

DIGITAL LABOUR AND WORKING FROM HOME:
INVESTIGATING THE FORMATION OF THE TRIPLE DAY

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the impact that digital labour and work from home have across different populations. This work is framed with regards to Marxist-feminism and particularly examines the impact of work from home across different genders. To demonstrate the depth and breadth of the impact that work from home has on worker agency, four unique industries are analyzed: office jobs, gig economy, affect labour, and sex work. Additionally, the lens of critical race theory is invoked to highlight the distinct challenges that BIPOC workers face in the transition to digital labour. This thesis would not be contemporary without addressing the COVID-19 pandemic which was occurring during the time of its writing. This thesis uses those established lenses of gender, industry, and race to examine the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the workplace and home (office). Work from home increases the amount of labour that needs to be performed by each worker in exchange for some flexibility and agency in some domains.

Keywords: Work from home, Digital labour, Work, Industry, Hybrid, Race, COVID-19

PREFACE

Imagine you're Katharina Boesche, a mother of three and a lawyer. All is well when your children can be in school during the regular school-day, and you can work during those hours. Now imagine all your childcare such as school, daycare, and even babysitting has suddenly been cut off and your work responsibilities have increased. Now unexpectedly like never before, your children are doing school online. They've never been left alone with computers before and don't understand how to log-in to all the necessary applications. How are you supposed to get any of your work done while monitoring three kids' virtual educations? One logical response would state that if there are sufficient funds you should either leave your job or hire someone to look after the kids during the day while you work. But unfortunately, there aren't sufficient funds, and it is not considered safe to interact with persons from different households. You like your job and love your kids, so you must find a way to balance both. In the case of Boesche, she found that she was able to work from 4am to 8am each day while the kids were asleep. This is not a sustainable option for anyone and unfortunately, it's not a situation that is unique to Boesche and her family. During the COVID-19 pandemic many families had to harbour the increased financial, time, and care burden of moving their children's education online while also moving their own work online – and those are the lucky ones. Now we're over a year into this arrangement of the fluctuating hybridity of school and work with no clear end in sight.

The kids have returned to in person school on a part-time basis, some of the time. Each day and week there are new plans from the school board, from the government, for your household. They tell you what to do and who to see. Unfortunately, the case of Boesche is not uncommon during the pandemic, especially when it comes to women in the workforce being the partner who must compromise their career to participate more in childcare. Across many studies, such as “The gender gap in mental well-being during the COVID-19 outbreak: evidence from the UK” from the university of Essex; those women have borne much of the additional mental, physical, and even financial burden because of the pandemic (Etheridge and Spantig). The idea of women bearing the additional burden of care responsibilities is not new and it is something that has plagued the workforce since women’s inception into the workforce. This disparity is something through which the ramifications are only increased with each intersection of an individual’s identity be it worker, woman, person of colour, etc. The trouble with the current pandemic alongside the digitization epidemic is that now that plague of unequal burden has come entirely into the home. Increased work-from-home and care-from-home procedures have been enabled because of digitization and are not necessarily correlated with better qualities of work or care.

Based on this example we can already see the contemporary ramifications of many years of systems of oppression. This thesis aims to provide a synthesis of why economic and social systems which have necessitated the need for movements such as feminism have led to longstanding oppressive systems. In

this portion of my thesis, I will examine how Marxist feminism can be synthesized with labour theory and critical race theory to produce a measured impact in the lives of workers. For the purposes of this thesis, feminist theory will be discussed insofar as it is concerned with the creation of the cultural product of the gendered person, specifically that of the woman. This definition of feminist theory is further linked to its place in Marxist-feminist theory which discusses how the patriarchy and the economy work together to functionally oppress women. This thesis is sensitive to the fact that women are not a homogenous group and that their level of privilege differ widely based on a variety of outside factors. As a result of this, this thesis aims to refer to critical race theory as a steppingstone through which feminist theory can be accessed.

The premise of discrimination can be described as predicated on one's belonging or non-belonging to a particular group; be it race, ethnicity, class, gender, etc. As a result of this historical belonging or non-belonging certain persons continue to benefit from these relationships and others maintain their status as the oppressed group. This is impactful when measuring factors such as job and career outcomes. One measurement of job outcome is an individual's success in occupational digitization. This measurement is particularly sound due to the multitude of factors which should be present for success to be likely. The ability to work digitally from home is not distributed equally among all workers. The American Time Use Survey (2018) found a disparity in the education levels of workers working from home, with nearly 50% of workers with a bachelor's degree worked from home at least occasionally, compared to just 3% of workers

without a high school diploma (Bureau of Labour Statistics 2). This educational disparity is the continuation of an economic class disparity which is already evident, Gould and Shierholz examined the American Time Use Survey data to determine that the ability to work from home is segregated by industry, which inherently segregates it by class. With higher earning industries such as finance and management having the most ability to work from home (Gould & Shierholz). The authors also identified a disparity in the ability to work from home based on race and ethnicity. They suggest that Black and Hispanic workers are the least likely to be able to work from home by about 10% with Asians being the most likely to be able to work from home (Gould & Shierholz). Racial economic disparity is a form of systemic oppression in which education and job type availability are factors.

Historically, women have not been economically included in for-profit labour positions. When they have been included, it has often been because of extenuating circumstances, in industry specific reasons. When women have entered the workforce, it is well-recognized that they have been historically and contemporarily paid less than their male counterparts as is evidenced by the gender-wage-gap theory which recognizes the lower percentage which women are paid relative to each dollar a man earns. Despite equal pay legislation, Michelle Barrett claims that women's hourly earnings as a percentage of men's is 73.9%, but that number is dramatically lower for weekly earnings at only 64.8% (223). One theory as to why women have been "left behind" in the economy is discussed by Hekman in the Routledge Companion to Critical and Cultural

theory, wherein she states that women's reproductive abilities are what leave them behind in the economy (98). This popular rhetoric is repeated across industries to spread misogyny. For example, women are passed up for raises or promotions on the account that they may choose to take some time off during their careers to have children. This does not only universalize the female experience, but additionally implicates women regardless of their future desire for children.

This thesis argues that women are no longer being left completely behind in the economy because of their reproductive abilities but are expected to perform a greater amount of labour than their male counterparts to achieve the same economic, political, and social status. As was seen in the Boesche example above, she is expected not only to reconfigure her workday to accommodate for the educational needs of her children, but also to compromise her sleep to still participate in her for-profit workday. Arlie Hochschild presents the quarrelling balance of work life and family life that working parents must face. She identifies women as being more plagued by this conflict than their husbands (Second Shift 26). This forms the basis for Hochschild's "Second Shift" this term refers to the caregiving responsibilities that are performed primarily by women after their regular workday has concluded (Second Shift 27). In the example of Boesche, her second shift occurs simultaneously with her first, wherein she must perform caretaking and for-profit labour at the same time during the day. She works additional hours in the early morning, forming the third shift. This tracks

with the colloquial use of the phrase third shift to refer to overnight shifts, as the only time Boesche can fit this work in is, overnight.

In an attempt to update feminism for the twenty-first century, Laboria Cuboniks proposes the term “xenofeminist” which she argues aims to address issues such as the precarity of women’s labour and to question why women must be responsible for the reproduction of men’s labour (19). According to Cuboniks, it seems that there is still room for feminism in the twenty-first century but that it necessitates a few updates from its first wave counterparts.

Contrastingly, according to the Honourable Beverley Oda, the Minister of Canadian Heritage from 2006 to 2007, “[She] confidently informed a House of Commons standing committee that this government does fundamentally believe that all women are equal” (Brodie 145). Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s Conservative government argued that equality was inherent in Canadian society, on the basis that it was written into the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Brodie 146). Many people believe that if this were true there would not be remaining measurable differences based on gender. Despite this, funding to women’s groups was deemed frivolous expenditure, and women’s equality movements were transitioned into the role of “special interest groups” (Brodie 155). Alongside the government, an alternative women’s movement appeared, which called themselves the REAL Women. This movement, established in 1983 is positioned against feminism, LGBTQ rights, and abortion (Strong-Boag). Additionally, they aim to villainize other feminist groups by implying that other feminist groups intend to put women’s rights above the rights of other groups. It is

evident that there remains a discrepancy in the perceived duties of the twenty-first century feminist movement.

Once again returning to the case of Boesche, movements which advocate for equity along the lines of marginalized identities are still beneficial to those individuals. For Boesche, being self-employed makes her labour precarious. Through the lens of Xenofeminism, this type of movement is still required because Boesche's use of technology is not inherently progressive (Cuboniks 17) – her ability to rearrange her schedule to make it work for her and operate during the middle of the night does not mean that she has achieved gender equality. It just means that she has found a system in which she can continue to participate in the cycle of oppressive work environments. While this technology has provided her with the agency to set her own hours, work from home, and still be able to manage her household and supervise her children, the question that begs to be asked here is: is this the type of agency that we should seek?

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to investigate problems associated with the increased trend towards digital labour, primarily as digital labour is performed in an in-home or telework and telecommuting settings. The problems that are associated with working from home in this format can be categorized into three primary sub-sections. These are: economic, social, and physical and mental well-being. For the purposes of this thesis, telework and work-from-home will be used interchangeably to refer to situations where the worker works primarily from their home for a business, institution, or for themselves in traditional and non-traditional environments including gig work.

The primary economic problems that are faced in a telework environment which will be addressed in this thesis are associated with the exacerbation of the gender wage gap. Additional economic implications can be found in the need for a home office or home-office equipment which can provide constant or regular connectivity to the office. The next economic factor which poses a problem in a telework setting is the lack of funds for childcare or eldercare during the ever-growing workday. Additional economic implications are felt across different industries which can typically be associated with economic class. The types of jobs which can provide their workers with the flexibility to work from home some or all the time typically have a high barrier to entry and are not public service positions or are self-employment or gig work positions which do not have reliable income potentials at the beginning of the employment term. Traditional telework positions which have high barriers to entry typically pay more. Although this pay

scale is not unique to telework situations, additional barriers are present with workers who wish to work from home.

The social implications of telework which will be examined in this thesis are three-fold. The first social implication is familial. It mirrors that of women joining the workforce for the first time, wherein women who joined the workforce for the first time were not absolved of their household duties as mothers and wives, but rather expected to take on more than ever before, all while earning 83% of what men earn (Second Shift 117). This idea of women's doubled responsibilities was introduced and titled by Arlie Russel Hochschild in her text of the same name, *The Second Shift*. It can be expanded in the work from home model to a third shift and even fourth shift, during which the paid workday, the responsibilities of care for others, and the home are performed simultaneously followed by another shift of care for others. In some circumstances these workdays are also followed by education or another paid-labour job inside or outside the home. Leaving little to no time for care for the self. Hochschild accounts for the extra time that women appear to have to perform these duties as creating a "leisure gap" wherein women essentially work an extra month on top of their husbands annually because of the duties that they perform in the home (Second Shift 24). Szalai, in exploring time-budgets describes that nearly 10% of women had no leisure time in 1975 (391). This data is nearly half of a century old at this point, in an updated analysis of the same style by Blair-Loy et. al. suggests that this "leisure gap" has since dramatically decreased or even disappeared as of the twenty-first century (439). The disappearance of the "leisure gap" can be

associated with changes in the amount and type of work that each parent performs, wherein women are able to work fewer, more flexible hours than men at paid labour positions, and can put those additional hours into caregiving duties. This forms the basis of some gender-wage gap arguments and counterarguments. This thesis will examine themes such as ludic capitalism, reproductive labour, and the leisure gap in greater detail.

This doubling, tripling, and quadrupling of the workday is exemplified by people of all genders in the work from home model due to the expectation that these individuals will be able to provide care for others and the home, all while working. Additionally, the commonplace expectation which allows a multi-day continues to work to drive down the price of the worker. The burden of care being placed on the worker who works from home can be due to a variety of factors; however, culture and economics are two of the largest reasons why there might be the unequal burden of care expectation under certain circumstances. Some individuals and cultures place an increased value on caring for their own family members above institutionalized care. Additionally, finances may also serve as a barrier to entry for institutionalized care or formalized home-care arrangements. This has led to an unequal division of care among working dual-income households where one person works in the home and the other works outside the home.

The second major social implication is the change in workplace culture that occurs with working away from the traditional workplace setting for extended periods of time. A variety of factors are at work here including the lack of ability to

properly interpret social cues over computer mediated communication (CMC) settings which can lead to increased blurring of communication or even complete misinterpretation. This inability to decipher social environments is one of the factors which leads to the aptly named “Zoom fatigue.” Robby Nadler argues that this “Zoom fatigue,” while caused in part by these social factors; is also spatial in nature (2). Additionally, Nadler argues that the medium of “*technology causes people to behave [passively]*” (5). Not only are the lines of communication physically and metaphorically altered, but a lack of workplace comradery and social culture can reduce loyalty and productivity – two large worries of firms deciding if telework is a viable option for their workers. There is this overwhelming stigma associated with working from home which paints the at-home worker as unproductive, many times due to those care tasks which they may also be responsible for. Nadler also notes that CMC allows workers to effectively “sneak” away from both synchronous and asynchronous environments in way that’s simply not possible with face-to-face communication (3). This adds to the feeling of unreliability associated with the work from home environment. It can lead to the worker appearing lazy when taking advantage of more flexible scheduling options. Additionally, there is some level of workplace competition which is altered when the worker works from home. Both the inter-workplace competition which is bolstered by a strong sense of collectiveness, and the intra-workplace competition which may be strengthened or weakened by working from home but is likely weakened which leads to a lack of critical thinking. While workers are able and sometimes expected to put in an unlimited number of hours

when working from home with the “always online” mentality of the smartphone generation, workers also face a more fragmented workday where shorter bursts of tasks are interrupted by home or care tasks.

The final social implication of working from home is the increased load of emotional labour. According to Hochschild in *The Managed Heart*, the level and type of care that can be provided to children changes based on the gender of the caregiver (Managed Heart 156). However, this is also intertwined with economic class to determine the emotional labour associated both with caregiving, and with the emotional labour of teaching children to be emotional labourers as they grown and enter the workforce. According to Hochschild, this is often due to parents preparing their children for the type of job field and level of emotional labour that will likely be required of them (Managed Heart 157). This emotional labour is increased by working from home in several ways, the first of which is the increased burden of emotional labour in social situations such as CMC. The labour of teaching children to become successful emotional labourers is increased when multi-days occur and care responsibilities such as this are performed in addition to paid-labour workdays. Hochschild writes that “it had never occurred to [Nancy Holt] to reserve a right to resent *having* to work” (62). This notion can be extended to not knowing whether it is one’s right to resent having to perform additional emotional labour. At this point cases of neurodivergence where certain types of emotional labour may not even be possible without causing undue burden on the individual have not even been considered.

The last problem associated with working from home has to do with the physical and mental well-being of the worker. Moving from working in a more traditional workplace setting outside of the home to working from the home comes with increased risk for developing poor mental health. Oakman et al. in an analysis of mental and physical health outcomes during work at home determined that worker mental health is variable during periods of work from home. However, despite levels of increased stress and improved well-being, they determined that the largest factor for determining employee mental health during work from home is workplace responses and support (Oakman et al. 6). This can be partially associated with newfound fears such as the fear of one's personal life impacting their work performance. Perhaps this is children or animals appearing in the background of video calls or the need for increased flexibility with regards to scheduling to ensure the proper schooling and care for children can also occur these are among a few of the types of examples that Oakman et al. suggest workplaces must provide support which include boundary management and role clarity (1). Boundary management has become increasingly important in instances where there may not be a home office environment for every worker.

When it comes to contemporary issues, such as COVID-19, the health impacts of the ability to work from home provide a clear advantage in one's ability to not contract the virus. As aforementioned, the ability to work from home is demarcated by industry standards. However, the ability and success of working from home is further segregated by race and gender. According to an examination of the American Time Use Survey by Gould and Shierholz, Black

and Hispanic workers were among the least likely to be able to work from home. According to Whitney Laster Pirtle, racial capitalism is the fundamental cause of this, and other more damning health effects of COVID-19 (504). Laster Pirtle argues that there are four primary factors which increase COVID-19 inequities. These factors are that racial capitalism already

shape[s] multiple diseases which interact with COVID-19 to influence poor health outcomes; affect disease outcomes through increasing multiple risk factors for poor, people of color, including racial residential segregation, homelessness, and medical bias; shape access to flexible resources... and replicate historical patterns of inequities within pandemics. (Laster Pirtle 504)

Laster Pirtle identifies both several reasons why people negatively affected by racial capitalism may be unable to work from home, and why they may be at greater risk for catching and sustaining complications from the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Laster Pirtle cites other research which points to systemically evaluating structures of power to alleviate some of these stressors (507). While the workplaces of primarily white workers were able to adapt and send their workers digital, an overwhelming number of employers with primarily Black employees either had to furlough their workers or have them perform work which increases their risk factors. The effect of the pandemic has not been equitable among workers of different races, therefore, the effect of working from home is not equitable among workers of different races even in times of global strife.

In their meta-analysis, Oakman et al. determined that the physical implications of working from home vary by gender. They used the binary genders of male and female for the purposes of their analyses. In one study they found that females had comparatively high levels of work exhaustion when working from home as opposed to their in-office counterparts (Oakman et al. 9). Despite this, they did not believe there to be enough data to draw conclusions about the physical health implications on workers along the lines of gender; rather they suggested that workplaces move to addressing gender-based inequities as a portion of their steps to success in telecommuting (Oakman et al. 11).

This thesis is limited by its size. As a result of this its scope will be limited to data which primarily investigates North America, in instances where this data is unavailable or inadequate data from outside of North America will be included supplementally. In conjunction with utilizing North American data, the Canadian census data from the 2005 long-form census will be excluded due to the advancements in technology for telecommuting since that time. In its place, the American Time Use Survey data which was conducted in 2018 will provide the bulk of statistical data about working from home prior to the pandemic. Furthermore, while the SARS-COV-2 pandemic is used as a case study through which to examine a new populous of workers telecommuting for the first time, previous disease outbreaks do not provide similar types of data and will be excluded from the analysis at this time. Due to the nature of pandemics to ebb and flow in severity across nations there is little conclusive data about the impacts of the pandemic, there are still mass amount of data about the pandemic

which emerge daily, this thesis does not aim to include all possible data about the pandemic and does not provide any conclusions about the pandemic, any conclusions henceforth are speculative.

This thesis's scope is further limited by my place as a white academic who works from home and who thinks and acts politically. Women are political; women's bodies, women's work, women's lives are political. The pandemic is political. It is impossible to merely exist in a political world without interacting with it and being influenced by it. The politics of this thesis are inherently situated with my place on the political spectrum, as evidently left as much of discussion may seem, it is my aim to provide points at which this discussion can be refuted by individuals with alternative political viewpoints. Some additional matters of scope involve the exclusion of certain types of work scenarios. This thesis does not aim to examine workers who live and work in the home of another individual or family such as live-in nannies. This thesis also aims to provide as much data as possible about non-nuclear families, however, it is limited by the types of data that are available, especially with regards to twentieth century data.

Methods:

The research performed for the purposes of answering the research questions will be performed in the format of a systematic review of literature. This review of literature will include theoretical perspectives as well as some quantitative and qualitative data, especially when it comes to data about the pandemic. The research will be presented in two primary sections, the first of which being a top-down approach with a look at industry and unionization, the

second will be a bottom-up approach which attempts to address race, gender, and other intrapersonal factors. These sections will be book-ended by a more theoretical chapter and a COVID-19 case-study. Economic class will be used as a variable through which to examine the impacts of digitization and working from home on various types of workers. Additionally, this examination will take place through a Marxist feminist, labour studies, and critical race theory lens to determine their influence of the gendered and racialized roles of individuals performing telework.

This research is relevant to contemporary perspectives on work because of the increasing ability for individuals to work from home at least some of the time. These new ways to work were present in many instances prior to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, however, there has been an increase in the reliance of workplace flexibility and work-from-home situations due to the pandemic, which are likely to be maintained in a post-pandemic state. In addition to the emergent data from the pandemic, this research is relevant because it maintains that race and gender are important factors in any work appointment and that these factors are only amplified when workplace flexibility and digitization are also being considered. Lastly, this research paper is relevant because it discusses affective labourers, which are needed across many fields.

CHAPTER 2: IMPACT OF INDUSTRY AND UNIONIZATION: WORK FROM HOME SUCCESSES?

Introduction

Working from home has a strong impact on worker agency. This impact is heavily influenced by industry and type of work. This thesis will examine some of the different types of workers who can work from home or work remotely as it pertains to their agency across work type and industry. The proportion of remote workers expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic, where many national and local governments implemented measures effectively forcing workers who had the ability to work remotely to do just that. It should be said that there is a scope of workers impacted by digital labour which is not formally included in this analysis due to their inability to work from home. Among these are workers who work in resource extraction and recycling, at both the beginning and the end of the technology life cycle.¹ These types of workers may be divided by industry, whether as care workers, service-based workers, traditional office workers, gig and micro labourers, or self-employed workers. The division of these workers along industry can be just as beneficial in determining the effects of digitization as the divisions along race and gender. As with race and gender, at some points it is impossible to separate industry from other factors such as socio-economic class, or educational attainment; both of which are additionally almost impossible

¹ These dangerous jobs do provide some agency to some of its workers, particularly workers of race and gender minorities and young workers who would have been previously unemployed. Ceballos et al. suggests that younger workers under twenty-five are over-represented in the e-recycling industry and face longer exposures to dangerous chemicals and hazardous working conditions because of such (957-959).

to separate from race and gender. As a result of this, it is at the intersection of these various points that one can determine who can benefit from different types of arrangements.

Digital labour, especially in the form of gig labour is considered to be easier than traditional, non-digital labour such as manual labour which requires specific physical capabilities, skills, and equipment. Not only does the digital labour market feature many jobs with few barriers to entry, but these jobs have also become geographically unbound (Graham et al. 136). This opinion is reverberated in the view of digital labour as an increased participant in the system of ludic capitalism wherein work and play are virtually interchangeable and inseparable. According to Jarrett, this longstanding blurring of the lines between market and non-market processes functions alongside the obfuscation of time as it relates to the workday. She posits that digital labourers across creative industries, social networking, and Web design are subject to real subsumption wherein human activity is shifted to support capitalism (Jarrett 2). Subsumption, a precedent set by Marx in two categories: formal and real; and further explained by Negri and others refers to the process through which capital takes hold of labour (formal subsumption) and proceeds to reshape it (real subsumption). Marx articulated that formal subsumption was a prerequisite for real subsumption. In an attempt to decolonize this linear capitalist view of subsumption, Menozzi suggests that real subsumption not be viewed as “an accomplished stage of late-stage capitalism” (14). The view of workers such as social media influencers as non-participants in the traditional capitalist process

continues to feminize this often under-compensated, precarious labour. As a result of this feminization, a portion of this discussion, in turn, must be centred on the discourse of work-life balance. According to Warren, this discussion has recently become more nuanced. Warren argues that “life” has traditionally only referred to family or home life, but it must now be expanded to include friends and social lives (524). The same can be said for work, unwaged labour should also be considered in the discussion of this balance (Warren 524). As a part of this work-life balance discussion, Warren identifies four areas in which this balance is further complicated: “timing of hours ... the predictability of work ... the tempo of work...and work-time autonomy” (526). Each of the following industries deals with these four factors in difference ways.

One of the ways in which workers have historically pushed back against unfair labour standards is through collective organization, or unionization. These collective action groups have been able to award employees with much safer work environments such as reducing the workday to shorter hours, reducing, or eliminating children in the workplace, and shortening the workweek. Each of these safety reforms does come at some expense to borrow from Marx, from the owner of the means of production therefore, it has been in the best interest of employers to prevent this type of action. Anti-union sentiments are common in North America, according to Smith and Stevens, anti-unionism in Canada takes three forms. They argue that anti-unionism presents structurally through the restructuring of the labour force to have fewer union jobs with the expansion of the gig economy and the increase in labour precarity, additionally they argue that

anti-unionism can come directly from the state with legislation that makes collective bargaining challenging, and lastly, they argue that anti-unionism can come from union-busting and corporate-level sanctions (Smith & Stevens 461). However, the implementation of laws which govern the practice of union-busting wherein corporations actively work to prevent unions from forming, have been introduced which do provide some cushion with regards to this matter.

Collective bargaining agreements are one of the ways in which the demands of the worker can be addressed and even met. Often, there is some form of compromise, rather than an outright handover of demands. Corporations and employees alike act in this way refusing to budge on their respective sides of the compromise. Sometimes it can be useful to examine exactly how this compromise will impact a corporation's bottom line to address if the demand can be met. Talented officials carefully assess each point. However, this research appears to be several years, if not decades behind the productivity levels of workers in today's workforce. There is evidence to suggest that compromises on matters such as flexible work hours, flexibility between synchronous and asynchronous work, and unlimited time off do not negatively impact the bottom line, but that this is limited by outside factors such as workplace size, age, and longevity (Whyman et al. 351).

This chapter will be broken down by industry in an unorthodox organization. Each industry section will further be followed by a brief afterword about the impacts of unionization in that sector. The Canadian Government recognizes approximately eighteen unique industries each with up to 180 sub-

industry categories (List of Industries). This thesis does not begin to attempt to discuss each of those in detail. Instead, this thesis aims to recategorize industries into sections sorted by relation to which their agency is impacted by digital labour. As a result of this, traditional industries recognized by the Canadian Government such as agriculture, mining, construction, utilities, and other industries do not feature on this list. They are instead replaced by 1) office jobs, which encompasses industries such as information, finance, insurance, real estate, and other industries whose tasks may be performed in an office or home-office setting; 2) gig economy, which covers a variety of industries such as transportation and retail; 3) affect labour, a term used primarily to discuss healthcare and social assistance industry jobs but also includes jobs who don't seem to have a recognized industry such as social media influencers and personalities; 4) academia, an industry specific to tertiary education and knowledge workers and; 5) sex workers, a group whose legal rights to sell their labour is often questioned and scrutinized but is not recognized as a unique industry according to the government.

Office Jobs

When considering “working from home,” “telework,” or any similar phrase, it is traditional office jobs that often come to mind. The roles of secretaries, bookkeepers, accountants, assistants, and even lawyers might be among the job titles that come to mind when thinking about the *who* of working from home. For the purposes of this thesis, the term “traditional office job” will refer to any job traditionally performed in an office setting which can in some ways at least part of

the time be performed away from the office, in an environment of the worker's choosing, such as the home. There are some jobs which border between care work and traditional office jobs such as that of doctors who may be able to perform telemedicine from their homes. For the purposes of this thesis, those jobs will be discussed in the "Traditional Office Job" section. Traditional office jobs vary widely in the agency given to workers by transitioning to working digitally from home. Certain fields may be able to provide flexible scheduling in addition to moving from the office to the home-office, certain workplaces may also provide workers with choice with regards to their schedules where ultimate flexibility is not possible. In other fields, workers are monitored using tracking software that measures keystrokes, mouse movement, and the amount of time spent in each window. Workers can be penalized for any underused time regardless of their overall productivity levels. This kind of workplace monitoring is not new and can be traced back to Bentham's 1995 Panopticon. However, this increased level of computer-mediated surveillance feels to many as increasingly and unnecessarily invasive (McParland & Connolly 108).

Employers are often concerned with the incidents of cyberloafing, or cyberslacking; which consists of any internet use at work which does not pertain to the duties at hand. According to an article by Andel et al., cyberloafing accounts for an \$85 billion loss for companies annually (124) according to Vitak, this number is considerably higher at \$178 billion annually in the United States alone (1751). This nearly two hours per day that employees effectively waste surfing the internet has directed several major firms such as Apple to a reliance

on employee monitoring software such as TimeDoctor to curb this behaviour as much as possible. However, recent studies show that cyberloafing may not actually have a negative impact on employee performance, and according to Andel et al. “cyberloafing may also act as an emotion-focused coping mechanism, ameliorating the effects of workplace aggression exposure on strains” (127). Regardless of the realized impact of cyberloafing, companies still work to reduce the behaviour.

Many employees are concerned with the ethics of employee monitoring software. This is evidenced by the lawsuit launched against the FDA by whistleblowers who believed such software to be unlawfully monitoring their activities (Busch 10). In response to these types of privacy claims, companies which manufacture employee monitoring software such as Spector have created new versions of their software which according to Ellen Messmer, take a “black box’ approach” (1), which would only deploy employee information to management if there was concerning behaviour (1). Many argue that work should be measured in productivity rather than keystrokes. Employees cite incidents where they have been able to build contraptions which effectively trick the monitoring software; some as simple as attaching one’s mouse to a rotating fan and others more computationally complicated. From the perspective of the employer, this type of behaviour appears defiant. However, from the employee perspective, this behaviour often feels necessary to use the washroom or grab a bite to eat. Many employers do not implement this type of micromanaging and platform tracking in non-digital workplace settings, allowing workers to grab a cup

of coffee or a bite to eat as they feel necessary. The use of this type of software is by no means new to work life or unique to working from home, however, the use of this software has increased as workers have increased their ability to work from home. A 1997 article by Houser touts that “Employee monitoring software returns us to 1984” (1). This article maintains that there are no laws which can protect employees from being digitally monitored and tracked by their bosses (Houser 2) despite what workers may think or want. The now, nearly a quarter of a century old article could not be more accurate in today’s climate with increased capabilities through technological advancement to track employees. Since this type of monitoring does little more than make the average worker uncomfortable it really begs the question of why large firms continue to employ these algorithmic management techniques?

In addition to worker monitoring, some digital only workers may experience the negative implications of not being able to engage in interpersonal bonding and in-office relationship building. Collins et al. identifies this relationship between work from home workers and their in-office colleagues and supervisors as slipping into an ‘us vs. them’ divide (162). In their meta-analysis, Collins et al. identifies several positive reasons why social support at work is meaningful and important, such as reducing role ambiguity and reducing employee turnover rates (162). What may not be immediately obvious is that they were also able to identify several negative impacts of the social isolation that comes from working from home much of the time, they conclude that these workers are more like to be passed over for a promotion, among other less desirable consequences

(Collins et al. 163). With each type of environment, there is a give and take, and in the case of teleworkers, they reported many positive social aspects of working from home such as the ability to avoid office politics (Collins et al. 164). These social implications can be mediated through the development and maintenance of relationships between colleagues using email, telephone calls, or instant messaging.

The effective agency provided to traditional office workers varies by the level of employee monitoring undertaken by their place of employment, and by the level of schedule flexibility provided to them. The agency within this category is more varied than other positions and is determined by the individual company rather than by the industry more broadly. In addition to flexibility, there is also stigma associated with working from home which indicates that levels of cyberloafing are higher, and levels of real work are lower. In a meta-analysis, Troup attempts to examine some of the perceived and realized stigma associated with working from home. Troup also examines the effect on work-family balance in work from home arrangements. She found that formal telework arrangements provided women improved job satisfaction, but not men (Troup 483). Troup found disparities in the amount of childcare that working from home that mothers and fathers performed (473). These qualitative analyses can be examined alongside the American Time Use Survey's (ATUS) quantitative measurements with respect to Americans working from home. According to this survey, 57% of workers had a flexible schedule, working from home at least occasionally (Bureau of Labour Statistics 2). Of these workers who work from home, women

are around 25% more likely to do so, especially for caregiving or other family related tasks (Bureau of Labour Statistics 2). Therefore, while some people, particularly women and mothers' benefit from increased workplace flexibility due to work from home arrangements, not all workers realize the same benefits.

What would a union of office workers look like? What needs would their ability to collectively bargain address? Typically, office workers operate in more of a "fend for yourself" type of environment, advocating for their own raises, benefits, and privileges based on individual merit. Additionally, these types of workers do not necessary share a skillset or workplace tasks indicative of typical unions. That is not to say that certain workplaces are unable to unionize on these grounds, but more to say that some workers have found more success expanding existing unions to include their workplaces, rather than forming new unions from the ground up.

In the case of digital media, Sarah Jaffe outlines the movement of Vice and other digital media firms toward unionization with the Writers Guild of America, East or with NewsGuild Communications Workers of America (37). While some may consider digital media professionals to be outside of the realm of traditional office workers, for the purposes of this thesis, they meet the working definition of individuals whose work is typically performed in an office setting and can be performed from home in addition to not meeting the criteria for the other job categories. Jaffe explains that the culture associated with these digital newsrooms is that of an always-on mentality where workers are expected to always love their jobs and to silently cope with the not-so-desirable parts of their

jobs such as low wages and little to no benefits (39). Jaffe goes on to explain that this unionization of digital media workers has created a ripple effect with regards to collective bargaining and has increased the number of workplace unions as a result (42). So, if digital media giants such as Vice can establish unions that their workers feel passionate about, it appears that there is little stopping other types of firms other than anti-union rhetoric on behalf of the businesses.

According to Kane and Newman, anti-union rhetoric extends beyond the traditional top-down direction of anti-unionization movements, they identify what they call class-based anti-union rhetoric (CAR) (998). They contend that CAR serves to drive an even bigger wedge between union and non-union workers by othering union workers and making them seem like an undesirable and undeserving sub-elite class (Kane & Newman 998). The posit that this rhetoric is reinforced by the media providing an unfairly large amount of coverage to “negative” union activities such as strike action (Kane & Newman 999). In their review of anti-union sentiment Kane and Newman also found that there was significant literature, such as the text *Framed! Labor and the Corporate Media* by Martin; to support the sentiment that consumers feel negative impacts of unions such as with regards to “the price, quantity, and availability of consumable goods and services” (qtd in. Kane & Newman 1000). Anti-union sentiment is multi-faceted, with the consumer, the corporation, the media, and the non-union worker each playing a role in the negative appearance of collective action groups. With all this anti-union sentiment, it’s easy to see why traditional office workers may not view unions as worth all the trouble.

Gig Economy

While it can be argued that workers across other categories, especially care workers and sex workers may engage in gig work, this category is unique because of its dependency on the internet and on algorithmic management both on the worker's side and on the consumer's. The gig economy involves the use of apps both to facilitate in-person transactions and to complete digital transactions. Another aspect of the gig economy is its relative lack of standard days. While there has been an increase in flexible scheduling across several industries, the gig economy features worker-led hours of operation where workers can complete as many or as few tasks as they wish each day. From this description, one might assume that workers in the gig economy have the highest level of autonomy. Unfortunately, due to the fleeting sense of employment, where "employees" are legally considered independent contractors in many of these positions, they do not have sufficient bargaining power when it comes to job quality (Wood et al. 61). In addition to this, according to Warren, gig workers frequently lost control of their time via last minute cancellations, in-app issues, or work coming in at the last minute, which means that workers cannot engage in very much planning (532). This, coupled with the increasing number of low and middle-income workers who use the gig economy to supplement their income from more traditional forms of employment, means that the abundance of available labour pushes the worker to perform lower quality jobs for less money. Additionally, since these independent contractors are not employees, the employers are not legally obligated to maintain any worker standards such as

minimum wage, nor are employers required to provide training for their gig workers. So, while gig work does provide workers with a lot of temporal freedom, it does not provide them with financial freedoms or other workplace protections.

Some examples of gig economy jobs which are facilitated by an app but performed in the real world are ridesharing and food delivery services such as SkipTheDishes, DoorDash, or Uber. These types of tasks often have a higher payout than their completely digital counterparts such as Amazon's Mechanical Turk which has users performing many tasks which take seconds and can pay as little as fractions of a cent. While the workers in each of these industries do have a choice to participate in this labour, there are several complicating factors. For instance, there are a variety of reasons why a worker may not be able to hold a traditional job, or their traditional job does not sufficiently support them, thus forcing them into the gig economy. These issues, combined with the algorithmic management; a system which uses consumer and digitally generated ratings and reviews to manage the worker (Wood et al. 62); which functions similarly to the employee management software of traditional office jobs ensures that employees do not in fact have the upper hand.

Gig workers suffer from the plight of being independent contractors rather than employees of the companies which they represent. As a result of this, not only are they not afforded the legal protections that most workers are, but they are also not able to easily unionize. In recent news, Uber drivers have become some of the loudest of these gig workers in the fight for their rights to unionization. According to Dominika Polkowska in an analysis of Uber drivers in

Poland, a portion of this problem can be attributed to the fact that these contractors do not have a real employer with whom to negotiate working conditions, but rather an “algorithmic employer” (27). Another factor which Polkowska identified among Uber drivers in Poland is their lack of interest in trade union membership (30), this does not appear to hold up in North America, the United Kingdom, or South Africa, where Uber drivers have often participated in fights for their right to unionization.

In an article concerned with the rights of gig workers in the United States, Kuhn and Maleki examine some of the terminology that is used and proposed for use when discussing the type of contracted labour that gig workers perform. Borrowing from Benjamin Walker, they begin by discussing the categorization of these workers as instaserfs (Walker, Kuhn & Maleki), a new term describing this internet serfdom that many gig workers feel victim to. Furthermore, Kuhn and Maleki begin a discussion of the term dependent contractor, they note that this term is established for use in other countries to classify independent contractors who perform the primary portion of their labour for just one client (185). This classification which is already in use by some Canadian provinces such as British Columbia and by a few other countries, provides a more detailed explanation of the type of work that these gig workers engage in and more clearly defines their relationship to corporations such as Uber, as not just a worker passing through but more of a long-term, reciprocal relationship. This change in worker classification would change workers’ ability to collectively bargain because dependent contractors seem to have different rights when compared to

independent contractors based on their relationships to their algorithmic employers.

In February 2022, the Ontario provincial government proposed The Digital Platform Workers' Rights Act which has been described by many as an 'historic' (McKenzie-Sutter, CBC News) move. This proposed act aims to shift how digital platform workers are paid in Ontario. This proposition includes amendments to transparency around wages and pay periods, but most importantly to some, this act would provide a fifteen dollar per hour minimum wage (Government of Ontario) to these workers; a wage which matches the provincial minimum wage for other occupations. Among other worker protections such as notice of removal from the platform and the protection from their labour being contracted out, this act seeks to "[present] an opportunity to better protect certain digital platform workers in non-standard working relationships by requiring a minimum floor of rights and the terms of their engagement to be established" (Government of Ontario). This new act does not however change the definition of these workers to employees and does not provide them protections under the pre-existing Employment Standards Act (McKenzie-Sutter). At this time the Government of Ontario has not performed a potential cost and benefit analysis (Government of Ontario), which may provide some insight on the impact in pricing which may also impact the number of jobs that are available if consumers are priced out of these services.

Currently, the unionization of gig economy workers appears to occur primarily in situations where the worker is interacting in some way with the real

world rather than just performing all their labour online. This unionization also appears to be locally dependent such as the 2021 unionization of British Uber drivers which many hoped would set a precedent for the unionization of other gig economy workers. This development would require the desire of these gig workers to organize, which is additional labour that these workers may not wish to or may not be able to perform because of their already full schedules (Cherry & Aloisi 669). Additionally, since many gig workers perform this type of work to supplement their income from full-time or part-time jobs in the traditional economy, this type of membership and commitment may not be something that these workers care about.

Affect Labour

Is affective labour really the unproductive underbelly that some would like you to believe? Affect(ive) labour, also known as care labour, or kin work typically refers to the response of Hardt and Negri to Hochschild's emotional labour. According to Hardt, affect labour is part of what he refers to as "immaterial labour" (90), he argues that this labour, rather than being unproductive, is one of the most valuable positions in the capitalist supply chain (90). Hardt more broadly defines immaterial labour as any labour where no physical good is being produced, or in other words, the service industry (94). For the purposes of this thesis, the term affect labour will refer to the underpaid industry of care work is associated with job titles such as stay-at-home parent, nanny, or personal support worker. Hardt's broader definition of immaterial labour with regards to the service industry will not be addressed due to the inability of many of these

workers to work outside of highly specialized locations, further presenting a barrier to work from home.

While the actual field of care work is much broader than those titles might suggest, workers in this field often work from in home environments, theirs or otherwise. For the purposes of this thesis, the homes of others will henceforth be considered “the workplace” in the discussion of care work; whereas individuals who perform paid or unpaid care work in their own homes will be considered individuals who work from home. Workers in this field are most often employed to work with children, elderly people, or individuals with disabilities. These vulnerable populations often rely on the support and care of others to function. Care workers are in the unique position of working with the goal of providing agency to others, rather than to themselves. For example, care workers who support people with disabilities may support their medical needs for them to have greater access to the world such as through employment.

Care work has historically been considered women’s work do to traditional matriarchal standards and is often underpaid and undervalued because of that. Furthermore, women are often expected to perform as unpaid caregivers for their children and households in the roles of homemaker or stay-at-home mother. There are stay-at-home parents of all genders, however, women have been historically favoured for this position, often due to their natural abilities to carry and breastfeed children. Some caregivers in these positions have the agency to decide for themselves if this is the position best suited for them and their families, however, other caregivers are forced into this option due to rising childcare and

eldercare costs and others are guided more strongly by cultural contexts which value familial care within the home. While these workers may have a great amount of agency with regards to how to spend each day and how to rear and educate their children, they also may not be provided with that agency due to outside pressures from individuals such as their partners.

There is a great deal of emotional labour attached to these care work positions beyond just the physical labour that might be associated with child rearing or personal care for disabled or elderly individuals. According to Arlie Hochschild in her book *The Managed Heart*, the level of emotional labour performed by a worker is varied by the type of position and industry. She argues that flight attendants and bill collectors are two examples of workers who must perform a high level of emotional labour in their fields. Hochschild argues that this level of emotional labour can be translated onto the emotional work being done at home (Managed Heart 156) and thus in care positions such as childcare or eldercare. With regards to parenting, Hochschild states that middle class families are more likely to parent their children in such a way that requires the children to conform to the parents' emotional standards with the use of emotionally weighted statements such as "because it would mean a lot to me" (Managed Heart 157). Whereas working class families tend to take more of an absolutist stance where rules are more geared toward "because I said so" (Managed Heart 157) and other similar explanations. As a part of providing childcare, some individuals believe that it is the caregiver's responsibility to prepare the child for their future as a part of the job market – this type of mentality follows that of parents who aim

to prepare their daughters for marriage above all other opportunities. This type of caregiving aligns with the type of preparation that parents can give their children for the job market and is a part of social reproductive labour. Not only does the type of care that a child receives prepare them for the job market in this reproductive sense, but it influences how they manage their emotions. In this way, care workers not only function as workers, but as managers; the care worker not only needs to adequately manage their own emotions but in the case of childcare, care workers must also help manage the emotions of children for the to become productive members of society in the capitalist sense since this is used as a measure of success. In the case of elder care, care workers often function to aid in managing the emotions of individuals whose bodies and minds are no longer at the capacity that they might once have been at, often leaving them distraught.

Recently, there has been a growing portion of the labour force comprised of individuals in dual-income households (Kramer et al. 1316), meaning that the inverse must also be true, a shrinking number of single-income families in the workforce. Kramer et al. and others suggest that factors which contribute to the likelihood of someone becoming a stay-at-home parent include educational attainment and income before childbirth (1317). Additionally, while these workers may have a great amount of agency within their domain of the home, they likely have little agency with regards to other aspects of their lives such as finances or the ability to change careers. Moreover, adult children caring for their aging parents may feel that they have even less agency due to needing to put the

wishes of their parents above their own; this may come from a cultural context in which eldercare is highly valued in certain societies.

Fraser suggests that there are two competing models to combat the lack of financial agency that some caregivers feel; first is the implementation of a wage subsidy, caregiver's wage, or universal basic income to bolster not only the incomes of these individuals, but also of their households Fraser calls this model the caregiver parity model (593). The other solution that Fraser notes is one that many minority nations implement, the universal breadwinner model. This version encourages women's participation in the labour force and combats the care needs with solutions such as daycare subsidies (Fraser 593). As a part of this discussion, Fraser notes that the universal breadwinner model, although seemingly preferred by feminists, is not necessarily the most feminist or only equitable solution (594). In addition to the unwaged labour performed by carers within their own homes, care work is an underpaid industry in which workers, who often have an advanced level of educational attainment such as a college diploma, continue to be underpaid and undervalued for their work. Currently, care workers have a varied amount of agency depending widely on their individual situation. However, care workers overall have more agency than some other types of workers such as workers who perform service work or work in other traditional office jobs.

In addition to unwaged labour, there is an aspect of free labour that is often left out of the discussion, namely labour associated with social media in the form of data collection, analysis, and sale by large corporations; those digital

users contribute to corporations when they spend time in any online environment. There is much discussion around the concept of data privacy with regards to the safety of the user, but there is not adequate discussion of the cost of that data and the benefit of the sale of that data to other corporations and even governments. The economy associated with this labour is one that sits in the margins of the capitalist system; it is an unrecognized form of profitable labour which generates profits only for those at the top.

When discussing care work and unionization, there are two unique avenues that can be explored; first the established industry of union and non-union care professionals; and second, the growing industry of unregulated personal caregivers. This nuanced discussion is concerned with topics such as the formal educational attainment of the caregiver, the financial situation of the person receiving the care, and the size and power of governments.

In the first situation in discussing the established union and non-union industry of caregiving professionals, this encompasses nurses of various levels of educational attainment such as Registered Professional Nurses (RPN), Registered Nurses (RN), and Nurse Practitioners (NP), additionally, various other job titles fall under this umbrella such as Personal Support Workers (PSW) and Social Service Workers (SSW), etc. This large variety of individuals with various levels of training and different scopes of practice can prove challenging to provide adequate unionization. Despite this, several workers in this umbrella are employed with unions who can clearly define their scope(s) of practice, working hours, etc. Boris and Klein estimate that only 36% of home healthcare

professionals are unionized (34). For the most part, despite not belonging to a union, many of these workers are still regulated by both the government and professional bodies such as the College of Nurses of Ontario.

Part of the problem with generating union activity in the unregulated sector of personal caregiving are the non-traditional routes of caregiving that many individuals seek out. Many individuals seek primary care from friends and family members who may be able to provide round the clock services in an unpaid arrangement due to the nature of their relationship. Many of these individuals may not wish to be unionized because they are simply caring for a loved one as a part of their day to day lives, or because they receive some other non-monetary benefit to this type of work such as housing which they fear may not hold up in a collective bargaining agreement due to the individuality of their agreement with the person whom they provide care for. Others may not wish to be unionized because they work as a part of a precarious work agreement which toes the line of legality, oftentimes receiving employment in these “undesirable” fields in exchange for privileges such as residence in a certain country. It has been established that there are many reasons why certain caregivers may not wish to work under the supervision of a union; however, there are individuals in this field who would benefit from the establishment of a caregiver’s union. Lastly, the size of government plays a large role in if caregivers can be unionized outside of professional spheres. Many advocates for small governments who are also anti-union advocates do not wish for the government to be able to play a role in their family’s day to day goings on.

Caregivers with unrecognized skillsets or certifications have been arguing for the right to collective bargaining in many ways since at least the 1930s. According to Jennifer Shorb, a group called “‘housestaff or ‘house officers,’ is comprised of hospital interns, residents, and fellows. These individuals are medical school graduates seeking additional training for licensure and specialization” (1052-1053). According to Shorb, these individuals have been denied their recognition as a collective bargaining group by the National Labor Relation Board in the United States, under the guise that these individuals were primarily students (1054). This argument, however, does not hold up across the board, where other students are able to enter into collective bargaining agreements in their respective fields. While this group is comprised of highly trained professionals primarily working in hospital environments, the precedent has been set for them and other unrecognized or underrecognized caregivers to be unable to unionize even when the group in question is in search of the power that collective bargaining may hold for them.

Academia

If you can't do, teach. Or so the adage goes. Academics represent an under-respected industry of highly qualified individuals. For the purposes of this thesis, academia is defined as working or participating in activities related to academic institutions, especially tertiary institutions such as colleges and universities. Primary job titles in this field include scientist, researcher, professor, lecturer, and teaching assistant. This field has high barriers to entry for new applicants. It is also highly misunderstood by those outside of the industry,

oftentimes people see academics as lazy as opposed to those that work within the industry for a given career.

This aura of laziness and lack of respect places a particularly large stigma on academics when it comes to working from home. While much of the jobs of these academics can easily be performed remotely, such as internet research, generating lecture slides and other materials, grading, and even meeting with students and colleagues, some may feel more professional and connected when working on campus. Like school, there is often some component of the day that is spent on campus and other components which are more suited to homework.

According to Barringer, this often unpaid at-home time can be avoided using some more unconventional grading techniques such as peer-graded assignments (50). These strategies of avoidance, however, do not decrease the stigma associated with academics who work from home at least part of the time. Despite this stigma, Barringer's unorthodox grading strategies can be implemented to reduce the impact of a double or triple workday. Academics often participate in a wide variety of tasks associated with their jobs such as lectureship, research, sitting on boards, etc. Not all these activities are compensated for or are conducted during a normal, structured workday, thus leading to many academics participating in a triple day, of which only one shift, or part of one shift is paid labour.

One measurable source of career output within academia is research. Due to the large role that research and particularly publication may play in the jobs of some PhD level departments, it is important to consider factors that may impact

this type of productivity. Meador and Walters hypothesized that union membership may positively impact productivity in academia, however, they found in their analysis of over 700 PhD level departments that due to the low impact that union membership has on academic wages, union membership is not positively correlated with productivity in research (382). Despite this, academia is one of the fastest growing sections of the labour movement. According to Wickens, 40% of full-time American university faculty were represented by labour unions by 1995 (545).

Among academics, labour union membership has been expanded to include not only full-time faculty but also part-time and adjunct faculty, and most controversially, graduate students (Wickens 546). At this time, it is important to mention that as the author of this paper, I am a graduate student member of a union, CUPE 3908 this may present some bias in this portion of my thesis. According to Wickens, the primary reason for academics to organize is based on improving working conditions (547). Her study found that unionized workers had increased job satisfaction in the categories of wages, benefits and job security but less satisfaction in other areas than non-unionized workers (548). Despite the (slight) increase in wages and benefits among union members, unionization and collective bargaining, even on the basis of improved working conditions does not prevent academics from engaging in triple days regardless of if they are able to complete some or all of their tasks remotely.

Sex work

One of the key industries which provides increased agency to workers who perform some or all the duties of their jobs remotely is sex work. In legal avenues of sex work such as pornography, stripping, and cam settings in addition to more precariously legal settings such as escorting and prostitution, individuals selling often experience greater levels of control over their work environment and their safety behind the security and relative anonymity of the internet. To facilitate the sale of sex, many sex workers must don a persona or mask; that's separate from their self-identity; which appeals to their clientele. The act of creating and maintaining this character is a form of emotional labour associated with the industry (Brewis & Linstead 84). This splitting of the self into two or more selves is common in both digital and non-digital portions of the industry. It is part of what provides workers with agency over their first "self," deciding what to disclose and to whom.

This separation of the self into two or more selves is made possible by the separation of sex for pleasure and as Brewis and Linstead call it, *work sex* (88). This important distinction furthers the discussion of non-market or fringe labour in terms of ludic capitalism. Another aspect of this distinction is the disparity between the view of sex work as legitimate labour in which agentic individuals engage and the view of sex workers as having been victimized by the patriarchy into unsafe positions with little to no choice (Gatrell 211). Sex is seen as something engaged in relationally, privately, and for pleasure. If these things are true, how can sex possibly be work? In one way, sex is work within relationships

where partners of different libidos engage in labours of love for their partner(s). This notion is propagated in certain religious communities where women are told or even commanded to satisfy their husbands at his desire. Sex is also work outside of relationships where sex workers provide and sell a physical service with their bodies. This work is usually emotionally uninvolved on the side of the worker, although there is emotional labour associated with distancing oneself from this involvement in such an intimate setting (Brewis & Linstead 88). This necessary distancing can pose a challenge to the worker in their ability to maintain the façade of interest in the customer.

In situations where sex is entirely sold online, the control is assumed to lie with the seller, they are often in complete control of their schedule, the type of work they perform, and their salaries. While this notion is not untrue for non-digital workers, there are many additional factors at play such as the timing of a client's climax, or when the next client encounter might be if the worker engages clients off the street. According to Brewis and Linstead, one way in which some workers attempt to control their agency in non-digital settings is through a connection to the time and the clock. They describe encounters as taking an average of seven minutes and propose that some workers “us[e] techniques to get clients to orgasm quickly (such as using her pelvic floor muscles to literally ‘milk’ a man) — here Mary theatrically fakes her own orgasm to encourage the client’s” (Brewis & Linstead 89). Angela Jones defines online sex work as “the internet-mediated exchange of sexual commodities and/or services” (560). Unfortunately, while there is a great amount of research about individuals who

use the internet to connect with clients for in-person services, currently there is not a lot of research about other uses such as marketing, branding, and advertising (Jones 558). Some of the issues such as the inability to judge tonality, intention, and reliability impact not only this work but this research as well.

As sex work becomes less digitized, there is some loss of agency as well as some loss of safety. However, individuals selling services such as escorting who can seek out customers online feel an increased level of security rather than those who seek customers on the streets. That is not to say that it is mutually exclusive, many individuals find themselves needing to do both to earn enough. Much of the literature about sex work details this type of sex work, rather than new ways in which the internet can level the playing field between different types of sex work and reduce the impact of physical proximity between the worker and the client (Jones 561). Despite the high level of agency that digitization can provide to certain sex workers, it is an industry steeped in a culture of lack of agency for the worker.

The internet is not entirely a positive space. According to Holt and Blevins, Johns; purchasers and consumers of sex work; also benefit from the increased agency provided by the internet. In this way they can seek out more niche forms of sex work such as pedophilia (333). In their 2007 analysis, Holt and Blevins conclude that most of the sex work is performed in the real world, yet the internet boasted a growing proportion of the sex work (335). Now, over a decade later it would be interesting to revisit this analysis and to determine if that growth has leveled off. While the internet has been able to provide a great amount of agency

to voluntary sex workers, it is not without the consequence of sex trafficking and other forms of involuntary sex work.

Violence is another issue that workers in this industry face, however, according to a 2012 study by Walby, male-for-male internet escorts reported little to no violence as compared to when women are involved (106). Walby further reports that in the absence of women, sex work becomes increasingly transactional (109). Walby suggests that certain parties wish for there to be an end to the sex work industry, an argument which he calls “prohibitionist” (4). This viewpoint does not acknowledge the agency that some workers have within this industry and does not account for workers who participate in sex work willingly, by choice. Like Walby’s term suggests, prohibition will not decrease the occurrences of sex work, it will only decrease the safe spaces in which it can be conducted. These “safe spaces” do not necessarily account for other types of dangers associated with sex work, one of the techniques that Brewis and Linstead cite for workers to maintain psychological distance from their work, condoms (89), also functions to create a physical barrier between the worker and the client, leading to safer sex, but this measure is far from foolproof, and far from being available to every worker due to the demands of certain clientele. Digital sex work does not run the same risk of contracting HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases as its non-digital counterparts. In the United States a series of laws called the fight online sex trafficking act and the stop enabling sex traffickers act (FOSTA-SESTA), this 2018 law made it the website’s responsibility to remove any traces of sex trafficking on their platforms. The unintended

consequence was also the removal of consensual and voluntary sex workers (Tripp 219). In line with Walby's ideas about prohibition, this law only made it less safe for online sex workers.

Within the domain of sex work, the concept of unionization is tightly linked to the legality of sex work across different countries. In many countries, sex work is not explicitly legal. Despite this, sex workers have historically been able to establish activist groups (Gall 289). The formation of these activist groups led to the development of workers' unions, much like the development of unions across other industries. These labour unions function primarily to engage in political lobbying for worker's rights, and to advocate for the healthcare of sex workers across various types of sex work from digital to in-person and along the lines of legality. Gall identifies many difficulties associated with the study of sex work unions such as the transient nature of many workers, the researcher's ability to access sex worker for the purposes of academic work, and the willingness of the workers to be identified in studies; often for their own safety (291).

Conclusion

The ability to work from home is not distributed equally among all workers and the level and type of work performed in the home varies greatly by industry. The level of agency that working from home or working digitally provides to workers also varies within and between industries. The level of education that a person has attained may play some role in determining these factors, The American Time Use Survey found a disparity in the education levels of workers working from home, where nearly 50% of workers with a bachelor's degree

worked from home at least occasionally, compared to just 3% of workers without a high school diploma (Bureau of Labour Statistics 2). Across some industries such as academia, it is normal and expected to participate in at-least some at-home labour each day in addition to the responsibilities of the regular in-person workday. This educational disparity is the continuation of an economic class disparity which is already evident, with higher earning industries such as finance and management being afforded the greatest amount of agency to payout ratio. Across other industries, similar levels of agency can be achieved such as the high level of schedule flexibility that benefits gig workers, however, there is a large disparity in their earnings when compared to more traditional office jobs, particularly ones which require a higher level of education.

Union membership may impact a worker's ability to work from home if their collective bargaining agreement contains a clause about working conditions. Despite a collective bargaining agreement's potential to provide flexibility, an analysis of the Canadian Workplace and Employee Survey by Ferrer and Gagné found that there was a discrepancy in the availability and use of these types of benefits such as telecommuting or flextime (722). In the case of the Communications Workers of America (CWA,) their union seeks improved worker protection against forced telecommuting, employee management software, and the outsourcing of labour facilitated by a culture of telecommuting ("Telecommuting works" 1). Union membership has a nuanced relationship with telecommuting and flexible work hours, not equally providing these benefits to all workers within a given industry or across industries.

CHAPTER 3: RACE, HISTORY & WHY NOT EVERYONE CAN WORK FROM HOME

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests over the killing of George Floyd in the summer of 2020 served to critically reframe the debates over race and policing for a generation. This thesis examines the contemporary landscape of race of working from home as it would be inadequate to avoid the impacts of the pandemic, lockdowns, and increased digitization without identifying the specific challenges faced by the Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) communities. The murder of George Floyd by the police became a flashpoint during the height of the coronavirus pandemic. Massive numbers of people around the world responded to the murder with a resurgence of all the emotions attached to other recent killings of innocent black individuals by police serving as state actors.²

This experience is not unique to Americans despite Floyd being an American, and his murder taking place in the United States, in Canada, people of colour are also targeted and unjustly killed by state actors.³ These common incidents have not only paved the way for the continuation of unethical policing practices but are a direct result of those policing practices. The year 2020 saw the resurgence of Black Lives Matter which was founded in 2013 as a direct result of the murder of Trayvon Martin (Black Lives Matter 2020). BLM which

²Some individuals murdered by the police in the United States in ascending chronological order: Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Stephon Clark, Breonna Taylor.

³Some individuals murdered by the police in Canada in ascending chronological order: Eishia Hudson, Chantel Moore, Ejaz Choudry.

functions as an activist organization and community has provided publicity and next steps after each of these events. Throughout 2020, many cities across North America, and globally held Black Lives Matter protests many of which called for police abolition. These protests occurred concurrently with COVID-19 lockdowns which limited gathering sizes for groups, making these large groups an additional target for police who had been given extra state-sanctioned power to ticket gatherings of large groups. This is the landscape in which racialized subjects engage in their work.

Beyond being unfairly vulnerable to police violence, anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and anti-Asian racism is so prevalent in North American society as to be mainstream. A resurgence of the all-too-familiar anti-Asian racism of the 2002-2004 SARS outbreak occurred in 2020 due to the media publicity associated with the Chinese roots of the COVID-19 virus. Policing itself is a racist act born out of histories of slavery (Maynard 71). This thesis does not examine the broader history of policing or police violence. This thesis rather examines some of the barriers that racism puts into place especially in workplaces. One of the first things that white individuals need to learn when beginning to do anti-racist work is that they are implicated as beneficiaries of a racist structure. There is no way for such a person who benefits from the systems of oppression which operate in our society cannot be racist. This form of racism is ordinary, but it does not mean that it is without harm. This ideology of being inherently racist without a way to solve it serves to placate white individuals and some believe that it absolves them of any inherent responsibility to participate in anti-racist work. Additionally, it

serves to continue the cyclical oppression that people of colour face on behalf of white people.

At this point, it is important once again to situate myself in the landscape of how I interact with the concept of race and with racism. At the time of writing this thesis, I am a twenty-three-year-old white woman who is a student. Some of those things will change over time, as I will age, and my vocation will change, but what will remain constant is my race. I have not experienced the world outside of my whiteness. Currently, I am actively trying to focus on anti-racist work. This active work against racism which includes listening to, supporting, and uplifting BIPOC voices in addition to trying to be well read on local, national, and international issues of racism. Despite this work, it does not mean that I am able to fully understand the impacts of racism on people of colour inside or outside of the workplace.

In an attempt to decenter my white perspective as the author of this thesis, I will be examining whiteness as a race and critical approaches to whiteness. Through a historical lens whiteness can be seen as an unequal and unearned advantage afforded to only certain groups of (white) people (Nyak 739). At different points throughout recent history, certain groups have “gained” status as “white” who were not previously considered to be such and thus their status as white is more precarious than other white individuals. Some of these groups include Eastern Europeans, Jewish individuals, and Irish people (Nyak 739). Currently, there is a growing discourse about a new group’s ascension to whiteness, Min Zhou discusses how Asian Americans are being appropriated into

whiteness (30). Zhou discusses some of the problems with this new development, she says that she is literally not white, moreover she discusses the divide between Asians whose ancestry is East of Iran versus other Asians (30). She argues that Asian Americans are being adopted into the social category of white as it represents privilege yet are reluctant to this classification and many prefer country-specific identities (31). The social category of whiteness is ever-changing, however, at this time, I do benefit in many ways from belonging to this social category.

This precarious relationship to whiteness is reverberated in my own identity and family history as a Jew. According to Sasson-Levy in discussing the whiteness of Ashkenazi Jews, whiteness should be considered less of a race and more of a "social category that maintains its privileged status through the marking of social boundaries" (28). Sasson-Levy continues to argue that Jews gained their status as white in America and Western Europe much later than other groups because of their upward social mobility (29). Daniel Boyarin aptly categorizes this relationship to whiteness as "off white" when referring to Freud's Jewish ethnicity (92), something which at times I have felt particularly attuned to. Of course, there are Jewish people who are not white, Sasson-Levy discusses the relationship between Ashkenazi Jews (Jews who are largely considered white because of their Eastern European heritage) and Mizrahi Jews (Jews of Asian, Eastern European, or North African heritage who are mostly not considered white;) specifically in the context of Israel where Ashkenazim occupy most of the upper echelons of society (28). Schraub argues that there is a problem with the

current conceptualization of the default Jewish person as white, forcing the onus of the modifier onto non-white Jewish people (382). This is echoed in broader society outside of Jewish circles where white is often considered the default with the onus of that same non-white modifier being placed on non-white people in other groups. This is the complicated personal position through which I attempt to write this thesis.

In studying critical whiteness, the question of how to literally write about race has arisen. For the purpose of this thesis, one might have observed the deliberate capitalization of the word “Black,” and thus, one might have noticed the deliberate lack of capitalization of the word “white.” These choices were made independently of the suggestion of the Modern Language Association (MLA), despite the guidelines that they have set for having neither capitalized. The guidelines were also examined for other manuals of style such as the American Psychological Association (APA), who suggests that both deserve to be capitalized. There is research to support all versions of capitalization of these two terms, however, the choices that have been made here reflect personally upon the culture and community represented by the proper noun, “Black,” and the lack thereof when it comes to the term “white.” In addition to this, the choice not to capitalize the word “white” is calculated as to not align with the viewpoints of white supremacist groups who choose to capitalize the term as a way to represent the power of “white people” as a group in society. This is not in any way to argue that white people do not have power in society, it is to argue that that power is unearned, unjust, and should not be celebrated. Hopefully, this

disparity in capitalization of the terms will also call to attention how “white” is often viewed as the default and goes unnoticed, whereas “Black” functions as a necessary modifier where it is used.

Scholars in the field of critical whiteness studies such as Doane, Matias, and Boucher have identified a shift in the framework, “the study of whiteness has shifted from understanding how people of Colour suffer whiteness to how whites understand their favour and privilege under it” (Matias & Boucher 2). Matias and Boucher are careful to identify their placement in this field with Black whiteness studies, a position which seeks to avoid the centering of whiteness (2). According to Doane, this field of whiteness studies seeks to problematize the dominant group (white people) instead of othering the minority groups (3). To maintain this position, Matias and Boucher identified three ideological precautions which they sought to implement in their work: “1) Avoid drawing from a white epistemological standpoint... 2) Give scholars of Colour their due... 3) Going beyond white racial epiphanies” (3). In setting up this framework, Matias and Boucher identify some of the work that they have done in the past which does not align with this type of scholarship (3). At this time, I too acknowledge that I have drawn largely from a white epistemological standpoint throughout my academic career and seek to do better. In addition to this, they focus on avoiding any emphasis on “wokeness” or similar white narcissism, this thesis aims to do the same.

Race as a Modern Concept

Despite the ordinary nature of racism, some people make the wrongful assumption that race and particularly racism are antiquated concepts whose painful artifacts have been carried throughout history and into modern context. Race, however, is far from being an antiquated concept. According to many critical race theory scholars, including David Theo Goldberg, “race is an irreducibly modern notion” (329). Goldberg identifies World War II as the emergence of a growing colorblindness rhetoric which mirrors and allows for increased globalization and neoliberalization. He posits that the twentieth century is marked by a theme of globalization, the largest of which he claims is the European movement later known as “modernization” (D. Goldberg 329), he argues against the idea that race predates this modernization and thus, this global modernization movement was not concerned with it. Goldberg argues that in fact Europeans were so concerned with race that they “sought to expunge race from social reference” (330). On the surface this seems like it would be nothing but a good idea, the state can no longer see colour, therefore, everyone must be equal. He also reminds readers that the European and American perspectives on race and racism were quite different throughout the early twentieth century, with Americans taking a few decades to “catch up” (332). Once caught up, this was the end of the era of the welfare state and the beginning of neoliberalism in the Global North. Despite the inherent colorblind policies of the neoliberal state, Goldberg says that this allows the state to push individuals to employ private means of maintaining their “safety” (335) a coded word to mean a community’s

(white) racial purity, just as the state pushes for privatization across other sectors.

This lens of ordinary racism can be used to observe the transpiring patterns associated with historic levels of worker agency which can be linked to global changes in circumstances and growing reliance on technology. We can see a historic pattern of racially tied vocations such as that of the transition of some members of Black communities out of domestic labour and into factory labour around the time of the second world war. In her essay “We weren’t allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war,” Dionne Brand discusses the privilege of being allowed to enter factory work for Black workers, particularly women, who were previously only able to work in low wage work such as domestic work specifically in the period between 1920 and 1946 (5). This argument is consistent with Barrett’s argument that women are largely considered a reserve army of labourers who are called on in a time of need, such as during wars (260). If (white) women were called on to fill empty positions in jobs outside of domestic service left by (white) men, then Black women were able to fill in some of those positions left open by those white women. Shreve, in Brand’s chapter remarks that while there were some factory positions available to Black women during the war, it was her experience that Black women were given the more dangerous jobs (qtd. in Brand 182) This privilege of being able to enter new types of work afforded these individuals with newfound economic mobility which would have been previously unattainable.

A similar pattern is emerging with Black and other racial and ethnic minority communities newly being afforded the opportunity of increasingly digital work after the opportunity was already offered first to white men, and then to white women. That is not to say that Black individuals were incapable of working digitally, but unfortunately, like in many other instances, Black individuals have been some of the last to be offered flexible work from home scheduling. Despite this increase in opportunity, the data as recent as 2020 still suggests that in the United States, Black and Hispanic workers were the least likely to be able to work from home when compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Gould & Shierholz). It can be hypothesized that this disparaging increase in opportunity across different races is due in part to the systems of oppression which have roots in education, class, and job type availability, among other factors. These low numbers of Black and Hispanic workers being able to work from home represents a continuation of the rhetoric of ordinary racism, wherein it has become the norm that this new opportunity will be first afforded to white workers followed by other races and ethnic groups. This fact can also be easily ignored by white workers because they have other factors to blame such as the education of their counterparts of colour rather than examining the systemic inequities which are present.

In essence this forces the workers of colour into a position where they must take drastic measures to generate change. Fanon, in his text *On Violence* suggests that the workers of colour, who are essentially the colonized subjects of this economy, are forced into violence because there is nowhere else to go.

There may indeed be elsewhere for these “colonized subjects” to go, however, Fanon suggests that perhaps this at times figurative version of violence is the path of least resistance. Violence to many seems like a drastic end-game tactic, especially in the case of worker rights – it may not seem appropriate to jump to violence. Fanon addresses this question by addressing compromise. First, he posits that nonviolence is the colonizer’s way to attempt to make a compromise before bloodshed becomes necessary, however, it is not the way in which the colonized subject can ensure that their demands are met. He says:

Nonviolence is an attempt to settle the colonial problem around the negotiating table before the irreparable is done before any bloodshed or regrettable act is committed. But if the masses, without waiting for the chairs to be placed around the negotiating table, take matters into their own hands and start burning and killing, it is not long before we see the “elite” and the leaders of the bourgeois nationalist parties turn to the colonial authorities and tell them: “This is terribly serious! Goodness knows how it will all end. We must find an answer, we must find a compromise.” (Fanon 77)

Perhaps it would be useful to determine what compromise and violence may look like in the case of the workplace and working from home and why employers and employees may wish to reach such a compromise.

Affirmative Action

One proposed compromise to addressing these systems of oppression which affect workers of colour is the case of affirmative action. Affirmative action broadly seeks to reach a compromise wherein people of colour, or people with other marginalized identities with equal merits to their white or less marginalized counterparts will be offered positions first to counteract longstanding systems of oppression. For the purposes of this thesis, affirmative action will be defined by David Oppenheimer in "Understanding Affirmative Action," his definition includes five tenants: quotas, preferences, self-studies, outreach and counselling, and anti-discrimination (921). One of the many problems that has been identified within the current system of affirmative action is that marginalized groups have not had equal opportunities throughout their lives and careers to achieve the status of equal merit due to systems of oppression. This system, which was implemented to help marginalized, and primarily racialized workers especially in the United States ended up benefiting white women more than any other group. According to Urofsky, white women were the most likely to climb the corporate ladder due to affirmative action mandates, but they remained underpaid when compared to their white male counterparts (163).

By the 1990s Urofsky claims that studies were able to show that white women held half or more management positions at any given time, a proportional share compared to men (447). While uplifting women and providing them with increased opportunities to be a part of management teams can be seen as an important portion of uplifting marginalized groups, the current legislation proves

not to be radical enough since people of colour are not benefitting nearly as much as was originally intended.

Despite most affirmative action benefits going to white women, there has been much pushback, with it often being referred to as reverse racism, a case in which white people feel that they are being discriminated against. Goldberg addresses this viewpoint by saying,

Affirmative action was considered unacceptable to the neoliberalizing stress on individual merit because it was taken to reward undeserving people on the basis of group attributes or achievements, not on individual effort and excellence. (337)

Chang further addresses this viewpoint by positing that perhaps the anti-affirmative action viewpoint comes from a narrow temporal scope, meaning the viewpoint which stands against affirmative action may see these systems of oppression as having only existed in the past due to the abolition of formal segregation laws (1119). During the 1980s, Greenberg, a political scientist began to see this viewpoint take root.

After gathering a group of white, male, blue-collar voters he learned that they no longer thought that the Kennedy-era affirmative action was necessary due to past racial injustices no longer being relevant nearly twenty years later (Urofsky 223). Urofsky also notes that this viewpoint may be rooted in the assumption that when a woman or person of colour earns a position that it is always at the expense of a white male (223). One perspective worth considering in this debate is that of the marginalized individual supposedly being helped by

these policies. According to Urofsky, polls suggest that most people of all identities prefer affirmative action strategies which do not implement quotas or other rigid forms of control (228). Perhaps this may be due to the refusal to accept positions out of fear of nepotism or accusations of such, or due to the strong Republican American preference toward smaller government. Fanon exemplifies this in his work when he says,

But the colonized intellectual introduces a variation on this demand and in fact, there seems to be no lack of motivation to fill senior positions as administrators, technicians, and experts. The colonized, however, equate this nepotism with acts of sabotage and it is not unusual to hear them declare: "What is the point of being independent then . . .?" (Fanon 66).

Workplaces must ensure that they are adequately implementing the tenets of affirmative action without implementing quotas, rigid forms of control, or seeming like they are using nepotism. At this point, the answer seems simple, just treat all workers the same. This strategy does not work as is the case of the gender-wage gap, there is also a gap in the treatment and pay of people of colour. This thesis does not attempt to suggest that the solution to this problem is to just treat everyone the same without acknowledging the nuance associated with the historical implications of this scenario.

Workplace rights and health and safety legislation are some of the places in which employees and employers are bound to disagree. This comes in part from the potential economic loss which employers face by adhering to stricter safety guidelines and more fair employment regulations. Historically, Fanon has

been correct, forms of violence such as protest have achieved the worker rights of today such as the forty-hour workweek and the eight-hour workday. He says, organizing work stoppages in the few factories located in the towns, mass demonstrations to cheer a leader, and a boycott of the buses or imported commodities. All these methods not only put pressure on the colonial authorities but also allow the people to let off steam.” (Fanon 82)

In addition to this organized labour within the workforce, these tactics of organization have reverberated into movements such as BLM where organizers sought to use primarily digital means of organizing people and protests. What’s occurring now that those goals have been achieved is twofold. First, there’s been a marked increase in productivity since those guidelines were generated, and second, there has been workday creep. Especially when working from home, workers are expected to maintain odd hours and an always online mentality. The eight-hour workday and forty-hour workweek are on paper only. Many workers, especially workers of colour engage in double and triple days. These effects are felt increasingly strongly by workers of colour especially due to the systems of oppression which they have faced and continue to face in education, the economy, and the workforce.

In addition to those original pieces of workplace safety legislation being introduced alongside federal minimum wages across many global minority nations; worker unions continue to put pressure on employers to improve workplace safety, culture, and compensation. As previously discussed, the power of collective action varies widely by industry, however, unionization is also

historically varied by race. The 1950s and 1960s in the United States saw not only the rise of the civil rights movement, but also the attempted rise and subsequent slow decline of unionism. Some strong unions were present in the United States including the United Auto Workers (Honey 238). Despite their strength, their membership was largely white (Honey 238). The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) is the largest federation of unions in the United States. The AFL-CIO has been accused of rampant racism during the 1950s, which led to the creation of Negro American Labor Council (Fletcher & Gapasin 34). However, despite the claims of racism within these unions, in 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed with the support of many major American unions including the United Auto Workers (Honey 239). According to Honey, Guggenheim Fellow and Haley Professor of Humanities at the University of Washington,

The act's Title VII created a new means to pursue equal rights at work. It established a federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which prohibited both unions and employers of more than one hundred from discriminating in union apprenticeship and membership or employment and promotion because of 'race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.' (239)

Following the passing of these acts, Black workers were some of the most active union members.

When it comes to affirmative action, the neoliberal state has expressed intention to stay out of this discussion within unions. The legal precedent for this

comes from a case wherein the affirmative action policy of the Illinois Education Association (IEA) was brought to court in the case of *Donovan v. Illinois Education Association*. Donovan asserted that the IEA was unlawful to appoint rather than elect members to its board in congruency with their policy of appointing members of four racial and ethnic groups if they did not reach eight percent representation by election (United States Court of Appeals, 1982). The court sided with Donovan citing the *Landrum-Griffin Act*; also known as Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959; as precedent for this decision (M. Goldberg 3). According to Michael Goldberg, this decision was “half right for the wrong reasons” (22), the IEA did violate the *Landrum-Griffin Act* by setting aside certain positions only for minorities and because of this, not having those positions available for any member to reasonably be elected to (25). Goldberg states that according to the judge, there was no evidence to support any benefits of this program, additionally, the judge questioned the decision to only include certain racial and ethnic minority groups and not others who may benefit from the program (30). Goldberg concludes that the increased involvement of minorities and women in union board membership is a largely positive thing, and he hopes that the *Donovan v. Illinois Educational Association* decision will not be considered in future court decisions about affirmative action policies within unions (51).

According to Weller and Madland, union membership maintains high numbers among “African Americans, Latinx workers, and Asian workers in the [United States]” (26). Despite this, there has been a marked drop in union

participation among particularly Black workers in the United States. Currently, it appears as if this drop in membership is because of job loss and job type availability. Many jobs which have historically been held by Black workers are now no longer in need of so many workers due to outsourcing and technological advancements. This has forced many workers of all races into lower paying, service industry jobs where there are not as many well-established unions (Bronfenbrenner & Warren 2). This increase in service industry jobs among Black workers also tracks alongside the reason why many Black workers are unable to access the benefits of working from home or flexible scheduling.

Teaching Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has recently been a hot-button topic around the world, but primarily in the United States. CRT has been circulated in American media as a term of abuse against “liberals.” This has led to certain individuals not wanting CRT to be taught in schools, particularly to children in the public school system. In an article about CRT bans across seven United States school districts, Sawchuk details the referendums proposed by these school boards in response to the Black Lives Matter resurgence in 2020. He details the perspective of one school board member in South Kitsap, Washington by the name of John Berg. Berg, like many others in his position believes that the history of slavery and racism in the United States should be taught comprehensively, including discussions of the “Trail of Tears, the Ku Klux Klan, the race riots” (qtd in Sawchuk 2), but he also believes that teachers should emphasize the progress that has been made with regards to race relations in the

United States and that the curriculum needs to be balanced in that regard (qtd in Sawchuk 2). To some this “tremendous progress” regarding race relations is not quite as tremendous. Despite this progress, there are still murders of Black people like George Floyd by state actors, this does not feel like much progress. Just because BIPOC individuals can attend non-segregated schools and no longer need to sit at the back of the bus, this does not mean that the KKK has been disbanded and that systems of oppression no longer impact people of colour. Yet, this is the perspective that some school board members and parents wish teachers to take with CRT.

In some cases, the bans are more drastic, with parents advocating for the banning of certain texts which discuss race, including famous contemporary texts such as *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas and older texts such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain (Top 10 Most Challenged). Each year, the American Library Association (ALA) publishes a list of their top ten most challenged books. Each of these books carry divisive themes such as race, LGBTQ+ issues, anti-police sentiment, and sex (Top 10 Most Challenged). Book banning plays a strong role in the intellectual censorship incurred by individuals. According to Knox, an assistant professor in the department of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois, banning books serves a two-fold purpose, first it prevents individuals, primarily students from encountering new ideas, and second it prevents these same individuals from engaging with controversial materials (29). Knox further argues that the banning of certain titles which are considered cannon to be considered educated serves to oppress

certain populations and prevent them from achieving the status of 'educated' (31). The banning of these titles does not exclusively affect BIPOC students, however, it is titles which contain themes of race which are most frequently banned. This lack of representation in literature and in the classroom presents one early barrier that BIPOC students face to entering the workforce on an equal playing field. In this way, students who wish to learn about these "alternative" histories such as the slave trade, must commit extra time and effort to researching on their own, thus an early introduction to the extra labour that is expected of certain groups but not others, or in other words, an early triple-day. These children attend school, extra-curriculars and perform chores, in addition they must commit to homework and this extra level of research. The school system is setting children up to be used to the triple-day rather than opposed to it.

The censorship of these types of titles begs the question of whose story is it to tell? Whose story is it to talk about segregation, racism, and ongoing injustices? According to Fanon, it is the job of the oppressor for the oppressor to maintain the power imbalance that is most favourable to them, "The colonist makes history, and he knows it. And because he refers constantly to the history of his metropolis, he plainly indicates that here he is the extension of this metropolis" (70). While a list of around 850 books has been compiled in Texas to be banned for having the potential to make students uncomfortable about their race or sex, according to a New York Times article by Michael Powell, no classroom curriculum at the elementary, middle, or high school level has been

identified to include critical race theory (par. 24). Despite the lack of a clear violation of some parents' preferred boundaries toward teaching CRT in the K-12 classroom, lobbyists and legislators alike have continued to promote anti-CRT rhetoric. What this has led to is a disparity in the types of histories that are able to be taught by educators, primarily in the United States, but also elsewhere. If educators cannot caution the young population against some of the injustices of the past, it is likely that the past is doomed to be repeated.

Politicians, particularly in the United States, have no problem invoking fear-mongering tactics when it comes to discussing CRT with their populous. At the time of writing this thesis, recent news focused on the questioning of justice-designate of the Supreme Court of the United States, Ketanji Brown Jackson, with regards to the teaching of CRT in schools. In the United States, judges, nor Supreme Court justices are responsible for the curriculum of public schools, despite pointing this out during her questioning period, alongside saying "'I've never studied critical race theory, and I've never used it... It doesn't come up in the work that I do as a judge'" (qtd in. Ward). According to Walsh and others, it appears as though Judge Jackson was unfairly criticized by the Republican Senators during her Senate confirmation hearing in a way which prevented the Senate or the public from learning about how she would rule should she be confirmed (2). Other Supreme Court Justices have not received the same treatment as Judge Brown, as recently as 2020, Justice Amy Coney Barrett was confirmed to the Supreme Court, her status as right-learning, and as a white person prevented any line of questioning with regards to CRT during her

confirmation hearing (Liptak). In this way, Judge Jackson's race has impacted her ability to actively perform labour in the same ways as her (white) colleagues.

Race and Digital Labour

This chapter has been a non-comprehensive discussion of the historical and contemporary impacts of race and racism on people of colour in the workplace, particularly with regards to Black workers. This multi-faceted issue does not have a particular starting and ending point, but rather several key notable historical points. Some of race's first impacts on workers have roots in the slave trade, particularly with regards to work type and job availability. These reverberations, which are still felt today, strengthened some of the voices in the American Civil Rights Movement, especially with regards to the impacts of union membership on the workplace benefits and privileges that Black Americans had to fight harder for than other groups. All the labour up to this point has been non-digital labour, however, the introduction of digital labour to the North American workforce has largely mirrored the pattern of being first gifted to white workers and then finally awarded to Black workers after some time (Gould & Shierholz).

When it comes to other forms of digital labour such as platform labour, a large portion of workers belong to marginalized groups. According to van Doorn, "the majority of cleaners, janitors, and home care providers operating in the gig economy are working-class men and women of color" (907). This mirrors the historic lack of value associated with the work performed by gendered and racialized individuals. To consumers of these services, it may outwardly appear that there is an increased rhetoric of colour-blindness, however, the ability to

have these workers at the beck and call of the consumer is reminiscent of “colonial imagery” (van Doorn 907).

With regards to compensation for work from home labour, there is some good news. In a study by White, he was able to determine that wages for workers who work from home have increased since 1980. In 1980, White identified that there was a wage penalty associated with working from home when compared to in-office counterparts. At the time of his study in 2014, he noted that there was a 5.4% wage premium for workers who worked from home (24). He noted that this held true with less variation than in-office workers faced especially on the grounds of race and gender, with only 6.9% variation in wages among workers who worked from home at the same position (24). One perspective here is that racialized workers may benefit from “hiding” from their employers, meaning that all things are in fact not equal, and some workers may feel this way. Adamovic in a three-wave survey study identified that worker’s cultural backgrounds had a large role to play in how they felt about their telework arrangements (7). While culture and race are not the same thing, and should not be conflated, racialized workers do have a different cultural background from white workers.

CHAPTER 4: WORK FROM HOME & COVID-19

This thesis has examined the impacts of gender, industry, unionization, and race on workers' abilities to work from home in some sort of formalized telework arrangement. However, there is one driving factor for an increase in work from home that is yet to be examined in this thesis, that is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic, beginning in the final quarter of 2019, saw its first impacts to the North American workplace in March 2020. In 2020, not much was known about the virus and seemingly temporary measures were first introduced to try to "flatten the curve." The phrases, "two weeks to flatten the curve;" attributed to a CDC infographic (Wilson) and United States' President Donald Trump's "15 days to slow the spread" (Feuer & Higgins-Dunn) were widely publicized during the pandemic's early days. At the time of writing this thesis, it is the second anniversary of these famous phrases.

In March 2020, spring breaks were extended for students, employees were sent to work from home for two weeks, and the videoconferencing software, Zoom, saw an unprecedented surge in its user base (Lawrence 3). In 2022, meetings are yet to fully return to their in-person, pre-pandemic format, and many, although not all workers are fighting against returning to the office after two years of work from home success (Julka 6). In general, employers and teachers alike have found the hybrid format of some in-person and some digital workers and students to be the worst version of this transition (Deffenbaugh 2, Ahlfeld 246).

Early Pandemic: March – May 2020

For the purposes of this thesis, the determination that March to May 2020 comprised the early days of the pandemic is based on the level of uncertainty during this time. It was at this time that not much was known about the potential effects of the virus, both in terms of health outcomes but also in terms of social and economic outcomes. March was chosen as the beginning of this period due to the date of March 11, 2020, being considered “The Date that Everything Changed” (Wamsley 2021), or the beginning North American panic with regards to the pandemic’s severity. May was chosen as the end of this early period due to the near conclusion of the first partial school year during the pandemic, additionally, after two months, many organizations had time to plan and adequately set workers up for work from home.

An examination of the COVID-19 pandemic as an external factor which has pushed many who were previously unable to work from home into the telework sphere should provide new data. Since prior to the pandemic, women benefitted through increased job satisfaction when they had formal telework arrangements with their employers (Troup 482) and flexible work arrangements such as formal telework arrangements are stigmatized and feminized (Blair-Loy et. al. 444), Investigators from Nanyang Technological University have determined that this stigma and feminization is only furthered when both parents from opposite sex couples with children work from home (1). They claim that working from home has increased the gender gap in work productivity since women engage more in caretaking tasks than before, while their male co-parents

do not (Investigators from Nanyang 1). According to one study performed by the Boston Consulting Group, women perform an average of fifteen more hours of unpaid domestic work than men each week (Krentz et al.). Additionally, the researchers found that parents spend an average of twenty-seven additional hours on childcare, cooking, cleaning, and other caretaking duties, per week, each, regardless of if they have another paid labour job (Krentz et al.). The results of this study have been echoed many times over including in a survey from Melbourne; whose provisional results can be found in a BBC article; which found that women are performing an additional two thirds of the necessary at home labour at least (qtd in. Savage). When these statistics are combined it is easy to see how that alone is an additional full-time job on top of their already busy paid labour jobs.

Barrett argues that women serve as a reserve army of labourers who can be called on in times of need, such as during wars (260). Following Marx's suggestion that a reserve army of labourers is comprised of the unemployed who might be willing to work in undesirable conditions and for very low wages. Van Doorn further argues that there is a secondary reserve army which supports those (white) women workers that Barrett is discussing. That secondary reserve army of labourers is comprised of immigrant workers, many of whom do not have legal status to work in the country in which they are employed, meaning that they are frequently paid sub-minimum wage to perform domestic work to bolster the function of the households they support (van Doorn 906). If women function as this "reserve army," are they serving in this role during the pandemic, and if so,

which women are bearing this burden? Lancy argues that in some cases, it is not women at all who are responsible for this function as a reserve army of labourers, but children. The ways in which van Doorn suggests that privileged (white) women may rely on domestic workers, Lancy suggests that families often lean on their children to perform extra domestic duties such as alloparenting, especially in times of “contingency-related” circumstances for instance when a new baby is born and requires more of the nursing mother’s attention (549).

Canada’s Temporary Foreign Worker program (TFWp) which was introduced during the 1970s to function as a reserve army of labourers in sectors where there were inadequate levels of Canadian workers has been affected by new COVID-19 protocols. During the first year of the pandemic 14-day quarantine protocols were placed on Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs,) with the burden of paying them, on their employers (Larue 235). Meaning that either not as many TFWs were able to be hired, or the cost burden shifted to the consumer. This alongside other supply-chain delays have impacted the cost of goods in Canada. Due to the rising cost of goods because of these issues, it is even more important that families can draw on their reserve armies of labourers, first women to work at paid labour jobs, and then children or under-paid domestic workers to fill those gaps.

Under other circumstances where it is inappropriate or families are unable to draw on children or domestic workers to function as a labour reserve, flexible work schedules during work from home has become a solution. This type of flexible work arrangement is stigmatized particularly due to the notion that the

“extra” domestic duties being performed are to be performed by women and are thus feminized tasks. To many women however, this type of flexible arrangement is not even available. This stigma, alongside the furthering of the gender-wage gap could undo some of the many years of work in pay-equity, this is a fear being repeated by many COVID-19 studies (Hupkau & Petrongolo), (Adams-Prassl, A., et al.), (Blundell et al.), (Johnson).

Unlike in other times of global strife when women have historically been called into the workplace, the pandemic has been dubbed a “she-cession” (Johnson 643) where women have faced the brunt of economic disparity caused by the shifting labour trends; and been called out of the workplace to take on the burden of household and childcare. According to an analysis of the United States Current Population Survey conducted by Collins et al., they found that on average mothers in heterosexual relationships where both partners are not able to work digitally full time there were children under thirteen typically took on the economic burden of reduced work hours by an average of approximately five percent (102). They found that this number was even greater among couples who both telecommuted regularly and had young children (Collins et al. 103).

It must be acknowledged that while it can be seen as an additional burden to take on childcare within the home while telecommuting, parents who can practice this are privileged to be able to keep themselves and their children safe from the virus. In addition to bearing the burden of reduced work hours, Collins et al. found that mothers typically sacrificed sleep and leisure hours in exchange for childcare more than fathers (110). Hupkau and Petrongolo identified a noticeable

downward trend in the mental well-being of mothers who have taken on these extra duties (625). According to Johnson, the pandemic represents a call for a necessary shift in governmental and organizational policy with regards to gender equity (644). Historically, the ideal worker has been an able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgender man. Johnson argues that with the advancement of the knowledge economy and of technologies, there is no need for this hard worker to be comprised solely of that one type of person (644).

According to an analysis of a United States survey by Brynjolfsson et al. nearly half of all workers who were employed before the pandemic were working from home as of April and May 2020 (1), with the fraction of workers who switched to working from home during the pandemic being approximately thirty-five percent (4). In a literature review by Frize et al. they examined the data from Brynjolfsson et al. among others, in this they were able to determine that across some industries there were no significant differences between the difficulties associated with working online between genders (Frize et al. 388-9). They did however note that there were disparities in the number of hours that men and women spent on childcare related duties such as schooling, with women taking on the larger time burden (Frize et al. 390). This is consistent with the pre-pandemic trends in division of domestic labour.

Mid Pandemic: June 2020 – June 2021

For the purposes of this thesis, the one-year period between June 2020, and June 2021 was identified as mid-pandemic. This period for many marked the settling into a routine of pandemic life. Additionally, this period marked the North

American development and roll out of vaccines. By June 2021, nearly all North American adults were eligible for their second dose of their COVID-19 vaccine. For some, this sense of relief brought a return to normalcy, a lift of mask mandates, and a sense of protection. For others, June 2021, and their second dose of the vaccine marked just that, the passing of their second pandemic June as many still feared for their lives, the lives of their loved ones, and what impacts would still be to come.

This period also encompasses what would become the first summer of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people thought that their lives would be back to normal by the end of that summer, and things were looking up. The initial wave of the pandemic seemed to have decreased with the warmer weather. Despite this, many parents still faced childcare struggles during this time. Parents who usually take advantage of summer camps or summer programs offered privately or publicly found themselves without too many options. While during the regular school year, digital versions of some classes were offered and provided some engagement for children, the summer was a whole new beast for parents, even those working from home. While childcare remained available to some children whose parents had essential jobs, this childcare was often limited to families where both parents were employed in healthcare and who had no other family or friends to look after their children.

School closures in the United States and Canada has often left the children of less praised and often low-income or single parent essential workers such as grocery store clerks without too many options for childcare. In a study

conducted by Radey et al., they found that approximately half of mothers in this position chose to enroll their children in home-based childcare options while the other half chose site-based childcare options when they were available (1322). The researchers found that mothers who chose home-based childcare did so based on thinking of these smaller environments as less risky in terms of the virus whereas mothers who chose site-based care did so on the basis of perceived cleanliness or outside factors such as the need for increased socialization or special programs for children with additional needs (Radey et al. 1323). Additionally, they found that these decisions were not equal among all races, for example, they found that Black mothers were more likely to be distrustful of information about the COVID-19 pandemic and chose home-based care more often due to its perceived safety (Radey et al. 1323). Low-income earners often found their jobs without the required flexibility of working from home that may have allowed them to maintain safe and effective in-home childcare, but there are simply not enough hours in the day to look after a child, work, maintain a home, and rest.

Smith posits that “the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of childcare to national economies in general and women’s economic participation in particular” (354). Using the circle of care model which demonstrates the relationship between paid and unpaid care work with other work, Smith highlights those mothers who have tried to work from home while simultaneously providing unpaid childcare face what she calls a “triple burden” (363). At all times during the pandemic, childcare and household related tasks

have seemed to increase due to the increased amount of time spent in the home. According to Statistics Canada, the satisfaction with the distribution of household tasks among parents remained about the same as prior to the pandemic, however, “women (16%) were nearly twice as likely as men (9%) to be dissatisfied with the distribution of household tasks during the pandemic” (Zossou 2). The Trudeau Liberal government of Canada positions themselves as feminists, as a response to the impact of childcare to economics, they introduced the Canada-wide Early Learning and Childcare system. The federal government set a goal to achieve a ten dollar per day average cost of childcare in all provinces except Quebec; which has already reaped the benefits of this program for nearly twenty years; by 2025-2026 (Canada, Department of Finance).

Toomasian identifies the summer of 2020 as a period where new vocabulary to describe the pandemic became popularized (572). He cites terms such as “new normal,” “flatten the curve,” “social distancing,” and of course “essential worker” (Toomasian 572-573) as being popularized by the pandemic. By this point in the pandemic, all workers (lawfully) remaining at their jobs on a regular, in person basis have been deemed to be these “essential workers.” Many of these jobs are important healthcare roles which are being recognized for their going above and beyond in providing care during unprecedented times. An unlikely outcome was that some jobs held by less qualified individuals and even teenagers were also seen as essential, grocery store workers, restaurant staff, and delivery services are among a few of this type of role that were also allowed to remain operational. Toomasian discusses the double-edged nature of being an

essential worker (572). It was especially dangerous to participate in the in-person workforce while little was known about the virus and before vaccines and personal protective equipment were widely available. However, many of these workers were thankful to be able to still earn money, help others, and have something to occupy their days. These workers also now had their own version of the triple-day, forced overtime or double shifts followed by at-home responsibilities. According to Statistics Canada, one quarter of nurses worked overtime during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic and on average those who worked overtime worked five more hours per week of overtime than in 2019 (Carrière 2). It can be expected that many other essential roles faced the same pressure to increase their overtime hours and frequency compared to previous years.

At this time, it seems as if there are two categories, essential workers, who remain working in-person throughout the pandemic, and digital workers, but there is another category entirely, there are workers who have been laid off or furloughed because of the pandemic. According to Statistics Canada, “on average 12.4% of Canadian paid workers aged 15 to 64 have been laid-off on a monthly basis since February 2020” (Chan et al. 2). At the same time, the unemployment rate in the United States reached just under 15% (Benitez & Dubay 20). These job loss numbers rival the Great Recession of 2008-2009. The impacts of this type of employment landscape resonate among new entrants to the workforce as well. During the pandemic many new workers could not or did not want to enter the workforce, thus alongside the COVID-19-related deaths,

decreasing the employment-population ratio in the United States (von Wachter 551). New entrants to the workforce include students who have either graduated from high school or post-secondary education or dropped out during the pandemic. Many of these new workers do not have the same skills as their peers may have had at the same point in their careers due to the pandemic's impact on education. While these laid off and furloughed workers may not be engaging in for-profit jobs as a direct result of the pandemic, they too are not free from the restraints of the extended day. These workers must be engaged in job-search activities to maintain their eligibility for any sort of monetary benefits, in addition to this they still have all the same home-related care tasks as other workers.

In the United States job loss and the recession during a global health crisis is a particularly pressing ordeal due to the lack of a national Medicare program. Many Americans receive insurance benefits through their jobs, and those who are not working may not have access to affordable healthcare or even any healthcare at all. Agarwal and Sommers argue for the importance of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in the United States during this time (1603) in addition to creating options for coverage that are not tied to an individual's job, the ACA which was enacted in 2010 has played a large role in addressing the racial disparities in accessing healthcare coverage in the United States (Agarwal & Sommers 1604). In addition to avenues to receive care through the ACA, "continuous coverage" had been provided through Medicaid to those who would have otherwise lost their benefits during this time (Erzouki 1). During this time in

the pandemic, the United States also provided free COVID-19 vaccination and testing to everyone regardless of coverage.

Late Pandemic: June 2021 – Present

At the time of writing this thesis, the COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing, despite what certain parties would like to believe. As of March 2022, North America is still reporting one million new infections every twenty-three days (Bhatia et al.). This period for North America has been marked with political unrest and revolt against ongoing public health measures such as mask mandates and vaccine requirements to enter certain environments. In addition to these negatives, this period provided many North Americans with the opportunity to receive a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, a second booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and with increased opportunities to return to business as usual such as a return to in-office work, a return to in-person gatherings, and for many a return to a pre-pandemic way of life.

Many firms including BFL Canada have emphasized the importance of this graduated return to office for the sake of re-establishing company culture as well as for the sake of boosting local economies by bringing people back into cities (Meckbach 11). In Detroit, Rocket Companies Inc. has begun a phased return to office which has benefitted local restaurants whose revenues have dropped between twenty-five and eighty-five percent due to the lack of lunch business (Davis & Manes 45). While BFL Canada does want to work on its company culture through promoting in-office time, they have also recognized some of the benefits of the hybrid model for doing business such as being able to hire an

increasingly diverse workforce. Those workers who may not have previously found the job suitable due to lack of time flexibility or due to disability may now be able to work (Meckbach 11). It seems as if BFL Canada is on to something about company culture. Firms which allow and encourage hybridity in their workforce can take advantage of the benefits such as larger talent pools, whereas businesses which are more rigid in their return to office requirements are not.

Despite the successes that BFL Canada and other firms have felt in utilizing this hybrid format moving forward past the initial dangers of the pandemic, many employees feel that there is a darker side, both to return to office, and to staying digital. Some employees may feel as if the only reason why their employers may want them to return to in-person work is for the sake of increased management and supervision. Many of these employees have already experienced the scrutiny associated with algorithmic management techniques while working from home and may not see the benefit to live supervision. Additionally, some of these individuals may not yet feel ready to balance the health risks associated with returning to in-person work, especially in industries and municipalities where vaccination rates are low, and masking is no longer required. According to a systematic and narrative review of literature and stakeholder considerations published by Chrysikou et al., the return to office is multi-faceted and includes both person-centric methods and infrastructural methods to ensuring a safe environment (357). Unfortunately, some employees may feel as if these solutions such as increased ventilation and masking requirements have not been adequately implemented by their workplaces.

For millions of workers across North America, they would prefer the flexibility associated with working from home on a more full-time or permanent basis. This, however, is not the case for all workers. In some instances, workers feel increased pressure to be “always on” when working from home compared to when they previously spent some time in the office. In a study by Derks et al. it was found that smartphone use associated with employment contributed to increased blurring of boundaries between work and home and therefore created more of a negative experience for employees (169). For some, this is a small price to pay for the flexibility of working from home, and for others, the always on mentality is not exclusive to work from home.

Instead of calling this method hybrid, Hoque, a visionary at BanglaCat, has dubbed it “Virtual Office Space” (Adrita & Mohiuddin 7), a concept which encompasses all versions of employees working away from the office. This 2018 project not only benefited BanglaCat at its time of introduction due to the reduction in costs and improvement in management efficiency, but it also left them well-prepared for the upcoming pandemic. At the time of implementation for this program, BanglaCat was aware of some of the barriers that they faced to the successful implementation of this program. They first encountered the need for amenities and provided each virtual office employee with the necessary equipment of a laptop, smartphone, modem, and internet (Adrita & Mohiuddin 8). Additionally, they had to the time and forethought to provide their employees with training for this new program which included many basic troubleshooting solutions (Adrita & Mohiuddin 8). Equipment and training served as two of the

biggest barriers to implementing virtual office environments at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many organizations faced the reality that their employees live in areas without high-speed internet access or may not have had internet access in the home at all. As a result of this, some employees did not have the necessary skills for a smooth transition without new infrastructure, equipment, and rigorous training; each of which effectively ate into the bottom line of these organizations.

Race and COVID-19

Race is another facet of the COVID-19 pandemic that must be considered. It is already known that prior to the pandemic, Black and Hispanic workers were among the least likely workers to be able to work from home (Gould & Shierholz). According to Whitney Laster Pirtle, racial capitalism is the fundamental cause of this, and other more damning health effects of COVID-19 (504). Laster Pirtle argues that there are four primary factors which increase COVID-19 inequities. These factors are that racial capitalism already

shape[s] multiple diseases which interact with COVID-19 to influence poor health outcomes; affect disease outcomes through increasing multiple risk factors for poor, people of color, including racial residential segregation, homelessness, and medical bias; shape access to flexible resources... and replicate historical patterns of inequities within pandemics. (Laster Pirtle 504)

Laster Pirtle identifies both several reasons why people negatively affected by racial capitalism may be unable to work from home, and why they may be at

greater risk for catching and sustaining complications from the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Laster Pirtle cites other research which points to systemically evaluating structures of power to alleviate some of these stressors (507). Race is a factor which is closely tied with economic class in determining the response of an individual's workplace to the pandemic. While the workplaces of primarily white workers were able to adapt and send their workers digital, an overwhelming number of employers with primarily Black employees either had to furlough their workers or have them perform work which increases their risk factors. The effect of the pandemic has not been equitable among workers of different races.

In addition to increased risk factors in the workplace which are ultimately caused by racial capitalism, in many cases people of colour have not been safely cared for by primarily white and Western medical practitioners in historical contexts. This has led some groups of people to be skeptical of the medical care which they may receive in the case of illness and to be skeptical of preventative measures such as vaccinations. When asked why some Black people do not trust the COVID-19 vaccine, Black feminist biochemist, Yolonda Wilson lists historical examples of atrocities committed against the Black community and Black individuals.

The Tuskegee syphilis experiment, the practice of robbing graves of enslaved people to use them as cadavers, J. Marion Sims's gynecological experiments on enslaved Black women (during which White audiences were invited to gawk at their vaginas), forced sterilization of Black (and poor

White) women in the South, and the taking of Henrietta Lacks's cervical cells without her consent and the subsequent development of the HeLa cell line, among other atrocities. (Wilson S14)

In addition to listing historical examples, Wilson also offers contemporary examples of the inequitable treatment of Black people by the medical community such as the belief that Black people do not experience pain in the same way or with the same degree of severity as individuals of other races (S14-S15). She concludes by explaining that the question of trust is insufficient in the discussion of the lack of uptake in vaccines among the Black American community (Wilson S16). Of course it is not just Black Americans or Black people in general who experience vaccine hesitancy, however, in this instance it is one way in which race impacts the safety of many individuals not working from home.

Industry and COVID-19

One industry that has been rapidly digitized as of the start of the pandemic is academia. Many academics, among other workers have been forced to work from homes where home offices, adequate technology, and supplies are not present. Ilaria Boncori shares a stream of consciousness style exploration of her life as an academic newly working from home who is also a partner, homeowner, and parent to a young child. Boncori's qualitative analysis describes her current state as "hyper performativity or speed-dial mode" (682). Some of the key points that she identifies are the work-life balance, the emotional labour, the nutritional implications, and the lack of home office. Kendall Powell, in her how-to guide about how her lab transitioned to following the COVID-19 protocols, details the

changes that they had to make to be more flexible considering everyone's new schedules and the new safety protocols (420). This qualitative overview of one lab delves deep into the impact that the rapid digital transition had on the mental health of its workers (Powell, 420).

A resounding fear that is shared by many academics in similar situations is the fear of their personal lives having an impact on work performance. While this is not directly tied to academia, in academia this fear is particularly strong as the pressures to publish and produce especially during the pandemic, and even more so in relevant fields, are stronger than ever before. Currently, much of the data surrounding the implications of COVID-19 on academics is qualitative in nature. Some of the recurring themes in the literature discuss the negative impact that the pandemic has had on the mental and physical health of workers who never intended to work from home; from nutrition and ergonomics, to depression, workers are multidimensionally effected.

A 2021 study by Almhdawi et al. examined the mental health impacts of COVID-19 on professors in Jordan, these results can be extrapolated to other professors however, cultural considerations must be made. They found, "a mild level or higher of depression, anxiety, and stress ... in 17.1–30.6% of participants" (Almhdawi et al. 1158). In addition to these mental health struggles alongside an increased risk for developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), professors in the study also reported physical impacts such as increased neck pain (Almhdawi et al.1158), which is likely due to the lack of an ergonomically sufficient home-office in the switch to home-based teaching. On a positive note,

the researchers reported that despite the increased time that it took many professors to prepare for online teaching, a high number of professors also reported increased job satisfaction associated with teaching online compared to other years, leading to a higher overall quality of life during their time teaching from home (Almhdawi et al. 1158).

Another consideration that must be made by academics and researchers conducting research during the pandemic, especially in the early stages of work from home when the infrastructure was not as robust as it is over two years removed, is the types of participants who are able to reliably access the infrastructure required to participate in such research efforts. A study by Kennedy et al. hypothesized that this would prevent researchers from achieving accurate population samples in some instances due to the inaccessibility of the required software or hardware to certain cohorts (Kennedy et al. Introduction). Through their work in providing digital connectivity kits to low-income families, the researchers found that access to hardware and software was not enough for a portion of these families. In addition to these barriers, they identified lack of data and lack of digital literacy as two other barriers which may prevent the active participation of some low-income families in digital engagement opportunities (Kennedy et al. Conclusion). Researchers must also be aware of access needs based on disability because not all individuals are able to engage in the same way via Zoom or other video conferencing software as they may be able to in person settings. These are just some of the barriers associated with conducting participant-based research during the pandemic.

Office workers such as those in the insurance industry may find that there are some benefits associated with returning to the office that a fully or even partially digital workforce cannot accomplish long-term. According to Kuczinski, insurance is a relationship business, and we have all felt a lack of human connection during the past year and a half. We had no choice during the pandemic, but as the world returns to a new normal, companies that don't prioritize relationships will be at a competitive disadvantage. (2)

Kuczinski further argues that in insurance, as with other jobs which are performed in an office environment, there is learning that occurs almost as if through osmosis, by being near to coworkers and having the ability to collaborate and seek help whenever it is needed (3). While it is true, that there can be a lack of collaboration in a mostly digital workforce, there are platforms which allow for this kind of collaboration if the company culture fosters it.

One creative solution proposed by Kleiman et al. is to incorporate video games into virtual meetings (31:2), they propose that much of the time spent in virtual meetings is passive, and the use of video games as a collaborative and team-building tool, allows users to be active participants and reduce feelings of loneliness and boredom (31:3). While not all organizations have the time, equipment, or desire to incorporate video games into their video calls, one lesson that can be learned from Kleiman et al. is the benefits associated with including time for all employees to be active participants in meetings, especially outside of traditional work time; think coworkers having a chat over coffee. One limitation to this type of interaction is that it can feel very forced and sterile to have a

socialization period integrated into meetings. When the interaction is not a part of the natural workday routine, many workers may find that they would rather spend that time grabbing their own coffee, using the restroom, or attending to their children or elderly family members for whom they are the primary caregiver in addition to their regular workday duties.

Education and COVID-19

Throughout the rises and falls in the severity of the public health crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, a large impact that children and adolescents have faced is the ongoing rotation of school closures. At the beginning of the pandemic, the resonant ideas were short two-week hiatuses from school but that quickly devolved into longer closures and virtual classes in areas where the infrastructure and economics allowed for such. Some schools were closed only at the onset of the pandemic until public health measures such as masking were able to be implemented while others closed more often on a rotating basis due to outbreaks. Two key impacts of these closures are educational attainment and the mental health of students. Together, these impacts also influence the types of graduates that schools can produce for entrance into the workforce. During the height of the pandemic, these students should be considered digital labourers, despite their work being unpaid, these students were still labouring each day in their virtual classes.

In a meta-analysis by König and Frey which examined educational attainment impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020 and 2021, they found that the effects of school closures are non-negligible and consistently

impact younger students more than older students (21). At this time, it is likely too early to determine the long-term effects of these closures however, in a study conducted by Henderson et al., they have observed that students seem to have lost up to the last two years in social and educational development, with 60% of students reporting that they were learning less than in pre-pandemic times (qtd. in Munir 7). This potential loss of the last two years of school has led to drastic measures being proposed by some governments. For example, one of the election promises made by the Ontario Liberal Party is the renewed implementation of an optional grade 13 with its own curriculum and a chance for students to catch up both academically and socially (Casey). Many of the reasons for poor educational attainment during these times are the same impacts that parents and other workers have felt during the shift to working digitally, lack of space, poor nutrition, lack of technology, poor sanitation, other childcare needs, etc.

In addition to these educational challenges, children and adolescents have faced mental health challenges associated with school closures, learning from home, and other pandemic related disruptions to their normal learning and social environments. An article by Almeida et al. details the many diverse potential consequences of school closures such as children's increased risk for anxiety and other similar disorders, and a noted increase in teen-pregnancy, sexual exploitation, and child marriage as is correlated with prolonged school absences for other reasons (608). In addition to school closures, children are impacted by other factors such as economic strife or poor and confusing public health

information which further incidents of domestic violence (Munir 2). Almeida et al. notes that the duration of school closures is regionally diverse (609) despite having impacted nearly 1.2 billion learners worldwide at some point during the pandemic (608), therefore, it is difficult to ascertain the long-term mental health impacts of the school closures.

Children with additional needs such as disabilities have been additionally impacted by the pandemic in ways that their peers may not have been. In some instances of disability, these children may be at an increased risk from an adverse reaction to the virus caused by SARS-COV-2 infection. In other instances, these children may require in person visits to therapies, supports, and specialists, many of whom are facilitated through public school environments. The access to these services may not be adequate in a virtual setting for all children. Yet another group of children with additional needs are children who require the structured socialization that a school environment provides to build and improve upon life skills. In a meta-analysis by Munir, it was found that children with special needs demonstrated increased unhealthy habits during times of school closures such as increased dependence on and overuse of technology (6). In addition, they found that the symptoms of certain disorders such as attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) were worsened (6). These varied experiences and many others demonstrate some of the impacts of school closures on children with additional needs that are above and beyond their peers.

Overall Impact of COVID-19 on Work From Home

Much to the chagrin of employers, COVID-19 has inherently taught many workers their value within the labour system. During the early portion of the pandemic, workers learned that their jobs were often able to be shifted to a remote environment, often with increased flexibility to their schedules. In some cases, this also allowed disabled workers to enter the workforce due to some reductions in workplace related barriers. Essential workers at this point in the pandemic received praise not only from the public, but often also from their employers, touting their value not only to the firm, but also to their communities. Many months of telling workers that they are valued members of a community uplifts these workers and invites them to question their value as an employee. In some instances, workers realized that it was not worth risking their lives for minimum wage, or sub-minimum wage in the case of some industries such as servers or gig-workers.

The period following the early pandemic comradery and sense of community that kept workers at their jobs has been dubbed by economists to be “The Great Resignation” (Sheather & Dubhefeasa 1). Sheather and Dubhefeasa attribute some of this strife specifically within the medical community to burnout (1). Across the United States, the number of resignations was the highest in 2021 than any other time in the 20-year tracking period (Ksinin & Jiskrova 525). The media has lambasted job seekers for being lazy for not accepting the new wages and work conditions being offered by many employers, however, workers in some cases feel that their value is greater than that of what is being offered,

especially with regards to working conditions, or workers have used the pandemic as an opportunity to pursue other passions outside of the workplace.

The impacts of the pandemic on workers' abilities to work from home has been widely varied across different populations. Across certain races, COVID-19 presented an increased risk of severe disease and a decreased likelihood to be able to work from home. The combination of these factors left certain racial groups, largely Black Americans at a greater disadvantage. In addition to the impacts of race, the ability to work from home and the efficacy of the work performed in the home is not equitable across all industries. From access to adequate home offices on short notice to access to a reliable internet connection in rural areas, there are many barriers that were not accounted for in the great digitization which occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors also affect children whose schools rapidly digitized due to the risks of the pandemic.

CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to answer the research question: “what impacts does work from home have on worker agency, if any?” in investigating claims related to this question, a systemic review of literature was used. A variety of recognized theories and theorists were drawn on including but not limited to Marx, Foucault, and various forms of feminism. These theories and theorists were used primarily to support the more contemporary findings from news and journal articles which comprised much of the body of this thesis. By way of conclusion, this chapter will attempt to address the answer to the question of worker agency in more direct ways followed by some lasting personal reflections on the matter.

During the process of beginning this thesis, I worked through multiple definitions of “work from home,” intermittently changing the definition to include workers who do not earn a wage for the work that they do within the home but also to include gig workers who may or may not work directly from their actual homes but may use their home as an administrative hub for the work that they do. This internal struggle to clearly define what it meant to work from home translated into the research that was conducted for the purposes of building this thesis. While contemporary texts written in English commonly use “work from home,” other, older texts may refer to the process as telework or telecommuting. It was important to build a thesis that was inclusive of all these terms to adequately assess what each meant for worker agency.

For the purposes of this thesis, the definition that was used throughout was a loose version of the following: any worker who may work part or full-time,

regardless of wage inside their home, or the home of another person or family performing tasks that are outside of normal personal and homecare tasks. Due to the loose nature of this definition, the thesis was constructed categorically to address several different types of persons who may experience a work from home situation. The two primary ways in which workers were subdivided to address these concerns was by industry and by race. People are much more than both their industry, and their race, however, these are two ways in which individuals interact with their environments.

When addressing individuals categorically by industry, this thesis aimed to address nearly all workers who can work from home at least some of the time. In writing this chapter, it is obvious that I used the term industry very loosely, as seems to be a growing theme among my definitions. I chose to address office workers as a monolith largely due to the way in which that environment frequently functions the same with regards to workplace flexibility and the ability to work from home across a variety of more traditional industries. Much of the same thought process followed throughout the choice of the remaining industries in which I decided to draw on more unique jobs and determine what their relationships were to work from home. It is in this chapter that it is most clear to me that worker agency is not so much determined by the ability to work from home, although that is a factor, but it is increasingly determined by type of position, job title, and type of industry; much the same as how it is determined in non-work from home situations.

As a growing industry dominated by a lack of governance due to its fluid nature, the gig economy was an obvious choice for one of the industries whose population has some individuals who work from home. What makes these workers unique is their lack of status as employees; in many instances these workers are independent contractors. As a result of this independent nature, there is the illusion of agency awarded to the worker but due to the nature of facilitating many of these transactions and micro-transactions in a profitable manner, these workers can often find themselves at the direct whim of the consumer, rather than of the platform.

As aforementioned, workers often do not fit neatly into these industry boxes and frequently perform tasks or work in more than one industry simultaneously. Gig work and affect labour are two of the industries which have sufficient time-related flexibility thus allowing workers to use their work in these industries as their second shift. For the purposes of this thesis, many job titles across healthcare and homecare industries were grouped together using the terms affect labour and immaterial labour. This was done to highlight the roles that these workers play in reproductive labour. Despite having a high level of autonomy in their jobs, affect labourers often have a low level of job satisfaction due to the underpaid and undervalued nature of their roles.

Academia is perhaps the most traditional industry that was examined as a part of this research project. Originally in writing this thesis, academia was not included in the discussion of industry and the roles in which it plays on worker agency. However, after careful examination, I determined that academia,

specifically when referring to roles in higher education institutions functions uniquely to other office jobs and the two could not easily be grouped together. Many academics have the luxury of performing research in their area of expertise and interest. This, however, does not mean that they are adequately funded to perform that research. Often higher governing bodies within academic institutions will regulate what is to be researched and taught, and even the level of research output by each member of its faculty and staff. In many ways these workers must wear various metaphorical hats, some of which provide increased worker agency, but many of which can feel limiting. Another limiting factor in academia is the stigma associated with those who choose to work from home rather than on-site.

The last industry that was examined from the basis of work from home was sex work. I chose to include this industry to reduce some of the stigma associated with sex work especially because the consumption of some types of sex work, especially the work from home style of sex work that was examined for the purposes of this thesis, can be more ethical to consume than other types of sex work which may include coercion or underpayment of workers. Sex work also functions independently of the larger gig economy and engages differently in fights for unionization than within the broader gig economy. This is sometimes due to the legalities associated with sex work internationally. Legality aside, this thesis determined that sex work afford workers a high level of worker agency in the work from home setting in instances where the work is voluntary.

A cross-industry determinant of worker agency is unionization. Workers who are unionized often benefit from the collective bargaining power of their

unions not only for higher wages and for medical and dental coverage but also for working conditions particularly as they pertain to job satisfaction. In understanding this, it is obvious why some less regulated industries such as gig work may be particularly interested in the support that unions are able to provide. This thesis examined the unionization of British Uber workers which paved the way for a broader wave of unionization among Uber workers. In Canada, the United Food and Commercial Workers union (UFCW) has entered into an agreement with Uber which provides Uber drivers the opportunity for representation across Canada (Canada's Private). Despite these workers not automatically being able to be enrolled in the UFCW, this is the next step in providing some protection for benefits which improve job satisfaction.

In addition to addressing just worker agency, in this thesis, I attempted to build on Hochschild's idea of the Second Shift, which she examined in her book by the same name. Throughout the body of this thesis, I referred to this process as the double-day, the triple-day, and so on, and the doubling and tripling of the workday. It is obvious that this phenomenon is not unique to those who work from home, however, one can conclude that teleworkers more frequently engage in a double workload during their regular workday in instances where employee monitoring software is either not used or is not used in a way in which workers are prevented from being flexible with their time management.

To place a value judgement on this, a double or triple workday is not necessarily inherently "bad," however, determining why some workers should feel or be more obligated to engage in it over others was a key point that this thesis

aimed to address. This thesis found that due to the leisure gap, women are more frequently implicated in the perils of the double day than men. This “gap” in who must engage in a greater workload across different industries and across households is where the problems associated with the double day come in. For some, there are just simply not enough hours in the day to complete all their required tasks each day. Due to the rising cost of goods and rising inflation, this problem is only projected to increase.

Due to the time in which this thesis was being written, it felt crucial to include a chapter which addressed the experiences of racialized workers. This thesis was written in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, but this is not the only way in which people of colour have felt the impacts of racism during this time or historically. At many times during the writing of this chapter, it was a struggle to effectively communicate the struggles that I do not directly experience due to my positioning as a white woman. In this thesis, I attempted to provide a brief, non-expansive overview of the transition of Black individuals into North American workplaces to draw similarities between this experience and the experience of Black workers transitioning to working digitally and some of the increased barriers that they may have felt.

Obviously, racism in the workplace is not just limited to increased barriers to accessing work from home positions. In this thesis I attempted to examine how racialized individuals have been prevented from accessing necessary information about their histories and have sat alongside while their white cohorts have not been adequately taught how to interact with people who are different from them.

In this case, I am referring to the banning of critical race theory within primary and secondary education, primarily in the Southern United States. This thesis found that while CRT was not explicitly being taught, the politicization of this concept has led to the banning of several books, many of whom feature people of colour as their protagonists for fear of being too “woke.”

One way in which some of these politicians have expressed their willingness or lack thereof to be “woke” is through their views on affirmative action. This thesis examined the ways in which affirmative action was implemented with the intent to help marginalized individuals, but in the end has done little more than help white women. In addition to mainly benefitting white women, this thesis found that another group that thinks that affirmative action is no longer useful was a surveyed group of white, male, blue-collar workers who cited the end of segregation laws as the end of racism in the United States, therefore justifying that these practices of affirmative action were no longer needed.

When specifically discussing race as it relates to working from home, there are two related primary factors that this thesis found that influences the ability of people of colour to work from home. The first is the historical basis on which people of colour have not adequately been set up to obtain a higher education, granting them access to managerial roles. The next is the types of jobs which employ people of colour, especially low-income people of colour were found to more commonly be low-paying service industry jobs which cannot be performed off-site.

To frame this thesis for a contemporary readership it was important to include the event which laid the foundation for the topic of digital labour and working from home, the coronavirus pandemic. During this event, more workers than ever before were asked or forced to work from home, many in unique and uncomfortable situations. In North America, March 11, 2020, is largely recognized as the beginning of a new way of life. This date represents when March Break/Spring Break was extended for students, and workers were moved online in many instances. In this thesis, the pandemic was subsequently divided into three separate temporals spanning from that initial date in March to present date, over two years later, summer 2022.

Each of those three stages represented a diverse array of challenges to workers. This includes the adjustment period of the early pandemic which featured many unknowns about the virus but also about work conditions and public safety. This period was immediately followed by a new normal which was established due to the roll out of vaccines which worked to reduce the burden on hospitals, thus allowing many places of employment to allow their workers to return to in-office work on an increasing basis. This return to office was not always met with employees who were pleased to return due to their new-found freedoms associated with the increased flexibility of working from home. In addition to this, this stage of the pandemic allowed many employers to see the benefits associated with having some employees work from home on a more permanent basis, including the need to pay less for office space. The final stage

of the pandemic is the ongoing new normal which was generated because of a global two-year interruption to the previous way of life.

This thesis already identified race as a factor which impacts the agency, which is afforded to workers, therefore it was obvious that race would be a contributing factor during the pandemic as well. This thesis found that much in the same way as before the pandemic, factors such as educational opportunity impacted the jobs in which workers were able to attain. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated the impact of these reduced job opportunities. In addition to factors which prevented some people of colour from working from home during the pandemic, additional risk factors for illness were present for some people of colour.

As this thesis previously addressed, industry is a large determining factor in the ease and simplicity or even possibility of working remotely at one's job. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a large expansion of the types of jobs across different industries which were moved online that had not previously been thought of as a possibility, in this way, this move was a win for many individuals for whom working in office represents a barrier to successfully working full-time such as individuals whose disabilities may require a more flexible schedule or the ability to work from a non-traditional desk or office setup. Despite this win, the pandemic also showed that there are some benefits associated with the office culture which was lacking when all employees were working remotely, some creative solutions such as video game play during meetings have been

attempted, but this thesis found that the only real way to foster these organic connections to coworkers was in in-office and in-person settings.

In addition to the impact felt among adults in the workplace, the COVID-19 pandemic also reached children. This thesis examined the impact of the pandemic move to digital learning on educational attainment of children across different ages. It found that younger children were much more at risk for negative impacts than older children. This thesis also found that in some cases children had lost nearly two full school years-worth of knowledge and social development, because of this, some governments, including the Government of Ontario have proposed the reimplementation of a grade 13 to compensate at least one extra year for those most greatly affected.

Reflection

Working on this thesis which intimately addressed digital labour and working from home while working from home during much of the two years which it has taken to write has provided me with a unique perspective as its author. I have found many of the concepts which were discussed in this thesis to be a reality in my own life, especially with regards to the attitudes towards digital labourers within academia. As someone who was very cautious at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when this thesis was in its infancy, it was easy to use the excuse that working from home was the safer option, but as the chances of developing serious complications from illness during the pandemic have stabilized, there is an increased level of judgement associated with the continued work from home within this industry. It is my hope that this pandemic has shown

many workers and especially employers that work completed at home can be just as valuable as in person labour, which will in turn lead to a marked increase in worker agency across all industries and races.

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