

THE INTERSECTION

AN EYEZWE CONSULTING NEWSLETTER & PODCAST

To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment."

Ralph Waldo Emerson
Poet/Philosopher

Series: Why Black Women in Corporate South Africa Fear Visibility – And How We Change It

Post 4: The Professional Cost of Standing Out

Visibility shouldn't be a career risk. But for many Black women in corporate SA, speaking up = backlash. Why 'fitting in' still feels like survival—and how we change that.

Backlash for Assertiveness

Standing up for yourself or calling out bias often comes with punishment. Boundaries are read as "difficult." Calling out racism—even the subtle kind—is met with defensiveness, denial, and attempts to "fix" you.

I've seen it first-hand. My son faced discrimination at his flight school, and when I raised concerns, the Chief Instructor flatly denied having biases. Another instructor defended the offender by saying, "He's the nicest person ever. He couldn't possibly be racist."

What's more exhausting than the incident itself is the burden: being expected to stay calm, polite, even nice to those inflicting harm—lest you be seen as angry or aggressive.

Code-Switching and the Cost of Belonging

Many of us polish our accents, change our hair, or tone ourselves down just to be "accepted." Natural hair is called aggressive. Bald heads? Intimidating. Code-switching isn't abandonment— it's survival.

But here's the truth: you are enough. You belong in every space you choose to occupy. What you're doing today makes the path lighter for those who come after you.

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Too Much. Not Enough.

Black women constantly walk the line between being “too much” and “not enough.” Too loud. Too ambitious. Not experienced enough.

I've been promised promotions—only to watch the goalposts move further away. Eventually, I chose my family and my mental health over a workplace that refused to see my worth.

For women, ambition is painted as arrogance. For men, it's celebrated. The price of Black women's ambition is exclusion: from meetings, projects, and opportunities. The unspoken message? Play small. Don't expect more.

Remember Who You Are

There is no one-size-fits-all survival guide. But this much is true:

You are qualified.

You are worthy.

You belong.

Know yourself, set goals, and find mentors—even in books, podcasts, or people you'll never meet. Heal your wounds and rewrite the stories you tell yourself. What happened to you is not your fault, but your healing is your responsibility.

CTA: Have you ever adjusted yourself to fit in? Share your story.

Next: The double bias of race + gender.