

# UNDERSTANDING THE BARRIERS: BLACK WOMEN AND WOMEN OF COLOUR

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## BACKGROUND

Changes in immigration policies have led to those who identify as minoritized individuals making up an increasing share of the Canadian labour force (Gunjal, 2020). The lived experiences of Black women and women of colour and perpetuation of systemic barriers are dependent on their intersectional identities. Due to the complex intersectional identity of Muslim women of colour, research indicates that they are disproportionately more likely to face barriers and discrimination in the workplace compared to their male counterparts or white women (Golnaraghi & Mills, 2017).

## A NOTE ON TERMS & LANGUAGE

**Intersectionality:** How various facets of one's identity and their resulting power and privilege, overlap to create a unique interaction of "sameness" and "difference" (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1990; Hill & Sobande, 2018).

**Diversity, equity and inclusion management practices:** any program, policy, plan, or initiative designed, implemented, and evaluated for the goal of increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace (Morrison et al., 2006).

**Minoritized:** How groups and communities do not "occupy the position of being a minority by virtue of some inherent property but acquire this position as the outcome of a socio-historical process" (Burman et al., 2004 p. 334; Stewart, 2013).

**Visibly religious Muslim woman of color:** a woman of non-white ethnic background who adorns any Islamic covering or abstains from consuming pork or alcohol for the purposes of ascribing to Islam.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the experience of women of colour in the GTA workplace?
2. How do these experiences impact social sustainability and diversity, equity, and inclusion practices and management for companies and governmental institutions to ensure women of colour do not face barriers in the workplace?

## METHODOLOGY

- I interviewed four advocates of Black women and women of colour in the workplace in the GTA in a semi-structured fashion (Creswell, 2002).
- Axial coding was used to organize the themes into three scales.
- The topic of this paper is necessarily informed by my own lived experience.

### Key Themes

- Male-dominated workplaces
- Mentorship
- Solidarity
- Community
- Network Building
- Leadership
- Allyship
- Sponsorship
- Wellbeing
- Visible Religiosity
- Unconscious Bias
- Stereotyping
- Microaggressions
- Advocacy

## FINDINGS

### CHALLENGES

#### Microaggressions

- Women of color may feel the need to rely on the support of a privileged white male to advance in their careers.
- This expectation to only speak on a single topic can leave women of color feeling obligated to advocate only for their communities at the cost of being labelled as someone who can only speak on one topic.

#### Unconscious Bias & Stereotyping

- Co-signing identifies the fine line between allyship and white saviourism where allyship involves self-reflectivity around power and privilege and collaborative action (Erskine & Bilimoria, 2019) while white saviourism perpetrates white supremacist structures through performative actions out of pity or obligation without consultation (Ford & Orlandella, 2015).
- There are tangible impacts of unconscious bias and stereotyping in organizations such as limits to recruitment, retention and promotion.

#### Sectoral Differences

- The not-for-profit sector may experience a false self-awareness that can perpetrate a lot of systemic barriers.
- The private sector was perceived to be lagging behind in advancing DEI and too reactive.

## STRATEGIES & SOLUTIONS

### Advocacy, Community & Solidarity

- It can be empowering to build solidarity and community, But it can also feel like an obligation and impose a cultural tax or emotional burden on an individual.
- Community and solidarity among women of colour is often built through informal platforms such as social media and instant messaging apps.

### White Allyship, Mentorship & Sponsorship

- It is important for white people to engage in allyship behaviours by recognizing their limitations of understanding, seeking to learn about challenges.
- White allyship can easily become performative and result in negative experiences for women of colour when systemic barriers and white privilege and power are not recognized.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Self-reflection** needs to occur before action.
- **Solidarity** increases job satisfaction, advocating for change and building a sense of belonging.
- Implement and encourage both **top-down** and **bottom-up approaches**.
- Establish clear and understood **definitions**.
- Invest in the future - support **youth development** programs that challenge the status quo.

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