



Navigating Anti-Black Racism in the Workplace

UNVEILING THE EXPERIENCES AND
STRATEGIES OF BLACK URBAN PLANNERS

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Foreword

I have the privilege of being a mentor and sponsor to those seeking to enter the planning profession; to build their commitment, skills and expertise; and to amplify their voices in the planning practice. Over the years, as a Registered Professional Planner, and planning educator, I have learned how for Black and Indigenous planners, building a commitment to planning and to the planning profession is especially difficult because of the historical inequities that these individuals have inherited, and the systemic racism and exclusion that they continue to experience.

Research about Black planners' experiences is lacking and so, when the Black Planning Project told me about their research project investigating the workplace experiences of Black planners, I wanted to learn more. This research report, "Navigating Racism in Workplace: Unveiling the Experiences and Strategies of Black Urban Planners in Canada," is a first of its kind in the planning realm and is a call to action for a collective response to anti-Black racism.

This report provides information about Black planners' workplace experiences based on research drawn from interviews and surveys rather than relying solely on anecdotal evidence. This research shows that racism, as experienced by Black planners, is both nuanced and overt, and that the onus to address anti-Black racism is too often placed on Black planners, rather than on the systems within which planners make their professional contributions.

The discussion and results of this study speak to multifaceted aspects of anti-Black racism experienced by Black planners. Action is needed to address anti-Black racism in workplaces. While the report's recommendations point to the leadership of Black Planning Project to act within its mandate, the report calls on employers across public and private sectors and planning membership organizations and associations, to also develop their own recommendations to address anti-Black racism in their policies, practices, and workplace cultures. The report reveals the overall context in which Black planners experience racism, and more specifically, to ways that employers can enhance the workplace experiences, opportunities, and supports for Black planners. By taking collective responsibility for finding solutions to anti-Black racism, employers and all planning practitioners together can work to enhance the working environments of Black planners and to retain them within the profession.

This report calls upon all of us in to build a collective response, to draw from our collective courage, and follow through on our intentions to achieve equitable outcomes for Black planners. This report behooves us all to work together to eliminate anti-Black racism in planning.

LEELA VISWANATHAN, PHD, RPP, FCIP

November 12, 2024

About Black Planning Project

The Black Planning Project (BPP) stands at the forefront of advocating for the representation and inclusion of Black professionals within the urban planning sector. Since its inception, the BPP has been instrumental in highlighting the contributions of Black planners, addressing systemic barriers, and fostering a supportive community for its members. As a beacon of leadership and change, the BPP's work underpins

the recommendations of this report, advocating for a proactive approach to community support and inclusive practices. Understanding the project's pivotal role provides readers with a foundational context for the subsequent analysis and recommendations, underscoring the collective effort required to transform the urban planning profession into a more diverse and equitable field.





Summary

The “Navigating Anti-Black Racism in Workplace: Unveiling the Experiences and Strategies of Black Urban Planners in Canada” report, prepared by the Black Planning Project, offers an invaluable investigation into the experiences of Black urban planners within Canada, highlighting both the challenges they face and the strategies they employ in response when navigating racism in their workplaces. This research gains significance against the backdrop of a recognized need for greater diversity in urban planning, a profession that greatly benefits from diverse perspectives, especially in multicultural urban environments. Funded by the Government of Canada through the Community Support, Multiculturalism, and Anti-Racism Initiatives Program, this study illuminates the nuanced barriers to entry and advancement for Black professionals in the field, alongside their impact on mental health and professional development.

Central to the report is a thematic analysis uncovering multiple forms of discrimination ranging from microaggressions to racial gaslighting, which not only stymie the professional growth of Black planners but also contribute to a broader lack of inclusion within the sector. Despite comprising a small percentage of the professional community, with just over 100 identified Black professional planners in Canada, their

experiences are crucial in understanding the broader dynamics at play in promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion within the field.

The research methodology includes a comprehensive mix of outreach, surveys, and interviews, which together build a rich dataset from which the findings are drawn. These findings are critical both in understanding the current landscape of urban planning in Canada and in identifying pathways forward.

Ultimately, the report culminates in a set of recommendations aimed at fostering a more inclusive environment for Black Planners. These recommendations include the organization of future workshops, exhibitions, and the importance of continued research in this area. By addressing these issues head-on, the report not only contributes to the ongoing dialogue surrounding anti-racism in professional settings but also paves the way for meaningful change within the field of urban planning. By acknowledging the need for tailored support and through detailed examination and proactive strategies, this study emphasizes the importance of diversity and inclusion for the benefit of both the profession and the diverse populations it serves.



Introduction

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report embarks on an exploratory journey to shed light on the landscape of diversity within the field of urban planning, with a special focus on Black professionals in Canada. Recognizing the existing knowledge gap aims not only to map out the current state but also to serve as a catalyst encouraging further research and understanding of ways to improve anti-racist support in the field. By delving into the underrepresented area of Black professionals' experiences and contributions within urban planning, this report seeks to illuminate paths toward a more inclusive and enriched field where Black Planners have their challenges and barriers recognized and, consequently, tailored support toward an anti-racist work environment. It invites stakeholders at all levels to learn from its findings and recommendations, fostering a collective movement that embraces and enhances diversity.

RELEVANCE OF THE REPORT

The need for greater diversity in the field of urban planning is clear and widely recognized. Theorists such as Goonewardena et al. (2004)¹ argue that diversity is essential for the legitimacy of planning, especially in increasingly diverse urban contexts. Sandercock (1995)² reinforces this view, highlighting that diverse professionals bring critical knowledge to the field, including “local insights on controversial planning issues, alternative cartographies of social life, oppositional worldviews that challenge misguided assumptions, and experiences in coalition-building that encourage thriving differences”. Therefore, recruiting and retaining racialized planners not only better reflects the demographic composition of urban areas but also enriches the profession with alternative visions about the role of planning in multicultural societies and ensures that urban environments meet the needs of all residents³. However, in order to recruit and retain Black professionals in the field, it is essential to assess whether the spaces in which planning is taught and practiced are adequately equipped to support diversity and whether they can provide a platform for Black professionals to successfully unpack the wealth of what they can offer the field of planning⁴.

Therefore, the relevance of this report is underscored by the broad recognition of diversity’s crucial role in urban planning. Scholars and industry reports alike accentuate the discrepancy between the demographic makeup of urban areas and the professionals who plan them. With data from organizations like the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) pointing to significant racial disparities, especially in leadership roles, the urgency to address these gaps is evident⁵. This report builds on such foundational work, offering a nuanced understanding of the barriers Black planners face and the unique perspectives they bring to the table. It highlights the necessity of an inclusive planning profession that mirrors the diversity of the communities it serves, ultimately contributing to more equitable urban environments.

THE CONTEXT FROM WHICH THIS REPORT IS DRAWN

The Black Planners and Urbanists Association (BPUA), estimates that there are just over 100 Black professional planners in Canada; however, precise data on the representation of Black planners at a national level remains elusive. The lack of diversity in the field of urban planning in Canada is noticeable, especially in senior and leadership positions. The Canadian Institute of Planners’ (CIP) 2021 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Insight Survey Report indicated that racialized individuals, categorized as People of Color⁶, comprised 18.8% of the survey sample (1701 respondents). Similarly, the 2023 compensation survey showed that 25%

of Ontario respondents identified as part of equity-deserving groups, with 17% specifically identifying as racialized⁷. However, this broad categorization fails to capture Black planning professionals’ distinct experiences and obstacles, thereby masking the nuanced challenges they face⁸.

Additionally, as reported by the American Planning Association (2001)⁹, multiple barriers can be linked to the lack of diverse representation in the profession, including: a lack of awareness about the profession; limited exposure to or negative images of planners; degree requirement to enter the profession; and relatively low remuneration compared to other occupations. These barriers contribute to the low numbers of Black professionals entering and remaining in the field. Additionally, racism is a structural element that encompasses these challenges, which will be explored further in this report.

Although it has been observed that the research on Black planning professionals has increased in recent years, the number of publications on this topic remains limited. In contrast, significantly more attention has been given to Black planning students, often driven by universities responding to growing demands from student bodies to address anti-Black racism in educational spaces. In the United States these policies were aligned with the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP), which recommended developing a policy statement supporting the increased representation of minorities and females in the profession and among its member institutions, reinforcing inclusion by making it a part of the accreditation process.

For Black planning professionals, however, data collection and dissemination largely depend on professional bodies such as CIP and the Ontario Professional Planners Institute (OPPI), which lack a mandate for in-depth research on this subject and consequently result in a general distrust and discomfort with these institutions due to their exclusionary past, making it challenging to engage Black participants in research. Skepticism about the use of data and the sincerity of the research intentions further complicates focused studies.

In 2022, the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) published several recommendations to increase Black representation in the field, which include having more Black voices involved in decision-making at different scales, such as provincial and municipal levels¹⁰. The OPPI’s Anti-Black Racism in Planning task force (2021) recommended removing barriers on the journey to becoming a professional planner to address the lack of Black representation in the planning profession¹¹. These recommendations, however, need to be supported by equity-focused data and evaluation. If the number of Black

professionals in the field is not being monitored, it means that successes in recruitment and retention as a result of OPPI's recommendations go unmeasured. Furthermore, the CIP and OPPI do not have the regulatory authority to enforce such recommendations. It is left up to the municipal planning departments to decide how they interpret and implement these recommendations.

As a result, nonprofits like MIIPOC (Mentoring Initiative for Indigenous and Planners of Color), BPP (Black Planning Project), and BPUA (Black Planners and Urbanists Association) bear the responsibility of producing the knowledge and data necessary to support policy recommendations that could improve conditions for Black planners. With a lack of tailored support directed to Black planners, support such as sponsorship and mentorship are being introduced by the above mentioned non-profit organizations. Still, additional support from firms, institutions and public planning departments is required to ensure continued growth and expansion of programs that support Black planning professionals in validating their experiences, addressing trauma, and strengthening their capacity to deal with racism as well as developing strong professional networks and advancing their careers. Furthermore, these organizations require funding and support to continue their advocacy and support work, as they are currently stretched thin, understaffed, and under-resourced¹².

Solis (2020)¹³, introduced a framework of Racial Equity in Planning Organizations (REPO) that aligns public planning racial equity with internal rules and norms of planning organizations. The author argues that planning departments' internal rules and norms reproduce racial inequality and that a framework is needed to improve the inner workings of planning departments to address racial inequalities that may otherwise lead to organizational inefficacy when advancing their equity goals.

Research among Black planning professionals has elucidated the detrimental effects of anti-Black racism on their mental health and well-being. Racism manifests in numerous forms, ranging from personal to structural and from subtle to explicit. Interviews with Black planners in Canada highlight pervasive issues such as tokenism, isolation, stereotyping,

microaggressions, and biases in hiring and promotion practices¹⁴. These challenges are compounded by a lack of diversity within planning departments, which, as Ahsan et al. (2020)¹⁵ argue, restricts BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) professionals' reach and influence, thereby impeding their career advancement. These professionals are often relegated to equity-related projects, excluding them from opportunities to gain the broad experience necessary for upward mobility to senior positions. This limitation is further exacerbated by professional networking events, which are crucial for fostering collaborations and partnerships within the field. These events are frequently held in predominantly non-diverse downtown cores, creating environments that can be uncomfortable and intimidating for racialized professionals. Consequently, the cumulative effect of these factors significantly hinders the career progression and overall well-being of Black planners.

Given the aforementioned challenging context, this report seeks to gather current data on anti-Black racism experienced by Black planning professionals in Canada. It builds on the unique perspective and extensive interviews and research exploring the experiences of Black planning students and professional planners in Canada conducted by the Black Planning Project from 2018 to 2022 and from interviews that were conducted specifically for this research.

WHO IS THIS REPORT FOR

This report is crafted for a wide audience, including professional planning organizations, accredited planning programs, municipal planning departments, private planning firms and other professionals within the urban planning sector. The hope is that these diverse audiences can use the information in this report when addressing anti-Black racism in the workplace. It aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges and opportunities facing Black planners in Canada, serving as a basis for reflection, dialogue, and action within the profession. Employers, educators, and policymakers are encouraged to engage with the report's findings and recommendations to foster a more supportive environment for Black professionals. By embracing the insights offered, readers can contribute to dismantling barriers and cultivating a profession that truly reflects the diversity.





Methodology

Given the scarcity of data on the experiences of Black planning professionals in Canada, we adopted a primary data collection methodology, surveying 22 Black planners and planning students and interviewing 17 planning professionals. The analyses of the data collected in the survey and interviews are composed of excerpts from conversations held with participants, condensing the information into meaningful narratives. This approach was chosen to respect the perspectives of the participants, especially the diverse types of storytelling (Evaristo, n.d.)¹⁶, allowing diverse audiences to connect with the stories and advance work that extends beyond this report.

The storytelling methodology proposed by Evaristo allows us to include passages with the interviewees' own words, recognizing that lived experience is a fundamental source of knowledge, particularly when investigating issues related to racism. Storytelling¹⁷ is, therefore used as a methodology that brings forward the experiences in an ethical manner, respecting each person's voice. This method values the uniqueness of individual stories and situates them within the broader context of the struggle against racism.

In a field where universal and neutral discourse has often been the norm (Mignolo, 2011)¹⁸, using first-person narratives in this report demonstrates a commitment to acknowledging diverse perspectives. By incorporating the voices and lived experiences of Black planners, the report aligns with an ethical and anti-racist endeavor that challenges traditional research and narrative practices.

Standpoint epistemology is crucial in this context, as the selected excerpts in the following sections are analytical perspectives that recognize and honor the agency and knowledge systems of Black individuals (Harding, 2004)¹⁹. By foregrounding these epistemologies, the report not only highlights the unique challenges faced by Black planners but also emphasizes the importance of their contributions to the field of planning. This methodology aligns with the principles of decolonial thinking (Mignolo, 2011), aiming to disrupt hegemonic narratives and promote a more inclusive and equitable approach to urban planning.

Additionally, by using storytelling as a methodology, we are also addressing ethical issues related to researching racism. Storytelling allows the voices of participants to be heard authentically, respecting their experiences and stories as legitimate sources of knowledge. This not only enriches the research process but also promotes a deeper and more humane understanding of racial issues, challenging traditional forms of knowledge production that often marginalize these voices.

TRUST

In conducting our research, we have placed trust at the core of our methodology. This foundational element extends throughout the entirety of our approach, from the personal storytelling aspects to the very mechanisms through which we recruited participants. Our decision to prioritize trust was reflected in our acknowledgement of the sensitivity required when exploring themes of racism and discrimination.

Most participants were contacted based on their connections to the Black Planning Project (BPP), ensuring that our study population was deeply engaged with the topic at hand. This approach was a deliberate effort to cultivate a sense of trust and safety from the outset. By engaging individuals that had somehow already engaged with BPP or the organization's network, we signalled our commitment to understanding and respecting the lived experiences of Black professionals in this field. We understand the importance of trust in fostering open and honest dialogue. In light of this, we prefaced our survey and interviews with a clear message acknowledging the potential difficulty of the questions and reminding participants of their agency to navigate the conversation in a way that felt safe for them. This approach was not just about mitigating discomfort—it was a crucial step in building a research environment grounded in respect and empathy.

By placing trust at the center of our methodology, we sought to navigate the complexities of researching sensitive topics like racism with the utmost care and respect. Our aim was to create a supportive and trustworthy research environment that would encourage participants to share their valuable insights, thereby enriching the quality and depth of our findings.

SENSITIVITY OF THE TOPIC

Due to the sensitivity of the topic and the understanding that conversations around anti-Black racism can be traumatic for affected individuals, especially questions that ask them to recount incidents in which racism was experienced, we prefaced the survey with the following:

“WE ARE AWARE THAT SOME OF THE QUESTIONS IN THE SURVEY MAY BE TRIGGERING OR CAUSE DISCOMFORT. IF YOU ENCOUNTER ANY QUESTION THAT YOU FIND TRIGGERING, PLEASE SKIP IT AND RESPOND ONLY TO THE QUESTIONS YOU ARE COMFORTABLE ANSWERING. IF YOU CHOOSE TO WITHDRAW AT ANY GIVEN POINT, DO NOT CLICK SUBMIT AT THE END OF THE SURVEY.”

The same instructions were given at the beginning of the interviews. Interviewees could skip any questions or stop the interview at any moment, as well as request that the recording be deleted if they chose to. The instructions outline was strictly followed in all of the interviews.

Racism is a highly sensitive topic because it involves deeply personal and often painful experiences. Discussions around anti-Black racism can evoke strong emotional responses from individuals who have faced discrimination. The act of recounting incidents of racism can reopen wounds and bring back distressing memories, making it essential to approach such topics with care and empathy.

To ensure the comfort and safety of our participants, all interviews were conducted by a Black interviewer. In cases where a non-Black researcher was present to assist, the team asked for the interviewee's consent beforehand. Some respondents highlighted that as long as the team had knowledge of race and racism, they would not mind a non-Black researcher's presence. This practice helped build trust and foster a respectful environment.

Concerning the exchange between the interviewer and interviewee, it is worth mentioning that due to the sensitivity of the theme and similar lived experiences regarding racism, it was, at times, challenging for both participants and researchers, which reinforces the necessity to always have interviewers with deep knowledge regarding the theme. The interview preface sought to reduce the possibility of a stressful environment for all involved.

Moreover, considering the above-mentioned context of the underrepresentation of Black professionals in the field, we understand that the pool of Black planners is already small, making it crucial for us to use an approach to not only highlight the experiences of Black planners but also protect the anonymity of the participants. Therefore, maintaining the anonymity of our participants was of utmost importance to protect their privacy and ensure their safety. We guaranteed anonymity by not disclosing any identifying information that could link responses to specific individuals and letting interviewees know about it before starting interviews. All personal details were either generalized or omitted from the final report. Additionally, all data was securely stored, and access was limited to the research team.

By prioritizing the emotional well-being of our participants and safeguarding their anonymity, we aimed to create a supportive research environment that respects and values the lived experiences of Black planning professionals. This approach not only enhances the reliability of the data collected but also upholds ethical standards in research involving sensitive topics like racism.

OUTREACH

In conducting our research, a robust and strategic outreach plan was essential to ensure meaningful participation from Black planners and planning students across Canada. Recognizing the importance of trust and community in discussing sensitive topics, we designed our outreach with careful consideration of these factors.

Interview requests were sent to 84 Black planners and planning students across Canada. BPP used direct email outreach to engage the participants, most of whom had worked with BPP on previous projects and were therefore familiar with the organization's goals to amplify Black voices and perspectives in city and community building, planning, and development. Additional outreach was conducted through BPP's partner organization, BPUA's (Black Planners and Urbanists Association) monthly newsletter. The research team also sent periodic follow-up emails in accordance with the calendar and deadlines for each part of the project, aiming to expand the number of survey responses and interviews. Customized and individualized communication was used in the outreach to potential participants.

Our outreach strategy was designed with intentionality and trust-building at its core. Given the sensitive and significant nature of the topic, we recognized that a vague or impersonal approach would not suffice. We leveraged the established relationships and trust that a key member of our team has cultivated within the Black planning community through many years of service. This approach ensured that our outreach was not only respectful but also effective in engaging participants who understood and trusted our commitment to their voices and experiences. By focusing on personal connections and the existing rapport built by our team, we were able to reach out through trust, which was critical for the depth and authenticity of the responses we aimed to gather.

SURVEY

To gather comprehensive insights into the barriers faced by Black planners in urban planning, an online survey was designed and distributed using the methods detailed above. The survey was sent to a cohort of 84 Black planners and planning students across Canada (4 in Quebec, 5 in Alberta, 47 in Ontario, 2 in British Columbia, 1 in New Brunswick, 2 in Nova

Scotia and another 21 for whom this information is unknown). Two Canadian planners working in the United States of America also received the survey. The aim was to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives within this community. Ultimately, the survey elicited responses from 22 participants. The demographics of this respondents will be discussed in a later section.

The survey instrument employed a diverse range of question formats, including yes/no, multiple-choice, Likert scale, short-answer, and checkboxes to ensure comprehensive data collection.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews were a critical component of our research methodology, designed to delve into the nuances of the experiences of Black planners and planning students that cannot be easily uncovered through survey alone. Over a span of 4 weeks, 15 interviews were conducted, each session structured to last between 45 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews were divided into distinct sections to cover a range of topics essential to understanding the participants' professional journeys and personal insights. These included:

- Self-identification
- Educational and Professional Experience
- Main Challenges and Barriers in Study/Workplace
- Lived Experiences Regarding Racism
- Supporting Communities and Services

Upon request, some participants received the interview questions in advance. Detailed notes were taken during each session, and audio and video recordings via Zoom were made for accurate transcription and analysis. The interview data underwent systematic coding and analysis to identify recurring themes, challenges, and strategies discussed by the participants.

The interviews provided invaluable insights into the multifaceted experiences of Black planners and planning students, uncovering layers of personal and professional challenges that surveys alone could not reveal. The comprehensive approach to interviewing—spanning self-identification, educational and professional experiences, lived encounters with racism, and the envisioning of supportive workshops—ensured a rich, nuanced dataset. This data, meticulously coded and analyzed, underpins the development of strategic recommendations aimed at fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for Black planners. As we transition to the Results and Discussion section, we will delve deeper into the thematic analysis of the interview and survey data, exploring key themes and presenting a detailed examination of the findings that emerged from this research.



Thematic Analysis

A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS AND SURVEY WAS COMPLETED, AND THE FINDINGS WERE ORGANIZED ACCORDING TO THE FOLLOWING THEMES:

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Understanding the demographic backgrounds of the respondents is crucial to contextualizing their experiences and challenges within the field. This theme provides a foundation for analyzing how different identities intersect and influence the experiences of Black planners.

CHALLENGES:

This theme encompasses the various forms of obstacles faced by Black planners, including underrepresentation, microaggressions, stereotyping, racial gaslighting, hostility, and exclusion. Recognizing these challenges is essential for acknowledging the systemic barriers that hinder the participation and success of Black professionals in the planning field. The narratives shared by Black planners underscore the pervasive hostility they face in their

professional environments.

IMPACTS:

This theme highlights the consequences of the identified challenges, such as barriers to entry and advancement in the profession, as well as the toll on mental health. Understanding these impacts is vital for advocating for changes that support the well-being and career progression of Black planners. Despite the existence of various informal support systems and community initiatives, these planners continue to confront significant challenges that stem from systemic racism and a lack of institutional backing.

LACK OF SUPPORT:

This theme addresses the absence of adequate support structures, both general and tailored, for Black planners. Highlighting this issue underscores the need for more inclusive and supportive environments that can foster the growth and development of marginalized professionals. The diversity of support mechanisms mentioned—ranging from grassroots

organizations and volunteer activities to Employee Resource Groups and mental health programs—highlights both the resilience of Black planners and the inadequacies of existing structures to meet their specific needs. Workplaces often fail to offer tailored support that addresses the unique experiences of Black planners. This shortfall is evident in the reliance on self-created communities and external organizations, as opposed to formal workplace initiatives.

STRATEGIES:

This theme focuses on the approaches used to combat racism and navigate the professional landscape. It includes identifying and addressing racism, individual coping mechanisms, and collective strategies. Examining these strategies is important for developing effective interventions and support systems that empower Black planners. The necessity for

Black planners to seek support outside their professional environments indicates a significant gap in employer-provided resources. This gap not only fosters challenges faced in the work environment but also places an additional burden on Black planners to find and create supportive networks independently. The importance of tailored support is further emphasized by the pressing need for mental health resources. Without accessible and culturally sensitive mental health services, Black planners are left to navigate the stress and isolation of their professional lives without adequate support.

This structure provided a robust foundation for the analysis, highlighting the critical areas of concern and the necessity for tailored support systems in the professional environments of Black planners. In the following sections, we will unfold each of the themes and the findings from the survey and interviews.



Demographics

The research team distributed the survey to 84 Black planners and planning students, receiving 22 responses. Additionally, 15 new interviews were conducted as part of this project. The demographics of both survey and interview participants reflect a diverse sample, which is essential for capturing a wide range of experiences and perspectives within the Black urban planning community. Notably, 13% of those interviewed had not completed the survey at the time of their interview, and only 72.7% of survey participants chose to participate in interviews.

All survey and interview participants self-identified as Black. Gender identity distribution was as follows: 63.6% of survey respondents identified as female, and 36.4% as male. The interview participants mirrored this distribution closely, with 62.5% female and 37.5% male.

Survey participants were employed across a broad spectrum of professional environments. The largest group was from the public sector (47.6%), followed by the private sector (14.3%). Community organization workers made up 9.5%, while 14.3% of respondents were self-employed. Those in the non-profit sector accounted for 4.8%. Students represented 19.0%, and 4.8% worked part-time in fields unrelated to urban planning. This diversity across sectors underscores the varied career paths and roles within the planning community.

In terms of professional roles, 59.1% of the survey participants identified as urban planners, highlighting a strong representation of the core profession. Community organizers comprised 22.7%, while developers and community developers were represented by 4.5% and 13.6%, respectively. Educators and researchers made up 18.2% of respondents. Students, a key segment for understanding future trends in urban planning, also represented 18.2%. This varied distribution ensures a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities faced by Black professionals in the field.

FIG 1: GENDER DISTRIBUTION

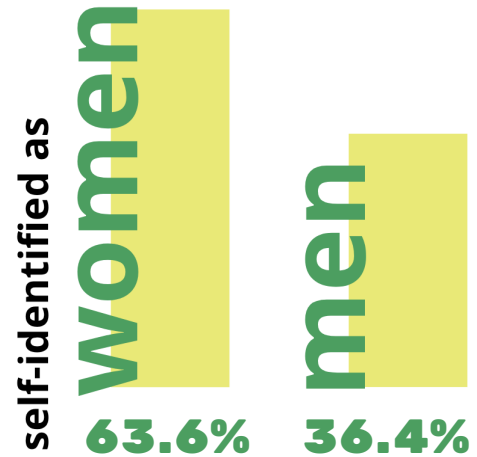


FIG 2: EMPLOYMENT SECTORS

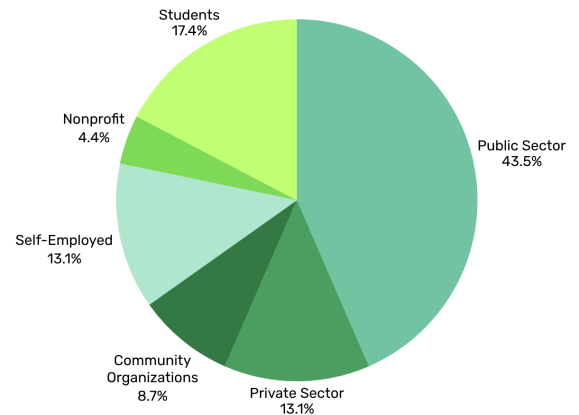
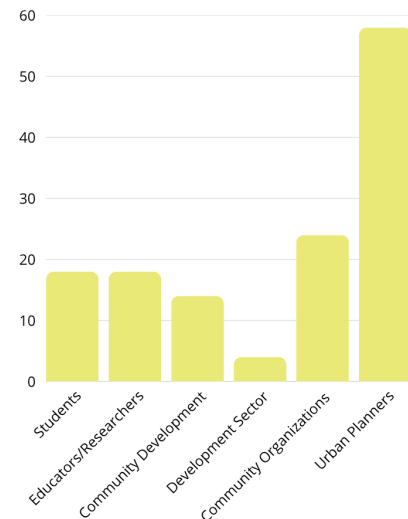


FIG 3: PROFESSIONAL ROLES

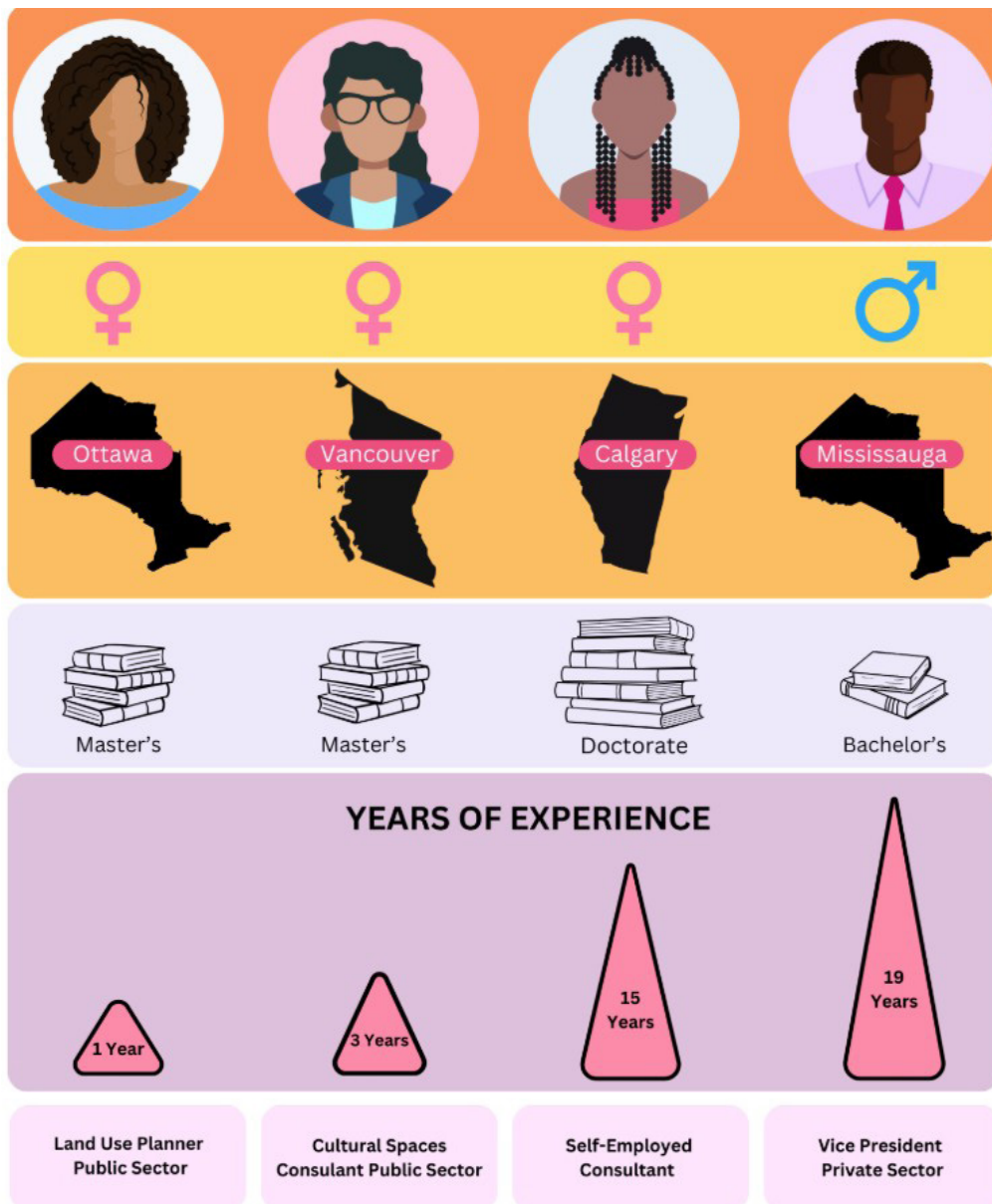


Only interview participants were asked to disclose their educational level. All interviewees hold undergraduate degrees, and 66% hold master’s degrees in disciplines such as urban studies, urban planning, urban development, or related fields. 20% did not disclose their education level. Similarly, only interviewees disclosed their geographic location. They reside in various Canadian cities, including Ottawa, Mississauga, Burlington, Edmonton, Vancouver, Halifax, Toronto, Scarborough, and Calgary. 47% of participants disclosed that they reside in Ontario

Below are four profiles that reflect a diverse range of genders, geographic locations, educational levels, years of experience, and professional roles covered in this research. This is an infographic with the objective of showcasing some of the

diverse profiles we have interviewed throughout this project. This research was conducted keeping in mind that Blackness is not a monolith, and we strived to find participants that best reflected the vast array of experiences and perspectives within Canada’s Black population.

By presenting the demographics and professional backgrounds of survey and interview participants, we underscore the importance of including a wide range of voices and experiences in our sample. This diversity is vital for capturing the nuanced challenges and opportunities that Black urban planners face, thus ensuring that our findings and recommendations are as comprehensive and inclusive as possible.



Challenges

This section will unfold the challenges related to anti-black racism and other types of oppression faced by Black planners who were interviewed and responded to our survey. The term Anti-Black Racism is employed here as a particular form of racism that impacts and describes Black individuals and groups' experiences of racism and discrimination. The term was introduced in scholarship by Dr. Akua Benjamin and refers to the specific systemic racism - the practices, policies and procedures embedded within institutions - experienced in the Canadian context by people of Black-African descent, i.e., Black individuals. These "attitudes, prejudice, stereotyping and/or discrimination towards people of Black-African descent" are rooted in global and Canadian historical and present practices. Furthermore, the term Black is used to refer to individuals of African descent, Canadians of African descent, African Black Caribbean, and/or African Canadians²⁰. The interviews revealed various barriers faced by Black professionals in the study and workplace, particularly related to racism. These challenges reveal the visible impacts of structural or systemic racism on the lived experiences of Black professionals. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995)²¹, racism is a fundamental element of American society and is embedded within institutional structures and practices. This perspective is central to Critical Race Theory, which argues that racism is a permanent feature of societies dominated by white hegemony (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017)²².

These barriers include, but are not limited to, explicit and implicit discrimination, lack of representation, and limited opportunities for career advancement. Crenshaw (1989)²³ notes that the intersectionality of race and gender exacerbates these challenges, creating an environment where the overlapping identities of Black individuals, especially women, lead to unique experiences of discrimination. From an intersectional perspective, considering gender, class, and race, social reproduction emerges as a critical factor. Black women frequently assume the primary responsibility for childcare and family care through daily reproductive activities. This trend is evident in the data, with 75% of those who identified caregiving for a parent or child as a barrier to career progression being women.

Studies show that these barriers are not just individual but also systemic. Feagin (2006)²⁴ argues that systemic racism is maintained through everyday practices and a series of institutional policies and procedures that perpetuate racial inequality. This is corroborated by Wingfield (2013)²⁵, who discusses how power dynamics and organizational

racism negatively impact the career trajectories of Black professionals.

The interviews reflect these academic findings, illustrating how structural and systemic racism manifests in various forms, from microaggressions to exclusion from professional networks. Analyzing these accounts can help develop more effective strategies to combat institutional racism and promote inclusion and equity in the workplace.

Interviewees have reported several examples of racism, including racial profiling in public places and anti-Black comments in studies and workplaces that went unpunished. Microaggressions were mentioned, where discrimination is more implicit, such as omissions in interviews or justifications that disguise biases. Other instances described include comments critiquing, for instance, the professional appearance of Black individuals. Stereotyping and exclusion were frequent, with Black individuals often isolated or left out of networking opportunities, especially within educational institutions, which impacted their experiences as students and into their professional careers. Some interviewees highlighted that racism usually stems from ignorance, with people making problematic comments without realizing their impact.

Biases and discriminatory attitudes from colleagues and clients further compound these challenges. Black professionals often encounter subtle and overt forms of racism that can create a hostile work environment, reflecting the everyday biases they face in their professional lives.

Data collected through the survey demonstrates that 77.3% of respondents confirmed that they encountered or are encountering racism in their place of study or work, corroborating with the examples provided through the interviews. The racism encountered ranged from microaggressions, gas-lighting and stereotyping to open hostility and barriers to promotion and career advancement. Desegregated data from the survey revealed that 8 out of 9 Black planners working in the public sector have encountered (or are encountering) racism. Amongst this group, microaggression was mentioned 7 out of 8 times. Gas-lighting was mentioned 5 times, and barriers to promotion were mentioned 4 times.

The underrepresentation of Black individuals in planning schools and the industry was also noted, with few examples of recognized Black leaders. The lack of recognition for the

work of Black urban planners and constant doubt about their abilities and leadership were mentioned as challenges. Uneven workload distribution and inadequate support were recurring problems.

The 2021 Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP) Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Insight Survey Report estimated the ratio of White to racialized planners as 4:1. Underrepresentation is, therefore, a persistent issue influenced by historical, structural, and systemic factors. This phenomenon manifests in various forms, including lower hiring rates, fewer promotions, and limited access to leadership positions for Black individuals compared to their White counterparts. According to a study by Avery, McKay, and Wilson (2008)²⁶, “organizational practices and the social context in which they are embedded play a significant role in the underrepresentation of Black employees in workplaces.” Their research emphasizes that addressing this issue requires systemic changes in organizational policies and practices to promote diversity and inclusion effectively.

The scarcity of Black professionals in senior roles or leadership positions means that Black employees frequently lack mentors who can provide guidance and support. This absence of relatable role models can hinder professional development and career progression, making it more difficult to navigate a career without mentors who share similar backgrounds and experiences.

Networking is crucial for career advancement, but interviewees described a frequent lack of access to professional networks

dominated by White individuals. This barrier limits learning, job opportunities, and career growth, making it harder for Black professional planners to gain a foothold in their industries. The lack of professional networks means fewer opportunities for mentorship, sponsorship, and career development.

Barriers to entry were also frequently highlighted, particularly by planning students and recent graduates. 60% of interviewees described their transition from post-secondary education in planning (or a related field) to a planning-related profession as “challenging.” Some of the reasons cited included networking challenges due to the low number of Black professionals in the field, challenges in securing positions due to ethnic background and name, and rejections attributed to racial discrimination.

It is important to note that while the specifics varied among interviewees, a majority highlighted race as a pivotal factor in the challenges they faced during their transition from academia to professional practice.

In the following sections, we will shed additional light on some of the most pervasive forms of racism that Black planning professionals encounter. These include:

- **MICROAGGRESSIONS**
- **STEREOTYPING**
- **RACIAL GASLIGHTING**
- **OPEN HOSTILITY**
- **EXCLUSION**



MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions encompass a spectrum of behaviors, both intentional and unintentional, that communicate hostile or negative messages to members of marginalized groups. These actions often manifest subtly as discriminatory comments, gestures, or environmental cues that demean or exclude individuals based on their race, ethnicity, gender, or other identities (Sue et al., 2007)²⁷. Their insidious nature lies in their ability to undermine the dignity and sense of belonging of those targeted, perpetuating a pervasive impact on their psychological and emotional well-being. Addressing and combating these behaviors is crucial as they contribute significantly to the maintenance of systemic inequities and social injustices.

Notably, 88.9% of survey participants identified microaggressions as a type of racism they experience in the workplace, highlighting the alarming prevalence and harmful effects of these subtle forms of discrimination. Additionally, 59% of interviewees explicitly mentioned experiencing microaggressions in their responses, further underscoring the widespread nature of these incidents. These everyday slights and indignities, though often dismissed as minor or unintentional, cumulatively erode the well-being and professional standing of those targeted.

One interviewee recalled a particularly jarring experience:

“I REMEMBER I HAD A PROFESSIONAL COURSE WHERE I WAS TOLD THAT I NEEDED TO CHANGE MY HAIR TO MAKE IT LOOK MORE PROFESSIONAL, POSSIBLY STRAIGHTEN IT. IT

WAS A HUGE AFRO, DYED RED AT THE TIME.”

This comment, couched as advice, inherently suggested that natural Black hairstyles are unprofessional, perpetuating harmful stereotypes and pressuring individuals to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards. Such incidents exemplify how microaggressions can impose undue pressure on individuals to alter aspects of their identity to fit within narrowly defined norms.

Another interviewee shared an account of differential treatment:

“I WOULD SEE VISIBLY HOW, LIKE, WHEN WE GO UP NORTH THROUGH THIS ONE PROJECT THAT WE HAD IN SIMMONS, THE WAY THEY WOULD TREAT MY WHITE COLLEAGUE AND THE WAY THEY WOULD TREAT ME AND MY ASIAN COLLEAGUE SOMETIMES. IT WOULD JUST BE LIKE OUR FACES; THEY WOULD BE SO NICE TO THE OTHER LADY AND THEN NOT NICE TO US.”

This testimony underscores how microaggressions can manifest through overtly differential treatment, making marginalized individuals feel unwelcome and undervalued in professional settings. The differential treatment based on race observed by the interviewee highlights the pervasive nature of microaggressions and their capability to undermine workplace inclusivity.

These personal accounts underscore the profound and pervasive impact of microaggressions, reinforcing the necessity for targeted efforts to recognize, address, and mitigate their presence in professional environments.



STEREOTYPING

Stereotyping can be defined as a set of beliefs, often simplified and generalized, that are applied to all members of a specific social group, often without considering individual differences. These beliefs are not purely random but are “formed from a combination of personal experiences, cultural influences, and second-hand information” (Schneider, 2004, p. 242)²⁸. Stereotypes are acquired through socialization processes and can unconsciously influence perceptions and behaviours.

55.6% of survey participants who reported experiencing racism in the workplace identified stereotyping as one of its manifestations. The perpetuation of stereotypes contributes significantly to systemic racism by reinforcing discriminatory practices in various areas such as employment, criminal justice, and healthcare. For instance, Pager (2003)²⁹ conducted a study showing that Black job applicants with identical qualifications to White applicants were less likely to be called back for interviews. This example illustrates how racial stereotypes influence hiring decisions and perpetuate economic disparities, highlighting the systemic barriers faced by marginalized groups in achieving equal opportunities.

Personal experiences further underscore the impact of these stereotypes. One individual recounted an interview experience:

“AND WHEN THEY SEE YOU’RE BLACK, AND YOU’RE SITTING IN FRONT OF THEM AT THE INTERVIEW, THEY’RE LIKE, ‘OH, YOU TOOK PLANNING?’ [...] SO I JUST THOUGHT THAT WAS BIZARRE, THAT THEY DIDN’T THINK BLACK

PEOPLE ACTUALLY KNEW WHAT PLANNING WAS, OR WENT TO PLANNING SCHOOL FOR IT.”

This quote vividly demonstrates how stereotypes can manifest during critical career moments, such as job interviews, where assumptions about a person’s background and capabilities can lead to biased judgments and hinder professional opportunities.

Another individual highlighted the additional challenges faced by Black entrepreneurs:

“STARTING YOUR OWN BUSINESS IS ESPECIALLY TOUGH, AS YOU OFTEN HAVE TO BE MUCH BETTER THAN OTHERS BEFORE GETTING A CHANCE UNLESS IT’S FOR SOMETHING SPECIFICALLY BLACK-FOCUSED.”

This statement reflects the broader societal expectation that Black professionals must exceed the standards applied to their non-Black counterparts to achieve similar recognition and opportunities. This disparity is not only demoralizing but also creates a significant barrier to entry for Black individuals aspiring to leadership roles or entrepreneurial success.

These testimonies reveal the pervasive nature of stereotypes and their detrimental effects on both professional and personal development. They illustrate the constant and often invisible battles Black planning professionals face in proving their worth and overcoming preconceived notions rooted in racial bias.



RACIAL GASLIGHTING

As societal values evolve, some Black professionals have observed that racism has become more subtle and harder to pinpoint, increasing the risk of victims being gaslit. Interviewees reported struggling to identify racism and label the type of discrimination they experience. This difficulty can often be attributed to gaslighting, a form of psychological manipulation in which a person or group makes someone question their reality, memory, or perceptions. It is often used to gain power and control over the oppressed by making them doubt their own experiences and feelings. This can be done through denial, contradiction, misinformation, and trivializing the victim's feelings or experiences (Davis and Ernst, 2019)³⁰.

66.7% of survey participants who reported experiencing racism in the workplace indicated that they have faced gaslighting as a manifestation of discrimination. Gaslighting can have profound effects on Black people, particularly when it intersects with systemic racism. When Black individuals express experiences of racism and discrimination, they may be met with responses that invalidate or downplay their experiences, a form of racial gaslighting. This can lead to self-doubt, mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, and a diminished sense of self-worth.

Racial gaslighting perpetuates systemic racism by denying the validity of Black people's experiences and perspectives, thus maintaining the status quo of racial inequality. It can occur in various settings, including the workplace, healthcare, education, and interpersonal relationships. For example, when Black employees report workplace discrimination and are told they are being "too sensitive" or that they are "imagining things," it not only invalidates their experiences but also

discourages them from speaking out about future incidents.

One interviewee highlighted the insidious nature of contemporary racism:

"PEOPLE ARE MUCH SMARTER ABOUT IT NOWADAYS; THEY'LL OFTEN FIND WAYS TO, YOU KNOW, EITHER JUST AVOID INTERVIEWING [A BLACK CANDIDATE] OR, YOU KNOW, STRUCTURE THE CONCERN IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY CAN JUSTIFY IT IF CHALLENGED."

This sentiment underscores how racial gaslighting has evolved into more covert forms, making it increasingly difficult for victims to address or confront discrimination. The avoidance of interviewing Black candidates or the framing of concerns in a seemingly legitimate way allows employers to disguise their biases under the veneer of objectivity and fairness. This not only perpetuates systemic racism but also creates a hostile environment where Black professionals are continually undermined and devalued.

Such tactics are part of a broader pattern of racial gaslighting, where the lived experiences of Black individuals are systematically denied or minimized. By invalidating their experiences, those in power can maintain racial hierarchies and avoid accountability. The psychological impact of this constant invalidation can be devastating, leading to a cycle where Black professionals feel disempowered and reluctant to report future instances of discrimination. This ultimately sustains a work culture that is unwelcoming and discriminatory, hindering the professional growth and well-being of Black individuals.



HOSTILITY

Hostility in professional settings refers to an environment characterized by antagonism, aggression, or unwelcoming behavior towards individuals based on their race, ethnicity, or other personal characteristics. This can manifest through overt acts of discrimination, microaggressions, or the normalization of derogatory language, creating a challenging and sometimes unsafe atmosphere for marginalized groups, particularly Black individuals. Research indicates that such hostile environments not only undermine individual well-being but also hinder organizational effectiveness and inclusivity efforts (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987)³¹.

38.9% of survey participants who reported encountering racism in the workplace also experienced hostility. Accounts from interviews underscore the persistent challenges and harmful effects of racism experienced by Black individuals in both educational and professional settings. One notable incident described involved a student making a blatantly anti-Black remark without facing significant consequences or a satisfactory resolution for the Black students affected:

“THERE WAS AN INCIDENT WHERE A STUDENT JUST SAID SOMETHING PRETTY ANTI-BLACK, AND THERE WERE NO REAL CONSEQUENCES OR A WAY TO ADDRESS THAT IN A WAY THAT WAS SATISFACTORY TO THE BLACK STUDENTS IN THE COURSE.”

This highlights a systemic issue where institutions often fail to address and remedy instances of racism effectively, leaving Black students feeling marginalized and their concerns disregarded.

Additionally, harmful comments directed at Black individuals in professional spaces underscore the pervasive nature of racism. These experiences, where individuals face direct and derogatory remarks about their community, contribute to a hostile environment and emotional distress. Such incidents not only violate professional norms but also reflect broader societal prejudices that Black individuals navigate daily. As one interviewee shared,

“AND SOMETIMES THE THINGS THAT PEOPLE SAY TO YOU IN THOSE SPACES ARE ALSO HARMFUL. LIKE, I DON’T KNOW, I’VE HAD EXPERIENCES WHERE PEOPLE SAY THE WORST RACIST THINGS TO YOUR FACE ABOUT DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES.”

Moreover, the data points to the systemic and structural components of anti-Black racism and discrimination. Personal accounts reveal instances of explicit racism, including the use of racially derogatory language in professional contexts. These experiences highlight deep-rooted systemic issues that perpetuate racial inequality and undermine efforts toward inclusivity and equity in workplaces and educational institutions.



EXCLUSION

Exclusion in professional contexts refers to systemic practices or behaviors that marginalize individuals based on their race, ethnicity, or other characteristics, thereby limiting their opportunities for engagement, inclusion, and advancement within organizational settings. It can manifest through deliberate actions of exclusion from decision-making processes, social gatherings, or professional networks, ultimately undermining the individual's sense of belonging and ability to contribute effectively (Williams, 2008)³².

Data collected from interviews highlights various experiences of exclusion faced by Black professionals in their respective fields. Individuals express frustration over not being included in important discussions or activities, which prevents them from building connections and effectively communicating their concerns. One participant noted,

"IT'S JUST, YOU KNOW, PEOPLE JUST DON'T INCLUDE YOU IN VARIOUS THINGS, SO YOU DON'T HAVE THAT OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT AND ENGAGE, AND EVENTUALLY BE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE YOUR CONCERNS."

This quote underscores the profound impact that exclusion has on professional relationships and communication. Without being part of essential conversations, Black professionals are denied the opportunity to network, share their insights, and raise issues that matter to them, which significantly hampers their career development and visibility within the organization.

The sentiment of being excluded resonates strongly among Black planners who navigate predominantly non-Black environments. They describe scenarios where they are left to navigate challenges independently, without the support or inclusion necessary for their professional development. As one Black planner shared,

"WE ARE PRETTY MUCH EXCLUDED, AND WE ARE FIGURING THINGS OUT ON OUR OWN AND SO THAT HAS BEEN MY EXPERIENCE SO FAR AS A BLACK PLANNER."

This statement highlights the solitary journey many Black professionals endure in their careers. The lack of mentorship and collegial support means they must find solutions independently, which can be both exhausting and discouraging. This self-reliance often stems from a lack of systemic support and the absence of inclusive practices that could facilitate their professional growth.

Additionally, the data highlights how racial identity can influence one's experience of exclusion. Participants mention feeling like outsiders in professional settings where their

lived experiences as Black individuals are not acknowledged or valued. This marginalization not only undermines their contributions but also reinforces stereotypes and biases that limit their opportunities for advancement. By not recognizing the unique perspectives and experiences that Black professionals bring, organizations miss out on the diverse viewpoints essential for comprehensive decision-making and innovation.

Furthermore, the data reveals the detrimental impact of being "othered" based on racial identity. Black professionals recount instances where they have been treated differently or overlooked, which has hindered their professional trajectories. This phenomenon not only affects individual morale but also contributes to a broader pattern of exclusion and inequality within organizational structures. Being consistently othered can erode confidence and motivation, leading to decreased job satisfaction and engagement.

Exclusion from key decision-making processes is another significant issue. Black individuals often find themselves sidelined in matters that affect their own communities, perpetuating systemic inequities and overlooking the valuable insights that Black perspectives can provide. This exclusion perpetuates a cycle of disenfranchisement and reinforces the barriers to inclusion and equity in the workplace. By not involving Black professionals in critical decisions, organizations not only perpetuate injustice but also miss out on solutions that could benefit from the lived experiences and cultural insights of these individuals. This systemic oversight ensures that the cycle of exclusion continues, making it difficult to break the patterns of inequality that persist within professional environments.

After analyzing the pervasive challenges of microaggressions, stereotyping, gaslighting, hostility, and exclusion faced by Black urban planners, it becomes evident that these barriers not only hinder professional growth but also perpetuate systemic inequities within the field. These experiences are not isolated incidents but rather systemic manifestations of racism that undermine the contributions and aspirations of Black planners. Moving forward, it is crucial to delve deeper into the profound impacts of these challenges. The next section will examine how such adversities affect career trajectories, mental health, and organizational dynamics, shedding light on the broader implications for diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in urban planning. Understanding these impacts is essential for developing effective strategies to dismantle systemic racism and cultivate environments where Black planners can thrive.

Impacts

Racism in the workplace has profound impacts on the mental health, performance, and relationships of Black employees, as demonstrated by the responses from interviews and the survey. The section of the survey assessing the effects of anti-Black racism revealed significant findings among respondents. 14 out of 22 individuals (63.6%) reported experiencing moderate to severe impacts on their mental health and well-being due to racism. 11 respondents (50.0%) noted a moderate to severe impact on their work performance. A similar number noting challenges in forming trusting relationships with colleagues. 9 respondents (40.9%) indicated that racism affected their ability to take initiative at work.

Data collected from interviews demonstrates that Black employees often face additional burdens beyond the direct impacts of racism. They may be unfairly burdened with addressing issues related to racism in the workplace, with an assumption that they should take the lead in addressing such issues. As one interviewee noted,

“BUT THERE IS A KIND OF UNSPOKEN ASSUMPTION THAT ANYTHING THAT HAD TO DO WITH ANTI-BLACK RACISM, THE BLACK STAFF WOULD JUST KIND OF TAKE CARE OF IT, OR DEAL WITH IT, OR LIKE FIND WAYS TO ADDRESS IT. OR LIKE, YOU KNOW, THEY WOULD TAKE THE IDEA THAT THESE INITIATIVES SHOULD BE BLACK-CENTERED OR BLACK-LED, AND THEY WOULD TAKE THAT TO MEAN THAT THEY THEN CAN JUST SORT OF NOT DO ANYTHING UNTIL THEY’RE TOLD TO DO SOMETHING BY A BLACK PERSON.”

This expectation can contribute to emotional labor and exacerbate feelings of isolation or tokenism among Black staff members.

In relation to the experiences of tokenism, participants report that they are expected to represent and speak for their entire race, placing an undue burden on them. One respondent highlighted,

“PEOPLE EXPECT YOU TO BE AN EXPERT ON BLACK COMMUNITIES AS WELL, AND YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO REMIND THEM THAT THAT IS A WIDE CATEGORY OF PEOPLES AND HISTORIES AND EXPERIENCES, AND YOU DON’T SPEAK ON BEHALF OF THEM.”

This not only adds to their stress but also fails to acknowledge their individuality and unique contributions, as well as the diversity of perspectives and backgrounds within the Black community. The expectation to facilitate conversations about race can be particularly taxing, especially in environments where there are few Black individuals. This pressure highlights a broader issue of racial stereotyping and the burden of representation, where individuals are expected to conform to or speak for monolithic identities rather than being recognized for their individual perspectives and experiences.

In the following sections, we will discuss the most prominent impacts of anti-Black racism on Black planning professionals. These will be grouped into three categories: **1) BARRIERS TO ENTRY, 2) BARRIERS TO ADVANCEMENT, 3) MENTAL HEALTH**



BARRIERS TO ENTRY

Several reports by interviewees revealed various instances where racial bias significantly impacted Black individuals throughout the recruitment process in urban planning. Concerns were raised about biases based on appearance, with job seekers speculating that judgments made from social media profile photos could influence hiring decisions unfairly. This suggests that initial impressions based on racial or ethnic identifiers may lead to discriminatory practices in candidate evaluation. One interviewee shared,

“ONE CASE WHERE SOMEONE OPENLY SAID... IN A PRIVATE SETTING THAT, YOU KNOW, ‘XXX [INTERVIEWEE NAME] IS NOT A GOOD FIT,’ AND IT WAS ESSENTIALLY IMPLIED THAT IT WAS BASED ON RACE, AND THEN BASICALLY ENSURED I DIDN’T GET THE JOB.”

Such instances highlight the pervasive nature of racial bias that can subtly yet significantly influence the hiring process.

Explicit cases of racial discrimination in hiring were also highlighted, where participants expressed that they were told they were not a good fit due to implicit racial biases. These cases underscore how racial prejudices can directly influence hiring outcomes, denying qualified individuals opportunities based on race. The impact of such biases is profound, as they not only affect individual careers but also contribute to the systemic underrepresentation of Black professionals in the field of urban planning.

Implicit biases also surfaced regarding candidates’ names and skin colour, reflecting hesitations or negative judgments in recruitment. These biases perpetuate harmful stereotypes and unfairly disadvantage candidates from diverse backgrounds despite their qualifications. Such biases are often subconscious yet can have tangible effects on hiring decisions, further entrenching racial disparities in the workforce.

Additionally, preferences for candidates with “local roots” or specific cultural fits indicate biases favouring individuals who conform to certain social or cultural norms. An interviewee recounted,

“I HAD ANOTHER INTERVIEW IN RED DEER COUNTY MANY YEARS AGO FOR A VERY JUNIOR POSITION, AND IN THE END, I WAS TOLD THAT THEY WANTED SOMEBODY WITH MORE LOCAL ROOTS.”

This preference can exclude qualified candidates who bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the

workplace, limiting diversity and perpetuating homogeneity in organizational cultures. In urban planning, where understanding diverse community needs is crucial, such exclusionary practices can undermine the profession’s effectiveness and relevance.

The data also highlights networking challenges faced by Black graduates, who often lack the same access to professional networks as their counterparts from other racial backgrounds. An interviewee noted,

“PEOPLE OFTEN GET JOBS THROUGH THEIR NETWORKS. FOR BLACK GRADUATES, WE OFTEN DON’T HAVE THE NETWORKS THAT WHITE PEOPLE OR OTHER RACES HAVE. THIS BECOMES A BARRIER TO ENTRY BECAUSE WHEN YOU GET YOUR FIRST JOB, YOU DON’T KNOW MUCH.”

Limited networking opportunities can hinder job referrals and access to career advancement opportunities, further exacerbating inequalities in employment outcomes. The lack of networking opportunities not only affects initial job placements but also impacts long-term career growth and professional development.

Furthermore, the lack of mentorship and guidance available to Black professionals in urban planning exacerbates these barriers. Without access to mentors who can provide advice, support, and advocacy, Black planners may find it challenging to navigate the complexities of their careers, from securing initial employment to advancing into leadership roles. This lack of support systems can contribute to feelings of isolation and hinder their ability to fully realize their professional potential.

These barriers to entry due to racism in urban planning highlight the urgent need for systemic change within the profession.



BARRIERS TO ADVANCEMENT

Interviewees have highlighted systemic biases that lead to a lack of recognition, restricted opportunities for advancement, and uneven distribution of workload, presenting significant obstacles in their careers. Several of the interviewees experienced what is referred to as the “glass cliff,” where their careers advance under the weight of maintaining their values, only to face a sudden decline and exclusion from further opportunities for being deemed “non-assimilated.” This phenomenon reflects a broader issue where expertise and leadership among Black professionals are continually questioned despite their qualifications and contributions.

One interviewee poignantly described their experience, stating,

“WITH THE LEVEL OF EXPERTISE THAT I DO BRING INTO THESE ROLES, I ALWAYS KNOW MORE. I’M ALWAYS MORE PREPARED, I HAVE MORE EXPERIENCE THAN THE PEOPLE THAT ARE AROUND ME. [...] AND PEOPLE WILL GET HIRED, THEY’LL BE GIVEN PERMANENT [POSITIONS], THEY WON’T HAVE A BACKGROUND IN PLANNING, BUT THEY’LL BE IN MY DEPARTMENT AND ABOVE ME.”

This sentiment encapsulates the frustration and disillusionment felt by many Black professionals who find their extensive knowledge and preparedness overshadowed by less experienced colleagues. The systemic biases are evident in hiring and promotion practices where Black professionals, despite their qualifications, are overlooked for permanent positions, while those without relevant backgrounds are placed in roles above them. This dynamic not only undermines their professional growth but also signals a broader devaluation of their expertise and contributions.

Black professionals often find themselves overlooked in meetings, with decisions deferred to white colleagues perceived as more authoritative, even when possessing superior knowledge. This marginalization not only undermines their authority but also restricts their ability to exercise their

roles and responsibilities, stunting career growth. The constant need to prove their worthiness and competence in the face of such biases can be exhausting and demoralizing, perpetuating a cycle of underutilization and disenfranchisement.

Another interviewee emphasized the compounded challenges faced by women of color:

“HOWEVER, IT’S BEEN ALSO VERY CHALLENGING AS A WOMAN OF COLOUR [IN] PLANNING BECAUSE YOUR EMPLOYABILITY IS ALWAYS QUESTIONED. YOUR EXPERIENCE AND YOUR EDUCATION ARE ALWAYS QUESTIONED.”

This quote sheds light on the intersectional nature of discrimination where race and gender intersect to create unique challenges. Women of color, in particular, face additional scrutiny regarding their qualifications and capabilities, leading to persistent doubts about their employability. This continuous questioning of their credentials not only hampers their career progression but also perpetuates a culture of exclusion and marginalization.

Survey data reveals that 55.6% of participants indicated that racism manifested as barriers to promotion and career advancement. Furthermore, 50.0% of participants who indicated that they experience racism ranked its impact on their performance at work as 5 or higher out of 10, and 40.9% ranked racism’s impact on their ability to take initiative as 5 or higher. Such experiences contribute to a pervasive sentiment of not being taken seriously or recognized for their efforts, pushing many to seek career opportunities elsewhere to achieve the professional development they are denied within their current organizations. The consistent underestimation and undervaluation of their contributions create an environment where Black professionals feel compelled to leave their current roles in search of workplaces that recognize and nurture their potential. This exodus not only represents a loss of talent for organizations but also highlights the urgent need for systemic change to address these entrenched barriers to advancement.



MENTAL HEALTH

Participants often find themselves as one of the few, or even the only, Black people in their workplaces and post-secondary education programs. This isolation can lead to feelings of invisibility, making it challenging to address race and discrimination issues due to a lack of collective support and understanding from colleagues. The rarity of shared experiences and support in the workplace further exacerbates these feelings of isolation.

The experiences of Black planners in their studies and workplaces reveal the profound emotional and professional impact of racism, encompassing feelings of isolation and continuous self-doubt.

In environments where Black planners are among the few representatives of their race, they often bear the burden of being seen as the spokesperson for all Black people, which can be overwhelming. This expectation not only adds pressure but also isolates them further when their perspectives are not understood or valued by their colleagues. One participant shared,

“[BEING] LOOKED AT AS THE EXPERT... THAT COMES WITH A LOT OF PRESSURE AND A LOT OF WEIGHT.”

Black planning professionals navigate environments where their expertise is undervalued, often feeling overlooked and burdened by the emotional labor of advocating for racial equity.

“IT’S DRAINING TO BE THE ‘ANGRY BLACK PERSON’ IN THE ROOM, ALWAYS BRINGING UP THESE ISSUES,”

This role of being the constant advocate can be exhausting, leading to burnout and a sense of being typecast. The need to continually address and confront racism takes a toll on their mental and emotional well-being, as they are often met with resistance or apathy from their peers.

The pervasive sense of being an outsider and the prevalence of imposter syndrome underscore their daily struggles.

“YOU COULD FIND YOURSELF GASLIGHTING YOURSELF, ESPECIALLY IF YOU’RE CONSTANTLY WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION THAT IS BEREFT OF BLACK PEOPLE, YOU KNOW BECAUSE THERE’S ONLY ONE SIDE [OF THE ISSUE],”

In predominantly white environments, Black planners may begin to doubt their own experiences and perceptions of racism, especially when their concerns are dismissed or minimized. This self-doubt can erode their confidence and sense of belonging, making it even more difficult to advocate for themselves and others.

Survey data reveals that 63.6% of participants who experience racism rated its impact on their mental health and well-being as 5 or higher out of 10, with 13.6% rating its impact as 10. Additionally, 54.5% indicated that racism impacted their ability to form trusting relationships with their coworkers, rating it 5 or higher out of 10, with 13.6% ranking it a 10. Despite their qualifications and contributions, Black planners report significant challenges in maintaining trust and engagement due to systemic barriers and microaggressions. These statistics highlight the widespread and severe impact of racism on their professional and personal lives.

These dynamics not only impede their professional growth but also lead to feelings of frustration and the need to prove themselves constantly. As one planner described,

“I’M CONSTANTLY DOING THE EXHAUSTIVE MENTAL WORK OF ‘WHY AM I NOT A PART OF THIS?’ LIKE BACKTRACKING, DOUBLE-CHECKING, AND TRIPLE-CHECKING MY WORK. I’M IN THIS CONSTANT STATE OF RECALIBRATING, LIKE, ‘WHAT DID I SAY LAST FOR THEM TO RESPOND LIKE THIS?’ LIKE I’M EVALUATING THAT I’VE DONE EVERYTHING RIGHT, SO THEN WHY IS THIS STILL HAPPENING?”

This relentless self-scrutiny stems from a lack of recognition and validation, pushing Black planners to question their every move and decision, further contributing to their stress and exhaustion.

The cumulative impact of these experiences underscores the critical need for robust support structures within organizations to foster inclusive environments where Black professionals can thrive without compromising their identities or facing constant scrutiny. By providing meaningful support, organizations can help alleviate the unique burdens faced by Black planners, allowing them to focus on their work and contributions without the added weight of racial inequities.



Lack of Support

The challenges faced by Black urban planners in overcoming systemic barriers are deeply entrenched within organizational cultures, where meaningful change encounters significant resistance. According to reports collected from interviews, initiatives aimed at combating racism are often perceived as superficial and more focused on optics than substantive impact. This perception leads to a lack of commitment to implementation, with initiatives treated as aesthetic projects rather than efforts that embed deeply into workplace culture. There's a troubling tendency to wait for Black leadership before taking action, delaying progress and leaving initiatives inadequately implemented. As one interviewee noted,

"THEY WOULD TAKE THE IDEA THAT THESE INITIATIVES SHOULD BE BLACK-CENTERED OR BLACK-LED, AND THEY WOULD TAKE THAT TO MEAN THAT THEY THEN CAN JUST SORT OF NOT DO ANYTHING UNTIL THEY'RE TOLD TO DO SOMETHING BY A BLACK PERSON."

Moreover, minimal consideration is given to ensuring these efforts are impactful and effectively integrated. Presentations and efforts to address racism may occur superficially, failing to substantially influence workplace dynamics or improve the overall experience for Black employees. Personal experiences are often documented for bureaucratic purposes rather than driving authentic change within the organizational framework. Financial constraints exacerbate these challenges, limiting access to essential mental health services tailored to the cultural needs of Black planners. The high demand and limited availability of culturally appropriate mental health care further hinder support efforts. This financial barrier not only impedes effective community engagement but also undermines efforts to combat racism comprehensively.

Resistance to change is pronounced, particularly in ostensibly liberal environments that falter in making substantive strides toward racial equity. This reluctance to confront racism perpetuates a frustrating cycle for advocates of change, who find initial enthusiasm waning over time. The slow pace of change compounds these frustrations, making sustained progress in combating racism a formidable uphill battle. The

barriers faced by Black urban planners underscore the urgent need for robust support structures and proactive initiatives within organizations. Addressing these systemic gaps requires a committed effort to integrate meaningful change into organizational cultures, ensure equitable access to resources, and accelerate the pace of transformative initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive and supportive environments.

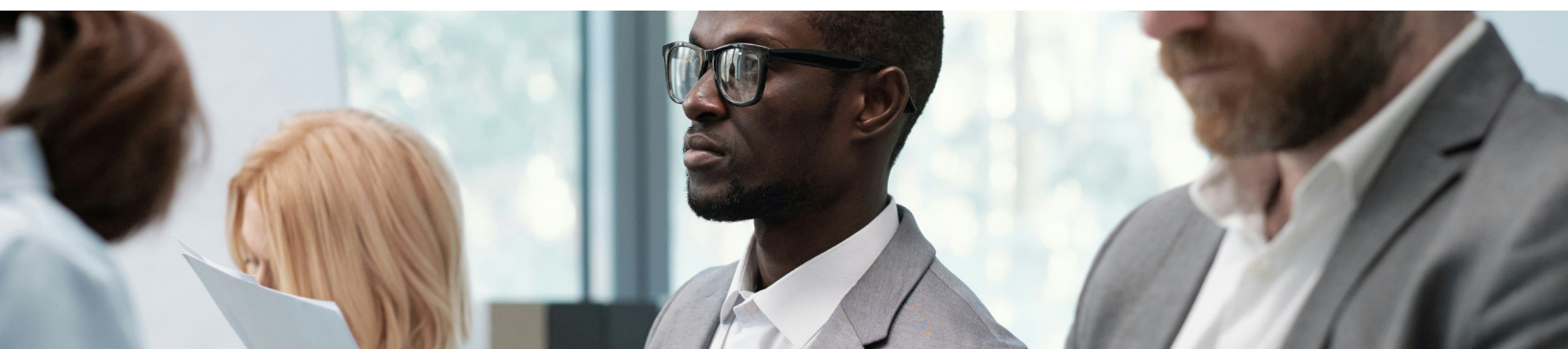
Furthermore, Black professional planners also struggle to find mental health support, and even in instances where systems are in place, Black planners still face a significant lack of support tailored specifically to them. Several interviewees emphasized that while their employer does provide employee support, they often do not tailor to the specific needs of Black individuals or are not culturally appropriate. As one interviewee explained,

"SO IT'S NOT THAT I DON'T HAVE ACCESS TO THEM, BUT IN TERMS OF ACCESS TO SAY BLACK SPECIFIC PROVIDERS OR GAY SPECIFIC PROVIDERS OR, YOU KNOW, BLACKISH OR GAYISH SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH SPACES, I DON'T REALLY HAVE ACCESS TO THOSE, OR IF I DO AGAIN, THEY ARE DESIGNED FOR PEOPLE IN A DIFFERENT SITUATION THAN ME."

Another interviewee highlighted the problematic history of employer-funded mental health services:

"BUT XXX [EMPLOYER-FUNDED MENTAL HEALTH FIRM] HAS A VERY CONVOLUTED DARK PAST, I THINK, LIKE THE PERSON WHO STARTED IT WAS A SLAVE OWNER. AND THERE'S ALSO BEEN A LOT OF TALK ABOUT PEOPLE NOT NECESSARILY BEING OF THE RIGHT IDENTITY TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEMS THAT HAVE BEEN AFFECTING PEOPLE."

This confluence of resistance, superficial initiatives, and lack of tailored support highlights the profound need for organizations to implement meaningful and inclusive changes to improve the mental health of Black employees and allow them to thrive.



Strategies

Addressing racism in the workplace or any environment often comes with significant challenges and risks for individuals who speak out or take action. One of the foremost concerns is the risk of career damage or facing retaliation. Speaking up against instances of racism can expose individuals to negative consequences, including potential backlash from colleagues or superiors, as reported by interviewees. This fear of retaliation can deter individuals from addressing racism, even when they possess the skills and knowledge to advocate for themselves effectively. The need to strategically manage interactions and conversations underscores the delicate balance individuals must maintain to protect themselves while advocating for change.

Survey data reflects this struggle, revealing that only a small percentage of Black planning professionals feel well-equipped to address racism in their workplaces or studies. Specifically, 54.5% rated their preparedness as low to moderate, and 45.5% rated their preparedness as good. This indicates a significant gap in confidence and readiness to tackle racism effectively.

Survey findings also highlighted disparities in the training received by individuals. When asked about their training experiences, respondents indicated that they had received training in the following areas:

- **RECONCILIATION: 10 RESPONDENTS (58.8%)**
- **NAVIGATING RACISM AS A BLACK INDIVIDUAL: 3 RESPONDENTS (17.6%)**
- **DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION: 14 RESPONDENTS (82.4%)**
- **ANTI-OPPRESSION: 7 RESPONDENTS (41.2%)**
- **ANTI-RACISM: 10 RESPONDENTS (58.8%)**
- **ANTI-BLACK RACISM: 7 RESPONDENTS (41.2%)**

These statistics show that while diversity, equity, and inclusion training is relatively common, training specifically tailored to navigating racism as a Black individual is less prevalent. This lack of targeted training contributes to the broader issues of preparedness and confidence in addressing racism.

Some interviewees problematized the expectation that Black people should carry the burden of addressing racism when they are, in fact, the victims dealing with the impacts of oppression. Furthermore, many individuals feel a sense of powerlessness when confronting racism on a personal level. Despite having personal strategies to cope with or

navigate these situations, they recognize that individual actions alone cannot eradicate systemic racism. The inability to influence the deeply ingrained biases and reactions of others, particularly in environments where racism persists, contributes to a sense of frustration and ineffectiveness.

Differences in cultural communication also present significant barriers. In multicultural workplaces, transferring cultural-specific communication styles can be challenging, especially between Black individuals and non-Black colleagues. Misunderstandings or misinterpretations due to differing cultural perspectives and communication norms can hinder effective dialogue and lead to misunderstandings, making it harder to address underlying issues of racism and to collaborate.

Together, these factors highlight the complexities and barriers individuals face when addressing racism in their professional or personal lives. They underscore the need for systemic changes and supportive environments that empower individuals to address racism effectively without fear of reprisal or marginalization.

The existence of various informal support systems and community initiatives, strengthens the planners' ability to continue to confront significant challenges that stem from systemic racism and a lack of institutional backing. The diversity of support mechanisms mentioned—ranging from grassroots organizations and volunteer activities to Employee Resource Groups and mental health programs—highlights both the resilience of Black planners and the inadequacies of existing structures to meet their specific needs.

Workplaces often fail to offer tailored support that addresses the unique experiences of Black planners. This shortfall is evident in the reliance on self-created communities and external organizations, as opposed to formal workplace initiatives. The necessity for Black planners to seek support outside their professional environments indicates a significant gap in employer-provided resources. This gap not only fosters challenges faced in the work environment but also places an additional burden on Black planners to find and create supportive networks independently. The importance of tailored support is further emphasized by the pressing need for mental health resources. Without accessible and culturally sensitive mental health services, Black planners are left to navigate the stress and isolation of their professional lives without adequate support.

To address these issues, it is crucial to leverage institutions that specialize in researching racism and developing technical solutions for support. Such institutions can provide evidence-based strategies and frameworks to help organizations create more inclusive and supportive environments. By incorporating research-driven ideas, workplaces can move beyond superficial diversity initiatives to implement meaningful changes that genuinely support Black planners.

In summary, the main challenges related to identifying and addressing racism include:

- **Risk of Career Damage/Retaliation:** Potential negative consequences or backlash an individual may face when addressing or challenging instances of racism in their environment.
- **Individual Powerlessness to Address Racism:** Feeling incapable of effecting change against racism on a personal level.
- **Cultural Communication Differences:** Difficulties or barriers encountered when transferring cultural-specific communication styles.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including comprehensive and targeted training, systemic changes within organizations, and fostering supportive environments where individuals feel safe to advocate for change. The next section will delve into individual coping mechanisms and collective strategies that individuals and their communities apply, providing insights and practical approaches on how to navigate these challenges.



INDIVIDUAL COPING MECHANISMS/STRATEGIES

In the interviews conducted, respondents identified a variety of individual coping mechanisms and strategies to navigate and counteract anti-Black racism in the workplace. These strategies can be broadly categorized into three groups: Self-affirmation strategies, Self-advocacy strategies, and Self-care strategies. Each category represents a different approach to handling the challenges posed by racism and highlights the resilience and adaptability of individuals in confronting systemic issues.

Self-affirmation strategies involve using experiences of racism as a source of motivation and determination. Rather than succumbing to the negative impacts of discrimination, individuals leverage these experiences to fuel their drive for personal and professional success. This approach underscores the resilience of Black professionals, transforming adverse experiences into catalysts for growth and achievement. For example, respondents noted that encountering racism often strengthens their resolve to excel and advocate for positive change within their organizations.

When self-affirmation alone is insufficient to overcome workplace barriers, self-advocacy becomes essential. This strategy involves actively speaking up for oneself and asserting one's rights in the workplace. Understanding human rights and employment policies is crucial for effective self-advocacy. One respondent highlighted the importance of being well-informed about these policies:

“KNOWING HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF, HAVING KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN RIGHTS RULES AND HIRING POLICIES BECOMES VERY IMPORTANT. IT ALLOWS YOU TO SAY, ‘HEY, THIS

DOESN'T MEET SUCH AND SUCH POLICY. I AM NOT PREPARED TO CONTINUE WORKING WITH THIS.”

By advocating for themselves, individuals can set clear boundaries on acceptable behavior and hold their employers accountable to established standards and policies. This proactive approach empowers individuals to challenge discriminatory practices and seek equitable treatment.

Self-care strategies focus on maintaining a healthy balance between professional responsibilities and personal well-being. These strategies involve consciously setting boundaries to ensure that work-related stress does not overwhelm personal life. Respondents emphasized the importance of work-life balance and the need to engage in activities that foster a sense of community and fulfillment outside of work. One respondent shared their perspective:

“MY DAY JOB IS DEFINITELY NOT ENOUGH FOR ME, AND IT DOESN'T MAKE ME FEEL CONNECTED TO THE COMMUNITY. SO I WANNA MAKE SURE I HAVE SPACE AND OPPORTUNITY FOR THIS STUFF. SO THERE IS THAT BALANCE OF LIKE, OH, HOW DO YOU DO EVERYTHING? AND THEN HOW DO YOU TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF?”

Additionally, many respondents seek therapy or counseling services from mental health professionals who share similar racial or cultural backgrounds. This approach helps individuals process their experiences in a supportive environment and develop strategies to manage stress and maintain mental health.



COLLECTIVE STRATEGIES

When asked about the communities that personally support the interviewees, more than 50% mentioned their friends and families as their primary source of support. Participants also mentioned a range of alternative collective and community-based supports, from grassroots organizations and volunteer activities to Employee Resource Groups and community projects centering on Black experiences. These sources of support offer valuable networks and safe spaces where individuals can connect with others who share similar backgrounds and challenges.

One interviewee shared their experience of actively creating communities that resonate with their identity and experiences. They stated:

“I HAVE CREATED MY OWN COMMUNITIES THROUGH VARIOUS PROJECTS THAT CENTER AGAIN, BLACK PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES, SPECIFICALLY BLACK WOMEN AND BLACK GENDER-DIVERSE AND TRANS PEOPLE. AND THROUGH THERE I’VE ALSO BEEN ABLE TO MEET WITH FOLKS AND BUILD COMMUNITY WITH FOLKS WHO ARE SUPPORTIVE.”

This underscores the proactive efforts required to build supportive networks, particularly when existing systems fall short.

Another participant described the formation and impact of a grassroots organization, highlighting its role in connecting people through shared cultural and social interests:

“THE FIRST ONE IS A GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION THAT WAS KIND OF FORMED WITH ACADEMICS – LIKE PROFESSORS AND STUDENTS FROM UOFT [UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO] – AND IT BECAME THE CARIBBEAN SOLIDARITY NETWORK. AND IT WAS A GATHERING SPACE WHERE, YOU KNOW, WE TALKED ABOUT SOCIAL ISSUES HAPPENING IN THE CARIBBEAN AND HOW IT RELATES TO OUR REAL LIFE BECAUSE I THINK THE CARIBBEAN DIASPORA IN PARTICULAR, ARE REALLY INTERCONNECTED.”

This example illustrates how academic and cultural intersections can create strong, supportive communities that address both personal and collective issues.

Additionally, the diversity of community groups was emphasized by another interviewee who noted the variety of support groups available:

“SO LIKE, THERE’S A QUEER GROUP, THERE’S A MUSLIM GROUP, THERE’S LIKE ALL KINDS OF DIFFERENT GROUPS LIKE A CARETAKER GROUP. I THINK THAT’S REALLY HELPFUL AS WELL, BECAUSE WE DISCUSS, LIKE EVERYTHING FROM LIKE GOOD FOOD, MOVIES, MUSIC, TO LIKE, YOU KNOW, THE CHALLENGES THAT WE’RE FACING AND IT’S A GOOD SUPPORT TO KNOW THAT WE’RE NOT ALONE, ESPECIALLY SINCE MUNICIPAL ENVIRONMENTS ARE VERY, VERY DIFFERENT THAN A LOT OF OTHER ENVIRONMENTS.”

This quote highlights the multifaceted nature of collective support, where cultural, social, and professional needs intersect, providing a holistic support system.

However, these alternatives highlight the gaps in formal, institutional support systems specifically designed for Black planners. Many of these initiatives are self-created or rely heavily on community efforts rather than institutional backing. This situation underscores the necessity for organizations and municipalities to implement dedicated support structures that address the unique experiences and needs of Black planners. Participants noted the importance of accessible and robust mental health programs, like those provided by Generation Chosen, which offer therapy specifically tailored for Black youth. Yet, such programs are exceptions rather than the norm, leaving many without the mental health resources they need to thrive in their professional and personal lives. This lack of mental health support exacerbates the stress and isolation often experienced by Black planners, further underscoring the need for comprehensive, inclusive, and culturally sensitive support systems.

Interviewees were also asked about how the communities that they mentioned helped them. They illustrated with examples that demonstrated validation, listening, advice, reassurance, acknowledgment, emotional support, sense of connection, strengthening connection to cultural background related to ancestry or cultural heritage, taking active interest and curiosity about their career, and providing a means of disconnecting from work:

“EVEN JUST HAVING THEM [MY FRIENDS], AS SOMEONE I CAN VENT TO OR TO VALIDATE, YOU KNOW, SOMETHING WHERE I’M LIKE, ‘OH, WAS THAT ACTUALLY PROBLEMATIC OR RACIST?’ LIKE JUST HAVING PEOPLE BE LIKE, ‘YES, THAT WAS DEFINITELY A PROBLEMATIC OR RACIST THING THAT HAPPENED TO YOU, YOU ARE NOT CRAZY.’”

This example shows how crucial it is to have friends who can validate one's experiences and affirm their feelings, thus providing emotional support and reducing feelings of isolation. This idea occurred frequently in interviews, with one interviewee explaining that their friends help by

"MAYBE EVEN SOMETIMES GIVING YOU ADVICE, BUT LIKE MOSTLY JUST LISTENING TO YOU, YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE TO SAY ANYTHING, BECAUSE SOMETIMES YOU ARE IN A PREDICAMENT THAT'S KIND OF HARD TO NAVIGATE, AND THEY MAY NOT HAVE ADVICE FOR YOU, BUT JUST FEELING LIKE YOU'RE BEING HEARD IN THAT MOMENT HELPS."

This quote illustrates the importance of having a support system that listens and provides a safe space for expressing concerns, which is essential for mental well-being.

Collective supports such as Generation Chosen, Caribbean Solidarity Network, and Employee Resource Groups serve as exemplary communities that provide essential support to Black professionals. These examples illustrate the profound impact that such communities can have in fostering resilience and offering a buffer against the pervasive effects of racism. In workplaces, it is imperative to emphasize the critical importance of establishing and expanding these supportive communities, to effectively support Black planners in the face of systemic injustice.





Conclusion

The narratives of Black planners illuminate anti-Black racism as a critical and multifaceted obstacle in their professional journeys. This racism manifests both subtly and overtly, affecting not only the individual planners but also the wider profession. If unaddressed, the profession risks losing valuable talent, exacerbating the existing mistrust Black planners bear towards the planning associations meant to support and advocate for them. Thus, the Black Planners Project (BPP) initiated this groundbreaking study, acknowledging the necessity for action and dialogue in tackling these pervasive issues.

Urgent action is crucial; this report, while outlining BPP's role, extends a broader call to action. Employers and planning organizations are urged to consider the findings seriously and develop their own strategies to combat anti-Black racism in planning. A targeted approach is vital to not only improving workplace experiences, opportunities, and support for Black planners but also fostering a sense of belonging—making Black planners feel genuinely included and valued.

To mitigate the challenges faced by Black planners, tailored support systems that address the nuances of racism are indispensable. Beyond the resilience exhibited through self-initiated communities and external support, there is a profound need for formalized, employer-provided resources. Specifically, there is an acute need for accessible mental health services that are culturally sensitive, pointing to a broader requirement for inclusive and supportive professional environments.

Ultimately, leveraging specialized institutions to obtain technical solutions and research-driven strategies is crucial in developing frameworks that allow for meaningful changes within the planning profession. This not only benefits Black planners but enriches the profession as a whole, ensuring a more inclusive, supportive, and equitable field. In doing so, the profession can begin to heal from the impacts of anti-Black racism and move towards a future where Black planners not only know they belong but feel it profoundly.

Recommendations for the Planning Profession

In the face of systemic anti-Black racism, a collective effort spanning various sectors and professions is essential for cultivating a more inclusive and equitable environment. Recommendations aimed at addressing these challenges must be tailored to the specific dynamics and responsibilities of different groups, including Black professionals, non-Black professionals, employers, professional organizations, and researchers.

For Black professionals, the journey involves a continuous process of learning and self-awareness to recognize and counteract systemic racism and power dynamics within their respective fields. Sharing this knowledge within their communities can help build a network of mutual support and resilience. Practicing self-empathy and engaging in supportive networks such as storytelling circles can foster understanding and solidarity. It's also crucial for Black professionals to prioritize self-care, seeking out culturally sensitive mental health supports and establishing personal safety and boundaries in the workplace. Embracing one's authentic self and leveraging one's cultural wealth as a professional asset can be empowering, as can advocating for one's needs and rights to prompt organizations to implement systemic changes.

On the other hand, non-Black professionals have a responsibility to engage in unconscious bias training and educate themselves about anti-Black racism and its impacts continuously. Building empathy through active listening and expanding personal and professional circles to include diverse perspectives, particularly those of Black colleagues, is crucial. Non-Black professionals should actively support and advocate for mental health resources, culturally appropriate supports, and the formation of peer ally networks. They should also strive to create safe spaces, practice appropriate allyship, and use their privilege to advocate for the empowerment of Black professionals.

Employers play a pivotal role in combating anti-Black racism by implementing comprehensive unconscious bias training, recognizing and addressing instances of racism, and fostering

a culture of empathy and support through shared storytelling and listening. Providing access to tailored mental health supports, encouraging self-care, and ensuring a supportive workplace culture are paramount. Moreover, revising HR practices to prioritize safety, establishing mentorship programs, and promoting a healthy work-life balance are essential measures. Employers should also focus on leadership development, specifically targeting the upliftment of Black and racialized employees, and commit to establishing an anti-racist work culture that is transparent and accountable.

Professional organizations can contribute by offering educational resources on systemic racism, hosting workshops to address power structures, and developing certification programs focused on equity and inclusion. These organizations can foster a supportive professional community through storytelling events and training in active listening and empathy. They should also advocate for industry-wide reforms in HR practices, promote the creation of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), and recognize the achievements of Black and racialized professionals. Leading by example, professional organizations should advocate for authenticity and diversity beyond mere representation and support the establishment of anti-racist work cultures across the industry.

Lastly, researchers in the field should employ interdisciplinary approaches and participatory research methods to explore systemic racism, ensuring that data collection and analysis are sensitive to the nuances of racial equity. Emphasizing trauma-informed and ethical practices, recognizing the contributions of Black scholars, and engaging in community-driven research are all vital steps. Additionally, policy-oriented research, public dissemination of knowledge, and advocacy for institutional changes are crucial for moving the profession forward and promoting systemic change. By taking a cohesive, collaborative approach to combating anti-Black racism, each group can contribute to a more inclusive, equitable, and respectful professional environment. This collective effort is not only necessary for fostering positive change but also essential for ensuring that all individuals have the opportunity to thrive without the barriers imposed by systemic racism.



Recommendations for Programming

Interviewees expressed a range of critical interests and needs for tools and training they would like to learn in the workshop setting. Survey respondents choosing a focus for the workshop selected *Navigating Racism in the Workplace* as a prominent preference, with 88% of survey respondents indicating interest in developing tools in that area. This theme was mirrored in the interviews, with 57% of interviewees directly mentioning it in their responses. Interview participants highlighted the critical importance of confronting internalized racism by addressing personal biases and beliefs that perpetuate discrimination within marginalized groups. They also expressed a strong interest in developing tools to navigate the risks associated with addressing racism, particularly concerns about potential retaliation. Healing from racial trauma and discrimination emerged as another essential focus, with the workshop aiming to provide emotional and psychological support. This need also emerged prominently in survey data, with 50% of respondents indicating mental health training as a crucial area for learning.

Building connections and fostering community among participants were highlighted as crucial for creating solidarity and mutual support networks. Participants stressed the value of creating a space where vulnerability is encouraged, allowing them to openly share their experiences and emotions related to racism. The African concept of Ubuntu, emphasizing interconnectedness and empathy, was mentioned as a potential guiding principle for building this community of understanding and solidarity.

Incorporating diverse cultural practices and unconventional methods for coping with racism was seen as enriching and validating participants' diverse experiences. Encouraging pride in cultural backgrounds and identities was identified as a strength in combating racism and promoting self-empowerment. Addressing imposter syndrome, particularly in the context of racial identity, was recognized as vital for participants to overcome self-doubt and fully embrace their professional capabilities. Equipping participants with strategies for self-care and resilience in navigating racism and its effects was highlighted as essential for maintaining well-being.

Effective communication practices and strategies for navigating potential backlash or retaliation for addressing racism were emphasized to ensure participants could advocate effectively while preserving their safety. Additionally, career-building strategies specific to Black planners were valued for addressing systemic barriers and promoting

professional advancement. Interviewees also mentioned the need for practical tools and frameworks for evaluating and addressing racism in personal and professional contexts, including promoting empathy, understanding different minority experiences, and fostering an anti-racist workplace culture through systemic change and policy implementation.

When asked about specific activities they would like to see in an anti-Black racism workshop, participants suggested several key elements. They emphasized the importance of providing a platform for sharing personal experiences and stories related to racism, as this would foster understanding and empathy among participants. Creating systems of personal accountability was another activity mentioned, with an aim at encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their actions and behaviors in perpetuating or challenging racism. Additionally, participants recommended incorporating role-playing exercises to simulate real-life scenarios of racial discrimination, allowing them to explore and practice effective responses. These activities collectively aim to create a supportive environment where individuals can openly discuss their experiences, reflect on their personal contributions to systemic racism, and develop practical skills to address racism in their daily lives.

When discussing their preferences for support and structure in the workshop, participants expressed several key wishes. 31.6% of survey respondents showed interest in small group activities to foster interpersonal connections, with interviewees highlighting the value of discussing practical experiences, and applying knowledge gained from training or lectures. Those in favor of listening sessions (42.1% of survey respondents) have highlighted the value of personal storytelling and the complementary nature of the two formats. Some have proposed shorter listening sessions with a greater focus on small group activities during the workshop. Some interviewees stressed the importance of designing content and activities that are inclusive and sensitive to the perspectives and experiences of marginalized communities, ensuring that all participants feel represented and valued. Providing structured opportunities for participants to process emotions, insights, and learnings throughout the workshop was also highlighted as essential for fostering a supportive environment. Participants also emphasized the need for workshop content and examples to be relevant and inclusive of diverse regional contexts beyond the Toronto area. They also recommended collaborating with major organizations such as OPPI and CIP in the planning and

delivery of the workshop to enhance its impact and reach. Moreover, participants expressed a desire for tailored tools and modules that accommodate the specific needs and capacities of organizations of varying sizes, ensuring practical relevance and applicability across different settings. These considerations aim to ensure that the workshop not only addresses systemic racism effectively but also supports meaningful engagement and sustainable change within diverse organizational and geographical contexts.

Participants have expressed varied opinions about the workshop format, whether online or in-person, citing both benefits and drawbacks. Some have recommended a hybrid approach, allowing individuals to select the most suitable option, while others have advocated for an online format due to the ability to turn off the camera during sensitive discussions, the potential for nationwide networking, and the

cost-effectiveness. This theme is also emergent in survey findings, with 73.7% of respondents indicating a preference for online training. However, those in favor of an in-person format have emphasized the advantages of being fully engaged throughout the event. Additionally, some have suggested an online format on weekdays to accommodate parenting obligations and an in-person format on weekends. The survey also assessed when participants would most likely be available for a workshop, with the majority (63.2%) preferring weekday evenings.

The Black Planning Project will carefully consider these insights as it designs a new series of workshops, aiming to tailor content and format to meet the specific needs and challenges articulated by Black planners themselves, and urges other organizations to do the same.



Future Research

The research conducted for this report highlights a critical aspect of discrimination beyond anti-Black racism in the field of urban planning. While discussing their experiences with racism and barriers to fully dedicating themselves to their profession, participants also shared experiences with other intersecting forms of oppression, revealing a complex web of challenges that intersect with racial bias that warrants further study.

For example, one participant highlighted experiencing ageism and fatphobia during their post-secondary planning program, shedding light on the compounded challenges that extend beyond racial discrimination. This underscores how biases related to age and body size can limit academic success, affecting overall career trajectories.

Moreover, several planners disclosed struggles with intraracial violence, including misogyny, homophobia, and xenophobia, which they encountered within the very communities they seek to serve professionally. These experiences reveal the intricate and multifaceted nature of discrimination, where biases within one's own racial or ethnic group can undermine professional development and workplace inclusivity. Furthermore, one planner noted that their sexual identity posed significant barriers to accessing culturally relevant support services tailored for the Black community, further complicating their professional journey. This highlights how intersectional identities can create unique challenges that impact not only access to resources but also one's sense of belonging and well-being within the planning profession.

Economic challenges also emerged as a critical barrier, with several interviewees highlighting the need to work while attending school. This financial strain can hinder academic and professional advancement, indicating the significant role socio-economic status plays in shaping career trajectories. One participant shared that she faced discrimination from faculty during her master's program because she had to work while pursuing her studies, affecting her ability to access vital learning and networking opportunities.

Given these findings, it is imperative to conduct further research to fully understand the breadth of discrimination faced by Black planning professionals. An intersectional analysis (Crenshaw, 1994)³³ of a variety of oppressions and the findings of this report, demonstrate that discrimination based on facets of identity not only affects one's well-being but also impacts educational and professional success. This makes clear that it is relevant to develop more research relating different types of oppression, their intersection and impact towards different social groups and identities. Such research should explore the intersectionality of race, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and other identity facets to develop comprehensive strategies that address the diverse challenges within the planning profession. Intersectional research is crucial in uncovering the nuanced and compounded forms of discrimination that Black planning professionals face. Only through a holistic understanding of these intersecting oppressions can effective and inclusive solutions be devised to support all planners in their professional endeavors.



MENTAL
HEALTH
MATTERS

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