This article was originally published in MENU magazine, Canada's foodservice and hospitality magazine. For more insights and industry stories, please visit menumag.ca.

THE DOUBLE BIND:

How Race and Gender Shape Black Women's Careers in Foodservice

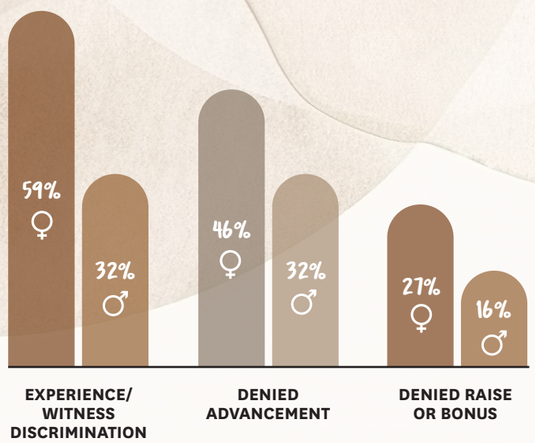
Intersectionality isn't just a buzzword—it's a reality that shapes workplace experiences in ways many don't see. Coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept explains how overlapping identities—like race and gender—create unique barriers. For Black women in the workplace, this means navigating both racial and gender bias, often leading to fewer opportunities, slower career advancement, and a higher likelihood of workplace discrimination.

This double bind forces Black women to constantly navigate workplace politics in ways their peers don't. This extra layer of stress contributes to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and high turnover rates. It's not just about fixing one issue at a time; real change requires acknowledging how these challenges compound—and taking action to dismantle them.

"That Black woman who's working for you is doing the work of 10 people. I know that I'm capable of doing my job because it gets done, but at the same time, do you understand the value?"

THE FORK IN THE ROAD:

Black women report being denied, isolated and left behind in the workplace significantly more often than Black men.



Technomic and Ignite. Custom Report: *Summary of Key Findings on Labour Participation and Discrimination in Foodservice*. Prepared for The Re-Seasoning Coalition, February 2024.

"You can't hide the fact that you're a Black woman and almost off the rip, people have this idea that they have to combat your presence and bring you down. Just by existing and having confidence, automatically, people are really standoffish, especially when you kind of know what you're doing in the kitchen. I feel like sometimes you have to dumb yourself down in order to be accepted in different spaces and environments."

"I feel like as a Black woman, there's even a thicker glass ceiling and I feel like we don't see anyone that looks like us. Starting out my career in food, the corporate side of foodservice, it can kind of feel like, you know, 'how do I kind of get to that director role or that management role from where I'm at right now? I've no one up there who looks like me and there's no actual runway for that."

"In a corporate setting, you'll definitely get access to mentorship. Typically everyone gets it, but that doesn't mean that your mentor actually understands your specific needs and your impact."

Support the Success of Black Women in The Workplace

ACKNOWLEDGE THE DOUBLE BURDEN AND GET COMFORTABLE WITH BEING UNCOMFORTABLE. Passive leadership is a significant influence on perpetuating toxic environments. Focus group participants observed that managers often ignored problematic behaviour, allowing discriminatory practices to persist.

NORMALIZE MENTAL HEALTH AND REDUCE EMOTIONAL LABOUR. Black women in particular need mental health support at work, including regular check-ins with empathetic managers and easily accessible professional development programs. Focus group participants stressed that financial incentives alone (e.g., raises) are insufficient to address deeper, systemic issues that are often driven by unconscious biases.

ACCEPT THAT AWARENESS IS NOT THE SAME AS COMPETENCE. Comprehensive management training and how to effectively lead diverse teams is urgently required in the foodservice industry. Focus group participants criticized the prevalence of inexperienced managers who fail to foster an inclusive work environment.

VALUE CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS. Embrace and explore foods and traditions from diverse backgrounds and create opportunities for your employees to share their knowledge and cultural know-how.

CHECK IN OFTEN. Proactively connect with employees to openly air—and actively address—concerns and manage interpersonal conflicts at work. Passive, "open-door" policies place the burden on employees to come forward, and is likely to result in higher attrition.

Join the waitlist for TRSC's foodservice specific e-learning program to learn how to integrate equity into your business model to create stronger teams and drive better outcomes.

thereseasoning.org

THE RE-SEASONING COALITION

This program has been funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada.

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According to data derived from a research base of 131 Black women who have worked in foodservice conducted by Technomic and Ignite on behalf of The Re-Seasoning Coalition:

- 1 of 5 Black women in foodservice roles report working with no other Black women. 11% of these women report their experience as "horrible" and are 76% more likely to leave the industry.
- There is nearly a 10-point satisfaction advantage (32% to 23%) when Black women work with other Black women and a 17-point retention advantage (59% attrition if working with peers vs. 76% if working alone).
- The vast majority of Black women are at risk for turnover. Only 14% report advancing quickly and seeing themselves staying in their current foodservice role for the long term.