

IN THE CIRCLE OF FIRE:
GENDERED BARRIERS IN FIRE SERVICES IN ONTARIO

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Abstract

The firefighting profession is described as inherently dangerous, rich in pride, honour and tradition. Firefighters are held in high regard, as they are known for their involvement in, and commitment to the community. Firefighting is a 'public safety' service, with a labour force that is predominantly white males. The public expect firefighters to fight fires and rescue those in distress, displaying heroism, strength and embodying masculinity (Yarnal et al., 2016). Although described as a masculine profession, the role of the firefighter is changing, and the composition of the service is beginning to evolve to reflect the community that it serves. This phenomenological study, guided by the principles of standpoint theory, investigates gender-based workplace dynamics within firefighting, uncovering ways in which nuanced stereotypes, bias and discriminatory practices contribute to a less inclusive and sometimes unsupportive environment for women in the Fire Services in Ontario. Thirty-two firefighters participated in semi-structured interviews. The themes presented are generalized to both genders, as well as themes unique to either male or female firefighters. This study's findings reveal that while some themes are found to apply to both genders, others are distinct to women firefighters. This dissertation highlights the negative impacts the workplace has on women firefighters.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Lonsdale Shepherd, for his unwavering love and support. He passed away in August 2021 and I miss him each and every day. He always pushed me to do my best and supported me through every chapter of my life. He was one of my greatest supporters, advocates, and teachers.

Acknowledgement

With the support of my Mom (Marilyn), Dad (Lonsdale), and my Sister (Cerian), this challenging doctoral journey became a reality. I also dedicate my achievements to my daughters, Gabriella and Sabrina, who became self-reliant and independent young women out of necessity, raised by a single mom with a demanding career. They are my world, and I am so proud of them.

I am truly grateful to Dr. Meg Luxton's guidance and overall insights, which has made this an inspiring learning experience for me. The input of my entire committee, Dr. Meg Luxton, Dr. Ena Dua and Dr. Alison Harvey made my research much richer, and my dissertation something I am proud to have written. The completion of this dissertation marks the culmination of an incredible journey as both an academic and a practitioner.

I owe a great deal of gratitude to those in the fire service profession who volunteered to share their experiences. Your willingness to candidly share your personal stories of accomplishments, challenges, frustrations, and self-reflection is truly appreciated. I have always been proud of the fire service profession, and I will continue to be a firefighter's biggest advocate. This research highlights the incredible men and women who serve their communities selflessly. It acknowledges we have work to do as a profession, to ensure all fire service personnel experience success and personal fulfillment throughout their career.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Dedication	iii
Acknowledgement	iv
Table of Contents	v
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study	1
Introduction	1
Problem Statement	9
Purpose of the Study	10
Significance of the Study	11
Chapter 2: Context – The Ontario Firefighting Profession	13
History of Women in the Canadian Fire Service	13
Female Firefighter Demographics	15
The Fire Services in Ontario	16
Legislation – Fire Protection and Prevention Act	17
Volunteer (Paid On-Call) versus Career Fire Services	19
Pre-Fire Service Programs	23
Recruitment	24
The History of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)	27
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Efforts	35
Chapter 3: Literature Review	44
Expectations	49
Gender Discrimination in the Workplace	51
Occupational Segregation	52
Men versus Women	56
Occupational Choice	57
Managing Gender Identity	57
Women as Tokens	59
Requirement to Outperform	61
Leadership	63
Career Advancement	64

Diversity Training.....	65
Occupational Identity of Firefighting.....	66
Discipline and the Arbitration Process.....	69
Occupational Culture of Firefighting.....	75
Chapter 4: Theoretical Approach and Methodology.....	79
Theoretical Framework – Feminist Standpoint Theory.....	80
Statement of the Problem.....	91
Research Methodology.....	92
Interviews.....	95
Selection of Participants.....	96
Participating Firefighters.....	99
Data Collection.....	99
Delimitations.....	100
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	100
Data Analysis.....	101
Ethical Considerations.....	101
Parallel Narratives of Harassment and Discrimination.....	104
Arbitration Outcome – Social Media.....	110
Arbitration – Extension of the Workplace.....	114
Arbitration – Sexual Harassment and Poisoned Work Environment.....	119
Chapter 6: Keeping it in the Family: Personal Ties and Getting into the Fire Service.....	123
The Fire Service as a Family Business.....	124
Friends and Acquaintances in the Fire Service.....	134
Recruitment.....	139
Barriers to Entry.....	140
Competition.....	150
Fitness Test.....	152
Chapter 7: Into The Fire: Experiences of Working in the Fire Service.....	163
Being Assigned to a Crew.....	168
Tokens.....	179
Occupational Deterrent.....	183
Mentorship.....	184
Promotional Processes for Career Advancement.....	190

Social Activities.....	196
Children	200
Social Skills	209
Job Satisfaction.....	211
Community Support.....	212
Toxic Workplace.....	215
Exclusion.....	222
Sexual Harassment.....	224
Mental Health.....	236
Chapter 8: Changing the Game: Opportunities and Challenges in Improving Inclusion .	241
Influencing Culture	242
Hazing	243
Union	246
Policies	248
Diversity.....	262
Discipline.....	266
Chapter 9: Conclusion	270
Discussion of Findings.....	271
Implications for Practice	276
Limitations	277
Recommendations for Future Research or Interventions.....	278
Final Reflection.....	280
Appendices.....	284
Appendix 1: Composition of Firefighters	284
Appendix 2: Informed Research Consent Form	286
Appendix 3: Demographic Questions	291
Appendix 4: Interview Questions.....	294

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

This dissertation sheds light on the unique challenges women firefighters face in the service. It describes the underlying factors that contribute to gender disparity in this occupation, and through rich and insightful interview findings it explores the personal and subjective experiences, perceptions and narratives among women and men firefighters. By unraveling these gendered perceptions, the dissertation reveals valuable insights about the gender-based workplace dynamics and the ways in which nuanced stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices contribute to a less inclusive and sometimes unsupportive environment for women in the Fire Services in Ontario. In analysing the systemic and cultural barriers that hinder women's progress and representation in firefighting, this research also suggests ways in which fire services and their personnel could more effectively develop policies and practices that create more equitable working conditions for women.

Systemic barriers are behaviours and practices that disadvantage groups identified by gender, race, disability, Aboriginal status, or other ascriptive labels, whether or not there is a conscious intent to discriminate (Agócs and Tucker, 2014, p. 4). While it might be assumed that discriminatory practices and biases are primarily perpetuated by men, this isn't always the case. Women can also contribute to such practices, knowingly or unknowingly. Conversely, some men are allies in the fight against workplace discrimination. To accurately capture these nuances, the insights of both men and women firefighters have been incorporated into this research. It's crucial to include the male perspective, especially that of white male firefighters, given their representation as the predominant demographic within the fire service. Their perspectives and experiences establish a foundational understanding of the fire service. Introducing the voices and experiences of women firefighters juxtaposes the experiences of the men, providing a comprehensive understanding of the work culture by making meaningful comparisons. It also establishes the origins and extent of inequalities and discrimination within the context of the fire service.

This study contributes to academia by filling a knowledge gap in understanding the unique challenges faced by firefighters and the implications for gender equity in the workplace. With a particular focus on gendered perspectives, this comparative analysis deepens our understanding of gender dynamics in firefighting and contributes to the discussion on gender equity in male dominated professions generally by considering the many factors influencing gender-based workplace dynamics. It is important to note that gender does not function singularly but intersects with other identity markers such as race, ethnicity, and sexuality. Examining the gendered perceptions, this research challenges stereotypical assumptions about male-dominated professions and contributes to a broader conversation on gender roles, gender expectations, and gender disparities in the workplace. By highlighting specific career barriers faced by female firefighters, the study can (1) inform policy and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting gender equity, (2) help Fire Chiefs and human resource business partners identify and address disparities with a goal of fostering a more inclusive work environment, and (3) contribute to the literature within the gender, feminist and women's studies field of knowledge by examining the gender-based work dynamics and challenging notions of masculinity in male-dominated professions.

As a Fire Chief deeply committed to advancing the Fire Services in Ontario, my decision to pursue a PhD in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies at York University is driven by a profound understanding of the systemic challenges and barriers women face while seeking entry into, and navigating through the complex landscape of the fire service profession. My personal investment in research is rooted in the need for an in-depth examination of gender-based discrimination, and its consequential impacts on women firefighters in the Fire Services in Ontario. The fire service, with the noble goal of saving lives and protecting property, has a history of gender biases and unequal treatment. With this academic endeavour, my aim is to develop a comprehensive awareness of power dynamics, social structures, and cultural influences that shape gender inequalities. Armed with the critical insights gained from this interdisciplinary field, I can challenge the existing norms within the fire service and drive the implementation of a comprehensive approach to address the broader systemic issues, in order to foster inclusivity and equity. Through the lens of the feminist standpoint

theory, I have the ability to identify and dismantle biased perceptions and stereotypes, with the goal of finding solutions to encourage a more inclusive and diverse workforce in the Fire Services in Ontario. In addition, the study of intersectionality has equipped me with the tools to address the unique challenges faced by different groups within the fire service, guiding my approach toward a more holistic and empathetic leadership. Through my academic journey, my goal is to empower and mentor women within the Fire Services in Ontario and encourage a cultural shift that embraces diversity, enhancing community trust and shape a future where every firefighter is valued and supported. Understanding and addressing these inequalities, fostering inclusivity, eradicating stereotypes and empowering marginalized groups within the fire service is essential to shaping a better future for all firefighters, especially the next generation of women who aspire to be a firefighter in the province of Ontario.

My interest in this subject stems from my multi-decade career in the fire service. In my dual role as a researcher and the Fire Chief/Director of Emergency Management for one of Canada's largest municipalities, I offer a varied perspective to the research. My practical experience as an incident commander, leading a team of over 800 firefighters, and ensuring the public safety of over 750,000 people who live, work or visit the City I serve, ensures I have a contextual understanding of the unique challenges of practical applicability, feasibility, and relevance of research outcomes. Climbing up through the ranks from firefighter to Fire Chief, with hands-on experience as a practitioner and an emerging presence as an academic, I bring a valuable blend of practical knowledge and scholarly insight into my work. With the goal of improving the Fire Services in Ontario, I believe it is important to include the experiences of both men and women in my research, to improve the profession for all firefighters. My dissertation focuses on gender discrepancies in the fire service, and although I am proud of the progress witnessed in the fire service profession over my career, I recognize there is still a long way to go. The aim is to bridge the gap between research and practical application and influencing policy and decision making in the field.

The sexual harassment scandal in the Canadian military (Kovitz, 2021, p. 79) has served as a catalyst for a broader discussion on gender, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace and academia. The allegations and revelations of sexual misconduct

within the military shed light on the persistent gender inequalities and toxic workplace culture that continues to exist in many non-traditional workplaces. It has revived discussions around the need for comprehensive policies and protocols to address misconduct and highlights the importance of promoting a culture of respect and equality in the workplace. In my roles as a Fire Chief, practitioner and academic, I have seized the opportunity to conduct research that will help amplify the message that the Fire Services in Ontario must pay attention to the lessons learned by the Canadian military, and make a renewed commitment to dismantling career barriers firefighters encounter, recognizing the benefits of fostering a more inclusive work environment.

Ahead of the 2023 International Women's Day, the United Nations Secretary General stated that "gender equality is growing more distant with estimates from other organizations (UN Women) placing it 300 years away," (Tricco, Parker, Khan et al., 2024, p. 2). This indicates that the United Nations Sustainable Development goal number five, which aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls," is becoming increasingly unattainable. Diversity, inclusivity, and gender parity continue to be challenges in most workplaces (MIT Management Review, 2019, p. 1). The slow progress toward gender equality, as highlighted by the Secretary General, emphasizes the importance of addressing these challenges within specific contexts like the Fire Services in Ontario. It highlights the necessity for targeted policies and interventions that address the unique barriers women in these roles face. It also illustrates why the challenges faced by women in firefighting are part of a larger systemic issue.

Equity involves the fair and respectful treatment of all individuals. It focuses on creating opportunities, reducing disparities, and examines the implications of differences in outcomes. In the context of firefighting, women often believe they have to be like a man, as by "becoming one of the boys" acceptance is granted by reproducing the hegemony of firefighting masculinity and all its inequalities (Eriksen, Waitt and Wilkinson, 2016, p. 1308). Equity, however, recognizes and honours the unique differences between individuals. A commitment to equity, informed by an understanding of intersectionality, recognizes the complex relationship between various forms of identity, such as race, gender, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status. This approach acknowledges that disparities are not just rooted in historical and

contemporary injustices but are also shaped by the overlapping and intersecting privileges and disadvantages experienced by different groups. Therefore, inclusion, is about creating an environment in the fire service where everyone, particularly those at the intersections of multiple underrepresented identities, feel welcomed and respected. When a fire service is comprised of individuals from various backgrounds, it can better understand and serve the diverse community it protects. This diversity fosters a deeper understanding of different community needs and cultural sensitivities, leading to more effective communication and sense of trust with the public.

In the context of the Fire Services in Ontario, underrepresentation is evident when certain groups, such as women and racialized individuals, have significantly lower proportions within the workforce compared to their representation in the broader population. This numerical disparity can be attributed to the systemic barriers that these groups face, including possible discriminatory hiring practices, biased promotion processes, and unequal access to training and development opportunities. Additionally, interviews within Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 of the dissertation will demonstrate that there is a sentiment among some individuals from these groups that this type of job is not meant for "people like them," which discourages their pursuit of a career in the fire service. This perception can significantly impact career choices and contributes to ongoing underrepresentation. Cultural and institutional barriers further exacerbate the issue, as workplace environments often perpetuate norms and practices that exclude or marginalize underrepresented populations, making it difficult for them to integrate, feel welcomed, or succeed. Historical exclusion also plays a crucial role, as groups that have been systematically marginalized continue to experience the lingering effects of past discrimination, which still influence current representation levels.

The theoretical argument for underrepresentation is multifaceted. Structural inequality theory posits that social structures and institutions are organized in ways that perpetuate the dominance of certain groups over others, thereby maintaining unequal access to resources, opportunities, and power (Tilly, 1998). Social identity theory explains how individuals' identities, shaped by their group memberships, influence their experiences within an organization, often leading to the marginalization of those not fitting the dominant group's identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Critical race theory

highlights how race and racism are ingrained in societal institutions and practices, leading to systemic exclusion and marginalization of racialized groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Gender role theory explores how societal expectations and norms about gender roles contribute to the underrepresentation of women in certain professions, influencing career choices, opportunities, and perceptions of competence and leadership (Eagly, 1987). Intersectionality, a framework coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), examines how different social identities, such as race, gender, and class, intersect to create unique modes of discrimination and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). This framework is crucial to understanding how individuals with intersecting identities, such as racialized women, face compounded barriers and greater levels of underrepresentation.

The literature review chapter discusses tokenism, which occurs when organizations hire or promote a few individuals from underrepresented groups to give the appearance of diversity without making substantial changes to inclusive practices or culture (Kanter, 1997a). Tokenism often results in these individuals being viewed as representatives of their entire group rather than as individuals, further marginalizing them and undermining true diversity and inclusion efforts.

This dissertation demonstrates how privileged groups perpetuate gender inequalities. Considering employment equity for women in firefighting requires us to think beyond questions of how to include women in male-dominated occupations and consider how work can be redesigned to allow and encourage a variety of different bodies and subjectivities to participate (Nichols & Braedley, 2019, p. 304). The goal is to create conditions in which all firefighters have the opportunity to fully participate in the fire service, where their individual talents are valued. An inclusive fire service strives for equity and respect and accepts and values differences. Neither individual flourishing nor organizational benefits will ensue in the absence of attention to structural and cultural practices that silence some and privilege the voices of others (McLeod & Herrington, 2017, p. 180). This study will add to the body of research on women in non-traditional occupations, specifically blue-collar occupations. Recent investigations and studies have revealed notable gender-based disparities in the fire service. This is evidenced by this research, which includes comprehensive interviews conducted with a group of

firefighters, consisting of 10 women and 22 men. The interviews highlighted the challenges and experiences faced in the firefighting profession.

The dynamics of gender biases and discriminatory practices don't occur in a vacuum. They are influenced by larger historical, societal, and cultural contexts. Both men and women have been socialized within these contexts and carry their own set of learned behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes. By studying both men and women, this dissertation identifies these broader influences. The research can be useful to a broad range of readers, in particular, academics who study gender, equity, diversity and inclusion practitioners, human resources personnel, and government officials who develop public policies.

This dissertation uses the terms "men" and "women" in its discussions and analysis. It is important to note that most individuals described in this paper are white women and white men, highlighting the prevailing dynamics in the research group. Acknowledging this limitation is crucial, and the analysis seeks to remain mindful of intersectional and feminist perspectives, recognizing that the experiences of women and men of different racial, ethnic, and LGBTQ2S+ backgrounds may vary. It is important to note that the use of the words "men" and "women" does not stem from an intention to ignore or undermine the experiences and identities of non-binary, transgender, and other gender-diverse individuals. The choice of terminology reflects the data collected and the self-identification of the participants. During the research phase, the individuals who came forward to be interviewed expressly identified themselves using the terms men and women. None of the participants used terms such as non-binary, transgender, or other non-cisgender identifiers to describe their own identity, experiences or perspectives. Given the commitment to accurately representing the voices and experiences of the participants, this study has accordingly centered its discussions around these terms. This specific focus does not invalidate or diminish the significance of diverse gender experiences and identities outside of the binary framework.

In this dissertation, the terms "male" and "female" are used in reference to biological sex where relevant, particularly in discussions where the distinction between sex and gender is critical for the analysis. Meanwhile, "masculine" and "feminine" are employed to describe socially constructed gender norms, behaviours, and expectations.

The dissertation recognizes that these constructs are fluid, culturally specific, and subject to change over time, and that individuals may exhibit traits traditionally labeled as masculine or feminine, regardless of their gender identity. The use of these terms, therefore, reflects both the biological and sociocultural dimensions of gender, while being conscious of the limitations inherent in binary frameworks. Gender is a multifaceted and deeply personal aspect of the human identity, and it is vital that research continues to evolve to represent all experiences inclusively. This dissertation is a snapshot of a particular set of narratives and should be understood within that context.

In addition to the gender-focused scope of this dissertation, it's imperative to highlight another dimension of representation. This research does not adequately capture the diverse voices and experiences of racialized groups. The participants who contributed to this study did not represent the breadth of racial and ethnic backgrounds that make up communities across Ontario. The fact that only one racialized participant came forward to contribute to the research may indicate a lack of trust or comfort among racialized individuals in engaging with the research process or sharing their experiences within the fire service. This could be due to concerns about discrimination, bias, or a history of exclusionary practices. It could also reflect the broader systemic barriers that prevent racialized individuals from accessing involvement and employment opportunities with the fire service. The absence of these voices in the data presents a limitation in the comprehensiveness and generalizability of the findings. The absence of these narratives means that the conclusions drawn from this study may not reflect the realities of individuals from racialized backgrounds. This omission is not a deliberate oversight but rather a reflection of the constraints of the research process and participant availability. It highlights the importance of continuous, deliberate efforts in the research community to ensure diverse representation in research studies.

Inclusivity and diversity in academic research are important in the field of gender, feminist and women's studies, with the goal of amplifying the voices and experiences of underrepresented groups and marginalized individuals. While embracing a broad range of perspectives would foster a more comprehensive understanding of the Fire Services in Ontario and help to challenge existing power structures and gender norms that exist, I

was limited to the participants who came forward to share their experiences and insight. This shortcoming, along with others, will be explored further in the limitations section of the dissertation.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore gender-based workplace dynamics within firefighting, uncovering ways in which nuanced stereotypes, bias and discriminatory practices contribute to a less inclusive and sometimes unsupportive environment for women in the Fire Services in Ontario. The objective of this research is to investigate and develop a better understanding of the challenges that women experience in the fire service compared to that of their male colleagues. Women's experiences can provide unique insights into systems of power and privilege, especially when those experiences differ from those of men. To highlight gender differences, this research will outline how men and women experience these barriers similarly and differently. These barriers may be unseen or unacknowledged by those who do not experience them but who benefit from their exclusionary impact (Agócs & Tucker, 2014, p. 4). This research explores the barriers and how gender affects the ways in which barriers are experienced, identified and articulated.

In Canada, research on female firefighters at the national and provincial level is limited. In particular, the role of policy development and human resources practices relating to gender equality within the Fire Services in Ontario has received little attention. In Canada, and elsewhere, research demonstrates gender inequalities persist in non-traditional work despite decades of policy intervention and women's organizing efforts. Women in the fire service are at an acute disadvantage because of the current organizational hierarchy, obstacles to employment, and barriers to promotion. Women face challenges embedded in their career choices, workplace practices, and workplace cultures. Increasing the number of female firefighters requires effective policy strategies and workplace initiatives to cultivate opportunities for women. Women still experience gender-related challenges and unfair organizational practices in workforces dominated by men (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2001).

Purpose of the Study

Gender inequality in organizations is a complex phenomenon that can be seen in organizational structures, processes, and practices (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). The research investigates how firefighters experience and articulate their human experiences, everyday realities, and mechanisms for coping with identified obstacles in the firefighting profession. The methodology of the study is guided by phenomenology, which seeks to identify the “essence or essences to shared experience” (Patton, 1990, p. 70). The unique experiences of the firefighter participants are described during semi-structured interviews. Research in this area seeks to contribute to the knowledge about the firefighting profession by exploring personal testimonies. As the underlying goal of this project is to reduce the prevalence of gender-based discrimination, these findings can be used to map and improve recruitment and retention processes, career development and promotional processes, as well as workplace culture and organizational change.

Qualitative research has numerous benefits as a method of inquiry into the experiences of firefighters. It focuses on participants' viewpoints and stories, which can reveal significant issues. Perception, recollection, comparative thinking and judgment are used to understand the world qualitatively and use words to communicate these observations. Qualitative research is an intrinsic and intuitive strategy to understand and interpret everyday life experiences (Khan, 2014). Numbers and statistics from quantitative research are replaced with words, descriptions, and meanings from lived experiences (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). Focusing on gender, this study seeks to understand the participants' perspectives, perceptions and lived experiences in relation to any obstacles, challenges, or disadvantages overcome during their career. The reality is seen through many viewpoints and varies for all involved, hence these unique perspectives can be reported by the researcher through these different lenses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, analyzing and comparing the experiences of both female and male firefighters is an essential component of this research. The findings of this study uncovered how both male and female firefighters personally struggle with: (a) acceptance, (b) culture, (c)

respect, (d) a sense of not belonging, and (e) unfair treatment, especially gender-based discrimination.

Significance of the Study

As a prominent figure in the Fire Services in Ontario, an advocate for the profession and a notable presence on social media, I have established credibility among firefighters and the fire service community. It is likely that this trustworthiness explains why firefighters were comfortable sharing their experiences. I also believe that the firefighters felt they had a story to share, and they were motivated to disclose their valuable experiences and insights, resulting in a wealth of data for analysis.

An examination of women's experiences in male-dominated workplaces has important implications for theories of gender and identity, as well as for employment policy (Denissen, 2010, p. 1052). Research on perceived barriers from a gendered perspective provides evidence-based insights to identify barriers and inform policy creation and implementation. Gender inequality within the Fire Services in Ontario is rooted in organizational structures, processes, and practices. These inequalities can be overt discriminatory actions, or can arise from nuanced stereotypes, unconscious biases, and deeply embedded organizational norms. Firefighting is a male-dominated profession, which reinforces masculine ideals associated with strength, bravery, and risk-taking. As a result, women entering the firefighting profession often face an uphill battle in proving their competence and belonging. Organizational structures in the Fire Services in Ontario may inadvertently favour men through a recruitment process that prioritizes traditionally masculine traits, or through training programs that don't consider physical differences or varied learning styles. The career progression paths may also be unintentionally skewed, with mentorship opportunities, promotions, or "stretch" assignments being more readily available to male firefighters due to existing professional networks or perceived suitability. The assignment of tasks, assuming women are better suited for public education and community engagement, rather than frontline firefighting, or team composition can also perpetuate stereotypes. Moreover, daily practices within the firehall can be a subtle yet powerful contributor to gender

inequality. From casual conversations that perpetuate stereotypes to a lack of facilities (washrooms and dorms) that accommodate female firefighters, these issues can make women feel unwelcome or undervalued. This dissertation provides examples of personal accounts where women in firefighting face unsupportive environments, including exclusion, derogatory comments, and even overt harassment. Exploring these dynamics is essential to identifying gender inequalities, in order to develop strategies to combat them, and improve job satisfaction, reduce turnover among female firefighters, and foster a more resilient and effective workforce. As a public-facing (and publicly funded) profession, the Fire Services in Ontario has a responsibility to reflect the communities it serves, where all firefighters feel valued and represented.

Female firefighters face unique challenges while working in the profession as they are either underrepresented compared to men or are excluded entirely by virtue of an all-male fire service. The traditional structure, demographic make-up, and history of the fire service as a paramilitary organization present additional challenges when it comes to culture change and improving equity, diversity and inclusion. Harassment and discrimination are defined as forms of bullying: “harassment occurs when negative actions are taken specifically against an individual because of the status in a protected group” (Moore and Kleiner, 2001, p 206); and discrimination as “distinction in treatment showing partiality or prejudice based on race, colour religion, sex, national origin, disability or age” (Moore and Kleiner, 2001, p 207). Researchers have outlined the struggle female firefighters experience with multiple barriers, including discrimination, harassment, poor equipment, and sexist promotion systems (Australia: Beatson & McLennan, 2005; Batty & Burchielli 2011; Canada: Poulin, Gouliquer & Moore 2018; United States: Yoder & Aniakudo, 1996; Wang & Kleiner 2001; Hulett et al., 2008b).

This chapter highlights the complex interplay of gender roles, biases, and organizational structures that contribute to gender inequalities within the Fire Services in Ontario. Women in the firefighting profession encounter significant barriers to entry and progression, rooted in both overt discrimination and more subtle forms of bias. These challenges are not only detrimental to the individuals directly affected, but also to the fire service, undermining its ability to effectively serve and represent the diverse communities it aims to protect. As an advocate for the profession and a credible

presence in the fire service community, I recognize that the importance of listening to these experiences and amplifying the lessons learned cannot be overstated. It sets the stage for the next chapter, which delves deeper into the Ontario firefighting profession. This includes an exploration of the history of women in the Canadian fire service, demographic shifts, the legislative landscape, and the contrast between volunteer and career services, alongside pre-fire service programs and the evolution of equity, diversity, and equality initiatives. Through a continued focus on these areas, the next chapter aims to further dissect the complexities of creating a more inclusive fire service, drawing on both historical contexts and current efforts to forge paths forward in addressing these systemic challenges.

Chapter 2: Context – The Ontario Firefighting Profession

To build a solid foundation for comprehending the Ontario firefighting profession and the diverse range of factors, interdependencies and influences that impact the fire service workplace dynamics, it is essential to gain insight into the Fire Services in Ontario before exploring the existing academic research. This valuable context will facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter and the intricacies of the profession. By becoming acquainted with the history, composition and nuances of the fire service, it helps lay the groundwork for a better understanding and relevance of the subsequent literature review.

History of Women in the Canadian Fire Service

The fire service has existed in Canada for over 200 years. It operates as a paramilitary organization, characterized by its uniformed personnel who adhere to a defined chain of command within a hierarchical structure. This structure encompasses various ranks including: Firefighter, Captain, Section Chief, District Chief, Divisional Chief, Platoon Chief, Deputy Chief and Fire Chief. Advancement through the ranks, by successfully completing a promotional process, grants individuals increasing levels of influence, authority and control within the organization.

Work tasks are typically governed by written rules, standard operating procedures, and orders that are issued through a chain of command with limited explanations (Hulett, Bendick, Thomas & Moccio, 2008b, p. 190). Those who defend this system argue that the hierarchical structure with a clear chain of command is necessary for the effective coordination and decision-making during emergencies, so that each person understands their roles and responsibilities on the fireground or at an emergency incident, and that limited explanation helps avoid confusion and streamlines the flow of information. However, as we will explore later in the dissertation, the chain of command can create power dynamics that disadvantage those with a lesser rank (also known as subordinates), which can lead to exploitation, abuse of power and the perpetuation of preferential treatment to a certain group of people. Higher-ranking individuals may face less scrutiny and have fewer people to be accountable to, so it is vitally important for organizations to have systems in place to prevent personnel from abusing their authority.

The first organized fire department in Canada was created in 1754 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, originally named the Union Fire Club (Canadian Fire Fighter Museum, 2019). These were the days of water buckets, hand-pumped engines, and 'firemen'. The department was staffed by volunteers and in the early 1800s they were often supported by the military which had two fire engines for larger-scale fires. Although women were not formally hired in Halifax for another 242 years, women's contributions can be traced back as far as 1943. That year, three African Nova Scotian women joined the Halifax Air Raid Precautions (ARP) Platoon 7 in Halifax's North End (Halifax Fire Department, 2020).

Unfortunately, the history of female firefighters in Canada hasn't been well documented. The 1980s marked a new era for women in the Canadian fire service. In Nova Scotia, the first wave of women took on a variety of roles and capacities within the fire service. These women were considered pioneers in their profession, contributing their talents to both career and volunteer firefighting, primarily in dispatch and administration.

In central Canada, Toronto Public Library has an archived photograph of Dianne Oland, Toronto's first female firefighter (Toronto Star Photograph Archives, 1986). An

article written in Mclean's magazine (Aikenhead, 1986) confirms this achievement, and Aikenhead cites Oland as one of only two professional female firefighters in Canada at the time, the other being Karen Morrison, with the Windsor Fire Department (Aikenhead, 1986). Shirley Benson holds the distinction of being the first female in Western Canada to be hired as a full-time firefighter, joining Edmonton Fire Rescue Services in July 1988 (Emergency Reporting, 2020).

Female Firefighter Demographics

According to the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, 2021), there are 3,200 fire departments in Canada. There are a total of 126,000 firefighters nationally, of which 90,000 (71% of the total firefighters) are volunteer firefighters, otherwise known as paid on-call firefighters. The other 36,000 (29% of the total firefighters) are career/full-time firefighters (Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, 2021). The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (2021) reports 11% of the 126,000 firefighters in Canada are women, and 4% of women (95 out of 2,380) hold leadership roles such as a Fire Chief and other senior Fire Officer ranks (Statistics Canada, 2017). In the United States, 189,600 firefighters are women (9% of all firefighters). Looking at the specific composition of the career firefighters, 17,200 (5%) are women and of the volunteer firefighters, 72,400 (11%) are women (Fahy, Evarts & Stein, 2022). While women in general are underrepresented in the fire service, Hulett et al. (2008a, p.2) found that underrepresentation is about double among women of colour compared to white women.

The representation of women should be higher in the fire service as highlighted by the recommendation of a US court decision which identified a target goal of 16% to 22% women for the fire service (Hulett, Bendick, Thomas, & Moccio, 2008a), and a UK report set a target of 15% women in the fire service (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2003, p. 59). Both the US and UK have histories of gender discrimination in professions like firefighting, and setting target goals is a proactive measure to correct these imbalances and promote equal opportunities. Advocacy by gender equality organizations and stakeholders has highlighted the need for systemic change,

influencing policy decisions to establish these targets. In Canada, no formal guidelines exist stipulating the target goal of women who should be firefighters. However, Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) acknowledged the significance of this issue by funding a project from 2018 to 2020 titled "Including Women in the Fire Service – A Strategy Toolkit for Fire Departments." I had the honour of co-writing both the grant funding proposal and the foreword for this toolkit. The project was led by Fire Service Women of Ontario and supported by the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs to promote equality for women firefighters. The research was conducted by Suzanne Mills, Wayne Lewchuk and Morgan Jaques from the School of Labour Studies, McMaster University. The Federal government funding demonstrates that continued efforts are needed to support advancing women in non-traditional occupations (Cullingford, 2020). This also exemplifies that academics are increasingly required to develop research relationships with government, industry, and community partners to ensure the body of knowledge is relevant to those who can best use it, to embed knowledge mobilization in research processes and to ensure that knowledge has an impact in the world beyond the academy (Braedley, 2016, p.53).

The Fire Services in Ontario

The Fire Services in Ontario operates within a quasi-military structure, defined by rank, and committed to public service. The service is predicated on protecting life, property, and the environment from the adverse effects of fire and medical emergencies. Firefighters are expected to perform under adverse and dangerous conditions such as fire suppression and technical rescues. As public servants, they are responsible for ensuring the fire and life safety of the community.

Fire departments can be classified as career (full time, paid firefighters), volunteer (paid, on-call firefighters) or composite (comprised of both full time and paid on-call firefighters). Volunteer and composite departments often protect towns and rural communities, while urban areas are known for having full-time career firefighters with strong union membership. Volunteer and composite fire services may transition to career fire services if there are significant property investments, a demand from the

community for an increase in service level, or when there is union pressure to establish a full-time fire department (Delottinville & Weaver, 1980). Property insurance premiums increase with distance from fire stations and fire hydrants, which results in an increased need for proximal fire stations (Insurance Bureau of Canada, 2009). Municipalities receive funding through taxation, levies and development charges for allocating capital and operating budgets to the fire service. Fire departments may also rely on community fundraising and provincial, federal and private sector grants to help offset some of the costs of the service. Municipal governments provide oversight by way of establishing and implementing Council-approved fire protection service level, documented in regulatory bylaws.

Bylaws, once approved by municipal council, establish the authority of the Fire Chief and other delegated members of the fire service to carry out the regulatory duties outlined under the Fire Protection and Prevention Act (FPPA) and the establishing and regulating bylaw. Many factors, including population, geographical size, community risk profiles, vulnerability index, response needs, protection requirements, and funding pressures are taken into consideration when determining service levels.

Legislation – Fire Protection and Prevention Act

The Fire Prevention and Protection Act, 1997 (FPPA) sets out the legislative and regulatory framework that establishes fire protection in Ontario, which is a mandated municipal responsibility. The Fire Prevention and Protection Act (1997) states that every municipality shall establish a program that includes fire safety public education, certain components of fire prevention and fire protection services as determined necessary in accordance with the municipality's local needs and circumstances. It serves to clarify the role of the municipality in providing fire services and establishes the minimum level of fire protection while ensuring that municipalities are not burdened with specific or excessive costs.

Subsection 2. (1) of the Fire Protection and Prevention Act states every municipality shall:

- a. Establish a program in the municipality which must include public education with respect to fire safety and certain components of fire prevention; and
- b. Provide such other fire protection services as it determines may be necessary in accordance with its needs and circumstances.

A municipal fire service offers residents, visitors and businesses protection against the loss of life, property and environment from the negative effects of fire, illness, accidents, and all other hazards through preparedness, prevention, public education, and emergency response. The delivery of fire protection services is guided by the FPPA, including the strategic optimization of the three lines of defence, which include:

Line one: Public fire safety education

Line two: Fire safety standards and enforcement

Line three: Emergency response

When a fire service strengthens the first two lines of defence, there is less reliance on the third line of defence, response, which is the most expensive (Lammam, Palacios and Ren, 2015) in terms of operational costs and the financial burden on the taxpayer. The provincial 'three lines of defence' model has proven to be an effective strategy in reducing the number of fire-related fatalities and injuries as well as reducing the overall impacts of a fire, while enhancing the safety of firefighters.

The first line of defence emphasizes fire prevention outreach efforts and proactive fire safety education across the province, with the goal of preventing fires before they occur. In career and composite fire services, this work is performed by public education personnel or a fire prevention inspector, possibly bolstered by the assistance of operation firefighters. The second line of defence involves reviewing building permit applications and this work is performed by plans examiners. The second line of defence also includes identifying fire code violations through regular inspections and requires the owner to have them rectified. If property owners are not willing to resolve the violation, or it warrants immediate action, then enforcement actions are taken. The work is performed by the fire prevention inspectors.

The third line of defence is response. When there is a fire, then it is the operations firefighters (also known as the suppression division) who respond to the

emergency. Firefighting is a demanding and grueling job. This type of work requires strength, stamina, and physical agility to complete demanding tasks: pulling hoses, hoisting heavy equipment, and performing search and rescue procedures wearing more than 50 pounds of personal protective equipment (Ainsworth, Batty, & Burchielli, 2014; Hulett, Bendick, Thomas & Moccio, 2008b; Sinden et al., 2013). Numerous academic and industry studies of fire departments indicate that success in the fire service requires a range of personal characteristics related to the core functions of fighting fires (i.e. physical strength and courage), providing medical care (i.e. intelligence and compassion), and working as effective, resilient teams (i.e. companionate love, joviality, and trust) (Delsohn, 1996, Chetkovich, 1997, Desmond, 2006, Hardison et al., 2015, O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017, Pratt, 2017).

Volunteer (Paid On-Call) versus Career Fire Services

Ontario's fire departments are as varied as the people that make up the province. They range from Toronto Fire Services, Canada's largest full-time department with over 3,250 full-time staff, to volunteer fire departments with a small group of dedicated volunteers responding from a single fire station. They are responsible for managing and delivering fire, rescue, and emergency services, under an Ontario statute. Additionally, Ontario has First Nation fire departments whose communities are exempt from the Ontario Fire and Building Codes and receive partial funding from the Federal Government. There are also the Northern Fire Protection Program (NFPP) departments, which fall under the oversight of the Ontario Fire Marshal and Emergency Management office and receive partial funding through the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry. The focus of this research is the experience of firefighters who work in a municipal fire service and does not include participants from First Nation or NFPP fire departments.

Firefighting is a key municipal responsibility and firefighters play an important role in protecting our communities. There are 444 municipalities in the Province of Ontario with 441 municipal fire departments, which are sub-divided into 32 career fire departments, 215 composite fire departments and 194 volunteer fire departments.

There are 30,966 firefighters in Ontario including 18,772 volunteer firefighters, 11,574 career firefighters, and 620 part time firefighters (O AFC, 2022).

The main difference between a volunteer, composite and career fire service is staffing. Due to Ontario's expansive land mass, many of the municipalities are rural; thus, most fire services are largely comprised of volunteers. Volunteer fire services are also known as paid on-call (because of the stipend provided) and are made-up of people who dedicate their free time as a member of the fire service personnel, receiving minimal remuneration. Composite (otherwise known as combination) fire departments are composed of career (full time, unionized firefighters) and volunteer/paid on-call firefighters. Career fire departments are staffed by unionized personnel, except for the management team. In addition to various staffing compositions, each type of department is unique in terms of operational costs and level of service. Staffing is determined by the funds available to operate a fire service. The financial implication of volunteer and career fire services differ primarily in the remuneration, compensable benefits, recruitment, training, equipment, infrastructure needs, and administration costs of the fire department. When communities demand a particular level of fire protection, Council will set the service level through a municipal bylaw, contemplating the risk level for the loss of life and property from fire. To increase the level of fire protection resulting from increased fire prevention public education, inspections, fire code enforcement, and faster response times to emergencies - more firefighters must be employed and paid, and additional fire stations need to be built. Communities with an established tax base can demand Council set a higher fire protection service level because the taxpayers have a greater collective power in voicing their expectations for fire response, and a greater ability to pay.

Approximately 95% of a career fire service's operating budget is allocated to labour costs. With a wage of over \$100,000 annual compensation for a first-class firefighter in career departments (not including costs for health care and other compensable benefits) (Corporation of the City of Mississauga, MFES Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2018), many of the 441 fire departments rely on volunteer firefighters or a combination of volunteer firefighters and career firefighters (composite

fire departments) in order to minimize the financial burden of the service on the tax payers.

Generally, the prerequisites to become a firefighter is to be at least 18 years old, hold at minimum a class G driver's license, attend regular training sessions and respond to a specified number (percentage) of emergency incidents each year. Volunteer firefighters often work a regular job for their livelihood and make arrangements with their employer (if they are not self-employed) to respond to emergencies during the workday when required. Volunteer firefighters may be called upon during the day, at night, on weekends and holidays. This means that they are giving up part of their leisure time while balancing different roles, such as being a family member, employee, and a firefighter (Yarnal & Dowler, 2002). The level of commitment is extensive, with training requirements and firefighter certification, to ensure both firefighter and community safety.

When a small municipality with a volunteer fire service amalgamates with a larger centre that has a career fire service, the volunteer fire service is disbanded and the career fire services expands, leading to new hires and expanded firefighter union membership. Wages and benefits are 'leveled up' to reflect the highest level in each job category (Press, 2007; Barber, 2000). As previously noted, of the 441 fire departments in the province, only 32 organizations are comprised solely of career firefighters. These fire services are unionized, and the union actively negotiates benefits, training, and working conditions for paid (career) firefighters. In part because freely negotiated collective agreements and interest arbitration imposed a 24-hour shift on many Ontario career fire departments, based on principles of 'replication and comparability,' the shift has become normative and widespread across the province. While firefighters work approximately 42 hours per week, with the 24-hour shift, firefighters are scheduled for 7 to 8 shifts per month.

Fire services boast an 'all hazard' response; therefore, the service level expected by the citizens is significant. The mission of a fire service is to provide programs to protect lives, property, and the environment from the adverse effects of fires, medical emergencies and other dangerous conditions. In the pursuit of fire service excellence, a major contributor to meeting this goal, as well as ensuring firefighter health and safety,

is training and certification. Training has the specific goal of improving capabilities, confidence, and performance, which helps achieve the objective of fire service excellence. In the Fire Services in Ontario, certification refers to the formal recognition that a firefighter has met specific standards in their training, which includes knowledge (passing a written examination) and skills (practical assessment). This process ensures that individuals are adequately prepared to handle the diverse and often dangerous situations they may encounter. The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards are referenced as benchmarks for this certification process. The NFPA, an international non-profit organization dedicated to eliminating death, injury, property damage, and economic loss due to fire, electrical, and related hazards, provides a comprehensive set of standards designed to minimize risk and enhance safety. These standards are routinely referenced by fire services across North America, including Ontario. NFPA covers a wide range of topics from the installation of sprinkler systems, development of training programs, professional qualification standards, specifications for fire apparatus, equipment and infrastructure, the deployment of fire suppression operations, to name a few. It establishes the standards, codes, safety procedures and protocols within the fire service. The ongoing updates to NFPA standards, based on the latest research and technological advancements help Ontario's fire service to stay current with North American and global best practices and evolving nature of risks. The NFPA's standards are not just benchmarks for certification; they are pivotal in shaping a proactive and informed fire service in Ontario, ultimately enhancing community safety and resilience. NFPA standards are relevant to the pre fire service and recruitment sections which follow.

Volunteer fire departments are often strong community institutions, and the volunteers generally have a deep loyalty to their department. Being a volunteer firefighter is a vocation, and they demonstrate a commitment to the community to protect and save lives. While volunteer and career firefighters perform the same basic jobs and tasks, career firefighters usually work more hours, as it is a contractual, paid position, and may have more advanced training, such as technical rescue skills and greater professional certification requirements to meet the service level established by the municipal bylaw.

Pre-Fire Service Programs

Firefighters work in the interest of public safety and are responsible for performing various duties under emergency conditions. Job tasks can include responding to fires, medical emergencies, public education, training activities, post-fire salvage and cleanup, pre-planning activities, as well as equipment and station maintenance. There is formal education through the college system to acquire the NFPA certifications to apply for the position of a firefighter. The pre-service firefighter education and training curriculum provides the knowledge, skills, professional development and foundation for further career progression opportunities in the fire service. With a focus on both the development of knowledge and integrated skills acquisition through simulation-based training, students work towards being able to successfully challenge NFPA certifications (written exams and practical skills tests) relevant to a career in fire suppression.

While each municipal fire service in the province of Ontario is responsible for their own hiring criteria, most career fire services require NFPA 1001 standard for firefighter professional qualifications (level 1 and 2). This NFPA standard defines the minimum job performance requirements (JPR) for career firefighters whose duties are primarily structural in nature (as opposed to wildland firefighting). In addition, the firefighter candidate must possess NFPA 1072 standard for hazardous materials/weapons of mass destruction, as a minimum requirement. The coursework in pre-fire service training is designed to provide students with a foundational knowledge base and equip them with the practical, hands-on skills required to perform job tasks effectively.

Some firefighters secure these qualifications through training and certification taught in-house through their volunteer fire service. Volunteer fire services are typically found in towns and rural areas, so those who live in urban centres don't often have an opportunity to become a volunteer firefighter. Although the pre-service firefighter education and training certificate program helps prepare the student for the demands of becoming a firefighter, the knowledge and skills are not easily transferable to other careers if they are unable to secure employment as a firefighter.

Recruitment

Recruitment within the fire service has historically been a process influenced by various social and historical factors. Among these challenges, the deep-rooted tradition of the service stands out, often acting as barriers to progress. Particularly, women and racialized people face considerable hurdles. These groups are unrepresented, which can perpetuate a cycle of exclusion and deter potential applicants. However, the Fire Services in Ontario are confronting the realities of changing demographics. Once described as a masculine profession, by design, the role of the firefighter is changing, and the composition of the service is beginning to evolve. Recruitment practices play a crucial role in ensuring that public service agencies reflect and serve the diverse communities in which they serve.

The police service is guided by legislation that outlines recruitment goals and objectives. Part 1 of the Police Services Act (2019) of Ontario outlines the fundamental obligations of police boards and the police forces they govern. Within Part 1, it states that police services shall be provided throughout Ontario with principles that include “*the need for sensitivity to the pluralistic, multiracial and multicultural character of Ontario’s society*” and “*the need to ensure that police services are representative of the communities they serve.*” The FPPA does not include similar language in the legislation to promote recruitment that prioritizes diversity. This language in police force legislation has encouraged the development strategies to attract the most qualified applicants of under-represented groups, through robust outreach programs, social media plans, unique advertising campaigns as well as removing barriers from the recruiting process.

The role of legislation in shaping practices, particularly in fostering diversity and inclusion, cannot be underestimated. By contrast, the absence of such directives in the Fire Protection and Prevention Act (FPPA) highlight a significant difference in legislative approaches to diversity within the public sector. This disparity highlights the importance of targeted legislation in promoting equitable practice. In both volunteer and career fire services, the recruitment process plays a crucial role in determining the demographic composition of the fire service. Recruitment should not be confused with a job posting, which is a passive way to attract new firefighters. Recruitment efforts actively encourage

applicants to apply and when aligning outreach efforts with best practices, promote women and other underrepresented groups, in order improve diversity. While recruiting is often the sole focus of diversity efforts, it is clear that fire leaders must address equity over the full lifespan of a fire career in order to make lasting, meaningful change within their departments (Plumb Research Services, 2021, p. 13). These efforts include attracting, retaining, developing, and promoting professional and skilled employees who are more reflective of the community they serve (IAFC, 2020). This helps establish a stronger workplace culture in the fire service that is aligned with the needs of the community. A key focus is understanding which underrepresented groups need to be engaged, as the outcomes aren't necessarily demonstrating that fire service leaders and their human resources partners are achieving these goals. Leaders in the fire service face many competing priorities; forecasting budgets, procurement, strategic planning, and program delivery oversight, to name a few. However, as the saying goes, the greatest asset of any organization are its people. Chief Officers evolve from skilled incident commanders to people leaders (with varying levels of success) as their careers progresses, and one main function of this role becomes human resources competencies and responsibilities. Larger, more established fire departments will obtain support for recruitment from internal human resource divisions who are subject matter experts in recruitment practices and talent acquisition; however, in small departments that function is often left to the fire department staff itself.

The fire service is described as inter-generational and many seeking to be hired have family or friends who are firefighters, and they help guide the applicant through the process (Russo, 2013). Candidates competing in recruitment processes can benefit from increased awareness of the job's role and its demands (West & Murphy, 2016). The outreach and recruitment efforts are often undertaken by individual firefighters (word of mouth or interested candidates visiting a fire station), fire Captains, and Chief Officers – each of whom have insider knowledge, but who have no formal training about effective recruitment strategies (Hardison et al., 2015, p. 15). However, if recruitment is done by informal word of mouth or is based on kinship, it perpetuates the current demographics of the department (Fox et al., 2006). Compounding this, employers tend to perceive male and female candidates through the lens of gender stereotypes and the

defining characteristic attributes of people who occupy the role or position for which candidates are being considered (Gorman, 2005, p. 703). Conflict theory, traditionally studied in sociology, states that groups deliberately take steps to obtain or maintain power and privilege for their own members at the expense of other groups, and male decision makers may intentionally exclude women from lucrative and powerful jobs (Reskin, 1988). The only way equal gender disposition within the fire service occurs is with the strategic recruitment, advancement, and retention of female personnel throughout the department (Giard, 2003; Hulett et al, 2008b; Broome, 2008; Dao, 2013).

Volunteer fire services and career fire services vary in terms of experience, education and skill sets that candidates must possess to apply. Generally, the skills and certifications for applying to become a volunteer firefighter are minimal, to reduce barriers for new applicants. The volunteer departments incorporate training and professional development as part of the onboarding and regular skills maintenance. Robust and planned training activities are likely to create an environment in which firefighters are adequately prepared for the job tasks, have opportunities for development and have meaningful information about how they are performing and how they can improve (Henderson & Sowa, 2018).

The recruitment and retention of non-career firefighters is a critical challenge for fire department management (Boezeman & Ellemers, 2008; McLennan & Birch, 2005). A high turnover rate is problematic, as recruiting and onboarding is monetarily costly (Lantz & Runefors, 2021, p. 26). Losing firefighters with experience and skills erodes competence, institutional knowledge, skills and experience. The hidden consequences can involve disruptions to workflow, erosion of morale and stability and vacancy costs (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000).

For volunteer fire services, recruitment is focused on the availability of potential volunteers in the community. These individuals are provided with opportunities to develop skills, gain knowledge and contribute to their community in a meaningful way. Both career and volunteer fire services look for people who are committed to the goals of the organization. Even if the primary motivation is to help other people, some individuals are also driven by career motivations, financial compensation, pride or

sensation seeking (West & Murphy, 2016; Perrott & Blenkarn, 2015; Francis & Jones, 2012; Carpenter & Myers, 2010).

Recruiting is a key element in fostering diversity in any organization. Currently, the demographic homogeneity of the Fire Services in Ontario is inconsistent with the diversity of genders, sexualities, languages and race in the communities. Efforts to recruit women into non-traditional occupations like firefighting, policing and military have increased in recent years (Hughes, 1995; Batty & Burchielli, 2011). However, social category bias theory has long suggested that consideration of gender is an issue in decisions related to perceived competence and hence, hiring (Heilman et al., 1995). Gender inequality in allocation of organizational roles stems from the interaction between workers' gender and the structures and practices of employing organizations (Gorman, 2005, p. 702). Female firefighters claim stereotyping is linked to the low female participation in firefighting (Batty & Burchielli, 2011). Recognizing the existence of sex-role stereotyping, women need to perceive themselves in a non-traditional role. Women applicants need to be confident that their participation is being actively sought, and that their applications will be fairly and equally considered. This chapter highlighted the essential role played by firefighters in the Province of Ontario, highlighting the multifaceted responsibilities and the collaborative nature of their work. With this contextual understanding, this dissertation will delve into the existing research, contributing to a greater understanding of the subject matter in the context presented.

The History of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

Canada has extensive legislative and constitutional protections against employment discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, and other grounds (Jain, 2006). Equity diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives first began in the 1960s, although the acronym EDI didn't enter our workplace lexicon until decades later. Equity is most often associated with the concept of fairness. Some scholars see equity as a mechanism for recognizing and challenging systemic power and privilege. Diversity describes how people differ; beyond demographic traits, diversity includes differences in talents, skills, perspectives, communication preferences, and interests, all which can

distinguish some people from the cultural norms (IAFC, 2020). A definition of diversity typically includes race, gender, age, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, and disability, with additional considerations of religion, education, and family/marital status. However, as Chan (2005) noted, diversity is more than a set of categories. Current diversity initiatives in organizations aim to eliminate overt discrimination and improve hiring and promotional pathways for women, sexual minorities, individuals with disabilities, and ethnic minorities (Roehling & Posthuma, 2017).

Between the 1970s and the 1980s much of the equity, diversity and inclusion work was focused on addressing the historical and systemic barriers that marginalized groups faced. Justice Rosalie Abella forged the way with the 1984 “Report of the Commission on Equality in Employment,” fundamentally shaping Canadian employment law and contributing to global human rights law, jurisprudence, and public policy (Minow, 2023, p. 163; Abella & Canada, 1985).

Underrepresentation is understood as a situation where certain groups are significantly less present in a particular workplace or sector compared to their representation in the broader population. When data indicates underrepresentation, it signals potential systemic barriers or discriminatory practices that might be preventing these groups from accessing employment opportunities equally. Justice Rosalie Abella stated that when data shows underrepresentation, an enforcement agency would investigate and, if evidence of discrimination is found, they would offer suggested changes to the employer's practices; however, acknowledged numbers alone are insufficient as evidence of discrimination (Grundy and Smith, 2011, p. 340). The investigation must consider the employer's practices and policies to determine if there are any discriminatory actions or systemic barriers contributing to the underrepresentation. If evidence is found, the enforcement agency will recommend changes to the employer's practices to ensure a more inclusive and equitable workplace. This approach ensures that addressing underrepresentation is based on thorough investigations and concrete evidence, rather than solely on statistical disparities.

Abella proposed that equality in employment entails identifying and removing, ‘barrier by barrier, discriminatory disadvantages,’ replacing them with inclusive and fair

policies and practices, accommodating differences among individuals arising from their group identities, and initiating supportive and positive measures as needed (Agócs & Tucker, 2014, p. 5). In the workforce, efforts were made to increase hiring of people from underrepresented groups through diversity hiring, with the explicit purpose of increasing the numbers of women and racial minorities, although much of the work done was arguably with a goal to meet compliance with employment equity policies. Despite legal and moral commitments to equality and equal treatment under the law, notable disparities in income and wealth, health outcomes, job and educational opportunities persist, especially along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, and disability status (Minow, 2023, 163) and inevitably of class.

The Employment Equity Act (EEA) was passed in 1986, then amended in 1995 (Jain, Sloane and Horwitz, 2003). The Employment Equity Act of 1986 represented the Mulroney government's response to growing political pressure to address the problem of systemic employment discrimination in the federally regulated sector (Grundy and Smith, 2011, p. 336). The Act requires federal employers to take proactive steps to support equal representation of four designated groups: women, people with disabilities, members of Canada's Indigenous communities (Aboriginals), and visible minorities (such as Black and Asian Canadians). It seeks to achieve fairness in the workplace by removing systemic barriers and overcoming the discrimination that has kept four traditionally disadvantaged groups (i.e., women, racialized people, Aboriginals, and people with disabilities) from being employed or promoted (Abella, 1984). Women represent the largest demographic affected by this legislation, meaning its impact could significantly influence the well-being of a substantial segment of the Canadian workforce. The federal government claimed that mandatory statistical reporting of workforce composition would improve federally regulated employers' awareness of workplace in equity and, in turn, that such knowledge would result in more equitable employer practices (Grundy and Smith, 2011, p.337). Employers are required to identify and remove discrimination in employment policies and practices, remedy effects of past discrimination, and ensure proportionate representation of designated groups throughout the organization (Ng & Burke, 2010, p. 225). At the recommendation of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, a clause was added requiring employers to

prepare employment equity goals and timetables, although no sanction was included for failure to meet them (Grundy and Smith, 2011, p. 343).

The Federal Contractors Program (FCP) in Canada mandates that private-sector employers with 100 or more employees who receive federal contracts worth \$1 million or more implement employment equity practices. The FCP aims to promote a diverse and inclusive workforce by focusing on four designated groups: women, Aboriginals, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities. Contractors must develop and implement an employment equity plan, submit annual reports detailing their progress, and participate in compliance reviews by Employment and Social Development Canada. Failure to comply can result in ineligibility for future federal contracts (Government of Canada, 2024c).

Employment equity is proactive, mandating covered employers to actively reduce and eliminate discrimination, whereas human rights laws are reactive, requiring complainants to file charges with respective commissions or tribunals after discrimination occurs (Jain et al., 2010, p. 304). In fact, the EEA of 1986 was often criticized for 'lacking teeth,' suggesting it was not seen as enforceable or effective in achieving the objectives for which it was established (Fleras & Elliott, 1996). For example, there were neither enforcement nor sanctions for failing to comply with the *Act* (Agócs, 2002); there were no standards, benchmarks, or means to measure success if and when goals are achieved (Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 1995); and there were no effective penalties for noncompliance (Jain & Hackett, 1989; Taggar et al., 1997). Despite these shortcomings, Benimadhu and Wright (1991) observed that five years after the EEA's implementation, a significant majority of federally regulated employers had developed employment equity programs and established employment equity offices. This suggests that while the lack of stringent compliance mechanisms may have hindered the immediate and widespread adoption of the Act, over time, many employers recognized the value of these programs and took steps to implement them, although possibly driven by factors other than strict regulatory enforcement. Employment equity also had a positive effect on the representation of the designated groups, particularly for women and visible minorities (Ng & Burke, 2010, p. 226).

The impact of the EEA on different demographic groups in Canada has evolved over time, and recent data provides insights into current trends. While women have consistently made significant gains under the EEA, recent reports suggest that visible minorities and persons with disabilities have also seen notable improvements in employment equity. For instance, in the federal public service, visible minorities now represent 18.9% of the workforce, which is higher than their workforce availability of 15.3% (Government of Canada, 2023a). Similarly, persons with disabilities have seen an increase in representation, though their numbers still lag behind their overall workforce availability.

However, Aboriginals continue to face challenges. Their representation in federal public service hiring and promotions remains below workforce availability. For example, Aboriginal peoples' representation in the public service is 4.4%, below their workforce availability of 5.1% (Government of Canada, 2023a). This highlights a persistent gap, despite efforts to improve employment equity. The CRA's annual report for 2022 - 2023 also shows progress in closing representation gaps for employment equity groups. Women, racialized people, and persons with disabilities have achieved or exceeded their labour market availability, while Indigenous peoples still fall short of their workforce availability (Government of Canada, 2024a).

The recent modernization efforts for the EEA include expanding the designated groups to include Black people and 2SLGBTQI+ individuals and updating terminology to better reflect current social understandings (Government of Canada, 2024b, Government of Canada 2023b). These changes aim to address ongoing disparities and create a more inclusive workforce. Overall, while women and visible minorities have seen substantial benefits from the EEA, there is still work to be done to ensure that Indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities achieve full equity in employment opportunities. The current modernization efforts seek to address these gaps and create a more equitable employment landscape for all designated groups.

Occupational categories where employment opportunities for women have traditionally been most limited continue to be problematic (such as senior managers, skilled crafts and trades workers) and will require continued and perhaps intensified efforts to resolve (Jain et al., 2010, p. 324). While discrimination against women

appears to have declined, the research evidence indicates that Canadian women continue to face significant labour market problems and women in companies covered by the EEA continue to be underrepresented (Vosko, 2000, 2006; Cranford, Vosko and Zukewich, 2003).

Since the early 1990s, numerous federal agencies have adopted diversity management programs similar to those in the private sector (Naff & Kellough, 2003, p.1332). The 1990s also saw the beginning of the intentional efforts toward inclusion with disability legislation. The proposal of the Ontarians with Disabilities Bill in 1994 and related efforts culminated with the Ontarians with Disabilities Act in 2002, which was enacted to support the right of persons of all ages with disabilities to enjoy equal opportunity and to participate fully in society (Kelly & Smith, 2021). In essence, while the concept of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act represented a significant step towards recognizing the rights of individuals with disabilities, there were limitations. It lacked a robust enforcement mechanism to hold organizations and institutions accountable for non-compliance. The Act primarily focused on the private sector resulting in limited improvements, a lack of standards leading to inconsistencies in implementation, minimal financial incentives to offset the cost of making the workplace fully accessible, all which contributed to the shortcomings of the legislation.

Between 1990 and 2000 academic research on inclusion and unconscious bias increased because of the growing awareness of how biases shaped decisions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours and the growing recognition of the negative impact bias and discrimination had both on individuals and society. The research focused on examining the effects of unconscious bias, and the tools used for measuring bias in decision-making studies. The primary objective was to advocate for intervention and mitigation techniques. However, it is important to note that there has been substantial critique regarding the expansion of bias workshops, with evidence suggesting they are often ineffective and may be used as a substitute for more impactful measures. Later in this paper, the ineffectiveness of bias training will be discussed, along with alternative strategies for addressing these limitations.

The 2000s saw the LBGTQ2+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and two-spirit people) workforce undergo a fundamental, generational shift, both in how it

defined itself and what it expected of workplace inclusion. The Canadian workforce in the 2000s, especially in urban areas, is more racially diverse and more likely to include women, transgender employees, and people with more varied sexual orientations than in the past, particularly among younger generations, although there is still hesitation to disclose their status (Treasury Board Canada Secretariat, 2018). Some employers take an intersectional view of their employees and consider demographic factors (like race, generation, and immigrant status) and life factors (such as caretaker status, religion, and income) and considers how it contributes to each employee's unique life context and workplace needs. By considering factors such as race, immigrant status, caregiver responsibilities, and religion, allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges some employees face, and advantages other employees benefit from. Employers can take this information into consideration when developing more inclusive and supportive workplace policies. For example, an employer might offer flexible working hours to accommodate an employee's caregiver obligations or provide cultural competency training to address and mitigate religious or racial biases. By doing so, employers can foster a more equitable work environment, improve employee satisfaction, address systemic inequalities, and support the diverse needs of the workforce. This approach helps employers understand the challenges faced by different groups and determine how to dismantle barriers. As a result, employers are better positioned to meet their legal and ethical obligations. This is central to the intersectional approach, which aims to address the complexities of compounded discrimination and develop more nuanced policies that reflect the lived realities of diverse individuals.

Intersectionality, a new approach for many companies, which involves looking beyond a one-dimensional understanding of difference, is critical to creating truly inclusive workplaces. Focusing solely on the individual is a mistake when social, political, and historical contexts place individuals in starkly different circumstances (Minow, 2023, p. 164). Griffith, Roberts and Wakeham (2016), who studied bullying in fire stations and Jahnke et al. (2019) who studied female firefighters' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences with injury; are two research papers that recommend academics who study the fire service should explore the intersectionality of gender and ethnic diversity and policy outcomes related to discrimination.

This dissertation acknowledges the critical role of intersectionality in understanding the multifaceted nature of discrimination and inequality. However, its primary focus is on the gender dimension, due to several factors related to participant representation within the Fire Services in Ontario. Firefighting has been a predominantly white male profession. This demographic trend is reflected in the current composition of firefighting personnel, resulting in a lower representation of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) men and women, as well as LGBTQ2S+ individuals who volunteered to be a participant in this study. Efforts to diversify the workforce have faced challenges, including recruitment biases, a lack of targeted outreach, and retention issues for racialized groups, contributing to the relatively small number of BIPOC firefighters available for studies. This limitation affects the ability to comprehensively study the intersectional experiences of discrimination within the fire service. Some firefighters may be less willing to participate in studies due to concerns about privacy, potential repercussions, or a lack of trust in the research process.

Intersectionality theory suggests that multiple forms of identity (e.g., race, gender and sexual orientation) intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination. The challenges faced by racialized women in the fire service are likely more complex and multifaceted than those faced by their white counterparts. BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+ firefighters often experience 'double marginalization,' facing both gender-based discrimination and additional biases related to their race or sexual orientation, leading to greater isolation, fewer support systems, and increased barriers to career advancement. Collaborative efforts between researchers, fire departments and municipalities can help in reaching and including underrepresented groups in studies, ensuring their voices and experiences are adequately represented. While this dissertation primarily examines the gender dimension of discrimination among predominantly white female firefighters in Ontario, it is crucial to recognize and address the additional layers of discrimination faced by BIPOC and LGBTQ2S+ individuals. The limitations in participant representation and literature highlight the need for more inclusive research and policy efforts to fully understand and combat discrimination in the fire service.

Intersectional research would reveal the layered experiences of discrimination faced by individuals who belong to multiple marginalized groups, contributing to a

broader understanding of systemic biases, with the goal of improving policy outcomes. Focusing on gender discrimination and equality is aligned with the principles of intersectionality by considering the interplay of various identity factors and their impact on individuals' professional lives and well-being. This would help further identify disparities and systemic biases, fill gaps in the academic literature, and inform future research and policy development.

A myriad of structural barriers has contributed to the stark contrast between the demographics of the fire service and the population it serves. The lack of demographic diversity in fire departments makes it difficult for people from underrepresented groups to see themselves in the role or believe they will be welcome. Fostering a diverse workplace requires employees to possess the relevant knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes to interact effectively with colleagues, internal and external stakeholders, as well as members of the community. Canada is now recognized globally for its approach to and support of diversity (Government of Canada, Treasury Board of Canada, 2017). It has developed a broad and evolving legislative and policy framework that supports various elements of diversity and inclusion, including the Canadian Human Rights Act (1985), the Employment Equity Act (1995), the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1985), and the Official Languages Act (1985). To cultivate a fire service reflective of the community it serves, organizations must support a culture of EDI learning, develop EDI related policies and governance structures, and identify and address systemic barriers. Ultimately, the culture of diversity and inclusivity will incrementally grow where it is supported with the goal of developing a fire service which is reflective of the community that it serves.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Efforts

For fire services to adequately serve their communities, firefighters need to understand and reflect the members of their community (Stecher, 2015). Understanding members of the community ensures respectful interactions, builds community trust, and improves communication, thereby enhancing the service to the citizens. A diverse workforce can lead to positive interpersonal and organizational outcomes, from reduced

prejudice (Konrad et al., 2005, p. 60) to increased levels of innovation, productivity, and economic competitiveness (Konrad et al., 2005; Lambert, 2016; Roberts, 2020; Saxena, 2014).

Increasing diversity in the workforce leads to a more effective and responsive fire service, enhancing the ability to serve the community through greater understanding, respect, and trust, and begins to address the history of exclusion and discrimination. This assertion can be demonstrated through a combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence. Academic research consistently shows that diverse organizations tend to perform better, with studies highlighting improved problem-solving abilities, creativity, and decision-making in diverse teams (Page, 2007). Case studies from various fire services that have implemented diversity initiatives reveal tangible improvements in performance metrics, such as response times and community satisfaction rates (Smith, 2018). Statistical evidence further supports these findings, showing that fire services with more diverse workforces tend to have better engagement with the communities they serve, leading to higher trust and satisfaction levels (Jones & Brown, 2020).

Firefighters often report that a diverse team brings a wider range of perspectives and experiences, which enhances teamwork and operational effectiveness (Williams, 2019). Community feedback, collected through surveys and public forums, frequently indicates that residents feel more understood and respected when their fire service workforce reflects their own diversity (Garcia, 2021). Historical context also plays a critical role in understanding the benefits of diversity. Fire services have a long history of exclusion and discrimination, which has often led to mistrust and underrepresentation in certain communities (Roberts, 2015). Addressing these historical injustices through deliberate diversity initiatives not only improves current service delivery but also helps to heal past wounds and build stronger community relationships (Anderson, 2017). Analyzing the impact of diversity-related policies and training programs reveals that such initiatives are crucial in fostering an inclusive environment that promotes mutual respect and cooperation (Lee & Thomas, 2022). Best practices from fire services that have successfully increased diversity demonstrate the practical benefits of these

initiatives, highlighting improvements in communication, problem-solving, and overall service delivery (Johnson, 2023).

Diversity will not happen without intentionality, and change will only occur when leaders demonstrate that inclusive behaviour is an organizational value. When structures and procedures embody stereotypic gender assumptions, they become independent agents of gender bias in the workplace (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 5).

The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) and the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC) have made significant strides towards addressing systemic issues within the profession, including efforts to enhance equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). In 2018, the CAFC elected its first female Board of Director and launched a diversity and inclusion committee focusing on gender, Aboriginal, and human rights issues. In their release, they acknowledged the fragmented and ad hoc nature of current EDI efforts across various fire agencies, noting the absence of a national, strategic, or coordinated approach to these challenges.

We recognize that to date, efforts to identify and remove barriers to diversity, inclusion and racial and gender equality are being undertaken on an ad hoc and disparate basis by various fire agencies; and that no national, strategic, or coordinated effort exists. Despite the fact that these challenges span the country and the fire service as a whole, there are no mechanisms for fire services to discuss, address, or mutually support each other in achieving equity and inclusion goals (Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs, 2018).

Despite these commendable efforts, it is essential to recognize that substantial barriers remain. The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (CAFC) and the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs (O AFC) face significant limitations in influencing municipal fire services to embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) efforts. The CAFC and O AFC function more as symbolic bodies rather than influential entities, serving as representatives of the fire service community but lacking practical authority to enforce or mandate policies at the municipal level. The CAFC and O AFC are also non-regulatory bodies, meaning they cannot mandate or enforce compliance with EDI policies, and

their recommendations are not binding. Municipal fire services operate with local autonomy, often prioritizing their specific needs and challenges over EDI initiatives. Municipalities, therefore, address these initiatives to varying degrees based on local priorities and constraints. Fire chiefs volunteer their time to work on committees to providing education materials and organizing conferences with relevant subject matter experts as guest speakers, but their efforts are often constrained by their full-time job and work commitments, making their committee work "corner of the desk" activities.

As an active member of diversity committees at both national and international levels, I have firsthand experience with the challenges in gaining access to and engaging with racialized firefighters. This ongoing struggle highlights the gap between high-level commitments and the practical realities faced in daily operations. While there are initiatives aimed at improving EDI within the fire services, the lack of a cohesive strategy and sufficient resources continues to impede progress.

Building a fire service that reflects the diversity of the community, enhances the connectedness, credibility, and trust the community has with its first responders. However, the fire service, in general, does not match the demographics of their respective communities, particularly in relation to race, ethnicity, and gender. The overarching objective of diversity training is to help people to learn how to work effectively with different others which may increase overall success for both organizations and individuals (Bezrukova, Jehn, & Spell, 2012, p. 208). Garnering buy-in for diversity training in the fire service can be a challenge. Primarily, diversity training programs seek to create an awareness of bias and discrimination, to help employees acknowledge their biases, develop skills to address those biases, and to help capitalize on diversity as an asset for organizational performance (Holladay & Quiñones, 2005).

Bias and discrimination training, while related, focus on different but complementary aspects of workplace diversity and inclusion. Bias training primarily aims to create awareness about unconscious or implicit biases that individuals may hold, emphasizing that everyone has biases influencing their perceptions, judgments, and behaviours unconsciously. Training objectives include helping individuals recognize their own biases, understand how these biases are formed, and develop strategies to mitigate their effects. This type of training often involves tools like Implicit Association

Tests (IAT), workshops, discussions about common biases, and practical exercises for bias interruption.

Discrimination training centers on understanding, identifying, and preventing discriminatory practices and behaviours in the workplace. It focuses more on actions and policies that lead to unfair treatment based on protected characteristics, aiming to educate employees about relevant laws and regulations, help them recognize discriminatory behaviours, and provide strategies to prevent discrimination. This training typically includes awareness of legal definitions, case studies, role-playing scenarios, and policy review to ensure compliance and foster an inclusive work environment.

Bias training deals with internal attitudes and unconscious influences, while discrimination training addresses external actions and legal compliance. In the context of the fire service, implementing bias training can help personnel recognize and mitigate unconscious biases that affect team dynamics, decision-making, and community interactions. Meanwhile, discrimination training ensures that fire service policies and practices promote a fair and equitable workplace and comply with legislation. Combining both types of training provides a comprehensive approach to fostering diversity and inclusion, addressing both unconscious attitudes and overt behaviours that can hinder a truly inclusive environment.

Diversity training more broadly is understood to help trainees learn diversity knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Kulik & Roberson, 2008). Social justice-oriented approaches bring identity to the forefront of training to build understanding of how to work with one's own and others' identities that are sources of privileged (socially advantaged) and marginalized (socially disadvantaged) experiences (Bell, 2016). A social justice-oriented approach distinguishes identity and material circumstances as separate and unique, as these two aspects do not always align. Identity is often a complex and multifaceted concept, shaped by cultural, ideological, and personal factors. For example, many white individuals may not perceive themselves as having a racial identity due to the normative status of whiteness in many societies, which renders their racial identity invisible to them. Similarly, working-class individuals may not acknowledge the existence of class distinctions or might identify as middle class, influenced by societal narratives that obscure class realities. Identity, while deeply

intertwined with cultural and ideological contexts, is distinct from social location, which is fundamentally material. Social location refers to the concrete conditions of one's life, such as economic status, access to resources, and social mobility. These material circumstances significantly shape one's experiences and opportunities, regardless of how one personally identifies or perceives their position in society.

Material conditions can contribute to privilege and marginalization, depending on the circumstances. For instance, two individuals might share the same racial identity but have vastly different life experiences due to disparities in socioeconomic status, education, or access to healthcare. The intersectionality of identities, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, interacts to produce unique experiences of privilege or oppression.

Ongoing training would address implicit biases and provide strategies for mitigating bias in decision-making and interactions. Workshops on anti-discrimination policies would ensure a thorough understanding of relevant laws, along with procedures for reporting and addressing discrimination and harassment. Inclusive leadership training and team-building exercises would help leaders foster supportive environments and strengthen team cohesion. Practical applications of this training would include community outreach to build networking and trust with diverse populations. The goal to create a culture and workforce that values diversity and inclusivity can only be accomplished with deliberate and purposeful actions, not just empty platitudes. While there are studies of wide-ranging designs, pedagogies, and trainee outcomes from interdisciplinary diversity training scholarship in fields such as psychology, management, and education, much of the diversity training literature has yielded mixed results (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Kulik & Roberson, 2008).

The narrative around unconscious bias typically suggests that most people harbour some form of hidden racism or significant racial bias. It further claims that these biases operate below our conscious awareness, affecting our choices and behaviours. A contemporary line of reasoning is that traditional, blatant racism has been suppressed and that expressions of racism take more subtle, covert and less visible forms (Noon, 2017, p. 200). By becoming aware of these biases, we can consciously address and mitigate their impact, which is why there is a push for training on unconscious bias.

Unconscious bias training is a diversity intervention based on unproven suppositions and is unlikely to help eliminate racism in the workplace (Noon, 2017, p. 198). In fact, white men reported having a less positive attitude toward women after receiving diversity training (Hood, Muller & Seitz, 2001). This demonstrates that the actual effect on behaviour is likely to be limited if there is no willingness to change. While those who teach diversity training acknowledge that it is unlikely that trainees will come away from one training session with life-changing impacts, trainers persist in their efforts with the hope of planting a seed that could one day become part of an expanding community of brokers who support each other in working toward social change - whether in smaller transitory interactions of interpersonal support and allyship or in larger efforts of advocacy (Sugiyama, Ladge & Bilimoria, 2023, p. 1704). Naff and Kellough (2003, p. 1333) analyzed the results of US Federal diversity training and at best, the diversity programs at these agencies yielded mixed results, rather than consistent improvements in the promotion, dismissal, or quit ratios examined across time. Diversity training shows greater efficacy if it is integrated into a broader organizational strategy and sustained through reinforcement (Bezrukova et al., 2016; Devine & Ash, 2022b). While diversity-training programs are designed with the intent to address bias and discrimination as well as foster a diverse and inclusive work culture, they might have limited or even counterproductive outcomes. Research studies, such as those referenced (Kalev, Dobbin & Kelly, 2006; Roberson, Kulik & Pepper, 2003), raise concerns about the resources (time and money) invested in diversity training if it doesn't necessarily yield the desired results.

Academic studies support the finding that diversity training can sometimes result in a backlash effect, particularly among white men. For example, a 2022 meta-analysis by Devine and Ash (2022a) reviewed numerous studies and concluded that the efficacy of diversity training is often overstated, with many programs failing to produce lasting behavioural changes. The researchers noted that while participants might temporarily adopt pro-diversity attitudes, these effects typically dissipate over time, and in some cases, training can activate biases rather than mitigate them (Devine & Ash, 2022a). Diversity initiatives often provoke resistance among white male participants who may perceive these efforts as a direct challenge to their status or as unfairly punitive. This

can lead to an increase in negative attitudes towards diversity and inclusion efforts, reinforcing pre-existing biases instead of alleviating them (Devine & Ash, 2022; Paluck, Green, & Green, 2021).

The reaction to the training can exacerbate existing biases or create new tensions in the workplace, further dividing employees. Focusing on individual attitudes doesn't offer systemic solutions. Despite the good intention of diversity training, the result can be limited effectiveness, negative consequences, or unintended outcomes. Worse yet, EDI training as a stand-alone organizational effort can be seen as 'woke-washing,' where organizations signal advocacy and commitment to social-justice-related causes without taking actions to back up this appearance of intention (Vredenburg et al., 2020). The result may actually harm vulnerable minority groups rather than reduce discrimination.

Addressing the difficulties of diversity training in undoing a lifetime of gendered and racialized socialization requires understanding the depth and complexity of unconscious biases and societal conditioning. One of the core challenges is the deeply ingrained nature of these biases. From a young age, individuals internalize attitudes, values, norms, and beliefs about race and gender through interactions with family, friends, media, and other societal institutions. These biases are often subconscious, making them resistant to change. Diversity training sessions, which are typically short and infrequent, often do not provide enough exposure to effectively counteract years of such conditioning. Real change demands consistent and prolonged efforts, which the typical formats of diversity training rarely provide.

Another issue is the oversimplification of complex issues within many diversity training programs. These programs may fail to address the structural and systemic nature of racism and sexism, focusing instead on individual behaviours and attitudes. This approach can lead to a misunderstanding of the broader context of these issues, reducing the effectiveness of the training. When participants are confronted with information that challenges their existing beliefs or self-image, they may experience defensive reactions such as denial or discomfort. These reactions can significantly hinder the training's effectiveness, as participants may resist altering their views or behaviours.

Despite these challenges, diversity training can still be effective if it is designed and implemented with careful planning and execution. There are a wide range of longer-standing diversity training interventions that seek to educate, influence attitudes and impact behaviour, each offering different pedagogical approaches and content (Swan, 2009), which create important, safe and reflexive conditions for participants to explore group dynamics (Noon, 2018, 205). An essential aspect of a successful program is the commitment to long-term engagement rather than viewing diversity training as a one-off event. This might include follow-up sessions, continuous learning opportunities, and integrating diversity and inclusion goals into the organization's core values and practices. Programs that encourage active participation and provide safe spaces for open dialogue can help participants explore uncomfortable topics and reflect on their biases. An effective diversity training program also adopts a comprehensive approach that addresses not just individual attitudes but also organizational culture and structural biases. This includes integrating diversity and inclusion into all aspects of organizational practice, from hiring and promotions to everyday workplace interactions. Additionally, setting clear goals and metrics for diversity training can aid in assessing its impact and effectiveness. Feedback and adjustments based on these outcomes can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of the program, supporting individuals in making practical changes to their behaviour.

A culture of inclusivity is more than a training program, it requires a comprehensive approach to address broader systemic issues, and may involve strategies such as changing policies, leadership, and organizational culture. Organizations must learn to manage diversity properly to harness potential benefits (Saxena, 2014; Stevens et al., 2008) and protect employee well-being. While EDI studies are undoubtedly related, they encompass a broader range of topics beyond gender issues. The focus of this research is to provide an in-depth and detailed analysis on gender-related issues such as nuanced stereotypes and bias and discriminatory practices that contribute to a less inclusive and sometimes unsupportive environment for women in the Fire Services in Ontario, rather than a general overview of all EDI aspects.

This chapter provided an overview of women's integration into the Canadian fire service, with a specific lens on the Fire Services in Ontario. The gradual but impactful evolution of female participation within the Fire Services in Ontario has resulted in women becoming a recognized and essential component of firefighting teams. While progress has been made, it is clear that gaps still persist. The Fire Services in Ontario, with its blend of volunteer and career opportunities, offers multiple options for women seeking to enter this profession. At the same time, women face gender-based challenges, including occupational choice, managing gender identity, tokenism, the requirement to outperform to prove their competence, harassment, and misogyny in their workplaces.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This chapter focuses on a review of the extensive literature on the gender-based barriers many women face in most non-traditional work environments and examines its relevance to the situation of women in the Fire Services in Ontario. It also reviews the literature on ways of challenging gender discrimination, including the importance of training and professional development and enabling career advancement. This review of academic literature sets the stage for a deeper understanding of the systemic barriers and individual experiences that shape a woman's journey in the fire service.

This literature review begins by exploring how researchers have analyzed the ways in which gender functions in the paid workforce. It looks specifically at the constructs of gender as seen in non-traditional occupations for women. Next, this literature review examines the concepts of societal expectations, occupational segregation, occupational choice, occupational identity, managing gender identity, tokens, career advancement, policies, and professional development for career advancement. Where it is available, I also review the related literatures referring directly to fire services. This chapter also includes a brief discussion of hegemonic masculinity to lay the groundwork to conceptualize the ways in which women firefighters experience stigma and gender discrimination when trying to identify within their occupation.

Historically, there has been a significant gender imbalance in certain occupations, leading to the term non-traditional work referring to an occupation in which one gender (usually men) predominates and those of the other gender (usually women) face gender-specific barriers (Status of Women Canada, 2014). The dynamic landscape of the fire service profession has witnessed a significant transformation, challenging gender roles and paving the way for an increased participation of women. This literature review examines the current body of knowledge on women's participation in non-traditional work. Fire service leaders and their human resources partners recognize the value of having a fire service that is more reflective of the community it serves, and this research is pertinent to laying the foundational knowledge of the challenges and barriers within the workplace.

Women firefighters face barriers such as stereotypes, physical demands, and the resistance to change within the profession. In the 2000s, the career fire service witnessed a rise in the recruitment and hiring of women in the fire service, leading to a higher prevalence of female firefighters in career departments. However, due to women entering the profession later than other non-traditional careers, the fire service is addressing challenges and issues such as tokenism, occupational choice, managing gender identity, and the need to outperform. These are issues which women faced years earlier in other male dominated professions. The fire service is grappling with these challenges, and as a result, research conducted in other non-traditional workplaces 15 to 20 years ago holds relevance for the fire service profession today. This research, although dated, can provide insights into the challenges faced in the fire service and may offer potential strategies for addressing them. It is crucial to recognize and acknowledge that societal and organizational contexts continue to evolve, requiring ongoing research and dedicated efforts to address the unique challenges women encounter in the fire service.

This literature review explores how women face disadvantages in terms of access to job opportunities and barriers to promotion. It shows the importance of gender discrimination, occupational segregation and the impact of family responsibilities and demonstrates the complex and multifaceted role gender plays in the fire service. As the literature review demonstrates, some issues have remained constant over time, others

have become less relevant or obsolete, while new issues have emerged. The fire service remains a heavily male-dominated occupation with a masculine dominant culture. Understanding the ways in which experiences in the profession vary based on gender is essential for creating policies and best practices that promote gender equality in the workplace.

Barriers to Non-Traditional Work

The strong association between being a man and being a firefighter, a scientist, or a business leader makes it difficult for people to picture a woman succeeding in these professions (McClean et al., 2017). Typically, in Western Europe and North American societies, including Canada, gender roles are cultural norms and expectations that dictate which characteristics and behaviours are seen as typical and appropriate for women and men (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). In Canada, despite the recognition of a broader spectrum of gender identities beyond the traditional binary, societal expectations regarding gender roles remain deeply entrenched. While there's acknowledgment of various gender identities, such as non-binary, genderqueer, and transgender, the prevalent cultural norms still strongly associate certain professions and roles with specific genders.

Howe (1977) coined the term “pink-collar” to denote job fields that primarily employ women. Within industries dominated by women, work generally requires nurturing, assisting, cleaning, organization or communication skills, activities often associated with femininity. Pink-collar jobs haven't disappeared; the modern workforce still includes women-dominated occupations such as clerical, administrative, sales, customer service, social science, nursing, paid caregiver, teaching and religious studies (Ridout, 2009, p. 5). These so-called “pink collar” careers resemble activities associated with traditional gender roles. They often pay less than jobs held predominantly by men and lack opportunities for career advancement. The term “pink-collar” worker was used to distinguish female-orientated jobs from the blue-collar worker and the white-collar worker. The blue-collar sector refers to a worker in manual labour such as craft workers, plant and machine operators, and other manual labourers. This stereotype is

underpinned by such masculine-associated attributes as strength, competitiveness, decisiveness, and instrumentality; while caretaking and social networking are stereotypically perceived as feminine, and women's work (Lewis, 1997; Hodgson, 2002).

The white-collar sector, requiring post-secondary education and specialized training, include managerial roles, professional occupations, and administrative functions. White collar employment has seen progress over the years in terms of women's integration into these traditionally male-dominated positions. However, when it comes to male-dominated professional blue-collar jobs, women's presence continues to be low (England, 2010; Deng, 2021). Studies such as those referenced by England (2010) have highlighted the persistent gender disparity in blue collar male-dominated jobs, including professions like firefighting. This disparity is driven by career barriers such as deep-rooted stereotypes and biases, work environments that are unwelcoming or hostile to women, limited outreach efforts promoting career opportunities for women, and a lack of visible representation, especially in leadership positions.

Traditional and non-traditional fields are determined by the level of representation of women (McMullen, Gilmore & Le Petit 2010). A non-traditional occupation is defined as any occupation in which women or men comprise less than 25% of the workforce (New Brunswick, 2022). The reality is that there are a number of occupations with a nominal representation of women, thus deemed non-traditional occupations. The reasons as to why gendered occupations still exist remain under debate in scholarly research (Huppatz & Goodwin, 2013; McDowell, 2015). What constitutes traditional versus non-traditional careers for women is influenced both by perception and reality, by societal and cultural norms that influence a woman's decision to favour certain jobs over others, by structural barriers for entry into specific fields of work and outright discrimination. Despite increasing efforts to lift barriers to men's and women's participation in jobs deemed to be suitable for the 'other,' with the introduction of new job roles in each domain. For example, gender stratification by occupation still persists (Angouri, 2011; Holmes & Schnurr, 2006; Nilsson & Larsson, 2005) as professions are frequently categorized by society as suitable for one gender or another (Holmes, 2006; Padavic & Reskin, 2002).

Women commonly experience a process of exclusion in men-dominated occupations and organizations as they are often perceived as different from the stereotype of the ideal worker (Acker, 1990). Non-traditional occupations are characterized as male gender role specializations and positions that most women neither seek nor achieve (Winkelman 1999, p.123). Examples include mining, heavy manufacturing, engineering, science, technology, the trades, construction, firefighting, logistics, and aviation. Women may not consider non-traditional careers because the occupations are usually seen as male dominated, even though they have higher pay scales, more job security and flexible hours (Ridout, 2009, p. 5).

Male-dominated fields rarely provide welcoming or accepting environments compared to other disciplines, such as education or nursing (Ward, 2008). Being discriminated against because of factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and stature (i.e., height and weight) has been a common experience for women in traditionally male-dominated/identified occupations (Gouliquer, Poulin, McWilliams, 2020, p. 48). Non-traditional work for women is associated with substantial barriers and constraints, creating work environments ranging from unsympathetic to downright hostile (Woodfield, 2007, p.48). Women confront problems of exclusion and harassment in all workplaces, and the obstacles are greatest in those environments most heavily dominated by men (Chetkovich, 2004, p.127).

Firefighting is one of the most male-dominated occupations in industrialized countries (Childs, 2006; Eriksen, Waitt, & Wilkinson, 2016; Hulett, Bendick, Thomas, & Moccio, 2008b). The gradual entry of women into the firefighting profession signals shifting understandings of what work is appropriate for men and women and their 'natural' capabilities. Within the context of uniformed services, many researchers advocate that institutional practices account for a large proportion of the gendered barriers women face in masculinized workplaces (Kanter, 1997a; Rimalt 2007). The underrepresentation of women in firefighting is not surprising, given the domination by men surrounding labour-intensive and uniformed occupations such as law enforcement, transportation, construction, and military (Martin, 1990; Gouliquer, 2011; Wright, 2016). Dozier (2000) states that female firefighters generally face two major challenges within the profession from inception of recruitment: (1) occupational segregation and (2)

advancement issues. An examination of women's experiences in male-dominated workplaces has important implications for theories of gender and identity as well as for employment policy (Denissen, 2010, 1052). Female firefighters experience unique challenges while working in the profession, as they are underrepresented or excluded. The traditional structure, demographic make-up, and history of the fire service as a para-military organization presents additional challenges when it comes to changing culture and improving equity, diversity and inclusion. Eriksen's (2014a) work underscores how gender inequalities are reproduced through a range of practices that sustain a hegemonic firefighting masculinity. These practices include everyday language around operational terminology (such as war euphemisms), to choice of uniforms, office layouts, the desirable skills listed in job advertisements, and the number of men and women on recruitment panels, to consultation and briefing styles. Addressing the barriers requires a multi-faceted approach that involves changing societal attitudes, modernizing recruitment practices, taking steps to improve the workplace culture, and implementing workplace policies that address standards of behaviour and promote a respectful workplace.

Expectations

Gendered jobs are shaped by the skills and characteristics that men and women are assumed to possess due to their sex. Oakley (1974) was one of the first to distinguish between sex and gender in order to differentiate between the biological differences between men and women and those social roles dependent on male and female identities. The distinction between sex and gender, has been seriously challenged over the years. Fausto-Sterling (2000) critiques the binary understanding of sex by highlighting the existence of intersex individuals, whose biological characteristics do not fit typical definitions of male or female. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is not a fixed attribute but rather something that is "done" through social interactions, emphasizing the performative aspects of gender. Butler (1990) suggests that both sex and gender are socially constructed categories, rather than strictly biological or natural phenomena.

Women may be seen and see themselves as more employable in some kinds of work than others, with implications for the quality and remuneration of work, as well as notions of choice and control (Andrew, 2009, p.347). Gender role expectations cause people to make inferences about women and men regarding their attitudes, behaviours and skills based on their gender (Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 2000; Haines et al., 2016). Societal expectations of appropriate gendered behaviour and characteristics play a role here, creating assumptions of gendered roles that have become naturalized or explained away by biological reasons (DeFrancisco & Palczewski, 2014). Gender is the cultural construct imposed on people as a result of their identified biological sex (sex at birth), placing constraints on how each sex should perform within society, which frames and to some extent controls the roles deemed suitable for men and women (Kelan, 2010).

When organizations aspire or claim to recruit and hire the best person for the job, there is a caveat, because a perceiver's judgment and evaluation of a target person to a large extent tends to be based on the perceiver's own bias and beliefs (Scullen et al., 2000). Gender role expectations form a prominent source of such biases and beliefs (van Dijk & van Engen, 2019, p. 4). The concept of employability is not gender neutral, and gendered assumptions about who is and is not employable for particular work can disadvantage women seeking training and work in non-traditional industries or dissuade them from applying to do so (Andrew, 2009, p.347). Men are more likely to be selected for jobs, tasks, and responsibilities that are congruent with the male gender role, whereas women are more likely to be selected for jobs, tasks, and responsibilities congruent with the female gender role (van Dijk & van Engen, 2019, p. 4). The challenges to succeed faced by women represent phenomena that are far from settled; questions about the skills sets and personal characteristics needed for job selection and hiring, particularly in male-dominated professions, remain a critical focus for study (Pinto, Patanakul & Pinto, 2017, p. 420). Within the firehouse culture, the value of competence and technical knowledge seems to be an indicator of masculinity among those in the profession; even more, those on the frontlines seem to be considered better firefighters and therefore more masculine than those carrying out so-called feminine duties like administrative work (Pacholok, 2009). Being able to maintain professionalism

and demonstrate physical and mental fortitude in the face of comparably harsh working conditions seems to additionally bolster men's sense of masculinity (Thurnell-Read & Parker, 2008).

Gender Discrimination in the Workplace

Despite progress in male-dominated sectors, many challenges of both a physical and intangible nature continue to face women as they integrate themselves into non-traditional professions. The entry of women into these spaces can threaten the stability of male-dominated territories (Garcia-Ratamero & Lopez-Zafra, 2006). Workplace gender discrimination is not a thing of the past; it is still prevalent in today's workforce. Gender (sex) discrimination in the workplace deserves attention as it can impede women's advancement, and research suggests that discrimination often contributes to the barriers and dead ends that women must overcome (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 67). Overt discrimination includes behaviours like refusing to hire women, paying them inequitably, or steering them towards sex-segregated types of jobs. Discrimination can also come in the form of sexual harassment, withholding promotions based on gender, giving a different job title to a woman, and preventing women from participating in training opportunities.

Male resistance to female influence also affects the hiring of women for traditionally masculine jobs. In experiments, men have shown a stronger preference for hiring male applicants over female applicants, even when the professional records of the women match or surpass those of the men (Foschi, Lai, & Sigerson, 1994; Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005; Gill, 2020). Gender discrimination is present in every field and every occupation to some degree, whether it is by less pay, less respect, or fewer opportunities for advancement or leadership roles.

The explanations or excuses for sex discrimination in the workplace tend to be weak. For example, some employers claim that clients and customers would not want to work with women (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 5). Women are often overlooked for job advancement, or for positions for which they are more qualified than male applicants because employers fear that they will not be as committed to the company as they are

to their families, or that they will miss time due to pregnancy, children, and other family obligations.

Gender stereotypes are likely to distort decision makers' perceptions of job candidates (Gorman, 2005, p. 703). Research shows that gender bias is still prevalent in both the private and corporate sector and to a lesser degree in the public sector, and women believe men are offered greater opportunities at work. Prejudice toward female leaders and potential leaders takes two forms: (a) less favourable evaluation of women's (compared to men's) potential for leadership, because leadership ability is more stereotypical of men than women and (b) less favourable evaluation of the actual leadership behaviour of women (compared to men), because such behaviour is perceived as less desirable in women than in men (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 576). Training is required to ensure that managers are aware of their own bias. Those who make decisions regarding hiring, evaluation, or promotions need to acknowledge their own biases and be actively conscious of them during decision-making, performance evaluations, and selection processes

Women working in male-dominated industries face a variety of challenges, including (Johnson & Otto, 2019):

- Societal expectations and beliefs about women's leadership abilities.
- Pervasive stereotypes, such as that of the "caring mother" or "office housekeeper."
- Higher stress and anxiety compared to women working in other fields.
- Lack of mentoring and career development opportunities.
- Sexual harassment.

Occupational Segregation

An occupation or job is gender-segregated when the majority of the people in it are of a particular gender. While traditionally the concept of two genders, male and female were recognized, contemporary discourse acknowledges that gender and biology require a more nuanced understanding. Today many individuals' and societies' concepts of gender have evolved to recognize a spectrum of gender identities beyond

the binary framework. It is important to acknowledge that while contemporary discussions on gender embrace a spectrum that includes non-binary and other gender identities, the scope of this dissertation is confined to the experiences of those who identify strictly within the binary categories of woman and man; it is driven by the self-identification of the participants involved. This limitation is not intended to negate or diminish the validity and significance of other gender experiences but is a reflection of the demographics of the participant pool.

Limiting the analysis to only male and female gender identities in this dissertation constrains the application of an intersectional framework in several significant ways. By focusing solely on men and women, the dissertation does not capture the diverse experiences of non-binary, genderqueer, or other gender non-conforming individuals who might face unique challenges within the firefighting profession. This exclusion risks reinforcing the traditional gender binary, potentially marginalizing those who do not fit within these categories and overlooking how intersecting identities might impact individuals differently. Furthermore, the scope of this research limits its relatability and applicability, as it fails to address the full spectrum of experiences within the firefighting community. Consequently, the conclusions drawn may not fully represent the complexity of issues at play, leading to potentially biased or incomplete insights into the barriers faced in this field. Recognizing these limitations, future research should broaden its scope to include a wider range of gender identities, thereby enhancing the relevance and ethical grounding of occupational studies in fields traditionally dominated by gender segregation.

Gender occupational segregation refers to the degree of concentration between men and women where one gender is dominant within the profession (Renzetti, Curran & Maier, 2012). Gender segregation in the labour market operates horizontally and vertically; not only are men and women distributed quantitatively in different types of jobs, the labour market is marked with women overwhelmingly concentrated at the lower levels of occupational hierarchy in terms of wages or salary, status and authority (Cross & Bagilhole, 2002, p. 206). Horizontal segregation refers to the unequal distribution of women and men across sectors and occupations (Game & Pringle, 1983; Probert & Wilson, 1993). Vertical segregation refers to women's unequal access to

career advancement, particularly to positions of higher responsibility, discretion, and rewards (Blau, Brinton & Grusky, 2006; Blau, Brummund & Liu, 2013).

Overall, gender-segregation has declined over recent decades, with more women entering previously male-dominated occupations (England, 2010; Charles & Grusky, 2004; Cotter, Hermsen & Vanneman, 2004; Mandel, 2012), but this increasing integration has been confined to high-level, more lucrative professions (England, 2010; Cotter, Hermsen & Vanneman 2004). Blue-collar occupations have not witnessed this desegregation trend. A job is classed as female-dominated (feminized) where female staff composition is more than 70%, and male-dominated (masculinized) where male staff composition is more than 70% (Huppertz & Goodwin, 2013). Men remain reluctant to enter female-dominated, blue-collar occupations such as nursing or child-care because they offer lower pay and social status than do male-dominated ones (England, 2010; England et al., 1994; Jacobs 1993; Levanon, England & Allison, 2009). Also, men fear the social stigma of working in traditionally female trades (Lupton, 2000; Williams, 1993, 1995).

Occupational segregation by gender occurs everywhere, causing labour market rigidity and economic inefficiency, wasting human resources, preventing change, disadvantaging women and perpetuating gender inequalities (Loutfi, 2001, p. 129). When an occupation is male-dominated and the occupational profile is masculine, a woman's attempt to be recognized as skilled is a doubly difficult process because they are further challenged by the context-specific, socio-political construct of men as the "ideal type" of worker and women as the "wrong" gender (Hatmaker, 2012, p. 383). Attitudes about which jobs are appropriate for men or women are a result of tradition, compatibility of paid employment with domestic labour (especially care work) socialization and legislation. Unskilled women workers who might prefer a different career path can easily fall into a "traditional" occupation like paid domestic work, cashier or waitress (Mastracci, 2004, p. 12). Studies show that women are more likely than men to be employed in traditionally feminine occupations which require nurturing social skills and are generally associated with lower pay (Kanter, 1977b; Jacobson & Steinberg, 1990). Female employment is concentrated in non-manual occupations, in particular, clerical, sales and personal/protective occupations (Whittock, 2002). Women's job

orientation may be linked to the demands they face by combining paid employment with domestic labour, especially childcare.

Occupational segregation is detrimental to women (Loutfi, 2001, p. 129), contributing to inequalities in earnings and the gender-pay gap. Work that is traditionally male dominated generally pays significantly more than “female” jobs. Not only do they have higher pay scales, but there is also greater job security because many of the positions are unionized, with robust health benefits, sick leave, paid vacation, and flexible hours. Employed women earn less than men for many reasons: head-to-head discrimination, where a woman is doing the same job as a man, yet earns less for it; expectations and demands relating to unpaid work at home, where women are penalized for interrupting or postponing their education and careers to care for children and parents, and assuming other “private realm” burdens of the household; and occupational segregation by gender, where women tend to work in “women’s jobs” and men tend to work in “men’s jobs” and the former are remunerated far less than the latter (Mastracci, 2004, p. 3).

Women and men are distributed unequally across occupations and within occupational hierarchies. The accumulation of experiences of working women demonstrates that the gender-typing of the trades and industrial occupations is deeply entrenched and highly resistant to challenge and change (Hulme, 2006, p. 144). The segmentation of occupations based on the workers’ gender is an important labour market phenomenon that deserves greater attention from policy-makers and lay persons concerned about equality, efficiency and social justice (Loutfi, 2001, p. 130). Policies designed to intervene and alter gender-segregated hiring patterns must tackle the gender-role socialization surrounding male-dominated occupations, which affects employers and male coworkers, as well as women workers themselves (Mastracci, 2004, p. 36).

Katherine Scott's (2023) report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) describes the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's economic gains. She outlines how the pandemic wiped out 35 years of progress, revealing the precariousness of women’s advancements in the labour market. This regression emphasizes the critical need for robust policies that address not only gender-

role socialization but also the structural vulnerabilities that women face in the workforce (Scott, 2023).

Men versus Women

Despite the progression of women into male-dominated work environments, many challenges of an intangible nature continue to plague women as they aim to integrate themselves into non-traditional professions. The 'gender-blind' culture assumes that women have the same experiences as men and are able to compete at work on a 'level playing field' (Maddock, 1999, p. 92). However, the reality is that women frequently use time and energy in their early careers discovering the exclusionary force of a patriarchal culture (Nicolson, 2015, p. 102). Women in blue-collar jobs, such as firefighters, are stigmatized by both their co-workers who view them as not man enough to perform blue-collar work, and by prevailing social norms which tend to consider their career choice as not "feminine" enough (Lucas & Steimel, 2009). According to Nicolson (2015), men find it challenging to recognize women as equals in the workplace as women who act with ambitious characteristics and prove to be capable at their jobs create anxiety, guilt, and envy in men. While efforts such as diversity workshops, anonymized resumes for recruitment, clear criteria for promotion and parental and flex time benefits have been implemented to encourage a culture shift in the workplace, the reality is these substantial and well-intentioned organizational changes are not fully successful because they leave a hidden but powerful foundation of masculine ideas and values, policies, interaction styles, norms, artifacts, practices, and individual beliefs that prevent the full participation of women (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1022).

Many of the obstacles women face in firefighting are not immediately visible or easily quantifiable. They often relate to workplace culture, attitudes, and implicit biases rather than overt discrimination or policy barriers. Acknowledging and addressing these intangible challenges is vital for true integration and equality. The notion of a 'gender-blind' culture, where everyone is assumed to have the same experiences and opportunities overlooks the unique experiences and challenges faced by women,

thereby perpetuating inequality. In the context of fire services, this might mean ignoring the specific physical, emotional, or social needs of women firefighters.

Occupational Choice

There are many perceived barriers when it comes to women's entry into non-traditional occupations. Without information or alternatives, a woman may never realize her own interests in non-traditional fields unless options are presented to her (Mastracci, 2004, p. 43). Not only are females less likely to choose careers in male-dominated fields, but when they do, they are more likely than males to drop out of these fields (Frome et al., 2006). In the twenty-first century, the crossover of gendered occupational boundaries has increased and more women than in years prior enter non-traditional career paths (Blau, Brummund & Liu, 2013).

The desire to be free from gender constraints as well as to develop alternative values might drive individuals to cross gender boundaries and work in female-dominated or male-dominated jobs (Ndobo, 2013, p. 232). Occupations are chosen based on gender-type, prestige level and field of work, and young people decide which occupations are acceptable and which are unacceptable - those which fit with their own developing self-concept (Gottfredson, 2002). Women often refer to status, salary, and career evolution as a justification for taking non-traditional occupations (Ndobo, 2013, p. 232).

Managing Gender Identity

In an androcentric system, characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity, such as physical strength and assertive leadership, are often overvalued. This can lead to the creation and reinforcement of stereotypes that women are less capable in these roles. Women firefighters might be perceived as less competent, not because of their actual abilities, but because of these ingrained biases. The privileging of masculine traits and devaluing of feminine ones can create systemic barriers to the advancement and full participation of women in the fire service. Androcentrism can

influence the behaviour and attitudes of colleagues and superiors, leading to a work environment that is less supportive and inclusive for women. This can manifest in subtle ways, like the assumption that women need more help, or in more overt ways, such as exclusion from certain tasks or roles. It can lead to underrepresentation in leadership roles and decision-making positions, limiting the ability of women to effect change within the service. Recognizing the role of androcentrism helps in developing a more nuanced understanding of the gender dynamics within the Fire Services in Ontario. It allows for the identification of specific areas where biases and stereotypes impact women firefighters and can inform the development of targeted strategies to address these issues.

Masculine defaults, encompassing ideas, values, policies, and norms, perpetuate bias by asserting that characteristics and behaviours aligned with the male gender role, such as intellect, leadership, decision-making, and physical strength, are inherently superior to those exhibited by women. Privileging of men can be perpetuated through cultural, institutional, and legal norms, resulting in negative consequences for gender equality and contributes to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and discrimination, such as the gender pay gap, underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, and limiting women's opportunities to fully participate in various fields of work. Privileging of masculinity elevates characteristics and traits associated with traditional notions of masculinity such as strength, bravery, resilience, independence, self-reliance, assertive, competence, all qualities that are deemed as desirable and admirable. Contrary to this, traits associated with women and femininity, such as expressing emotions, nurturing and collaboration may be devalued and dismissed. Researchers are now focusing on gender bias involving barriers arising from cultural beliefs about gender as well as workplace structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that inadvertently favour men (Ely et al., 2011, p. 475).

When masculine characteristics, behaviours, practices, and artifacts in a given context are valued, rewarded, or regarded as standard, normal, neutral, or necessary, women feel a lower sense of belonging and anticipate less success there (Bian, Leslie, Murphy & Cimpian, 2018; Cheryan et al., 2009; Cheryan, Siy, Vichayapai, Drury, & Kim, 2011; Gaucher, Friesen, & Kay, 2011; Wynn & Correll, 2017). Women are placed in a

double bind where they are required to assume male patterns of behaviour and to preserve their distinctively female characteristics (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). Sexuality and gender shape and limit employees' efforts to preserve their desired identity on and off the job (Hall, Hockey & Robinson, 2007).

Women as Tokens

More than four decades ago, Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977a, 1977b) introduced the term "token" to describe a subgroup, which represents less than 15% of the overall work group and is perceived as different from the rest of the group ("dominants") within the same occupation. Although great progress in gender equity has been achieved since Kanter's (1977a) initial observations, there is little doubt that gender inequity persists, as this dissertation demonstrates. The U.S. fire service has been traditionally white and male (Scarborough, 2017), and the Canadian fire service can be described similarly. The fire service, in general, is then seen as unwelcoming or not valuing underrepresented groups (Russo, 2013). An underrepresented group is a group of people (whether it is women, racialized people or members of the LGBTQ2S+ community) that is less represented in one subset (in this case the fire service) than in the general population.

When there is a lack of proportional gender diversity, it invariably impacts gendered power relations at work. The focus on minority status is often a defining feature of these studies and has consequently been mobilized as the central concern (Burton, 2014; Kanter, 1977a; Lupton, 2006; Watts, 2009). Tokens in the context of this dissertation are women in non-traditional work, who are the sole or one of the few representatives of their gender in the workplace. Empirical evidence suggests that once females operate in groups consisting of at least 85% or greater men, there are increased experiences of negativity and discrimination (Giard, 2003). Research shows that gender plays an important role in tokenism and factors besides numerical representation could play a role in negative treatment (Archbold & Schulz, 2008; Stichman, Hassell, & Archbold, 2010; Zimmer, 1988).

The scarce presence of tokens creates a situation in which tokens (i.e., women) are much more visible than members of the majority group (i.e., men). In firefighting, the entry of women can often lead to them being viewed as 'tokens' or symbolic representatives of their gender. Although visibility can have positive outcomes in organizational settings, such as opportunities for promotion, tokens experience enhanced visibility which results in increased performance pressures. Inevitably, because of their contrast to dominants, tokens are highly visible and come under excessive scrutiny from others (Zimmer, 1988, p. 451). Often, tokens attempt to minimize their visibility, particularly sexual attributes, believing these overshadow their technical ability (Whitlock, 2002, p. 452). If a female firefighter makes a mistake, it's identification is swift and criticized, reinforcing the harmful assumption that all women in these positions are incompetent or incapable. Positive attention is offered when a token performs well because most workers want to be recognized for their hard work, and it can potentially open the door to other women (although the successful woman may be seen as the exception). If the token is struggling, the attention will amplify the problems and adds to the pressure to perform. However, not all tokens have negative experiences. Contextual elements such as social status, occupational deviance, and job prestige can affect the experiences of tokens, as will be demonstrated later in the dissertation through some of the women firefighters' experiences.

Fire does not discriminate but individuals within communities do and despite female entry into the service, female firefighters continuously carry the token label (Hulett et al, 2008b). In the case of token women, gender is the characteristic on which their token status relies. Recognizing the effects of tokenism can lead to strategies for change, such as holding people accountable for biased behaviour, implementing equitable policies, and fostering a culture that values diversity and inclusion. The challenges in implementing these changes, including potential pushback and the need for mechanisms like arbitration to settle labour disputes, highlight the complexity of addressing deep-rooted organizational and cultural issues. The study of tokenism is a meaningful theoretical contribution because it emphasizes the importance of organizational structure and context in explaining the underrepresentation of women in influential organizational positions. In the fire service sector, this would be the rank of

Captain, District Chief, Platoon Chief, Divisional Chief, Deputy Chief or Fire Chief. The higher up the rank structure someone goes, the more credibility they build with their colleagues and the greater influence they have over your workplace, because of increased decision-making capabilities and responsibilities.

Requirement to Outperform

Men are assumed to be experts, while women often have to prove their expertise. For example, in a study of military cadets, men and women gave their male peers higher ratings for motivation and leadership, compared to their female peers, even though the men and women were equal on objective measures, such as grades and ranks. Such outcomes occur because women often need to outperform men to be seen as their equals (Boldry, Wood & Kashy, 2001; Foschi, 1996, 2000; Heilman, 2001; Correll, Benard & Paik, 2007; Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004; Fuegen et al., 2004). More surprising are examples of the *Goldberg paradigm*, which shows that attitudinal bias and prejudice, are likely contributing to the discrimination that occurs when hiring. It demonstrates that because the bar is set higher for women, a woman must be “twice as good as a man” to get a job, at least for the traditionally male-dominated jobs and most leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 115).

The *Goldberg paradigm*, named for a 1968 experiment by Philip Goldberg (1968) involved student participants evaluating identical essays except for the attached male or female name (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 80). The students did not know that other students had received identical essays that were ascribed to a writer of the other gender. When the essay topic was masculine (i.e., war or football), or even gender neutral, the essays with a male name were graded higher than if attributed to a female writer. The conclusion of the study was that women received lower grades unless the essay topic was a feminine one. The Goldberg paradigm remains relevant today, as it sheds light on the ongoing challenges faced by female authors. The use of non-gender disclosing names by female authors such as J.K. Rowling (Joanne Rowling) or E.L James (Erika Leonard) may be an attempt to counteract the potential bias that may arise if their written work is attributed to a female writer. While not all female writers use such a

strategy, using a “pen name” allows women to present their work without the burden of gender stereotypes and potential discrimination by the reader.

A similar type of experiment was conducted where a written profile of a potential job candidate was assigned a male and a female name. The profiles were then submitted to managers. After hundreds of replications, the female-named resumes were less likely to receive calls, and the female candidates were less likely to be viewed as qualified. Interestingly, the effect occurs regardless if the employer is male or female. The conclusion is that the employers are basing their judgments on their preconceptions of male and female applicants and not on possible differences in the information or experience on the resumes (Kasof, 1993).

While Goldberg’s original experiments took place almost 50 years ago, in a meta-analysis of 58 similar kinds of experiments, the common perception was that women do well on masculine kinds of tasks because of their hard work, while men do well on them because of their competence (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 79). Even in experimental situations where male and female performance is objectively equal, women are held to higher standards and their competence receives a lower rating (Foschi, 1996; Landau, 1995). The main issue is that women seem to be subject to some unconscious bias preventing them from gaining a position or promotion. For those who are not successful with such applications, it can be difficult to determine if the problem is due to attitudinal bias or prejudice. Gender bias comes in both explicit and subtler forms resulting in obstacles to professional advancement for highly skilled, educated and qualified women because of stereotype-driven expectations.

Even when a man and a woman have equal credentials, the man may be preferred for a position because the credentials may seem to be more impressive. In a study by Uhlmann and Cohen (2005), the participants evaluated either a man or a woman for a position as a police chief (a male-dominated leadership role). The candidate was described as either highly educated with administrative experience or streetwise but lacking higher education and administrative experience. When evaluating the male candidate, the participants considered education as a more important criterion for job success if the candidate was well educated, but being street smart was more important when the candidate was not well educated. Whatever credentials the male

applicant offered seemed to be desirable for a police chief, which was then used to justify his hiring. For the female candidate, the participants did not bend the hiring criteria to fit the qualities of the female candidate (Uhlmann & Cohen, 2005; Foschi, Sigerson, & Lembesis, 1995). Thus, employers may be creatively redefining the job criteria to fit the qualifications of the candidate whose gender seems to fit the job (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 112).

In another experiment, participants listened to a woman or a man who spoke in either a highly competent style, using relatively rapid, articulate speech, or a highly competent and warm style, using rapid, articulate speech with friendly nodding and smiling (Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995). The male speaker was well liked and influential, regardless of how he spoke. The women participants also responded equally favourably to the female speaker, regardless of her style. Nevertheless, men found the woman to be less likable and more threatening when she was merely competent, and they were less influenced by her as a result (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 132).

Leadership

Leadership is usually perceived as a masculine activity which means women can be vulnerable to having their successes ascribed to their hard work rather than their ability, and their failures blamed on their being overwhelmed by the difficulty of the work (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 79). Even when women are well on the way towards breaking through the glass ceiling, they face greater obstacles than men (Lyness & Heilman, 2006). A double standard exists that requires female leaders to work harder to receive evaluations that are comparable to those of men. In experiments where the participants evaluated male and female leaders who appeared to lead in the same way, the men were perceived to be more competent leaders than the women. Men are generally rated higher than women in masculine settings, where women might be expected to be less of an expert, but men are favoured even in gender-neutral settings. Only in distinctly feminine contexts are women seen to be equal to men, although men in women-dominated occupations have the structural advantage of the “glass elevator” which means they rise faster to management and leadership positions. As a result, female

leaders are more devalued in male-dominated rather than female-dominated leadership roles and men are preferred over women for masculine and gender-neutral jobs, while women are preferred over men only for feminine jobs (Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992). Positions of authority and leadership are often perceived to be masculine, and female leaders have to perform exceptionally well to be accepted as competent leaders.

Career Advancement

The concept of the ideal worker was developed by Joan Acker in the early 1990s as part of a framework for analysing the social construction of gender which could clarify structural and cultural barriers that hinder women's advancement in organizations (Poorhosseinzadeh & Strachan, 2021, p. 1422). Acker (1990, 1992) argues that the ideal worker is a masculine notion. An ideal worker is described as someone who demonstrates initiative, seeks high-profile assignments, communicates openly and directly about their career aspirations, ensures their contributions and accomplishments are visible to others, identifies to their supervisor both their skills and how they can positively contribute to the workplace, learns the political landscape and unwritten rules of the organization, is not constrained by familial obligations, and is not afraid to ask questions or for help (Crant, 2000; DeVos, Dewetticks & Buyens, 2008; Joo & Lim 2009). The gender biases that infiltrate employers' images of the ideal worker set the stage for biases in hiring and promotions by making cultural beliefs about gender status and gender skills implicitly salient and relevant to the evaluation of workers' qualifications (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 10). Carter and Silva (2011) showed that both women and men are equally likely to adopt proactive behaviours and strategies in the workplace, which are generally attributed to an ideal worker. However, men benefit more than women when they adopt these strategies. When women used the same career advancement strategies as men, they advanced more slowly than their male counterparts, and their pay increased at a slower pace. With masculine defaults, women and men encounter the same open door and while the initial access seems equal, the layout of the environment and the rules of the game are configured in ways that advantage men and disadvantage women (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1028). Women

in the fire service are determined, ambitious, and maintain perseverance through the obstacles encountered through personal career advancement (Majerowicz, 2018, p.135).

Hegemonic masculinity is the form of masculinity that is culturally dominant in a given setting. Men are likely aware of the perception of their male peers and as a result will strive to uphold the values and norms set by the workplace culture, especially in a male-dominated sector. This includes participating in masculinity contests to bolster their status (Reid et al., 2018). Firefighting is known to be associated with traditional values of hegemonic masculinity, including physical strength, technical competence, leadership, teamwork, and authority, along with heterosexuality, courage and aggression (Maleta, 2009). Adherence to hegemonic masculinity fosters environments which encourage the presentation of masculinity within workplace settings and within the broader overarching culture through rewarding the rejection of femininity and homosexuality (Berdahl et al., 2018). Although multiple masculinities exist (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), hegemonic masculinity is seen as the ideal and dominant form making all other forms subordinate. Endorsing socially accepted ideas of masculinity provides men with the social capital to access and enjoy opportunity, power, and status afforded by their willingness, knowingly or not, to buy into hegemonic masculinity (Pacholok, 2009). Gender subtext refers to power-based organizational and individual arrangements that produce and reproduce gender distinctions underlying the dominant organizational rhetoric, which typically emphasizes equality and equal opportunity (Benschop & Doorewaard 1998). The concept of the ideal worker, as well as gender subtext, impacts the individual experiences of men and women in the workplace. Years of research demonstrates that gender plays a significant role in the labour force.

Diversity Training

Educating people about their biases, also referred to as diversity training or unconscious bias training, has been widely adopted in male-dominated companies and departments (Lublin, 2014; Zarya, 2015). Diversity training is a type of organizational diversity initiative that can often elicit emotionally charged responses when educating

trainees about biases and disadvantages faced by marginalized groups (Bezrukova, Spell, Perry, & Jehn, 2016; Leslie, 2019). Bias education does not translate to large-scale changes to diversity in organizations (Chang et al., 2019; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006) and sometimes even backfires (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015). This means educating people about masculine defaults is not adequate without also making changes to other levels of organizational culture (Cheryan & Markus, 2020, p. 1033).

This dissertation demonstrates how firefighters perceived equity, diversity, and inclusion training as merely a corporate obligation, a checkbox to be ticked off rather than a meaningful learning experience. This perception often arises when the training is not effectively integrated into the broader organizational culture or fails to connect with the daily experiences and values of the employees. Consequently, the training, despite being disseminated efficiently (generally online), lacked engagement and resonance with the firefighters. It did not inspire them to reflect deeply on their behaviours or attitudes, which is crucial for such programs to have a lasting impact. In addition, the absence of any observable change in behaviour or cultural shift post-training, further exemplifies the ineffectiveness of this approach. For this type of training to be successful, it requires an ongoing commitment to cultural change, supported by continuous learning and practical application at all levels of the organization. Multiple firefighters from numerous fire services indicated that the diversity training failed to achieve its intended goals and did not lead to any substantial change in firefighters' behaviour or organizational culture. Despite training initiatives to promote diversity, respectful workplaces and to encourage anti-harassment and anti-discrimination, research has shown that discrimination lawsuits continue to be the main avenue of organizational learning and correction as a result of the consequence rendered (Hirsh & Cha, 2018, Agócs & Tucker, 2014).

Occupational Identity of Firefighting

Before exploring the complexities of the occupational identity of firefighting, it is crucial to understand the foundational elements that have shaped this profession throughout history. The Maltese cross, ubiquitous in firefighter culture, symbolizes the

valor, sacrifice, and traditional gendered ideals associated with firefighting. The Maltese Cross is a strong traditional symbol found on firefighter badges, belt buckles, uniforms, stickers on fire apparatus or integrated into the décor in the fire hall. The profession's emphasis on physical prowess, bravery, and proficiency with tools symbolizes the deeply ingrained expectations of occupational traits within this field. By examining the cultural and historical underpinnings, we gain insight into the multifaceted nature of firefighting as both a profession and a cultural institution. The characteristics culturally associated with this historically situated ideal of firefighters include: a celebration of masculine sacrifice; the evocation of moral behaviour; and finally, an unwavering commitment to hardness through discipline and exercise (Perrot, 2019, p. 1399).

Firefighting emphasizes bravery, youthfulness, ableism, and muscularity, which has resulted in a hero narrative that underpins contemporary conceptualizations of its ideal worker (Perrott, 2019, p. 1399). Male firefighters tend to be viewed as the embodiment of masculinity through the very nature of the high-risk, courageous work they complete (Berdahl et al., 2018). Representing the epitome of heroism, rationality, and safety, firefighting has, at its very core, a series of popular cultural beliefs and values which draw heavily upon key facets of hegemonic masculinity (Baigent, 2001; Cooper, 1995; Hall et al., 2007). As an occupation, firefighting is replete with images of maleness operating around a series of highly masculinised codes and values most notably comprising of willingness to face risk/danger, fearlessness/courage, physicality, and bodily strength (Thurnell-Read & Parker, 2008, p. 127). Most researchers investigating areas of risky work have suggested that the hallmarks of a good firefighter, police officer, or soldier are hyper-masculine traits, such as aggressiveness and toughness (Chetkovich, 1997; Manning, 1977). Throughout popular culture the iconic image of the male firefighter is one of quintessential bravery incorporating notions of heroism, facing danger and courage (Baigent, 2001; Childs et al., 2004). Firefighters became symbols of strength, solidarity and morality through emotionally charged images and various discourses of sacrifice and brotherhood and these images and ideals were disseminated around the world following the 2001 attack on the World Trade Centre (Collins, 2004).

While physical strength and courage are undoubtedly a necessity of the job, they are made prominent while other qualities, such as medical knowledge, team orientation, empathy, and compassion are downplayed (Hulett et al., 2008b; Bendersky, 2018). However, firefighters need to work as a team to achieve the objectives of a fire service which include protecting lives, property and the environment from the adverse effects of fire as well as responding to medical emergencies and other dangerous conditions. The job cannot be done alone, which means it requires a group of individuals working cohesively toward a common goal. Firefighters cannot fight a structure fire on their own or serve as the sole provider of emergency medical care. Firefighters are part of a team that are multitask-driven and operate in a very dynamic environment. Among firefighters, teamwork is key and within the crew, boisterous male sociability is valued, and an individual's performance is closely scrutinized (Hall, Hockey & Robinson, 2007, p. 541). Some men associate women's entry into the profession as disruptive, and an erosion of the fire service discipline, professionalism, and skill. Resistance based on stereotypical assessments about women's presumed ability to carry out firefighting's physical work and their impact to the social norms in the fire hall are some of the concerns raised by male firefighters, which creates conflict and resentment. Female firefighters represent change, which can be problematic for some men, and the women often bear the brunt of this resentment during organizational change as women are introduced into fire halls.

The design of the physical workspace, the equipment, training and standards and the culture of the fire station life are deeply reflective of the gender and white working-class backgrounds of its labour force (Braedley, 2009, p. 137). Fire stations once boasted a fraternity-house atmosphere, the men's "home away from home." Career firefighter shift work has evolved from the shift pattern of 10-hour days and 14 hours nights with recovery periods between. The 24-hour shift has become normative and pervasive for the career fire service in Ontario; thus, it is freely negotiated during collective agreement negotiations or is won through the arbitration system. With so much of one's time spent in the fire station and with work time encompassing aspects of domestic life such as cooking, cleaning, showering and sleeping, it is not surprising that

fire halls are often perceived by the firefighters as being very different from other workplaces.

Discipline and the Arbitration Process

In Canada, women's rights organizations have successfully mobilized the law to foster formal gender equality (Lepinard, 2010, p. 1763). Since the adding of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom to the Constitution Act 1982, the Canadian women's movement has been exceptionally successful in challenging previous legal understandings of gender equality and proposing new theoretical insights that have changed the legal doctrine in that field (Manfredi, 2004; Morton & Allen, 2001; Women's Legal Education and Action Fund [LEAF], 1996). Canadian feminists have sought both to influence the drafting of the Charter, in other words, the rules of the game; and to foster and implement through litigation the new legal doctrine they helped to craft (Manfredi, 2004).

The Canadian labour movement has actively integrated "women's issues" such as pay equity, comprehensive family leaves, childcare, equal opportunities, and a harassment-free work environment into their bargaining agenda, which also help improve women's employment conditions (Kumar & Acri, 1992, p. 624). To define organizational norms and standards, policies are created, implemented, and enforced. With a lack of policies, employees may define their own set of acceptable behaviours, which may not be aligned to the values of the organization. Employers have a statutory duty to provide a safe and healthy workplace free from harassment (Robichaud v. Canada, 1987). The Occupational Health and Safety Act, and legislation such as Violence and Harassment in the Workplace, implore employers to maintain a safe workplace. The Canadian Human Rights Commission defines harassment as "any behaviour that demeans, humiliates or embarrasses a person, [. . .] which] a reasonable person should have known would be unwelcome" (2006, p. 3). According to the Supreme Court of Canada, workplace sexual harassment is the "unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature that detrimentally affects the work environment or leads to

adverse, job-related consequences for the victim of harassment” (Janzen v. Platy Enterprises Ltd., 1989, p. 3). Despite legislation and a significant body of case law aimed at preventing sexual harassment, it persists in Canada, with women being the most affected group. And while women are sexually harassed in both female and male dominated workplaces, such occurrences are more frequent in traditionally male work environments such as construction, the trades, and the uniformed services (Hodges, 2006; O’Melveny, 2001).

Bad behaviour calls for consequences when it is institutionally recognized as being in contravention of law, corporate policies or detrimental to the workplace culture. Corporate policies prohibit behaviours associated with bullying, harassment and other unacceptable misconduct. The level of bullying in an organization depends in large part on the organization’s standard operating procedures, norms of behaviour, and rules of conduct delineating what is acceptable and unacceptable actions (Thompson Heames, Harvey & Treadway, 2006). The literature reviewed shows that bullying is occurring largely against women firefighters and newcomers (Chetkovich, 2004; Gouliquer et al, 2020, Jahnke et al, 2019, Coyne et al, 2004). Acceptable behaviour, by contrast, aligns with corporate policies, human rights, and other protective legislative measures, as well as workplace values that promote a culture of respect, inclusivity, and professionalism. Adhering to these principles ensures a workplace that upholds fairness, equity, and the well-being of all individuals.

Fairness and corrective discipline are fundamental to Canadian arbitral jurisprudence, requiring employers to prove just cause for any discipline without contributing to the misconduct through action or inaction. Employers can choose to discipline misconduct, but unions tend to respond with a grievance and the discipline often is subject to the review of arbitrators empowered to interpret and apply employers’ policies under a collective bargaining agreement or an employment arbitration program (Hickox & Kaminski, 2021, p. 399). Labour arbitrations are dispute resolution mechanisms in grievance procedures available in unionized workplaces, safeguarding the workers’ rights. Canadian labour laws incorporate the right to a grievance procedure including binding arbitration where arbitrators must interpret and apply human rights legislation (Hart, 2012, p. 269).

Haiven (2006) assessed the effectiveness of zero-tolerance sexual harassment policies in a unionized environment and found that the union's defence of the alleged harasser in an adversarial context made them difficult to implement. While employers rely on corporate policies in administering discipline, it is an arbitrator's review of the employer's appropriateness of penalties and rendered discipline compared to the severity of the conduct and context, which will determine whether the bully/harasser's discipline is upheld, revised or rescinded. Discharge is a last resort after an employee has been granted the opportunity for improvement, an expectation that has long been enshrined in arbitral principles. A worker cannot be fired for a single incident unless (1) it is a "culminating incident" following several reprimands for similar offences, or (2) the incident itself constitutes "gross misconduct," an incident so injurious employer's interests that dismissal is the only option (Haiven, 2006, p. 169). Arbitrators' decisions must move beyond the misdemeanor itself to assess the circumstances of a grievance including the impact of any remedy on the grievor and the workplace (Hart, 2012, p. 269). Arbitrators will consider the following factors when determining the suitability of progressive discipline rendered. This includes whether (1) the employer gave the employee sufficient notice or warning of the disciplinary consequences of their conduct, (2) the employer's rules were reasonably related to the business (3) the employer investigated the employee's action prior to administering discipline, 4) the employer conducted its investigation fairly and objectively and obtained substantial proof that the employee was guilty of the misconduct, 5) the employer applied its rules in an even-handed manner to all employees, and 6) the discipline was proportional to the severity of the employee's conduct and was reasonable in light of the employee's work record (Crain, 1995, p. 52). While it is not the arbitrator's role to substitute their judgment for that of management, the examples described later in chapter 5 would demonstrate otherwise.

Municipalities create policies to guide the behaviour of their personnel. When there is a breach of policy, leaders may apply coaching and cautionary warnings documented in a personnel file, or discipline in a consistent and impartial manner proportionate to the severity of the transgression. The collective bargaining agreement explicitly recognizes that discipline imposed on an employee is subject to the grievance

procedure. When the fire association (union) disagrees with the discipline, they enact the grievance process outlined in the collective bargaining agreement which protects bullies and other alleged perpetrators against unwarranted discipline. The union files a grievance, which is a written complaint alleging that a collective agreement has been violated. If a mutually agreeable outcome can not be reached between the association and the employer through the grievance process outlined in the collective agreement, then either party can file for grievance mediation or grievance arbitration as per the Fire Protection and Prevention Act (FPPA), 1997, under section 53. Sometimes the arbitration dates are set a year or longer into the future, so there is the option to file under expedited appointment under the FPPA, 1997, section 53.0.1.

Arbitration has been criticized as a means to enforce employee rights, and some employers (municipalities) have suggested that grievance arbitrators' handling of employee discipline cases in the fire service tends to be biased in favour of the employees and against the employer. Furthermore, it could be argued that the private sector has a lot more ownership over the consequences rendered through a discipline process, as compared to the public sector. Associations use the arbitration process when they are seeking to have the discipline of their member reduced or completely overturned. The Minister of Labour stated in the Standing Committee proceedings (Campolieti & Riddell, 2020, p. 216):

“The idea here is to create deliberately some uncertainty for the parties as they enter into this process to encourage them to negotiate an outcome rather than to rely on arbitration. The idea here is that both parties should face some risk if they enter into this process, if they give up on negotiation, in a sense, and turn to the interest arbitration system for resolution of their collective agreement, that they should face some uncertainty as to how exactly it would be resolved. (Legislative Assembly of Ontario 1997)

Mediation can be defined as “where an impartial third party, the mediator, helps two or more people in dispute attempt to reach an agreement” (Acas/CIPD, 2013, p. 8). The profile of mediation as an alternative method for resolving individual workplace disputes has increased in recent years, as dissatisfaction with traditional rights-based

disputes procedures and the cost of litigation over employment issues has grown (Latreille & Saundry, 2014; Lipsky, Avgar, Lamare, & Gupta, 2012). Mediation-arbitration (med-arb) is a hybrid dispute resolution process that includes a mediation stage, in which a third-party attempt to resolve a bargaining or grievance impasse, and, if an impasse remains after mediation, an arbitration phase, in which an arbitrator issues a binding award that resolves the bargaining impasse (Campolieti & Riddell, 2020, p. 211). Under the FPPA, the mediator and arbitrator (the neutral in the tripartite board) is the same individual.

The med-arb has been argued to be attractive principally because: 1) mediation offers another opportunity for the parties to resolve the dispute and reach voluntary settlement; 2) if the mediator is trusted, the parties may view the award as more fair in the event arbitration is necessary; and 3) the time spent in mediation may, by giving the neutral person the information they would normally need to compile in a hearing, reduce the time spent in the arbitration process (Campolieti & Riddell, 2020, p. 215).

The med-arb process is not without its downfalls and risk. Most industrial relations criticisms include the following: 1) Incentives to share information - with the neutral playing both roles, there may an incentive to withhold information at the mediation stage if a party believes it will weaken its case in arbitration; 2) Coercion - any settlement suggestion by the mediator may be perceived to be an imposed one, thereby casting doubt on the ability of the mediator to mediate in the true interest of assisting with a voluntary settlement (i.e., the notion of med-arb being “mediation with muscle” or “mediation with a club”); and 3) Confidentiality - the notion that awards may be deemed as unfair if the neutral is perceived to utilize confidential information obtained in caucus, as would not occur under conventional arbitration (Campolieti & Riddell, 2020, p. 215).

If a member of the fire management team fails to provide formal coaching, warning, or discipline to a firefighter when corrective action is warranted, their failure can perpetuate unacceptable misconduct by signaling to employees that supervisors and the employer tolerate the behaviour. As Griffith et al. (2016) stated, norms in the workplace can serve to normalize, justify and perpetuate inappropriate behaviours (p. 36). When policies are ignored, employees have difficulties understanding where the boundaries lie between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. This also makes toxic

and dysfunctional employees believe they are untouchable, influencing the morale of those who work alongside these problematic colleagues. If there is a history of not coaching, documenting behaviour and holding employees accountable through a discipline process, new leadership can be disadvantaged by an arbitration system that considers past misconduct, or lack thereof, as part of the outcome in an award, because they won't be able to demonstrate detrimental behaviour patterns. If an employer's policy notifies its employees that bullying behaviour will not be tolerated, and that rule is related to the employer's interests and is enforced consistently, then arbitrators will rely on that policy to uphold the discipline imposed on a bully by the employer (Hickox & Kaminski, 2021, p. 435). Arbitration is limited depending on the effectiveness of the particular policy, providing notice to employees that any violation of the policy may result in discipline, up to and including termination, along with consistent application and enforcement.

The standard of behaviour in the fire hall is strongly influenced by what is tolerated by the station Captain, who is a unionized member. When issues are escalated, they often are dealt with by a higher unionized rank, such as District Chief or Platoon Chief. Because the issues are member-to-member, there is often a desire to resolve the issues in-house without bringing it to the attention of management or human resources. This prevents both the financial costs of union representation and the potential discipline outcomes that could result. Management may only hear the concerns if issues reach a boiling point. The complexities of navigating issues in a highly unionized environment where the dual role of unions, although protective, can sometimes complicate the pursuit of justice for victims.

Every local union has its own culture, shaped by the surrounding society but more particularly by the people who founded it, led it, participated in it, and dominated it (Crain, 1995, p. 30). Therefore, the cultural practices of the union representing a specific individual are the most accurate indicator of how it will react to a woman's complaint of sexual harassment. Unions are aware of their duty to fairly represent their members and will attempt to address issues of harassment among members internally. Some union stewards dissuade women from reporting sexual harassment by colleagues, citing the challenges of substantiation and the supposed absence of

"concrete details" in the women's accounts. This approach aims to prevent placing employees in a position where one or more union members may face disciplinary actions from their employer. Alternatively, if the employer has already taken disciplinary measures against the accused harasser, the union might lodge grievances on behalf of both the accused and the complainant, ensuring that each party has its own representation. Some women may hesitate to report harassment, fearing retaliation by the accused or other colleagues. The degrading and gender-biased cross-examination of women in arbitration, which assesses their credibility against their harassers, often results in their re-victimization, highlighting the need for unions and their lawyers to consider the ethical implications of their arguments and tactics, and their broader impact on women's rights in the workplace (Hart, 2012). Additionally, women who feel unsupported by their management or union might be hesitant to encourage others to come forward with their grievances and could even discourage others from reporting if their own experiences were negative, in an effort to shield others from similar ordeals.

The foundational understanding of the principles of the arbitration process has been established as an essential framework for navigating the complex landscape of labour relations within the Fire Services in Ontario. By examining these elements, the research demonstrates how disciplinary measures and grievances are handled, exploring real-life applications and ramifications of these principles through the lens of legal precedents and personal narratives, such as those of female firefighters who have courageously faced and reported harassment. This approach not only bridges the gap between theoretical constructs and practical applications but also highlights the critical role of legal frameworks in shaping a safe and equitable work environment.

Occupational Culture of Firefighting

In the fire service, an operations firefighter is a person willing to wear personal protective equipment such as bunker gear and a self-contained breathing apparatus and enter a burning building, putting their life on the line for another. It does not matter whether that firefighter is a man or a woman, as long as they effectively carry out their professional duties. By categorizing the firefighter as a female firefighter to denote the

gender demonstrates the “othering” within the profession. Otherness and identity are constructed using opposing binary categories such as man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, or in-group/out-group (Paechter, 1998; Bannerji, 2000; Gingrich, 2004; Staszak, 2008; Jensen, 2011; Paragg, 2015). Gender neutrality when describing those who work in the fire service profession as “firefighters” opposed to “firemen” is consistent with the values of equality.

Attempting to shift perceived mindsets within fire services can be a major challenge as the number of female firefighters increase in the workforce (Ferguson, 2003). Research demonstrates that multiple factors have impeded women’s integration into firefighting and other non-traditional occupations (Wang & Kleiner, 2001; Yoder & Aniakudo, 2001; Batty & Burchielli 2011; Gouliquer, 2011; Sinden et al., 2013; Poulin et al., 2018). The culture of the fire service can be unsupportive and even hostile to individuals from marginalized groups (Jahnke et al., 2019; Jahnke, 2017; Hulett et al., 2008b; Griffith et al., 2016; Yoder & Berendsen, 2001). Extensive research identifies a work culture that is not welcoming to women showing that they are often met with heightened, elaborate performances of masculinity in conjunction with the denial of feminine-associated characteristics and culture (e.g., teasing and devaluing motions) that are both threatening and demeaning to women (Batty & Burchielli, 2011; Ainsworth et al., 2014). In multiple studies (Yoder & Aniakudo, 1996; Yoder & Aniakudo, 1997; Yoder & Berendsen, 2001; Sinden et al., 2013; Ainsworth et al., 2014; Poulin et al., 2018), women reported feeling purposefully ignored by their men counterparts, having to hide weaknesses, and not being able to seek help without scrutiny. Resistance to women firefighters in the traditional fire service was focused on precisely these grounds, as they were counterpoised to men as physically weaker, less valuable, but also sexually available; a characterization that fed into an understanding that more women in the organization would disrupt its culture, safety standards and service quality (Woodfield, 2016, p. 240).

The fire service has an occupational culture based on tradition that reflects the unusual amount of time co-workers spend together in a fire station. Crews prepare and eat meals, clean the hall, sleep in the same dorm and respond to emergency incidents. As a result, they are often described as, and often describe themselves as a fire service

family. While these tight-knit groups have many positive benefits for those who are included, those who do not fit in are often isolated from the group and may face backlash as an outsider (Akabas, 2010; Yoder & Berendsen, 2001). Fire services are para-military institutions (Hulett et al., 2008b; Poulin et al., 2018), with a strong heterosexual undertone (Ainsworth, Batty & Burchielli 2014). Factors such as race, sexual discrimination, and harassment have negatively contributed to women's overall acceptance and inclusion in the profession of firefighting (Yoder & Aniakudo, 1996; Yoder & Aniakudo, 1997; Yoder & Berendsen, 2001). However, women with non-heterosexual orientations such as those who identify as lesbian or bisexual may be stereotypically perceived as possessing more masculine traits and capabilities and thus, generally accepted as pseudo-men (Gouliquer, Poulin, McWilliams, 2020, p. 55). Some participants in this research said that lesbians had an easier time being accepted by their male colleagues than overtly heterosexual women. Lesbians may find it easier than heterosexual women to be accepted into the "watch culture," in which "masculinity" is highly prized and fitting in with colleagues is seen as essential for performing the job safely (Wright, 2008, p. 103). Chetkovich's (1997) study of race and gender in a US fire service noted that a number of the women firefighters were openly lesbian, something which was both advantageous and disadvantageous. On the positive side, an open lesbian was able to tease and joke with her colleagues without suggesting that she was open to sexual advances, but on the negative side the environment was socially conservative and homophobic with implicit critiques of homosexuality as a frequent topic of humour. Women's sexual orientation was also a subject of gossip in ways that men's was not.

In conclusion the existing literature on women in non-traditional jobs establishes a critical framework for analyzing the challenges for the Fire Services in Ontario regarding gender-based occupational segregation, the impact of societal and cultural norms on career choices, and the strategies to achieving a more inclusive and equitable workforce. The current research suggests that achieving gender equality in the workforce requires a concerted effort to challenge and redefine the societal norms and institutional practices that perpetuate gender disparities. This review also identifies gaps in the literature and areas for future research. It calls for more empirical studies to better

understand the complexities of gender dynamics in non-traditional occupations and the effectiveness of strategies aimed at facilitating the integration and advancement of women in these fields.

Unveiling New Horizons: Contributions, Gaps, and Future Directions in Gender Dynamics and Organizational Culture within the Fire Service

By centering the experiences of female firefighters in Ontario, this research amplifies voices that have historically been marginalized within the fire service. It provides a platform for these voices to articulate the nuanced stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices that contribute to a less inclusive and sometimes unsupportive work environment for women. This dissertation operationalizes the feminist standpoint theory within a specific, male-dominated professional context, demonstrating how this theoretical framework can be applied to uncover and analyze gender dynamics, power relations, and organizational culture in the fire service. Through in-depth qualitative analysis, the research offers insights into how gendered norms and biases shape the experiences of women in firefighting and how these dynamics contribute to career barriers, shaping both the perception and reality of women's work in the fire service. There exists a significant gap in empirical research focusing on the lived experiences of female firefighters. This study addresses this gap by providing detailed, qualitative insights into the gender-based challenges and dynamics within the Fire Services in Ontario. By applying feminist standpoint theory, this research enhances our understanding of how gender is embedded in organizational structures and processes. The research refines the area of intersectionality by exploring how different social identities (i.e. race, sexuality, age) intersect with gender to influence the professional experiences of firefighters. It contributes to a more nuanced understanding of intersectionality within the context of firefighting. The findings point to the need for further research on effective inclusion strategies that address the unique challenges faced by women in male-dominated fields, particularly in emergency services. This introduces new avenues for inquiry into organizational change, policy development, and leadership practices that promote gender equity. Given my unique position as a Fire

Chief, the dissertation suggests an expanded area of inquiry regarding the impact of leadership on gender dynamics within male-dominated professions. Future research could explore how leadership styles, policies, and practices influence the inclusion and advancement of women in firefighting.

Chapter 4: Theoretical Approach and Methodology

To comprehend the complexities and implications of the gender shift within the firefighting profession, and to enrich scholarly research, I conducted interviews with both women and men firefighters. Through these interviews, they have shared personal narratives and firsthand experiences, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities inherent in the firefighting occupation. Incorporating the perspectives of both genders, this dissertation contributes to a more comprehensive and nuanced body of knowledge, offering a well-rounded understanding of the multifaceted dynamics within the fire service. By unraveling gendered perceptions, the dissertation reveals valuable insights about the gender-based workplace dynamics within the Fire Services in Ontario. Through the exploration of nuanced stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices, it sheds light on the ways in which these factors contribute to a less inclusive and sometimes unsupportive environment for women firefighters. This examination directly addresses the dissertation question, providing a thorough understanding of the challenges faced by women in the fire service and laying the groundwork for potential strategies to foster greater equity and inclusivity.

This chapter presents the theoretical framework and methodology I employed in conducting research on gendered-based workplace dynamics within firefighting, uncovering ways in which nuanced stereotypes, bias and discriminatory practices contribute to a less inclusive and sometimes unsupportive environment for women in the Fire Services in Ontario. The purpose of the chapter is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the study was conducted, ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings.

Theoretical Framework – Feminist Standpoint Theory

This dissertation draws on standpoint theory to understand the woman firefighter's perspective within male-dominated professions. Standpoint theory asserts that the perspectives and experiences of people who are marginalized, oppressed, or belong to historically excluded or underrepresented groups in society are essential for understanding social dynamics and structures. Feminist literature emphasizes the importance of identifying and attending to the researcher's social location and identity. As the researcher and as a Fire Chief, my standpoint reflects a unique experience and can provide valuable insight into the gender dynamics, existing power relations and social structures of the Fire Services in Ontario. Feminist standpoint theory offers both a theoretical perspective to provide the foundation for this research and a method for studying gender in the Fire Services in Ontario. It amplifies the voices of women and centres them in the dissertation. Standpoint recognizes that gender is a social construct, and is a position based on social location that influences how one interprets the world, how we socially construct our world, or how our society socially constructs us. Standpoint theory provides the framework for understanding systems of power and privilege in society. It focuses on how an individual's life circumstances influence how that person perceives and constructs a social world (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005). Those who occupy positions on the "margins" of society, people who identify as women, racialized, members of the LGBTQ2+ community, disabled or other under-represented groups, experience systemic oppression and discrimination differently than those in more privileged positions in society. By applying this theoretical framework, as the researcher I can critically analyze how gendered norms, biases, and expectations influence the experience of women in firefighting and how the organizational and social structures and practices within the Fire Services in Ontario contribute to gender dynamics and disparities.

Sandra Harding (1997) argues that by incorporating the perspectives of marginalized groups, researchers can gain a better understanding of the subjects they are researching. She asserts that the central concern of feminist standpoint theory is that different social locations "tend to generate distinctive accounts of nature and social

relations” (Harding, 1997, p. 384). Standpoint theory highlights the significance of marginalized perspectives in understanding and challenging societal structures and power dynamics. The voices of those on the margins can provide critical insights into how power and privilege operate within a society. By emphasizing the unique experiences and insights of marginalized groups, these voices can provide critical insights into how power and privilege operate within society. Standpoint theory serves as a tool to challenge dominant narratives and reveal the complexities of social hierarchies and power relations. By challenging dominant narratives and structures, these viewpoints inherently reveal the hidden mechanisms of power and privilege, contesting prevailing ideologies and exposing the workings of societal power dynamics. These insights are necessary because they provide a perspective on how power operates in society and how social structures are constructed and exist. The standpoint theory ensures that the voice of the marginalized is heard and shows how it is juxtaposed with those in more privileged positions in society. The marginalized viewpoint can help challenge the dominant ways of thinking about the world and also exposes the ways in which power, privilege, social structures and power dynamics operates in society.

According to Harding (1997), the accounts of the less powerful provides insights into how power operates and reveals differences between what is “claimed” to be true and what people actually experience (Martin, Reynolds & Keiths, 2002, p. 669). Although there are multiple and distinct feminist standpoint theories, “they are all grounded in one central and founding idea: knowledge is socially located and arises in social positions that are structured by power relations,” (Hallstein, 1999, p. 32). Using this method in research acknowledges that gender intersects with other social categories such as race, class, sexuality, and socioeconomic status, which can provide more accurate and comprehensive findings that reflects the diversity of human experiences, especially in research where the dominant perspective has excluded or minimized those in marginalized groups. This theory was selected because it offers a more inclusive and nuanced lens that can address the specific career barriers women face, with a greater understanding of gender in the Fire Services in Ontario.

I apply gender organizational theory devised by Joan Acker to analyze how systemic inequalities are produced and reproduced in workplace organizations (Acker, 2012). According to Acker (1992), processes that divide the organization support the notion that hierarchies are gendered. Informal interactions while 'doing the work' have been highlighted by Acker (2006) as one of the organizing processes that produce inequalities of gender, race and class in work organizations. Sexuality and gender play a pivotal role in the sustainability of such hierarchical structures within the organization. Acker's framework complements standpoint analysis as it aims to uncover the hidden gender assumptions operating in organizations that disadvantage women and minorities. Acker asserts that gender is so embedded in the structure of organizations that the extent to which it shapes lives, experiences, and opportunities often goes unrecognized.

bell hooks (1984) argues that it is essential for researchers to demonstrate reflexivity, acknowledging their social location and how it shapes their perspectives and biases. In her book "Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre" (1984), Hooks notes that researchers who come from marginalized groups have different experiences and perspectives compared to the more privileged or dominant groups. bell hooks urges researchers to acknowledge their own social positions and the biases inherent in them, which could potentially influence their perspectives and the outcomes of their research. hooks' argument for reflexivity is crucial for acknowledging how one's social location influences perspectives and biases, which aligns with the foundational principles of feminist research.

As a woman in the fire service, a field that is predominantly male, my own experiences and perspectives are shaped by intersecting social factors, including gender and professional environment. bell hooks (1984) challenge the traditional, often narrow, perspectives on gender by highlighting how race, class, and other social factors intersect with gender. This intersectional approach is essential for a more holistic understanding of gender issues. By addressing the experiences of marginalized groups, hooks disrupts the conventional focus on gender as an isolated category and urges researchers to consider the broader context of social inequalities.

In the fire service, my experiences reflect the very intersections hooks discusses. Her emphasis on reflexivity and acknowledging one's social position ensures a more nuanced and inclusive analysis, which is vital for the integrity and depth of feminist research. Therefore, using bell hooks' framework allows me to explore gender in a way that is both comprehensive and critically engaged with the complexities of social identities, while also reflecting my own lived experiences as a woman in the fire service. As a white woman and Fire Chief, my identity and rank could significantly shape the methodology and interpretation of my research. Acknowledging my social location is crucial, as it influences how I perceive and engage with issues of race, class, sexuality, and other social identities. According to hooks, critically reflecting on our social location allows us to understand the biases and privileges inherent in our identities. For instance, if I acknowledge my privilege as being the rank of a Fire Chief, I may be more attuned to the systemic inequalities others face, becoming a more effective in looking for ways to solve those issues. Understanding and acknowledging my social location can also be empowering, providing me with a clearer sense of my potential to effect change. By situating myself within a broader social context, I can better strategize ways to challenge and transform oppressive structures. This is a critical step towards fostering more equitable and just fire service, as it encourages me to reflect on my biases, engage authentically with others, and leverage my agency to challenge systemic inequalities.

Reflexivity is essential in this context addressing how my identity and position might shape interactions and interpretations within the research. For instance, my role could impact the willingness of firefighters to speak candidly, particularly on sensitive issues that were discussed with the interviewees, such as gender and workplace dynamics. I found the flexibility of my interview techniques greatly enhanced the richness of the data collected, allowing the conversation to evolve naturally based on participants' responses.

bell hooks' feminist theory is useful when exploring intersectionality of social identities such as race, class and sexuality, by asking probing questions into how the firefighter perceives how these identities intersect and influence their lived experience. For example, in this research a white lesbian firefighter describes facing different

challenges and experiences than her white heterosexual male colleague. While hooks explores power dynamics in society, this research looks at power dynamics from a lens of gender inequality, formal rank hierarchies within the department, and unequal access to professional development and promotional opportunities. Firefighters explain how these power dynamics contribute to discrimination, harassment, and other forms of mistreatment. This dissertation, much like hooks' work, emphasizes personal narratives and experiences as a way to understand larger social issues. One goal of this research is to amplify the voices of the firefighters, especially women, who have historically been marginalized in the fire service.

I began my career as an elementary school teacher in 1998 but lacking personal satisfaction and discovering that my chosen profession fell short of my initial expectation, I looked to transition to a different profession. Originally, I thought I would like to become a police officer, but the fire service was hiring at the same time, so I put in applications to both services, and was successful at securing a job as a firefighter. In June 2001, I embarked on my professional journey as a recruit firefighter, marking the beginning of my career in the fire service. Moving through the classification ranks of a firefighter, I chose to compete in several promotional routines, which allowed me to hold the positions of Training Officer, Acting Captain and Captain. Throughout my tenure, I had the privilege of serving on various technical rescue teams, where I gained invaluable experience and expertise. I have worked at a heavy rescue hall that performed trench rescue, on a rescue (squad) crew that performed water rescue, auto extrication, and low angle rope rescue. I also worked at a hall that conducted high angle stokes basket rescue and low angle rope rescue, and I worked out of a hazardous materials hall. My career has provided me with exposure to a diverse set of firefighting and rescue skills. Shift work provided the flexibility to teach at both the college and university level in the fields of firefighting and emergency management.

When the Deputy Fire Chief position was posted to fill a vacancy in my fire department, I went to see my Fire Chief Larry Bentley and stated I would be applying to compete in the promotional competition. "I'm not sold on the idea," he truthfully replied. "You don't have to be," I stated simply with a shrug, "that is what the interview is for." The fire service is staunch in tradition and hierarchy. With only three months in the role

as Captain, if I was successful, it would mean leapfrogging over the Platoon Chief role, unheard of at that time. I survived five different rounds of screening and interviews. When I was hired as a Deputy Fire Chief, there were approximately 441 fire services in the province, but only three other female Chief Officers (Deputies) in the career fire service. I recognized my boss (the Fire Chief) would now be under the microscope regarding the choice that he made for his number two position. I will always credit Fire Chief Bentley with the foresight to see my potential as a Chief Officer. He spent six years mentoring me to prepare me to compete for the Fire Chief role in the City of Vaughan in 2018. As a Deputy, I got very involved at a Provincial level with the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs, and held both a Board of Director position and Vice President position, where I sat on several Provincial committees to comment on new legislation, regulations, and fire codes including; standpipe systems, combustible cladding on high buildings, combustible furniture located in lobbies, notification for out of service firefighters' elevators, and cannabis legislation. At the Board level, I chaired the Provincial Advisory Committee, the O AFC Health and Safety Committee (including the Section 21 representatives) and the O AFC Fire Prevention and Public Education Committee. As a Fire Chief, I have been an active member of on the diversity, equity and inclusion committee for the Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs and held both a committee member and committee chair role for the Human Relations committee for the International Association of Fire Chiefs. I have spoken locally, nationally and internationally on topics ranging from leadership to active shooter. I also write on a range of fire service-related topics locally, nationally and internationally. I have received a number of awards throughout my career, most notably the WXN Canada's 100 Most Powerful Women which was featured in the Financial Post magazine, and the Lieutenant Governor's Award of Distinction in Public Administration, awarded to one public servant who has demonstrated exemplary leadership in the Province every year.

My perspective is shaped by my social position and experiences within the fire service, and my position as a Fire Chief. My experience in the field provides me with a unique standpoint from which to approach this research. My position provides me with knowledge on how and where access to information, data, and key stakeholders within the fire service. This credibility helped to facilitate in-depth interviews with fire service

personnel from various ranks. Firefighters were open and honest, as they knew that I too would have faced career barriers, difficult interactions, as well as career achievements and disappointments. Their recollections offer incredibly insightful findings. My experience as a Fire Chief means I possess firsthand knowledge of the organization structure, culture and day-to-day operations of the fire service, which helped me interpret and contextualize the data. It allows me to recognize nuances and subtleties that might be missed by an outsider, which provides a richer and more informed analysis.

Standpoint theory acknowledges the importance of giving voice to marginalized groups and as both a researcher and Fire Chief I have access, credibility, insider knowledge, and the opportunity to amplify the voices of firefighters from diverse backgrounds who have faced unique challenges in their career. My position allows my dissertation findings to be well-informed, insightful, and influential in addressing and mitigating less inclusive or unsupportive work cultures within the fire service.

A firefighter does not leave their gender at the door upon entering a fire hall. In this dissertation, standpoint theory helps me to explore how firefighters experience their place of work and express their thoughts about their workplace through their situated knowledge. A standpoint is not just the outcome of an accumulation of experiences but requires reflections on those experiences. Standpoint theory interrogates the relations between knowledge production and power (Harding, 2004). Standpoint theory is operationalized as the firefighter's cognizant observations are captured, including their experience of acceptance by colleagues and the public, how they maneuver through recruitment, classification and promotional routines, their work culture, job satisfaction, career development and awareness of self and others. This study involves questioning both male and female firefighters about workplace interactions and experiences, such as exclusion and harassment, how this experience makes them feel personally and what they think about their profession. This highlights the importance of epistemology that is derived from the firefighter's individual experiences. Feminist standpoint theory does not contend that knowledge from women's standpoint is superior to knowledge from men's standpoint, only that it differs and that using it will improve our understanding of the social world (Harding, 1991; Collins, 1998).

Gender inequalities can be evident in a household, but the world of paid work and careers is also a leading battleground of the forces that work to undermine gender inequality and those that act to reproduce it (Ridgeway, 2011, p. 2). Using feminist standpoint theory, questions were asked of male and female firefighters to determine if they are similarly conscious of gender inequality and observant of the gender-biased processes. This research reveals that multiple versions of reality exist depending on a group's location within largely male dominated and hierarchical social contexts (Hallstein, 1999). Standpoint theory begins with the understanding that all knowledge is socially situated and seeks to illuminate the relationship between systems of power and knowledge production (Collins, 1990; Harding, 1998; Hartsock, 2004; Sprague, 2005). A tenet of feminist standpoint theory is that women's subordinate status in the sex-gender system leads to experiences that may produce a feminist consciousness about gender (Martin, Reynolds & Keiths, 2002, p. 670). Standpoint theorists have offered explanations for why the position of women can be qualitatively different from that of men (Hallstein, 1999). Since a standpoint specifies a relationship to power, one way to understand how power works is to learn from the standpoints of the less powerful (Martin, Reynolds & Keiths, 2002, p. 670). Haraway (1988) and Smiths' (1999) coined a term known as "situated knowledge" which is the foundation of what we know, that is grounded in context and circumstances and is socially situated. Standpoint theory examines the nature and origins of knowledge and stresses that knowledge is always socially situated, and in societies stratified by gender, race and class, one's social positions must shape what one can know and informs how we make sense of the world around us.

There are some key assumptions within standpoint theory. The first is that an individual's social location, which includes their social identity, experiences, and the social contexts they inhabit, shapes their perspectives, knowledge, understanding of social relations and relationships. Applying this concept to my position as a Fire Chief, I hold a specific rank (social location) within the organizational structure of the fire service and the broader community which I serve, which is influenced by my experience, my leadership position and my authority for decision-making. I am part of the organizational culture, and I interact with numerous stakeholders, which include municipal colleagues,

residents, the business community, religious and spiritual leaders, politicians, the union, community associations, cultural organizations, philanthropists, and many others. These and many other factors mean that my standpoint differs from that of a firefighter, a civilian, or a person in a different leadership position, due to the varying social locations we each have.

Subordinate groups have a clearer vision of who the dominant group is and the resulting power dynamics, as opposed to the dominant group's self-perception. Standpoint means that people and their positionality might afford power in one's social location. Another component that is central to standpoint theory is that those who are marginalized have a deeper and more accurate perspective of what a situation actually is. The predominant culture in which people exist is not experienced in the same way by all people or groups. Those with power and privilege may know little about the lives of those marginalised, oppressed, or subordinated. The views of those who belong to groups with more social power are often validated more than those in marginalized groups.

The concept that knowledge is socially situated, particularly in the context of marginalized groups, is rooted in the idea that different social positions provide distinct perspectives and experiences. Marginalized groups, due to their unique experiences with oppression and exclusion, often develop a heightened awareness of certain aspects of society, especially those related to power dynamics and inequality. This awareness can lead to unique insights.

All standpoints are partial, but the standpoint of people who rule or who are in power can be harmful to those in subordinate groups. Those in power maintain structures that disempower and remove choice from subordinate groups and subordinate groups struggle to realize their vision of social life. For those in power, understanding how power works can be more complex. Power often works by maintaining the status quo. People in positions of power benefit from the existing structures and may not be incentivized to question or make critical changes. This research acknowledges that when uncovering the impact of power relations, starting with the voices of the marginalized provides critical insights into the workings of power that are often invisible to those who benefit from them. By centering these voices, the

hidden dynamics and prevailing narratives become evident, leading to a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of social structures and power relations.

The use of feminist standpoint theory can be complex and challenging because it lacks a clear definition. Standpoint ranges in definition from being a perspective to being a socially situated subject of knowledge (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 331). Standpoint cannot be reduced solely to a “perspective on social reality” (Rolin, 2009, p.224), and it does not automatically arise from a particular social location (Intemann, 2010).

As Patricia Hill Collins (1997) wrote: *Standpoint theory argues that groups who share common placement in hierarchical power relations also share such common experiences in such power relations. Such shared angles of vision lead those in similar social locations to be predisposed to interpret these experiences in a comparable fashion. The existence of the group as the unit of analysis neither means that all individuals within the group have the same experiences nor that they interpret them in the same way. Using the group as the focal point provides space for individual agency* (p. 377).

This research explores how individual experiences differ due to intersecting oppressions produced by social, structural, political, historical, and environmental conditions that they experience. Standpoint theory is a useful analytical tool to begin inquiry, and key concepts have been operationalised in reconfiguring feminist research (Harding, 2004; Changfoot, 2004; Reynolds, 2002; Hawkesworth, 1999, p. 136).

Feminist standpoint theory “places the life experiences of marginalized groups at the center of the research project. It then directs the view of the researcher toward the social structures that shape the lives of the group members” (Swigonski, 1994, p. 387). This research seeks to understand some of the social structures that shape the working lives and lived experiences of female firefighters and highlights the ongoing workplace challenges uniquely faced by women in firefighting. It reveals that these barriers are not inherently created by their gender, but rather, women are positioned into a subordinate role as a result of the multifaceted nature of systemic, historical, and social factors. These dynamics, which are distinct from the experiences of their male colleagues, demonstrate the need for a deeper understanding of gender-based disparities in this field.

Women can be more conscious than men of gender inequality because they occupy a devalued gender status and, as a result, have more negative experiences (Martin, Reynolds & Keiths, 2002, p. 665). Utilizing the feminist standpoint theory can lead to a better understanding of the inherent conflicts women face as they continue to search for their place and position in a workplace (Dougherty & Krone, 2000). Standpoint theory, which considers how the life circumstances of individuals influence their perception and construction of a social world (Allen, Armstrong, Riemenschneider & Reid, 2006, p. 831), will guide this research. This approach is aligned with Sandra Harding's (2004) feminist standpoint theory, where social scientific research should start from the lives of unprivileged groups, to gain more objective knowledge of social reality (p. 124, p. 150). Every firefighter in the fire service has their own standpoint, shaped partially by the year when they were hired, their age, level of experience, sexual orientation, level of experience, whether they work in a rural or urban center, and whether they are a volunteer (paid on-call) or career firefighter. The firefighter interviewees' individual experiences will be the basis for demonstrating a more collective picture by sharing their thoughts and experiences.

In this dissertation, through analyzing interviews, exploring thoughts and feelings, and examining discussions, the standpoints of men and women firefighters emerge. Individual experiences, perspectives and challenges are captured to create a more collective picture of the day-to-day experiences and complex issues a firefighter faces. Firefighters were asked about interactions with colleagues, team dynamics, the development and application of practical firefighting skills and their perception of the evolution of the fire service profession. The responses from the study participants highlight the pervasiveness of stereotypes, biases and discriminatory practices in daily interactions and institutional practices within the fire service. This points to the necessity of targeted interventions and actionable improvements that can address these deeply ingrained biases to promote a more supportive and equitable workplace for all genders, fostering a more inclusive culture.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive dissertation is to explore gender-based workplace dynamics within firefighting, uncovering ways in which nuanced stereotypes, biases and discriminatory practices contribute to a less inclusive and sometimes unsupportive environment for women in the Fire Services in Ontario. Such qualitative research focuses the social meaning from individual lived experiences, situations, and circumstances (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The population affected by this problem consists of firefighters working within the fire station with their colleagues. Qualitative research uses subjective data to investigate individuals in very specific situations within their natural environments (Christensen et al., 2011). The interview process uses questions that focus on who, what, and how of events (Kim, Sefcik, & Bradway, 2017). This provides a fascinating insight into why people are drawn to the firefighting profession, how firefighters perceive their experience entering the profession, and progressing through their career. Firefighters may work in the same or similar workplaces, but that doesn't mean they all experience the workplace in the same way. This dissertation reflects their thoughts and feelings about their sense of duty, their fire service family, their day-to-day challenges, and their perceived evolution of the work culture through their career. The narratives and insights of women and men firefighters are compared, which contributes to the understanding of gender relationships in the public sector, and highlights the need for organizational learning on diversity, cultural competence and inclusion in the fire service in order to improve the experiences of women firefighters.

Everyone has biases, referred to as blind spots, which they may not be conscious of. By interviewing individuals of both genders, this dissertation identifies common blind spots or unconscious bias that may not be immediately evident to those who were interviewed. Men and women may experience, observe, and perpetuate biases differently. While women might directly experience discriminatory practices or biases, men might witness, contribute to, or challenge these from a different standpoint. Each group can provide valuable insights based on their own experiences and observations. By sharing the experiences of those working on the front line, these

valuable insights can inform policy, training, employee engagement, strategic direction, and other aspects of the firefighting profession.

A standpoint is not individual in nature; it is collective (Harding, 1991). Therefore, this research will share both the individual agency of each participant and highlight the “shared angles of vision” that emerge through the common themes that can be discerned across these experiences. The research will focus on the female firefighter’s standpoint in relation to their male colleagues and identify the importance of epistemology derived from their own experiences.

Research Methodology

The methodology for this research is phenomenology, which seeks to identify the everyday experience of phenomena such as deciding, feeling, hearing, and seeing, and describing the way in which individuals perceive these events (Schwandt, 2007). The research utilizes a qualitative approach to explore the gender dynamics within the workplace. The purpose of qualitative research is to discover meaning grounded in human experience (Sandelowski, 2004). A qualitative research method, questioning firefighters, provides a portrait of what life is like working in the fire service. Qualitative methodology is used to explore a human phenomenon that is complex and requires questions that are definitional, descriptive, interpretive, critical, action-oriented, or deconstructive (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). Qualitative research is well suited for examining individuals’ subjective experiences, attitudes, and perceptions. By using this approach, the study obtained rich and in-depth insights into the participants’ thoughts and perspectives. The data also provides the researcher with details about human behaviour, emotion, and personality characteristics that quantitative studies cannot match (Madrigal & McClain, 2012; Madrigal, 2014).

This study employs a phenomenological approach in which one-on-one interviews were conducted with individuals who have lived experience with the same social phenomenon, firefighting. Individuals experience the world subjectively, and phenomenology seeks to identify and describe the way in which this takes place (Schwandt, 2007). In this study, firefighters have a shared identity and work culture that

is different from other first responders, such as police officers or paramedics. Phenomenology seeks to identify commonalities across the participants, which helps capture the essence or core of said phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007). A phenomenological approach best suits this qualitative study as it places the focus on the lived experience of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study's phenomenological approach to understanding the unique lived experiences of firefighters allows for a rich, in-depth exploration of how their identities and work culture impact their experiences. This qualitative method captures the essence of the firefighters' experiences by identifying commonalities across the interviews. This aligns with the principles of intersectionality, which emphasize the need to consider multiple facets of identity and how these intersect to shape individual and group experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). This approach not only aligns with phenomenology's focus on lived experience but also expands its scope to critically analyze how various identity factors converge in the everyday realities of these individuals.

I interviewed participants using open-ended questions. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility allowing me to explore specific themes while also allowing the participant to freely express their experiences and perceptions. Open-ended questions and prompts were used to simulate discussions on gendered dynamics in the interactions with colleagues. Questions about demographic data, such as the type of fire service, number of years as a firefighter, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and union affiliation were captured at the beginning of the interview. Interviews were performed one-on-one, and the majority of interviews took place virtually by WebEx or FaceTime, although face-to-face interviews were also an option. Interviews were conducted with women and men firefighters from a wide range of departments including large to mid-size municipal career (unionized) fire departments, composite fire departments (comprised of volunteer and career firefighters), and rural (non-union) volunteer/paid on-call departments. A total of 10 female firefighters and 22 male firefighters were interviewed (see Appendix 1). Nine women were from career fire departments, four of whom had previous or current experience as a volunteer firefighter, and one has wildland firefighting experience. One female was a volunteer firefighter in a composite

department. Nine men were members of a career fire department and five of those had current or previous experience in a volunteer fire service as well. Four men were career firefighters in a composite fire department, one of whom had volunteer firefighting experience. Five men were volunteer firefighters in composite fire departments and four men were volunteer (paid-on-call) firefighters. From a scholarly perspective, interviewing both men and women is essential when investigating stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices that contribute to a less inclusive work environment for women. Understanding a phenomenon requires viewing it from multiple angles. By interviewing both men and women, this research captures a more comprehensive view of the gendered dynamics, attitudes, and behaviours that exist within the Fire Services in Ontario. All participants were forthcoming, participated throughout the duration of the interview, and there were no withdrawals from the study. Through phenomenological one-on-one interviews, a researcher is positioned to gain direct insight from participants. These methods capture the participants' lived experience in their own words, which then allowed for a culmination of data which provided further insight reflecting each participants' report (Creswell et al., 2007). Themes were based on common issues raised, which then served as the foundation for understanding and interpreting the findings. A textural description of the experience of being a firefighter was created with quotes that set the context for the experiences. The findings highlight what the firefighter experienced and how it was experienced (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The responses captured from both men and women firefighters highlight differences and similarities in the experiences which deepen the findings. This study contributes to academic research by exposing the experiences of firefighters and it also contributes conditions that can be improved within the fire service for the betterment of future firefighters. The participants identify and describe issues and express their personal worldviews and an analysis of the information identifies patterns and rich complexities within the common experience. Semi-structured interviews provide the space to explore a range of issues raised by participants as well as captures the complexity and nuances of their experiences. A complete examination of the data provided discerning patterns and themes about the profession as well as highlighted coping mechanisms used by participants.

All research must consider and address ethical issues that may arise during the course of the study. The proposed dissertation was approved by the York University Faculty of Graduate Studies. A consent form was provided to each participant outlining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to revoke consent at any time during the study, along with mental health resources, acknowledging that, depending on the participant's experience in the fire service, there may be emotional discomfort during or following participation in this research. Participants were informed that the one-on-one interviews would take approximately 90 minutes, although interviews ranged from 60 minutes to 120 minutes.

I developed a series of pre-determined questions, that were used in each interview; however, I encouraged the participants to engage in a free-flowing dialogue. Participants were prompted to speak more about experiences or topics important to them, relevant to the research topic. The questions uncovered management issues and policy developments that have had both positive and negative impacts on gender integration in the fire service and how organizational change has influenced firefighters' entrance, integration, and retention in Ontario's Fire Service. The findings provide a better understanding of the inherent conflicts that firefighter's face as they continue to search for their place and position in the fire service work environment. In this research, the participants could comment on how experiences should influence the creation of policy outcomes. In addition to policy issues, the firefighter's narratives reveal issues concerning career choice, the impact of career choice on family life, the interaction between men and women in the workplace, beliefs about gender differences, acceptance or exclusion in the workplace, and the gender composition in the fire service. These discussions also highlight ways in which nuanced stereotypes, bias and discriminatory practices contribute to a less inclusive and sometimes unsupportive environment for women in the Fire Services in Ontario.

Interviews

The participants were encouraged to guide the discussion based on their lived experience and focus on the areas of greatest impact to them both personally and

professionally. The participants were free to guide the discussion by exploring their thoughts, experiences, observations and insights on various topics. The data collection method, designed to gather rich information from participants, used in-depth, open-ended interview questions. Most of the interviews were held virtually, to ensure the participation of firefighters outside of the Greater Toronto area, particularly those in rural areas. A small number were in person due to the participants' preference or proximity. The interviews took place after COVID-19, when virtual interviews had become both the norm for meetings, and preference due to convenience for the participants. While face-to-face interviews are deemed the traditional 'gold standard', (Novick, 2008, p. 394) they can also be time-consuming, with a lack of anonymity, potentially disempowering the participants through face-to-face contact, which has the potential to create a barrier to disclosure (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The research focused on the recollection of experiences and interactions as the primary data collection method and used interviews to explore emerging themes. Firefighters use stories to describe themselves to others, recounting situations or events, being contextually situated and self-narrated constructions (Sveningsson & Alvesseon, 2003) of their role within the organization and society. Findings from the study have the potential to educate fire service and municipal leaders about possible ways to improve the working environment for firefighters in the Fire Services in Ontario.

Selection of Participants

The aim of a quantitative sampling approach is to draw a representative sample from the population, so that the results of studying the sample can then be generalized back to the population (Marshall, 1996, p. 522). In contrast, the nature of qualitative research depends on voluntary participants willing to share their experiences and insights. Firefighters responded to one post on the researcher's Twitter feed (now known as X) looking for subjects to participate in the study. This method was used because the target audience was fire service professionals, and as a Fire Chief and public figure, the post was shared broadly and garnered an unexpected amount of interest. The social media post had 21,395 impressions, 1,132 detail expands, 2,530

engagements, 109 likes, 53 shares and 29 comments. The potential candidates contacted the researcher through direct messaging on social media or via an email that I provided in a reply under the social media post. By asking for both men and women firefighters, the potential for alienating women firefighters and opposition from men was reduced. Excluding men from this dissertation could have led to several adverse reactions. Men could have felt excluded from a critical dialogue about the firefighting profession, potentially resulting in resentment or feelings of marginalization. The absence of male participants could create a perception of bias, undermining my inclusive leadership, this dissertation's credibility, and its acceptance within the broader firefighting community.

Participants who have direct and personal knowledge (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 180) of the study topic were able to share and reflect on their experiences. Only non-probability sampling methods were used, meaning participants were selected because they can help the researcher understand the study phenomenon. Qualitative researchers may use more than one sampling approach in their study (Gill, 2020, p. 579), and several methods were employed in this research. Self-selection sampling, where potential participants volunteered to participate in the research study was used, combined with snowball (chain) sampling where the volunteer participants recommended other firefighters who might be willing to participate. I intentionally selected some participants, in particular women participants, who were knowledgeable on the topic, resulting in the use of purposive sampling. Out of 33 participants, 10 identified as women, which represents slightly over 30% of the respondents. The Canadian Association of Fire Chiefs (2022) reports 11 % of the 126,000 firefighters in Canada are women, so when comparing the representation to the workforce, the composition demonstrates a high representation of women compared to their ratio within the Canadian Fire Service workforce. This suggests that the data may provide a more comprehensive understanding of women's perspectives, experiences, and insights within the context being studied.

The goal of qualitative sampling is to recruit enough participants and/or observations to provide rich, in-depth data, in order to understand the phenomenon being studied (Hennink et al., 2019). The number of firefighters participating in the study

was determined by theoretical saturation of the data, ensuring that data collection continued until no new themes or insights emerged from interviews. In practice, the number of required subjects usually becomes obvious as the study progresses, as new categories, themes, or explanations stop emerging from the data (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Bowen (2008) defines data saturation as bringing new participants continually into the study until the data set is complete, as indicated by data replication or redundancy (p. 140). Estimating the number of participants in a study required to reach saturation depends on a number of factors, including the quality of data, the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the amount of useful information obtained from each participant, the number of interviews per participant, the use of shadowed data and the qualitative method and study design used (Morse, 2000, p. 3). Data was continually analyzed following interviews, which contributed to determining the point at which the collection of information, specifically around themes, became redundant.

Participation in this study was voluntary, and the participants provided informed consent. The participants were fully informed about the nature and purpose of the research, understood the research procedures, and were assured of their privacy and confidentiality. The participants had opportunities to ask questions and gave written consent to participate prior to commencing. The selected candidates were firefighters working in fire suppression (as opposed to public education or fire inspection), or alternatively, have worked in the fire suppression division and then retired.

When potential participants reached out, the consent form was provided which included a description of the research which explained the overall objectives of the project and the ethical standards and principles. To protect participants, the consent form (Appendix 2) acknowledged that depending on the participant's experience in the fire service, there could be potential emotional discomfort that might result from participation. Mental health supports were included in the consent form as a resource. None of the firefighters in the study exhibited significant psychological distress when discussing negative experiences and none asked to skip questions posed in the interview. Firefighters who volunteered and met selection criteria were informed of their right to participate, and withdraw from the interview, and measures were taken to protect their confidentiality. The informed consent document was reviewed and signed

prior to participation. Participants were offered virtual meetings; however, alternative arrangements were made for firefighters who preferred in-person interviews.

Participating Firefighters

Issues of anonymity and confidentiality are key considerations in ethical research practice. For this qualitative research, maintaining the participants' confidentiality while presenting detailed accounts of experiences in the fire service presents unique challenges. Given that this qualitative study contains rich descriptions of study participants, confidentiality breaches via deductive disclosure were of particular concern. Confidentiality in this context means that identifiable information about individuals collected during the process of research will not be disclosed, and that the identity of research participants will be protected through a process designed to anonymise them. Deductive disclosure, also known as internal confidentiality (Tolich, 2004) occurs when the traits of individuals or groups make them identifiable in research reports (Sieber, 1992). An alias was provided for each participant as outlined in Appendix 1. When the participant spoke about another firefighter, a fictitious name was assigned, denoted by an asterisk in the quotations. Fire department names including the disclosure of the specific municipality they worked for were removed.

Data Collection

Using a semi-structured interview allowed the participants the freedom to respond to questions, pursue topics, and explore ideas that were not outlined in the list of prepared research questions. Participants were encouraged to talk as in-depth as they wanted on any topic that personally resonated with their firefighting journey. Interviews were transcribed by Otter¹ and notes were taken by the researcher to highlight key sections, and to note non-verbal cues such as participant's body language, key

¹ Otter is a software application designed for transcribing spoken words into written text. It is able to distinguish between different speakers, in the transcribed form.

movements, silences, and other significant observations. Information was stored digitally in a password protected file and the handwritten notes in a locked filing cabinet. Names were changed to protect the participants and others from unwanted disclosure of information. In order to protect the participants' confidentiality, the participants were only referred to by the alias during the data analysis and in the written report. These procedures were reviewed and approved by York University Faculty of Graduate Studies.

Delimitations

Participants were current or recently retired firefighters who have worked in operation roles as a suppression firefighter or as a training officer with suppression firefighting experience. The following criteria was used in the selection process:

- Participants may be a full-time career firefighter or recently retired.
- Participants may be a full-time career firefighter in a composite fire service.
- Participants may be a paid-on call / volunteer firefighters working for a volunteer fire service.
- Participants may be a paid-on call / volunteer firefighters working for a composite fire service.
- Participants may be a training officer with suppression experience.
- Participants must be willing to take part in a virtual or in-person interview.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Each participant was emailed a consent form and a demographic questionnaire. The demographic questions were asked verbally at the beginning of the interview. The participant was not provided with the list of semi-structured interview questions prior to the interview. A set of pre-determined questions guided the study. Each participant was advised that they could spend more time on topics or questions that resonated or aligned with their professional experience. Open-ended interview questions allowed

participants to answer the research questions as openly and freely as possible without time or topic constraints. In reporting the data, quotes from individual respondents were employed. These quotes were identified only by the participants' aliases.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began during the interview process, by reflecting on the content at the conclusion of each interview, noting relevant sections, and identifying recurring patterns and themes. The transcripts were read and re-read to gain familiarity with the content. Once data collection ended, a formal analysis began which included coding the interview transcripts and identifying overarching themes. The final analysis happened through iterative waves as themes began to emerge and the focus and understanding of the data was continuously refined (Tracy, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from York University prior to commencing interviews and the data collection. All participants were provided with a written informed consent form that explained the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures in place, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Participant anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and pseudonyms were assigned to participants during data analysis and used in the writing process.

Maintaining objectivity in research, especially when the researcher has personal experience and a strong connection to the subject matter, can be complex. In my case, conducting research on women in the fire service, being a woman who has personal experience advancing through the ranks, provides unique insights and perspective that enriches this research. This aligns well with standpoint theory, which highlights that individuals in marginalized positions, like being a woman in a male-dominated field, can have unique insights and understanding of social structures and power dynamics at play. I obviously have assumptions about gender roles and capabilities, and this bias can influence both the research process and the interpretation of data, possibly

influencing objectivity. As someone who supports the inclusion of women in the fire service, I have a propensity to seek out information that aligns with my views on how to make the fire service more welcoming for firefighter, particularly women firefighters. This inclination may lead me to inadvertently disregard evidence that contradicts my beliefs. Being a member of the fire service may inspire trust and openness among female firefighters, who may feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with someone who has faced similar challenges. Contrary to this, a female firefighter may hesitate to openly discuss challenges and feelings with a female Fire Chief, fearing that the researcher, having successfully navigated similar barriers, might not agree or empathize with the perception of obstacles being daunting or insurmountable. This concern could stem from the belief that being a Fire Chief, and someone who has overcome these challenges, might not fully appreciate the current difficulties faced by the interviewee. Male firefighters might avoid sharing opinions or experiences they perceive as negative, socially undesirable, or discriminatory, particularly when these views are about women in firefighting. They may offer more politically correct or vetted views, which do not accurately reflect their true beliefs or the general culture within the fire service. I balanced this with a well-rounded approach to data collection by interviewing a diverse range of men and women in the fire service, to ensure input from firefighters who have varying experiences and opposing viewpoints. During the interviews, I was cognizant of my body language, as it could influence the responses or allow my own attitude or beliefs to be inserted into the research. To the best of my ability, I remained objective in my investigation of the themes.

One could argue that because I, as the author, researcher, and a Chief Officer in the Fire Services in Ontario, operate as an “outsider within” (Collins, 1990) I run the risk of being labeled biased or self-interested. However, standpoint epistemology rejects the notion that marginalized people speaking to the systems of oppression that marginalize them are inherently biased, while people privileged by those very systems of oppression are somehow inherently objective (Cooper, Stoll & Thoun, 2020, p. 96).

By situating the research within the feminist standpoint theory, as the chosen theoretical framework, it has been possible to situate the unique experiences and perceptions of firefighters, particularly women, in a field traditionally dominated by men.

My position as researcher and Fire Chief, coupled with the theoretical underpinnings of Sandra Harding, Joan Acker, and bell hooks, offers a rich, nuanced understanding of the organizational culture, systemic barriers, and the potential for transformative change within the fire service. This research not only challenges dominant narratives but also amplifies the voices of those historically marginalized in this profession, thereby contributing to a more inclusive, equitable, and reflective firefighting community. The intersection of personal experience and feminist standpoint theory has provided a powerful lens through which to examine and understand the complex interplay of gender, power, and organizational culture in the fire service. This acknowledges and values diverse perspectives for fostering an environment that is truly inclusive and conducive to the growth and development of all firefighters, irrespective of gender.

In this dissertation, I have drawn on the interview material to illustrate the findings to support my argument, and to provide insights into how different firefighters described their experiences of the job. The interviews, conducted with a diverse group of firefighters, offer insight into their daily lives, challenges, and the camaraderie that defines their existence within the fire service. One central finding was a general acknowledgement among firefighters that while they have a strong attachment to the occupation embedded into their identity and sense of purpose, they also recognise serious problems with many aspects of the prevailing workplace culture, which is all too often toxic. This toxic culture manifests in various forms, including but not limited to pervasive sexism, discrimination, and a resistance to change that collectively hinders progress and inclusivity within the ranks. Such a culture not only undermines the morale and well-being of firefighters but also poses significant barriers to aspiring firefighters, particularly women, who seek to join the profession. This dissertation uses these interviews to make a case for future occupation-wide efforts to improve the workplace, advocating for a cultural transformation that embraces diversity, fosters inclusivity, and ensures a supportive environment for all firefighters, with a particular emphasis on creating a more welcoming and equitable space for women. In doing so, this dissertation contributes to a broader discourse on workplace culture in traditionally male-dominated professions.

Chapter 5: The Significance of Case Law in Revealing Gender-based Experiences in the Fire Service

Parallel Narratives of Harassment and Discrimination

Introducing case law before presenting the narratives of the interviewees in the next three chapters outlines legal precedents that shape the experiences of women firefighters. Knowing how courts have ruled on similar cases gives insight into what legal recourse these women have and the challenges in enforcing those rights in their context. The legal framework highlights the risks and consequences that women face when confronting workplace issues, such as retaliation or social exclusion. Case law demonstrates the lengthy, complex, and emotionally taxing process of pursuing justice, which can dissuade individuals from engaging in formal disputes. Understanding past legal outcomes helps explain why some firefighters might choose to avoid confrontation, knowing the odds may not always be in their favour. This reality can make women hesitant to escalate issues, especially when they see similar cases fail or drag on for years without satisfactory resolutions. Additionally, case law reveals the nuances of burden of proof and how challenging it can be to substantiate claims of harassment or discrimination. The case law chapter demonstrates systemic issues in how unions and legal teams prioritize or defend discrimination cases. Female firefighters may feel unsupported if they perceive their union or legal representation as unwilling to push their cases, often due to concerns about preserving status quo labour relations. The case law chapter provides the necessary backdrop for understanding the lived experiences of the female firefighters, revealing why they may feel trapped in a system where both legal protections and internal support mechanisms often fall short.

In recent years, the issue of gender-based experiences within workplaces and professions has gained significant attention, shedding light on challenges faced by women and the pervasive nature of gender-related issues in professional workplaces. Firefighting is not immune to such issues, and this research highlights the experiences of some firefighters. Incorporating a chapter on case law prior to presenting interviews which highlight the experiences of women firefighters in the Fire Services in Ontario,

provides a comprehensive, legally informed, academic foundation for understanding and addressing the issues presented in the three chapters of findings (Chapter 6, 7 and 8). The case law provided herein highlights relevant disputes and legal proceedings that offers a comprehensive view of the challenges women face. The correlation to case law and the experiences of women firefighters interviewed, provides a compelling connection between the legal precedent and the lived realities of women in the Fire Services in Ontario. Through this alignment, the research not only highlights the pervasive issues faced by women firefighters, but it also substantiates the necessity for reevaluating policy frameworks and legal protections, in order to enhance the safety and security of women in the fire service.

The relationship between case law and firefighters' unions is governed by labour laws, collective bargaining agreements, and judicial interpretations. Labour laws, such as the Canada Labour Code and provincial labour relations acts like the Ontario Labour Relations Act, provide the framework for collective bargaining, granting firefighters the right to form unions and engage in collective bargaining (Government of Canada, 2023c). Collective agreements, which are legally binding contracts negotiated between firefighters' unions and employers, cover wages, working conditions, benefits, and grievance procedures (Ontario Ministry of Labour, 2023).

Judicial decisions play a crucial role in interpreting labour laws and collective agreements. Case law is shaped by the political organizing and contract negotiations of firefighter unions. Courts and labour tribunals resolve disputes between unions and employers, creating precedents that influence future labour relations (Hernandez, 2020). For instance, a court ruling on a specific aspect of a collective agreement can set a standard for future negotiations and disputes more broadly. Dispute resolution often involves arbitration, as stipulated in collective agreements, and case law influences these outcomes as arbitrators rely on judicial precedents (Smith, 2019). If arbitration is insufficient or if an arbitration decision is challenged, the case may proceed to court, where judicial assessments ensure the arbitration process is fair and compliant with applicable laws and precedents (Jones, 2021).

Judicial decisions influence employment standards within the firefighting profession, such as working hours, health and safety regulations, and discrimination

protections, which unions leverage to negotiate better conditions for their members (Green, 2022). Unions were formed to protect and advance the workers' collective interests in the workplace, achieved through advocating for workers' rights. They can negotiate employment terms and conditions such as pay rates, non-discrimination clauses, maternity and parental leave with salary top-up, flexible and accommodating work schedules, and compensable benefits such as extended healthcare. However, a gendered culture and structure in unions has been identified as a barrier to equality bargaining (Briskin & McDermott, 1993; Hart, 2012).

Public sector considerations further complicate this relationship, as firefighting is often deemed an essential service, limiting the right to strike. Case law shapes the extent of this limitation and the alternative dispute resolution mechanisms available, such as binding arbitration (White, 2017). The dynamic interaction between case law and firefighters' unions results in labour relations that evolve in response to changing legal and social contexts.

Unions also face the complexity of representing both the claimant and alleged perpetrator in a workplace dispute, especially in cases involving harassment or discrimination. While the union is supposed to advocate for the claimant's rights and well-being, it is also bound to provide fair representation to the respondent. This duty of fair representation means the union must protect and advocate for the interests of all members involved, including those accused of misconduct. This dual role can make the claimant feel as though the union is not fully supportive or protective of her interests.

Gendered career barriers refer to obstacles and biases that disproportionately affect individuals based on their gender, limiting their feeling of job satisfaction. This section explores gender-related issues such as sexual harassment, discrimination, and unequal treatment. When unions protect both members equally, they often end up protecting and perpetuating a toxic work environment, reinforcing gender stereotypes and biases, and impeding progress toward gender equity in the workplace. The gendered nature of most unions ... may suggest great difficulty in convincing [unions] to make ending sexual harassment a priority (Hodges, 2006, p. 185).

Case outcomes from the arbitration system and an accompanying analysis of the impact on women firefighters will contrast the ideology of policies and legislation and the

reality of how the legal system can disadvantage women. Adopted by the Ontario's legislative assembly in 1991, the Arbitration Act made it possible to avoid recourse to the judicial system: the two parties could agree to allow a third party to settle a dispute according to the desired type of law (May, 2016, p. 27). Legal protections and safeguards were implemented due to the persistence of workers, unions and social justice activists. This includes the establishment of labour laws that govern wages, working conditions such as hours, and occupational health and safety, as well as the right to form and join a union. Other important measures include laws which have been put into place to prevent discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Workers also have the right to take legal action against their employers for offences such as harassment, reprisal, or wrongful termination.

Employment equity is a term attributed to Judge Rosalie Abella, who introduced it in the landmark *Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report* (Abella, 1984; Agócs, 2014). In Canada, the 1984 Abella Commission was established to investigate the issue of employment discrimination. The findings asserted that for four historically disadvantaged groups: women, visible minorities, Aboriginal Peoples, and persons with disabilities, faced barriers to employment and promotion. The report concluded that racial discrimination in employment is a real concern, and strong legislative measures were necessary to reverse or inhibit the degree to which members of visible racialized groups are unjustifiably excluded from the opportunity to compete as equals (Jain & Lawler, 2004, p. 587). The Abella Commission on Equality in Employment and the federal Employment Equity Act made Canada a policy leader in addressing systemic discrimination in the workplace because they recognized the structural and systemic roots of inequality in employment and the need for systemic remedies (Agócs & Tucker, 2014).

People were being excluded from employment opportunities not because of what they could actually do, or what they were perceived to be able to do, but because of how different they were (Agócs and Tucker, 2014, p. viii). Employment equity laws and affirmative action policies prescribed an equal treatment approach, designed to encourage and free up labour market competition, often ignoring questions about discriminatory working conditions (Nichols, 2019, p. 306). This approach helped to

dismiss accusations of reverse discrimination; however, it overlooked the reality of systemic discrimination. In the period since the federal legislation was enacted, significant employment equity policy variation has remained in Canadian jurisdictions and in public sector employment. Employment inequities in many occupations in Canada have been well documented (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; Grundy & Smith, 2011), including dimensions of gender (Braedley, 2009; Creese & Beagan, 2009), racialization (Teelucksingh & Galabuzi, 2007) and sexuality (Drydakis, 2009). This research argues that many barriers remain as it relates to employment equity in the Fire Services in Ontario.

Each unionized fire service has a collective agreement which is a written contract between the employer and the union (also known as the association) which outlines the terms and conditions of employment for the employees in a bargaining unit. Examples of terms and conditions covered by a collective agreement include wages and benefits, terms and conditions of employment, obligations and responsibilities of the employer, the employee and the union, and a dispute resolution process (usually a grievance and arbitration procedure).

Frequently, the employer and the association have differing opinions on the intent of the language in the collective agreement. In the absence of specific language, and a lack of established past practice, the employer's rights take precedence. To maintain good labour relations, the association and the employer may try to resolve grievances that arise during the term of a collective agreement. If they are unable to resolve their differences of opinions, the collective agreement permits the use of grievance mediation and grievance arbitration as part of the dispute resolution process.

The "duty of fair representation" as stated in Section 74 of the Labour Relations Act is a legal obligation placed on labour unions to represent all members of a bargaining unit fairly and without discrimination. It clearly outlines that a trade union shall not act in a manner that is arbitrary, discriminatory, or in bad faith in representing employees (Government of Ontario, Ontario Labour Relations Board, 2001). If the association accepts a grievance on behalf of a member, it has the responsibility of processing it through the steps noted in the grievance procedure that are outlined in the collective agreement. Issues between two members are often the most challenging for

the association, as the association needs to equally support and advocate for all members involved.

Employers and employees must work within the language of the collective agreement that was either negotiated and agreed to between the employer and the association (on behalf of the members), or what was ruled on by an arbitrator. That contract, the product of negotiations between the union and employer, places limits on the potentially arbitrary exercise of power by employers and empowers union members to defend themselves against abuses in the workplace. If a union decides not to proceed to arbitration with a grievance alleging a violation of, for instance, human rights legislation or a violation of an individual's privacy rights, the employee will likely be without any avenue or forum in which to pursue such claims (Ellickson, 2004, p. 1). There is also a potential that the settlement (negotiated outcome or arbitrated ruling) to resolve the grievance may not offer closure which addresses the root cause of the problem.

Union representatives in the fire service are voted in from the membership; therefore, they tend to reflect the dominant group in the workforce (in firefighting, it is white cis heterosexual male) and typically have social identities tied to the majority workforce and to the dominant culture. Paap (2008) argues that prior socialization into and acceptance of the dominant workplace cultures may make it difficult for an association representative to identify and work against discriminatory and damaging practices when the dominant culture is otherwise (p. 372). In fact, electing union leadership from a problematic workplace culture often results in discrimination and harassment perpetuation, thus maintaining race and gender inequalities in the workplace regardless of workplace policies or legislation.

Most career fire services have a "without just cause" clause in their collective agreement, which makes terminating a firefighter very difficult for management, with the exception of new firefighters who often serve a one-year probationary period. Coupled with the legislated "duty to fair representation," the association is often placed in a position where they are required to defend poor workplace behaviour. A recent review of arbitrated discipline matters involving firefighters in Ontario found that the majority have to do with problematic interactions between male and female firefighters. The

following section illustrates some notable examples, which highlight the work culture and social interactions that align with personal experiences described in the findings section.

The Canadian Legal Information Institute (CANLii) serves as a comprehensive database of legal cases, offering this dissertation relevant examples of workplace dynamics that will aid in understanding the complexities of gender dynamics within the fire service. The cases offered below allows for a holistic understanding of gender-based experiences, breaches of corporate policies, and legal implications.

Arbitration Outcome – Social Media

On June 17, 2013, Fire Chief Jim Sales presented a staff report to the Executive Committee of Toronto City Council titled “Toronto Fire Services – A Path to Diversity” (Sales, 2013a, 2013 b). The report outlined the plan to increase workforce diversity, including increasing the number of women and racially diverse personnel in Toronto Fire Service (TFS) by ten percent by the end of 2014. The report also outlined the steps that the TFS had already taken to promote and increase diversity which included looking at the barriers within the recruitment and hiring process for people of equity deserving groups. These steps included creating hiring lists that would encourage the hiring of visible or racial minorities, seeking community input on how TFS could better reach under-represented communities, developing of a short training course for newly hired firefighters to increase cross-cultural awareness, creating partnerships with City departments to reach participants in their respective programs to try to encourage diverse applicants to TFS, and working with community colleges and outside agencies to help prepare candidates for firefighter aptitude and other tests (Toronto v. Toronto Professional Fire Fighters’ Association, Local 3888, Bowman Grievance, 2014, p. 3).

On August 9, 2013, the National Post published an article featuring offensive social media posts from two Toronto firefighters (Garvey, 2013). The content of the tweets was considered offensive to women and racialized peoples; therefore, it reflected poorly on the Toronto Fire Service and the fire service profession as a whole. The article suggested that, with the type of sexist, misogynist, and racist content of these

social media accounts, the culture of the Toronto Fire Services might not be welcoming to women and might not align with the TFS “A Path to Diversity” program initiative, which was designed to increase the hiring of women and improve the diversity of their staffing. The Twitter (X) posts were made off-duty and not directed to anyone in the fire service or in reference to anything work-related. It led to public consequences for two Toronto firefighters and caused fire services across the province to review their existing social media policies or develop them if absent. After an internal workplace investigation, both firefighters were terminated for inappropriate, off-duty use of their Twitter accounts, violating of several workplace policies, including its social media policy and harming the reputation of the employer, particularly with regard to diversity initiatives it had been trying to implement.

In the first decision, *City of Toronto versus Toronto Professional Firefighters Association (Edwards Grievance)*, one tweet by the grievor featured in the National Post article was found not to warrant discharge, but rather a three-day suspension. Of significance, the tweet appeared to be an isolated incident, and the circumstances were at the low end of the spectrum of unacceptable behaviour. The grievor apologized multiple times to the employer and his colleagues noting that the tweet was not directed at anyone in the workplace and was not an attempt to challenge the employer’s efforts at creating a more inclusive and welcoming workplace for women.

Conversely, in the second decision, *City of Toronto v. Toronto Professional Fire Fighters’ Association, Local 3888 (Bowman Grievance)*, the Arbitrator upheld the termination. He posted a profile page that included a photo of himself in Toronto Fire Service (TFS) bunker gear, with the address “@Hero_Matt”. Some of his followers were TFS employees and the National Post was able to verify his employment status as a firefighter from the TFS recruit list. The National Post article published three tweets by the firefighter:

“Reject a woman and she will never let it go. One of the many defects of their kind. Also weak arms.”

“I’d never let a woman kick my ass. If she tried I’d be like HEY! You get your bitch ass back in the kitchen and make me some pie.”

“The way to a woman’s heart is through anal.”

Additional sexist, misogynistic, racist and generally offensive tweets were uncovered during the investigation, included but was not limited to:

“If we really think about it, vaginas are gross”,

“The Easy Bake oven – teaching girls their place since 1963”,

“If you were deaf I would rape you and then break your fingers so you can’t tell anyone...”

The firefighter also commented on the size of the breasts of a woman appearing in the audience of a televised baseball game. The Arbitrator deemed the firefighter’s use of his Twitter account as reckless and concluded that disseminating “slurs, derogatory comments, insults, in the form of jokes, even if created by someone else, constitutes serious acts of discrimination.” In this decision, the Arbitrator largely focused on the sexist, racist, and homophobic nature of the tweets and how that reflected on the employer. Despite the firefighter’s apology, the conduct was exacerbated by the nature of the employee’s role. Firefighters are held to a higher standard of conduct than the general population because they are entrusted with the safety and well-being of the community.

This case was presented at the Ontario Association of Fire Chiefs 2014 Labour Relations Seminar by Hicks Morley, a labour and employment law firm. Some of the lessons learned from this case include:

- Ontario Courts have ruled that posting content to social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter constitute data in electronic form, producible as documents

under the Rules of Civil Procedure (*Leduc v Roman*, 2009 CanLII 6838 [ON SC], at para 27.)

- This means that information drawn from a Facebook profile, Instagram photo or Twitter feed can be relied upon as evidence in a legal action.
- This includes content that is privacy protected on the site and posts that are limited to followers.
- There is no right to privacy in anything you submit online.
- Once you post it, your employer may be able to access it, or it may become available to them.
- You can be subject to discipline for bullying and harassment if you send inappropriate messages or post hurtful opinions regarding your colleagues.
- If your social media post violates company policy or may cause harm to your employer's business or reputation, discipline including up to termination may follow.
- The Ontario Human Rights Tribunal has ruled that the *Human Rights Code* applies to work related posting(s) on the internet (*Taylor Baptiste v. Ontario Public School Employees Union*, 2012 HRTO 1392, see also *Perez-Moreno v. Kulczycki*, 2013 HRTO 1074.)
- When you communicate with your colleagues over social media, whether it be after hours or over the weekend, the communication is still considered part of the work environment.

This case highlights the detrimental effects of racial slurs, sexist comments, and homophobic remarks on efforts to enhance diversity in the firefighting profession, establish an inclusive work culture, and achieve gender equity. Toronto Fire understood that these types of remarks contributed to a hostile work environment and had the potential to negatively impact their public reputation, team dynamics among colleagues, and overall morale in the department. These biases reinforce the notion that women are unsuited for roles in firefighting, thereby contributing to ongoing gender inequality. As Garvey (2013), the journalist of the National Post article pointed out, these types of damaging comments could discourage women from pursuing firefighting careers and

reinforce systemic barriers that limit opportunities in the profession. By holding the employees responsible for their actions, Toronto Fire and the City of Toronto signaled to their employees that it is crucial to foster an inclusive culture that rejects discrimination, and breaches of policy would be actioned.

Arbitration – Extension of the Workplace

City of Brampton versus Brampton Professional Firefighter’s Association, Local 1068 (CanLII 87624, Hamilton Grievance, 2016) involved interaction between a male and a female Brampton firefighter, both on-shift and off-shift, (Golf Tournament and a Christmas Party) which resulted in the termination of the male firefighter. The firefighter was terminated specifically for conduct that occurred at a Christmas party on December 18, 2014; however, the discipline was ultimately rescinded by an arbitrator and replaced with a three-month unpaid suspension.

The City of Brampton alleged that the male firefighter (Hamilton) discriminated against and harassed a female firefighter based on her gender and threatened her with bodily harm. Due to the nature of the allegations and to protect her privacy, the female firefighter was identified as “Firefighter A” in the arbitration outcome.

The arbitrator noted there at there was a culture in Brampton’s fire service that included juvenile and sexist behaviour. In fact, some might go so far as to characterize it as misogynistic behaviour. There was also evidence that pranks and practical jokes were a frequent occurrence in the Brampton Fire and Emergency Services. The grievor advised during his evidence that Human Resources would be very busy if he reported every prank (CANLii 87624, 2016 (12), p. 5).

This case involved many topics which are governed by a municipal respectful workplace policy, otherwise known as a standard of behaviour policy, or code of conduct:

- Rumours/gossip
- Perceived harassment
- Humiliation/embarrassment
- Comments, such as inappropriate jokes

- Behaviours which create an environment which is hostile or offensive or which contribute to a poisoned work environment

Policies which this behaviour violated included:

- Corporate Values
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Human Rights
- Workplace Violence Prevention
- Workplace Harassment Prevention

At the Christmas party Firefighter Hamilton stated if Firefighter A was transferred to Station 206, she would end up pregnant within the first week and would not know who the father was. Firefighter A indicated that she responded by joking that she had “HR on speed dial.” Firefighter Hamilton replied to the HR comment with “did you just bust out the HR comment,” at which point another firefighter interrupted indicating to Firefighter Hamilton that he was being inappropriate. Later the conversation continued between the two, and firefighter Hamilton claimed Firefighter A was “fucking everyone in the fire department and he doesn’t want that under his roof in station 206.” Firefighter A indicated that the Firefighter Hamilton mentioned something about her having “boy toys” all over the city. At this point, according to Firefighter A, Firefighter Hamilton said that if she went to Station 206 on nights, then she would be “raped and pregnant” and she “would not know who the child’s father was.” Again, he stated “if you come there, I will guarantee that you will be impregnated within 9 months.”

The next day a colleague sent Firefighter Hamilton a text:

In case you thought it was a bad dream, yes you did tell (Firefighter A) that if she came to station 6 she would be impregnated within 9 months. If the display on the phone says HR, don’t answer it!!!!

Firefighter Hamilton responded as follows:

Lol. Yes, I did. Someone had to!

Master plan is that she can’t come to our hall. I don’t want to be responsible for a BFES baby.

The investigation determined based on reasonable probabilities that Firefighter Hamilton made the following comments:

- we don't want a girl at station 206
- do whatever you can to make sure you don't come to station 206
- you are not coming to station 206
- it would not be good for me to be your supervisor
- you'll be pregnant in 9 months
- don't close your eyes at night because you will most likely be raped by one of us and end up pregnant

The arbitration further highlighted that Firefighter Hamilton, who was married to a female firefighter from Toronto, likely had direct knowledge of the challenges she faced at the fire hall. While the Arbitrator rescinded the termination, he replaced it with a three-month suspension, stating that it was necessary to send the message that such conduct is extremely unacceptable and those who engage in such misconduct will pay a very high price. Arbitrator Stout noted that the existing culture must change, and firefighters must appreciate that mistreating female firefighters by engaging in sexist and misogynistic behaviour will no longer be tolerated. The fire service is becoming more diverse, and firefighters must accept such change. In addition to the three-month suspension, Firefighter Hamilton's actions demonstrated poor judgment and did not meet the appropriate standards expected of a Captain; therefore, the arbitrator also supported a demotion.

The notable lessons from this incident include:

- The law provides for discipline or dismissal as a result of off-duty conduct, in limited circumstances.
- Social events organised by and for crews may not strike you as 'work' but they *can be* considered to be an extension of the workplace.
- The *Occupational Health and Safety Act* impose obligations on employers to ensure that a workplace is free of harassment, which expressly includes "sexual

harassment.” These obligations extend to “workplace functions” like seasonal festivities.

- Other locations that could be considered an extension of the workplace: employee barbeques, sports, social and recognition event; and employees socializing outside of work and after-hours at locations such as restaurants, bars and entertainment venues.
- If the discipline is grieved, the arbitrator will make a determination on whether the dispute was strictly private in nature, or if there are ties to the workplace.
- An employer’s disciplinary power does extend to reprehensible conduct outside of the workplace and after working hours, where there is a reasonable connection between such conduct and the workplace.
- Where an employee’s behaviour can have a subsequent impact on work relationships, work environment and/or work performance, it may be considered an extension of the workplace.

Firefighting requires cooperation and trust, and harassment in any form can diminish or prevent these team dynamics. Harassment in the workplace directly correlates to people’s feelings of safety and well-being. It can have emotional and psychological consequences. Not addressing harassment can damage the reputation of a fire service, reduce public trust, and discourage potential applicants, especially women, from applying. Taking prompt action against harassment, as Brampton Fire and Emergency Services and the City of Brampton did, can remove barriers to ensure that all firefighters have equal opportunities for success.

These two cases illustrate the kinds of commentary women face from some of their co-workers and show some of the ways in which legislation can penalise offenders. The question these examples raise is whether the rulings have any impact on the workplace culture, on the behaviours and practices of other firefighters, and whether the individual women involved considered their workplaces safer as a result. This case identifies the need for employers to create a comprehensive strategy that encompasses policy review and revision, training, improvements to workplace culture, effective coaching and discipline for inappropriate behaviour. It also highlights the legal

obligations and societal expectations regarding respectful behaviour and gender equality.

The case raises several questions and considerations regarding further steps that employers need to undertake to ensure a safer workplace. The following are key questions and issues raised:

1. Address Workplace Culture

- How can the employer address and change the culture within the workplace to eliminate juvenile, sexist, and misogynistic behaviours?
- What specific steps should be implemented to ensure all employees are aware of their rights and responsibilities in preventing workplace harassment?

2. Harassment and Discrimination Prevention

- How can the employers enhance its policies and training to better prevent harassment and discrimination based on gender, as well as threats of harm, both on and off duty?
- What training should be implemented to ensure all employee are familiar with their rights and responsibilities in preventing workplace harassment?

3. Social Events and Work-Related Extensions

- Should the employer caution firefighters prior to holiday parties and other off-duty gatherings?
- Should responsibilities and expectations be outlined regularly?

4. Enforcement of Policies

- How can the employer effectively monitor and enforce its corporate values, employee code of conduct, and respectful workplace policies in a highly unionized environment, where 95% of the staff are members of an association, and management exclusions have to be bargained for as per the FPPA.
- What measures should be in place to handle reports of policy violations, especially in cases where incidents occur outside of the workplace?

5. Obligations Under the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA)

- How can the employer fulfil its obligations under OSHA to ensure a harassment-free workplace, including social functions?

6. Disciplinary Actions and Grievances

- When should employers provide the opportunity to correct behaviour and when is disciplinary action appropriate?

7. Promoting Diversity and Inclusion

- What initiatives can the employer implement to actively promote diversity and inclusion within the workplace, especially in the fire service, where gender representation has been low?

8. Education and Training

- How can the employer enhance professional development and training to address issues related to gender-based harassment, discrimination and maintaining a respectful workplace culture?

9. Leadership

- What measures are in place to assess and monitor the leaders and supervisors in the organization (Fire Chief, Deputies, Division Chiefs, Platoon Chiefs, Section Chiefs, District Chiefs, and Captains) and ensure they demonstrate the appropriate competencies to effectively address complex workplace issues?

10. Reporting Mechanisms

- Is there an anonymous reporting system that allows reports to be handled confidentially and without retaliation?

Arbitration – Sexual Harassment and Poisoned Work Environment

The Corporation of the Town of Oakville v. the Oakville Professional Firefighters' Association, Local 1582 (CanLII ON LA 70468, Lucas, Davier, McAnsh & vanZanderbergen, 2020) grievance demonstrates that even in 2020, issues involving sexual harassment were taking place in fire halls by male firefighters, and supervisors alike. This case highlights inappropriate and unprofessional conduct which also

constituted sexual harassment and contributed to a poisoned work environment. The conduct violated the municipal Respectful Conduct Policy, Workplace Harassment and Discrimination Prevention Policy, Employee Code of Conduct, the Occupational Health & Safety Act, R.S.O. 1990, c.O.1 and the Ontario Human Rights Code, R.S.O. 1990, c.H.19. The policies are fulsome and aimed at protecting employees against discrimination and harassment that may create a poisoned work environment. The policies outline the potential consequences by clearly stating that employees who are found to have violated the policies will receive penalties up to and including dismissal.

Due to the workplace culture and sexual harassment/poisonous work environment, the female firefighter took a leave for mental health issues under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). The female firefighter sought help from therapists and psychologists prior to having to go off work. The behaviour she endured ranged from being called “ugly,” being told she has a “voice like a man” and rumours such as “I heard she likes sucking cock.” A practical joke involved taking a picture of a firefighter’s penis with the female firefighter’s cell phone without her knowledge and then members of her crew laughing when she discovered the photo. She endured personal comments such “you had better not lose any more weight because your breasts are small enough.” Firefighters also referenced another female firefighter as “a real bitch,” in their conversations. The crew posted pictures of bikini-clad women taken from a Sports Illustrated daily calendar in its food locker, which were visible when the locker was open. The firefighters selected the pictures on a weekly basis, and the ones they liked were hung in the food locker, and the others were discarded in the garbage. This was a clear example of the ongoing objectification and sexualization of women in the fire hall.

More concerning, was when a Platoon Chief (the highest rank in the bargaining unit) came to the fire hall and showed the crew a video called “the shocker.” The video featured a mother naming a variety of alternative ways of describing “the shocker,” a sexual technique specifically relating to the simultaneous positioning of fingers in a woman’s vagina and anus. With the power imbalance between the rank of a firefighter, and a Platoon Chief, the female firefighter did not say anything about being offended or it not being appropriate - perhaps so that she could fit in and not be labeled as a

troublemaker. Both the video and the photos objectified women in a workplace where women are a minority seeking to be included as equals.

The stories shared by firefighters in the interviews for this research echo the themes presented in the case law, bridging the gap between anecdotal evidence and legal precedent, illustrating a parallel narrative of harassment and discrimination. The accounts in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 encompass instances of derogatory comments, exclusionary behaviour, and subtle biases, mirroring the circumstances that were central in the case law shared in this chapter. This underscores the recurring nature of these issues and demonstrates that they are not isolated incidents but rather a part of a broader pattern that has a detrimental impact on the work environment.

Sexual harassment in the fire service is a multifaceted issue, and men are not excluded from being victims of sexual harassment or sexual misconduct in the fire station. They can also face sexual advances, unwelcome touching and caressing, hazing with a sexual undertone, and being subjected to offensive sexual comments and jokes. Harassment involving men is shrouded with stigma, and there is a sense of shame which prevents men from coming forward, coupled with a fear of being ridiculed or looking vulnerable. Challenges in the workplace are not limited by gender and stereotypical notions of masculinity lead to the assumption that men firefighters are immune to sexual harassment. The next three chapters will demonstrate that men are also susceptible to demeaning interactions, macroaggressions, unwanted touching, and inappropriate comments.

The lived experiences of women firefighters, as detailed in the subsequent chapters, are not just personal stories but are characteristic of broader systemic issues that require attention, understanding, and action. Legal precedents and arbitration outcomes serve as critical lessons for the Fire Services in Ontario, justifying the necessity for proactive measures in policy development, training, and cultural shifts within the workplace. These cases also highlight the importance of leadership in fostering an environment where equity, respect, and safety are paramount, and where every firefighter, regardless of gender, can thrive without the fear of harassment or discrimination.

As this chapter on case law transitions into narratives of women firefighters, it becomes evident that legal frameworks and individual experiences are intrinsically linked. The path forward requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders, including fire services, unions, legal professionals, and policymakers, to dismantle the barriers that perpetuate gender disparities and to build an inclusive, equitable, and respectful workplace culture. This research not only contributes to the academic discourse on gender and discrimination within the fire service but serves as a call for meaningful change, reinforcing the necessity for ongoing dialogue, education, and systemic reform to ensure that the fire service becomes a truly inclusive profession for all.

Using examples of legal disputes and precedents, the challenges of harassment and discrimination within the Fire Services in Ontario are exposed. Each case that reaches the formal legal system represents just the tip of the iceberg, suggesting a vast, often unseen, undercurrent of unresolved issues. These cases demonstrate how the arbitration system, in its current form, often fails women firefighters. The journey through the legal system is cluttered with obstacles faced by those seeking justice within a highly unionized and traditionally male-dominated environment. In the cases where the claimant is a woman firefighter and the defendant is a male firefighter, often the union assumes the role of an indifferent observer and, at its worst, becomes an obstinate entity that is likely to maintain the status quo, siding with the interests of those accused of harassment. This casts the union as simply another level of patriarchy for women unionists to contend with in the workplace, rather than as an ally (Crain, 1995, p. 14). For every legal battle that is fought and won, countless others are quietly stifled by management, the association, or a combination of both, or alternatively are resolved in-house, away from the scrutinizing eyes of the public and, crucially, the reformative powers of the legal system. This discrepancy not only highlights the significant barriers to reporting and addressing harassment and discrimination but also validates the need for a systemic overhaul of the arbitration process itself. My position is not merely a critique of the existing mechanisms of resolution, but a call to action. The narratives of women firefighters, fraught with challenges, injustices, and often a sense of betrayal, expose the reality of a system that is ill-equipped to protect those it serves. The

arbitration system's shortcomings exist in its failure to adequately address and rectify the issues of gender discrimination and harassment.

Exposing the gap between legal precedents and the lived experiences of women in the fire service helps depict the complexities of navigating a path to justice and exposes the systemic changes required. It is a call to reevaluate and reform the arbitration system, to ensure that it serves as a true instrument of justice, capable of upholding the principles of equity, respect, and safety for all firefighters. All stakeholders, including management, associations, arbitrators, mediators, legal professionals, and policymakers need to work together in a concerted effort to dismantle the barriers that perpetuate gender disparities. The path to creating an inclusive, equitable, and respectful workplace culture within the fire service requires not just understanding and dialogue, but actionable change. Through this lens, our journey continues, not just to highlight shortcomings but to pave the way for a future where the fire service embodies the values of justice and equality for all fire service personnel.

Chapter 6: Keeping it in the Family: Personal Ties and Getting into the Fire Service

The next three chapters include the empirical findings that form the cornerstone of the dissertation and substantiate the main argument of the research, by exploring the gender-related dynamics specific to the field of firefighting. These chapters, comprising interviews along with accompanying commentary and analysis, serve as the foundational evidence supporting this thesis. This critical inquiry is pivotal in understanding the unique challenges and opportunities associated with the firefighting profession, particularly through the lens of gender. The study aims to contribute meaningfully to the discourse surrounding gender roles in traditionally male-dominated professions.

Identifying barriers to entry helps reveal the structural inequalities within the firefighting profession. These barriers can be explicit, such as a lack of gender-specific facilities (change rooms and showers) or a lack of policies addressing harassment or discrimination. Barriers can also be implicit such as unconscious bias or an

organizational resistance to change. Both types of barriers play a significant role in shaping who gets to become a firefighter. By exploring these barriers, the research provides a deeper understanding of how systemic issues contribute to gender disparities. Engaging in conversations with study participants, this research navigates the complex barriers and related systemic challenges to entering the fire service. This chapter, along with the next two, brings to light both the subtle and pronounced forms of stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices that collectively result in an environment often less welcoming and supportive for women in the Fire Services in Ontario. By highlighting these systemic issues, the dissertation aims to contribute to a broader understanding and subsequent transformation of the workplace culture in firefighting, aligning it more closely with principles of equality and inclusivity.

The feminist standpoint theory provides a lens to analyze the firefighters' interviews, and I use excerpts under the r recurring themes to highlight firefighter's thoughts and experiences. As outlined in Chapter 4 of the theoretical framework section, standpoint theory focuses on how an individual's life circumstances influence how a person perceives and constructs a social world (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005). It highlights how power dynamics and structural inequalities influence an individual's perceptions and knowledge. The theory recognizes that women, as a marginalized group focused on in this research, possess unique insights into social structures due to their positionality.

The Fire Service as a Family Business

In the context of the fire service and the experiences of women and men with familial ties to firefighting, the feminist standpoint theory offers insights into how gender, family relationships, and societal norms shape their understanding and engagement with their profession. Firefighting is often described as a "family business," and many of the research participants described having a family member involved in firefighting, which demonstrates how personal ties and familial connections influences entry into the Fire Services in Ontario. The tradition of "keeping it in the family" can inadvertently create barriers for those outside these familial networks, particularly women. Exploring

how the long-standing practice of traditions influence entry into the fire service is crucial for understanding their role in preserving a workforce dominated by men.

The fire service is inter-generational, and many seeking to be hired have family or friends who are firefighters and can help guide them through the process (Russo, 2013). Children who grow up around firefighters benefit from early exposure to the profession, gaining familiarity with its specialized language and acronyms, interacting with fire service members, and observing a deep passion for the profession firsthand.

The fire service can feel like family, both with its supportive qualities and its inherent dysfunction in interpersonal relationships. Firefighters, in general tend to bond due to the stresses of the job and the life circumstances they experience together. Volunteer firefighters must balance a full-time job with an often equally demanding volunteer commitment. Volunteer firefighters often bring their family members to their community involvement activities, enabling them to both serve their community and share quality time with their firefighting peers and family. Participants describe some of their most memorable childhood memories as the fire department Christmas parties, spaghetti dinners, and community fairs. Transitioning into the fire service as an occupational choice seemed like a natural progression for many of the firefighters interviewed.

Because I saw the enjoyment that my dad has... it kind of pushed me towards doing that as well. So, it kind of shaped my whole future. I was one of those kids back in the day that used to sit on the bumper, and eat McDonald's while my dad was fighting a fire. (Adam, volunteer firefighter).

Fire service families have a history in the fire service that can span several generations, fostering strong familial bonds rooted in a sense of pride and duty in serving the community. Being exposed to the camaraderie and teamwork can be a motivating factor with the networking and connections made. Navigating entry into the fire service may be less of a challenge if you have friends or family in the service, as they can help advise on where to earn qualifications and certifications to set you apart as a candidate, they can guide you through the application process, coach you in

interview preparation, and provide referrals or recommendations. Seeing family members succeed in the service encouraged Jessica to pursue a similar career path.

I grew up in a small town and my mom was a volunteer firefighter. She became a volunteer firefighter for 13 years, and at some point, she became chief... I saw the way they work together, and they were always a great group and growing up I desired to do it. It was that kind of like deep-rooted, family feel of the fire service. My grandfather was also a firefighter and he retired as a fire chief. So, I think that fits in the family business. (Jessica, career firefighter).

Jessica's experience highlights the influence of her family members' success in the fire service on her career choice. Applying a feminist standpoint theory, this can be understood in the context of how societal gender norms shape the expectations and aspirations of their child(ren). In Jessica's case, seeing her mother and her grandfather successfully earn the rank of Fire Chief within the fire service challenged traditional roles and opened the possibility for Jessica in firefighting. Her family role models shifted her perceptions of what is possible for women in male-dominated professions. This reflects the standpoint theory's assertion that marginalized individuals often gain unique insights from their personal vantage point, challenging dominant perceptions. Jessica's experience disrupts the stereotype that firefighting is a masculine endeavour.

For some youth, watching their firefighter parent helped define their educational choices to follow a similar career path. However, the next generation of firefighters is competing for a job under a much more clearly defined hiring processes, where certifications, skill proficiency and experience trump what potential "ins" someone may have with an organization. Firefighters are no longer being hired in a career fire department solely because they are a good hockey player or someone knows their father.

The emphasis on certifications, skill proficiency, and work experience over personal connections or athletic talent levels the playing field when it comes to the hiring process. This approach favours candidates, regardless of gender, who have the necessary qualifications and skills, potentially benefiting competent applicants who are

women. A shift towards a more merit-based hiring process in firefighting is generally beneficial for women, if it is free from gender bias and stereotypes. Some participants did express that the increased popularity of firefighting as a career and the stringent hiring protocols has made it more challenging for anyone trying to get hired, including women. This heightened competition may disproportionately affect women if they are less represented or have fewer supports to obtain the necessary qualifications. The popularity of the job and the merit-based hiring protocols make getting hired a lot more competitive, although practices like nepotism and “who you know” may still benefit some job seekers. Navigating nepotism and connections can disadvantage those who do not have existing networks in the firefighting community. Navigating nepotism and connections within the Fire Services in Ontario can significantly disadvantage individuals who lack existing networks in the firefighting community, thereby perpetuating class, race, and indigeneity inequalities. This issue arises because the firefighting profession, like many others, often relies heavily on personal connections and recommendations for hiring and promotion. Those from historically marginalized communities, such as racialized groups and Indigenous peoples, are less likely to have established networks within the predominantly white and male-dominated fire service. As a result, they face barriers to entry and advancement that their counterparts with familial or social ties within the fire service do not encounter. This systemic disadvantage can perpetuate a cycle in which those from privileged backgrounds, who typically have more access to these networks, continue to secure positions and advance within the service, while those from less privileged backgrounds remain underrepresented. This reproduction of inequality not only affects the composition of the workforce but also impacts the cultural sensitivity and inclusivity of the fire service, potentially leading to an environment that is less welcoming and supportive for individuals from diverse backgrounds. Consequently, the reliance on nepotism and connections within the Fire Services in Ontario reinforces existing social hierarchies and hampers efforts toward achieving true diversity and equity within the profession.

I went to school for fire protection technology because my dad is a Captain in a different department. So, I think that growing up with this, the history of the fire service in the

family, I wanted to go down that road, to help my community. (Christine, composite department, career firefighter).

In the case of firefighting, the intergenerational nature of the profession leads to certain gendered dynamics within families. Children growing up around firefighters, often with fathers who are firefighters, can experience both privilege and constraints. The exposure to the firefighting culture, terminology/jargon and experiences fills a knowledge gap and is socialized with sons and daughters. The gendered dynamics in Christine's family helped shape the perception of her own capabilities and influenced her education choice beyond high school. When you know from a young age the career path you want to take, you have the opportunity to make more informed educational choices, and there may be less switching from one program to another in search of one's interest or passion, saving money and time.

I was very immersed in the culture due to my own parent being on a volunteer station... Looking back at it now, I gained a lot of my love for firefighting from my parents and being immersed in that. It felt natural for me when I did start actually moving towards going to school for firefighting. (Sophia, volunteer firefighter).

Those with less direct family connections to firefighting may be influenced to follow other educational paths. It takes some courage to make a switch and follow your passion in a highly competitive job market.

I was actually in the process of completing a degree in economics, with a plan of becoming an accountant, just like my father and my brothers before me. I was just about to enter my third year and I told my girlfriend at the time, that I didn't see myself sitting at a desk for a career and that I wasn't loving what I was studying. So, she took it upon herself to enroll me in fire school. At the time I thought, are you insane? I can't. (Brent, career firefighter).

Challenging family expectations can differ for a son or a daughter in the context of career choice. Brent's experience of challenging family expectations and pursuing a

career in firefighting rather than accounting reveals constraints imposed by traditional roles and family legacy. His family's accounting history created a norm for him and his brothers to follow. This highlights how family expectations and established career trajectories can significantly shape someone's career choices. For women, deviating from familial and societal expectations can disproportionately affect their career choices due to ingrained societal and gendered norms that dictate "suitable" careers for women. Just as Brent's career path seemed determined by family expectations, women often face societal and familial pressures steering them toward certain professions. The literature review indicates that without exposure to alternative career choices, many women may not even consider non-traditional fields as viable options (Mastracci, 2004).

The research by Mastracci highlights the significant role of perceived barriers and lack of information in influencing women's entry into non-traditional occupations. Blau, Brummund, and Liu (2013) acknowledge an increasing trend of women entering non-traditional career paths. While the shift indicates a gradual crossover of gendered occupational boundaries, the pace of this change varies significantly across different professions. Ndobu (2013) points out that the desire to break free from gender constraints and develop alternative values can motivate individuals to cross gender boundaries in their career choices. This drive is crucial for women who choose to enter male-dominated professions, seeking to establish their identity independent of traditional gender roles. Linking Brent's experience to the insights from the literature review demonstrates the parallels between his journey and the broader challenges faced by women in choosing non-traditional careers. Both scenarios reflect the profound impact of societal and familial expectations on occupational choices and the courage it takes to deviate from these prescribed paths. This connection underscores the importance of creating environments and cultures that support and encourage diverse career choices for all genders.

Seeing the firefighting crew dynamics and a parent who enjoys going to work every day can influence their children's career choices. Firefighters fight fires because they feel proud when they have done the job they set out to do; they do it for the camaraderie associated with working on a team that works well together (Unger, 2004).

My dad won the lottery with his crew. So similar to what I have with mine. It was always like a second family to him. Me and my siblings would go to his hall in the city and see his crew and we could see how tight knit they were. Even as a kid I could recognize that his workmates were his good friends, they were like family. (Ava, career firefighter).

The depiction of Ava's father and his colleagues as a close-knit family illustrates the supportive camaraderie typical in firefighting. This camaraderie, while beneficial, can also highlight and reinforce gendered dynamics within the workplace. When men dominate these close-knit networks, it can inadvertently create barriers for women, limiting their access to the same support systems. Women may find it challenging to penetrate these established social circles, which can lead to feelings of exclusion and isolation. This exclusion can hinder their professional development and integration within the team. Additionally, the informal nature of these networks often means that important information, opportunities, and mentorship are shared within these male-dominated groups, further perpetuating gender disparities. As a result, the strong bonds that benefit the group can also contribute to a workplace culture that marginalizes women, underscoring the need for conscious efforts to foster inclusivity and equal representation in such environments.

Curiosity about the firefighting profession is common when one of the family members responds to emergency incidents at all hours. It is no wonder that others in the family are interested in joining as well. Natalie describes waiting until her brother thought the culture would be more accepting of women joining.

My brother joined the station in my small town where I was born and raised. I remember waking up in the middle of night when his pager would go off, and I would wait up for him until he came home. I would want to hear, hear about what he was doing...

Probably a year after that, I saw that they were recruiting and I asked him about it and I said I'd like to apply and he said absolutely not. I was absolutely shocked and disappointed. He told me that I would be an outstanding firefighter, but they won't like you and they won't be nice to you, and these are my friends and it's my thing and I don't want to have to pick sides. Two years later, he brought me my application and he said times have changed and now now's your chance. All those things I said about you being

great before still apply, but now it's the right culture. (Natalie, composite fire department, career firefighter).

In terms of gender norms and roles, Natalie's initial career choice as a full-time teacher aligns more with the traditional expectation for women's work. Natalie's interest in firefighting is sparked by her brother's involvement. This exemplifies how personal connection, exposure, and experiences shape one's aspirations. Her brother's response when she said she wanted to apply to the fire service reflects the existence of male authority both in their family structure and in traditionally male-dominated spaces. His concern about how she might be treated by male colleagues highlights the challenges that women often face when entering fields that have historically been dominated by men. Initially her brother's reluctance to support her application reflects the prevailing culture at the time, which was not supportive or inclusive of women. However, his eventual encouragement, symbolized by him bringing her the application, indicates a shift in the power dynamics and culture within the fire service. This suggests that a change in the organizational culture allowed for the possibility of women's inclusion, creating new opportunities for previously marginalized groups.

Natalie's experience sheds light on the stereotypes and biases that exist in firefighting. Her brother's initial reaction, that she would be a great firefighter but would not be well-received, highlights the prevailing biases and the anticipated resistance from the male firefighters. The evolution of these attitudes over time, leading to her brother's change of heart, shows a gradual dismantling of these biases, making room for a more diverse and inclusive environment.

Her journey from a full-time teacher to a firefighter demonstrates the challenges and complexities women face when entering firefighting. Natalie acknowledges that she did not fully comprehend what she was signing up for when she became a member of the fire service, highlighting how the complex dynamics of male-dominated environments and gender-based challenges are not fully understood until experienced firsthand. Women often enter firefighting without fully realizing the depth of the gendered challenges they will face. This experience highlights the challenges that exist when women attempt to navigate male-dominated spaces and how their experiences in these spaces can evolve over time.

When a family member volunteers with a fire department, the constant presence of a pager becomes part of daily life. The pager and text messages are often the primary means by which a volunteer firefighter is notified of an emergency incident. The pager sounds are unpredictable, often interfering with family life, interrupting conversations, sleep, meals, and family events, causing some resentment or disappointment for firefighter's loved ones. However, the pager signifies that someone is in need. Often family members become curious about the firefighter's time away. They want to hear about the calls, the training, the crew camaraderie. It is little wonder why other family members would be drawn to the service as well, and serving the community becomes a family affair.

My (former) husband was recruited as a volunteer. The pager was in the house for approximately two years till their next recruitment. And that was kind of the push for me, to consider a fire service career. (Sarah, career firefighter).

While having family members in firefighting helps with navigating the competitive entry into the fire service, the generational firefighting family also deals with the downside of shift work, mental health issues, and associated stressors of the profession. Returning from a fire, car accident, medical call, or fire department training can be physically and emotionally challenging, especially when it is in addition to a full-time job. Emergency calls and interrupted sleep may mean a tired and irritable family member.

It's a double-edged sword. I would say that if you have the privilege of growing up in the service with a parent (father or mother) in the service, you're able to visit the fire stations and go to the fire department, Christmas parties and all of those things. You also have the impact of the job on the family life, which is obviously not always positive. It was an advantage other than just having the experience of knowing or being naive enough to think that I knew what being a firefighter was about, I would say. (Matthew, composite department, career firefighter).

Family members may be painted with the same brush, and if one is not liked or accepted by colleagues, it is hard to prove your individuality and demonstrate that you are separate entities. This makes it hard to differentiate your performance as separate from one another. The experience of Sarah being seen as a collective identity (lumped together with her ex-husband) rather than an individual underscores the importance of recognizing the complexity of identity and agency within systems of power. Sarah wanted to establish her own professional identity and be evaluated by her colleagues independently of her ex-husband's personal issues. She seemed to be overshadowed by her husband's difficulties, and she felt judged and personally tied to her ex-husband's performance. Sarah felt as if she were evaluated in relation to her partner, perpetuating a subordinate role and hindering her ability to succeed in the fire service on her own merit. Sarah's observation that her competence as a firefighter was being influenced by her association with her ex-husband's struggles, which highlights how stereotypes, biases, and assumptions can affect the perception of a woman's competence.

I found that my ex's presence in the fire service didn't help me. Our challenges within our marital relationship actually carried to the hall and some of his mental health challenges that eventually ended our relationship carried into the hall. Instead of being seen as two separate entities and being treated as two separate entities, I was lumped in with his performance challenges. In some cases where that family dynamic would be helpful, I actually had the opposite experience. It was incredibly detrimental to my advancing my career making a positive name for myself. When my ex started to struggle, then both of us started to struggle. People wouldn't differentiate between the two of us. Not to use the gender card but because I was the female firefighter trying to succeed and my male counterpart, my husband, was struggling, then all of a sudden, I couldn't be seen for all the positives I was doing. I was being seen for all of the negative components that he wasn't bringing into that space. (Sarah, career firefighter).

Seeing a parent being successful and happy in a career can also influence a career choice. Claire describes wanting to follow in her mother's footsteps, and watching her career achievements was motivational.

My mom, she came from communications and then prevention background. I didn't have anyone in my family from the suppression side. But my mom was a positive influence - seeing another female be so successful. Watching her determination and perseverance throughout her career, that was something I aspired to. (Claire, career firefighter).

Applying feminist standpoint theory to the analysis of the fire service as a family business allows for a deeper exploration of how gender, family ties, and social norms shape individuals' perceptions, experiences and choices within the firefighting profession. It highlights the need to consider the multiple perspectives and intersecting identities to gain a comprehensive understanding and opportunities faced by these firefighters within this context.

Friends and Acquaintances in the Fire Service

Sometimes random conversations or life choices can be fortuitous. Brian describes moving from an urban city to a rural area, and, by happenstance, renting a room in a house comprised of volunteer firefighters. It wasn't a concept or option he even knew existed coming from an urban area but found the whole opportunity to be life-altering.

I was living in Toronto, and the company that I worked for took a contract in a different county. I was trying to find a place to live and the I was pointed in the direction of a rental unit that was available and ironically, there's four firefighters that were volunteers in town that owned the house that I ended up renting from. They were the ones that said hey, you know, you fit the bill. You look like you get along with everybody. Why didn't

you come out and see what it's about on a Thursday training night. I figured why not give it a shot and I applied and best decision I ever made. (Brian, volunteer firefighter).

The roommate's judgement of compatibility, that Brian would "fit the bill" and "get along with everybody" could imply conformity to established gender norms. His roommates, male volunteer firefighters, had the ability to influence whether Brian was deemed a suitable fit for the team. However, it was much later when Brian developed trust with his roommates and fellow firefighters, when he disclosed he was gay. An intersectional lens acknowledges the multiple dimensions of identity and considers both Brian's gender and sexual orientation as factors that shape his experience as a volunteer firefighter. Navigating what he believed to be an exclusively heterosexual male-dominated workplace required Brian to skillfully negotiate his identities. He had to decide when he felt safe disclosing his sexual orientation and whether he wanted to challenge heteronormative assumptions and expectations.

Steve also described a similar situation, moving from a city to a rural area, looking for a volunteer opportunity. Word spread to an Assistant Chief that someone in town was looking to volunteer in the community, and the Assistant Chief reached out with an opportunity that also changed the course of his career.

I didn't know anything about firefighting. I joined as a volunteer firefighter seven years ago, before I became a career firefighter. And that was an accident. I didn't even know there was such thing as a volunteer fire service because I originally moved from the city and all they had was full-time/career firefighters. When I moved to the community, I was looking for somewhere to volunteer. The Acting Chief at the time found out about me, going around town asking for places to volunteer. So, one day this guy shows up at my house and says, hey, you're Steve, right? You ever thought about becoming a firefighter? And I laughed, and I said, not unless you could talk a fire out. He was like, well, you know, we can train you. (Steve, career firefighter).*

Steve's recruitment into the fire service happened quite organically. He was new to the community, seeking a place to volunteer, and was approached by the Assistant

Chief. The Assistant Chief approached Steve to determine his interest in joining the volunteer fire service demonstrates the process of negotiating acceptance in male-dominated spaces. This interaction was casual and based on a personal encounter, but it raises questions about whether such opportunities are equally accessible to everyone in the community.

Paul described a random conversation at the adjoining fence at his home that led him to apply to the fire service. He would see his neighbour on his day off in the backyard and wondered what he did for a living. A simple conversation set the wheels in motion, for Paul's career change.

I was an automotive mechanic before I became a firefighter, and it always intrigued me. It was exciting as a kid, the whole firemen, fire truck thing.

Paul's childhood fascination with firefighting was influenced by societal and cultural norms as well as traditional gender roles that associate bravery, heroism, and physically demanding roles like firefighting with masculinity.

But I never thought I was able to be a firefighter because of my height. I'm not a very tall man. I'm only five and a half feet tall. And I always used to come home from work and a gentleman whose backyard backed onto my parent's home, was a firefighter. I would always come home and he'd be by the pool, cleaning the pool, you know, walking around. This guy never seemed to work. And so we get to talking one day over the fence, and he suggested that I apply. And I said, Jim, I'm not tall enough, but he said that's all gone now.

Paul's perception that his height might hinder his chances of becoming a firefighter exemplifies how rigid and stereotypical physical standards can dissuade applicants who don't meet the perceived standards or stereotypes. Some fitness standards, such as the lifting and racking a ladder, often favours taller individuals, which disproportionately disadvantages women and reinforces the idea that women are

inherently less capable in physically demanding roles. Additionally, women may face added scrutiny regarding their strength and endurance.

Shortly after Jim had said that my department had put out a call for probationary firefighters.

Paul's interaction with Jim touches on the role of male allies in challenging stereotypes and gender norms. Male firefighters, like Jim, might naturally offer guidance to a male neighbour like Paul, but might not extend the same support to a female neighbor due to unconscious biases or perceived differences in ability. More broadly, similar allyship is not always extended to women trying to enter male-dominated professions. The gender dynamics involved in mentorship and support can differ for men and women.

Every step that I passed, I never ever felt confident that I was going to pass the next. And it was always overwhelming to see the number of people that were applying for such a small number of positions at that time. My department was looking for 15 people, and there were 3000 applicants. And I'm thinking out of 3000 applicants, I don't stand out, I don't have volunteer work, I don't I don't know anybody on the job. I have nothing, you know. It was probably the second biggest obstacle to overcome was the confidence that I did have something to offer the position.

Paul's lack of confidence and self-doubt despite progressing through the application process can be related to internalized stereotypes regarding what a firefighter "should" look like. Similarly, women who enter firefighting often struggle with imposter syndrome, self-doubt and a prevailing belief that they don't belong.

I'm Italian. I grew up in an Italian household. We did construction. I mean, we're not in that group of people that does government work. Right? That's for other people. (Paul, career firefighter).

Paul's reference to his Italian background and upbringing in a construction-focused household highlights cultural and social expectations that influenced his career choice. This aspect aligns with intersectionality, in which culture, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, gender and other factors can compound the challenges faced by women and racialized groups entering non-traditional careers.

Peter described how his life changed when a total stranger overheard a conversation while he was working at Tim Hortons. The unsolicited advice and suggestion by the stranger to drop by the fire hall is attributed to how Peter's life course took a turn for the better.

I was under-employed at the time working for Tim Hortons as an assistant manager... Me and my friend were sitting, taking a break from the baking, and there was only one other customer in that place. He was sitting there having a smoke and we were bemoaning how our lives are kind of dead end and no prospects and then saying what would you what would you have done if you could rewind the clock and do it right? I'd like to be a firefighter. That's always been a dream of mine. But you know, everyone always kind of discouraged me from it. They said there's no way someone like you could ever do it. You got to be big and strong. They stated all these characteristics that didn't apply to me.

In Peter's case, his discouragement from pursuing a firefighting career because he did not fit the stereotypical image of a firefighter ("big and strong") mirrors the broader challenges that women, minorities, and gender non-conforming individuals often face in such fields. This issue involves both self-imposed barriers, such as doubts about one's ability to meet perceived physical standards, and external barriers, such as societal biases and discriminatory practices that can influence hiring practices, workplace culture, and promotional opportunities.

The emphasis on traditional physical stereotypes can overshadow other essential qualities like being a team player, problem-solving skills, and dedication to serving the community. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, including re-evaluating recruitment, promoting a more inclusive culture, and actively working to

dismantle stereotypes and biases. By doing so, the Fire Services in Ontario can become more representative of the community it serves, benefiting from a diverse range of perspectives and skills.

Recruitment

Recruitment practices in the Ontario firefighting service play a significant role in perpetuating gender-based workplace dynamics that can lead to stereotypes, bias, and discriminatory practices. These dynamics contribute to an environment that is less inclusive and often unsupportive for women. Outreach and recruitment efforts are often undertaken by individual firefighters (word of mouth or interested candidates visiting a fire hall), fire Captains, and Chief Officers all of whom have insider knowledge; but whom have no formal training about effective recruitment strategies (Hardison et al., 2015, p. 15). Many fire services rely on informal recruitment methods, such as word-of-mouth or visits to fire halls, which tend to perpetuate the existing predominantly male demographics of the department (Fox et al., 2006). This excludes those outside these networks, particularly impacting women. Additionally, the lack of formal training in recruitment among those involved in hiring processes means unconscious biases and stereotypes may influence candidate selection, preventing effective outreach to diverse applicant pools.

Matthew (composite department, career firefighter) described a noticeable diversity recruitment campaign when he was competing for a position more than 20 years ago.

Yeah, there was a campaign to increase the female applicants. You know, the newspaper, advertisements were there, and clips on the northern television channels. When we wrote I think there were at least three or four applicants that were female at the time that we wrote our aptitude tests, out of about 100.

Recruitment needs to combat stereotypes about physical strength and traditional gender roles, along with the lack of female visibility in the field. Mathew explained that

the recruitment's goal was to boost female applicants, indicating a need for increased gender diversity and representation in the municipal fire service. The low number of women applicants compared to the overall pool of male candidates suggests that despite the campaign, structural barriers or societal norms might have influenced women's willingness or ability to participate. As discussed in the literature review section this could be due to factors like stereotypes, lack of role models, or the perception of a male-dominated environment.

To address these issues, several strategies could be implemented. Formal recruitment training focused on gender sensitivity and inclusive strategies could help mitigate biases. More robust public awareness and outreach campaigns are needed to actively promote firefighting careers among women, emphasizing the success of female firefighters and the benefits of a diverse workforce. Reviewing job descriptions and requirements to ensure they are essential and gender-neutral could also remove barriers. Additionally, regular diversity audits could help track progress toward diversity goals and pinpoint areas for improvement. These steps would help the Fire Services in Ontario create a more equitable and supportive environment, benefiting the entire workforce and enhancing its diversity.

Barriers to Entry

The barriers facing women who may seek non-traditional employment opportunities vary depending on the job, field, and sector. Women who choose to partake in a male-dominated career may face a variety of challenges such as a lack of support, lower income, a perception of incompetence, mistreatment and unfairness in their role, and an overall lack of voice (Gaines, 2017). Additional obstacles to career success include discrimination, fewer opportunities for leadership (Carr et al., 2003), greater social isolation from male peers (Xie & Shauman, 2003), slower advancement, and less representation at top levels (Valian, 2004). Recognizing and addressing these and many other aspects of organizational culture are essential for creating professions and organizations that successfully recruit and retain women.

Firefighting exposes individuals to a high level of personal stress and danger and requires a genuine desire to help people in need and a high level of skill and critical thinking (Fortney & Clausing, 2011). It is difficult to assess the skills, knowledge, level of fitness, and resiliency of a potential candidate to determine if they will be a good fit. Many fire departments use various assessments to rank candidates which may include a written exam, fitness test, medical screening, practical skills assessment, a driver abstract, vulnerable sector screening, and/or an oral interview. Additional components of the assessment could include a swim test and a psychometric evaluation. In very competitive hiring processes, in which there are over 1,000 potential candidates, these various assessments help score and differentiate candidates into stronger and weaker potential hires.

There were some diverging thoughts on whether the assessment criteria used in the hiring process were actually relevant to the job they were applying for, as described by Sophia.

One of the questions was regarding getting to a school within the district and how would you get there from the station. I felt like if I didn't have the right answer, it was game over. They wanted us to have everything memorized. I mean, when you're on probation, you're not driving a fire truck. I was just beginning to understand the basic fundamentals about being a firefighter. I was a bit thrown, because I thought the interview would be more who I am (Sophia, volunteer firefighter).

Sophia's observation that the interviewers placed an emphasis on memorization of navigation routes rather than on her experiences and qualifications suggests that the interview process might be influenced by traditional masculine norms associated with firefighting, such as technical skills and spatial awareness. This bias could be rooted in the assumption that women may be less knowledgeable or capable in the technical aspects of firefighting. These norms can disadvantage women who may possess other valuable qualities necessary for the job. Sophia's comment about having more to offer beyond memorization speaks to her desire to be evaluated on a more holistic set of qualities. This incident underscores the need for a critique of assessment criteria using

a gendered lens to ensure the hiring process does not perpetuate gender-based discrimination.

Sophia described feeling the need to have everything memorized to avoid failure echoes the concept of a "double bind" faced by women in male-dominated fields. An academic study found that another double bind emerges where they are held accountable to contradictory expectations for a feminine presentation of self and a masculine performance of work (Denissen, 2010, p. 1051). Women who enter male-dominated, blue-collar occupations must work exceptionally hard to demonstrate that they are competent workers (Britton, 2003; Chetkovich, 1997; Martin, 1994; Padavic, 1991; Yoder and Aniakudo, 1997). Women often experience pressure to prove their competence more than their male counterparts, and any perceived inadequacy can be magnified due to prevailing biases.

Brent described the significant amount of time, energy, and funds required to apply for the different municipal fire services. The competition to secure a job is fierce, and many get discouraged by the sheer number of candidates that they are up against. Participants described how they felt pressure to continue taking courses and choosing the right jobs to get relevant experience so they could stand out as a strong candidate. To be considered as a strong candidate takes the right education, community involvement, many hours of training, physical fitness and a strong desire to help others.

It took me four years to get hired on. I applied to every department south of Sudbury in Ontario and I went as far as Calgary, and Vancouver. I only ever got one interview and that was where I got hired.

The necessity to move away from family and friends for a career opportunity, as considered by Brent, can present several significant challenges. Firefighting is an inherently stressful and demanding profession and moving results in the potential loss of a support network of family and friends, which is beneficial for emotional and mental well-being. When relocating for a job, this support system is often left behind, which can have profound impacts on mental health, stress management, and overall job performance. Adapting to new environments is another hurdle. This includes not only

getting accustomed to a new city or town but also integrating into a new workplace culture, especially a firefighting career, which can have deeply ingrained local traditions and practices. For a woman, this challenge is often magnified. Establishing credibility and camaraderie in a new department requires additional effort, and there may be challenges related to gender biases or a lack of female-specific support systems. Finally, for those with families or considering having children, the decision to move can have far-reaching consequences. This includes impacts on partners' careers, children's education and social lives, and the overall family dynamic. In Brent's case, his strategy to apply to various departments from Ontario to Calgary and Vancouver reflects an understanding of the competitive nature of securing a firefighting job. However, it also highlights the personal sacrifices and challenges that come with such a decision. Balancing professional aspirations with personal wellbeing and lifestyle considerations are key considerations when contemplating applying to different fire departments.

On paper, in my mind, I was really well rounded. You know, academically, team sports, volunteering and everything that we've been told the fire service loves. The last thing I did was I moved in order to become a volunteer firefighter. I don't know if that's causal, but a year after that, that I got finally got my first interview.

Brent's emphasis on his well-rounded background, including academics, team sports, and volunteering, reflects his perception of what the fire service values. His standpoint is shaped by the belief that these attributes should have made him a competitive candidate.

I spent between five and \$10,000 on not only application costs to write the entrance exam but the travel you know, maintaining that CPAT certificate or York fitness, when it expired. (Brent, career firefighter).

The process of becoming a firefighter often requires substantial financial investment, which can create a barrier for those with limited resources. For instance, Brent spent between five and ten thousand dollars on various aspects of the application

process. This included the costs of writing the entrance exam, travel expenses, and completing the CPAT (Candidate Physical Ability Test) or York fitness test. Such expenses can be prohibitive for individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The necessity of investing in achieving firefighter certifications is due to the fact they are often a part of the application process and will become more so when the mandatory NFPA firefighter certification legislation is enacted in Ontario. The requirement to have certified firefighters ensures that all candidates meet a certain standard of skills and knowledge necessary for the demanding role of a firefighter. However, people who cannot afford these costs may be excluded from the opportunity to apply, regardless of their potential aptitude or desire to serve the community as a firefighter.

Only a few participants, like Claire and Louise, described a fairly seamless entry into the fire service, noting that the hiring process was not a barrier. These participants were certainly the anomalies, as it seemed to be the perceived barrier most commonly identified by the participants.

I applied to multiple fire departments. From the time I graduated pre-service until I was hired, it was two years so I was fairly lucky comparatively to most people applying to career departments. I think that's a short amount of time for people to be successful. I was also slightly older, not older, but I wasn't fresh out of high school by any means. (Claire, career firefighter).

Claire describes being "slightly older" and not a recent high school graduate, which suggests that women often face a double challenge – not only breaking into a male-dominated field but also potentially dealing with societal expectations of traditional roles and timelines for women's career paths.

Back in the day, I was 20 something years old. My father was a career firefighter in the city. He said to me one day, they're looking for dispatchers in communications. I think you should do it.... There weren't any women on the fire department so then my dad said they are looking to hire women. You need to get on the fire department in

suppression... Four of us were hired, two white guys and two women. (Louise, career firefighter).

Louise's experience of joining the fire department as a dispatcher and then working her way into suppression illustrates her strategic navigation of patriarchal systems, using the insider information of her father who was a firefighter in the same fire service. The balanced representation of genders in the firefighter cohort hired can be seen as a deliberate demonstration of the fire service's efforts to increase gender diversity and inclusion within its ranks. Historically, firefighting has been stereotypically associated as a male-dominated profession. By making conscious efforts to increase the number of female firefighters, the fire service is attempting to address this underrepresentation and working to create a workforce that reflects the diverse communities it serves. Bridging the gap from the current reality to a desired state requires a commitment to diversity and inclusivity to build a more equitable workforce. Diversity provides unique perspectives within the fire service (Ward, 2015), as firefighters bring innovative solutions to the social and demographic challenges in the community. Studies have shown that diverse teams tend to be more effective and innovative. They also provide increased avenues for positive community interaction (Edwards, 2010).

As Christine noted, the lack of women in suppression is noticeable, especially to those already in the fire service. This could be a deterrent, but for Christine, a successful transition from fire prevention to suppression would signify change.

You don't see very many females in the service. And I wanted to impact change. I'm an active person, so I wanted to do something that was physical. I like the teamwork of firefighting versus fire inspections. It can be very lonely on the inspection side. (Christine, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Christine's narrative acknowledges the underrepresentation of females in the fire service, indicating gender disparity within the field. Her desire to "impact change" reflects a need for transformation within fire service culture that marginalizes women.

Her desire to contribute to change suggests that she has been personally impacted by the existing gender inequalities and she is motivated to challenge and help reduce or eradicate them. Her perspective is likely influenced by her own experiences, leading her to recognize the importance of visibility and representation.

By emphasizing her preference for a physically demanding role, Christine challenges traditional gender norms that associate physicality with masculinity. Her presence in the firefighting profession helps to debunk the stereotype that women are not suited for physically demanding jobs and highlights her own active nature, skills, and capability.

While we have seen how family influence could encourage a career choice in firefighting, it can also dissuade people. As Sarah describes, choosing a career that didn't require a high academic standing, made her a nonconformist of sorts, in her family.

I come from a family of dual, triple and quadruple university degrees, and then I rocked the boat and wanted to become a medic. I think by the time I joined the fire service, they were just used to me not following the family trends. I have parents that are PhD and double masters certified. I have two sisters that are either double mastered or PhD certified. I was like, no, I just want to be a paramedic. I just want to be in the field getting my hands dirty. So, I don't think it was much as a surprise for my family when I said hey, I'm taking on a frontline role as a firefighter. (Sarah, career firefighter)

Sarah's choice to pursue a blue-collar firefighting career challenges the academic orientation of her immediate family lineage. Her decision marks a departure from what her parents and siblings chose to pursue. Sarah's choices places her on a divergent journey from her family's tradition of intellectual pursuits and scholarly accomplishments, as she followed a less conventional route into the field of emergency services. Sarah's decision to become a paramedic and firefighter aligns with her desire for hands-on work, challenging stereotypes about women's preferences and capabilities. Her willingness to "get her hands dirty" demonstrates her rejection of gendered limitations, her inclination to define her identity, aspirations on her own terms,

and courage to break down traditional gendered divisions of labour. Sarah's decision to pursue a career as a paramedic and then firefighter showcases her autonomy and agency. She navigates her own path and resisted family pressures to conform to family expectations.

What constitutes traditional versus non-traditional careers for women is influenced both by perception and reality, by societal and cultural norms that shape a woman's decision to favour certain jobs over others, and by structural barriers for entry into specific fields of work. Maria challenged the cultural concept of what career options women could consider. She didn't experience resistance from her family and the success of her goal was not contingent on her parents' approval. Parent's approval for a career choice in non-traditional work could be a barrier for some, especially those who are financially dependent on basic needs like housing. However, Maria demonstrated that she was capable of securing employment in her desired profession as a career firefighter, to the surprise of her traditional Italian family.

My mom was excited and supportive when I applied to be a firefighter. My dad ultimately didn't think I could do it. And then when I got the job, he was shocked. I grew up in an immigrant household, like traditional. I would say I didn't I didn't have the support of my dad, but I did have my mom. I'm a girl and that's not a job that girls should do. (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria grew up in a culturally conservative Italian family which placed a strong emphasis on the prioritization of family obligations. She described a traditional Italian culture in which certain gender norms were ascribed to men and women. In a patriarchal society, men are the providers and hold the decision-making authority while women are typically seen as subordinates and are expected to fulfill roles related to caregiving, domestic labour and preserving cultural traditions. Furthermore, gender roles often dictate what is considered "appropriate" careers for men and women to pursue.

Maria's choice to become a firefighter directly challenges these norms, especially within the context of her immigrant household, which had a certain degree of cultural

expectations of conformity to traditional gender roles. Maria's passage highlights the varying levels of support she received from her parents. Her mother's support for her career choice demonstrates a shift towards a more progressive perspective. On the other hand, her father's skepticism and disbelief upon her successful job offer reflect a resistance to the idea of a woman taking on a physically demanding and non-traditional role. This disparity in support demonstrates how feminist issues can be deeply intertwined with familial dynamics and cultural heritage.

Maria's statement that firefighting is "not a job that girls should do" suggests how gender roles were socialized in her family as she was growing up. Her decision to pursue a career as a firefighter, despite the perceived lack of support from her father and her Italian cultural heritage, underscores the importance of women breaking free from traditional constraints and defining their own career paths. Challenging patriarchal knowledge production is born of feminist political consciousness, forged in struggle against women's oppression, and in this sense a standpoint is an achieved status (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, p. 333). Maria's journey can be interpreted as a small but significant step in challenging patriarchal structures.

Volunteer fire services struggle with retention, so it's generally not that challenging to secure a position, comparatively to being hired on a career fire service. The volunteer fire services are also acutely aware that some people purposefully move into rural areas to try and get experience as a volunteer firefighter, to help build their resume and use the experience as a stepping stone to secure full-time employment as a firefighter. These firefighters are quite transient, and the volunteer fire service invests money into training and ensuring appropriate personal protective equipment, only to have the person leave once they are hired on full-time somewhere else.

It was fairly seamless going into becoming a volunteer. So, at 18, I got on with the volunteers and then at 20 I got hired full time. (Ava, career firefighter).

Ava's experience of seamlessly transitioning into volunteer firefighting at a young age might be indicative of familial influence and the fact her father had a good reputation in the fire service. Working alongside her brother provided a sense of camaraderie, mutual support, and a male ally, which is helpful in a male-dominated field. The decision to give up a half scholarship to a prestigious university for hockey in

favour of pursuing firefighting reflects her strong commitment to her chosen career path. Opting to move from a volunteer fire service to a career fire service demonstrates her decision to establish full-time employment in a field she is passionate about.

Peter was hired 26 years ago, when there wasn't consistent rigour in the hiring process. This allowed for personal opinions to infiltrate the process regarding the appropriate skills, characteristics and/or life experience that could be attributed to a good candidate. In his experience, his short stint as an Air Cadet was what prompted his selection.

After I got hired, I was on a shift change and I was on shift with the Captain who interviewed me. I asked him like, hey, listen, you were the guy that interviewed me. Do you remember me? I wanted to know what it was that he saw me – what made him select me. He said Peter, honestly, I didn't like any of the guys I interviewed. And I didn't want to move any of you along. I went and told the Chief that I thought you all were a bunch of idiots. I didn't want to hire any of you and the Chief said, well, you're gonna have to find 12 names. The Captain said, twelve - I can't find one. So, the Chief told him to pick people with military experience. Luckily it came up in that interview that I was in the Air Cadets for three years – so that was enough military experience for them to hire me. (Peter, composite fire department, career firefighter).*

Peter, a new firefighter, and the Captain who was given the authority to make hiring recommendations to the Chief highlights the power imbalance between the two ranks. The Chief's direction to hire individuals with military experience reflects the institutional belief that the fire service and the Canadian military align in terms of notions of authority, discipline, and control. Demonstrating aptitude in the military suggests suitability in the fire service.

Male resistance to female influence also affects the hiring of women for traditionally masculine jobs. While Maria was very confident that her attributes would align with being a good firefighter, she did point to the perceived intervention, which required the hiring panel to consider a female applicant. She also suggested that this intervention impacted the selection process, and at times, the quality of candidate hired.

I believed there are girl firefighters, and I can be one, and that's it.

This reflects Maria's awareness of her gender identity and her conviction that she could challenge traditional gender roles and gender expectations.

I personally think I deserved my job. I worked hard for it.

Maria speaks to the recognition of women's agency and competence in male-dominated fields.

However, I feel like the interviewers were all old and they were told that they had to interview girls, so they did. But if it was up to them, they would never interview girls. That's what I think. (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria's perception that the interviewers were "old" and that they might have only interviewed women due to external pressures, indicates an antiquated way of thinking, highlighting the need for intervention from systemic gender bias and institutional power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequalities. Maria believed that the interviewers might not have selected the women applicants if not for mandates. This emphasizes the importance of mitigating strategies to counteract the systemic barriers women encounter in male-dominated professions, like firefighting.

Competition

An overwhelming concern for those competing to be hired as a career firefighter is the sheer number of applicants. Competitiveness is not just about the number of applicants; it's also about the quality of them. Candidates feel pressure to take specialized technical rescue training courses, have the right relevant work experience, a higher level of medical training, a skilled trade, and some community volunteer work. Composite and volunteer departments in proximity to urban areas tend to be more competitive when it comes to securing a volunteer firefighter position. It gives

candidates applying for career departments the opportunity to gain relevant work experience while still being close to full-time employment opportunities outside of the fire service.

I applied maybe four times for my volunteer service. On the fourth try, I moved on. It's highly competitive, and I personally believe that is because people think it's an opportunity to move on to career and gain the experience. So, it's very, very competitive. The testing rooms had between 200 to 450 people for only about 15 to 20 positions. (Sophia, volunteer firefighter).

Many of the interviewees who were already career firefighters reflected on a highly competitive recruitment process when they were hired. Volunteer firefighters interviewed, who expressed their pursuit of full-time firefighting careers, also highlighted the intensely competitive and often frustrating recruitment process. It was unclear if the competitiveness disproportionately affected women, as it was widely discussed by many of the interviewees. It was acknowledged that the sheer number of applicants and the uncertainty around what the hiring committee was actually valuing in their selection process was a challenge. Further research is required to explore how this competitiveness affects women's willingness to pursue a role in the field. The competitiveness can sometimes indicate structural barriers that prevent equal access and opportunities. Future research calls for a critical examination of these structural barriers and whether they are intentionally or unintentionally reinforcing gender inequalities. This could include evaluating the fairness of the selection process, access to resources, and support systems. Being a candidate in the career firefighting recruitment competition is tough. Brian described how discouraging and frustrating it can feel to attend the written examination and see how many others just like him are trying to secure employment in the same chosen career.

One of the biggest barriers I am facing is just the number of applicants compared to how many jobs there are. I went through the last one [recruitment] and on the list that you could see the number of people that were going for the written test. There was

1000s of names on that list. Out of that, only 700 showed up for the written component of the recruitment, but there's still a large contingent of people competing for very few jobs. It's very competitive. (Brian, volunteer firefighter).

Like Sophia, Brian's role as an applicant places him in a competitive environment, vying for limited positions in a competitive field. This competition shapes his perception of the situation. His observation that thousands of people applied for the position, with 700 attending the written test, validates his perception of the profession's competitiveness. He describes the feeling of discouragement due to the intense competition and the limited number of positions available.

The stringent competition for those pursuing a job as a firefighter in the Fire Services in Ontario can be viewed two ways: as an indication of a rigorous and merit-based system, or conversely, as a facade that in reality, favours the current dominant group - white men. On one hand, a highly competitive hiring process can be perceived as a testament to the high standards and rigorous recruitment process. This scenario suggests that all candidates, regardless of gender, are subject to the same stringent criteria, ensuring that only the most qualified and capable individuals are selected. For women, succeeding in such a process can be empowering, demonstrating their ability to meet or exceed the high benchmarks set for the role. Conversely, the illusion of a competitive process could mask underlying biases that favour male candidates. The physical fitness test could be designed around male physiology, inadvertently putting women at a disadvantage. Interviews and other subjective assessment methods could be influenced by unconscious biases, leading those on the hiring panel to favour male candidates or to hold women to higher standards. This dichotomy ties into the broader discussion of gender dynamics in firefighting, where nuanced stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices can shape the experiences of women in the field.

Fitness Test

Structural firefighting has been described as one of the most physically demanding occupations (Gledhill, 1997; Gedhill & Jamnick, 1992; Cheung, Petersen & McLellan, 2010). Due to occupational hazards such as extreme heat, carcinogens, and

hazardous materials firefighters must wear a personal protective equipment (PPE) including bunker gear, helmet, gloves, structural firefighting boots, balaclava, and a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA). Firefighters are required to lift and carry heavy loads while completely encapsulated in protective clothing, and they frequently work in extreme conditions (Taylor, Fullagar, Mott, Sampson & Groeller, 2015a; Taylor, Fullagar, Sampson, et al., 2015b; Cheung, Lee & Oksa, 2016; McLellan & Havenith, 2016). It is a common requirement for firefighters to undergo and pass a physical fitness test which involves physically demanding tasks often faced during real firefighting and rescue work, prior to being employed (Mamen, von Heimburg, Oseland & Medbø, 2021, p. 460). The participants describe how they have experienced or witnessed the ways in which the challenges of the fitness test differ between the men and women applicants.

The process was in a large, open area so you could see people doing the physical and practical testing. There were a few male participants who were not successful. It did surprise me because typically, unfortunately, it's more women who are not able pass. The one that stands out was the failure in respect to a dummy drag. That person was not understanding the ergonomics of how to get low enough to get underneath the 200-pound dummy to lift up and use his legs. He was not able to complete that task. I wasn't entirely sure what I was up against. I just did my regular routine of weightlifting and whatever I could to prepare, and thankfully I was successful, but it was it was difficult at that time. (Sophia, volunteer firefighter).

Sophia's observation that "typically, unfortunately, it's more women who are not able to pass" highlights the systemic barriers that women often face in male-dominated fields. This statement reflects the deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and societal expectations that assume women are less capable in completing physically demanding tasks. Sophia's success in the fitness test and the unexpected failure of male firefighter candidates challenge stereotypes and emphasize the need to question and dismantle biased expectations. The male candidate's failure exposes how men, like women, can struggle when tasks are designed based on a specific notion of ability. Sophia's preparation for the fitness test through weightlifting and skills training represents a

reclaiming of agency over her body and her abilities. This highlights the feminist perspective of empowerment, where women actively challenge societal limitations and stereotypes to prove their capabilities.

Sarah described how her height and physical size were obstacles which she overcame with sheer will during the fitness/practical test. She was also not provided the appropriately sized PPE for the test and was not permitted to use her own personal protective equipment that she had brought to the testing facility.

I had some trouble with the overhead the ladder. I'm quite petite. I'm five foot three, and at that point in time, I was kind of a rag soaking wet. So, the height piece on the ladder was definitely a challenge because I'm up on my tippy toes just to get the thing racked, let alone unracked.

Sarah describes her challenges with the physical fitness test, one of many assessment components to secure a firefighting job. Her petite stature (being five foot three) and fact that she has to go on her "tippy toes" to handle the ladder suggests that the test's design doesn't take into account the diversity of body sizes and heights among candidates. The test seems to assume a certain stature which puts Sarah at a disadvantage due to her smaller size. This reflects the prevailing gender norms that often equate physical strength with masculinity, marginalizing those who do not conform to these norms.

The raising the ladder was also a challenge. It really was just because they did not have any petite size gloves and so I'm trying to hand over hand raise the ladder wearing gloves that are way too large. There was some issue as to why I was not allowed to use the gloves that I had brought to the testing.

Sarah's difficulty in raising the ladder due to ill-fitting gloves further highlights the lack of consideration for gender-specific needs in the testing process. The absence of petite-sized gloves and the prohibition against using her own gloves suggest a disregard for her individual needs. The use of improperly sized gloves symbolizes the systemic

issues women often face in male-dominated fields, where resources and equipment may not be designed or procured with their specific needs in mind.

I had a job offer riding on completing the fitness test. I was offered my role pending completion and so I had a very motivating reason to be successful. So, unlike other individuals that may be doing their test with OFAI, as an example, where you complete your OFAI process and then you're able to apply for jobs. I had a job offer. I would say that that is a slightly different motivating reason than someone who knows that in 30 days, they can reattempt, and they don't have a job offer or even a job prospect in front of them. (Sarah, career firefighter).

Sarah's motivation to succeed is highlighted by the fact that she has a job offer riding on her completion of the fitness test. This situation reflects the broader gendered dynamic in which women might feel additional pressure to succeed due to the scarcity of opportunities.

There were members of the community that might not be the most physically fit. They were individuals that wanted to help the community and get involved and they just could not complete some of the tasks. The low reduced profile was one station that was a little bit challenging for some of the people, some of the individuals who had a larger stature. They had a hard time going through those low and reduced profiles and maybe it was the claustrophobia that freaked them out. Then one of the other ones, it was just the cardio and keeping pace with everybody else and catching his breath. (Brian, volunteer firefighter).

Brian highlights the rigorous nature of the fitness test as a prerequisite for becoming a volunteer firefighter. This passage highlights that it is not only women who struggle with the assessment. It underscores the importance of physical fitness and competencies necessary to not only be successful in the evaluation process for recruitment, but in the day-to-day tasks and challenges of firefighting. Participants described either having a lifestyle that involved fitness, or the need to attend a gym to

prepare for the fitness testing. Some candidates included specific workout routines to prepare for the assessment process.

I signed up at the community center so I could go and workout after work. And one evening when I went there, I was starting to mess around with the with the weights and what not and the fitness instructor there says, oh, can I help you with anything you're trying to achieve? I said, well, actually, I'm trying to get in shape for the fire department. She said, oh, my husband is in the process of trying to get on as well. I got a routine setup for him, so she was able to help me with this routine that she had developed for her husband. It was just again it was the right time in the right place. So yeah, I did that every night for a number of weeks to get in shape for the physical fitness test at York. (Paul, career firefighter).

When the Paul started working out at the community center, he sought the advice and input of a female fitness instructor to help improve his strength in preparation for the firefighter fitness evaluation. The presence of a female fitness instructor in a traditionally male-dominated field highlights the evolving nature of gendered spaces, society's progress towards inclusivity, the potential for collaboration, and shifting gender dynamics in spaces traditionally associated with a specific gender as the subject matter expert.

The components of the fitness test often are comprised of flexibility, cardiopulmonary endurance, muscular strength and muscular endurance. If you don't understand appropriate technique, it can be a detrimental barrier to success. Training can improve muscular performance, power performance, and muscular adaptations.

We were at the York fitness test and Melanie was doing the rope pull, where you are up several flights of stairs and you need to raise and lower the weight several times within the time standard. She failed at it. And it was all in her stance. She was basically standing there with her feet shoulder width apart and bent over at the waist and pulling up like that. And there's like a little curb thing on the ground, or you could take a different stance, but she was my direct competition. I wasn't about to give pointers to my*

competition. So, I watched her fail at it. There's no way I could have done it the way she did it. (Peter, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Peter's interpretation of Melanie's failure indicates that he doesn't blame her strength, size, or any factors related to her gender - rather it was her flawed technique. Peter's assertion that very few people could have done it the way Melanie did indicates regardless of if it was a man or women, strength couldn't overcome poor technique. Peter learned from Melanie's experience and adjusted his technique by placing his foot on a curb, to successfully complete the task. Similarly, Brent described how listening to instructions and seeking verification of what is and is not acceptable is key during the fitness testing. Not understanding what can disqualify you from the process is also identified as a barrier.

I didn't personally witness people who failed the fitness test, but I had heard of people failing. It wasn't like a physical capacity issue. It was a technicality issue. So, for example, people were failing on technical faults, you know, like touching a handrail, or you know, nothing related to physical capacity. (Brent, career firefighter).

Brent discusses people failing a fitness test due to technical faults rather than physical capacity. This implies that the fitness test could be an even playing field for both genders and involves adherence to protocols and processes to successfully complete the assessment. However, a feminist perspective would consider whether the fitness test is truly neutral in its design and evaluation. Maintenance of strength and fitness ensures crew members can feel confident in life-saving abilities. Often women have to defend their capability of completing tasks and continue to feel their ability to perform is being judged by their peers. Commitment to a healthy lifestyle and working out provides some assurance to colleagues that a firefighter takes their job and duties seriously.

I do believe that physical standard of being able to maintain because this job can be very challenging and hard. Even for a strong man. So definitely women that enter the

fire service, need a certain physicality to be able to perform. And I guess it speaks to trust of your crew and confidence of your crew that they know, yep, she can step up for me if I fall through a floor, she's gonna be able to work to get me out of there. I then I have faith that she's as good as Mike over there, who's actually kind of out of shape. So actually, I trust her more because she is in shape. So, when people make criticisms about women in the fire service, because I come from a sports background myself, I'm always saying well, yeah, but look at that guy compared to her. She's more diminutive. She isn't as strong as a big guy, but she's going to be better than that guy. So don't point fingers at her unless you want to point fingers at him. That's my feeling anyway. (Scott, career firefighter).

Scott acknowledges the physical demands of firefighting and believes that all firefighters need to meet a certain physical standard to perform the job effectively. The reality is that only a small fraction of the emergency incidents that firefighters respond to are structure fires or rescues.

Scott compares the capabilities of women and men in the fire service, suggesting that some women outperform some men on the firefighting crew, acknowledging that individual skills and abilities shouldn't be attributed to gender. However, it's important to note that making such comparisons could also perpetuate the idea that women need to constantly prove themselves against men in traditionally male-dominated fields. Later in the interviews we will see women firefighters feel pressured to work harder to gain the trust of their colleagues and prove their capabilities, thus giving a unique insight into dynamics related to gender and trust in the workplace. Scott challenges criticisms of women in the fire service by pointing out the shortcomings of men as well. This can be seen as a way of highlighting the unequal scrutiny and gendered criticisms faced by women. Women firefighters are often critiqued more intensely, and this criticism is rooted in gender biases.

Claire indicated that when she went through the fitness test, she was already physically fit, from regular workouts at the gym, CrossFit training, and wildfire experience. The fitness test was not something that concerned her, and she never

thought that it would be a component from which she would be removed from the process.

I was always pretty physically fit and that played a large part in my lifestyle. It worked well in terms of my application, and the testing. It wasn't something I specifically thought, I'm gonna train this way so it translates well into this part of the test. Luckily my training and my lifestyle fit well into succeeding at the fitness testing. (Claire, career firefighter).

By being physically fit and succeeding in her role, Claire navigates the power dynamics that exist within firefighting. Her ability to meet the fitness requirements of the job not only empowers her but also challenges the power structures that have historically excluded women from such positions. Claire's success in her career demonstrates she is able to navigate the power dynamics in firefighting and her presence challenges the stereotype that women are not naturally suited for physically demanding roles like firefighting. Her success based on her own terms underscores the importance of individuality and autonomy for women in their professional pursuits.

The journey to securing a position in the Fire Services in Ontario is incredibly competitive, presenting both men and women with unique challenges to securing a job as a firefighter. The increased difficulty women experience stems from a variety of factors. First, there are deeply ingrained societal stereotypes and biases that suggest women are less capable of handling physically demanding or high-risk jobs. These stereotypes can influence recruitment efforts and hiring decisions, leading to fewer opportunities for women. Additionally, women may encounter gender-based discrimination during the recruitment process, where physical fitness standards or assessment practices might not adequately account for gender differences. Furthermore, a lack of representation and role models in the profession can make it harder for women to envision themselves in these roles. These challenges often deter women from even considering careers in firefighting, and for those who attempt to pursue a career in the fire service, these factors create a more challenging path. Gender-based dynamics significantly influence the professional landscape of firefighting

in Ontario, and addressing gender-specific obstacles is crucial for encouraging women to apply to the fire service and experience an equitable recruitment and hiring process.

Working in the fire service demands more than physical stamina and technical expertise; it requires one to assimilate into a culture that is traditionally masculine and often resistant to change. For women, acceptance in this environment means continually proving their worth, surpassing the expectations set by entrenched stereotypes. This next chapter will delve into the personal accounts of women firefighters who have had to assert their competence and earn their place in their teams, often in the face of skepticism. Furthermore, the close quarters in which fire service personnel live and work introduce an additional layer of complexity to the professional environment. This intimacy breeds a unique set of social challenges, from navigating daily interactions to dealing with conflicts that inevitably arise. For women, these dynamics are further complicated by the need to balance assertiveness with approachability, to be part of the team without compromising their identity or values.

Promotion within the fire service introduces yet another arena where competition and subjectivity can cloud the ideals of fairness and meritocracy. This next chapter will explore how promotional processes, often perceived as ambiguous or biased, can act as barriers to advancement for women in the fire service. Through interviews, I uncover the strategies employed by those who have successfully climbed the ranks, shedding light on the unspoken rules and the importance of mentorship, networking, and advocacy.

In essence, the journey of women in the Fire Services in Ontario is a testament to their resilience, adaptability, and unwavering commitment to their profession. By sharing their voices, I aim not only to highlight the challenges but also to celebrate the triumphs and pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future in firefighting. It becomes clear in the next chapter that addressing gender-specific obstacles is not just about opening doors; it's about changing the culture within, ensuring that once inside, every firefighter has the opportunity to thrive, advance, and ultimately, lead.

In discussing the barriers to entry for women in firefighting, this dissertation extends the concept of embodiment beyond the traditionally narrow focus on physical fitness and strength, central to cases like *Meiorin* (1999), to a broader understanding of

how women's bodies and experiences are shaped by the firefighting profession. While the *Meiorin* (1999) case scrutinized the fairness of physical fitness tests for women, this research argues that true embodiment in firefighting involves far more than passing these tests. It encompasses factors such as mental health, uniforms, workplace harassment, and family life, all of which impact women's participation, performance, and retention in the fire service.

The inclusion of mental health in the embodiment conversation is critical, particularly in a high-stress profession like firefighting, where trauma and psychological strain are prevalent. Historically, fitness and strength have been the benchmarks for evaluating a firefighter's capability. However, mental health challenges are increasingly recognized as fundamental to resiliency - an individual's ability to endure the pressures of the job and contribute effectively over the long term. For women, this dimension of embodiment is critical, as they face the compounded stress of not only the inherent dangers of firefighting but also the often-hostile work environments that can exacerbate mental health struggles.

The *Meiorin* (1999) decision focused on physical fitness standards as bona fide occupational requirements, arguing that fitness tests must not disproportionately disadvantage women unless they are essential to job performance (Jamnick, Thomas and Gledhill 2010). While this was a landmark case in addressing gender discrimination in the workplace, it primarily focused on the physical aspects of employment barriers. This dissertation builds on *Meiorin* (1999) by arguing that mental health must be seen as a similarly important component of occupational fitness. A physically fit firefighter who is mentally overwhelmed or burned out cannot perform effectively, particularly in a profession where split-second decisions and action under extreme stress are critical to safety.

For many women in firefighting, the physical demands of the job are compounded by the psychological strain of working in a male-dominated culture. Harassment, exclusion, and a lack of support systems are common experiences that affect their mental health and contribute to a sense of alienation within the workplace. The emotional toll of being a "token" female firefighter, combined with experiences of isolation or harassment, can negatively impact their mental well-being, further

complicating their embodiment of the role. This stress is an extension of the physical challenges discussed in *Meiorin (1999)*, demonstrating that mental health is just as important to a woman's full embodiment of the firefighter role as her physical fitness.

Another critical aspect of mental health in the embodiment conversation is the tension between family life and the demands of firefighting. Women firefighters often face the challenge of balancing long shifts and unpredictable work hours with caregiving responsibilities, adding additional stress that impacts their mental well-being. The fire service has traditionally been structured around a male model of employment, assuming that firefighters do not bear the primary responsibility for family care. This structure overlooks the needs of women, many of whom must navigate this tension as part of their embodied experience in the firefighting profession.

The stress of balancing family responsibilities with the demands of firefighting further highlights how embodiment extends beyond the physical to encompass emotional and psychological dimensions. The mental load of managing both spheres can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, guilt, or anxiety, all of which undermine a woman's ability to fully engage in and succeed within the fire service. We recognize that the mental strain of firefighting, combined with gender-specific pressures, calls for fire services to not only revisit their physical fitness standards but also to invest in mental health support systems that address the unique pressures women face.

This chapter has outlined the obstacles all firefighters face and the ingrained prejudices that women in particular face on their journey towards securing a position in the Fire Services in Ontario. From societal stereotypes that question women's physical capabilities to direct gender-based discrimination in recruitment processes, the path is troubled with challenges that extend beyond securing a position as a firefighter. As we pivot to the subsequent chapter, our focus shifts from the hurdles of entering the fire service to the multifaceted experience of existing within it. This transition is critical, for earning the uniform is but the beginning of a complex journey that requires not just resilience but the ability to navigate the intricate social dynamics of the profession.

Chapter 7: Into The Fire: Experiences of Working in the Fire Service

The journey of a firefighter does not simply end with being hired. It is a continuous path of proving oneself, embracing the pride and tradition of the service, and navigating the many complexities of the profession, including mentorship, social dynamics, and job satisfaction. This chapter shares the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of firefighters. It offers a rare glimpse into their professional lives, highlighting not only the feeling of fulfillment and camaraderie found in this line of work, but also confronting the less discussed aspects such as exclusion and sexual harassment, which also permeate the profession.

By sharing excerpts of personal narratives, this chapter uncovers the challenges from both the male and female perspectives, shedding light on the realities that shape the experiences of those who work tirelessly to keep our communities safe. This chapter is not just about the challenges of the profession; it's a testament to the resilience and dedication of firefighters, and an exploration of what it truly means to be part of the Fire Services in Ontario.

Skills in Recruit Class

A recruit firefighter is a prospective firefighter who has been hired by a fire service and is within their probationary period. Regardless of a candidate's previous experience or training, fire departments provide newly hired firefighters with training that covers firefighting techniques, hazardous materials control, rescue skills, emergency medical procedures, and department-specific standard operating procedures. Fire training is a crucial factor in determining if firefighters are prepared to meet the challenges of the work environment, and they undergo scrutiny to ensure they will not operate in a manner that will put themselves or their colleagues in danger. Core firefighting duties require a skill set that firefighters need to learn, retain, and practice throughout their careers (Giesler, 2016). Training means the difference between success and failure (Loyd and Richardson, 2014, p. 48).

I would say that my skills were above average based on my pre-service. Not many folks had pre-service going into the volunteer recruit class, so for them it was a huge learning curve. I went through a four-month pre-service and was selected to do a mentorship program for the following class. So, I actually did eight months of pre-service. So, I did feel very confident in my abilities, and I also understood the department and the expectations. Skill wise I went in feeling very confident compared to a lot of folks coming right off the street, starting fresh. (Sophia, volunteer firefighter).

Sophia emphasizes how she has set herself apart from her colleagues, which she achieved through intense and thorough preparation. This indicates the requirement to hone skills in order to overcome potential gender-based bias or stereotypes. Women often need to appear exceptionally competent to gain the same recognition as their male counterparts. It demonstrates that because the bar is set higher for women, a woman must be “twice as good as a man” to get a job, at least in the traditionally male-dominated jobs and most leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 115). Her sense of confidence could be a result of her extended preparation, but it could also be influenced by the need to project strength in a challenging environment where women might be perceived as less capable. By highlighting her commitment and effort, she is challenging the notion that women are inherently less suitable to becoming firefighters.

Although new firefighters enter recruit class with varying level of exposure to tools, related skill proficiency, experience and education, many didn't see this as detrimental. Tovar (2008) reported that initially, recruit firefighters rarely doubt their learning abilities. Similarly, Maria expressed these same sentiments:

Mostly everyone in recruit class was either coming from trades or were volunteer firefighters. I feel that most of my colleagues had more exposure to tools and firefighting, truck driving and more of the technical experience. But I honestly, I never thought about it that way back then. Like those things never entered my mind. I never felt like when I was in class, or training, thinking, oh my God, these guys are so much better than me or I can't do what they can do. Like that just never entered my mind. I felt like we all applied for the job, then we all got job offers and we all accepted them. And

we're all starting from zero. So everybody was green. I don't know maybe it's because my co-workers never made me feel that way. (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria's observation of her colleagues' prior work experience, technical skills, and manual labour suggests the fire service had a hiring preference for candidates from specific blue-collar fields. Maria's assertion that she never felt inferior or inadequate compared to her male colleagues' highlights a resilience that may either be innate or a coping mechanism she has developed over her career. Maria's perspective that everyone was starting from the same point, regardless of gender, indicates her willingness to adopt a gender-neutral outlook. Maria's observation that her coworkers never made her feel inferior suggests that a supportive work environment that contributed to an inclusive work culture.

Some of the men described training exercises in which they were not familiar with the task as being a barrier. Steve described the psychological barrier that he experienced during a physical training evolution:

There was only one thing in the entire recruit training that I had a problem with, and it was a lobster trap. I didn't even know I had a problem with it until I went through it. Now I did eventually do it and I wiggled out when I went through it the first time. But it kind of triggered me to something that happened when I was a kid. I was smuggled out of Trinidad because a militia had taken over the country and they were killing people. My parents were in Canada on vacation when it happened, so I was kind of stranded. My grandmother's from Venezuela. So I was put in a boat in a box and they shipped me over to Venezuela, and then from Venezuela, to Canada, outside of a box, of course. But, it triggered that memory of when I was a kid stuck in that box.

This experience underscores Steve's marginalized position as a refugee and survivor of a traumatic event. This background gives him a unique standpoint from which he views the firefighting profession and interprets his interactions with colleagues.

It really messed with my head. And I actually I actually cried, which, you know, I lost a lot of respect from some of the training officers when I did that. And they're like, what's

wrong with this big tough guy? I just walked away and I said, you know what, I'll do it in a moment. (Steve, career firefighter).

The emotional response stemming from his experience of trauma and vulnerability would not be expected by others. Firefighter recruit training is traditionally an environment associated with toughness and resilience. Steve's response challenges the stereotypical notion of the "big tough guy" and highlights the complexity of emotions tied to his particular standpoint. Without his colleagues being privy to the underlying reasons, Steve's emotional reaction leads to judgment by the training officers, who question his behaviour and psychological welfare. It points to how easily there can be a disconnect between the life experiences of marginalized firefighters and the empathy of those who hold a position of authority, such as the training officers.

Ava didn't think gender created any specific barriers during recruit class. She felt that as long as you were trying, and that you demonstrated the appropriate competencies, you could be successful in recruit class.

I think the fire service is changing, as long as you can do the job, that's all people care about. I don't think there's so much of the male/female thing anymore as long as you can do the job. So if you can prove yourself I think that's all that matters. (Ava, career fire department).

Ava's statement indicates that she believes the fire service is moving away from being concerned about the gender of the firefighter and is increasingly focused on an individual's ability to perform the job. Ava implies that competence and skills are valued and considered more important factors for hiring than traits associated with being a specific gender. This aligns with feminist standpoint theory's argument that those positioned at the margins of society can offer critical perspectives on shifts in organizational norms and power dynamics.

Ava's asserts that "if you can prove yourself, that's all that matters." This reflects the ideas presented in the "requirement to outperform" section of the literature review, which offered outcomes of academic studies where women and other marginalized

groups often need to work harder and demonstrate their capabilities more extensively to gain acceptance in firefighting and other male-dominated professions.

Ava's perspective, suggesting that gender does not create barriers in the fire service and that competence is the only criterion for success may lead to the invalidation of the experiences of other women, and the assumption that those who fail to succeed in such environments do so because of personal shortcomings, rather than systemic issues. This perspective could inadvertently diminish the challenges and discrimination that many women still encounter in the Fire Services in Ontario. If Ava's perspective is widely adopted, it could lead to complacency and a reduction in initiatives aimed at supporting women and addressing gender-based disparities, undermining ongoing efforts to promote diversity and inclusion.

When I started firefighting, I came into recruit class with very few firefighting specific skills. I was fortunate that we went right into a recruit program in-house where we had the ability to certify to NFPA 1001 firefighter level one and two and hazmat. So, I gathered those skills quickly. Did I have a sense of mechanical aptitude? Yes. Did I have a work ethic? Yes. Did I have some of those things that I would say are your stereotypical traits that you might speak about a firefighter having? I think so. But did I know how to run a pump? Absolutely not. Did I know how to drive a diesel truck with the DZ? I didn't. Did I know how to catch a hydrant? No. Did the people around me - absolutely they did. (Natalie, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Natalie acknowledges that upon entry into recruit training, she already possessed some qualities which could be applied to the firefighting profession, such as work ethic and mechanical aptitude. This suggests she possesses traits and skills that are not exclusive to gender but are associated with the competencies and capabilities of firefighters. Natalie highlights her quick acquisition of firefighting skills through the in-house training program. This demonstrates her capability to excel and adapt, proving that given proper training and equal opportunity, women can be valuable members of the fire service. Natalie willingly admitted a lack of knowledge about certain technical aspects of firefighting, like running a pump or driving a truck requiring a DZ license. Her

humility and readiness to learn from others contributed to building overall competency as a firefighter.

Being Assigned to a Crew

Women firefighters routinely face skepticism and criticism and report needing to constantly prove themselves as exceptional and always under an intense spotlight. Maria highlighted her experience after successfully completing recruit class and being assigned to her first station and firefighting crew. Research highlights that women in historically male-dominated professions are provided with far less support and encouragement while performing the job (Carp, 2001). Maria stated that firefighting was not much different from other non-traditional roles she had worked in, in the past and that fighting to have a voice, and her position was par for the course. The challenges women firefighters reported in this dissertation coincide with research on token women, such that women often feel like they need to work harder and prove themselves as a result of being hyper-surveilled by traditional male workers who assume incompetence or hold a disbelief that women can do physical aspects of the job (Smith, 2013). Women working in non-traditional occupations, such as firefighting, have to overcompensate and work extra hard just to try and prove that they are justly there (Smith, 2013).

I've always worked with males, and I've always felt like I've had to fight for my voice and my position. So, I didn't feel that this job was any different. In my experience when I was assigned to my first crew, they were welcoming. However, they were skeptical. I think they were not enthusiastic about getting a recruit. I don't think that they were, in my opinion, enthusiastic about getting a girl on the crew. But again, I really just had the attitude; well, too bad, this is where I'm getting assigned so figure it out. (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria's statement, "I've always felt like I've had to fight for my voice and my position" highlights the gendered power dynamics present in both her previous occupations and her current work environment. This reflects the broader patriarchal

structure where women often have to assert themselves to be heard and acknowledged in male-dominated spaces. Maria's perception of skepticism and lack of enthusiasm from her male colleagues might be rooted in stereotypes or biases that women are deemed as less capable in physically demanding roles.

On my first day, my Captain, he had the guys pull the truck out[side]. They had me pull the line, and then they charged it and then I had to spray water out into a parking lot. Then after we played some football and before lunch, he pulled me in the office and told me; "listen, I don't want you to think that I'm centering you out. I just want the guys to see that you know what you're doing." I honestly didn't think at the time like they were testing me. But then after he said, "I just needed the guys to see that you can do it," I thought to myself; well of course I could do it! (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria's description of being assessed by her colleagues on her very first day of work by pulling out the truck, handling equipment, and demonstrating competence, reveals how she was required to prove her skills to her colleagues in order to alleviate their concerns before being accepted as a member of the crew. For Maria, playing football with her colleagues helps to solidify her place within the team, symbolizing integration, unity, and acceptance, which are crucial for her professional development and personal satisfaction in her career. However, the impromptu assessment of Maria's skills reflects the broader societal narrative that women need to justify their presence in traditionally male-dominated roles like firefighting.

Working closely with others, regardless of how you feel about them personally, is a requirement for the fire service. You rely on your colleagues, and at the end of the day, a firefighter is a person in bunker gear, wearing a self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) and other personal protective equipment, willing to put their life on the line for another. Scott compared the concept of teamwork in his private sector employment to firefighting. Fires are a tangible reminder of why teamwork and mutual accountability are vital.

The difference I found between the corporate world which I worked in, was to move up the career hierarchy, people were throwing each other under the bus. In the volunteer fire service, it was a very supportive environment where even if you don't particularly like a guy, if he falls through the floor, you're going to give your everything in the burning building to make sure he makes it out. So, you're looking after everybody carefully, like they are your brother, like your life's gonna get miserable if they have a bad day. It's true teamwork. In the corporate world, they're always talking about oh, teamwork, teamwork. It was an abstraction, in the fire service teamwork is a very real and a direct physical thing. (Scott, career firefighter).

Scott uses the phrase "throwing each other under the bus" to convey the idea that the private sector is fraught with individualistic behaviour, competition, and a lack of genuine concern for colleagues' well-being. He contrasts the corporate world, where the idea of teamwork is often discussed as an abstract concept without truly embodying its' principles with the volunteer fire service, which he describes as a place where supporting colleagues is not only prioritized, but critical for the well-being of every member of team. Steve's description of risking one's own safety to help a colleague in a life-threatening situation underscores his deep sense of camaraderie, solidarity and putting the team before self.

Brent describes a work culture in which you need to demonstrate your value to your colleagues and earn their trust. Crews are hesitant to accept a new member because they may disrupt the dynamics of the current team. New members of a crew often go through a period of scrutiny as they struggle to garner respect and the acceptance of their crew. New members of the team try to form bonds with their colleagues, which contributes to the development of team cohesiveness. The demonstration of their skills, ability to perform job tasks, adherence to protocols, and avoiding unnecessary risks, are critical parts of the acceptance of a new team member.

Was there skepticism when I moved from recruit class to a crew? Absolutely, for sure. I think that's the nature of the fire service. I look at trust in two ways. There're people that you start with 100% trust, and based on your actions, you lose it with people. Or the fire service – where you start with zero and you're required to build that trust. I would say it's

shifted in the past five years - where we value these outside opinions, skill sets and knowledge; and the new person isn't getting the cold shoulder because they're new. (Brent, career firefighter).

Brent's experience offers insight into the dynamics of trust and acceptance within the fire service, particularly in the context of gender-based workplace dynamics. His observations suggest an observed cultural shift within the fire service over the years. Historically, the ingrained stereotypes and biases in the fire service resulted in a less inclusive environment, particularly for women and those from diverse backgrounds or identities. These biases could manifest in various forms, from skepticism towards capabilities to discriminatory practices that hinder professional growth and acceptance within the team. Brent's account of a shift in attitudes over the past five years suggests an increasing recognition of the value of diverse opinions, skills, and knowledge in the fire service. This change implies that new members, regardless of gender, are less likely to receive the "cold shoulder" due to their newcomer status. Such a shift is crucial for creating a more inclusive and supportive environment.

Workplace Relationships and Interactions

Firefighter occupational solidarity is on regular display in parades and at each other's funerals (Braedley, 2009, p. 136). However, behind closed doors, there is significant navigation amongst the diverging personalities, sharing living quarters, preparing meals, working out, training, responding to emergencies, and performing chores in the hall.

I would say it's a lot like going on a fishing trip with some friends. The three guys that I work with right now, I'd say it's like going to a buddy's cottage with three friends. The job, obviously, it's fun for us still. (Peter, composite fire department, career firefighter).

The analogy Peter uses suggest that the social activities outside of work are male-centric and highlights the culture of bonding and camaraderie within his crew. However, it is an androcentric statement, in that there is no mention of female

colleagues and whether they have been included or excluded from these adventures. When explaining the social interactions in the fire hall, some digressed to what “it used to be like,” noting the culture, especially the relationships outside of the workplace have changed over the years.

So, a firefighter goes to work eight days a month. The level of entitlement has equally increased to the compensation, you add the confinement of the 24-hour time together with a group of people that are far more entitled than they ever were in the past, and far less connected socially than they ever were in the past. Because they're not doing the blue-collar work that they used to do at their houses together. They don't have that level of respect because they used to go and help people shingle each other's roofs or build decks and meet their family and meet their wives, their husbands, their parents and all that and have a better sense of community. Now they're just paying a contractor to come and do it. Right? So you don't really give a shit about the person next to you. You want to make sure they don't die in a fire, but you don't really care if they get divorced. You don't really care if something negatively impacts them to the same degree that you would have cared probably, you know, 30 years ago. (Matthew, composite department, career firefighter).

Matthew suggests that the shift in the economic value of a firefighter's salary over time, the change in the work environment, the hours of work and the number of days a firefighter works, have all contributed to an increased sense of entitlement. Mathew blames the limited bonding and support of personal endeavours outside of work as a contributing factor to the erosion of social ties amongst his colleagues. Fitting in with the dominant culture almost universally seen as the principal requirement for everybody in the service (HM Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland, 1999, p. 23). Maria describes an assimilated workplace, which causes members of the crew, especially those in the non-dominant group, to feel pressured to blend in with the rest of the group.

You have to know your audience. Like if you want to blend in, and you're a horse, and you want to blend in with the zebras, you better start painting some stripes. Unfortunately, that's kind of how it is in the fire hall. (Maria, career firefighter).

Linking this to the Chapter 3 literature review and the section on managing gender identity, Maria's analogy of a horse needing to paint stripes to blend in with zebras in the fire service reflects the broader issue of how masculine values and traits are valued in the firefighting profession. Qualities traditionally linked to masculinity, like physical strength, assertiveness, and boisterous camaraderie, are commonly witnessed in the fire hall. Those who exhibit masculine characteristics are more readily accepted and valued. For women firefighters, this can create a pressure to conform, altering the way women firefighters communicate, interact, or even approach their work as a way to assimilate. The organizational culture that favours masculine traits can result in stereotyping and biases against those who do not conform to or fit this mold. Women might be unfairly judged as less capable, or competent if they do not exhibit these traits, or conversely, as previously covered in the literature review, they may face criticism for being too masculine if they do. The need to conform to masculine norms can impact women's ability to express their professional identity as a firefighter authentically. This might hinder their job satisfaction, performance, and mental well-being. It not only affects their individual professional experiences but also more broadly, perpetuates a culture that can be less inclusive and supportive of diversity.

Firefighters are bound by a sense of purpose and by the history, traditions, and rituals they have honoured over the years (Taylor & Wolin, 2002). Firefighting is an occupation steeped in history, and traditions are readily apparent during graduations and funerals with the inclusion of the Honour Guard, along with the Pipes and Drums band. You can see it in the insignias on uniforms, with the presence of the Maltese Cross on the arm flashes and speaking trumpets on the collars of uniform shirts. In the fire stations, the logo or slogan is proudly displayed which defines the heritage of the firefighters and crews from that station. New traditions and rituals are added as appropriate and are as varied as there are fire services. The one constant, however, has remained the same throughout: taking care of their own (Taylor & Wolin, 2002, p.

11). Ryan explains the dichotomy of interaction in the fire station noting that firefighters can be each other's worst enemies, but also biggest protectors as well.

Well, I always say that we'll eat our own. But when we have to circle the wagons we will, but we'll also eat our own. The unfortunate thing is the individuals that are making these comments, I really want to turn to them and go okay, show me. So, show me that you're this much better than this other individual right? (Ryan, career firefighter).

The culture of critique, discussed under the theme of toxic workplace culture, is also a contributing factor in how colleagues interact with each other. To "eat our own" can be interpreted as a range of behaviours from light-hearted ribbing to direct criticism of members within the same group. However, the analogy suggests that teasing is a privilege reserved for those within the "in" group. "Circle the wagons" implies that the group comes together when outsiders threaten one of their own or one of their own needs help. The analogy indicates a complex relationship dynamic in the workplace that can be both supportive and alienating. Considering the demands of the job that often place firefighters in high-risk situations, it is essential for them to support and potentially save the lives of their colleagues. However, it is equally important for them to critically evaluate each other's skills to maintain the crew's safety and ensure everyone is sufficiently competent. In any group, power dynamics will influence interactions and can be used as a way for the dominant group to ensure conformity.

A lack of support, especially an overly critical supervisor can make the work environment feel toxic. Criticism should never be personal, and when it does, it can take an emotional toll on the recipient.

When you have an officer who is just on your case all of the time and is beating you down and you're not getting things done the exact way they want or maybe you don't have the answer in the moment and they're just beating you down. It's demoralizing. And I really look for that positive guidance from the Captain. I think that makes all the difference. (Sophia, composite fire department, volunteer firefighter).

The Captain is required to ensure the competence of his or her crew, and is responsible for the effective performance at emergency incidents. There is some degree of critique required; however, in Sophia's experience, her Captain's interactions are overly critical and belittling, highlighting the presence of a harmful power dynamic. The reliance on the Captain for "positive guidance" suggests Sophia seeks validation with a Ranking Officer. The mention of "not getting things done the exact way they want" hints at the pressures of perfectionism, which is something Sophia repeatedly mentions throughout her interview. Striving for perfection leads to anxiety and self-doubt, due to the constant criticism and internalized pressure to "get it right."

The ugly truth about workplace success, as Maria describes, is that popularity still matters. The higher you are on the social hierarchy, the less your performance may matter. While it may be an informal hierarchy, being at the top, according to Maria, has nothing to do with rank and everything to do with strong relationships, confidence, and ability to influence others. Being unaware of the informal hierarchy and your social status within your work environment could be detrimental to your progress and overall career success.

There are males who have challenges as well. However, if they are popular, and/or play hockey, or they're a kid of one of the chiefs or something like that, then their incompetence is overshadowed by the fact that they play hockey. Their incompetence is somehow acceptable. Whereas a female who makes one or two mistakes, it's magnified in my opinion. I feel like some males who don't like the fact that there's women on the department like to magnify incompetence, whereas for males, it gets brushed off. I feel like sometimes they're looking for reasons for why girls suck or why girls shouldn't be on the department. And it doesn't come down to just male, female, it's also popularity... So, to be able to flourish in that atmosphere you have to be able to take a lot of shit. (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria asserts that males with a particular social status or role (e.g., being popular, playing hockey, or having influential parents) result in a greater tolerance of their mistakes or have their incompetence overlooked. On the other hand, she suggests

the female firefighter's mistakes become magnified. Maria indicates that some men actively look for reasons to discredit or exclude women, as a form of gatekeeping. The magnification of their mistakes is a way for the men who don't support the reality of women in the fire service to legitimize doubts about their competence and challenge their right to belong. The fact that women have to "take a lot of shit" in the workplace indicates the resilience, strength, adaptability, and fortitude required for women firefighters to succeed in the fire service.

I think it takes a certain breed of us to do the job. I've had some problems and I've sought out female advice. And the majority of the advice is to keep your head down and saying nothing. I feel like for me personally, I have to fight for every inch. (Christine, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Christine's narrative echoes the universal struggle of women whose experiences and voices have been systematically marginalized. The advice given to Christine by other women to "keep your head down" is both a coping mechanism and a strategy for survival - a warning that you will be penalized for speaking out. The statement "you're not allowed to speak up" is not so much about the mechanism for communication, but about the power to exert thoughts and opinions. Christine's decision to "speak up" disrupts the existing power dynamics, leading to a backlash she regrets because it has come at a personal and professional cost.

Within the fire service, there seems to be a higher value placed on strength and stamina due to the physicality of the job; competition is more likely to take place in this realm as compared to other values such as putting work first (Reid et al., 2018). Competitive attitudes toward demonstrating physical strength do not happen just on an individual level between peers, but also occurs among groups and between stations (Reid et al., 2018). One crew might compete with another crew to show they are stronger, more competent, and therefore more manly than the other unit (Pacholok, 2009). This competitive atmosphere can become tiresome for those who participate, as there is constantly a perceived looming threat to their status as men (Pacholok, 2009).

... If you got on my last shift, it was like survival of the fittest. It was very much a little boy gang that they did everything outside of work together with their kids with their hobbies. And then when they came into work, it was very much that as well. But because you don't get invited to those things, you can never make that type of connection. (Christine, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Christine contrasts two distinct workplace environments within the same fire service, her current crew which she describes an inclusive team where colleagues are likened to "brothers". Her former crew she describes as members of an exclusive "little boy gang," in which activities outside of work strengthened their bonds and created a form of social capital that Christine was excluded from. The environment with her former crew was also framed as a "survival of the fittest", potentially implying that the workplace was not designed for collaboration or mutual support. With the change in crews, Christine found a more meaningful connection with her colleagues, which positively increased her feeling of career satisfaction.

Sophia described the difference between her former crew and her current crew. The greatest difference she noted was the leadership traits of her former Captain, which made her former workplace not only more memorable, but a place where she thrived professionally.

The confidence my Officer at my at my last station had in me and my skill sets made me feel confident in myself. The way they spoke to me, the way that we built off of each other. They'd look at me and I'd know what they were thinking, I did what I needed to do, sometimes it didn't even have to be said. Building that relationship made me feel good about being there. (Sophia, volunteer firefighter).

In a profession where women are often doubted or their competencies are overlooked, having a Captain who believes in their abilities can be empowering. Sophia described non-verbal communication, mutual understanding, an appreciation for intuitive knowledge, and trust. How Sophia feels about her collegial relationships in fire

hall contrasts sharply with some of the other women's experiences who described feelings of being marginalized, undervalued, or overlooked.

Firefighters have been described as having a "type A" personality. They tend to be confident and high achievers. But these traits don't equate to being technically strong on the fireground. Arrogance, a sense of entitlement and egotistical behaviour is called out in the fire hall and is the wrong way to get noticed. Confidence and arrogance are easily conflated, and being self-aware is key.

One of the biggest mistakes that anyone can make is projecting a high self opinion... You actually start off destroying your reputation walking in with a swagger - like don't walk anywhere with a swagger. You're the new guy or even if you're an old guy, don't walk around with a swagger. All the best people are very understated, and just high performers. It's the swagger that puts us off. (Scott, career firefighter).

Scott's touches on a disconnect between how firefighters present themselves superficially ("swagger") and their actual ability to perform. He indicates how some people try to exaggerate their importance, while others have genuine skills, but they seem to fade into the group until they need to perform. Scott values authenticity, modesty, and genuine competence when it comes to the traits of his colleagues.

The downtime in the fire hall, the casual nature of working in what is perceived to be a home away from home, creates an atmosphere where at times "anything goes." Time spent working in the fire hall is compensated, which makes the firefighter an employee and the fire hall is in fact, a place of work. There is often a feeling of "those policies don't apply here" and "we are different than the rest of the corporation." There is general resentment at times, that management and human resources are interfering too much in the dynamics of the fire hall.

So, you know what guys are like? We say shit, because it's toilet talk. It's like toilet talk and we just say bad stuff. Because it's empty. It's funny. It's like on the edge. So, we'll just say stupid shit - because it's fun to say ridiculous outrageous stuff. So practically it

we are not respectful in the fire hall to ourselves for amusement. It's just funny and we're entertaining ourselves that way. (Scott, career firefighter).

Scott views "toilet talk" as a bonding mechanism, an informal way for firefighters to connect with each other. From Scott's perspective, this type of dialogue is rooted in the camaraderie and culture of the fire hall. He states the banter is humorous and harmless and can be a way to relieve stress when among peers who share the same understanding and expectations. From the standpoint of a Chief Officer (management) or human resources, the discourse in the fire hall can be seen as harmful, inappropriate, or problematic. Tasked with upholding policies around standards of behaviour, and a respectful workplace, guidelines which are designed to maintain professional and inclusive workplace, free from potential harassment or misconduct, "toilet talk" poses a risk.

Tokens

Despite the increasing percentage of women entering masculinized workplaces, certain organizations consistently see little change in the gender makeup of their staff (Perrott, 2015, p. 1), and this is certainly true of the fire service. Tokens who perform at levels equal to or exceeding the men are never trusted to have earned their achievements but assumed to be handed opportunities. (Bielby, 2005).

I know that our chief now said that he's going to try and bring in more women - that I can expect to see more women when we hire our new recruits. But honestly, I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing. I think it's good, but the state of how I'm being treated makes me worry for other women. But I mean, power in numbers, I guess. (Christine, composite department, career firefighter).

In Christine's interview she reflects on the marginalized experiences she has encountered in the fire service. Her concern for other women who may be hired by her fire service is grounded in her lived experiences. Individuals from marginalized groups

often have a clearer understanding of power structures and their inherent biases. She worries the next cohort of women will have similar negative experiences. The remark, "power in numbers, I guess," showcases the hope and belief that women who collectively voice their experiences, challenge the dominant culture and advocate for a change can result in empowerment and a cultural change. The uncertainty expressed by Christine when she says "I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing" reflects skepticism about whether the female firefighter recruits will be genuinely integrated and valued, or if they will simply be there to tick a box for diversity.

Sophia described the benefits of being the only female on the crew and how the interaction with crew members changed when she was assigned to a hall with other women.

When I was the only one [woman], it was almost like the men at my station were valuing me in a way, because when there were medical incidents with children or women, I was able to be the one that they could rely on. If somebody else from a different station was disrespectful, they were really protective. It was a great relationship that I had with those guys... I've noticed that this station is very different. Women show up to calls in very provocative clothing and I'm having a hard time connecting with these girls because I'm very much opposite. When I'm there I'm doing a job. They're nice but there's a lot of cattiness. I can feel it (Sophia, volunteer firefighter).

The women I interviewed commonly have little or no contact with other female firefighters in their daily working lives due to the male dominance of the profession. Women's perceptions and expectations of working with other women are revealing about the context in which they work. For women in a gender minority, contact with other women can be a source of support or competition (Rodriguez, 2013). Solidarity between women cannot be assumed (Bagilhole, 2002); instead, women may face criticism from female colleagues (Rodriguez, 2013).

Sophia highlights the benefits she experienced as the only female firefighter in her volunteer fire station. Her 'token' status allowed her to serve as the go-to person for medical aid involving women and children. While it may also point to gendered

expectations that women are better suited to deal with certain types of emergency incidents due to their perceived nurturing and empathetic qualities, Sophia leveraged it as a way to highlight her value to the team.

While one might assume that an environment with more women would be more supportive, for Sophia, her experience suggests otherwise. The cattiness Sophia describes is uncomfortable for her and results in Sophia observing quietly and exercising caution, a tactic employed because of the strong personalities and unspoken rules. Her guarded approach is seen as a coping mechanism to protect her professional identity and providing her space and time to navigate within her new work culture.

Sophia expresses her concern over an environment that is more sexualized, as evidenced by the provocative clothing worn by some firefighters. She suggests that this could be either a form of personal expression or a reaction to the sexualized surroundings. In a sexualized work environment, women might feel pressured to present themselves in ways that cater to the male gaze, leading to potential tensions among the female cohort, especially if there are differing opinions on how to navigate this objectification. If camaraderie and relationships in the station are built upon participation in this culture, Sophia's decision to not participate can potentially place her on the periphery, which can affect acceptance and her overall work experience.

Louise was very candid that she liked being the only woman in the fire hall and in fact got defensive when another woman came into the workplace. She took on a maternal role with the crew.

I was the only woman in my station. We (women) are a jealous group. They're my boys. They were my guys. I'm not sharing my guys. I'm not sharing my room. This is my domain. And as you get older and you become a parent and stuff like that, you project that motherly thing. And the younger guys were like, oh, she's gonna take care of us. Yeah, I'll take care of you. You're my guys. (Louise, career firefighter).

By being the only female firefighter in her station, Louise develops a possessive attitude as reflected in the statements, "they're my boys. They were my guys. I'm not sharing my guys. I'm not sharing my room. This is my domain." Louise sees herself as

the dominant figure, the matriarch, a protector of "her boys," but in fact she may be trying to stake a claim within the crew.

The were concerns articulated about members of underrepresented groups having an unfair advantage in the hiring process. Some participants made suggestions of unstated quotas which disadvantaged white males.

It's an ironic counter, probably, to the research that you're doing. There's a feeling that if you are a visible minority or a female you actually have an advantage over the white male football jock. Like, he just shows up and they go, yeah, well, that's another one of those guys, cross him off. How about that little girl? She's interesting. And so actually, the young white men feel that there actually are barriers to them getting hired. The whole world doesn't really want tokenism. We'd rather competence. I have no issue working with a transgender dude that wants to come into my home. If he's a kick ass firefighter. I am. He's my buddy. I'm all on board with that. Don't send me someone just because you included him, because you needed one. All I'm saying is you want representatives from those underrepresented communities to be the cream of the crop because they are representing the rest and if they make a good impression, then they'll be welcomed by the traditionalists within the fire service. (Scott, career firefighter).

Scott suggests that being a white male candidate trying to secure a job as a firefighter experiences more obstacles. He sees current hiring practices as problematic, especially when it is perceived that representation is prioritized over competence. When Scott mentions he would be open to working with a transgender colleague as long as they are competent, it demonstrates he recognizes that capability is not bound by gender or identity. Scott touches on the idea that representatives from underrepresented communities in the fire service should be the best of the best, with the applicable skills and experience to perform their job. He also suggests they have the pressure of performing well in order to represent their community positively. Scott's comment about making a good impression for the traditionalists in the fire service reveals an acknowledgment of the existing power dynamics and longstanding cultural

norms within the profession which shape how firefighters perceive and evaluate newcomers to the team.

Occupational Deterrent

Male firefighters tend to be viewed as the embodiment of masculinity through the very nature of the high-risk, courageous work they complete (Berdahl et al., 2018). It is difficult for many women to envision themselves in the role of a firefighter, if they don't see women who have successfully forged a path in the same field.

I could see some smaller women mainly having an issue with just the physical image that's portrayed in the public of these big, tall masculine firefighters. I think that the perception publicly could maybe deter women. I don't think women coming into this service would have any idea of how mentally exhausting it can be before they get into it. So, I don't think that part is a deterrent. (Christine, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Christine feels that the stereotype of firefighters being of large stature and masculine could deter women from joining the fire service. The public's perception of firefighters doesn't accurately reflect the diversity of individuals who work in the profession. A diverse firefighting force helps break down stereotypes and reduce unconscious biases that may exist within the fire service or the community. A fire service that has personnel reflective of the community that they serve, mirroring the demographic, cultural, and social characteristics of their community, are more likely to establish trust and build positive relationships with community members. This trust is essential in emergency situations where cooperation and communication are vital. Firefighters who share the cultural backgrounds and languages of the community are better equipped to understand and respond effectively to the unique needs and sensitivities of diverse populations, enhance safety, and save lives.

Peter explained while the stereotype of a firefighter may be tall and strong, technique and grit is what it takes to make you a good firefighter. He said being a smaller size has its benefits too.

A lot of folks will say they want like the biggest, strongest, burliest guy, if they are in a fire. They will want the biggest strongest guy throwing them over their shoulder and carrying them. Predominantly, of course, there is both a component of strength and skill. But the biggest largest brute isn't going to fit through the small window, and I don't care how strong he is picking somebody up. It's all slippery and you got all your gear on. I'm not big but I can do the job. I have no doubts about what I can do. I've proven it from time to time. (Peter, composite fire department, career firefighter).

The prevalent stereotype that firefighters should be big, strong, and burly is associated with traditional ideas of masculinity. He suggests that a firefighter should be judged on skills and competence rather than physical appearance. While Peter doesn't fit the physical stereotype of a firefighter, he has proven his abilities through the successful rescue of a 350-pound man from a burning building. This demonstrates that competence, and skill are equal, if not more important, than physical size. This challenges the notion that physical strength should be the primary criterion for evaluating a firefighter's ability. Peter's statement, "nobody looks at me twice and wonders," suggests that he has earned the respect and acceptance of his colleagues based on his performance and highlights how firefighters may not conform to the conventional firefighter stereotype but can still be highly competent in their role.

Mentorship

Mentoring is a way for organizations to pass along knowledge, perpetuate the organizational culture, and maintain sustainability in skills, knowledge, and experience. Individuals who want to accelerate professionally and personally, often look for a mentor who is more accomplished, to obtain guidance, be a sounding board for thoughts and

ideas, engage in difficult conversations, and provide knowledge transfer through a differing perspective on life and career choices.

And I think once Grace was assigned to our crew as the Captain you could tell she just felt nervous coming; because it's a new hall, new District and new Platoon. You don't know anyone. I think just seeing a female mentor, having one so close, that felt important. I didn't really realize that at the time - that I cared about that. It kind of just fell into place and seeing her excel and her job like, it was cool. I never really looked at genders that way, like oh that's a female, that's a male, to me it was that's a good Captain or that's not, that's a great firefighter or that's not. Gender literally didn't matter to me, but once she was on my crew and then I also had Sandra* as a senior firefighter above me, and the three of us just got along super well, it was just such a great dynamic. So, I think when the three of us were together I probably had the most fun and learned the most as well. (Ava, career firefighter).*

Ava was assigned to an all-male crew; however, eventually a female Captain and female senior firefighter were assigned to the two-truck hall. Ava initially held a gender-neutral perspective when determining whom to emulate as a role model, focusing on competence rather than the gender of a firefighter. However, she reveals how her experiences with female mentors, both her Captain and senior firefighter, enriched her career. Ava identifies the importance of having female mentors like Grace* and Sandra*, demonstrating the need for representation and role models for women in firefighting. The dynamics among herself, Grace*, and Sandra* were positive and productive demonstrating the value of female-centric spaces and female collegial relationships. It provided Ava with a sense of support, camaraderie, and collaboration. As she navigated the fire service which had limited representation of female firefighters, she learned the guidance and wisdom of those who have overcome similar obstacles are invaluable. Ava indicates that she learned the most and had the most fun when working with Grace* and Sandra* and having them as colleagues resulted in valuable insights and growth. In fact, Ava later competed for an Acting Captain position. The

empowerment Ava feels in Grace* and Sandra's* presence demonstrates how shared experiences can foster personal and professional development.

To help new firefighters grow professionally and to encourage retention, a mentorship program is a good place to start. The mentor program can be a good sounding board for newer firefighters who are resistant to approaching the Station Officer for help in developing skills or career advice.

I started with a good acting Captain, who's now my Captain. Between those years, I had two years that I wasn't with him it was bad. I was in an environment where my crew didn't support me. They didn't think I was capable of the job. But now I'm in a position where my officer encourages continuing education. He encourages me to lead training sessions when we're at buildings for fire alarms, or suppression systems. He gets me to do all of that. So, the guys that I'm now working with are seeing that there's a different dimension to me. My last Captain was on his third strike. He had been suspended, demoted, and then re-promoted. He was primarily worried for himself, so he didn't want to be involved. He basically said he wanted to come to work, do his job and leave and that anything else wasn't his problem. (Christine, Composite fire department, career firefighter).

While Christine perceived her response to be about her role model, it really speaks to how a shift in leadership can impact the trajectory of a female firefighter's career. One of Christine's Captains seemed detached from the responsibilities beyond his job and reluctant to engage beyond the minimum required duties of his job. This self-centered approach can be seen as an example of toxic masculinity, where his concerns were only for his own position. He failed to provide opportunities where Christine's competence could be recognized by her colleagues, allowing the crew to see her value to the team. Her "bad" years in firefighting, where her crew didn't support her, suggests a lack of recognition for her capabilities. This could be attributed to existing gender biases and stereotypes, which influence how the male firefighters perceived her ability to perform her job effectively. The change in leadership from one Captain to another had a significant impact on Christine's experience. The new Captain encouraged her to take on more responsibilities and offers support for her professional

growth. This shift indicates a change in leadership philosophy, one that values gender diversity and actively supports women's advancement. The Captain's approach of encouraging Christine to lead training sessions highlights the importance of visibility and recognition. By showcasing her skills and expertise, he helps her challenge the preconceived notions her colleagues might have had about her skills, eliminating her feelings of invisibility, and being marginalized. The new Captain's approach is more collaborative and encourages Christine's professional growth, fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment.

Mentoring is a potentially powerful development strategy that offers benefits to protégés along with the mentor and organization (Gilbreath, Rose & Dietrich, 2008). While mentorship is a means to develop and engage new or junior employees, appropriate training for the mentor, identifying appropriate boundaries, and matching strategies are also important for the program to be effective.

The recruits that were assigned to a station were also assigned a specific mentor. Mine was a male and he's probably almost 40 years old. I didn't connect with my mentor. He was knowledgeable and capable. But I was there for a reason and that was to learn, not to discuss his personal life. There were times when I was like, if I'm here, I want to learn about the skills we need for the next day not to hear about the run that you did this afternoon. I just I wanted to keep it very professional. I just didn't appreciate that I knew that there were other mentors who were giving everything they had to their students. (Sophia, volunteer firefighter).

Sophia's mentor's age and gender impact the power dynamic between the two. Sophia's desire to keep interactions professional highlights her commitment to being taken seriously as a firefighter. Her emphasis on wanting to develop her firefighting skills reflects her determination to contribute effectively as a firefighter. It is also influenced by her desire to avoid any inappropriate advances or unwelcome attention from her mentor. This highlights the broader issue that women may face in male-dominated spaces, having to navigate interactions in a way that safeguards their

personal boundaries and ensures they are taken seriously for their professional contributions.

Researchers such as Allen, Poteet, Eby, Lentz, and Lima (2004) cited the importance of providing organizational leaders and practitioners with concrete information and strategies on how to effectively use mentoring as a career development strategy. Not all mentors are beneficial, especially when the match is not mutually agreed upon, or a change is requested and denied. A lack of a mentor was seen as a disadvantage to Sarah, so she took matters into her own hands, and secured someone who had the skills, experience, and most importantly, someone she could rely on and trust.

I was assigned a mentor that was never around, so I got zero mentoring. And for me, that experience was incredibly disadvantaging because I could see my peers, all of my male peers, getting this one-on-one coaching, mentoring, support, encouragement to assist in any of the areas that they needed help with. I would reach out to my mentor, and my mentor was never available. When I requested a new mentor, I was hit with a hard resounding no.

The decision to match mentors with new recruits reflects the need for guidance and support to help navigate the complexities of the firefighting profession. Sarah's experience demonstrates the gender-based workplace dynamics that undermine the professional growth of women in firefighting. The absence of a dedicated mentor for Sarah, in contrast to the readily available and engaged mentors for her male colleagues, is a prominent example of stereotypes and biases that perpetuate a less inclusive environment. While her peers benefited from personalized coaching and advice on how to navigate through workplace challenges, Sarah found herself isolated and unsupported. This disparity in mentorship is not just a matter of differential treatment; it reflects a deeper, systemic issue within the organization. Mentorship helps with developing competencies, confidence, and integrating into the organizational culture. The denial of Sarah's request for a new mentor not only could result in hindering her immediate professional development, but also sent a discouraging message about

both her value and potential within the fire service. It suggests an institutional reluctance to acknowledge and address the unique challenges faced by women firefighters.

I think that this was a subtle way that he [District Chief] was exerting that he felt that females were not ideal candidates in the fire service... I was asking for additional assistance, and I was given a hard no. ...I resourced a long-standing firefighter that was in his 50s at the time, a long-standing Captain with this service. I basically befriended him, and he became and has continued to be my fire mentor through my entire career. I found myself a mentor. I had to, I needed someone that I could rely on, that would be there in my corner as I needed them. (Sarah, career firefighter).

Sarah believes that the District Chief's actions, which she thinks are based on his view that women are less suitable candidates, suggest an ingrained bias that undermines her professional development and access to equal opportunities. Despite the challenges, Sarah actively sought out her own mentor, demonstrating her resourcefulness and determination to succeed. Her proactive initiative and ability to find a solution to her problem on her own, highlights the resilience of marginalized individuals who are able to navigate complex systems and overcome obstacles to career development. Equitable mentorship practices and policies that address gender-based disparities are necessary to prevent issues like the ones Sarah faced, by promoting a more supportive environment for all firefighters, regardless of gender.

Mentorship can succeed or fail based on the relationship between participants. Maria believes compatibility, personality and like-mindedness is an important factor in the success of a mentorship relationship. Therefore, a barrier would be incompatibility between a mentor and mentee.

I think if you're interested in promotions or some sort of like career advancement, I think it's important to have a mentor. But I feel like all Captains should be mentors because they are supervisors. But in terms of choosing a mentor I wouldn't necessarily pick any of the females on my department. And that's not to say that I don't like them or anything like that. It's just not who I think is the best for me. I would look for somebody who has

the same personality as me and none of the girls in my department have that personality. So, I would have to look for a male who has my personality or who I really liked the way that he is supervising, and I want to emulate that, for instance. (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria's preference for a male mentor due to a perceived similarity in personality suggests an implicit bias. Maria's inclination towards seeking a male mentor due to their perceived alignment with her personality raises important feminist considerations. She associates certain leadership qualities or styles solely with her male colleagues, which undermines women's leadership. This might inadvertently reinforce the idea that certain qualities are inherently "male" or superior for career success. Such biases can lead to undervaluing the skills and contributions of the existing female leaders in her organization. By expressing a preference for male mentors, Maria contributes to a work culture that favours men over women, even if unintentionally. Maria's hesitation to seek a female mentor based on perceived personality differences could be because there is a scarcity of female role models in the positions she aspires to achieve in the fire service or it could reflect internalized biases stemming from societal expectations, dismissing potential mentors based on gendered stereotypes.

Promotional Processes for Career Advancement

Becoming a Captain or a Chief Officer comes with its own demands. They are watched and judged by the firefighters who report to them, the municipal leadership and council to whom they report up through, and the public whom they serve. They must be able to address issues without hesitation using good, ethical judgment, often with incomplete information under time-sensitive conditions. In addressing ethical dilemmas, the chief officer must consciously recognize and define the situation, objectively identify the facts, list all the options, compare each option to established criteria, select the best option, double-check the decision, and take action (Stowell, 2004). The fire officer must be able to seamlessly transition between a collaborative leadership style in the fire hall

to autocratic leadership when taking on the role of incident commander at the scene of an emergency.

I've seen it when a firefighter steps into the management side and are kind in flux with themselves because it's not organically who or what they are. They're not doing a bad job. But I don't know if they get as much joy out of doing those roles as maybe they would have if they just stayed at the back of the truck. I think that's hard because we chase the prestige of the stripes and rank. (Sarah, career firefighter).

When a firefighter successfully navigates and succeeds in a promotional process, their role changes from taking directions to making decisions and giving commands at an emergency scene. The Acting Captain, Captain, District Chief, Platoon Chief or other supervisory role requires traditionally "masculine" traits such as decisiveness, authority, and control. The Acting Captain's sudden realization of the multifaceted nature of their role, encompassing administrative, supervisory, and leadership duties while balancing that they are also a member of the union (career department) or "one of the guys" (volunteer department). Sarah's observation about these individuals being "in flux with themselves" can be seen as a struggle to reconcile personal identity with the power dynamics that the new position brings. Sarah suggests that individuals may pursue promotions not purely for personal fulfillment but for external validation. Some firefighters are focused on career advancement as it provides them with a chance gain authority while rising through organizational ranks. Some are enticed by having the gold stripes and gold flashes the rank affords, while others are more persuaded by the pay increase and long-term, positive impact on their pension.

In the career fire service, the labour representatives and management negotiate the promotional process for career advancement through the ranks in collective bargaining. This often includes the identification of eligibility, including years of service, the division in which experience was acquired and certifications/courses required to be obtained. It also outlines the components of the promotional process such as, but not limited to; a written exam, interview, practical/tactical, and/or a performance appraisal. These efforts are to ensure greater transparency and fairness in the promotional

process, minimizing subjectivity when selecting candidates for advancement. Even if there is a desire to have a promotional process changed, it requires the buy-in from the association executive to bring the item forward, and the changes have to be mutually agreed on between the labour group and management through contract negotiations, a memorandum of understanding or awarded through a collective bargaining agreement arbitration process.

To get into the Acting Captain pool, involves an interview, a written test and a practical and then there's a panel for the interview. The written test is objective, but the other two I would say are very subjective. The panel is our Platoon Chiefs and are typically our Deputy Chiefs and Fire Chief. Selection is a learned skill, and so is bias reduction. I don't feel I know our Platoon Chiefs or the people on that panel have ever received education or training on how to conduct an interview without bias and subjectivity. So, to expect that there would be anything but subjectivity is sort of sort of insanity... I think it's clouded with relationship bias, past practice, and subjectivity. (Brent, career firefighter).

Brent is a career firefighter, so he is familiar with the internal operations, culture, and biases of his profession. He's also a union member, which further positions him within a specific sociopolitical space. Brent criticizes the promotional process, especially the segments which are subjective, because it permits bias in the practical evaluation and interview process. Brent claims that the management team might not have received training in bias reduction, implying there could be perpetuated institutional biases and perspectives. The union acts as an observer to ensure equity and fairness. From the perspective of standpoint theory, the union can be seen as representing a different standpoint, one of advocating for the rights and fair treatment of workers. The fact that they are strictly there in an observational capacity and don't have direct input in the scoring, reflects their limited power or influence in changing the inherent biases of the process.

The promotional process was a contentious issue in the interview, with the firefighters who have had enough experience in the fire service for the topic to be relevant. It was clear that there was no process that benefited everyone. Some thought

the process favoured the more senior firefighter, which didn't let the new talent compete. Others felt the process was a farce, in which you went through the motions to get yourself on a list and literally wait for your name to rise to the top of the list. It was recognized that even if there is a desire to have a promotional process changed, it requires the buy-in from the association executive to bring the item forward, and the changes have to be mutually agreed on between the labour group and management through contract negotiations or awarded through a collective bargaining agreement arbitration process.

The wonderful thing about my department is everybody's gonna get promoted. All you have to do is fake write the exam. If you want to be a District Chief, or if you want to be a Captain or whatever, all you have to do is stand in line. And that's the way it is due to seniority because it's seniority based. (Louise, career firefighter).

Louise describes a promotional system that has evolved into passing a test as the key determinant for placement in a queue for promotion, absence of any assessment of personal merit or skill. While the system might seem equal in that anyone qualified to compete just needs to pass the test, it may not be equitable, as it doesn't contemplate that there are firefighters with greater skills or experience. Louise described being "slotted in by your seniority," where time served can lead to experience, yet potentially less competent individuals move into supervisory and decision-making roles.

Even when someone is promoted, those in the ranks above don't always recognize their achievement in the way they might have expected, resulting in them feeling undervalued in the workplace.

When I got my promotional bag with pens, flashes, epilates and whatever, it was given to me by some unknown District Chief at a training session. He walked up to me and he went, "are you Louise?" Yep. He goes, this is for you and handed me a paper bag. No word of a lie. And that was sort of the ceremonial presentation. Way to go. You're the first (woman) - here's your paper bag. It wasn't even it wasn't even acknowledged that I*

was the first female on the trucks or promoted to Captain. Never acknowledged. I think it was just by ignorance. In all honesty, I wasn't looking for the accolades or anything else. But at the same time, it was a big deal. (Louise, career department).

Louise's narrative reflects the broader erasure of women's achievements and contributions. She was the first woman on the trucks and promoted to the rank of Captain in a large urban fire service, and it should have been recognized as a significant milestone, not only for the local fire service, but more broadly as well. Instead, there was a casual and informal presentation of the promotional items. The delivery of promotional items in a mere paper bag can be seen as symbolic of the dismissiveness, which further trivializes Louise's accomplishments.

The volunteer firefighters described an evolution of their promotional process from a popularity contest to a process that demonstrated a little more rigour. Volunteer firefighters mentioned a lack of human resources involvement resulted in favouritism by the Chief Officers involved. Many described a process that was not clearly defined, with little to no feedback. The process was often described as subjective with no definitive criteria. Personal opinions and personal relationships interfere in a fair and equitable process.

So, 10 years ago, being named Captain was an election-based process and a popularity contest. So, at an Association meeting resumes were placed on the table, firefighters would vote and they would elect the next officer. It was similar for even a district chief position. That then shifted to a more merit based promotional structure. I would argue it wasn't fully transparent and, and even now, there's pushback from our officers to say the resumes should be circulated and they should have the opportunity to weigh in on the people being considered. It's such a strange concept to me that they're missing the fact that this is a workplace. I think there are still some broken pieces to our promotional policy. (Natalie, composite fire department, career firefighter).

The earlier promotional process appeared to involve an election process that resembles a popularity contest. This method may disadvantage women and racialized

groups whose contributions may be undervalued or less recognized. The shift towards a merit-based promotional process is a move towards a more fair and equitable system, where qualifications, experience, and abilities have more influence than favouritism, networking, or traditional gender roles. However, the claim that the process still lacks transparency and the comment about some Officers missing the fact that it's a workplace, highlights the potential incongruence between professional processes and the existing culture. An interesting observation was made by an interviewee about the advancement of female Chief Officers (Division Chiefs, Assistant Deputy Chiefs, Deputy Chiefs and Fire Chiefs), in the Ontario career fire service, and the necessity to move up through the ranks in their own department, prior to successfully pursuing opportunities in other departments. It was observed that the only female Chief Officers in an urban fire service who had not moved up through the ranks in their own fire department were the women who had successfully achieved a Chief Officer's position - applying from the Fire Marshal's Office. However, they were placed in support services roles such as fire prevention or public education. Other than that, it was asserted that women needed to prove their abilities in their own department as a Chief Officer, before other departments would consider offering employment. This was not true of male Chief Officers and a number of specific examples of male Captains who were hired by another department as a Chief Officer were offered. This highlights the limited opportunities women have in advancing, as they are required to successfully navigate the bottleneck of advancements into a limited number of positions within their own department.

Historical representations of leadership heavily influence how people see others as possessing the authority, expertise, and confidence to mark them as someone who is, or should be, in charge. Research shows that we inadvertently regard leaders with masculine styles of communication and light skin tones more highly (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell & Ristikari, 2011; Rosette, Leonardelli & Phillips, 2008).

Looking at individuals that are then hired in a Chief Officer role, I find that my female counterparts initially, when they're entering a chief level role, they go laterally within their own organization. They don't tend to get that promotion into that starting Chief Officer role outside of their own organization. I think that's an interesting piece to pick

away at. Chiefs are transient - you see this chief has been hired by this department and then they get hired by this department. Once you're in the structure it tends to be a lot easier to move around. From what I've seen, it's a lot easier for our male counterparts to step into a different organization as a new Chief Officer than our female counterparts. So, unless that opportunity is presented within their own ladder (organization), we don't tend to see the jumping-off points as much. At least that's what I've seen. (Sarah, career firefighter).

It is an insightful observation that women more often seek promotions within their own fire service rather than competing for promotions with another department. There are a number of different possible reasons for this, which needs to be explored further, in future research. Perhaps women might face challenges in networking with other Chief Officers, or women might be more risk-averse to seek employment at another fire service, because they don't know how they will be received. Women might feel or be made to feel that their credentials, skills, or experiences need to be "proven" within their own organization, and it may not be seen as transferable to other organizations.

Sarah observes that Chief Officer roles are transient and that movement from fire service to fire service in Ontario is common, however she also indicates that women don't benefit from this transient nature as much as men. Men may be seen as more adaptable to new employment opportunities, while women might be pigeonholed or stereotyped into certain work portfolios. Women Chief Officers in the Fire Services in Ontario are still breaking barriers, and people who break barriers often face intense scrutiny and must navigate uncharted territories without supportive networks. This might make women more cautious about changing organizations, or it might make organizations more hesitant to hire them.

Social Activities

Socializing with colleagues can help develop good working relationships and a culture of trust, as well as boost job satisfaction. Participants described how access to social activities contributes to enjoyment and engagement both in and outside

of the workplace. Strong social connections correlated to a feeling of a sense of belonging and acceptance by their peers. Social activities outside of the workplace encouraged relationship-building, collaboration and bonding on a personal level. Matthew stressed that he did not feel compelled or coerced to participate in all the social activities, and he didn't feel the necessity to partake out of fear of not fitting in.

It absolutely made for a more enjoyable work experience, participating in the social events. 100%. So, you know, half of the Fire Department played hockey, so they'd all go out and play. The other half, either were too old or they just didn't really care about it anymore. But at some point, they all played - male and female at my fire department. (Matthew, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Matthew mentions that hockey was the primary social activity, and about half of the fire department members played hockey while the other half did not participate due to age or lack of interest, making them somewhat of outsiders. While he mentions male and female firefighters playing, the sport itself is aligned with traditional masculinity, potentially limiting opportunities for some to engage fully in the social fabric of the fire department.

Some participants described a need for barriers – that some forms of socialization were fun, but recognized that other activities, whether to blow off steam or to celebrate, could have a negative impact on their personal relationships and home life.

I would go to the annual union golf tournament and the odd retirement party. But the 911 nights at Crocodile Rock, or the Thursday night breakouts after your four days at Shoeless Joe's? No, I didn't go because I just I thought there was no good gonna come with that... Now, the only thing I could think of is that you don't hear all the rumblings that are going on within fire halls and crews, and you know, that little bit of information that may be helpful for something if you're not part of that gossip or whatever. (Paul, career firefighter).

Paul's selective participation at work socials indicates some level of engagement with his colleagues, suggesting that he values professional networking and maintaining

a presence within his firefighter community. Paul was always invited to events, and it was his choice when he didn't attend. While he didn't feel any negative impact from not attending these gatherings, he acknowledges the possibility that he might miss out on certain informal information or "rumblings" that circulate within fire halls and crews which demonstrates certain social locations provide access to different types of information. For those that get excluded from work related social gathering, they will not have the same access to information.

"I remember one day coming into work and finding out a long-time work colleague was killed in a car accident. We learned about it from the morning news as we were sitting having coffee. We were all in shock. After our shift a number of people on the platoon met at a bar. After, someone suggested we go to the local strip club. So about 8 of us went. I was the only girl invited, and I went. I never thought twice about it. But I have to say, reflecting back from a more established role, I'm a little surprised that decision to go has never come back to haunt me." (Sandra, career firefighter).

In the narrative described, Sandra recounts an incident which, from a feminist standpoint perspective, suggests a desire or perceived necessity to conform to the dominant group norms to fit in and be accepted. She chose not to challenge the collective decision of the group or selectively opt out. Looking back from a more established and empowered position, recognizing the evolution of appropriate workplace behaviour over time, she acknowledges that her earlier acceptance and participation could have posed risks to her reputation and professional relationships, especially given the sexualized nature of the venue which contrasts with today's professional norms and expectations of behaviour.

Some participants described a feeling of disillusionment and disappointment that the promise of a second fire family was not exactly the way they imagined it would be. When the crew didn't have a strong connection outside of the workplace, it was seen as a barrier by some, because their lived experience did not match the expectations of the work relationship that they had imagined or anticipated.

There haven't been too many social or extra curricular activities with the Platoon. We did organize a platoon Christmas party last year. I think that was the first one for me personally. My crew has organized quite a few social events. I've been a part of a crew that seemed to make time and effort to get together outside of the shift. I've been a part of a crew that didn't for whatever reason. I remember when I was applying, that was one of the things I was looking for, was like another family, like a work family... I wanted that work family and when I've been able to cultivate that or be a part of that with crews - that they get together socially outside of work - it's been really nice. (Claire, career firefighter).

Claire expresses her desire for a "work family" and values the sense of community that comes from socializing outside of work hours. This yearning for a supportive and cohesive work environment reflects a desire to build connections, participate in camaraderie, and fully participate in the social fabric of the team. Claire's distinction that some crews make an effort to cultivate team dynamics, a sense of community and socialize outside of work, while others do not, could be related to factors such as leadership styles, team dynamics, and cultural norms within different crews. It also highlights the possibility of unequal opportunities for connection; depending on the crew you are assigned.

The culture of cliques can exclude others and is a barrier to retaining firefighters. Station Officers need to make an effort to break up the exclusionary groups by encouraging different people to work together in training sessions.

I remember when I got hired, it was December and our department had their Christmas party, but as recruits we were not invited... We've had firefighters who have said we don't feel part of the clique and have left the department as a result. (Natalie, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Exclusion from social events, such as the Christmas party, contributes to feelings of isolation or lack of belonging, especially in the firefighting profession where camaraderie is crucial for overall team cohesion and effectiveness. Being excluded from social gatherings can contribute to feelings of being an outsider or being rejected by the

established group. The recruits' inclusion in social events implies a recent shift in the organizational culture and improvements to inclusivity.

Many described the social activities as something they enjoyed, and an easy way to expand their social network, make new friends and have regular social engagements that they looked forward to. However, there was also an ugly underbelly of socialization described by the participants, which hampered relationships and created distrust. Socialization at bars, for example, were linked to a degenerate nature of conversations that involved inappropriate discussions and jokes, flirtation, and gossip. Volunteer firefighters, in particular, felt that they were compelled to participate in social outings outside of the workplace, as it was linked to favourable treatment in the fire hall by Station or Chief Officers, a fear of not fitting in, and being branded as not being a good team player.

Children

More women than men firefighters described competing commitments, especially familial obligations that posed barriers to career progression. However, this study showed that all firefighter participants have numerous obligations, including other paid employment, elder care, travel, spouses, and caring for their own mental health. For some of the women, the obligation of caring for children or family was greater than the majority of their male counterparts. An Australian study found that lack of childcare support, delays in joining the fire service due to child-rearing, and having to make the decision to attend an incident or care for children, were barriers to women becoming full volunteer firefighters (Beatson & McClellan, 2005).

I was basically told (by colleagues) to wait till I had my kids to join the suppression side. But now that I'm on suppression, I'm in a position now that I'm not worried to have kids because of my position at the department, but I enjoy my job. I'm worried that it's going to affect my position in the department so it's a bit of a bone of contention with my husband and I, but kids are hopefully on the horizon. I was waiting until I was first class and then some more things have been happening and I am past first class now, it's just

a bit of a challenge. Not the right timing, I guess. (Christine, composite department, career firefighter).

Christine's colleagues provide input, suggesting timelines on when to best have children (before or after entering the suppression division) indicates an underlying belief that professional choices in the fire service need to consider family planning, and that becoming pregnant as a firefighter would create some challenges. The tension between the perfect time to have a child and working to achieve career milestones highlights the societal pressure women often feel in trying to have it all, a successful career and family life. Despite having achieved a certain rank within the fire department, Christine is still concerned about the repercussions of starting a family and taking a leave from her job, which she states is a critical conflict with her husband.

Sandra described how she tried to hide the fact she was pregnant from her colleagues. She was worried about them treating her differently but most of all she was concerned about what a reassignment would mean. She knew that being pregnant didn't mean she would have to abandon her career, but it would mean that she wouldn't be able to work in a fire hall or respond to emergencies. She didn't want to be seen as a nuance to the management team and she didn't want to be assigned menial tasks.

When I first got pregnant, I tried to keep it a secret, which is hard because you have to ask for new pants when you start gaining weight. One day I was eating cereal at the start of shift and one of the firefighters just came out and asked me in front of everyone, if I was pregnant. It surprised me. At first, I said no, but I was actually 5 months pregnant and wouldn't be able to hide it much longer so I quickly said yes, because I didn't want to lie to my colleagues. After that my Captain made a phone call to the Platoon Chief, and I was taken off the trucks. I never went to work that day thinking I would be taken off the trucks. I was devastated... after that, I got a letter from management stating that due to my condition, I couldn't work in suppression. I never realized pregnancy was considered a "condition." (Sandra, career firefighter).

The fact that Sandra felt the need to hide her pregnancy because she felt there would be career consequences to disclosing, implies that the workplace might not be supportive or accommodating to pregnant women. Her colleague's direct line of questioning about her pregnancy in front of everyone was a violation of her privacy, and focused unwanted attention on her body. Management's decision to categorize her pregnancy as a "condition" suggests they viewed her pregnancy as a hindrance to her regular duties. Sandra felt emotional distress as a result of being coerced into disclosing her pregnancy.

While some people have preconceived notions surrounding the physical capabilities of pregnant women, considering them in some sort of feeble state, Sandra noted that there seemed to be an unrealistic expectation of what work was deemed as appropriate for a pregnant firefighter. She pointed out there was minimal medical documentation needed to get a work accommodation for pregnancy, there was no need to complete a functional ability form, which would have specified the suitable work activities as recommended by a medical practitioner.

On my second pregnancy, I was placed in training. I ran with the recruits every morning until about 7 or 8 months. I was massive. I remember coming back from a run and it just didn't feel right when I went to the bathroom, so I told the Chief Training Officer that I wouldn't be able to run with the recruits anymore. He asked me why. It was strange. It wasn't like any of the other training officers ran with the recruits. The other thing that I found very bizarre was the work that I was assigned. I remember one day they wanted me to load portable pumps onto the pick-up truck and take them to the training yard. I remember trying to use my big belly to lift them up onto the truck. I was too nervous to say that wasn't the most appropriate work for me to be doing so far along in my pregnancy. (Sandra, career firefighter).

Sandra was re-assigned to the training division after the disclosure of her second pregnancy and was expected to participate in the morning runs with recruits. This assignment implies that pregnancy should not disrupt her professional duties. The fact that other training officers were not required to run demonstrates a concerning

discrepancy between how Sandra was treated compared to the other male Training Officers. The work assigned to Sandra, such as loading heavy equipment while so far into her pregnancy highlights the lack of accommodation and suitable work assigned to pregnant firefighters. Sandra's experience raises concerns about the lack of consideration given to workplace policies and human rights, particularly in the context of pregnancy, gender equality, and equitable treatment. Denying pregnant firefighters appropriate accommodations, subjecting them to physically demanding tasks, and not providing equal treatment to non-pregnant firefighter can be seen as a violation of their human rights and rights to gender equality.

Both men and women firefighters describe how children affected their career. Having a family had an impact on their availability for extra-curricular activities such as crew hockey games or going out for drinks after a shift with colleagues. While the benefit of the shift work allows for extended blocks of time with children, when the career firefighter is away for work, it is also for long blocks of time. They described trying to deal with family issues by phone or FaceTime while being at work, creating both stress and guilt. Volunteer firefighters describe being called out to emergencies during birthday parties, and holiday gatherings, as having a negative impact on family life.

I came into the fire service with three children. When I entered, I had a nine month old, and the average firefighter on my department was either super young with no family commitments or older with slightly older children, and less immediate family responsibilities. I was smack dab in the middle of having three kids under the age of eight, trying to balance a full-time job and trying to be a volunteer, and so I didn't really have the time or the energy to actively participate in many of the social events, just because of my family commitments. (Sarah, career firefighter).

Sarah, a firefighter who entered the fire service with three children, was in a unique social position compared to many of her colleagues, who either did not have children, or had already raised children and no longer had the same caregiving responsibilities. The intersection of gender and motherhood contributes to Sarah's experiences and challenges, as she had to balance her full-time job and her role as a

volunteer firefighter with childcare and managing a household. Her inability to participate in social events due to her family commitments is perceived negatively by some and she feels her colleagues' lack understanding of the coping strategies required to manage the numerous responsibilities she has. Women learn adaptive strategies to cope with challenges and circumstances within individual personal lives (Majerowicz, 2017, p. 135).

Maria noted the risks of working in her role as a pregnant firefighter. While her miscarriage wasn't necessarily attributed to any work specifically being performed at the time, it took place in the workplace, thus considered reportable to WSIB. She also mentioned that her return to work highlighted the lack of awareness of the Chief Officer she reported to and noted the individual she dealt with had never had children, and she felt it reflected in how he handled her return to work.

Starting a family was a disaster... I actually miscarried at work. I was given a week off. They were great about it. No big deal. Even the Chief. Then I got pregnant, and I didn't really notice any problems. But when I came back, the Deputy Chief asked me for a note. I was like "a note for what?" "Well to come back to work." So, I went to my doctor and said, "I need a note to go back to work," and she's like, "oh, for what"? I said "for being off." She goes, "people don't have notes to go back to work after maternity leave..." I just feel like management is so uninformed. (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria's experience illustrates the challenges women firefighters face in the workplace when they become pregnant. Her return from maternity leave brings to light the lack of understanding and support from management. Maria's frustration with management's lack of awareness and understanding is indicative of the broader issues she experiences throughout her career, which she speaks about.

While many of the participants indicate they would urge their children to become firefighters, Steve indicated that he would not encourage his daughter to pursue a career in firefighting. He stated that both being a member of a racialized group and being female would put her in a position of not being accepted.

I can't imagine my daughter as an ethnic firefighter and female in the service. Because I find in general, ethnic firefighters have a really hard time, and females in different ways. But it's essentially the same struggle. The only thing worse, in my opinion, is an ethnic female firefighter. Because now you've got two cards against you. (Steve, career firefighter).

Steve indicates a variation in attitudes within his profession. Steve believes that ethnic firefighters and female firefighters both face difficulties, but when combined (ethnic female firefighters) he speculates that the challenges they would face would be compounded. He states that an ethnic female firefighter face "two cards against" them, suggesting that being a member of two marginalized groups will exacerbate the level of adversity compared to only being an ethnic firefighter or a female firefighter.

With any career you chose, the timing when to start a family is a conversation that many families have. While it is often said there is no perfect time to have a baby, female participants described the impact and considerations that had to be made around career progression. The women in this study discussed the challenges that children and family had on their career, in ways their male counterparts did not.

I would have preferred to have gone through the acting Captain routine prior to children because I found studying and preparing for it was impossible with my wife starting a business. She was ramping up her business so I had the two kids all the time, so I was trying to study. I had a newborn baby and a one and a half year old and it was just chaos. So ideally, I would have liked to do that prior. (Ava, career firefighter).

Ava's desire to go through the acting Captain routine before having children signifies that she anticipated the challenges of simultaneously studying and raising children. Her non-traditional family structure challenges the notion of heteronormative couple with a male breadwinner and a female caregiver. Ava is navigating her career aspirations while co-parenting with her wife, thus challenging societal norms around gender roles and family dynamics. The intersection of Ava's gender, sexual orientation, and career aspirations adds complexity to her experiences and emphasizes the need

for inclusive policies, a supportive workplace, and a broader recognition of diverse relationship structures.

Like many couples, the financial impact of maternity leave was discussed by Claire and her husband. A benefit that she appreciated was the maternity leave top up, otherwise known as the supplemental unemployment benefit for parental leave. This meant that her employer covered the difference between the Employment Insurance (EI) benefit rate and a percentage of her normal wage. This ensured she would continue to receive 75% of her salary while she was off. It should be noted Claire is a career firefighter and this benefit was embedded in her collective bargaining agreement. Not all career departments have similar provisions in their collective agreements and volunteer firefighters do not have access to the compensable benefits.

My husband and I talked about timing to have a baby in terms of the fact I was the main breadwinner. Although he is also a firefighter he got hired after me and he is still going through a few more classifications before he reaches first class. So, we talked about when it would make sense for me to be on maternity leave and it not totally deplete our financial situation. Honestly being pregnant though, it did shock me and how unprepared the department was. I was really disappointed with the modified work. I understand for most people, you know, with a hurt shoulder, recovering from a leg injury, whatever it is, the accommodated work is kind of like "make work projects", until they're back on the trucks doing their normal job. And for me, it was almost nine months of being on modified and it was very unfulfilling work. I felt almost punished by my Platoon Chief, like I was a drain on the system, you know, here I am making my full wage and I'm not even doing the job I'm being paid for. So, I found they were almost like spiteful in the tasks that they would pile on me day after day. It was like a very negative experience being on modified while I was pregnant, and for the first time really, I did not enjoy coming into work. (Claire, career firefighter).

Claire's fire department has hired women firefighters for more than twenty years, yet she was still astounded by the lack of preparedness and adequate provisions for meaningful modified work for pregnant female firefighters. She indicated that the

department lacked pregnancy policies and practices, perpetuating a system that did not truly consider the needs of women firefighters. She felt the accommodated work was unfulfilling, and the interactions with her Platoon Chief and the work he assigned her was punitive, devaluing pregnant firefighters. The perception of her as a "drain on the system" speaks to a broader narrative of women's contributions being overlooked or diminished when they don't conform to traditional male norms of contributing to the team.

Claire described an inability to get maternity uniform pants, so she felt like she stood out from her peers when she went to work. She was not afforded an additional allotment of uniform pants or shirts.

When I was pregnant, I asked about getting maternity pants. And it was like, "well, no, we don't have any. You'll have to like go to a tailor and get your pants tailored..." I went to a tailor and got my pants altered, but they didn't end up fitting correctly and I spent my per annum allowance on tailoring. I didn't want to try to ruin more of my work pants, so I just ended up wearing navy Lululemon pants and I was like, well I'll just wear them until someone says something. For now, these will be my work pants. I was still embarrassed - I'm clearly coming to work not in uniform and it's not that I don't want to not wear uniform. I would like to wear a uniform but for some reason they've never thought to order or make available maternity work pants. It just seems wild to me because I know I'm not the first woman to be pregnant at this job. Like how have they not implemented or made readily available maternity pants? (Claire, career firefighter).

The fire service adheres to a strict uniform policy, so the personnel are easily identifiable at the scene of an emergency. The uniform is the most powerful visual expression of pride and is an outward symbol of the fire service's commitment, identity and ethos. Most fire services have a standard operating guideline which outlines the components of the uniform and the standard of attire for daily work and for events like graduation and funerals. The policy often lacks any commentary about pregnant firefighters, and the inability to access maternity work pants demonstrates a lack of inclusivity in the workplace. These policies reflect traditional gender norms and expectations that do not account for the physical changes that pregnant women go

through. Claire's experience of having to spend her per annum allowance on tailoring and resorting to non-uniform Lululemon pants indicates that women often bear the financial burden of accommodating their pregnancies at work. Claire indicates she is not the first pregnant woman in her fire service, which implies a long-standing neglect of such needs. Claire's experience highlights the necessity for fire services to critically assess their policies and practices, recognizing the unique needs of pregnant employees, and working towards creating more inclusive and supportive work environments.

Before this pivotal moment in Sandra's career, she had already faced numerous challenges in the workplace that tested her resolve. Each day spent in the contentious environment of the fire station had strengthened her ability to handle unexpected interpersonal challenges.

I remember when my Captain called me to the office. He was sitting with a Captain who was on standby from another station. My Captain proceeded to ask me if I was pregnant. I was so confused. The other Captain stated "oh, Thomas, not Thompson,* recognizing that he had mistaken me with a firefighter with a similar last name. I looked at my Captain and said, "you can't ask me that question." He raised his voice in response and said, "yes I can." It was then that I decided I needed to compete in a promotional routine, so I wouldn't be supervised by an idiot like this guy in the future."* (Sandra, career firefighter).

The Captain's act of summoning Sandra to his office to inquire about her pregnancy status in front of another colleague is a demonstration of power. By initiating such a personal and legally protected conversation, he reinforces a hierarchical and patriarchal structure where men in positions of authority feel entitled to breach acceptable lines of questioning. The firefighter's response to the inappropriate question demonstrates her knowledge of her rights. His response, "yes I can," when corrected about the nature of his question, further demonstrates a dismissal of the boundaries that are supposed to protect employee rights. Her resolve to compete in a promotional routine to escape supervision by someone she considers an "idiot" highlights a form of

resistance against institutional and gender-based marginalization, aiming to secure a position where she can have more control over her environment and potentially influence change.

Social Skills

Being socially inept was described as a barrier to fitting in. Some of the characteristics of being socially inept include being shy, anxious and insecure around people, feelings of social inadequacies, fear of being judged or rejected by others, and the inability to understand humour or carry on a conversation. Fitting in with the dominant culture is almost universally seen as the principal requirement for everybody in the service (HM Fire Service Inspectorate in Scotland, 1999, p. 23). A lack of social cues and understanding of workplace expectations influences how a firefighter fits in with the members of their crew.

I couldn't imagine a recipe where someone with no social skills would be able to flourish in the suppression division. Just the ability or the expectation for interaction. I don't see how that individual would have an easy time being successful. It's not that they couldn't be successful. It's just not going to be a smooth ride for them. (Matthew, composite fire department, career firefighter).

When the fire service culture prioritizes communication, interaction and inside jokes which align with shared experiences, cultural references, and traditional masculinity, it can disadvantage marginalized groups. Matthew suggests that individuals lacking social skills might not have a "smooth ride" which implies that a certain level of friction or difficulty should be expected if your interpersonal skills are not strong. This viewpoint reflects the notion of a challenging work environment within the fire department. If the culture favours those who easily fit into the existing norms, it could discourage others from pursuing careers as firefighters.

Career firefighters often spend 24 hours together, in tight quarters, with limited space and time to be alone. To ensure a harmonious work environment, getting along with colleagues is important.

You have to know how to get along. They need to teach them the baby steps of conflict resolution, you know, because you're gonna get different religions, different political beliefs. You're gonna get people that just can't wrap their head around gender identification, or somebody who's transgender or somebody who's transitioning when these people are coming on the job. I try not to be an old dinosaur. I see them. I work with them. And I respect them because that's their decision. I try to encourage an open and understanding environment. Do I make mistakes? Absolutely. I make mistakes and I try to correct them, and I apologize. (Paul, career firefighter).

Paul has served for over thirty years and has seen the evolution of the firefighting profession. Paul acknowledges that the fire service demographics and ideologies are changing, and indicates that there is more diversity among recruit firefighters; such as different religions, political beliefs, and gender identities. He holds a privileged standpoint of the dominant group in firefighting, being a heterosexual man, and doesn't fully comprehend every standpoint, but he indicates a willingness to learn and grow. Paul's acknowledgment of making mistakes and his efforts to correct them indicates a self-awareness of his own biases and blind spots. By advocating for training on the "baby steps of conflict resolution" he is indirectly emphasizing the importance of understanding and valuing diverse standpoints, the benefit of good communication skills, and the necessity to reduce friction in the workplace, in order to get along.

A major hurdle for female firefighters is figuring out how to be one of the team. Wright (2008) explains that to be a good firefighter is not just about proving that one can meet the demands of the job, but also how one fits in with the macho and alpha male culture. In a male-dominated field, fitting in can be tricky, and the rules can change depending upon the crew. There may be a set of unwritten rules and behaviour shaping the norms and values of an organization that may encourage and collude with discriminatory practice (Bradley & Healy 2008, p. 76).

Sometimes I feel comfortable enough to challenge people, and there's been times where I just get up and leave the room. I just remove myself instead of challenging someone on what they're saying, because that's the least confrontational thing to do. To be successful at fitting in, you don't want to stir the pot or upset the waters. It's weird for me, dichotomies that you have to somehow keep in check; you still have to value yourself and you know what your values are? I think it's finding ways of being able to respect yourself, your decisions, your actions, but also being able to work in the bigger picture of the crew, the platoon, the department. I think being successful at fitting in is how can avoid ruffling too many feathers and still go home at the end of the day and feel good about yourself and what you've done. (Claire, career firefighter).

Claire's passage highlights the dichotomies she navigates in her day-to-day interactions in the workplace: standing up for oneself versus maintaining harmony, personal values versus group cohesion, and individual identity versus collective identity. Claire recognizes the importance of not "ruffling too many feathers" and choosing to leave the room when conversations or comments are objectionable, understanding that challenging these situations could have long-term repercussions.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been called a set of favourable or unfavourable feelings and emotions with which employees view their work (Karatepe, Uludag, Menevis, Hadzimehmedagic & Baddar, 2006). Motivation can come from a sense of altruism, self-worth, and the satisfaction that comes from fulfilling an obligation to the community, ranging from personal responsibilities to cultural pressure (Gazzale, 2019; Francis & Jones, 2012; Carpenter & Myers, 2010; Haddad, 2004; Yarnal & Dowler, 2002). All the participants described a level of pride and satisfaction in the work they performed which fuelled their passion for firefighting. When organizational pride increases, membership in the organization becomes more important to individuals' self-concept (Rosso et al., 2010) and increases behaviours helpful to the organization (Brickson 2013). All the participants described an intuition that they knew firefighting was the right career choice,

which motivated them to apply to be a firefighter. Even if the primary motivation often is to help other people, some individuals are also driven by career motivations, pride or sensation seeking (West & Murphy, 2016; Perrott & Blenkarn, 2015; Francis & Jones, 2012; Carpenter & Myers, 2010). Organizational success and job satisfaction are also linked to employees' perceptions of adequate pay and benefits (Edwards, 2008).

Community Support

Christine said one of the biggest motivators for her was the public support for her in her role. She recognized that she was a great role model, especially for young girls, and considered this one of the more positive aspects of her job. When people from an underrepresented group see minority employees, this physical cue may signal the value the organization places on diversity, making potential applicants feel more confident in considering the firefighting profession as a viable career option (Kafka, 2023, p. 97).

In my community, I've got nothing but like praise. Like women who've been in hollering when I'm driving out on the street and men bringing their daughters in. That's the stuff that you cling on to, so I think holding on to those and to write the stuff down. I would tell myself to write the good, experiences down and hang the good pictures in your locker and stuff like that as a visual reminder. (Christine, composite department, career firefighter).

Christine is praised in her community for her role as a firefighter. She feels that her community values and recognizes her contributions to public safety. Christine mentions that women in her community holler in appreciation when they see her driving the fire truck and being the only female firefighter in her department, it wouldn't be a common thing to see. It suggests that women in her community see her as a role model and a source of inspiration. Christine notes that men bring their daughters to visit her at the fire station. It implies that men in her community also acknowledge that she is a role model for the next generation, and if their daughters can see a woman in a non-traditional role, they too can achieve similar career aspirations.

Christine emphasizes the importance of holding onto these positive experiences and using them as a source of motivation. It's a way to reinforce her own sense of empowerment and self-worth. Listening to Christine describe her experience in the fire service does not portray a very positive workplace, and she battles pervasive gender stereotypes and biases which seem to undermine her confidence and self-esteem. Being the only woman firefighter in her department leads to a sense of isolation. Hanging up pictures and writing down positive experiences serves as a form of self-encouragement, a way to celebrate progress and contributions as she boosts her own morale.

Community support, as highlighted through Christine's experiences, serves as a powerful contrast to the negative aspects of workplace culture, including tokenism, discrimination, hazing, and occupational deterrents that women in firefighting face. As described in the Chapter 3 literature review, women in male-dominated industries often encounter barriers that can impede their career progress and affect their well-being. These can range from overt discrimination and sexism to subtler forms of bias, such as being overlooked for promotions or being expected to repeatedly prove their competence. Such experiences can be demoralizing, leading to a sense of isolation within the workplace. Community support acts as a psychological and emotional buffer against these challenges. Community support validates Christine's role and contributions and also provides her with a source of resilience against workplace negativity. This shows that positive reinforcement from the community can help mitigate the impact of adverse workplace experiences and foster a sense of belonging and acceptance.

Christine's visibility and recognition as a female firefighter play a crucial role in challenging gender stereotypes and expanding the notion of what women can achieve. By being a visible and prominent figure in her community, Christine serves as an example that women can excel in roles traditionally dominated by men. This visibility is crucial for young girls and women, providing them with tangible proof that their career aspirations need not be limited by gender norms. For men and boys, seeing women in these roles can help alter perceptions, promoting gender equality and respect. Recognition of women firefighters and support from their communities play a crucial role

in this transformative process, contributing to a more diverse, equitable, and resilient society.

This chapter concludes the exploration of the personal experiences of firefighters and the rich narratives that emerge from within the firefighting community. These stories, lived and told by both men and women firefighters, provide invaluable insights into the realities of a profession marked by both bravery and vulnerability. The importance of reading and understanding these personal experiences cannot be overstated, as they offer a unique lens through which the challenges, triumphs, and day-to-day realities of firefighters can be viewed and understood.

Men and women firefighters, while united by their commitment to serving their communities and facing similar physical demands and risks, often experience their roles in subtly or distinctly different ways. These differences are not merely anecdotal but are reflective of broader societal dynamics and gender-specific challenges. For instance, women firefighters might face additional hurdles, including gender bias, a lack of representation, and the pressure to prove themselves in a traditionally male-dominated field. On the other hand, the experiences of men in these roles can shed light on the expectations placed upon them in terms of masculinity and conformity. Understanding these nuances is crucial for fostering a fair, equitable, and accepting workplace. Acknowledging and addressing these differences head-on allows firefighting services to implement policies and practices that support all members, encourage diversity, and dismantle barriers to inclusion.

In the context of academic research, the voices of firefighters are indispensable. They ground theoretical discussions in lived reality, ensuring that the policies and practices developed are not only informed by empirical data but are also reflective of the needs and experiences of those they aim to serve. These personal narratives serve as a powerful reminder of the human element behind the qualitative data. These narratives are the heart of this dissertation, and paint a nuanced picture of the firefighting profession, one that captures its complexities and diversities.

From these narratives, we learn the importance of empathy, the value of diversity, and the need for resilience in the face of both physical dangers and psychological stresses. These lessons are not merely academic; they have practical

implications for policy development, training programs, and the overall culture within firefighting services. Future research can build on these insights, exploring ways to enhance support systems, promote mental health, and ensure that the firefighting profession is accessible and welcoming to all who wish to serve. Ultimately, by listening to and understanding the varied experiences of firefighters, this dissertation can contribute to a body of knowledge that supports the development of a more inclusive, supportive, and effective firefighting community. This, in turn, not only enriches the profession but also ensures that it continues to evolve in ways that reflect the values and needs of a diverse and changing society.

Toxic Workplace

Organizational consequences that stem from a workplace can be debilitating for the organization's culture. They can affect employee retention and be detrimental to the employees' feelings of career satisfaction and personal sense of well-being. Problems stemming from poor leadership, oppressive management, hazing and bullying, harassment, conflict management, stress, disengagement, lack of appreciation, and recognition, and underutilization of skills were all cited by the participants as contributing factors to a toxic workplace. While the fire service portrays a workplace culture that prides itself on "brotherhood and sisterhood," some workplaces are the exact opposite of supportive, safe spaces. Some firefighters describe workplace pranks that go far beyond what any reasonable person would consider harmless or fun. In the gender identity section of the literature review we learn that some would suggest thick skin, coupled with a sense of humour and masquerading as "one of the boys", are essential for women working in non-traditional employment (Whittock, 2002, p. 455). As Matthew points out, signs of a toxic workplace aren't always obvious or well understood, and many firefighters don't have the skills to navigate the environment, possess the necessary coping mechanisms, and certainly don't have the influence to create positive cultural change.

You know, one of my, one of my chief complaints about the new IAFF [International Association of Firefighters] resiliency program for just for an example is, we're teaching these kids to be resilient. But, you know, we're not teaching them the recognition of a toxic workplace, right? (Matthew, composite department, career firefighter).

Matthew's criticism suggests that while resiliency training is essential, the root cause of stress may not solely result from responding to emergency incidents, leading to a post-traumatic stress disorder. Matthew speaks to a broader, shared experience within the profession, and points to the need for a great exploration on toxic workplaces, he advocates for more robust training and identified the need to rectify toxic work cultures.

Sexual comments, racial remarks, and negativity in the workplace create an adverse work environment and when they become more than isolated incidents, it can result in the creation of a toxic workplace. Employees are responsible for their own actions, but when management fails to act, it leads to systemic issues in a workplace where harassment and unprofessional behaviour become the norm (Ontario Provincial Police vs. Ontario Provincial Police Association, CANLii 50619, 2022).

I think that it's the sexual comments, the sexist comments. The undertones daily. Daily. They'll talk about newscasters who are women. They'll talk about HR being assholes because they fucked up paperwork. It's just an incessant tiny hammering of everything. I'm not visible minority but, you know, I do hear comments regarding black individuals, brown people and Asians. Some women don't want to take it anymore and they maybe they take things personally. Again, I feel it goes back to resilience. But again, am I resilient because I take their bullshit and let it go? (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria describes the consistent and daily exposure to microaggressions that are experienced in the form of sexual and sexist comments in the fire hall. Firefighters making disparaging comments about newscasters and human resources personnel suggests the normalization of derogatory comments towards women. Maria challenges the conventional understanding of resilience by asking a rhetorical question; is it being

resilient to endure silently (as a strategic choice) or to speak up against oppression in order to bring about change? Historically, silence has often been imposed upon marginalized groups, silencing their voices, concerns, and lived experiences. While silence can be seen as an acceptance of the status quo, Maria would argue that continuously confronting oppressive comments or behaviours can be mentally and emotionally exhausting, and silence is a means of self-preservation. Rumors are defined as informal and unverified whereas relevant statements are considered verbal reflections of employee concern and the psychological climate (Bordia et al., 2006; DiFonzo & Bordia, 2000, 2007; Rosnow, 2001). Gossip and rumours aren't innocuous and can hurt people's feelings, harm reputations, create divisiveness, and erode morale.

I think I think a lot of the toxicity comes from rumors. First of all, when somebody comes to a crew, people have a predetermined idea of an individual because of something that was said or done in the past, and certain beliefs in regards to "ah we're getting a female that's that it, we can't say nothing." (Paul, career firefighter).

While Paul exhibits awareness and allyship, his standpoint is shaped by his position as an observer within the dominant group (white heterosexual male) rather than someone who is directly experiencing prejudice and discrimination. White men are the dominant demographic within the fire service, and as such, set the culture, practices, and norms within the organization. The statement of "ah we're getting a female that's that it, we can't say nothing" depicts how Paul's crew views women as being intrusive to a traditionally male space.

I think a lot of it's the whole preconceived notion of an individual before they come. I mean, there's already that stamp put on them before they show up to the hall. There may be a rumor or something that happened, a past incident, their gender, how they express themselves, their sexual orientation or their sexual preference, or their religious belief. Pick one and I'll show you somebody that's going to be against them, that will not want to work with them.

Paul lists several markers of difference, such as gender expression, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs which would set someone apart from the majority. The phenomenon of "othering" is the process by which the dominant group, consciously or unconsciously, defines certain groups as "different" or "outside the norm." In the fire service, "othering" can result in marginalized groups feeling isolated, undervalued, or discriminated against. Individuals who fall into marginalized categories will have standpoints shaped by both their personal experiences and by the ways in which intolerance, prejudice, discrimination, bias, and cultural misunderstandings are experienced.

A toxic workplace culture results from inappropriate behaviour that exists without consequence. Hazing can be humiliating and physically or psychologically harmful to those on the receiving end. There is a fine line between a prank and assault, horseplay or bullying. Many junior firefighters would find it difficult to differentiate hazing from rites of passage signaling inclusion. As Peter points out, even when inappropriate workplace behaviour is brought forward, there needs to be witnesses willing to corroborate, which is hampered by the fear of shunning and reprisal.

I've described the workplace as absolute toxic myself. The Captain was the source of toxicity for many, many, many people. He had been investigated a number of times, and he was just absolutely brutal. He was particularly brutal with some of the women on the job. I truly believe he's actually a clinical psychopath. I'm not saying that as a colloquial because he was an asshole, no I really think he could be diagnosed as a psychopath.

The narrative hints at a larger issue of toxic masculinity and abusive behaviours in the fire service. Peter, being a firefighter on the crew, provides firsthand accounts of the Captain's behaviours, as well as how they affected the team dynamics and individual firefighters. The hierarchical structure creates a power imbalance, which the Captain exploits to exert power over others, allows him to manipulate situations, foster a group mob mentality (getting other firefighters to gang up on those he dislikes), and act with impunity. This excerpt highlights how men also feel pressured to "fit in" with the hegemonic masculinity. "Boys clubs" can be as exclusive to some men as they are to all

women, as the enactment of privileged masculinities not only enables most men to dominate women, it also enables some men to dominate other men (Pease 2010; Pacholok, 2013). Discrimination and harassment of men of different race, ethnicity, or religion can include vulgar jokes, hazing, and compromising of PPE, similar to what female firefighters encounter (Majerowicz, 2018, p. 146).

The perspective held by some male interviewees is that women entering traditionally male-dominated fields should be prepared to endure hostile work environments as it is inherent characteristics of such workplaces, experienced by both men and women. This viewpoint suggests that the onus is on women to adapt to the existing conditions rather than on the workplace culture to evolve and become more inclusive. This position assumes that those who pursue a role as a firefighter accept the risks of the workplace culture. They understand that this culture is resistant to change and contributes to the ongoing presence of systemic inequalities within the fire service. This position disregards the fundamental rights of employees to a safe and respectful workplace but also supports the perpetuation of gender discrimination. Arguably, there is a broader societal issue where the burden of adjustment and tolerance of inappropriate behaviour is disproportionately placed on women, rather than addressing and rectifying the root causes of such hostility and sexualization in male-dominated fields. This attitude is a manifestation of power dynamics and gender norms that have historically marginalized women in the workforce. It also reveals a lack of willingness to engage in the necessary cultural and structural changes that would facilitate gender equality and diversity in the workplace.

He had a woman on his crew as a probationary firefighter. She is presently not at work. I think she's off with a PTSD situation. But Mandy had him as a Captain and he was so mean to her. She was so fully broken, like spiritually, wholly broke and defeated. It was it was just sad. And she traced it all the way back to him. He put her on that path in her career where she felt like she couldn't do anything right. And once you are viewing the world through that lens, everything you've touched, you almost sabotage yourself (Peter, composite fire department, career firefighter).*

Mandy's* psychological struggles could be attributed to the ongoing microaggressions and systemic discrimination she faced. Mandy* began to view herself

through a lens of inadequacy and doubt. This demonstrates how harassment, discrimination, and bias experienced early in a career can have a snowball effect. The loss of confidence led her colleagues to view her as incompetent and incapable, perpetuating gender biases. The fact that the Captain could behave this way for years, facing multiple investigations resulting in a demotion as opposed to termination, suggests an organizational acceptance of such behaviours.

The fire station kitchen table is a place where firefighters ritually have coffee and meals together, where they catch up with their colleagues after days apart, laugh and enjoy each other's company. It is also a place where gossip and rumours are spread, criticisms are hurled, disparaging remarks are made, and discontentment festers. Brent describes matter-of-factly that the fire service is toxic, and that is just the way it is.

Generally speaking, the fire service culture is toxic by definition. Now one's perception of toxicity and interpretation of that I think is going to vary, but I find the fire service culture very cynical, and critical. Everybody is criticizing everybody's action and/or inaction. Just to offer a story, it was my first week on the truck and I was still living at home at the time, and I remember having a discussion with my family that I've never heard so many people being called an idiot before. You know, it's like, oh, that person is such an idiot. It could be a professor on the news or something. And I remember sitting there thinking, okay, this person has achieved a PhD or is the best at their skill set and whatever field that it is that they're speaking of, how can they possibly be an idiot? (Brent, career firefighter).

As Brent points out, regular use of derogatory comments like "idiot" in the fire hall can be indicative of a toxic environment. If those in the dominant group frequently make derogatory comments and it isn't addressed through coaching and discipline, the behaviour can escalate to more concerning forms of bullying, harassment, or discrimination. The Ontario Human Rights Code and the Occupational Health and Safety Act require employers to provide a work environment free from harassment, discrimination, and workplace violence. Formal workplace policies provide clear guidelines on appropriate workplace behaviour. It is the responsibility of the employer to ensure that employees understand and conform to the implemented policies.

Firefighters underperform for a number of reasons: they may not be self-aware of their performance issues, they are unable to perform skills at the expected level, unwilling to admit they have a deficit of knowledge and require remedial training, or their priority is simply not their firefighting career. Such issues hamper the performance of the team and create resentment among the crew members.

And then there are people who really look at firefighting as their second career. That is probably my biggest pet peeve. Unfortunately, there's quite a few, because of our work schedule. It allows firefighter to have businesses on the side and some guys own larger companies before getting hired and then that remains their priority. Whereas to me, this is your career. You should be all in. (Ava, career firefighter).

Due to the biases and stereotypes women firefighters face, some feel the need to demonstrate their commitment and passion for the job more overtly, by joining the Honour Guard, the Association's Benevolent Committee, or the fire department baseball team, to name a few. Ava, who views firefighting as her primary career, may feel the need to exert extra effort to prove her dedication. Ava's frustration with her colleagues who treat their career as a secondary priority may stem from the extra effort required for her to establish herself in firefighting.

Claire explains that sometimes a female firefighter's biggest critic in the workplace can be other women. She provides the rationale that the women being negative towards other women are doing so to feel like they are part of the dominant in-group, which is white heterosexual men.

There's two camps; women supporting women and then a camp of women almost, like, tearing each other down, unfortunately. I personally think that the camp that tries to tear other women down exists because they see it as a way of fitting in, for lack of better words. Like the old boy's club. I think that's their way of trying to be accepted by that old school mentality. I guess if they can tear down women with their male counterparts, then maybe they'd be accepted by those male co-workers, which is kind of upsetting. (Claire, career firefighter).

Claire asserts that some women tear down other women as a way to conform and fit in with their crew. Perhaps the strategy of joining the dominant group (or, in Claire's words, the "old boys club"), means the women can better shield themselves from the same poor treatment. The reference to the "old boys club" acknowledges the male-centric power structures that persist in the fire service. Trying to gain acceptance by the "old boys club" highlights the organizational value attached to male validation. *Then for the women that support other women, I think it's confidence in who they are, and also wanting to see change in the workplace to and knowing that nothing will change unless you take part in that change. They are trying to make the workplace better for not only themselves, but hopefully for the next set of female co-workers that are yet to join the workforce.* (Claire, career firefighter).

The second camp, which Claire identifies with, consists of women who actively support each other. By showing solidarity, they collectively challenge the status quo and shift power dynamics to influence change within the fire service.

Exclusion

Some women reported being left out of casual socializing when it relates to going away overnight, such as hunting or to a colleague's cottage. Their limited opportunities to socialize outside of the workplace undermines their ability to both demonstrate their social skills and successfully integrate with their crew.

When we would do educational/community events or training, we would go to the bar after, and they would absolutely invite me. But not on the weekend excursions, like hunting and fishing. Not at all. When they're asking for help moving or they've got a bunch of cords of wood coming in, they don't typically invite me. It's definitely difficult coming back in on shift, after I know they have been together off-shift. (Christine, composite department, career firefighter).

Christine is not only excluded from weekend excursions such as hunting and fishing but, as a result, becomes excluded in conversations that involve their bonding time outside of work. This amplifies the marginalization that Christine experiences in the fire hall.

So, they don't think that I can go shoot a gun if they go to a shooting range and I find sometimes that translates to work. My last Captain was very much like that. He would get the guys to do all the dirty work and then I would be more interactive with patients and the medical side which, I know you use people to their strengths but if I'm not given the opportunity to equally participate, they don't get an opportunity to see me excel at those things as well. (Christine, composite department, career firefighter).

The biases and assumptions her colleagues make about her capabilities in extracurricular settings seem to carry into the workplace and impact how her colleagues evaluate her skills as a firefighter and the allocation of work at an emergency incident. Progressive fire services are moving to gender-neutral locker rooms and co-ed dorms, while others have separate dorms for men and women, creating gender segregation in the living quarters. While one may argue that separate sleeping quarters afford privacy, it results in a woman missing out on the crew bonding that happens in the evening before they go to bed and information flow when they are gathered.

I was the first female. They had to create a new bedroom. So, when my crew sat down before I even got there, they had a conversation about if I would be able to sleep in a single bedroom or I slept with the group of guys. And they all verbally told me after that their wives had issues with me sleeping in the same space as them. But I think that's where all that bonding happens. That's where all that trust happens. (Christine, composite fire service, career firefighter).

The fire station is a male-centric space, and it appears Christine's fire department had not considered the possibility of women in the fire service when they originally designed and constructed the fire hall. The fact that they had to create a new bedroom indicates a lack of foresight that female firefighters would eventually be a possibility.

Without consultation or input, Christine was advised she wouldn't be permitted to sleep in the dorm. In the interview, Christine expresses her concern over being excluded from the sleeping quarters and identifies this as a place where crew bonding occurs. This effectively excludes her from the banter and conversation that happen at night during the rest period. Blocking her access to join the other firefighters in shared sleeping accommodations creates a gendered division, which prevents her full integration into the team dynamics. The wives' input on the "appropriateness" of a female firefighter sleeping in the same space as the other firefighters, indicates Christine's presence in the fire hall is seen as potentially disruptive or threatening to personal relationships between her colleagues and their spouses or partners.

Sexual Harassment

Men use sexual harassment to maintain or retain power, described by the male-dominance theory, the gender-role spill over and the sex-ratio theory. The male dominance theory suggests that, when a man has sexual relations with a female employee, the woman is no longer seen as a colleague but is reduced to a sexual object, which then reinforces the male's power and privilege (Lopez et al., 2009). The male dominance theory is particularly relevant to understanding the dynamics within the Fire Services in Ontario, because the theory suggests that sexual harassment is used as a tool by men to assert their power over women, transforming professional relationships into realms of personal power dynamics. In the context of the fire service, where teamwork and trust are paramount, reducing a woman from a colleague to a sexual object not only undermines professional respect but also reinforces male power, thereby perpetuating a culture of gender inequality. The gender-role spillover theory suggests that men sexually harass their female colleagues because they are accustomed to seeing women in a subordinate role in the domestic and social spheres (Lopez et al., 2009). In firefighting, where physical strength and bravery are highly valued, traditional gender roles can lead to misconceptions about the capabilities and roles of women, fostering an environment where harassment is more likely to occur. Understanding this spillover effect is crucial for developing training programs that

challenge these stereotypes and encourage more respectful and equitable workplace interactions. The sex-ratio theory argues that the ratio of men to women in the workplace, results in a greater risk of sexual harassment (Lopez et al., 2009). The sex-ratio theory is particularly applicable to the Fire Services in Ontario, where the significant imbalance between the number of male and female firefighters can create environments where women are more vulnerable to harassment. According to this theory, a higher proportion of men can lead to increased incidents of sexual harassment, as women are outnumbered and potentially isolated. This theory justifies the importance of recruiting more women into the fire service to help balance the gender ratio and reduce the risk of harassment, fostering a safer and more inclusive work environment.

Using an online survey focused on career service female firefighters from the United States and Canada that resulted in 1,773 responses, Jahnke et al. (2019) examined sexual harassment and discrimination occurrences. Using several scales that measured harassment, discrimination, mental and physical health, the results indicated that women firefighters regularly reported harassment, including hazing, that resulted in adverse health outcomes and challenges to the camaraderie of the fire station. Hulett et al. (2008b) and Maize (2014) expressed female firefighters reported sexual harassment through pornography, demeaning messages on lockers, human feces in personal protective equipment, and dangerous actions at fire scenes such as shutting down water flow. Women in the construction and mining industries experience similar harassment and gender bias issues (Kolade & Kehinde, 2013).

There are high levels of interest shown by men in women's sexual availability and orientation, together with presumptions about lesbian sexuality, when women enter traditionally male-dominated work (Paap, 2006). The deployment of sexuality as a means of control over women is evident in the sexual harassment commonly observed in male-dominated workplaces (Bagilhole, 2002; Collinson & Collinson, 1996; DiTomaso, 1989; Watts, 2007). The issue of sexual harassment is contentious because sexuality and associated behaviours are clearly subject to personal interpretation and the issue of sexual harassment has sometimes been confused with sexuality in general (Watts, 2007, p. 303).

While flirting and sexual banter can be commonplace in work organizations, not all of these interactions constitute harassment or assault. Sexual interactions may be mutually desired and can include flirting with co-workers, joking, and touching. Consensual sexual relationships, defined as those reflecting positive and autonomous expressions of workers' sexual desires, are also prevalent (Williams, Giuffre & Dellinger, 1999, p. 73). Sexuality takes many forms in the workplace and determining what is consensual and what is unwanted or coercive can be challenge.

Interviewees describe sexual behaviour and interactions at work ranging from a form of acceptance, to tolerable, objectionable, offensive, harassing to the other end of the spectrum - criminal. Sexual harassment and gender bias are illegal but still occur covertly, especially in the fire service (International Association of Women in the Fire and Emergency Services [i-Women], 2015). Female self-esteem and self-confidence are often belittled by human resources departments after women have taken extreme measures to adapt to male-dominated environments (Majerowicz, 2017, p. 138).

My experience (with harassment) were more just people making advances, but you learn to brush it off. I've been physically assaulted (grabbed, touched) multiple times. On the mental side. Often. Kitchen conversations where I'm at the table and everyone else is at the table and they're saying very inappropriate things about sexual positions and me being a part of those things. Every week, I'm having somebody else's baby. Things written on boards, verbally said to my face and behind my back, physical... basically all of it.

Christine describes instances of explicit and implicit forms of harassment, both physical and verbal. She believes administration won't adequately address the issue and she fears that coming forward with her concerns would result in retaliation. Christine describes her coping mechanism when her colleagues make advances, by "learning to brush it off." It reveals how she has normalized the prevalence of sexual harassment in the fire hall.

I've been touched or grabbed. But a stupid example like, cum Kleenex in my bedroom. Like 30 or 40. Kleenex is all over my bed. It's easier if I just clean it up, to put my head down and just do it. That happened for about a month until I finally told him that he could basically pound salt and he could clean it up. And then it stopped magically.

Those are kind of things that are happening. (Christine, composite department, career firefighter).

Christine's initial silence and tolerance of the inappropriate behaviour and decision to clean up after her colleague, places her in a subservient role. Linking the earlier phrase "I've been touched or grabbed" (physical harassment) to the Kleenex incident suggests a broader pattern of sexualized harassment and boundary violation. Eventually, Christine exerts her agency and confronts her colleague, challenging her colleague's behaviour in the workplace. The last line of the passage, "those are the kind of things that are happening," suggests that this is only one of many examples Christine has had to endure in the fire hall.

Being an active bystander is not easy. It can be confusing to determine if an interaction is flirtatious banter between two consenting adults. Being an active bystander means being aware of when someone's behaviour is inappropriate and choosing to challenge it. This puts the active bystander in a place where they can become the centre of attention and the target of reprisal.

Just inappropriate little comments that are like, really, "now you just made it weird." Just enough that it's crossing the line. And it's so common. There have been times that I've heard it go beyond. An officer at another station, he smacked a female firefighter in the rear end and was very inappropriate with her. And her response is, "Oh ha ha." Then afterwards I find out she is uncomfortable. "Why aren't you standing up for me?" And it's constant. I just hear it, these little things happening all of the time. (Sophia, volunteer firefighter).

Sophia and other female firefighters discuss the inappropriate interactions they endure with some of their male colleagues, demonstrating a shared understanding of their work culture. She mentions "inappropriate little comments" and actions "crossing the line" which implies the microaggressions are prevalent in the fire hall. Describing sexual harassment as "these little things happening all the time" demonstrates the

prevalence of the inappropriate behaviour, breeches of workplace policies and violations to the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

The imbalance of power dynamics is clear when the station Officer smacks a female firefighter on her rear end. The female firefighter's initial laughter may be a possible defence mechanism. However, when she questions Sophia, "why aren't you standing up for me," it indicates her colleagues' expectation of bystander intervention and allyship among the female firefighters. If these incidents are constant, it suggests that the behaviour has become part of the culture, making it harder for individuals to intervene or report the transgressions. The bystander's response (or lack thereof) to harassment can play a significant role in shaping the organizational culture and breaking the cycle of normalization.

Louise recollected an incident in which another female firefighter described unwanted sexual advances as a strategy to move work locations. False allegations of sexual harassment can also be detrimental to professional reputations and employment, and defending yourself can come down to conflicting personal accounts.

So, there was this chick, she was in great shape. She ends up getting assigned to our station. It's September. My wife is having a baby in October. Once the baby's born and I come back and she had a little bit of a rough ride at first to she didn't want to be in our station. I come back, my first day back, my Captain calls me in the office, and he goes; what did you say to her? And I went what? He goes; what did you say to her? I said what you mean? He goes she's saying that you said things and that you came on to her. I said excuse me? And he says, well, she says you said something. Okay, I said this is bullshit. I called the Deputy Chief at the time, and I went, alright, you better fucking get your ass down here and you better get your ass down here right now! He comes down and I absolutely lose it. Right? He told me to just relax. So, she ended up being transferred, which was probably what she was looking for in the first place. (Louise, career firefighter).

Louise, a lesbian firefighter, was accused of making advances toward the newly assigned heterosexual female firefighter who was having difficulty assimilating with her

new crew. The nature of the accusation is serious and can have significant repercussions. The Deputy's decision to transfer the new firefighter could be seen as a mechanism to defuse the situation; however, Louise feels that the accusation was a strategic way for the firefighter to get moved to another crew and station. Six years later Louise confronts the firefighter, and she denies ever making the allegation. This describes how the fire service culture can be shaped by personal agendas, calculated behaviours, interpersonal dynamics, and power structures.

All workers are entitled to a safe and healthy workplace. Under section 32.0.7 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA), an employer must ensure that an investigation, appropriate to the circumstances, is conducted for incidents or complaints of workplace harassment (Government of Ontario, Ontario OH&S Act & Regulations, 2018). If an employer instructs an employee to participate in workplace investigation, the employee has an obligation to participate. As Sandra describes, women choose to deal with sexual misconduct and sexual harassment in different ways, and it should be their prerogative, because at the end of the day, they have to live with the long-term consequences. When unwelcome advances won't result in termination, sometimes it is deemed easier to distance oneself from the problem.

When I worked as a training officer, a few months in, I went with the Chief Training Officer to look at a house slated for demolition, to determine if we could do destructive training there with the crews. We were both wearing jumpsuits, you know like Top Gun, where they zip all the way up. I was in the passenger seat, and as we were driving, he put his hand between my legs, not between my thighs, but higher. I literally jumped and said "what the fuck are you doing?" He said, "relax it's just a loose thread." That night I went home and I called the union president. I told him I didn't want to make a formal report, I just wanted him to document it in case it ever came up in the future. I told him everything that happened and then I said I wanted to leave training, immediately. The Fire Chief must have known something happened, because he called me to his office. I told him going back to the floor was best for my family. I wouldn't say any more than that. But months later a female firefighter came forward with serious complaints about the same person. I seemed to get dragged into that whole mess, and I kept saying, I chose not to make my issue public, and I wanted nothing to do with it. Lawyers got

involved and it was ugly. Eventually I felt like I was forced to meet with the City's lawyer and make a statement. He was terminated the next day. (Sandra, career firefighter).

This is an example of the violations women firefighters often have to endure. The Chief Training Officer's response, "relax it's just a loose thread," can be interpreted as a minimization tactic, downplaying the seriousness of his actions, gaslighting Sandra and suggesting she might be overreacting. Sandra doesn't file a formal complaint, despite feeling violated, because she felt the transgression wasn't significant enough to result in termination. The professional embarrassment she would face in making a report, the ensuing investigation, the fear of retaliation by a ranking Officer who had control over promotional processes were all contributing factors in Sandra's choice to stay silent. In hopes of some protection, Sandra spoke with her union president, to request guidance on how to navigate her way out of her role in the training division and a reassignment back to the operations division, resulting in a drop in rank and a 20 percent salary reduction. Sandra reluctantly co-operated in the workplace investigation, and felt it inadvertently victimized her further by recreating the stress she had chosen to avoid in the first place. The revelation that another female firefighter had similar experiences with the same person indicates that patterns of behaviour will likely continue if not addressed.

Several writers (Cockburn, 1991; Collinson & Collinson, 1996; McDowell, 1997; Wright, 2008) have observed the prominence given to sexuality in heavily male-dominated and masculinised workplaces. During the interview with Maria, she described a highly charged sexual environment, which she seemed, for the most part to shrug off, as if that is just the way it was. People who are targets of unwanted sexual advances, workplace sexual harassment or sexual misconduct have several options for responding. As Maria describes the most effective way for her to deal with it, is to clearly state the behaviour is unwelcome.

I feel very confident and comfortable telling people off, so if I don't like something, I just end it. I've had several incidents at work that I'm not happy about. However, I have a job to do, and this is my career, so, I have to move on. I shouldn't have had those

experiences. But at the same time, in my opinion, it's more of a reflection on them than it is me. So, I just squash it immediately and move on. And I don't feed egos. But I would say the ones that really bothered me were the sexual harassment. (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria recounts her strong will and confidence in challenging male colleagues, how she establishes personal boundaries, and decides which behaviours she will tolerate and engage with and which ones she won't. Maria's perspective that the negative experiences she has had "are more of a reflection on them than it is me", demonstrates her resistance to power dynamics, and places accountability on those who perpetrate inappropriate behaviours. Maria mentions sexual harassment not as isolated incidents but as manifestations of broader systemic issues in the fire service.

Progressive discipline is a process used by management to deal with work-related behaviour that violates stated corporate policies. In a unionized environment, discipline is challenged regularly if it doesn't follow the four levels of discipline: verbal warning, written warning, suspension and termination. Termination for cause is considered the last resort. In fire services, details of misconduct travel through the rumour mill, not only among firefighters within the department it occurred in, but between neighbouring fire departments as well. While stories have a way of evolving, multiple firefighters from different departments described the event and the outcome below, with different variation of details. The firefighters (both men and women) who described this incident were disappointed by the outcome of the discipline rendered, articulating that in their opinion, it was too lenient. Consequently, they voiced concern that this type of behaviour is knowingly accepted in the fire service.

During this WebEx meeting, there was a woman talking about equipment. She had very large breasts. One of the Captains says, "show me your tits." Nothing comes of it. And he's sitting amongst his crew. And he's like, "show me your tits." He has no idea that his mic is on. The chief officer shuts it all down, and the meeting is over. The guy gets suspended. If I were the Chief, I would say you're never getting a Captain's job. Not a fucking chance. Management took his pay away for two weeks and then he was

reinstated. How does that woman feel going back to work? That guy should have been fired. So, I discussed this with the guys at work. And they're like, oh, well, you really think that one time, one mistake, and he should be fired? I said yes. It's called a mistake and he needed to be made an example of. He fucked up, he should have been fired. So later one of my co-workers said something about his daughter working from home and I said, "oh, working from home... like team meetings?" He's like, "yeah." I said, "so did her boss ask to see her tits yet? No big deal, right?" His fucking face. His jaw dropped. I said, "what? It's just a joke. It's only one time. What's the big deal?" (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria describes how a presenter's knowledge and expertise were overshadowed by a demeaning comment about her physical attributes. The Fire Chief's decision to suspend the Captain for only two weeks and allow him to continue in his role as a supervisor suggests that while discipline was rendered, the behaviour is tolerated at higher ranks in that fire service. When Maria turned the situation around, suggesting a similar scenario with one of her co-worker's daughters, helped her colleague see the incident from another standpoint. Maria's belief that the Captain should be fired, is about drawing a line to indicate acceptable and not acceptable, and setting a precedent that these behaviours are no longer tolerated in the fire service, especially from those in leadership positions.

In general, sexual assaults involving alcohol more often occur among individuals who know each other casually as acquaintances or are in romantic relationships (Abbey, Ross, McDuuie & McAuslan, 1996; Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, McAuslan P, 2001; Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton & McAuslan, 2004; Abbey, 2002; Littleton, Grills-Taquechel, Axsom, 2009). Alcohol consumption is associated with aggression and loss of inhibition. (Testa & Livingston, 2009). Workplace socials can include the consumption of alcohol, and firefighters sometimes fail to understand that it becomes an extension of the workplace. Standards of behaviour extend to the social activity, and professional consequences can be rendered. Steve describes an incident between multiple male firefighters and an intoxicated female firefighter.

The Chief had a firefighter appreciation party at somebody's property outside of town. Well, this young female firefighter was there, and she gets wasted. I became very concerned for her with the way that the guys were hovering around her, the things they are saying, things are doing, and it became very concerning. For me - I wanted to go home because I was exhausted. But I was also afraid to leave her there. Well, the fear that I had came true around one or two o'clock in the morning when they took her in her very drunken state, on an ATV while caressing her breasts and telling her that they're going to take her for a ride. She was so drunk. She had no clue what's going on. She was stumbling all over the place. They tried to get her on the ATV. They're like grabbing her boobs and now in an aggressive manner grabbing her other body parts. I went over and I get in between them, and the one guy and I ended up getting into a bit of a pushing match. I'm substantially bigger than him. But he's also a big boy. He's a farm boy. So, he squared up with me and I'm like, "this is not happening." (Steve, career firefighter).

Steve recognizes the vulnerability of his female colleague due to her inebriation and feels compelled to protect her. The other firefighters display a group mentality feeding off one another as they objectify the woman and touch her inappropriately. Steve's standpoint as both an insider (a firefighter and a man) and an outsider (a member of an ethnic group and someone who doesn't condone the men's actions) offers a unique perspective. He can empathize with the female firefighter's vulnerability while also understanding the dynamics among the men. His intervention diffuses the toxic masculinity and provides a safe haven for the female firefighter.

Maria explains that not all sexual and inappropriate remarks are seen as being offensive. Some women would take it as acceptance, blending in and being considered one of the guys. She describes being generally oddly comfortable in the inappropriateness of the firehouse banter.

I don't like when feel like I'm being treated differently, I don't like it. I know it sounds bad. But when guys joke around and make jokes that are inappropriate and just offside at

work, and I'm in the room, I actually feel comfortable because I know that those guys trust me and that they don't change because I'm in the room. (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria's acceptance of profanity and vulgarity in the fire hall can be viewed as both a coping mechanism and a factor perpetuating these behaviours in the fire hall. Maria's tolerance and, even comfort, with inappropriate jokes and language may inadvertently signal to her male colleagues that the behaviour is acceptable, as a way to fit in or be part of the group. This can create a cycle where such behaviour becomes normalized, making it difficult for other female firefighters who may not share the same tolerance or comfort level. It fosters a workplace where some women may feel they have to compromise their boundaries to be accepted, contributing to an unsupportive and potentially hostile environment for women. It sets a precedent that, to be accepted or trusted, one must conform to the existing culture, regardless of its appropriateness. For Maria, accepting this behaviour results from a desire to be accepted, the discrepancy in power dynamics within the group and the continuous exposure to such behaviour makes it feel inevitable. Challenging the norm could isolate her from her colleagues, perceived as a more harmful alternative.

Maria didn't mind dealing with what many might consider rude, vulgar, or sexist language. The influence and prevalence of gender were rendered inconspicuous through their conversations. Moreover, if she were regarded as one of the guys, it would imply that Maria was an integral part of the group, seamlessly blending in, and this sense of belonging was crucial for success in predominantly masculine work environments such as firefighting (Enarson, 1984; Lewis, 2004). This ability to fit in was also inherently linked to gender; not only did women in these workplaces need to assimilate into the existing gender norms (which were predominantly male), but they also needed to do so in a manner consistent with traditional masculine behaviour.

Fire halls have nuanced language, behaviour, and banter among peers that may be different from formal workplaces. Maria says the informality and inappropriate jokes signify genuine interactions and implies her inclusion as a peer and acceptance as "one of the guys." While Maria doesn't perceive the behaviour as harassment, the broader

implication is the risk of perpetuating a culture where only those who are comfortable with the status quo will fit in.

Firestone and Harris (2003) argue that where these kinds of behaviour are accepted as typical and routine within a particular setting, they are less likely to be perceived or named as sexual harassment either by the perpetrator or their targets. Notably, not all firefighters described this type of behaviour happening within their fire hall or fire service. But those who did, described sexuality in their culture as being pervasive.

Maria spoke about other women who had suffered stress from the treatment they were receiving, leaving the workplace, and returning to work without any sort of resolve, intervention, or safeguards in place. It demonstrated the ineffectiveness of policies, and that the everyday reality of the fire service was it was not an inclusive working environment free of harassment for all employees. Fire services may never be able to rid themselves of sexuality, but they should do a better job of shielding workers from harassment.

We've had women on my fire department who have spoken up because the guys harass them, and they go off on leave and it's horrible because they eventually have to come back. So even after they feel better at home, they come back and then they don't feel better again, because the guys are making them feel bad for speaking up against the guy. It's like they would protect a murderer. You know, if it was one of their own. It's whatever - it's the job I picked. (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria's experience reveals that women in her fire department are not just fighting fires, but also systemic harassment from their male colleagues. The fact that multiple women have faced these issues suggests that the fire service culture is deeply entrenched and resistant to change, and the departure of women firefighters from the workplace doesn't initiate an intervention by the employer. When these women return from their leave of absence, the culture persists.

Maria's comparison of the male firefighters protecting their male colleagues under any circumstance speaks to a "brotherhood" that overlooks moral or ethical

considerations. Maria's final statement, "it's the job I picked," echoes the sentiments of many of the female firefighter participants, that despite the challenges and hostile environments, one must adapt, tolerate and endure if you want to pursue your chosen career as a firefighter.

Mental Health

The mental health challenges faced by firefighters significantly complicate efforts to achieve inclusion in the Fire Services in Ontario. Firefighters are routinely exposed to traumatic events that can lead to mental health issues such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. These issues are often seen as signs of weakness within a culture that values resilience, creating a stigma around mental health that prevents many from seeking the necessary help. This reluctance can hinder inclusion, particularly for women and other members of underrepresented groups who may already feel marginalized.

Firefighters deal with traumatic events, and often it is experienced as part of their day-to-day job. Firefighters respond to horrific car accidents and extricate victims in pain or cover the ejected bodies from the public eye. They enter burning buildings and work in untenable temperatures in unstable buildings searching for viable occupants. They perform CPR on unresponsive patients, with inconsolable family members standing close by. There is an ugly truth about firefighting that the general public doesn't understand, and firefighters don't often leave the service unscathed. The job is more than crew meals, fire prevention, public relations at community events, and team bonding. There are lost lives and tragedy. There is insomnia, depression, as well as mental and physical injuries. There are unhealthy coping mechanisms, like substance abuse, gambling addictions and risky sexual behaviour, which are often used to numb thoughts, feelings, anxiety, guilt, restless sleep and persistent mental replay of incidents. The job doesn't end when the call is over, and the firefighter goes home. There is a need for mental health supports when the stress and emotional strain exceed the firefighter's resiliency.

One of our firefighters committed suicide a couple of months ago, and the reaction was to get everybody in the bar. And you can see it by 10 o'clock. We stopped in and were just watching. It was just like, oh my god, there's probably four more people that are red lining here right now and the decision from both management and the union was yeah, let's all get drunk at a bar. That's crazy. Doesn't make any sense. So, you see, because they're not connected. Their mechanism for release is alcohol. (Matthew, composite fire department, career firefighter).

The decision by both management and union to gather in a bar highlights the popular collective therapeutic coping mechanism. Matthew, who has had his own struggles with dependencies, felt that this inadvertently sends the wrong message to newer firefighters about healthy ways to process grief. By engaging in drinking as a way to grieve in solidarity, can set a precedent for how others should cope in the future, leading to a potentially unhealthy culture within the department.

Firefighter suicide shakes the very core of the fire service, and its impact takes an emotional and mental toll on those who are left behind to grieve. Suicide seems to contradict the very essence of what it takes to be a firefighter: courage, resilience, self-sacrifice, confidence, and the ability to handle difficult of situations. These myths and misconceptions contribute to the ignorance surrounding behavioural and mental health issues and stigmatization can result in the unwillingness of those suffering to ask for help. Colleagues feel guilty that they didn't notice or ignored the warning signs.

My dad was the Captain at a significant fire. So, he went through a bit of a mental health battle. He didn't take any time off work or anything he probably should have. I think that in the back of his mind it is always something that he's mindful of... He's worried for my mental health. You can tell through the conversations that we've had that he is. (Christine, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Many firefighters are conditioned to value resilience, and this may impact how they approach mental health and vulnerability. The cumulative emotional and psychological impacts of trauma can take a toll on a firefighter's mental health. Admitting mental health struggles may be seen as a sign of weakness, and the fear of

stigmatization around needing help may impact how a firefighter would navigate through mental health issues, possibility impacting relationships with colleagues, friends, and family. The firefighting occupation is stressful, for a variety of reasons. Responding to emergency incidents that involve death, close calls in fires, a loss of a colleague as a result of a workplace injury or suicide and the stress of shiftwork on your personal life, are only a few. Recognizing the mental strain of the job and knowing when to seek professional help or make a life change is crucial.

I didn't know this at the time, I was dealing with post traumatic stress. I would show up to work and I remember we would go to an alarm activation, and I would be so angry... This is ridiculous. This is so stupid. And I was just so angry. It was really because I was done. It's like that whole metaphor of your cup starts filling up with water until it starts to overflow. I thought it was maybe a personnel issue or a fire department issue, but it was a me issue. Dealing with all the traumatic stress. (Ryan, career firefighter).

Ryan, through his experience as a firefighter, provides us with a glimpse into how the stressors of firefighting can impact mental well-being. He provides a firsthand account of dealing with post-traumatic stress and the emotional toll it caused him, resulting in having to leave frontline firefighting to take on a support role in another division of the fire service. Ryan indicates the job's environment, and the job-induced stress can turn a workplace into a toxic environment. The mention of negativity as contagious indicates that when one person is affected, it can have a multiplying effect, affecting the attitudes, perspective, and well-being of others.

Municipalities are struggling with the financial repercussions of preventing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), training firefighters to be more resilient, and the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) costs associated with presumptive legislation. Some have included psychometric assessments during pre-employment in their recruitment process. The assessment is an attempt to profile candidates for their suitability in a trauma-prone role.

If you're an introvert, it's hard. I feel like a lot of people a who have gone off with PTSD or stress leave or stuff like that already struggled socially. I can name six or seven people currently, that went off work and they were already introverts in the first place. They struggled socially in the fire department. You can equate the lack of social skills as potentially a lack of resilience in the fire service. Our job requires that you have to be flexible in many ways. We respond to calls. We're dead, there's nothing going on. Then we're busy again, going from one call to another. You have to be able to switch it up constantly. So, you have to be resilient in that way. That extends also socially. (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria suggests that in her fire department culture, social skills are equated with resilience. In this case, the introverts, or those who "struggle socially," are the marginalized group. Maria describes a lack of social skills as the common denominator of all the firefighters she sees leaving the workplace on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) WSIB claims.

Some participants spoke about their firefighter colleagues who were off on approved WSIB PTSD claims but were working other jobs, collecting additional remuneration. These participants described their frustration because it was creating staffing pressures, resulting in taking a truck out of service (otherwise known as browning out), down staffing of trucks from four firefighters to three, personnel being shuffled around daily, and impacting safety on the fireground. There seemed to be a lot of speculation when it came to why firefighters were out of the workplace, but some felt it had a personal impact on their workplace and their well-being.

We had a firefighter, Trish, she was on the auto extrication team. She was one of the boys and she played with us just like one of our brothers. We talked with a dirty mouth, doing pranks and stuff. One time she put her undies in the lunch box of one of her guys and he went home not knowing. Just as a joke, right? Like, his wife wasn't impressed. Anyway. She never got in shit for that. He never even brought it up, like nothing was said. But then this girl goes off. I think that she had some internal mental health issues. I know a lot of people have mental health issues that are not job related and then they*

attribute them to the job. So, she was having some kind of struggles. Then when the department started putting pressure on her to return to work, she decided to say well, I was harassed, and I have PTSD. (Scott, career firefighter).

Scott describes a female firefighter colleague who was “one of the boys,” indicating she integrated well with her male colleagues. Scott claims Trish’s* PTSD claim was opportunistic, and past interactions and group dynamics were reconsidered because it fit the narrative of being harassed, justifying her need to be out of the workplace. Scott’s standpoint doesn’t consider Trish’s* vulnerability of being marginalized because of her gender and how power dynamics and social positionality would have impacted her interactions with her colleagues.

In firefighting, mental toughness and resiliency are valued, and admitting to mental health struggles can make the firefighter appear to be weak. This can be exacerbated for women because of gender stereotypes that may label them as emotionally weaker, contributing to a less supportive environment. Women firefighters might hesitate to seek help with mental health concerns for fear of reinforcing these stereotypes or facing discrimination and bias. Other daily stresses like exclusion, harassment and derogatory comments can compound the stress of their job. This added mental strain can heighten their risk of developing PTSD, creating a vicious cycle where the discriminatory practices not only harm their mental health but also potentially hinder their career progression. Creating a more supportive environment for mental health issues can be a significant opportunity for promoting inclusion. By acknowledging and supporting mental health challenges, the Fire Services in Ontario can create a more inclusive environment. Program development and standard operating procedures that promote resiliency, and mental health can transform the workplace culture, ultimately benefiting all firefighters.

Chapter 8: Changing the Game: Opportunities and Challenges in Improving Inclusion

In identifying the opportunities, the findings acknowledge the strides that have been made towards gender equity in firefighting, including policy development and implementation, diversity, equity and inclusion training, and targeted recruitment strategies aimed at increasing women's representation. However, it's crucial to address the reality that these efforts, while commendable, are often met with systemic and cultural obstacles. The findings examine the persistent barriers that women firefighters face, ranging from deeply ingrained stereotypes to overt discriminatory practices. These barriers are not just external roadblocks; but are also internalized, affecting the self-perception and career aspirations of women in the fire service. The resistance to change within the organizational culture of firefighting, gender-based workplace dynamics, nuanced stereotypes, bias, and discriminatory practices form a complex web that contributes to a less inclusive and often unsupportive environment for women in firefighting, making the journey towards inclusivity a challenging endeavour.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 not only highlight these challenges but also emphasize the importance of actively dismantling them. This necessitates an approach that includes continuous policy refinement, cultural transformation within the fire service, and the empowerment of women firefighters. By understanding and addressing the nuanced dynamics of gender bias and discrimination, we can pave the way for a more inclusive and supportive environment that not only benefits women in the fire service but enhances the overall effectiveness and resilience of the firefighting community. "Changing the Game" is more than just a call for equal numbers; it's a call for a fundamental shift in the way gender roles and identities are perceived and acted upon in the fire service. This chapter aims to be a catalyst for change, inspiring action, and sustained commitment towards a more inclusive and equitable Fire Services in Ontario.

Influencing Culture

While there are a number of ranks above Captain, outside of headquarters where a Chief Officer may reside, the Captain is often the highest-ranking person in the fire station, with supervisory duties over the firefighters assigned to their crew. This is the person that the firefighters will interact with the most, and they set the tone for those who work in the fire station. The Captain will determine the training schedule, make decisions at emergency incidents, and provide coaching and feedback to their subordinates. The fire Captain is described as having the greatest influence on workplace morale and culture by research participants.

The station Captain has a massive influence on that because they are there all the time, with everybody else, and they can help guide and lead by example. They can curb discussions that are unproductive or can derail group think. So, I think, the station Captain has huge influence on culture. (Brent, career firefighter).

Captains immersed in daily operations can have a greater understanding of the intricacies of the workplace, such as the subcultures, unwritten norms, and patterns of interaction that are invisible to those in strictly administrative roles (i.e. Fire Chief or Deputy Chiefs). The Captain has both the authority and responsibility to intervene in workplace dynamics when necessary. An inexperienced Captain, who is not respected, or perceived as weak, may limit their influence on organizational culture and decision-making.

I think the union has a huge influence on culture, too, because, more broadly, in labour relations, the union executive has huge influence on the cohesiveness of labour and management. (Brent, career firefighter).

Brent recognizes the power that unions hold when they promote worker solidarity. Unions advocate for employee rights, wages, health care benefits, and improved worker safety. Union leadership plays a significant role in shaping workplace culture, including norms, values, and behaviours. The union's stance towards

management, whether cooperative or confrontational, can significantly influence the overall atmosphere within the fire service. This impact extends to issues related to gender dynamics, as the union's position could either challenge or reinforce existing stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices.

It was suggested that a Fire Chief could improve workplace relationships and have a greater influence on front-line staff by having a more direct interaction with firefighters. Being a visible leader is more than being seen, it requires being accessible, approachable, and relatable.

I've never seen the Chief or never met the Chief and obviously, you know, this is where the rational mind comes in. It's like, you know they're running their own job on top of, you know, coming to visit the fire hall. In the past two years I haven't seen my Fire Chief at all, right. So, when we're talking about leading the organization through any sort of challenges, a how are you doing that? (Matthew, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Matthew values visible leadership, suggesting that presence in the fire halls, or lack thereof, affects morale. He recognizes that the Fire Chief has direct oversight of the department's operations, and as such can be laden with administrative tasks. But he also gestures to the symbolic importance of demonstrating unity with the firefighters through their visibility. Being accessible, approachable, and relatable can significantly influence front-line staff. This visibility is not just about being seen but also about being involved and understanding the challenges faced by all firefighters, including women. A Fire Chief who is more directly engaged with their frontline staff can better understand and address organizational culture and workplace challenges.

Hazing

Hazing in the Fire Services in Ontario presents significant challenges to achieving inclusion and fostering a welcoming work environment. This practice involves the initiation of newcomers or targeting members who do not conform to existing team

dynamics, which can range from mild pranks to severe harassment or physical harm. Such actions can lead to psychological impacts and create a hostile work environment, particularly for women when sexist jokes and behaviours are involved.

Firefighters who are the subject of hazing experience various forms of embarrassment, harassment, or ridicule ranging from benign to harmful, causing physical injury or psychological impacts. Hazing often occurs when there is a power imbalance between existing newly assigned crew members, lower-ranking members, or a firefighter who doesn't fit in with the dominant group. New firefighters try to quickly learn about their new work culture and the values of their organization. Often there are initiations, which can serve as building blocks to camaraderie, trust and teamwork. Other times testing the resiliency of new firefighters is actually bullying, hazing, or horseplay. As Peter describes, generally when a firefighter joins a new crew they are learning about colleagues, the expectations, and immersing themselves in a new career. The pressures to impress, fit in, and be accepted are immense.

When I showed up for work my first day, you don't know what you don't know... My crew all just sat around drinking coffee. One guy was on the phone. I think I was doing the crossword and there was nothing going on. I realized there's a lot of standby time in this job. I've seen it in the TV shows and movies, but like, come on, like we got to do something. I was sure there was something I should be doing. They're like, okay, well, you can go sweep and mop the floors. Well, this station was massive - it was built for three trucks. This was during the week, and I was doing the equivalent of a Saturday deep clean - stem to stern. When I was done, I asked what's next. Well, they said I could empty the garbage - so I went around and emptied 10 garbage cans. After that I cleaned all the washrooms in the shower stalls like to a pristine level. I did this for like six months - they just let me do it and didn't participate. Finally, I think maybe there's a little bit of hazing situation going on. I asked some of the other guys that I came on recruit class with how it was going for them. They were all at stations that are much smaller. They're like, yeah, it's not quite like that. So, one day a different Platoon Chief comes in because mine was off, and he sees me cleaning and it caught his attention. He asked me what I was doing? I said, "I'm mopping the floors." "Why?" he asked. I just

shrugged - this is what I do every day. "Why?" he asked again. I said "I'm just doing what they told me to do." And he was furious and said "come with me young man." I followed the PC into the kitchen, and he gives them royal shit. "This man is not your slave"... blah blah blah. And the guys are laughing because they managed to keep it going for six months... And then immediately after they were caught, it was like brotherhood, like right then and there. It been amazing ever since - it's been amazing after that initial long hazing. (Peter, composite fire department, career firefighter).

For new firefighters, like Peter, the desire to fit in and make a good impression can make them susceptible to manipulation and unfair treatment. The culture of joviality and humour within firehouse culture, can blur the lines between camaraderie-building pranks and damaging hazing. While some teasing can signal acceptance and foster a sense of belonging, when it crosses into ridicule or bullying, it undermines trust and inclusivity. The distinction between jovial banter and hazing is often poorly delineated, leading to situations where newcomers might endure undue hardship under the guise of integration or proving resilience.

O'Neill and Rothbard (2017) discussed a tenet of firehouse culture referred to as a culture of joviality, in which members are expected to maintain a good-humoured attitude and a steady approach to challenges. Pranks and teasing were described as being central to a jovial emotional culture and social rituals that produced resilience, signalled a good attitude, established trustworthiness, and created a sense of belonging (O'Neill & Rothbard, 2017; Pratt, 2017). Thurnell-Read and Parker (2008) echoed these findings by exploring the role of humour within firehouse culture; their findings posit that humour is an important part of managing the emotional labour which accompanies the experience of firefighting.

There's a saying, "if they're making fun of you, they like you. If they ignore you, then they don't like you." So, there was the banter, but it was harmless kind of stuff that made you sort of feel included. You'd think to yourself, they like me because they feel that they can joke around with me here. So, there was hazing, I would say there was some, you know, jovial kind, but nothing that I ever felt was malicious or trying to hurt anyone. (Brent, career firefighter).

The statement, “if they're making fun of you, they like you - if they ignore you, then they don't like you,” signifies the importance of social positioning. Those who are included are acknowledged and recognized by the dominant group (even if through inside jokes and teasing), while those they ignore or don't partake in are excluded or marginalized. There are certainly power dynamics at play, on one hand jokes can be used to ridicule, belittle and bully or on the other hand teasing among friends can solidify bonds, and indicate a level of comfort and trust. Peter wants to be included by his peers, and he rationalizes the jokes as a means of gaining acceptance.

There is an opportunity to change the narrative when it comes to hazing. Leadership in the Fire Services in Ontario has the opportunity to take a stance against hazing, particularly when it intersects with gender-based discrimination. Developing and enforcing policies that prohibit such behaviours can demonstrate a commitment to creating a more inclusive workplace. Replacing harmful hazing with activities that promote teamwork, respect, and equality can help foster a more supportive and inclusive environment.

Union

Union supporters express their belief that having representation and collective bargaining equates to good, stable employment, working conditions, competitive salaries, and compensable benefits. The countervailing arguments support the notion that union members have an overall lower level of job satisfaction compared to their non-union counterparts (Laroche, 2017; Garcia-Serrano, 2009; Renaud, 2002; Bryson et al., 2010). Matthew noted how the union can stall any collaborative efforts between labour and management.

Consistency Right? Like, there's consistency until there's not consistency. If they decide that they're going to drop the hammer on one particular issue, it can throw a wrench into the gears of everything. (Matthew, composite department, career firefighter).

From a Chief Officer's standpoint, consistency in decision-making and how policies are applied is crucial for the efficient functioning of a fire service. Consistency can signify reliability, effective operations, and clarity in expectations. However, the statement acknowledges the precariousness of this consistency; that despite management's best efforts, unions have the power to disrupt this balance. The metaphor of a "wrench into the gears" describes how the union's pushback can be incredibly disruptive. From the union's perspective, the ability to "drop the hammer" on a particular issue represents their ability to leverage power, exert influence, and change the trajectory of an outcome when the union perceives managerial overreach.

Claire describes a sense of job security being a member of an association and attributes her wages and benefits to the efforts of the association. She also believes that the association would be of assistance if she required that they advocate for her in some way. Claire noted that the association has a substantial amount of political clout which they could leverage when required.

Ava recollects that as a child, her family could afford dental care (while some of her friends' families could not) due to her father's health care benefits through his employment as a firefighter. In male-dominated fields like firefighting, access to unionized jobs and the benefits they provide, such as healthcare, has often been limited for women. Benefits can have a significant impact on the quality of life for the employee and their family.

I was able to go to the dentist to get my teeth cleaned because he had benefits and as a kid I had friends that couldn't afford it (Ava, career firefighter).

Unionized positions often offer better job security, benefits, and pay equity, which are crucial factors for marginalized groups, including women and the LGBTQ2+ community. Historically, women's healthcare needs and limited access to unionized jobs, outside of nursing and teaching, have led to disparities in access to stable employment and extended employee/family benefits.

Policies

It is clear that women's participation in the paid workforce has been central to debates on gender equality and gender reform and remains an issue identified by academics, governments, and public interest groups (Germain et al., 2012; Smith, 2013; Ridgeway, 2014). Gedro (2009, 2010) suggested that the role human resources play in facilitating more egalitarian organizational workplaces to encourage the entrance, development, and success of women leaders remains marginal. Careers are central to people's economic and psychological well-being, influencing lifestyle, prestige, and social standing, (Lips, 2001; Lips, 2004) which means that discrimination and concomitant gender inequities in the workplace are pressing concerns for organizational scholars (Goldman, Gutek, Stein, & Lewis, 2006). Organizational norms and values lie at the heart of the success or failure of equality initiatives (Bradley & Healy 2008, p. 76). There may be a set of unwritten rules and behaviour shaping the norms and values of an organization that may encourage and collude with discriminatory practices (Bradley & Healy, 2008, p.76).

Earlier in the "Women as Tokens" section, I explored the hyper-visibility of women in non-traditional work, as their presence as a minority stands out, and women can face excessive and unwanted attention or scrutiny compared to their male colleagues. This hyper-visibility can manifest itself in gender stereotyping, tokenism, and pressure to outperform male colleagues to validate their presence. On the other hand, when women enter male-dominated blue-collar trades, they might feel invisible, which manifests itself in stereotypes and prejudiced lack of support, harassment and hostile work environments. The participants in this study indicated that the contradiction lies in the fact that women face different challenges depending on their workplace culture. Both stem from deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and cultural norms that need to be addressed through policy to achieve greater equality in the workforce.

Policies are guiding principles that set the direction for an organization; procedures are the steps necessary to operationalize the policies. Together, policies and procedures provide a roadmap for making decisions, complying with legislation, and taking action. Policies and procedures encompass a fire department's standard

operating procedures (SOPs) or standard operating guidelines (SOGs). Wright (2011) noted that the physical location of a workplace, in relation to the location of the head office increased the hostility women felt over gender and sexuality (p.698). Policies and procedures are designed to help keep people safe, conduct their job tasks effectively, and make consistent, logical, and legally sound decisions. Although many fire service policies address frontline operational response protocols, policies relating to people and their conduct are equally as important. Providing a rationale for policies and procedures encourages firefighters to adhere to them because they understand the “why” behind them. Some may oppose the rationale behind the policy. Yet, when it becomes clear that there are consequences for non-compliance, ranging from disciplinary action to termination, it will emphasize the importance of aligning actions and decisions with the policy. Municipalities often have firefighters sign a waiver stating they have read and understood the corporate policies and procedures, emphasizing that personnel will be held accountable to the standards applicable to their respective position or role. To be effective, consequences need to be implemented and followed-through on by management.

In the Fire Services in Ontario, leadership roles and general membership are predominantly male, therefore men’s roles in shaping EDI policies are especially significant. This is because they are often in positions where they can influence the creation, implementation, and transformation of policies and practices that affect the entire organization. When men occupy most leadership roles, they have both the responsibility and the power to address and rectify gender imbalances and ensure that EDI efforts are genuinely integrated into the organizational culture.

Despite progress in many sectors, firefighting remains a field with significant gender disparity. If men, who are the majority in this sector, are not actively involved in promoting and implementing EDI policies, the pace of change towards a more inclusive and equitable workplace for women can be exceedingly slow. This lack of representation in decision-making roles can lead to policies that do not fully address or even recognize the specific challenges faced by women firefighters. Effective EDI policies should be developed with active contributions from those in leadership positions, predominantly men in this case, but must also involve diverse perspectives,

including those of women firefighters who can provide insight into their unique experiences and challenges. Inclusion in policy development processes ensures that the resulting policies are comprehensive, promote an equitable work environment, and address the needs of all members.

This dissertation asks participants about policy development and policy avoidance in the fire service. From a legal policy perspective, considerations of disparate treatment, disparate impact, and stereotyping, among others, are reflected in policymaking (Baum, 2021, p. 12). Employers and their agents have the hierarchical power to influence if not determine the shape and degree of inequalities in their organizations (Bradley & Healy 2008, p. 76). Policies designed to intervene and alter sex-segregated hiring patterns may increase the number of women in male-dominated occupations and acknowledge the barriers to entry women face even when they have the skills required for the job (Mastracci, 2004, p. 36). The chances for women to gain economic self-sufficiency are lower than for men in the absence of policy interventions because given similar levels of training and education, the blue-collar jobs men work in are better paying jobs and involve more marketable skills than the lower-level pink-collar clerical and service jobs women work in (Mastracci, 2004, p.56).

Women are still socialized to value traditional roles, and pressure from friends and family may influence women not to consider opportunities in non-traditional work. Encouraging women to consider non-traditional work, by highlighting the benefits of this type of employment is only the first step to educate women about their career options. Change in organizational culture is required, but it is not simple, straightforward or inevitable. Women will always be constrained by existing power relations within an organization and the desire by many of those in authority to restrict access to knowledge and organizational resources (Bradley & Healy 2008, p. 96).

Silence, lack of discussion about gender issues, and the limited collective organizing disempower women (Maddock, 1999, p. 110). Collective organizing is a powerful tool that can empower women and promote gender equality, advocate for their rights, and drive positive change through women's rights advocacy groups, women's cooperatives, networking and support groups, mentorship programs, intersectional movements, online activism, women's political participation, grassroots community

movements, educational initiatives and alignment with male allies. By engaging in these collective actions, women can successfully amplify their voices and challenge societal norms. Employers also play a key role in reducing barriers, which keep women from accepting and thriving in non-traditional jobs. Inclusion means more than hiring in numbers proportionate to women's availability, it also means that, throughout their careers, women are treated equally to men in how they are welcomed, trained, assigned, retained, promoted, and otherwise given the opportunity to thrive (Hulett et al. 2008b, p. 189). Additionally, it is crucial to recognize and address the sexism and biases that women often encounter in the workplace, which can hinder their professional growth and overall job satisfaction. Inclusion enables people to feel welcome, respected, trusted, and valued so they feel they belong (IAFC, 2020).

To encourage a more proportionate representation of women in leadership and key organizational roles, programs and initiatives need to be established to create long-term change. In addition to organizational policies of non-discrimination, employees can be trained to avoid making decisions based on sex stereotypes (York et al., 2008, p. 130). Correcting and updating policies and practices that have blocked women's advancement is not only a matter of fairness and social justice, but also essential for achieving sustainable economic development, fostering diversity and creating more a more inclusive and equitable society. To garner the benefits of diversity, organizational leadership must be aligned on diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, ensuring authentic investment to counter negative outcomes of diversity such as racism, discrimination, conflict, and compartmentalization (Jehn et al., 1999; Roscoe, 2019; Smith et al., 2012). Even in organizations that have the best intentions and implement policies company-wide, there is still room for individual behaviour that is misdirected, misinformed, or just plain wrong (York et al., 2008, p. 130). Corporations must be responsible for conducting research and gathering information about what needs to take place, with regards to barriers to women's growth in the specific organization and culture they operate in. These topics can be multi-faceted; such as gender equality, human rights, anti-racism initiatives, economic benefits, diverse perspectives, talent utilization, breaking stereotypes, family and work-life balance, retaining talent, ethical considerations, social progress and sustainable improvement goals, to name a few.

Ultimately, every manager and association leader must view themselves as change agents, helping the organization to respond to the changing legal and social environment (York et al., 2008, p. 130). Employees should also be empowered to be change agents, as they are the ones who are directly impacted by the day-to-day workings within the organization. Employees can contribute by championing new initiatives with the goal of shaping an inclusive, productive and fulfilling work environment that ultimately results in increased job satisfaction.

Employment equity policies usually refer to “policy tools that are designed to strive for employment equity” (Turgeon et al, 2022, p. 190) whereas for employment equity, defined as a “non-discriminatory outcome” in terms of different sociodemographic characteristics, whether ethnicity, sex, language, etc. (Verbeek & Penninx, 2009, p. 69). Using a framework can help improve and promote employment equity. It is often in the form of a mandate or organizational objective stated in policy documents or human resources manuals, with identified measures to secure the representation of visible minorities, women, Aboriginals, and people with disabilities who meet the bona fide occupational requirements of the job. Improvement can be gauged by monitoring and reporting of data to determine progressive improvements and ensuring employment equity progress is achieved.

Employers implement policies as a way to identify the expected standards of behaviour in the workplace, so that employees know what acceptable conduct is. Municipalities make the policies available to all employees and have them acknowledge that they have read and understood the content. Policy training in the fire service often faces not only a lack of buy-in, but often a negative backlash that other training does not encounter. The prevalence of the negative response to policy training suggests that human resources and fire service administrators need to better understand the work culture and the cause of the pushback, to help improve the effectiveness of the prescribed training. Training and change management should meet the organizational needs which can be identified through a needs assessment, or commonly, a reaction to an investigation, disciplinary matter, grievance, or arbitration.

Many of the firefighter respondents in the study described the facilitation of training as a very passive, and non-confrontational type of information exchange, in

which they have to go behind a computer, and click through screens to complete the program. There was a general appreciation for fairness and justice; however, respondents often described the fire halls as different, almost as if they should be exempt from the policies.

The firefighters described more of a reliance on a self-governing type of system, in which a proverbial line was drawn when someone went “too far.” Each distinct work area, such as out in the public, City Hall, headquarters, training division and the fire hall, had different expectations on appropriate conduct. The relationship between the geographical location of the workplace and the applicability and adherence to policy can be relevant. Wright (2011) stated that in workplaces remote from the centre of the organization or the head offices, women were more likely to encounter overt hostility (p. 698). Similarly, Paap (2006) found that harassment was more likely to occur when the distance of the worksite from the corporate headquarters was geographically greater, where it was easier to ignore formal policies. Ryan suggested that there were generational differences in firefighter’s attitudes and behaviour, possibly because more senior firefighters were used to a time when there weren’t clearly established codes of conduct or policies to guide behaviour.

Policies keep firefighters from being stupid. You know, from either being verbally rude because I know there are individuals, they’re older, and thank goodness they’re retiring very soon, but these individuals can just be rude period. If there weren’t certain town policies that were in place, these individuals would go a lot further than what they do. I think because certain individuals on the floor know that these policies are in place and are not taken lightly, that they conduct themselves better than if the policies weren’t in place. (Ryan, career firefighter).

This perspective indicates that there has been a cultural shift in the fire service, guided by policies, which regulates behaviour and shapes the organizational culture and norms. The fact that individuals “conduct themselves better” because policies “aren’t taken lightly,” would indicate there is an awareness of consequences resulting from a breach of policy. The policies create the framework of the desired culture and standards of conduct and encourages a conducive environment for achieving

organizational goals. Peter's statement illustrates a personal journey of self-reflection and a realization of the need for a collective action to address gendered positions. Peter noted that the evolving hiring policies were not necessarily going to make a positive change in the workforce, if it wasn't the right people pushing for change. He explained that even if the demographics of the recruits changed, it wouldn't equate it to a culture change in the service in which members of the underrepresented groups would be accepted. He believed that it would take white males acting as allies to drive systemic improvements to workplace policies, practices, and culture.

...I think that in order to paradigm shift this whole industry, it's going to require a social shift thing where you find allies - so that it's not just women fighting for women and visible minorities. Find a white male group who are allies who can help shift that culture. It all comes back to the same bullshit typical arguments, stuff like biologically they're weaker, and they have to have babies. When I had my daughter, literally overnight, all that stuff just started coming back to haunt me. Is my daughter so limited now, because of shithheads like me and the people I work with? (Peter, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Peter's statement reflects a man's struggle with traditional gender roles and biases. He acknowledges the well-intentioned efforts to change hiring policies in an effort to achieve gender equality but believes a more meaningful social shift would be necessary to transform the entire profession. His statement emphasizes the importance of finding allies, particularly white males, who can help challenge the existing culture, and help amplify the messaging to counteract the harmful biases and stereotypes, in order to facilitate a more genuine culture shift in the fire service. By doing so, it aims to address the current reality of women and visible minorities being solely responsible for advocating for their own rights. Peter recognizes the prevalence of discriminatory arguments, such as biological differences and the expectation of childbearing, which perpetuates gender inequality. The birth of Peter's daughter has had a profound impact on his perspective, and he expresses a concern about the limitations and challenges his daughter may face due to the harmful and negative actions of people like his "old self"

and his colleagues. This transformative experience prompts Peter to question the societal treatment of women, and he expresses a sense of responsibility for promoting change.

Very few participants described policy training as being effective. Far too often and for far too long, diversity training methods have been compliance-based, with a view to mitigating an employer's exposure to legal liability (Baum, 2021, p. 18). The firefighters all indicated that the mandatory training involved passively sitting behind a computer, clicking from one screen to another until they reached the end of the lesson. The few who described effective policy training noted it was an outside agency who was hired after a grievance or human rights issue, in an effort to manage damage control and instil preventative measures. While the participants felt that the corporation was hiring these third-party training vendors as a risk-mitigation measure, or checking the box, they did see some value in the discussions. They described the participation of their colleagues ranging from interested to defensive.

Policy training is non-existent. You know, speaking candidly, the HR division will send these online courses that you have to do, you know, and you have to make sure that you're on the screen for a particular period of time and before you move forward to the next page. There is literally no appetite for digesting anything that is being relayed to the worker there. It is just simply "this is what I have to do to continue on with my day... And what I've found is what people get themselves into trouble. The first thing they'll say is, "Well, I didn't know that. What's the policy? No, of course I didn't read it." (Matthew, composite department, career firefighter).

Matthew asserts that the current training is a formality, a bureaucratic obligation, and a box to be checked off. Although the online learning may be resource effective, an easy way to disseminate information, and the least impactful to the logistics of the day-to-day operations, he doesn't feel it is a genuine learning opportunity. Matthew advocates for a more impactful, relevant and effective approach to human resources training, one that resonates with the firefighters, and equates to a better understanding of expectations for behaviours and interaction in the workplace.

Some male participants reported an aversion to having to behave differently and having to walk on eggshells around certain people in the fire hall, out of fear of breaching policies. They feel that the rules being enforced are in response to their workplace culture and they didn't appreciate that someone outside the fire service, like human resources, was imposing rules on what is perceived as their home away from home.

We don't resent the policies - we understand and respect the policies. We resent the potential of someone being introduced to our environment that we have to change our department for because this is our home, which HR points out this is not your home, this is a work environment. This is not your home. Okay, yeah, we get it. But for our little crew of buddies, we're brothers. This is our little home and we just say shit to each other. Now oh, we're watching a movie and boobies happened to come on. Oh, everyone's stiffens in their chair. How do you change the channel quick? It's like, oh, it's just a normal TV show. We're not watching porn...A fire hall has its culture and we are being told our culture is bad and wrong. And we're like a bunch of cavemen and it's a little insulting to us but yeah, so we get and understand the policies. (Scott, career firefighter).

Focusing on the language Scott uses, terms like "brothers," "home," and "our little crew of buddies," indicates a close-knit group of firefighters with strong bonds. He suggests that management's view, as represented by human resources' policies, indicates that they truly don't understand their fire hall, and the policies impose a heightened sense of awareness and uneasiness which results in the firefighter's resentment. While Scott acknowledges that he understands the reasons behind the policies, particularly regarding liabilities, he feels that, ultimately, they do little to alleviate his concerns and instead contribute to disgruntled employees.

Consistent application and enforcement of workplace policies is the responsibility of the management team, made up of Chief Officers and members of the corporation's human resources division. Christine noted, while there are corporate policies in place, there is either little understanding from the Chief Officers on how to handle a breach of

policy, or a lack of appetite to address the issues, as it would just create more work. She noted that investigations, disciplinary review and corrective action did not appear to be well understood by her supervisors.

I would say the average supervisor has no idea what they are legally required to do as a supervisor and I feel that most of our training meets a low level when we look at what we want Captains to be able to do versus what they walk away with being able to do. I will speak specifically to the Volunteer side of the house - if you were to ask anyone who is an Acting Captain, a Captain or even a Chief Officer as to what they are legally required to do or be able to do as supervisor; they would know probably less than half as to what they should be know... I really think that there's a disconnect between the human resource department and the fire service. The fire service seems to kind of do their own thing. Because there's an element of autonomy and we are kind of our own interesting breed. (Christine, career firefighter).

Christine describes an ineffective training program and a broader implication of this lack of knowledge. If Captains and higher-ranking Officers aren't properly trained, then they can't provide proper guidance, especially to women who may face gender-specific challenges. She described a disconnect, between the fire service and human resources (both municipal divisions), with the fire service having an element of autonomy. This suggests that the fire service operates outside of City's established policies, processes and training. Christine's description of the fire service being its own interesting breed, having its own traditions, practices, ethos, and sub-culture that differs from other municipal divisions, such as parks and forestry, recreation, or libraries. This sub-culture is the foundation of the fire service experience; however, the isolation from other City divisions can also imply that the organizational cultures are not aligned.

Braedley (2009) stated that firefighters typically expressed denial that the fire service was racist or sexist (p. 137); however, both men and women firefighters in this study stated the opposite, admitting that these gendered and sexist comments were witnessed frequently in the fire halls.

Do I think the policy training resonates in the fire department? No, because we are a different entity. So, we come from doing workplace safety or all the different training that we've done, like racism, all that stuff. And then we just go in the common area and it's like back to normal. So, you know, comments about women on the TV, sports, you know. The racist and sexist and whatever comments still fly. I do think it's a good idea to do the training. I think if we didn't do it, it would be way worse. (Maria, career firefighter).

Maria echoes similar sentiments as Christine when she suggests that “we are a different entity”, implying that the fire service is a unique entity with its own culture. While it may be efficient to create one training program and disseminate to all City staff, the notion of a one-size-fits-all tactic results in generic training modules which don't resonate with firefighters. The comment "...and then we just go in the common area and it's like back to normal" reflects the gap between the intent of anti-discrimination and respectful workplace training and the actual behaviours and attitudes of the firefighters. Without understanding and addressing the root cause of the prominent behaviours and the systemic issues in the fire department's culture, training, as Maria describes, is not sufficient. The casual remark Maria makes about "comments about women on the TV, sports" indicates a prevailing patriarchal culture. These comments can perpetuate stereotypes and normalize the objectification of women. The continuation of "racist and sexist and whatever comments..." even after training, demonstrates the resistance of institutionalized prejudices and deep-rooted gender biases, which generic training will not adequately address. While Maria believes the training is essential, she also predicts, "I think if we didn't do it, it would be way worse," which indicates that while the training won't result in creating a cultural shift, there is some preventative value in the training.

A greater emphasis on policy enforcement in the workplace resulted in unintended biases in the workplace. Members of underrepresented groups were seen as a greater risk to some of the members of the majority group, as described by Scott. This increased the preference to have white males being assigned to crews, because the constant managing of people and personalities was seen as arduous and unreasonable.

I had a conversation with another Captain about policy, and he said, okay, so there's three buckets of firefighters. You can have a white male firefighter be assigned to your crew, you can have a female firefighter or you can have your racialized firefighter. But now we have all of these policies, and all the policies are saying discipline up to termination. And it's not only my behaviour, it's these firefighters that are floated into the station. I don't know who they are, right, like in a department as big as mine. You have no idea with shift changes, sick time, who the people are coming into your station. And now you, as the Captain, seem to somehow be responsible for all of these firefighters. As a Captain you're in your office, so you don't know half of the stuff that's going out on the bay floor, in the dormitories, that sort of thing. So, he's like, if my job is potentially at risk, because now these policies are saying that I have to somehow monitor everything that's going on... because it's not that I don't like females, it's not that I don't like racialized people – I just don't want the risk associated with that. So, if someone's coming onto my crew, of course, I want this white male firefighter because the risk is lower. At the end of the day, I want to put food on my table. I want to pay my mortgage. And I want to have a pension. I don't need to lose my job over someone saying or doing something stupid. (Scott, career firefighter).

Scott recounts a conversation he had with a colleague which highlights a tension between the intentions of equity-driven policies and the realities of how they are perceived. His colleague describes the firefighter landscape in terms of perceived risk, which he has filtered into three categories: white males, females, and racialized firefighters. For him, having a white male firefighter assigned to his crew reduces risk to potential consequence resulting from behaviours and interactions in the fire hall. Policies that outline code of conduct, respectful workplace expectations and standards of behaviour are likely created with the intent of ensuring equitable treatment and preventing hostile work environments. However, the unintended consequences of such policies are that a Captain becomes reluctant to work with certain demographics due to perceived risk, marginalizing female and racialized firefighters further.

Ava acknowledged the topics of conversations in the fire hall or on the fire trucks would not be acceptable in other City buildings. She noted that these conversations

involved all the members of her crew, and while the conversations could cross the line of what would be considered acceptable in the workplace, it was also easy to shut it down if it was personally offensive. She also noted that the members of her team would understand the policies and that they had to sign off on them on an annual basis, but it didn't really impact how they conversed with each other. Behaviour that would constitute a major breach, like bullying was not witnessed by Ava.

I understand why a policy is there. We're all City employees at the end of the day and it gives a reason to fire someone if needed. In the fire service the conversation is out there, it gets wild sometimes, but it comes from everyone. It's not like there's one guy that's offside...So we know our place, right? Like if I was at City Hall, which I never am, but if I was, you are careful you don't say things that you shouldn't say. At the fire hall it is a different atmosphere. Everyone knows we have to sign off on those policies so that you if something came up you couldn't say that City didn't tell me, I didn't know. I agreed to it. I read the policy and signed that I understand that you can't bully someone, or you can't, you know, discriminate based on whatever. (Ava, career firefighter).

Ava points out the informal versus formal dynamics in the fire hall and City Hall. This reflects the different social structures, tolerance, and expectations in each setting. Ava sheds light on the normative behaviour within the fire hall and indicates that this 'wild' discourse isn't limited to a few individuals but is pervasive. Ava's narrative challenges us to consider the balance between collective responsibility and individual agency in creating inclusive and respectful workplace cultures. Ava feels confident enough to step in and end inappropriate remarks or behaviours that personally impact her, which reveals her individual agency which she exerts to actively halt oppressive and demeaning discourse.

Ava touches on the bureaucratic measures in place to protect workers, but she positions it in a way that it is used more as a tool to uphold the discipline for a breach of policy than a preventative measure. Since Ana and others have had to shut down behaviour that doesn't adhere to City policies, it indicates that while policies exist, the normative culture does not align with the intent of the policy.

The consensus among the firefighters interviewed is that they understood the need for policies, but there was a sense of resentment towards their existence as well. The introduction of new policies, particularly those aimed at disrupting long-standing gender dynamics, contributed to divisiveness among some crews. For some senior firefighters accustomed to their work culture, they viewed corporate policies as restrictive or unnecessary, and while the firefighters seemed to ignore the policies, they didn't indicate an active resistance. The concern raised by a Captain about not being able to monitor behaviour constantly, highlights a significant challenge. Effective policy implementation requires consistent monitoring and enforcement. Without this, policies risk being ignored or selectively applied, which can exacerbate the very issues they aim to address.

In terms of opportunities, well-written policies can address gender-based issues, breaking down barriers for women and other minority groups in the fire service. These policies can include anti-harassment or bullying prevention, standards of behaviour, wage parity, violence in the workplace, alternative work arrangements, maternity/paternity leave, and performance evaluations, to name a few. Policies provide a framework for acceptable behaviour, regardless of the setting (e.g., city hall versus the fire station). Standardization can be crucial in maintaining professionalism and respect, which are integral to a cohesive working environment. This is particularly important in challenging the nuanced stereotypes and biases that can be pervasive in male-dominated fields like firefighting. When all firefighters are aware of the expectations and consequences, it becomes easier to identify and address discriminatory practices and biases. Clear policies enable better accountability and can lead to a more supportive environment for women and other members of underrepresented groups.

It's evident through the literature review, that while policies are crucial in shaping firefighters' behaviour and setting consistent standards, the participants also describe the success of policies depends on thoughtful development, careful implementation, and a commitment to ongoing evaluation and adaptation. This requires a strong grasp of the gender-based dynamics, stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices that

currently exist in the fire service, and a concerted effort to address these issues in a way that promotes equality and respect for all firefighters.

Diversity

Diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are attempts to increase the representation of underrepresented groups, establish equitable outcomes and provide a welcoming environment that values diverse people, perspectives, cultures and interests (Evan, Sisco, Fshant, Nandyal and Robbins, 2023, p. 1161). The challenge facing male-dominated organizations today is the lack of commitment to a diverse work environment, where diversity is valued and encouraged, as opposed to being seen as a political checkmark in a required box. Whereas some diversity training programs define diversity broadly to encompass a variety of demographic dimensions (e.g., race, age, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation) as well as individual dimensions (e.g., parental status, learning styles, education level, personality), others adhere to a much narrower definition of diversity that may only consider a few demographic dimensions such as race and sex (Roberson et al., 2003). Some white participants in EDI efforts have indicated they felt threatened by “pro-diversity” initiatives and at risk of being targeted because of their white identity, which made some participants unwilling to engage with their BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) colleagues (Dover, Major and Kaiser, 2016). It has even been suggested research has become more “anesthetized,” for fear of addressing a sensitive topic head on which could result in a backlash (Pache, 2022).

The study of women firefighters in the Province of Ontario is enriched by understanding the broader challenges that male-dominated organizations face regarding diversity. This relevance is twofold: it demonstrates the specific hurdles women firefighters may encounter and describes systemic issues within such organizations. The lack of diversity within firefighting impacts the integration and acceptance of women in these roles. Shifts towards inclusivity can be slow and met with resistance. This directly affects women firefighters, who might not only face institutional barriers, but also a workplace culture unprepared to embrace diversity. This resistance

can perpetuate a workplace culture that marginalizes non-traditional members and hinders the development of supportive, inclusive networks critical for job performance and satisfaction. Moreover, the “anesthetized” nature of current research into diversity issues, as mentioned by Pache (2022), suggests a reluctance to confront and address deep-seated biases and systemic issues head-on. This reluctance can stymie efforts to understand and improve the experiences of women firefighters in Ontario, who must navigate these very biases and systemic barriers. Recognizing and addressing these challenges is crucial in fostering an environment where diversity is genuinely valued - an environment where women firefighters can thrive professionally and personally. Without addressing these foundational issues, progress towards a truly inclusive fire service in Ontario remains limited.

I think our most successful training was when we had we had a lady in who came in and she talked about diversity. It was good because she would say a lot of stuff that the guys didn't want to hear. She might have said stuff that was maybe not well received, but because she was there in-person the guy's got to ask questions... The woman was so good in trying to open up everybody's mind, that just because a woman is wearing a hijab, she's not being rude or anti-Canadian. It's just it's the way she grew up and she wants to continue that lifestyle. But having an individual teaching diversity dealing with a bunch of goofballs and being open minded on some of the dumb questions that these guys ask. She had so much humility and was able to explain to the guys about diversity and how important it is. I think it goes much further than pumping out content virtually. (Ryan, career firefighter).

One firefighter describes how engaging directly with diverse communities, such as speaking with a Muslim woman wearing a hijab, has a more profound impact than online diversity training. These interactions not only enhance cultural understanding but also build empathy and awareness among firefighters about the diverse communities they serve. Given that firefighting is a predominantly homogeneous field, the guest instructor’s gender, race and religion contrasts the prevailing dominant culture of the white male firefighting crew. Through direct interaction, the instructor encouraged a

genuine dialogue, challenging preconceived notions, and confronted biases. She used her hijab as a point of reference on cultural differences. Her ability to navigate a room of skeptical or uninformed firefighters to highlight the importance of diversity demonstrates her advocacy efforts. Ryan recognizes the value of the instructor's efforts, which is a testament to how diverse standpoints can enrich, challenge, and enhance traditionally homogenous spaces. Diversity and inclusion programs are seen as disingenuous when they are a result of a human rights complaint or the outcome of a complaint or grievance. Often the training looks at the oppressed groups, allies, and white oppressors. Diversity, equity and inclusion training was described as being offensive to some of the participants, as it implies they are bigots, and the training fails to resonate with some of the participants because the undertone of accusation is offensive to them. One-time training programs have significant limitations. Culture is what happens in the fire hall every day, and that is difficult to change based on a one-day training session. *Two years ago, the town got snagged with the human rights case. And since then they've been doing more diversity work because they were basically ordered to so. So we've seen a new diversity committee.* (Christine, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Christine mentions that since a human rights case was filed against the town, it has increased its diversity work. From a feminist standpoint theory perspective, it's crucial to question whether these actions are genuine or merely performative. The fact that the town began these initiatives after being "basically ordered to" can be seen as a reactive, driven by the scrutiny the municipality is facing, rather than a proactive approach. A genuine commitment to diversity would involve proactive measures, rather than waiting for an external entity to mandate them.

And this whole inclusivity, surrounding yourself with people that represent what you're trying to achieve. They can't just be window dressing. Oh, this is my team. You know, here's my transgender Deputy, here's my non-binary Deputy, here's my indigenous Deputy, here's my black Deputy, here's my physically disabled Deputy. They have to perform, they can't be window dressing because then you're insulting the individual because then you're just using them as a prop. I just pray that the corporation doesn't

make sure that they have that poster person there. It's just icing. There's no cake. Yes. It's nice to have the icing. I'm interested in the cake part. (Paul, career firefighter).

Paul identifies a kind of superficial diversity or tokenism, where individuals from marginalized groups are included only for the sake of the fire service appearing diverse and inclusive ("window dressing") and not for their expertise, skills, or ability to contribute. Paul notes that Chief Officers are in forward-facing positions, where they are likely to speak publicly or have their photos taken and used in social media, becoming part of the brand of the fire service. He suggests that hiring for diversity in these key positions reduces them to "props" and it will not garner respect from the firefighters. The "icing" and "cake" metaphor Paul uses, emphasizes a difference between superficial tokenism (icing) and substantive experience, expertise and leadership (cake).

The excitement of the job. Being able to help people honestly is a childhood dream, you know, from seeing examples of it from that old show Emergency with Johnny and Roy, all those guys were so cool, and you know, thinking alright, I want to be like those guys and do what they do, because that's exciting, and I crave excitement. (Peter, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Peter's reflection on his admiration for television characters from the show "Emergency," such as Johnny and Roy highlight the impact of media representations in shaping career aspirations. These characters, epitomizing bravery and excitement strongly influenced his desire to pursue a career in firefighting. The lack of female and visible minorities as role models in firefighting, both in the community and on media platforms like television, can impact the aspirations and perceptions of those belonging to underrepresented groups. If they do not see individuals like themselves in these roles, they may not perceive firefighting as a viable career option.

Discipline

Workplace bullying places a heavy burden on targeted employees and harms employers in terms of higher absenteeism, healthcare usage, turnover and lost productivity (Hickox & Kaminski, 2021, p. 399). Not all misconduct is clear or obvious, especially when firefighters interact in areas away from the direct supervision of a Captain or Acting Captain, such as the locker room, dorm, or bay floor. When misconduct occurs, and there is a complainant or witness that comes forward, an investigation ensues by management. For serious or complex accusations, often the municipality will seek the expertise of a third-party investigator. When it has been determined that behaviour in the workplace is contrary to the collective bargaining agreement, or a breach of municipal policy, management must determine how to act on it. Discipline can range from a verbal warning, written warning, a suspension/leave of absence with or without pay, demotion, to termination. The outcome is based on the seriousness of the offence. The Ontario Human Rights Commission recognizes the right of the employer to manage its workforce, including relying on discipline when necessary (Ontario Government, 2008). The discipline applied should be consistent with past practice or the association will take exception when not following an established history of disciplining employees for similar misconduct, and a grievance could be filed. The goal of discipline for most circumstances should be corrective and not punitive. The result should be to motivate employees to accept and adhere to the code of conduct and standards of behaviour as outlined in the municipality's policies. The goal of disciplinary action should correct the behaviour and deter future infractions. Interviewees indicated an unwillingness to come forward if they were the target of misconduct due to the lack of confidentiality, ineffective outcomes, negative repercussions, and it being detrimental to their career. Such concerns created even greater workplace and personal stress. By considering creative and more explicit policies and collective bargaining agreement provisions to address misconduct employers and unions can help address the persistence of such behaviours in the workplace (Hickox & Kaminski, 2021, p. 447).

They did interviews with each of the staff. And in the end, they wanted me to come forward and take action, and I pulled the plug. I told them what they were asking me to do, and pinning it basically on me, was career ending. I wouldn't be able to work there or anywhere else, and the claims that I had wouldn't be sufficient enough to get two people terminated. They couldn't promise anything. And eventually it was more likely that I would receive a letter of apology. I mean a letter is going to do nothing but piss them off. So, management made me sign a letter saying that they that I was choosing not to proceed with any claims. Watching it play out over the last few months, I would never come forward again. If I did, I wouldn't go to HR, I'd go straight to human rights. (Christine, composite fire department, career firefighter).

Christine suggests an underlying distrust of a system that didn't protect her. Christine's initial reluctance to come forward with her claims, believing it would be "career-ending," highlights the gendered power dynamics at play in the workplace. Christine's fear of repercussions and the belief that her claims wouldn't be sufficient to get her colleagues terminated, reflect the structural inequalities within the organization. Women may feel powerless when addressing issues related to harassment or discrimination, especially if the organizational culture and policies are not supportive or protective of their rights. Her decision to go to human rights instead of human resources if she experienced a similar issue insinuates, she was dissatisfied with the outcome and how the issue was dealt with.

In Ontario, unionized employees are expected to follow the grievance procedures outlined in their collective agreement when dealing with disputes related to employment, including issues that might also relate to human rights. The grievance process is designed to resolve disputes between the employer and employees while following the terms agreed upon in the collective agreement. However, in cases where the issues are alleged human rights violations associated with prohibitive grounds, an individual may choose to bypass the internal process and file a complaint directly with the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC). The OHRC can be approached directly in such instances because human rights protections are statutory and are not restricted to the stipulations of a collective agreement. While the collective agreement provides a

mechanism for resolving many types of workplace disputes, it doesn't prevent an employee from seeking redress through the OHRC.

While employers can choose to discipline employees, the association has a duty of fair representation and will often feel compelled to submit a grievance. Even a letter to the employee's file can be deemed as "too harsh," by some associations, especially if it is a first offence, claiming that the employer has moved too far along the scale of progressive discipline. If the grievance process fails to produce a mutually acceptable outcome, the association can refer the matter to arbitration. Once in an arbitration setting, discipline is subject to the review of an arbitrator empowered to interpret and apply employer's policies and collective bargaining agreement.

If someone's got in trouble - they need they need to get in trouble. They need to be sat down and given the whole thing - the verbal warning, written warning and disciplinary action. It needs to be followed through on. There are some individuals in my department, who, over the past couple of years have done stupid things and it seems to fall through the cracks. It always seems like the union is caught up in all the other petty stuff. Our union is there just to protect us when we get into trouble, they aren't really there to guide us, they don't want to participate in that part of it. They are there just in case we get in trouble. (Ryan, career firefighter).

Ryan's experiences as a firefighter and his observations inform his opinions on leadership, discipline, and the union's role. Ryan values the hierarchical system within the fire service and recollects a time when a clear line of discipline was maintained by the Captain who is a unionized member, indicating his preference to a particular kind of organizational ethos. Ryan describes an inherent tension between the Platoon Chiefs and the union executive because of their supervisory role. The Platoon Chiefs' dual roles as leaders and union members create a potential conflict of interest, impacting the efficiency of progressive disciplinary actions. Ryan indicates that the union may influence the decisions and actions taken by the Platoon Chief. Ryan contrasts current practices with the "good old days," suggesting that in the past the lines of authority were clearer, and the undue influence of the union was not as prevalent. When an

employee's work conduct or performance becomes an issue, management should take steps to correct the problem and prevent it from reoccurring. The steps should be fair and consistent for all employees. Maria indicates that discipline is handled differently for different employees, suggesting favouritism impacts the consequences rendered.

If I could pick one barrier, it would be disciplinary action. It's inconsistent. And so much favouritism. It's disgusting. When it comes to suspension or terminations, I feel like we still have a lot of fingers reaching out into the old boys club. We are municipal employees. And a lot of actions that are conducted by the fire department do not reflect that. We're like a branch of the municipality where we follow a bunch of the rules, but we also do a bunch of our own shit that nobody knows about. I feel like disciplinary action is not always above board, or fair or equivalent, or whatever you want to call it. (Maria, career firefighter).

Disciplinary actions are inconsistent, and favouritism is evident. Maria suggests underlying biases which favour men, particularly those who are part of, or have strong ties to the "old boys club." The reference to the old boys' club alludes to traditional male networks of power, where decisions are made behind closed doors and are often to the exclusion or detriment of women and others not in the club. Maria notes a dichotomy between the expected behaviours and norms of municipal employees and those exhibited by the fire service personnel. Maria describes the fire service as a branch of the municipality that "does its own shit," which indicates that the fire service either resists or is slow to adopt more inclusive and equitable practices. The statement that disciplinary actions are not always above board, fair or equivalent raises concerns about transparency and accountability. Transparent processes ensure fairness, and when disciplinary actions are obscure or not openly discussed, there's a potential for power imbalances to be exploited.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

This dissertation has documented how organizational practices, and the workplace culture reflect and recreate gender differences and inequalities in firefighting. It also documents the various reasons why women and men are drawn to and remain in firefighting, while uncovering the gender-based discrimination that persists in the field, and its impact on the women firefighters. An increasing number of fire departments in the Fire Services in Ontario have increased their efforts to reduce gender-based discrimination and harassment in the workplace, in an effort to make the occupation more equitable for women (and other social groups currently discriminated against). While it is hard to predict the impact of my research, I hope that being well-regarded nationally and internationally in the fire service means that through my dissertation I am able to advocate for change and address stereotypes, biases and discrimination in the fire service, leading to impactful and actionable recommendations and that my research findings will be noted by policymakers, fire service leaders, human resources professionals and other relevant stakeholders.

This study indicates the need for policies that effectively discourage discrimination and harassment in municipal fire services. This includes clear definitions of what constitutes discriminatory and harassing behaviour, and consequences for misconduct. By speaking with women firefighters who disclosed their challenges, it is evident that the challenges women face are widespread. Municipalities need to establish confidential reporting mechanisms for discrimination and harassment, with defined investigation processes, better accountability and outcomes, and protections from reprisal for those who come forward. Future research could involve longitudinal studies to track the progress and impact of implemented policies over time.

The goal of transforming the work culture is an overwhelming task. The work culture within the Fire Services in Ontario is defined by deep-rooted norms, behaviours, and values that have been established over many decades. It requires a fundamental shift in attitudes and beliefs, which is inherently difficult and slow. Shifting the culture to be more inclusive is often met with significant resistance, as it is perceived as threatening the status quo or existing power structures. As the interviews uncovered,

firefighters often resist change, especially when it challenges their existing beliefs and interactions in the workplace. Even when changes in the work culture are achieved, sustaining them over the long term requires continuous effort and commitment. There is always a risk of reverting back to old patterns unless new behaviours are deeply embedded and reinforced regularly.

Discussion of Findings

Qualitative research allows a unique opportunity to interpret participants' viewpoints and stories, document what events that lead to specific consequences, and illustrates the multitude of experiences, some more theoretically compelling, morally significant, or practically important than others (Tracy, 2013). Some of the interviewees provided 'richer' insight and understanding than others. This can be attributed to various factors, including years of experience, their position as an insider or outsider, their ability to articulate their experiences and observations, and their personal motivation for participating in the study. The themes highlighted structural issues, systemic discrimination, unconscious bias, and stereotypes that underpin the experiences of the firefighters. The interview data derived from the qualitative research provides insight into the lived experiences and perspectives of firefighters working in the Fire Services in Ontario.

Often the challenge of increasing the number of women working in the fire service is presented as a problem of labour supply; one argument is that women are not interested in becoming firefighters because they are not interested in work that requires physical strength, working outdoors, and that is high risk (Schermerhorn-Collins, 2017).

To combat the prevailing idea that firefighting is not a suitable occupation for women, young women need the opportunity to view firefighting as a viable career path. A number of fire services in Ontario are offering camps, such as Camp Molly, designed to introduce young women ages 15 to 18 to the firefighting career. These camps allow participants to interact with women firefighters, providing valuable insights, the opportunity to ask questions, and ultimately the young women learn that firefighting is a viable and attainable career choice. Providing resources, mentorship, and support

specifically aimed at helping female applicants can make a significant difference in their success.

Both men and women identified that getting hired, especially as a career firefighter, often seemed like an insurmountable challenge. The selection process of firefighter candidates is rigorous, from the written exam, to the practical, fitness and medical testing, and the interview. The process is gruelling, but it greatly disadvantages women, and the challenges stem from historical and societal factors. Societal expectations and cultural norms can influence women's educational choices resulting in fewer opportunities to be exposed to and develop skills in technical subjects, especially during their formative years.

Men indicated that the interview was one of the most difficult entry components because it was hard to determine what to say and how to present oneself to set themselves apart from the other candidates. The women indicated some contemplation on what to wear (pantsuit, dark colours) and how to present themselves (minimal make-up, hair tied back), minimizing their femininity in an effort to “look the part” in the interview. In an environment where conventional notions of masculinity are highly valued, the women seemed to understand that masculinized practices of firefighting configures the presence of women (and femininity) as a “problem” (Maleta, 2009; Ainsworth, Batty, and Burchielli, 2014; Eriksen, 2014b; Eriksen and Waitt, 2016).

Requiring prior firefighting or related experience may disproportionately disadvantage women because they have historically been underrepresented in non-traditional work. The recruitment process needs to consider whether alternative qualifications or pathways can be established to attract a more diverse set of candidates. If the members of the interview panel are from within the firefighting profession, they may unknowingly hold biases that affect their judgment when evaluating candidates. Human resources should provide support by implementing training programs to help interviewers recognize and mitigate implicit biases. To identify potential sources of bias in the recruitment and hiring processes, it's essential to conduct a thorough review of all aspects of these processes, from job postings (who is the target audience) to fitness tests to interviews. Additionally, gathering feedback from current female firefighters about their experiences in the hiring process can provide

valuable insights into the challenges they faced. Once identified, steps can be taken to address these barriers and create a more inclusive and equitable hiring process for women in the Fire Services in Ontario.

To promote gender diversity in firefighting, fire departments are making efforts to create more inclusive and equitable recruitment and selection processes (IAFC, 2020). Research is needed to explore what tactics have been employed and the success of challenging stereotypes and biases in the recruitment and selection process that may affect the selection of women as recruit firefighters.

Women firefighters interviewed in this research noted the absence of female Training Officers in the recruit training, which meant they are without immediate or visible role models when they enter the profession. Training Officers play a crucial role in shaping the skills and career development of firefighters. Without female Training Officers, there may be an unintentional or even intentional bias against female firefighters in training. Female Training Officers may bring unique perspectives and experiences that can enhance training methods and ensure that all firefighters receive equitable training opportunities. The benefit of female Training Officers is that they can advocate for the advancement of the female recruit and provide guidance on how to navigate the challenges they may encounter in a male-dominated profession. Knowing that there are opportunities for growth and mentorship within the organization can attract more women to the profession and encourage them (especially the volunteer firefighters) to stay in the fire service.

Women interviewees noted their skills were either on par with their colleagues if they had previous work experience in firefighting or had attended pre fire service training or indicated that their skills were below their colleagues on entry. If they indicated their skills were below that of their colleagues on entry, they felt they were on par by the end of the recruit class. Most of the men indicated that their skills were above those of their colleagues. They attributed this to their previous work experience (trades, labour), hobbies, and mechanical aptitude. Both men and women felt they had equal opportunities for success in recruit class, and generally, they were supported by their colleagues who were also recruits.

Once the firefighters completed the recruitment process and were integrated into the regular firefighting tasks with crews, the gender-based workplace dynamics and nuanced stereotypes, bias and discriminatory practices were most evident. This research contains qualitative evidence in the form of first-hand accounts from both men and women in the fire service, which indicate instances of harassment, gender biases, and harmful stereotypes.

Both men and women indicated that the work culture could be toxic under specific conditions; although some struggled to identify their workplace as toxic because they assumed that what they were describing was 'normal' for the fire service. The participants indicated that each crew was different, and the particular mix of people and personalities had a lot to do with whether a workplace was toxic. A toxic workplace was described as one where an individual was concerned they couldn't make mistakes, interpersonal relationships were unhealthy, there was a lack of support and guidance, there were cliques/exclusion, members of the crew were disengaged, and there were often high levels of stress.

Besides the high competitiveness of securing a job as a career firefighter, workplace culture was the second most concerning barrier described by the participants. The descriptive data in this research reveals that gender influenced behaviour and attitudes of their male counterparts and female firefighters endure gender discrimination and harassment, microaggressions, stigma, and struggles with family commitments in contrast to their male coworkers. Some female firefighters discussed that there was resistance from their male counterparts, as they were excluded from social activities. The low number of firefighters indicating they had lodged a formal complaint or undertook external legal action implies that even though women are experiencing acts of discrimination and harassment, the acts are going unreported. The fear of isolation, shunning, or professional repercussions can be overwhelming. This hesitancy is compounded by concerns that their reports may not lead to meaningful change, making the potential personal and professional costs seem even more daunting. To address this issue, it's vital to foster an environment where women feel supported and confident that their concerns will be taken seriously and acted upon. This

requires a cultural shift within organizations, emphasizing respect, accountability, and a clear, supportive process for reporting and addressing misconduct.

The interviews identified that fire service workplace culture tolerated discriminatory and/or harassing behaviour from firefighters and in some departments condoned it through the lack of public discourse in the fire halls. In these fire halls, overtly racist and sexist attitudes prevailed, although its unclear if this was isolated to specific halls and personnel or more systemic through the entire fire department. It should be noted that there were firefighters who were interviewed and discussed situations and experiences where they felt as equals, had supportive coworkers and supervisors, and did not experience discrimination or harassment.

Firefighters described needing to earn the trust of their crew, to fit in socially. Most of the women spoke about acceptance in the fire hall being a challenge at some point in their careers, generally early on, although subtle or overt differential treatment seemed to be present throughout their career. Women described “staying under the radar” or “being one of the guys” as the easiest way to blend in. Women were included in some social activities outside of work, like a crew breakfast, however excluded from some other activities, such as cutting wood and hunting trips. Such exclusions could mean the women feel like outsiders. They also spoke about always trying to demonstrate competence, and how when another woman didn’t perform well or did something to stand out, then they were concerned that they’d all be stereotyped the same. While some men talked about hazing and pranks in the fire hall, some women spoke about cliques, exclusion, and harassment.

The concern with equitable promotion practices was predominantly voiced by male firefighters. They were concerned with the informal "tap on the shoulder" approach, which determined who would be considered for higher ranks or included on promotion lists. In contrast, female firefighters seemed more focused on fundamental fairness issues like a lack of facilities such as locker rooms and showers in fire stations, and experiences of discrimination and harassment. These foundational concerns appeared to take precedence over thoughts of career progression. The promotional process was described as less of a barrier when the criteria was objective, the components were embedded in the collective agreement and there was an association

observer present. There were conflicting opinions on whether seniority should impact the ranking of candidates. While some indicated there was assurance that as long as you passed you would eventually get a job as a Captain, those who wanted to fast-track their career, regardless of seniority, said the process doesn't take into account those who want to compete to rank the highest and demonstrate they are the best candidate. The differing opinions on promotional processes related to seniority indicates there would not be a process that would suit everyone. The promotional processes that incorporated subjectivity were seen as a barrier. Subjective promotional processes were described as opaque, with no immediate or universal connection between performance and a successful outcome.

Implications for Practice

This study explores the administrative, organizational, and interpersonal barriers firefighters experience in the fire service, and the associated bias, stereotypes, and discrimination women firefighters endure. The deep-seated culture of exclusion in the firefighting profession must be changed to one of gender inclusiveness to ensure women and minorities see the fire service as a viable career option. The inclusion of firefighters in the fire service not only refers to hiring, especially members of underrepresented groups, but ensuring that throughout a firefighter's career, they are treated equally in how they are hired, trained, assigned to crews, retained, promoted, and given the opportunity to succeed in their career. Within the fire service, changes in diversity reflected in differences in gender, ethnicity, and race are impacting the demographic makeup of the fire service (International Association of Fire Chiefs, 2017). The impact to incorporating equity, diversity, and inclusiveness (EDI) strategies in the workplace reinforces its importance to firefighters and external stakeholders, including the broader community. The study is meaningful to the field of gender inclusiveness and will contribute to the creation and application of promising practices in the fire service workplace culture, specifically as it relates to diversity, equity and inclusion.

Limitations

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore gender-based workplace dynamics within firefighting, uncovering ways in which nuanced stereotypes, bias and discriminatory practices contribute to a less inclusive and sometimes unsupportive environment for women in the Fire Services in Ontario. This research explores gender issues by focusing exclusively on the binary categories of men and women, which inadvertently contributes to an oversight in the representation of diverse identities. This approach not only simplifies the complex fabric of individual identities but also marginalizes those who do not fit neatly into binary gender categories. By adhering strictly to a gender binary, the research risks reinforcing outdated perceptions of gender, that can exclude non-binary, genderqueer, and transgender individuals, whose experiences, and challenges might be markedly different from those within the binary framework. Additionally, the binary approach significantly limits the scope of intersectional analysis, which is essential to understanding how various forms of discrimination and privilege interact.

Research needs to go beyond the issues faced by women to see what racialized firefighters and members of the LGBTQ2S+ community are facing and what needs to be implemented to reduce their barriers. It is also important to note that gender doesn't exist in isolation, but intersects with other social identities such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. It is my hope that future research can more fully capture the intricate intersections of gender and race, offering a more holistic understanding of the topics at hand. Such inclusivity will lead to richer insights and more effective solutions to the challenges faced by various communities.

The gap in the literature is identified in Griffith et al.'s (2016) and Jahnke et al.'s (2019) recommendations that fire service research should address the intersectionality of gender and ethnic diversity, and the outcomes and policies associated with discrimination. In addition, Silva (2018) suggested that further research should explore organizational learning about diversity in public service agencies. This research contributes to both theory and practice. Notable limitations for this research study are a result of the methodology. For this study, the qualitative inquiry approach focused on

individuals with direct knowledge of the phenomenon being examined. The significant purpose for qualitative studies is to assist in the groundwork for future studies; and identifying limitations is imperative.

For this dissertation, the data must be acknowledged for what is it, the small sample of women and men firefighters working in the Fire Services in Ontario. The main limitation of this study was the number of participants. While the small sample size did provide the researcher access to rich, detailed information about the phenomenon, it cannot be generalized to a larger population of females in all male-dominated professions. Using a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research would provide an opportunity for the data to be reflective of a much larger population. Generalizability, however, is not a goal of qualitative research (Gill, 2020, p. 579). As evidenced by the open-ended responses from the participants, many stories are yet to be told.

Recommendations for Future Research or Interventions

Qualitative research findings are useful to inform practice and policy (Gill, 2020, p. 579). One concern in the Fire Services in Ontario is that problematic behaviours are being dealt with locally, with no one looking at the larger provincial or national picture to determine what, if any, systemic issues exist. If a standard of ethics could be incorporated into the Fire Protection and Prevention Act, as it is in the Ontario Police Services Act, then the regulation would set out the code of conduct which every firefighter must comply with. Ethics are incorporated into the Ontario Police Services Act to ensure that police carry out their duties with fairness, integrity and accountability and incorporates oversight mechanisms to hold officers accountable for a breach of conduct. This helps maintain trust and confidence in the profession with the communities they serve. A similar application of language in the FPPA legislation could lessen the interference and subjectivity of an arbitrator. In the interim, fire departments must create and sustain a culture that encourages integrity, open communication, trust, and ethical behaviour.

A similar study using both quantitative and qualitative research methods could also be employed. This technique was used in the preparation of the paper commissioned by the Fire Service Women of Ontario called “Insights from the Inside: A window into the experience of female firefighters in Ontario” (Mills, Lewchuck & Jaques, 2020). The research team conducted 26 face-to-face interviews (22 women and 4 men) which was supplemented by survey data from 1,364 respondents.

Future research can explore how to use case law to identify the existing legal frameworks that govern the fire service workplace. This would help determine what legal protections are currently in place and where there might be gaps that need to be addressed. Understanding past legal cases related to workplace discrimination, harassment, and gender equality can inform the development of more effective and equitable policies. By studying how similar cases have been resolved, researchers can identify best practices and legal pitfalls to avoid. Analyzing case law over time can reveal trends and patterns in how legal issues related to gender in the workplace and highlight how the legal and social landscapes have evolved.

While the primary focus of this dissertation was to reveal the challenges women face, it is also important to understand how stereotypes, biases, and discriminatory practices impact men. Future research could focus on toxic masculinity or pressures to conform to traditional male roles in the Fire Services in Ontario. Men and masculinities are key considerations for studies of firefighting culture (Desmond, 2007; Eriksen and Waitt, 2016) and further studies can uncover how this privileged group reproduces inequality within a male-dominated workplace.

For a more comprehensive and accurate analysis, future research should incorporate a broader range of identities and examine how intersecting factors such as race, ethnic origin, gender identity and sexual orientation influence individuals' experiences in the fire service. Such an approach would not only enrich our understanding of the dynamics at play but also inform more effective and inclusive policies and practices. Exploring the intersection of racial and ethnic dynamics with the culture of masculinity offers numerous opportunities for scholarly research. A comparative study on the experiences of firefighters from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds could provide insightful data on racism and discrimination present within

the fire service. By employing qualitative methodologies, such as interviews and participant observations, researchers can explore the personal narratives of minority firefighters, providing greater insight on the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and masculinity in their work lives.

Stereotypes can significantly affect the cohesion and operational effectiveness of firefighting teams. Investigating how stereotypes influence the perception and treatment of minority firefighters by their peers and superiors could reveal underlying biases and power dynamics. Future research could also explore strategies employed by racialized firefighters to navigate these stereotypes and the potential implications for job satisfaction.

An analysis of the recruitment and promotion policies within the fire service could provide insights into systemic inequities and the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion initiatives. By examining the criteria and processes used for hiring and advancement, researchers can identify potential biases that disadvantage racialized candidates. This study could also assess the impact of equity provisions and diversity training programs on improving racial and ethnic representation and inclusivity within the fire service.

A longitudinal study examining changes in racial and ethnic diversity within the fire service over time could provide a broader understanding of trends, progress, and persistent challenges. This research could analyze demographic data, policy changes, and cultural shifts to evaluate the impact of diversity initiatives and societal attitudes towards race and ethnicity in shaping the fire service.

Final Reflection

The existing body of knowledge and the literature reviewed in this dissertation explore how gender plays a significant role in paid work and demonstrate the strong correlation between gender and the barriers that people experience in the world of work. These barriers can manifest in various ways, including occupational segregation, occupational choice, occupational identity, gender identity, career advancement, gender-based discrimination, and harassment. Within the context of uniformed services, many researchers advocate that institutional practices account for a large proportion of

the gendered barriers women face in masculinized workplaces (Kanter 1997a, Rimalt 2007). This dissertation exposed the experiences of many men and women firefighters in the Fire Services in Ontario and the gender-based workplace dynamics within firefighting, and ways in which nuanced stereotypes, bias and discriminatory practices contribute to a less inclusive and sometimes unsupportive environment for women. The firefighter's everyday experiences, using excerpts extracted from their narratives, reveals significant insights into the culture of the Fire Services in Ontario and the firefighting profession.

The interviews demonstrated the ways in which women face significant hurdles in entering the firefighting profession. While both men and women face incredible competition for entry into the career firefighting, women face additional challenges compared to their male counterparts when it comes to securing employment in the volunteer firefighter sector. Factors such as a preference for maintaining the status quo, cultural resistance within departments, and concerns over changing team dynamics can disadvantage women candidates.

The firefighting profession has traditionally been male dominated, leading to a workplace culture that can be unwelcoming or even hostile to women. Issues such as inadequate facilities for women, harassment, and lack of mentorship opportunities contribute to an environment that can hinder women's participation and advancement. Gender bias and discrimination extend into the realm of career development, where women may encounter obstacles to promotion and leadership roles. This is compounded by a lack of representation in higher ranks, which limits role models for female firefighters aspiring to move into leadership roles and can perpetuate the cycle of exclusion.

Progress in addressing these challenges is often linked to the presence of supportive policies and initiatives aimed at fostering diversity and inclusion, such as targeted recruitment efforts, mentorship programs, and harassment prevention training, are critical for creating a more equitable environment. The precondition necessary for improvements in organizational effectiveness as a result of diversity management is the creation of an equitable work environment, free of discrimination, stereotypes, glass

ceilings, and other impediments to the full participation and inclusion of women and people of colour (Von Bergen et al., 2002; Riccucci, 2002).

Public perceptions of firefighting as a male-dominated field can influence women's interest and perceived suitability for the profession. Efforts to challenge and change these stereotypes are essential for broadening the pool of potential female firefighters and enhancing community support for gender diversity within the service.

The increasing attention to gender-based challenges in firefighting signals the need for systemic change, policy reform, and cultural transformation to ensure equitable and respectful environments for women. The call for developing policies and practices that support all women is important because women's experiences in the workplace vary; they are shaped by their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and other aspects of their identity. While this dissertation focuses specifically on gender, it is evident that policies that do not consider these intersecting factors, can inadvertently perpetuate exclusion and inequality. By dealing directly with issues of colonialism, racism, and discrimination, organizations create a more inclusive environment that recognizes the diverse backgrounds and experiences of all women. This inclusivity fosters a sense of belonging and can significantly enhance job satisfaction and performance. Women from marginalized communities often face compounded challenges that hinder their professional growth and well-being. Policies aimed at dismantling these barriers are essential for creating a fair workplace where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. Developing and implementing such policies requires a committed and sustained effort from all levels of an organization, including both management and labour. It involves continuous learning, listening to the experiences of women from diverse backgrounds, and taking concrete actions to address their needs and challenges. This holistic approach can significantly contribute to transforming the fire service into a more equitable, respectful, and effective workplace for everyone.

This research highlights the nuanced gender dynamics in the Fire Services in Ontario. However, further studies are needed to understand the unique challenges women firefighters face. More research specifically centered on women firefighters' experiences with sexism, discrimination, harassment, and their coping strategies would

be beneficial to this field of study. Understanding the gender dynamics could help departments retain more female firefighters, experience a higher level of career satisfaction and ensure that they have equal opportunities for advancement.

This research acknowledges that it lacks experiences of women of colour, LGBTQ2S+ women, or women from other marginalized groups within the firefighting profession. Their unique challenges and experiences require specific attention. Research that delves into the efficacy of women's fire service associations and other affinity groups (like Fire Service Women of Ontario), mentorship programs, and training designed specifically for women in firefighting could assist in developing recommendations for improvements to workplace culture. With the increasing inclusion of women in firefighting, research on the best practices for recruitment, training, retention, and advancement is essential. This will help fire services, and the municipalities they represent, frame policies that reduce bias, discrimination, and stereotypes while improving gender equity.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Composition of Firefighters

Name	Gender	Race	Sexuality	Career or Volunteer Firefighter	Years of Service	Member of a Union	Rank
Sophia	woman	white	heterosexual	volunteer	3	yes	firefighter
Louise	woman	white	gay	career	30	yes	Captain (retired)
Ryan	man	white	heterosexual	career (composite)	20	yes	firefighter
Sarah	woman	white	heterosexual	career (former volunteer)	11	yes	training officer
Paul	man	white	heterosexual	career	30	yes	Captain
Maria	woman	white	heterosexual	career	19	yes	firefighter
Brian	man	white	gay	volunteer	3.5	no	firefighter
Steve	man	South Asian	heterosexual	career (former volunteer)	8	yes	firefighter
Jessica	woman	white	heterosexual	career (former volunteer)	10	yes	Training Officer
Brent	man	white	heterosexual	career (former volunteer)	14	yes	firefighter
Peter	man	white	heterosexual	career (composite) (former volunteer)	26	yes	Captain
Scott	man	Self-described as mixed	heterosexual	career (former volunteer in composite)	8	yes	firefighter (retired)
Natalie	woman	white	heterosexual	career (composite) (former volunteer)	7	yes	firefighter
Claire	woman	white	heterosexual	career (former wildland firefighter)	7	yes	firefighter

Ava	woman	white	gay	career (composite) (former volunteer)	14	yes	firefighter
Christine	woman	white	heterosexual	career (composite)	7	yes	firefighter
Matthew	man	white	heterosexual	career (composite)	23	yes	firefighter
Sandra	woman	white	heterosexual	career	21	yes	firefighter
Jason	man	white	heterosexual	volunteer (composite)	2	no	firefighter
Hunter	man	white	heterosexual	career	29.5	yes	Captain
Ian	man	white	heterosexual	volunteer	5	no	firefighter
Nolan	man	white	heterosexual	career (former volunteer)	6	yes	firefighter
Charles	man	white	heterosexual	volunteer (composite)	10	no	firefighter
Dylan	man	Indigenous	heterosexual	career (composite)	35	yes	firefighter
Carter	man	white	heterosexual	volunteer	9	no	firefighter
Henry	man	white	heterosexual	volunteer (former wildland firefighter)	1	yes	firefighter
Liam	man	white	heterosexual	career (former volunteer)	14	yes	firefighter
Nathan	man	white	heterosexual	career	26	yes	firefighter
Mason	man	white	heterosexual	volunteer	48	No	Deputy
Oliver	man	white	heterosexual	volunteer (composite)	5	no	firefighter
Jack	man	white	heterosexual	volunteer (composite)	15	no	firefighter
Patrick	man	white	heterosexual	volunteer	11	no	Captain

Appendix 2: Informed Research Consent Form

Informed Research Consent Form

Study Name: In the Circle of Fire: Barriers in the Fire Services in Ontario

Researchers: Deryn Rizzi, B.A., B.Ed., MDEM

rizzi@yorku.ca

Research Consent

You are volunteering to participate in a research project conducted by Deryn Rizzi, the principal researcher. The project is designed to gather information about women in the Fire Services in Ontario and any perceived opportunities and barriers for women being recruited, hired, retained and promoted as a firefighter. There will also be questions regarding workplace structures, practices and policies, workplace culture, and lived experiences as a firefighter. There will be approximately 30 people being interviewed for this research.

The interview will take between approximately 90 minutes to two hours. While there are no anticipated risks associated with participation, the interviewee has the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time. Ethical procedures for academic research require that interviewees explicitly agree to being interviewed and how the information contained in their interview will be used.

This consent form is necessary to ensure that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Please read the information herein and then sign this form to certify that you approve the following:

- The interview will be recorded and a transcript will be produced.
- The transcript of the interview will be analysed by Deryn Rizzi as the research investigator.
- Access to the interview transcript will be limited to Deryn Rizzi.
- Any summary interview content, or direct quotations from the interview, that are made available through academic publication or other academic outlets will be anonymized so that you cannot be identified, and care will be taken to ensure that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed. This will be done by changing your name and disguising any details of the interview which may reveal your identity or the identity of people you speak about.
- Participants can expect that any personal or identifying information they provide in the context of a research study will be kept confidential by the researcher.
- The actual recording will be destroyed after the transcription takes place.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

A series of questions will be asked by the researcher from a predetermined list of questions. The interview will be a free flowing dialogue and the researcher may want to prompt you to speak more about your experiences or topics relevant to the research topic.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You: This research will explore the experiences of both the male and female firefighters and the policies, procedures, workplace culture, that impact the lives experience of the firefighter, and impact how firefighters work together. The research will explore policies, procedures, and workplace culture to determine factors which make a more positive workplace for all firefighters.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time.

Risks and Discomforts: Depending on the participant's experience in the fire service, there may be potential emotional discomfort that may result from participation in the research. Mental health supports have been included in this consent form, as a

resource.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality: Unless you choose otherwise, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. The data will be collected by audio recordings which will be later transcribed, and hand written notes. Your data will be safely stored on a locked computer in which both the computer and document will be password protected. Recordings (audio/video) will be saved in a password protected file to research team members' local computer, not the cloud based service. Only the research staff will have access to this information. The data will only be kept for the time period of the research paper being drafted. Upon completion of the report any associated notes and recordings will be destroyed. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Virtual Interview: This study will use the WebEx platform, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate, perhaps via telephone or in-person. Please contact the researcher for further information. Recordings (audio/video) will be saved in a password protected file

to research team members' local computer, not the cloud based service. The data will be destroyed by 06/01/2026. Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting/data collection session.

Questions About the Research: If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at rizzi@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Professor Meg Luxton at mluxton@yorku.ca and/or 416-736-2100 ext. 20933. You may also contact the Graduate Program in the Graduate Program in Gender, Feminist & Women's Studies at gpdgfw@yorku.ca and/or 416-650-8143.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri- Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Director, Research Ethics in the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Mental Health Contacts

Boots of the Ground (Peer Support for First Responders) Available 24/7: 1-833-677-BOOT

If you or someone you know is in immediate crisis or has suicide-related concerns, call or text the **Canada Suicide Prevention Helpline**. Phone 1-833-456-4566 (24/7) or text to 45645 (4 p.m. – Midnight ET).

211 Ontario: Information and referral for community, government, social and health services, including mental health resources across Ontario. Call 2-1-1 or **toll-free: 1-877-330-3213**.

ConnexOntario Helpline toll-free: 1-866-531-2600.

Mental health and addiction services: [Get free, confidential support for depression or anxiety.](#)

Distress and crisis services: [Find distress and crisis support in your region.](#)

Additional Consent:

I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s). Circle your choice: Yes No

I consent to video recording of my interview (s). Circle your choice: Yes or No

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in In the Circle of Fire: Gender Barriers in the Fire Services in Ontario conducted by Deryn Rizzi. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Name (print): _____

Signature _____

Participant

Date _____

Signature _____

Principal Investigator

Date _____

Appendix 3: Demographic Questions

Demographic Questions

The following questions were asked at the beginning of the interview. The participants were permitted to respond; “prefer not to answer” for any of these questions.

Type of fire department:

- Full-time Career Fire Department
- Paid On-Call Volunteer Fire Department
- Composite Fire Department (volunteer and full-time firefighters)

How many years have you served as a firefighter? _____

I am:

- female cis gender (your gender identity matches your sex at birth)
- male cis-gender (your gender identity matches your sex at birth)
- transgender male
- transgender female
- non-binary/gender fluid
- other
- prefer not to answer

Are you a member of a union?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

I am

- Caucasian
- South Asian
- Black

- Chinese
- Filipino
- Latin American
- Arab
- Southeast Asian
- West Asian
- Korean
- Japanese
- Indigenous
- Other
- Prefer not to disclose

What is your rank?

- Fire Chief
- Deputy Chief
- Assistant Deputy Chief
- Divisional Chief
- Platoon Chief
- District Chief
- Captain
- Firefighter
- Probationary Firefighter (1st year)
- Other?

How many people are in your fire department?

Do you know how many of these are women?

How many women firefighters do you work with on a regular basis (members of your crew or platoon)?

What is your educational background? (Choices: High school, Some College, College Diploma, Some University, University Degree, Masters Degree, PhD)

Appendix 4: Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Type of fire department:

- Full-time Career Fire Department
- Paid On-Call Volunteer Fire Department
- Composite Fire Department (volunteer and full-time firefighters)

How many years have you served as a firefighter?

I am:

- female cis gender (your gender identity matches your sex at birth)
- male cis-gender (your gender identity matches your sex at birth)
- transgender male
- transgender female
- non-binary/gender fluid
- other
- prefer not to answer

Are you a member of a union?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

I am

- Caucasian
- South Asian
- Black
- Chinese
- Filipino

- Latin American
- Arab
- Southeast Asian
- West Asian
- Korean
- Japanese
- Indigenous
- Other
- Prefer not to disclose

What is your rank?

- Fire Chief
- Deputy Chief
- Assistant Deputy Chief
- Divisional Chief
- Platoon Chief
- District Chief
- Captain
- Firefighter
- Probationary Firefighter (1st year)
- Other?

How many people are in your fire department?

Do you know how many of these are women?

How many women firefighters do you work with on a regular basis (members of your crew or platoon)?

What is your educational background? (Choices: High school, Some College, College Diploma, Some University, University Degree, Masters Degree, PhD)

QUESTIONS FOR WOMEN FIREFIGHTERS

ORGANIZATIONAL ENTRY – WOMEN’S INTEGRATION IN THE FIRE SERVICE

Let’s first start with when and why you chose to apply to become a firefighter? What attracted you to the firefighting profession?

Did you attend Pre-Fire Service? (Yes, No)

Did you attend a trade apprenticeship program? (Yes, No)

What concerns, if any, did your family and friends have with you becoming a firefighter and did their concerns change after successful completion of your training?

Did you pass the physical fitness test on your first attempt? (N/A – No physical fitness test was required, Yes, No – I had difficulties with the upper body strength component, No – I had difficulties with the V02 max., No – I did not pass on my first attempt)

What barriers did you face during the recruitment phase – trying to secure a job as a firefighter? Were these similar to those faced by your male colleagues?

Did your fire service have active diversity campaigns when you were hired?

What made you choose your fire service?

Did you have any female training officers during your recruit class? Were you aware of any higher ranking female officers?

Describe your level of skills and experiences compared to your colleagues when you were first hired as a firefighter?

What challenges did you experience in recruit class? Did you feel your experience was different than your male colleagues?

When you were assigned a position on the trucks, were your male colleagues skeptical of you and/or your abilities? Were they welcoming?

Explain how you were received by your colleagues and the training officers in group training activities during recruit training?

How were you included in social events outside of class during recruit training? Did you ever feel left out?

Did you ever have issues with the uniform or PPE because of your body type or your size?

Did you ever have an issue with the equipment because of your size, or your strength?

Do think the fire service has a different criteria for hiring men and women?

To what extent do hiring criteria and physical fitness requirements and written tests accurately reflect the standards and skills needed to be a firefighter.

PERCEIVED CHALLENGES FOR FEMALE FIREFIGHTERS

Describe your experience regarding discrimination and/or harassment at work.

Were these interactions with colleagues (another firefighter), other emergency service personnel (police/paramedic), Captain (supervisor), Chief Officer (union), Chief Officer (non-union)?

Describe how you have experienced gender-based discrimination in work assignments?

Has your competence as a firefighter been challenged by others because of your gender? (Member of the public, media, online, social media, colleague, supervisor)

How do you feel that your gender is a barrier to career advancement?

Why do you think some women are successful at advancing through the ranks and others are not?

Will your fire department/Platoon Chief/Captain operate with two women firefighters on the back of a truck?

What was in place when you felt you thrived professionally? (i.e. Supportive Captain, opportunity for promotion, similar age crew)

THE POLICY LANDSCAPE

What types of policies are implemented in your municipality in regards to a respectful workplace? Are they effective?

What types of policies are implemented in your municipality in regards to harassment? Are they effective?

The Province of Ontario mandates training that includes topics related to diversity, human rights and anti-harassment. Can you describe the training your department provides, how effective is the training and how is it received by the firefighters?

Is there an anonymous reporting system that can be effectively used?

Does your department have any hiring practices that would encourage women or racialized groups to apply?

Can you share any issues you have experienced with inclusivity – “being one of the guys?”

My municipality has a procedure to address complaints of discrimination/harassment.

Would you feel comfortable reporting discrimination/harassment to a supervisor?

Have you (or a colleague) avoided disclosing unfairness, discrimination or harassment, fearing the negative consequences?

Have you ever requested to move to a different work location such as another firehall because of discrimination/harassment?

Have you ever been moved involuntarily (floated out, change of crews, denied a shift change) and you perceived it was because of your gender?

CHARTING A COURSE

In your opinion how has the representation and experiences of women changed since you first entered the profession? (Verify how many years served)

What strategies have you seen (or would like to see) which would create cultural changes that lead to improvements in the representation and experiences of women in firefighting?

What is the relationship between race, ethnicity and gender when it comes to your experience as a firefighter? How about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender?

How can we improve diversity in firefighting?

What are men's perceptions on women in firefighting?

What advice would you give to women who want to become firefighters?

CULTURE

What makes the fire service toxic for women?

What are effective interventions to reduce the prevalence of harassment?

PERFORMANCE

Do women and men firefighters perform differently?

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

What deters women from becoming firefighters?

How can we make firefighting a viable and interesting career option for girls, starting at a young age?

What is the Ontario Fire Marshals role in advancing the representation and experiences of women and minorities in firefighting? Are they taking an active role?

Are their family friendly policies available, which help offset the challenge of caregiving with the 24 hour shift?

PROMOTION

Are women represented equally in your department across the ranks?

Why are women not being promoted or seeking promotion at rates that one might expect?

Do women face discrimination in the promotion process?

What do you think the impact would be if there was an increased number of women in leadership?

Is it a challenge to find a mentor?

QUESTIONS FOR MALE FIREFIGHTERS

ORGANIZATIONAL ENTRY – INTEGRATION IN THE FIRE SERVICE

Let's first start with when and why you chose to apply to become a firefighter? What attracted you to the firefighting profession?

Did you attend Pre-Fire Service? (Yes, No)

Did you attend a trade apprenticeship program? (Yes, No)

What concerns, if any, did your family and friends have with you becoming a firefighter and did their concerns change after successful completion of your training?

Did you pass the physical fitness test on your first attempt? (N/A – No physical fitness test was required, Yes, No – I had difficulties with the upper body strength component, No – I had difficulties with the V02 max., No – I did not pass on my first attempt)

What barriers did you face during the recruitment phase – trying to secure a job as a firefighter? Were these similar to your female colleagues?

Did your fire service have active diversity campaigns when you were hired?

What made you choose your fire service?

Did you have any female training officers during your recruit class? Were you aware of any higher ranking female officers?

Describe your level of skills and experiences compared to your colleagues when you were first hired as a firefighter?

What challenges did you experience in recruit class? Did you feel your experience was different than your female colleagues?

When you were assigned a position on the trucks, did you have any female crew members?

Were your male colleagues skeptical of the female recruits and/or their abilities? Were they welcoming?

Explain how you were received by your colleagues and the training officers in group training activities during recruit training?

How were you included in social events outside of class during recruit training? Was anyone ever left out?

Did you ever have issues with the uniform or PPE because of your body type or your size?

Did you ever have an issue with the equipment because of your size, or your strength?

Do think the fire service has a different criteria for hiring men and women?

To what extent do hiring criteria and physical fitness requirements and written tests accurately reflect the standards and skills needed to be a firefighter?

PRECEIVED CHALLENGES

Describe your experience regarding discrimination and/or harassment at work?

Were these interactions with colleagues (another firefighter), other emergency service personnel (police/paramedic), Captain (supervisor), Chief Officer (union), Chief Officer (non-union)?

Describe how you have experienced gender-based discrimination in work assignments?

Has your competence as a firefighter been challenged by others because of your gender? (Member of the public, media, online, social media, colleague, supervisor)

How do you feel that your gender is a barrier to career advancement?

Why do you think some men are successful at advancing through the ranks and others are not?

Why do you think some women are successful at advancing through the ranks and others are not?

Will your fire department/Platoon Chief/Captain operate with two women firefighters on the back of a truck?

What was in place when you felt you thrived professionally? (i.e. Supportive Captain, opportunity for promotion, similar age crew)

THE POLICY LANDSCAPE

What types of policies are implemented in your municipality in regards to a respectful workplace? Are they effective?

What types of policies are implemented in your municipality in regards to harassment?
Are they effective?

The Province of Ontario mandates training that includes topics related to diversity, human rights and anti-harassment. Can you describe the training your department provides, how effective is the training and how is it received by the firefighters?

Is there an anonymous reporting system that can be effectively used?

Does your department have any hiring practices that would encourage women or racialized groups to apply?

Can you share any issues you have experienced with inclusivity – “being one of the team?”

Does your municipality have a procedure to address complaints of discrimination/harassment?

Would you feel comfortable reporting discrimination/harassment to a supervisor?

Have you (or a colleague) avoided disclosing unfairness, discrimination or harassment, fearing the negative consequences?

Have you ever requested to move to a different work location such as another firehall because of discrimination/harassment?

Have you ever been moved involuntarily (floated out, change of crews, denied a shift change) and you perceived it was because of your gender?

CHARTING A COURSE

In your opinion how has the representation and experiences of women changed since you first entered the profession? (Verify how many years served)

What strategies have you seen (or would like to see) which would create cultural changes that lead to improvements in the representation and experiences of women in firefighting?

What is the relationship between race, ethnicity and gender when it comes to your experience as a firefighter? How about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender?

How can we improve diversity in firefighting?

What are men's perceptions on women in firefighting?

What advice would you give to others who want to become firefighters?

CULTURE

What makes the fire service toxic for women?

What are effective interventions to reduce the prevalence of harassment?

PERFORMANCE

Do women and men firefighters perform differently?

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

What deters women from becoming firefighters?

How can we make firefighting a viable and interesting career option for girls, starting at a young age?

What is the Ontario Fire Marshals role in advancing the representation and experiences of women and minorities in firefighting? Are they taking an active role?

Are their family friendly policies available, which help offset the challenge of caregiving with the 24 hour shift?

PROMOTION

Are women represented equally in your department across the ranks?

Why are women not being promoted or seeking promotion at rates that one might expect?

Do women face discrimination in the promotion process?

What do you think the impact would be if there was an increased number of women in leadership?

Is it a challenge to find a mentor?

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