Mar 22nd, 12:00 PM - 1:30 PM

Racialized Youth and the Public Library: A Critical Race Theory Approach to Program Utilization and Effectiveness

Amber Matthews
Western University, amatthe4@uwo.ca

Follow this and additional works at: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/fimulaw

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Racialized Youth and the Public Library

A CRITICAL RACE THEORY APPROACH TO PROGRAM UTILIZATION AND EFFECTIVENESS

Amber Matthews, Master of Library and Information Science, FIMS

BACKGROUND

- **Racialized youth** refers to youth whose racial or ethnic identity is constructed in opposition to the dominant white identity in society (Kumasi and Hughes-Hassell, 2017).

- The experience of racialized youth and their information needs is an unstudied area of Canadian LIS scholarship.

- Racialized youth face different challenges in which race and systemic racism are a facet of everyday life. Yet, library services often do not account for race, class, and urbanism.

- Race-blind approaches to library programs and service delivery are not reflective of the communities being served

- Ambivalence to race and its impact in everyday life can lead to the disengagement of racialized youth that do not see themselves represented or their information needs met

Toronto youth and race: STATISTICAL LENS

49% white

51% visible minority

Youth: Generational Status

	First Generation	Second Generation	Third or more
Toronto	41.1	34.8	24.1
Canada	22.3	18.9	58.8

73% of residents in high-income neighbourhoods are white

3% of high income residents are black

Source: Statistics Canada, 2018

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- While principles of neutrality and fostering diversity have been utilized to address race and racism by LIS scholars and professionals, these responses do not address the core issue of racial inequality.

- *Namely, how are dominant ideologies the organizing structure? How do institutional narratives work to sustain privilege? Whose voices are acknowledged? Whose voices are overlooked or silenced?*

- **Libraries do not exist in a race blind world** and social inequities cannot be mitigated through diversity and inclusivity alone. 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 or oppression.

- **The prevalence of whiteness** and forms of privilege like class and access to education render library spaces and practices neither neutral or objective. It is a philosophical fallacy that libraries reside in an ahistorical and acultural context that do not perpetuate racial privilege or other forms of oppression.

- **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 normative.

Core tenets of CRITICAL RACE THEORY

- Race and racism, along with other forms of discrimination, are defining characteristics of society as opposed to isolated acts and events of prejudice or oppression

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

- Interdisciplinary and historical analyses are needed to disentangle dominant ideologies

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

- It centers and is guided by the experiential knowledge and stories of those whose lives are impacted by everyday and systemic oppression and injustice

Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995

"Systemic racism occurs when an institution or set of institutions working together creates or maintains racial inequity. It is often caused by hidden institutional biases in policies, practices and processes that privilege or disadvantage people based on race. It can be the result of doing things the way they've always been done, without considering how they impact particular groups differently."

Government of Ontario, Anti-Racism Strategy. 2018

RECOMMENDATIONS

Examine how oppression can be experienced in and through our spaces

Race-specific data collection in accordance with the Ontario Anti-Racism Act (2018)

Consultations to identify impact of societal forces on information needs and wants

Culturally-relevant programs that are directly beneficial to the experiences of racialized youth

Partnerships to reach youth that are not currently being served or accessing services
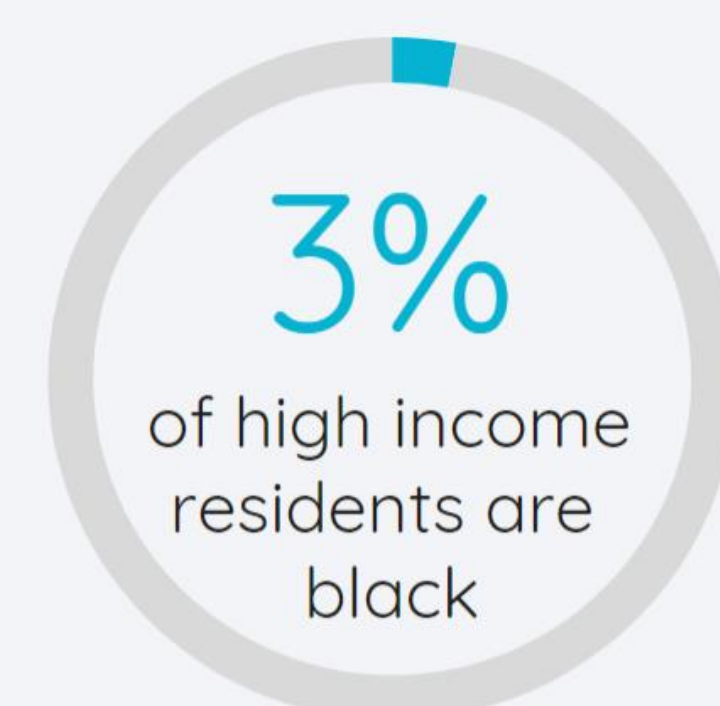
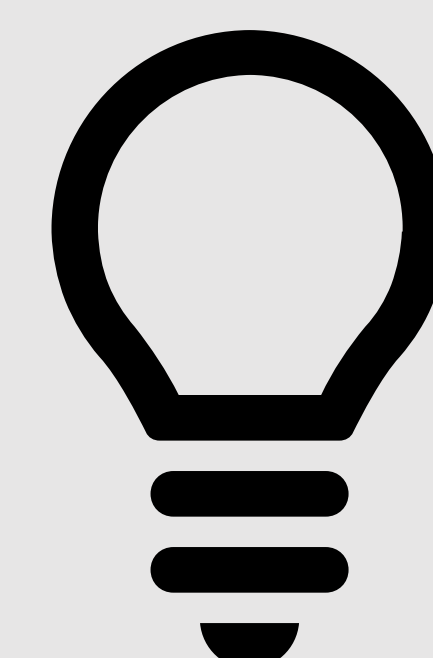Encourage and use counter stories to examine how libraries are perceived

CONCLUSION

Critical perspectives are only effective when they are matched with institutional readiness to redress policies, structures and practices that are reinforcing racial biases and oppression. It is up to public libraries to put their values of equitable service, inclusion and the pursuit of knowledge-informed policies into practice.

REFERENCES

Government of Ontario. 2018. A Better Way Forward: Ontario's 3-Year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan. Retrieved on March 9, 2019 from https://files.ontario.ca/ar 2001_ard_report_tagged_final-s.pdf

Hulchanski, David J. Neighbourhood Inequality, Diversity, and Change: Trends, Processes, Consequences, and Policy Options for Canada's Large Metropolitan Areas.

Kumasi, Kafi and Sandra Hughes-Hassell. 2017. "Shifting Lenses on Youth Literacy and Identity." Knowledge Quest 45, no. 3: 12-21

Ladson-Billings, Gloria and William F. Tate. 1995. "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education". Teachers College Record, 97,1: 47-68.

Statistics Canada. 2018. A Portrait of Canadian Youth. Retrieved on March 9, 2019 from https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2018001-eng.htm

Western FIMS
Faculty of Information & Media Studies