The Canadian Art Teacher
Enseigner les arts au Canada

What is the Impact of Online Hate?

Natasha Doyon

Article abstract

This is an arts-based action research (ABAR) project on how online/offline hate speech impacts new immigrant and refugee youth. Using a non-experimental qualitative arts-based approach, the youth participants developed digital literacy skills to create alternative narratives by transforming online images, text, and symbols into comics as new narratives. By working within a feminist and critical theoretical framework this project aimed to amplify the marginalized voices of youth through participatory art workshops, skill building, group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. In order to diffuse systemic inequalities and racism this research aims to build bridges between youth's engagement with social media and their embodied knowledge towards fostering a new sense of belonging in their online/offline communities.

What is the Impact of Online Hate?

Natasha Doyon

This is an arts-based action research (ABAR) project on how online/offline hate speech impacts new immigrant and refugee youth. Using a non-experimental qualitative arts-based approach, the youth participants developed digital literacy skills to create alternative narratives by transforming online images, text, and symbols into comics as new narratives. By working within a feminist and critical theoretical framework this project aimed to amplify the marginalized voices of youth through participatory art workshops, skill building, group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. In order to diffuse systemic inequalities and racism this research aims to build bridges between youth's engagement with social media and their embodied knowledge towards fostering a new sense of belonging in their online/offline communities.

Who is speaking? Can we listen to the voices of marginalized youth and collaborate with them to combat discrimination? To transform embodied and internalized online hate speech into resilience and empathy? What might this look like?

Marginalized: is a term used to identify a non-dominant cultural group and an individual who is at greater risk of becoming invisible, negatively stereotyped and/or targeted in cultural, educational and societal spheres. In this article, marginalized young people are children, adolescents, and young adults who have experienced economic, social, political, and cultural marginalization because of factors beyond their control, including poverty, discrimination, violence, trauma, dislocation, and disenfranchisement

Online/Offline Hate Speech: hate speech is any form of expression through which speakers intend to vilify, humiliate, or incite hatred against a group or a class of persons on the basis of race, religion, skin color, sexual identity, gender identity, ethnicity, disability, or national origin.

Introduction

The following project was an ethnographic inquiry into how community-based critical art-educational projects can amplify marginalizsed youth voices. This was achieved through collaboratively creating new alternatives to the embodied and internalized prejudices, stereotypes, and hegemonic narratives that portray them adversely, both within their communities and on social media. Social media platforms are contradictory systems of connection without a clear moral structure; and while platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, WhatsApp, and Twitter play multiple roles as mediators and disseminators of hate speech, they may also alternatively perform as chaotic global platforms upon which to create new social spaces (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021).

Natasha Doyon

Natasha Doyon is a PhD candidate in Art Education at Concordia University. Her research is at the intersection of arts education and social justice as a way to listen to youth and to collaboratively develop better teaching practices with teachers using an ABAR (arts-based action research) methodology. She is a visual artist natashadoyon.com, K-12 & community art educator. Natasha has a BFA from Concordia University, an MFA, and a B.Ed. from the University of Ottawa.

This ethnographic, ABAR (arts-based action research) methodology emphasizes "producing narratives that ennoble human experience while facilitating civic transformations in the public (and private) spheres" (Denzin, 1997, p. 277). In essence, by working with a participant-centered approach, the collective and individual creation of artworks comprised of an inductive strategy for understanding how the intersection of the arts and social justice may cultivate a sense of belonging for youth who are often spoken for.

As a K-12 teacher and artist with experience working in diverse community settings, I was particularly drawn to work with this population. Having come from Israel and South Africa I had experienced & witnessed the complexities of generational trauma and found art to be a means of connecting the dispersed threads of hopelessness, yearning for change, and the importance of developing agency. While being an immigrant myself I felt drawn to work with people who exist in-between differing worlds, languages, and cultures.

My specific interest in undertaking this study was in understanding how a critical art-pedagogical approach may create opportunities to interrupt, question, and reconsider the dominant cultural narratives promulgated by the media and the structural and embodied racisms that maintain stereotypes of Others. Certain feminist media scholars and critics (Byers & Crocker, 2011; Dixon, 2014; Rivers, 2017) highlight the underlying inequities in social media and the misogynistic elements embedded in its gaming and social media platforms (e.g., Instagram and Facebook). Fourth Wave feminists such as Rachel Dubrofsky and Megan Wood (2014) theorize such elements as manifestations of the male gaze are filtered via self-surveillance and masked as "authentic." Such edited versions of the self in digital social spaces are crucial to understanding the mechanisms that may produce a deeper, virtual re-engineering of the self. In this context, developing critical digital literacy skills can assist youth in understanding their position as cultural producers and consumers.

> "We don't realize how the media actually controls us. Because, like, you know, we vote for people to be in the government so they can represent us when they make decisions. Usually what we watch and see it's like, it also represents who you are and how you grow up. How we see society and stuff, and how girls and boys will act in their life. So I really think media has a huge impact." (Participant 1)

Between 2015-2021 there has been a 174% increase in hate crimes against youth (10% more than in adults) motivated by race, ethnicity, and gender (Department of Justice Canada, 2023). Who is monitoring online content and making media corporations accountable? The youth felt that the negative stereotypes about refugees online were biased and that they were at the bottom of the hierarchy of media targets as black, Muslim, refugee women. It takes skill and time to differentiate between hate-speech and freedom of speech and the Internet is a paradoxical space with shifting goals.

The research highlighted the participants' voices and their relationships with social media. It called upon the participants as producers and consumers of social media, and, as such, examined the linkages between social media and well-being. Throughout the study the participants' sense of confidence grew based on two principles; one being that their experiences were validated, and two, that they authored an artwork in which they developed agency through self-representation. Van der Holk (2014) suggested that the arts have a way of grounding the individual in their body, which is the foundation of a sense of agency. When someone feels embodied it is the opposite of being dissociated and out of one's body. Although this study was focused solely on visual art, the symbolic act of self-representation was a means towards embodying a narrative.

The Study

The research was a collaboration with Say Ça!, a nonprofit organization in Montreal that helps integrate refugees and new immigrant youth aged 12–18 into Canadian (Quebec) society. The youth meet once per week, every Saturday for 2 hours, to learn French, participate in cultural outings and various workshops, and play. I had been volunteering as an art educator with Say Ça! for a year and a half before beginning this project. I have also partnered with the Landscape of Hope project that is co-directed by Vivek Venkatesh and Owen Chapman, a collective of artists and educators who work with different community-based stakeholders and schools to offer multimedia workshops to support youth aged 12–35 to develop critical digital literacy skills and to combat online and offline racism and discrimination. These workshops, which are designed to offer alternatives to hate, use interdisciplinary approaches to remix and transform images and sounds from social media into expressions of resilience and hope.

"While being an immigrant myself I felt drawn to work with people who exist in-between differing worlds, languages, and cultures."

This transformational approach includes engaging with a community's resilience, rather than merely focusing on its deficits, thereby framing certain groups as problems and reinforcing negative personal and collective identities (Chiu, 2003). Yvonna Lincoln (2009) refers to a feminist communitarian model that proposes research within communities that benefits the community members and recognizes them as producers of knowledge and makers of policy. Its neighborly aspect and respect for individual moral codes ground this ethnographic approach as a direct articulation and integration of cultural differences rather than glossing over them. Therefore, using a dialogical interdisciplinary artistic approach leaves room for evolving responses and thus creates opportunities to glean in-depth "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) of human lived experiences.

There were 3 participants 15-17 years old. All the participants were sampled from the Say Ça! non-profit organization. They wish to remain anonymous, however, in their comic they included their identities. The participants came to the 16 sessions every Saturday morning from 11:00 am -1:00 pm while being full-time high school students. The final comic was completed by 2 out of the 3 participants.

There was a significant shift after an initial self-portrait exercise. Unaware, initially, the participants drew themselves as white girls, although they were not. They began to question their disconnectedness and become more critical of what they drew. They claimed that the media they used (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, movies, and news) showed biased representations of refugees, racialized people, women, and Muslims. Digital intersectionality (Nakamura, 2008, Noble & Tynes, 2016, Tynes, 2007) states that online microaggressions happen 5.14 times a day towards black adolescents (English et.al. 2020) resulting in heightened anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem. Therefore, drawing became a diagnostic tool to examine identity at the crossroads of fantasy, imagination, and reality.

Robert Coles (1967) had noticed how racialized children represented themselves as either fragmented, or as the dominant culture. The same occurred with the participants before they noticed how they were representing themselves. For minority youth the risk of self-erasure and distortion has two main functions. The first being to not stand out, and the second being that they consume more positive messaging associated with white people in the media.

The Participants

Participant 1 was a 16-year-old female asylum seeker from Cameroon who had been in Canada for 1 year. She is a self-taught coder, animator, and basketball player. Her desire to participate in the research was because she was curious about creating digital narratives, making art, connecting with others, and she wanted to add to the conversation regarding online/offline hate-speech.

During our sessions she was both critical of social media and understood its power as a social mobilizer. She was equally confused about the ethics regarding accountability & responsibility towards protecting people from hate-speech. Her main pre-occupations were sexism, racism and stereotypes against refugees. She shared, "Self-representation is a way to debunk stereotypes about black girls/women. Social media can help to show representation but can also be harmful by sharing false stereotypes".

Participant 2 was a 15-year-old female refugee from Nigeria. She had been in Canada for 1.5 years. Her desire to participate in the research was to learn about critical digital literacy and the impact of online/offline hate-speech, connect with other youth, and create artwork. As a Black, Muslim, and immigrant young woman she felt that she was falsely stereotyped and had to defend her identity by being perfect, saying "black women are portrayed as being super strong, being made to fit into this narrative to be strong – there is not a lot of room to be vulnerable". She stated that social media "has such a huge effect on our people… we are defined as a group and not as individuals. No one is perfect, why must we be?". In her comic she wanted to show that as a black girl she was always trying to prove herself against stereotypes and that social media could be both a tool to connect and equally a weapon to shame and ostracize.

Participant 3 was a 16-year-old refugee from Lebanon. She had experienced a lot of ignorance from her teachers when she arrived in Quebec by telling her to take off her hijab and felt that social media negatively framed refugees. She recognized the ambiguity and dangers of what social media offers us, "We never talk about the consequences of hate-speech in real life. For some people it can be a fight, and for others it is a debate."

Challenges

I was challenged when I heard participant 3 talking about ethnic cleansing in Israel/Palestine. I felt subjugated by the comments because this is
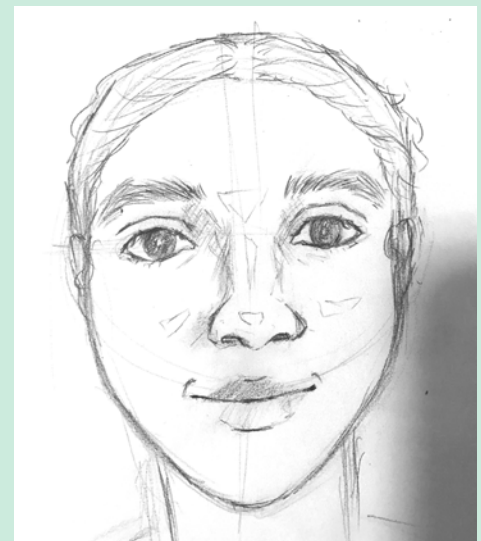

Figure 1. Participant 1 Self-Portrait

Figure 2. Participant 2 Self-Portrait

Figure 3. Participant 3 Self-Portrait

Figure 4. Title page, *Our Stories Nos Histoires*

a sensitive situation and personal to both of us. I needed to maintain my calm and ask her how that made her feel. I recognized that this was an opportunity for the participant to be heard in a safe environment. Yet, as an Israeli I had my own understanding of the situation and needed to 'get out of the way' to listen to a different narrative and perspective of the situation. This also meant that I would need to be transparent and tell her that I was Israeli. I should mention that this participant left after the following workshop. I recognized that by being transparent I might lose her significant presence in the group. However, the participant may have left for other reasons, but for myself the doubt lingered throughout the entire research project.

Ethics

Youth have long been viewed through a psychological and sociological lens as passive and observable (Alldred et al., 1998). Using ABAR provides a power-sharing model that resists perpetuating hierarchical systems of power. Youth are invited to lead and share input into decision-making processes that influence the research process because they are experts and can offer detailed accounts of their lived experiences (Chabot et al., 2012). Certain questions to ask when engaging in ABAR with youth: Is it in their best interest? Whose needs is it meeting? Am I / or is this research causing harm? What is my capacity to handle ambiguity? Who owns the knowledge? It is important to be rigorous regarding member-checking and embedding self-reflexivity throughout all the cycles of the research. Consent from parents/guardians, and a relationship with the community organization pre-, during, and post-project.

Our Stories / Nos Histoires

The workshops culminated in the creation of a comic. Each participant created a 2-page comic that was originally written in English, but they wanted to reach a wider audience, so they translated it into French as well. One of the artists had knowledge of Clip Studio Paint Pro and created her comic digitally, and the other artist drew hers by hand which she then coloured and inserted the text with Canva (free online software), links below. Each participant had their own level of drawing skills. Different drawing exercises were done throughout the 16 weeks, yet my focus was to support the participants to create a story where they could express their ideas within their skill sets. They wanted to create two individual stories that merged into one. This was due to their individual experiences, which also overlapped.

The two characters meet each other in the end to share their stories and support one another.

The outcome was inspired by the emerging themes that came out of our conversations relating to their concerns: racism, sexism, Islamophobia, and being falsely stereotyped both online and offline. They wrote, drew, and conceptualized 'Our Stories''Nos Histoires' collaboratively. It is a story about two girls who meet at the airport and are questioned, detained, and stereotyped. Whereby, they use social media to communicate their struggles of being judged and undermined. They wanted their comic to be read by youth like themselves and bring awareness to other youth & teachers alike.

The participants added questions at the end of the comic to be used as a pedagogical tool with youth, such as:
- Can social media bring awareness to situations? What are some of the negative aspects of social media?
- If you were in Lanna's position, would you do something different?
- Would you take the same steps that Sahla took?

The final comic work has been shared in Park-Extension Community Center for Refugee Youth, CSSDM Classe d'Accueil Program, Refugee Center of Montreal, and Equitas with youth from Montreal Nord. Their comic can be accessed both in paper and digital form, and it is bilingual. They also received a grant from Rising Youth to be printed in colour.

Their Perception of ABAR

In the beginning, the participants were unsure about the process. How would they help to co-create the research and influence its direction? More importantly, they were not accustomed to being the central voice that was being highlighted. The three participants repeated throughout the project how they felt they had little influence over their lives and struggled to speak and be heard in their own 'language' (not only dialect but their voice).

The participants said that being with other refugee youth at Say Ça! and in the research project offered them "a place to ask for help, like – where else maybe, we could make more groups like people coming together to make a change, you know", and "I mean I think the most important thing is that you find people that are like you so that you can relate and talk about your experience".

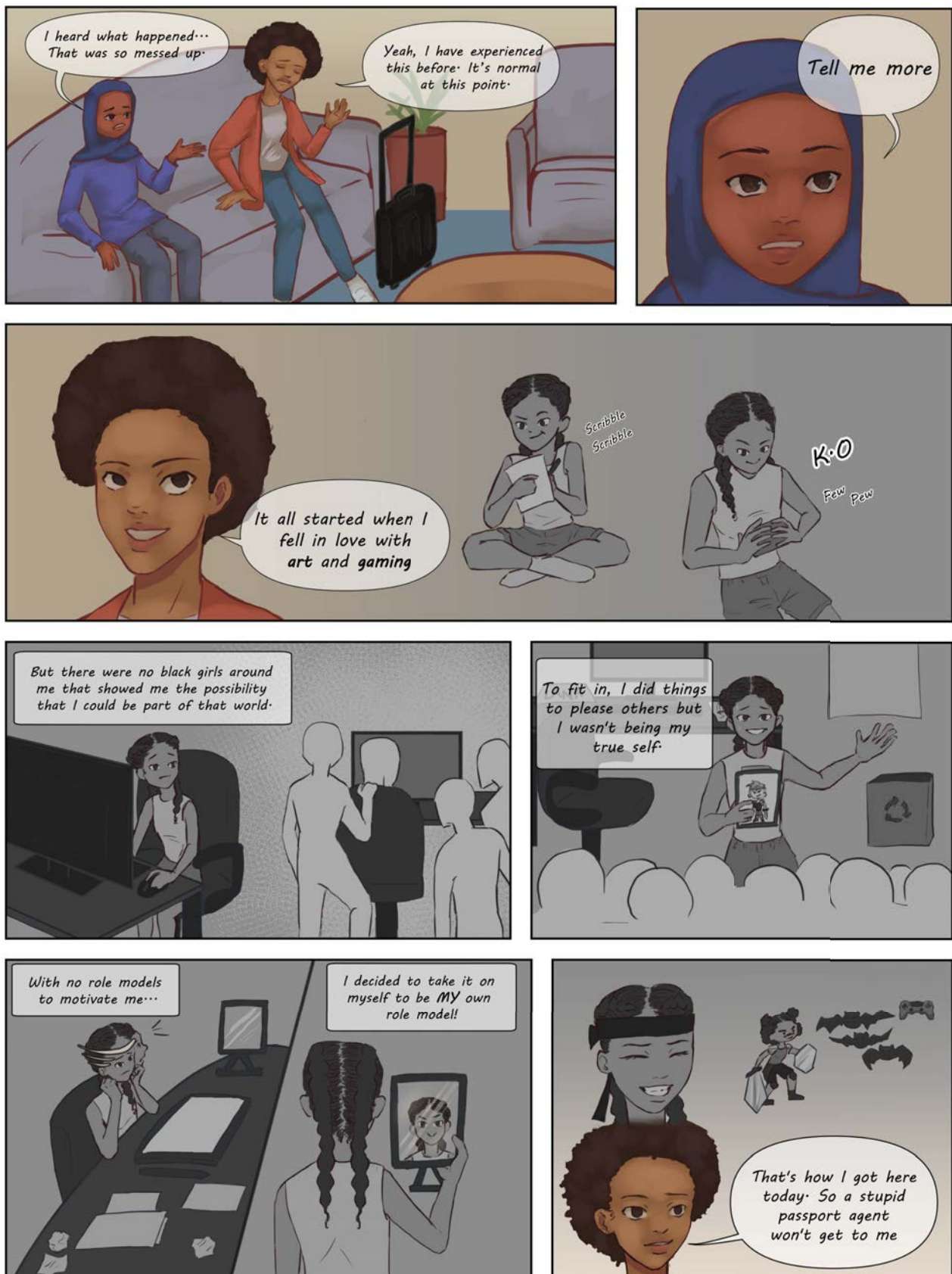Figure 5a. Lanna's experience at the airport
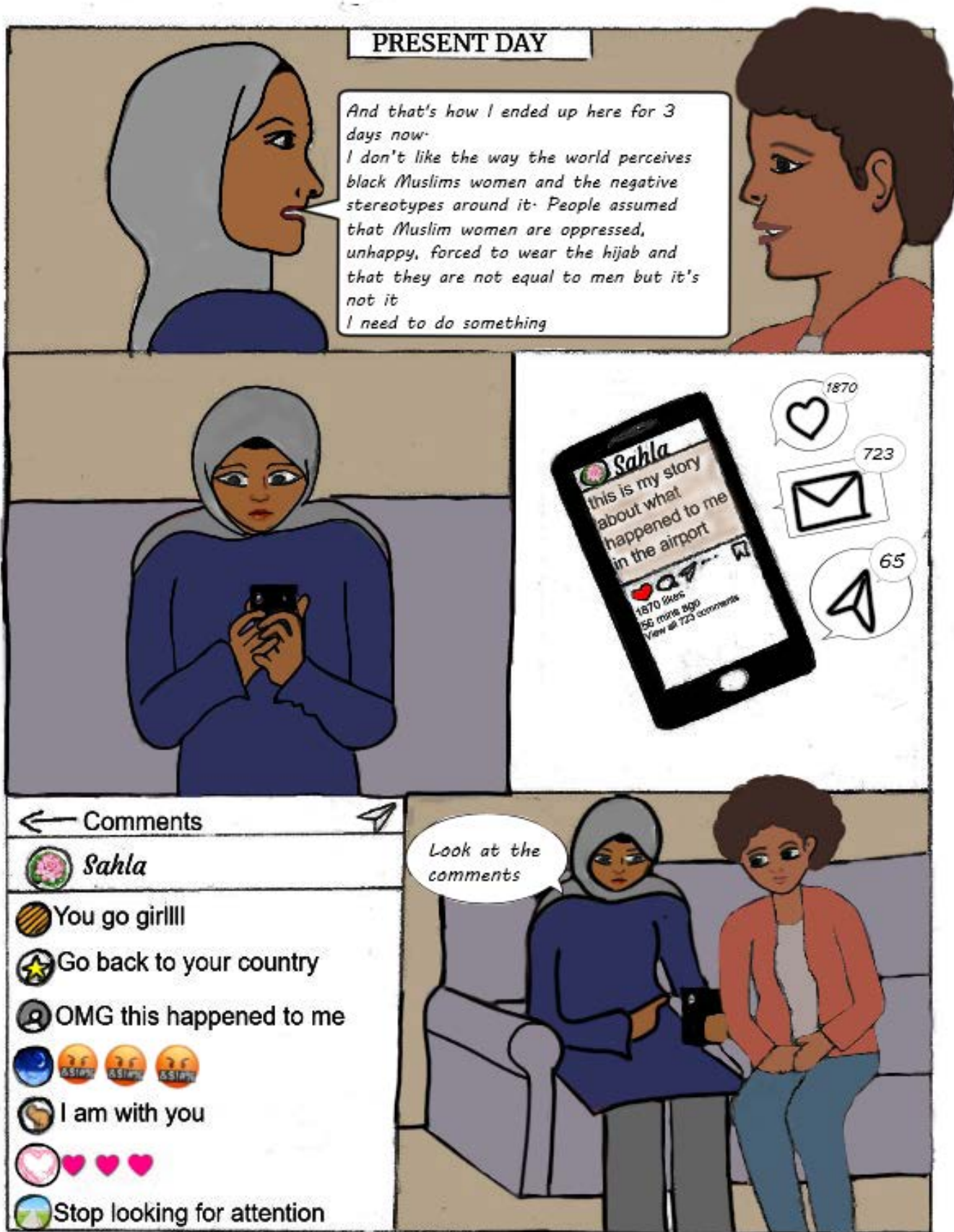
Figure 5b. Lanna's experience at the airport

Figure 6b. Sahla's experience at the airport

Figure 7a. L'expérience de Lanna à l'aéroport

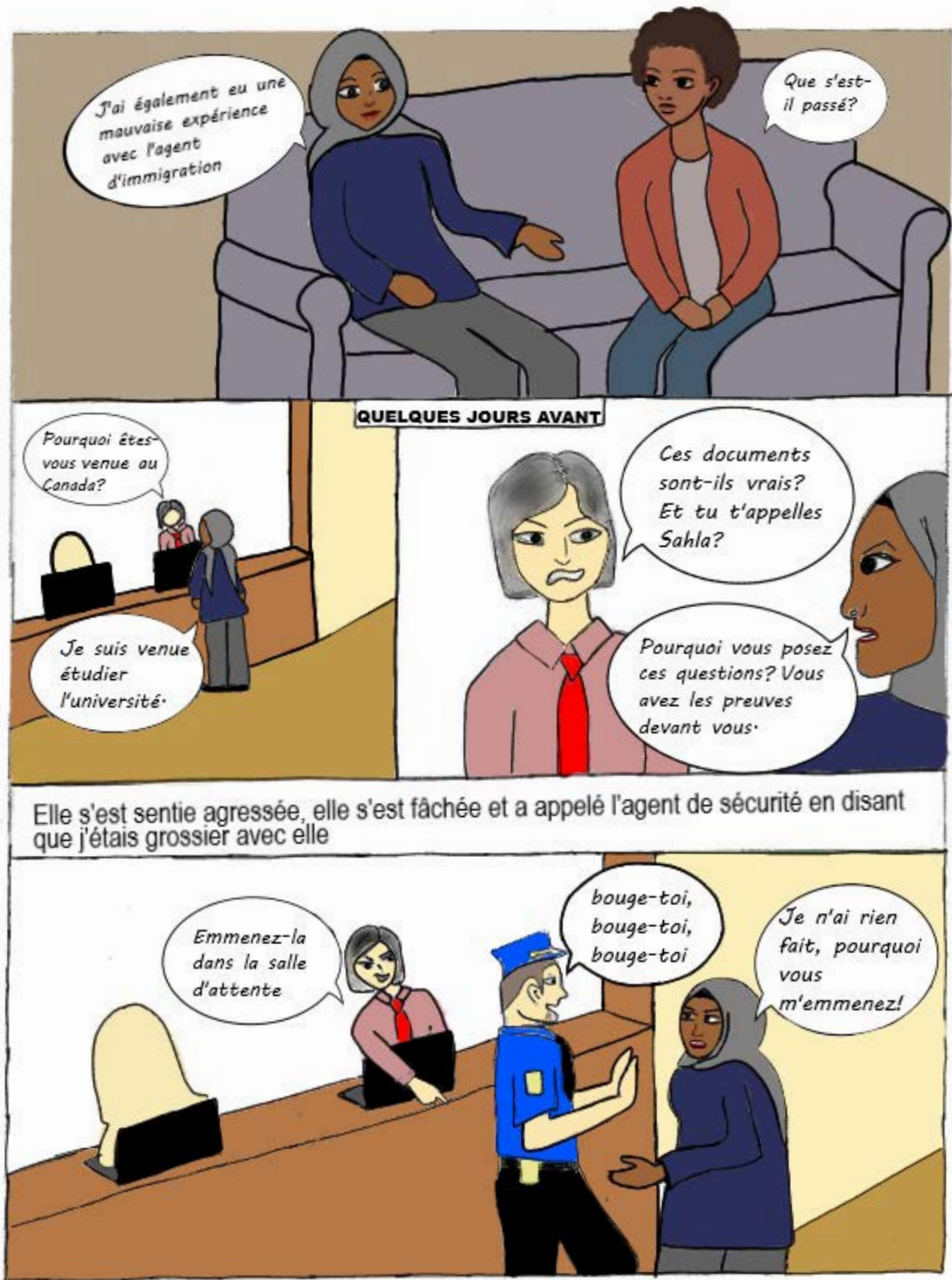Figure 7b. L'expérience de Lanna à l'aéroport
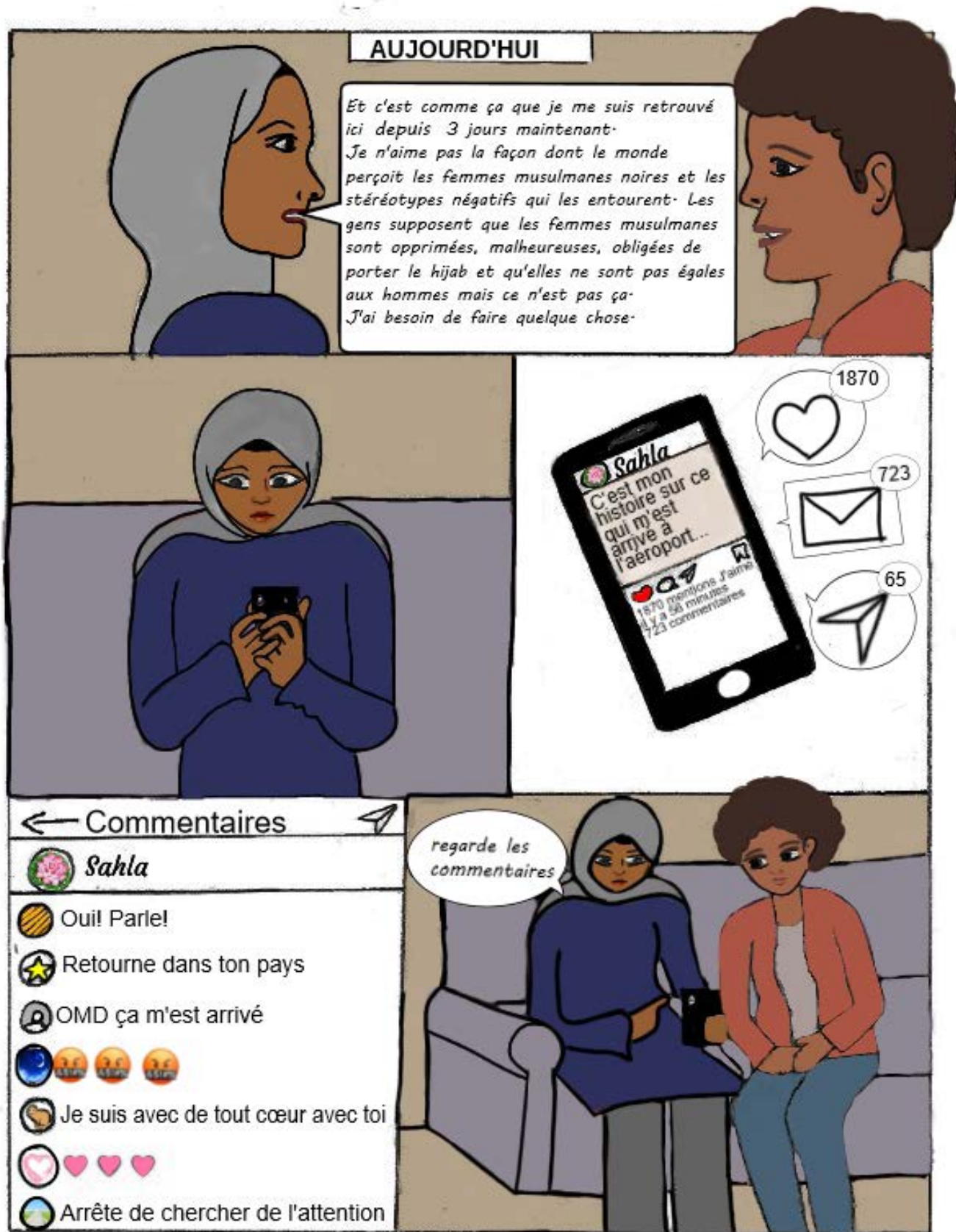
Figure 8a. L'expérience de Sahla à l'aéroport

Figure 8b. L'expérience de Sahla à l'aéroport

Although ABAR seemed confusing for all of us in the beginning, the participants felt like it facilitated a unique pedagogical opportunity to center their voices. Throughout the cycle of ABAR, I was able to expand on questions by offering diversified resources (art exercises, videos, news articles) to complement and stimulate deeper reflections on their interests and questions. They shared that they had not thought of the lack of accurate self-representation, being stigmatized for being a woman and a visual minority to the extent that it influenced their behaviour, and the impact of online biases before the project. As they got to know each other, they collectively navigated the uncertainty of a creative process. With the absence of an instructional method, I was able to invite them to express their ideas in alternative ways. This was at times demanding as it required that I continually modify my guiding questions and pedagogical methods. However, the participants' voluntary presence showed perseverance and commitment on their part, one comic being hand-drawn and the other made digitally. More importantly, the participants expressed that by completing the comic they were proud of their work.

Conclusion

Henry Giroux (2004), in considering the links between sociopolitical ideologies and education, explained: "Education, in the broadest sense, is a principal feature of politics because it provides the capacities, knowledge, skills, and social relations through which individuals recognize themselves as social and political agents" (p. 115). This, in turn, becomes a critical pedagogical approach to understanding and acting upon the political agendas in education, overt and hidden, which result in sustained systemic prejudices in curricula and content delivery alike. As a K-12 art educator, artist, and Ph.D. candidate, I learned that critical pedagogy is not a noun but a verb and a practice. By facilitating collaborative learning with youth, we were able to produce a new form of pedagogy based on their lived experiences. I learned that hate-speech is both silent and loud, pervasive and limited, complex and homogenous. "Hate can be good," said one participant, "when you hate something bad."

This article has been published under the Canadian Art Teacher Peer Mentoring process.

Links to software:

Canva: *https://www.canva.com/create/comic-strips/*
Clip Studio Paint: *https://www.clipstudio.net/en/*

References

Alldred, P., Cullen, F., Edwards, K., Fusco, D. (Eds.) (1998). *The SAGE handbook of youth work practice. SAGE Publications.*

Byers, M., & Crocker, D. (2012). Feminist cohorts and waves: Attitudes of junior female academics. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 35(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2011.09.003

Chabot, C., Shoveller, J. A., Spencer, G., & Johnson, J. L. (2012). Ethical and epistemological insights: A case study of participatory action research with young people. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 7(2), 20–33. https://doi.org/10.1525/jer.2012.7.2.20

Chiu, L. F. (2003). Transformational potential of focus group practice in participatory action research. *Action Research*, 1(2), 165–183.

Coles, R. (1967). *Children of crisis. A study of courage and fear.* Little, Brown & Co.

Denzin, N. K. (1997). *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21st century.* SAGE Publications. http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/enhancements/fy0658/96025245-t.html

Department of Justice Canadian Government. (2023, January). *Victims of Hate Crime, 2015-2021.* https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/jr/jf-pf/2023/jan5.html

Dixon, K. (2014). Feminist online identity: Analyzing the presence of hashtag feminism. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 3(7), 34–40.

Dubrofsky, R. E., & Wood, M. M. (2014). Posting racism and sexism: Authenticity, agency and self-reflexivity in social media. *Communication and Critical Cultural Studies*, 11(3), 282-287.

English, D., Lambert, S. F., Tynes, B. M., Bowleg, L., Zea, M. C., & Howard, L. C. (2020). Daily multidimensional racial discrimination among Black U.S. American adolescents. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 66. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appdev.2019.101068

Giroux, H. A., & Giroux, S. S. (2004). *Take back higher education: Race, youth, and the crisis of democracy in the post-Civil Rights Era* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan;

Geertz, C. (1975). T*he interpretation of cultures: Selected essays.* Hutchinson.

Lincoln, Y. S. (2009). Ethical practices in qualitative research. In D. M. Mertens & P. E. Ginsberg (Eds.), *The handbook of social research ethics* (pp. 150–169). SAGE Publications.

Matamoros-Fernández, A., & Farkas, J. (2021). Racism, hate speech, and social media: A systematic review and critique. *Television & New Media*, 22(2), 205–224.

Nakamura, L. (2008). *Digitizing race: Visual cultures of the Internet* (1–1 online resource). University of Minnesota Press. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=220871

Noble, S. U., & Tynes, B. M. (2016). *The intersectional Internet: Race, sex, class and culture online.* Peter Lang Publishing. The intersectional Internet : race, sex, class and culture online | WorldCat.org

Rivers, N. (2017). Between 'Postfeminism(s)': Announcing the Arrival of Fourth Wave. In N. Rivers (Ed.), *Postfeminism(s) and the Arrival of the Fourth Wave: Turning Tides* (pp. 7–28). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59812-3_2

Say Ça! Montréal. Say Ça Montréal - Cercle de soutien aux étudiants réfugiés et nouveaux arrivants (saycamontreal.ca)

Tynes, B. M. (2007). Role taking in online "classrooms": What adolescents are learning about race and ethnicity. *Developmental Psychology*, 43(6), 1312–1320. https://doi.org/10.1037/0012-1649.43.6.1312

UN. Human Rights Council. Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent. (2017). *UN. Human Rights Council. Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent.* United Nations. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1304262#record-files-collapse-header

Van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma.* Viking.