

## **A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Racialized Internationally Trained Non-Academic Staff in Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions**

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### **Purpose of the Study**

An increasing number of Internationally Trained Professionals (ITPs) are entering the Canadian workforce, prompting various levels of government across the country to develop policies aimed at supporting the successful hiring, placement, and flourishing of all ITPs. These include *Bill 98: Fairness for Ontario's Internationally Trained Workers Act* (Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2022), and the Canada Foreign Credential Recognition Program (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2021). Despite these important initiatives, the struggles of integration that ITPs experience remain unaddressed, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of recruitment and transition programs for ITPs.

ITPs provide substantial educational assistance to the progressively growing number of international students (Deters, 2015; Schmidt & Block, 2010; Schmidt et al., 2010), and play a vital part in educating both international and domestic students to fit into the evolving school system. Although numerous studies have examined the experiences and challenges of internationally trained faculty (Ball & Tyson, 2011; Banks, 2015; Henry et al., 2017; Schmidt, 2015; Schmidt & Block, 2010), little research has focused on the experiences of non-academic staff in Canadian institutions, despite the growing number of ITPs in these equally essential roles.

In a 2007 equity review, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) noted that many equity-seeking groups remain seriously underrepresented in Canadian post-secondary institutions. The lack of consistent and reliable data about equity makes it very difficult for policymakers, administrators, and academic staff associations to determine the full extent of the problem and develop the most effective and appropriate tools to ensure equity. Daniel (2019) claimed that the experiences of racialized faculty members are continually under-theorized, marginalized, and frequently erased with stereotypes.

If the experiences of racialized faculty members are continually under-theorized and marginalized, then the experiences of racialized non-academic staff, a group that has received even less attention, are even more neglected. As a result, the need to explore the experiences of racialized non-academic staff became evident. Therefore, this study offers insights into the experiences of racialized ITPs and serves as a catalyst for further research into the experiences of all non-academic professionals in Canadian post-secondary institutions, not just racialized ITPs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study employs Yosso's (2005) Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) as a theoretical framework to comprehend and describe the narrated experiences of racialized ITPs in academia. Yosso (2005) developed this approach by critiquing and challenging the assumptions of Bourdieuan cultural capital theory (Bourdieu et al., 1977). Academic research has historically relied on traditional conceptualizations of cultural capital concerning social reproduction, prompting scholars to question whose knowledge counts or is discounted within academia (Bernal, 1998; 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000;). CCW emphasizes that all communities have

significant and unique cultural capital, in contrast to Bourdieu's model of cultural capital, which maintains the idea that the cultural capital of one social class is more valuable than the cultural capital of other classes. Yosso (2005) defined CCW as “an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of colour to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression” (p. 77).

Yosso (2005) identified six types of cultural wealth nurtured by marginalised individuals to resist oppression. The six types of cultural wealth are aspirational, linguistic, family, social, navigational, and resistance capital. Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real or perceived social and structural barriers. Linguistic capital includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language or style. Familial capital refers to the cultural knowledge nurtured among kin that carries a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition. Social capital refers to the individual and communal network within the sphere of influence of marginalized individuals. Navigational capital refers to skills of manoeuvring through social institutions, inclusive of educational institutions. Lastly, resistant capital refers to those knowledge and skills fostered through oppositional behaviour that challenges inequality to secure equal rights and freedom. Therefore, these classifications of capital can be considered positive coping mechanisms employed by racialized individuals since their cultural wealth is not often recognized or valued.

### **Research Method and Data Sources**

A narrative inquiry methodology was used in this study to better understand the experiences of racialized ITPs in Canadian academia. Clandinin and Huber (2010) defined narrative inquiry as a way of understanding experience, and “an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honouring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (p. 437). Participants had worked as support staff at a post-secondary institution for at least one year, identified as a member of any racialized group, and had finished their first post-secondary degree outside of North America or Europe. Three support staff were recruited for the study using a combination of probability (simple random) and non-probability (purposive and snowball) sampling techniques. Each participant participated in a single informal semi-structured interview lasting between sixty and ninety minutes. The qualitative data obtained from these interviews was analysed using thematic analysis. With each participant’s permission, the interviews were recorded, and all participant names were replaced with pseudonyms.

### **Results**

The narratives of racialized ITPs in this study highlighted a range of unique experiences. Four recurring themes emerged: foreign credential recognition (FCR), inconsistent institutional structure and responsibilities, lack of support, and language and cultural barriers. FCR is a major impediment to many new immigrants’ successful economic integration in Canada. Participants in this research study initially immigrated to Canada as international students. Their experiences align with the findings of a longitudinal survey conducted by Schellenberg and Maheux (2007), which revealed that 62% of newly arrived Canadian immigrants aged 25–44 face job search difficulties during their first four years in Canada. Edna, a participant in this study, expressed that racialized ITPs require more education and professional experience than non-racialized professionals to secure comparable jobs. Similarly, Park, another participant suggested that the

success and integration of racialized ITPs would be better facilitated by placing less emphasis on Canadian professional experience and degrees. Despite the challenges of FCR, the determination to persevere and succeed can be linked to their aspirational capital, driving them to realise their career hopes and dreams.

Henry et al. (2017) identified a lack of institutional support for racialized and Indigenous professionals in Canadian academia, forcing them to navigate narrow spaces, blindness, silences, and tokenism. As a result, these professionals must develop coping mechanisms to manage feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and alienation. Racialized faculty members gain some acknowledgement for their contributions to equity, diversity, and inclusion committees or working groups during tenure evaluations. However, Edna has experienced that the efforts of racialized support staff on similar committees are largely overlooked when it comes to promotions. She further explained that non-academic staff often serve more than just the student population. She recounted an experience where a janitor visited her office seeking career advice because she was having difficulty with her superior at the private company contracted for cleaning and did not know who to turn to for help. Park and Victoria both shared their dissatisfaction with non-academic staff induction programs, or the lack thereof since neither got any formal induction beyond an initial meeting with a hiring and human resource manager to learn about the academic institution. Participants acknowledged developing ties within academia who encourage and recommend ways for staying focused when feeling overwhelmed or frustrated, exhibiting navigational and social capital.

The structure of post-secondary institutions has a significant impact on how colleagues form both academic and social relationships. As a result of underrepresentation, academia can sometimes be a very lonely place for many racialized ITPs looking to make new connections at the university and in the city where they now work and call home. Edna has experienced that racialized professionals are often not easily trusted, and she frequently must depend on the authority of her superiors to gain recognition or credibility in her role, making it challenging to fulfil her responsibilities. Similarly, Park has often been assigned tasks outside her job description, particularly during peak periods. While she takes on these additional responsibilities to ensure student success, she acknowledges the need to establish stronger boundaries to prevent becoming overwhelmed by the increased workload. Social and resistance capital are often employed as racialized ITPs navigate Canadian institutions.

Anwar-Travas (2018) notes that adapting to socially accepted behaviours, such as specific expressions and body language, represents an additional challenge for immigrants. As a racialized ITP, Park said, “It can be difficult to feel like a member of the team due to language and cultural differences”, making it challenging to build a social network at work. She noticed that she often keeps her opinions or views about sensitive topics to herself because she is unsure how they will be received. Consequently, she stressed the importance of racialized ITPs and their domestic counterparts showing mutual respect and taking the time to learn about each other's cultures. Edna noted that racialized ITPs often reside in “silos” or communities, limiting their social interactions with people from other nationalities and locals, which can lead to missed opportunities. She also pointed out the unconscious linguistic bias she faced, stating, “I do not regard it as a compliment when people say I speak good English”. Linguistic and navigational capital are essential for racialized ITPs to communicate effectively and adapt to the socially acceptable behaviours of their host countries.

### **Importance of the Study**

## A Narrative Inquiry

All support staff are professional employees who contribute significantly to the success of post-secondary institutions as they bring an important repertoire of professional skills and experience to collaborate with faculty and administration to realize institutional goals. The real and perceived challenges that racialized ITPs face provide them with the opportunity to utilize their rich cultural wealth. Despite efforts to support the successful hiring, placement, and flourishing of ITPs entering the Canadian workforce, including academia, a significant gap exists, particularly because of the lack of race-related data. Lao et al. (2017) contended that mere statistics are insufficient to measure the underrepresentation of racialized and marginalized professionals within academia. Therefore, administrators, faculty, staff, and students should aim to validate and amplify all racialized and marginalized voices, including those of racialized ITPs. This study, therefore, offers a platform for validating and amplifying the voices and experiences of racialized internationally trained non-academic staff, a phenomenon that has received little attention until now.

### **Conclusion**

The narratives of participants in this study reflect how they understand and make sense of their lived experiences. According to Oloo (2016), the experiences and challenges presented in narratives are not exhaustive but represent what the individuals choose to share. As samples from a larger population, their stories are not intended to be generalized because narrative inquiry aims to seek understanding and meaning rather than definitive conclusions. Scholars such as Yep (2014) and Yosso (2005) have argued that a cultural wealth pedagogy acknowledges, values, and utilises the diverse forms of capital that racialized individuals bring to the Canadian workforce. These forms of capital are interconnected and form a dynamic process that builds upon one another as part of Community Cultural Wealth. Though significant attention has been given to the experiences and challenges encountered by internationally trained members of faculty, little has been done to explore the experiences of non-academic staff in Canadian post-secondary institutions despite the growing number of racialized ITPs in these equally essential roles. Therefore, this research study aims to act as a catalyst for further exploration into the experiences of all non-academic professionals in Canadian post-secondary institutions, not just racialized ITPs.

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