

**Obstacles to Diversification: Lived Experiences of Visible Minority Applicants and Faculty
Members in Psychology**

Virginia M. C. Tze¹ and Johnson C.-H. Li²

¹Department of Educational Administrations, Foundation and Psychology, University of
Manitoba

²Department of Psychology, University of Manitoba

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Virginia Tze, Department of Educational Administrations, Foundation and Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg Manitoba MB R3T 2N2, Canada. Email: Virginia.Tze@umanitoba.ca

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Abstract

The profession of psychology demonstrably lacks diversity, with inequitably low numbers of visible minorities represented in the field. Although equity, diversity, and inclusion as a social advocacy movement has received increasing attention within the profession and at the university level, changes are thus far too small to be noticeable. Little is known about the lived experiences of minority applicants applying to professional psychology graduate programs nor the experiences of faculty members involved in student selection processes. We interviewed eight unsuccessful minority applicants, and eight faculty members affiliated with Canadian professional training programs to identify obstacles in diversifying the profession. Thematic analysis of interview data revealed that obstacles were multifaceted, ranging from unsuccessful minority applicants reporting lack of support during the application process and feeling worried about the impact of their identities to faculty members expressing insufficient resources to provide mentorship experiences to minority undergraduate students. We discuss the practical implications of the obstacles identified in relation to how to dismantle those systemic barriers.

Keywords: diversity, obstacles, minority students, professional psychology, training

Public Significance Statements

In our study, minority participants were frustrated in their journey due to the lack of guidance and support offered to them. This echoed the programmatic challenges faculty participants expressed. Making admission preparation and evaluation more transparent, offering targeted support for both minority applicants and faculty, and engaging in tangible systemic changes at the program and university levels are critical steps toward addressing the lack of diversity in the field.

Introduction

In Canada, minorities have faced additional barriers to access mental health care; this includes, but is not limited to, longer wait times, lack of access to minority mental health professionals, discrimination, and practitioners' lack of understanding of the complex needs (Fante-Coleman & Jackson-Best, 2020). When supported by matched minority clinicians, minority clients show more improvement (Kim & Kang, 2018). This could be in part related to non-White¹ clinicians have stronger multicultural awareness and counselling relationship when compared with non-White clinicians (Dune et al., 2022). Both Faber et al. (2023) and Goghari (2022) called for the pressing need to address the lack of diversity in the professional psychology in Canada through the change in policies that keep prospective Indigenous and visible minorities out. This study takes a step further and listens the lived experiences of visible minority in their unsuccessful applications to professional psychology training programs and faculty members' perceptions on this issue.

Lack of Diversity in Professional Psychology

In Canada and the United States, there has been a longstanding lack of diversity in the professional psychologist workforce, which has made it difficult to meet the mental health needs of growing ethno-diverse populations. Galán et al. (2023) argued that the lack of diversity in professional psychology is a key factor in the underutilization of mental health service among visible minorities and Indigenous Peoples. The issue has been a subject of study for at least twenty-five years. Muñoz-Dunbar and Stanton (1999) found that the majority of clinical psychology programs involved in their study reported specific recruitment efforts being made to diversify their student populations, which is the first step in producing more ethnoculturally

¹ In Dune et al. (2021), visible minorities and Indigenous Peoples were included in the non-White category.

diverse practising psychologists. Given this, the field of professional psychologists should, by now, be more diverse. Yet Callahan et al.'s 2018 study shows little progress, identifying a lack of Hispanic/Latine and Black doctoral students in American Psychological Association accredited programs, as compared to the proportion of these ethnic groups in U.S. census data. The situation is not much different in Canada. In 2021 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News reporter Nicole Williams wrote "Black psychologists say there are too few of them in Canada – and that's a problem" in the headline. Callahan et al. (2018) stated that the lack of ethnocultural diversity is the most significant shortfall in the field. Faber et al. (2023) well-summarized the challenges for Black, Indigenous, East Asian and South Asian in accessing mental health services, and a lack of understanding of minorities' cultures stands out. Thus, an ethnoculturally diverse psychologist workforce is necessary to the provision of responsive mental health and psychological services (Ding et al., 2021), as psychologists from diverse ethnocultural backgrounds bring with them a shared understanding of minorities' cultural perspectives on mental health. In addition, diversity also includes linguistically diverse mental health providers, as both Ding et al. (2021) and Faber et al. (2023) discussed the challenges minorities experience due to language barriers in their access of mental health services. In Canada, 13% of the population speaks a language other than English or French at home (Government of Canada, 2022), and 20% speaks a language other than English at home in the U.S. (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022). Without making a deliberate effort to have an ethnocultural and linguistically diverse psychologist workforce, our profession is perpetuating an unjust system.

Gridlock in Diversifying Professional Psychologists

Admission

The first bottleneck in the so-called ‘diversity pipeline’ – that is, the path individuals take from initial application to credentialled professional standing – occurs during admission, and it is indeed a bigger problem than the subsequent bottleneck in retention during professional psychology training (Callahan et al., 2018). A case study, based on the University of Ottawa’s admission criteria in their professional psychology program, identified four commonly used admission criteria, namely university grade point averages (GPA), most recent degree, conference presentations, and publications were deemed to put Indigenous and visible minority students at a disproportionate disadvantage (Sarr et al., 2022). De Los Reyes and Uddin (2021) explained how traditional admission criteria/metrics, such as GPA and research experiences, are perpetuating inequities in graduate admission. First, undergraduate GPA was not a strong predictor of graduate degree attainment in social sciences, including psychology (Kuncel et al., 2001). Worse still, Whitcomb (2021) revealed that underrepresented minorities (except Asian) attained lower GPA across all six years in their undergraduates when students who did not have any disadvantages. Furthermore, Pierszalowski et al. (2021) speculated that students of colour may have been impacted by multiple barriers in their access of undergraduate research experience, such as scarcity of research opportunities and lack of time from research mentors. On the other hand, Miller et al. (2020) found that previous research experiences were not associated with success in graduate school nor in research performance. This raises a serious question about the utility of these traditional metrics in graduate school admission, including professional psychology programs. While both Callahan et al. and Sarr et al. recommended faculty members in professional psychology programs rethink and revise these common criteria when evaluating applications, it is unclear how likely institutions are to invest the necessary time and energy to do so, nor do we know the obstacles to proposing and implementing such change.

Literature on admission and recruitment hurdles for minority students is burgeoning. DeJoseph et al. (2023) described the complexity of navigating the application process, including searching graduate programs, preparing and writing required tests, completing written statements, and possibly attending interviews, coupled with accumulated and ongoing research experience. They discussed how a virtual peer mentorship program offered in conjunction with panel workshops for marginalized students was critical in making visible “unspoken rules” (p. 2). The program looked promising because psychology departments themselves funded underrepresented graduate students and/or postdoctoral fellows to provide the mentorship (DeJoseph et al., 2023). However, the authors acknowledged that it was a huge time commitment to coordinate and operate such a mentorship program. Further, while the program provided much-needed support for mentees, the nuances in applying to professional psychology Ph.D. programs may not have been obvious in the formal events offered (DeJoseph et al., 2023).

Program’s Commitment to Diversity

Galán et al. (2023) argued that the challenge of recruiting visible minority students is inherent in a misguided perception of the problem of insufficient diverse applicants. In the study, the authors focused on both clinical psychology graduate students’ and faculty members’ perceptions of recruitment efforts, and they found that minority participants (graduate students and faculty members) rated programs’ seriousness in recruiting diverse applicants as well as faculty lower than non-minority participants did. There was no significant difference among the three minority groups of participants—Asian, Black and Latinx—in their ratings. Hsueh et al. (2020) explored the perception of authenticity in a program’s commitment in diversity among clinical psychology graduate students during an admission interview. Ten percent reported perceiving inauthenticity while 25% reported perceiving high authenticity. Hsueh et al. further

reported that ethnocultural diverse clinical psychology graduate students put more emphasis on funding incentive than White non-Hispanic clinical psychology graduate students to inform their final decision about whether or not to embark on their graduate education journey.

As challenges are identified in admission and recruitment, there have been discussions about how to improve recruitment efforts. First, program information should be disseminated in multiple avenues, such as in-person events, social media, and professional networks (Ding et al., 2021). Second, Ding et al. (2021) suggest more flexible admission evaluation, consistent with Callahan et al. (2018) and Sarr et al. (2022)'s criteria for admission evaluation. Specifically, among Faber et al.'s (2023) recommendations for Canadian universities, one of them was to "incorporate more holistic markers of potential" (p. 349) to reduce barriers to be accepted into professional psychology training programs. Third, they stress the importance of providing funding to students (Ding et al., 2021), or as Faber et al. (2023) suggested, it is critical to remove the "financial burden" (p.349) to relocate for a mandatory residency. And fourth, it is vital to recruit visible or linguistically diverse faculty members, as they can provide the mentorship and research supervision on topics that resonate with prospective minority students (Ding et al., 2021).

Features of Programs with Increased Diversity

While there are stumbling blocks, Rogers and Molina (2006) investigated common characteristics of psychology programs who were successful in increasing the number of minority graduate students of colour, including Indigenous and visible minority students. Seven of these programs were in professional psychology. Through interviewing faculty and students, the authors identified that these programs have faculty of colour representation in the program or within the department, and utilize multiple recruitment strategies. While two most highly rated

admission factors were personal statements and recommendation letters, undergraduate GPA was still considered highly important by two-thirds of these programs. It is undeniable that GPA provides information on applicants' scholastic achievement. However, Woo et al. (2023) also highlight the concerns regarding fairness of undergraduate GPA, such as being compounded with low SES and individual factors. However, Martin et al.'s (2017) study found that despite individual variables, such as study skills, are related to undergraduate GPA, they do not additionally explain the ethnocultural impact on undergraduate GPA.

Rationale

The literature on recruitment, admission, and retention of minority and faculty is expanding, and many studies survey current graduate students and faculty members. The recent studies (e.g., Faber et al., 2023, Goghari, 2022) call for systematic changes in professional psychology programs in Canada to address the diversity issue. However, as a profession, we know little about the lived experiences of visible minority applicants during their preparation process to get to the point to submit an application. These are importance perspectives to have when the profession is embarking on this just journey. Without these voices, our understanding of how to effectively diversify the profession will be incomplete at best and misguided at worst. Hence, in Study 1, we interviewed visible minority applicants about their challenges and obstacles in their unsuccessful application journey to professional psychology training programs.

Given admission is not a one-way street, those involve in making admission decisions are voices which we should listen. These are faculty members in the professional psychology training programs. Their lived experiences in the selection process to address the bottleneck of diversity issue are unknown. Furthermore, it is equally important to listen to their perceptions of obstacles to implementing the strategies suggested in the literature. Therefore, in Study 2, we

interviewed faculty members who are affiliated with either clinical, counselling, and/or school psychology programs in Canada to shed light on systemic barriers that keep the profession from move forward in more equitable ways. The critical awareness gained will become a driving force in combating oppression (French et al., 2020).

Positionality and Epistemology

The first author is an Asian psychologist registered in Alberta and Manitoba. She has the lived experienced of being a minority applicant to professional psychology programs in Canada. She is a faculty member at [blanked the university's name] which offers a graduate program in [blanked the speciality] and the Editor of [blanked the journal name]. She was also a past member of the Canadian Psychological Association Accreditation Panel. The second author is a minority faculty member at [blanked the university's name] whose research involves applied psychology and methodology. Given both author's lived experiences as a minority and faculty member in Canada, the present study anchors on subjectivist epistemology (e.g., Poucher et al., 2020) in which researchers' knowledge and experiences are considered the tools in the research process. Subjectivist epistemology acknowledges that knowledge generated through researchers' values and interpretations (e.g., Levers, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2018).

Study 1: Sample and Procedure

This study aims to answer the research question of what barriers unsuccessful minority applicants face and what strengths they identify. Ethics approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Board 2 at a Canadian university to recruit individuals who self-identified as visible minority based on Statistic Canada's definition². They were recruited through social media

² "Visible minority refers to whether a person is a visible minority or not, as defined by the Employment Equity Act. The Employment Equity Act defines visible minorities as "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour". The visible minority population consists mainly of the following groups:

advertisements on Facebook and Instagram or through snowball sampling from minority participants involved in this study. A screener form was used to see whether prospective minority participants met the eligibility requirements: 1) a minority who had applied to a Canadian professional psychology graduate training program in counselling, clinical, school, or clinical neuropsychology in the past five years (2018-2022), 2) who had had unsuccessful application(s) during the five-year period, and 3) who resided in Canada. Each minority participant completed an individual semi-structural Zoom interview conducted by a research assistant, and the interviews were recorded using Zoom as well as a backup recorder. An honorarium of \$120 was provided to each minority participant. While there were ten participants who met the eligibility requirements based on responses submitted on the screener, a review of the interview contents revealed that two were deemed ineligible because either their applications were not in any of the aforementioned speciality of professional psychology or they were not unsuccessful in a given year. This resulted in a reduction of participants to eight. The mean duration of minority participant interview was 21 minutes. All participants completed a demographic survey after completion of the interview. The mean age of minority participants was 36 years old. Half of the participants self-identified as Black and the other half self-identified as Asian. These eight participants resided in British Columbia and Ontario. Eight reported their SES as middle and one reported as low-middle. Two minority participants were later successful in getting admitted in the professional psychology training programs, and out of the other six participants, two are either unsure or will not reapply and four will reapply again.

Study 2: Sample and Procedure

South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean and Japanese.” (Statistic Canada, 2021).

The second study aims to answer the research question regarding important aspects to remove barriers to enhance the diversity for professional psychology programs. Ethics approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Board 2 from the same university as in Study 1 to recruit faculty members who were affiliated with a professional psychology graduate training program (i.e., Counselling, Clinical, School or Clinical Neuropsychology) in Canada. These participants were recruited through emails or the Recruit Research Participants Portal (R2P2)³, which is a service provided by the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA). Research studies posted on R2P2 are advertised by CPA allowing the reach of CPA members, including faculty members. The first author submitted an R2P2 application on CPA's portal after obtaining the university ethics approval. It was then reviewed by CPA, and once it was accepted, the project was advertised on CPA's research studies page. Those recruited via R2P2 completed a screener to ensure that they were faculty members in one of the aforementioned professional psychology training programs at a Canadian university. Faculty participants also completed an individual semi-structural Zoom interview, with a mean duration of 44 minutes. The interviews were conducted by the first author. The same recording procedure was used with faculty interviews. An honorarium of \$215 was provided to each faculty participant. Eight faculty members participated in the study, and their affiliated specialities included counselling, clinical and school psychology.

Rigour of the Study and Data Analysis

Interview recordings were first transcribed using Microsoft Word 365 transcribe feature and were checked for accuracy by two research team members. Member checking was used to

³ Participants were also recruited through announcement made in the CPA educational and school psychology, counselling psychology, clinical psychology and clinical neuropsychology sections in listserv, and they were provided with the R2P2 link.

ensure rigour of the information (Johnson et al., 2020). Each transcript was then shared with the participant for their review and/or corrections. Redacted transcripts are available upon reasonable request. Consistent with the subjectivist epistemology, we decided to take a Big Q approach in data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Given the richness of interview data of both sets of participants, a reflexive inductive thematic orientation was considered a suitable way to capture the unique themes that emerged from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Following Braun and Clarke's recommendation that a single coder conduct all the coding, the first author coded all 16 transcripts in NVivo 12, while allowing reflexivity in the process. Codes were all verified by a research assistant to ensure the rigour of the coding.

Findings from Study 1

Themes Identified through Interviewing Minority Applicants

In the interview data gathered from our minority participants, four core themes emerged: 1) perceptions of psychologists as a profession, 2) experiences of the application journey, 3) concerns and challenges, and 4) making a difference in their experiences. These themes addressed the obstacles minority participants faced as well as possible directions to uplift their application journey. In the following sections, we will report findings for each theme sequentially. Table 1 shows the quotes extracted for each theme.

Perceptions of Psychologists as a Profession

Minority participants were motivated to enter this profession either during their undergraduate program or as a change from a related allied profession such as social work or education. To support their eventual applications, minority participants also accrued experiences in teaching or through volunteering in community organizations. Participants viewed psychology as a profession of great importance to the society and expressed their desire to have an impact on

others in their mental wellness. This reflected that our minority participants valued the use of psychological knowledge to help people, as is explained by CPA about what a psychologist is (n.d.). Our participants further commented on psychology as a profession from their cultural lens. They expressed that denial and stigma of mental health challenges was common, and they highlighted the clinical impact they perceived professional psychologists render. This was also their motivation to begin a career in professional psychology and to support back in their community. Interestingly, only two participants mentioned research as part of their motivation for entering the profession, whereas professional psychology training programs often have a heavy emphasis on research.

Experiences of the Application Journey

Participants revealed contradictory perceptions regarding the complexity of the graduate application journey to professional psychology. Most described it as simple and cited the core requirements needed for them to apply. Some participants, however, were puzzled by a lack of clear information about those requirements. Participants was also frustrated with the limited admission spots. Only two participants referenced the importance of finding a supervisor during the application journey.

One common experience this sample had was that they were unsuccessful in their application journey. Most of our participants felt that the reasons given for their lack of success was generic and too vague to be useful. While providing generic feedback to unsuccessful applicants is not an uncommon practice, the participants who received this feedback questioned the admission process. Although participants' journeys ended with a notification of unsuccessful application, the ripple effect of frustration continues. Participants in this sample hope for more support to begin with, better support from the faculty or the university, as well as more useful

feedback on their unsuccessful applications. Contrasting to this experience is the support that two other participants received. They highlighted the importance of support from professors with whom they had connections as research/teaching assistants.

Although each participant ended their application journey at different application stages, common experiences included frustration about how admissions decisions are made and less-than-useful feedback and support during the process.

Concerns and Challenges

Participants identified a range of diversity challenges, including discrimination in different facets of life, feeling judged by other people's formed stereotypes, being the only visible minority in a given context, and balancing financial responsibilities with the effort to strengthen applications. Seeing the lack of diversity in the profession, participants expressed worries about the impact of their identities as minorities on their application journeys. There were only two participants explicitly mentioned that research was part of their motivation to enter professional psychology training programs. However, when our participants reflected on their unsuccessful applications, they drew connections between their lack of research experience and their unsuccessful applications.

Minority participants revealed that the lack of diversity in professional psychology training programs made them worry about the impact of their minority identity on their applications. Participants also worried that not having enough research exposure impacted their success.

Making a Difference in Their Experiences

Participants believed that their experiences in their application journeys could have been different had they received guidance and support early on. A couple of participants reflected on

insufficient knowledge about psychology training programs at other universities, as well as the different programs offered by the same university. Participants also emphasized the importance of knowing the process and knowing what to do during their undergraduate programs of study. While the knowledge of application process is one way to make a difference, participants also expressed how mentorship could have a positive impact on their journeys.

Being equipped with knowledge of the process and having access to mentorship could potentially uplift the experiences of minorities during their graduate application journey. As was reported in an earlier core theme, minority participants felt limited in support.

Study 1 Discussion

Despite their strong motivation and interest of providing culturally sensitive support, one key finding observed from our minority participants was that most of them were unaware of how much research is emphasized in the admission to professional psychology training programs. As was found by Faber et al. (2023), most doctoral programs in Canada are Ph.D. that dually focuses on clinical and research trainings. Without being fully informed of the equal (or greater) emphasis on research experiences, minority applicants are kept in the dark regarding why they are unsuccessful in their applications despite having relevant “clinical” or “helping” experiences. Indeed, Psy.D. which “trains students for clinical practice rather than research careers” (Faber et al., 2023, p. 343) is more in alignment with what these participants might have in their minds as a career. Furthermore, Miller et al. (2020) found past research experiences were not predictive of future academic and research performance, and Woo et al. (2020) highlighted the fairness issue about who have access to research exposures. Hence, while knowing the importance placed on research experiences in admission to professional psychology programs would be helpful for prospective minority applicants, it is equally important to examine the utility of this criterion in

admission as it fails to predict graduate performance (Miller et al., 2020). In addition, the ability of the field to move forward to have more diversity hinges on prospective minority applicants having access to high-quality of mentorship, as was found in this study. A recent review conducted by Grapin et al. (2023) found that mentorship, conceptualized as a reciprocal relationship between a mentor and a mentee (Cobb et al., 2018), supports mentees in their exploration of careers, scholarly productivity and networking. Our minority participants also brought forward the concerns regarding disclosing their ethnocultural identities in graduate applications, and it is of critical importance of how such disclosure will be used as well as how faculty personal biases will be brought to awareness (e.g., Stewart et al., 2017) when making decisions on admission.

Findings from Study 2

Themes Identified through Interviewing Faculty Members

Faculty members in our sample revealed contrasting observations in terms of diversity of graduate students in professional psychology programs. While an encouraging trend of an increase in diverse student body was noted by some faculty members, other faculty members expressed a lack of diversity with a possibility that is related to the geographical locations of the programs. Three core themes emerged from interviews with these faculty participants, and they are 1) programmatic barriers, 2) faculty's perceptions of intersectional barriers for minorities, and 3) initiatives to diversify the profession. These themes offer perspectives on how to address challenges to diversify the profession, describe efforts made so far, and suggest possible future directions to encourage more psychologists with diverse backgrounds. In the following sections, we will report findings for each theme sequentially, and Table 2 shows the quotes extracted for each theme.

Programmatic Barriers

Faculty participants all commented that professional psychology program admission is very competitive, with 70% to over 95% rejection rates. This is partly related to financial and resource constraints. Furthermore, given the limited opportunities in funding and support packages available, achieving diversity through recruiting international students presented as an additional obstacle. A less diverse faculty composition could be a barrier for minority students to engage in research and clinical work, and thus to contribute back to their communities. There is also a lack of systemic support in terms of funding and recognition for individual faculty members who offer support to prospective students interested in becoming psychologists. Embarking on the diversity work is also contingent on colleagues' buy-in to make structural changes in their own programs. Structural barriers, such as a requirement to enroll in a full-time programme or expectations to relocate for internships, as well as training opportunities on "*intersectional factors*" may take longer to break.

Faculty participants expressed challenges in diversifying the profession and the obstacles they perceived hindering the process. Program structure in terms of financial (e.g., funding for research experiences and positions) and human resources (e.g., workload and support) as well as the graduate program training itself are obstacles that require greater consideration.

Faculty's Perceptions of Intersectional Barriers for Minorities

All faculty participants shared their perceptions of obstacles for increasing the numbers of minority applicants. While it is clearly a multifaceted problem, *intersectional barriers* appear to capture all the nuances. Given the programmatic barriers identified earlier, these intersectional barriers that faculty participants perceived minorities struggle with become more prominent when the experiences in research and clinical/volunteering are emphasized. Intersectional

barriers must also be understood in the context of paths to professionalization which can be nonlinear. Furthermore, faculty participants shared the experiences that they had with past minority students accepted into the programs, and yet were not successfully, or culturally, pursuing a career in psychology is not as commonplace as for other careers.

Faculty participants in our sample shared their perceptions of intersectional barriers that minority students may face when they are in undergraduate training. When these perceived intersectional barriers interlock with program requirements and challenges, minority applicants are clearly less likely to be accepted into programs. Concrete plans should be coordinated and ameliorate rarity of minority in professional psychology training programs.

Initiatives to Diversify the Profession

Individual faculty members play a key role, as they build relationships with prospective minority applicants, offer mentorship, and revise curricula. Advocacy for a change requires both individual and systemic efforts. Some faculty participants were excited that the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) was removed or considered optional for admission, while some felt ambivalent of this move. While an entrance examination is one option to addressing diversity issues, some faculty participants' experiences highlighted different mechanisms, ranging from changing the program structure by accepting applicants with a non-psychology degree who have completed a certain number of "*prerequisites to ensure success*" for a particular psychology stream, to revamping the admission considerations. In addition, funding from the government is what it needs to increase the capacity to address the limited spots issue.

There was a participant reported admission processes remaining the same. This highlights the wide variability in terms of efforts and initiatives to address the admission barriers within the profession. The same pattern was observed in support offered to minorities, ranging from

targeted mentorship being offered, to workshops being offered to all. Furthermore, having faculty recruited to conduct research on diversity topics is reported to be a critical step to diversify the profession.

Across institutions, initiatives are undertaken at different levels and at different paces. This ranges from seeing not much change, to making more major revisions to program structure and admission evaluation processes. Faculty participants expressed the need to seek more national and coordinated support for students of colour through the professional organization, and resources to address “*pipeline*” issues.

Study 2 Discussion

While intersectional barriers (e.g., being Black and from low SES) could be a possible reason why professional psychology is subpar in terms of having diverse graduate student population and eventually in the workforce, how mentorship is offered (e.g., to whom and how mentee(s) are selected), as well as what and how admission criteria and policies are used in admission can have an impact on addressing the bottleneck issue in diversifying the profession. Workshops specifically designed for Indigenous and visible minority students was found to be effective (Silverstein et al., 2022). Instead of offering an introductory event, it was a series of relevant online workshops walking aspiring graduate applicants through the process from searching for programs, writing personal statement and CV to interviewing skills (Silverstein et al., 2022). It is critical that White faculty should also step up in providing mentorship to non-White students (Stewart et al., 2017) for the field to see noticeable change in diversity.

Sadly, as was revealed in our findings, our profession does not have a coherent mechanism to move toward in diversifying the graduate student populations. It is left with each individual program to decide what to work on and how to work on, or at the worst, no to work

on. Woo et al. (2023) outlined the importance of developing a “predictor-criterion linkage [that is] explicit and accessible” (p.19). This exercise will thus require the admission committee, consisting of faculty members, to examine how a given admission criterion chosen is useful in predicting the skills and/or abilities critical to the professional psychology training (Woo et al., 2023).

Integrated Discussion

As far as we know, this is a first study that listened to the lived experiences of minorities who were unsuccessful in their application journey to professional psychology programs, as well as exploring faculty members’ perspectives. While the findings presented the collective themes that emerged in each sample, it is important to derive meaningful discussion through an integration of core themes and messages.

Transparency in Evaluation and Preparation

Drawing lessons from both the initiatives theme and the programmatic barriers theme, we see that each professional psychology program and its faculty members have their own pace and agenda regarding their investment in enhancing the diversity of the graduate students they accept. While academic standings, research, and volunteering experience appear to remain major factors in admissions decisions, enhancing the transparency of the evaluation process (e.g., Kuryшева et al., 2019) could indeed be an important step toward dismantling the barriers, and addressing frustrations about the perceived secrecy surrounding decision-making that most minority participants expressed. Whether a program is fully onboard or still in the discussion phase of finding ways to consider how disadvantaged backgrounds impact the key indicators evaluated in admission, prospective applicants, minority applicants included, could at least be

supported to exercise agency when preparing their applications as well as when they received a rejection notification.

Transparency also extends earlier, prior to application, and take the form of empowerment revealed in some faculty participants' expression regarding the importance of mentorship. As expressed in the experiences of the application journey theme, minority participants might not fully understand the complexity and competitiveness of entry to this profession. Their journeys could be different if mentorship is both supported and received (e.g., Silverstein et al., 2022). More specifically, Pakhale (2021) shared a strong sentiment: "Mentor must not let the system affect BIPOC students negatively and deny society of well-deserved diversity that leads to creativity, innovation and productivity" (p. 1302), and faculty members can indeed make a difference in prospective visible minority applicants' journey.

Tangible Supports from Administration and Government

There is only so much that an individual faculty member can do, as was captured in the programmatic barriers theme which addressed perceived intersectional barriers for minorities. On the other hand, minority participants were frustrated about the lack of support offered by faculty members and universities. This clearly presents as a deadlock that could lead to maintaining the status quo of subpar diversity representation in professional psychology. To dismantle intersectional barriers minorities are facing, and the obstacles presented in faculty members' work, university administration and provincial governments (e.g., Government of Manitoba, 2023) need to form concrete plans to invest in this social advocacy movement for equality.

As was captured in the programmatic barriers theme and the experiences of the application journey theme, once intersectional barriers for minorities build up during their

undergraduate study, they become harder to surmount, and limit their chances to be accepted into the professional psychology graduate programs. Hence, early and substantiable funding and resources are critical, in which faculty members receive time release and monetary support to implement EDI tasks such as providing high-quality mentorship for prospective minority students to address the lack of connection/relationship minority participants reported, and offering paid research opportunities with the goal not only to prevent the downward spiral effect but also proactively empower prospective minority applicants to gain hands-on research experiences and become more competitive. Lent et al. (2023) reported the preliminary success of a purposeful mentorship program, with stipend, offered to Indigenous and visible minority undergraduate students over nine months. Those students involved in Lent et al. (2023) mentorship program participated a wide range of activities, ranging from shadowing, learning about clinical research skills, to evaluating the effectiveness of intervention, and these skills building activities allow them to be better prepared to move on to “practitioner-scholar” (p.4) careers.

Systemic Changes

Systemic barriers need to be dismantled through systemic changes; minority participants expressed particular concerns about the lack of diversity in the professional psychology faculty composition. This goes hands-in-hands with the underrepresented minority students being accepted into professional psychology programs. In Huff’s (2021b) report of perspective shared by Dr. Andrea Romero who is the Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs at the University of Arizona studying equity and diversity issues (n.d.), it is clear that there should be a mechanism to ensure implicit biases do not get in the way when recruiting professional psychology faculty position. Furthermore, minority participants felt that their own identity could have a negative impact on

them and were concerned about how to navigate such context. This is in alignment with the perceived barriers for minorities shared by faculty participants, which require a systemic change to address, instead of a patchwork approach. Meaningful and concerted effort from administration and the faculty/unit is needed, as well as collegial support to increase the diversity in this profession to attract prospective minority applicants. This is undoubtedly a pipeline issue to be addressed through early outreach, mentorship, and support. It is equally important to be creative in seeking methods to increase the diversity representation at the admission decision-making level, such as how to factor intersectional barriers minority applicants face in the evaluation of core requirements submitted as part of their applications considering the limited spots available in the professional psychology training programs. Assefa et al. (2024) reported that psychology programs in US have begun a change, with greater emphasis on letter of recommendations in both Ph.D. and master's programs admission decision (ranking the top and the second respectively), and research personal statement ranked the second most important criterion for Ph.D., and undergraduate GPA ranked the first for master's programs. Furthermore, systemic change should also involve partnership with the national professional psychology organization and practising visible minority psychologists to inform how changes could be made at multiple levels. Considerations should also be given to the professional psychology program structure as well as how to access information presented by programs when minority applicants do not have a social network to provide them with guidance.

Limitations

This qualitative study comes with several limitations. First, it is not intended to be representative of visible minority lived experiences nor faculty members' perceptions on challenges in diversifying the profession. While conducting virtual Zoom interviews afforded the

research team opportunities to delve into minority participants' experiences, some participants were more hesitant to express their perceptions; for example, one interview took less than 10 minutes from start to finish. Because all eight minority participants reported residing in two major provinces in Canada, it may also limit our interpretations about minorities who live in other provinces and applied to professional psychology programs. Although eight in-depth interviews with faculty members allowed the research team to capture the unique experiences each participant has gone through, experiences may vary based on geographical locations and their specialities in professional psychology. We did not use a survey to collect the demographic information (e.g., age, years in the position, and ethnocultural identity) of faculty members. Future studies should consider collecting faculty members' positionality and explore the relationship between faculty's lived experiences and their perspectives on dismantling barriers minority applicants face in admission to professional psychology training programs.

Implications

Although Wien et al. (2023) acknowledged that data about the ethnic composition of psychologists in Canada is not available, U.S. data showed that only 14% of psychologists are self-identified as visible minorities (Huff, 2021a). This study thus provides a missing piece of information about the lived experiences of minorities who did not get admitted in a given year of an application cycle by reviewing the obstacles in diversifying the field presented by faculty participants. This study will be useful to minorities who are aspiring to enter this profession, knowing the complexity and variability inherent in the pursuit of the professional psychology training opportunities. In particular, the current landscape of getting admitted into professional psychology programs are still emphasized substantially on research experiences, despite the literature pointing to its lack of utility. The earlier this information can be shared with minority

students aspiring to becoming a psychologist, the more time they would have to develop the knowledge and skills to be competitive. Another key message gleaned from both minorities and faculty participants interviews is that coordinated effort and support should be provided and sought out earlier in minorities' undergraduate program of study. Information event offered mostly cover basic information required to apply. Hence, university-funded mentorship programs supporting faculty members to undertake social advocacy initiatives and minority undergraduate students should be developed, ensuring both mentors in providing high-quality mentorship to minority undergraduate psychology students and minorities developing their knowledge and skills important in the admission consideration in professional psychology programs. Finally, faculty members will find this study useful to inform what aspects should pay more attention (e.g., admission criteria and its transparency) to dismantle those systemic barriers as well as advocate for a systemic change within their programs, and as a profession.

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