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‘Strange faces’ in the academy: Experiences of Racialized and Indigenous faculty in Canadian universities

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Abstract

This paper is based on a larger qualitative study of exclusion and belonging as experienced by members of marginalized groups in the professions. The current analysis draws on a subsample of 13 racialized and Indigenous academics at Canadian universities to examine their experiences of both everyday racism – subtle, almost intangible micro-level interactions that convey messages of not-fully-belonging – and overt racism and colonialism. Overt experiences were less common, though intensely painful. Though in some ways they are more straightforward to address, as they are more obvious, they also consume considerable time and energy. Instances of everyday racism and colonialism were more common, often intricately interwoven with the very fabric of the institutional culture. Their cumulative nature is exhausting. Diversity initiatives, while popular in contemporary universities, are failing to approach equity, in that they deny the need for change in institutional cultures.

Keywords: racism; colonialism; academia; microaggressions; faculty; higher education

Introduction

Despite institutional commitments to equity in Canadian universities, racism and colonialism continue to have profound impacts on the daily work lives of racialized and Indigenous academics. In fact, the routine implementation of equity and diversity policies in universities can actually veil the everyday processes of exclusion that faculty continue to face (Ahmed 2012; Henry et al 2017a). Gillborn writes that 'far from being immune to the wider forces that create and sustain race inequalities in society, institutions of higher education are especially prone to reproducing those inequalities beneath a façade of meritocracy and color blindness' (2012, 1742). Similarly, Ahmed suggests 'an equality regime can be an inequality regime given new form, a set of processes that maintain what is supposedly being redressed' (2012, 8). Though there is a significant body of literature on racism in the academy, faculty experiences in Canada are under-researched. Recent investigations demonstrate that faculty face racism at many levels, including micro-level interactions, systemic disadvantages, and overt instances of hostility and exclusion (Henry & Tator 2009; Henry et al. 2017b; Henry et al 2017a).

Drawing on thirteen interviews from a larger Canada-wide study exploring the experiences of ‘minority’ faculty, this paper presents the everyday experiences of belonging and exclusion for racialized and Indigenous faculty members. All participants described everyday racism, including experiences of microaggressions – interactions generally not intended to be racist or colonialist, but which nonetheless convey subtle messages of not-quite-belonging (Wing-Sue 2010). Participants also described routine systems and academic cultural norms, including institutional and epistemological racism, that affected their experiences within the profession. Institutionalized whiteness, along with neoliberalism and an ‘audit culture’ (Ahmed 2012) coalesce to entrench a toxic culture in which racism is subsumed into normalized practices and performance measures. These routinized expectations demand that racialized and Indigenous faculty do extra, invisible work in order to prove ‘legitimate’ academics in both research and teaching, also in addition to meeting scholarly expectations. Instances of overt hostility were more common than might be expected, suggesting current equity policies are ineffective in addressing even explicit forms of racism in the academy.
Literature review

Everyday racism: Microaggressions and impacts

Many scholars argue that racism has not so much diminished as changed form, with less overt processes dominating (Bonilla-Silva 2010; Essed 1991; Sue 2010). Philomena Essed (1991) coined the term 'everyday racism' to describe the ways in which contemporary racism has been integrated 'into everyday situations through practices...that activate underlying power relations' (50). Everyday racism manifests in a multitude of subtle ways, including in behaviours, humour, ways of speaking, and body language, leaving it often unnoticed and difficult to challenge. Everyday interactions between members of marginalized groups and dominant groups are micro-level instantiations of macro-level power relations, 'practices that infiltrate everyday life and become part of what is seen as “normal” by the dominant group' (288).

In psychology the term 'microaggressions' has been advanced by scholars like Wing Sue to define the 'brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative...slights to the target person or group' (2010, 7). What makes these experiences significant is that they are part of the everyday fabric of racism; while one microaggression seems insignificant, they are an everyday reality for racialized people with detrimental cumulative consequences. Some argue that these subtler forms of racism have a greater impact than overt racism, in which 'no guesswork is involved' in deciphering the intention behind and meaning of an incident (Sue 2010, 23). Since racial microaggressions are repetitive, those on the receiving end are often especially attuned to their presence and 'have a more accurate assessment’ of their occurrence and meaning than dominant group members (Sue 2010, 47). The subtlety of microaggressions means that those on the receiving end may experience self-doubt in their analysis, relying on each other to 'sanity-check' their interpretations (Sue 2010, 74-75).

Racism & colonialism in the academy

In higher education, everyday racism can occur not only in individual interactions, but also through the structure of the institution itself; the lack of administrators and tenured professors of colour tell students and faculty of colour that they do not belong and their likelihood of advancing in the academy is low (Huber & Solozano 2015; Sue 2010). Likewise, the language of the academy is itself a microaggression: meritocracy, 'colour blindness', and insistence that the academy is an equitable institution committed to diversity all deny the reality experienced by faculty of colour (Ahmed 2012; Henry et al 2017a).

Scholarship on racism and colonialism in Canadian universities is growing, though to date only a few major studies exist (Henry & Tator 2009; Henry et al. 2017a). These and similar studies in the United States and the United Kingdom (e.g., Ahmed 2012; Ross & Edwards 2016) demonstrate that formal commitments to equality and 'the language of diversity in academic institutions is often more about changing only the perception of whiteness than it is about changing the culture and organization of the institution’ (Ahmed 2012, 34). Thus, even as increasing numbers of racialized and Indigenous faculty and students participate in higher education, universities maintain and perpetuate racist and colonialist systems that make such participation a daily struggle and actually serve to hinder or minimize change. Ramos and Li (2017) show that in Canada the relative representation of racialized and Indigenous faculty is actually worsening over time. Moreover, when age, degree, province, immigrant status and discipline are taken into account,
visible minority faculty earn substantially less than white faculty, despite performing as well or better in terms of productivity measures.

Despite increases in relative numbers of ‘minority’ faculty, racialized and Indigenous faculty frequently report being the only such individuals in their department or university as a whole (Henry & Tator 2012; James 2012). Such ‘institutional isolation’ (Smith & Calasanti 2005) may leave them feeling isolated and alienated, lacking important information networks without which they are less able to participate in decisions and policy-making (Ross & Edwards 2016). Tenure and promotion processes are particularly difficult when role models are lacking (Henry & Tator 2012).

The challenges of tenure and promotion review are exacerbated by the fact that academic norms are decidedly Eurocentric. When only certain types of knowledge are seen as legitimate, only certain types of research questions and methods ‘count’, only certain journals are recognized, and only certain knowledges enter into curricula (Henry & Tator 2012; Ross & Edwards 2016), this constitutes epistemological racism, a form of racism that effectively renders the ways of knowing of some groups as lesser, unauthoritative. The kinds of research many racialized and Indigenous faculty engage in may be deemed less scholarly than ‘mainstream’ research (Henry & Tator 2012; Ross and Edwards 2016). Moreover, they may need to publish in 'lesser' journals that are more open to critical perspectives. These norms render racialized and Indigenous faculty as 'illegitimate'.

Hesitance to see racialized and Indigenous faculty as legitimate is also evident in student evaluations of teaching, wherein racialized faculty are rated less favourably than white colleagues (Ross & Edwards 2016). Proving themselves authoritative experts in the classroom expends untold energy (e.g., Mayuzumi 2015). At the same time, alongside their regular faculty duties, racialized and Indigenous faculty are disproportionately likely to be involved in equity and diversity initiatives and mentoring minority students, often experiencing futility in those endeavors (Henry & Tator 2012; Ross & Edwards 2016). They may be essentialized – invited to work on diversity concerns simply because of their race – even as their involvement in such work confirms stereotypes of narrow self-interest, resulting in potential career harm. As James (2012) reports, racialized faculty face negative repercussions whether they raise issues of equity or not.

The impacts of racism are significant: Henry and Tator (2012) found that racialized and Indigenous faculty report low self-esteem, physical and mental health impacts, and serious considerations of leaving academia, demonstrating that these ‘daily small events and incidents’ have the potential to severely affect career trajectory and engagement (78-79). The current study builds on the recent work of Frances Henry and her colleagues (2017a; 2017b), exploring the experiences of racialized and Indigenous academics in Canadian universities. Here we explicitly tease apart instances of everyday racism and instances of more overt hostility, the kind of thing typically understood as racism. We highlight the extra work demanded of racialized and Indigenous faculty in order to navigate the institutional whiteness of academia and examine how the culture of academia perpetuates racism in the lives of racialized and Indigenous faculty.

Methods

Our analysis draws on data from a larger study of faculty at Canadian universities who self-identify as members of groups traditionally under-represented due to race, Indigeneity, ethnicity, gender and sexual identity, working class background and/or disability. Participants were recruited through researchers’ professional networks and snowball sampling. Letters of invitation were sent to potential participants, who in turn forwarded them to their networks. Thirty participants
volunteered, from a range of academic fields and a range of intersecting social locations. All processes were approved by the university research ethics board.

Following discussion of informed consent, semi-structured qualitative interviews grounded in critical theory explored everyday experiences of belonging and marginality, inclusion and exclusion. Each participant was interviewed once, for 60-120 minutes. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face, some by telephone; all were recorded, transcribed verbatim and assigned pseudonyms. Using consensus building through weekly team meetings, data were coded by two research assistants using Atlas/ti data analysis software. Iterative analysis involved the authors and members of the larger team to enhance rigour. Transcripts were read repeatedly, attending to meaning passages, moving back and forth between individual transcripts and cross-participant comparisons. A summary narrative was returned to each participant for feedback, as a form of member-checking.

The current paper draws on data from a sub-sample of thirteen participants who identified as racialized and/or Indigenous. Participants taught at universities across Canada, in fields that include business/management/economics, law/social work/education, arts and humanities, health/medicine, and social sciences/gender studies. Ten of the thirteen participants identified as women. The team included researchers who identify as racialized and ethnic minority, and those who do not. Collective interrogation of emerging analyses helped ensure reflexivity and provided a form of researcher triangulation to enhance credibility.

Results

Everyday exclusion

Lack of representation

Many participants described working in departments and faculties where they were among very few racialized faculty members; some were the only Indigenous professors at their universities. In her department, Laurie said, ‘I am it for diversity…I’m the only one in terms of ethnocultural diversity, I am the only non-white’. Robert had been the sole Indigenous faculty member at several universities, positioning him as the singular voice for Aboriginal issues on campus:

Someone called me up and said, “I’m consulting with the Aboriginal community on campus, about how they’re doing in their faculty and staff positions”... So, we had a nice conversation and then at the end I said, “Can you tell me who else at the university you’ve been talking to?” And he said, “You’re it.” So, I was the Aboriginal community at the time... That’s happened two or three times in my career.

Rachel was not only the sole racialized faculty member in her department, but remains the only one in her entire field in the country: ‘Still today, I’m the first and only Black professor [in my field] teaching at a Canadian university’. As Henry et al. note, underrepresentation ‘underpins, loneliness, isolation, and tokenism. Everyday racism thrives in an atmosphere of nonrepresentation’ (2017a, 127).

As discussed more below, many participants were asked to participate in administrative or academic service work representing racialization or Indigeneity. While many enjoyed this work, it
was also experienced as tokenizing, especially when the work was unconnected to academic expertise:

From the time I was hired, people started asking me to talk about women and science or racialized minorities in science or under-represented groups in science, or bias in science. When I started, I knew nothing about any of that, other than my personal experience. So, the feeling that having been hired into this role, in addition to my day job, I have this other responsibility, to represent for my race, was kind of odious, really. (Marianna)

Participants often struggled to know whether they were asked to engage in service work for their abilities or their identity. Tokenism ‘goes to the heart of how racialized (and Indigenous) faculty are perceived and evaluated. Their presence is required not because of their special abilities, aptitude or knowledge, but because of their essential nature as members of particular groups’ (Henry et al. 2017a, 125). Moreover, they felt invited to represent difference, disguising the fact that nothing at the university really changed.

Being often the only non-white person in the room may make explicit a sense of ‘not belonging’. As Janet described, this increases with career advancement:

I can’t pretend to be surprised when I walk into a space and I’m the only person of colour. I sort of scan the room, “Are there any other people of colour here?” I’m not even going to think about are there any other Black people here. That’s just not going to happen, there aren’t going to be any other Black people. Or that will be very rare. So now I’m looking for people of colour, or any of my Indigenous brothers and sisters...And certainly, the further you go up, like, from pre-tenure to tenure, to then as a tenured faculty member in an administrative position, this gets more and more sort of rare.

She later commented, that at ‘every level, it becomes a little, (sigh) there’s more of a sense that you’re not supposed to be there. The “What are you doing here?”’ Matt also commented that at his university the senior administrators are ‘still all white men’.

Such experiences of not-fitting make apparent the institutionalized whiteness that is the norm in Canadian universities (Henry et al. 2017a). Racialized Others may be welcomed to the university, but they are invited to inhabit a pre-existing whiteness, a taken-for-granted assumption that the bodies occupying that space are white bodies. As Ahmed states, ‘To inhabit whiteness as a nonwhite body can be uncomfortable’ (2012, 40). Racialized and Indigenous faculty are present as unexpected guests, explicitly not in the position of hosts who already occupy the space.

One way that participants dealt with lack of representation was by connecting with other racialized and Indigenous faculty across departments and universities, often across disciplines. Nonetheless, many participants felt isolated. When they felt a sense of belonging in their academic positions, it was often due to other racialized colleagues in the department or even the discipline.

Whiteness and the culture of academia

Many participants reflected on the Eurocentric culture of academia, describing intentional shifts and sacrifices they have made to ‘fit’ within it, learning academic cultural norms and sometimes relinquishing elements of their own culture. For example, Rachel described academic culture as ‘ways of mainstream, coded Euro-Canadian engagement that are not universal, [but] that all the white people who might be your colleagues think are universal.’ She referred to the use of Robert’s Rules in department meetings as one example of an intensely culture-bound system that
professes universality and impartiality. This is a ubiquitous example of the way whiteness is institutionalized (Ahmed 2012; Henry et al 2017a), built into the taken-for-granted ways of doing that become normalized and normative within academia.

As Ahmed notes, the informal conversations conducted in ‘conversational spaces’ of meetings and committees also establish who is expected to be present (2012, 122). Such expectations are grounded in, and in turn ground, a culture of whiteness. Rachel described a version of whiteness inextricably bound up with academic elitism, conveyed through rejection of popular culture from a stance of superiority:

There’s a certain type of white professor who has totally forsaken any pop culture...I think that’s racially specific. I don’t find a lot of black professors who do that, or are that unplugged and detached from pop culture. And so the kind of jokes and conversations you can have with people, their idea of assumed knowledge is not universal knowledge. And that really pisses me off... “You guys are so in your own world of whatever you think is universal that you don’t get that when you’re citing this play and this [classical music], that not everybody knows what the hell you’re talking about.” But why do I know that I have to explain to you who Beyoncé is? ... it’s still a kind of white cultural supremacy, like a certain type of white culture too, that passes as universal and what you should know because you have a PhD.

This is precisely the way whiteness places ‘the interests and perspectives of white people at the center of what is considered normal and everyday’ (Gillborn 2015, 278). Ahmed describes the too-frequent experience of being the only person of color in an academic setting as being like ‘walking into a sea of whiteness’ (2012, 35). The presence of a few racialized and Indigenous faculty confirms the norm of whiteness. One of our participants described an ‘unpredictable’ but profound sense of not-fitting in the context of whiteness: ‘Sometimes you’ll be having a discussion in a faculty meeting and suddenly, in my head it feels like a chasm opens up between me and the rest of the faculty’ (Marianna).

In the context of routine denial (even concealment) of systemic racism and colonialism, faculty are required to engage in self-censorship (Ahmed 2012, 161), or ‘passing as the “right kind” of minority, the one who aims not to cause unhappiness or trouble’ (157). Robert, an Indigenous scholar, described academia as requiring cultural performance: ‘There’s a lot of having to “play the part” of what people perceive as conventional in terms of being a teacher. There’s a lot of early self-censorship that happens, until you realize maybe you don’t always have to play that part.’ Indigenous participants described themselves as cultural translators within academic whiteness. Eva translated in hiring committees, intervening to ensure Indigenous applicants were not misinterpreted. Janine helped Indigenous students learn to perform academic culture: ‘We have to learn how to do that, within a context that’s so culturally different than what we’re used to... so that we can make ourselves understood within that academic context.’

Lauren described herself as always ‘translating between the culture of academia and the cultures of Indigenous communities where she does her research. She struggled with faculty meetings that felt culturally irrelevant:

I just don’t feel part of the conversation, generally. I think the topics that we’re talking about are not necessarily ones that I think are the most important things to be talking about. You know? A lot of meetings are like that. I feel like they’re just air.

Community meetings Lauren attends start with a teaching from an elder to create an ‘atmosphere of presence and humility’ and respect for each person’s story. She had attempted to bring this to
academic meetings, asking colleagues to start with a few minutes of ‘talking about things that have happened over the past month, so we get to know one another and just foster an atmosphere of respect.’ It was maintained briefly then fell away, sacrificed to busy agendas: ‘Like, that's just sort of not important... it just falls off the radar, or people just do it as a token.’ Not only does this highlight the emphasis on efficiency that dominates the neoliberal academic context, but at the same time, stretching beyond business-as-usual in institutionalized whiteness requires racialized and Indigenous faculty to be insistent, persistent, keeping issues of equity on the agenda (Ahmed 2012). Such insistence is risky, positioning the individual – already an interloper – as pushy, a problem, disruptive. It is also simply exhausting.

*Not belonging: ‘There’s this strange face that shouldn’t be in that hallway’*

Participants routinely described feeling that they did not belong in academia, most often as a result of micro-level interactions that positioned them as outsiders. Such instances of everyday racism (Essed 1991) frequently began in graduate school, where several participants had been discouraged from continuing their studies, regardless of excellent performance. Participants interpreted these experiences as reflecting an unacknowledged belief that racialized and Indigenous people do not belong in academia. The power of everyday racism lies in its repetition, the accumulation of messages of not-belonging, which participants described as occurring consistently throughout their academic careers.

Terms of address can be an everyday means of conveying that you are an unexpected body in the halls of academe. Sara Ahmed (2012) described being the only person of color and the only woman at an academic event; while others were introduced by title and last name, she was introduced as Sara. To insist on the proper title means demanding ‘what is simply given to others... [Yet] your insistence confirms the improper nature of your residence’ (Ahmed 2012, 177). Interestingly, our participants reported being addressed by students both overly formally and overly informally – whichever differed from the forms of address used for their colleagues. For example, Aafiya’s students refused to call her by her first name, though that was the norm in her department. In contrast, Rachel’s students consistently called her by her first name despite her requests for more formal address, and despite addressing her colleagues by title. She interpreted this as not seeing Black women as legitimate academics: ‘Part of that is the disrespect and the unfamiliarity, in terms of how they read [me] and what they think is possible in terms of Black femaleness’.

Rachel suggested it was more than being unfamiliar with Black people as professors, but actual discomfort with Black authority and expertise: ‘White students are uncomfortable with someone that they don't identify with being the purveyor of knowledge at the front of the class’. The normative whiteness that attaches to the role of professor meant that some racialized and Indigenous faculty were mistaken for students, as Marianna described: ‘When I first started here, they would knock on the door and say “Oh, is Professor [name] here?”’ They’d look over my shoulder (laugh). Similarly, Janet described, ‘People thinking “Well, you must be a student. You can't be a faculty member”’. Both Marianna and Janet interpreted being misread as students as revealing an institutional given that a professor will/should be white. As Ahmed argues, ‘Being asked whether you are the professor is a way of being made into a stranger, of not being at home in a category that gives residence to others’ (2012, 177).
The most explicit instance of ‘being made into a stranger’ was described by Laurie. After completing multiple degrees and moving into a teaching position at the same university, she had spent many years on campus, in the same buildings. Yet she was stopped one day by security and asked for ID, while three white colleagues (all new to campus) proceeded unquestioned.

I thought “That’s strange.” And they didn’t even notice. We were all chatting, all of us, chatting. And they continue chatting, and I’m stopped... You begin to question yourself, when you get these things all the time. So I went home that evening and it was still bothering me. But I didn’t want to overreact to it. And so the next day I asked my colleagues, “Did you notice what happened? Did you see that I was stopped there?” And they were like, “Oh yeah, yeah. I think you were.” But they didn’t really even make anything of it.

Laurie was frustrated that her colleagues did not see this as problematic. She later encountered the security person who explained that Laurie had not looked familiar, while the White faculty members were recognized: ‘Me not looking familiar. I’m the one Black face that is around the building all the time... I didn’t look familiar because I don’t belong there. There’s this strange face that shouldn’t be in that hallway.’

In a context of institutionalized whiteness, non-white bodies are rendered both invisible and hyper-visible: ‘Bodies stick out when they are out of place’ (Ahmed 2012, 41). Laurie was seen in a way her white colleagues were not, yet unseen in that she remained unfamiliar. The ability of white bodies to move about institutional spaces with ease, not noticing who is or is not present, confirms the normative expectation of whiteness. Our participant Rachel suggested she is visible as a Black woman because she is in the position of professor – beyond her station:

There’s a certain kind of white person who... would be more comfortable with me as a janitor, because that’s what I’m supposed to be doing. But as a professor, it’s like, “No, you’re supposed to be in your place”, which is always already beneath me. So, there’s a certain type of racism that’s reserved for so called over-achieving blacks.

Experiences of everyday racism in academia – from being misread as a student to being treated as an interloper – send a message to racialized and Indigenous faculty that they do not fully belong, that they remain a ‘strange face’ in the academy. Yet each individual instantiation of power relations, each incident, is subtle and open to interpretation. As Laurie said, ‘you begin to question yourself.’ This uncertainty, this ‘guesswork’ (Sue 2010, 23) attached to everyday racism takes its own emotional toll. Marianna described a powerful member on a committee ignoring everything she said. When two trusted colleagues later confirmed, ‘That guy didn’t listen to anything you said!’ she felt ‘vindicated’: “I’m not just imagining it. It’s not just that I made weak points.” And that’s the problem with all of it, is that it can just erode your confidence if you’re not careful.’ Though those on the receiving end of microaggressions are often attuned to these experiences and have a more accurate assessment of their meaning, the failure of others to recognize it can raise self-doubt and uncertainty. Thus, everyday racism may contribute to low self-esteem, low self-confidence, hopelessness, and poorer physical, emotional and mental health (Henry et al 2017a, 2017b).

**Overt racism: The ‘illegitimate’ academic**

Though universities may embody professions of commitment to diversity and inclusion (Universities Canada 2017), to challenging the existence of racism and colonialism in the institution (Ahmed 2012), the racialized and Indigenous faculty we interviewed reported numerous instances of overt racism, such as ignorant or hostile comments from colleagues and students. These
definitely contributed to a climate in which many of our participants stated that they saw colleagues as acquaintances but not as friends, and spent as little time on campus as possible. Some instances of overt racism detrimentally affected tenure and promotion.

Racialized and Indigenous faculty described having course evaluations and positive feedback removed from their files, making this information unavailable during tenure and promotion considerations. For example, Rachel’s department chair received a sudden influx of positive emails from community members about an event Rachel had organized; they later disappeared:

She was actually upset with me... She was getting all of these letters about how wonderful the event was and how I should be tenured immediately. And said if I had put these people up to this, it wasn’t going to do me any good. So, that taught me a lesson in- You know, I was aware that if I failed, there would be repercussions, but succeeding could be punished as well. But when I went up for tenure then, a couple years later, I wrote to her and said “Can I get the letters? They're not in my file.” And she claimed to not know that the letters existed. So, she destroyed them.

Similarly, Janine received almost-perfect evaluations for a course she taught, only to have the student comments ‘lost’ by the department secretary:

When they did the student evaluations at the end of the year, the secretary told me, “Oh yeah, you got really good marks in your [Indigenous content] course, but what’s the point? They were all Indians in your class, weren’t they?” “So, where are my comments?” “Oh, they got lost.” And I had, like, a 4.8 out of 5.

In both cases, the assumption seemed to be that racialized and Indigenous faculty members could not possibly be performing well enough to receive legitimate positive feedback, and any such feedback is either coerced or evidence of intra-racial favouritism – a critique not typically levelled against white faculty who receive evaluations from majority white students.

Participant credibility was also questioned in relation to employment equity hiring. Many people were accused of being unqualified, hired only for their race rather than their qualifications or performance. Janet was constantly undermined despite knowing that she ‘was an exceptional candidate’ when she was hired: ‘I knew I was a strong candidate. Which didn’t stop people from implying, at the same time... “Oh, you know, they just hired her, because they had to get a Black woman in the department”’. For Janet, the repeated message was, ‘You’re here under false pretenses’. Employing the myth of color-blind meritocracy, preferential hiring becomes cast as a threat to potential excellence, which is understood to rely on hiring the best candidate (Henry et al 2017a). The structural advantages of white privilege are invisible in the context of institutionalized whiteness, rendering visible only the advantages experienced by those who arrive through employment equity, which are perceived as unfair (Ahmed 2012, 157). As Janine said, ‘Students would write things in my student evaluations, saying “Why do we have an unqualified affirmative action person teaching us?” and “Why is this Indian here?”’

Challenges to the legitimacy of racialized and Indigenous academics came from faculty, staff and students. Janine had been facing such overt challenges since she was a student; when she performed well on assignments, she was told ‘the professor’s an Indian lover’ or was accused of plagiarism: ‘...but they wouldn’t make a formal [accusation], so it got read by different people and the grade went from 95% to 90% to 85% to 80%, (laugh) to 75%’. The underlying message Janine
Students commonly demonstrated overt racism, often in anonymous course evaluations – though a few people had experienced ‘outright, hostile, racist attacks in class’. Course evaluations hold serious ramifications for faculty and are problematic for racialized and Indigenous professors (Henry et al. 2017a). As Rachel noted, ‘there is stuff that people will say, do, and put on women of colour faculty that I know they would never do to a white guy’. Some participants received course evaluations attacking their qualifications, but equally common were comments about appearance and accent. For Laurie and Fathima, accents were repeatedly raised as shortcomings in course evaluations. Even though she adjusts her teaching to account for her accent, Azedeh reported, ‘Students seem to associate not doing well in a course with the accent of the professor, or any other shortcoming of the professor that they can find’. Janine noted that Indigenous colleagues received evaluations asking why they ‘wear beads and feathers to class?’ As Rachel said, there are ‘too many ways in which students who don’t like your identity will attack you through an evaluation’. Again, this may stem from racialized and Indigenous faculty being ‘unexpected occupants’ of the professor position, presumed less competent, but also the target of hostility for having moved beyond their expected station in life.

Administrators were also known to engage in systematically disadvantaging specific faculty, particularly through course assignments. Several participants noted that racialized and Indigenous professors are disproportionately assigned courses that students dislike, consequently receiving poorer evaluations. Rachel was assigned multiple unpopular research methods courses at once, which she argued tend to get assigned to white women and people of colour: ‘Students often resent methods courses because they’re required, and then white women and people of colour get marked down on their teaching evaluations, which then adversely impacts us when we come up for tenure’. Fathima’s courses were ‘pushed to the spring/summer session’ which lowers enrollment; she was rarely assigned courses in her area of expertise. According to participants, Indigenous faculty are routinely assigned courses that conflict with Indigenous ways of knowing; if they choose to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into their teaching, they face student resistance, harsh criticism and poor evaluations:

Students really resisted hearing about Aboriginal [perspectives]... And [instructors] got really poor teaching evaluations from their students. And I know they’re good teachers because I’ve watched them teach and known other classes they’ve done better. And they’re really ridden hard by the students in those settings, to not vary from the norm of what [students] perceive as the conventional type of [content]. (Robert)

The absence of courses that reflect Indigenous perspectives illustrates the institutionalized whiteness of the university through what is deemed legitimate academic material. Students perpetuate this view through teaching evaluations that punish faculty who attempt to incorporate alternative perspectives into the canon. Indigenous faculty are often caught in a double bind, forced to choose between teaching material that conflicts with Indigenous ways of knowing or risking career consequences from unfavorable course evaluations. Course assignments and evaluations are understood as routine, normalized components of business-as-usual for university professors – objective, neutral and fair (Gillborn 2015). Yet these ostensibly egalitarian ‘colour-blind’ practices camouflage the distinct and detrimental impact they have on racialized and Indigenous faculty.
**Additional work: 'We get pulled too many ways'**

In addition to their regular teaching and research duties, many participants were involved in unusually high levels of service work, often involving equity and diversity initiatives. This meant hours of additional work each week that significantly detracted from their research. Eva pointed out that lack of representation of Indigenous faculty means 'everybody wants us to be on their committees' with the weight of equity issues falling on very few shoulders. Marianna noted this means racialized faculty 'get offered interesting service', but it also means they 'get offered every bit of service that comes along'. While Indigenous and racialized academics often agree to sit on committees where 'diversity' is sought, this may be highly strategic, as noted by Laurie: 'If you're not at the table, then where are you? Probably on the menu, where you'll be eaten up.' Many people participated willingly, even eagerly, in equity-related work, finding passion and sense of value there.

At the same time, however, the burden is high. Some have called this a 'race tax' or 'cultural taxation' (Henry et al. 2017a), extra service work that contributes to exhaustion and burn-out. Lauren described routinely 'being asked to, or being told that you're going to sit on things because they need someone who's Aboriginal'. This seemed especially true for the Indigenous scholars, who all agreed, 'We get pulled too many ways... you have to be really alert about not wearing yourself out' (Eva). Robert saw junior scholars being given administrative roles more suited to 'people 20 years in' and not having mentorship to negotiate equitable workloads. Moreover, that extra service work is not 'counted':

> There's a lot of things that I'm asked to do over and above what others in the academy would be asked to do, just by nature of the fact that I identify as Aboriginal. And I don't think that that's acknowledged. And they don't measure that when you're thinking about tenure and promotion... (Lauren)

Eva attempted to account for the 'race tax', the toll on productivity:

> Let's say I have six or seven hours more a week than other people, for things [service work]. So what, that's almost a day a week I lose, that you know, that's probably three or four weeks of extra stuff a year, which every two years, that would be an article.

Service work is essential to a university, yet not necessarily highly valued (Henry et al. 2017a, 289). This may be particularly true for service regarding equity issues, despite university proclamations regarding the importance of diversity: 'If diversity and equity work is less valued by organizations than other kinds of work, then the commitment of some staff to diversity might reproduce their place as "beneath" other staff within the hierarchies of organizations' (Ahmed 2012, 135).

Some of the extra work – particularly mentoring and supporting racialized and Indigenous students – felt meaningful and rewarding, even if it also felt like a duty and additional work. Laurie's experience as a student of 'not seeing any Black professors you can go to and talk to' informs her own approach to mentoring students:

> Even when you have your own quota of students that you can supervise, you see a student, a Black student in my case, who is struggling and you want to be on their committee so you can help. That is an additional burden that you take on.

Similarly, when Janine was a graduate student, an Indigenous mentor was critical to her success: from guidance in applying to graduate schools, to sharing childcare, to seeking out spiritual healing
ceremonies when needed. For Eva, mentoring Indigenous students – even on matters unrelated to their academic work – was a professional responsibility, a duty to her home community. As Henry et al. (2017a, 164) point out, ‘despite the difficulties, the exhaustion… racialized faculty will continue to put in the extra time because we feel that we cannot refuse,’ not only due to moral commitment to communities but also due to a (stated or unstated) sense that this is why they were hired.

Given the experiences of being cast as ‘illegitimate academics’, it is not surprising that many participants perceived they needed to work harder than their white colleagues to be seen as equally good: ‘If my colleagues were publishing two articles a year, I have to publish three. So at least I know when they’re looking at my file, they’re not going to find something that is not equal to what other people have. They should always find something that’s more’ (Laurie). Yusuf described colleagues routinely asking why he works so much, despite being a full professor: ‘The glass ceiling is there, very clear, but you also need to work harder than your colleagues, at least you feel, maybe you feel that you have to work harder.’

Part of that extra work entailed defending their scholarship. Community-engaged research was devalued, seen as not meeting ‘expectations in terms of what counts as scientific knowledge… the work that is valued’ (Laurie). Several people found their research on issues concerning race or Indigeneity was dismissed as ‘biased’ and lacking rigor. Janet said, ‘If you’re a Black woman doing research on Black issues, there’s something fishy about that… doing research that’s not considered sort of the important research questions.’ Janine’s research on an aspect of colonialism was dismissed: ‘People didn’t really consider it a relevant topic’. She went on to say, [long pause] ‘It wasn’t really important. It wasn’t. I mean, it was only important to me. Right?… I wanted to contribute something. And then it just ended up being trashed… Maybe it was too personal. It was too [pause]– ‘This final ‘it was too–’ is painful. It suggests the kind of low self-confidence, hopelessness and internalized doubt that others have noted among racialized and Indigenous faculty (Henry et al. 2017b). It speaks of a distressing sense of ‘failure to fit’ within the overwhelming whiteness of academia (Ahmed 2012). Janine said elsewhere in her interview, ‘I’m really, in terms of my professional development, a failure. Like, I have failed. I don’t know why. I don’t know how. I don’t know if I’m not smart enough, if I’m not good enough, if…’

Finally, the extra work of challenging discrimination and racism through human rights and equity processes cannot be underestimated. Four people had been involved with such complaints, some more than once. Fathima said ‘everything is a fight for me,’ describing repeated conflicts with her department head. She had had to bring complaints to the harassment office: ‘I don’t want to make a harassment complaint. I don’t want this. But, this is not fair. It should not happen.’ Battles over discrimination took a high emotional toll, but also had career impacts. Rachel described to her chair the impacts of having to fight a discrimination case: ‘What I said was I want on the record that I’ve lost months of my research… [When] I come up for tenure, and you’re going “Where’s your seventeen books?” I just lost a couple in the battle’. In that instance the discrimination complaint was leveled by white students but supported by her department chair. Others have noted the ineffectiveness of existing processes for addressing equity matters, to the point where many faculty see no point pursuing claims (Henry et al. 2017a). Not surprisingly, several participants said racialized and Indigenous faculty need to ‘choose their battles’.

There is labour involved in being racialized and Indigenous faculty in institutions infused with whiteness. Racialized and Indigenous faculty are ‘unexpected bodies’ in academia, requiring they work to ease the tensions of their presence: ‘The body that causes their discomfort (by not fulfilling an expectation of whiteness) is the one that must work hard to make others comfortable’
(Ahmed 2012, 41). There is work in challenging – or deciding not to challenge – preconceptions. There is work in building connection across not-belonging. There is work in being different enough to represent diversity yet not so much so as to embody the negative perceptions of your group. There is work in making space for others. There is work in deciding whether and how to respond to racism, and in the responding itself. As Ahmed (2012, 174) notes, only the continual ‘practical labor of “coming up against” the institution’ allows its whiteness to become apparent.’ She describes this as going against the flow, akin to ‘the experience of going the wrong way in a crowd,’ requiring great effort (Ahmed 2012, 186).

**Conclusion**

Assumptions of whiteness have exacted an incalculable cost for many racialized and Indigenous scholars. They rob the academy and the broader society of a wealth of talent and the invaluable heterogeneity of people, their knowledge, and the perspectives that could make universities more equitable, diverse and excellent. (Henry et al. 2017b, 311)

Equality regimes and diversity policies have become the standard, officially endorsed by university presidents in Canada (Universities Canada 2017) and usually touted most volubly in response to a crisis or public scandal. Yet our results suggest racism and colonialism continue to have a profound impact on racialized and Indigenous faculty at Canadian universities across disciplines and geographic regions. Here we echo the conclusions of a recent Canadian study (Henry et al 2017a, 2017b), and point to the argument of Ahmed (2012) in the UK, that diversity measures are ‘non-performatives,’ ineffective at best and hindering effect at worst. Not only is racism not ameliorated by income and social status in the professoriate, but in fact is complicated by hierarchy, neoliberal managerialism, and institutionalized whiteness.

Our participants were isolated, few in number with increasing scarcity as people moved up the hierarchy. This under-representation fuels both tokenism and the burden of extra service demands. Both informal conversations rife with culture-bound elitism, and the structure of meetings conveyed messages of not-belonging. Faculty were undermined by students and sabotaged by colleagues and staff seemingly uncomfortable with racialized and Indigenous people in positions of authority. Contemporary universities are simultaneously neoliberal and archaic, emphasizing entrepreneurial innovation and productivity alongside conventional modes of hierarchy that stretch back centuries. This is a perfect context for competition, rivalry, distrust, isolation, superiority, and egoism, all of which exacerbate the power imbalances of racism while making them even harder to see. While all faculty are affected by power relationships with more senior colleagues and administrators, it is notable that racialized and Indigenous faculty are also vulnerable to power plays by students and staff. Moreover, the potential critiques of and challenges to business-as-usual are silenced when toxic power hierarchies leave them unsafe to speak out.

Individualist meritocracy – believed to be objective, neutral and egalitarian – has long been a mainstay of university hierarchy. This has increased exponentially with the promulgation of neoliberal ‘regimes of performance’ (Morrissey 2015) and an ‘audit culture’ (Ahmed 2012). In the university-as-corporation, the value of academics is measured through performance indicators: grant funding, patents, journal impact factors, citation indices, social media ‘likes’ and ‘shares.’ These ostensibly universal, color-blind measures leave most faculty feeling they are never good enough (Authors 2017), but when standards of academic excellence are encoded with white settler cultural norms and expectations they are particularly destructive to racialized and Indigenous faculty. All knowledge claims, and all evaluations of knowledge claims, bear the fingerprints of the
social communities that produce them (Harding 1991). Academic performance standards devalue the potentially transformative knowledges and practices racialized and Indigenous faculty bring to universities, which could enhance excellence (Henry et al 2017a; Ross & Edwards 2016). Instead faculty must fight for recognition of their research, teaching and administrative service, particularly when they face epistemological racism in challenging the canon or employ decolonizing research methods. Excellence – the coveted status of each university – is seen as undermined by attending to equity, broadening understandings of quality performance (Ahmed 2012).

As Ahmed argues, adding people to the university who look different, adding in color and cultural difference, ‘confirms the whiteness of what was already in place’ (2012, 33). In the context of institutionalized whiteness, racialized and Indigenous academics are unexpected guests, occupants who do not meet the expectations of whiteness. Institutionalized whiteness is preserved when they ‘are expected to fit with little to no attempts made to accommodate, respect or encourage their presence and differences in interests, scholarships, ways of knowing and understanding the world’ (James 2012, 135). Our participants described numerous ways institutional whiteness positions them as ‘illegitimate academics’; their work is devalued and their qualifications questioned, affecting considerations for promotion and tenure, but also engendering a profound sense of failure for some.

Yet belief in meritocracy, earned advantage, feeds a willful blindness to the pernicious entrenchment of whiteness throughout academia. It is hard to see and hard to name. Silence is soul-destroying to those experiencing oppression, while speaking out casts them as the ‘problem’ (Ahmed 2012), over-reacting or wrong-headed, disturbing the comforts of business-as-usual. Racialized and Indigenous ‘interlopers’ in academia are faced with negative consequences whether they speak out or not (James 2012). Attempting to address racism through equity processes that exist expressly for that purpose takes an enormous toll of time and energy, on top of already-excessive service work, student mentoring (Henry & Tator 2012; Ross & Edwards 2016) and striving to produce even more than their white colleagues to ensure their place in the academy is not open to question (James 2012). Until university cultures change, until institutional whiteness is undermined, racialized and Indigenous faculty will remain ‘strange faces’ in the hallways of academia. This is unacceptable.

This study is limited by reliance on a small sample, which nonetheless included considerable heterogeneity. There is a risk of essentializing race when experiences across a wide range of racialized groups, including Indigenous scholars, are analyzed together. While there is value in seeing the similarities across groups, nuances of different ways racism and colonialism play out may be lost. We have not here teased apart the differences among disciplines, nor the inevitable intersections of race and Indigeneity with other social identities, such as gender identity, sexuality, social class background, disability or immigration history. Continued attention to such nuances is much needed in the Canadian context.

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