

THE INTERSECTION

AN EYEZWE CONSULTING NEWSLETTER & PODCAST

“Not everything that is faced can be changed, but
nothing can be changed until it is faced..”

James Baldwin
Author

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

Post 5: The Double Discrimination of Race & Gender

Black women don't face just a glass ceiling—it's a concrete one. The dual burden of race and gender bias is one of the most overlooked challenges in South African workplaces. Even well-intentioned DEI efforts often fail to address how these two forms of discrimination intersect, leaving Black women carrying the weight alone.

1. Gendered Racism: Competence Questioned More Than Peers

Apartheid left a generational legacy: many white South Africans have never had to take authority from a Black person—in school, church, or the workplace. This history shapes how Black women leaders are treated today.

When a Black woman asserts her authority, she is often met with criticism, not for her competence, but for how she makes others feel. White employees in particular are centred: “She should have been less aggressive. More considerate. Nicer.”

The reality? Black women rarely get the benefit of accumulated credibility. Success doesn't compound—it resets daily. Every morning is a fresh audition to prove you deserve to be in the room.

Ibram X. Kendi captures this paradox: Black people are judged as a collective; white people are judged as individuals.

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2. Eurocentric Standards: Beauty, Behaviour & Belonging

Corporate South Africa still equates professionalism with Eurocentric norms.

Natural hair is labelled “unkempt” or “too political.”

Speaking with conviction is policed as being “too loud” or “too aggressive.”

Makeup and weaves are recommended to “soften your look” and make you more approachable.

The painful truth is that many Black women also internalise these standards—associating straightened hair or lighter makeup with success at graduations, weddings, or corporate milestones.

The problem isn't choice—it's pressure. Do it because you want to, not because it's the unspoken cost of acceptance, visibility, or belonging.

3. The Mental Load of Navigating Dual Biases

Carrying both racial and gendered bias creates an invisible weight that affects not just careers, but mental health and self-worth.

Black women are often:

Fighting self-doubt, no matter past achievements.

Settling for less pay, fewer resources, or limited recognition.

People-pleasing to avoid being labelled “difficult.”

Compromising values to “fit in.”

Experiencing isolation and loneliness, even from peers who fear association.

As Jamie Kern Lima reminds us: “We rise to the level of our confidence, but we fall to the level of our self-worth.”