BEYOND MARGINALITY: EXPLORING BLACK WOMEN'S LABOUR MARKET PARTICIPATION IN THE GREATER VANCOUVER REGIONAL DISTRICT

by

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ABSTRACT

What have Black women's labour market experiences been in the Greater Vancouver

Regional District? How have education, family, and systemic barriers been perceived by and

impacted Black women in the labour market? Utilizing qualitative methodological

techniques, primarily open-ended interviewing, and centred in critical Black feminist and

endarkened feminist epistemological approaches, as well as anti-racist or critical race theory,

I explore these important questions. Historically and currently marginalized, this thesis puts

Black women's experience at the forefront of investigation and provides an opportunity for

five women to voice their knowledge, thoughts, and observations on employment in British

Columbia. Findings suggest that while some view the educational system as unsupportive

and alienating for Blacks, it is ultimately deemed important for labour market success. The

results also reveal a pronounced focus on personal rather than systemic barriers to success,

and stress the value of family and other support networks in fostering individual

empowerment.

Keywords: Black Women, African-Canadian Women, Labour Market, Employment,
         Greater Vancouver Regional District, GVRD

DEDICATION

To the many Black women who have and continue to endure numerous difficulties and hardships, yet cease to give up in the struggle for justice and equality in all facets of their lives, I dedicate this thesis.

To the women who agreed to participate in this research, I dedicate this thesis to you as well, and graciously thank you for giving of your time, thoughts, energy, and enthusiasm toward a project that remains very close to me.

I also dedicate this thesis to my wonderful, loving, and supportive partner, without whom I fear this research would not have come to fruition. For his continued support and words of encouragement, I am forever indebted.

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As my senior supervisor, I would like to thank Dr. Habiba Zaman for being a strong support of my research interests and affording me a great deal of freedom in defining and carrying out this work. I would also like to thank my second supervisor, Dr. Parin Dossa, who provided invaluable feedback and thoughtful commentary throughout the research process from the initial planning phase through to the final written thesis. Without question, her critical insights helped to strengthen my work as well as consolidate and positively affirm my approach to the research.

Special thanks goes to Dr. Yvonne Brown who agreed to participate on my committee as an external member despite the pressures and time constraints of her quickly approaching retirement and impending cross-country relocation. Dr. Brown's participation on my committee meant a great deal to me as I respect her opinions and perspectives on Black experience in British Columbia. Her comments on my work not only revealed a high level of engagement, understanding, and connection, but also served to reaffirm and validate my overall research objectives. For the experience of having her on my committee, I am extremely grateful.

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CHAPTER ONE:
Introduction

Black women, whose experience is unique, are seldom recognized as a particular social-cultural entity and are seldom thought to be important enough for serious scholarly consideration.
                                                        - Barbara Smith

Within the Canadian context, African-Canadian or Black[1] women receive very little attention. In comparison to their American counterparts, Black women in Canada often struggle to find even the smallest bit of information that is both relevant and geographically specific to them. Given that the historical and contemporary experiences of Black women in the United States differs drastically on many scales, it is often difficult to look toward the U.S. for guidance in exploring the nature of Canadian Black women's experience. It is primarily for this reason that I feel it is extremely important to create and contribute to a dialogue and a history of Canadian Black women's experience.

As a Black woman I understand the need and desire to locate the specificities of Canadian Black experience and I have felt the disappointment in discovering that there is an almost complete absence of accessible information that conveys the nuances and variations within this experience. I therefore have both a personal and an academic desire to aid in uncovering the experiences and treatment of Black women within a more local context, specifically, in relation to the labour market of the Greater Vancouver Regional District (GVRD). My objectives are to explore and identify the labour market experiences of Black women, including participation within and potential barriers to access of various

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[1] Throughout this thesis, I will use the terms African-Canadian and Black interchangeably.

employment sectors among a small group of Black women living within the GVRD. In

conducting this research, I have developed and utilized four primary research questions:

(1) Do African-Canadian women who live and work within the GVRD feel that they have
been successful[2] in negotiating the labour market? Do these women feel that they have
been treated fair and impartial within their employment experiences? Do they feel that
they have experienced barriers and if so, what are some of the specific barriers they have
encountered?

(2) Do African-Canadian women feel that the Canadian educational system provides enough
support in order for them to eventually achieve their goals within the workforce? What
sort of changes, if any, do these women feel would be necessary in order to create a
better bridge between education and employment?

(3) What sort of changes, if any, (on the part of government or other agencies), do African-
Canadian women feel would assist them in successfully negotiating the labour market?
How do these women's perceptions of what needs to systematically change compare
with existing governmental or agency approaches which are touted as providing support
to minority (Black) women?

(4) Do African-Canadian women feel that there is a systemic (i.e. within the educational
system and on the part of the government) failure to address Black issues?

Before I discuss my study in more detail, I believe that it is relevant to position

myself in relation to the research by providing a bit of personal background information and

history in order to demonstrate how my research interests evolved with respect to my own

experiences within educational and employment systems in British Columbia.

Experiences and Relativity

Determining exactly how I relate to and fit within the boundaries of my research

seems quite simple in one way, but particularly difficult in other ways. Being a Black woman

in Vancouver, it takes little effort to understand the relevancy that investigating Black

women's experiences in the labour market would have in my life. This topic of research is

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[2] Although success will be determined based on each individual woman's idea or definition of what it means to
be successful, a general concept of success will be conveyed. This concept will identify success as obtaining a
job that is desirable and for which one feels they are qualified with respect to education and experience.

directly relevant to me. Moreover, my position as a graduate student and as a researcher carries with it a certain degree of novelty and privilege; having the academic space to think about and study these issues is not an experience that is available to everyone, and certainly not all Black women. Yet, as a Black woman, I am consistently forced to think about these issues, whether it be within academia or not, and while my position within the university is privileged, it is, as both a student and employee, consistently fraught with marginalization and experiences of racism. It is almost ironic that the very system which has granted me the space to undertake this research has also been partially responsible for defining why this research is important. Regardless, I do feel Black women's experiences in the labour market are important and worthy of consideration, and that having the space to address these is in some ways a novelty and one that I am both appreciative of and which undeniably shapes the way I relate to my research and this process.

Education

I must admit that it is difficult for me to pinpoint or single out the exact moment during my educational experience that I began to acknowledge and recognize the disparity in treatment between myself and other (white) students. Perhaps this is due partially to the fact that it was a somewhat gradual process, involving several incidents over the course of several years. From a very early age though, I remember feeling a sense of alienation from the system. The experience of being physically eyed and scrutinized as the only Black girl in the class whenever any reference to Black people was made, references which generally had a negative connotation to them, only served to make me want to distance myself from Blackness and Black culture that much more. There were particular occurrences within my education that stand out as having helped to solidify my difference. For instance, having my

high school basketball coach assume that when I was attacked by another white girl on the team during practice, it must have been me who was responsible for the provocation – this despite the fact that anyone who knew me, would also know just how adamantly opposed I was to any sort of aggression or confrontation of any type or persuasion. Even further, having that same coach say verbatim to my white biological mother when she had come to discuss my impending punishment for being involved in the altercation, "I thought you'd be a short, fat, Black woman." This experience has never left me and the response of my mother also lays indelibly in memory, "Is my daughter short, or fat?" Of course I was neither short nor fat according to society's standards, but somehow this coach thought it was acceptable to make such comments, which were obviously based on her stereotypical conception of Black motherhood.

Another experience that I had in high school, which revealed the different values and expectations that were placed on me in comparison to my white counterparts, was during a group assignment that I worked on with a couple of my classmates. Having put a significant amount of individual time and effort into the assignment when the other students in my group lacked the interest to do so, I became even more bitter about the experience when one girl in my group made a comment to suggest that she would get a good grade regardless of the effort she put in. Her comments gained more significance when our group received our grades for the assignment and instead of each of us receiving the same grade, she and the other student were both given an "A," whereas I was given a half grade point below. This despite the fact that I had put in the majority of the work in completing the assignment and furthermore, as there was no requirement or expectation that we indicate which sections we were responsible for, it could not have been a situation where the instructor felt that certain areas of the assignment were stronger than others and therefore graded accordingly.

Fortunately, not all of my educational experiences have been negative. Within my early educational experience, there were also some very positive moments and those I will not forget. Mr. Sapinski taught my grade ten English class and introduced me to the fierce intelligence and literary skill of Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou and although it probably was not considered to be the most popular subject of instruction, he also introduced the class to Malcolm X. His teachings made me realize that Black people had to make a space for themselves in the world because effectively no one else would. His brilliance was in trying to equip me (as a Black woman) to live in a society that was going to continually devalue me. This experience also made me feel as though for once, my life was important and applicable to what I was learning. He was very subtle in his instructing approach; white, somewhat lanky in his physical stature, and in many respects a bit on the eccentric side, he ignited the passion within me to learn more about Black writers and leaders outside of those taught within orthodox curriculum. Another white teacher, Mr. Stephenson gave me the opportunity to express myself boldly and in ways that significantly helped to build my self-esteem and confidence. He taught my drama class during high school and allowed me to release my frustrations on an almost weekly basis during class and it was cathartic to have a space within which I was able to release all the pent up emotions that I was feeling at the time. I will never forget what a supportive and safe environment his class provided.

Unfortunately though, despite the few positive and influential moments that did exist in small pockets throughout my educational experience, my overall experience was that of a struggle. It was a struggle to get through the system and feel proud of who I was as a Black person when I did not see myself reflected at all in the majority of readings and curriculum. My experiences at university were not that different from my elementary and secondary school years. There were several incidents that happened throughout the classes that I

attended, but the one incident that has never left me was in relation to a Criminology course that I took in the second year of my Bachelor's degree. The course topic focused on women and the state; a topic which peaked my interest almost immediately. The beginning of the course was interesting and I remember feeling quite engaged during the initial classes that I attended. However, there was one day of lecturing for which we were required to read a whole selection of literature and articles pertaining to Black women and prostitution, and not only prostitution, but slavery as well. Having read the materials prior to the class, I was already feeling incredibly upset about the choice of readings as well as the sensationalist value that I felt they represented. Rather than avoid going to class (as a means of protest), I decided instead that it would be a good idea for me to see how the instructor was going to deal with the material in the classroom. I had hoped that she would have some sort of insightful discussion of the readings that would reveal her overall rationale for choosing them.

I attended the class and during part of the opening discussions, Black women's sexuality was discussed in such a way as to basically reinforce stereotypes of their promiscuity thereby creating a situation in which it was extremely difficult for me to sit through the lecture. Following this, was the discussion of Black women being put on the blocks during slavery, where comparisons were made between their hair texture and facial features and that of apes and gorillas. I ended up leaving the class in tears at one point because I could not endure hearing so much negativity, especially when that negativity felt entirely as though it were being directed solely toward me. I eventually returned to the class before it ended, but was never really given a satisfactory explanation by the instructor as to why she chose the material. What was even more unsettling was that none of the other students in the class seemed to express any opposition to the lecture – perhaps it served to

provide them with academic, legitimized confirmation of Black women's immorality and corruption and they were satisfied to simply leave it at that. This is an experience that nonetheless stays with me because it exemplifies the isolation that I have felt many times throughout my education. I have often felt as though I am at war with a system that is unwilling to recognize the extremely biased and racially discriminatory teachings and practices that exist within it.

Employment

In combination with my educational experience, my employment experiences have also played a significant role in determining my research motivations. From the time of my initial employment at Simon Fraser University, I was under the naïve impression that such an environment would provide for the most egalitarian treatment possible of any workplace. Despite the high level of education and intellect that I thought to be characteristic of the university however, it has been a difficult and somewhat rude awakening, as well as an emotional journey – over the course of several years employment – to discover that my experiences have and continue to be enormously racialized. There are so many unspoken, subtle ways in which an individual can be made to know their place and their status in comparison to others and I feel that in many of my work experiences at the university, it has been made abundantly clear that my unequal treatment is tied to my racial identity as a Black woman. These things are always difficult to articulate and to claim though as there is often a lack of tangible or physical evidence. Nonetheless, even with these limitations I have resolved that I will no longer be prevented from speaking out.

There was one particular incident that I experienced while working at the University that does provide absolute and indisputable evidence of the low status that was accorded to

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me by a white superior. While in the course of my normal workday in a former department at the University, the Director of the department came into the office and more or less out of nowhere, and in a very detached manner, asked me whether I was working for Al Qaeda. There was no obvious or immediate indication that the question he asked was meant to illicit laughter or any sort of clever retort or that he in any way felt that it was inappropriate for him to have asked it. I was so taken aback initially, that I had no direct response other than to feel a sudden and overwhelming sense of shame. The range of emotions that I began to feel shortly afterward however, moved in all directions from frustration to sadness to anger and then disgust. My emotions raged and seethed beneath the surface as I had once again been reminded, or more accurately, been obliged to accept the extreme isolation of being a Black woman in Vancouver. Or perhaps more technically according to skin colour, a brown-skinned woman – this skin colour which invariably serves to separate, exclude, and alienate, also apparently served as an invitation to frivolous ridicule. What was in my estimation most disconcerting about the whole experience was the realization that this man who had spoken to me with such extreme disrespect and quiet hostility was part of upper level management within student services at the University and as such, had a great deal of influence and power.

The fact that there were some students in the department when the Director had made those comments, and that no one chose to speak up or say anything, only served as a stark reminder of my seclusion amongst them. My attempts to discuss with the students later, any sort of possible motive for the Director's behaviour were quickly sidetracked and ignored. It was as though they all believed that through wilful denial the incident would just go away, and that ultimately, I would go away. During and after this final incident that eventually impelled me toward action, my mind kept coming back to the same question,

"Who should be made to bear the burden of racism?" Logically speaking, it is the victim who bears this burden and often in isolation. Still, I could not help but to contemplate who "should" bear the burden and who should therefore also be made to take up the fight against it. I view this thesis as in some ways, an opportunity to explore this question.

That the students who had witnessed the incident were all either unwilling or unable to recognize or empathize as to the severity of what had been said to me, momentarily served to disabuse me of any claim or accusation. They did not have to take on the burden of this act of racism because it did not impact them personally and they were all white, so in their minds, it did not concern them. After such a lack of validation for my thoughts and feelings, my next thought process was to immediately begin to question the accuracy of my understanding of the situation. As it turned out however, the Director later confirmed that I had indeed heard him correctly when he approached me several minutes afterward to ask whether I was going to file a grievance. It was almost as though he was taunting me and highlighting my severe lack of power and control in the situation, given that if I were to file a complaint, I would then be required to take on the burden of proof. Although to some the comment made by my former Director may seem minor, insignificant or trivial, even excusable, it is no small coincidence that the majority of people who would find it excusable would also never be subjected to such a comment in the first place.

Since it was difficult to let this incident go without a thorough debriefing, I sought out all the Black women that I knew and after speaking with several of them about the incident, I was strongly encouraged to file a complaint with the University's Human Rights Office. Despite their encouragement, it was difficult not to feel very isolated, ashamed, and fearful of pursuing any sort of formal recourse. Over time however, I became compelled to turn my anger and frustration about the incident toward some sort of positive end. I

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realized that in continuing to remain silent, I was perhaps contributing to the same cycle that allows Blacks and other minorities to be treated in racist and discriminatory ways by white superiors within the workplace. It was then that I decided to channel my energy into my academic pursuits and revise my thesis topic to reflect my newfound commitment.

Research Scope and Objectives

For my research, I chose the Greater Vancouver area as it allowed for a broad region within which to locate participants and it also represents the widespread urban area in which Black women live and work. I address my research objectives by both creating a space where Black women are able to voice their experiences, and by analyzing interviews with the women and developing some basic understanding of shared experiences. My aim is to identify the specific experiences of a small group of women, therefore the research is in no way meant to be representative, generalizable, or to resemble a large scale study. My focus is on the personal, that of individual Black women's lives within the society and labour systems of the GVRD. This research contributes to the dialogue of Black women in relation to employment and labour; dialogue that within mainstream society and the Canadian academy has almost entirely been overlooked.

Structure

Before sharing the women's experiences or presenting my analysis of their interviews, I will introduce and describe in detail how Black feminism, endarkened feminist epistemology, anti-colonial theory, and antiracist or critical race theory serve as a critical theoretical foundation for my research. I will also discuss an underrepresented history of Blacks in Canada and the GVRD, so as to create a more meaningful context in which to

understand these specific women's experiences and the Black Canadian experience in general. I then share what the women I interviewed have to say, their experiences and insights into various aspects of working in the GVRD, followed by an analysis of the interviews and how their answers relate to my primary research questions. Lastly, I reflect upon the research, with a discussion of some of the difficulties I encountered as well as what I believe are some important future paths to be taken from this research.

CHAPTER TWO:
Theoretical & Methodological Approaches

Theoretical Framework

My investigation of the labour market experiences of African-Canadian or Black women relies on the basic tenets of several theoretical approaches. Primary among these is Black feminist epistemology, which emphasizes experiential accounts, a validation of everyday lived experience, encouragement of dialogue, and a continual desire to locate the connectedness or commonalities among Black women's experiences (Collins, 2000; King, 1988). The theoretical underpinnings of an "endarkened feminist epistemology" have also given much direction to the course of my research with respect to Black women in detailing the more salient aspects of the research process, and placing an emphasis on research that is responsible, humanizing, socially and historically contextualized or grounded, and that continues to search for omissions in the representation and portrayal of Black women's experience (Dillard, 2000). In addition, anti-colonial theoretical perspectives, specifically those which acknowledge the complex role institutional structures play in hindering the success of visible minorities, have influenced my research approach and questions. Finally, anti-racist or critical race theory informs my questioning of the embedded nature of racism and social inequality in the everyday experience of Black women, specifically, the everyday experiences of these women in labour market environments.

Black Feminism & Endarkened Feminism

The principles of Black feminist theory and endarkened feminist epistemology are particularly important for my research in that they have informed my methodological approach as well as validated my desire to excavate the "subjugated" experiences of Black women. These theories support the notion that Black women have a legitimate claim to make when detailing their experiences as potentially racist or discriminatory in nature. As well, these theories substantiate the belief that certain research perspectives and approaches can be useful in helping to expose underlying power differentials that exist within society.

Black feminist theory importantly acknowledges that race, class, and gender interact and intersect in the lives of Black women in such a way that no one variable can be understood in isolation from another (Collins, 1989; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984; hooks, 1989). This aspect of the theory understands that in Black women's lives and experience, "racism, sexism, and classism constitute three, interdependent control systems" (King, 1988, p. 47), which taken together, exert a significant impact on their life chances and therefore ultimately influence and affect their ability to achieve success within a variety of societal, cultural, and institutional milieu, including both educational and occupational spheres.

One of the most influential aspects of Black feminist theory for African-Canadian women is that it proclaims that personal everyday interactions must be understood and conceptualized within the oftentimes imbalanced and sometimes blatantly biased societal power structures. Though Black feminist theorizing stems originally from academia, the theory acts interdependently with the community, and is informed by the "everyday, taken-for-granted [subjective] knowledge" (Collins, 1989, p. 750) that Black women are able to articulate by virtue of their individual social interaction and experience.

Building upon this, and utilizing what I perceive to be an extension of Black feminist theory, my research incorporates some of the key epistemological concepts of an "endarkened feminist" viewpoint (Dillard, 2000), which focuses almost exclusively on research approaches. Principles of an endarkened feminist epistemology emphasize that the research process should be a humanizing project whereby Black women's agency as opposed to their victimization is captured and reflected (Dillard, 2000). Under the rubric of endarkened feminism, the overall research objective is to provide an account of Black women's lives which enriches a more accurate and true depiction of the diversity among them and recognizes the myriad positionalities from which they experience and negotiate social and institutional relations. Locating Black women as agents in their own lives and experience reveals the transformative potential of the research, which can serve to counter hegemonic discourse[3] by representing an oppositional stance to the oftentimes monolithic and essentialized representations of Black women as either victims or problems (Dillard, 2000; Reynolds, 2002; Oesterreich, 2007).

Focusing on Black women's ability to subjectively define their own realities through the exposition of lived experience is essential to countering prevailing mythologies and stereotypes which serve to denigrate, objectify, and dehumanize them. In order for Black women to develop a healthy self-concept, Collins (2000), asserts that they must counter all sorts of negative, dominant, and controlling images and positively define for themselves what it means to be Black. Through the construction of a unique and oppositional knowledge base and understanding then, Black women are able to reclaim their subjectivity and move out of their positioning as objectified Other.

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[3] The socially embedded white-supremacist attitudes that reinforce the notion of Blacks and other racial minorities as inferior.

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Within Black feminist epistemology, dialogue and storytelling is considered critical in terms of providing a counter-story and creating an alternative understanding of reality (Collins, 2000; Rodriguez, 2006; Wane, 2004). In this respect, the theory aids in recognizing and confronting the manner in which Eurocentric culture has negated the heterogeneity among Black women. It is anticipated that when Black women from various locations and perspectives begin to reveal their subjective experiences, essentialized and stereotypical imagery of them can be discredited, and a communal basis of support from which to resist oppression, consolidated. Black women's documented experiences therefore symbolize an overt act of resistance against widespread and socially accepted, inaccurate and or demeaning portrayals. As an essential aspect of the endarkened feminist epistemological approach, the use of dialogue or narrative provides opportunity for individual and collective experience to result in an overall consciousness raising among Black women where, "coherence is realized in…[the] collective refusal to be reduced to someone else's terms" (Dillard, 2000, p. 673). In its desire to excavate the hidden and silent spaces that Black women are often forced to occupy, the theory provides the most radical potential for truly understanding what it means to experience the world as a Black woman.

Black feminism recognizes that those who occupy positions within subordinate groups experience and interpret their reality in ways which often differ from those who hold the power and that as a result of this unequal distribution of power, there is also predictably, a concomitant unequal opportunity to be heard and to share perspectives (Collins, 1989; Bottero & Irwin, 2003). The theory nonetheless advocates that Black women must come to voice, and name their experiences as those which are "lived," in order to give credence to the harmful consequences of a socio-historical tradition of white Eurocentric, patriarchal supremacy (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989). Accordingly, Black feminist thought is not simply

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to be considered in abstract terms. Rather, in application, the theory should be conceptualized as that which can have a liberatory effect, as "Black women's struggles... [come to be seen as] part of a wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice" (Riviere, 2004, p. 224). Even so, in terms of research agendas that specifically place Black women's interests at the forefront, Dillard (2000) notes that there is a complex and confounding interplay at work between the often *intended* or *expected* treatment of research outcomes, and how those outcomes actually come to be received within the dominant discourse:

> ... [S]tories, when received and heard by White researchers are often unbelievable at worst, painful fodder for contexts of White guilt at best. However, these cultural ideologies are the exact stories that 'endarken' the epistemology at work, that expose the relations of power that disproportionately exclude how and what we know the world to be as Black women, how we know racism and sexism and identity politics influence and shape the contexts of our lives, in contrast with being told how they operate from perspectives outside of ourselves. (p. 678)

Rationalized as an alternative epistemology, Black feminist thought hence involves the use of methods and approaches to knowledge production that often run in direct opposition to the viewpoints of the dominant culture. Therefore unfortunately Black feminist knowledge is frequently seen as a type of "subjugated knowledge" (Collins, 2000, p. 252), which can be easily discredited and delegitimized within the canon of traditional research inquiry and approach.

In reference to research endeavours, endarkened feminist epistemology highlights the importance of conceptualizing "research as a responsibility, answerable and obligated to the very persons and communities being engaged in the inquiry" (Dillard, 2000, p. 663). An understanding of this assertion of responsibility encourages the researcher to strive for an awareness and openness as to the multiple ways of knowing, and to pursue the interrogation of the real and intangible boundaries which can be placed on research at a variety of levels

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both from and within personal, political and institutional locations. This assertion of responsibility as a guiding principle in research inevitably locates Black women's voice and narrative at the center of epistemological inquiry and further entrenches the overall goal of uncovering the "evidence of things not seen,…[and] demystifying Black… [women's] ways of knowing, in moments of reflection, relation, and resistance" (Dillard, 2000, p. 664). In essence, this approach strengthens and consolidates the accountability and ethical obligation of the research, both to itself, and to the communities within which it seeks to investigate, encouraging and allowing for spaces to open up where alternative, specialized knowledge forms can take precedence.

An endarkened feminist epistemology maintains that it is important to situate research within cultural, historical, personal, and social contexts in order to develop a full understanding of the thoughts and realities that are conveyed throughout the research process. In placing research motivations and outcomes within the appropriate context, Dillard (2000) argues that credibility is given to individual Black women's accounts and representations, while simultaneously revealing the complex nature of their connectivity to the broader socio-historical experiences of Black women in general. This aspect of the theory impels the researcher to examine their own background, motivations, and approach to the research and to come to terms with the impact that power differentials – existing both within the academy and out in the field – might have on overall research results (Dillard, 2000). The strength in an endarkened feminist epistemological approach is that it permits Black women researchers to impenitently define their research interests, goals, and motivations in relation to their communities of study.

Anti-Colonial and Anti-Racist/Critical Race Theories

In addition to Black and endarkened feminism, the anti-colonial theoretical perspective has ideologically influenced the direction of my research and focus of my inquiry. An anti-colonial perspective maintains that there are several means through which institutional structures serve to hinder the success and progress of visible minority populations. According to Dei (1999), "the anti-colonial discursive framework acknowledges the role of the educational system in producing and reproducing ethnic/racial, gender… and class-based inequalities in society" (p. 399). He advocates that in order to confront these oppressions there is an urgent need to create a more inclusive and responsive educational system which actually addresses the knowledge or voices of marginalized communities. Dei (1999, 2000) also suggests that recognizing and problematizing difference is essential to creating an environment in which knowledge is no longer considered "stable" or taken for granted, but instead thoroughly questioned and interrogated.

One of the key considerations of anti-colonial thought is that it places emphasis on the unrelenting negative impact of the colonialist legacy in relation to the psyche of individuals and communities, and as such, "its goal is to question, interrogate, and challenge the foundations of institutionalized power and privilege, and the accompanying rationale for dominance in social relations" (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 300). The theory encourages a thorough investigation of the operation of power throughout society, and questions the manner in which dominant groups' knowledge claims are valorized. The result of the colonialist discourse and enterprise has been a deeply embedded inferiority complex among colonized or racially marginalized people. This in response necessitates a reliance on and validation of indigenous forms of knowledge production and understanding, in order to combat an internalized inferiority complex and eventually lead toward a decolonization of

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the mind (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001; Fanon, 1967). The theory recognizes that there are a

myriad of complexities within social interactions, which racial minority communities must

confront in order to succeed:

> Anti-colonial thought realizes the interlocking nature of various systems of
> oppression and rejects the privileging of any one single site over and above the
> others. Such a realization comes from the acknowledgement that our social lives
> are profoundly affected by relations of power and domination, which are
> oppressive and colonial by nature and which are products of [a] multiplicity of
> forces, structures, actions, ideologies, and beliefs. (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2001, p.
> 311)

In keeping with anti-colonial theory, anti-racist or critical race theory, is also integral

to countering systemic discrimination as it acknowledges the embedded nature of racial and

social difference and the manner in which power relations influence every aspect of social

life (Calliste, 1996). Perhaps the most useful insight of antiracist discourse, in relation to my

research, is that it emphasizes "race" as fundamental to the organization and hierarchical

stratification of contemporary social relations, and at the same time acknowledges that

"racism is continually negated by the status quo as an organizing logic of relations of

production and labour" (Calliste, 1996, p. 363). This conceptualization is useful for

understanding the way that white power and privilege invisibly permeate throughout state

and societal institutions. Antiracism therefore questions all institutions for their historically

constituted, racially biased modes of dealing with so-called foreigners or Others (non-whites)

including the devaluation of their skills, knowledge and credentials.

The primary goal of anti-racist or critical race theory is to question the ingrained

nature of racially biased forms of discrimination, which may be hidden or masked under

veils of neutrality and claims of political innocence by the dominant culture (Dei, 1999;

Gillborn, 2006). There is a distinct recognition that racism can take on many forms, both

overt and subtle, and that the more subtle forms of racism can have just as devastating or

damaging effects for an individual as overt forms. In areas of education and employment in particular, it is evidenced that notions of meritocracy, color blindness, and neutrality, as well as general denials that race is a factor in the organization of social life, serve only to strengthen and enforce the level of exclusion that minority individuals experience (Dei, 1999; Gillborn, 2006). This continual presence and repression of racism on both the individual and structural level can be an extremely difficult aspect of social life for racialized groups to come to terms with and eventually reconcile.

Both anti-colonial and anti-racist or critical race theory have directed the focus and development of my research and interview questions as well as my analysis of institutionally located racism and barriers. These theories have helped to bolster an awareness and understanding that external societal limitations can have a very serious and oftentimes detrimental influence on the potential successes that Black women are ultimately able to achieve. As a researcher who aims to understand and contextualize the experiences of Black women, it would be extremely remiss of me to overlook the real and tangible consequences of systemic and institutionalized racial discrimination on the overall life chances for this population.

Methodological Approach

Of methodological significance to my study, is the recognition that research focusing on Black women's employment issues is greatly understudied in Canada and throughout the GVRD, and where research does touch upon these issues, however marginally, quantitative methodologies and impersonal research methods are predominant. Therefore, in conducting my study of Black women's involvement within the labour market under the guidance of my theoretical framework, I have applied feminist principles of qualitative inquiry. According to

Reinharz (1992), feminism or feminist approach does not inherently determine

methodology, rather it lends a perspective on how to utilize existing methodology.

Following this rationale then, Black feminist and endarkened feminist theory have informed

and centered my methods within critical Black feminist discourse. I feel that these

orientations offer an ideal backdrop for my research which is primarily exploratory in nature

and which seeks to give more weight to personal accounts, interpretations, and feelings.

Within my research, the use of qualitative methods – informed by critical Black

feminist and endarkened feminist epistemologies – have allowed for a more detailed and

representative account of each individual woman's experience. Qualitative methodology

prides itself on being soft, flexible, and subjective and on being less strict or "fixed" in

orientation than alternative or quantitative approaches (Silverman, 2000; Schram, 2003), and

as such, provides a sound methodological fit for Black feminist modes of inquiry. One of

the major strengths in qualitative methods or approaches such as interviews, is that they are

"instrumental in informing researchers of the various dynamics that shape… race and gender

interactions… [and are] rooted in a phenomenological paradigm, holding that reality is

socially constructed through individual or collective definition of the situation" (Few,

Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003, p. 207). In this way, Black feminist qualitative approaches

to research are capable of generating a much more nuanced and contextualized

understanding of Black women's experience.

In accordance with the principles of Black and endarkened feminist research

epistemology (as previously outlined), my research employed the semi-structured interview

technique in order to locate the specificities of African-Canadian or Black women's

experience in the GVRD. I have primarily made use of semi-structured or open-ended

questions (see Appendix A: Section 2; questions heavily influenced by assumptions of anti-

colonial and anti-racist theories), which allowed participants to exert a strong influence on the direction of the interview and the direction of the research overall. The benefit of using the semi-structured questionnaire format is that it encourages an interview that is guided by the person being interviewed, "which means focusing less on getting one's questions answered and more on understanding the interviewee" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 24). As a technique for gathering data, the semi-structured interview allows the researcher to have a great deal of freedom in terms of the manner in which the interview takes place. The semi-structured interview also has the built-in flexibility of being able to accommodate those women who have a breadth of information or knowledge to share, and those who may have more difficulty formulating or articulating a response. Using this technique, I was able to incorporate and when necessary, seek further clarification on a variety of issues that arose within each interview session – issues that were not previously outlined within the original research questionnaire.

Participants for my study were located using a combination of methods. The principal mode of locating participants that I used was a non-probability sampling method, whereby interviewees were found using a process which was not based on random selection (Singleton & Straits, 1999). Since my aim was not to obtain an entirely random or representative sample of Black women whose experience could be generalized to the larger Black female population, but rather to determine their individual lived experiences, I primarily utilized the snowball sampling method and essentially relied on "word-of-mouth." This involved asking friends, acquaintances, and others to spread word of my research interests to those that they felt might be suitable candidates for participation. Along with using "word-of-mouth" however, I also made efforts to obtain participants from the community at large by placing an advertisement (see Appendix B) in several different

locations and establishments throughout the GVRD. After engendering very little response from my advertisement, I realized that it may have been too restrictive in terms of seeking Black women who were educated within the Canadian educational system. I then revised my original advertisement into smaller handout versions (see Appendix C), which simply specified that the Black women who participate in my study should have previous or current work experience within the GVRD. These were then handed out in various locations and environments which I occupied on a daily or weekly basis, including the transit system, local malls, grocery stores, and other establishments.

In accordance with protecting the rights of the individual participants and satisfying the ethical research requirements of the University, I obtained signed, informed consent from each participant (see Appendix D). I attempted to establish a comfortable interview environment with each woman and made certain they were aware that they were under no obligation to answer any question or discuss any topic with which they did not feel comfortable. I also informed each participant that they could stop the interview at any time and gave them the option of having me use a pseudonym when referring to them by name in my thesis and related writings. Because of this, it should be noted that the women's names that appear in this thesis are not the actual names of the women who participated in this research.

Individual interviews lasted between one and two hours. With consent, I digitally recorded each interview. Each of my five interviews were spread across several months, so I worked on transcribing individual interviews as I progressed. After completing the interviewing aspect of my thesis work, I then worked toward making my interview transcriptions suitable for analysis by coding interviews for common themes and discussions as well as individual stories and experiences. While my research interviews have produced a

wide range of responses and stories from the women's varied experiences, my analysis of the interview data seeks to draw out common themes and shared experiences that will help inform the conclusions that are reached within this research overall. Some of the themes that I have attempted to locate within the interview data are, "barriers in the workplace," "shortcomings of the educational system," "systemic racism," "recommendations for change," and "resistance to racism." Although I have identified some key themes to use in analyzing the interviews, since the women's divergent experience and use of language has at times, differed from my expectations, I have also probed the interviews for additional shared and unique themes. Throughout my analysis, I have also identified keywords that can be used to determine the commonalities among the women as well as direct me toward the more significant aspects of their responses.

CHAPTER THREE:
Black Canadian History and Geography

Recognizing Black Canadian History

Black people in Canada originate from an incredibly diverse array of locations, including parts of the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa (Elgersman, 1999; Winks, 1997). My intent here however, is not to provide an extensive history of Blacks in Canada, rather it is to highlight some of what I believe to be pivotal moments within that history; moments which not only provide glaring evidence of a long and enduring presence in Canada, but that also reveal the unrestrained racist and discriminatory nature of much of the early treatment of Blacks within the country. With respect to my research, this history is particularly important in order to properly contextualize the society in which Black women in Canada live. Devoid of recalling and remembering Black Canadian history, past treatment toward Blacks becomes invisible and negated, providing opportunities for the creation of alternative, distorted, invalid or falsely altruistic representations of that history.

Consequently, this chapter seeks to explore, uncover, validate, and make relevant some of the important and often hidden aspects of Canadian Black history. Within the long and complex history of Blacks in Canada, my focus is on three primary areas which have played a key role in shaping perceptions of Black people. Where possible, I highlight and explore the specific treatment of Black women, but for the most part my discussion revolves around the treatment of Blacks as a whole.

Beginning with a discussion of the early experiences of Black women in Canada and in relation to the institute of slavery, the experiences of an historical figure, Marie-Joseph Angélique, are explored (De Barros, 2006). Following this, I scrutinize an issue that has affected Black women in Canada's more recent history; the selective and biased introduction of the "points system" in immigration policy (Arat-Koc, 1999). My discussion then concludes with an examination of the impact that governmental actions have had on the destruction and dislocation of Black communities, primarily Africville and Hogan's Alley (Clairmont & Magill, 1999; Compton, 2002). It should become evident that within each of these histories, the origins of current attitudes and treatment of Blacks throughout Canada and in the GVRD is echoed.

Early Enslavement of Black Women

While most historical accounts of the Canadian relationship to slavery have tended to focus discussions toward the well-known Underground Railroad[4], proudly detailing the benevolent safe haven that Canadian space held out for many fugitive Black slaves, there is also a less familiar story. That is, Canada as a country with a very long and established history of Black enslavement. The difficulty in putting forth such arguments – regarding Canada's participation in the unsavoury treatment of racialized minorities – is that these arguments are often met with a great deal of scepticism and reprieve by the dominant culture. Within such an atmosphere, racial minority groups, and in particular Blacks, become "altogether deniable *and* evidence of prior codes of representation that have identified blackness [or] difference [seen] as irrelevant" (McKittrick, 2006, p. 93). The "deniability" of

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[4] "Loose network of abolitionists... who communicated with one another in order to make known various places of refuge where fugitive slaves might go during their journey from the slave states to the free border cities of the north and to the British provinces" (Winks, 1997, p. 233).

Black presence and experience is made particularly evident in the cultural and historical

amnesia that is shown in relation to Canada's intimate connection to slavery. In order to

provide a context through which to understand and conceptualize Black women's current

positioning at the bottom of socio-economic and racial hierarchies, it is nonetheless

necessary to look at and endeavour to understand, the manner in which Black women's

historical relationship with slavery blends into and informs their present-day experience.

Although Canada's slave system was no doubt equally harsh for both men and women, in

this particular area the focus of my inquiry is directed primarily toward its effects on Black

women.

The Canadian slave system departed somewhat from other slave systems such as

those in the United States or the Caribbean as a result of Black women's duties being much

more tied to the domestic sphere; a situation that was almost solely accounted for based on

the geography of Canada, including the fact that the land did not necessarily allow for the

creation of any sort of widespread lucrative plantation-type economy (Elgersman, 1999;

McKittrick, 2006; Bethune, 2006). As a result, Black women in Canada were often

purchased individually and made to work in isolation from other Black slaves (Elgersman,

1999). That isolation was generally more indicative of the Canadian slave experience also

signals to the ways in which sexual violence could be carried out behind closed doors where,

"[i]n addition to household duties, black women were… purchased for sexual violence,

sexual gratification, and sexual reproduction" (McKittrick, 2006, p. 113). Though Canadian

slavery may have differed in some ways from other slave systems, it did share one common

and integral feature and that was to view Black women as the chattel or property of the slave

owner, necessarily stripping away their subjective capacity as well as their humanity.

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Uncovering the Truth in Black Women's History – Marie-Joseph Angélique

An example of the profound impact that the Canadian slave system had on Black women, Marie-Joseph Angélique and her life story occupy a prominent role in Canadian Black women's history. Originally from Portugal, Angélique found herself unwillingly transported to New France (now Montreal) in the early eighteenth century where much to her disappointment, she became the physical property of a yet another slave owner (De Barros, 2006). Perhaps guilty of many small acts of resistance throughout her indenture in New France, such as running away and being verbally abusive toward her owners, it was not until after the death of her slave master, Français Poulin de Francheville, that Angélique made her final act of rebellion (McKittrick, 2006). Having caught word of her mistress' intent to put her up for sale, she had conspired with a white indentured servant, Claude Thibault, to run away for good. Despite her efforts to get away however, on April 10, 1734, Marie-Joseph Angélique's trail of infractions had finally caught up with her as she was apprehended by authorities, then later accused, tried, and ultimately convicted of setting her mistress' house on fire; a fire which led to a blaze that consumed much of Montreal, totalling the destruction of forty-six buildings (De Barros, 2006). This was to mark Angélique's last *suspected* act of rebellion as she was sentenced to death on June 21, 1734 (McKittrick, 2006).

Angélique's story is significant to the history of slavery in Canada because her alleged involvement in arson, coerced confession, and ultimate demise through public hanging and then burning, has been documented in court transcripts which have served to officially write her (and hence Black enslavement in early Canada), into existence. McKittrick (2006) explores how the construction of Angélique as criminal also functioned to provide an

archetype for how Blacks have been historically, and perhaps even currently, understood and

perceived within the Canadian landscape:

> ... [H]er confession under torture reinscribed race and gender hierarchies and
> affirmed existing assumptions: the unruly black slave was, as the local population
> knew, subhuman, primitive, and negligent... her story implicates the nation in
> slavery, sexism, and racism: Angélique was enslaved; she resisted slavery by
> (allegedly) setting fire to her mistress' home; she escaped; she is feminist,
> resistant, heroic – a black martyr who refused Canada and refused racial-sexual
> objectification... [For] scholars, her presence troubles Canada's historical and
> contemporary terrain because it does not neatly parallel how we are supposed to
> know, or encounter, the nation. Angélique was, and is, a radical historical
> subject because she secures blackness and black subjectivities in a nation that has
> an ostensibly blackless past. (p. 117-119)

Marie-Joseph Angélique was able to find a way to resist the objectification and overall

dehumanization of the slave system through defiance and revolt. Whether through "every-

day acts of resistance," (work stoppage, *marronnage*,[5] and talking back) causing intermittent

hindrances to the operation of the slave system, or through "collective resistance," (such as

destruction of property, revolts, and arson) resulting in a more long term and significant

impact on the slave system, Cooper suggests (2005) that Angélique's resistance throughout

her enslavement exemplified her overall refusal to accept the constrictive boundaries that

were placed on her.

The acknowledgement that slavery existed within Canada and that it was in fact one

of the foundational modes of establishing the nation that Canada was to become is

instrumental to understanding the present treatment of Blacks (both men and women).

Though Marie-Joseph Angélique provides an incontestable example of slavery in early

Canada, there are indications that slavery existed from as early as 1628 and began primarily

in Canada's eastern provinces (Milan & Tran, 2004). Walker (1985) claims that slavery, from

Canada's inception on through to the present time, has materially and ideologically played an

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[5] "Absenting oneself temporarily" (Cooper, 2005, p. 6).

integral role in regulating and defining a racial hierarchy among Blacks and whites, and ultimately in reinforcing the belief that Blacks are somehow inherently meant to occupy a subordinate status within society. Stereotypical characterizations of Blacks – born out of the slave system – such as "notions of dependence, lack of initiative, and suitability only for service and unskilled employment" (Walker, 1985, p. 8), over time have become embedded within the social structure of society and continue to dictate the parameters within which Blacks are able to progress.

Selective Immigration Policy & Black Women

In 1967, Canadian immigration policy made a significant shift from what many considered to be a racially biased and restrictive approach to immigration, to one that was deemed to be "non-discriminatory" in nature, the "points system." However, despite the intention of the new legislation, it soon became apparent that its legislative outcome, was in many respects, even more discriminating (Arat-Koc, 1999; Zaman, 2006; Akbari, 1999; Crawford, 2003). Whereas prior to 1967, groups such as Blacks could be denied entry solely on account of belonging to an undesirable racial group, after the introduction of the points system, they were allowed into Canada in greater numbers, but only to fill positions within fields that were generally avoided and thought to be of low status by most whites (Crawford, 2003).

The treatment of Black women immigrants under the points system supports the notion that racialized immigrant women were seen as a threat to the white Euro-centric nation-building that was taking place in Canada. As one of the main groups of immigrants affected by the new policy, "foreign domestic workers," were categorized as temporary instead of permanent residents; this resulting primarily from governmental manipulation of

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the points accorded to certain occupations (Arat-Koc, 1999). In essence, it created a

situation which disproportionately affected Black women domestic workers coming to

Canada from the Caribbean:

> … [K]eeping the points assigned to occupational demand for domestic work
> relatively low, Caribbean women [were] unable to acquire the points needed for
> permanent residency unlike their European counterparts who [were] ranked
> higher as nannies and nursemaids. Racial sexism informed the decreased
> citizenship rights assigned to African Caribbean domestics… making them
> "good enough to work but not good enough to stay" in the country. (Crawford,
> 2003, p. 2)

Further compounding the situation for Black women, the temporary work visas that they

were given outlined a wide variety of stipulations that basically transformed their work into a

type of indentured servitude (Arat-Koc, 1999; Crawford, 2004; Bakan & Stasiulis, 1995).

Being unable to acquire permanent residency status resulted in a lack of general mobility

rights as well as other restrictions on their physicality (such as having to live in the residence

of their employers), therefore Black women found themselves in a precarious situation as

they were left vulnerable and open to abuses from employers who relied on the women's

desire to stay in Canada and therefore believed that they would tolerate their victimization

(Arat-Koc, 1999).

The experience of Caribbean Black women within the Canadian labour market in the

mid-late twentieth century can be summed up according to Glenn (1992), as the result of the

dualism that exists within the labour market, which designates distinct vocational aptitudes

for Blacks and whites and ensures that Blacks are relegated to the lower end of occupational

hierarchies. Glenn (1992) further argues that when Black women are seen to occupy

positions that are of a lower level or degraded status, it not only affirms their supposed

inferiority but it also becomes easier for the dominant (white) culture not to see them as

capable of achieving anything more.

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Destruction of Communities & Physical Displacement

While individual enslavement and biased immigration policies have played a

significant role in shaping Black experiences and sense of place in Canada, so too have

initiatives which have sanctioned the construction and subsequent destruction of Black

communities. Where Black communities have been allowed, governmental and institutional

racism toward them has often resulted in action throughout Canada, to create poor and

marginalized social or geographical space for Blacks to live. When these communities or

spaces have been destroyed and physical displacement from the land has occurred, as has

been the case in regards to several well established Black communities, this has served to

further marginalize and alienate Black people.

Africville

For Black people in Canada, Africville represents a glaring example of the manner in

which Black Canadian space, along with its requisite cultural and historical identity, can be

violently and systematically erased from the landscape, and often with little opportunity for

any recourse on the part of its former inhabitants. In order to fully understand and grasp the

situation that developed in Nova Scotia's Africville, it is necessary to explore some of the

foundational aspects of the community.

Following the War of 1812, and with British assurances of free land as well as equal

rights in exchange for their participation in the war, many Black refugees and former slaves

were enticed to Nova Scotia in search of better opportunities (Walker, 1997; Nelson, 2002).

Unfortunately for them however, the reception they received once in Nova Scotia was

altogether different than anticipated and the land that was originally allocated to them was

for all intents and purposes, deemed to be uninhabitable (Walker, 1997; Clairmont & Magill,

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1999). As a result, many of these early refugees sought land elsewhere, and during the 1840s, began to move to the settlement that was quickly being established along the Bedford Basin; the settlement that was to become known as Africville (Clairmont & Magill, 1999).

The site of Africville was desirable for many reasons, primary of which was its geographical proximity to the town core, and it was hoped that this close proximity would increase employment and economic opportunities and assist in the creation of overall better living conditions (Nelson, 2002). Although the Blacks in Africville were initially hopeful that equitable employment and other opportunities would be forthcoming as a result of their move, it soon became apparent that only certain types of employment would be extended to them. According to Walker (1997), there existed a general perception that Blacks were only suited toward more low-level occupational positions with most men falling into the unskilled labour pool despite some of their previous training and ability, and the majority of women falling somewhat equivalently into service sector jobs as cooks and cleaners within Halifax homes and institutions.

The general hardships and difficult living conditions that the people of Africville were forced to endure resulted largely from the manner in which the city developed and progressed while failing to recognize the desire among Africville residents to progress alongside. For many years, the people of Africville sought to be included in the basic aspects of industrial modernization and overall development that took place in other parts of Halifax, with members of the community often writing petitions to the city requesting that the roads within their district be paved, that street lights be installed, that they be given access to fresh water, and that proper sewer management systems be put in place (Walker, 1997; Nelson, 2002; Nieves, 2007). They also asked for more basic protections in the area of police surveillance and fire response units, however their numerous requests were to no

avail, and the conditions within Africville were encouraged, by the city, to grow increasingly desperate (Walker, 1997).

The continued neglect of the citizens of Africville and the suppression of their ability to better their situation undoubtedly helped to impart feelings of powerlessness and marginality and reinforce a notion of Black inferiority. Throughout Africville's existence on the periphery of Halifax society – and despite the continued objections from those who lived there – its boundaries were encumbered and encroached with many undesirable industries that were denied space elsewhere within the City of Halifax. The many institutions and facilities that were established virtually on the doorsteps of Africville's residents included, "Rockhead Prison (1853), the city's night soil disposal pits (1858), an Infectious Disease Hospital (during the 1870s), [and] a Trachoma Hospital (1903)" (Nieves, 2007, p. 89). With the final addition of an open city dump in the 1950s, it would seem clear that the City of Halifax had a somewhat deliberate agenda for the community of Africville, and this Nelson (2002) refers to as a "self-fulfilling prophecy," wherein:

> Africville… [became] exactly what it was set up to become in the eyes of the outer white community… [a] slum [which] legitimates dominance by offering a concrete example of filthy, intolerable conditions, a notion of helplessness and a lack of self-determination that are seen as inherent to its inhabitants. (p. 217)

The dominant white culture used this situation as an opportunity to reaffirm negative assumptions about Blacks. The unfortunate circumstances which eventually led to some Blacks salvaging scrap metal, clothing, and other useful materials from the dump that was located in their community, should have been viewed as a form of survival, rather than seen as evidence or confirmation of Black peoples' absolute depravity (Nelson, 2002; Walker, 1997). Nonetheless, it is in the act of viewing the Blacks of Africville as somehow comfortable or "at home" frolicking in the waste and disposal left at the city dump, that Nelson (2002) maintains, the dominant group can be assuaged of any complicity or guilt in

the creation of such a deplorable, "slum-like" situation. Inundated with an overwhelming combination of objectionable industries and facilities it does not seem difficult to imagine that a community such as Africville might come to feel negatively about themselves and about how they are perceived by the broader society. This is not to suggest that the Blacks within Africville had internalized the oppressive conditions under which they were forced to live, but simply to point out that their ability to persist in the face of such obvious and blatant discrimination speaks to the resilient nature and spirit of their community.

After several years of contemplating a relocation of Africville, city hall officials and politicians finally put their plan into effect in the mid-1960s (Clairmont & Magill, 1999). The underlying rationale for the relocation was framed as humanitarian and, "related to two matters: the improvement of living conditions and the racial integration of Africville residents" (Clairmont & Magill, 1999). Framing the relocation within arguments that the Africville people needed to be racially integrated into other parts of the city for their own benefit, "enabled an appearance, to many whites, of good intent that relied on a mode of imposed euthanasia – that is, the necessity of putting the community out of its misery" (Nelson, 2002, p. 222). However, some members within the community saw the relocation effort to be more tied to the further development of the City of Halifax, rather than a response to any real concern for the well-being of Africville's citizens (Clairmont & Magill, 1999). While initially many of the Blacks in Africville saw relocation as inevitable, there was still strong resistance toward losing the historical roots and sense of belonging that Africville provided (Farnsworth, 1995; Walker, 2006; Moynagh, 1998). After the city had successfully convinced, bullied, and coerced the members of Africville to give up their homes, many felt disillusioned and isolated by the process while being faced with the empty promises of improved employment programs and other transition assistance (Walker, 1997).

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Following the complete annihilation and destruction of the community by bulldozer, the city chose to erect Seaview Memorial Park in its place, providing yet further evidence that the necessity to destroy Africville came not out of compassion, but instead from a sheer desire to erase the land's memory of the ongoing atrocities committed against the Blacks of Nova Scotia. Africville represented for Blacks, a space to inhabit, a space to call home and it is therefore through the desecration of Africville as Black space, "the appropriation of space as white, the suppression of the story of this violence and the denial of accountability, [that] the life of Africville is grounded upon a geography of racism and its discursive organization" (Nelson, 2002, p. 231). What happened in Africville represents a very shameful chapter in Canadian history, and therefore the importance in telling and sharing this aspect of history is demonstrated in the way that it resurrects Canadian space as Black and gives authority to claims of a Black presence, which is neither recent nor transitory.

Hogan's Alley

Reminiscent of the space of Africville in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the community of Hogan's Alley, previously located in Vancouver, British Columbia's east end Strathcona district, represents a further example of the ease with which Black Canadian cultural space can be disrupted, displaced and then erased altogether from the landscape. Unlike Africville however, the destruction of Hogan's Alley has received very little attention or publicity, which has undoubtedly helped prompt recent interest in recovering the lost histories of one of Vancouver's first, and it would appear last, significantly Black communities. Since there are no formal historical documents or texts available to draw from in determining the experiences of those who lived in Hogan's Alley, my exploration of this community relies predominantly on oral accounts and newspaper articles as well as the research and literature

of Wayde Compton (2002), one of the primary campaigners for the revival of Hogan's Alley within our cultural memory.

The neighbourhood known as Hogan's Alley existed for about half a century, from the 1910s to the 1960s, and to be true to its original configuration, was comprised of a mixture of working class Blacks, Italians, and Asians (Compton, 2002; 2005). The main distinguishing feature of Hogan's Alley was that its original composition of Blacks was more concentrated than in any other part of Vancouver either preceding, during or subsequent to that period, and according to Compton (2005), "the black community of Hogan's Alley was not essentially different from other urban black communities... [in that i]t was forced into coherence out of a combination of poverty and segregation" (p. 109). Though the form and nature of Vancouver's ill treatment of Blacks may have differed characteristically from that of the outwardly racist American persuasion, the treatment that was recounted in several oral recollections reveals in many respects, a much more sinister approach to Black exclusion. As Dorothy Nealy (2002), former resident of Hogan's Alley recounts:

> ... [I]n the United States, the Americans are so blatant about the racial prejudice. You can fight it, because they call you "nigger" and they segregate you out loud and clear. But the racism in Canada is so subtle, and so elusive you can't really pin it down. Like finding jobs. They tell you, "Oh, that job was just filled 15 minutes ago, and if you had of come a little earlier you could have had the job." They would no more have hired you than shot themselves. (c 1979 – p. 116)

For Rosemary Brown (2002), the racism and exclusion experienced in Vancouver was, to some extent, difficult to articulate and come to terms with:

> ... [Due to] the subtle and polite nature of Canada's particular brand of racism...We often found it difficult to describe to each other racist experiences because, except in the case of housing and employment, their form was so nebulous – a hostile glance – silence – being left to occupy two seats on the bus while people stood because no one wanted to sit beside you – being stopped and questioned about your movements by the police in daytime in your own neighbourhood – the assumption of every salesperson who rang your doorbell that you were the maid. How do you protect yourself against such practices?... How do you explain that sometimes you feel ashamed to be the recipient of

such treatment and that the reluctance to acknowledge its existence is somehow linked to lowered self-esteem and self-worth? (c 1955 – p. 122)

Though Rosemary did not reside within Hogan's Alley, but instead took up residence close to the University of British Columbia (in order to support her husband's academic pursuits), I felt that her comments warranted inclusion here in order to give an overall sense of the climate that existed within Vancouver at the time. It is also significant to note that Rosemary discussed in some detail the racial barriers that made it difficult for her and her husband to secure a suitable, clean place to rent in Vancouver in the mid 1950s, despite a "glut of apartments on the market" (Brown, 2002, p. 121).

With regard to employment within Hogan's Alley, Blacks took up positions in a variety of service-oriented positions including working for the railway as porters, in poultry packing houses, in beer parlours, and also at one of the main restaurants in Hogan's Alley, Mrs. Pryor's Chicken Inn, where Nealy (2002) claims "practically every Black woman in Vancouver has worked... sometime or other" (p. 117). Interviewed by *The Vancouver Sun* in 1992, Norm Alexander remembers a point in Vancouver's history (during the 60s and 70s), when a climate of heightened racism required him to work tirelessly in his capacity as activist for the B.C. Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (BCAACP) (Stainsby, 1992). He claims to have "watched as blacks gained inroads into menial trades, entertainment, sports, social services and jobs that served but didn't direct the community," and basically summarized the situation for Blacks in Vancouver at the time in saying that, "They [were] expected to excel, yet there... [was] a hand on the head, pushing them down" (Stainsby, 1992, p. E8).

Although from some accounts, originating both outside and within Hogan's Alley, the red-light district was considered to be a particularly negative aspect of community life, it

was reminisced by one former resident, Nora Hendrix (2002), as beneficial to the community

for a variety of reasons:

> Men wasn't grabbing women and all that stuff. 'Cause a man coming out of the woods or something, well he'd know where to go… It was a good thing to have that red-light district. I know a lady and her daughter used to do the washing for the girls that worked in them houses, and they made all kinds of money washing them women's clothes… They had people, maids, to come clean up the house and all that. There were a lot of coloured girls that used to love to go there to work, 'cause it was good money… A woman that's looking for a job, to cook or to clean up, that's where you could make your money. (c 1979 – p. 98)

Nora also alluded to the fact that employment for men was quite limited and that

aside from the men who were lucky enough to be employed working for the railway

company, and those who were able to obtain positions as janitors, even the "ordinary jobs"

were hard to come by for most.

During the 1960s, and following similar plans for urban renewal as were advanced to

the citizens of Africville in Nova Scotia, the City of Vancouver resolved to demolish

Hogan's Alley and begin construction on a viaduct, which was to eventually lead to the

creation of an interurban freeway. While the construction of the Georgia Viaduct did come

to fruition, the city has yet (in 2008) to see the construction of an interurban freeway. By the

time Hogan's Alley was marked for destruction, the city had already put in place "a series of

anti-residential bylaws designed to shift the population into a set of housing projects in

central Strathcona" (Compton, 2005, p. 111), therefore the Black community had largely

acquiesced to defeat and begun to vanish throughout other parts of the city prior to the

construction of the viaduct.

Though Hogan's Alley appears on the surface, to be a seemingly less violent and

disruptive displacement as compared to Africville, the troubling aspect of the story of

Hogan's Alley is that it speaks to the highly invisible nature of B.C.'s Black populations, and

to the pressure that is placed on Black people to remain *transient* and disconnected from the

land for fear that forced and or coerced removal may occur at any point in time, without significant justification or rationale. Furthermore, it reveals how inconsequential Hogan's Alley was or is to the majority of people in B.C. – that Black histories and Black space can slip away with such ease is perhaps one of the most disheartening discoveries of attempting to locate and expose Canada's history of racialized treatment. According to McKittrick (2006), preservation of the land in a manner that supports the dominant cultural narrative ultimately necessitates the erasure of Black or subaltern space:

> Unseen black communities and spaces… privilege a transparent Canada/nation by rendering the landscape a "truthful" *visual* purveyor of past and present social patterns. Consequently, "truthful" visual knowledge regulates and normalizes how Canada is seen – as white, not blackless, not black, not nonwhite, not native Canadian, but white. "Other" geographic evidence is buried, ploughed over, forgotten, renamed, and relocated; this illustrates how practices of race and racism coalesce with racial and racist geographic demands. (p. 96-97)

The implication for Black people living in a space that continually works toward invalidating and negating different or non-white forms of knowledge, experience, and historical understanding, as well as preventing their identification as part of the nation (land), is that it renders them altogether invisible and erases the many struggles and contributions that they have made.

Has Canada Really Changed?

My focus throughout this chapter has been on some of the main aspects of historical Black experience in Canada which support claims that Blacks have existed within Canada for a significant amount of time and that the experiences they have endured have largely been sub-standard. The topics that I have discussed represent both the racially biased and discriminatory treatment that Blacks have encountered in Canada, as well as the manner in

which attempts have been made to essentially erase and displace them from history altogether.

If there is one thing that history has shown, it is that cultural and institutional biases are persistent. While the outright slavery of Blacks, a real part of Canadian history, may not exist at the present time, the negative cultural perception of Blacks from this history lingers on. Whether it is through the internalized oppression that Blacks take on or through white Canadian perception of Blacks as inferior, the consequences of slavery persist. When Black historical experience goes unrecognized and is essentially marginalized within general historical discourse, there is a risk in creating the perception that there are no race issues in Canada or that if there are, these are new and fleeting. Institutionally biased immigration practices are still utilized and continue to have real consequences for Black women today, and the actions enacted upon Black communities, such as those in Africville and Hogan's Alley, happened in our recent history, suggesting that there is still a lot of work that needs to be done in order for Blacks in Canada to achieve a level of true and substantive equality. Though there may be more of a general willingness to admit or recognize a racist Canadian history, the refusal to appreciate and acknowledge how this history impacts the current reality of Blacks living in Canada, is endemic. An understanding of this history is crucial to the discussion of current educational, employment, and other opportunities for Blacks in Canada, and in particular, for Black women living within the GVRD.

CHAPTER FOUR:
Black Women in the GVRD – Voices on Employment, Education & Lived Experiences

Labour market research frequently reveals that minority groups as well as women experience a higher degree of obstacles while seeking employment opportunities (Juteau, 2000; McCall, 2001; Hughes & Dodge, 1997; Browne & Askew, 2005). While I can personally speak to this, my research seeks to ascertain what other Black women in the GVRD have experienced, and in particular, the relative successes and or failures that they have encountered. Based on my primary research questions (previously outlined in Chapter One), I utilized a series of demographic and open-ended interview questions (Appendix A: Sections 1 and 2) to draw out a more full and comprehensive understanding of each woman's unique and varied experience. Although my research questionnaire did lend a great deal of insight into answering my four primary research objectives, as with many open-ended research questionnaires, it also led to the discovery of new information and inspired new and additional questions.

It should be noted that the revision of my research advertisement in order to broaden the pool of potential interviewees, significantly impacted the research outcome and it became apparent after progressing through a total of five interview sessions that not all aspects of the women's lives and experience would fit neatly within my initial categories of inquiry. Three out of the five women interviewed revealed that they were immigrants rather than Canadian-born as was my original stipulation for research participation. Owing in part to this discovery, it also then became evident that of the women interviewed, most had

obtained their higher education outside of British Columbia, either in other parts of Canada or abroad; a situation which has made it difficult to determine specifically, the potential impact of the local Canadian educational system on Black women's overall success. This nonetheless, has provided for an interesting opportunity through which to explore a wider range of issues than was perhaps initially anticipated.

In the following section, the women that participated in my research project are given a voice through the sharing of direct quotes and insights which were gathered during the interview process. I have chosen several inserts from the interviews, which I feel best capture the fundamental nature of each woman's understanding and reflection on their experience in relation to the set of questions that were asked. Subsequent to this, I analyze the women's interviews within my critical theoretical framework in an attempt to answer my primary research questions as well as direct attention to other issues of significance.

The Women's Backgrounds & Role Models

The five women that participated in my study occupy a variety of economic and social positions. As outlined in Table 1, their yearly incomes range from "Less than $20,000" to "$60,000 and Over," and of the women, Alicia, Charlene, and Joy are single and do not have children, while Mary and Shae are married with one and two children respectively. All of the women except Joy have obtained a university degree.

Table 1 – Interviewee Demographics

Name (Pseudonym)	Age (Years)	Education	Employment Status	Income (Per Annum)	Relationship Status	Immigrant
ALICIA	26-30	University Degree	Employed Full Time	$40,000 to under $50,000	Single	Yes
CHARLENE	26-30	University Degree	Unemployed	$30,000 to under $40,000	Single	No
JOY	19-25	High School Diploma/GED	Employed Part Time/ Student	Less than $20,000	Single	Yes
MARY	41-45	University Degree	Employed Part Time	$30,000 to under $40,000	Married	Yes
SHAE	31-35	University Degree	Employed Full Time	$60,000 and Over	Married	No

Originally from South Africa, Mary immigrated to Canada at the age of 11 and on a very basic level believes that her attitudes surrounding employment have been influenced by the fact that her parents did not expose her to all of the opportunities that were available to her in Canada:

> My family was supportive, to their capabilities. You have to understand that first of all, coming from South Africa, leaving South Africa, going to other African countries that were in themselves still struggling to find out who exactly they were, eventually realizing that that was not the ticket so therefore leaving Africa, coming to Canada, settling in a totally, totally different culture than what they left behind, my poor parents had their hands full. They're both highly educated and really incredible people in being able to settle in and assimilate and they are ambitious people. They have been tremendously successful everywhere they've gone so they knew what they needed to do to, to gain success. But they had their hands full, every step of the way they had their hands full and they were great parents, they were supportive and they were encouraging and all that, but I think that if perhaps they themselves had grown up in North America, seen everything that North America has to offer, they would have been in a better place and position to then give what my brother and I needed to grasp everything in North America even more. For instance, to be precise, never ever did they offer suggestions on the variety of occupations or careers that are available because they themselves didn't know. They had their careers, they came to North America and settled in those careers and that was that. And all they basically said was, "stay in school, we'll support you in school" and go and

find what you want to do... I grew up not really being aware of the infinitesimal kinds of career paths I could have followed.

Shae, who is native to B.C., describes her upbringing and the support that was garnered from her parents as playing an integral part in her ability to succeed. Shae holds her parents in extremely high regard on account of their ability to come to North America and be able to achieve the level of success that they have:

> The most important thing to me and in terms of I mean, direct role models, it'd probably be my parents. To know that they came from the West Indies, I think they had like $300 Canadian dollars in their pocket and you know, bought a house, bought a car, me, my brother and sister grew up, you know, not wanting for anything. So I figured if they can do it, why couldn't I?

For Charlene, also a native to B.C., her parents both represent prominent role models in her life. When asked whether she thought this had an impact on her perceived ability to succeed, her comments were that seeing her parents as role models has, "been very important to [her] personally," and that because her parents are "well educated and they're working in their fields that they studied and they're happy and successful and... together and they work on their relationship," that they pretty much exemplify everything that she aspires to in her own life.

As a recent immigrant, Joy discussed how the transition from Africa to Canada was a challenge. Although Joy's father had promised to assist her financially once she arrived in Canada, as the sole provider for her mother and siblings, he was unable to follow through on his promise. It was at that time that Joy realized she would have to "step up" and make sure that she worked hard at school in order to eventually get a good job. She said that when she completes her degree she will, "be the first person to finish, to go to university in [her] family."

Alicia, who immigrated within the past couple of years, credits her African parents as being her main support system. Beyond her parents, Alicia also sees many others in her life

as being role models or people that she can look to for guidance, strength, and support. She said that friends who were single mothers and attending school, or friends who worked several jobs in order to pay for their schooling, all represent role models to her because they were able to overcome some significant obstacles in order to be successful and get better jobs, and her belief was that, "if they can do it, why can't I?"

Negotiating the Labour Market in the GVRD

Each woman who participated in an interview session had a different approach to determining whether or not she had been successful within her employment experiences. One of the women, Shae, who grew up in Surrey, B.C., and currently works as a Human Resources Consultant with the federal government, feels fairly satisfied in her current work position, though she clearly recognizes that there are some significant barriers to Black women progressing within various employment sectors. Relaying some of her past experiences while seeking employment, she mentioned that it is not always easy to determine whether certain hiring practices are biased in a race-related way or not:

> I certainly had experiences... But then I don't know if necessarily you'd know that. You know what I mean, like I find things here are not overt, right, so you know. If you're going for a job you'd like to think it wasn't something... that could've been perceived as a barrier. Like you know what I mean like you don't want to interpret it that way. So not overtly but there's certainly been times where I thought that I was a good candidate for a position and didn't get it for whatever reasons and you just, I don't know, I always default to "like hires like." I firmly believe that you know and I'm not afraid to tell people that even at work now like when you go for positions. If I was a director and there was a young Black woman or a young Black guy that comes into the office, I'm trying to help him out, plain and simple. Would I necessarily declare that you know at the time, no, but you, like that's just how it is.

Joy, a student, who was born in Africa and immigrated to Canada in August of 2004 to pursue her athletic goal of training to participate in international sports, conveyed that her initial experiences while searching for employment were quite difficult. As an international

student, Joy was unaware that she was restricted to finding work at on-campus jobs only and as a result she applied for several jobs that were outside of the university. When she did not hear back from any of the potential employers – who had initially expressed an interest in hiring her – she did some investigation and discovered that they were actually unable to hire international students. Despite this initial setback, Joy was eventually able to obtain a position on campus, working in the university's residence dining hall. Unfortunately though, soon after being hired, she began to encounter some difficulty with other staff members who started to push extra work onto her and provide her with false direction in her duties:

> They want me to do everything, 'cause it's very hard work… You know like this person would tell you… do it this way and this person… I was so upset that I would have to go to the manager and say, can you come in here and tell me what to do because I don't know why everyone is telling me a different way of working here you know. So the manager showed me how to do it right and so I was working and this lady came and tell me no, you should do it this way and I said, okay the manager told me to do it this way so I'm not gonna listen to you. And because of that I was having some argument with people and I just didn't wanna stay.

Joy was unable to suggest any sort of potential underlying reason for being treated so poorly by her co-workers. Nonetheless, as a result of the treatment she received in the dining hall, she eventually quit and is now working in the equipment room in the university's gym – a position that provides her with flexibility in her schedule and which she describes as a "perfect job for me to pursue my education and my [sports] as well."

When asked to portray her current working environment, Mary expressed a great deal of personal dissatisfaction:

> Oh my goodness, my current working environment. Really, in an nutshell it's about frustration on many, many, many levels. Individually, it's frustrating because although my job description is strictly quite straight forward, quite mundane, I have never ever, ever done just what my job description is. I do so far beyond what is in my job description, all without any kind of recognition or respect or reward and I'm not even necessarily talking financial reward, just recognition and a thank you. And there are times when I have done and made decisions on things that are at the director level and, as I say, keep in mind, my

job description is not much more than basically reception. So, the frustration about not being recognized for that is… it's incredible.

She also discussed her frustration with the way in which others in the organization have been able to easily advance from "receptionist-type positions into doing other positions… [with] the bigger titles, the bigger pay checks, all that kind of thing" on account solely of their relationships with their managers (i.e. – not based on merit).

As a new immigrant to Canada, Alicia admits that finding a job was not an entirely easy process. When she first came to Canada, she arrived in Montreal and began her job search by going to different companies and trying to market herself:

> Oh I used to walk to companies, walk and ask if they were hiring. People were quite mean, it's like, they'd be like, "you didn't book an appointment, why are you here?" kinda thing. So that was a barrier, that was quite low you know, in the sense that I just wanted to drop my CV, it's no big deal.

Alicia pointed out however, that her willingness to relocate to wherever a job was available, may have been a major factor in helping her to secure her current position as a Project Technician with the provincial government:

> I am the *very* lucky few. Being a new immigrant, to get the job that I have, I'm very fortunate. Because I know, I've heard stories of other people who've been in the system for years and they're still not able to get into what they want, but I was also very open to the idea of, anywhere the job is, I'll go. And most, I think it was, I'm single, I don't have kids, so it's easier for me to move. A lot of immigrants come with their family and they don't want to uproot their kids into different systems… I don't know I was lucky, I was very lucky but that's because I also didn't want to give up, I was very, very arrogant as my cousin kept saying behind my back because… for other people who kept saying just do anything, I said no, if I settle right now, I'll never, ever get into anything I want.

Alicia characterizes her current working environment as being a great opportunity to grow and learn and is surprised at the level of support and commitment that is directed toward employee development. Along with numerous opportunities to attend different types of training sessions, her supervisors also seem to have a predetermined plan in terms of how

they would like to see their employees advance. Alicia realized that it was important to participate in work-related activities that may not always seem immediately relevant:

>My supervisors are very, they really wanna help, they want to help me with my career goals. I, I was given some tasks that I really had no interest in. For instance, like accounts, I hate accounting. So they were trying to get me to do accounting and I would be like no I don't wanna do it, I don't wanna do it and then they kept saying trust me this will be very useful for you in your career in a few years down the line, where we see you to be. So that's when I realized well, okay maybe these people are really taking me seriously for a managerial position and they kept saying that for a Project Manager you need to know certain aspects of finance and I thought, okay so you're really serious about me being a Project Manager. It "sinked" in my head that okay I guess they're really serious about me being a Project Manager one day. I just thought that, that they wanted to train us but we're never gonna get there. So far so good. I mean, honestly so far so good. I cannot complain.

Navigating Racially Biased Treatment in the Workplace

During the course of each interview session, the women were provided with an opportunity to discuss any difficulties or issues that they had encountered within a given workplace. For Shae, dealing with some of the initial resentment of her co-workers in her current position was a bit of challenge:

>When I got my job at um the government, there was a conversation that… two white guys were having and they're your typical government workers, like they've been there, I don't know, 5 or 10 years, just not going anywhere, whatever, and when I got hired in, because communications is seen as quite a coveted job to work at regional headquarters (a.) you're paid better and you're at regional, you're not starting in a local office, having to claw your way up, you know, jokes were kinda made that you're, I was only hired because I was Black and I came to find out later that in fact my Director… The way it works is they actually get paid a bonus for having um, we have four equity booths that are part of the federal government: Visible Minorities, Persons With Disability, Women and Aboriginal. So when directors have a certain amount of representation of those groups in their workplace they get a bonus, which, it's an employment equity initiative with some benchmarks that were set to be reached because the public service is so not representative of the Canadian public, that's the idea behind it, but it was quite offensive to know that potentially that was the reason I was hired in versus some of my skill sets. So I was, I did hear them talking like that and kind of was involved in the conversation and of course defended myself you know appropriately. But just they were, the kind of offhanded [way], you know [they] tried to kind of make that insinuation was pretty offensive.

Although Shae feels that she has a strong set of skills, which have qualified her to be in her

current position, finding out that she was possibly given preference on account of her race

and that others in the office were aware of that information and felt entitled to discuss it

openly and in a degrading way, is understandably somewhat disheartening. However, Shae's

active resistance against the demeaning way that her co-workers talked about her situation is

evident in the manner in which she stood up for herself and adamantly refused to be defined

on their terms.

In a similar incident, Charlene talked about a previous employment situation during

which she was subjected to ignorant, disrespectful, and negative treatment based on her

physical appearance:

> What happened was, I don't want to make it all… it's not a long story, basically,
> I had a very young set of managers at [a telecommunications company] in
> Vancouver – the team leader was 27 and the manager was 30. They were very,
> very good friends and they were very immature, uneducated people… so what
> happened was… they decided to track all of our progress everyday… And in
> order to do this and make it seem fun they decided to take and reserve an entire
> wall within the department of the building with our names on it and a chart
> showing how much work we had done everyday … and how you compared to
> that person so it became very competitive, and instead of just putting your
> names with a line showing how much work you did for the day they decided to
> give each person a role as an animal and at the top of the chart was the piece of
> food that that particular animal would eat, so if it was a cat, there would be like a
> mouse at the end of the chart or a lion and a piece of meat or a monkey and a
> banana at the end of the chart and… it was showing like you chasing the piece
> of food at the top depending on how much work you did… so what they did
> was they took digital camera pictures of us all and put them on their computer
> screens… [Then they] cut out our heads and put them on the face of the animal
> and so they took this digital camera picture of me and then they were working
> on it in Photoshop, like cutting my head and pasting it on the animal… they
> were laughing and talking about my hair and saying how like big and bushy and
> you know whatever, just insulting my hair and how they had to take it off and
> Photoshop it because it was taking up too much room. And these were the two
> managers talking behind one of their cubicles.

When I asked Charlene how she dealt with the treatment, she conveyed that she waited until

they were finished their discussion and then she went into the cubicle and told her manager

that she "could hear everything that she was saying and so could the other employees in the area and… that [it was] not acceptable." Charlene could not remember what else she said but recalled that about 10 minutes later the manager came to her desk and apologized. From the way that her manager behaved when she apologized, Charlene suspects that there was not much sincerity to her apology and suggests that it was essentially a way for her manager to try and protect herself against any sort of formal repercussion; which in Charlene's opinion made the incident that much more insulting.

Both Shae and Charlene refused to accept what they believed to be unfair and inappropriate conduct within the workplace. It was unfortunate to hear from each woman however, that the stories they shared were not isolated incidents and that throughout their different employment experiences they have often been forced to deal with negative and racially biased behaviour. Charlene also shared with me that depending on the circumstance, she is not always able to come up with an immediate response or retaliation:

> Sometimes I'm so shocked by it that I don't say anything and then afterwards I'm kind of annoyed that I didn't, but it takes awhile to sink in… But I've had other incidences where something's been said and then I just blow it off or, or I will attack in a classy kind of professional way just showing them how stupid what they're saying is, if it's obvious right then and there that it's completely ridiculous.

It is interesting to note that of the three other women who were interviewed, none were able to identify any sort of treatment that they felt would qualify as being racially discriminatory in nature. After some consideration as to the possible significance of this finding it became apparent to me that all three of the other women are immigrants and all originally from Africa. Although it is difficult to make any sort of grand or conclusive statement as to what this might mean, it does seem plausible that perhaps in comparing their experiences to those of Canadian-born Black women, they may have a different way of conceptualizing racism or racially biased treatment. For instance, when talking to Mary

about her current work environment and whether she has ever felt that she was treated

inappropriately due to her race, she commented:

> People being what they are of course, there are people that have made all kinds
> of stupid comments... People make remarks that are, I dare say not even
> necessarily racist. It's more just a stupid remark and you just know that he or
> she just is not thinking or is not aware... Maybe I should say though, there are
> some comments that have been made by people... comments where you think,
> "I wonder if he would have said that if, if I were not Black or would my reaction
> to that comment not be the reaction I feel if I were not Black?" So, is it a
> deliberate comment? Is it a comment that is deliberate to my colour or is my
> reaction to the comment because I'm Black? It's difficult to know which, but no
> I really cannot say that there have been any comments that stem from [race].

Similar to Mary, Alicia shared that she has never been the target of any ill treatment that

could be categorized as racially motivated:

> Oh, I think I'm a very lucky Black woman. Honestly I have, well, no... I've
> worked in all kinds of organizations and well in Canada, no. No I can't, I can't
> think of any horrible experience... Black people, women do have problems in
> the workplace but I think I'm lucky so far and I'm... I'm pretty confident that
> this will be the case for the rest of my life.

Something that stood out in Alicia's comment is the way that she deemed a racist experience

as something that would automatically be "horrible" in nature. This is not to suggest that

racist behaviour is something that is easy to deal with or that it should not be considered

"horrible," but perhaps this example provides some insight into a possible rationale for the

different conceptualization on the part of both Mary and Alicia in terms of whether they

classify an incident as significant enough to *register* as racially aggressive or racially motivated

behaviour. In support of this suggestion, after I had finished the recorded interview with

Alicia, we sat around talking casually for awhile longer and in that comfort she disclosed to

me (which I asked her permission to include here) that when it comes to racism and

experiences that she feels race may be the motivating factor in how she is treated, she

chooses to "pick her battles." By dismissing the smaller occurrences that happen on a daily

or weekly basis that may have been initiated due to underlying racism, she is able to stay

focused on the things that matter to her, like her overall job performance. She mentioned that if she were to allow the small and insignificant behaviour of co-workers to derail her from her own agenda and focus on furthering her career, then she would lose out in the end.

In response to whether she had ever encountered racism in her workplace, Joy was quite confident in stating that she had never experienced any sort of racist or otherwise biased treatment. Currently working for her university's gym equipment room – a position that is very much tied to the athletics department, of which she is a competitive elite athlete – Joy however, did have some notable observations to make:

> You know what I will say. I think, I don't know but, I think it's because I'm [a] very good [competitor]... and most of the points are coming from me like when we go to the college, to the big [competitions] in the States right, Nationals they call it, like um each person who wins gets 10 points and I, I do like, I'm very good in so many events so I just choose to do four because I wanna help the team right and then I, I win all of them so like 40 points is coming from me so... I'm just thinking, what if I'm not... How they gonna treat, you know what I mean so... That's why it's so hard for me to answer racism or something because I've never encountered anything from anyone, so if I wasn't good enough, like how they're gonna you know...

It is interesting that Joy is aware that she is a valuable commodity to her university's athletic team and that she is able to make speculations as to how this may be positively influencing her treatment within her job.

Education to Employment

For some of the women in my study, level of education and ultimate job satisfaction or attainment, seemed to correspond quite strongly. Perhaps one of the more significant discoveries during the research process, was that the majority of women had either chosen or by circumstance, received their higher education outside of B.C. Even though Shae was born and raised in B.C., she was eager for the opportunity to go elsewhere to obtain her post-secondary degree. She said that leaving Vancouver and going to Toronto was due

primarily to her desire to connect with more people of Caribbean descent and that, "just being around a lot of other West Indian kids in general was like huge in terms of support when you know… you had a bad day. These are people who just knew who you were. You didn't have to explain anything or nothing like that. They just understood your experience." Shae chose Toronto's Ryerson Polytechnic University for its larger Black culture, but also because she was more interested in studying journalism as opposed to the mass communications degree that she was one year into at SFU.

When asked to comment on how her educational experience has impacted her current employment situation, Shae was convinced that it was critical to her success:

> It was huge, um the reason I have my current job is because of my education
> and I'll explain. When I got back from Toronto (I have an honours in
> broadcasting, broadcast journalism), um, I worked at Shaw for awhile, I had a
> TV show, which was cool, being on camera. That wasn't really my thing, I don't
> find, it wasn't too challenging. I mean you do interviews, I don't know, it just
> wasn't my thing. So I wanted to do some communications work or go behind
> the scenes and at the time the federal government was running a program called
> post-secondary recruitment. And so, once you had your post-secondary degree,
> you could apply through this process to get hired in the federal government.
> Because [of] the aging demographic they're looking to hire young people. So I
> applied on the process, I got screened in and at my interview, um, it happened
> to be the Director of Communications who was interviewing me. And when
> she saw my background – that I came from Ryerson and that I had all these
> skills and of course when you do the journalism thing you also get some of the
> PR stuff, they were really excited about that and I came to find out later, that
> that's one of the reasons that I got hired in and I got hired right into the
> communications branch at the time. Whereas a lot of people who got hired in
> through that post-secondary program, they went to work in local field offices in
> jobs that were more administrative… my job was at regional headquarters, in
> communications, directly related to my degree and so from there I was able to
> catapult and I've done lots of different things since then but that's what got me
> in the door.

Shae further explained that although her degree may not have been an exact match to the job requirements, the transition from school to work was still somewhat effortless:

> Journalism is not communications so it was an easy jump in the sense that my
> attitude towards a degree… it's not so much what you get the degree in, it's the
> fact that you went to school for four years, you got your degree, you applied
> yourself to a discipline… that kind of stuff which translates into the workplace.

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That kind of discipline, um, but in terms of the work it's totally different. Like I was used to being in front of the camera, writing stories, meeting deadlines and this is communications where you're writing media lines, doing press kits... So it was good to have an understanding of how the media worked. From that perspective, my skill set was invaluable to the branch... but I didn't necessarily use the skills that I learned at school on the job if that makes sense.

The desire to leave Vancouver in order to have more interaction with other Blacks was also shared by Charlene, who was born and raised in B.C. Charlene expressed that she was hopeful when she got to SFU, that she would have the opportunity to meet more Black people and when she discovered the lack of Blacks at SFU, she was somewhat disappointed. Although Charlene did stay in Vancouver long enough to complete her degree at SFU, she felt the necessity to leave immediately after she graduated, and suggested that the limited amount of Black people and lack of Black community in Vancouver, "forces a lot of young Black women especially to leave." She said that she knew several other Black women who left Vancouver because the climate was considered to be so destructive and so counter to creating a positive level of self-esteem.

At the time of the interview, Charlene was unemployed and staying with her parents in Delta (a suburb of Vancouver), however she was intending to go back to Montreal to further her education and to look for more permanent employment. Her reason for leaving Vancouver once again, was that she was unable to experience a sense of belonging. When asked if she could elaborate, she commented:

Um, it makes me feel frustrated that this is supposed to be my home. I was born here, but there's so many ignorant people and how can I possibly feel at home amongst all these people that are so different from me, that don't understand anything.

Undoubtedly, the isolation and alienation that is felt by some Black women in the GVRD is something that requires further exploration. It is significant that both of the women who

were born in B.C. felt that it was necessary to leave B.C. in order to feel supported within

their education.

For Alicia, the transition from education to employment turned out to be somewhat

easier than she expected. Alicia feels extremely grateful to have obtained a position with the

government that directly relates to her field of study but she also identifies and empathizes

with those who are not as fortunate:

> I mean, being a new immigrant and usually the case of most immigrants, you
> have to do what you gotta do to survive because you can't get the job that you,
> you... studied for. I just kept telling myself no, I can, I'll do the cleaning, I've
> done it all before once as a student but being a new immigrant I am so gonna
> get the job with my degrees.

Alicia holds two masters degrees, "an MBA and then a Masters of Environmental

Management," which she obtained from the University of Notre Dame in Australia. She

accredits having a high level of education, having received that education from a known

university, and interestingly enough, being Black, as major contributing factors in her success

obtaining employment in B.C.:

> They could have seen it as a way of trying to show that, okay, we really would
> give people like, of colour a chance. I'm the only Black person in my, in my
> office... and I think we're very few Black people for the very um organization
> that I'm working with... but I strongly, absolutely believe without a doubt that,
> because with the office that I'm working in we've got Australians with us, a lot
> of Australians with us so they were confident in my degree knowing that, okay
> I'm coming from a country where the degree is recognizable. If they could hire
> the other Australians, why can't they hire me and also I guess that I was
> probably more qualified than the other people because most of them were
> straight from university with an undergrad.

Alicia commented about her educational experiences in Australia, stating that it was a

difficult time, but that it also taught her perseverance and resilience:

> Being a Black woman when I was studying was a bit hard. We always had to
> prove that we could do this, we were intelligent. That was the one thing I truly
> disliked about my school and certain people because we were very few for my
> program and if we had to do group assignments you find that a lot of times
> people don't want you in their group because they thought oh Black girls, maybe

we're not as intelligent or we didn't have enough to offer for assignments or whatever and it was, you find most times a lot of Black girls... Like I remember one course, all the Black girls in the class ended up in the same group and the lecturer later on was like, no you guys need to mix and we told the lecturer, it's hard, everybody ends up pickin' everybody, we can't, we end up having to be on our own, so not that we don't want to mix and integrate, it's just hard... So that was always my issue when, for me being a Black girl... people just always thought that we were not smart enough to be in the group.

She also went on to talk about how she feels a similar type of pressure in her current work environment with respect to proving herself and making sure that people know she is capable, "you always as a Black woman, even right now, even being the fact that I'm alone in my job, I'm always trying to make sure that I sound intelligent, that I'm doing things the right way, I'm always... you always, always have to represent." Alicia also expressed a general feeling of disillusionment that Black people are often more known for being hard workers in minimal jobs like cleaning and that they are rarely associated with higher level or more intellectually driven positions.

In response to whether her educational experience has translated into a commensurate level of employment, Mary bluntly conveyed:

> Ummm... I suppose there is a bit of disappointment and bitterness, only because again my parents came from a society where you were told or there was an implicit promise that if you get a good education, then you will get a good job... You will fall into it and I have a good education, I don't have a good job. Now I will also be the first to say that I initially when I was younger was quite ambitious, but then I sort of looked around and saw what the sacrifices would need to be for me to achieve professional success and I wasn't prepared to make those sacrifices. I'm just one of those people who looked around and saw or at least questioned initially, can you really be a tremendously successful person career-wise and a really successful parent? I believed then and believe it even more strongly now that you cannot do both. It is impossible, and so when I got married and had my daughter my choice was made and I said I am going to opt to be a dang good mother at the expense if you will, of a career, and I have no regrets about that, but... I do have a good education and I don't feel that I am being rewarded career-wise or successfully being realized in my abilities.

For Mary, it appears that making the transition from education to employment was complicated by her decision to have a family. Although it might be expected that her level

of education would influence her positioning within the labour market, she also recognizes

that part of the reason she has not excelled is that she chose to prioritize her family life and

caring for her daughter over struggling to advance her career.

Aiding in the Labour Market Success of Black Women

Of the five women that participated in my research, Shae was the most resolute that

employment equity-type initiatives were absolutely necessary in order for Black people to

advance within different employment systems and she used herself as an example in order to

illustrate her point:

> I think especially where I am now, like I said with the huge focus on hiring
> visible minorities… I'm really well positioned right now. I know that and I'm
> not afraid to admit that in the sense that you know what, if being a Black woman
> gets me in the door to a job, great. I know that I have the skills to do any job,
> but if that's gonna be the, the vehicle that gets me in, perfect. The reason I say
> that is because historically, especially [in] the federal government, there are so
> many of us that have been denied positions, because of our colour, right? So
> who am I to be, "no, no, no, I want to be just like everybody else, I don't want
> that position just because I'm Black"… I'll take it, you know what I mean? It
> means that if I'm there I can potentially help other people to get there because if
> we all have this attitude about, well I wanna be treated fairly and just like
> everybody else, well that's not realistic. You weren't treated fairly before, so why
> all the sudden now should I adhere to that. No, I'll take whatever handout I can
> get because like I said, I know that at the end of the day I can do the job.

She also seemed to have given some serious thought as to how governmental policies could

better assist Black women in their labour market participation. As someone who works for

the government and also actively participates on the board of various groups and

associations geared toward helping visible minorities, Shae pointed out that one of the

greatest shortfalls of government initiatives is the lack of follow through. She commented

specifically on the failure of an initiative called *Embracing Change*, the benchmark of which

was that by 2005, one in five hires were supposed to be from a visible minority group.

Though the initiative was positive in the sense that it helped to create an awareness and

consciousness of who was being hired, it fell short of the proposed mandate and the main problem she identifies is that there was no overall accountability for this deficit. Therefore, accountability and follow through were cited as the main areas in which the government really needs to improve.

Shae also commented that even with such good initiatives, which are aimed at helping visible minorities gain access to positions within the government, there are still many other changes needed:

> What's happening is, we're concentrating more at the administrative level, right, and as I say, the higher up you get, the less, or the more scarce [visible minorities] are. So again, while they're having targeted recruitment, it's a good start, but there needs to be other programs to help develop visible minorities throughout the process and they actually need to commit to those.

The most striking illustration of the problem Shae identified is captured in her comment, "When I look at my regional management board in 2007 and don't see a person of colour, much less a Black person, that tells me that obviously change is needed."

Even though Alicia herself was able to obtain a good position working for the government, she was painfully aware of many other Blacks, both men and women, who had immigrated to Canada with the hopes of obtaining a position that corresponded with their level of education, but ended up having to settle for something outside of their field because their credentials were not being recognized. Therefore, when asked what changes she would like to see the government make, Alicia said she thought:

> ... it would be great if the government [could] give Black immigrants a chance... if only the government would recognize [their] degrees it would be awesome. It doesn't matter if she studied in the university of whatever that you don't know, just recognize the fact that it's a university degree and she did it in English, that's enough.

Analysis

Each of the women who have participated in this research have shared details about their lives and experiences, which have proven to be both extremely interesting as well as insightful. While each woman's set of individual experiences shared are very personal, their experiences also reflect the position of being a Black woman within the GVRD and although it would be unrealistic to generalize these five women's experiences to those of all Black women in the GVRD, they are nonetheless important in understanding some Black women's experiences, and increasing the conversation about Black women and employment in the GVRD, a conversation that has been by and large, absent.

Having approached my research on Black women's employment experiences within the critical gaze of Black feminist epistemology and with the theoretical understandings of anti-racist and critical race theory, I anticipated that there would be a fairly high disclosure rate of prejudice and barriers encountered both within the workplace and while seeking employment. Following Collins (2000) main assertion that Black women's lives must be understood within the intersections of race, class, and gender oppression, my research sought to locate the specific impact of these oppressions on Black women's everyday lives and experiences through a series of questions, which were aimed at identifying subtle nuances in that experience. In accordance with anti-colonial, anti-racist and critical race theory, my questions also pointed to institutionalized racism and discrimination and the major impact that these can have on minority success rates (Dei, 1999). However, despite my belief and expectation that Black women would come to disclose a variety of difficulties and obstacles faced throughout their participation in the labour market – which could be considered attributable to their race – in many respects, the women presented a fairly different account. While the lack of widespread disclosure of perceived racial barriers and

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discrimination at first came as a surprise, I began to realize that the women's responses and insights revealed answers to my primary research questions in somewhat different, and perhaps at times more personal than systemic ways. Their responses also led to insights into the importance of support networks and various forms of resistance.

Success in the GVRD Employment Marketplace?

In order to explore possible answers as to: (1) whether or not African-Canadian women feel that they have been successful[6] in negotiating the labour market, (2) whether they feel that they have been treated fair and impartial within their employment experiences, and (3) whether they feel that they have experienced barriers, it is necessary to conduct a close examination of the women's interview responses.

Notably, four out of five of the women's account of their experience within the labour market indicate that they have achieved a fair degree of success. While Shae has obtained what she terms to be a "coveted" position with the federal government, and Alicia as well, has been successful in obtaining employment with the provincial government, both women express an awareness that it is not always easy for Black women to acquire decent positions in the job market. Joy shared that she is quite content with her most recent position working in her university's equipment room as it fits with her current status as a full time student, while Mary on the whole, considers herself to be generally successful in terms maintaining stable employment, though she recognizes to some extent, that she has not achieved the most ideal position in relation to her level of education.

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[6] Although success was determined based on each individual woman's idea or definition of what it means to be successful, a general concept of success was conveyed. Success was identified as obtaining a job that is desirable and for which one feels they are qualified with respect to education and experience.

Determining whether the women believed that they had been treated both fair and impartial within their employment experiences was a bit of a challenge given that a few of them revealed somewhat mixed responses. For Joy, the experience of searching for employment as an international student initially presented additional hurdles to overcome, and though in one of her first on-campus jobs at the dining hall she experienced some difficulty with co-workers, she seemed reluctant to put forth any argument to suggest that her racial identity may have impacted the treatment that she received. Mary shared several frustrations experienced within her current position; doing tasks that are outside of her job description, having higher level work go unrecognized and unrewarded, and being looked over for promotion. Regardless however, of the many criticisms and objections she put forth, there again seemed to be an unwillingness to suggest or insinuate that this type of treatment may be tied to racially biased attitudes on the part of her employer.

The strongest protests against negative and racially discriminatory treatment in the workplace came from Shae and Charlene. Given that they are both Canadian-born, it seems interesting that they were also the most willing to share thoughts on racist treatment and that they were the most vocal in their objections to such treatment. Perhaps their position as born into and raised in Canadian and North American society has given them a different context and ability to speak to racism in the GVRD. It is conceivable that in having a more intimate understanding of the subtleties of Canadian racism, they were also more able to identify this type of discrimination, although I would speculate that they simply had a different way of responding to and coping with such treatment than did the other women who had immigrated to Canada. The kinds of treatment that both Shae and Charlene relayed to me during the course of our interview falls into a category of stress that for Blacks, Carroll (1998) has labelled:

... mundane, extreme, environmental stress... mundane, because this stress is so
common, a part of the day-to-day experience of all Blacks that it is almost taken
for granted; extreme, because it has a harsh impact on the psyche and world
view of Blacks... environmental, because it is environmentally induced and
fostered; stress, because the ultimate impact on [Black people]... and their
families is indeed stressful, detracting and energy-consuming. (p. 271)

The consequences of living in an environment that is essentially hostile, is that it requires

one to either, put up a continual fight, as Shae admits is usually her mode of combating

racism, to become almost "desensitized" to much of it as Alicia alluded to, or to disengage

altogether, as Charlene has basically done in deciding to move to Montreal permanently.

Despite the fact that both Shae and Charlene recognized certain barriers to seeking

employment within B.C., it seems clear that Charlene's desire to move to Montreal primarily

to be around a larger Black culture and community while she furthers her education and

looks for permanent employment, is an indication that she sees the lack of Black support

within the GVRD, as a significant enough barrier to require relocation. Charlene's desire to

move away from B.C. is understandable, and in my opinion, is connected to the history of

the region and the specific aspects of that history which have served to marginalize and

alienate Blacks from one another. One need only look back to Hogan's Alley for a reminder

of how *warmly* Blacks and Black communities were embraced by the City of Vancouver, in

order to realize that the prejudicial attitudes that existed during that period quite evidently

endure into the present day.

The Black community in B.C. has always had to be somewhat transient according to

Compton (2002), who points out that, "Black B.C. has never been a single, monolithic

population... It is a population that has never truly reified, and, as such, has remained less

fiercely demarcated than others" (p. 20). This lack of community that Charlene speaks to, is

in my critical perception, the result of a concerted and systematic effort (as in the destruction

of places like Hogan's Alley, the erasure of local Black histories, the general pushing out of

Black people from B.C.), to quash Black people's ability to come together and create community support and social networks. I believe Charlene's plan to leave B.C. is quite convincingly tied to the history of racism, marginalization, and isolation that Blacks have and continue to be subject to within the GVRD.

In attempting to answer this research question, as with all my research questions, the women's responses on average spoke much more to personal context than comparisons to social demographics or Black women's success on the whole. In many ways this is not a surprise, and quite normal that these women would spend much more time thinking about their individual situations than how their success fits into the general success of Black women in the GVRD. While this, as well as the small number of interviewees, makes it difficult to answer how successful Black women as a group have or have not been in the GVRD labour market, I think it also suggests that the overall measure of widespread demographic success may not be as relevant, and that the focus on individual factors made more sense and empowered these women to a greater extent.

The Importance of Education: Benefits of Personal & Societal Choices

In terms of answering whether African-Canadian women feel that the Canadian educational system provides enough support in order for them to eventually achieve their goals within the workforce, it seems that from two of the women's accounts at least, there are parts of Canada that are able to provide a supportive educational experience. Both Shae and Charlene have searched for opportunities to engage with a larger Black community in the process of pursuing their education respectively in Toronto and Montreal, cities which arguably have much larger and more discernable Black communities than Vancouver. Both women talked about the way in which being around other Blacks helped to strengthen their

self-esteem and allow them the freedom to be themselves. These accounts unmistakably address an absence of support for Black women particularly within the British Columbian educational system.

Identifying whether the women felt that there were any changes that could be made in order to create a better bridge between the educational and employment systems proved to be a much more elusive task. Joy was still in the process of completing her degree when I conducted her interview and since she was uncertain about her future job prospects, she was unable to suggest whether any changes could be made to the educational system. Although Mary felt strongly that having a good education should lead to getting a good job, she made a decision several years ago to prioritize motherhood over the pursuit of a more satisfying career. During the time period in which she felt compelled to make a decision between motherhood and career, the options for women in general were limited, therefore it seems obvious that the constraints placed on a Black woman trying to make that decision, would have been even more daunting. Rather than place the blame however, on the system for potentially forcing her to choose, Mary put the blame on herself, though she stands firm that she does not regret having made the decision to put motherhood first. She suggested several times throughout her interview that Black women have to work much harder than other groups and make enormous sacrifices in order to gain a modicum of respect and recognition in their work, and to her it just was not worth the sacrifices that would have to be made. Therefore, even though she has a university degree, she does not feel as though she has been able to take full advantage of it in terms of her employment outcome.

Of the women who participated in this research, none of them were able to identify systematically how a better bridge could be drawn between education and employment. After a careful review of some of the women's responses though, it became apparent that

again the women were operating under a different and more individual-focused agenda than I had anticipated. For instance, from Alicia's responses regarding education, as well as the feedback from Shae and Charlene, it seems evident that each of these women have made very strategic decisions with respect to where they have chosen to receive their post-secondary degrees. The choices these women have made regarding their education appear to fall into two separate and somewhat distinct categories, which are seemingly motivated by gaining either *personal* values or *societal* values, both of which lead to personal gains. The personal choices that Shae and Charlene made seem driven by the desire to choose educational sites that have a strong Black community. This aspect of the personal choice invariably served to bolster and enhance their overall prospects to succeed by fundamentally increasing their individual level of confidence and self-esteem. Choosing to surround themselves with a larger Black community helped to give them a sense of place and belonging and served to consolidate feelings of value and self-worth; an experience which they both felt was missing from their earlier education. Shae's ability to reference her skills and assets in order to counter the negative remarks of her co-workers surrounding employment equity, are direct evidence of her personal level of confidence.

The societal choice that some of the women made was to choose an educational site that would be valued by others within the employment sector. Both Ryerson and Notre Dame played a significant role in helping Shae and Alicia to acquire positions with the government. In completing degrees at Ryerson and Notre Dame, both women saw the value that society places on credentials which are obtained from recognized and established institutions, and although they would benefit personally from this decision, it was a decision that was ultimately responsible for increasing their socio-economic value within the employment market of society.

Rather than focusing on grand, institutional or systemic changes then, these women chose to place their focus on areas that they were able to control and made choices on an individual level in order to increase their own social positioning. Once again, these women have focused more on empowering themselves individually than looking to or thinking about how the system, that some of them identify as problematic, could be changed to benefit Black women.

Are Systemic Changes Needed?

Following an assessment of the women's responses in order to determine whether they felt that any sort of broad systemic changes were needed to assist Black women in successfully negotiating the labour market, similar to the lack of commentary on systemic changes that would create a better bridge between education and employment, it became apparent that most of the women had not given a great deal of thought or consideration to this issue. It seems significant to me that of the five women, the two that gave substantially more consideration to the issue of systemic changes, happen to both be government workers.

Shae's contention that there are programs and initiatives already in place to assist minorities and potentially Black women, but that they are not being properly utilized or followed through with is noteworthy. The failure of the *Embracing Change* initiative that she discussed, which mandated that by 2005, one out of every five government hires should be a minority, has obviously been overlooked. I agree with Shae's belief that the government needs to be made accountable for the promises that are made and for initiatives such as these that fall through the cracks without further consideration. Leck (2002) discusses several ways in which more accountability can be built into employment equity programs,

foremost of which is to impose self-audits to ensure that there is a high level of compliance with the goals and objectives of such programs. She also suggests that everyone within an organization should be made aware of the exact purpose and intent of these initiatives so that a more positive understanding and acceptance can be fostered (Leck, 2002). In addition to creating a system where there is more accountability, I also believe that the definition of "minority" for these type of benchmarks should be broadened to define a more diverse minority population than simply any group that is non-white so that there is a higher degree of transparency as to which minority groups are actually being hired.

As the other government employee, Alicia also had an important point to make regarding the recognition of foreign credentials. Even though she herself was successful in having her degree from Australia recognized when she applied for her current position, she is immensely aware and concerned about the huge number of Black women (from Africa) for whom the government is unwilling to recognize credentials. She argued that as long as the women have obtained a university degree and they did it in English, it should be recognized. The issue of non-recognition of foreign credentials is one that has received a lot of attention in the literature surrounding barriers for new immigrants and in view of the fact that this is a significant impediment and the result of a severely biased and prejudicial system, several have urged that policy begin to recognize the equivalency of foreign credentials within the job market in order to work toward creating a more egalitarian system (Khan, 2007; Li, 2001).

Given the often critical responses from many of the women during the course of my interviews with them, it is surprising to discover that only one out of the five women clearly stated that she believes Black women as a group are at a disadvantage when it comes to finding employment. Though there is a general willingness to acknowledge that racism can

be a factor in the daily lives of Black women, there appears to be a great deal of hesitation with regard to drawing potential links between individual experience and the impact of indoctrinated or institutionalized racism and discrimination. For many of the women, it is believed that a good education will lead to a good job and that opportunities are available to anyone, given that they have the appropriate level of education. Like many dimensions of the women's perceptions about Black women's success, any shortcomings that were disclosed in the area of employment were often explained away as individual or personal rather than as a result of the way in which Black women are constructed within various systems and bureaucracies.

Nonetheless, I think that there may be a very legitimate reason for the women reporting few links between their own personal situation and broader societal discrimination. Black women live in a society in which they must contend with a steady and continual devaluation in terms of their physical attributes, their assumed capabilities, and in general their overall level of intelligence. In order to counter the continual barrage of negative and controlling images, these women must as Collins (2000) asserts, create their own definition of what it means to be Black. Black women are so burdened and consumed by the need to continually protect and guard their individual psyches from negative definitions, that they may be to a great extent, unable to take up larger systemic battles.

I think that it is important to also recognize that a regular focus on institutional and infrastructural biases and racism are most prominently seen within the university and areas of activism and that individuals, even the Black women that I interviewed, are like most people, more focused on the individual than the institutional experience of an entire population. The fact that Shae and Alicia, the two women who work in the most bureaucratic settings, were the women who talked most about systemic changes and

problems seems no coincidence. I feel the context of their situations brought these issues more to the forefront of their thinking, especially when prompted to discuss them.

Notwithstanding the fact that the women on the whole had less to share about systemic changes than I had initially thought, I feel that the experiences they have shared have only served to reinforce my belief that these type of changes do need to occur. That they focused primarily on individual ways to deal with what they perceived to be, at least at times, a racially biased system, and one that Brown (2008) argues continues to be so, does not dismiss the institutions who hold power from recognizing biases that exist. I look positively upon the women's strength and ability to navigate these complex social systems but reject the notion that these efforts are all that is needed or that Black women exclusively should be made to bear the burden and responsibility of changing these systems.

The Importance of Support Networks

Through the focus on individual experiences and realities as opposed to systemic problems, support networks became a key theme that the women, directly or indirectly, discussed and felt was a salient aspect in their ability to achieve success. One important and repeated support theme that the women talked about, and which I opened this chapter with, is the focus on family. For all of the women, family represented the primary and most influential factor with respect to their level of confidence and their overall beliefs and perceptions of the possible opportunities that were available to them. The family is undoubtedly a strong place where opposition to systemic oppressions can occur, and where self-esteem, confidence and ambition can be developed. Certainly, much of Black feminist discourse highlights the home as a site of personal empowerment in terms of the safe haven and center of support that it can symbolize for Black people (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984).

For the women in my study, the influence of parental figures, and their example of success also created a sense of empowerment and represented a very strong motivating force in the women's own drive and ability to be successful.

The majority of the women also felt very strongly about the importance of interaction with outside networks and communities of Blacks and reasoned that having a group to identify with and that understood and shared common experiences was essential to promoting a healthy level of self-esteem. As Shae commented in relation to her community of Black friends at Ryerson, "just being around a lot of other West Indian kids in general was like huge in terms of support when you know… you had a bad day. These are people who just knew who you were. You didn't have to explain anything or nothing like that. They just understood your experience."

Finally, I feel that it is worth mentioning the manner in which a couple of the women also discussed, to a lesser extent, the importance of taking advantage of supportive opportunities when they were offered. Alicia's comment about her supervisors' insistence that she learn some accounting skills through work-related tasks in preparation for her future advancement from Project Technician to Project Manager was pleasantly surprising to her as it signified their belief in her ability to take on a higher level of responsibility in the future. In my interview discussions with Shae, she had also mentioned how important it was to take advantage of any available tools that could assist in the goal of job advancement. She appreciatively described her mentor, her departmental Director, as both a representation of where she hoped to see herself in a few years and also as someone who was willing to assist and guide her in the process of getting there.

Resistance & Resilience

Through examining the women's interviews, I believe that they have each practiced a great deal of resistance toward racism in their individual acts and behaviour. Shae's ability to speak proudly and adamantly against accusations that she may have obtained her current position through illegitimate means is testament to the tenacity of her self-confidence. Charlene's refusal to engage in a biased system by moving to Montreal where she could feel more supported in both her educational and employment pursuits, clearly demonstrates her ability to navigate the system in a manner that will ultimately nurture her success. For the others, learning when to take on the burden of racism and when to ignore it has been an invaluable marker in their achievements. Whether resistance is characterized in speaking out against racial discrimination, choosing to remain silent and pick your battles, or disengaging altogether, each act that the women conveyed reveals the profundity of their overall strength and courage.

Regardless of the degree of success that each woman in my study expressed, or the difficult racially biased experiences that they encountered, it is extremely encouraging that I have been able to interview and share the experiences of five very strong and resilient Black women. It is certain that not all Black women in the GVRD will experience as much success within the labour market and other aspects of daily life, but in the face of the vast amount of complex racism that Black women in Canada, and specifically within the GVRD face, such resilience and resistance as these women have shown is essential.

CHAPTER FIVE:
Conclusion

Based on my own experiences within British Columbia, the GVRD, and at Simon

Fraser University, I began this thesis in an effort to investigate the experiences of other

Black women in relation to the labour market in the GVRD. Some of my initial questions

regarding the experiences of other Black women were heavily influenced and grounded in

critical theoretical paradigms, but also stemmed from my own personal experiences of

frustration and feelings of alienation within local educational and employment spheres. A

strong desire to locate the connectedness and commonalities between my own experience

and that of other Black women living in the GVRD, was also admittedly a motivating factor

in conducting this research. In some ways I suppose that I was searching for a certain

degree of validation and confirmation that my experiences were not unique in the sense that

though they happened to me personally, they could be established or recognized to be the

result of an overriding systemic problem or issue that is common to all Black women living

in Vancouver and its suburbs. I anticipated that, when given an opportunity to share, other

Black women might come forth with similarly difficult experiences of their own. Though

the results may not have conformed to my initial expectations, the women who have

graciously chosen to share their experiences as part of this research have provided invaluable

insight into many of my questions surrounding and directly related to labour market

participation experiences, barriers, and successes, and I believe that these results will make

an important contribution to an area of social inquiry that is dramatically understudied and

rarely a topic of discussion or interest within British Columbia.

Important Considerations

My research produced an interesting profile of Black women's interaction with the labour market of the GVRD. Although I had mentioned in the opening of this thesis, that it is often difficult to look toward the U.S. for guidance in understanding Canadian Black women's experiences due to the different historical influences, I do want to recognize the findings of some U.S. studies that seem to have rang true for a few of the women in my research. The more pertinent aspects of this literature indicate that for Black women, job related stress is often provoked through various sources of job dissatisfaction; these include a lack of workplace challenges, underutilization of skills, lack of control over working conditions, negative treatment and little opportunity for personal or professional development (Mays, Coleman & Jackson, 1996; James, Plaza & Jansen, 1999). In addition to these circumstances, perceptions of discrimination are also considered to have an extremely detrimental impact on workplace productivity and attitudes among Black women, who oftentimes feel as though there is little opportunity to successfully counter such treatment (Mays, Coleman & Jackson, 1996). The literature also indicates a strong negative bias on the part of whites in relation to preconceived notions surrounding work expectations, skills, and abilities of Black women (Mays, Coleman & Jackson, 1996; Bakan & Stasiulis, 1995; Browne & Askew, 2005).

One of the women in my study, Mary, relayed her extreme disappointment with being treated in a manner that failed to fully recognize the workplace contributions that she had made. The overall lack of appreciation and gratitude that was shown to her, for the higher level work that she had performed – work that fell outside of her job description – served as a marker of the differential treatment accorded to her. Although Mary was reluctant to identify this treatment as being racially motivated, she nonetheless experienced

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and expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction with the situation. Mary's experiences closely resemble several of the difficulties disclosed among U.S. Black women, difficulties which were attributed to perceived or actual racial discrimination. However, the strong reluctance on Mary's part to address these issues as potentially systemic in nature reveals the extremely problematic and confounding situation of attempting to identify and label racism. In Joy's previous position, the workplace challenges that she was subjected to by her co-workers, would seem from an outside perspective, to be motivated at least in part by racially discriminatory attitudes. Nonetheless, her reluctance to define her experiences as the result of individual or systemic racism also proved to be somewhat perplexing and to me, this again speaks to the elusive and problematic nature of naming racial discrimination.

The difficulty that these women had with identifying or labelling an experience as one that was racially motivated may be owing in part to the ubiquitous and "common sense" (Bannerji, 1995) nature of racism. Bannerji (1995) discusses the way in which whites can demonstrate racist behaviour or attitudes while simultaneously failing to recognize their behaviour as being at all discriminatory. Furthermore, she suggests that these individuals can show evidence of support and approval toward anti-racist politics and at the same time harbour deep-seated resentment toward non-whites; the resentment part of their psyche of course being muted by the common sense, everyday, accepted, and entrenched nature of racially discriminatory conduct. It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that some of the difficulty the women in my research experienced in terms of identifying racist treatment may be the result of constantly being made to bear the burden of a racist and oppressive system. Perhaps in failing to claim or adamantly vocalize racism, they are attempting to turn the table on the whites who are never obliged to take on that burden. Whites can claim that they are unable to recognize that their behaviour may be racist or discriminatory, and seemingly to

their advantage, their ignorance is socially and institutionally supported. However, for

Blacks and other minorities, daily existence often necessitates a recognition that the

treatment they receive may be based on underlying racist attitudes. The non-recognition of

racism on the part of whites serves to liberate them of the burden of racism as it casts this

burden directly onto the shoulders of those subject to oppression. This iniquitous burden is

undeniably tiresome and perhaps helps shed some light as to why some of the women in my

research chose not to name racism.

As Lee and Lutz (2005) suggest, widespread cultural acceptance of racist ideology is

"so often taught and repeated, that [it can] become 'common sense' and internalized – even

by those who are oppressed by these very ideas" (p. 5). Assuming the form of everyday,

normal experience, racism may also become in many respects, largely undetectable. Though

Bannerji (1995; 2000) speaks more directly to the manner in which members of the

dominant culture, as well as state and institutional apparatuses, can begin to normalize racist

ideologies and viewpoints through indoctrinated common sense notions of difference –

which then help to dismiss any involvement or complicity in the perpetuation of racist

practices – there is nonetheless implicit within such assumptions, the inference that non-

white or minority group members may also become unaware or less critical of what might

actually constitute racist treatment.

The thoroughly embedded nature of racism throughout state and society also makes

addressing racism more difficult. Racism is not merely a static entity that takes on one

particular and identifiable form, rather racism and racialization processes are in a constant

state of flux dependent upon specific socio-historical points in time and ultimately based on

the various agendas of the dominant culture within a given historical moment (Lee & Lutz,

2005). Therefore, even the language of racism is liable to become outdated and outmoded

such that it is unable to reign true for everyone and suggesting that "it would be unwise to believe that racisms can [ever] be identified [definitively] once and for all" (Lee & Lutz, 2005, p. 4).

Browne and Askew (2005) note that Black women experience a formidable amount of barriers to advancement, "with more lateral moves and fewer promotions to upper level management" (p. 501). In my own research, Shae spoke adamantly about the need to have more Blacks occupy higher level positions within various organizations and she ardently commented on the lack of overall minority group representation at the supervisory and management levels within her department of the federal government. Mary also recognized to a certain degree, the difficulty of advancement, when she shared some of her primary complaints and frustrations of being passed over for promotions while others within the organization seemed to easily move up the ranks. Clearly there is a need to ensure that equal opportunities are available for Black women to progress and advance within their careers, but it is not very encouraging to learn that even within areas of government, where some of the core proponents of equity-type initiatives originate, there continues to be a severe lack of representation.

In conducting this research I became greatly intrigued by the discovery that three out of the five women who participated, happened to be immigrants. This discovery, while unanticipated, within the context of the local Black population, turned out to make perfect sense. According to Census data, the Black population in Vancouver[7] for the year 2006 totalled 20,670 and of this number, 9,060 were categorized as non-immigrants in comparison to 11,015 who had immigrated (Statistics Canada, 2008). It was somewhat surprising to realize just how small of an overall population Blacks make up within the GVRD. However,

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[7] Statistics Canada's term "Vancouver" outlines similar areas as those specified to be part of the Greater Vancouver Regional District.

given these numbers, it is entirely reasonable then to expect that the majority of women who would participate in my research would also be immigrants. That there is such a small number of Blacks dispersed throughout the GVRD, perhaps provides some insight into the difficulties this population faces in terms of building community support, political influence, and having their concerns raised within the broader public discourse.

With respect to the immigrant women who participated in this research, each was able to find a stable position within the job market. Even though there was not always a high degree of satisfaction experienced within their respective positions, in general they all recognized that they had been successful in terms of maintaining employment. Alicia was perhaps the most passionate in her conviction that Black women from Africa be given more opportunity to stay within the fields that they studied once they arrive in Canada. Her main complaints were directed toward government policies, which prevent the recognition of degrees that have been obtained in Africa. Alicia considered herself to be very lucky in securing a government position in the field of her study and interest, but continuously pointed out that her situation is not representative of most. The numerous difficulties that are faced by immigrant Black women are often compounded by a Canadian job market, which is typified by employers who are generally more inclined to hire those with Canadian experience and recognize only degrees and training that took place within Canada or other developed countries. As to be expected, a situation of polarization is thus created whereby European ethno racial groups are treated preferentially in relation to African, Caribbean and other minority group members (De Wolff, 2000; Reitz & Verma, 2004). For many employers, visible minority membership quite simply becomes a proxy for a whole host of negative stereotypes and preconceived assumptions which hinder their ability to become gainfully employed (Calliste, 1996; Browne & Misra, 2003).

Considering the fact that between the period of 1996 and 2001, a greater number of immigrant women (27.7%) compared with Canadian-born women (20.9%) held degrees in undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate designations (Statistics Canada, 2003), it is difficult to comprehend why these women continue to encounter such difficulty in obtaining well paying, stable jobs. Therefore, although one might expect that education would have a significant positive impact on future job prospects (a sentiment expressed by many of the women in my own study), that does not always appear to be the case. Several reports have detailed the various obstacles that racial minority immigrants face in obtaining employment that is commensurate with the level of skill, education, training and foreign work experience that they possess (Statistics Canada, 2003; Cregan, 2002; Grant & Feng, 2005; Galabuzi, 2001). As Creese (2005) points out, the supposed goals of immigration policy seem to be at complete odds with the reality of immigrant experience; that is, the consistent deskilling and devaluing of foreign labour.

Since a major component of my research entailed looking at the impact of educational attainment and skill level on securing employment that is both suitable and proportionate to experience, I found it interesting to assess the extent to which the women in my research (either Canadian-born or foreign-born) felt that they were successful in negotiating the labour market. The women in my study all seemed to be fortunate enough to gain employment when it was desired, and although Mary in particular, expressed that her level of education does not exactly match her current secretarial-type position, she admitted that her decision to put motherhood first played a role in her ultimate job positioning. I also found it interesting to assess whether the women had interpreted their successes or difficulties as being the result of either individual or societal influences or hardships. As discussed in the previous chapter during the research interview analysis, it seems clear that

the women mainly placed responsibility on their individual shortcomings as opposed to focusing on systemic or institutionalized obstacles. Although initially it was a challenge for me to accept that the women did not resoundingly view the system as a problem, after some consideration it became evident that their way of dealing with difficult or challenging situations was simply to focus on areas of their lives that they were able to strengthen and exert a certain degree of control over.

In my research, Charlene identified the difficulty of living in Vancouver as a Black woman and expressed the need to leave B.C. in order to feel a sense of belonging and develop a healthy level of self-esteem. She expressed extreme frustration with not being able to feel as though she could call B.C. her home, since she was continually forced to defend her status as a native to the area. Charlene's experiences are completely understandable given that notions of citizenship and belonging are so thoroughly entangled within Canada's uncontested Euro-historical narrative that non-whites often do feel an overwhelming sense of alienation and exclusion. These narratives, which essentially dictate who belongs and who does not, can be extremely difficult to counter. Whereas, historically white women have generally been viewed as a "civilizing force," non-white women have often been seen as aggressive and *foreign*, if not entirely problematic for Canadians (Sharma, 2005). With regard to how gendered, racialized subjects are conceptualized then, Sharma (2005) argues that visible minority women are extremely vulnerable to being denied membership in the citizenry through the "interlocking affects of 'race,' gender and nation" (p. 10). Citizenship invariably creates and solidifies racial and gendered realities, forging a perpetual division between those who can lay a so-called legitimate claim to the opportunities that Canada has to offer and those who cannot.

The fact that Charlene felt such a sense of alienation provides a very strong recommendation and argument for the importance of knowing and understanding the history of Blacks in Canada. If such information were disseminated to students in their schooling experiences, perhaps this would serve to not only increase the sense of place and belonging that is felt by Blacks in B.C., but also help to diminish the overwhelming sense of privilege and entitlement that is demonstrated by many whites in the province. An understanding of the historical presence of Blacks within B.C. and other parts of Canada, also serves to create a context within which to understand how modern day attitudes and treatment of Blacks developed. Without a proper understanding and socio-historical contextualization of Black experience in Canada, the current issues and concerns of Blacks will continue to be negated, trivialized, and ignored.

A Difficult Process

While I feel that this research is in many ways insightful and that it will hopefully be of benefit to others, I must admit that it was at times difficult to undertake. The main limitation that I encountered in attempting to conduct my research on African-Canadian or Black women in the GVRD was that it was extremely difficult to locate research participants. Given that I do not have any personal ties or connections to a larger Black community or even circle of friends, and that my own situation predictably mirrors that of Charlene and Shae in terms of feeling a sense of isolation from other Blacks, finding suitable participants proved quite a hurdle to overcome.

I had initially intended to conduct at least two separate focus groups prior to my individual interviews in order to fine tune my research instruments as well as have an opportunity to incorporate any issues that might arise within a given focus group session;

issues that other Black women may feel were relevant and therefore warranted inclusion. Nonetheless, the difficulty of trying to schedule a focus group around several women's schedules and my own full time work schedule, proved insurmountable and after discussing these difficulties with my supervisor, it was determined that the best course of action would be to move on to my interview sessions. Though in the beginning of my research I was able to confirm the individual interview participation of three Black women (who were friends), due to ongoing scheduling difficulties and family as well as other personal issues that arose among the women on separate occasions, they all eventually ended up dropping out of the process and simply stopped responding to my requests to reschedule. Further compounding the problem of locating participants, was the experience of approaching random women that I had encountered in my daily travels, and having them either express hesitation toward participation or simply laugh off my invitation as though the research were unimportant and irrelevant to them. One woman that I spoke with and who had agreed to participate, of her own initiative during our conversation, divulged that she could see other Black women in Vancouver not wanting to participate in such research or to talk about such bold issues, and though she had stated that she would be in touch within the following week, surprisingly I never heard back from her. Needless to say, this process was at times, a very humbling experience for me.

Despite my initial beliefs that having membership in the group that I wished to study would provide me with easier access, it quickly became apparent that there were several other factors at play when I approached various women. For instance, I feel that in a few circumstances, the fact that my research was associated with a university may have increased a certain level or perception of intimidation and prevented the women from wanting to participate. Also, when I first began asking different women if they wanted to participate,

my research requirements were quite strict in terms of wanting them to be educated in Canada (preferably in local educational systems) and to have worked within the GVRD. I strongly believe that this provided an opportunity for some to disclose that they would not make suitable participants and then ultimately decline participation.

Finally, and perhaps one of the biggest obstacles or issues that I faced in conducting my research was learning to negotiate and maintain my identity as a researcher, separate and distinct from my identity as a Black woman. Although on some level I do feel that my status as an "insider" was beneficial to conducting the research, I was also greatly aware that in having such closeness to the project as well as experiences which are directly relevant, I had the potential to unintentionally encourage or elicit a particular type of response. Therefore I made a conscious effort throughout my interactions, to monitor my own behaviour and experiential perceptions. I also made the decision to dedicate the research analysis chapter of this thesis primarily to the thoughts, experiences, and voices of the women who participated in my study, rather than to try and incorporate and interject my own experience in relation to theirs. This gave me the opportunity to step back from the research to a certain extent and to view the women's lives both individually and in relation to one another, and within the unique and rich contexts that they provided.

Limitations & Future Research

In general, I believe that I have achieved the basic goals that I set out to accomplish with this research. As with most research however, it is important to recognize the limitations that exist as well as discuss potential directions for future research, some of which has grown from the limitations and some which has been generated simply through the research inquiry process, particularly through reflecting upon the varied and contextually rich

information that each woman conveyed. These questions are drawn primarily from the basic acknowledgment and recognition that there is far more work to be done in order to better understand and appreciate Black women's experiences within Canada and specifically within the GVRD. While there are several limitations and a seemingly endless list of further questions to be addressed, I will focus on a few significant limitations and key areas of future research that I feel deserve substantial investigation.

In order to clarify some of the limitations that are present in my research, it is important to reiterate a few points made earlier. Since my objectives and goals were to investigate the experiences of a small group of Black women, my findings should not be assumed to represent the experiences of all Black women in the GVRD. While there are undoubtedly intelligent Black women with unique and interesting experiences from all walks of life, all socio-economic classes and all backgrounds, the five women who participated in my research (partially due to my participant gathering method) were either university educated or in the process of completing their university degree. Therefore, these women's experiences may not be shared by or represent all the experiences of other groups and or classes of Black women.

My research was also not designed or intended to be directly comparable to other types of mainstream social science research, such as statistical studies that rely on large data pools. Although this limitation may seem to withhold comparisons to most other research on labour markets in the GVRD, my research was designed differently in order to address what is in my view, the failure of other studies to dynamically challenge race, gender, and the multitude of biases, which are built into our society, and which in turn have limited a more comprehensive and full understanding of marginalized populations – in this case Black women.

Despite my strong belief that racially discriminatory experiences are to some extent common among Black women in the GVRD, not all of the participants in my study conveyed a similar belief. As well, each woman's conception of success understandably was not inherently tied to the absence or defeat of racism and other biased treatment and experiences. While each of the women identified themselves as successful to a certain extent within their employment, they did so on their terms and more specifically in relation to the particular aspects of their lives that they deemed to be most important. Their judgments on success then, certainly may not be understood in a universal sense or in exactly the same way that other racial groups in the GVRD might determine success (i.e. based primarily on financial gain).

As many feminist positions hold, focus on the everyday lives of women as a better way to understand the true dynamics of social interaction and experience is vital. Though I have used the terminology of "everyday lives" throughout this thesis, I have done so with a specific and assumed rationale in mind. Given that individuals who are employed full time arguably spend more of their waking hours doing work than just about any other activity, work constitutes a substantial portion of everyday life. Therefore, understanding Black women's labour market experience is in many aspects key to understanding their lives. Although labour market work indeed does not capture the totality of work that individuals, particularly women, carry out on a daily basis, nor does it capture many other aspects of daily life, for the purpose of my own investigation I have chosen to use "everyday" as a signifier for the amount of time and energy that working Black women dedicate to employment. While I have conveyed the insights that the women had into social support and family, my analysis should not be considered a full exploration or complete analysis of the everyday

lives of Black women in the GVRD. There are many other experiences in the lives of these and other Black women that significantly influence and inform their realities.

Research limitations, though not necessarily indicating the failure of research, can certainly hint at directions that future research can take. Consequently, a continued investigation of Black women and labour market in the GVRD could benefit from a broadened analysis of other aspects of the everyday lives of Black women. Expanding research into areas the women briefly mentioned; more closely examining family experiences, social support networks, non-labour market work, and more general daily experiences could allow for a more detailed and nuanced understanding of how Black women navigate labour markets and life within the GVRD. A continued use of feminist narrative approaches and inquiry would be ideal for undertaking these future investigations.

Other important directions for future research were highlighted throughout the research process with new questions and insights growing out of the women's responses, and from the unanticipated discoveries that occurred. Perhaps one of the more interesting aspects of this research has been attempting to distinguish the differential experiences of Canadian-born Black women and immigrant Black women. Clearly there are many similarities in experience that these women share by virtue simply of being Black, but I believe that it would be a disservice to both groups to not work toward uncovering the range of distinctions between these experiences. For instance, in relation to support networks, Black Canadian-born and Black immigrant women seem to gain support in somewhat different ways.

According to a study by Ochieng (2006), African immigrant women who come to B.C., rely quite heavily on creating "new extended family networks" and other supports in order to cope with the isolation and difficulty of settling into the Canadian lifestyle. For

these immigrant women, such support systems are formed through meeting other Black women immigrants who share similar experiences, as well as maintaining relationships with other non-immigrants who may be sympathetic to their situations (Ochieng, 2006). For the Canadian-born Black women in my study, the immediate family represented the main source of support; however, these women also felt the need to connect with a larger Black culture and community and as a result left B.C. at different points in their lives in order to garner that support. It is interesting that in looking at Ochieng's (2006) study in comparison to my own, it would appear that immigrant Black women in B.C. sometimes have a greater ability to form supportive relationships with other Blacks than do Canadian-born Black women. I feel that a larger scale study aimed at investigating in-depth, the differences and similarities among Canadian-born and foreign-born Black women, would provide important and valuable insight into how each group could be better assisted and supported within B.C.

Another issue that deserves further research and investigation is that of employment equity and accountability. This issue was brought up by one of the women in my research, Shae, during our discussion of the type of changes that she felt were needed in order to create a more accessible labour market for Black women and other visible minorities. That the Employment Equity Act, which has been in place since 1986 to ensure equal access to employment opportunities (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2000) has not produced greater results for Black women in the 22 years of its existence, is cause for concern. This is a serious policy consideration and I believe that the approach to employment equity needs to be much more aggressive and that there also needs to be some assurances that the principles of the Act are adhered to and followed through with in a much more substantial way. Following the lead of the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (2000), perhaps an initial step would be for "[e]mployment equity measures [to] move beyond recruitment to focus [more]

on retention and promotion" (p. 4). This could provide a partial solution to the problem that Shae identified of Blacks and other visible minorities concentrating in the lower level positions of workplace hierarchies.

Due to the inherent correlation between educational background and experiences, and success within the labour market, the final issue that I believe deserves serious research attention is the manner in which the educational system in Canada, and in particular, B.C., operates to fundamentally instil and reinforce a very exclusionary agenda. Brown (2008) maintains that through its selective remembering of history and particular brand of "benign celebratory multiculturalism" (p. 386), the educational system as it is currently configured, serves only to establish an inferiority complex within those who are not considered to be part of the dominant culture. This assertion certainly describes much of my early and more recent experiences within the educational system, along with the feelings of isolation and disengagement that characterized that experience. I would argue that it also captures on some level, the essence of both Shae and Charlene's experience of alienation within the British Columbian educational system. There is an obvious and urgent need to closely examine the impact that Canadian educational teachings have on racialized students in order to fully come to terms with and acknowledge the changes that must occur to create a more inclusive and engaging experience for all.

Concluding Thoughts

I truly hope that in some small way this research contributes to the growing body of literature on Black women's experiences in B.C. The varied and rich knowledge and experience that the women in this research have conveyed, I believe, assists in countering commonly held perceptions that all Black women experience their reality in the same way.

Although there are undeniably many overlaps within these women's lives, there are also many unique and interesting aspects of their lives individually, which only serve to enrich the overall level of understanding of Black experiences. I feel very privileged to have had the opportunity to interact with five very intelligent and articulate Black women and to provide a forum for them to demonstrate their strength, courage, and resilience in negotiating the labour market system within the GVRD.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Section 1: Demographic Profile

1. How old are you?
   - ☐ 19-25 yrs
   - ☐ 26-30 yrs
   - ☐ 31-35 yrs
   - ☐ 36-40 yrs
   - ☐ 41-45 yrs

2. Were you born in Canada or did you immigrate? How old were you when you immigrated?

3. Where was your Mother born? Where was your Father born?

4. Can you describe where you grew up?

5. What is your relationship status?
   - ☐ Single
   - ☐ Married
   - ☐ Divorced
   - ☐ Common Law
   - ☐ Widowed

6. What education have you completed?
   - ☐ 8th grade or less
   - ☐ High School diploma or GED
   - ☐ College / Technical Institute diploma
   - ☐ University degree
   - ☐ Vocational certification

7. What was your income last year?
   - ☐ Less than $20,000
   - ☐ $20,000 to under $30,000
   - ☐ $30,000 to under $40,000
   - ☐ $40,000 to under $50,000
   - ☐ $50,000 to under $60,000
   - ☐ $60,000 and over

8. How would you describe yourself?
   - ☐ Employed – Part time
   - ☐ Employed – Full time
   - ☐ Unemployed
   - ☐ Student
   - ☐ Retired
   - ☐ Volunteer (_____ hours per week, on average)

9. What is your current occupation? Could you describe the nature of your job?

10. What is your current living arrangement? (check all that apply)
    - ☐ Live alone
    - ☐ With parent(s)
    - ☐ With friend(s)
    - ☐ With husband / wife
    - ☐ With partner
    - ☐ With children
    - ☐ With extended family members

11. What best describes your current housing situation?
    - ☐ Own
    - ☐ Rent

Section 2: Narrative Questionnaire

(1) Tell me in detail about a supportive experience you have had in your education.

a. Would you consider this account representative of most your experiences within the education system? Why or why not?

b. How important have role models been in your life and in your perceived ability to succeed? Can you describe your most prominent role model?

c. Do you feel that it is important to have an outside support network? Why?

(2) Explain to me how your educational experience has impacted your current employment situation?

d. How do you feel that you could be better assisted in making the transition from education to employment?

(3) What is (or was) it like to be a Black woman in the Canadian educational system?

e. Can you describe high school; college; university; other training individually?

(4) Could you tell me about your most memorable experience while seeking employment, and why it was most memorable?

(5) Can you remember a time when you encountered a significant barrier to gaining employment? Describe to me what that experience was like?

f. Have you ever been the target of racially motivated insults or aggression in the workplace? How did you deal with it? How did it make you feel? Were you able to share your experiences with co-workers?

g. Can you describe any ways you have dealt with or challenged any type of discrimination or other barriers in your workplace?

(6) How would you portray your current working environment? Describe to me some of the relationships that you have with co-workers and/or management.

h. Do you ever feel that you have been treated unfairly on account of your race? Were others supportive of your feelings?

i. Have you ever been involved in volunteer work? Why and how did you get involved?

j. Has your volunteerism ever led to a paid position? Do you feel that volunteering is an important aspect of getting ahead in the job market?

(7) How do you feel that your current job compares with your educational experience, background and/or training?

(8) Drawing upon your experiences, describe how being a Black woman has impacted your treatment within both the education and employment bureaucracies/systems?

k. Do you think that your parents or family or support network helped to prepare you for growing up in Canada as a Black woman?

(9) Describe how closely governmental policies that claim to address Black women's employment issues match your experience and perceptions of what changes are needed?

l. Do you think that it is important to see women who are visible minorities occupy higher level positions within government, community and other institutions?

m. Do you feel that you have equal access to the opportunities (educational or occupational) that other racial groups have access to? Why or why not?

n. Have you ever accessed social services agencies or job assistance agencies? What was your experience like? What things could have been better?

o. What kind of impressions do you get from the government, media or other sources regarding career opportunities for Black or other racial minority groups?

(10) In your own words, explain how the government could make changes to positively influence Black women's opportunities within the workforce.

Appendix B

SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
THINKING OF THE WORLD

WOMEN'S STUDIES MASTER'S THESIS PROJECT

Participants Needed for Study on "Labour Market Participation of Black Women in the Greater Vancouver Regional District"

This study aims to locate the unique experiences of Black women and their participation in the labour market, including possible barriers and/or support structures that are available to them, and ultimately the opportunities they may have to succeed.

If you identify as a Black female between the ages of **19 and 45 years old**, have received formal or informal education within the Canadian system, and are currently or have previously been employed within the Greater Vancouver Regional District, you are invited to participate in this study.

The study will entail participation in a semi-structured interview session.

Please send an email to Alieka Rudder (xxx@sfu.ca) OR call xxx-xxx-xxxx if you are interested in participating.

All information will be kept confidential.

Appendix C

Revised Advertisement

SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
THINKING OF THE WORLD

WOMEN'S STUDIES MASTER'S THESIS PROJECT

Participants Needed in Study on "Labour Market Participation
of Black Women in the Greater Vancouver Regional District"

This study aims to locate the unique experiences of Black women and their participation in the labour market, including possible barriers and/or support structures that are available to them, and ultimately the opportunities they may have to succeed. If you identify as a Black female between the ages of 19 and 45 years old, and are currently or have previously been employed within the Greater Vancouver Regional District, you are invited to participate in this study

Participation will entail a semi-structured interview session.

Please send and email to Alieka Rudder (xxx@sfu.ca) OR call xxx-xxx-xxxx, if you are interested in participating.

*** All information will be kept confidential. ***

Appendix D

Consent Form

Simon Fraser University and those conducting this project subscribe to the ethical conduct of research and to the protection of the interests, comfort, and safety of participants at all times. This form and the information it contains are given to you for your own protection and full understanding of the procedures.

As part of SFU Women's Studies Master's program, Alieka Rudder is conducting a study which seeks to explore the labour market participation of Black women living in the Greater Vancouver Regional District. Your participation in this study is of great value as there is a significant shortage of current information on Black women and employment trends within this region of British Columbia.

The interview will take approximately 1.5 to 2 hours to complete and a digital audio recorder will be used throughout to provide a record of the interview. If you choose to participate in this study, you may withdraw, in part or in full at any time. You may at any time, for whatever reason, request that the researcher turn off the digital audio recorder. As well, you reserve the right to refuse to respond to any question you do not wish to answer, without explanation. The information provided from this interview will become part of a written thesis. Knowledge of your identity is not required for the purpose of this research. Although your signature is required for this consent form, the researcher may use a pseudonym (if requested) when referring to the information that you have provided. Any information that is obtained from this interview will be kept confidential.

Participant:
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw, in part or in full at any time.
- I may at any time, for whatever reason, request to turn off the recording device.
- I also reserve the right to refuse to respond to any question that I do not wish to answer, without any further explanation.
- I understand that I have the option to request that my name not be used on the interview or in the written thesis.
- I understand that all information that is obtained from this interview will be kept confidential.

If you have any comments, questions or concerns regarding this study, please feel free to contact myself, Alieka Rudder (phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx or email at xxx@sfu.ca), my immediate supervisor Dr. Habiba Zaman (phone: 604-291-5528 or email at hzaman@sfu.ca), or the Women's Studies Chair, Dr. Mary Lynn Stewart (phone: 604-291-5526 or email at mstewart@sfu.ca), or the Director of the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University, Dr. Hal Weinberg (phone: 604-268-6593 or email at hal_weinberg@sfu.ca).

Please use a pseudonym when referring to the information that I have provided: **Yes**___ **No**___

Pseudonym:_____

Participant Signature: _____
Date:_____

Witnessed by: _____