Canadian laws governing labour unions are based on Britain's traditional common law of self-governance (Lynk, 2002), more commonly known as **union autonomy**, or democratic governance, regardless of the type of union or the layers of leadership associated with a particular union. Union autonomy relates to the ability that Canadian labour unions have to determine and regulate their own affairs, or their business. For example, a **national** union (parent union) is comprised of several local unions, referred to as **locals** or **affiliates**. The national may draft and pass policy statements and procedural practices, determine the accepted parliamentary rules of order for meetings, e.g., Bourinot Rules of Order or Robert's Rule of Order, and encourage their locals to adopt said policies, procedures, processes and practices. Though, there is a hands-off approach with the locals, in that there is no enforcement

mechanism to ensure that locals will accept and adopt practices endorsed by the national as locals are seen as their own entities. Obviously, there are expectations about certain issues because if a local expects to remain affiliated with a particular national and maintain the support of the national when needed, they must abide in principle to the basic tenets of the national, such as their mission statements. However, the routes by which they achieve this are often left to the locals to decide.

> "The affiliates need to take on this work as well. So, we can have policies in
>
> place, but if the, the affiliates aren't following those policies, and the lead
>
> organization is not implementing any kind of sanctions, what is the point of
>
> having policies?" (Participant 5, December 2021)

Unions that are not affiliated with a national operate independently and members have very little recourse to challenge wrongdoing or injustices. Independent unions may be affiliated to a **labour council**[68] or another type of overarching union-based organization. However, the same hands-off approach is maintained to allow unions to make decisions about their own businesses.

> "With local autonomy, you can do what you want in your little group, a local
>
> union can change that structure. But when you talk about, say a policy of
>
> employment equity or racial equity, the head union will have documentation, but
>
> they can't enforce it in these different places." (Participant 15, January 2022)

Therefore, issues, complaints, inequities, situations, wrongdoings and injustices are addressed by union leaders the in the manner that they determine regardless of the appropriateness or fairness, or the existence of, or lack of, policies, procedures, processes and practices. Having said this, violations of the union's constitution, policies, procedures, processes and practices can be legally challenged through the union's grievance process. However, these processes take

time and often require the endorsement of the union's executive board or union employers and the resources of the union. So, if the violation involves a union executive member from the dominant group, e.g., a White man, and someone who has the support of the majority of the union executives, it is highly probable that the union executive board will not endorse pursuing legal action in support of the Black woman union leader. Moreover, since full-time union leaders control union communications, issues of unfair practices remain within the confines of the executive board, so the general membership is often unaware of such circumstances, and if the Black woman union leader attempts to inform the membership, rumours and untruths about the Black woman are circulated through the membership by full-time union leaders to discredit the Black woman.

> "*I was accused of all kinds of things, yelling, screaming, being an angry Black woman."* (Participant 19, February 2022)

These conditions create an insular environment where anything could, and does, happen, oftentimes without any real oversight or consequences, and results in a culture of violence for Black women.

> "*There's nothing in terms of the human rights piece to solve these issues. There's no authoritative body built into the union structure or independent, that can do anything when it comes to these matters."* (Participant 7, December 2021)

3. Lateral Violence: Intra-group Lack of Support and Hostility

> "*We need to find a way of not fighting amongst each other for power positions, but rather to fight to take centre stage for our issues and putting forth actual actionable change."* (Participant 23, March 2022)

Racially oppressed groups share experiences of struggle that were produced and reproduced through the processes of colonialism and imperialism and that still exists in today's society. Competition between groups (intergroup) and within groups (intragroup) is used to maintain and reproduce hierarchies, differences and disunity and effectively ensure the continued success of the dominant group. Competition serves as a distraction and disrupts unity between groups and within groups, using seeds of distrust and preferential treatments, pitting groups against groups and group members against each other. This perpetuates the hierarchical nature of race with some races being placed in higher positions and some races being stereotyped as **model minorities**[69].

> *"It's like it's not in our DNA to help each other rise up, because it's that whole dichotomy of the field slave and the house slave."* (Participant 12, January 2022)

3.1. Crab Mentality, or Crabs in A Barrel Syndrome (CBS), and Lateral Violence

Competition creates and maintains divisions. Moreover, competition takes the focus off the oppressor who can continue with their efforts at accumulating wealth relatively unscathed. Meanwhile, intragroup disunity requires group members to focus and expend energies on individual interests in intragroup conflict rather than work together to address issues to elevate the group as a collective. Intragroup disunity also involves fighting against the success of group members in order to attain one's own interest known as **crab mentality**[70] or **crabs in a barrel syndrome (CBS)**.

> *"You'll see them in different spaces talking about how they're there for the people and how they're feminists and when we get up there, we will leave the door open. No such thing! Not only have they closed the door, they've pulled the ladder, and while they are pulling the ladder, they're stepping on your fingers*

so you're falling off the rung. Completely bad minded crabs in a bucket."

(Participant 18, February 2022)

In these efforts, intragroup members take on the behaviours and roles of the oppressor against their own group members. This phenomenon is known as "lateral violence" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011; Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton, 1967 in Theoni Whyman, Cammi Murrup-Stewart, Michael Young, Adrian Carter and Laura Jobson, 2023:183), "lateral oppression" (Eric John Ramos David and Annie O. Derthick, 2017 in Whyman, Murrup-Stewart, Young, Carter and Jobson, 2023:183), "horizontal violence" (Paulo Freire, 1970 in Whyman, Murrup-Stewart, Young, Carter and Jobson, 2023:183), and "intra-racial violence" (Arthur L. Whaley, 1992:585–588 in Whyman, Murrup-Stewart, Young, Carter and Jobson, 2023:183).

Lateral violence, a byproduct of colonization and imperialism, "is common in oppressed and colonized people, including Indigenous [P]eoples" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011 in Whyman, Murrup-Stewart, Young, Carter and Jobson, 2023:183), and is defined as the "tendency of peoples from oppressed groups to direct their anger and frustrations toward members of their own culture" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011; Carmichael and Hamilton, 1967 in Whyman, Murrup-Stewart, Young, Carter and Jobson, 2023:183). Lateral violence "can encompass feelings of distrust, mistrust and jealousy with behaviours such as gossiping, bullying, shaming, social exclusion and various forms of violence including domestic and family violence (DV and FV, respectively), social, physical, psychological, economic and spiritual violence (Clark et al., 2016)" (Yvonne Clark, Anneka Bowman, Rachel Elovaris, Treena Clark, Naomi Thornthwaite, Karen Peterson, Karen Hawke and Feda Ali, 2024:2). The lack of support and hostile behaviours that research participants reportedly experienced at the hands of union executives, leaders, employers and members who are Black or from other racially oppressed groups are examples of lateral violence.

"The other Black executive member never publicly supported me at meetings

even when I was being attacked by the White executive officers." (Participant 7,

December 2021)

"I've been publicly challenged and attacked by Black members." (Participant 14,

January 2022)

3.2. Internalized Oppression

During colonization, colonialists and imperialists created and disseminated narratives

and images about the people they intended to oppress. These narratives were essential to the

development of racial ideologies that were widely adopted and used to exploit and subjugate

those targeted groups of people. These same narratives are embedded in societal norms and

structures and are unconsciously replicated in personal and institutional practices. Over time,

these same narratives and their accompanying treatments can "become internalized by the

oppressed" (Albert Memmi 1965 in Whyman, Murrup-Stewart, Young, Carter and Jobson,

2023:184) and is known as "internalized oppression" (Freire, 1970; E. J. R David and A. O

Derthick, 2014 in Whyman, Murrup-Stewart, Young, Carter and Jobson, 2023:184).

Internalized oppression "leads to feelings of inferiority, powerlessness, self-hate,

resignation, and isolation" (Gail Pheterson, 1986:146-160 in Whyman, Murrup-Stewart, Young,

Carter and Jobson, 2023:184) and can "manifest as lateral violence toward one's self and other

members of the oppressed group" (Freire, 1970; Frantz Fanon, 1961; Kyllie Cripps and Michael

Adams, 2014 in Whyman, Murrup-Stewart, Young, Carter and Jobson, 2023:184). A person

perpetrating acts of lateral violence has internalized the behaviours of an oppressor and

"becomes an oppressor, or sub-oppressor" (Freire, 1970 in Whyman, Murrup-Stewart, Young,

Carter and Jobson, 2023:184).

"You already know the table is not yours. There are Black leaders who have

reached the table, and they are happy to tell you what happened at dinner, but

you weren't invited to dinner. The difficulty is there isn't enough food on their

own plate, so they have to protect their own plate." (Participant 23, March

2022)

4. **Despite Their Work Life Experiences in Their Labour Union Organization, Black Women Union Leaders Maintain Their Belief in The Labour Movement as A Symbol of Hope for Black Workers**

Black women union leaders maintain that, despite their own work life experiences in their labour union organizations, the labour movement is a symbol of hope for Black workers because the working conditions, circumstances outside of work and the socio-economic status of Black workers can be elevated through labour unions.

"I still love the movement. I still believe that the trade union movement is still a

movement that will help Black workers." (Participant 5, December 2021)

Black workers are disadvantaged in employment and are often relegated to jobs that are precarious, highly underpaid and classed as unskilled. Research has shown that labour unions can positively improve the socioeconomic status of all workers, especially workers from racially oppressed groups, and specifically Black workers. For example, C. Bucknor (2016 in Ng, Khan and Stanford, 2024) writes, "Black union workers in the U.S. recorded higher wages, and better access to health insurance and retirement benefits, than non-unionized Black workers" (14). Ng, Khan and Stanford (2024) elaborate:

"Black union workers earned average wages that were 36% higher than non-

union Black workers; 71.4% had access to health insurance compared to 47.7%

of non-unionized Black workers; and 61.6% had employer-sponsored retirement

plans compared to 38.2% of non-union Black workers. These benefits were even

more pronounced for unionized Black workers working in low wage sectors" (15).

Moreover, research participants are also careful about not publicly disclosing their work

life experiences in labour unions to others outside of their own labour union organization or

criticizing labour union organizations because of the value they place on labour unions. The

fear is that by openly discussing injustices that occur in labour unions, radical changes could

occur in the labour movement causing the unravelling of the advantages that Black workers and

other workers from other racially oppressed groups have gained through the labour movement

and drive a deeper divide between workers from racially oppressed groups and other workers.

It would also produce an avalanche of harm for the individual reporting the concerns, because

as previously discussed, there are currently no protections available.

> *"I recognize that I have to be careful about what I say because it could bring the*
>
> *movement down, and despite everything that this movement has done to me,*
>
> *it's also done a lot for me."* (Participant 5, December 2021)

C. Conclusion

Black women are disadvantaged based on their race and gender but primarily by the

social construction of their race and the systems historically designed by colonialists and

imperialists to exploit and subjugate Black Peoples, and specifically Black women, to support the

maintenance of capitalism for the benefit of those in dominant groups. Grounded in racial

ideologies, assumptions are already made about Black women as they enter a room without

knowing their character, political views, educational and work accomplishments, roles in an

organization or a community, other identities or personal life stories.

Based on research findings, historical barriers entrenched in societal norms, practices

and institutions impact Black women's daily lived experiences, including their work life

experiences in employment. Moreover, despite widely perceived notions about the *good labour union*, these same historical barriers are also embedded in the structures, policies, procedures, processes and practices of Canadian labour unions and serve to undermine Black women's efforts at attaining and being successful in paid and voluntary leadership roles in Canadian unions. They also result in extremely poor, trauma-inducing and life-changing work life experiences with impacts that extend beyond the workplace for Black women leaders in Canadian unions.

More research is needed about the work life experiences of Black women globally and specifically in Canadian workplaces, including labour unions. More research is also needed about labour union organizations, and specifically Canadian unions. It is acknowledged that the COVID19 pandemic and the 2020 global racial uprising instigated a measure of global reflection about oppression and anti-oppressive practices by organizations, including some labour unions. However, substantive and transformative changes to the structures, policies, procedures, processes, practices and accountability measures in Canadian unions and the laws that govern Canadian unions are needed to support anti-oppression efforts that would help to positively impact, and improve, the work life experiences of Black women union leaders in Canadian labour union organizations.

> *"We've been intentional capital in the labour movement. We've intentionally not gotten those big salaries. We've intentionally been kept away from attending meetings around the globe, all these different things and we are due reparations."* (Participant 11, January 2022)

Notes

[55] Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "mansplain" as a man "explain[ing] something to a woman in a condescending way that assumes she has no knowledge about the topic". https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mansplain.

[56] See Note #38.

[57] See Chapter 1, Section A1(b).

[58] Merriam Webster defines "kangaroo court" as "a mock court in which the principles of law and justice are disregarded or perverted". https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/kangaroo%20court.

[59] "Tapping" or "tapping on the shoulders" is a strategy used by union leaders to a) self-select and encourage particular individuals to run for, or apply to, leadership roles in order to stack committees or leadership roles with their preferred candidates, and b) exclude others from gaining access.

[60] "There are often two main aspects associated with work-life balance – the first is lack of time and scheduling conflicts, and the other is feeling overwhelmed, overloaded or stressed by the pressures of multiple roles. Balance is not necessarily about splitting time equally, but rather that the individual feels fulfilled and content with both aspects of their life. Work-life conflict occurs when the overall demands of work and personal roles are incompatible in some respect making participation in one role more difficult by participation in the other role. Health Canada has identified four broad categories associated with work-life balance: Role overload, Work-to-family interference, Family-to-work interference: Caregiver strain."
Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOSH; n.d.). What is meant by work-life balance. https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/worklife_balance.html.

[61] WebMD defines hypervigilance as "the elevated state of constantly assessing potential threats around you — is often the result of a trauma".
WebMD (2024). What Is Hypervigilance? Medically Reviewed by Smitha Bhandari, MD on February 25, 2024. https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/what-is-hypervigilance.

[62] The term "LGBTQIA2+ community" does not reflect a homogeneous group, but is comprised of distinct groups of marginalized and oppressed peoples. Much like the terms "racialized" or "people of colour", this is a categorical term used by society to ignore and erase differences.

[63] UFCW Canada (n.d.). Everything you need to know about the Union. https://www.ufcw.ca/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=32573&Itemid=2451&lang=en#is-it-worth-joining-a-union-at-work.

[64] Canadian Labour Congress (n.d.). Get into a union. Because unions make life better at work, and at home. https://canadianlabour.ca/get-into-a-union/.

[65] AFL/CIO (n.d.). Unions begin with you. https://aflcio.org/what-unions-do.

[66] Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) (n.d.). Join CUPE. https://cupe.ca/join-cupe.

[67] Equity is often mistaken to be equivalent to Equality, but they are very different principles. According to the Center for the Study of Social Policy (2019), **Equality** is defined as "The effort to treat everyone the same or to ensure that everyone has access to the same opportunities. However, only working to achieve equality ignores historical and structural factors that benefit some social groups and disadvantages other social groups in ways that create differential starting points" and **Equity** is defined as "The effort to provide different levels of support based on an individual's or group's needs in order to achieve fairness in outcomes. Working to achieve equity acknowledges unequal starting places and the need to correct the imbalance".

[68] Nationals, locals and independent labour unions can be affiliated to labour councils. UFCW Canada Locals 175 and 633 (2023) define "labour council" as an "organization that plays a significant role in representing the interests of workers and unions. These councils are typically regional or local bodies that bring together multiple labour unions and workers' groups to collaborate on common goals, coordinate activities, and advocate for workers' rights and interests". https://ufcw175.com/what-is-a-labour-council/#:~:text=November%202%2C%202023,informed%20advocates%20for%20their%20rights.

[69] According to HC Yoo, KS Burrola and MF Steger (2010 in Alice W. Cheng, Janet Chang, Janine O'Brien, Marc S. Budgazad, Jack Tsai, 2017), "the model minority stereotype suggests "Asian Americans are more academically, economically, and socially successful than any other racial minority group associated with their supposedly stronger values emphasizing hard work, perseverance, and belief in the American meritocracy" (573).
Cheng, Alice W., Chang, Janet, O'Brien, Janine, Budgazad, Marc S. and Tsai, Jack (2017). Model Minority Stereotype: Influence on Perceived Mental Health Needs of Asian Americans. J Immigrant Minority Health, Vol. 19, pp. 572–581. DOI 10.1007/s10903-016-0440-0.

[70] According to Carliss D. Miller (2019) crabs in a barrel syndrome "is a metaphor that describes the undermining behavior from members of "oppressed collectives" (McPhail, 2010). McPhail (2010) interprets the motivation of CBS as self-interest and opportunism, sometimes a by-product of one's desire to succeed in the face of systemic opposition (i.e., the barrel) and limited resources. This desire can be characterized as a competitive motivation between minority group members whereby the pursuit of limited resources within an organization can sometimes lead to subtle, harmful effects" (353). Miller, Carliss D. (2019). Exploring the Crabs in the Barrel Syndrome in Organizations Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 352–371.

Poem: A Place of Refuge: The Workplace Washroom

Paula Gowdie, 2022

The workplace washroom
Quiet
Sheltered
Behind closed doors
Alone
I sit, contemplating the occurrences
The cruel behaviours
The disrespect, misogyny, double
standards, the blatant and subtle
acts of racism, sexism, xenophobia
I know they occurred
I saw them with my own two eyes
Felt the daggers pierce my heart
How could the other sixteen in the
room watch and be silent?
Time and again
Like some form of entertainment?

The workplace washroom
Silent
No response
Alone
I cry
The pain unbearable
My soul aches
I contemplate the hatred
Longing for acceptance,
acknowledgement, understanding
For allies in truth and spirit

The workplace washroom
Alone
I pray
I cry
To my God
For healing
Strength
Mercy
Relief
The burden heavy
Though I offered myself
The mission seems impossible
I must endure
The purpose soon to be revealed

The workplace washroom
Alone
I think of my predecessors
The ones I can name
The unnamed heroes
My ancestors
My family
My mother
I am here because of them
This pain will not be for naught
Breathe, deeply
Refocus
Exit and reentry

A place of refuge
The workplace washroom

Reflection: Journey to Healing: Love Letter to Myself

Paula Gowdie, Women of Courage Art Exhibition, 2023

Struggling through the trees and the darkness, I burst onto this beautiful, picturesque scene. Calming, vibrant colours, the still, clear water calls me to come forward, to immerse myself in its coolness, to be cleansed. A refreshing.

The white sand is at first cool to the touch where it's been shaded by the trees, then hot where it has been kissed by the sun. This is what I have been looking for – peace. A place to heal my mind, away from the constant running, doing, searching, needing, the demands of the world; always having to be switched *on*, never able to truly be myself; always needing to fight for what is right; the seeming lack of humanity in the world today. Here, I can forget the rest of the world and focus on me and being myself, if only for once. So, that's what I will do.

Eyes, slowly gaze at the sight in front of you and drink in all the wonder and the beauty of this place. The sun, the wind, the sand, the water, the sky, the trees, the birds.

Face, lifted towards the heavens. Feel the warmth of the sun rays as they gently caress your skin.

Lungs, breathe deeply, continuously filling yourselves with the life flowing goodness of the salt infused air. Again. And again. And again.

Image by lifeforstock on Freepik.com

Ears, hear the music of the waves, the gentle laps of the water flowing, in, out; the melodies of the wind rustling the leaves on the trees; the songs of the birds flying about. A beautiful symphony of sounds.

Mouth, smile so wide that you might break at the seams. Open wide, let laughter erupt from deep inside your belly and show your appreciation. Add your solo to the orchestra already in play.

Feet, revel in the sands seeping through your toes. Move, run, walk, get wet but most of all, dance! With arms flung wide, dance to the music in your head, to the music all around you.

Just let go and be yourself! Let your light shine through in the safety of this place.

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APPENDIX A: Themes and Other Findings: Research Participants Speak About Their Work Life Experiences in Canadian Labour Union Organizations

1. **The Work Life Experiences of Black Women Union Leaders: Work Stressors Experienced by Research Participants**

1.1. Black Women in Union Leadership Roles Are Often the First, the Only or One Of A Few

"It's pretty male, White male focused, structurally and the way the way business is done." (Participant 9, January 2022)

"I was one of the first Black woman who was hired." (Participant 15, January 2022)

"The union world I'd say very plainly is often referred to amongst circles I'm in as pale, male and stale. I was the only Black member of the board. At the end of a board meeting, I said goodbye to the secretary treasurer, and he said, oh, here is my water, you can take it away assuming I was the cleaner." (Participant 23, March 2022)

1.2. Black Women Are Underrepresented in Leadership Positions of Authority in Canadian Labour Union Organizations, Whether Elected or Recruited

1.2.1. Fewer Black Women in Union Leadership Positions

"I could tell you what I don't see, and that is people that look like me. There are no people of colour in the union's leadership." (Participant 1, December 2021)

"I strongly believe that representation matters. If you don't see yourself reflected there, you're not going to believe that you belong there." (Participant 7, December 2021)

"We need people like myself in leadership roles within the union to feel like you belong." (Participant 8, December 2021)

"Black women need more leadership opportunities…There weren't many examples in leadership. There was one other Black woman who was part of the union, but she stepped away." (Participant 13, January 2022)

"Black members, other racialized members haven't always felt included in the union." (Participant 14, January 2022)

"We have to work twice as hard, maybe three times as hard before we get opportunities. Even when they have the education, Black women are still not given opportunities because of their race." (Participant 15, January 2022)

"I just didn't see a place for me, I participated in strikes and work to rules, but I didn't realize that there was anything where I could be directly involved." (Participant 18, February 2022)

"We deserve to be in these seats. Why do we always have to go for recording secretary or executive at large? We can be president. We can be vice president." (Participant 19, February 2022)

"Representation inspires, motivates. Usually, our executive is predominantly Caucasian." (Participant 21, February 2022)

"I do notice the lack of people who look like me…The members need to see themselves reflected in who's leading them." (Participant 21, February 2022)

1.2.2. Black Women Union Leaders Expressed Being Lonely at The Top

"The need to look at intersectionality, the need to ensure that when dealing with women's issues, we're looking at all women, not just White women." (Participant 5, December 2021)

"Navigating conversations with management and recognizing that sometimes I get different responses than the other executives. Then, sharing that and them not understanding why I'm getting different responses." (Participant 14, January 2022)

"There is in the labor movement an old guard. There are pale, stale, males that take up a lot of space, and do not give racialized folks the respect or the dignity, or the seriousness that they should in their capabilities, in their work, in their experience, in their passion, in their knowledge and their history." (Participant 16, January 2022)

"Understanding that Black women are many different types of women." (Participant 17, January 2022)

"Anti-Black racism has been trivialized in the union." (Participant 18, February 2022)

"I just really noticed there's a real bias the higher up in the union you go, or the more into the labour movement you go. We have to do things three times as hard." (Participant 19, February 2022)

"Once you get to a certain level there are either nobody else or very few others who are of colour or women." (Participant 23, March 2022)

1.3. Black Women Union Leaders Do Not Have Support

1.3.1. Inherent Barriers in The Labour Union's Organizational Structures and Practices

"Staff is predominantly all White in unions. They are decent jobs and it's a matter of tapping their buddies, and because all the leadership is mostly White, they're tapping the White guys." (Participant 2, December 2021)

"I applied for a management position. I didn't get the job even though I had a lot of related management experience and the educational requirements. The position was given to a White woman with no management experience." (Participant 3, December 2021)

"I applied for an instructor position. I heard after the fact that all the other applicants got a phone call and got the job. With me, I had seven people interview me for over an hour and a half." (Participant 4, December 2021)

"They stack the executive board." (Participant 19, February 2022)

"Labor leaders have a book of rules that only apply to themselves." (Participant 22, February 2022)

"We constantly have to either demand a seat at the table or wait to be invited to the table often in a tokenistic manner." (Participant 23, March 2022)

1.3.2. A Lack of Training, Mentoring and Opportunities to Learn

"There is no blueprint for coloured people." (Participant 6, December 2021)

"I've found that members have no idea how their own unions are structured." (Participant 9, January 2022)

"I didn't have any real leadership examples as to how I should conduct myself." (Participant 10, January 2022)

"I had an understanding of unions and how they worked but when I started working and became a member of a union, I didn't really think of myself as a union member." (Participant 14, January 2022)

"Members don't necessarily understand the governance structure of the organization, which is a deliberate practice for those who want to maintain control." (Participant 18, February 2022)

"I spend a lot of time trying to train members to fight for themselves and to stand up for each other." (Participant 22, February 2022)

1.3.3. A Lack of Structures to Support or Promote Being Successful in a Leadership Position

"The people who get certain positions in the union fit a specific look - White." (Participant 3, December 2021)

"As a Black woman, we were still secondary even when it came to the women's movement. We were never included fully in the fight and struggle for equity. You would be present but sometimes you felt like you were a token." (Participant 4, December 2021)

"When you talk about equity, people are reluctant to talk about race. They are comfortable talking about women's issues, about disability issues, LGBTQ, but not about race." (Participant 13, January 2022)

"There is a lot of knowledge in the union. In order to get access to that knowledge, you have to be welcomed in." (Participant 17, January 2022)

1.3.4. A Lack of Support From Union Executives, Other Union Leaders, Union Employers and Union Members Including Those Who are Black or from Other Racially Oppressed Groups

"Within the labour movement, you've got the Black guys who gets in with the White president and screws over the Black sister who's trying to do really good work." (Participant 2, December 2021)

"I was yelled at in meetings by the president and other executives and they would say awful things about racialized people. It was just endlessly toxic on an executive that was primarily White. My opinions were disagreed with 99% of the time." (Participant 7, December 2021)

"I do get some challenges from some even on the executive and from other Black women, and Black males." (Participant 12, January 2022)

"The biggest critics for me have been Black women." (Participant 18, February 2022)

"There is one thing that we don't do, we do not back each other up well enough." (Participant 19, February 2022)

"I have seen how the shade of a Black person's complexion is used to separate us. Individuals with a lighter complexion get selected first even if they have no experience…There was a woman who was failing in every sense with the work she was doing and yet she got promoted." (Participant 22, February 2022)

1.4. Union Leadership Roles Often Achieved by Black Women Involve Excessive Workloads and Demands, Working Longer Hours and Earning Less Than Their Non-Black Counterparts

"You will find Black women clustered in the lower levels and they never move beyond doing the grunt work at the local level, and never really get the full picture." (Participant 11, January 2022)

"Black women have been labouring, and we have led on the sidelines, and we have been vocal, but we haven't been decision makers, and we haven't been in those positions to really influence change." (Participant 13, January 2022)

"A member said to me how can you fight for workers to say it is important that they take their breaks, they're entitled to those breaks but yet you can't do the same? It makes you want to go back and get home and think what are you doing? I wasn't getting paid for these long hours." (Participant 22, February 2022)

1.5. Black Women Union Leaders' Authority is Often Diminished by Union Executives, Other Union Leaders, Union Employers and Union Members

1.5.1. Question Their Intelligence, Undermine Their Efforts, Treat Them with Derision and Falsely Accuse Them of Wrongdoing

"I have to assert myself at times when giving direction. There is a difference in how they respond to directions from me and the previous White men in my position." (Participant 3, December 2021)

"There's always been challenges of people accepting me as a Black woman being in a position of decision making. It's very difficult for them to accept that I had the skills and ability to do the job. Did they second guess me? On many occasions." (Participant 4, December 2021)

"Despite my many accomplishments in, and outside, the labour movement, I was told in no uncertain terms by union executives that I was incompetent." (Participant 5, December 2021)

"I'm the first Black person in my executive. There are many members that would rather talk to the White person and say, I'd rather talk to ---." (Participant 6, December 2021)

"They would say, you got that job because you are Black." (Participant 8, December 2021)

"A lot of conflicting verbal, sometimes on the phone and, written communication, questioning my allegiance, questioning my authority and hostile communications from people who feel that I should not be in the position that I am. They believe that the election was stolen because I'm a Black person." (Participant 12, January 2022)

"People questioning your ability to do the role even when you have the experience and qualifications." (Participant 13, January 2022)

"I just want to be respected like a mediocre White guy, right, because they cannot do anything. And, you know, they'll get elected, get respect, get praised, right, for doing very little. They don't have to prove themselves." (Participant 14, January 2022)

"They were really critical of any mistake that you'd make and use it to make you look ridiculous." (Participant 15, January 2022)

"I know a lot of racialized staff work a lot more hours to do every aspect of the job, to make sure that everything we do is the best quality, all the time. And there's not the same commitment that I see with some of the White staff, and their work isn't questioned in the same way that our work is." (Participant 16, January 2022)

"I have to prove to them that I do have the experience and can do the job." (Participant 18, February 2022)

"There seems to be this absolute permission, right, to marginalize women, racialized women. If you are not white privileged, then you will wait your turn to speak, you will wait your turn to provide an opinion." (Participant 19, February 2022)

"I think the most blatant is having my knowledge called into question." (Participant 20, February 2022)

1.5.2. Black Women Union Leaders Are Excessively Surveilled and Scrutinized and Often Subjected to Arduous Approval Processes Rife with Stalling, Delay Tactics and Resistance to Change

"A member from the president's former local reached out to me. The racism that he faced was so horrific. And because I actually listened to him, and was trying to help him, I mean the man, he was in tears because he had tried everything, and he had just been ignored. So, when I went to the president to say I talked to this member and the horrific racism he's facing, like, we have to do something, the president basically said to me 'bury it'." (Participant 2, December 2021)

"There's a lot of resistance to understanding that there's racism within the Union as an employer." (Participant 3, December 2021)

"Anti-Black racism was very significant and upfront, in all the work that I did, and I got push back every step of the way…Union leaders don't like to hear that they're not doing something that they should be doing" (Participant 5, December 2021)

"A lot of filibustering and intimidation strategies are used to prevent success and succession." (Participant 12, January 2022)

"It's literally exhausting. At times it's frustrating because you're constantly explaining why we need to do certain things." (Participant 13, January 2022)

"We can pass resolutions on the convention floor and walk away, and then nothing happens with that resolution." (Participant 15, January 2022)

"There is a constitution, but there are ways to circumvent it." (Participant 17, January 2022)

1.6. Black Women Union Leaders Experience a Culture of Violence in Canadian Labour Union Organizations

1.6.1. Black Women Union Leaders Daily Experience Microaggressions, Gaslighting, Racelighting, Harassment, Are Ignored and Excluded in Different Ways and Experience Other Types of Unfair Treatment by Union Executives, Other Union Leaders, Union Employers and Union Members

"I've dealt with a lot of racism internally, within the Union. I've dealt with a lot, a lot of racism, some overt, some not so overt. The union space is very racist. Most of the union leaders are White men, older White men." (Participant 3, December 2021)

"The president called, said 'do not show up for meetings'. I'll get asked a question at a meeting, and I'll respond, and he talks right over me." (Participant 5, December 2021)

"Many times, they put things in your path to instigate you or intimidate you." (Participant 6, December 2021)

"Very isolating and there's a lot of gaslighting." (Participant 7, December 2021)

"I have to always be vetting myself, double checking myself." (Participant 8, December 2021)

"As with society, you face all the other horrible things that one faces in society. The marginalization, the racism, systemic and overt, the conniving, like, the words can't describe that other side of trade unionism." (Participant 11, January 2022)

"If you are too strong, you're angry but then people don't expect you to have a brain or opinions. You're supposed to sort of agree with everything, to be a token where you are seen and not heard. To be visible, yet invisible." (Participant 13, January 2022)

"The Union space is not free of systemic oppression. I've had things thrown at me in meetings by a president." (Participant 17, February 2022)

"White males in the labour movement feel entitled to talk over women, to talk over racialized folk." (Participant 19, February 2022)

1.6.2. Black Women Union Leaders Are Targeted and Subjected to Rumours and Negative Characterizations

"A Black worker won the election and is now the president, but they started targeting her. Told the members not to go to her because she doesn't know what she's doing. Meanwhile, she's thorough and raises the issues, but they don't want that. They wanted somebody who's White, and it doesn't matter what kind of job they do. So, they got her out." (Participant 1, December 2021)

"I was accused of bringing racism to the union because I started calling it what it is. Nobody wants to talk about it, but you have to. So, the ones who dare to do that suffer the brunt, isolation and all the other stuff that goes with that." (Participant 9, January 2022)

"They have done everything they can possibly think of to do, resorting to bold faced lies and rumours." (Participant 12, January 2022)

"Being called names or derogatory terms that on the face of it, you might not think anything of it, but these words are used to be dismissive, diminutive. Being tone policed." (Participant 18, February 2022)

"The executive board started these rumors and there's a lot of animosity." (Participant 19, February 2022)

1.6.3. Reporting Unfair Treatment to Persons of Authority in Union Organizations is Futile

"They're pointing out the racism, and you weren't ready for that, for... And so, instead of responding in a way of 'oh my God, thank you for pointing that out', you get defensive, I'm not racist." (Participant 2, December 2021)

"They're very sympathetic when they listen to you, and you talk to them - extremely sympathetic. You start questioning yourself, because they'll listen to you, they'll say all the right words, but nothing will happen. And when you follow up in writing, silence." (Participant 8, December 2021)

"The issue is that the people who receive these complaints aren't necessarily trained in anti-Black racism." (Participant 14, January 2022)

"This member made a racist remark about me, and I called him on it. I reported it to the supervisor, and the supervisor said he didn't think anything was wrong with what the member said." (Participant 15, January 2022)

"I think most of us, you figure out ways to deal with it, you figure out ways to keep going. I mean, honestly, if I reported every instance of racism, sexism, ageism that I've experienced, I would be recording every hour. It's nonstop." (Participant 16, January 2022)

1.6.4. Research Participants Spoke of Union Structures That Were Not Inclusive

"I work for an organization that's profoundly racist. They will try to tell you something else, but their actions speak louder than words." (Participant 1, December 2021)

"The union is not safe for Black women but safe for White women." (Participant 13, January 2022)

"I was in such a vulnerable situation that I don't think I could have continued." (Participant 15, January 2022)

"I thought that a union would protect the people in the margins. They just protect their own." (Participant 17, January 2022)

1.6.5. Organizational Changes are Often Performative and Lack Meaning

"It's frustrating for some of us because, sure, the executive board will denounce racism. But what are you actually doing beyond just your words?" (Participant 16, January 2022)

1.6.6. Research Participants Reported an Overwhelming Lack of Accountability Within, By and For Unions, i.e., Union Structures, Union Executives, Other Union Leaders and Union Employers

"I wish that people who were in union leadership positions, were there for the leadership and the members and not for themselves." (Participant 5, December 2021)

"There's no level of accountability to say we were wrong, just this blaming and making you question yourself." (Participant 7, December 2021)

"I think that's still a big problem. The politics in unions often prevent the kind of accountability, in my view, again, that should be happening." (Participant 9, January 2022)

"Systemic racism is within the labor movement. It's no different than any other workplace, and the value of the work and the contributions that we make is not seen in the way that it should, in the way that it would if we were White." (Participant 16, January 2022)

"There isn't any accountability. There isn't any because the person who was the VP is now the president, and they're a terrible human being, and very performative. They would have gotten rid of me." (Participant 17, January 2022)

1.7. Black Women Union Leaders Experience Many Impacts as A Result of Their Work Life Experiences

"High blood pressure. Sleepless nights. I never had high blood pressure before." (Participant 1, December 2021)

"Work life balance does not exist for unions." (Participant 3, December 2021)

"My children were young when I first started so that was a difficult moment, developing tools to be able to be a mom, a partner and dealing with workplace demands because you are working seven days a week, 24 hours a day, being on call." (Participant 4, December 2021)

"It bothers me because of the sacrifices that I've made." (Participant 5, December 2021)

"Panic attacks, I could not sleep, crying randomly and hyperventilating. It's mostly psychological." (Participant 7, December 2021)

"Family time. Because the way the union is structured, it does not take into account that members have families. And that the work of families more times than not fall under women. And that some of those women are on their own." (Participant 9, January 2022)

"Stress on my personal relationships, the source of a lot of stress and anxiety." (Participant 10, January 2022)

"I never knew what stress was. I honestly didn't. I hear people talk about stress, I didn't know what that was until I joined the union. I honestly did not." (Participant 11, January 2022)

"Gaining weight, not taking care of myself, becoming divorced because of it, and you know different issues." (Participant 12, January 2022)

"It wears you down." (Participant 14, January 2022)

"My children have suffered because work has been so dominating of my time because the demands of union work is really high, it's heavy and negative stuff and so, it can be taxing." (Participant 16, January 2022)

"We do have to work harder to prove ourselves because there is that idea that we can't." (Participant 21, February 2021)

2. Other Findings

2.1. Coping with the Effects of Their Work Life Experiences in Canadian Labour Union Organizations

"I'm pretty religious, and I think that helps me a lot." (Participant 1, December 2021)

"Understanding the harms that come from doing the work. By that I mean, by working with members, you are helping them to deal with traumatic situations, and by virtue of that, I am vicariously being harmed. So, normalizing self-care practices is absolutely needed." (Participant 3, December 2021)

"When you're dealing with other people, you yourself must be grounded somehow." (Participant 5, December 2021)

"Therapy." (Participant 7, December 2021)

"Have a creative outlet outside of your work." (Participant 9, January 2022)

"A strong support system outside the union." (Participant 13, January 2022)

"I love reading and I love to party...One step at a time." (Participant 15, January 2022)

"Physical exercise is very important." (Participant 17, January 2022)

2.2. Research Participants' Motivations for Involvement in Canadian Labour Union Organizations

"If you see an injustice and you do nothing about it, you can't leave it for the other person to fix because they may never get fixed. The satisfaction that I get from being able to help somebody, I don't think you can recreate that anywhere else." (Participant 1, December 2021)

"My family encouraged me to, you know, take roles that if I thought I could make a difference, and people who are being harassed or are discriminated against, that I should do it. I've decided, this is so entrenched. Until I go to my grave, I'll be doing this work." (Participant 2, December 2021)

"I have such a love and passion, I think for the people and justice that I can't give up the fight, it's never going to happen." (Participant 11, January 2022)

"You need to be a part of writing the future. Your imprint needs to be there, and you have no say if you're not even there to help write the story. So, get involved. You lose more when you don't get involved." (Participant 12, January 2022)

"There's so much to be done and it's like any other movement, our voice is important, our ideas, our influence. We have everything it takes to lead this movement, and others need to see that we are the labor movement. We have a place and a prominent place, not just supporting but leading and guiding for many generations, and we could be trailblazers and, shifters and bargainers and negotiators. We have those skills and talents, and we

need to make sure that that is seen and we utilize that. It's a movement for our children, our future. We're shaping generations, not just for Black women, the Black communities, but for all Ontarians, all Canadians.”
(Participant 13, January 2022)