



A Double Life: Black Queer Youth Coming of Age in Divided Cities

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Black Queer Youth; poverty; programs; racism; homophobia; transphobia

POPULATION GROUP

Newcomer Youth
Racialized Youth
LGBTQ Youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Diversity, Social Inclusion & Safety
Coordinated & Youth-Friendly
Communities

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

“Many Black Queer Youth navigate the Canadian urban terrain by leading a double life – one in their ethnocultural community, and the other in established queer-positive spaces like the gaybourhood on Church Street in Toronto” (McCready, 2015, p. 355).

1. What is the research about?

This research situates the everyday experiences of Black Queer Youth (BQY) in two socially and economically-divided urban centres, Toronto and Montreal. McCready’s research is premised on the fact that in these urban centres, there is an intense income polarization between the white and wealthy downtown core and the outer suburbs, which are home to predominantly low income and racialized communities, including BQY. By drawing from interviews with BQY, McCready asks the central research question:

What is it like for BQY to come of age in cities that are culturally diverse from multiple waves of immigration, but whose education, health, and human service institutions are divided economically and geographically?

2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place in Toronto, Ontario and Montreal, Quebec.

3. Who is this research about?

This research explores the everyday experiences of Black Queer Youth (BQY) in Toronto and Montreal. McCready notes that BQY experience compounded discrimination. They face discrimination for their sexual and gender orientation and presentation, as well racial discrimination. Black youth experience systemic social inequalities within education, criminal justice, child welfare, health, and employment institutions.

4. How was the research done?

This research draws upon interviews with BQY about their everyday school, family, and neighbourhood experiences. The researcher situates the findings and implications in relation to literature on income inequality, multiculturalism discourse, neoliberal funding schemes, and program development and evaluation.

5. What are the key findings?

The research found that BQY maintain a strong connection to their ethnocultural communities, identify as being Black, and face racism. The researcher notes that although BQY may experience homophobia and heteronormativity in their ethnocultural communities, these identities and community affiliations remain important to BQY.

The research describes that BQY’s ethnocultural communities are more likely to be located in the outer suburbs of cities they studied. These communities, however, tend to be underserved in comparison the downtown core. Hence, in holding multiple identities and community affiliations, BQY facing barriers to service when it comes to programs for queer youth. These programs typically cater to the mainstream and are concentrated

in cities' whiter and wealthier downtown cores. These services are often inaccessible and have limited impact on the everyday lives of BQY.

To navigate these inequalities, the research found that BQY strategically live a 'double life,' living a 'straight life' in their ethnoracial communities and a 'gay life' in the established, highly-serviced, and queer-friendly downtown core.

Although the research cites living a double life as a form of BQY resilience, the researcher notes that this finding also speaks to the fact that few programs, especially mainstream ones, are meeting the needs of the youth where they live. While the research suggests that grassroots programs that serve BQY in their communities would be more effective than existing mainstream programs, the research draws attention to the fact that within the current fiscally-constrained funding context, these programs would invariably experience precarity.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

This research is important for youth work because it draws attention to the fact that youth hold multiple identities that must be considered when developing programs. For example, this research explored BQY's identities in relation to race, culture, gender, sexuality, and geography. In this regard, this research reveals the importance of grassroots programs for meeting the unique needs of BQY and their communities.

The lack of consideration for BQY's identities in program development has shaped how BQY experience service barriers in urban centres such as Toronto and Montreal. Ultimately, BQY compensate for service barriers by living a double life. Although this is cited as a form of resilience, these findings raise questions as to how current funding schemes and program requirements shape the conditions in which BQY needs are being met, or rather, are not being met.



McCready, L. (2015). A Double Life: Black Queer Youth Coming of Age in Divided Cities. *The Educational Forum*, 79(4), 353-358.