

Open Access Theory

# Quantification of Black Bodies: Anti-Black Racism in Research

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**Abstract.** It is time to start interrogating the legacy of colonialism that privileges a Eurocentric system of knowing within the Canadian education system and examine the research experiences of Black researchers. Many Black researchers continue to struggle with limited funding to conduct their research projects and many are faced with the issue of access to research mentorship. While Black scholars are restricted by these challenges, the Black populations are often researched by researchers who have little or no knowledge about their experiences. Moreover, the colonial constructs that pervade academia have relegated Black scholars and racialized groups as illegitimate knowledge producers. Our stories of lived experiences cannot be adequately represented by numbers nor by an outsider. This article argues that it is time to center the research experiences of Black researchers through the lenses of Critical race theory (CRT) and an anti-Black racism (ABR) framework. Our way of knowing creates a space for us to share and document voices alongside participants. hooks (1994) offered a way to think about personal experience as, “a way of knowing that is often expressed through the body, what it knows, what has been deeply inscribed on it through experience” (p. 36). This complexity of experience can rarely be named from a distance, neither can it be quantified into statistical data. Therefore, this article is inspired by the research agenda of Black female academics from a Canadian university. We view ourselves as legitimate knowledge producers with a keen interest in decolonizing research.

**Keywords:** Critical Race Theory, Anti-Black Racism, Decolonizing Research, Black Bodies, Legitimate Knower.

### Introduction

The colonial constructs that pervade academia have constructed Black scholars and racialized groups to the role of illegitimate knowledge producers (Griffin et al., 2013). It is time to start interrogating the legacy of colonialism that privileges a Eurocentric system of knowing within the Canadian education system and examine the experiences of Black researchers. We use the terms ‘racialized’ and ‘Black’ but recognize the heterogeneous nature of the varied lived experiences, histories, cultures, religious beliefs, class, gender, and other social identities to explore the experiences of Black academics. Many Black researchers struggle with limited funding to conduct their research projects, and many face the issue of access to research mentorship. For instance, mentoring involves guiding, nurturing, and teaching (formally and informally) between individuals with differing degrees of experience (Jordan-Zachery, 2004). Career research views mentoring as supporting, coaching, sponsoring, providing advice, and helping new employees improve their visibility and exposure (Eby et al., 2000). Our motivation in writing this article stems from our personal experiences as Black women in academia and research mentoring. In our work as university professors and researchers, some of us have gone through situations that have left us frustrated, angry, helpless, marginalized, and discriminated against when seeking support from colleagues for mentorship in research.

The responsibility of producing new knowledge implies that academics have an essential role in undertaking research that will benefit society. Kloet & Wagner (2023) attest that many Black women scholars collaborate with marginalized communities in research that perceives knowledge as collective instead of focused on productivity and commodification. This disrupts the conventional hierarchical relationship that usually exists between the researcher and participants. Collaboration usually demands a lot of time in negotiating partnership with the communities and challenges Black scholars in adopting research projects that take time to meet the academy’s required demands to produce. In addition, Black women faculty are often regarded as tokens, and they are frequently called upon to provide both gender and cultural representation for departmental and institutional events. They are expected to mentor more students than White colleagues or serve in contingency committees, creating an overload that often leads to less time for research activities. These demands are often placed by academic institutions, governments, and fellow citizens in order to maintain our professional jobs in academia. As Riddell (2016) states, research is used to assess tenure-track faculty members, with research as part of their workload in most universities, and

it determines promotion or employment retention This is also connected to the issue of commodification and productivity.

Based on our experiences, research is the primary tenure consideration for faculty with a research workload, and a strong tenure case is built on a solid research program with a good number of peer-reviewed publications and research grants (Riddle, 2016). All tenure-track faculty members with research workloads are expected to engage in research by applying for competitive research funds, writing for publication, collaborating with other faculty members in academia, and making meaningful contributions. However, in our experience, it is challenging for early-career Black women in academia to find research mentorship or collaboration with colleagues because many of us are not matched with mentors, and we also lack access to mentors and role models. Based on personal experiences, colleagues in academia perceive Black women to be less productive, impacting our research collaboration opportunities.

As Black scholars, our stories of lived experiences cannot be adequately represented by numbers (in statistics) nor by an outsider researcher who may not understand or appreciate the experience. This article argues that it is time to centre the experiences of Black women faculty through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CTR) and an anti-Black racism (ABR) framework. Our ways of knowing create a space for us to share and document our experiences. hooks (1994) offered a way to think about personal experience as “a way of knowing that is often expressed through the body, what it knows, what has been deeply inscribed on it through experience” (p. 36). This complexity of experience can rarely be named from a distance, and neither can it be quantified into statistical data, as most research works on Black bodies attempt to do. This article is inspired by the research agenda of Black female academics from Nursing, Social Work and Social Sciences in a Canadian university. We view ourselves as legitimate knowledge producers because we acknowledge the relationships between human experiences and the broader theoretical concepts. We have a keen interest in decolonizing research, by this we mean interrogating the paternalistic system that continues to promote a gendered, classed, and racialized politics of knowledge production and dissemination.

This paper explores our experiences in teaching and research mentorship, collaboration in academic institutions.

### **Our Positionality**

Positionality for us is a critical understanding of the role of a scholar’s personal identity and their present position, whatever role they occupy in the academy, and how those two pieces come together into this article. It is essential to acknowledge our collective positionalities as authors of this article, which may impact how we synthesize the literature, and tell our stories and make recommendations for future directions in research mentorship, funding, and decolonizing research. All the authors

identify as Black, immigrant, upper-middle-class, cisgender female faculty members in a university with experience in research in physical and mental health, socio-economic issues, and assessment across diverse groups of Black populations. Our collective positionalities contribute to the representation of Black voices in this article. Our intention for writing this article is to amplify existing Black female scholarship and encourage further Black academic collaboration in future research and writing. By Black academic collaboration, we mean a collaborative process whereby scholars from different disciplines interact, but they are comfortable enough to venture outside of the positivist paradigm. This kind of collaboration can help us share, borrow, and adapt new ideas from each other. This sharing of ideas will not only cement solidarity among the Black women scholars but will help us provide indispensable support to incoming researchers. We know that every scholar brings a unique approach into research while sharing scholarship commonalities but adopting and integrating those differences and commonalities into our own work will enrich and enhance our research practice. Further developing the synergy of interdisciplinary collaboration can also empower Black women scholars to critically examine how the system has functioned to thwart their research aspirations and goals.

In the context of the recognition of the historical importance of colonization of Black bodies and its far-reaching contemporary implications for systems of oppression, we also acknowledge our relationships to Canada, which this work focuses on, and our identities as long standing or recent settlers.

### **Research Mentorship and Black Women in the Academy - Literature Review**

There is a dearth of research on race and mentoring in academia in Canada (Mullings & Mukherjee, 2018; Spafford et al., 2006). However, Canadian research has further demonstrated that Black women faculty lack mentorship in their early careers (Henry et al., 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2021) and encounter discriminatory policies and practices based on the racialized and gendered nature of hiring, tenure and advancement, particularly in the way the abilities and qualifications of Black women faculty are judged. This is an example of the discriminatory practices that often cause intense anxiety concerning tenure and promotion despite universities' declaration to commit to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). Critical race theorists (Henry & Tator, 2012) argue that universities' commitment to EDI could be considered a double standard when subtle forms of racism, such as lack of mentorship for Black women faculty members, are not addressed. Previous studies have demonstrated that Black faculty members are less likely to have mentors to guide them to succeed in academia, such as through publications, managing research, teaching, and service, and obtaining external fundings, which are essential for tenure and promotion (Edwards & Ross, 2018; Kolade, 2016). However, Black women faculty are expected to work harder

to demonstrate their academic credibility, which is often questioned (Henry et al., 2017; Mohammed & Beagan, 2018; Whitefield-Harris et al., 2017).

Henry and colleagues (2017) noted that Black academics have learned to play the game in the academy by working harder to increase their publications and obtain successful external funding. However, this group still encounters challenges with tenure and promotion due to anti-Black racism and the quantification of soft skills such as personality and collegiality in their career (Henry et al., 2017). Hooks (1989) argues that these challenges experienced by Black academics are a result of racism, sexism, and class exploitation, which act to suppress and silence them in the academy. These are different ways in which Black bodies are turned into numbers and further removed to the margin of the academic community.

Research from the UK suggests that academic mentoring is influenced by the cultures, systems, and processes of academic institutions, many of which are historically non-inclusive of racialized minorities and have been developed and perpetuated in ways that reinforce the status quo (Harris & Ogbonna, 2022). These racist practices have been taken for granted by academic institutions as they are integrated within their policies that direct decision making. Tate and Bagguley (2017) noted that research, whatever form it takes, is important for the progress of societies, to the extent that it helps us to understand better and modify issues, policies, theories, and serves as a link to practice. Bhopal (2016) found that the lack of research mentoring by senior racialized academics was because they commonly have higher teaching loads than their white counterparts. Ahmed (2012) further argued that racialized academics are more likely to lack access to mentoring and networks that facilitate career success, and the low number of senior racialized academics acts as a disincentive to apply for promotion. The lack of inclusion of racialized academics in the academy suggests they are viewed as not belonging to the academy (Bhopal & Pitkin, 2020).

Research from the US suggests that the limited number of Black women in academia can result in potential mentors being unavailable to junior scholars, or fewer opportunities to establish this relationship (Jordan-Zachery, 2004). Prior research on faculty of colour found that many experience marginalization in. Examples of marginalization include poor institutional fit, lack of support, and cultural and social differences (Smith et al., 1996), others, such as Gregory (1995) and Tack & Patitu (1992) indicated that factors such as isolation, discrimination, low salaries, low professional rank, and lack of tenured status impact Black women's research mentorship.

hooks (1989) suggested that in response to this marginalization, Black women try to find a “home place.” A home place is a space that can minimize the marginality of Black women and centre their experiences in academia. Mkandawire-Valhmu et al. (2010) asserted that although the process of mentorship has been recognized to increase career success, research has demonstrated that Black women experience everyday racism

in academia, both personal and structural; these forms of racism within academic institutions marginalize, subordinate, restrict, and silence Black women's access to mentors who share their interests and with whom they can candidly discuss race issues. As Black women in the academy, we need to raise consciousness and keep talking about these issues by finding ways to design intentional support and ongoing opportunities for peer research mentorship to achieve tenure and promotion. For instance, by establishing and enforcing policies for mentoring, and updating faculty on the new policies through mandated institution sponsored mentor workshops and seminars

In addition, peer mentorship counteracts isolation and supports collective achievements over individual competition, which becomes more apparent as collaboration in research develops, increasing multidisciplinary teams and partnerships. These are practical strategies that could be used towards decolonization of research and also as the ways to operationalize the proposed theoretical frameworks for this work.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

We view CRT and an ABR framework as instrumental for contextualizing the work we do, our lived experiences, and the space we occupy in academia. For this reason, we ground the analyses of our experiences in academia within the theoretical framework of CRT. This critical theory emerged from the work undertaken by legal scholars including Derrick Bell and radical feminists such as Sojourner Truth to advance the issues of race and racism fought during the civil rights era (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Harris, 1993). Today, CRT is not limited to legal studies but has been mobilized by several disciplines including education. As Black women, our case is unique in the sense that we are vulnerable to anti-Black racism since the issues we often encounter in our practice on a daily basis are both the issues of racism and sexism. Therefore, both CRT and ABR are the frameworks that we could use to apprehend, interpret, and create a critical consciousness not only about these encounters and on issues concerning our lives as Black women but the struggles of the Black community. The CRT is a powerful tool that we could use in creating awareness about how anti-Black racism affects the lived experience of Black women in academia.

Delgado & Stefancic (2023) assert that “race and races are products of social thoughts and relation. Not objective, inherent or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (p. 9). In essence, race is a social construction that is premised on the pseudoscientific characterization of non-whites as being biologically, intellectually, and emotionally inferior to their white counterparts (Ndegwa & Olajide, 2003). These notions not only racialize and marginalize Black bodies, including women's, but place us in a precarious position in which our work and scholarship is often unrecognized and not seen as legitimate knowledge.

Addressing the subtlety of racism is an important aspect of CRT as it draws attention to the reality of racism and the challenges of addressing this perpetual issue when it remains unacknowledged (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). Undoubtedly, racism supports and advances the interests of white people and provides them with material and physical benefits. Interest convergence, a key tenet of CRT, makes visible the material disparities racism renders to Black people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). As Black scholars in the fields of nursing, social sciences, and social work, we embrace CRT's key tenets of intersectionality, storytelling, and counternarrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023) to situate our being and positionalities in a white space, counteract oppressive dominant narratives projected onto Black bodies, and reconstruct our own narratives that capture the essence of our lived experiences as academics. An intersectional lens accounts for the heterogeneity that exists among us as we come from different backgrounds, cultures, and histories that have been colonized. Giving attention to these areas is needed to identify intersecting points of oppression. Through storytelling and counternarrative, we can speak back, a psychologically beneficial mechanism (Ladson-Billings, 2013) for groups whose voices have been historically silenced.

In order to focus on our experiences, we deemed an ABR framework necessary to highlight Black peoples' everyday encounters with racism. The term ABR was coined by social work professor Akua Benjamin (Black Health Alliance n.d.). The concept of ABR speaks to the systemic racism Black people experience due to the normalizing effects of white supremacy. As Black women, our experiences in academia illuminate occurrences of ABR that expose us to continuous racial discrimination. According to Clarke et al. (2018):

[ABR is a] pervasive, overarching climate of attitudes, beliefs, institutional practices, and policies that are embedded in Canada's White supremacist history and culture that denigrate people of African descent, and it is manifested in various forms of structural violence and racialized inequalities in multiple social systems, including education, housing, racialized poverty, workplace, and criminal justice. (p. 44)

Within the Canadian context, the interests and dignity of Black people continue to be sidelined even though efforts are being made to address ABR. Systemically, Black people are not granted the same privileges and opportunities as white people and too often are put in positions where they have to resist whiteness and fight to be seen and heard. From our narratives, an ABR framework is suitable to capture incidences of ABR and highlight its impacts on Black women academics in the promotion and tenure processes. Although ABR is not a fully developed theoretical framework, its ideologies help to frame racism as a human rights concern

that demands a systemic as well as cultural response to protect the inherent worth of Black people.

By integrating CRT and an ABR framework into our analyses, we hope to shed light on how academic spaces are occupied, how knowledge is constructed, and the consequential effects on the lives of Black women who are unified by their shared experiences and desire to create spaces to thrive as Black academics in the areas of teaching, mentorship, and research.

### **Methodology: Narrative Inquiry**

We have used a narrative approach to present accounts of individuals who have experienced quantification of the Black body in academia here. We used this approach because it offers a space for the telling of stories of Black women's experiences. This approach enhanced an exploration of the meaning of our experiences. Wang and Geale (2015) explained how the power of storytelling can unearth degrees and details of life experiences. Narrative inquiry methodology was deemed a powerful tool because, by telling stories and inquiring into painful memories of experiences, people have found strength to resist the power of dominant narratives that shape their social contexts (hooks, 1990; Nelson, 1995).

During the early part of our deliberations on this work, we were reticent and cautious about sharing our experiences. However, using Narrative inquiry methodology allowed us to present real-life experiences through our stories. So, we found that telling stories enhanced the exploration of the meaning of those experiences. This section presents some accounts on how constraints, dilemmas, and challenges in academia have impacted Black people differently, and how these experiences are remarkably similar and reflect the experiences of Black people inside and outside of academia.

#### *Account One*

As I continue to think with the metaphor of the quantification of Black bodies in research, I like to acknowledge that this title has with it both historical and contemporary undertones. The more I reflect on the title, the more clearly I see the resemblance between the legacies of plantation and colonization and contemporary research politics, and how they affect Black scholars. Historically, Black bodies have been equated with commodities, to be oppressed and exploited in various ways devoid of human dignity (Hartman, 2008). It is quite interesting that even legislation created a legal ground for the violent treatment of enslaved Black people as property and not only were they exploited for the value of their physical bodies and labour, but for their intellectual aptitudes (Knight, nd). This comparison might sound far-fetched but regardless of how they might have made their ways to the Western world, whether through the Atlantic, immigration, or education, Black people have been and continue to be subjected to quantification and exploitation.

We often read reports about Black people's health and the predominant social issues in Black communities, but several of such studies are conducted or led by non-Black researchers. Many research studies conducted among Black population are often conceptualized with a biomedical model and individualistic mindset. Statistical reports consistently demonstrate a striking pattern and prevalence of chronic health conditions such as cardiovascular diseases and diabetes mellitus among the Black population (Harris & Ogbonna, 2023; Hollier, 2013; Sells et al., 2023; Spruill et al., 2019; Williams & Leavell, 2012). Apart from statistically reporting the percentage of the Black population affected, shouldn't there be some attention paid to the less explicit experiences underlying those conditions though? For instance, a strong connection has been identified between psychological violence and cardiovascular diseases (Harris et al., 2022; Van der Kolk, 2014), but how many scholars are interested in how Black people experience the psychological trauma of racism? It is simply not a competitive research focus or a popular topic, particularly among those who have access to means and resources. This calls into question the agenda for those statistical reports.

As Black scholars, our interests often stem from a compelling need to lend a dimension of authenticity to the prevailing issues in Black communities and the experiences leading to those issues. We want to provide our own perspectives regarding the grand narratives and assumptions about our health, values, culture, and identity. Our research interests are usually inspired by our experiences and a concern for our community. We recognize the need to improve our people's experiences in the educational, health care, and political arenas. Tired of reading about Black people in statistical reports of studies conducted by non-Black scholars, it is our desire to tell our stories with our own voices. We like to describe and interpret our own conditions, but unfortunately the efforts are often met with covert disapproval and skepticism. It was contended that criticism of Black scholars' research often occurs on the assumption that it is political, or it focuses too much on story and experience rather than being legitimate or discipline-specific research (Jayakumar et al., 2009; Settles et al., 2019).

Quite often, our research interests are devalued and dismissed as self-serving or insignificant. The general perception is that the topics do not constitute academic scholarship or there is no demonstration of appropriate rigour. Research by Black scholars is often discredited on the basis of the question of objectivity in the analyses of problems related to life experiences and lack of conformity to mainstream research protocol. The question that I often ask is: who determines the standard and the rules of the game? I saw a situation where a Black immigrant student conducted research on the experiences of the Black immigrant families in her community, but she was persuaded to relinquish her work to a fellow White student to present at a conference. The decision was based on the notion that the Black student was not capable of presenting the work. It was interesting

that the White student was the one who received an accolade for this work instead of the Black student.

My observation of a Black immigrant student not being given an opportunity to present or receive recognition for her work caused me to reflect on the need for Black faculty mentors. This presents another dimension of the quantification of Black bodies on the “academic plantation” through the politics of tokenism and representation. Some of us are familiar with stories about the lives of Black people on the plantation or during colonization where people were manipulated to see each other, the land, and knowledge as the property of the slaver or the colonizer (Hartman, 2008). I have seen a situation where Black faculty have been manipulated to compete against each other instead of working with a collective voice to address the issues affecting their people. In writing this piece, I hope Black scholars will be watchful for how plantation politics still play out in academia. I also look forward to a time when Black research will be well supported without covert oppressive experiences.

#### *Account Two*

As a migrant woman from Africa, I traveled to a developed country to pursue my graduate degrees. My plan was to seek knowledge from an international perspective to complement the knowledge gained from my African descent and to enable me to give back the rich, blended knowledge gained to my nation and the global community. To contribute to enhancing the limited documented evidence to support nursing education in my home country, I decided to conduct my master’s and PhD theses on a topic within the context of my country in Africa.

However, I realized there was limited funding to support my research to inform knowledge development in the area. Funding that was available for nursing education was hugely lacking. This was aggravated by the context in which I wanted to conduct my study: funding opportunities that were available focused on contexts related to developed countries, and knowledge mobilization projects related to the African context were marginalized. I also realized that I could have had a variety of research funding opportunities if I was not within a minority population. This reflects the oppressive perspective in research where my abilities to contribute to knowledge development and interpretation from my emic perspective of realities, values, and the historical context of my background could be compromised.

#### *Account Three*

I decided to pursue my PhD in nursing after over 20 years working in various healthcare settings in Africa and North America. The university granted me a full scholarship for the PhD program. However, as the single earner for my household, I still needed to work a full-time job to gather for my family. When I decided to register for graduate school, I knew it would not be easy. Working a full-time job outside of the university denied me the

opportunity to network within the academic community. Most of my colleagues worked as teaching assistants or research assistants. The experiences allowed them to participate in grant applications, boosting their academic experience. Further, I did not receive support from my employer, unlike my work colleagues who received support while attending their graduate school.

My PhD supervisor, who is a Black immigrant from Africa, was my sole academic supporter throughout the program. At the time, I was the only Black student in the program. I felt alone. The lack of representation of Black students in my program exacerbated my mental health. Being the only Black student in the program, I felt like an imposter and developed anxiety due to microaggressions in the classroom. As a result, it negatively affected my participation in class activities. The encouragement from my supervisor inspired me to make myself seen. The following words from my supervisor still resonate with me, and I pass them on to Black students in my courses:

You need to assert yourself. Sit at the front of the class and answer questions even if you think it doesn't make sense to you. Don't worry about your accent, people pay to go to Africa to hear this accent, and you have brought it here to them.

Microaggressions and other forms of biases at the institutional level still exist. One of the ways these are visible is in student evaluations. During my postdoctoral fellowship, I taught clinical to second-year students at a Canadian university. There was a lack of support for me and some students of colour among the nurses and other staff on the unit. Additionally, there was disrespect from some Caucasian students that was noticeable during the end-of-day debrief. At the end of the term, I received low scores on my student evaluations as an instructor, although the students rated their learning experience highly. Nursing is a predominantly white profession that upholds whiteness as an ideology that negatively affects both nurses and patients, and racialized nurses face discrimination from their colleagues (Mapedzahama et al., 2018).

Further, Black faculty members face unique challenges with racial microaggressions, and it is important to recognize and address these issues in their working environments (De Sousa & Varcoe, 2021; Louis et al. 2016). Hence, Black faculty members need to have mentorship, especially when starting out in their careers. Having mentors within the university can help new faculty navigate the system and achieve success. Even though I am currently being mentored by someone outside the university, having mentors within the university would greatly benefit my professional growth.

#### *Account Four*

Over the years, I have noticed unhealthy rivalry among Black scholars in academic research and teaching. There is also a lack of collaboration among Black scholars. Approaching a senior visible minority

researcher for project collaboration is usually unsuccessful because everyone is fighting to access the limited funds available to Black scholars. The most recent report by SSHRC (2023) recognizes the funding limitation for Black scholars. The limitations of funding and resources among Black researchers make their collaborations hard. This situation has created resentment and an inability to collaborate efficiently with other researchers.

One can also see that collaboration with Black communities in community-based research is challenging. Breland-Noble et al. (2024) explain that this challenge is caused by the lack of trust and fear among community members as they have seen traditional research conducted in a way that did not favour them. While this research is based on the experiences of Black communities in the US, based on my experience, it is common to see such challenges elsewhere.

The consequence of this competition and lack of collaboration is the low participation of Black scholars in research. In fact, only 2.5 -3.9% of applicants to SSHRC programs were Black scholars between 2019 and 2021 (SSHRC, 2023). In addition, there is limited research on socioeconomic issues in Black communities. However, this knowledge is imperative to implement inclusive policies. There is a need to build trust among Black communities to close the current research gap. And more importantly, more research funds should be available for Black faculty and students.

#### *Account Five*

I am in the early stage of my academic career. Two of the key issues that I have experienced are a lack of teaching and research mentorship for new hires and an absence of start-up grants for new professors to conduct research. Without adequate support in the areas of teaching and research, I find myself having to go over and beyond to ensure that I meet the requirements of my position.

#### *Account Six*

Writing this narrative draws my memories back to the history of slavery and the quantification of Black bodies that enriched Western capitalism. The profits of slavery provided the seed money for the European industrial revolutions, built great homes, and supported emerging banking systems, universities, and agricultural revolutions in crops such as sugar, cotton, and tobacco plantations that were owned by white slave masters. This history helps us to understand the historical quantification of Black bodies through physical and psychological violence during slavery, which is an ongoing practice in academia.

In this narrative, I will focus on my journey in academia. However, I am deeply conscious of how I share my experiences in this work while also maintaining a professional vagueness about some details. I do not do so to avoid naming the problems but to speak louder on structural inequities and racism in academia. As Lorde (1984, cited by Williams, 2020), argues the master's tools cannot be used to achieve genuine change. As a doctoral

student, my supervisor, who did not identify with my race and sex, was my mentor. He guided me through the university channels where I could get help and how to teach in a university. He also guided me with my first academic publications and conference presentations by revising my abstracts, drafts, and presentations.

When I obtained my first academic job as a tenure-track faculty assistant professor, I expected similar support. Within a few weeks in this position, in my first meeting with the director, she was cold and unwelcoming. I was confused, since during my interview, she appeared supportive. I also thought maybe I did something or said something I shouldn't have. As an early career faculty, I expected the meeting to include guidelines about mentorship in teaching and research. But I was wrong. When I inquired about research, I was told that for my position, I was not expected to conduct research since it was a teaching position. I know I signed the job offer prior to taking on this position, but I did not understand the workload requirement for these two positions. During my first year of teaching, my workload included teaching and coordinating field practicums. I later learned through personal communication with colleagues that field practicum coordination should not be part of my workload since I joined the department with a PhD. I also learned coordinating the field practicums could prevent my career progress since it was not quantified as part of my academic work. As a Black woman in academia, the allocation of field practice coordination as part of my workload resonates with Ramdeo's (2023) discussion regarding Black women educators as being conveniently seen to serve academic needs yet invisible in our career progress. It is also an ongoing practice of enslavement of Black bodies and institutionalized EDI policies which continue to quantify Black bodies without recognizing our research skills. Although I was not expected to conduct research, I did not receive research mentorship. In my first year of teaching, I presented at an international conference based on my doctoral dissertation. I was also invited by two colleagues to join their research projects as co-principal investigator.

#### *Account Seven*

My journey as an academic and a faculty member began with loneliness and isolation. I recall seeing another Black faculty member on campus and in my faculty and I was happy, I was relieved. Being the only Black faculty member often meant that when Black or diverse student issues arose, I was the consultant. These instances communicated that my visibility is based on what I look like, not what my performance or competence is. These daily and weekly encounters meant I had to be deliberate by mentally dismissing the subtle messages of competence and merit. It is exhausting. I recall a colleague casually mentioning to me that I look like a peasant and another telling me that they value my "diverse perspective" and then discrediting that same diverse perspective when their votes and support counted. I have experienced microaggressions, exclusion, minimization of

my capability; I am challenged, overlooked, and my decision-making questioned while simultaneously being complimented on “doing great work.” The incongruent messages are not only confusing, at times they are humiliating. My experience has encouraged me to discard subtle messages intertwined within the system and recognize my value and continue to do the work to demonstrate my and others’ worth.

### **Key Themes**

The key themes that were consistent across all accounts of Black faculty’s experiences, observations, and thoughts were in relation to how Black bodies are quantified in research and academia. In this section, we reconceptualize the themes from a standpoint of moving our stories from the grand narratives of “what is wrong with Black bodies” to our reality of “what happened to Black bodies.”

#### *Similarity between Slavery and the Colonization Era and Modern-Day Academia*

Those familiar with the history will agree with the observation about this similarity. Account One and Six mentioned that the politics of slavery and colonization are still much around in academia and research. Consistent with the history of slavery and colonization, academia continues to dehumanize Black bodies as disposable commodities. While commodification of Black people was clearly articulated in the story of slavery, the same tone is continually reinforced today in indirect and subtle ways. The slavers envisioned Black people as laborers on the plantation, and Black faculty remained the convenient and cheap labor in academia. As stated in account Seven, we are often reminded of this space by White colleagues. Why could Black people not be seen as anything other than as “peasants” regardless of the level of education or position? There is often a remarkable disconnection when such insinuation is carefully presented on a platter of diversity and inclusion.

#### *Quantification of Black Populations in Statistical Reports*

Account One questioned the agenda behind the quantitative research studies that only focus on bio-statistical reports of chronic conditions among the Black population and ignore the qualitative factors leading to those conditions. Account Four also reflected on how the Black communities being targeted in studies are beginning to question the agenda as well: “the lack of trust and fear among community members as they have seen traditional research conducted in a way that did not favour them.” As a people, the more conscious and enlightened we are about the oppressive system in which we live, the more eloquent we also will be in questioning the intentions when they manifest in the tenure and promotion processes.

#### *Devaluation of Black Scholars’ Work*

Some of us have experienced a devaluation of our scholarly works in a very subtle way at certain points in our education and career such as asking for a justification of the source of our ideas, questioning the credibility of personal essays, or treating our works with skepticism and suspicion. In her reflection, Account One explained why Black research works are often discredited: “our research interests are devalued and dismissed as self-serving or insignificant.” In account Two, “limited funding to support my research,” could be interpreted as a lack of interest to support Black research interest.

#### *The Politics of Tokenism and Representation*

The experience of the politics of tokenism and underrepresentation is embedded in Black scholars’ accounts. For instance, Account One mentioned the case of the Black student being supervised by a white faculty member because there was a lack of Black faculty representation in that role to supervise the Black students. Account Three also described an experience of tokenism and under-representation of Black faculty in a graduate program: “I did not receive support from my employer unlike my work colleagues who received support while attending their graduate school.” Account Three could only look up to her supervisor, who was among the very few at that position: “the encouragement from my supervisor inspired me to make myself seen.” Account Three also described the impact on her as a student: “the lack of representation of Black students in my program exacerbated my mental health,” “it negatively affected my participation in class activities.”

#### *Lack of Mentorship and Support for Early Career Black Scholars*

This theme was evident in Black scholars’ accounts. For Account Five, the key issue in her experience was a lack of teaching and research mentorship: “without adequate support in the areas of teaching and research, I find myself having to go over and beyond to ensure that I meet the requirements of my position.”

#### *Limited or Lack of Funding for Research Among Black Communities*

This is a theme that resonates across all accounts because we have experienced a lack of funding at certain points in our career. For instance, Account Two reflected on her experience and explained the reason for unavailability of funding for Black researchers: “funding opportunities that were available focused on contexts related to developed countries and knowledge mobilization projects related to the African context were marginalized.” Account Five also reflected on her experience as an early career faculty: “an absence of start-up grants for new professors to conduct research.” For Account Six, her director could not see the need for her to be engaged in research or any scholarly activities: “when I inquired about research, I was told that for my position, I was not expected to conduct research since it was a teaching position.” In her reflection, Account Two

felt that things might have been different if she was not a Black scholar: “I also realized that I could have had a variety of research funding opportunities if I was not within the minority population.”

#### *Microaggressions and Covert Racism*

Our reflections unraveled the subtle ways in which racism is embedded in the daily experiences of Black scholars both in teaching and research. Account Three described her experiences of microaggressions, ranging from her low score on student evaluations to bullying and disrespectful behaviours from students. Yet, it seemed like the disrespectful behaviours were endorsed by those who witnessed the behaviours. Account Three expressed the unsupportive attitude of colleagues: “it was apparent that there was a lack of support for me and some students of colour.” Account Three’s narrative reminds us of the plantation experiences in which the children of the slavers could treat their nannies the way they wanted. The long-standing effects of covert racism on self-esteem and sharing the reality of experiences are evident in some accounts: “I felt like an imposter and developed anxiety due to microaggressions in the classroom,” (Account Three). “I am deeply conscious of how I share my experiences in this work while also maintaining a professional vagueness about some details.” (Account Six).

#### *Exploitation of Black Faculty and Students*

Reflecting on our experiences is a way of calling to consciousness the grand narratives that position Black scholars as inadequate in academia. Even though Black faculty must work much harder than their counterparts, they are unappreciated, and their efforts undermined. This is a kind of experience described in Account Six’s narrative as “the perception of Black women educators as being conveniently seen to serve academic needs yet invisible in our career progress.” This struggle was echoed in Account Five as well: “I find myself having to go over and beyond to ensure that I meet the requirements of my position.” In her reflection, Account One recounted how a Black student was persuaded into relinquishing her work for another student, without being given credit for it. Have we not experienced the situations in which Black people’s ideas were discarded, and the same ideas were later claimed by peers? Black faculty are not only exploited, but they are often manipulated to turn against each other in competition. Manipulation often causes a case of divide and rule and survival of the fittest. Account Four described it as “the lack of collaboration among Black scholars.” The impact of such manipulation was well articulated by Account Four, that “this situation has created resentment and an inability to collaborate efficiently with other researchers.” Our accounts call attention to the unique challenges faced by Black women in navigating the landscape of academia and the influence race and gender have on the way Black women are perceived, treated, and evaluated as faculty. Writing our reflections was a way of giving voice to “what happened (on the plantation)

and continues to happen" to Black bodies in academia. Sharing our concrete experiences in this article was a way of naming those unconscious biases that are often ignored in the experiences of Black women scholars.

### **Discussion**

Through the above-explicated narratives, accounts, and reflections, we presented our experiences and revelations in the context of Black women in academia through the lens of the quantification of Black bodies. Our perspectives and unique experience of not only being Black but also women in academia, point out the challenging issues pertaining to a) our responsibility to conduct research with limited resources and support, aggravated by being Black women in academia (Baldwin & Griffin, 2015; Henry & Glenn, 2009; Wilder, et al., 2013); b) limited funding for Black researchers and challenges of mentorship in our academic endeavors (Evans & Cokley, 2008; Talbert et al., 2021); c) concerns about non-Black researchers conducting research on Black folks due to the colonial construction of Black scholars as illegitimate knowledge producers (Carter, 2009; Follis, et al., 2023; Zuberi, 2000); and d) discrimination, marginalization, and racism in our positions and roles as Black women in academia (Baldwin & Griffin, 2015; Hirschman & Bosk, 2020; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021).

Similar to the above challenges inherent in the narratives of our experience as Black women in academia, evidence from the literature reveals that anti-Black racism continues to exist in academia and has been shown to have an undesirable impact on the performance and productivity of Black faculty, especially Black women in academia (Evans & Cokley, 2008; Follis et al., 2023; Hirschman & Bosk, 2020; Patton, 2004). Access to informal research resources requires inclusion into the departmental or institutional culture. In some instances, archival databases or resources in other departments may be available that Black faculty are not aware of. Gender and racial discrimination may also limit the access of Black women faculty to formal research resources such as external funding. Moreover, Black women are especially vulnerable to being challenged and questioned in the classroom because of the negative stereotypes and being the most stigmatized ethnic group regarding beliefs about intelligence (Devine, 1989; Jones, 1997). These intersectional experiences negatively impact Black women's productivity and career advancement.

This was also confirmed in a recent study by Lopez & Jean-Marie (2021), which examined the lived experiences of Black educators in Canada and the US. The authors reported that anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism are manifested in schooling spaces, especially in the areas of teaching, learning, and leadership. Lopez & Jean-Marie (2021) strongly advocated for the importance of examining ways to disrupt, confront, and challenge racism in the education of Black students, scholars, practitioners, staff, and all people of colour.

Diamond and Gomez (2023) have also argued that white supremacy and anti-Black racism are deeply embedded in educational institutions, and manifest in the form of racial domination and subordination; hence, the creation of racially just schools focused on disrupting racism is critical. The authors also advocated for the need for educators to engage in critical reflective action to deconstruct and redesign organizational routines to facilitate racially just education systems. This assertion relates to the aspect of our reflection focused on the practice of non-Black researchers conducting research on Black folks, which could be due to the relegation of our academic responsibilities to non-research roles. This could contribute to the misinterpretation of perspectives and knowledge owned by the Black community. Congruent with the above explanations, Zuberi (2000) postulated that concepts pertaining to racial classifications have been misinterpreted and incorrectly presented due to the social circumstances that created the concept of race.

Similarly, Graetz et al. (2022) reported that static measures of self-reported race and conventional regression estimators are usually used in quantitative studies to examine racial health disparities, which have been criticized as inconsistent with social-constructivist theories of race, racialization, and racism. This speaks to our argument on the impact and challenges of how the concept of quantification of Black bodies impacts our productivity and experiences as Black women in academia. Further, Zuberi (2000) explained that race is as an individual attribute fixed at birth and is employed by researchers as a variable with the potential to cause change in some other aspect of that same individual. Zuberi argued that an individual's race cannot change since it is an individual's attribute and therefore suggested that using the appropriate language to facilitate increased efficiency of communication about the statistical analysis of race is critical. The author further indicated that statistical research goes beyond racial reasoning and therefore, before the data pertaining to race can be deracialized, the social circumstances that created race must be deracialized.

Lett et al. (2022) also reported that there are weaknesses in the conceptualization, and operationalization of race in quantitative population health research and argued that race should not be used as a measure of biological difference but rather as a proxy to expose systemic racism. This aligns with Follis et al.'s (2023) call to action on the need to improve research on race, ethnicity, and structural racism. Also inherent is the need to equip and support Black scholars to increase their capabilities to engage in scientific inquiries about Black communities to foster accurate interpretation and development of knowledge relevant to the community. The support for black scholars includes but is not limited to; a) research funding to support research methodologies appropriate for knowledge development in black communities, subsequently increasing the scholarly productivity of black scholars, b) providing welcoming spaces for Black scholars to form professional alliances/friendships, and promoting racial

healing; c) empowering black scholars to demonstrate their cultural authorities through storytelling and facilitate intellectual space for the development of transformative black knowledge in academic research, and d) mentorship for Black scholars in research grant application and management and other scholarly activities (Cook et al., 2022; Williams, 2019).

As indicated in the above discussion, mentoring is one of the strategies identified to support junior scholars through their academic and scholarly endeavors (Evans & Cokley, 2008; Talbert et al., 2021). Mentoring provides guidance and structure for junior faculty to achieve their academic and professional goals (Talbert et al., 2021). The authors reported using a mentorship approach in the form of a training program called Leading Emerging and Diverse Scientists to Success (LEADS) to provide multiple training platforms for mentees in academia. The mentorship program increased the mentees' skills and knowledge regarding research to promote expertise in grant writing and submission for funding opportunities. This program adds to the value of using mentors to help define the research pathway of their mentee.

Evans and Cokley (2008) reported that African American women in academia face difficulties with their research programs due to sex and racial discrimination, which leads to denial of their promotions and tenure. However, receiving mentorship was beneficial in assisting African American women to cope with psychosocial difficulties. The current mentorship model has been documented as Eurocentric and hierarchical, involving the mentor holding a position of power, and the need for decolonizing mentorship processes in higher education (Ahmed-Landeryou, 2023). The presence of power dynamics and structures of inequality is seen as a way of maintaining the colonization status quo. Thus, there is a call for Black women scholars engaging in mentorship to demonstrate self-reflexivity when examining the policies and processes of racialized academics, in order to prevent the reproduction of performative colonialism (Rahman & Kazmi, 2023). This also calls for a fundamental re-evaluation of core theories and methods related to decolonization practices and intersectionality analysis. Moving beyond the traditional Euro-centric model to achieve decolonization, a deliberate effort is required to prioritize racialized identities (Rahman & Kazmi, 2023). This also raises a methodological and ethical question. Does mentoring Black women accord them the methodological freedom that resonates with their research interest or are they restricted in the positivist box? Further, Evans & Cokley (2008) advocated that research mentoring at the pre-doctoral and postdoctoral levels is critical in increasing career advancement among African American women in research-oriented academic institutions. Apart from mentorship, we also advocate for incorporating anti-racism frameworks inherent in critical race theory to assess and examine inequities that affect Black people's experiences, performance, and productivity in their academic and educational systems.

Lopez-Littleton et al. (2023) indicated that CRT is a theoretical framework useful in designing strategies to dismantle structural racism, counterbalance dominant paradigms, and build a new social contract with Black communities. The authors developed the ADORE model as a strategic framework to dismantle anti-Black academic institutions. ADORE is an acronym where (A) acknowledges harm; welcomes (D) diverse perspectives; accepts (O) ownership and (R) responsibility for systemic change; and garners (E) energy to sustain the progress of change. Lopez and Jean-Marie (2021) also identified possible ways that leaders and others in educational institutions could act to curb anti-Black racism. This includes a) *naming* anti-Black racism through understanding manifestations and the conceptualization of anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism in schooling practices, educators examining their positionality, engaging in self-reflection, and understanding what they need to learn and unlearn; b) educators *owning* the issue, thinking about how they are complicit, and possible actions for change; and c) using *framing* by educators to engage in intentional and purposeful actions in looking for spaces in their work to actively challenge anti-Black racism. Further, the authors explained that when anti-Black racism is *named*, *owned*, and *framed*, the development of an action plan must be completed, executed, and sustained. They added that when educators know they are being held accountable, their actions pertaining to racism will be more intentional and thoughtful.

Dixson and Rousseau Anderson (2018) also identified six boundaries for CRT and education: 1) support the fact that racial inequity in education is the logical outcome of a system of achievement controlled by competition; 2) examine the role of education policy and educational practices in the construction of racial inequity and the perpetuation of normative whiteness; 3) reject the dominant narrative about the inherent inferiority of people of colour and the normative superiority of white people; 4) reject historicism and examine the historical linkages between contemporary educational inequity and historical patterns of racial oppression; 5) engage in intersectional analyses that recognize the ways that race is mediated by and interacts with other identity markers; and 6) agitate and advocate for meaningful outcomes that redress racial inequity. These ideas provide a framework for analyzing antiracism in education. Considering the explanations of the narratives and reflections of our challenges as Black women in academia in the context of the literature, we suggest using frameworks embedded in CRT to address all forms of ABR in educational systems.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Our accounts indicate that there is a lack of representation and support for Black female academic scholars, which limits the opportunities for Black women in educational spaces. Despite bringing unique perspectives and experiences to the academic community, Black female scholars have historically been underrepresented in academia and have

faced systemic entry and advancement barriers. Therefore, institutions must take bold action to support Black female scholars by implementing mentorship programs and professional development opportunities, offering targeted funding for research and projects, and enabling mentorship and collaboration among Black faculty members by supporting the creation and financing of safe spaces within academic institutions. Increasing representation starts with ensuring a higher education pipeline for Black female students. Fewer than half of Black girls who graduate from high school enroll in degree programs (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Creating a dedicated space for Black female scholars ensures that diverse voices and perspectives are heard and valued in academic discourse. Academic institutions must establish policies and procedures that identify and respond to ABR. For instance, policies that address biases and microaggressions in institutions, ongoing mandatory equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) training for all faculty and staff, incorporation of EDI into the curriculum, and implementation of clear EDI statements with actionable steps. We believe that investing in the success of Black female scholars is critical to improving EDI in academia and creating a more equitable society. Additionally, it provides opportunities for mentorship and support for Black students who aspire to become scholars.

Most academic institutions in Canada have made an effort of diversification and inclusion by hiring Black women and racialized instructors. However, diversification continues after determining the number of men and women faculty members. It goes beyond and should be incorporated in post-secondary institutions at different levels and contexts. Instructors should be trained and reminded of the importance of recognizing diversity and encouraging a more inclusive environment. The diversity of curriculum and the change in the structure will help Black students feel more welcome. Education and training on diversity should also be considered at all levels for all instructors and students. As narrated above, Black students still experience racism and microaggressions from their peers. This discourages them from furthering their education; they become uninterested in research and academic life.

### **Informed Consent**

All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000.

All authors have consented to share their documented experiences

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There is no conflict of interest

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All authors have equally contributed to the inception, writing, analysis and revising the manuscript.

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