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Confronting Afrophobia: A Phenomenological Inquiry on the Marginalization of African-Canadian Youth in Canadian Institutions

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ABSTRACT

In this qualitative paper, we address, from the perspectives of youth workers, how Afrophobia marginalizes African-Canadian youth in youth-serving organizations and institutions. Using phenomenology and online data from Youth Research and Evaluation Exchange (YouthREX's)[1] *Virtual Café*, we therefore interrogate from the above perspectives, how youth sector professionals (YSPs) including youth workers themselves, *challenge* or *enable* Afrophobia-caused youth marginality within the Ontario youth sector. With 1790 registered members, the Virtual Café is an online Community of Practice (CoP) forum hosted and moderated by YouthREX. Our findings show that culturally and socially conscious YSPs are vital in combating Afrophobia at the frontline and at the policy levels. The findings also highlight systemic obstacles faced by YSPs combating Afrophobia and the strategies they use to push back on these obstacles. Using these findings and phenomenology (as a self-responsible beginning), we highlight effective intervention strategies already used by some YSPs, and from our analysis.

KEYWORDS

Afrophobia/Anti-Black racism; African-Canadian youth; youth work; phenomenology; multiculturalism

Introduction and social context

> Because we have been taught in mainstream spaces that anti-Black racism only consists of using anti-Black language, we often do not see the way that "hidden" social structures on an institutional and cultural level continue to keep Black folks in socio-economic precarity while also exploiting them for physical, emotional, intellectual, and cultural labour. (Participant 21)

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This qualitative paper is about combating Afrophobia and the marginality it causes for African-Canadian youth in the Ontario youth sector. We therefore address, from the perspective of youth workers, how Afrophobia (anti-Black racism)[2] marginalizes African-Canadian youth in, for instance, child welfare, school system and in the legal justice system (Alicia Boatswain-Kyte, 2024). We will show in the results section through the views of the participants how this marginality is manifest. Some of the issues these youth workers share, which they say marginalize African-Canadian youth, are the systemic challenges they face in their work, the systemic challenges African-Canadian youth face, the resistance within their own organizations, how they themselves push back on these challenges, and how they are at time complicit in Afrophobia- caused marginality. This marginality, whose systemic examples we will show in the next section through evidence-based scholarly literature, is equally the case in nonprofit organizations such as youth group homes (Edwards et al., 2024). The data, as will be presented later, shows that Youth Sector Professionals (YSPs) who work with racialized youth, especially African-Canadian[3] youth, are essential frontline voices in youth work in Canada. They are vital, as their views will show, in combating Afrophobia in the youth sector. While YSPs in Canada work with Canadian youth of different racial groups, we focus in this paper on the views of YSPs who work with youth of African descent. These YSPs are the participants whose views on Afrophobia shared on the Virtual Café (see methodology section) provide the data for this paper.

To address Afrophobia and the marginality it causes, we have therefore paid close attention to, and theorize, what our participants have said (their views or perspectives we mentioned in the abstract) about Afrophobia including their role in ending or enabling it. To confront Afrophobia and its marginality, we integrate three interrelated themes (see the results section) that we believe can help in *combating Afrophobia*, the overarching aim of our paper. Combating Afrophobia is also the aim of the discussion question that generated the data on the Virtual Café. What our results show is that when informed by culturally relevant and experience-informed training (Samuels-Wortley, 2021), critical consciousness, and a social justice worldview, these critical youth workers can act as indispensable conduits of anti-racist and anti-stereotypes strategies in schools and social institutions and organizations.

Some youth researchers have shown that critical youth work improves communications and conversations between youth and youth workers (de St. Croix et al., 2018; Hammond & McArdle, 2024). Socially and culturally informed communication between YSPs and African-Canadian

youth, if improved through trainings and organization policy changes, as our result will show, can support YSPs to better understand youth experiences with greater socio-political context and bias mitigation, thereby promoting a transformative approach to challenge structures of power within their institutions of employment. With an anti-racist lens, YSPs can consciously and collectively militate against structural inequities as allies and social justice vanguards, illuminating the systemic barriers that limit opportunities and amplifying the voices of African-Canadian youth in the fight for equitable access and representation (Daniel, 2021).

To address Afrophobia and end systemic barriers, therefore, marginalized youth need the support of advocates who understand how systemic factors shape youth experiences. These advocates—the participants on the Virtual Café being examples—are often critically trained youth sector professionals accustomed to centering the voices of young people. They do not unquestioningly trust reports from authority figures like child protection services, school principals, or police officers. Instead, YSPs actively identify and challenge potentially racially biased decisions or attitudes from authorities. With an understanding of how systemic functionaries have historically denigrated generations of African-Canadian youth (Davis, 2021), effective anti- racist YSPs ensure that youth perspectives and testimonies are seriously considered before any conclusions are drawn to avoid the assumption by some YSPs that they know everything about African-Canadian youth (Garang et al., 2024).

With an awareness of racism's pervasiveness, especially Afrophobia in Canadian institutions (Hairstory, 2019), effective anti-racist YSPs commit to what Lewis Gordon (2002, p. 88) has called "epistemic openness" as opposed to "epistemic closure." YSPs who embrace epistemologically open attitudes do not assume they *know* everything there is to know about African-Canadian youth, so they avoid all-knowing attitudes. They are willing and ready to learn from these youths. Through what the participants in this paper have shared, therefore, we will answer the following two questions from an analysis of youth worker's engagement with Afrophobia.

1. How do YSPs, who work with African-Canadian youth, challenge systemic barriers facing youth to avoid complicity in institutionally entrenched racist ideals that are pervasive in the sector?
2. How can complicity in systemic oppression be identified among sector professionals who work with the youth?

From here, we have organized the paper as follows. In the next section, we present through existing literature some of the ways in which Afrophobia

is manifested followed by the theoretical framework, the prism through which we approach youth issues addressed in this paper. This is then followed by our research methodology. The remaining four sections will focus on the research results, critical reflections, policy recommendations, and the conclusions.

Afrophobia (Anti-Black Racism) in Canadian Institutions

Canadian institutions, particularly schools, are at times responsible for egregious racial stereotyping of African-Canadian youth (Fante-Coleman et al., 2023). Even if the elimination of stereotypes may not be the panacea to youth marginalization, reducing such biases can help prevent feelings of alienation among some youth in Canadian institutions. Akuoko-Barfi et al. (2023), for instance, have shown that African-Canadian students feel schools in Ontario are spaces in which they do not feel they belong. Authorities either treat them like adults or they do not listen to their grievances. These attitudes are pervasive in youth-serving institutions and social service organizations.

Examples of such attitudes, which continue to exacerbate Afrophobia, include implicit biases (FitzGerald et al., 2019) that may lead to unsubstantiated and irrational *fear* of these youth (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Bergstrom et al., 2024). This unnecessary fear may, in turn, lead to the adultification of these youth (Edwards et al., 2024). Adultified youth (Cooke & Halberstadt, 2021) are treated differently than young people who benefit from caring and culturally responsive guidance (Amponsah & Stephen, 2020; Radebe, 2021) to grow into responsible adulthood and civic responsibility. They instead become the Dubosian problem people (Du Bois, 1999 [1903]) who only need punishment to control them for the safety of racial others (Aery, n.d.; Radebe, 2021). At times, this problem-people ratiocination is deemed necessary to exclude African- Canadian communities and youth from certain institutional settings and social spaces (Aery, n.d.). Through such actions, the Canadian society apparently says, "You do not belong here."

YSPs in this scenario adopt what Gordon (2002, p. 88) calls "epistemic closure", which is "the judgment 'say no more'". They may, as a result, assume an uncritical, complacent attitude that makes them implementers of oppressive institutional policies. This problematic attitude assumes that the experiences and behavioral dispositions of these youth are already known by institutional authorities. For instance, Creese (2019) notes in Metro Vancouver a case of an African-Canadian young woman police assumed was a prostitute while walking in the city. There is, therefore, no need, this supposition maintains, for practitioners and policy-makers to learn first- hand from youth experiences as an important heuristic

practice. These prejudices are in most cases premised on dominant educational and institutional cultures (Creese, 2014) and the myopic formation of epistemes and epistemologies (see edited volume by Kempf & Watts, 2024).

There is more. In some cases, YSPs support oppressive practices because they believe these cultural stereotypes to be true. Some of these harmful stereotypes affecting African-Canadian youth in youth-serving institutions assume them to have violent and criminal tendencies (Mason et al., 2022), lack of interest in academic endeavors (Thompson & Pinnock, 2022), predisposition exclusively to athletic pursuits (Black Experience Project, 2017; James, 2019), misbehaviours from parenting failures (Adjei & Minka, 2018), among other deficit-based presumptions.

When some of these stereotypes become sedimented in institutional policies and further operationalized by YSPs who believe them to be credible at face value, the youth find these institutions hostile to their presence (Codjoe, 2001) and inattentive to their needs (Mason et al., 2022). Without historically grounded context into how social misnomers have informed the origination of these policies, some youth workers and agency leaders risk characterizing institutional policies as neutral, colourblind regulatory necessities (Brooks-Immel & Murray, 2017). The consequences of erasing the racializing implications and impact of these policies are particularly dangerous for the people who continue to bear the brunt of these structural barriers intergenerationally (Creese, 2019).

As Du Bois (1920) has reminded us, only the sufferer, "however humble, knows his [sic] own condition. He may not know how to remedy it, he may not realize just what is the matter, but he knows when something hurts and he alone knows how that hurt" (p. 143). Certainly, African-Canadian youth know how it hurts to be oppressed in Canadian institutions, but they are not always asked to narrativize their hurt. Instead of being "subjectified" (Foucault, 2003 [1976], p. 43), to tell their stories to combat marginality (status) and marginalization (as on-going process), they are rather "desubjectified" (Foucault, 1996, p. 222). George Elliot Clarke (2014) has noted the dissonance between the Canadian narrative of liberalism rendering racism in Canada as less harmful, and the lived realities of African-Canadians who continue to navigate systemic and inter-personal racism.

Our participants show how and why Afrophobia, through these lived realities, is still pervasive in the Ontario youth sector. It is a societal problem in Canada. For instance, the Canadian Human Rights Commission (2020) noted that African-Canadians feel "threatened or unsafe every day because of the color of their skin." In September 2023, a "whites-only moms and tots" public poster in the city of Coquitlam, British Columbia, caused public ire (Pawson, 2023). The public poster advertised an exclusive space where "proud parents of European children" and their toddlers can

interact with children who "look like them" rather than cope with "forced diversity" in unsegregated spaces. While this incident may be considered surprising or rare, it demonstrates the modern-day *color line* in Canada which is often much more covert. The fact that such a sentiment of racial exclusion from a socio-politically dominant group can be proudly promoted by local advocacy groups shows how far the Canadian society is from truly understanding the stakes of racial inequities. Uncoincidentally, this group also weaponized the language of terming themselves a racial "minority" in a not-so-subtle protest around the intolerable conditions of having to attend public institutions with racialized bodies. However, many would argue that the supposed rarity of these public incidents is an indication that Afrophobia is no longer of grave concern. However, the data we use in this paper will highlight the great dissonance between the implied removal of racist barriers touted by the Canadian nation-state narrative and the lived experience of racialized communities (Clarke, 2014).

Theoretical framework

This paper utilizes phenomenology, as expounded by Edmund Husserl, as a framework to make sense of youth marginality in the aforementioned contexts. This paper is data driven so we theorize the results from what YSPs have said of their work with African-Canadian youth and the youth sector in Ontario through the Virtual Café. What YSPs participants have shared tells us that they can, as we mentioned in the introduction, play an important role in combating Afrophobia. We therefore thought of a theory that can help center them in this role. Given what the participants are telling us through the Virtual Café, we settled for phenomenology.

Phenomenology, as a philosophy of self-responsible beginning according to Husserl (1982), centers the subject when it comes to knowing a given situation. This means phenomenologists prioritize direct subjective knowledge over knowledge obtained through a third- party. According to Paget Henry (2005), phenomenology is "the discursive practice through which self-reflective descriptions of the constituting activities of consciousness are produced after the "natural attitude" of everyday life has been bracketed by some ego-displacing technique" (p. 1). For Lewis Gordon (2002), phenomenology is a "reflective thought upon what can be called objects of thought" (p. 73). What Husserl calls the "natural attitude" is our everyday understanding of reality. In the natural attitude, we take things for granted. We are not critical of what they are because they meet the need for which we acquire them (Gordon, 2002). This is normally the case with social mores, cultural ideals, and what Gordon (p. 73) has called the "world of purpose and interest."

While the natural attitude is the way most of us live in the world—our being-in-the-world as Heidegger (1962) has described it—it can also become an obstacle to a deeper understanding of the social reality or object of thought (Gordon, 2002). Canadians in the natural attitude who have been taught from childhood that African-Canadians are predisposed to being violent, rude, poor, or less intellectual, may not find it necessary to go beyond what they have initially learned (or not learned) through the educational system, mainstream media, and other socializing agents. The myth that African-Canadian's are more likely to practice rudeness, violence, or display a lack of intelligence is simply a *fact* to these Canadians, as they refuse to interrogate the substance of these stereotypes and be critical of ideals they have learn about African-Canadians. In these cases, unlearning or challenging these race-based biases becomes either unnecessary or offensive. Unnecessary because they assume they already know African-Canadians, and offensive because their current knowledge (and the merit of their belief system) is being challenged.

Husserl (1982) therefore suggested a solution to the problem posed by the natural attitude. His solution is *epoché*, the suspension of the natural attitude to arrive at the phenomenological attitude. The path to the phenomenological attitude is the phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1999, p. 34). Since the natural attitude provides us with ideas about objects of thought, or people whose ideas we have been taught, we tend to find it unnecessary to go back to the things for which we have developed these ideas. Husserl therefore suggests that we "go back to the thing itself" (Zahavi, 2019). By going back to the object—the thing itself—Husserl argues that we can now perceive and know the object not as we have been taught as in the natural attitude, but as we encounter it from first-hand experience. As Gordon (2002, p. 73) has noted, "The phenomenological moment begins when we suspend" objects or social situation as we know them in the natural attitude. The subject/phenomenologist (YSP for instance) can now describe the object as it appears to consciousness. An object as it appears to consciousness of the perceiving subject is the phenomenon. What is then described, is the object appearing to consciousness as a phenomenon. This is not the object, or an event related by a third party, but as experience subjectively, or in time.

However, the natural attitude is *not* dismissed entirely. It is only bracketed or suspended (Zahavi, 2019). According to Husserl (1999) "What is *taken for granted* in natural thinking is the possibility of knowledge" (original emphasis). After suspending the natural attitude (what we know about the object – in this case, African-Canadians), we can then discern whether our first- hand knowledge (phenomenological) of the object after the suspension, and our knowledge of the object through the natural

attitude, correspond. The natural attitude is either negated or confirmed. This leads to what Husserl (1982) has called a grounded judgment, which is the "most originary evidence, wherein all conceivable evidences must be grounded" (p. 150). A grounded judgment ensures social subjects do not take the basis of what they know for granted. We interrogate how YSPs in this paper ground their judgements when they work with African-Canadian youth. Do they ground their judgment (decision-making) on the *natural attitude,* or do they ground it on *phenomenological attitude*? The data indicates YSPs use both.

Methodology

As we mentioned in the introduction, this study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Youth Sector Professionals (YSP) in Ontario, their work with the youth, and how these can help illuminate why Afrophobia/anti-Black racism persists in their work environment. In the discussion section, we will bring together how we have used phenomenology to make sense of the results presented in this paper to help advance the fight against Afrophobia. In this section, we focus on the data we have used, how it was collected, the participants of the Virtual Café, and why we chose to use this method as the source of our data for the paper. The Café itself is our *method* that furnished us with the qualitative data. The participants on the Virtual Café are from different racial and ethnic backgrounds: European-Canadians, Asian-Canadians and African-Canadians. The participant are also YSPs working on the frontline and leadership levels. The data was already collected by YouthREX so what we had to do was to thematized and code the data. We chose the Virtual Café because of the diversity of the YSP voices on the discussion board, their deep understanding of Afrophobia and youth issues, and the fact that these participants shared why they think anti-Black racism continue to exist in the Ontario youth sector. They also shared what they are doing to combat Afrophobia, obstacles they face in their agencies, and some of the best practices already deployed against Afrophobia.

Data: Virtual Café

The participants in this study were YSPs who were actively engaged in YouthREX's *Virtual Café* with 1790 registered members. To connect and support Ontario's youth sector toward evidence-based studies and trainings, YouthREX launched the Virtual Café, an online community hub, in 2020. YouthREX is a professional development initiative housed at the School of Social Work at York University. Founded in 2014 and funded by Ontario's Ministry of Children, Community and Social Service, YouthREX

provides evidence-based professional development trainings to the youth sector in Ontario. There are six main topics on the discussion board: (1) Centering Black Youth Wellbeing; (2) Critical Youth Work; (3) Evaluation and Youth Work; (4) Reimagining Youth Work in a COVID-19 Era; (5) Cannabis and Youth; and (6) Community Board.[4] The Virtual Café was therefore created to facilitate connection and collaboration among youth sector stakeholders across the province of Ontario. Through the Virtual Café, frontline youth workers, managers, leaders, policymakers, and researchers are invited to share their views on the youth sector in relation to the above six topics. Under each of these six topics, discussion themes can range from critical theory, critical practice and critical approaches to evaluation of youth programs. Note that members registered under the Virtual Café may post different but related themes/posts under one of the above six topics.

The Virtual Café and its content are publicly accessible, but stakeholders must register to respond to (or create) topics, post resource information or events, or connect independently with other registered stakeholders. When participants sign up, they acknowledge that YouthREX (and other public institutions) have access to and can use their posted comments in research review or to help in producing research products that can advance knowledge in the sector. Participants were asked to agree to terms of use. There are therefore no ethical concerns as the participants have given us their informed consent to use the data for research purposes.

As an online Community of Practice (CoP), they may voluntarily connect with peers, share how their work responds to local needs and issues, and learn from one another's experiences and expertise. Through the Virtual Café, CoP participants share ideas and discover new resources to help strengthen the youth sector in communities across Ontario. By fostering connection and learning, the Virtual Café creates a space to help drive innovation and develop solutions to support the communal well-being.

The main question to which the participants were responding on the Virtual Café is the following: "Why is anti-Black racism [Afrophobia] still a problem in Ontario?" This question, posted under Centering Black Youth Wellbeing (see the list of the topics above), was embedded within the broader context of the Virtual Café's ongoing discussions on supporting the well-being of youths and addressing challenges within the youth sector. The question, which was meant to solicit their views on anti-Black racism/Afrophobia, was asked at the beginning of the topic 1 on the virtual Café [see the list above]. The question is also informed by the main topic in Module 3 of the certificate. The question therefore prompted participants to reflect on their experiences and perspectives during and after taking the certificate or through their experiences in the sector. Most, though not all, participants on the Café have completed YouthREX's *Centering*

Black Youth Wellbeing: A Certificate on Combatting Anti-Black Racism. The Centering Black Youth Wellbeing certificate provided the epistemic background for discussions focused on a range of questions related to prioritizing Black youth wellbeing and addressing anti-Black racism. This certificate, comprised of 4 modules[5] and 17 lectures delivered primarily by African-Canadian "advocates, service providers, academics and artists"[6] guided participants through various aspects of this critical topic.

Module 1 [The Context of Anti-Black Racism] focused on the historical context of anti- Black racism in Canada. Module 2 [Engaging with Research About Black Youth] walked the participants through some of the best practices on how to conduct research among African- Canadian youth. Module 3 [Critical Practice for Centering Black Youth Wellbeing] focused on ways to prioritize the health of African-Canadian youth. Finally, Module 4 [Ongoing Accountability for Transformative Change] challenged the participants to use the knowledge learned from the certificate to work toward making the sector a better place for African-Canadian youth. While the 4 modules inform the topics posted on the Virtual Café and the various themes posted under each of the six discussion topics, it should be noted that the six topics on the Virtual Café and the four modules of *Centering Black Youth Wellbeing: A Certificate on Combatting Anti-Black Racism* are related but not necessarily the same. Participants on the Virtual Café can post under the six topics themes/issues that may have not been covered by the certificate.

Data coding and analysis

The data was analyzed using a combination of in vivo coding and thematic analysis. According to Manning (2017), "In vivo coding is a form of qualitative data analysis that places emphasis on the actual spoken words of participants" (p. 1). In our paper, therefore, the in vivo coding has centered the voices of the participants, youth workers and sector leaders. Through thematic analysis a researcher identifies and interprets meanings and patterns in each data set or data sets (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The data we used in this paper is from participants' written responses to the persistence of Afrophobia/Anti-black racism within the youth sector in Ontario. Publicly posted responses on the online forum of the Virtual Café between January 27, 2021 and February 7, 2021 were systematically downloaded, stored, and prepared for analysis by our research team. Personally identifying information, though volunteered online, was removed to promote a degree of anonymity throughout this study. The discussion thread involved over 500 YSPs. Most of the participants were female with diverse age participants, including university students and experienced professionals. Most participants held frontline youth worker positions, for

example, a Youth Program Coordinator or Child and Youth Worker; the remaining were program managers, researchers, and policymakers.

To analyze the discussion thread, we began with a quick run-through to examine what Virtual Café members were saying in regard to their general understanding of the main topic and to see if we could spot potential themes. We then read through all the comments multiple times to immerse ourselves in the data and get a sense of the overarching ideas and themes being expressed. We then began the coding process by identifying distinct concepts that emerged from the text and our initial in vivo coding process. For each concept, we created a descriptive code using abbreviations that would allow us to tag relevant portions of data. For example, the theme of "Importance of Research" became coded as "IR." As we re-read the discussion thread data, we assigned these codes to quotes and excerpts that best exemplified the concepts. We then compiled the coded quotes under their corresponding themes to see the clustered of ideas together. This organization of the coded data allowed us to write additional memos summarizing the essence of each theme, as memos were also used to record key points and examples taken from the overall process and discussions. This coding process enabled us to systematically analyze the unstructured qualitative data by indexing it to concepts and themes for further synthesis. Our approach aimed to rigorously capture the insights from the participants' dialogue by linking the verbatim passages to emergent themes in a reflective and triangulated process.

Research results

The exchanges among the participants on the Virtual Café were extensive. In our analysis, three distinctive themes emerged. These themes are (1) how youth workers challenge racist systems, (2) how institutional leaders and some youth workers uphold Afrophobia within their institutions, and (3) how racial and professional apathy is pervasive in Canadian institutions and among some YSPs. While our two research questions are answered in the three sections below, we will stress the following to focus readers' attention. The first section addresses the first research question: "How do YSPs, who work with African-Canadian youth, challenge systemic barriers facing youth to avoid complicity in institutionally entrenched racist ideals that are pervasive in the sector?" The quotes we provide highlight some of the ways our participants and their agencies have used to combat Afrophobia and the systemic barriers it creates. We have also noted some of these systemic barriers (see Akuoko-Barfi et al., 2023 for instance) in the introduction and social context. The other two sections answer the second research question: "How can complicity in systemic oppression be identified among sector professionals who work with the youth?" Our

participants have highlighted ways in which their complicity in Afrophobia is manifested in their own work, among some of their coworkers, and in the agency leadership.

On not being "bystanders": youth workers challenging Afrophobia

One of the issues participants have highlighted is the lack of interest in difficult conversations about race because of the discomfort that comes with such conversations. This is usually the case with European-Canadians, whose race is not often regarded as a major personal identifier (in their daily experiences) or as a catalytic social barrier in Canadian institutions. For instance, European-Canadians have the option and privilege of not having to talk about race with little to no consequence to their lived experience (James, 2010). Unlike African-Canadians whose racialization is a constant reminder of their contested position in Canadian statehood, European- Canadians are often regarded as "Canadian" by default. In some cases, the refusal to talk about racism, especially anti-Black racism, is done to uphold a pseudo-narrative of Canada and Canadians as benevolent. As one participant has argued,

> I think that anti-Black racism is still an issue because people don't like to upset the "status quo" – they don't like the feeling of discomfort from acknowledging that things are not perfect, things are not as amazing as we like to think. I also think that geographical locations help keep anti-Black racism an issue. Having grown up in a rural, white community the topic of racism didn't come up – we had no contact with individuals of different races (Black or otherwise). Looking at the same town now, where immigration has increased drastically and there are now more POC [people of color], it is challenging the white communities beliefs – specifically, their belief that they are not racist while still spouting off the same, often racist, comments that they learned in their youth. The social landscape is changing and it is upsetting the "status quo" which is leading to many individuals displaying behaviours you would never expect – based on historical learnings that do not represent the true experience. (Participant 16)

Canadians, in this context, avoid these difficult conversations in favor of the familiarity of the "status quo" where the good intensions outweigh the violence experienced by marginalized communities. These Canadians are therefore likely to frame Afrophobia and African-Canadian youth stereotypes as archaic historical baggage that will mystically disappear. As George Elliot Clarke (2014) has rightly argued, this is the *polite*, but dangerous, so-called Canadian way. "Polite" because Canadian racism is often smiled away. However, this insidious smile is all the more dangerous because it is an evasive strategy that obscures social problems and prevents or delays discussions of possible solution models or strategies. Clarke has described this racism-with-a- smile poignantly: "It is a tentative racism, a speculative racism, a ghost racism, whose smile is that of the Chesire

cat and whose trace is a subtle chill—like that which specters float when they want their presence felt, not seen" (2014, p. 68).

Participant 16 also identifies another problem: The importance of neighborhoods and their ethnic and racial compositions. Where Canadians live, according to Participant 16, has an impact on expanding or preventing racial conversations and opportunities to build bridges of understanding. According to this participant, the physical underrepresentation of African-Canadians in rural locations, for instance, facilitates ignorance about African-Canadian's diverse existence and experiences in the country.

This is a problem within the Canadian multicultural paradigm. In Canada, as it is in other western democracies, multicultural enclaves, advertent or inadvertent, keep Canadians apart (Griffith, 2015).[7] Participant 16 speaks of their personal experience, but also frames the contradictions of a society that boasts of multiculturalism, tolerance and peace-keeping while simultaneously fostering a culture of silence around racial injustice, regardless of who is living in the neighborhood. This also means that youth sector professionals need not only discuss and address topics of racism if and when racialized youth are participating in the program. They should also address subtle but oppressive front-line practices. This Canadian multicultural dynamic, for instance, not only nurtures tokenistic and disingenuous approach to anti-racist responsibility (Camargo, 2023), but it can also indicate unwelcoming and alienating space markers for would-be participants.

Another participant goes even farther. Emphasizing the need to be proactive and self- reflexive, Participant 7 argues that combating oppressive systems requires engagement with oneself and the people within one racial or ethnic group, who may be dispassionate about, or indifferent to, systemic oppression.

> When we are navigating and live within social systems and structures that were made by and for cis, white men, we are going to internalize racist assumptions and ways of behaving without this necessarily being in our conscious awareness. Doing the difficult work to unlearn and relearn helps me in seeing what I didn't see before and has allowed me to do better. The less I take for granted and the more I learn and question, the more I find myself able to engage my family, friends, and peers in anti-racist conversation and continue to do the work to raise awareness of and push back against anti-Black racism and other systems of oppression.

Canada, which may be one of the societies Stuart Hall (1996) would call complexly structured societies, must encourage a critique of systems of oppression and our immediate social environments if it is to come closer to earning its meritocratic status on the world stage. Youth workers and sector leaders who adopt the attitude Participant 7 exemplifies not only challenge systemic racism, but they also actively self-educate and strategize on how to challenge the status quo. They take it upon

themselves to encourage others to engage in these difficult conversations as Canadians. Starting with family, friends, peers, and coworkers, as Participant 7 has suggested, may help increase the web of dissemination of mitigation ideas and strategies against social problems such as Afrophobia. In speaking to "other systems of oppression," Participant 7 implicates the important and useful Black Feminist concept of *Intersectionality* (Collins & Bilge, 2020) as a key component in operationalizing social justice practice. Understanding that one does not have to be a member of the oppressed group to be invested in their wellbeing opens the door to the understanding that equity work is humanizing work from which we all benefit.

Participant 17 adds an important dimension. For this participant, the problem is also the refusal to teach how anti-Black racism has its roots in colonialism and oppressive legacies in Canada. This participant challenges Canadians who act as "bystanders" when racism marginalizes racialized communities, and challenges the role of mainstream media for distracting rather than informing Canadians on important systemic issues.

> Anti-Black Racism is still a problem in Ontario largely due to the refusal to acknowledge the white/colonial systems still prevalent in our society. If our only decision is to become bystanders in these issues, nothing will be accomplished.

The participant added,

> We need to acknowledge our history, both good and bad, instead of being in denial. Media such as news outlets have not attributed to this cause either. We constantly have information shoved in our faces to try to distract us from real issues. This lack of coverage means that the proper voices are not being heard, and thus change will not be possible.

Participant 17 is therefore holding the system accountable by speaking up for "the proper voices" that are "not heard." To ensure that voices that are supressed or ignored are highlighted to bring system change, as noted by Participant 17, Participant 5 urges the school system to effect inclusive curricular change. This is important for racialized youth, especially in the context of African-Canadian students.

> I see it as the complexity and importance of the roots of Black people in history and how those roots are still alive today and will continue to grow into the future. I couldn't agree more that youth, Black youth in particular, need to feel heard and safe. A big part of that is schools, educators, and admin needing to develop an awareness and acceptance of the reality of anti-Black racism and engaging Black parent and youth voices in their responses to addressing the issues these students/families face and ways in which to make curricula and responsive to their needs and inclusive of their stories. (Participant 5)

Howard and James (2019) have emphasized why it is important to include voices of African-Canadian parents in some administrative decisions. Participant 5's statement highlights the importance of youth workers challenging oppressive systems by refusing to be "bystanders." In addition to challenging the system, critical youth sector professionals spur change through the informal education of people around them. However, as discussed below, sometimes these youth workers militate against social systems that do not want to change.

"On-going" Anti-Black racism: upholding systemic constraints/historical Amnesia

While the above views challenge the system, in the following section we present samples of how Afrophobia continues to be upheld within Canadian institutions as understood by the youth workers in our study. This section focuses on why combating Afrophobia is challenging.

> I believe that a significant barrier to this is a lack of general education about the construction of race, racism, and ultimately, White supremacy. "White supremacy", for Canadians, can drum up images of specific, nameable, assumed-as-foreign actors, rather than a system of power dynamics that drives racial disparities. This is both an example of Canadian exceptionalism and an incomplete understanding of White supremacy. White folks, when confronted with evidence of racism, can experience discomfort on multiple levels, including challenges to this exceptionalism and the cognitive dissonance associated with democratic racism. (Participant 9)

Without this understanding, youth workers and institutional authorities may be supporting marginalizing and oppressive policies because of the way race, racism and ideologies of white supremacy are understood within their racial group. If social problems are not properly conceptualized, an assumption could be made that the problems they are asked to address are superficial or simply do not exist. As such, according to Participant 8

> Inaction, lack of awareness, and sometimes intentional silence creates [sic] a negative ripple effect to embolden the unfair and systematic discrimination faced by Black youth in particular. There also also amplifications that have occurred through online platforms, where racist vitriol finds its echo chamber to manifest through anonymized hatred. The latter especially is concerning as it creates a very deep mental divide in which racist ideologies can take root with an unfettered speed without stoppage.

For Participant 17, this is unequivocally a systemic problem.

> There is a significant lack of black history in our educational system. Throughout all stages of the educational history there is hardly any mention of Black Canadian's contributions to Canadian society, and even less mentions of the history of slavery, anti-Black racism and discrimination that exists throughout our history. Thus, most Ontarians believe that there is hardly any racism in our society and therefore there is no need to fix it. (Participant 17)

In her important book on slavery in Canada, *The Hanging of Marie Angelique*, African- Canadian historian, Afua Cooper (2010), has noted how most Canadians do not believe that the institution of slavery and the engagement by Canadians in the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade were not historical Canadian realities. As such, Canadians either deny or minimize slavery and the slave trade in Canada. Canadian point South (USA) when it comes to slavery. This attitude seeps into our earlier conversation on the flavor of Canadian racism. As Participant 15 has noted,

> Anti-Black racism is still an issue because the generations/people who participate in it were raised to think, "it isn't my problem to fix" or "it doesn't happen that often. With social media these days, we all hear of stories such as George Floyd and Ralph Yarl, but many people think that these stories are just one-offs. It happens every day – in our schools, in our work places, in our social gatherings. Until we can spread awareness and shine the light on the cruel world that is anti-Black racism, I believe some people will always think it's not prevalent.

Therefore, if Afrophobia is said to not exist or it does not happen often, then emotionally uninvested YSPs may believe that there is no problem to address. However, as Participant 28 has stressed, Canadian institutions of learning have failed system professionals, including YSPs:

> It was only until I entered university for social work that I was told about Canada's complicity in the continual colonial project. However, when I converse with others in other programs, such as business or law, none of them are aware of colonization. Colonization is inherently intertwined into all of these systems – why is it that business students are not taught about the structures that profit from the appropriation of Black culture? Why are law students unaware of the disproportionate rates of Black youth in the child welfare system or Black Peoples in the carceral system? (Participants 28)

Unless Canadian institutions revisit (or teach) Canadian history in its fuller context (Clarke, 2014; Taylor, 2020), many youth workers and institutional leaders within the youth sector will continue to operate as if anti-Black racism does not exist, or it is negligible. As Participant 19 has argued,

> ABR [Anti-Black Racism] is still a problem in Ontario because Canadian society has adopted convenient amnesia- a discourse of denial- and ignores the historical realities of Black Canadians and Blackness in our society. It pretends that it happened over there, in the U.S., and denies ABR, its historical roots, and it's very real and on-going consequences for Black people in Canada.

Regarding the importance of acknowledging the existence of problems in order to devise mitigation strategies, Participant 19 added,

> You cannot fix a problem if you don't acknowledge that it is a problem. Also, language used matters and the quote shared in module 4 [Ongoing Accountability for Transformative Change] about "visible minority" still being used in the context of

> Toronto although "minorities" make up more than 50% of the population in the city really resonated with me.

This is a useful reminder, something Participant 15 has noted as quoted above. Misdiagnosing social problems has grave social and moral consequences. It amounts to assuming, for instance, that the challenges arising for African-Canadian youth which may lead to disparaging outcomes are not socially driven but pathological/biological. This is the assumption that social ills must be addressed by *fixing* people rather than addressing the structural dynamics that produce the social problems at hand (Escayg et al., 2017). Without strong social justice-oriented policies that would give youth workers the support they need to better work with African-Canadian youth, some youth sector professionals will decide not to challenge Afrophobic rhetoric by falling into professional apathy, as we discuss below.

"Complicity": professional/racial apathy

As we discussed in the two preceding sections, youth workers have identified how they challenge systemic racism and other structural constraints facing African-Canadian youth, and how Canadian institutions continue to uphold Afrophobia. However, they have also acknowledged how individual youth workers and agency leaders may become complicit in addressing racism and marginalization. This is an important matter given the complexity of African-Canadian youth marginalization (Akuoko-Barfi et al., 2023; Edwards et al., 2024; Garang et al., 2024;). Addressing anti-Black racism must occur simultaneously from the individual, organizational and societal levels in order to decrease possible abdications of responsibility. According to Participant 1,

> In modern day society with the growing number of people on social media and adhering to propaganda refusing to educate themselves and the increasing lack of self-awareness is the problem as most people do not want to hold space for "uncomfortable" conversations the discomfort simply coming from acknowledging that there's injustice still at play and that they are catering or even a part of the problem. Nobody wants to see themselves as the villain, so they just lie to themselves, but they know it's a lie and then they find comfort in the fact that everyone else is doing it.

This is a tragedy of the commons situation (de Oliviera et al., 2023). People who are privileged by the system as part of the dominant social group tend to be non-committal when it comes to systemic anti-Black racism. This is because, as Participant 15 has noted earlier, ideologies of white supremacy are rendered invisible within the Canadian school system. Nevertheless, this is the system that is tasked with the role of enlightening society by educating the younger generation. This is a deep and contradictory practice by which Canadians within the dominant social group

and administrators of structural offices become complicit. Participant 14 has echoed this:

> Being complicit really stood out for me during the 1st module [The Context of anti-Black Racism]. Inaction is nurtured in our many organizations, and I feel like folx [folks] are also in token numbers and often have to carry and spearhead initiatives while enduring and navigating systems of oppression and performative allyship.

When allyship, which is vital in combating systemic racism, becomes merely performative, attempts to curb oppressive processes become ineffective. Through the mask of performativity, potentially powerful anti-racist actions become little more than self-congratulatory indulgencies. Participant 23 has described is as "fake allyship".

> There is a lot of denial and not enough accountability. As mentioned in the lectures, often the data is collected and nothing is done about it. Or it was simply done for personal gain, like not wanting to "appear" racists, or "appear" out of touch. The fake allyship is really getting out of hand because again, it goes unchecked. Actions speak louder than words. Lets put the data to use, lets see the needs and then go out there and genuinely deal with. More people need to "do it for the love and not do it for the likes."

"Fake Allyship" gives the impression that something is being done to combat systemic problems while real systemic problems are unabated. David Goldberg (2002) has discussed this dynamic in the context of whiteness which seems to change only to turn out the same in its unchecked structural positioning. This presumptuous, obfuscating, discursive change is germane to elite powerplay. Clarke (2014) has described this Canadian powerplay as the "optics of the de facto ruling class" (p. 74). These optics, which are pervasive in Canadian institutions, not just among the elite, are obstacles to transformative change. They present an image of Canada and its institutions whose reality is obscured by counter-factual projections rather than by the lived reality of the people affected by systemic oppression.

The smoke screening of systemic racism gives youth workers on the front line, teachers, and even social service organization and state institutional leaders, no incentives to be proactive in combating Afrophobia through effective and coordinated strategies. On the other hand, what is important in the words of the critical YSP is how they point out systemic problems, reflect on their own complicity, and examine the complicity of their coworkers, demonstrating their motivation to challenge the sector and its deeply entrenched racial apathy. But as the words of the sector professionals quoted in this section show, racial apathy is not only prevalent within the youth sector, but it is also buttressed by the lack of educational investments by the Canadian school systems to target racial inequity.

Despite the dismal realities discussed thus far, the results presented in this section do show some promise. But these results also show how difficult it is to combat Afrophobia embedded in state institutions. In the following section, we delve into critical discussions to make sense of these results through a phenomenological lens.

Critical analysis

Youth workers, as we noted in the introduction to this paper, are instrumental in challenging Afrophobia in youth work and social services. They can help center the experiences of African- Canadian youth, through collaboration and what they learn from these youth during first-hand interactions. This may help challenge assumptions and stereotypes (FitzGerald et al., 2019). In a phenomenological parlance, critical youth workers can "bracket" the everydayness we take for granted (Gordon, 2002), and the cultural assumptions and prejudgments (Loiselle et al., 2012) motivated by Afrophobia in Canada. Husserl (1983) call these taken-for-granted ideals, the *natural attitude*. These are uninterrogated assumptions which can be harmful to racialized youth (Creese, 2019; Francis, 2021; Mason et al., 2022; Radebe, 2021).

Unfortunately, these experiences are not rare enough for African-Canadian youth in Canadian institutions. What is helpful to consider in unpacking and divesting from these practices is what Husserl has called the *phenomenological attitude*. This is a careful focus and description of the object/problem in question from a subjective, first-hand experience after assumptions (stereotypes, beliefs, misjudgements, prejudgments) have been "bracketed" or "suspended" (Zahavi, 2019); that is, after *epoché* (see the theoretical framework section for detail). According to Husserl, the operationalization of *epoché* places "all knowledge in question" (Husserl, 2013, p. 23). Knowledge about African-Canadians is not always placed in question. It is sometimes assumed from the denigrating and oppressive epistemes of the colonial order and regimes of enslavement. That is why, participant 18 has noted, "we continue to struggle with unlearning and de-centering the white, colonial structures in place in our province, especially in education."

Epoché, a vital epistemological process in the assessment of knowledge professionals have about African-Canadian youth, can afford youth workers the opportunity to make interventions or care decisions from what the youth say. As Irwin Elman has noted in his foreword to Hairstory (2019), "The young people whose voices are reflected in this report [Hairstory] ask government and the province's systems of care to work in partnership with them to improve services" (p. 9). Youth workers whose words inform this paper have emphasized the need for these vital partnerships.

Note that the natural attitude is only suspended. It is not dismissed entirely. There are, in fact, cases in which the natural attitude and the phenomenological attitude are the same; but the actions taken beyond these attitudes are what offers promising practices.

For instance, a teacher may tell a social worker, a youth worker, or a police officer that a certain student is *violent*. The story of the six-year-old African-Canadian girl who her mother said was cuffed on the wrists and ankles by police for 28 minutes at a school in Mississauga, Ontario, in 2016 (CBC News, 2020) is an example. It may be true that this student has expressed violent behavior or intentions, but it could also be the case that the teacher is projecting a "violent-youth" narrative from prejudices, racial bias, or distorted colonial Canadian histories (Cooper, 2010; Taylor, 2020). The social worker, the youth worker, and the police officer may accept the teachers' violent-youth narrative and make consequential decisions based on that account. This is to remain in the natural attitude. They may, however, "bracket" (not dismiss) the violent-youth narrative from the teacher and talk to the student, without prejudice, to gain a first-person narrative. Therefore, while the subjective circumstances may be similar, the outcome can be transformational by actively combatting racial biases through self-reflexivity and sociological imagination (Mills, 1999). This subjective interaction between the youth and the professional exemplifies the importance of combating oppression-enabling assumptions and racist attitudes from first-hand interactions rather than from administrative and pre-established (uninterrogated) bureaucratic discourses. As a youth participant has noted in Hairstory (2019) report, "How helpful is it for staff in group homes to call the cops at the *first sign of difficulty*?" (p. 104, emphasis added). This rush to judgment stems from the natural attitude. As Husserl has noted, the natural attitude is a "manner characteristic of a believing on account of something believed already" (Husserl, 1982, p. 10).

The phenomenological attitude may therefore be vital in addressing disciplinary, behavioral, and pedagogical challenges in the school system when working with African- Canadian youth (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). Research shows that attitudes of teachers toward students in their formative years influence how student's grow as adults, and how their attitude toward education and success takes shape (Youn, 2016). Youth workers as system vanguards can, as the participants have highlighted in this paper, challenge systemic constraints and cultural and professional apathy. They can challenge the system and use the phenomenological attitude as a practical, epistemological strategy. This is important in embracing culturally informed social service practices (Amponsah & Stephen, 2020) and education (Wynter-Hoyte & Smith, 2020). Systems resist change unless the proposed

change benefits or has the potential to benefit system authorities or beneficiaries. For instance, Afrocentric education has its opponents in Canada (see Radebe, 2021) even though its many benefits have been acknowledged (Dei, 2013, 1996; Wallace, n.d.). As participants 17 has noted, "Anti-Black Racism is still a problem in Ontario largely due to the refusal to acknowledge the white/colonial systems still prevalent in our society." Unacknowledged Eurocentrism in Canadian institutions is an unhelpful dynamic that critical youth workers, especially those on the frontline, identify, navigate, and actively combat in their work every day.

Here is another important point for consideration. Much, though not all, of the anti-racism work in social justice and social services is undertaken by those outside the youth sector. In other words, those who challenge ineffective or harmful intervention processes in child and youth sector (Adjei & Minka, 2018) are typically looking in from the outside. They usually have ethnic or racial connection with these youth. They are usually racialized scholars, social justice activists, youth themselves (McArthur & Muhammad, 2022; Livingstone et al., 2014), or parents (Kozak & Schnellert, 2023; Parents of Black Children, 2022). Some of them have emotional attachments because of past negative personal experiences within the system (Garang et al., 2024). As Garang et al. (2024) have argued, these racialized youth do not want the systemic oppression they suffered replicated in the care of the future generation. They want to break the cycle by advocating for supportive education (Garcia et al., 2019) and effective socio-emotional teaching (Durlak et al., 2011).

What the results in our paper show is that self-aware and self-reflexive YSPs, like the participants in this paper, can amplify the voices of marginalized advocates and highlight experiences that are denied, or hidden, by systemic powers through institutional policies. Their convictions offer an opportunity that can reinforce self-interrogation regarding African-Canadian youth adultification and unfair disciplinary actions and expulsion from School (Howard & James, 2019) and throughout the system. Additional sites and practices of chronic social injustice hidden by institutional policies which may benefit from the insights of the YSPs in this study include youth criminalization (Francis, 2021), unnecessary foster care intervention (Cénat et al., 2023; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018), and the disproportionate representation of racialized youth in the criminal justice system (Owusu-Bempah et al., 2023).

Accordingly, the opinions and attitudes of youth workers presented in this paper must be amplified by researchers and sector leaders. It is an encouraging dimension. Many of these professionals are familiar with everyday challenges African-Canadian youth face. Their willingness to point out systemic problems, challenge their colleagues and sector leaders

to address these problems, and be ready to learn strategies necessary to challenge system-wide Afrophobia, increases the capacity for systems-level transformation. As allies who work with African-Canadian youth, their commitment to self-reflexivity (Mendonça et al., 2023), and to challenge the system from within can complement existing activism and advocacy strategies beyond the youth sector. Effecting change in systems with entrenched oppressive systemic cultures is difficult, but not impossible. It is a protracted process because of the racist frameworks embedded in the founding of Canadian society (Thobani, 2020).

Since some participants on the Virtual Café are not African-Canadians, the results add an important dimension to the mitigation of the problems youth face. They may, as Amponsah and Stephen (2020) have noted, improve the effectiveness and productiveness of their engagement with the youth if they are self-aware and self-reflexive. As participants have shown, youth workers who are self-aware tend to notice systemic problems, challenge them, and propose possible solutions. They, as Husserl (1982, p. 24) has argued phenomenologically, "assert nothing" they "do not 'see.'" They challenge the system not from what they hear (from their histories, culture, education, social systems, values), necessarily, but from their "subjective mode of access" (Pietersma, 2000, p. 11) to systemic problems African-Canadian youth face. This makes them, as Husserl would say, self-responsible, an important attitude in a system still informed by the legacies of enslavement, colonialism, and the color-line regime. What these participants have articulated may not be the ultimate panacea to systemic Afrophobia/Anti-Black racism. Still, as noted earlier, their insights offer a critical mitigating angle that must be interrogated further. YSPs whose opinions and experiences inform this study have not merely pointed out systemic problems for the sake of laying blame. They have located themselves within the problem matrix and proposed possible solutions.

Policy recommendations

From the data and the critical discussions above, we suggest the following: (1) Culturally appropriate anti-Black racism trainings to ensure YSPs understand the nuances of racial differences and systemic barriers whose effects on African-Canadians they may downplay; (2) Teaching of African-Canadian history and historical oppression at the secondary and post-secondary education to help YSPs understand that there is a continuity of racial oppression between the past and the present; 3) More inter-cultural exchanges through youth programs in education, sports and cultural events. This may help Canadians understand themselves beyond yearly events such as Black History Month, Diwali or Latin Heritage Month. Recommendations 1 and 2 are directly from the information shared by

the participants. Recommendation 3 is based on our reading of the views shared by youth workers in this paper. Their views, and Virtual Café itself, are geared toward combating Afrophobia and making youth work more youth friendly. We believe these recommendations will contribute toward policy changes in the sector or contribute toward valuable anti-Black racism conversation in Canada.

Conclusions

We conclude the paper here with key learnings from the paper. We also note the limitations of the data and make recommendations for future research. The Virtual Café data reveals how things we take for granted, the natural attitude according to Edmund Husserl, can have harmful and marginalizing implications. The natural attitude prevents Canadians from digging deeper into the essence of what they believe about themselves and others. As the participants in this paper have noted, this natural attitude may appear benign and rational. But it can be harmful. For instance, Canadians who grew up in ethnically or racially homogenous neighborhoods (or small towns) may find it peculiar when asked about their stakes in addressing anti-Black racism. They may forget or are not aware of the racist attitude that was foundational to the Canadian state and nation-building. For these Canadians, it seems that only people with openly racist attitudes should address anti-Black racism. They may attribute contemporary systemic issues affecting African- Canadians as personal failings, not knowing that Canada's historical amnesia or the erasure of African-Canadian suffering is to blame (Thobani, 2000; Cooper, 2010).

America's founding leaders noted in the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, that "all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed" (American's Founding Documents, 1776). African-American historian Nell Painter (2010), echoed America's founding fathers more than two centuries later, arguing that what we can see in our social and cultural environment is what our culture has trained us to find. This is something our data has also highlighted. People usually base their decisions on how they were raised and trained. As a result, they tend to dismiss facts and truths that contradict their upbringing. They take a defensive insular position rather than challenge themselves and social conventions (Blumer, 1958).

It is therefore imperative for Canada to teach history of slavery, colonialism, social reform, and resistance in school. But this should not be a tokenistic gesture, something operationalized for the sake of evanescent pacification. Teaching the history of oppression in Canada should be a Canadian socio-cultural and socio-political ideal from the perspective of

those harmed and those who continue to be harmed. This history, if properly contextualized within state policy frameworks and institutional regulations, may make youth sector leaders self-evaluate to avoid getting stuck in marginalizing assumptions, going beyond a natural attitude. The participants in this study have emphasized the importance of self-interrogation and strategies for addressing Afrophobia in the consciousness of frontline youth work and managerial staff.

While the ideal of *multiculturalism* is a Canadian political identity (Kymlicka, 2010), history and social studies curricula are not multicultural. Canadian multicultural history is taught from a Eurocentric perspective. It reflects European-Canadian view of history and the Canadian reality. Because of the Eurocentric nature of Canada, teaching African, Asian, and Islamic histories is therefore considered unnecessary (Radebe, 2021). Yet, the Canadian official *Multiculturalism Act* (Government of Canada, 1988) embraces racialized citizens and immigrants as part and parcel of the Canadian social fabric. Their historical marginalization and suffering are considered minor aberrations in history with no contemporary vestiges. The youth workers (of all races and ethnicities) in this paper disagree. What their words and experiences reveal is some promise notwithstanding the difficulties they have expressed working within a Eurocentric youth sector and in their own ethno-racial communities. There are voices challenging the system from within. These voices must be amplified. As professionals who work with African-Canadian youth on a regular basis, their views on Afrophobia in the Ontario youth sector are based on first-hand experiences. The sector leaders and policy makers should therefore pay attention to the systemic barriers they have highlighted and the policy and systemic changes they have suggested.

Finally, we must note, for researchers who may take up or expand on our findings, that our data has one obvious limitation. We had no control over how many frontline workers, junior managers, or senior managers were represented in the sample we used. Not all participants who attended the training registered as members on the Virtual Café. We therefore did not go beyond the registered participants, nor did we go beyond what they shared on the discussion board. This is important. If senior and junior managers are well represented among people who challenge systemic Afrophobia, then an important window toward eliminating anti-Black racism is opened. We had no control over how many sector leaders responded. We also had no control over the ethnic and racial makeup of the participants. We, therefore, suggest future research be undertaken to interrogate empirically (qualitatively or quantitatively) how youth workers, at all levels of responsibility, challenge anti-Black racism in their communities and at their place of work.

Notes

1. For more information, visit www.youthrex.com.
2. Like Anti-Black racism (ABR), Afrophobia is racism directed at the people of African descent, not just continental Africans. As our preference for place and culture-based identities—rather than colour-based identities—we also use Afrophobia. Some readers may not be familiar with the term Afrophobia, so we have used the two terms inter-changeably.
3. In this paper, we have used place and culture-based identities in our explanatory texts. We therefore used "African-Canadian" and "European-Canadian" instead of "Black Canadian", "White Canadian", "Black people", or "White people." We have not changed the phrases "Black people" or "White people" if they appear in quoted texts. This is our decolonial, gradual move away from colour-based identities. Colour-based identities have a problematic socio-economic and socio-political utility stemming from the slave and the colonial regimes.
4. See the list of the six discussion topics on the *Virtual Café* here: https://cafe.youthrex.com/.
5. For more information about the certificate, the four modules, and the socio-epistemic and socio-epistemological premises on which the certificate is grounded, see YouthREX (2024): https://youthrex.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/YouthREX-%E2%80%93-CBYW-%E2%80%93-Two-Pager-%E2%80%93-October-2022.pdf.
6. See the list of the presenters in "Meet Your Teaching Team" at the bottom of this page: https://youthrex.com/abr-certificate/.
7. Prominent Canadian scholars like Will Kymlicka (2010, p. 14) dismiss the enclave or silos argument as a "red-herring." Kymlicka may, unfortunately, be looking at multiculturalism from the state perspective rather than from the lived realities of everyday-Canadian, especially racialized communities.

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