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Visible minority experience in the Canadian advertising industry: A case study of the racialized minority creative worker

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Visible minority experience in the Canadian advertising industry: A case study of the

racialized minority creative worker

by

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<u>Abstract</u>

Issues of race and representation have gained significant consideration in relation to the creative industries and the structures of power within them. This study examines barriers to entry for racial minority creative workers in the Canadian advertising industry. As racial minorities attempt to enter an atmosphere entrenched in white privilege and power, they are met with an interconnected web of struggles that restrict them from entering spaces of influence in advertising. Drawing on concepts of cultural gatekeeping, racial valuation, shallow diversity, and self-monitoring, data from thirteen qualitative interviews have been analyzed through a narrative approach. Influenced by aspects of critical race theory, the lived experiences of participants inform this analysis and provide a new perspective on the preestablished structures of racial inequity. The findings of this study indicate that racial minority workers face an exponentially different experience than their white counterparts throughout their careers. They are forced to appease their white leadership and configure to the demands of the industry that are rooted within white ideals. The performativity of diversity additionally pushes minorities to be extremely cautious of their behaviour and demonstrate greater professional performance than their white counterparts. Due to racial perceptions of majority groups, people of colour must engage in the identity work of code-switching to assemble a balanced character of colour and whiteness. Ultimately, the systemic organizations of power are reproduced through inequitable practices that regulate the progression of racial minority workers in the Canadian advertising industry. This assists in sustaining the ideologies, values, and culture of majority groups within the advertising industry and the cultural products they produce.

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<u>Introduction</u>

This study investigates the personal experiences of racial minority creative workers in the Canadian advertising industry. The aim of this research is to illustrate the differing experiences that racial minorities face in the industry compared to their white counterparts. While previous studies have helped to establish racially motivated inequitable practices conducted by industry power figures, this study aims to highlight the experiences of minority creative workers on an individual level that will assist in demonstrating the results of those practices. Through the lived experiences of participants, it will be shown that racial minorities face an abundance of barriers throughout their careers that emerge from structures of racial hierarchy and white privilege. These barriers cause limitations to the mobility and progression of racial minorities that deeply influence their allowances in the industry. The lack of diversity that arises from this practice ultimately serves the interests of white majority groups who are then permitted to continue their reign of power and influence over advertising and its production process. The findings of this study suggest that normative whiteness is a structure of power in Canada that reproduces itself in the creative industries, such that minority creative workers are subject to racialized inequity in the workplace.

This study reveals a number of gaps in the current scholarship surrounding race in the creative industries. Previous literature has made many contributions to addressing racial issues in the creative industries as a whole. Many studies have focused on industries such as film and television due to the greater visibility of these arenas (Erigha, 2018; Erigha, 2019; Idriss, 2016; Stein, 2019). This study focuses its analysis on the advertising industry due to its position as an instrument of socialization and for its influence over cultural notions of identity and belonging (Boulton, 2012). The limited research that has been conducted on the advertising industry in relation to race has mainly focused on the industries of the United States of America or other

global countries. This project is situated within the Canadian advertising industry due to a lack of research on this area.

The Advertising Industry

The creative industries are a heavily populated sector of the workforce that produces and disseminates powerfully influential media. The advertising industry is a particular segment of this area that has a significant impact on societal norms and representations through its content. Advertising is much more than a profit-making tool that companies use to increase their sales. There is a distinction to advertising that involves its privilege as a storyteller and modifier of commonly circulated discourses. The power of this industry lies in its ability to create and disseminate media that carries meanings representative of society. Advertising offers an ideological influence on social mores and cultural practices while reflecting an idealistic society. When an industry has such power over its consumers, it may easily impact cultural notions of identity and belonging through its messaging and imagery (Boulton, 2012). The persuasive grasp advertising has upon society solicits an exploration into how this type of media affects perceptions of race and racial minorities.

All creative work is a reflection of its creators and their capabilities. The allowances of advertisers produce power that supports the shaping of cultural norms and social behaviour. The demographic profile of creators, therefore, is vital in producing advertising that is reflective of the currently diverse landscape of consumers. The racial background, cultural experiences, and creative knowledge of creative workers greatly affect the representations of racial identities that reach mass audiences (Ambwani, Heslop, & Dyke, 2011; Wonkeryor, 2015). When there is a lack of diversity behind the scenes, there will be a subsequent lack of diversity in mass-produced content continuing the chain of underrepresentation and misrepresentation (Erigha, 2015).

Diversity then becomes a central component of the advertising industry as it impacts the representations and discourses surrounding race. The employment of diversity is essential "…to portray accurate images of diverse ethnicities, to encourage a culture of tolerance and respect for diversity, and…to enable [successful] multicultural marketing efforts…" (Wonkeryor, 2015, p. 15). When a staff is diverse in an intersectional way, there is a more effective uniting of the multiplicity of cultural identities, perspectives, and experiences which not only improves cultural products but also help to create a better workplace (Stein, 2019). The demographic variability of workers allows for a greater opportunity to draw from multiple areas of knowledge and expertise (Lynch, 2019). Diversity can be considered an advantage as it creates a means to develop greater innovation, creativity, originality, and importantly, competition (Lente & Saha, 2022a). Through an array of racial backgrounds, advertising companies can gain a competitive edge by utilizing the differing experiences of their employees to create unique advertising.

Unfortunately, racial minorities are under-represented in the advertising industry. Minorities have been routinely excluded from the industry through racially charged systemic practices. In the instances where minorities are included, they must face a plethora of barriers and microaggressions to enter and remain in the industry. The failure of the advertising industry lies in its inability to create spaces of cultural production that effectively embody the experiences and concerns of racialized communities. The marginalization of minorities, therefore, limits the range of visions and opinions heard in the production and distribution of advertising (Hesmondhalgh, & Saha, 2013). While "the advertising industry has been charged with and trusted to reach the influence [of] an increasingly racially diverse populace, [it] lacks credibility given the limited extent to which it has impacted the color line within its own industry" (Appiah

& Saewitz, 2016, p. 92). The centrality of diversity, racial equity, and minority oppression in relation to power in the advertising industry will be the fundamental core of this study.

<u>Literature Review</u>

Issues of race and diversity have often been addressed by scholars in relation to the creative and cultural industries, with a limited focus on the advertising industry. While this study aims to address this gap, this section will explore prior research on the creative industries with the intention of applying this knowledge to the workings of the Canadian advertising industry. The section will begin by placing the advertising industry within its dominant context of whiteness. The core focus of whiteness in the industry is essential to understand as it will provide a basis for the examination of minority creative worker perspectives. This knowledge will help to illustrate the relationship of whiteness to power that is demonstrated through cultural gatekeepers. As a result of the influence power figures hold, the concept of racial valuation emerges as a tactic of justification for inequitable racial practices. Shallow diversity, a concept defined by Anamik Saha (2018), will also be shown to be a central concept in explaining the performative nature of diversity in the industry. The process of maneuvering industry barriers requires racial minorities to engage in identity work that will support their configuration into an acceptable creative worker that holds the values of whiteness while also distinctly showing colour within the permitted bounds. The following literature review will provide an insightful background of racial discourse, value, and power that will create a framework for the analysis of minority creative workers' experiences.

Race & Racism in Canada

It is essential to begin this literature review with an outline of the landscape of race and racism in Canada. This will help to establish a frame of reference for the latter scholarship and

findings of this study. Race and racism are elements of Canada that cannot be ignored. Race is often seen as the center of the nation's multicultural identity. The vital role of race must be addressed, particularly when examining Canada's extensive relationship with racism. With this being said, the racial and ethnic relations of Canada are often not the product of a natural process. Rather than being the result of cultural evolution, they are often seen as the outcome of government actions and policies that reflect differing interests in society (Li, 1990). Racism in Canada can therefore be understood as an issue that is linked to aspects of sexism, the economy, class, and culture. It is something that afflicts an entire society, operating to exclude minority groups from the historical and contemporary landscapes, ultimately rendering them invisible (McKague, 1991).

Canada has secured a long and painful history with racism and racist practises. Through legal action and immigration policies, Canada has been able to enact structures of racism that have influenced the identity of the nation and its people. The ideals of Canadian racism began when settler Europeans came into contact with the Indigenous peoples of the land. The exploitation of race started with the colonization of the Canadian Indigenous population and its accompanying practise of racial discrimination. European explorers were able to subordinate native populations by marking them as an inferior race to their superior, white racial identity (Li, 1990). While the Europeans categorized themselves as civilized, the Indigenous were portrayed as savages who needed to be saved. The assumption was that native individuals were at the lowest point of human development, marking them as inferior to the white settlers (McKague, 1991). From this point on, the dominant ideology was based on colonial domination and the superiority of the white race through which the rest of Canadian history would be defined (Li, 1990). The murder, enslavement, and torture of Natives was by law in the name of 'civilisation'.

In the name of national interest, such actions were given legal sanction and celebrated (Thobani, 2007). Alongside Indigenous groups, many other racial minority groups in Canada have also been subjected to a number of racially motivated actions that have been conducted under this notion. Legal acts such as residential schools, the Indian Act, Chinese Head Tax, and many more are ~~one of the~~ ways that Canada has legitimized racism and perpetuated racial discrimination. For example, the Indian Act of 1876 was a policy that defined the identity and treatment of Aboriginals in Canada. This legislation has initiated and carried forwards processes of colonization through its institutionalized restrictions upon the Canadian Indigenous population. Similarly, ~~the~~ numerous bills passed between 1885 and 1967 by the Canadian government have allowed for the restriction of legal rights of Chinese populations attempting to permanently settle in Canada. Such state policies have not only marginalized racial minority groups by legalizing unequal treatment but have affected the racial perceptions and treatment of other Canadians towards minorities (Herrick & Stuart, 2004; Li, 1990). The legality of these racist practises provides a formal basis for identifying groups as racial or ethnic. They also assist in defining the institutional framework through which race and ethnic relations are constructed (Li, 1990).

Historically, immigration policies have also been a vital aspect of racism and racists practises in Canada. Immigration policies are shown to be one the most significant factors in determining the size and composition of the racial and ethnic communities of Canada (Li, 1990). Until the second world war, Canada's immigration policies were based on ascribed characteristics of prospective immigrants, particularly of race and national origin. Such policies helped to control the quality and character of immigrating populations while also ensuring their ability to assimilate to Canadian culture. The requirements of assimilation reflected a racist discourse that enlisted the racialization of immigrants and required them to meet the standards of

the preconstructed image of a 'good' Canadian citizen. The polices were used as tactics to keep a racial order in place. By subjectively choosing who may or may not immigrate to Canada, the government was able to keep racial minorities out, so they do not become a 'hindrance on the well-being of the Canadian people'. Immigration acts have supported the creation of a structure of citizenship that has produced and sustained a racial social order (Fuji Johnson & Enomoto, 2000). Immigration practises also established a racial hierarchy for immigrants, further restricting the allowances of racial minorities. In the early twentieth century, potential Canadian immigrants were evaluated on a basis of a racialized hierarchy of desirability. Peripheral Europeans were perceived as racially inferior yet still capable of assimilation and cultural change. For other groups, such as the Chinese or the East Indians, they were seen as more racially inferior and deemed as non-white (Bolaria & Hier, 2007). The hierarchy of race became an embedded part of Canadian immigration practises and continues on today in varying ways. Ultimately, the construction of the nation as Euro-Canadian, meaning white, was not a natural or predestined occurrence. This structure is the result of the various actions and policies administrated by a government who sought to eliminate and exclude (Thobani, 2007).

In contemporary visions of Canada, a national imaginary has emerged through an underlying framework of positioning racial minorities as outsiders or Others. The constitution of the national subject involves a particular type of human being that belongs to a particular kind of community. Under these imagined notions, the national subject is vulnerable to the unreasonable and deceptive outsiders. Through this imagery, Indigenous groups are presented as making impossible demands for treatment in their claims for land and human rights while immigrants are made responsible for carrying over their backward cultural practises, diseases, and criminal activity. This is ultimately a technique of power for Canadian elites to reproduce a racial

hierarchy under the concept of modern national formation. The traits of the national character are shown to be the inherent aspects of the members of this community, assuring that only some communities have such traits while others do not. This imagery is part of a lager, master narrative of Canadian nationhood that helps to define who and what belong in the country. The discourses that construct Canada's nationhood are built upon the reproduction and naturalization of the nation as a space of shared history, race and ethnicity, values, characteristics, and aspirations. However, this view is a simplified image of the complex history of racial domination in Canada. In reality, the nationhood of Canada and its nation subject hold rigid criteria for who a Canadian may be. If a racial minority desired to become a nation subject, they must deploy their difference in a controlled and reassuring manner. The individual can exhibit their foreignness but only within the confines of national identity (Thobani, 2007). Part of this nationhood is also the contemporary view of Canada as an inclusive, welcoming, and non-racist country. Through this view, the national subject is able to erase the racist imagery of the past and place blame upon a minority within the white population. These minority groups are identified as the culprits of overt racism in Canada, dispelling the nation of racists actions. The responsibility of past acts of racism are attributed to an old nationalist minority while more recent occurrences are blamed on racist extremists of current times. Through the embrace of multiculturalism, nationals are able to detach themselves of responsibility (McKague, 1991; Thobani, 2007).

Multiculturalism is the tool through which Canadian nationhood is able to build its identity and present itself as a diversified country. It allows Canada to live with the differences of others while claiming that this difference enhances its own cultural superiority. Multiculturalism offers the nation to be imagined as a homogenous country, accepting of all racial identities. Ultimately, Canada's claim of multiculturalism helps to mask the continuity of

white privilege. White subjects are perceived as tolerant and respectful of diversity while non-whites are constructed as monocultural and in need of teachings of tolerance and assimilation to Canadian culture under white supervision. Multiculturalism sustains white privilege by connecting people of colour with an excess of culture, marking them as outsiders to the nation. Through multiculturalism, the national subject remains empowered by placing racial hatred in the past or upon the identified white minority groups. This avoids the intersection of institutional power and interpersonal forms of racism, requiring focus only during interpersonal interactions. By placing an emphasis on white tolerance and cultural diversity, Canadian multiculturalism can discredit claims of inequitable treatment by racial minorities (Thobani, 2007).

Although the goal of multiculturalism is to help racial and ethnic minorities adapt to Canadian life, the nation currently uses it as a performative act to claim their ideals of inclusiveness and diversity. To solve their short-term problem of unification, the government uses multiculturalism as a vessel of integration rather than adaptation. Their aim is to solely integrate individuals into Canadian society. They are not interested in supporting the constructure of social structures that would provide racial and ethnic groups with permanence and organizational strength as this may allow minorities to challenge the interests of other minority groups or of the whole nation. The Canadian government is concerned with providing ethnic and racial minorities a space to express their cultural orientations as long as these actions are aligned with the existing institutionalized social structures. While Canada may be a racially and ethnically diverse country, it does not truly follow a multicultural society due to its commitment to symbolic multiculturalism over institutionalized multiculturalism (Li, 1990).

This brief overview of Canadian racial and ethnic relations illustrates that the nation has inherently linked itself to race and racism in a complex manner. Canada often portrays itself as a

diverse and inclusive land through its claim of multiculturalism as a definitive factor of its

nationhood. However, this view ignores the underlying structure of racism and racists actions

that continue to implicitly occupy the nation and impact its people (Bolaria & Hier, 2007).

Central Whiteness

When discussing racial power in Canada, whiteness overwhelmingly takes a dominant

standing over other racial identities. This consensus is rooted within a deep history that places

whiteness as the norm of society. Taking its position as the normative, whiteness sets the

standard for a variety of situations. Whiteness is considered to be the center of logic through

which all others are defined. People of colour are situated in opposition to whiteness through the

construction of a narrative that describes white people as worthy and connects them to innocence

and goodness (Delgado, Harris, & Stefancic, 2017). This allows white groups to view themselves

as civilized, racially superior, and intelligent. This narrative provides a path of justification for

the immense power and privilege that white individuals enjoy. By contrast, out-groups of colour

are regarded as less than, often even sub-human, and thus undeserving of any social advantages

(Wonkeryor, 2015). White privilege emerges from this discourse and provides white individuals

with certain rewards that accompany their status as the dominant race. This system of privileged

situations works to benefit white people while simultaneously excluding outsiders of colour.

White dominance can be explained through two elements: oppression based on a process of

othering and a system of privilege that serves whiteness. These components come together to

create a structure of power that allows the normativity of whiteness. It is through this

organization that white people are able to expel themselves of the notion of race and simply exist

as people. Their values and beliefs are understood as a universal truth, a normative sense of

knowledge, rather than as coming from a white viewpoint. The denial of race by white people

allows them to reproduce their ideas as truth and demonstrate power in the form of normativity (Delgado, Harris, & Stefancic, 2017) while also framing colour as inferior, different, and other (Erigha, 2019).

The creative industries have been shown to be entrenched within this logic as exhibited by the sea of whiteness that characterizes these industries (Erigha, 2015; Erigha, 2018; Lente & Saha, 2022b; Simon, 2019). Scholars have made specific reference to the advertising industry in relation to the dominance of whiteness (Thomas, 2017). Studies of Black workers in the US advertising industry have shown that over time people of colour continue to represent a minuscule fraction of the advertising industry in comparison to the white population in the same industry (Boulton, 2016). As of 2021, only three out of every ten employees in the US advertising industry identify as any sort of minority (Craft, 2022). Eikhof and Warhust (2013) show that part of the reason for this occurrence may lie in the capabilities of accumulating social and economic capital among racial divides. Those with affluent parents are often the ones who gain access to the industry as opportunities are more readily available to them. When individuals have reduced financial burdens, they can more easily afford to participate in unpaid internships that allow them to gain access to the industry early in their professional careers. Those with less affluent parents may not have the ability to engage in such opportunities due to a lack of economic capital, thus missing out on potential points of entry to the industry. When examining this over racial lines, wealth has historically been held by the white middle class, placing racial minority groups at a predisposed disadvantage. Social capital is another aspect that remains central to entering the industry. In their continued grasp of power positions, white middle-class groups gain the ability to enrich their social capital through community connections and insider networking. These factors grant the possibility for future generations to use these connections to

propel themselves more easily into the creative industries. On the opposing side of this, racial minorities lack access to this type of social capital and often feel excluded from this 'contact culture' (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013). This dynamic provides allowances for white groups to create spaces of insider membership (Erigha, 2015). While these elements create an open gateway for white majority groups, they simultaneously create a journey riddled with barriers for racial minority groups. Conclusively, a white middle-class monoculture emerges (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013) that authorizes a cycle of inequity to continuously advance while reproducing white control over the creative industries.

The whiteness that dominates the creative industries has been a constant source of issues for racial minorities. White middle-class males continue to be the organizing principle of the industries, characterizing their very structure (Nwonka, 2021). As demonstrated in Euro North American society, whiteness holds the status of being the industry norm. As white figures wield their power over the industry, they continue to maintain a structure of inequality by marking people of colour as outsiders who must gain their attention for the possibility of being seen (Nwonka, 2021). Whiteness is positioned as the frame through which creative workers of colour may seek validation of self-value (Saha, 2018). This normative lens can be explained as a Eurocentric worldview that is situated as an industry common sense (Lente & Saha, 2022b). Acting as a neutral canvas of the advertising industry, whiteness is easily homogenized while colour visibly stands out (Boulton, 2015). Creative workers of colour are consequently forced to engage in work to meet these industry standards and adjust to the norm. While this fact occurs, it is also important to note that the institutional whiteness of the industry is sustained only through the ability to mark out racial minorities (Saha, 2018). By identifying people of colour as

outsiders, whiteness carries the ability to ensure its dominance by maintaining its status as the normative organization through which everything should be viewed.

Cultural Gatekeepers

Cultural gatekeepers, also known as cultural intermediaries, are central players in the creative industries. At every point of the creative process, cultural gatekeepers hold power and influence over what can be created, what is created, how it is created, and who is involved in the process. Through their daily discourse, cultural gatekeepers construct ideas and thoughts that link race to judgments of value and performance, ultimately shaping the process of construction and distribution of cultural products. Importantly, they are considered to be gatekeepers as a result of the power they hold over decision-making processes. By choosing what cultural products and people survive through this system they can promote some individuals while excluding others. Gatekeeping is exercised through the construction of imagined audiences and ideas surrounding the right 'fit' (Erigha, 2020). Inequality thus emerges from the choices of cultural gatekeepers that are ingrained within racial hierarchies and white privilege.

A central topic of the literature surrounding racial issues in the creative industries is the importance of power. To understand the racial profile of the advertising industry, it is first vital to examine the politics of power at play. There must be an understanding of who carries power versus who does not and how this allows control to certain individuals over others. An analysis of power must acknowledge the complex relations between economic, political, and sociocultural factors that influence the discourses and practices that fuel power (Hesmondhalgh, & Saha, 2013). As shown above, white groups have a dominant standing within the creative industries. The normative frame of whiteness has allowed white groups to disproportionately monopolize the industry. This dominance has allowed white individuals to gain control over

decision-making roles granting them significant influence over who gets ahead, who gets promoted, and who may reach higher levels of success (Erigha, 2018). This also creates a system of white privilege in which resources and opportunities are distributed along racial lines (Erigha, 2019). The choices of decision-makers are influenced by their values which often occur to be in alignment with the white middle class due to the racial makeup of the industry (Finkel, Jones, Sang, & Stoyanova Russell, 2017). White individuals frequently occupy spaces of cultural gatekeeping, including roles such as creative directors, publishers, account executives, and other types of managerial and leadership positions. When in these roles, they are able to maintain power over decision-making processes that in turn directly influence racial minorities in the creative industries. This power involves the capability of shaping the visibility and mobility of cultural products and the people involved with them (Erigha, 2020).

As decision-makers, cultural gatekeepers have the authority to construct media and media teams based on personal perspectives and opinions. When making decisions, cultural gatekeepers have been shown to gear toward people and products that support their personal interests. In this way, cultural gatekeepers can use cultural content and workers to reinforce their personal ideologies (Erigha, 2019). In the creative industries, the personal beliefs of power figures continue to be rooted in a frame of whiteness that dominates this space. The media and structure that expels from this practice is therefore frequently representative of the interests of the dominant social group, which in this case is associated with the white racial identity (Hesmondhalgh, & Saha, 2013). As a result, it can also be said that marginalized racial groups hold little control over the production and content of the creative industries that are consumed by mass audiences. To maintain control over their power, white cultural gatekeepers justify their actions by socially constructing an imagined audience that meets these same interests (Erigha,

2019). There is an alleged 'matchmaking' process between the decision-makers and their imagined audience of the content and producers that are chosen to move through the flow of production (Erigha, 2020). These individuals are framed as key tastemakers for their ability to shape forms of available culture based on an imagined audience (Allen, Friedman, O'Brien, & Saha, 2017). Gatekeepers generate racial inequality through a lens of racialized systems of value and oppression when defining their imagined audiences. The idealized target is identified as white male individuals that become the default for both audiences and workers in the creative industry (Erigha, 2020). The imagined 'core' audience is a source of marginalization for creatives of colour as they stand outside of the defined target. It has been shown that gatekeepers find it difficult to imagine audiences that are not comprised of the white middle class. This ultimately increases the supposed risk of success that is associated with minority creative workers (Lente & Saha, 2022b) and leaves them to be marked as insignificant and high-risk to the process (Erigha, 2020). Under this assumption, universal notions of 'quality' arise as a consequence of decision-making based on imagined audiences. What is deemed quality is then based on the values and beliefs of the privileged social class in association with an imagined audience that is comprised of the same groups. In turn, this type of merit is designed as a safeguard for the privilege of white power figures and their actions in the creative industries (Lente & Saha, 2022a).

Through this, racial hierarchies become embedded within the structures of the creative industries. Organizational practices are also influenced by these forces, dividing workers in the industry along racial lines and creating dynamics of dominance and subordinance between groups (Erigha, 2018). These ideas become particularly operational through social networks and hiring practices. Social identity theorists have demonstrated that individuals tend to classify

themselves into categories of similarity and difference based on their shared identity traits with others, such as race (Stein, 2019). The concept of homophily "…describes the relationship and degree of contact between similar identities…" (Nwonka, 2021, p. 446). A stronger relationship will emerge between similar individuals compared to those of different identity groups (Nwonka, 2021). Homophily is useful in examining racial relations in the creative industries as it provides an understanding of the unconscious bias that works to conceal the discriminatory relations of power in the industry. It exposes the commonsensical notion that industry power figures are psychologically indifferent to racial exclusion (Nwonka, 2021). This results in homogenized hiring and promotional practices in the creative industries that allow for the continuance of favoring white job candidates over those of colour. Competition also lies between minority workers as those willing to assimilate to maintain a monocultural workplace will be more heavily favored (Boulton, 2015). In particular, it has been found that leadership in advertising hire creative workers who reflect their own cultural consumption (Alacovska & O'Brien, 2021). Common practices in the advertising industry include referral hires, also known as must-hires (Boulton, 2015), and hiring for specific teams rather than for an agency as a whole. The dominating whiteness of the industry reproduces an unconscious common sense that allows for the continuous and exclusive hiring of white creative workers. This dynamic remains problematic as it tends to privilege notions of a subjective 'fit' over qualities of experience and qualifications. Ideas surrounding aspects of the right 'fit' and 'chemistry', disguise the structural system of white privilege in advertising (Boulton, 2013; Simon, 2019). These types of buzzwords allow room for interpretation, which often creates a space of advantage for white men through privileged ideologies (Simon, 2019). Roles and promotions are often given to people who feel like the right culture fit rather than those who may be more deserving (Craft, 2022).

Social networks are a significant site for notions surrounding the right 'fit'. Social networking is a central element of entry and presence in the creative industries. The ability to build industry contacts and relations has been shown to improve chances of employment. While social networking is a tool for dominant racial groups, it can act as a disadvantage to those of minority racial identity (Idriss, 2016). Getting hired depends on who you know and how rather than relying simply upon your experience and qualification. In advertising, white workers enjoy increased access to these spaces due to their higher standing in social class (Boulton, 2013). Informal recruitment is a common practice within the industry. Just as decision-makers tend to choose individuals who reflect themselves, they also rely on tried and tested workers that are recommended by trusted colleagues (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013). Their closed social networks work to keep these practices within the bounds of race, pushing white workers into opportunities of privilege. These issues are structural to the advertising industry. Personal ties and relationships as a means for employment, access, and mobility occur as patterns of racial hierarchical separation. This acts like a system of segregation that advantages white groups over minority groups in the industry (Boulton, 2013).

Racial Valuation

Maryann Erigha's concept of racial valuation (2020) is especially helpful in examining discrepancies between the experiences of minority creative workers and their white counterparts. While Erigha focuses ~~the concept~~ on the dichotomy between whiteness and blackness, I believe that it can be applied to include other racial minorities under an equivalent reasoning. Racial valuation explains the ways that cultural gatekeepers use tactics that employ race as a judgment device to translate status, economic power, and success, ultimately dictating who receives an advantage or disadvantage. Economic worth is dictated by linking coloured cultural products

with uncertainty, high economic risk, and an expectation of failure. In opposition, whiteness is associated with low economic risk, increased profitability, and an expectation of success (Erigha, 2019; Erigha, 2020). Along with economic value and success, competency emerges as a characteristic that becomes attached to white creative workers (Erigha, 2018). Cultural gatekeepers are able to construct and assign economic value and worth through the use of racial characteristics.

Erigha argues that there is a racialized failure expectation associated with racial minority cultural products and the talent that produces them. Conversely, there is also an association of a racialized success expectation for white cultural products as well as the thought that white talent has the ability to reverse the racialized failure expectation (Erigha, 2019; Erigha, 2020). The failure expectation suggests that possible chances of success for racial minorities and their content are predetermined on the basis of racial characteristics (Erigha, 2020). In practice, this works to constrain minority creative workers while rewarding white creative workers based on a number of claims all rooted in racial disparity (Erigha, 2019). Racial valuation allows white creative workers to receive benefits in the form of opportunities of greater budgets, high-profile clients, prominent campaigns, etc. (Erigha, 2018). By labeling white cultural products and people as economically superior to those related to racial minorities, cultural gatekeepers offer insider rationalizations to validate practices of racial inequality (Erigha, 2019). These ideas are circulated in the industry as a hidden curriculum to overcome financial risk and ensure success (Erigha, 2020). Cultural gatekeepers look to formats of the past and reproduce them without the concern of racial representation. Therefore, although there may currently be greater demand for diverse perspectives in the creative industries, there are constraints on what actions and influence

can be demonstrated by racial minority workers. Despite the case for increased diversity, minority workers continue to be viewed as a riskier investment (Lente & Saha, 2022b).

Racial valuation is rooted within the framework of normativity that places whiteness at the center of the creative industries. When cultural gatekeepers engage in these practices, they reproduce racial hierarchies but seek external factors to expel themselves of fault. Culture and economics are often blamed for their disproportionate allocation of advantages and disadvantages along racial lines. Under such myths, gatekeepers can claim that they do not want to exclude minorities and their content but rather that they are frequently unsuccessful (Erigha, 2019). This claim also aligns with the thought that racialized issues are more difficult to deal with in media. Decision makers assert that they want to be more diverse but only if it does not disrupt their subjective definitions of quality (Lente & Saha, 2022a). In this sense, quality remains entrenched within the norm of whiteness in the industry. Ultimately, such practices allow for the reproduction of white privilege under the claim of informed economic decisions (Erigha, 2020). Rather than focus on how gatekeepers engage in practices that emulate racial inequality, minority groups are represented as a social problem (Banks, 2017).

The justification of this practice stems from the use of imagined audiences by cultural gatekeepers. Under the perception of what the audience wants, gatekeepers are able to engage in racially charged practices that place constraints on minority creatives and what they may produce (Lente & Saha, 2022b). The failure expectation linked to racial minorities arises from the assumption that the white imagined audience will not receive such content in a positive way. This domination of whiteness creates structures in which white workers who create content through a white perspective are prioritized over minority workers who expel content that is representative of varying racial backgrounds (Erigha, 2019). Colour is labeled as "unbankable"

and risky based on an imagined audience constructed by white hands. Under this assumption, minority creative workers must appeal to a 'core' audience that is understood to be white (Lente & Saha, 2022a). Consequently, people of colour are presumed destined to fail, while white individuals and content are exempt from criticism. When white content and workers perform poorly it is excused and seen as the exception. There is a convenient ignorance towards these actions that assist in maintaining the significant position of whiteness (Erigha, 2019). White individuals and the content they produce are made to be the standard of quality, thus assigning them a superior status based on race.

Shallow Diversity

In recent years, there have been an increasing number of diversity initiatives enacted in the creative industries that aim to address the issues indicated above. Under a critical racial lens, it can be shown that many diversity initiatives fall into Anamik Saha's (2018) concept, shallow diversity. Shallow diversity describes how diversity initiatives and policies claim to address the needs of diversity but ultimately fail in providing any true sense of progress. Diversity initiatives serve an ideological function that sustains the institutional whiteness of the cultural industries (Nwonka, 2021; Saha, 2018). Barriers arise through the intrinsic whiteness of these initiatives that police the boundaries of where and what minority hires can do and go. Under the claim of inclusiveness, minority workers are often pushed into low-status, entry-level roles (Saha, 2018). In alignment with racial valuation, diversity initiatives often assign racial minorities to positions of lower prestige and economic importance (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013; Alacovska & O'Brien, 2021). They are often placed in low-level technical and craft positions that can be considered as 'backstage' duties. Subsequently, racial minorities find it more difficult to secure stable and consistent work. They also struggle to engage in forms of workplace elevation and promotion

into more senior and secure positions (Banks, 2017; Boulton, 2013). Their placement in entry-level positions helps to ensure that they remain absent from any managerial, administrative, or leadership roles (Banks, 2017; Erigha, 2019). Diversity initiatives create a sense of representation for minorities that can be reduced to a few recognizable racial stereotypes and tropes (Idriss, 2016; Saha, 2018). Due to this, their racial background often gets manipulated as a form of tokenism. Especially prevalent in the advertising industry, tokenism occurs through diversity initiatives by scattering a small number of minorities throughout a workplace to create the perception of diversity (Kaye, 2016). Minority creative workers are often made to be the signifiers of diversity even though they may be the only person of colour in the room. Their race is emphasized and exaggerated to counteract the lack of racial representation a workplace may truly have (Boulton, 2016; Kaye, 2016). Although diversity initiatives aim to improve representation, they frequently engage in a process of othering where racial minorities are recruited as 'the only one' (Stein, 2019). Power figures wield their power over the industry through tactics such as diversity initiatives. They help not only in reproducing whiteness but also in simultaneously making race prevalent (Saha, 2018). Diversity initiatives assist in keeping the privilege and status of the dominant culture intact while appearing to meet the demands of racial minority groups (Lente & Saha, 2022b). In the performance of meeting their claims, gatekeepers use these schemes to keep minorities in their place and maintain racial hierarchies (Lente & Saha, 2022a; Saha, 2018).

The function of diversity initiatives relies on a definition of diversity that is constructed by white powerholders. In this context, diversity holds two components: addressing demands for increased representation and attempting to limit any actual structural change to the creative industries. Saha and Lente (2022) argue that diversity should be treated as a set of practices

"…through which the dominant culture attempts to maintain its status, rather than simply a target that is not being met" (p.1811). In relation, Gray (2016) has indicated the concept of precarity of diversity, in which diversity acts as a technology of power and knowledge. Diversity is understood as a means of managing the difference it expresses (Saha, 2017). Diversity initiatives can be explained as the capitalization on the demand for diversity. In this sense, diversity commodifies race for the interests of the dominant culture. Capitalism and racism are intertwined and work to create a space that keeps racial hierarchies in place while creating a realistic vision of diversity. Racial identities are molded into a form of capital to be exploited as brand value. As companies begin to see the value of diversity, they begin to enlist initiatives that manipulate racial identities for personal gain. Diversity acts as a branding tool that helps agencies and companies to gain the title of an inclusive and representational workplace (Lente & Saha, 2022a). The demand of racial minorities to be recognized has been redirected as a commercial imperative that workers in favour of those in power. Minority groups become recognized as market niches to be sold as part of company culture and identity (Saha, 2018). A diverse workforce is framed in terms of innovation and creativity by cultural decision-makers, with a minute emphasis on addressing actual inequalities (Saha, 2018).

In advertising, both clients and agencies have come to understand that involving racial minorities makes good business sense. Diversity allows for the vision of racial and ethnic diversity in employment and also translates the capabilities of an agency or client to reach diverse consumers. Considering the spending power of minorities, marketers see that employing minorities in advertising is an effective strategy to create a successful brand (Wonkeryor, 2015). Power effectively remains in the hands of the dominant white groups, meaning that diversity may be allowed but only within the appointed confines of whiteness. Power figures are therefore

able to employ diversity to showcase their perceived willingness to be inclusive. Diversity

becomes a performative element that companies capitalize on to differentiate themselves (Lente

& Saha, 2022a). In their presentation of diversity, gatekeepers reap the rewards of an idealized

sense of diversity that does not truly consider the role of the minority worker.

At the root of these initiatives is a focus on the individual worker. By focusing on the

individual, workplaces are able to claim that they have addressed their diversity issues with a

diversity initiative that, for example, aims to hire a certain amount of minority creatives or place

them in particular departments. There are deeply embedded issues when workplaces operate this

way as they do not address the foundational causes of limited opportunities for participation and

advancement for racial minorities (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013; Lente & Saha, 2022a). Diversity

initiatives allow power figures to maintain their power while claiming to meet the needs of

minorities. They provide the ability to ignore the underlying racial hierarchy that constitutes the

creative industries. They create short-term and small scaled solutions for issues that stretch

beyond the bounds of the individual minority worker. The reality of diversity initiatives calls for

management and decision-makers to confront their own racial biases and change their behaviour

in order to undertake the systemic issues of the creative industries (Boulton, 2013).

A significant problem with diversity initiatives is that they are framed as a solution to a

statical concern. Diversity is often reduced to a numerical problem due to a shift in focus that

places importance on racial representation. Under this assumption, visibility is the central

component through which diversity is understood and measured (Lente & Saha, 2022b). This

approach believes that the diversity problem of the creative industries can be solved if the racial

parity gap is reduced (Boulton, 2015; Saha, 2018). Numerical representation promises the greater

presence of minorities behind the scenes and on-screen. The thought is that if racial minorities

are given more opportunities to be present in the industry that inequality will naturally be overcome (Erigha, 2019). In terms of content, there is also the assumption that increasing the amount of minority workers in the production process will automatically improve the representation of minorities on-screen (Saha, 2018). Under the name of an equal opportunities policy, the understanding is that a numeric solution will provide increased visibility while also diversifying the representation of minorities in content (Saha, 2017).

In reality, this is not a simple issue that can be solved by exclusively inserting more minorities into the industry. This strategy deflects attention from the systems of racially charged practices that are at the core of inequality (Lente & Saha, 2022b). 'Pipeline' diversity tactics ignore aspects of representation that expand beyond visibility by believing that equality can arise from mere numerical parity (Boulton, 2015; Erigha, 2019). Relying on this type of representation is problematic as it can result in progress that is more symbolic than substantive. While minorities can gain visibility and presence, they continue to remain marginal to the core operations of the creative industries. They continue to occupy low-status, entry-level roles that hold no space for progression or influence (Erigha, 2019). Although there are more visible minorities in the industry, they are not being offered impactful opportunities (Lente & Saha, 2022a). Rather, they are being placed as requirements for a company to be perceived as diverse. The industry must consider an approach that replaces elements of binary representation with a more substantial method that allows minority visibility in positions of power. In occupying key decision-making roles, minority workers will be able to engage in work that will have an impact on the actual representation and quality of representation in the industry (Erigha, 2019). A solution will require more than simply having more racial minorities working in the creative

industries. To obtain cultural plurality and meaningful diversity, attention needs to be directed toward involving people of colour at all levels of the production process (Saha, 2017).

Self-Monitoring

Once racial minorities have entered the industry, they encounter issues of identity that must constantly be negotiated to secure their presence in the workplace. The ideas surrounding cultural fits go beyond hiring practices and embed themselves in industry behaviour to create conflicts of racial inequity. Racial minorities are expected to both play up and play down their backgrounds. One study found that on the one hand minority workers are expected to offer a unique insight into their demographic by exaggerating it through their behaviour and demonstrating the expertise of knowledge on it. On the other hand, they must simultaneously self-monitor their behavior to fit the dominant culture and represent their racial community (Boulton, 2016). There is an unspoken pressure on minority workers that white workers do not have to face. These pressures include an act of conforming to the racial expectations of white leadership in order to advance their careers (Boulton, 2015; Lente & Saha, 2022b). It is often only through the assimilation of white culture that a minority may be welcomed into the industry space (Stein, 2019). The performance of the raced self occurs through strategic identity transactions that comply with the expectations of white colleagues (Boulton, 2015). This practice is not only to gain entry but also to sustain any confrontations they may encounter due to their token racial status (Stein, 2019). Those who do not fit into the dominant culture are forced to negotiate their racialized identity and carefully manage this behaviour (Alacovska & O'Brien, 2021). While racial minorities must assimilate into the dominant culture, they must also represent themselves and their communities. Stein (2019) has shown that minorities carry an exhausting burden in which they are expected to represent and speak on behalf of their entire

race. When minority workers are the only one of their kind or one of few, they are tasked with

the obligation of speaking for their racial communities (Kaye, 2016). A significant part of this

pressure is rooted within the stereotypical tropes that are privileged in the industry to sustain a

western idea of race as exotic and different (Saha, 2013). The burden of stereotype pushes

minorities to avoid individual behaviours that may poorly reflect on them both independently

and on their race as a whole (Boulton, 2016). When racial minorities are made to be the token

individual, this pressure becomes exaggerated to a point where they are coerced into diversity

and identity work (Saha, 2018; Stein, 2019) This also comes with the responsibility of

confronting white colleagues who engage in racially charged behaviour (Stein, 2019).

   Under these racialized expectations, creative workers of colour can be seen as objects

produced by the decisions of others. There is a continuous act of reassembling the intersection

between the creative and the racial to create an identity that meets the standards of the dominant

group (Finkel, Jones, Sang, & Stoyanova Russell, 2017). Racial minorities are often called to

perform strategies of self-monitoring to fit into the creative industries, one of which is code-

switching. Code-switching is formally described as the modification of vocabulary, speech style,

and/or language "…to better accommodate the expectations of listeners or conform to the

content of perceived participant roles and relative power hierarchies of any given social

interaction" (Boulton, 2016, p. 132). Code-switching has grown to become a term that

encompasses a set of behaviors beyond linguistics. In the industry, code-switching often occurs

situationally to accommodate the expectations of dominant white groups and to conform to the

dictated racial lines and power hierarchies of any situation. When code-switching, minorities

must also be aware of creating a balance of their racial identities. They must negotiate the racial

stereotypes that white groups hold against them while also not acting too far from their race in

order to maintain their 'unique' perspective (Boulton, 2016). Idriss (2016) has shown that minority creative workers often feel forced to compromise their authentic sense of self due to the pressures of the industry.

McRobbie (2002) enlists the concept of 'selling the self' as a way to describe how workers must negotiate their identities to find their footing in the creative industries. They face the challenge of formulating an occupational identity that is necessary for creative labour (Idriss, 2016). This can be directly applied to how racial minorities in the industry feel an abundance of pressure to meet the standards of dominant groups through the rearrangement of their racial identities. This includes the need to be twice as good and work twice as hard to prove that they belong in the industry (Kaye, 2016). While negotiating their race, they must sell themselves to their white colleagues and leadership as a conforming worker who will meet racial expectations while still having a sense of difference to offer, therefore, reifying their membership in the space. As a result, people of colour report that they do not feel that they can contribute their ideas or fully expresses themselves out of the fear that they may confirm the stereotypes that their white counterparts have premeditatedly placed upon them. This also prevents them from engaging in risky behaviours and choices. If they take risks in their work, there is a fear that it may fail or have an undesirable outcome, thus allowing white colleagues to confirm stereotypes they pre-emptively carry (Stein, 2019). The fear of being one's true self creates a mask that forces minority workers to constantly engage in a type of identity work. At all times they must actively conform to the dominant culture and ensure that they show a balance of their racial identity that is pleasing to their leadership.

These practices extend beyond the workplace causing a problematic system in which racial minorities engage in identity work professionally and socially. There is a need to constantly be

performing for the security of membership. Being a minority in the industry comes with strings attached, specifically social ties that tend to benefit white employees (Boulton, 2013). Socializing is deemed an unspoken yet mandatory element of the advertising industry. Leadership and colleagues look to socializing as a way to create a company culture that individuals should work to fit into. Minorities often face a more difficult task during this practice as they must work to assimilate to the dominant culture even though they may not share common experiences. This is how diversity barriers arise in an industry that demands their employees to act as one homogeneous team. It is never enough to simply do their jobs, racial minorities are also expected to socialize as a part of their association with their workplace. Great importance is placed upon the mandatory obligation to fit into the environment of the company. Social segregation becomes an issue as many people of colour are not interested in spending time with white individuals that do not share any similar life experiences with. However, this is often an implicit requirement for entering the industry and staying in it. Minority workers are thus obliged to take part in the act of identity work to make sure that they fit in.

The issue with self-monitoring is that it places a great deal of responsibility upon the individual. By overemphasizing individual power and behavior, the systemic and structural obstacles of the industry gain the ability to attribute their racially motivated practices to the personal judgment and actions of minority groups (Thomas, 2017). Under this perspective, many minorities fall into a fatalistic sentiment regarding the impossibility of challenging larger systems of inequality. Workers feel that there is an inevitability that the industry will continue to come from privileged backgrounds, sustaining the ruling dominance of whiteness (Nwonka, 2021). Minorities ultimately end up feeling helpless in their situation and use any possible tactic, such as self-monitoring, to gain entry and presence in the creative industries. The lack of agency they

hold over the progression of their careers leaves minority workers feeling that the cycle of inequality is never-ending. No matter what they may do, minorities have understood that whiteness will continue to rule the industry and feel that they do not have the power to change this structure.

Summary

This literature review has outlined several concepts that are useful in examining the distinct experience of racial minority creative workers in an industry that remains to be predominantly white. The current literature suggests that there are a number of ways in which minorities may have a different experience than their white counterparts. The underlying force of divergence emerges from the dominance of whiteness in the creative industries. This assists in the formation of an assemblage that privileges white groups, establishing a politics of power that dictates the experiences of all who enter the industry. Scholars have identified that whiteness and power play central roles in the creative industries and may thus be the factors that define each worker's career path. The accepted fact that the majority of leadership roles are exclusively given to white individuals shows how whiteness continues to be placed in positions of power that hold great influence over the production process of cultural goods (Erigha, 2018; Lente & Saha, 2022b; Simon, 2019).

Maryaan Enrigha's (2020) concept of racial valuation has been demonstrated by a number of scholars as a prevalent issue in the creative industries. The existing literature shows that race has been inherently linked to valuations of economic worth and overall success. When competency is perceived to be lower for people of colour, whiteness is reproduced in terms of opportunities and allowances. The distinct failure expectation that is set upon racial minorities

and their content is a significant indication of how their experiences in the industry may vary in comparison to racial majorities.

Another significant source of conflict has been shown to be shallow diversity. Anamik Saha (2018) has indicated that shallow diversity is the tactic through which white leadership enlists diversity initiatives as an attempt to meet the needs of the minority while actually serving their own interests. Research suggests that the concept allows for decision-makers to claim they are inclusive while placing racial minorities into positions and situations of disadvantage. It is clear that shallow diversity reifies the racial hierarchy set in place for the industry. It causes a number of barriers that may alter the entry and progression of minority workers while allowing organizations to engage in performative diversity. These practices allude to the identity work that racial minorities are compelled to take part in. Scholars have demonstrated that there is a need for minorities to self-monitor their identities and behaviours in order to fit into the industry. Previous research on these topics is especially important for this study as it indicates the various systemic structures of racial inequality in the creative industries. They demonstrate the consequences these systems may cause to the minority creative worker who is looking to find a place in the industry. Much of the previous scholarship has focused its work on American and British workplaces, with a heavy focus on the television, film, and publishing industries. As a result, there is often a Black-white racial binary rather than a focus on various racial minorities more broadly. There is also a lack of information on the advertising industry. This case study aims to contribute to the existing scholarship by examining the established systemic issues through the perspective of the racial minority creative worker. By examining the impacts of inequitable treatment, this study assists in filling the gaps in existing research by offering a view of the Canadian advertising industry unique to the minority creative.

The central concepts of this study involve five main components from this literature review. The first is the centrality of whiteness in the advertising industry. Establishing this sector as a white industry is important in understanding the variance of struggle racial minorities face. Next is the concept of cultural gatekeepers. The power of whiteness can only be understood through the racial hierarchies that are created and reproduced by cultural gatekeepers. The concept of racial valuation is important in examining the role of race in the advertising industry. The race-based judgments of white leadership ultimately dictate the career path of all workers, disproportionately impacting those of colour. Shallow diversity is another central concept that allows for the visibility of diversity performance conducted by white groups. The tokenistic practices of white majorities greatly affect the responsibilities and impacts that racial minorities may have. Lastly, the concept of self-monitoring is central to understanding the strategies that racial minorities are forced to employ as a result of systemic structures of power and race. In addition to the literature review, this study has also found that the concept of microaggressions is widespread among participants. The implicit nature of racially motivated practices makes it difficult for racial minorities to address the issues they face. Overall, these concepts come together to create a rich basis of explanation for the differing experience of racial minorities in the Canadian advertising industry.

Methods

This study was based on a dual-pronged approach that involves both primary and secondary research. The secondary research consisted of online in-depth semi-structured audio interviews. A total of thirteen interviews were conducted with self-identifying racial minorities in the Canadian advertising industry. The interviews were conducted through the framework of the key concepts of the study, as outlined above, in an attempt to draw out the personal experiences of minority creative workers as a result of the pressure of racially bound systemic structures.

Participants

The sample for this study included participants that self-identify as belonging to groups of visible racial minorities. With nearly seventy percent of the Canadian population identifying as having a white racial background (Statistics Canada, 2022), this study considered the white race to be the majority group. Racial minorities were considered as participants who self-identified as racial identities other than the white race. Participants themselves initially identified themselves as individuals who may be interested in taking part in this study. A call to participants was disseminated to several industry contact points, such as online social media platforms, as an open call for racial minority creatives to take part in the study. The invitation of participation was designed to include information on the study, its anticipated aims, and the personal contact information of the principal investigator. By allowing individuals the opportunity to personally contact me, the study was able to be devoid of any assumptions and biases surrounding racial backgrounds as individuals were allowed to self-identify their race and their interest in participating. This practice also permitted the security of anonymity of possible participants due to the restriction of any of their personal information surfacing onto a public

forum. Snowball sampling was also used during the interview process to identify further possible

participants. Respondents were asked and encouraged to disseminate the principal investigator's

contact information and other information about the study for others to see. The qualification of

participants was determined by their self-identification as a visible racial minority and their

confirmation that they have experience working in the Canadian advertising industry.

Once participants identified themselves as interested through email correspondence, I sent them

a detailed description of the project's objectives and the involvement required for a participant.

Once individuals had reviewed this information, they were sent a consent form that included an

articulate structure of the study and the various elements that were involved that participants

must agree to in order to take part in the study. Once they read through the consent form and

agreed to participate, a date and time were negotiated for the interview.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted online through the Zoom platform and were restricted to

exclusive audio-recording. Audio recordings were presented to assist in the process of

deidentification of individuals. The semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasted between thirty to

sixty minutes as a one-on-one process with me and the participant. Audio recordings were then

transcribed and made anonymous of all, directly and indirectly, identifying data. The anonymity

of participants was central in establishing a safeguard for those sharing personal experiences,

feelings, and issues in their workplace. This provided a safe space for them to discuss issues of

race and inequality without the fear of consequences. Within the deidentified transcriptions,

participants were given pseudonyms for the sole purpose of organization and differentiation from

other participants. The assigned pseudonyms were used for this study and all findings within it.

Interviews were semi-structured to create a guided discussion that allowed for the space to input personal perspectives and experiences. It permitted participants to reflect upon their experiences while also providing me with the freedom and flexibility to react to their responses and ask relevant questions when topics arise. Before the interview began, I suggested that participants review the provided consent form and informed them that I would verbally read aloud the consent lines from that form to receive their informed consent. The interview began with a question that asked them to identify their self-identified racial background and to speak about their experience and history in the Canadian advertising industry. Although this information was omitted from the study, it acted as a crucial first step to inducing respondents to reflect on their professional lives and begin contextualizing their experiences in the industry. In the following part of the interview, participants were asked questions concerning their experience in the industry in relation to their racial identity and diversity in the industry. The variety of themes incorporated into the interview questions were shaped around the key concepts of this study: power, whiteness, racial valuation, shallow diversity, and self-monitoring.

While conducting this research, it was vital that I remained aware of the need to be self-reflexive to the dialogue that is constructed through these interviews. My personal identity and background must be considered when collecting and analyzing the data (Benschop & Essers, 2007). I identify as a racial minority myself and believe to have a degree of knowledge of the creative industries both professionally and academically. Although it is impossible to know how my profile will impact the narratives that arise from the interviews, it was an important factor to consider as it does not differ far from the backgrounds of participants. A reflexive approach was required for narrative analysis as my identity may influence the stories and experiences respondents feel comfortable sharing.

Analysis

The data in this study was analyzed through a framework based on critical race theory (CRT) (Flick, 2022). This provided a theoretical standing in which experiences can be interpreted in relation to the power dynamics of racial inequality. Importantly, it created a point of inquiry that served to curate a structure to underly the findings of this study. The analysis of the study was rooted within a narrative approach. Narrative inquiry is the process through which stories and lived experiences of participants are analyzed and used as raw data for a study (Leavy, 2014). It helps to examine the ways in which narratives are constructed and assigned meaning within groups and by individuals. Such analysis allows for the understanding of group organization and thought (Glisczinski, 2018). This project will specifically focus on a thematic narrative approach. The primary focus of this approach is the content within the text (Leavy, 2014). This type of analysis involves data being interpreted in light of themes that are developed by the investigator and influenced by prior and emergent theory and concepts. The emerging patterns within data are categorized into themes that may align with the key concepts of a study and are then used to create conclusions surrounding the topic of that study (Glisczinski, 2018).

Using this approach, the goal was to achieve comprehensive generalizations and commonalities of understanding within the individual case. The focus on the everyday experience allowed for greater, macro-level visibility of the issues racial minorities face in the industry (Flick, 2022). A narrative approach was particularly effective for exploring the intersections between the self and the world. It allowed for the generation of a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of human experience by placing individual meaning into a greater context (Flick, 2022). It also permitted a view of how identities are made communicatively, through the everyday interactions with others (Leavy, 2014).

Through the employment of a narrative approach, I began my analysis using the de-identified transcriptions of each interview. The concepts of cultural gatekeepers, racial valuation, shallow diversity, and self-monitoring were used in association with ideas rooted in critical race theory to inform the process of analysis. While examining the transcriptions, I looked to identify common themes among participant data that aligned with the established categories above. Simultaneously, I also searched for themes that independently emerged from the data as they determined a key finding that may help to enrich the current scholarship on racial inequity in the advertising industry. The aim was to connect the everyday stories of participants to greater themes of generalizability. The complex relationship between their daily experiences and the structural workings of the advertising industry was the outcome of this methodology (Flick, 2022). The data was categorized into six coding themes, the predominance of whiteness, cultural gatekeepers, racial valuation, shallow diversity, self-monitoring, identity & self-monitoring, and microaggressions, which can be seen in Appendix A. The chart depicted in Appendix A shows how each theme was assigned a colour and description. The participants' lived experiences helped to assemble the description of each theme. The descriptions allowed for general findings to emerge even through the variance of experience. The colours were used to highlight particular text that related to a theme in order to visually understand the prevalence of themes and also to organize the data. The highlighted text was organized into sections based on themes so that I could compare the stories of each participant and reach generalized conclusions. The findings indicated that the six themes that arose from the data were the most prevalent in creating a differing experience for racial minority creative workers in comparison to white workers.

The findings of this study are compiled through the dual use of inductive and deductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning can be seen through the use of critical race theory as a basis for

this study. It created a focus for the research that is immersed in an awareness of the dimensions of racial inequity in society. CRT will provide a first step for the research process and assemble pre-categories at starting points for the data. This will allow for an openness towards new dimensions outside of the pre-categories when analyzing data, therefore incorporating inductive reasoning (Heit & Rotello, 2010). The second part of this process will involve features of inductive reasoning through the extraction of information from minority workers' experiences. When analyzing participant data, personal experiences and stories will be used to confirm existing concepts and establish new findings to build concluding generalizations on the Canadian advertising industry. By combining aspects of inductive and deductive reasoning, I will be able to construct informed findings that have considered both theoretical logic and participant experience.

The basis of this analysis lies within critical race theory and its pillars of racial inquiry. Finding its roots through the racial issues of the American law system, critical race theory can now be seen as an interdisciplinary movement that is concerned with questioning the creation and maintenance of white supremacy and its causal subordination of people of colour (Dixson & Lynn, 2013). The major premise of the theory is that society is racially stratified allowing power to operate systematically to racially oppress people (Hylton, 2012). Scholars of CRT place race at the center of analysis drawing light to how racism is entrenched within a system structure that works to benefit whites at the expense of people of colour (Brown, 2017). The focus of CRT scholarship involves exploring and altering the relationship between race, racism, and power (Delgado, Harris, & Stefancic, 2017; Hylton, 2012; Mitchell, 2020). There are several pillars of CRT that build the foundation for theorists' beliefs. Under this theory, racism is viewed as ordinary, the common experience of daily life for people of colour. Racism becomes a difficult

topic to address due to its invisibility in society. The normalization of racism allows for the continuous subordination of racial minorities and the simultaneous reproduction of domination of whiteness (Dixson & Lynn, 2013). CRT scholars refrain from understanding racism as overt actions, they rather view microaggressions as unconscious interactions that are so deeply ingrained into society that they have become an aspect of neutrality that is constantly influencing the treatment and perception of racial minorities (Brown, 2017). Secondly, the hierarchy of whiteness serves to benefit the dominant group. Racism advances the interests of whites, materially and physically, therefore offering little to no incentive to eradicate it (Brown, 2017; Delgado, Harris, & Stefancic, 2017). White individuals often also assign stereotypes to minorities based on their needs and benefits (Mitchell, 2020). Third, race is understood as a social category rather than a biological or genetic reality. These categories are further manipulated to serve the interests of the dominant group (Delgado, Harris, & Stefancic, 2017). Lastly, CRT carries a significant theme of intersectionality in which individuals face multiple oppressions that overlap with their racialization (Mitchell, 2020).

As a methodology, critical race theory challenges mainstream, narrow ideologies, and their agendas to bring knowledge of racism and unequal treatment to the forefront (Hylton, 2012). CRT scholars view the voices and understandings of racial minorities as crucial elements in identifying the origins and reproductions of racial injustices. There is an importance placed upon first-person narratives that direct attention toward the racialized experiences of people of colour (Brown, 2017). By drawing on the lived experiences of racial minorities, CRT methodology is able to gather concrete knowledge to explore alternative meanings and perspectives on race (Brown, 2017; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Limitations

This study was limited to an online interview format which constrained my ability to analyze forms of non-verbal communication that may have been demonstrated through body language, hand gestures, and facial expressions. This limitation also occurred through the audio recording of interviews as there was no way to look back on interviews to view any non-verbal cues. The anonymity factor of this study acts as an additional limitation as it prevents any data on participants to be released. The incorporation of elements such as racial backgrounds or job titles may have helped in creating more informed findings.

<u>**Findings**</u>

The findings of this study were collected from the analysis of thirteen qualitative interviews with racial minorities in the Canadian advertising industry. In this section, it will be shown that participants spoke to numerous concepts indicated in the literature review of this study. Importantly, it was found that six central themes emerged from the data: the predominance of whiteness in the industry, the role and power of cultural gatekeepers, racial valuation, shallow diversity, identity and self-monitoring, and implicit microaggressions. In combination, these themes illustrate the variance of experience that racial minorities face compared to their white counterparts. I argue that racial minority creative workers in the Canadian advertising industry face a multitude of barriers due to their race and systemic practices that reproduce racial inequity. Through narrative analysis, the participants' stories and experiences are utilized to demonstrate the impacts of racial inequity on minority workers. The data show that racial minorities are unjustifiably treated differently than racial majorities. Their experiences in the advertising industry emphasize this difference and depict the struggles they face to enter and stay in the industry.

Overall Findings

Table 1

Findings of each individual theme

Theme	Number of Participants that Commented
Predominance of Whiteness	11
Cultural Gatekeepers	13
Racial Valuation	8
Shallow Diversity	13

Identity & Self-Monitoring	12
Microaggressions	9

The data has indicated that 100% of participants commented on experiences or stories surrounding cultural gatekeepers and shallow diversity. All thirteen participants spoke to some aspects of both concepts and their prevalence in the industry. Twelve participants spoke to strategies of self-monitoring and identity work in order to fit into this space. Eleven participants indicated that whiteness was heavily represented in the Canadian advertising industry. Nine participants addressed their thoughts on the implicit nature of racism in the industry. Lastly, eight participants touched on various elements of racial valuation and race-based judgments of white majority groups.

The Predominance of Whiteness

The participants of the study conferred a collective consensus that positioned the Canadian advertising industry as predominantly white. Advertising was designated as a white industry that is and continues to be dominated by white male creatives at all levels. This was coupled with the thought that the industry has always been this way, insinuating a commonsensical notion of whiteness. One participant stated that they find it "a little bizarre seeing another person of colour on [their] team" when explaining the lack of diversity of the advertising industry. Participant four similarly said, "I could literally count the number of minorities on one hand". Several participants also expressed concerns about feeling Othered by this construction of race. This experience is often related to the awareness of racial minorities of their outsider status. Participant six explained that "…they just kind of see you as the outsider and that you kind of are [one] sometimes".

The ubiquitousness of whiteness led eleven out of thirteen participants to claim that there is a resulting unconscious bias in the Canadian advertising industry that works to establish barriers for creatives of colour attempting to find their place. Participant nine revealed: "…For very long, [the industry] has been a certain way and has been mainly male and white-dominated…that's why it takes a lot to cut through colour and to get in the industry [for racial minorities] to prove that they are…creative in the way that is defined by a white male".

The acknowledgment of difference was a prevailing comment amongst the eleven participants. Whiteness was viewed as the obvious lens through which the industry operates, leaving racial minorities to feel emotionally excluded and physically restricted.

Cultural Gatekeepers

In accordance with the dominant normality of whiteness, all thirteen participants confirmed that the majority of management and leadership positions in the industry are occupied by white males. They felt that this majority enlists a power shift in which white decision-makers are able to gatekeep and influence the nature and content of production. As a result of this, serval respondents felt that this fact created a racial hierarchy in the industry that proves to be disadvantageous for people of colour. The power and influence of white decision-makers were shown to dictate who and what is involved in advertising. Participant seven referred to these positions of power in saying:

"…[there is an] unconscious bias that plays into small things…certain briefs for certain jobs go to certain producers or creatives…your success within the industry is based on experience and if you're not given those opportunities to be able to a part of certain projects, clients, etc.,…[a] kind of system of unconscious bias can be put to play".

Ten participants indicated that these opportunities often go to other white creatives due to the affinity of white gatekeepers to hire and promote individuals that look like them and whom they can relate to. Much of this idea was cast in the context of cultural fit. Participant nine explained, "it feels like you need an X factor and sometimes that comes from…looking familiar to people. She's a good culture fit or they're not a good culture fit, but who is establishing that culture?", also mentioning how there are some "…biases about what a creative person might look like, how well they might understand culture and when I say culture, I mean advertising culture, the culture of Canada". In this case, similar to many other respondents, the individual is referring to the race-based qualifications of white groups to enter and gain membership in the industry. Along with the visual aspect of belonging, participant five expressed how "people have a harder time relating to someone who doesn't come from the same upbringing as them". Participant eight expanded on this topic by saying, "when you're interviewing someone, meeting someone, or working with someone [for the] first [time], what you have in common obviously dictates a lot of how your relationship will go…I think it's easy for people to hire other people who are kind of like them [which is] maybe more pronounced because of… [a] culture fit".

Ten respondents also made clear indications that the Canadian advertising industry functions heavily on a system of networking that is deeply ingrained in aspects of normative whiteness, cultural fits, and racial inequity. The data exhibited the significant importance of networking for hiring and promotion within the Canadian advertising industry. As participant five showed, "it's a small industry, and who you know is ultimately how you succeed". Participant thirteen similarly stated how "certain people perhaps might get more opportunities to be on more senior projects, or they may have more access to mentorship which in turn allows people to move up the corporate ladder better". The consensus among participants concluded that

white groups engage in social networks that consist of their own kind, ultimately providing them with racial advantages in the industry. Participant two spoke of their struggles due to their inability to receive opportunities and networking opportunities that their white counterparts benefit from, it's about "meet[ing] the right people to even just get into the advertising industry because it's pretty white-centric…I didn't really know anyone in that vicinity that would give me access to those job opportunities or know who to talk to about [it]". Some participants alluded to the practice of gatekeepers consistently calling upon the same or similar individuals under the illusion of consistency. Participant six noted, "[leadership] just keep reaching out to the same [white] folks…and I'm sure they do a great job but are we also giving equal opportunity to other folks who might not have had that opportunity?" Participant ten spoke to this as well in saying that "there are a lot of barriers for [racial minorities] to get through and I feel like…a huge aspect of landing a job is really about who you know…most of these positions are filled through connections, so if you're a [racial minority], it's not really the easiest thing to build those connections". The data has demonstrated that networking is a vital aspect of industry success that is generally a task of greater ease for white groups who have access to these networks. This insider status has been shown to cause a difference of access and opportunity between racial minorities and racial majorities. Participants felt that their lack of access to high-level networks and networking opportunities altered their experiences of entry and progression in the Canadian advertising industry.

My findings confirm that cultural gatekeepers have power over the career paths of creative workers, disproportionally and detrimentally impacting racial minorities. In alignment with the barriers indicated above, cultural intermediaries hold great influence over the hiring and promotional practices and decisions of the industry. Several participants spoke of how racial

minorities are often turned down for jobs and promotions due to their racial identity, while their white counterparts reap the rewards in their place. Participant nine explained, "I think that race was one of the reasons why…I may have been passed on for certain roles…my ability to get promoted sometimes felt othered because I felt like my experiences weren't a common man's experience…but I would say it's been a lot easier for my white counterparts, especially to hit a senior level". Participant thirteen illustrated an example in which a racial minority colleague with twenty years of experience was overlooked for a promotion over a white individual who joined the company a few years prior. "Someone who literally has twenty years on someone else being passed over for a promotion. I think it's easier to get promoted when you are more visible to senior leadership because that's who makes the decisions". Participant eleven similarly showed that "…if you want to be promoted you take on more leadership, but you can't take on more leadership if you're not being assigned [to it]".

The data can be gathered to display how cultural gatekeepers often hire within their personal social networks that happen to consist of other white individuals. Their influence over decision-making processes showed that racial minorities are often left behind in the process of hiring and promotion. These racially motivated actions, therefore, create an industry built upon racial inequity. Importantly, the participants have shown that they are often professionally repressed due to this structure while white workers are granted affordances of progression.

Racial Valuation

While the concept of racial valuation relies on the thoughts and judgments of cultural intermediaries, my analysis examined it through the lens of creative workers. While this study found a lack of data to prove the presence of racial valuation, several experiences were shared that demonstrate the possibility of racial valuation. The study is limited to the perspective of the

racial minority creative worker and thus cannot assume the judgments of decision-makers without interviewing them. Participants showed an unawareness of the structures at work but indicated instances that may be the result of racial valuation.

In line with the mechanics of racial valuation, participant one identified the skepticism of coloured workers:

"…there's just a high level of skepticism…whether it be from a business or creative standpoint…[there is] a high level of skepticism in terms of [racial minority] abilities, what we contribute. I've been questioned [during] a number of interviews [and] left the interview and the person interviewing then said offline that they didn't believe I was the person that matched the resume".

In this case, the participant felt doubt from their superiors based on their racial identity. Racial judgments trickle down to the individual level causing racial minorities to feel that they do not carry the same value as their white counterparts.

Racial valuation may also be seen through participants' recollections of leadership and colleagues degrading their opinions. Participant two recalled a situation in which she stood as the sole minority on a project that was targeted toward racial minorities. "…it was weird because nobody really asked me for my opinion, and I was the only [minority] in the group…it made me feel very silent…it made me feel disrespected [that] no one really valued my opinion [even] being the obvious [minority]".

When compared to white creative workers in the industry, four participants illustrated the effects of racial expectations that are tied to success or failure. Participant eleven explained, "I've had white counterparts with the same experience who are behaving in ways I could not fathom. [They are] able to get away with…being super emotional, taking things personally, or

not being great at their jobs and still being able to succeed despite that – [even] being given numerous chances". Participant one also added how minorities have a more difficult experience in attempting to receive recognition and celebration for their work in comparison to members of the majority. "Those wins [of majorities] feel more celebrated…there should be no difference between my contribution and someone else's".

Five out of the eight participants who spoke to this topic also believed they had to work significantly harder than their white counterparts to simply meet the requirements placed on them by hierarchical racial structures. When addressing this issue, participant five explained, "I just think that [white workers] didn't have to work as hard, that they could get by and it would be okay, they would get another chance. But if I did that- if I screwed up this pitch because I didn't deliver perfectly, then I probably wouldn't get called to pitch again. If [racial minorities] mess up, [they're] not going to get another chance… I have felt that I've needed to work twice as hard to be on equal footing as everyone else".

The topic of scarcity consistently came up during interviews. Participant two shared, "[there's] always that kind of scarcity feeling [that] if I mess up, I might lose my job…I had experiences where I felt that I was putting in more work than a white male colleague in the same position, but he got promoted". This may illustrate the results of practices of racial valuation, where participants have possibly been designated with a failure expectation and therefore must compensate by working more diligently than their white colleagues. Through the experience of racial minority workers, racial valuation may be seen in terms of being valued and recognized, however, this is impossible to confirm without interviewing power figures themselves.

Shallow Diversity

The data has exhibited an overwhelming agreement on the sense of performativity emerging from diversity initiatives in the Canadian advertising industry. While many participants were happy to see that diversity initiatives have become a more common practice, they were also skeptical of their effectiveness in achieving a more diverse workplace. Ultimately, diversity initiatives were expressed as a branding tool rather than a path through which diversity may be achieved. People of colour were strategically used to position companies as inclusive. Participant four identified an instance in which they were asked, "Oh, why don't you just sit in [the meeting] because it's just looking a bit white". Participant six also called on an incident where their employers exploited the individual's race, "This white agency was showing me off to their coloured client [to say] hey look who's working for us now…and there [were] just two people of colour working at this agency". Participant two went on to say "it feels very performative, and it feels like it's being done to accommodate all the other things happing in the world. It's not really sincere in a sense, that anything is really being [done] to change things". As participant four stated, "…people of colour are meant to be the beacon of colour, literally within a sea of white". Nine participants felt that diversity initiatives were using minorities to simply fill quotas of diversity rather than looking at them for talent and skill. The thought was that white leadership will often hire by skin colour rather than through levels of qualification. Participant nine recalled a situation where during an interview they were told that the company was looking to hire a person of colour, "It's not a check box and people are treating it [like that]". After being told this, they began thinking "well am I going to get the job because I'm good or am I going to get the job because I tick [all of their boxes]?" Participant twelve explained, "As much as we push for hiring D&I (diversity and inclusion) just to be more inclusive, it doesn't always work that

way because you can't just hire somebody because they are coloured, they also have to be qualified".

Eleven respondents expressed a concern about performativity on other levels as well. Concerns arose from the fact that although more faces of colour are being seen in the industry, they are not being placed in spaces that foster growth, advancement, and influence. Participant one made a significant point when asking, "what does your talent pipeline look like? Is [diversity] reflected on all levels or just a few?". Numerous participants indicated that there is a lack of racial minority representation reflected in their leadership, also contending that minorities are often placed in entry-level roles that do not allow for growth. Participant four showed, "…I'm seeing more people of colour on the more junior level and as we go up higher it feels like the printers running out of ink". Participant five demonstrated, "I think we need better representation in senior roles. I think that the industry is attracting a lot of entry-level roles, but we don't see [racial minorities] at the top. You look at any leadership of an agency and there's not a lot of people of colour". Specifically, ten respondents reported having little to no racial minority leadership throughout their careers. Participant four brought this to life when saying, "The higher you get, the more [leadership's] names need to be diverse because I'm so tired of being represented by people with white names". Participant thirteen offered, "…I wouldn't say that there's been investments in helping [minorities] grow beyond those…more junior or mid-level walls…the progression has been a little slower".

A significant finding within the data involved the pressure racial minorities feel to be an expert on all diversity matters. The data showed that diversity initiatives often hire racial minorities to add glimpses of colour into their majority of whiteness. This has caused many respondents to feel the burden of constantly being the only advocators of diversity while also

having to be experts on the subject matter. As participant twelve pointed out when discussing an instance in which they were made to be the only person of colour on a team, "It felt like all that responsibility rested on my shoulders as the one token coloured person…". Participant four further examined this by saying, "As visible minorities, [we have to be] the reason for any kind of cultural activity. We have to bring everyone together and we have to bring the news about anything that's happening in diversity and equity…and then all that our majorities do is attend [diversity trainings and events]". Participant five felt this sense of obligation when addressing racial minorities who do not want to be the sole contact for diversity knowledge, "…if not us, then who?...I feel like it's up to us to take on the conversation and yes, it means more work, but it's better than the alternative". Here participant five is referring to the alternative being nothing at all. While there may be differing sides to the matter, the data shows that the teachings and knowledge of diversity rests on the shoulders of racial minorities due to their token status.

Identity & Self-Monitoring

In accordance with being an expert on diversity, nine participants also indicated this idea is associated with the thought that race is the most notable characteristic of a minority worker. Participants suggested that the emphasis placed on racial identity for minorities is overexaggerated to a point that race becomes a minority's entire personality. As participant four entailed, "that person of colour will be a person of colour [first], and then they will be a professional". Due to the lack of people of colour in the industry, all projects, events, and issues and pushed toward the few individuals in a company. Participant ten detailed this concern regarding a story about a fellow minority who felt these pressures:

"[there's a] kind of responsibility that's just put on [them] because [leadership] is not hiring other people to represent that community…[they say] let's give it to the person of

colour…they'll be able to handle it [but] what if we don't want to…just because [someone is coloured], it doesn't mean that [they] have to know everything about every [minority] initiative and community".

Participant six clearly explained, "they expect you to be the expert in diversity…[but] I'm an expert by no means [and] I definitely think that I [was] put onto certain clients of colour because…they thought they could relate to me". In this sense, participants felt that they were defined by their race, pulling back from concepts of racial valuation and shallow diversity. Their skills, experience, and identity ultimately are replaced by their race.

With race being positioned at the center of their identity, six participants felt that they were constantly under increased scrutiny and stereotype threats that hindered their ability to be their authentic selves. Participant one detailed an experience in which a white senior leader constantly called the individual out by implanting racial tropes upon their identity in the presence of other senior executives. This caused senior leadership to create a perception around the participant's character that was attached to race and took away from their professional skills. Participant eleven also described how minorities must be "…more mindful, way more structured in how [they] formulate [an] argument or counterpoints…to not be perceived as being aggressive…or difficult to work with". Such experiences combine with the normativity of whiteness to create pressures for racial minorities to perform in certain ways. Ninety-two percent of participants similarly dictated the need to create a compromised identity to fit industry standards. Through the process of codeswitching, respondents showed that they assembled a balanced identity that contained both "colour" and whiteness—both of which are deeply classed attributes. Some of these claims involved the altering of appearances, actions, and behaviours in order to create a racial identity that was white enough to assimilate into advertising culture but

coloured enough to meet the demands for diversity. Participant two perfectly summarized this idea by saying, "…my identity is between these two worlds…you're too scared to be too [coloured] because you don't know if that's accepted but then you're also trying to blend in [and] align with Western ideas…[there is a] constant identity shift of being authentic to yourself but also trying to fit the mold so you can progress". Under the illusion of presenting their best selves, participants alluded to the obligation to change their hair, the way they dress, their daily behaviours, and more to be accepted into the industry. Participant five illustrated how they chose to change their name to establish an ease experience in the industry. "…people of my [racial] background have white names or even our accent would change when we are acting at work…you felt like you had to put on a show just to make everyone else feel comfortable with who you are…that's just been ingrained into who I am now". Participant six similarly added, "…I would mimic what other white [people] do at agencies whether it's what they were wearing or…straightening my hair [even though] it wasn't a personal preference". Participant nine called to the importance of code-switching, "I hate to say it [but code switching] is almost necessary to move up in the advertising industry…there is an expectation to behave a certain way in order to move up". Code-switching can thus be seen as a necessary action for racial minorities to survive in the Canadian advertising industry.

Part of this performance was also discovered to include a social aspect. Four participants spoke to the importance of sociality in the advertising industry. It was positioned as an obligatory route to establish insider membership with other white colleagues. As participant nine pointed out, "[the] creative field requires you to be personable, part of a community, and outgoing…". They continue to expand on the topic by stating, "the people who go out are treated better and I say this as someone who does go out. If you have certain values that get in the way of that [then]

I think it would be extremely hard to fit in for you…it's a culture that's driven on certain values of fun and entertainment…so there is an encouragement to be who you are but to a limit, there's still a box…". Participant six also concluded, "…but the twentieth time you get asked to go [out], [there's a] personal preference thing, like maybe I don't drink…[so] the reason why you're not fitting in is because you're not the same culture as them and then that will affect you in your role or career".

Microaggressions

The data has produced a crucial finding indicating the implicit nature of racism within the Canadian advertising industry. Nine participants indicated that the Canadian advertising industry performs racially inequitable behaviors in an indirect manner, often emerging in the form of microaggressions. Racism was described as a daily micro-occurrence rather than an overt action. When addressing this issue participant nine stated, "…it's very subtle and it can really shatter your confidence over time when you feel like you're being overlooked, ignored, or not being treated the same". They also added, "it's never been overt, it's just been in the small things [like] how much they talk to you, [their] tone. That's not something I can really explain, it's something you feel". Participant eleven called to this particular industry when speaking of this issue, "[racism] is typically very polite and I think that's a very Canadian thing, to be honest. It's almost insidious in a way that it [becomes] very difficult to name and call out…no one can quite articulate what the issue is, but we all know what it really is". Participants described a number of small-scale incidents that affected them, including switching up names of the only minorities at the company, to comments made based on racial characteristics that are later played off as jokes. The covertness of racism was posed as an entirely different challenge to tackle beyond the systemic structures that are predetermined in the industry.

While four respondents addressed the existence of micro-aggressive racism, they also often relieved white groups of responsibility of the matter. Participant four claimed that "white people don't really realize it; they don't understand what they're doing so they don't even realize that it's not okay". Participant twelve similarly added, "I think a lot of things go unsaid that people who are not of colour just do and say and they don't realize that it might be a microaggression". These beliefs may show that there is an ignorance of understanding of the racial hierarchies at play within the industry. Denying blame may also be a response to compromise to make up for the barriers racial minorities face. Further investigation might help to reveal the motivations behind these ideas.

<u>Conclusions</u>

This study addresses the practices and behaviours of racial inequity in the Canadian advertising industry that fuels the reproduction of a systemic hierarchal structure of race rooted in the normativity of whiteness. The focus on perspectives and lived experiences of racial minorities has allowed for a deeply informed analysis that provides an original point of view on predefined racial barriers. By bringing together the various perspectives of thirteen racial minorities, this study was able to achieve a greater view of what they constantly and concurrently experience in the industry. This research suggests that the advertising industry is entrenched in formations of racial inequity that operate to disadvantage racial minorities while simultaneously benefitting racial majorities. The construction of the industry presents a unique set of challenges for racial minorities that create barriers to entry and existence in this space.

The organizing principle of the Canadian advertising industry remains normalized and dominated by whiteness. By placing this as the center of logic, racial minorities are heavily disadvantaged due to their designation into out-groups where they are made to be othered (Erigha, 2019). When attempting to enter and create influence in the industry, minorities are met with the hurdle of cultural gatekeepers that restrict and regulate their professional mobility. Through the creation of barriers for racial minorities, white gatekeepers are able to reproduce their personal ideologies and practices (Erigha, 2020). In their pursuit of appeasement of cultural gatekeepers, racial minorities must also manage perceptions and judgments of their race that have come to define their entire personality (Boulton, 2016). The constant need of participants of this study to prove themselves is a clear indication that there are certain expectations of their performance that stem from white leadership and colleagues. While white leadership often champions the importance of diversity in advertising, creative workers of colour face the reality

of those ideologies. The performativity of diversity that companies engage in disproportionally impacts minorities as they ultimately bear the outcomes. The lack of opportunity and weight of responsibility that racial minorities face arises from a false sense of inclusivity. The burden of diversity is shifted back onto the individual to navigate the industry and search for areas to succeed (Lente & Saha, 2022). While dealing with these issues, creatives of colour are forced to engage in practices of code-switching and self-monitoring to gain control over the perceptions that others have of them. Minorities participate in identity work in anticipation of instances of racial inequity in which they may be discriminated against through implicit behaviours (Stein, 2019). The various aspects of treatment and actions that racialized workers undergo can be considered in a collective sense as they work together to build immense barriers of difficulty. This research contributes to the existing scholarship surrounding racial inequity and the impacts of racially charged structures of power. The results confirm previous literature but offer a new perspective on systemic arrangements of the Canadian advertising industry. This study has given a voice to minority creative workers to illustrate how organized constructions of inequity impact the individual on a basis of racial identity. It is only by examining the individual perspective that a collective vision of racial inequity can be established. The findings of this study provide knowledge of visible minority experiences that can be used to further understand the process of cultural production in advertising and the products that emerge from them.

The significance of these issues lies in their ability to disrupt the flow of professional progression for racial minorities. Whether considered individually or collectively, these elements of inequity cause roadblocks for minority creative workers attempting to enter a predominantly white industry. The practices described in this study are vessels of power wielded by white figures for the purpose of keeping racial minorities out of the industry and within their control.

Racial barriers assist in advancing the difficulty of experience for minorities, one that is exponentially different from that of white workers. The struggles people of colour face in the industry are carefully constructed tools of white privilege that place serious limitations on minority careers. Ultimately, this all maintains and perpetuates Eurocentric views and structures in advertising. By keeping minorities out and keeping majorities in, white privilege can be sustained as a dominating factor that keeps control within the realm of the powerful. It is only through this process that cultural products can remain immersed within white culture and represent the interests of insider groups. The advertising industry continues to be submerged in whiteness, drowning out the voices of racial minorities. This study helps to confirm that the biases of the industry perpetuate an experience of inequity for racial minorities. To maintain their power and ensure the continuance of their influence, white groups engage in racially motivated practices and behaviours that aim to place minorities at a great disadvantage.

The marginalization of racial minorities, therefore, has a great impact on the content that is produced in this industry. The advertising industry holds power in disseminating ideologies and representations across the Canadian population and if people of colour are restricted from participating in this process, messages of the majority groups will be the sole knowledge that reaches mass audiences (Erigha, 2018). The intrinsic link between production and consumption places importance on *who* creates culture, causing racial inequity to be directly related to the content that is readily available. A lack of diversity during the production process translates into a cycle of underrepresentation and misrepresentation of racial minorities (Erigha, 2015). The content that is consumed continues to reflect the beliefs, culture, and perspectives of dominant white groups. The barriers set for minority workers cause the advertising industry to produce

cultural products that emerge from a narrow range of lived experiences that fit within the white box (Stein, 2019).

The influence of advertising on culture dictates the importance of a reflective vision of race in content. Many participants in this study spoke to the value of diversity in advertising addressing the need to be representative of the surrounding world. While they indicated that advertising on-screen must be more reflective of Canadian audiences, they also stressed the importance of an industry landscape that is just as representative. By giving workers of colour more opportunities to influence and shape cultural products, more inclusive advertising can be created. This study calls attention to the numerous obstacles that restrain racial minorities from reaching spaces of cultural production that embody the experiences and concerns of racialized communities.

The Canadian advertising industry, while still riddled with issues, has seen the staggering difference in representation and claims to be working to solve the problem. Several respondents nodded to improvements in the industry, establishing that they have seen representational change since they began their careers. Participants concluded that there has been a definitive shift towards involving more people of colour, allowing them greater influence, and making more significant efforts to address the barriers in place. Regardless, concerns still arose surrounding the genuineness of these attempts and the longitudinal time frame in which they could be accomplished. Following the fatalistic sentiment, participants felt that although they have seen change, racial inequity in the industry is a defining factor of its function, and will take great strides to reduce it. There was a sense of impossibility of the matter causing participants to maintain a sense of hope for greater diversity but carry a reality that this will never truly be achieved.

In conclusion, we must consider the role of white groups in reproducing racially motivated practices and behaviours and how they, in turn, create systemic structures of disproportionate power. The hierarchy of race that lies at the center of the Canadian advertising industry must be examined to understand the lack of diversity that characterizes this arena. The desire of racial minority creative workers to engage in a production process that is situated within a broad range of lived experiences will be indefinitely restricted until the barriers of entry and existence that they face are diminished. The advertising industry must enact new processes to welcome the perspectives and experiences of racial minorities if they want to prosper in a society that contains an increasingly diverse population. As audiences become more aware of aspects of representation, advertising must meet their demands and employ people of colour to enter spaces of decision-making if they want to conduct a successful business (Erigha, 2019).

This study has addressed a number of issues and concerns that can be further examined. Future scholarship is suggested to investigate the relationship between inequitable racial barriers minorities face in the industry and the cultural products that emerge as a result more deeply. It is vital to understand how the racially charged behaviours of the industry impact the content that is disseminated into the world and how that content shapes the minds of society. Another important future consideration is of the intersectionality of demographics. Further inquiry should be conducted surrounding the intersectionality between elements of gender, economic capital, education levels, age, and so on in relation to race. Many participants of this study made connections throughout their interviews to intersectional points of inequity. It would be useful to explore the relationships between race and other elements that produce inequity in society.

Appendix A

Theme	Colour	Description
Central Whiteness	Light Purple	Discussion surrounding the racial makeup of the industry. Stories about the prevalence of whiteness in the advertising industry.
Cultural Gatekeepers	Light Yellow	Discussions surrounding the occupancy of white people in managerial and leadership roles. Experiences discussing the power of these white figures in decision-making processes in the industry. Experiences involving the lack of social networking opportunities compared to white counterparts and leadership.
Racial Valuation	Light Red	Experiences of diminished value on a racial basis. Discussions surrounding the skepticism of racial minority performance in the industry. Any talk about having to work harder than white individuals.
Shallow Diversity	Light Blue	Discussions surrounding the performativity of diversity initiatives. Discussions around the lack of professional advancement for racial minorities. Experiences of feeling the need to be an expert on diversity matters.
Identity & Self-Monitoring	Light Orange	Experiences of the pressure to create a balanced identity of colour and whiteness. Stories involving the need to change one's behaviour based on the white ideals of the industry. Experiences of feeling the need to represent one's entire race and community.
Microaggressions	Light Cyan	Any talk surrounding the implicit forms of racism participants faced. Discussions about the Canadian industry's ability to make these experiences less overtly racist.

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