Racialized Youth in the Public Library: Systemic Racism Through a Critical Theory Lens
Jeunes racialisés dans la bibliothèque publique : le racisme systémique sous l'angle de la théorie critique

Amber Matthews

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Résumé de l'article

Les bibliothèques publiques sont sur la ligne de front pour servir des groupes défavorisés comme les jeunes racialisés et les aider à atténuer les inégalités sociales qui se manifestent par des résultats négatifs comme les lacunes en matière d'éducation, le sous-emploi et l'accès au logement sûr et abordable. Bien que les jeunes racialisés représentent la moitié de la population des jeunes dans les villes canadiennes comme Toronto, leur expérience dans les bibliothèques publiques est un domaine non étudié de la recherche universitaire et professionnelle en bibliothéconomie et en sciences de l'information au Canada. Les recherches existantes abordent les jeunes comme un groupe homogène en termes d'âge et de stades biologiques et ne tiennent pas compte de la race, de la classe et de l'urbanisme. Cependant, les jeunes racialisés sont confrontés à des défis différents défis dans lesquels la race et le racisme systémique sont une facette de la vie quotidienne. Cette étude vise à inverser la neutralité raciale dans les bibliothèques publiques en montrant comment l'ambivalence envers la race perpétue les inégalités systémiques et le désengagement des jeunes racialisés. Elle s'appuie sur des recherches interdisciplinaires pour montrer comment l'approche aveugle aux questions raciales ne reflète pas les besoins des communautés desservies. À l'aide d'un cadre de la théorie critique de la race, elle montre que les bibliothèques publiques peuvent mettre en œuvre des processus de collecte de données spécifiques à la race en vertu de la Loi de 2017 contre le racisme récemment mise en œuvre. Cela permettra une compréhension contextuelle de la composition raciale des utilisateurs et fournira un cadre de référence précieux pour soutenir les efforts visant à établir des relations plus solides et plus efficaces.

Racialized youth in the public library: Systemic racism through a critical theory lens

Amber Matthews
amatthe4@uwo.ca
Western University

Abstract

Public libraries are on the frontline of serving underprivileged groups like racialized youth and help them to mitigate social inequities that manifest in negative outcomes like education gaps, underemployment and access to safe and affordable housing. Although racialized youth account for half of the youth population in Canadian cities like Toronto, their experience in public libraries is an unstudied area of Canadian LIS scholarly and professional research. Existing research approaches youth as a homogenous group in terms of age and biological stages and does not account for race, class, and urbanism. However, racialized youth face different challenges in which race and systemic racism are a facet of everyday life. This work aims to reverse racial neutrality in public libraries by demonstrating how ambivalence about race perpetuates systemic inequalities and the disengagement of racialized youth. It draws on interdisciplinary research to show how the race-blind approach is not reflective of the needs of communities being served. Using a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework, it shows that public libraries can implement processes to gather race-specific data under the recently-implemented Anti-Racism Act (2017). This will provide a contextual understanding of the racial make-up of users and provide a valuable frame of reference to support efforts to build stronger and more effective relationships.

Keywords

public libraries, racialized youth, critical race theory, anti-racism

In September 2018, University of Toronto Professor David Hulchanski released a disturbing new analysis of demographic trends that revealed a striking and saddening picture of Toronto: Canada's largest and most diverse city is also undeniably segregated. Based on 2016 census information, Hulchanski and his researchers provided concrete evidence showing that 48% of census tracts in Toronto are low-income and an overwhelming number of its residents are visible minorities (2018, p. 5–6). Although Toronto's population is almost equally split between white and visible minority populations at 49% and 51% respectively, this data revealed that visible minorities encompass 68% of low-income neighbourhoods, whereas the population of high-income neighbourhoods is 73% white (Hulchanski, 2018, p. 5–6). Of the 27% percent of visible minorities that reside in Toronto's high-income neighbourhoods a shockingly meager 3% of those residents are Black (Hulchanski, 2018, p. 5–6). These results are more than observation or interpretive analysis. They are, what Hulchanski calls, the "strongest possible evidence" that Toronto is physically and demographically segregated by race (Hulchanski, 2019, p. 48). Sadly, there appears to be no end to this growing stratification. In fact, this longitudinal analysis of census data from 1970 to 2016 shows that racial and income segregation are increasingly getting worse in Toronto.

 For organizations, librarians, and information professionals that serve increasingly stratified populations, these findings of pronounced racial and income inequality are likely not surprising. Large library systems are acutely aware of the communities they serve and are committed to values of equity, service, and social justice. Their purpose and professional practices centre around working with local communities to provide high quality, free, and equitable access to information and services. However, proponents of racial equality and anti-racism measures argue that Canadian public institutions also lack a complete understanding of how social, racial, and economic disparities are experienced and the insidious impact of unbalanced power and resources (Hansen and Dim, 2019; Hogarth and Fletcher, 2018; Mullings, Morgan, and Quelleng, 2016; Sheppard, 2017). The presence and effects of systemic racism are often hidden in race-neutral approaches to service delivery that fail to account for the differential experience of racial and marginalized groups. This is compounded with a lack of meaningful data on race and service delivery in public institutions that can mask or accurately capture their representation and utilization of programs and services (Government of Ontario, 2017). The result is a profound gap in understanding of how public institutions can perpetuate systemic racism and stymie their own efforts to move towards greater social equity by failing to acknowledge and adequately respond to this incredibly important social force and its impacts on individuals and communities.

While Hulchanski's findings and other indicators from across Canada strongly indicate that race has and continues to be an important social determinant, the unique experiences of racialized groups in public libraries remains an understudied area of Canadian library and information science (LIS). In the case of youth, who are in formative stages of identity development and have consequential information needs for their future, this lack of meaningful data has the potential for far-reaching impacts. Much of the existing Canadian research concerns youth as a homogenous group and does not account for race, class, urbanism, or other significant factors, such as the impact of intergenerational trauma on Indigenous youth. Yet, these factors directly shape their

lived experience in their communities and outcomes in society. Race and social inequality also impact their experiences with learning and education, information needs and behaviour, and perceptions of the library and services (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2010; Kumasi, 2012; Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell, 2017). Racialized youth often face starkly different challenges in their everyday life than other youth. For many, these challenges include lower income homes and families with less access to information and technology. For others, the experience of being racialized means the perception of criminal behaviour and daily life in the shadows of prejudice and discrimination. The term "racialized youth" is drawn from LIS scholars Kafi Kumasi and Sandra Hughes-Hassell's work to signify youth whose racial or ethnic identity is constructed in opposition to the dominant white identity in society (Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell, 2017, p. 14). This is an important distinction because it allows for a more fulsome understanding of how youth form collective identities that are not always along strict racial or culturally segmented lines such as Black, Latino, or Indigenous. The term allows for a broader analysis of the impacts of cultural, economic, and racial marginalization on non-white youth by acknowledging the pervasive force of race and the forms of everyday and systemic racism that they face in their lives.

Although public libraries have a strong mandate to provide programs and services to racialized youth that help them mitigate the social and economic impacts of racial inequity, a peculiar demarcation occurs when considering how race and racism are experienced in our spaces and through our practices. This unintended consequence of race neutral approaches to programs and services renders libraries imperceptive to the unique information needs and experiences of racialized groups. In the case of youth, the ambivalence to race can also lead to their disengagement with libraries when they do not feel represented or engaged (Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell, 2017). In the face of such demonstrated and increasing stratification, Canadian public libraries must begin to seriously consider race an important consideration in our work and the lives of youth who use our services. Using a Critical Race Theory (CRT) framework, this work calls libraries to pay attention to the presence and force of institutional and systemic oppression that may have permeated into our practices in ways that can be detrimental to racialized youth and other non-dominant groups. CRT is both a theoretical and practical approach that provides opportunities to explore viable paths toward anti-racist spaces and practices by meaningfully acknowledging and addressing biases in our work. In the spirit of guidelines recently set forth in Ontario's Anti-Racism Act and similar legislations across Canada, public libraries are encouraged to consider implement processes in order to gather race-specific data. This data will provide a more complete contextual understanding of communities served and act as a frame of reference to guide and measure efforts to build better relationships with racialized youth. The CRT framework and its privileging of counter storytelling to hear non-dominant perspectives also offers an invaluable opportunity to open dialogue on how libraries are experienced by racialized youth and their information wants and needs. The purpose is not to suggest that libraries are deliberately failing to meet the needs of racialized youth. Nor does it aim to speak on their behalf to provide recommendations on future programs and services. Rather, the interdisciplinary body of research exemplifies that the race neutral approach to program and service delivery inappropriately ignores the force of

race in Canadian society and can undermine our work to engage with racialized youth in our communities.

Critical Theory Framework

As the major premise of this work is that race is central to understanding the lived experiences and needs of racialized groups, it is necessarily rooted in the CRT framework. CRT first emerged in United States (US) legal scholarship in the 1970s in response to the belief that critiques of racial inequality were insignificant following the legal achievement of equal rights and opportunity under US Constitutional law (Delgado and Stefancic, 2013). It has since been applied to a wide variety of disciplines throughout the social sciences to argue that race—while biologically disproven as a distinguishing factor in much the same way as gender—is still a socio-historical phenomenon where privilege and opportunities are inequitably bestowed on those that possess the dominant identity (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). Critical race theorists maintain that race and other constructions of social oppression are endemic to modern society and often intersect in complex and powerful ways (Crenshaw, 2019).

A substantial body of evidence argues that race ought to be considered in analyses that aim to address societal inequities. Yet, race has not been subject to comparable inquiry and its force goes unacknowledged in many scholarly disciplines and fields of professional practice (Howard and Navarro, 2016; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995). CRT provides an especially valuable framework to guide research and professional practice evaluations with an interest in identifying and redressing systemic racial oppression. According to CRT scholars, there are five core tenets to the theoretical framework that are applicable to any discipline, field, or context where racial injustice is experienced:

1. Race and racism (along with other discriminations experienced through gender, socioeconomic status, sexuality, immigration, age, and ableism) are defining characteristics of society as opposed to isolated acts or events of discrimination

2. Ideologies of objectivity, meritocracy, neutrality, and colour-blindness often shield dominant groups from identifying their privilege in ways that sustain power

3. Analyses must be interdisciplinary and historical to disentangle dominant ideologies

4. It is a transformative social justice framework to eliminate all forms of oppression

5. It centres and is guided by the experiential knowledge of those whose lives are impacted by every day and systemic experiences of oppression and injustice (Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995)

The interdisciplinary nature of the CRT framework is particularly useful because analyses that centre the experience of racialized groups are sparse in Canadian LIS literature. LIS has historically centred measures to address racism through principles of

neutrality and fostering diversity in hiring, program delivery, and spaces, including collections (Galvan, 2015; Hankins and Juárez, 2015; Morales, Knowles and Bourg, 2014). However, these responses are largely inadequate because they do not address the core issues of racial inequality; namely, in what ways are dominant ideologies the organizing structure? How do institutional narratives sustain privilege? Whose voices are heard and acknowledged? Whose voices are overlooked or silenced? (Honma, 2005; Hudson, 2017)

Whereas many in LIS proffer that libraries are both neutral and diverse spaces, a CRT approach upholds that the prevalence of whiteness and other related forms of privilege, like class and access to learning and education, render library spaces and practices neither racially neutral nor objective. Libraries are a racial space where the dominance of whiteness is sustained through unacknowledged norms, values, and structures that have operationalized white ways of being and knowing as invisible and normative in both the profession and our institutions. Ingrained notions of race neutrality mask the ubiquitous presence of whiteness and shield those with privilege from identifying how they benefit from racial inequality. There is a reticence to acknowledge this aspect of race and privilege in librarianship. The field holds a strong attachment to the belief that objectivity and neutrality are the bedrock of the profession and its practices. This serves to support the philosophical fallacy that libraries reside in an ahistorical and acultural context that does not embody racial privilege or perpetuate forms of racial oppression. However, libraries do not exist in a race-blind world and the social realities facing racialized users are rarely lessened through principles like diversity and inclusivity. In fact, these principles can perpetuate racial injustice, and are more akin to opening our space for others rather than working towards addressing the status quo that has been normalized through organizational and professional practices (Brook, Ellenwood and Lazzaro, 2015; Honma, 2005; Hudson, 2017; Morales, Knowles and Bourg, 2014).

This research is also rooted in Critical Education and Critical Youth Studies, informed in particular by the work of Eve Tuck. Her highly influential body of research in Indigenous and urban education argues that research frameworks are often flawed in their approach to under-served communities. Research participants and their communities are typically framed as damaged or less effective participants of society that require support or intervention (Tuck, 2009). Yet, these research frameworks do not account for the persistence of historical, economic, and sociocultural systems of inequality and marginalization. Tuck's work is closely aligned with CRT, and argues that educational institutions and scholarly researchers conduct their work from the standpoint that marginalized groups are not adversely affected by past social and historical systems of oppression because their direct effects have been redressed. This leads to "damaged-centered" analyses that problematize communities and research participants rather than the underlying foundations of systemic marginalization that continue to impact many communities and individuals (Tuck, 2009, p. 413). In Canada, the historical narrative tends to rest on the ideas of equal opportunity, diversity, and multiculturalism. These beliefs are reliant on a deeply entrenched perception of Canada as being a white nation that has welcomed and included others as opposed to a settler state that was borne through colonization and racism (Hogarth and Fletcher, 2018; Mullings, Morgan, and Quelleng, 2016; Sheppard, 2017). Fabled notions of diversity and inclusivity blind us to

the reality that systemic inequities are omnipresent and need to be addressed as the only means to ensure equitable outcomes in our organizations and Canadian society.

Anti-racist and critical approaches fundamentally differ in their acknowledgment of the presence of systemic racism throughout society and their direct attempts to redress unequal power structures. The crux of these critical theoretical frameworks lies in their emphasis on counter-narratives to inform and encourage a transformative change in institutions and their processes. CRT and related frameworks argue that by paying attention and attending to individual perspectives in respectful, legitimate, and appropriate ways the potential emerges for a more meaningful understanding of the lived experience of others. Counter stories help us to see and identify ways that dominant narratives can unwittingly be replicated and experienced in our work and professions. Openness to the experiences and stories of others—in this case, racialized youth—allows us to examine how our institutions are perceived and reveals opportunities to transform our spaces to be truly responsive to the communities served.

Critical Theories in Librarianship

There is a growing body of literature in LIS that aims to decentre oft-held perceptions that libraries are racially neutral spaces that reflect values of diversity, neutrality, and objectivity (Brook, Ellenwood and Lazzaro, 2015; Cooke and Sweeney, 2017; Gibson, Hughes-Hassell and Threats, 2018; Honma, 2005; Hudson, 2017; Leckie, Given and Buschman, 2010; Morales, Knowles and Bourg, 2014; Sheppard, 2017; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2017). These perspectives reject that libraries are colour-blind and call attention to the unexamined dominance of whiteness in LIS scholarship and the profession. In the first monograph on whiteness in LIS, Schlesselman-Tarango suggests that the field incorporates "Critical Whiteness Studies" as a framework to identify and analyze the centering of whiteness in the field (2017). In an earlier work, Honma argues that colour-blindness in LIS is rooted in two problematic and interrelated paradigms: "unacknowledged whiteness" and "celebratory multiculturalism" (2005, p. 14). He contends that libraries have uncritically tethered themselves to Western ideological notions of universal knowledge that signify white modes of practice and thought as the legitimate and appropriate way. This reinforces the perception of whiteness as normative and leaves LIS scholars and practitioners unable to envision transformative practices. His second concern lies with operationalizing "celebratory multiculturalism" in libraries without articulating that the need for multiculturalism arises from the dominance of whiteness in society and our spaces (2005, p. 14). Honma suggests that LIS look to interdisciplinary and sometimes activist disciplines like ethnic, queer, and women's studies that are rooted in social change and community impact. He argues that their scholarship is more closely aligned to the social justice mandate of LIS and they provide useful theoretical frameworks to centre the voices of those marginalized in dominant discourses (Honma, 2005).

Others like Hudson (2017) and Morales, Knowles, and Bourg (2014) rest their critique on the LIS diversity paradigm as the principle strategy to address power and privilege in the profession and society. Although it may seem, at least to some, that diversity would be the appropriate response to criticisms of "monocultural homogeneity," Hudson's key

point is that severing the ability to critically engage with race and racism as a structural and historical phenomenon is not an anti-racist strategy (2017, p. 6). To be anti-racist, the dialogue must centre and problematize how race imbues or denies power and privilege—and, most importantly, it must also include meaningful action to redress racial power structures. Thus, the notion of diversity is faulty because it asserts that inclusion is tantamount to equality. Hudson explores several ways that the diversity paradigm proffers the 'inclusion as equality' ideal (2017, p. 10–14). For example, the use of demographics over experiential knowledge to measure success (i.e., counting the number of non-white librarians and ignoring their lived experience) or boilerplate cultural competency standards that support the operationalization of diversity. The uncritical adoption of diversity as the sole anti-racist strategy leaves libraries detached and out-of-synch with racialized communities who contend with race and racism as facets of life.

However, the notion that libraries are racialized spaces is not a new critique. Librarians of colour have been vocal about disproportionate staffing and career opportunities for several decades (Hankins and Juárez, 2015; Morales, Knowles, and Bourg, 2014; Schlesselman-Tarango, 2017). Whereas past efforts to problematize whiteness in libraries has been a human resources issue, what is emerging is a critical reflection on how institutions, programs, and spaces may be tacitly supporting forms of racial oppression. Critiques about the unacknowledged racialized space of libraries and majoritarian narratives are also increasingly focusing on institutions of learning as a main source of concern. Cooke and Sweeney (2017) and Gibson, Hughes-Hassell, and Threats (2017) argue the absence of critical theory as a core learning throughout LIS programs supports the development of an ill-prepared professional workforce with incomplete conceptions of race and systemic privilege. Unfortunately, while many are quite vocal and active in racial justice issues in society and through their professional practices, the criticism is a perception, even amongst progressive librarians, that libraries' commitment to neutrality and objectivity is an anti-racist perspective and that marginalized persons do not experience racism or racial oppression in our spaces.

Racialization, Youth and Libraries

In her wide-ranging work, Kafi Kumasi often uses a CRT approach to demonstrate the force of systemic discrimination and inequality in education and learning institutions such as school libraries (Kumasi, 2012; Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell, 2017). Within the urban school library context, she compels librarians to "reflexively look back at [their] practices and policies… to see how they accommodate (or do not accommodate) the experiences, backgrounds, and literacies" of youth whose identity and information needs are informed through the lens of racialized experiences (Kumasi, 2012, p. 36). Gans (2017) provides a framework to examine this form of racialization in institutions and its impacts. He suggests that the principal focus of research should be a threefold identification process of the racializers, the mechanics of racialization, and its purpose— in other words, "who does exactly what, how and why" (Gans, 2017, p. 342–344). Uncovering each element calls attention to the processes of racialization that are performed and re-performed continually and not just the racialization act itself (i.e., identification of racial difference) since these reinforcing mechanisms serve to normalize both notions of neutrality in the racializer and difference in the racialized. Gans' call to

uncover institutional processes of racialization aligns with Kumasi to situate the experience of racialized youths on organizations and the entrenched practices within them.

Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell (2017) examine how the education system and other sites of learning have operationally failed to adequately serve racialized youth. They use the metaphor of the "canary in the coal mine" to show that racialized youths collective struggles in education and learning reveal that "there is something wrong with the institutions themselves, not with the youth" (Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell, 2017, p. 4). The concern noted by them and others is the overwhelming perception among racialized youth that library services do not meet their specific information needs (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell, 2017). Racialized youth often do not see themselves or their culture reflected in library programs and collections, and this is often "inadvertently" reinforced by well-meaning librarians who are not attuned to their social, information, and cultural preferences (Kumasi, 2012). As a result, many racialized youth become accustomed to looking outside of traditional avenues like libraries and schools for information. This leads to a progressive disengagement over time that becomes hard to counter as youth become older and no longer accessible to libraries through school and community programming. To counter this, Kumasi (2014) suggests that libraries make non-traditional forms of information available and incorporate them into their collections and programs. Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell also draw on urban culture and Own Voices narratives as examples of non-traditional information sources that could be of interest to racialized youth. The goal is to create space for racialized youth information needs and experiences and reverse trends of disengagement by being open to the idea of non-traditional collections and culturally relevant programs.

Finally, several research studies indicate that racialized youth are most likely to draw upon those they have personal relationships with for information such as family, friends and other adults (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2005; Abbas and Agosto, 2013). For librarians and other LIS professionals, this presents a challenge because of the negative perception of libraries in which racialized youth often feel judged and excluded (Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell, 2017). This relates to both their past experiences in libraries and the perception that the library was not a valuable source of information. Instead, racialized youth often prefer personal sources of information such as friends and rely on media and the internet for information-seeking (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2005). This is particularly concerning because in one study 60% of the research participants also worked part-time in urban Philadelphia libraries (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2005, p. 162). Although somewhat puzzling, these youth revealed that they did not feel comfortable in a library setting and that the resources available were not perceived as useful. This demonstrates that libraries need to pay closer attention to the information needs and wants of these youth and enhance their services and collection with "culturally-relevant" materials and programs to improve the perception of services (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2005, p. 162).

Racial Youth in Canadian Libraries

The significant gap in professional and scholarly research into the experience and needs of racialized youth in Canadian public libraries should be an area of significant concern as prior research has been almost exclusively based in the United States. Unfortunately, there are too many variances between the experience, histories, and impact of race to make US analyses overly generalizable to Canada. However, there is a strong case for comparable research to be conducted in Canada. Earlier cited studies demonstrate that rising income disparity and poverty directly correlate to race in Canada. Statistics Canada's recent census report entitled "A Portrait of Canadian Youth" also reveals the importance of race and ethnicity in the lives of youth. Racialized youth account for over a quarter of the youth population and this number continues to rise. In large Canadian cities like Toronto and Vancouver, 76% of youth are first-generation immigrants or have at least one parent who are immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2018). This is well above the Canadian average of 41% and exemplifies that local responses are needed to reflect the racial, ethnic and cultural make-up of the communities served by public libraries (Statistics Canada, 2018). This data, in concert with trends in racial and income segregation, also suggests that racialized youth need unique skills and information to navigate a society that is increasingly inequitable and discriminatory.

Public libraries are in the unique position of serving underprivileged groups and can help to mitigate social inequities that manifest in negative outcomes like education gaps, underemployment, and access to safe and affordable housing. A CRT-approach suggests that these issues relate directly to systemic issues of race and are a facet of everyday life for racialized youth. Yet, the root cause of these challenges remains largely unacknowledged in Canadian LIS scholarly literature and professional practice. For example, the Toronto Public Library (TPL) recently released a new Youth Services Strategy to inform and guide its program and service delivery. While the strategy has several notable features from a youth services perspective such the expansion of the upper age range for youth services from 19 to 24, it does not pay direct attention to race or offer any acknowledgment about the importance of race and ethnicity in the lives of Toronto youth (TPL, 2018, p. 5). Rather, the strategy speaks around race by noting that "some youth who identify with other equity-seeking groups" need greater support to achieve equitable social and economic outcomes (TPL, 2018, p. 12). It also notes that these same youth do not receive equitable service from the library and commits to youth-friendly spaces and support at the neighbourhood level (TPL, 2018). However, the strategy stops extraordinarily short of acknowledging that race and income inequality are major determinants of wellbeing and successful transition to adulthood for youth in Toronto (Hulchanski, 2018). Thus, the strategy fundamentally misses the mark for the most vulnerable members of the youth population that the library aims to serve.

While statistical data from the US on race and service delivery cannot be readily applied in the Canadian context, it is worth noting that the research suggests that racialized youth engage with public libraries programs and services less than their white peers (Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell, 2017). The differing levels of engagement noted in other racialized youth and TPL's acknowledgement that some youth do not benefit equally

from the library strongly suggests that this may also be the case in Canada. For many, this rests on the perception that library programs and services are not geared to their cultural information needs and that librarians are not a valuable source of information (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell, 2005). Although this criticism may appear unfounded in that librarians' access information based on the needs and wants of users, this is an issue with the relationship that libraries have with racialized youth and not the information or mechanics of the role itself. Libraries need to attend to this perception and actively create new experiences and connections through culturally informed and appropriate programs that are directly relevant to the experiences of racialized youth. The programs and services offered by public libraries are vitally important to help youth develop competencies they will carry with them in life such as information literacy and reading comprehension. However, if programs and services are only relevant to experiences of youth that culturally identify with the library then we are inadvertently failing to meet the needs of our racialized users (Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell, 2017). These are valuable missed opportunities to engage youth with equitable attention to their racial and culturally diverse experiences and offer services relevant to their needs.

Libraries must remain mindful of majoritarian and geared to current users' approaches because of the organizational risk of circular justification such that the reason for not developing more relevant programs is because they are not accessed or utilized. In Public Libraries and Social Justice (2010), Pateman and Vincent paint a picture of a "typical community" where only half are library users (p. 11). Within this group, 21% are considered active users and the remaining 27% are passive or lapsed users that do not access library services on a consistent basis (Pateman and Vincent, 2010, p. 11). There is a strong tendency for libraries to gear programs and services to the active users, which only constitutes a small subset of the community served. For public libraries, there are compelling fiscal and operational reasonings to support this service trajectory—namely, it is a more judicious use of time and resources to direct programs and services to those likely to use them. It is also difficult for organizations to recruit segments of the community that they do not have active relationships with and target services for their needs. However, Pateman and Vincent remind that the purpose of public libraries is not to provide exceptional service to those that want its services and support. Rather, the raison d'être of public libraries is "enabling, facilitating and empowering individuals and communities" with the resources needed to mitigate social and economic inequities (p. 118-119). To achieve this, it is incumbent on public libraries to offer tailored programs and service to "the people who need it most and use it least" in support of democracy, social justice and equity (Pateman and Vincent, 2010, p. 11).

To this end, it is encouraging that TPL has identified becoming partnership-focused to engage with more youth in the city and provide greater exposure to the programs and services available throughout its branches. Service data from the Youth Services Strategy indicates that 42% of Toronto youth hold library cards (TPL, 2018, p. 5). This figure does not speak to the number of youths that use programs that do not require library registration. However, it does reveal that nearly 60% of youth are not currently able to access vital services such as digital collection materials, online homework help, reserve computers, or participate in Digital Innovation Hubs. Although the strategy does not detail the plan to expand its reach in youth communities, the partnership focus is an

important first step to engage youth that may not be accessing programs and services. This is supported by research conducted in other disciplines like social work that demonstrate that the onus is on organizations to take deliberate and constructive steps to reach those that are not currently utilizing services. These studies show that marginalized youth have less access and are the least likely to participate in youth programs (Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo, 2013). One key factor is that many programs focus on normative youth interests, situations or characteristics and only reach marginalized youth that present as interested participants. This creates a challenge whereby many programs that desire to recruit marginalized youth are inappropriately designed and often ignorant to the structural barriers that limit access, support and participation (Lavie-Ajayi and Krumer-Nevo, 2013, p. 1699). Community engagement via partnerships with other public service organizations is a wise and evidence-based approach that creates opportunities to open dialogue, and helps to identify programs and services that are geared to meet their needs (Pateman and Williment, 2013).

Identifying Systemic Racism in Public Libraries

For public libraries to attract and strengthen our engagement with racialized youth, it is necessary to consider how oppressions experienced in society can and do occur in and through our practices and spaces. This means explicitly acknowledging that the social, economic, and historical realities of race and racism are not immune to public libraries. It also means looking at our programs and services from a perspective attuned to the experience of race to identify where the dominance of white narratives, ingrained through our own racial experience, are influencing our perceptions of our services, racialized youth and their needs. While this is an incredibly difficult exercise, and is avoided in much the same way as the reticence to discuss race as a whole, failure to do so can result in serious consequences for libraries that serve racial and ethnic communities. Not only does it reduce the ability of library professionals to understand the force of privilege and positionality in program and service delivery, it also works against efforts to maintain libraries as sites of critical engagement, anti-oppression and social justice. Most importantly, it blinds us to the experiences of marginalized groups and can further reinforce perceptions that some feel as though they do not belong in libraries or are not served through their programs. Libraries risk the potential of losing future users for life by not being attentive to their experiences and acknowledging that unintentional systemic racism may be underlying disengagement.

Within the context of this research, it is impossible to definitively state whether there are substantial issues with race and racism in Canadian libraries because this kind of information is not publicly available. A CRT approach would suggest that systemic racism is endemic to Canadian society and occurring in our spaces and practices. However, race and correlative data on systemic racism in the lives of racialized groups does not appear to be something that libraries meaningfully account for or measure in the field. Thus, in order to assess whether Canadian public libraries are adequately meeting the needs of racialized youth through our programs and services, it is critical to consider race-based measures of the communities served and use these measures to identify any potential problems or gaps in service delivery. The collection of race-based data has been a contentious issue in Canada. It is commonly thought that the Charter of

Rights and Freedoms and the Human Rights Code preclude organizations from requesting or collecting information about race and ethnicity. However, Ontario's recently implemented Anti-Racism Act clarifies this misconception, and specifically encourages organizations to collect this information to identify barriers or discriminations that occur in the delivery of programs and services as a means to counteract systemic and institutional inequities (Anti-Racism Act, 2017).

Ontario's Anti-Racism Act recognizes and seeks to address the force of racism in the lives of Ontarians with A Better Way Forward: Ontario's 3 Year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan. As of August 2019, this ground-breaking plan is still being implemented by the new Ontario government and provides guidelines to document how systemic and institutional racism impact the daily lives of Ontarians in their interactions with government and public service organizations. "Racism is real", as the report rightly states, and the plan adopts a proactive approach that interestingly aligns with critical perspectives that identify diversity and multiculturalism as ineffective anti-racist policies (Government of Ontario, 2017). While it notes that there are valuable aspects to policies that incorporate inclusion and tolerance, the spirit of the legislation is that the only way to address systemic racism is by acknowledging that it exists and that it is sustained through relationships of power. The plan also underscores that systemic racism is not an intentional decision or action on the part of individual employees or public service organizations. Rather, it is a result of "hidden institutional biases in policies, practices and processes that privilege or disadvantage people based on race" and is sustained by organizational perspectives around "doing things the way they've always been done without considering how they impact particular groups differently" (Government of Ontario, 2017). Although it remains to be seen how this plan will be incorporated in the years to come in Ontario, the document and its accompanying guidelines around the collection of race-specific data dramatically shifts the way that public organizations are presently being encouraged to evaluate and monitor their programs and services.

As a result of this legislation, many public service organizations such as the Toronto District School Board, Children's Aid, and Legal Aid Ontario are now legally mandated to gather race-specific information. Through acknowledging race and the potential for racism to be deeply ingrained in policies and procedures, the act aims to help public service organizations resolve gaps and enhance the effectiveness of programs and services for racialized groups (Government of Ontario, 2017). Public libraries are not currently mandated to collect and report race-specific information about their users or programs. However, race-specific information can support and inform library programs and services in a variety of beneficial ways. For example, in order to develop appropriate programs and services, it is essential that libraries know and understand the percentage of users that are accessing programs and services from racial and ethnic groups whenever possible. This provides the opportunity to better train library workers to serve those groups and be proactive in identifying issues they may face in other aspects of their lives. Libraries can also analyze if programs are truly addressing needs and make steps toward improving the value of programs and services. Finally, libraries will have increased capacity to identify if programs and services are being equitably accessed and see where gaps occur in communities. The Government of Ontario provides a comprehensive document on Ontario's Anti-Racism Data Standards that can

be utilized by public libraries to inform and facilitate this work (Government of Ontario, 2019).

Hearing the Stories of Racialized Youth

The collection of race-specific data is more than a means to identify how programs and services are meeting the needs of diverse communities. It is also an opportunity to focus attention on the stories and experiences of racialized youth that are overlooked when we are not continually mindful of the impact race and racism has on their lives. Stories hold unique information about individual perceptions and listening to the lived experience of racialized youth is the principle means to understand the underlying feelings of being inadequately served, out of place, and judged in our spaces. This is particularly important because of the tendency to burden marginalized groups with identifying, leading, and counteracting systemic and societal oppressions enacted upon them. In the context of racialized youth, this is a wholly unethical and inadequate response. It is not the responsibility of non-dominant youth to identify and educate adults beholding power about how they are affected by privilege and power. As institutions of public service, libraries are responsible for taking proactive approaches that identify gaps in programs and services, disentangle privilege in our work, and reconstruct practices and processes to be less oppressive for racialized users.

In our work to create anti-racist and welcoming spaces for racialized youth, it is equally important to listen to their accounts of what they need and want from library programs and services. Canadian public libraries have already demonstrated the success of this practice through their experiences with the community-led librarianship model. Initiatives like the Working Together Project (WTP) show how public libraries can improve library service and address institutional barriers by becoming partners with users and advocates for their needs (WTP, 2008). Undertaken from 2004 to 2008 in four Canadian cities, WTP had two principal objectives: bolster collaboration and communication on how public libraries can meet the self-identified needs of socially excluded groups and identify systemic barriers to their use and participation in library programs and services (WTP, 2008, p. 7). The work of WTP is a pioneering example of how needs-based service delivery improves the capacity to provide relevant and equitable programs (Pateman and Williment, 2013). Youth Hubs across the TPL are another successful example of the benefits of providing services that directly meet the needs of the community served. Youth Hubs operate in eleven TPL branches in city-identified Neighbourhood Improvement Areas and offer youth aged 13 to 19 with a safe and supportive environment after school and during the summer (TPL, 2019, p. 1). TPL notes that Youth Hubs often operate at 200% capacity and drew in 70,000 non-unique visits in 2018 alone (TPL, 2019, p. 1). The development and expansion of Youth Hubs is an important gain in program delivery that has allowed TPL to "[reach] youth through this service that can be challenging to reach," according to the Manager of Youth Services (Pagliaro, 2018, para. 14). Staff and participants credit its success to an openness to giving participants agency and providing a service that is desired and localized to the community served (Pagliaro, 2018). This is a valuable and highly relevant community-led model that could be explored in Canadian public libraries.

While this analysis is rooted in a CRT framework for transformative social justice, it is important to caution that critical perspectives are only effective when they are matched with institutional readiness and commitment to change. CRT and similar approaches that call attention to the impact of race and racism cannot redress policies, structures, and practices that are reinforcing bias and perpetuating oppression. Public libraries must put their values of equitable service, inclusion, and the pursuit of knowledge-informed policies into practice. We know that there is a pronounced and impactful gap in our research around the experiences of racialized youth in our programs and services. We also know that demographic and census data concurrently demonstrate that racialized youth experience different challenges related to learning and education compared to white youth. We also know that they face barriers such as unemployment and underemployment, housing and crime, and negative stereotypes and perceptions in society. What we do not know is to what extent public library programs and services are helping or hindering their efforts to mitigate these challenges and enter adulthood with the same educational and learning opportunities as their white peers. The core tenets of CRT are easily relatable to the community-led library model. Moreover, they emphasize that the work facing public libraries is twofold: we must aim to uncover the structural conditions maintaining inequity while attending to the experiences and stories of racialized youth in our community. The collection of race-specific data is an opportunity to assess how we are meeting these aims and supporting racialized youth with effective and relevant service delivery and program development. Attending to their voices with a concrete plan to measure the impact and address their experiences and perceptions is an important opportunity to collaborate with racialized youth to revitalize their energy and engagement with our programs and services. Most importantly, it is an exercise in empowerment and anti-racism to bring library principles into practice to enhance relationships with racialized youth that build trust and foster engagement.

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