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Résumé de l'article

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Your World Not Mine: Racialized Women Navigating the Racialized Workplace

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Abstract: This paper uses critical race theory as the theoretical basis for considering the voices of racialized women in professional settings in Alberta and British Columbia, Canada. Using the concept of the racialized social system, I investigate the experiences of racialized women in the workplace, looking at the impact of the intersection of their racial and gender identities. The 24 respondents in this study represented diverse racialized women who spoke about their responses to racial and gendered stereotypes in the workplace. Respondents reported self-monitoring, behaviour-policing, and self-exclusion, resulting in negative impacts on their mental health. The results of the study are presented as composite counter-narratives. I argue that given that the workplace is a significant place where racialization and racism take place, the current movement to remove initiatives to address racism in the workplace, which has happened without the input of racialized women, is causing them harm.

Keywords: critical race theory, racialized women, racialized workplace, composite narrative, racial social system

Previous research has explored the representation and experiences of racialized women in Canadian institutions, demonstrating the impact of the intersection of race and gender (Aujla-Bhullar, 2018; Cukier et al., 2019; Knight, 2016; Premji & Shakya, 2017; Wijesingha & Robson, 2022). Grounded in critical race theory (CRT), this study adds to the literature by investigating the experiences of professional racialized women when navigating the racialized workplace. Respondents in this study expressed that they were aware of the various racial and gendered stereotypes perpetuated against racialized women, with the impact of these stereotypes being felt in all aspects of their work lives. Based on this discussion, I argue against the removal of efforts to rectify the racialized social system, most notably the elimination of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) programs, suggesting that the elimination of these programs harms racialized women as it maintains the racialized and gendered system that diminishes racialized women's dignity.

Theoretical background

CRT suggests that race relations are embedded in society and impact everyday interactions. I use the concept of the "racialized social system" to understand how everyday interactions are racialized specifically within the workplace (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 2017; Meghji, 2022). The racialized system created during colonization has been maintained in Canadian society, resulting in the systemic entrenchment of racialization in all social systems and institutions. In addition, two key concepts from CRT are relevant for this paper. The first is the principle of differential racialization which is based on the idea that race is socially constructed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). According to this principle, societies can trace the ways racialized groups have been constructed to the social realities at the time of construction, in this case during colonization. The second key tenet of CRT, the principle of interest convergence, suggests that with the social construction of race, racialized groups are defined to maintain the social structure that serves the interests of those in power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). Thus, in the process of differential racialization, the dominant group attaches characteristics to each racialized group to benefit the racially dominant group. It follows that the characteristics associated with each racialized group differ depending on their unique history of racialization. However, that racialized groups were defined by those in power predominately at the time of colonization means there is a commonality in how groups were racialized. This suggests the entire social system is racialized (Bonila-Silva, 2001, 2017; Meghji, 2022). Since racialized categories are entrenched in society, often through ideologies and stereotypes, these categories operate in all aspects of our social system and social institutions to maintain racial dominance. Given that the system is designed to disadvantage some and to reward others, the ideologies that permeate society reinforce social relations of dominance. Thus, we need not have individuals who are intentionally "practicing racists" to enact racism. As we are part of a society and have internalized society's definition of race, we are all subject to the influence of differential and harmful racialization.

Intersectionality

For racialized women, navigating the professional world comes with unique challenges based on the social position they inhabit. In her 1989 articulation of the concept of

intersectionality, Crenshaw highlighted the reasons Black women risk erasure compared to white women and Black men. According to Crenshaw, both anti-racism policies and feminist theories overlook the unique experiences of Black women due to their focus on Black males and white women. Crenshaw further noted that the workplace is a central social institution where Black women's experiences are disregarded. Early feminist arguments to include women in the workplace ignored that Black women were already forced into the workplace due to their racialization, often working in unsatisfactory circumstances. Early feminist movements advocated for white women's participation in the workplace and neglected to challenge the structural race relations that forced Black women into the workplace before white women. Further, that Black women were working when the definition of femininity involved excluding women from the workplace resulted in "personal, emotional and relationship problems in Black women's lives" (p. 156). Crenshaw further argued that within the anti-racism movement, challenges to the dominant system based on race have often been seen as a singular and more pressing concern than challenges based on gender, ultimately removing gender from the fight. This meant Black men could not understand the racialized sexism experienced by Black women, such that the anti-racism movement seldom recognized the experiences of Black women.

It is within the framework of intersectionality that I investigate the experiences of racialized women in the racialized workplace. Given that women and men experience race in different ways, and that white and racialized women experience gender in different ways, I shed light on the unique experiences of racialized women in a pivotal social sphere where race and gender are often front and centre. It is important to reiterate that, given the principle of differential racialization, not all racialized women, and certainly not all women of any single race, share the same experience. However, given that we reside in a racialized and patriarchal social system, there are commonalities in racialized women's experiences.

Methodology

The data for this paper were collected as part of a larger study looking at the impact of racist public discourse on the individual and social identities of racialized individuals. The study received ethics approval from the Ambrose University Research Ethics Board in accordance with the Canadian Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. The original study involved in-person and online interviews and focus groups with 31 racialized males and females that I conducted and transcribed during spring 2022 and summer 2023.

While conducting the analysis for the larger study, evidence for the unique experiences of racialized women in the workplace surfaced as data outside the scope of the original study. While the principle of differential racialization means that diversely racialized groups have different experiences in the racialized social structure, common themes were apparent in the experience of diversely racialized women in the workplace. This paper presents these women's stories as composites, highlighting the voices of racialized women whose narratives about the workplace were extracted from the data of the larger study.

A total of 24 racialized women's voices are represented in this narrative inquiry. Many of these voices were combined into characters to represent the composite narratives below. The characters are Shonda, a Black government employee who represents the voices of 12 Black professional women working in fields such as education, the public service, and law; Tracee, a Black social worker who represents five Black women including current and aspiring social workers; Min, an Asian female who works in the financial sector and who represents three women of Chinese heritage; Reyna, a Filipina social worker who represents three Filipina social worker participants; and Olivia, a Latina technological expert who represents one Latina woman who worked in a related field. Individual voices were combined into composite narratives given the similar experiences the women shared in professional settings, despite working in various fields. Given that Olivia represents one voice in the study, her narrative represents an anonymized narrative rather than a composite narrative. The voices of the three Filipina women represented by Reyna's narrative voice were separated from the other Asian voices due to their shared occupation, the similarities in their experiences, and their references to the Philippines. Similarly, the voices of the Black women were separated into two characters due to the larger number of Black women respondents and to account for the similar and unique experiences of the social workers, who are represented by Tracee. The occupations for the characters were chosen to approximate the actual occupations of the participants. All quotes used in this paper are direct quotes from the study participants.

Data analysis was conducted with the aim of understanding how knowledge is communicated and transmitted via discourse. Initial codes were created based on the racialized group with which the women identified. Themes were then created based on common codes that were identified across the diversely racialized women. A composite counter-narrative approach was taken to represent the participants' voices. Composite counter-narrative presents counter-narratives while maintaining respondents' anonymity, and is a key method used by critical race theorists to highlight the experiences of those who are racially marginalized (Burton et al., 2025; Delgado, 1989; Delgado and Stefancic, 2023; Samuels-Wortley, 2021; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Tarafi, 2018). The counter-narrative is intended to challenge the dominant narrative about race relations. The composite narrative presents the shared experiences of racialized women to provide a comprehensive account of social phenomena rather than individual isolated voices (Crenshaw, 1991). While composite counter-narratives in the CRT tradition are typically fictionalized accounts, I have chosen to use direct quotes provided from the data collection process. This decision was made based on my training in the sociology of knowledge, particularly institutional ethnography, which advocates for the positioning of participants as experts on their social position and using participants' voices as the starting point for inquiry (Smith 2006). While this project is not an institutional ethnographic study, I am drawn to the idea that participants' stories, particularly counter-stories, can be told in their own authentic voices, and therefore I have chosen to include direct quotes into these composite counter-narratives. The composite counter-narratives presented here speak to shared experiences and to the intersection of race and gender, and highlight that the treatment of racialized women is a societal concern rather than a case of isolated individual occurrences. That racialized women share common experiences with race-based treatment underscores that the racialized social system impacts all racialized women.

While the quotes included in these narratives were not stated by all respondents represented by the composite character, no quotes that were contradicted by other respondents included in the composite are included in the narratives. Thus, these composite narratives represent the common themes among respondents that emerged through data collection. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) speak about the composite counter-narrative as a means by which the data collected can be presented as a dialogue between characters who inhabit similar social positions and have similar social experiences. Other critical race theorists (Ender 2019; Samuels-Wortley, 2021; Tafari, 2018) have used this form of storytelling to present themes with the "unapologetic use of creativity," a method of representing marginalized voices advanced by Bell (1995, 899). Further, composite counter-narrative is useful as it symbolizes the community formation necessary to combat the power structure within which the dominant narrative is constructed. Counter-narratives present data in a purposefully disruptive anti-racist format; the coming together of racialized women's voices represents the possibility of unity (Bell, 1995).

As a Black woman who occupies an insider position (Le Gallais, 2008), I engaged in reflexivity (Finlay, 1998, 2002; Hill-Collins, 2000) while collecting and analyzing the data to avoid bias, while recognizing the benefit of the insider/outsider position in forming trust with the participants. Since the data were collected for a larger study, I began data collection with a standardized script about my interest in the larger topic, which did not contain information specific to the topic of this paper. During the interview process, I was mindful of my "assumptions, expectations, behaviour/emotional reactions and unconscious responses" (Finlay, 1998) to ensure my biases did not interfere with my analysis. While I provided prompting questions, I was careful not to interject with my own experiences as participants told their stories. Further, during both data collection and analysis, I documented the moments where I found myself agreeing or connecting with the narratives of the respondents. As Le Gallais (2008) notes, the relationship between the insider/outsider role is fluid and cannot be ignored when the researcher has similar traits to the participants. Therefore, rather than attempt to avoid my proximity to the stories, I was careful to recognize this proximity and address it through reflective thinking. I documented my potential biases and experiences of agreement with the participants and paid attention to these occasions during the analysis process.

Findings

When considering the experiences of racialized women in the workplace, the women in my study spoke about their awareness of racialized and gendered stereotypes. The women also spoke about being overlooked for positions or promotions, which they attributed to these stereotypes. They then discussed the strategies they used to overcome these stereotypes, including self-monitoring, behaviour-policing, engaging in extra work, and direct exclusion. Finally, they articulated the harm caused by these stereotypes, including being unable to be authentic, striving for perfection, and experiencing high levels of self-questioning and self-doubt.

Combatting stereotypes

Within a racialized social system, all members of the society are aware of the stereotypes and the racial ideologies that fuel false beliefs about racialized people. As such, racialized people who are the subjects of stereotypes have learned to develop responses to navigate the system. In addition, gender plays a key role in how racial stereotypes are developed. This group of racialized females was able to identify the responses and strategies they used to navigate this system and the ways they managed both their gender and race to present themselves as "suitable" in work environments. In addition, the daily interactions encountered by racialized women are shaped by others' level of comfort while interacting with them. Racialized women are positioned as often *responding to* social situations to manage others' ideas, rather than initiating social interactions.

One form of stereotypes noted by respondents centred on their embodied race and gender. Shonda spoke about how the "Angry Black female" stereotype impacted her:

> The angry Black female…I'm a very passionate person when I'm speaking and people think I'm angry, but I'm not… Things happen and I would always second guess myself, like, should I speak up? Because if I speak up, people are going to think I'm angry when I'm actually not being angry…I constantly…have that battle in my head…as a Black female because I feet like I [can] not be my natural self.

Reyna noted that she could relate, as she is also cautious about how she presents herself. As a Filipina woman, she wanted to ensure she was seen as being assertive and not as a passive Asian woman:

> I'm very conscious about wanting to sound…very assertive, because a lot of the time for Filipina women, Asian women in general, they're always seen as really timid, they keep to themselves. They are always just going to do what they're told and be very obedient…I want to be conscious about that balance…I make sure that I'm being assertive enough because I don't want people to think that they can just go over you.

Meanwhile, Olivia's concern was being taken seriously as a Latina woman:

> In undergrad one of the classmates asked me if I got into [technology] because I wanted to meet my husband. And I laughed it off, but that was just like the tip of the iceberg being in a predominantly male field…I think we had to become more male-like, to be respected in our circles that are predominantly male. And so, for me like I am female I am voluptuous and vivacious, and I have curves, and I'm a female being, and it is hard to be that in a predominantly male setting. I think as women we have double the work.

Here, Olivia noted that because she is a Latina she must engage in extra work to prove she is competent in her field despite her body, which is often oversexualized based on her race. Tracee summarized her feelings about having to navigate stereotypes as a racialized woman in a professional setting:

> Being in a professional space, if you are racialized or Black…I've had to work with a lot of like lawyers and stuff, and so it was always interesting…the way that I would feel lawyers looking at me and making assumptions about me.

Shonda concluded by adding:

> It's almost like people already don't [relate to] you…how their body language is, the way they are looking at you. And so, you have to just be extra and it's draining. It's acting, and it's very draining…It might just feel weird, and you might work harder at trying to get your message across trying to have the interaction go successfully.

What these women highlighted was that they are aware of societal stereotypes in a racialized workplace, and that this constant awareness of how they are perceived guides their interactions.

Being overlooked

Shonda spoke about occasions where she believed she was unable to overcome stereotypes. She noted the following:

> It's been interesting what I have found the last few years is a few job opportunities that have come up that I feel I was more than qualified for, but I believe that the optics sort of played into me not getting the positions. The positions ended up going to 2 white girls and I thought I was a top candidate for sure, based on my expertise. But what is interesting is I was told that I didn't quite have what they were looking for, as far as qualifications, the other girls just had more. But they ended up bringing me back anyway to volunteer my time to support the work. The 2 girls that got hired on were always coming to me, booking me into meetings saying you know 'Shonda, you're the expert, and you have a lot of experience.' I found it to be a slap in the face, and quite insulting.

Olivia added that the discourse around EDI did not prevent racialized women from being overlooked at work:

> I think it's something that is getting ignored. There's lots of nice language about equity in hiring, and all that sort of jazz, but in reality, at least within the institute that I work for, that's not really happening, and I just want to say you're not alone [Shonda]…it is definitely a very common phenomenon.

Shonda further agreed that despite the positive talk about EDI, racialized people were not working their way up to leadership positions, noting, "I feel there are qualified racialized individuals for [leadership] positions, but they are not being considered. They're not moving up, so I think there's something in the pipeline as far as who is being trained and promoted." Tracee substantiated the concern about the lack of representation in top positions even in female dominated professions. With reference to the increase in racial representation in social work, she noted,

> Now there's a lot [of women] but again we [racialized women] are all kind of at the bottom. You don't have any Black people in supervisorial positions or managers, and even women like where we all know, social work is dominated by women, and somehow all the managers are white.

The experience of racialized women being overlooked for upper-level positions reflects the phenomenon of intersectionality. Longpré-Verret and Richards (2021) observed that in Canada, women and racialized people were underrepresented in both leadership and

officer positions. It stands that racialized women would experience the double impact of being overlooked for leadership positions because of both race and gender, despite their qualifications.

Navigating the racialized social system

Given the women's experiences of facing stereotypes and being overlooked for positions, they needed to develop strategies to navigate the system. Strategies included self-monitoring and behaviour-policing, doing extra work to attain additional qualifications, and directly removing themselves from harmful work environments.

Self monitoring and behaviour policing

Shonda noted that she monitors her *presentation of self* in order to counter the "angry Black woman" stereotype:

> I just felt like sometimes I…already offended people just by being the only dark skin person in the room, and so I had to be like 'Okay, make sure you're always listening and smiling, and reflecting back others' feelings, that you're not offending anybody.' Always working super hard to do that because I could tell by the way people look at me when I walked into a room…something was off. So, I work really hard, just to be amicable. It's exhausting.

This process of behaviour-policing and self-monitoring is one that Black women experience in the face of the angry Black woman stereotype. Black women strive to present themselves as "amicable." Min also spoke about the self-monitoring strategies she used as a Chinese female. She was aware that she is part of a racialized, minoritized group, but was also aware of the model minority myth that makes her a "more desirable minority:" She also recognized that due to the model minority myth, there was a higher likelihood of her being tokenized as a display of "diversity":

> I had an experience where someone approached me [at work] and they were saying that they were doing a feature for female leadership... And I'm like 'Oh, cool. You want to feature me'. Then, the second sentence was '…because we don't have enough diversity on our list. I was like 'Well shit like I don't want to be that', and I didn't follow up. I was like 'No, thank you. I don't want an interview, and I don't want to be featured'…In some ways, you know I feel like they're using me for the way I look…I have done really great work that could be featured, and it would be good period like if they just stopped at that. But it was because we're lacking diversity and that didn't sit right with me.

Min expressed that her self-policing work was a response to her awareness of the model minority myth. Her quote "I feel like they're using me for the way I look" is important in the context of her race, as she noted that she is aware of the model minority myth (see quote later in this paper). To be clear, while the risk of tokenism is something all respondents spoke about, it took on a different perspective when the tokenized person was thought to represent the favoured minoritized position. For example, Shonda spoke of the experience of being tokenized, reinforcing that as a Black woman there's the realization that "you're not important" or of being "at the bottom of the food chain" and "not being elevated to leadership positions." Olivia also noted that while there are conversations about diversity

in hiring, this isn't the reality signaling tokenistic language around equity and resulting in her being the only realized woman in her company. Tokenism was also experienced by Tracee who spoke about the "layered" ways "dominance was communicated" by those in leadership, which served to keep her from advancing at work. However, Min's experience was unique in that she reflected on this element of tokensim with the awareness of her position as a model minority. Her comment is reminiscent of Matsuda's (2020) acknowledgement that Asian Americans will not allow themselves to be used as a token racialized group. Matsuda (2010) notes that awareness of the model minority myth has often caused Asian women to avoid being tokenized as the epitome of the racialized female, as this tokenization presents other racialized women as being undesirable while masking the racism experienced by Asian women. Given this social position of occupying the "in-between space," many Asian women are aware they must monitor how they are perceived.

Lack of agency

That racialized women must self-monitor and behaviour-police is evidence of their inability to define their identities in a racialized social system. Reyna spoke about the impact of differential racialization resulting in a lack of agency and feeling "on-guard" in work settings, as she struggles to be understood:

> You hear stories about how certain situations have gone, and it makes you very much guarded. And from my experience in the agency I was working in, I heard stories from…other people I knew who worked there about how [the agency] goes about issues of race. How they handle their racialized staff... When I was working there, I was very much on my guard.

Tracee reaffirmed this feeling, noting that, particularly at the beginning of her career, she felt powerless and alone due to a lack of power in her workplace:

> I had [an] experience when I was starting out in my career. I would respond very differently to it now. But starting out…being one of the only racialized people there as well as a young social worker…I would just take it in and get mad by myself. Not do anything about it, cause it's a very powerless position to be in. You already feel some type of way and if you go and try and address it you get shut down, like how many times am I going to do that to myself?

Even in a female dominated field, Tracee felt isolated and powerless as a Black woman.

Doing extra work

To avoid being overlooked in the workplace, racialized women often found themselves doing extra work to be recognized. However, despite the extra work, they often found themselves being tokenized and wondering if their work was seen and appreciated. Shonda noted the following:

> What I have found myself doing is going outside and either volunteering or taking up consulting and other opportunities in order to gain the so-called experience that I didn't have, or taking extra courses. And so I find for me as a racialized woman, as a Black woman, it's draining…. I am working double time just to be seen and just to be recognized.

Reyna affirmed Shonda's comment:

> I feel like because I'm a racial minority it always feels like I have to work three times or four times harder compared to my white peers…as racialized people, we're already coming into a space that's predominantly white. And so I feel it…I've always felt like I've had to prove myself even harder compared to my white peers.

Min noted that due to internalized stereotypes, she too finds herself working harder while acknowledging the impact on her overall health, stating "…that's my own ongoing struggle, the stereotype that I have built in, and I've tried to overcome by working harder." Tracee had a similar response noting that she often thinks to herself, "One—you're a social worker, and two—you're Black…you can't mess up," out of fear of retribution should she not perform at an exceptional standard. Shonda reaffirmed this point by acknowledging that other individuals do not need to work as hard as racialized women, stating, "Heaven knows I do a lot of volunteering… it's funny because I feel everyone works like this but then, I've had conversations when I'm like 'So you don't have three jobs? That's not the norm?'" All of the women in the discussion agreed they need to work harder to prove themselves. Further, they see this as the standard rather than particular to their personal experience.

Direct exclusion

A final theme that emerged was the women removing themselves from situations where they carried the weight of their race and gender. Min shared this experience:

> When I was interviewing with this company… the person who was interviewing me was a white male. He introduced me to his boss and his boss's boss who were white. I did actually ask 'What does the diversity in the office look like? How many women are there in the office?' Basically, there's an office of 200… and there's three women. Then I asked, 'What about other diversity?' And the boss's boss, he's like, 'Well, we hired a South Asian man last year,' and I'm like 'Wow! Hired one South Asian guy last year?' so I was like, 'Yeah, I got to tell you that doesn't impress me.' So it really was one of the main reasons I didn't go there, it just was not appealing to me to be one of a few. I couldn't imagine what the conversations would have been like.

Shonda supported the idea that when there was limited diversity in the workplace, she tended to "stay under the radar" and remove herself from being actively involved:

> It's taken a long time to find my voice, to find my thoughts, and to say where I feel like I'm being disadvantaged because of who I am…before I would probably tend to just kind of stay under the radar and keep quiet, and not put myself in scenarios where I would be at the forefront of anything.

Shonda provided the example of not applying for promotions to avoid rejection, stating, "I think to myself, 'I'm sure that there are other colleagues who would just apply because, why not?' But I don't want to embarrass myself…those are the things that go through one's mind." For these women, awareness of a combination of their gender and race led to them remove themselves from accessing opportunities either to avoid being tokenized, to "not rock the boat," or to avoid the embarrassment of being denied, given their history of being overlooked. This led to the final discussion about the impact these environments have on the women's mental health.

Overall impact on mental health

Racism and racial stereotypes acutely impacted the participants' mental health. They acknowledged that because their concerns were neither recognized nor addressed, they had no outlets to deal with their experiences; rather, they were forced to internalize their feelings. This had significant consequences, including feeling a loss of a loss of authenticity, pursuing a damaging quest for perfection, and experiencing self-doubt.

Loss of authenticity

Shonda spoke about her inability to be her authentic self in her workplace; moreover, she shared a story where her white female boss attempted to equate her own experiences of authenticity with those of Shonda's, undermining Shonda's experience and concerns:

> My boss said, "I have to change and not be my authentic self at work as well because I can't come into work and curse"… I told her "I get that, but my authentic self is not unprofessional, I'm not a curser, I'm a very professional person"… my focus is not necessar[ily] that I'm unprofessional. My focus is that my Blackness is going to come out. And that was the conversation I had with her when she's like I can't bring my authentic self to work. I'm like "I get that because when you're your authentic self, you might curse and that's unprofessional," but for me when I say I can't bring my authentic self, it's that I can't stand up in the way that I would like to stand up because then I'm going to look as if I'm too angry. So, I think everyone might have the inability to bring their true authentic self. But I think the motive for why you can't bring your authentic self to work, that should be discussed…if it is out of fear of backlash for a race or ethnicity…or gender…that's the key takeaway…cause the default thinking is that your race or gender aren't the professional standard.

The feeling of being unable to be authentic often led to racialized women having to prove their belonging in a workplace, which was not supportive of their mental health.

The quest for excellence and perfection

Another theme that emerged during the conversation was a concern with perfection. This was driven by the need to overcome stereotypes, self-doubt, the constant fear of being judged, and experiencing a lack of agency. Racialized women felt the only way to secure their positions in the workplace and simultaneously gain the respect of their colleagues was to perform at an exceptional level. Olivia noted that,

> there are just so many challenges being a female, being a female of colour…at the end of the day, being a Latina…I work really hard, I think because I'm trying to disprove the stereotype in my head, I have to overcome that.

For Olivia, the need to seek perfection was based on overcoming the stereotypes of being Latina, which she noted have been imprinted in her own mind., Reyna noted she felt the need to always be on top of her game to avoid being "let go" from her occupation:

> I was …very much like on my guard to make sure I'm on top of everything, I don't know who my supervisor is going to be. If they're going to be someone who I can see as an ally. If I do something that's wrong, are they going to back me up? Are they going to be there for me or not? Are they going to have my back? Because if they're

> not someone that is also racialized, that also has that experience…if I messed up or something bad happens then I'll be the first to go.

Likewise, Tracee noted that she puts unrealistic pressure upon herself:

> You can already see the need to be like 'you can't mess up'…I had to make sure I knew everything, even though that's unrealistic. Like, no one knows everything, and people are going to mess up in their job. But then I felt like if I didn't say the right thing or if I didn't get a fact right then it reflected on who I am, my entire being as a social worker, and everything that I'm trying to bring …. When you're in a professional space and working with different clients and the assumptions they have…we set unrealistic expectations of perfection. Yeah, that's the thing, the expectations of perfection.

Shonda also referenced the standard of excellence she feels she must accomplish, not only as a Black woman but also as an immigrant:

> There's a standard of excellence…so you better not just put your best foot forward, put both of your best feet forward and bring some other things with you. There is a standard of excellence, and I feel like we were raised that way. You bring everything that you have into something, and if you can't bring that, then work at it, and then you step forward. It's a narrative for a lot of immigrant families as well, right, like you work 10 times harder.

Further, Shonda spoke about the need to instill the same values in her own children, particularly her daughter as a Black female:

> It's interesting for me being a mom in terms of how I'm trying to raise my kids …the idea that we have to be like three times better, like Black excellence… my daughter, can't be ordinary…I want her to be this like empowered strong Black woman. What if she isn't like that? That's a lot of pressure on her right?

Self-doubt

Overall, the women noted that they have all been impacted by a level of self-doubt and self-questioning when it pertains to their experiences of being racialized in the workplace. Encounters with racism often left these accomplished women questioning themselves, their abilities, and their experiences. Further, they were aware they were questioning themselves, which led to them experiencing even more self-doubt. Shonda had this to say:

> I often go home wondering what happened, like I dissect the whole thing. And I'm like, is it because I'm a woman? Is it because I'm Black? Is it because of my age? Like, I wonder a lot of things and why interactions happened. Working so hard to overcome these stereotypes, and you know it's not a healthy work/life situation, it's not healthy. It's very toxic.

The inability to be one's authentic self has led to these women losing their sense of self. Shonda continued,

> It's just realizing you're not important…being a woman and it's a man's world…I think here is just almost realizing that you're at the bottom of the food chain…when you see us being successful, we have really had to undergo so much because…it

> usually goes from like a white man and white woman then a Black men, and then look, Black women are just right there [at the bottom] and it's feeling that way right like you walk into a place where you're the only Black person, and you just feel really self-conscious and just really feeling like you don't really matter.

Tracee had a similar comment, noting it was difficult to find solidarity in her workplace:

> I'm like 'Oh, this happened to me. Is it was because I was Black, and I think, being that I'm Black, and I'm a woman as well, when things happened to you especially at the hands of you know, white women, it's like you know you're supposed to have…that gender solidarity, and it's not there.

Black women not only experience a lack gender solidarity from other women, but they also experience a lack of racial solidarity from Black men. Shonda added, "…as Black women…Black men, they don't understand what we go through…we always take on the fights and it's kind of like, 'When are people going to care about us too?'" Reyna relayed her experience in the following way, also noting that her feelings were rooted in both her racialized female identity and her immigrant status:

> I do want to mention the inferiority complex of immigrants, and my experience as an immigrant, and a racialized woman, thinking that you're less than and then behaving like that as you interact with people. So, letting others speak first, usually the white males. Not taking up too much space. Struggling to think you are entitled to space or to speak. Thinking that you are not entitled to opportunity as well… believing that you're not really as entitled to these opportunities because maybe you're an outsider or you're just not the norm, not white…Sometimes I behave like I'm less than and also believe that I am. I'm still working through that.

Reyna was not the only one who was actively working to overcome her feelings of self-doubt. Oliva noted that as she battled to combat stereotypes, she realized that "it leads to a lot of unhealthy things like [harm to] your mental health, not [having] a balanced work-life situation…overcoming these stereotypes is even harder than [others] understand." Shonda expressed a great level of exhaustion with the fight, also impacting her mental health:

> It is beyond exhausting because, you have to work twice as hard if not harder than anybody else, I worry about my mental health, and you know just what it is I'm having to do just to be put out there, so it's hard. It's a tough one… Some days, especially when I'm tired, I have to work extra hard and be like 'watch what you're saying and smile,' and doing all that mental work, it's really not good for my mental health.

Although Min noted the pressures she feels are different due to the process of differential racialization and the model minority myth, she also noted an ultimately negative impact on her mental health:

> It may be in the reverse for other minorities…you know for Asians of Chinese descent or Japanese descent. They have like the opposite problem where they're the model minority…but what gets ignored is like their mental health, because they're not necessarily being recognized like that. They are human, too. They have issues

> too…that's my own ongoing struggle is the stereotype that I have built in, and I've tried to overcome by working harder.

At the heart of this self-doubt was what Olivia noted—the lack of recognition of the value of racialized people and of racialized women in particular. She stated, "They [others] have no understanding of what people of colour can bring to the situation, can bring to the job…We're not appreciated and it's hard to articulate when you're in it." In addition to speaking about the difficulty of articulating the impact of racial stereotypes in the workplace, these women also spoke extensively about the mental fatigue of navigating the workplace while contending with various stereotypes.

Discussion and Implications

This paper presented the perspectives of 24 racialized women as they navigated professional settings. My decision to highlight these voices was made due to their similar experiences, which differed from those of the men in the original study. Racialized women spoke about their experiences in the workplace and the lack of respect and appreciation they felt while interacting at work. That these concerns were raised by racialized women demonstrates the intersectionality in their experiences. Responses from racialized men in the original study did not reflect similar concerns. The women in the study spoke to the alienation they felt in the workplace. For example, the participants represented by Shonda, Tracee, Min, and Olivia highlighted the struggles they experienced working in a male-dominated workplace. While Min's concerns were with non-racialized men specifically, Olivia noted the challenges of working in a male-dominated field without specifying race, suggesting an estrangement from both racialized and non-racialized men in the workplace. In addition, Tracee, Reyna and Shonda all highlighted challenges with non-racialized women in the workplace. This underscores the importance of intersectionality and the need to take racialized women's race *and* gender into account when considering how they navigate the racialized workplace. It also calls into question the decisions to abandon EDI initiatives that were intended to grant groups, including racialized women, equal opportunities in the workplace.

It is significant that three of the women in the original study held active EDI roles at the time of data collection; one was a former EDI specialist and two were tasked with EDI responsibilities in their companies due to their race and gender. However, as indicated in these discussions, the women did not occupy leadership roles in their organizations and thus were skeptical of their organization's commitment to EDI. The recent move away from EDI and other equity-seeking initiatives has largely ignored the voices of racialized women who speak to the value of EDI. As Olivia noted, racialized women's full contributions are often overlooked. In Crenshaw's (1989) discussion of intersectionality, in which she investigated court cases involving Black women and their lack of representation in their claims of discrimination, she notes, "the way courts interpret claims made by Black women is itself part of the Black women's experiences" (p. 141). This suggests that Black and racialized women share a common experience: Though their encounters are unique to the individual, there is a shared experience with the racialized social system. This is evidenced by the common narratives voiced by these diverse racialized women. That these women

had a unique perspective on the experience of racialization in the workplace makes the lack of racialized women in positions of power particularly concerning. This is even more problematic because racialized women were given the task of implementing EDI strategies, but not given the authority to make lasting and impactful changes. These workplaces are thus making nothing more than a tokenistic pledge to EDI, demonstrating the lack of institutional commitment to challenging the racialized social system. The outcome is harm to racialized women who possess the knowledge to truly change the social system for greater equity, however, the voices of racialized women are ultimately not trusted and marginalized. Evidence of this can be seen in the treatment of Calgary, Alberta's first racialized female leader, Mayor Jyoti Gondek, who received immense pushback and who people claimed was incompetent in her role as mayor, despite her stellar qualifications and the accomplishments she achieved while in office. Her success was acknowledged when she received the inaugural Mayor of the Year award from *Municipal World Inc.*, despite her own constituents' constant cries against her. Two things are important to highlight in this case: First, Mayor Gondek was mayor in a city where many of the respondents for this study reside. Second, the complaints against Mayor Gondek suggest that not only are racialized women less likely to be given leadership roles, but when they are given these roles, their performance is likely to be questioned by those surrounding them, even when applauded by those on the outside.

This paper does not provide an essentialized account of the ways racialized women encounter the workplace. However, given they all reside within a racialized social system, there are commonalities that were identified among the racialized women in this study. The presence of these trends and the similarity of the narratives from a diverse group of women underscore the that the system operates to produce similar outcomes of othering and marginalization: Racialized women have similar experiences as they reside on the margins of a racialized society. Moreover, the racialized social system not only ignores the benefits that racialized women bring to the workplace and to society at large, but in its disregard for their worth, the system causes racialized women to also question their own value, leading to self-doubt and self-elimination from certain positions. Thus, the current refusal to commit to a robust system of inclusion can be seen as a commitment to keep racialized women "in their place" where they continue to be harmed.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations. First, I acknowledge that I am writing this from the perspective of a Black woman with an interest in the topic. However, this can be considered as a benefit as I represent a similar social position as the respondents, allowing me to form connections during the data collection phase that made respondents feel comfortable engaging in vulnerable conversations. In addition, I was cognizant to correct for potential bias as I engaged in reflexivity throughout the research process (Finlay, 1998, 2002; Hill-Collins, 2000). Second, given the method that was used to present the data, there is a possibility for accounts of the racialized workplace that went against the dominant narrative to be missed; however, there was little dissent in the original voices collected in the data. A third limitation is the nature of qualitative research, which uses small sample sizes and highlights a few voices. This means that the data cannot be generalizable to the

entire population; however, when taken in conjunction with other data and literature, the underrepresented voices of these women add valuable insight into the experiences of racialized women in the workplace, which are often overlooked. Finally, this data was taken from a larger study that was not intended to yield the responses specific to this topic. Based on these limitations, further research that focuses on racialized women's experiences in the workplace could look at the differences they encounter based on their unique racialized identity. Despite these limitations, this study provides insights into the ways the dominant racialized social system shows up in the lives of racialized women in the racialized workplace.

Declarations

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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