

## Chapter

# The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on Black Youth in the Region of Peel

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## Abstract

Policies within the Region of Peel have failed to acknowledge the harm that racial microaggressions have on Black youth in the education system, in public and social realms, as well as in employment, housing, banking, healthcare, and policing. The correlation between microaggressions and systemic and institutional barriers has long been overlooked; therefore, significant gaps remain. This study applies an intersectional approach with Family Services of Peel's Equity, Anti-Oppression and Anti-Violence Framework to draw conclusions between stereotypes originating in the media to educational, economic, social, public, and health consequences for Black youth. This research demonstrates how Canada's official multiculturalism policy resulted in colour-blind attitudes among Canadians that promote tolerance over embracing diversity and lead to stereotyping and microaggressions against Black youth. Implications for future research and recommendations are also discussed.

**Keywords:** anti-Black racism, anti-oppression, equity, intersectionality, microaggressions, multiculturalism, policy, social media.

## Introduction

Black youth in the Region of Peel experience daily racial microaggressions that profoundly affect their well-being and ability to succeed in society (Peel Region, 2021; Briggs, 2021). Considering racial disparities in critical life areas, including education, housing, and employment, researchers have explored barriers that limit Black youth's success. These barriers have been found to arise out of experiencing continuous racial microaggressions (Family Services of Peel, 2023a). Racial microaggressions are "commonplace, brief, subtle denigrating messages" (Houshmand, 2017, 6) or verbal or non-verbal insults targeted at people of colour because they belong to a racial minority group (Corkett, Cho & Steele,

2021). The continual experience of racial microaggressions results in worse mental health and subjective well-being, a poor sense of self, limited educational and career opportunities, poverty, housing, and social struggles, putting Black youth at risk of experiencing further microaggressions due to their position in society (Williams et al., 2022; Houshmand, 2017; Anucha et al., 2017; Briggs, 2018; Briggs, 2019; McPherson, 2019; Lettman, 2020; George, 2020; York University, 2017; Cénat et al., 2022). Continuing Collecting evidence on microaggressions and their effects is necessary to reduce the spread of misinformation and disinformation about Black youth and tackle the challenges and barriers associated with the experience of microaggressions.

While racial microaggressions undoubtedly have profound impacts on the livelihood of Black youth, we found minimal research has examined the extent of the impacts that racial microaggressions have on Black youth over long periods, specifically within the Region of Peel. There is also limited information on the gender differences in how racial microaggressions are experienced by Black youth, and the available data is often on Black male youth. However, some studies have focused their attention on the lack of research on the unique experiences of Black girls in the school system. Although they have demonstrated that Black girls face additional complex educational challenges, research must continue to examine this. While reviewing various types of literature, additional gaps were found regarding the physical health impacts of racial microaggressions, especially when compared to the existing mental health data. Similarly, although there is research on the mental health effects of racial microaggressions, it is not specific to the Region of Peel, which is of great concern given the lack of mental health and social service support available (Peel Region, 2021). The risk of having few culturally sensitive and relevant support systems and circumnavigating discourse around the mental health of the region's Black youth population will only exacerbate the problem. The study aims to explore social and mental health determinants and the influence of external negative factor visible in the form of microaggression and opens doors for future research in all of them.

## **Methodology**

The literature review was conducted between December 2022 and May 2023 through Google Scholar, Insauga.com, Canadacommons.ca, and selected social media platforms. While Google Scholar was selected to access scholarly published articles, other sources were used with an emphasis on tracing the contents that were most relevant to its geopolitical scope and their value in supplying the content relevant to our study. To limit the scope and focus of the study, we established four sampling criteria: 1) publications had to be in English; 2) publications had to be focused on anti-Black racial microaggressions; 3) social media posts (Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, and local news channels) had to be from those living within or about those living in the Region of Peel. 4) The publication had to be published between 2017 and 2023. The time period was selected to capture and analyze the most recent trends and patterns of the phenomenon.

In terms of limitations, we found that there is a lack of academic information available regarding the experiences of Black youth in the Region of Peel. So, the parameters were expanded to include academic articles and reports from the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Ontario, and Canada. With great certainty, it can be assumed that those in the Region of Peel are exposed to the same mainstream media as the rest of the Canadian population; therefore,

we felt confident drawing conclusions from these broader academic sources. The social media sources were narrowed to ensure we were gathering accurate data regarding the opinions of the region's Black youth population. The second limitation is the exclusion of non-English literature on microaggression against Black which limit the geo-linguistics scope of our study. We excluded overt examples of racism to focus on subtle racism, including assumptions or microaggressions about Black youth, as both are two distinct categories. Subtle racism comprises comments, questions, or actions that include assumptions or opinions that are racist, yet are often indirect or seem less harmful, yet carry powerful negative messages (Tulshyan, 2022). For example, assuming a Black person is unintelligent by saying, "You are so articulate." Additionally, assuming that all Black people are criminals; for example, a White woman clutching her purse while a Black person walks by or following a Black person around a store (School of Public Health, n.d.). Essentially, microaggressions and other forms of subtle racism exclude derogatory and racist comments; physical violence; and comments openly displaying racism, including offensive language and stereotypes. Creating this distinction helped us narrow our focus and draw conclusions about how covert comments resulted in institutional and systemic consequences. This was crucial as although microaggressions are often subtle; they are a form of violence as they remind people daily that they do not belong (Douglas, 2018).

The literature review utilizes the Family Services of Peel's Equity, Anti-Oppression and Anti-Violence Framework as a critical lens. This framework helps us examine the topic of anti-Black racism within the Region of Peel by considering behavioural and environmental factors; community infrastructures, systems, and resources; and historical, social, political, and economic factors. We selected and analyzed 65 academic articles, reports, and other grey literature and over 100 social media sources to determine the depth and breadth of racial microaggressions experienced online and in person. In the second round of our qualitative analysis, we synthesized our findings and narrowed the reference list to the most relevant ones.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to contextualize racial microaggressions experienced by Black youth in the Region of Peel, and to understand the impact it has on their health and wellbeing.

## **Goals**

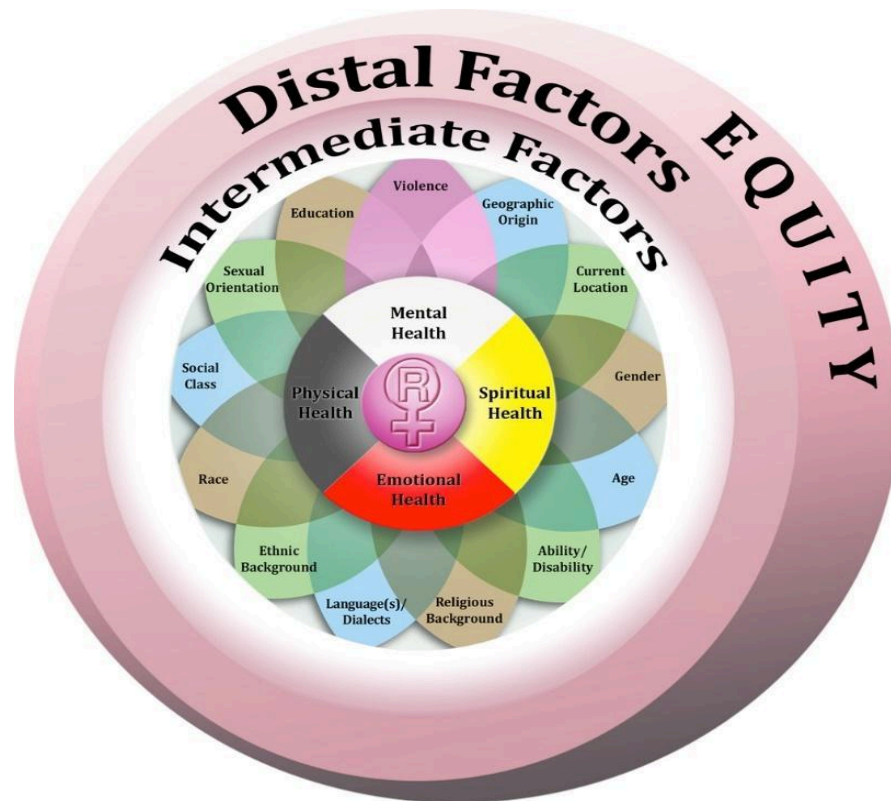
Guided by the evidence collected during Family Services of Peel's study, we had two primary goals: to address online misconceptions related to anti-Black racism and conceptualize ways to combat them.

The findings indicate a need to create widespread awareness in Peel and beyond about the impacts of microaggressions on the life pathways and well-being of youth. Based on these findings, recommendations are made.

## **Equity, Anti-Oppression and Anti-Violence Framework & Intersectionality Theory**

FSP applied its Equity, Anti-Oppression and Anti-Violence Framework to examine the anti-Black racism within the Region of Peel by assessing and evaluating proximal factors,

which are behavioural and environmental; intermediate factors, which include community infrastructures, systems, and resources; and distal factors, which are historical, social, political, and economical. Using this FSP's Equity lens, it becomes evident that microaggressions are not just subtle negative comments but ideas that affect opportunities, systems. Intersectionality theory critically guides us in understanding how multiple identities and interconnected forms of oppressions affect individuals. For example, being both Black and a woman creates a distinct experience than being both Black and a man. Intersectionality is crucial when conducting research to ensure that different populations are not being generalized and that their unique experiences are being considered.



**Figure:** Monica Riutort, Peel Institute on Violence Prevention, 2015 (Adapted from: Integrated Life Course and Social Determinants Model of Aboriginal Health. Charlotte Loppie 2009)

## Results and Discussion

### Microaggressions Against Black Youth

There can be an undeviating correlation between what Black youth face in the form of microaggressions through mainstream social media and what is replicated within the supposedly inclusive and safe educational settings. Further in life, the microaggressions heighten their vulnerability and marginalization in various aspects of life, including public and social settings, employment, housing, banking, healthcare, and policing. (Cénat et al., 2022). Mainstream media is the singular frame of reference for many who grow up without

exposure to diversity, making it easy to internalize the same stereotypes repeatedly being portrayed on television (Being Seen, 2022b). These stereotypes result in institutional and systemic discrimination and racism, leading to limited educational and career opportunities, placing them at risk of experiencing homelessness, poverty, and mental and physical health issues (Lettman, 2020; Briggs, 2018; Briggs, 2021; Briggs, 2019; York University, 2017; McPherson, 2019; Houshmand, 2017; Sanni-Anibire, 2022; Williams et al., 2022; Anucha et al., 2017; George, 2020; Capurri, 2021; Cénat, Dalexis, Darius, Kogan, & Guerrier, 2022). As a result, micro-aggressions, while often subtle, can have significant and lasting impacts.

Specifically, within the Peel District School Board (PDSB), staff were found to have “fostered a schooling environment that made learning tough and challenging” for Black students (Green, 2019, 3). Black students with accents were segregated into English as a Second Language (ESL) classes even after demonstrating exceptional reading skills (Raza, 2022). These students faced daily microaggressions from their teachers and peers. Their teachers acted surprised when Black boys were in their classes and expressed disbelief in their capabilities (Raza, 2022; Visentin, 2022). One Facebook user shared a collection of Instagram stories from current and past Port Credit Secondary School students in Mississauga, highlighting similar experiences. Another student described how their English teacher favored anyone over boys of colour (Atiq 2022). Further, they explained how the teacher used a biased marking scheme and would falsely accuse the boys of colour of plagiarism, resulting in failing or barely passing marks (Atiq 2022). Similarly, PDSB’s Black Trustee, Kathy McDonald, whose son from PDSB school achieved a perfect score in his University of Waterloo Math Test, was not provided with his results by his teacher and was excluded from the photo with the other award winners (Marychuk, 2020). McDonald also heard PDSB staff refer to Black children as “dumb, lazy and savages” (Marychuk, 2020). This evidence strengthens the argument that Anti-Black microaggressions continue to pervasively spread across and within the education systems and that they continue to harm Black youth.

Black students were also judged on their appearance, clothing, and media stereotypes (Lettman, 2020; McPherson, 2022; McPherson, 2019). One Facebook post discussed a news story about the controversy surrounding a supply teacher in the PDSB who was being investigated for posting an alleged racist photo of a student on social media (Flow 98.7, 2018; Paradkar, 2018). The post was uploaded to Instagram, comparing two pictures side by side. On one side was “Loc Dog,” a character from the 1996 movie “Don’t Be a Menace to South Central, While Drinking Your Juice in the Hood,” and the other side showed the back of a Black student’s head (Flow 98.7, 2018; Paradkar, 2018). The caption reads, “Who rocked it better? LOLLOL”, referring to their hair (Flow 98.7, 2018; Paradkar, 2018; Flow 98.7 2018). This example clearly depicts how racial microaggression could thrive and operate within educational settings. The internet is flooded with similar stories of Anti-Black racial microaggressions. They are often sourced through media stereotypes that perpetuate serious harm to Black youth.

The notion of criminality has seriously damaged Black youth's success in the PDSB, as teachers assumed Black students were inherently violent and criminals or drug dealers (McPherson, 2022). These assumptions altered how they were perceived and affected how they were treated (McPherson, 2022). Further, these continue to create more complex systemic barriers. Black males from Toronto are three times more likely to be stopped and asked for identification by the police (Government of Canada, 2020). Black male youth are often labeled as “at risk,” justifying educational discipline and placing them in special education classes (Briggs, 2021; James, 2021). Additionally, Black students are found to be disproportionately disciplined, leading to increased suspension, expulsion, and drop-out rates (Chadha et al., 2020; Briggs, 2021; York University, 2017; Thomas-Reynolds, 2020;

Newport, 2020; Raza, 2022; InBrampton, 2020; George, 2020; Feinstein, 2022; Green, 2019; Williams et al., 2022). The Ministry of Education's review of the PDSB found Black students were approximately two-and-a-half times more likely to be suspended than their White peers (Feinstein, 2022). The report also found that Black children in junior and senior kindergarten faced suspensions (InBrampton, 2020) and that Black students were suspended for wearing hoodies, hoop earrings, and durags (Chadha et al., 2020). Consequently, one cannot deny that problematic stereotyping ricochets and continues to damage a Black person's identity in social and public spaces.

Microaggressions severely hinder Black youth's ability to succeed in life. As Black youth are often portrayed as criminals or as uneducated and lazy, the uninformed assumptions of teachers and guidance counselors considerably alter the course of their lives (York University, 2017; Chadha et al., 2020; Newport, 2020; Briggs, 2021; Briggs, 2018; James, 2021; Raza, 2022; Visentin, 2022; Houshmand, 2017; McPherson, 2019; Cénat et al., 2022). Studies have observed that within the PDSB, Black students were disproportionately streamlined into applied and locally developed classes as opposed to university streams (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.; Briggs, 2019). Academic streaming is the process of grouping students into classes based on their perceived ability and/or potential (McPherson, 2019). According to one CBC News report, a review of the 2018-2019 school year demonstrated that while 10.1% of Grade 9 and 10 students were Black, only 7.7% and 21.7% of Black students were enrolled in academic and applied courses, respectively, compared to 25.4% of Black students in locally developed courses (Raza, 2022). Streaming directly limits future educational opportunities and the ability to aim for meaningful career choices or advancement, resulting in precarious jobs with minimal security, benefits, and stability (Anucha et al., 2017; York University, 2017). Similarly, teachers and guidance counselors withheld relevant information by showing disinterest in Black students' future career goals and by not asking questions (Chadha et al., 2020). One PDSB student shared their experience of having an A average yet being forced to wait weeks for a five-minute appointment where they were encouraged to take non-academic courses, which would limit their career options (Chadha et al., 2020). Therefore, it is indisputable that teachers and counselors can worsen racial harm if they routinely undervalue Black youths' aspirations by abusing institutional power.

Black members in the Region of Peel face life-altering experiences due to microaggressions in the public and social realms. Precarious work creates more economic disadvantages for Black youth. Specifically, Black youth are more likely to pay for their job training, less likely to have employment benefits or pension plans, and 85% are required to report their work hours weekly or monthly (Briggs, 2021). Additionally, Black members are constantly subjected to unfair hiring practices and being dismissed from their jobs (Cénat et al., 2022). Further, economic challenges are correlated with social inequalities (Briggs, 2021). Employment anxiety related to unstable employment and unlivable income has been found to interfere with personal and family lives, in addition to exclusion from resources, family activities, social service access, and challenges accessing adequate housing and social networks (Briggs, 2021). This has a direct connection with how Black members find themselves further trapped and exposed to additional microaggressions in the forms of being overlooked, ignored, refused services, treated disrespectfully, having accusations hurled at them, and being followed in public spaces (York University, 2017). Black youth struggling financially informed that Black members close to them have been significantly affected

because of their race (York University, 2017). In the Region of Peel, Black members describe often being labeled in a negative way even when successful, being questioned while driving nice cars, being treated condescendingly, others expecting their work to be inferior, and people reacting fearfully to them because of their race (York University, 2017). They also experience negative interactions with police, while seeking healthcare treatment, housing, and when being considered for bank loans (Cénat et al., 2022).

## **Multiculturalism and Colour-Blindness**

When examining the microaggressions experienced by Peel's Black youth, multiculturalism and colour-blindness must be considered. Despite Canada's official multiculturalism policy, which aims to embrace and promote all races, ethnicities, and cultures (Capurri, 2021), it is seen that Black people continue to struggle with belongingness (McPherson, 2019). Given Canadians' acceptance of all people without considering the unique experiences of other races or cultures, it is foreseeable that colour-blind attitudes could exist in every facet of Canadian society. While policies aimed to create "bias-free" hiring practices across Ontario, teachers were found to have ignored racialized students' experiences. Fundamentally, these policies had the opposite effect, creating colour-blind attitudes that continue to harm racialized students (Visentin, 2022). Some Ontario teachers were found to have believed that hard work was all that was necessary to overcome obstacles, which may explain why Black youth found they had to work harder than their White peers to succeed (McPherson, 2019; James, 2021; Anucha et al., 2017). Similarly, as many teachers believed there was no need to recognize diversity in their classrooms because they were attempting to avoid bias, racialized individuals were often excluded from the curriculum (McPherson, 2022; CBC News Kids, 2022; Francis & Ngabo, 2020).

A study found that colour-blindness and White apathy were linked, resulting in students without the same opportunities, access to curriculum, learning experiences, or resources (Visentin, 2022). Social media posts and local news within the Region of Peel demonstrated the accuracy of this notion. Social media users shared their experiences with the Peel District School Board (PDSB). Once, the police were called on a four-year-old Black girl in a PDSB school, and Twitter users immediately claimed that her race had nothing to do with the actions taken and that the police are called on students of all races. (@JulieRoedding, 2022 February 25, comment on Ahmed Ali 2022). Interestingly, they failed to address why armed police officers were called to exercise force upon a child.

Likewise, Black people in the Region of Peel often face microaggressions and other forms of racism while attempting to secure housing. A Black woman on Twitter described being refused a rental property by a Brampton landlord, while commenters claimed race had nothing to do with it (@TinaYazdani 2020). Other users expressed further sentiments about colour-blindness, including in response to a tweet about a Member of the Provincial Parliament's challenge to the government concerning cuts to the anti-racism directorate. He wrote, "...What racism he is talking about; this is Canada, for God's sake. We have no racism; we have those trying to get an advantage by looking differently to act differently. Our race is Canadians" (@RamizAliev, 2018 July 18, comment on Ontario NDP 2018).

Challenging the notion of colour-blindness and ensuring that all Canadians are educated on and comfortable seeing others' unique historical, cultural, and racial differences are important ways to reduce microaggressions and racism. Contrary to this, eliminating the topic from the discussion will only continue to allow individuals, institutions, and systems to be nonchalant about racist behavior and attitudes, which would further exacerbate prejudices against Black youth. This may also allow non-Black members to earn a sense of goodness for

not seeing the differences they believe would lead to bias. Eventually, the biases are expected to always be present, but being aware of them could guide us in challenging our own prejudices and motivating us to hold accountable those content on maintaining them.

## **Media Context**

Reviewing social media related to microaggressions against Blacks, we felt that there was an overflow of disproportionately crafted verbiage which often justified anti-black sentiments. Therefore, it is essential to analyze social media in the context of microaggressions. Social media is often the sole frame of reference for many individuals who grew up without diversity awareness, exposing them to different groups of people and often stereotypes (Being Seen, 2022b). Compared to white youth, Black youth are rarely represented in the media and are often misrepresented. However, when they are, negative stereotypes are depicted, therefore influencing the viewer's opinion of who Black youth are, which is often one-dimensional and negative (York University, 2017; Briggs, 2021; Briggs, 2019; Being Seen, 2022b; George, 2020). These depictions result in assumptions about Black youth, thus leading to racial microaggressions. This is detrimental in two ways. Firstly, people interact with Black youth through a negative lens, often isolating and discriminating against them and making their lives more challenging. Additionally, Black youth often struggle when they do not see themselves reflected in these portrayals and have difficulty locating their identity (York University, 2017; Briggs, 2021).

Examining the similarities and differences in mainstream and social media pertaining to the differences in power and narratives is crucial. Research has found differences, and it would be valuable for future research to determine why, and which has a more significant impact. Currently, mainstream media has been cited as more harmful than social media, as it has been created by those with access to power and by those who determine how different people and groups are depicted (McPherson, 2019). Alternatively, social media platforms enable users to produce and share their own messages, ideas, perceptions, and representations of identities (McPherson, 2019). Despite social media allowing individuals to filter through content and demonstrate alternate realities and perceptions of various identities, these platforms still promote negative and inaccurate stereotypes (McPherson, 2019).

Screen media has been criticized for its limited yet recurring stereotypes of Black communities, with Black characters cast as gangsters or drug dealers, as part of broken families, or as the best friend or sidekick who helps the white protagonist in their character arc (Being Seen, 2022b). Also, Black women are often portrayed as “less than,” as prostitutes or side chicks, or as having experienced significant trauma (McPherson, 2019). Similarly, it would be noteworthy to observe and study how social media posts regarding Blacks in the Region of Peel mainly pertain to criminality. The most frequent negative messaging was found in comments under posts regarding crime from the Peel Regional Police Twitter account. In one of the posts with booking photographs featuring Black men, commenters indicated their lack of surprise by writing variations of “Not surprised” (@CarlySly-Mason, n.d., comment on Peel Regional Police 2022, Post 1), “Shocker” (@KevinSnow, n.d., comment on Peel Regional Police 2021), and “Every day this type of mugshot” (@Onlylad\_v, 2022 October 19, comment on Peel Regional Police 2022, Post 2). Another Twitter user described a scenario where she claimed that taking the transit as a Black woman in Brampton was a blessing, as people avoided sitting next to her unless they, too, were Black (@ety\_17

2023). In response, one commenter shared having the same experience, while another said, “People don’t want to get shot” (@FluentAsFluck, 2023 January 6, comment on ety\_17 2023). Media portrayals have real-life consequences when people start believing what they see represented over time. Combating anti-Black racial microaggressions requires challenging the idea of the common notion of racism, multiculturalism, and color-blindness and facilitating sincere debates with Canadians around the historical, cultural, and racial diversities of all.

### **Gender Differences Within Stereotypes**

Gender differences within stereotypes and treatment were found in the literature and on social media. Black girls and women reported experiencing more racial discrimination than Black boys and men (Cénat et al., 2022). Outside the education system, Black girls and women encountered more racial discrimination than their male counterparts with police interactions, healthcare services, housing, and bank loans (Cénat et al., 2022). These experiences created greater feelings of isolation, marginalization, and “otherness” compared to what was experienced by Black boys (McPherson, 2019).

Black boys were labeled as lazy, violent, aggressive, anti-intellectual, and threats to hard-working, peaceful members of society (Briggs, 2021; Raza, 2022; York University, 2017). Black girls are reportedly seen as “baby mommas,” “sexually promiscuous,” the “angry Black woman,” or underachievers uninterested in school (McPherson, 2019; Being Seen, 2022b). These stereotypes place all Black youth at risk, and Black girls face an additional layer of discrimination (McPherson, 2019; George, 2020; Thomas-Reynolds, 2020). The same could be deconstructed with the intersectionality theory. An example is seen in the common stereotype that Black youth are seen as athletes rather than academics, as they are presumed to be naturally gifted at sports (McPherson, 2019). Yet, research found that high school coaches gave more attention, training, and support to Black male athletes, with Black female athletes often being ignored or treated in ambivalent ways (James, 2021).

Similarly, in academia, Black female students received far fewer resources and attention than Black male students (George, 2020). Teachers showed no concern or attention toward them, assuming they had no interest in school. According to the study, Black girls reported that the media significantly influenced how they were treated by teachers and peers (McPherson, 2019). Media depictions of Black girls as “less than” led to teachers expecting them to have an attitude and to show anger and aggression. This led to teachers punishing Black girls who were not even exhibiting these behaviors (McPherson, 2019).

### **Mental Health and Access to Services**

Two of the most significant findings include the high prevalence of mental health issues from facing continuous racial microaggressions and the lack of culturally sensitive support in the Region of Peel. Mental health issues ranging from isolation, hopelessness, lack of motivation, low self-esteem and confidence, limiting beliefs, anger, and stress to depression, anxiety, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and suicidal ideation were found (York University, 2017; McPherson, 2019; Houshmand, 2017; Briggs, 2021; Briggs, 2019; Briggs, 2018; Sanni-Anibire, 2022; Cénat et al., 2022; George, 2020). Stress was primarily caused by

having to work twice as hard academically while battling with negative stereotypes, in addition to attempting to secure stable employment while experiencing a lack of income security (Sanni-Anibire, 2022). Canada's colour-blind attitudes were another common source of stress because popular sentiment that racism does not exist resulted in self-doubt, frustration, and isolation from facing subtle racial bias (Houshmand, 2017).

Isolation in schools was severe for Black youth, given the lack of culturally relevant instructional materials and misrepresentations, which was worse for Black girls (McPherson, 2019). Isolation results in Black girls' disengagement in schools and is exacerbated by being in predominantly white spaces, furthering feelings of loss (McPherson, 2019). For Black male youth, isolation was felt in school and followed them into the workforce (Briggs, 2018; Briggs, 2019). Experiencing educational neglect through a lack of guidance, low expectations, and limited to no support can alienate youth in a way that limits their pathways to employment (Briggs, 2018; Briggs, 2019). On social media, an Instagram user described attending Port Credit Secondary School as "the root and catalyst" for their friend's mental illness (Atiq 2022). They said their friend's experiences in that school contributed to their anxiety and stress disorder. They described the blatant division in the school, how Black and brown students struggled to fit in, and the constant gaslighting by white students, teachers, and higher-up officials.

Interestingly, explicit racism was associated with lower depressive affect, externalizing symptoms, and anger (Williams et al., 2022). However, subtle racism was linked to internalizing symptoms and higher depressive affect (Williams et al., 2022). Similarly, Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF) was a term coined by Dr. William Smith in 2003 to describe "a syndrome marked by anxiety, worrying, hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts, and difficulty thinking clearly" (Medium, 2018; Williams et al., 2022). According to Briggs (2021), Active Battle Fatigue describes micro and macroaggressions that people of colour are conscious of. Black members experience this in addition to unconscious micro and macroaggressions, of which they are passive recipients (Briggs, 2021). Therefore, Briggs (2021) states that racialized individuals' well-being is impacted at multiple levels simultaneously, having to fight conscious and unconscious forms of oppressions continuously.

Unfortunately, with the high prevalence of mental health issues in Peel's Black community, there are inadequate and few culturally relevant and sensitive services that are accessible. A significant barrier to Black youth receiving the treatment and support they need is the lack of health professionals of colour (Williams et al., 2022). When Black youth in the Region of Peel decide to seek professional help, they discover that the mental health specialists do not represent them racially or culturally (Peel Region, 2021). One individual in Peel described how difficult it was to find a Black psychiatrist and psychologist and that they could only find one Black psychiatrist in the Region of Peel (Peel Region, 2021). Black families need culturally appropriate services that acknowledge that the system of racism exists as well as its impact on Black communities (Peel Region, 2021).

## **Implications for Future Research**

In the discourse about racism, acts of blatant racism have been the sole focus in recent years in the Region of Peel, as well as in Ontario and Canada. Despite the term 'microaggressions' coined in 1970 by Harvard University psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce, the phenomenon has

only recently been discussed by the wider population, and specifically by the non-Black population (Harvard Business Review, 2022). The importance of this research is to give momentum to the debate that, though the term 'micro' implies small or insignificant, their effects on Black youth are found to be disproportionately severe. These effects have resulted in diminishing opportunities in education and careers, further depriving the community of the opportunities to thrive economically, socially, and with improved physical and mental health (Williams et al., 2022; Houshmand, 2017; Anucha et al., 2017; Briggs, 2018; Briggs, 2019; McPherson, 2019; Lettman, 2020; George, 2020; Cénat et al., 2022).

As previously discussed, microaggressions affect Black youth across all areas of life in the Region of Peel. Misinformation and disinformation in mainstream and social media play a significant role, which is discovered and reported in this study. We found that individuals within the region are highly susceptible to believing misinformation and therefore are prone to making assumptions based on the racial stereotypes they see in the media. In order to combat this, drastic and immediate steps must be taken, specifically in the areas of policies, services, education, and community recommendations.

This study offers several implications for research. First, by emphasizing the impacts of racial microaggressions in critical life areas of Black youth. The effects of subtle racism on Black youths' well-being and life satisfaction are well documented. This research, however, can be known as the first-time study that analyzes and reports institutional and systemic racism and its correlation with microaggressions within the Region of Peel. Additionally, using social media examples to support this research is original and new in the context of studies on racial microaggressions. The social media evidence supports the findings of the broad research on microaggressions within the GTA, Ontario, and Canada about how Black youth across the country are affected similarly. It helps demonstrate that this research is relevant to those within the region. Despite the relevancy of the existing research, it is challenging to develop policies for the region when most of it exists outside the area. FSP's Equity, Anti-Oppression, and Anti-Violence Framework enables us to examine and foresee three factors influencing Black youths' lives within the region. It shows a clear progression from witnessing stereotypes in the media to committing microaggressions against Black youth and finally rendering Black youth disempowered, excluded, marginalized. Eventually, these result in Black youth struggling institutionally, systemically, socially, politically, and economically.

More qualitative and quantitative research is needed to comprehend and articulate the nuances of Peel's Black youth experiences of racial microaggressions, particularly by gender. We have found ample research about the pathway from microaggressions in school leading to precarious work, resulting in disadvantageous outcomes for Black male youth. Similar research on Black female youth and research specific to the Region of Peel would help us gain an in-depth understanding of the socioeconomic conditions of Black youth and the contributing factors. Given the evident dearth of culturally appropriate and sensitive services, quantitative research in this area will help in analyzing the true nature and scope of disparities between Black members' access to adequately support and impact of their isolation or unsatisfactory experiences with the service providers.

## **Recommendations**

### **Policy Implementation**

The Ministry of Education has released 27 directives, with more than 54 actions to dismantle systemic racism on the PDSB Board (Feinstein, 2022). As of September 2022, only five have been observed to be successfully implemented (Feinstein, 2022). Accountability measures need to be introduced for all and for especially those who fail to abide by the policies. This is highly problematic because racial microaggressions continue to harm Black students' future opportunities as they struggle to obtain a livable income and stable employment (Briggs, 2018; Briggs, 2019; Briggs, 2021). It is recommended that the PDSB immediately implements all the directives and actions. Providing accelerated training, hiring more black teachers and guidance counselors, and revising the curriculum would be the most effective places to start. These actions are essential basic steps for promoting inclusion, acceptance and representation in the curriculum. With successful achievement of this goal, the Region of Peel will surely move beyond the advocacy of tolerance to celebration of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

Research shows that in 2020, the Ministry of Education reported that 70% of the PDSB's staff were White, while only 16% of the board's students were White (Feinstein, 2022). Current data must be made available, as racialized students comprise the majority of the PDSB yet are not reflected in their teachers and guidance counselors, who are supposed to provide advice about students' futures. Similarly, the PDSB should ensure their staff is highly diverse to guarantee that all students feel supported, creating an equal opportunity for everyone to succeed. A notable benefit is that Black students believe having black role models would make achieving post-secondary educational goals easier (York University, 2017). Additionally, their experience is understood without the need for training, and diverse faculty members foster creativity in solutions and dismantle groupthink. Further, this results in Black students achieving higher Grade Point Average (GPA), higher retention rates, and a reduction in the achievement gap between White and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) students (Sarr et al., 2022).

As Black youth experience significant discrimination within the critical life areas of housing, banking, employment, healthcare, and policing, it is suggested equity, anti-discrimination and anti-racist policies be developed to facilitate successful and inclusive educational and training programs. Black youth should be able to access these services without any fear of stereotypes about them impacting the type of treatment they receive. In addition, repercussions for those creating barriers for Black youth should be stringent to discourage the limiting of options Black youth have access to, which further exacerbates their mental health and subsequent challenges they face because of their race.

The creation of stricter policies within the workforce is critical to allowing Black individuals reach leadership positions at the same rate as other races and make decisions about who is hired. Further, new policies must remove the stipulations that create unfair hiring practices and prevent unsubstantiated job dismissals. Additionally, Black youth in Peel have expressed their concerns about their negative experiences with the police, particularly over unwarranted police involvement in minor incidents and trivial matters (Cénat et al., 2022; Chadha et al., 2020; Newport, 2020; Raza, 2022; InBrampton, 2020). School should be a safe space for all children where they do not have to fear being handcuffed or having force used against them.

### **Funding for Harm Reduction and the Promotion of Black Excellence**

Two current issues the Region of Peel faces are a lack of culturally relevant and sensitive services and the gaps in accessing them. Mental healthcare was found to be particularly

inaccessible in the Region of Peel. Racialized communities face considerable cultural stigmas for sustaining mental health difficulties, which is a significant barrier to seeking support (Williams et al., 2022). When Black youth in the Region of Peel decide to seek professional help, they discover that the mental health specialists do not represent them racially or culturally (Peel Region, 2021). A report examining community safety and well-being found that while seeking mental health support in the region, Black youth struggled to find representation in their healthcare providers and could only find one Black psychiatrist within the region (Peel Region, 2021). Further, FSP's demographic analysis enabled us to see where the Black-focused services are throughout the region. While in areas with high Black populations, accessibility gaps remain (Family Services of Peel, 2023b). Funding for more services evenly spread from east to west while prioritizing Brampton's west end is suggested to ensure that all of Peel's Black communities receive the care they need (Family Services of Peel, 2023b). Additionally, recruiting Black healthcare professionals to work in the region is recommended so youth do not have to travel outside Peel to access culturally relevant and sensitive support.

Funding and grants for Black youth entrepreneurs and Black youth, in general, are recommended. Studies have shown that Black youth often struggle to achieve a liveable income due to systemic barriers. Funding and grants can elevate Black youth by offering the necessary support to gain autonomy. Additionally, mentorship programs by Black leaders providing skills and advice to Black youth can encourage their endeavors by showing them what is possible through representation. Funding is explicitly suggested specifically for mentorship programs, training, and internships and entry-level job opportunities across institutions affecting critical life areas, such as healthcare, banking, real estate, and general employment. Increasing the number of Black youths in these industries can strengthen diversity, promote better treatment for Black youth, and could significantly reduce discrimination. Additionally, funding programs that provide education and support regarding financing, including applying for bank loans and securing housing, are imperative, as these are areas where Black youth face barriers. Informing Black youth of their rights and the rights of landlords, employers, and healthcare workers is recommended. These programs can empower youth to advocate for themselves and increase their ability to succeed financially.

It seems hard for Black youth to escape the microaggressions they face within the Region of Peel. While additional research will hopefully combat misinformation over time, solutions are urgently required. Therefore, generous funding for safe spaces must be allocated to protect Black youth's mental health and well-being. These safe spaces must safeguard Black-owned and Black-led spaces where youth can freely express themselves and develop a sense of belonging in safer communities. A Region of Peel report found that a sense of belonging, and community counteracts the adverse effects of racism and increases well-being (Peel Region, 2021).

## **Education**

This section will highlight the educational requirements we recommend for the abovementioned programs that require support and funding. As misinformation and disinformation are prevalent in mainstream and social media, it is crucial to have awareness programs within educational and community settings that challenge stereotypes and hold all

those who use microaggressions and other forms of racism against Black and other racialized youth accountable. We recommend that these programs be designed to familiarize all youth with why racial stereotypes are problematic and educate youth how hate prevails through social media. These programs should also demonstrate the severity and short-term and long-term consequences of racial microaggressions and encourage inclusion and learning about other cultures and races.

Further, we suggest increasing the number of programs within schools run by individuals with specialized knowledge of Black and other racialized individuals' unique challenges and life experiences. Often, teachers and other school staff possess limited understanding and training to fully engage with racialized children. Therefore, these children are pushed toward community services and/or often receive harsh disciplinary consequences. This places a significant strain on the parents and caregivers, and often they do not have the time. Most importantly, they themselves have already had traumatic experiences with these services and feel lost navigating spaces to meet their basic requirements. Increasing the number of Black and racialized teachers, guidance counselors, and program staff can help these students feel seen and heard and reduce any challenging issues they may experience in school. This will further balance the racial diversity ratio between teachers and students within the PDSB.

### **Implementation Concerns**

Most importantly, while developing these policies, programs, and educational materials, Black youth and families must be consulted as well as included through community forums and all possible means to ensure their lived experiences are reflected to facilitate social change. With lived experiences, Black youth are more than capable of articulating and discussing what specific measures would benefit them to thrive in the Region of Peel. Not consulting them could lead to erasure, creating significant accessibility gaps and unenforced rules and regulations in the systems. Peel's Black youth are one of the key stakeholders and social partners in such a process. Their voices and concerns need to be included while developing, implementing, enforcing, and evaluating all policies and programs framed to reduce racial harm, increase the acceptance of diversity, and improve the quality of life for Black youth.

### **Conclusion**

This study established how damaging racial microaggressions are to the livelihood and well-being of Black youth in the Region of Peel. Unfortunately, Canada's colour-blind attitudes have resulted in an epidemic of subtle racism against Black youth, affecting them in all areas of life without reprieve. It is especially detrimental as subtle racism often goes unchallenged or is downplayed, further contributing to the isolation and marginalization of Black youth in the Region of Peel. Stereotypes of Black members portrayed in mainstream media and regurgitated across social media contribute to the problem and create negative narratives about Black youth. This chapter demonstrates that most people receive information about different groups of people through the media, which has no regulatory body to confirm or deny what is being depicted, further causing mass internalization of these narratives. Therefore, it can be determined that Peel's residents are highly susceptible to misinformation and disinformation in the media regarding Black youth.

This chapter asserts the direct correlation between the harmful effects on Black youth's mental health from experiencing continual racial microaggressions and subsequent systemic, institutional barriers. The region's mental health services are found to be inadequate and lack culturally relevant and sensitive professionals, resulting in Black youth being unable to access the immediate and necessary care they need. Microaggressions result in Black youth being ignored or experiencing ambivalence or hostility from others in educational, public, and other social spaces. This further creates multiple complex challenges for Black youth when seeking advice for higher education or career advancement while simultaneously struggling to successfully access bank loans, housing, adequate healthcare, or navigating positive interactions with the police. More empirical evidence is needed to determine Black youth's specific experiences and needs in the Region of Peel and how intersectionality within the Black community, such as the differences between Black boys' and girls' shape their experiences of racial microaggressions. Finally, the research presents itself as a foundational work for policymakers, educators, and funding bodies to draw insights from to tackle racial micro-aggressions within the region and ensure that the safety and well-being of Black youth are prioritized.

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