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EDI Failure: Experiences of Racialized Interpersonal Misconduct and the Delegation of Moral Responsibility

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Abstract

This paper investigates how responsibility for addressing interpersonal misconduct within organizations is managed as part of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) efforts. Despite progress in promoting workplace EDI, the management of interpersonal misconduct tends to be individualized rather than systemically addressed. Drawing on qualitative data from a national survey of UK workers, we investigate employees' experiences of racialized misconduct and their perceptions of organizational responses to these events. Our research surfaces a prevalent empirical phenomenon whereby individuals perceive they are tasked with managing and resolving issues of abuse, bullying, and incivility. We understand this through the concept of responsabilization, as a delegation of moral responsibility where organizational structures and policies, shaped by reflexive subjectivity, shift responsibility onto individuals. When individuals cannot or will not take on this responsibility, entrenched patterns of inaction and superficial problem-solving lead to suboptimal outcomes for targets and bystanders. By reframing interpersonal misconduct as an object of responsabilization, our findings prompt a re-evaluation of organizational approaches to EDI management. This research illuminates the need for systemic changes that move beyond individual culpability and instead emphasize the value of ethical and relational management in responding to interpersonal misconduct.

Keywords Diversity, Equity, and inclusion (DEI) · Interpersonal misconduct · Racial abuse · Responsibilization · Moral responsibility

Introduction

Corporal Kerry-Ann Knight was the inclusive face of the British Army, representing its Black and Minority Ethnic Network and featuring on posters and magazine covers for a military recruitment campaign. Despite this outward promotion of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), Knight was repeatedly the target of interpersonal misconduct by colleagues and superiors, ranging from racialized and sexualized humiliation to verbal and physical harassment

(Equality & Human Rights Commission, 2024). The dissonance between projected and experienced reality was further emphasized when, on reporting her experiences to superiors, she was deemed mentally unfit to continue as a training instructor. Finding herself marginalized and unsupported, Knight took it upon herself to secretly record her abusers, including references to her being “tarred and feathered.” The subsequent tribunal, which induced compensation and a public apology from the Army, highlighted the manifold harms that exist when organizations fail to protect minoritized individuals from systematic interpersonal misconduct despite commitments to the contrary.

This article explores the exclusionary and discriminatory dimensions of interpersonal misconduct in organizational settings, particularly in the form of racial abuse, bullying, and incivility. These actions, which we define as deviations from accepted ethical standards, often motivated by harmful intent, disproportionately target individuals based on demographic or identity-based differences (Adamson et al., 2021; Han et al., 2022; Ogunfowora et al., 2023). They can manifest as criminal (e.g., sexual

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harassment) and unethical behaviors (e.g., microaggressions) and are rooted in systemic power dynamics and structural injustices associated with race, gender, or other intersectional differences (Buchanan et al., 2014; Linstead et al., 2014). Accordingly, prevention and restitution are established dimensions of EDI management, complementing more commonly emphasized promotional initiatives with the protection of individuals—and, by extension, liable organizations—against abuse, exclusion, or discrimination (Shore et al., 2018). For instance, diversity training emphasizes individual compliance, while grievance procedures provide formal channels for reporting and addressing incidents. However, such mechanisms are often criticized as ineffective, inaccessible, or detrimental to targets of abuse (Harrington et al., 2015; Klaas & Ward, 2015; Smith et al., 2023). Moreover, as Knight's experience illustrates, individuals subjected to interpersonal misconduct frequently bear the burden of managing these situations, relying on their own emotional and cognitive resources or informal bystander support (Hellerstedt et al., 2024; Janssens & Steyaert, 2019; McCluney et al., 2017; Pizarro Milian & Wijesingha, 2023).

We examine this dynamic through the lens of responsabilization, wherein organizations delegate moral responsibility for what would otherwise be organization-level issues (Lemke, 2015; Shamir, 2008), shifting, in this case, the onus of addressing interpersonal misconduct onto individuals. Our analysis of UK employee experiences reveals how this process positions individuals (targets or bystanders) as the primary agents of risk management and resolution. Specifically, we use the qualitative responses from a national survey of UK employees to explore the experiences of racial discrimination and exclusion. In doing so, we find that responsabilization opens organizations up to two interconnected failures in relation to their management of EDI. Firstly, when responsabilized individuals cannot or will not fulfill the delegated role, this absence creates suboptimal outcomes for targets. Secondly, responsabilization represents a moral failure of organizations to fully recognize and uphold their duty to prevent workplace misconduct and protect employees from related harms.

We advance understanding of this issue in three ways. First, we provide empirical support for our argument that when individuals (e.g., targets and bystanders) encounter racialized interpersonal misconduct, they are often tasked with resolving it at an individual level. While concepts like allyship (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023; Warren & Warren, 2023) and empowerment (Valentine et al., 2019; Zanoni & Janssens, 2007) highlight the importance of supporting individual agency, our findings underline the practical and ethical significance of effective organizational responses (Adamson et al., 2021; Shore et al., 2018).

Second, we conceptualize this circumstance as a form of delegated moral responsibility (or responsabilization), whereby organizations rely on individual self-regulation to address structural limitations in EDI management (Foucault, 1988; Kelly, 2001). We examine how shifting responsibility from the organization to individuals affects the management of interpersonal misconduct, highlighting the ethical implications of delegating moral responsibility to employees. Particularly, we find that this perpetuates entrenched inaction and suboptimal outcomes, particularly where individuals are unable or unwilling to meet the responsibilities themselves. This presents an ethical issue for organizations, both in the resulting harms to targets and bystanders, and the effect of responsabilization in obstructing meaningful inclusion. To the best of our knowledge, the responsabilization of EDI management and its attached ethical implications remains underexplored in extant organizational and business ethics literature.

Finally, by extending understanding of the capacity for organization-level failures in individual actions, we build on existing studies that have identified interpersonal misconduct as a critical ethical issue for organizations (c.f., Andreoli & Lefkowitz, 2009; Rahim et al., 1992; Von Bergen & Bressler, 2023). We thus argue for the greater prominence of organizational moral responsibilities as part of EDI management systems, as well as systemic changes that move beyond individual culpability. To do this, we emphasize the value of ethical and relational management structures and tools (Gagnon et al., 2022; Tyler, 2019), which represent a viable alternative to compliance-based frameworks for organizational EDI.

Interpersonal Misconduct

Interpersonal misconduct refers to individual or group behaviors that harm others through their exploitative, discriminatory, or exclusionary effects (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Ogunfowora et al., 2023; Valentine et al., 2019). These behaviors deviate from accepted ethical—and often legal—standards, encompassing a range of potentially interconnected phenomena. Specifically, interpersonal misconduct can manifest as abuse (Jones et al., 2024; Anderson et al., 1994), bullying (Einarsen et al., 2003; Hodgins et al., 2014; Namie, 2007), incivility (Alt & Itzkovich, 2015; Han et al., 2022), and workplace violence (Harris, 2017). While anyone can become a target of such behaviors, they disproportionately affect minoritized individuals and those with intersectional vulnerabilities (Bhopal & Henderson, 2021; Buchanan et al., 2014; Fernando & Kenny, 2023). Such cases are often symptomatic of institutional racism and other systemic phenomena, exemplifying how power imbalances and discriminatory structures manifest in everyday organizational

practices (Agyemang et al., 2024; Buchanan et al., 2014). Indeed, while this study emphasizes interpersonal misconduct in relation to race-related abuse, bullying, and incivility, it can stem from and intersect various dimensions, including gender, sexuality, and disability.

Abuse typically emphasizes overtly harmful behaviors and intent to cause physical, emotional, or psychological harm (Cortina & Areguin, 2021; Lucas & Fyke, 2014). These actions may include verbal threats, harassment, or acts of aggression and are generally targeted and deliberate, often leveraging interpersonal power asymmetries. For instance, research has emphasized abusive supervision by superiors (Boddy et al., 2015; Priesemuth, 2013) and the sexual abuses committed by those in positions of institutional authority (Nite & Nauright, 2020; Palmer & Feldman, 2018). In contrast, incivility represents lower-intensity, ambiguous behaviors that breach norms of respect and dignity but may lack overt intent to harm (Cortina, 2008; Fernando & Kenny, 2023; Schilpzand et al., 2016). While individual acts of incivility may not appear particularly problematic in isolation, this belies their cumulative implications (Von Bergen & Bressler, 2023). Examples include dismissive comments, interruptions, or failure to acknowledge contributions, which can erode morale and support institutionalized exclusion and discrimination (Han et al., 2022). Such action requires less mindful deliberation, often representing the subconscious outcomes of biases and exclusionary attitudes (Haidt, 2001; Robertson et al., 2017). Workplace bullying falls between these extremes and focuses on patterns of sustained harassment that undermine an individual's dignity, wellbeing, and professional standing (Hodgins et al., 2014; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Namie, 2007). As such, it often involves repeated, targeted attempts to undermine, intimidate, or demean.

While these concepts have conceptualized different forms of interpersonal misconduct in general terms, existing literature has also emphasized that intersectional dimensions exist as part of such phenomena (Agyemang et al., 2024; Ray, 2019). For instance, racial identity and inequalities operate as material aspects of racial incivility and abuse (Buchanan et al., 2014; Davis et al., 2024). Similarly, Harris (2017) shows how ostensibly 'neutral' organizational interpretations and definitions, in fact, prioritized dominant intersectional differences (e.g., whiteness and masculinity), thus contributing to the non-reporting of sexual violence. Thus, numerous studies have highlighted how discriminatory and exclusionary actions interconnect with broader societal and organizational structures (Babacan et al., 2020), exist as historically situated injustice (Godfrey et al., 2016), and perpetuate inequities through overt behaviors and subtler microaggressions (Śliwa et al., 2024). In their explicit acknowledgment of intersectional dimensions, these studies emphasize race, sexuality, and gender as theoretically significant considerations for interpersonal misconduct while

also establishing links to broader concepts like harm, injustice, and responsibility.

Along with other forms of organizational wrongdoing, perpetrators of interpersonal misconduct are often characterized as "bad apples" by organizations, which frames the issue as one of individual and isolated failures rather than systemic institutional responsibility (Andreoli & Lefkowitz, 2009; Land et al., 2014; Palmer, 2012). As such, overt actions like racial harassment or workplace violence, which contravene legal standards, warrant formal sanctions that limit organizational liabilities and punish wrongdoers. However, this approach fails to address any underlying systemic conditions that enable and potentially even normalize such behaviors. Additionally, an overemphasis on liabilities can marginalize whistleblowers or targets of misconduct by framing them as a source of reputational and legal risk (Beenen & Pinto, 2009; Kluemper et al., 2019; Roulet & Pichler, 2020). More legally ambiguous forms of misconduct, such as microaggressions or incivility, also sit uncomfortably with an individualized view of misconduct, as discrete transgressions are hard to address in isolation or separate from the broader discretionary and exclusionary attitudes that sustain them.

Interpersonal Misconduct Through the Lens of EDJ

EDJ management provides the dominant lens through which organizations support marginalized or underrepresented groups in their workforce (Gagnon et al., 2022). Many EDJ policies and initiatives target institutional inequalities, addressing issues such as career progression, executive diversity, and representation. These constitute part of what Shore et al. label as a "promotion orientation," whereby management focuses on enhancing the organization's inclusion and diversity (2018, p. 185). However, the promotion of EDJ alone is not sufficient, as inclusive organizations also need to maintain a "prevention orientation," which focuses on averting or responding to exclusion and discrimination (Shore et al., 2018, p. 185). These exist largely as compliance policies and practices and focus primarily on preventing lawsuits and other damaging activities for the organization (Zheng, 2020). Applied inauthentically, such approaches constitute little more than impression management, shielding organizations from accountability while perpetuating or failing to address inequalities (Adamson et al., 2021). Ahmed (2009, p. 44) critiques such initiatives as contributing to the "politics of feeling good"—creating an organizational façade that obscures deeper issues like systemic racism. Even well-intentioned programs can yield unintended consequences, such as retaliation or a deepening sense of exclusion, which undermine their potential impact (Leslie, 2019). Reporting processes typically require those affected to initiate action, often through rigid and legalistic

mechanisms (Matsson, 2023; Raj & Wiltermuth, 2022). These procedures frequently prioritize organizational risk mitigation over genuine resolution, imposing burdens like proof requirements or decisions on escalation solely on targets (Schuster, 2019; Zheng, 2020). Such practices can deter reporting and fail to adequately protect individuals (Klaas & Ward, 2015; Smith et al., 2023; Zheng, 2020). Bystanders are also assumed to play critical roles in addressing misconduct (Jennings et al., 2024; Priesemuth, 2013), but this dynamic relies on their willingness, impartiality, and capacity to act (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023; Warren & Warren, 2023). Thus, even when organizations actively engage in EDI management, the burden of addressing interpersonal misconduct is often placed on individuals, reflecting their responsabilization (Graso et al., 2020; Kwon & Farndale, 2020; Rahim et al., 1992).

Toward a Theory of EDI Responsibilization

Recent empirical studies highlight the continued prevalence of workplace racism, particularly anti-Black racism, which manifests in overt and covert ways (Hebl et al., 2020; Quillian et al., 2017). Critical Race Theory provides a lens to understand how structural and systemic racism shapes interpersonal misconduct in organizational contexts. From this perspective, racism is not seen as aberrant behavior but as a normalized element of societal and organizational life (Bell, 1990, 1992; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; King et al., 2023). Intersectional theory asserts that individuals experience discrimination at the intersection of multiple social identities (Cho et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991). These identities, including race, interact to shape unique experiences of disadvantage or privilege as systems of power are not isolated but mutually reinforcing (Collins, 2015). The complexity of intersectionality underscores the need for a systemic analysis of interpersonal misconduct that goes beyond a single identifying characteristic. Critical race theory and intersectional theory prompt a critical evaluation of the structural mechanisms that perpetuate discrimination, including organizational policies relating to interpersonal misconduct. In response to this need, we draw on the concept of responsabilization for understanding how organizational systems uphold inequities while also recognizing the importance of critical race theory and intersectional theory in informing our approach to understanding interpersonal misconduct.

Responsibilization refers to a neoliberal governance technique that constructs and regulates individual subjects (Lemke, 2015). This strategy of self-regulation renders the individual an empowered and autonomous subject, ostensibly capable of rational self-determination and ethical decision-making. The individual alone becomes accountable for their actions and the subsequent consequences, which

they have undertaken of their own free will (Miller & Rose, 1990). Through processes of responsabilization, social risks become the responsibility of the morally reflexive, autonomous, and self-regulating individual (Lemke, 2015). This means of self-governance “responds to the sufferer as if they were the author of their own misfortune... the disadvantaged individual has come to be seen as potentially and ideally an active agent in the fabrication of their own existence” Rose (1996, p. 59). Explanations for concerns or problems are shifted from external forces or agents to oneself (Pyysiäinen et al., 2017). This reflects a broader social trend, which has seen individual actors increasingly assume responsibility for major social issues like ethical consumption, social support, and community investment (what Shamir (2008, p. 1) refers to as the ‘age of responsabilization’). Under this neoliberal logic, deeply rooted grand challenges such as inequality and discrimination are shifted from a systemic to an individual level (Amable, 2011). Attempts to address these challenges focus predominantly on changing individual behavior and increasing the ethical responsibility of individual actors, with little recognition of systemic and structural conditions (Cao et al., 2023; Hodgins et al., 2014).

In the context of organizational praxis, Siltoaja et al. (2015) caution that responsabilization shifts the duty to perform responsibilities from organizations to individual employees. As with other forms of formal organizational policy, EDI becomes a self-regulated practice enacted by managers or employees, leading, in some cases, to a significant delegation of moral responsibility from organizations to individuals. Brewis (2019) demonstrates how diversity training represents technologies of the self or strategies of responsabilization, which construct inclusive subjects in relation to a neoliberal morality unlikely to challenge existing hierarchical relationships. EDI-related policies and processes represent the instruments of a reflexive, self-regulatory, and horizontal neoliberal authority that relies on predisposing individual actors to act as responsabilized subjects who not only take responsibility for their actions but also act as agents of change (Shamir, 2008).

Consequently, EDI governance occurs through self-monitoring and employees become responsible for their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others through the regulation of their own behavior. This attribution of moral blame to individual actors absolves the organization from responsibility to counteract misconduct (Giesler & Veresiu, 2014), effacing any sense of institutional inequality and further marginalizing staff who face abuse (Bajde & Rojas-Gaviria, 2021; Jones & Arnould, 2024). In this vein, the bigger systemic picture of structural racism and discrimination is ignored, preventing adequate resolution of organizational wrongs and injustices. Subsequently, Barnhart et al. (2024) suggest a need to better understand the potential for responsabilized behavior to harm individuals and society.

We argue that EDI management, informed by neoliberal principles of voluntary action, individualism, and self-reliance, represents part of this broader phenomenon of the responsabilization that mobilizes employees to undertake and perform self-governing tasks. This raises questions about how organizations develop and implement processes and mechanisms of EDI management, including the consequences that arise when strategies of responsabilization fail to construct ethical subjects or when individuals resist this subject positioning.

Method

We had access to a unique data set generated from a large-scale, cross-sectional survey administered by British business-outreach charity, Business in the Community (BITC), in collaboration with YouGov (UK). Following the McGregor Smith Review (2017), BITC created the 'Race at Work Charter,' which denotes seven commitments to signatory organizations to improve race equality, inclusion, and diversity in the workplace. Subsequently, the Race at Work Survey 2021 was administered to signatory firms in 2021, with signatories including large, well-known multinational enterprises, public sector organizations, and smaller regional firms. The semi-structured survey captured the responses of 24,630 individuals, all of whom were employed by UK-based signatory organizations, and – via open-ended questions – generated a total of 24,950 qualitative comments. Here, participants were asked seven questions related to experiences of racial bullying and harassment in the workplace, recruitment and progression, and organizational approaches to equality, diversity, and inclusion. As our study is focused on understanding interpersonal misconduct in the context of EDI management, our analysis focused specifically on the qualitative responses to three open-ended questions:

- i. Thinking of when you experienced racist harassment or bullying, are you able to tell us what happened and whether you did anything about it?
- ii. Thinking of when you witnessed racist harassment or bullying, are you able to tell us what happened and whether you did anything about it?
- iii. How do you feel about the diversity and inclusion offering of your organization?

Thus, a qualitative, exploratory methodological design allowed for the analysis of accounts related to interpersonal misconduct in the context of EDI management. We analyzed the data generated from these three questions using qualitative data software NVivo14 and based on the grounded

theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Our analysis was conducted following the three-step process of Straus & Corbin (1990): data familiarization, data coding, and axial coding. Prior research around EDI in the workplace identifies this approach as useful in understanding the experiences of individuals in this context (Mousa, 2022; Richard & Hennekam, 2021). Familiarization with the data involved a first review of all open-ended responses, to ensure insight into the data. Subsequently, a secondary analysis of the data allowed for further identification and exploration of themes. We focused particularly on the nature of reported incidents of racial harassment and bullying in the workplace, and the subsequent organizational response mechanisms, as our initial review of the data identified such incidences as indicative of the responsabilized nature of EDI management. Here we paid particular attention to the respondents' experiences and perceptions of EDI in the workplace, as per the notion of Weick (1989) that a greater focus should be placed on the sense-making of the discourse of respondents, to link the respondent, researcher and identified concepts. We then independently coded the responses to form descriptive codes. Axial coding was used to develop patterns from the descriptive codes and ensure that the meanings of the responses were reflected sufficiently. From here, the descriptive codes were translated into themes.

Our coding process focused on collaborative refinement and consensus-building across the research team (c.f. Campbell et al., 2013; Hemmler et al., 2022). While one researcher conducted open coding of all textual survey responses, the emerging codes were periodically reviewed independently by the second and third authors. At these points, the research team also met to discuss any ambiguities identified by the lead researcher, discrepancies in the coded material, or differences in interpretation between the researchers. During these sessions, codes were revisited and refined collaboratively based on our collective understanding of the data and our interaction with existing theory. By incorporating the perspectives of all three researchers, we aimed to mitigate individual bias and improve the confirmability of the findings (Schwandt et al., 2007). This iterative approach allowed deep immersion in the data by the lead researcher and consistent application of codes across the dataset while also emphasizing shared understanding and interpretation. Ultimately, this process produced a coding framework that was representative of the data and reflective of the team's collective interpretation (Table 1).

Our findings are unique in that they are based on the experiences of a large sample of British employees. Simultaneously, we acknowledge that what makes our research unique also presents a limitation to our study. While we were able to capture a breadth of experiences, the large sample of respondents means that we are not necessarily able to

Table 1 Primary themes and sub-themes

| Agents of responsibility failure | Manifestations of failure | Significant institutional actors |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| Inaction (N ^a = 780) | Compelled Inaction: Misconduct is not reported or challenged, and no intervention occurs (N = 231) | Targeted individual (N = 108) Bystander (N = 123) |
| | Active Ignorance: Misconduct is ignored, despite awareness of its occurrence through witnessing it firsthand or receiving reports and complaints (N = 261) | Bystander (N = 40) Leadership (N = 154) Human resource department (N = 67) |
| | Misconduct continues despite awareness of its existence and the identity of perpetrating actors (N = 288) | Perpetrator (N = 288) |
| Symptom-Solving (N = 565) | Informal Correction or Challenge: Misconduct is challenged or corrected informally, but bullying and harassment remains unresolved (N = 173) | Targeted individual (N = 37) Bystander (N = 136) |
| | Informal Support: Support is offered informally to the target of misconduct, but bullying and harassment remains unresolved (N = 78) | Bystander (N = 78) |
| | Organizational EDI policy and misconduct processes are referred to, but fail to resolve bullying and harassment (N = 313) | Management, Human Resource Department (N = 313) |

^aN = Number of reports from the data

capture the depth of experience that a smaller qualitative sample would afford. Nonetheless, the data captured provides a ‘wide-angle lens’ on interpersonal misconduct in the context of EDI management, allowing us to interpret a diversity of perspectives, experiences, and sense-making (Braun et al., 2021). We recognize a further limitation of our methodology in that our data come from an opinion survey, meaning that our findings are generated from the perceptions and recollections of respondents. Our unit of analysis is thus the subjects of EDI policy and practice, as self-identified through the survey data. Yet, the exact processes and formal procedures contained in the EDI policies of the organizations employing the respondents of the survey are not clear. To establish this and synthesize the lived experiences of respondents with the specific institutional EDI mechanisms, we would have liked to integrate documentary and policy analysis from these organizations. As this was not possible, our analysis is based on the perception of racialized interpersonal misconduct and its management across diverse organizational contexts.

Where an important facet of organizational EDI is that marginalized employees are supported through empowerment and visibility (Kang & Kaplan, 2019), this research utilizes a participant-led narrative to describe our findings (Bhopal & Henderson, 2021; Bhopal & Pitkin, 2020). We focus particularly on reported incidents of racial harassment

and bullying in the workplace, from the viewpoint of those targeted or bystanders of such events. Here, we wish to highlight three important considerations. We firstly advise reader discretion, as some of the quotations presented contain distressing or upsetting themes. To ensure that visibility is brought to the voices of our respondents, we felt it important to include lived experiences as they are recounted, as opposed to rephrasing experiences to dilute distressing themes.

We secondly utilize demographic descriptors for each participant in the indicative examples. Here, it should be noted that this information was self-identified by participants from a list of demographic descriptors provided by BITC in the survey.¹ For consistency, we have utilized these descriptors in our article, but acknowledge that terms such as BME, which categorize anyone who is not racialized as white into one homogenous grouping, and conflate race and ethnicity, are problematic for lots of reasons outside of the scope of discussion of this paper.

Thirdly, we wish to draw attention to our own positionality as researchers. We acknowledge that our racial identities differ significantly from many of those of the participants who shared their experiences in the survey. Moreover, we recognize that

¹ Participants were asked to mandatorily select if they identify with one or more of the following identities: White British; White; White Other; BME (Black, Minority Ethnic); Mixed; Asian or Asian British; Black or Black British; Arab; Other Ethnic Group).

race does not exist in isolation, but intersects with other aspects of identity, such as gender, religion, and ethnicity. This intersectionality adds layers of complexity to the experiences of racialized individuals, which we, as white researchers, may not fully comprehend. These differences carry significant implications for how we approached, interpreted, and presented our research. We remained attentive to the fact our racial positions might influence our understanding of the lived experiences of those who face multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization, particularly in contexts where systemic inequalities and power imbalances are deeply entrenched. To address these differences, we engaged in continuous reflexivity throughout the research process, critically examining how our positionality might shape our interpretations. Our goal was to amplify the voices of participants without imposing our own perspectives and to contribute meaningfully to the broader discourse on EDJ by highlighting the systemic nature of these issues.

Findings

Our theoretical framing suggests that organizational EDJ practice represents the process and outcome of the responsabilization of individuals. Our findings suggest that voids at the institutional level and resistance on the individual level result in a practical and moral failure of EDJ. Specifically, we identify that inadequate organizational responses related to reporting, liability, and conflict resolution encourage negative interpersonal practices. Through our analysis, we identify two agents of EDJ failure, which we present as two distinct patterns of responsabilization in the context of interpersonal misconduct. The following discussion highlights these findings, with indicative quotes as a reference point for our findings.

Institutional Actors and Interpersonal Misconduct

Before we unpack our two observed patterns, it is first necessary to outline the institutional actors identified from our sample as the ‘responsibilized subjects’ in organizational EDJ management. Five institutional actors are identified as relevant to our synthesis. Targeted individual/s (1) represent organizational employees who have been targeted by misconduct, such as racial bullying and harassment. Bystander/s (2) then refers to organizational actors who directly witness racial abuse and harassment in the workplace but are not the direct targets of such misconduct. Bystanders may be ‘active,’ in the sense that they chose to intervene in or challenge misconduct. Active bystanders are common actors in the ‘symptom-solving’ pattern of failed responsabilization. Bystanders may also be ‘passive,’ in that they do not intervene in or challenge the racial bullying and harassment

witnessed. Passive bystanders are common actors in our ‘inaction’ pattern of failed responsabilization.

Our analysis of the data implies that frequently, the sole responsibility for intervening in interpersonal misconduct falls to those targeted by racial bullying and harassment or the bystanders of such events. For example, one bystander (female, BME, Asian, or Asian British) describes a situation where a colleague used racist language, stating, “I called them out on it. Not one other colleague said a word, I was completely unsupported.” In a similar vein, one bystander (Male, White, White, or White British), who works in a university, reports that they have witnessed racial bullying and harassment frequently from students. In this case, the bystander reports that their only option to deal with such misconduct is to “throw” the students out of the class, with “no further action, as the university does not allow it.” Such reports imply the delegation of responsibility for interpersonal misconduct to these organizational actors, which is indicative of the responsabilization of the target/s or bystander/s and the limits that circumscribe enacting the responsabilized self.

Synonymous with the delegation of responsibility to those directly impacted by or bystanders of misconduct, we identify two further categorizations of relevant institutional actors: managers (3) or those with positions of ‘power’ and governance within the workplace, such as owners; and, the overarching departments that formally govern organizational EDJ policies, practices, initiatives (4), such as Human Resource (HR) departments. Managers act as agents of responsabilization in that through their role, they hold an auxiliary responsibility to respond to incidents. For example, employees might first report misconduct to or seek support from their line manager. Equally, these actors have a moral responsibility to address such issues as they arise, due to their powerful governing position within the organization. Conversely, actors from within human resource departments have formal responsibility to intervene in, and adequately restore harm stemming from, interpersonal misconduct. Such actors are agents of responsabilization in that their role is formally connected to protecting and preventing EDJ issues, and thus, these actors enact responsabilization, without necessarily being the subjects of this. Yet, as our findings indicate in the following sections, those with the responsibility to act through their roles as governors of the organization, such as managers, or with formal responsibility to act through their roles, such as HR departments, often fail to act or facilitate an appropriate intervention.

We finally identify a fifth institutional actor relevant to our analysis. The perpetrator (5) refers to the individual/s responsible for the primary incident of misconduct. The perpetrator may be an internal institutional actor, such as an employee of the organization. Alternatively, they may be external to the organization, such as a customer, contractor,

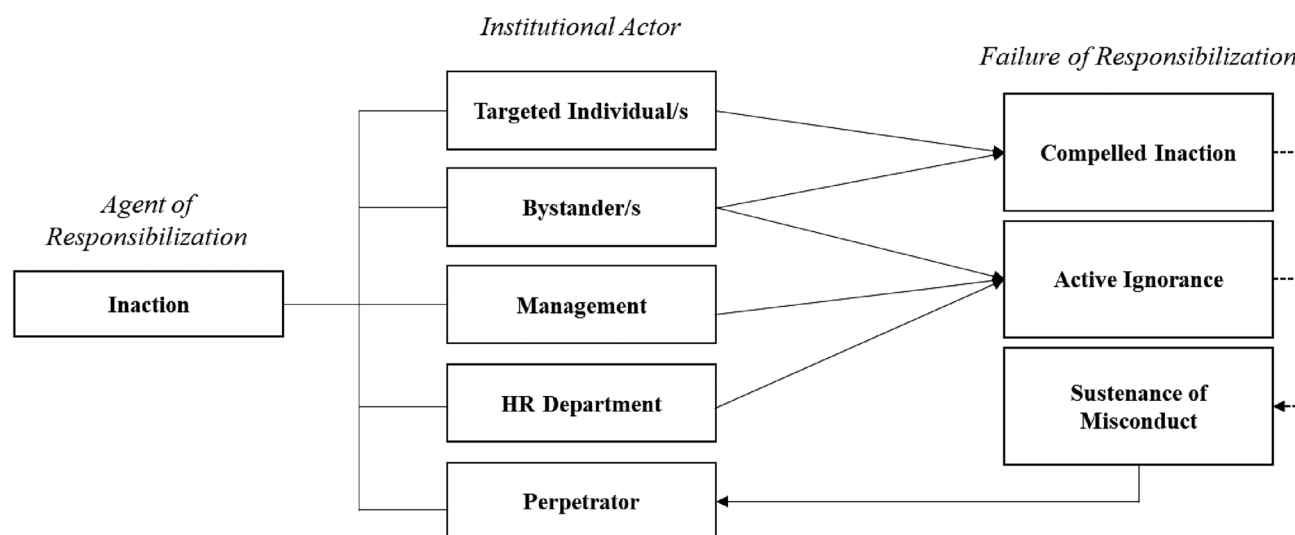


Fig. 1 Inaction as an agent of failure in the responsabilization of EDI management

or supplier. That perpetrators engage in racial bullying and harassment, suggests that they are failed subjects of responsabilization, through resistance to the morally reflexive and self-regulating responsabilized subjectivity. While the distinctions presented in this brief section present the starting point of our analysis (i.e., the delegation of responsibility), the following sections will unpack the roles of each of these actors and how (in)action shifts the burden back to the individual responsabilized subject.

Inaction as an Agent of Failure in the Responsibilization of EDI Management

Our findings suggest that responsabilization fails in the management of interpersonal misconduct through inaction (Fig. 1). Inaction manifests as the failure of institutional actors to respond, intervene, challenge, resolve, and repair incidents of racial harassment and bullying. Subsequently, the perpetrators of misconduct are not held to account, meaning that deviant, abusive, and uncivil social phenomena persist within the organization. Where inaction is identified in some reported cases as the standard or regular procedure employed by institutional actors and departments in response to misconduct, this inaction manifests differently and with different motivations depending on the institutional actor involved.

We identify one pattern of inaction stemming from targeted individual/s or bystanders, which manifests as not reporting, intervening, or challenging racial bullying and harassment when it occurs. Despite wanting to intervene, report or challenge misconduct, the targeted individual or bystander feels that they cannot or should not, due to a perceived lack of organizational safety and support (see

examples in Table 2 A1–A3 and B1–B3). We thus conceptualize this phenomenon as ‘compelled inaction,’ whereby this lack of institutional support compels the responsabilized subject toward inaction. While equally, inaction from managers and human resource departments manifests as not reporting, intervening, or challenging racial bullying and harassment when it occurs, we term this ‘active ignorance’ (see examples in Table 2 D1–D3 and E1–E3). Despite being aware of the uncivil and deviant behavior and bearing the institutionalized responsibility to intervene, management and/or human resources departments choose to actively ignore misconduct. This failure is also evident in some (passive) bystanders (see examples in Table 2 C1–C3), who, despite witnessing instances of racial bullying and harassment, actively ignore the misconduct.

Although both manifestations of inaction signify inaction toward racial bullying and harassment, there are different manifestations and motivations behind each. Not reporting, intervening in, or challenging EDI-related incidents within the organization commonly manifests in the targeted individual/s or the bystander/s, signifying inaction or no response to misconduct from these actors. Although the want, desire, or intention to respond is identified, respondents feel they cannot, should not, or must not intervene. As opposed to this inaction stemming from deviant, abusive, or uncivil interpersonal practice, our findings suggest that inadequate organizational support systems and responses deter employees from acting. Here, the failure of responsabilization results from ineffective EDI policy and practice rather than resistance to the responsabilized subject position. While such observations represent an organizational failure and attribute no blame to the individual/s affected, not reporting, intervening, or challenging also ensures that those

Table 2 Inaction as an agent of failed responsabilization

| Agent of responsabilization failure: Inaction | | |
|---|-----------------------|--|
| Reference | Institutional actor/s | Manifestation of failed responsabilization |
| A | Targeted Individual | Compelled Inaction: Targeted individual does not report, or challenge interpersonal misconduct experienced |
| | | Indicative example |
| | | 1 "I was told by my boss that it was tough if work refused my request to go abroad on holidays last year, after all, I had chosen to live in this country. I didn't report because I don't trust the HR team to manage my complaint fairly" (Female, White Other) |
| | | 2 "I was too afraid to report it as I feared for my job. My manager actively not including me in meetings that had straight impact to my workload and responsibilities, and when I was present, she wouldn't let me speak or speak over me, not letting me finish my sentence. The manager doing this is a UK native speaker and I am not, making it double as hard to interrupt and make my point." (Female, White, White Other) |
| | | 3 "A continuous campaign by a director continues to make my life a misery! Directors run the company, who is there to tell?" (Male, BME, Black or Black British) |
| | | 4 "The most recent incident was a microaggression. A new and junior member of staff queried the origins of my name, why I had that name, and then asked, "how long I had been here?" I was caught off-guard and didn't do anything about it, even though colleagues reassured me it was racist, and I should have done. It still leaves me feeling uncomfortable, but the slur was so subtle, you feel awkward for making it an issue." (Female, BME, Mixed) |
| B | Bystander | Compelled Inaction: Bystander does not report, intervene, or challenge interpersonal misconduct |
| | | Indicative example |
| | | 1 "A manager told me BLM protestors were animals who should be locked up for being thugs. Followed by more questionable opinions. He'd also done racist foreign accents in front of me, but both times I was too shocked to act." (Female, BME, Mixed) |
| | | 2 "I had a manager continue to make stereotypical comments about me even though he's never heard me use any of those languages or exhibit any of those behaviors. I laughed along because that's what you do to have to avoid confrontation, otherwise they'll be quick to label you an aggressive black person for simply standing up for yourself. Lose-lose situation." (Female, 2, BME, Black or Black British) |
| | | 3 "A colleague would regularly make racial comments with regards to black people that I felt was ignorant and racially insensitive. I did not comment as I have been warned before not to upset the male white colleague as he gets upset easily and was friends with my manager, so I may lose my job." (Female, White, White British) |
| | | 4 "I didn't do anything about it as I have lost all faith in the HR department which is where ironically I work." (Female, White, White British) |
| C | Customer | Compelled Inaction: Customer does not report, intervene, or challenge interpersonal misconduct |
| | | Indicative example |
| | | 1 "A customer asked to be served by someone who spoke 'fluent English'. I didn't know what to do." (Female, White, White British) |

Table 2 (continued)

| Agent of responsibility failure: Inaction | | |
|---|-----------------------|---|
| Reference | Institutional actor/s | Manifestation of failed responsibility |
| C | Bystander | Active Ignorance: Bystander ignores interpersonal misconduct |
| | | Indicative example |
| | | 1 "A very senior person told me that I should not be focusing on the area that I do in my career because I would not succeed in that area due to my ethnicity. This was said in a meeting with other people there. Nobody defended me. I was the most junior person in the meeting." (Gender not-specified, BME, Other Ethnic Group) |
| | | 2 "People tend to find it acceptable to assume that just because I have a classical Arabic name, I am to blame for all Islamic wrongdoings in history and I must have a link somewhere or to know somebody responsible for some atrocity. I try my best to brush off comments or educate customers but receive hardly any assistance or backup. Most find it funny or my fault for having a 'weird' name and it's only fair as my father is Arab. I'm almost considered a terrorist just because of my ethnic origin and my name!" (Female, BME, Mixed) |
| | | 3 "I was giving my opinion, and it was interrupted by a colleague who complained that I was not using English words and other teammates laughed. I went back to check the word in the dictionary, and it turns out it was an English word. I felt powerless in the moment and couldn't do anything about it as other people didn't speak up but laughed, so I doubted myself." (Female, BME, Black or Black British) |
| | | 4 "I was asked if I was a Tamil Tiger because I am from Sri Lanka. I told a colleague who though this was hilarious and then inputted my number in her phone under the name terrorist." (Female, BME, Asian or Asian British) |
| | | 5 "Just the usual 'I'm not racist but...' and 'it was banter.' Also blaming me for being humorless when I stood up to it. No one stood by me. Lots of eyes averted. This is happening with increasing frequency." (Male, BME, Mixed) |

Table 2 (continued)

| Agent of responsibility failure: Inaction | | |
|---|---------------------------|--|
| Reference | Institutional actor/s | Manifestation of failed responsibility |
| D | Management | Active Ignorance: Management ignores interpersonal misconduct |
| | | Indicative example |
| | | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 "A white service user who was ironically married to an African woman told me to return to my country. This was reported to my manager who did nothing." (Female, BME, Black or Black British) 2 "There are 3 managers responsible for my team. One has a history of making racially inappropriate comments, including the use of racial slurs. Near the start of my time at work, I witnessed this firsthand and went to another manager to talk about it and for help with the next steps. I was told "Yeah, I know it's bad but that's just how he is." I felt unable to complain again after that." (Female, BME, Mixed) 3 "I was bullied by my line manager and a group of colleagues, and I went to (my) boss's boss, but he didn't care so I was retaliated at after my manager found out... I ended up trying to kill myself and then I was off for 6+ months from work diagnosed with PTSD." (Female, BME, Asian or Asian British) |
| E | Human Resource Department | Active Ignorance: HR departments ignore interpersonal misconduct |
| | | Indicative example |
| | | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 "Racist comments in the workplace by senior manager, affecting my colleague. I supported my colleague to bring this up with HR. Their concerns were brushed aside by HR saying, "don't worry about it, they're a nice person really- that comment is out of character." That reinforced my colleague's impression that her discomfort/hurt from the racist statement was unjustified/not worth bringing up/the company didn't want to take it seriously" (Female, White, White Other) 2 "Someone sent round an email saying I could do "oddjob impressions" (James Bond Villain from Goldfinger). Reported it to HR but nothing happened." (Male, BME, Mixed) 3 "Some colleagues regularly bully me about my nationality and accent I reported it to HR, but I was told to address the issue myself with the colleagues in question" (Male, BME, Mixed) 4 "A colleague started a rumor that I only got a promotion because of my ethnicity. I was told that I was a tick box multiple times (the promotion couldn't possibly be down to the incredible results I'd had in the last months and year prior). The person had to work with me when I first started my new role made my life extremely difficult. I went to HR but nothing was done because they said it was simply an opinion." (Female, BME, Black or Black British) |
| | | |
| | | |

Table 2 (continued)

| Agent of responsabilization failure: Inaction | | |
|---|-----------------------|--|
| Reference | Institutional actor/s | Manifestation of failed responsabilization |
| F | Perpetrator | Sustenance of interpersonal misconduct through lack of holding the perpetrator to account |
| | | Indicative example |
| | | 1 “The operations and assistant operations manager were constantly racially bullying and harassing me but every time I complained, nothing came of it.” (Male, BME, Asian or Asian British) |
| | | 2 “I was bullied for 2 years, when I finally felt comfortable challenging it, I was told I was the problem and not the manager. I escalated it to my director, and instead of dealing with it, they moved the individual to another team to continue bullying others. I lost faith in the system!” (Female, BME, Asian or Asian British) |
| | | 3 “I experienced microaggressions from a senior manager. I told my manager and she shrugged it off and called me sensitive, so this went on for a year.” (Female, BME, Black or Black British) |

causing harassment and bullying will inevitably reproduce the behavior. Thus, racial harassment and bullying remain unresolved within organizations, and deviant, abusive, uncivil and antisocial behavior persists.

We identify that this inaction is predominantly a direct result of: 1. fearing victimization (Table 2 A2); 2. feeling that there is no support from the organization or lacking trust in the response of the organization to enact appropriate interventions (Table 2 B2); 3. the position (of power) of the perpetrator (Table 2 A3); 4. the covert nature of incidents (i.e., microaggressions) (Table 2 A4); 5. being unsure of what to do, how to respond, or who to go to (Table 2 B3); or 6. being too shocked, upset, hurt, and embarrassed to respond (Table 2 A5). Other reasons for inaction are identified as not wanting to deal with the ‘hassle’ involved with reporting misconduct, not feeling confident enough to respond informally or preferring to ‘brush off’ the incident. The underlying theme between these reasons is a lack of security and support at the institutional level, through EDI policies and practices, that should be scaffolding the ability of the responsabilized subject to assume the moral responsibility for intervention.

Despite notions that bystanders may not intervene because of the factors listed above, we further identify that some may choose to ignore misconduct, thereby acting as passive bystanders, as opposed to active bystanders (Table 2 C1–C5). There is an overarching theme in each report of ignored misconduct that such individuals utilize the initial incident of misconduct as an opportunity to engage in racial bullying and harassment themselves (See Table 2 C3 and C4). Not only are such individuals actively choosing to ignore misconduct, but they are also actively choosing to perpetuate incivility and antisocial behavior. This finding suggests that responsabilization fails in the process of creating a morally responsible subject. Where such responses are indicative of passive bystanding, they may also be considered indicative of active ignorance, and hence, we term this second manifestation of responsabilization failure in this way. Active ignorance is more commonly observed in managers and human resource departments. Here, we find that organizational actors with a built-in, explicit responsibility for resolving EDI incidents choose to ignore deviant, abusive, or uncivil behavior and do not act despite being aware of this and being duty-bound to intervene (Table 2 D2 and E4). The outcome of this is that misconduct is naturalized within the organization, such as the case seen in D2, whereby a complaint to a manager is minimized and shut down, leaving the respondent feeling unable to complain should similar misconduct occur. Similarly, E4 demonstrates how inaction through exemption occurs when departments minimize misconduct as being an ‘opinion’ as opposed to deviant behavior. Should the responsibility of incident resolution lie solely with managers, our analysis suggests that

this general organizational inaction compounds the perpetuation of harassment and bullying. Management practice may hide behind the image of responsibility while often being the driving force of incidents and subsequent victimization (D3). In this vein, uncivil and antisocial practices are perpetuated, with organizational liability limited, as those entrusted with assuming and enacting liability through resolution and reporting mechanisms are fettering attempts at resolution.

In some cases, we identify that this institutional inaction places a greater burden on those experiencing misconduct. Implicitly, a lack of action, response, or support from the organizational structures or bodies in place to deal with incidents results in those affected shouldering the emotional burden or assuming the responsibility to intervene, even if it is not safe to do so (C2). Explicitly, we find cases of leadership or human resource departments instructing the targeted individual/s or bystanders to resolve incidents themselves (E3). This approach risks the safety and wellbeing of employees through exposure to further abuse, implying a lack of organizational concern and psychological safety for those facing racial bullying and harassment. The perpetrator, due to an absence of intervention at the institutional level, is not held to account and thus continues racial bullying and harassment (Table 2 F1-F3). Abusive, uncivil, and antisocial practice is allowed to persist as a direct result of organizational inaction from management or human resource departments. For example, F1 describes an instance when, despite repeated complaints against the perpetrator, no action was taken by the organization, signaling that even where the targeted individual does act, a supporting institutional response is not guaranteed.

Here, an absence of robust and effective organizational processes and policies to deal with harassment and bullying is evident, impacting employee health and wellbeing (D3) and causing fatigue for those who are continuously faced with the responsibility of countering racial harassment and bullying. As aptly put by one respondent, "after a lifetime of challenging assumptions, it can be tiresome to have to once again challenge a misapprehension, so I sometimes 'do not hear' or ignore a comment" (Female, BME, Black or Black British). Where a lack of organizational support exists for individuals challenging uncivil or deviant behavior, the targeted individual or bystander eventually assumes the responsibility of absorbing the comments and feigning indifference, to limit the fatigue associated with assuming the sole responsibility of intervention.

The implication here is that organizations, both explicitly and implicitly, are failing to provide the empowerment and psychological safety required to support employees to intervene in or report incidents (A6), failing to generate the trust that reporting, or intervening will change anything (B2); and perpetuating an internal organizational culture that instills a sense of powerlessness or helplessness within employees

(D3). Thus, the organizational environment limits individual agency and constrains the responsabilized subject, who, rather than being empowered, becomes trapped in a vicious cycle of racial bullying and harassment, creating tensions between responsabilization and the organizational (social) norms and culture. While subjects are responsabilized to act as 'ethical' subjects, our findings show how the norms and culture of the organization can create a tension that limits the success of responsabilization as a tool for change in EDI management.

Symptom-Solving as an Agent of Failure in the Responsibilization of EDI Management

The second agent of failed responsabilization we identify in the reported cases of interpersonal misconduct is symptom-solving (Fig. 2). We define this agent of failure as well-meaning, informal interventions that do not get to the root of misconduct but may provide a temporary remedy. Although such actions might provide alleviation of the immediate impacts of misconduct, incivility, and antisocial behavior, they do not address interpersonal misconduct in the long term and do not provide restorative justice or repair to those targeted by bullying and harassment. Here, we identify three mechanisms that are indicative of the failure of responsabilization.

In the first case, the target/s or bystander/s of bullying and harassment present an informal correction or challenge to the instigator (See Table 3 A1-A3 and B1-B3 for indicative examples). Most of these cases testify that often, this informal rebuke is the only form of response or intervention to racial bullying and harassment. Here, respondents highlight that without the support and intervention of institutional actors with formal responsibility to resolve misconduct, the perpetrator, and subsequently racialized misconduct persists. This finding is indicative once again of the failures in the process of individual responsabilization. Where EDI management is positioned as a 'technology of the self,' allowing (through autonomous problem-solving) empowerment, transformation, and emancipation, our findings imply that this process of responsabilization is having the opposite impact, given that informal rebukes only stymie deviant, abusive or uncivil behavior in the short-term (i.e., in the moment of time misconduct occurs), but fail to have a lasting impact in the longer-term. The perpetrator, resisting the appropriate moral regulation to not engage with anti-social, uncivil, and deviant interpersonal practices, further resists responsibility for their actions when held to account informally.

In the second case, the bystander/s, having witnessed an incident of bullying and harassment, might offer informal support to the targeted individual (see Table 3 C1-C3 for indicative examples). However, most of these reports do not

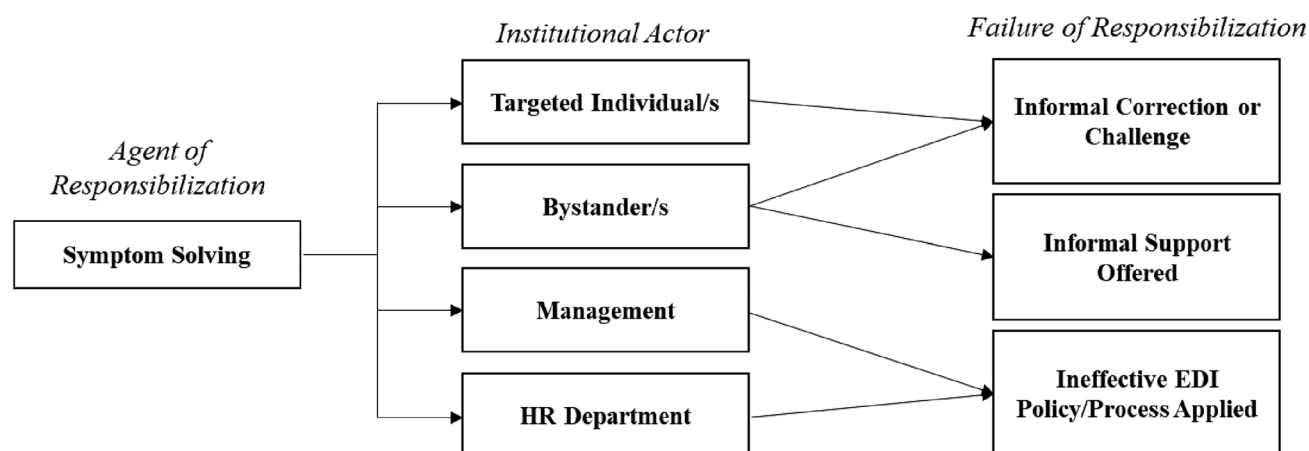


Fig. 2 Symptom-solving as an agent of failure in the responsabilization of EDI management

evidence any further action taken beyond this offer of support, with the negative effects of misconduct still impacting the targeted individual. For instance, one respondent recounts how they tried to support a colleague by “backing him up when I agreed with him” and pointing out to the perpetrators that “English was not my first language either.” Despite this, the targeted individual “ended up needing to take sick leave due to the stress.” Such cases imply limits to the effectiveness of individual action when the impacts of racism in the workplace are systemic. Informal intervention is bounded and constrained by the limits of individual responsabilization, where institutional interventions, which uproot and deal with the cause and effect of racial bullying and harassment, are absent. Individual action does not go far enough to effectively resolve and repair a systemic problem with systemic impacts.

Our findings suggest an uptake in informal support or challenges, which might be viewed as indicative of the purported empowerment associated with responsabilization. Similarly, the offering of informal correction, challenge, or support (Table 3 C1-C3) from bystanders could be viewed as indicative of the uptake in employees willing to step-up as active bystanders when witnessing racial bullying and harassment and demonstrate allyship. In and of themselves, such instances do not necessarily indicate a failure in responsabilization, given that they suggest evidence of personal responsibility and moral self-regulation among some employees. Yet while these suggestions may signify the potentially positive associations of responsabilization, such as emancipation, allyship and empowerment, a general frustration is evident among respondents. The organizational structures and systems, supposedly in place to both protect and support employees from racial bullying and harassment, are not providing the safety and protection required to support the responsabilized individual (see the indicative examples in Table 3 A2, B2 and C2). For example, in C2 the

bystander attempts to support their colleague by befriending them. Yet the targeted individual leaves the organization a week later, suggesting that support is not enough to undo the harm caused by misconduct. Such instances add further credence to the notion that without formalized and enacted structures and systems of support, responsabilized individuals providing informal support or intervening in cases of incivility and antisocial behavior is not enough to resolve the root cause of the problem.

While our findings thus far suggest that some institutional actors are assuming responsibility for the self-management of risk attached to EDI management, they also largely imply that a void at the institutional level, in the form of ineffective EDI policy, results in a lack of misconduct resolution. This failure can be linked to explicit evidence of ineffective EDI policies and initiatives, which are characterized by a disconnect between what should be done, and what is done in practice. Having been made aware of misconduct through reporting mechanisms or firsthand accounts from the target/s or bystander/s, organizational policies and procedures are utilized by managers and/or the human resource department to counter, or to appear to counter, bullying and harassment. With 313 references to this form of resolution, this finding is largely consistent with the increasing uptake of EDI-related policies highlighted in our theoretical framing.

Yet our results show that the policies and processes utilized in this mode of resolution are ineffective and, in some cases, exacerbate misconduct. Here, respondents report such policies and procedures as being counterproductive, lacking proactivity to adequately address misconduct, or being overruled by the culture of the organization. Most reports suggest that these EDI policies and practices are implemented to comply with regulations and stakeholder pressure or to bolster organizational reputation, as opposed to reflecting an authentic organizational belief in EDI (D1). While training may be effective, problems remain, and the

Table 3 Symptom-solving as an agent of failed responsibilization

| Agent of responsibilization failure: Symptom-Solving | | |
|--|-----------------------|---|
| Reference | Institutional actor/s | Manifestation of failed responsibilization |
| A | Targeted Individual | Informal Correction or Challenge: Targeted individual informally challenges or corrects the perpetrator |
| | | Indicative example |
| | | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 "I turned the poor humor around onto the individual and made a funnier point. Followed up with a private conversation about appropriate audiences- but did not vilify or humiliate, just educated politely and fairly." (Male, BME, Mixed) 2 "Lots of little comments from people within the business. I have called it out at times I felt able and safe to do so, but that isn't always the case." (Female, BME, Asian or Asian British) 3 "I was thinking of reporting the incident to HR at first. But I spoke to my manager privately instead and expressed what I was feeling. The way he spoke to me around my colleagues does not show respect, even though he was trying to do it in a joking way. Times like that leaves me feeling like I am nothing. Really demoralizing and demotivating." (Male, BME, Asian or Asian British) |
| B | Bystander | Informal Correction or Challenge: Bystander informally challenges or corrects the perpetrator |
| | | Indicative example |
| | | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 "Someone criticized a colleague's accent and appearance. I spoke to this person about their behavior and why it was unacceptable and told them that it should never happen again." (Female, BME, Mixed) 2 "Customer harassed a colleague telling them to 'go back home,' as I was nearby and saw them acting intimidatingly, I shouted and started to run over, at which point they ran away. I offered mental support to the colleague and warned the rest of the shop about what had happened, unfortunately it happened in a location with no cameras so no long-term impact against the customer could be achieved." (Male, White, White British) 3 "One of my colleagues racially abused a black nurse giving flu jabs. Other colleagues stepped in and removed him from the situation before I had chance to." (Male, White, White British) |
| C | Bystander | Informal Support: Bystander provides informal support to the targeted individual |
| | | Indicative example |
| | | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 "A colleague complained that their manager assumed they could speak 'Indian' because they are 'brown,' but they are of Pakistani origin. I encouraged the colleague to put in a complaint and supported them." (Female, BME, Black or Black British) 2 "It wasn't obvious or direct but the one black person at my last job was clearly singled out a lot. I didn't work directly with him, but I tried to befriend him to offer my support, but he left a week later." (Female, White, White British) 3 "A colleague complained that their manager assumed that they could speak 'Indian' as they are 'brown,' but they are of Pakistani origin. I encouraged the colleague to put in a complaint and supported them." (Female, BME, Black or Black British) |

Table 3 (continued)

| Agent of responsabilization failure: Symptom-Solving | | |
|--|-----------------------|---|
| Reference | Institutional actor/s | Manifestation of failed responsabilization |
| D | Management | Indicative example |
| | | <p>1 "Mostly lip service. Attention and energy are spent when discrimination is highlighted or publicized but fades within a couple of years. Consistent and long-term commitment, with consistent and regular progress is lacking." (Female, BME, Black or Black British)</p> <p>2 "The group I am in has been helpful for me and I feel I have learnt a lot from training. But I still see inequality and people quitting or being fired over injustice or perceived injustice." (Female, White, White British)</p> <p>3 "It's assumed there is no diversity issue because of the nature of the organization, so there is no proactive work around diversity. They only introduced meetings with BME staff after a number of racist incidents reached our lay leaders." (Male, White, White British)</p> <p>4 "I think there is a genuine attempt by senior managers to tackle these issues but since they are often white and male, they do not really have the relevant personal experience to understand the issues." (Male, BME, Mixed)</p> <p>5 "The diversity training skirts around racist and gender issues, which are not spoken about or tackled head on. Instead, the training just covers that we should strive not to discriminate (or) bully colleagues, and we should include colleagues in our interactions. How we go about doing this isn't really discussed and so the behaviour just carries on in the organization. It's not really acceptable for a manager to go to a managers' training day about dealing with difficult co-workers and give a scenario in front of everyone else that he finds it difficult to deal with female colleagues which he suspects were menstruating on the day." (Female, 3, BME, Asian or Asian British)</p> |

Human Resource Department

initiative, processes, and practices advocated for are not seen in practice (D2). EDI is reported as only being a priority when incidents do occur (D1, D3), and those responsible for leading such initiatives have the lived experience, training, or education to approach topics appropriately (D4, D5). Once again, the responsabilization of EDI creates a negative outcome, in this case, when individual actors are left to resolve EDI issues without adequate structures and resource commitments from organizations to do so effectively. Thus, the organizational environment limits individual agency and constrains the responsabilized subject, who, rather than being empowered, becomes trapped in a closed loop of racial bullying and harassment.

Implications of Failed Responsibilization in EDI Management

Through our analysis, we identify some outcomes resulting from the failed responsabilization of individuals and the failure of organizational EDI. Physical and mental health implications are common, with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), burnout, stress, depression, and anxiety frequently cited as stemming from a lack of organizational support and resolution in misconduct. For example, “it wasn’t taken seriously, and it affected my mental health: the manager was supported over me. Until I kept complaining and then the manager was investigated, but he was given a package to leave the company. At this point, I had been ill for 11 months” (Female, BME, Asian or Asian British).

We secondly identify a perpetuation of misconduct, bullying and/or harassment. Here, the lack of a formal response, or ineffective responses, means that bullying and harassment are exacerbated. Often, the targeted individual is victimized, with harassment increasing because of reporting or intervening. One participant explains “my line manager referred to me in racially loaded terms. I questioned him about it privately and ended up being disciplined” (Female, BME, Mixed). Moreover, the lack of action on the institutional level is seemingly interpreted by some organizational actors as an endorsement of misconduct.

There is a noticeable impact on turnover, with references made to employees resigning from their place of work due to the ineffective management of misconduct. As put by one respondent who reported bullying and harassment to management, “nothing really happened, so I left” (Female, BME, Black or Black British). On the institutional level, our analysis implies that an unsupportive culture is fostered by failures to ensure an appropriate response to racial harassment and bullying. A failure to intervene or appropriately respond to bullying and harassment creates and sustains this unsupportive culture. Those who are targeted are continuously blamed for reporting or being negatively impacted by

incidents, and an overall lack of support, which perpetuates organizational (passive) bystanding, invalidation and ridicule of those targeted. The quote of one targeted individual (Male, BME, Mixed) is indicative of this perpetuation, with this respondent describing how, upon standing up to bullying and harassment, the response of organizational actors was to claim that the experienced misconduct was just “banter” and “blaming me for being humorless.”

Consequently, we observe a shifting of responsibility to external actors, representing the involvement of external actors in the intervention and resolution of misconduct, such as trade union representatives, or even the police. The implication of this is that inaction or symptom-solving on the institutional level, results in the need to escalate particularly egregious cases of misconduct to external actors of authority. We make one observation here, however, that such instances are rare in our data. Where misconduct manifests as deviance but not necessarily criminality, is hidden behind the veil of ‘banter,’ is denied by all other institutional actors, or is enacted in a way that ensures no evidence bar the testimony of the targeted individual or bystander, the involvement of external actors for resolution is unlikely. These implications demonstrate once more how failures in the responsabilization of EDI management hinder appropriate repair and resolution. The agentic burden of the consequences of workplace racism is placed back on those targeted directly or vicariously by such incidents.

Discussion

We introduced our paper with the horrific experience of Corporal Kerry-Ann Knight and the British Army’s failure to protect her from systematic racialized abuse. Our analysis, which uses the perspectives and reported experiences of individual employees to elaborate on the ways in which responsabilization fails to address interpersonal misconduct, demonstrates how this example is not an isolated experience but rather commonly replicated across organizations. Had the Army fulfilled its prevention-oriented responsibilities (Shore et al., 2018), Knight’s report of misconduct would have been investigated thoroughly, avoiding the subsequent victimization of Knight, which resonates with many of our observed accounts of EDI failure. However, that Knight was the target of interpersonal misconduct and harassment goes further than failures in the response mechanisms of misconduct, suggesting the absolute failure of EDI management in addressing the needs of marginalized groups (Gagnon et al., 2022). Our findings speak to this, highlighting a void in the technologies of the self and strategies of responsabilization, which EDI management is purported to represent through the construction of inclusive subjects (Brewis, 2019). Where training and policies are expected to create self-regulating,

moral individuals, our findings question their suitability and effectiveness despite apparent institutional confidence in them. An overreliance on the individuals' moral discretion and capacity for responsibility, without appropriate institutional governance, thus represents a failure in the strategies of responsabilization to construct the responsabilized subject, as well as an avoidance of organization-level responsibility (Lange, 2008; Roulet & Pichler, 2020; Wang et al., 2019).

Further, we observe a resistance to this responsabilization from subjects. In such cases, self-governance breaks down due to these failures, and the subject positions are not adopted. Essentially, employees do not buy in to the notion of themselves as a responsabilized, self-regulating subject. While institutional policies and practices might exist to delegate the responsibility for EDI, individual responsabilization is not enough to encourage suitable responses to racialized misconduct from various organizational actors, or the enactment of the said policies and practices. The process of responsabilization also has implications for other roles within interpersonal misconduct. In constructing responsabilized subjects, abusive, exclusionary, and discriminatory phenomena become discrete acts of individual misbehavior, and blame is thus shifted away from organizational causes and onto individual actors who are responsible for their own unethical conduct. As such, responsabilization limits the extent to which the system is responsible for such events. This “bad apple” view of wrongdoing, where institutional agency and identity are separated from aberrant and deviant individuals (Palmer, 2012), allows organizations to limit their responsibility for specific cases of misconduct and insulates the institutionalized problems that contribute to their occurrence.

Of course, responsabilization can also be effective if targeted individuals, bystanders, and managers adopt a self-governing, moral-regulating subject position (for example, in cases where informal challenges are presented). Yet our findings indicate a failure in responsabilized EDI governance to successfully address issues related to inequality and exclusion. In particular, the targets or bystanders are required to bear much of the legal and social risk for speaking out (Zheng, 2020), something reinforced by many workplace reporting structures. Even when individuals do speak out, the suggestion that they resolve negative interpersonal conflicts informally and by themselves reinforces the notion that inequality and discrimination are within the purview of self-regulating responsible subjects and discourages the use of more formal channels of resolution. Our findings suggest that the reasons for these failures are linked to the structural conditions of the working environment, where existing hierarchies of power create tensions that inform the enactment of responsibilities. Specifically, tension is evident between existent organizational norms and culture related to

reporting and resolving misconduct and the responsabilized subject.

While Shamir (2008) suggests a redefinition of the role of market actors, whereby organizations assume responsibility for major social issues and grand challenges, the impact of this transformation may be questioned due to the tensions and lack of institutional support identified in our analysis. Where responsabilization relates to the self-management of risk by the autonomous individual (Kelly, 2001), we identify a failure in some organizations to provide an environment where the self-management of risk (i.e., individual intervention in race-related abuse and discrimination) fully meets the needs of individuals or is even possible. We also identify that managing this risk by employing institutions (i.e., through supportive and restorative processes and practices) is lacking, as this is delegated to individual agents who are often unable or unwilling to provide a resolution.

Even when institutional actors do adopt the role of the responsible subject and act as morally reflexive, autonomous, and self-regulating individuals (Lemke, 2015), resolution and repair of misconduct events remain unrealized institutionally due to failures in the enactment of policies and processes by managing actors. By consistently delegating the responsibility for organizational EDI management to the responsabilized subject, there appears to be an assumption that all subjects will passively accept and enact the scripts of EDI management (Brown, 1978; Creed et al., 2002; Pizarro Milian & Wijesingha, 2023), removing the need for institutional responsibility. DiMaggio and Powell (1991, p. 22) note that “socially provided and constituted scripts rarely prescribe action in a way that establishes correct behavior.” Perhaps, then, there exists a need for organizations to view institutional actors less as ready-made moral agents of change and more as individuals whose sense-making of EDI management is informed by pre-existing worldviews within the context of local histories, systems and structures (Pizarro Milian & Wijesingha, 2023).

Avoiding the risks of inaction and symptom-solving requires organizational approaches that go beyond solely compliance-based prevention of EDI (Shore et al., 2018, p. 185). Although our data are experiential and do not suggest alternatives to the identified failures of dealing with interpersonal misconduct, empirical evidence suggests that alternatives to responsabilization should focus on shifting the burden of responsibility from individuals to broader societal structures and institutions (Ahonen et al., 2014; Barnes, 1999). In this vein, a useful starting point is deconstructing the responsabilization that commonly occurs in a society based on neoliberal principles, where the individual, and the individual alone, is to blame for their own fate or misery (Giddens, 1991; Pyysiäinen et al., 2017). Commonly associated with this deconstruction is Foucault's (1981, 2007) notion of counter-conduct, which denotes that communities

push for systemic change and hold institutions accountable for addressing systemic issues (Jones & Arnould, 2024).

At the organizational level, this would entail a relational approach to EDI management, which demands a better understanding of how to support minoritized members of staff and facilitate structural and institutional support for EDI (Tyler, 2019). In this vein, organizational moral responsibilities, as distinct from compliance responsibilities, are prioritized. In doing so, ethical relationality is introduced into organizations through the recognition of the embodied relationship or mutual dependency that each actor has within the organization (Butler, 2000). Simultaneously, dispossession becomes important here, whereby organizations seek the corollary undoing of discriminatory and uncivil behaviors and beliefs (Butler, 2004). Gagnon et al. (2022) position that this undoing should focus on a deep understanding of four areas. In the first sense, organizations should seek to measure organizational inequality, gaining hard facts on the representation of diverse groups within the firm, measures of bias, and the impact of diversity on outcomes. In the second case, organizations should seek to understand individual experiences related to inequity, diversity, belonging and identity in the workplace. In the third case, organizations should seek to understand the power imbalances in the workplace, and how individual or collective agency, through emancipation, can challenge these imbalances. In the fourth case, organizations should seek to understand the structural basis and development of inequality (Gagnon et al., 2022). This approach moves the organization away from the HR-based, legalistic approach that currently underpins EDI management, and allows for a movement toward the ethical management of EDI. More so, a relational approach further allow for a clear focus on intersectionality, with any attempt at managing EDI recognizing intersecting identities. By acknowledging the interplay of intersecting identities, organizations can design more inclusive policies and practices that address the compounded nature of discrimination, recognizing that experiences of disadvantage or privilege as systems of power are not isolated, but mutually reinforcing (Collins, 2015).

Conclusion

Much of the research into EDI either focuses on the agency of marginalized individuals to advocate for and emancipate themselves or elaborates the management of EDI-related performance as a managerial concern (Gagnon et al., 2022; Nkomo et al., 2019). Organizations often have EDI-related policies and initiatives in place, which represent the organization-level structures through which this is managed (Leslie, 2019; Shore et al., 2018). In this way, it has long been expected that organizations will put mechanisms in place

for EDI performance. However, we show that, in practice, delivering EDI and preventing and resolving interpersonal misconduct events represents an aspect of organizational responsibility that has been largely delegated to individual employees and managers through a process of responsabilization (Lemke, 2015).

Through our analysis, we identify two clear failures of responsabilization. In the first case, inaction relates to the inability or unwillingness of individual employees to act effectively in preventing future misconduct or repairing damage. Our findings imply that this can be because of a variety of factors, including an unwillingness to engage due to inadequate support, systemic barriers or fear of retaliation, lack of authority or insufficient resources. In the second case, symptom-solving identifies cases where, rather than embedding robust institutional structures, policies and accountability mechanisms, the responsibility for EDI protection and prevention is delegated to individuals, suggesting the ethical, moral and practical inadequacy of organizations.

These two failures are inherently linked, in that an organizational failure to assume responsibility creates the conditions under which individuals are set up to fail in their roles as *de facto* agents of EDI protection and prevention. This cycle perpetuates a lack of accountability and systemic change, ultimately resulting in negative outcomes for those affected by misconduct and stimulating a culture of unethical practice. The systems put in place at an organizational level place a large amount of the agentic burden on organizational participants (individually or collectively), and when this process fails, it represents a breakdown of EDI management and a disconnect between policy and practice. Organizational mechanisms often fail to support responsabilized subjects or force too much personal responsibility on individual actors, resulting in incidents of discrimination and abuse that, at best, remain largely unresolved and, at worst, are escalated even further (Matsson, 2023; Raj & Wiltermuth, 2022). More generally, in constructing responsible subjects without providing structural and systemic support for individual action, organizations are limited in their capacity to fully address their EDI performance, meaning that systemic issues are likely to continue despite the significant investment in EDI performance (Nkomo et al., 2019).

Our research has implications for literature, organizational policy and legislation. The empirical elaboration of experiences of misconduct highlights a prevalent perspective that organizations leave individuals to address these issues on their own. An implication for organizational policy is thus found in the need to develop institutionally managed policies and structures for EDI management that prioritize organizational moral responsibility, rather than focus mainly on performative and legalistic approaches. This shift might be supported by an extension of current employment legislation

to go beyond legal mechanisms that stimulate organizational compliance only and consider how moral responsibility can be encouraged among employers.

Theoretically, we use the concept of responsabilization to add to the understanding of how organizations are systemically failing workers. By reframing interpersonal misconduct as an organizational rather than individual failure, our research advances understanding of the ethics of EDI management, underscoring the importance of systemic approaches that foster collective responsibility and institutional accountability, thereby enriching the discourse on organizational ethics. In doing so, we open the door for further theoretical advancements in terms of systemic solutions. At one level, addressing responsabilization requires research and praxis that reforms existing EDI policies, for instance, by encouraging more accessible reporting processes. On another level, a significant rethink of how EDI is approached may be needed if we are to address institutionalized EDI issues within an organizational context fully. A relational approach, which focuses on ethical management and systemic and structural remedy, over compliance and performativity, as a means of counter-conduct to responsabilization could help to achieve this. In doing so, experiences of interpersonal misconduct, such as those faced by Corporal Kerry-Ann Knight and the participants of our research, may finally begin to be challenged from the root.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest. The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

Ethical Approval This research has been conducted with a commitment to uphold the highest standards of ethical integrity. Approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the University of Birmingham to undertake the analysis of this data.

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