

**The Impact of Racial Microaggressions on  
Black Youth in the Region of Peel:  
A Literature Review**

**Peel Anti-Black Racism Project  
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## Abstract

Microaggressions are common statements, actions, environmental indignities, and assaults demonstrating negative attitudes toward people of colour. This literature review examines the impacts of racial microaggressions on Black youth in the Region of Peel. It analyzes mainstream and social media portrayals of Black youth; the types of microaggressions they face, both in the education system and in public and social spheres; the impacts of microaggressions and coping mechanisms. Findings from this review show that microaggressions are a daily experience for Black youth in the Region of Peel. Despite this, little has been done to combat misinformation regarding stereotypes that impact Black youth in the education system and in public spheres. Additionally, mental health stigma, combined with limited access to racially or culturally informed mental health care, exacerbates the effects of microaggressions.

## Introduction

This report seeks to address online misconceptions related to anti-Black racism and conceptualize ways to combat them. Its other goals are to determine the level of misinformation on social media and other news platforms and assess individuals' susceptibility to believe this misinformation. This literature review will attempt to draw a connection between online misinformation and how it impacts individuals' views and perspectives of Black youth in the Region of Peel. The primary focus of this report is to examine microaggressions against Black youth in the Region of Peel, with a brief section dedicated to the Black community's views on other races and ethnicities. It will examine how mainstream and social media stereotypes influence microaggressions in the Region of Peel and their impact on Black youth. Specifically, it will analyze the impact of microaggressions on the mental and physical health of Black youth, as well as their educational, social, and economic experiences and opportunities.

This research is the first of its kind in the Region of Peel and relies heavily on the perspectives of Black youth within the region. The Peel Institute of Research and Training (PIRT), the research arm of Family Services of Peel (FSP), formed a Youth Advisory Committee as part of its Anti-Black Racism Project. The committee members are aged 16 to 30, with only one member residing in the Region of Peel, though she resides within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). For this literature review, the committee members were asked to review a sample of the sources used and to provide feedback to ensure that this work reflects the thoughts and experiences of Black youth in the Region of Peel. In addition, this research draws from academic and non-academic sources, including social and local news media, as well as grey literature. As previously mentioned, this pilot research seeks to answer several questions about

combatting anti-Black racism. Therefore, despite the project's focus and most sources coming from the Region of Peel, the research had to be expanded by drawing from work in the GTA, Ontario, and Canada.

This review utilizes the Family Services of Peel's Equity, Anti-Oppression and Anti-Violence Framework. 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 (Appendix A1). In addition, using an intersectional approach will help us understand how multiple identities and interconnected forms of oppression affect individuals (Appendix A2). For example, understanding the specific challenges of being both Black and a woman creates a different experience than being both Black and a man. As this review seeks to establish equity for Black youth within the Region of Peel, it is imperative to consider how intersectionality generates specific needs for different individuals to prevent further harm to Black communities. Furthermore, this topic will be analyzed through the lens of individual lifestyle factors, social and community networks, and socioeconomic, cultural and environmental conditions and how that affects the well-being of Black youth in the Region of Peel.

The key questions behind this literature review are:

- What types of microaggressions does the Black community experience in the Region of Peel?
- What misconceptions exist online regarding racism, and how do we combat them?
- What is the level of misinformation on social media and other alternative news platforms?
- What is the susceptibility of individuals to believe misinformation based on their primary news source?
- How does misinformation impact individuals' views and perspectives on racism and racialized individuals?

## **Methodology**

This literature review has been conducted by the Peel Anti-Black Racism Project, utilizing peer-reviewed articles, other scholarly sources, and grey literature, including theses and dissertations, government and organization reports, and news regarding microaggressions affecting Black youth in the Region of Peel. Social media platforms were also utilized for supporting evidence.

The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to the literature search:

## Inclusion

- Must be posted between 2017-2023.
- Must be posted by a creator/outlet based in Canada, focusing on the GTA and Region of Peel.
- Scholarly or grey literature from reputable sources focused on microaggressions and the impacts of racial discrimination on health, social, educational, and economic well-being.
- This includes videos, blog posts, photos, short stories, news articles, tweets, and memes.
- Content from Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, local news channels, etc.
- Must depict microaggressions and/or subtle racism toward the Black community.
- A small portion of this literature review will focus on the thoughts of Black people toward other races/ethnicities. Specifically, comments about assumptions, microaggressions, or subtle racism towards other communities.
- Additionally, content featuring Black creators speaking on experiences or interacting with other communities.

## Exclusion

- Posted before 2017.
- Posted outside of Ontario (Except for a few sources which provide Canadian context relevant to the study).
- Blatant racism (The focus of the project is more subtle aspects; we will not be including content that is blatantly racist):
  - Derogatory and racist comments toward the Black community
  - Physical violence towards Black people with racist intentions by the perpetrator
  - Comments openly displaying racism (i.e., using offensive language and stereotypes openly towards black people)
  - This includes blatant racism from Black people toward other communities.

The literature review included searches of the following databases:

## Search terms

**Google Scholar:** Peel AND Black student; Peel school AND racism; Peel school AND Black student, Brampton microaggressions; social media AND Black athletes Peel Region; Microaggressions GTA; Media portrayal Black Canadians; Media treatment of Black people Ontario; Peel Region microaggressions social media; Peel Region microaggressions Black youth social media; GTA Black youth microaggressions; Social media anti-Black racism Peel Region; GTA Black students university sports scholarships

**Google:** GTA AND Black student; Microaggressions Peel Region pdf; Microaggressions Peel Region; Peel Region microaggressions; Region of Peel microaggressions; Region of Peel microaggressions news; Media reporting on Black Canadians; Media portrayal by race Canada pdf; Black communities attitudes towards other races Peel Region; Black youth in Peel schools racism; Black youth in Peel schools news; Black youth in Peel schools; Mississauga news anti-Black racism; Peel Region racism; Racial microaggressions Peel Region

**Canada Commons:** Media AND Black AND Canada

**InSauga:** Microaggressions

**Twitter:** Mississauga AND Black; Brampton AND Black; Brampton AND Black friend; Peel police AND Black; Brampton racism; Mississauga racism; Caledon racism; Racist Brampton; Brown in Brampton; White and Black people Mississauga; Black people Caledon; Racist Brampton; Peel Regional Police

**Facebook:** Peel Region AND racism; InSauga AND Black; Mississauga AND racism; Caledon AND racism; Peel Regional Police; Microaggressions Brampton; Microaggressions Peel Region; Affirmative action Brampton; Mississauga news; Racism in Peel Region; Racism in Caledon; Racism in Brampton; Toronto racism; Black friends in Peel Region; Black in Brampton; Hate crime Brampton; Indian people in Brampton.

**TikTok:** Region of Peel AND racism; Toronto AND racism; Renting in Brampton; Toronto shorty phase.

**Instagram:** Bramalea.rd

## Results

We reviewed all that seemed related to our subjects of interest and excluded ones that did not fit our inclusion criteria. Of the 65 academic articles, reports, books, and news articles initially found, 37 were selected as relevant to our literature review. In addition, 107 of 112 social media sources were selected. The article by Houshmand (2017) was selected despite being based in Montreal, as it was one of the only articles to address coping mechanisms and responses to racial trauma. Literature that was unable to meet our standards for the purpose of this report failed for the following reasons:

- The articles were related to our interest in microaggressions against Black youth; however, they did not mention Peel Region and were outside our geographical criteria.
- The articles were related to our interest in anti-Black microaggressions; however, their focus was on Black individuals over 30 and therefore was outside our focus on Black youth.
- A few articles matched our criteria for our target demographic and geographical criteria but were outside the range of the inclusion criteria pertaining to when the article was published.

- Some articles and books mentioned microaggressions, Black youth, and the Region of Peel, but only briefly and not significant enough to include in this literature review.
- A few articles were not selected due to their sole focus on blatant or systemic racism.
- Social media sources were determined to be examples of overt racism rather than microaggressions, and those outside of the geographical criteria were excluded.

## **Limitations of this Literature Review**

The Peel Institute of Research and Training (PIRT) has many goals with this literature review. These include examining how the media portrays Black youth in the Region of Peel, uncovering the impact on their physical and mental well-being, and determining Black people's thoughts toward other communities. This literature review has a broad scope but is limited in its breadth. Most existing research on racial microaggressions against Black youth focuses broadly on Canada or specifically on the GTA, with limited research on the Region of Peel. This research would have benefitted from including more statistics and demographical information, such as the age groups most likely to commit microaggressions. That information, however, was unavailable for the Region of Peel. Additionally, only one academic source was found that discussed the Black community's opinions of other races and ethnicities within the Region of Peel, the GTA, Ontario, or Canada, and only a few social media sources addressed this sub-topic.

## **Anti-Black Racism**

Anti-Black racism is defined as “Prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination directed at people of African descent and rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and its legacy. Anti-Black racism is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies, and practices and manifests in African Canadians' current social, economic, and political marginalization” (see Appendix B1).

Over the last few years, we have seen an increase in mainstream and social media content discussing issues related to anti-Black racism. Common themes demonstrate that Canada is not immune to racism (see Appendix B2); that racism, not race, creates systemic inequities (see Appendix B3); that social media is biased against content promoting anti-racist rhetoric (see Appendix B4); and that finding a way to combat anti-Black racism is important. We have seen a surge of racist content in response.

The attention paid to anti-Black racism in the media has resulted in numerous responses. These include demonstrating strong, anti-Black racist attitudes; having anti-racist conversations; showing neutrality; making excuses for their families or their friends' anti-Black attitudes, and those very evidently expressing racist thoughts and opinions. Reflective social

media posts were created by those hoping to assist individuals in assessing their anti-racist or, specifically anti-Black attitudes. For example, one creator made a post titled “Are you anti-Black? Answer these questions and read the caption.” Questions were posed, such as, “Does this line of question bother you?” and “Does the term Black Lives Matter make you want to roll your eyes?” (see Appendix B5).

It is important to listen to Black content creators to learn how to combat anti-Black racism and practice allyship. Especially as “73% of Black people in Canada believe that anti-Black racism efforts and broader diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives will be ‘put on the back burner’ by their employer during an economic downturn” (see Appendix B6). The content creator behind the TikTok account, Racial Equity Insights LLC, discussed five ways to be a better anti-racist (see Appendix B7). Firstly, he says we must educate ourselves on the history and legacy of racism. He recommends the video series “Race: The Power of an Illusion” (see Appendix B7). He also says to begin the tough work of uncovering our hidden racial biases and recommends Harvard’s Implicit Association Test as a starting point (see Appendix B7). Expanding beyond the “good person/bad person” binary is essential, as a person can be “good” and still have racist ideas. He also highlights the importance of following content creators of colour by supporting them and allowing their perspectives to help reprogram our thoughts (see Appendix B7). Finally, developing an intersectional analysis is crucial in understanding that systems of oppression do not exist in a vacuum and that people who occupy multiple identities require extra sensitivity (see Appendix B7).

## **Multiculturalism and Colour Blindness**

Canada's official multiculturalism policy, which aims to embrace and promote all races, ethnicities, and cultures, distinguishes itself from the United States (Capurri, 2021). The Multiculturalism Act (1985) was created to enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadian immigrants, suggesting that it is possible to maintain their cultural and ethnic identity while participating within Canadian systems and structures (McPherson, 2019). Despite this, McPherson (2019) found that Black people continue to struggle with belonging.

In 2020, a Facebook user discovered that the Region of Peel’s Twitter account had “liked” a Tweet by the National Post stating, “Rex Murphy: Canada is not a racist country, despite what the Liberals say” (see Appendix B8). In addition, several Tweets mocking diversity were uncovered in the Region of Peel, specifically in response to crime-related news. For example, there were comments such as “Cultural enrichment,” “This is what happens when you value diversity and inclusion over public safety,” and “Looks like diversity is working” (see Appendix B9). A Facebook user implied that anti-racism was impossible in response to a rally in



the Region of Peel denouncing racism and demanding radical change, stating, “Living in one of the most diverse and accommodating countries but sure...” (see Appendix B10).

The concepts of multicultural tolerance and colour blindness have fostered a culture of whiteness, resulting in microaggressions against racialized students (Visentin, 2022). Colour blindness is embedded in the education system, demonstrated through the attitudes and beliefs of non-racialized teachers (Visentin, 2022). These colour-blind attitudes emerged from policies that sought to implement “bias-free” hiring practices across Ontario, which were created to have the opposite effect (Visentin, 2022). Despite these teachers wanting to ignore the unique experiences of racialized students, their behaviours showed that they were not colour-blind (Visentin, 2022). A few Ontario teachers were quoted as saying, “If people work hard enough, they will overcome the myriad obstacles” (Visentin, 2022), which may partially explain why Black youth found they had to work harder than their white peers to succeed (McPherson, 2019; James, 2021; Anucha et al., 2017).

Non-racialized teachers resisted these changes within schools as they believed there was no need to recognize diversity in their classes (Visentin, 2022). Similarly, institutions operate on the assertion that the education they offer is free of cultural bias and that no dominant group or culture informs educational practices and content (McPherson, 2022). Visentin (2022) also found that colour blindness and white apathy were linked, resulting in students without the same opportunities, access to curriculum, learning experiences, or resources. In response to these attitudes, a group of students at a Mississauga high school felt they needed to change the curriculum, as they had never learned about the full history of Black people in Canada (CBC News Kids, 2022). The curriculum around Black history addressed the emancipation of enslaved Black people and the legacy of such figures as Martin Luther King Jr. and Viola Desmond (CBC News Kids, 2022). Feeling left out of the curriculum, a Black student named Jayden Dill created and distributed a survey via Snapchat, which resulted in the school offering a new course called “A History of Black People in Canada” with the help of two other students (CBC News Kids, 2022).

Social media provided countless examples of colour-blind attitudes toward Black individuals. Referencing a Tweet about the police being called on a four-year-old Black girl in school, Twitter users quickly claimed that colour had nothing to do with the actions taken and that the police are called on students of all races (see Appendix B11). In a similar scenario where Peel Police handcuffed a six-year-old Black girl at school, a Twitter user commented, “Everything is anti-black racism now. Anti everyone else racism is ok, though” (see Appendix B12). Likewise, a Facebook post about ending anti-Black racism in the Region of Peel attracted comments about teaching children to respect each other rather than talking about racism (see Appendix B13).

Commenters also expressed colour-blind attitudes in response to posts about Black people's experiences outside the education system. For example, in a Tweet about a Black woman being refused a rental property by a Brampton landlord, commenters claimed that race had nothing to do with it. Despite these colour-blindsides, Briggs (2021) found that landlords might refuse to rent to Black people as they expect that incidents of crime and violence will follow. Another example of colour blindness was a Tweet about a Member of the Provincial Parliament's challenge to the government concerning cuts to the anti-racism directorate. A commenter to the Tweet 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" (see Appendix B14). It is clear from these comments that a significant demographic of social media users in the Region of Peel continues to hold colour-blind attitudes and spread misinformation across social media.

### **The Media's Influence on Microaggressions**

Microaggressions are defined as "commonplace, brief, subtle denigrating messages" (Houshmand, 2017, p. 6) or verbal or non-verbal insults targeted at people of colour because they belong to a racial minority group (Corkett, Cho, & Steele, 2021). They can occur in formal and informal settings, such as classrooms or locker rooms (Houshmand, 2017). A microaggression is a form of violence detrimental, as they remind people daily that they do not belong (Douglas, 2018). A Canadian study showed that 50.2% to 93.8% of participants experienced a form of racial microaggression, with the numbers varying based on the type (Cénat, Hajizadeh, Dalexis, Ndengeyingoma, Guerrier, & Kogan, 2022). The average age of the participants was 24.96 (Cénat et al., 2022), and is therefore relevant to this literature review examining the experiences of Black youth.

Mainstream media is the sole frame of reference for many individuals who grow up without exposure to diversity, making it easy to internalize the same stereotypes repeatedly being portrayed on television (Being Seen, 2022b). Black youth are rarely represented in the media compared to white youth, yet when they are, negative stereotypes are depicted, leading to a one-dimensional view of Black people (York University, 2017; Briggs, 2021; Briggs, 2019; Being Seen, 2022b; George, 2020). These negative portrayals result in Black youth facing countless microaggressions in their daily lives (York University, 2017; Williams, Khanna Roy, MacIntyre, & Faber, 2022; Anucha, Srikanthan, Slad-Togane, & Galabuzi, 2017; Visentin, 2022; Cénat et al., 2022; McPherson, 2019; Chadha, Herbert, & Richard, 2020). Black youth in the Region of Peel mainly face microaggressions in the education system, which have been shown to impact how they view themselves in general, as well as academically, and their choices when entering the workforce (Chadha et al., 2020; Sanni-Anibire, 2022; Visentin, 2022; Green, 2019; George, 2020). Yet, school is not the only place they are exposed to various forms of subtle racism. Black youth also face microaggressions in public and social spaces.

## Mainstream Versus Social Media

Mainstream and social media heavily influence how society views diverse groups of people, with media used to create and maintain stereotypes that negatively shape Black people's lives (McPherson, 2019). These portrayals also often differ by gender (McPherson, 2019; George, 2020; Being Seen, 2022b; Raza, 2022; James, 2021; and Briggs, 2021).

Additionally, these two forms of media vary in the types and levels of stereotyping we see as a society (McPherson, 2019). Mainstream media has been cited as more harmful than social media, as it has been created by those with access to power and media owners 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 demonstrate alternate realities and perceptions of various identities, these platforms still promote negative and inaccurate stereotypes (McPherson, 2019). For example, McPherson (2019) found in her interviews with participants that social media circulated more sexually suggestive images of Black girls, while television upheld the “*baddy*” Black girl image, described as a “tough, aggressive female”.

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 on their character arc (Being Seen, 2022b). Similarly, Black women are often portrayed as “less than,” as prostitutes or side chicks, or as having experienced great trauma (McPherson, 2019). One of McPherson's (2019) participants also believed that Black girls were portrayed as unintelligent or there for comedic effect.

While examining social media accounts within the Region of Peel, microaggressions emulating the stereotype of criminality were most seen. The most frequent messaging was found in comments under posts regarding crime from the Twitter account of Peel Regional Police. For example, in posts with mugshots featuring Black men, commenters indicated their lack of surprise by writing variations of “Not surprised,” “Shocker,” and “Every day this type of mugshot” (see Appendix B15). Additionally, an Instagram user commented, “ask all Jane and Finch men that moved here” in response to a post stating, “Peel Region ranked one of the safest communities in Canada” (see Appendix B16).

In a Tweet about protestors gathering in Mississauga to speak out against anti-Black racism, a user commented, “I hope these fools don't start destroying property and killing people” (see Appendix B17). Other various Tweets described instances of a group of Black boys being called thugs in a 7-Eleven store, a man discussing that he likes living in Caledon because

“there’s no ghetto shit here, no Black people,” and a police officer referring to Black people as gangbangers (see Appendix B18). Additionally, an Instagram post stating, “Brampton couple welcomes two sets of twins in the same year,” attracted comments including, “4 new criminals born” and “4 bikes just got stolen in Brampton” (see Appendix B19). These comments were left on this post which was meant to be an uplifting and incredible story, as cited in the caption.

These media portrayals have real-life consequences as we tend to believe what we see represented to us over time. For example, a participant in Being Seen’s *Black Communities Report* (2022b) discussed her experience of people avoiding sitting beside her on the bus. She attributed this to Black people being viewed in the media as gangsters involved in violent acts or in drug activity. A Twitter user cited an identical 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 (see Appendix B20). In response, one commenter shared having the same experience, while another said, “People don’t want to get shot” (see Appendix B20). Another Facebook post included a link to a Brampton Guardian article. The article referred to the Region of Peel declaring an anti-Black racism crisis. Comments on the post stated, “Those fists look violent” (see Appendix B21) and, “Getting attacked by oppressed black people doesn’t appeal to me!!” (See Appendix B21).

## Gender Differences Within Stereotypes

There are differences in how mainstream media portrays Black girls and boys, resulting in gender-specific microaggressions and affecting how they are perceived. For Black girls, mainstream media is largely to blame for their bias and discrimination, impacting them on a social level with peers and in school with teachers and administrators (McPherson, 2019). Despite more diversity and variety in contemporary media, limited narratives and images portraying Black people continue to result in inequality in educational and social realms (McPherson, 2019). McPherson’s (2019) study and Being Seen’s (2022b) report found that common stereotypes Black girls face include the “baby momma” or being sexually promiscuous, being the “angry Black woman,” and being underachievers who are uninterested in school. Additionally, Black girls are often depicted as loud or funny and goofy, as well as uneducated and athletic, and therefore, are not seen as academically inclined (McPherson, 2019; Being Seen, 2022a; George, 2020). McPherson (2019) interviewed 14 Black girls who described Black female characters they viewed in the media as distraught, abused, with low self-esteem, engaged in fighting, working as strippers, or growing up poor in the projects.

Black boys are often stereotyped as lazy, violent, aggressive, anti-intellectual, and threats to hard-working, peaceful members of society (Briggs, 2021; Raza, 2022; York University, 2017). In the *Black Communities Report*, a participant shared how they hated

portraying Black people as rappers, athletes, and criminals in the media (Being Seen, 2022b). They were also depicted as unable to handle workplace responsibilities (Briggs, 2021). Black male youth are often labelled as “at risk,” justifying educational discipline and placing them in special education classes (Briggs, 2021; James, 2021). This “at risk” label is further supported by the above-mentioned stereotypes, as well as claims that they are immigrants, “fatherless,” and underachieving troublemakers (James, 2021). Despite this label indicating the need for educational support, guidance, and mentorship, it instead places Black male youth at risk by encouraging racial preconceptions and shaping their experiences in school and society (James, 2021).

Another predominant stereotype Black youth are subjected to is that of the athlete. This stereotype is seen throughout mainstream media (Being Seen, 2022b; Aladejebi, Allain, George, & Nzindukiyimana, 2021). The media portrays Black people as naturally gifted at sports; therefore, a one-dimensional expectation exists that they will succeed at athletic endeavours over academics (McPherson, 2019). The stereotype was also cited across the literature, with Briggs (2021) finding that Black males are labelled as being oriented toward physical activity and sports. Green (2019) states that Black students in two Toronto Catholic schools were often subjected to the “Black athlete” stereotype. One of the participants in Thomas-Reynolds’ (2020) study described being involved in music and, as a result, was separated from negative Black stereotypes. She said the Black athletes had bad reputations, despite not being bad kids or students. She found herself avoiding associating with them, wondering if it was because she was afraid or simply because she hung around instead with students in the music program (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020).

Thomas-Reynolds’ (2020) research uncovered perceptions of sports and athletic performance and their impact on GTA students’ futures. One participant in her study felt lost, knowing she was no longer going to the United States for college (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020). She described that being in athletics at a Canadian university is a vastly different experience, where you can get academic grants but not funding for being an athlete (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020). Additionally, she found that her success in sports, which occurred exclusively outside of school, meant she failed to receive the social acceptance that others gain for their in-school athletic performance (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020). She elaborated on her experience by expressing how being ‘othered’ in the education system pushes Black Canadian athletes to pursue full scholarships from American universities (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020). Thomas-Reynolds (2020) deduced that inadequate financial support from Canadian universities and the socialization of Black students to imagine their chances of success elsewhere ushes them to look outside a Canadian setting.

Additionally, teachers and administrators were found to have failed to provide support and assistance to Black youth while also demonstrating low expectations of them (James, 2021). Black youth experienced more athletic than academic support, and it was discovered that coaches provided significant positive attention to their athletes (George, 2020; James, 2021). Similarly, Thomas-Reynolds (2020) found a correlation between Black students' access to resources and their athletic contributions to an institution. Within this stereotype, gender differences were discovered. James (2021) 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).

Aladejebi et al. (2021) describe the advertising campaign 2014 of We the North, which showed mostly racially diverse young men playing basketball on outdoor courts. Although Black boys are pushed towards athleticism, stereotypes surrounding criminality and violence further alienate them (Aladejebi et al., 2021). At the same time the We the North campaign was running, a neighbourhood in the Region of Peel had basketball nets removed out of fear that they would attract violence, criminals, drugs, and disrespectful behaviour (Aladejebi et al., 2021). Those using the basketball courts, known to be racialized, were described as outsiders, claiming that the nets were attracting an “unwanted crowd” (Aladejebi et al., 2021, p. 25). Residents of the neighbourhood also stated that those playing basketball on the courts were not from their neighbourhood and that their kids “play hockey, not basketball” (Aladejebi et al., 2021, p. 25). Aladejebi et al. (2021) found that despite all the claims of the deviant behaviour these basketball nets were attracting, residents had not witnessed drug problems over the years.

## Educational Microaggressions

Black youth experience specific forms of microaggressions in the education system. The Peel District School Board (PDSB) was found to have “fostered a schooling environment that made learning tough and challenging” for Black students (Green, 2019, p. 3). Microaggressions occurred daily without teachers intervening in the PDSB (InBrampton, 2020). Cénat et al.'s (2022) study found that 60.5% of Black Canadians who participated in their study had negative experiences in educational settings because of their race.

Teachers were committing these microaggressions by acting surprised that Black male students were in their classes (Raza, 2022) or telling students that they did not believe “their group of people could do certain things” (Visentin, 2022). Teachers were also astounded when Black students received good grades or succeeded in post-secondary education, despite being discouraged to pursue higher education (Visentin, 2022). Similarly, many students within the PDSB shared their experiences of being fluent in English and excelling in their English classes yet

being pushed to take English as a Second Language (ESL) classes (Raza, 2022). One student said that because she was an immigrant with an accent, she was told, “No, she can’t speak; she has to go into ESL” (Raza, 2022). Another student who attended school in the GTA explained feeling confused when she was an exceptional reader, yet her teacher would place her in very low reading groups (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020). Similarly, Black students were more likely than their white peers to be academically streamed into work-related courses, suspended or expelled, and drop out of school without graduating (Green, 2019; Briggs, 2021; Briggs, 2018; Williams et al., 2022; Lettman, 2020). Additionally, Lettman (2020) and McPherson (2022) found that students and teachers judged Black students based on their appearance and clothing. Overall, racial discrimination has resulted in negative outcomes for Black students, including poor academic performance, increased stress, and low college persistence (Houshmand, 2017).

Although these barriers are systemic, microaggressions expressed by teachers and other administrators discourage Black youth from pursuing higher education (Briggs, 2021; Visentin, 2022; McPherson, 2019; Cénat et al., 2022; Chadha et al., 2020). This could be partially explained by mainstream media casting white people while excluding people of colour in storylines about higher education (Houshmand, 2017). Stereotypes in mainstream media are connected to inequities in educational practices, resulting in a lack of educational success for school-aged youth (McPherson, 2019). Teachers’ attitudes towards Black youth demonstrate apathy, low expectations, and surprise at good academic performance (Briggs, 2021; McPherson, 2019). These microaggressions affect Black youth and the unique challenges faced by Black males and females.

McPherson (2019) found that teachers struggled to see Black girls as multidimensional due to the lack of positive, complex representations in the media. Despite these stereotypes, many Black students desired higher education and careers apart from being entertainers or athletes, pursuing athletics, such as working in a retail sports store or other precarious work (Briggs, 2021). Another challenge Briggs (2019) found was that Black males were discouraged from pursuing higher education, while some considered higher learning to be feminine or a whitewashing process, which would leave them with a non-authentic Black identity due to internalizing microaggressions in school. When Black males expressed interest in non-stereotypical Black pathways, non-Black teachers and peers showed cynicism and humour regarding their chances of success (Briggs, 2021). The stereotypes constructing Black males as lazy, anti-intellectual, and violent are shown in dominant media images that create negative perceptions of Black male identity (Briggs, 2021). The anti-intellectual stereotype is the most detrimental in the education system, as it directly correlates with academic streaming (Briggs, 2021).

Despite the significant challenges Black males face in school, Black female students receive far fewer resources and attention (George, 2020). In fact, there was a consensus view that teachers were indifferent to the positive development and well-being of Black girls (McPherson, 2019). Similarly, teachers showed no concern or attention toward them, assuming they had no interest in school (McPherson, 2019). 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, therefore punishing Black girls who were not even exhibiting these behaviours (McPherson, 2019). For example, Thomas-Reynolds (2020) found that Black girls experienced teachers getting upset with them and sending them to the office over minor instances, such as whispering to each other, despite girls of other races doing the same. This resulted in suspensions and happened as early as Grade 4 (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020). The Black girls in her study described altering their personalities to become quieter and more obedient after these experiences (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020).

Additionally, the notion of criminality in the education system was raised throughout the literature. McPherson (2022) found that teachers' perceptions of Black students as violent or as criminals or drug dealers led them to assume the worst. These sentiments were shared by other administrators and students (McPherson, 2022). One participant in McPherson's (2022) study cited that teachers' expectations of how Black students should act resulted in teachers intentionally triggering students to elicit a reaction. She also said that teachers sometimes followed Black students when they tried to walk away from the situation (McPherson, 2022). Participants in the *Black Experience Project* shared that they thought the most common beliefs non-Black people had about Black people were that they were involved in crime, violence, gangs, or drugs and that they were uneducated and unintelligent (York University, 2017). Participants in Cénat et al.'s (2022) study cited being treated as potential criminals because of their racial or ethnic background.

Social media users supported the claims in the academic literature and reported on the PDSB. A Facebook user, Ayesha Ansari, collected a series of stories from Instagram in response to a post about microaggressions the Instagram user faced in Clarkson. She re-shared these stories on Facebook. They highlighted the racism experienced at Port Credit Secondary School. In the stories from Instagram, two users described not feeling comfortable enough to eat in the cafeteria as a person of colour because of the “unwelcoming environment” (see Appendix B22). Another Instagram user still attending Port Credit Secondary School described an instance where a Grade 10 English teacher favoured anyone over boys of colour (see Appendix B22). They explained that the teacher used a biased marking scheme and would falsely accuse the boys of colour of plagiarism, resulting in a failing or barely passing mark (see Appendix B22). Another Facebook user, Pernia Jamshed, created her own post in response, sharing her



experiences about her time there. She said she encountered daily microaggressions and snide comments (see Appendix B22). She also described living with fear instilled by the Vice-Principal's treatment of her (see Appendix B22).

Also, on Facebook, a user responded to a news article about eliminating anti-Black racism in Brampton and Mississauga schools, stating, "As someone who went to high school in Peel Region, none of this is new" (see Appendix B23). The post links to a Brampton Guardian article that describes Kathy McDonald, a PDSB trustee's experience having children in the PDSB. McDonald recalled when a teacher at Agnes Taylor Public School told her not to bother inquiring about programs for bright students because her son would never go to university (Marychuk, 2020). McDonald also explained that when her son was in Grade 9, he earned a perfect score on the University of Waterloo math test, yet his teacher did not tell him the results, and he did not get to have his picture taken with the other award winners (Marychuk, 2020). She also heard PDSB staff refer to Black children as "dumb, lazy and savages" (Marychuk, 2020).

A Twitter user responded to a photo of a white family in a car, smiling and looking back in their seats at a camera. The user said, "I'm dying because this is how the white and Indian people in Brampton behaved when Rap music came on when Black people showed up in textbooks (usually followed by a "is that your cousin?" remark) and when it was Black History Month at school (see Appendix B24). An Instagram user left a comment saying, "Lmao, I'll never forget when this guy was our substitute for the gym one day and looked at our predominantly black class and said, "wow, this is a dark room" in response to a post about a Brampton teacher (Nk, 2022). Additionally, the Facebook account for the radio station *Flow 98.7* posted a news story about a supply teacher in the PDSB being investigated after posting an alleged racist photo of a student on social media (Flow 98.7, 2018; Paradkar, 2018; Appendix B25). The post was uploaded to Instagram, with two photos, 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 a picture of a Black student (Flow 98.7, 2018; Paradkar, 2018; Appendix B25). The caption said, "Who rocked it better? LOLLOL", referring to their hair (Flow 98.7, 2018; Paradkar, 2018; Appendix B25).

### **Public and Social Microaggressions**

In the Region of Peel, Anucha et al.'s (2017) study found that microaggressions shaped the daily experiences of Black youth in Ontario. Participants reported being labelled immediately, even when successful. For example, one participant stated that Black people in Mississauga were asked where they got their nice cars. Another Mississauga participant described how Black people were represented in the media in response to the lack of recognition of Black excellence (Anucha et al., 2017). In the GTA, four out of five participants

reported commonly experiencing microaggressions (York University, 2017). These included others expecting their work to be inferior, being treated in a condescending manner, and frequently experiencing others reacting to them in a fearful or intimidating way because of their race (York University, 2017).

Cénat et al.'s (2022) study found that the most common microaggressions experienced by participants were as follows. 61.5% were subjected to unfair job hiring practices, 56.7% were dismissed from their jobs, 55.5% described negative experiences by the police, and 53.1% experienced negative treatment in health services (Cénat et al., 2022). 47.5% of the participants also reported being unfairly treated because of their skin colour in housing, and 46.3% said the same when being considered for bank loans (Cénat et al., 2022). Additionally, female participants reported experiencing more racial discrimination than male participants (Cénat et al., 2022).

Symonds (2017) found that two specific microaggressions were commonly experienced by some of the participants in her study: being asked where they came from and having people ask if they could touch their hair. Regarding being asked where they came from, one participant described these conversations as frustrating, expressing that white people came on boats like everyone else. Yet, they do not face the same questions (Symonds, 2017). The participant also described this line of questioning as emphasizing the 'where' she came from, "like they're waiting for me to say Africa!" (Symonds, 2017, p. 20). The participants described the 'touching hair' microaggression as rude and inappropriate, stating they have had this happen to them in public, the workplace, and social settings (Symonds, 2017). One participant also said white females were likelier to commit this microaggression (Symonds, 2017). She also shared that she did not believe it was out of hatred, but ignorance, which made her feel like she was different, not part of the group, and exoticized (Symonds, 2017).

Additionally, Paradkar's (2018) article reported on a short film out of Toronto called PICK, which aimed to straighten out misconceptions about Black women's hair. Black women are constantly judged for their hair being too "poofy, unkempt, nappy, matted" (Paradkar, 2018). The film depicts a young Black girl who faces racist comments and microaggressions from her teachers. Then, the story shifts to picture day, where she decides whether to wear her Afro, which she wants, yet everyone pressures her to tie her hair back instead (Paradkar, 2018). The two sisters who created the film are Black, and the film was based on one of the sister's experiences growing up with a natural Afro (Paradkar, 2018). One of the sisters explained that negative comments and strangers trying to touch her hair resulted in her chemically straightening her hair for 12 years, starting at age 11 (Paradkar, 2018).

On Twitter, Black users shared their experiences of being in public and having racial microaggressions targeted at them. Black people cited facing microaggressions while trying to rent properties in the Region of Peel. One Twitter user described her experience, explaining that she is 29 years old, with great credit history, salary, and references, but struggled to find a place to rent as she was told that “they weren’t sure I was responsible enough” (see Appendix B26). Additionally, Wittnebel’s (2021) article on Peel police not prioritizing Black voices provided an example of microaggressions that Black youth face outside the education system. Former chief of police, Jennifer Evans, stated that the Black youth who attended meetings about racial profiling only showed up because they were offered free pizza, demonstrating her distrust and disrespect for Black youth (Wittnebel, 2021). Other examples of microaggressions occurred in the workplace. For example, employees at a restaurant in Brampton were talking about a Black male who died by falling off a roller coaster in a group chat (see Appendix B27). Ignorant jokes quickly turned into racial microaggressions, with one person writing, “watermelon flavoured” (see Appendix B27). Overall, racial microaggressions in the Region of Peel are displayed overtly towards Black people and in private settings, such as group chats.

### **Mental Health Impacts of Microaggressions**

Microaggressions have been proven to have minor to severe mental health impacts on Black youth in the Region of Peel. These range from emotional issues to mental health conditions and disorders. Researchers have also discovered the phenomenon of Racial Battle Fatigue, which is found in individuals who experience perpetual microaggressions (Williams et al., 2022). The persisting stigma around mental health and the lack of access to services within the Region of Peel exacerbate these issues.

### **Impacts on Mental Health**

The same emotional impacts were found across the literature as a result of experiencing persistent microaggressions. They include feelings of isolation, hopelessness, powerlessness, inferiority, a lack of motivation, low self-esteem and confidence, anger, and stress (York University, 2017; McPherson, 2019; Houshmand, 2017; Briggs, 2021; Briggs, 2019; Briggs, 2018; Sanni-Anibire, 2022). In addition, limiting beliefs (Visentin, 2022) and developing resilience out of necessity were found (Sanni-Anibire, 2022; Houshmand, 2017; York University, 2017; McPherson, 2019). These have also been linked to developing more severe mental health conditions and disorders, including depression, anxiety, PTSD, as well as suicidal ideation (Williams et al., 2022; Sanni-Anibire, 2022; Houshmand, 2017; Cénat et al., 2022; Briggs, 2021; Briggs, 2018; McPherson, 2019; George, 2020).

McPherson (2019) reported that no matter how seemingly insignificant a microaggression is, they “evoke powerful emotional reactions and increased perceived stress”

(p. 101). Stress due to experiencing microaggressions and stereotypes was one of the most cited mental health effects across the literature (McPherson, 2019; Briggs, 2021; Briggs, 2018; Briggs, 2019; Williams et al., 2022; Houshmand, 2017; Sanni-Anibire, 2022). Black female students experienced stress as they struggled to define themselves under pressure and exposure to negative stereotypes (McPherson, 2019). In general, Black students working twice as hard academically while rejecting negative stereotypes of Africans created more stress, despite their resilience (Sanno-Anibire, 2022). Additionally, Black youth seeking stable employment and experiencing a lack of income security resulted in extreme stress and anxiety (Briggs, 2018; Briggs, 2019). Briggs (2019) also found that Black males in precarious employment experienced further stress, marginalization, and social exclusion.

Anucha et al. (2017) state that Black youth in Ontario experience disempowerment, isolation, internalized racism, and poor self-esteem from experiencing daily microaggressions and stereotypes. Popular sentiments that racism does not exist result in feelings of self-doubt, frustration, and isolation from facing subtle racial bias (Houshmand, 2017). McPherson (2017) found that schools could isolate Black girls, causing them to experience feelings of marginalization and “otherness.” Additionally, Black girls felt isolated more than Black boys due to the intersections of race and gender (McPherson, 2019). The lack of culturally relevant instructional materials and misrepresentations contributed to girls' sense of isolation (McPherson, 2019). Isolation contributes to Black girls' disengagement in schools and is exacerbated by being in predominantly white spaces, furthering feelings of loss (McPherson, 2019). Briggs (2018) and Briggs (2019) found that isolation for Black male youth was felt in school and followed them into the workforce. 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).

Black youth also experience low self-esteem, confidence, and self-worth, in addition to outright self-hatred due to microaggressions and stereotyping (Williams et al., 2022; Houshmand, 2017; Anucha et al., 2017; Briggs, 2018; Briggs, 2019; McPherson, 2019; Lettman, 2020; George, 2020; York University, 2017). Notably, not all York University (2017) *Black Experience Project* participants experienced a loss of self-esteem caused by racist experiences. Some experienced a loss of self-esteem or increased self-doubt, while others claimed these experiences made them stronger or increased their desire to succeed or create change (York University, 2017). Those bothered by these experiences felt the need to downplay their Black identity, especially at work or in public places (York University, 2017). Additionally, explicit racism was associated with lower depressive affect, externalizing symptoms, and anger (Williams et al., 2022). Yet, subtle racism was linked to internalizing symptoms and higher depressive affect (Williams et al., 2022). This was discovered in Williams et al.'s (2022) survey

study, where 67.5% of the participants were female, 80.4% were Canadian citizens, and 7.6% were landed immigrants, ranging in age from 16 to 65 years (Williams et al., 2022).

The literature detailed other mental health issues accompanying this loss of self, stress, and isolation. Racism-related distress was tied to exhaustion, sleep dysregulation, anger, a lowered sense of safety, frustration, and feeling violated (Williams et al., 2022; Briggs, 2021; Capurri, 2021; Houshmand, 2017). These emotional and mental health impacts caused Black youth to develop more severe mental health conditions and disorders, especially among male youth (Sanni-Anibire, 2022; Briggs, 2018). Further, a study examining the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms in Black Canadians aged 15 to 40 found that those who experienced mid and very high levels of racial microaggressions and everyday discrimination reported greater PTSD symptoms (Cénat, Dalexis, Darius, Kogan, & Guerrier, 2022). Additionally, this study also concluded that participants born in Canada were more likely to experience significant PTSD symptoms compared to those who immigrated to Canada (Cénat et al., 2022).

An Instagram user described attending Port Credit school as “the root and catalyst” for their friend’s mental illness (see Appendix B28). They said their friend’s experiences in that school contributed to their anxiety and stress disorder (see Appendix B28). 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 (see Appendix B28).

Additionally, many authors used racial battle fatigue as “a syndrome marked by anxiety, worrying, hypervigilance, intrusive thoughts, and difficulty thinking clearly” (Williams et al., 2022). Houshmand (2017) added that those who experience racial battle fatigue also have feelings of shock, anger, disappointment, helplessness, hopelessness, and fear. Briggs (2021) specifically discusses racial battle fatigue in the context of Black males transitioning from school to the workforce. As they experience continuous microaggressions and jobs with low pay, minimal benefits, no pensions, and limited job security, they feel exhausted, frustrated, stressed, and anxious (Briggs, 2021). Briggs (2021) also discussed active battle fatigue, which describes micro and macroaggressions that people of colour are conscious of. He says Black people 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 oppression constantly.

### **Accessing Mental Health Services**

Given the vast amount of mental health impacts that Black youth in the Region of Peel face, it is important that they have access to adequate mental health services. Despite this

necessity, the literature raised two significant issues that prevent Black youth from receiving the help they need. There is a stigma around mental health and a lack of access to mental health services within the Region of Peel (Peel Region, 2021). These issues worsen the impacts of experiencing racial discrimination on a continuous basis (Anucha et al., 2017).

### **Mental Health Stigma and the Lack of Access to Services**

Unfortunately, the Black community still has a stigma around mental health (Peel Region, 2021). People from racialized communities face more considerable cultural stigmas for having mental health difficulties, let alone diagnosable mental disorders (Williams et al., 2022). Many consider it taboo to converse about mental health issues with others outside of their community, and not having many health professionals of colour is a significant barrier to seeking mental health 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). One individual was quoted as saying 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).

Anucha et al. (2017) say that the Black community acknowledging mental illness is not enough and that positive support is necessary to help youth cope with mental illness. Black youth are often left to deal with their mental illness alone out of fear of being judged and penalized by their own community (Anucha et al., 2017). Another barrier youth experience in seeking professional help is the criminalization of mental health by various organizations within the community (Anucha et al., 2017). These issues worsen the impacts of experiencing racial discrimination.

### **Physical Health Impacts of Microaggressions**

There is a direct correlation between the mental health impacts cited above and the physical health impacts Black youth experience due to being subjected to continuous microaggressions (Williams et al., 2022; Briggs, 2018). Williams et al. (2022) found that one participant experienced hypertension because of suppressed anger, while another said racism contributed to her over-eating. General experiences of racial discrimination are associated with high blood pressure, cardiovascular diseases, chronic pain, and a 1.6 times higher mortality rate for Black people compared to white populations (Williams et al., 2022; Houshmand, 2017; Cénat et al., 2022; Briggs, 2018). Sleep dysregulation and exhaustion were other common physiological effects of experiencing microaggressions (Williams et al., 2022).

## Educational Impacts of Microaggressions

Microaggressions in the PDSB result in negative outcomes that significantly affect the futures of Black youth and their ability to succeed (Peel District School Board, 2022; Raza, 2022; InBrampton, 2020; Newport, 2020). Students, parents, the PDSB Reviewers, and the Minister of Education, Stephen Lecce, have all concluded similar findings. Across the PDSB, Black students have been subjected to academic streaming, overrepresentations in suspensions and expulsions, harsh disciplinary measures, dealing with guidance counsellors and teachers who expressed low expectations of them and pushed them toward precarious work, police involvement over trivial matters, and children leaving the PDSB as it was not safe for them (Chadha et al., 2020; Newport, 2020; Raza, 2022; InBrampton, 2020).

Streaming is grouping students into classes based on their perceived ability and/or potential (McPherson, 2019). The Ontario Human Rights Commission, examining the 2019 Review of the Peel District School Board, found that Black students were disproportionately streamed into applied and locally developed classes (Ontario Human Rights Commission, n.d.), as opposed to university streams (Briggs, 2019). Data from the Ministry of Education's 2018-2019 school year review found that only 10.1% of Grade 9 and 10 students were Black. Yet only 7.7% and 21.7% of Black students were enrolled in academic and applied courses, respectively (Raza, 2022). Conversely, 25.4% of Black students were in locally developed courses (Raza, 2022). Anucha et al. (2017) suggest that streaming limits the ability of Black youth to aim for meaningful career choices, resulting in precarious jobs with minimal security, benefits, and stability. Supporting this, York University (2017) found that streaming Black students into non-academic programs limit future educational opportunities and career advancement.

Similar to the effects of streaming, teachers and guidance counsellors have a significant impact on Black youth achieving their future goals. Students within the PDSB cited that their teachers and guidance counsellors did not ask them about their future goals when considering their course options (Chadha et al., 2020). One Black student shared their experience of having an A average yet being forced to wait weeks for an appointment with the guidance counsellor just to have a five-minute meeting where they were encouraged to take non-academic courses (Chadha et al., 2020). A former student in the PDSB expressed regret over taking teachers' advice to take applied courses and enroll in a vocational program, despite having high marks (Chadha et al., 2020). They expressed that this advice resulted in having limited college program choices and being excluded from university options (Chadha et al., 2020; Lettman, 2020). Overall, the literature shows that academic disengagement limits the occupational opportunities of Black youth (Briggs, 2018; McPherson, 2019). Students experiencing abandonment by staff who are supposed to help them realize their full potential can result in believing that their only choices for finding success are as musicians or rap artists or in precarious work (Briggs, 2018).

Another significant issue in the PDSB is that Black students are disproportionately represented in suspensions and expulsions (Chadha et al., 2020; George, 2020). Raza (2022) referenced the Ministry's report on the PDSB, based on the review launched by Lecce, finding that Black students accounted for 22% of suspensions yet made up 10% of the student population. In other words, Black students were approximately two-and-a-half times likelier to be suspended than white students (Feinstein, 2022). The report also found that Black children in junior and senior kindergarten faced suspensions (InBrampton, 2020; Chadha et al., 2020). Teachers in the PDSB were suspending Black students for wearing hoodies, hoop earrings, and durags (Chadha et al., 2020). The long-term consequence of suspension is that students fall behind academically (Lettman, 2020). Further, expulsions from school have been linked to youth experiencing homelessness (Lettman, 2020). Additionally, a PDSB report from September 2021 discovered that Black students were two to five times more likely than the average Peel student to not graduate after five years (Feinstein, 2022).

Chadha et al. (2020) and George (2020) found that Black students experience disproportionately more discipline, which is also harsher and not progressive. Findings showed that disciplinary measures were used to exclude children from the classrooms, with one vice-principal noting that children spend days staring at a white wall, not learning, and parents were not informed of this (Chadha et al., 2020). A participant in McPherson's (2022) study had an incident with a teacher being rude to her in front of the class and refusing to acknowledge it. The girl explained that the teacher's actions hurt and embarrassed her, to which the teacher responded by threatening to call her mom and the principal to have a meeting (McPherson, 2022). Other participants in McPherson's (2022) study also shared their experiences. One girl explained that her white peers were allowed to submit schoolwork past the deadline, yet Black students were provided excuses as to why they were not allowed to do the same (McPherson, 2022). Another participant explained that one of her teachers constantly called her out "for no reason" (McPherson, 2022, p. 15). The consequences of teachers taunting Black students and forcing them to act stereotypically to justify disciplinary actions destroy Black students' trust in the education system (McPherson, 2022). This results in further tensions, diminishing the quality of education Black students receive (McPherson, 2022).

Further, some teachers are unaware of or choose to ignore the various challenges Black students encounter in their personal lives and at home (Lettman, 2020). These difficulties may impact students' punctuality, attendance, and/or academic performance, but teachers nevertheless penalize students without considering the reasons for their behaviour (Lettman, 2020). For example, a former student in the GTA described her experience after her dad got into a really bad accident that significantly impacted her (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020). She explained how none of the teachers inquired about how she was doing, despite how obviously she was struggling (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020). She felt they viewed her as just another Black



student who did not want to be there, who wanted to skip school, and who was just another statistic (Thomas-Reynold, 2020).

### **Economic and Social Impacts of Microaggressions**

While microaggressions are not directly associated with negative social and economic impacts in the lives of Black youth, microaggressions in the education system result in Black youth making or being forced into choices that limit their options regarding their futures. Black males face more economic disadvantages from working in precarious jobs. It is more likely that they pay for their own job training compared to those with permanent positions; they are less likely to have employment benefits or pension plans; and 85% are required to report their work hours on a weekly or monthly basis (Briggs, 2021). Social challenges also arise out of economic struggles. For example, 40% of workers employed in precarious jobs experience employment anxiety which interferes with their personal and family lives (Briggs, 2021). Additionally, unstable employment and unlivable income result in uncertainty and exclusion from resources, family activities, and access to social services (Briggs, 2018; Briggs, 2021). Black youth face further challenges, including poor housing and inadequate social networks (Briggs, 2021).

While microaggressions can be the starting point for eventually experiencing economic and social challenges, further microaggressions can be experienced because of these challenges. For example, those with inadequate incomes experienced microaggressions in the form of being ignored, overlooked, or not provided service in a store or restaurant, being treated rudely or disrespectfully, having accusations hurled at them, and being observed or followed in public spaces (York University, 2017). Additionally, those struggling financially often report that the Black people close to them, including family and friends, have been significantly affected because of their race (York University, 2017).

### **Overall Life Satisfaction and Subjective Well-being**

Well-being is defined by Black youth in the Region of Peel as experiencing emotional, mental, and financial safety; not feeling judged; having support and self-confidence; thriving; having basic needs met; having access to culturally appropriate tools and resources; and being seen as an individual (Peel Region, 2021). York University's (2017) study of 1,504 Black participants in the GTA, including the Region of Peel, found a strong relationship between being bothered by experiences of anti-Black racism and life satisfaction, health, mental health, and stress. Briggs (2021) claims that Black individuals' well-being is impacted by facing conscious and unconscious micro and macro-aggressions.

Cénat et al. (2022) found that racial discrimination predicted low life satisfaction and low self-esteem, with persistent discrimination a predictor of poor physical and mental health. Similarly, Peel Region (2021) found a strong correlation between the consequence and the

impact of racism on mental well-being. Additionally, participants with day-to-day experiences with discrimination often expressed having medium life satisfaction, followed by high and low life satisfaction (York University, 2017). Williams et al. (2022) found that although socioeconomic and political conditions are the most important factors in determining Black people's well-being, stigmas contribute to their lack of accessibility.

Racialized students who experience racism daily display negative impacts on their well-being and academic success (Visentin, 2022). Black males' well-being and quality of life are negatively impacted by economic disadvantages caused by being forced into precarious work (Briggs, 2021; Briggs, 2018). A significant limitation in the existing literature is that most research on well-being and the education of Black youth in Ontario has focused on Black boys (McPherson, 2019). Yet, Black girls' experiences in the education system directly impact their overall development and well-being (McPherson, 2019). Research needs to be conducted specifically on Black girls' well-being and participation in society as they tend to face additional challenges in the education system (McPherson, 2019). Further, teachers and school administrators reacting as if Black students are aggressive and placing the blame on Black girls impact their academic success and well-being (McPherson, 2019). Teachers were also found to have little interest in the positive development and well-being of Black girls by directing microaggressions and differential treatment toward them (McPherson, 2019).

## **Coping Mechanisms**

The literature found negative and positive coping mechanisms Black youth utilize in response to daily microaggressions. Overall, more positive than negative coping mechanisms were reported. The theme of belonging is repeatedly cited throughout the various coping mechanisms Black youth employed (Peel Region, 2021; York University, 2017; Sanni-Anibire, 2022; Briggs, 2019).

## **Negative Coping Mechanisms**

In response to experiencing perpetual racial microaggressions, Black youth sometimes develop negative coping mechanisms. These include disordered eating and drinking heavily (George, 2020; Williams et al., 2022; Houshmand, 2017). Houshmand (2017) also found that Black people who used emotion-focused responses to cope with negative feelings resulting from racism were likely to suffer from higher blood pressure, lower self-esteem, and lower life satisfaction. Emotion-focused strategies are passive tactics to regulate emotional distress (Houshmand, 2017). These include avoiding, detaching, denying the situation or turning to religion (Houshmand, 2017). Overall, Black people were less likely to use emotion-focused responses when dealing with racism (Houshmand, 2017).

Briggs (2018) found that some young Black men are at risk of engaging in forms of anti-social and criminal behaviour that threaten their well-being. These young Black men's dreams are often based on a desire to gain respect, which they develop through associating respect and success with athletes and entertainers (Briggs, 2018). As they struggle to find full-time jobs that pay well, they can turn to alternative forms of making money, resulting in a self-destructive lifestyle (Briggs, 2018).

### Positive Coping Mechanisms

There were significantly more positive than negative coping mechanisms utilized by Black youth throughout the literature. Houshmand's (2017) thesis provided substantial material for this section, as she extensively wrote about coping with racial microaggressions. She identified different forms of coping: collective, resistant, protective, and spiritual (Houshmand, 2017). She also identified problem-focused strategies, most often utilized by Black individuals experiencing racism, which have been linked to better psychological outcomes (Houshmand, 2017).

Collective coping was the most popular and consisted of group-centred strategies and reliance on support networks, including family members, allies, friends, and partners (Houshmand, 2017). For example, Black students formed study halls and peer groups in response to improper racial stereotypes of African American people (Houshmand, 2017). Resistant coping includes direct and indirect behavioural strategies that challenge perpetrators and dominant ideologies (Houshmand, 2017). An example is Black women wearing their natural hair as a form of resistance (Houshmand, 2017). Houshmand (2017) described protective coping as acts that safeguard an individual from the negative effects of racial microaggressions. Examples include focusing on work, eating, or sleeping to detach and distance themselves from microaggressions (Houshmand, 2017). Finally, spiritual coping uses prayer, meditation, and other rituals to direct tensions linked with racial microaggressions toward a Higher Purpose (Houshmand, 2017).

Houshmand (2017) also recognized seven themes under resilient responses to racial microaggressions. They included calling out perpetrators; seeking out others for advocacy, resources, and emotional support; choosing a positive outlook, including cognitive reframing and spirituality; empowering themselves and others; choosing not to engage; utilizing humour; and taking care of themselves through creative expression and comforting activities (Houshmand, 2017).

Social media was also a positive coping tool for racial microaggressions (McPherson, 2019). Despite the racial microaggressions on social media, Black youths found that social media allowed users to filter the type of media they accessed on sites like Instagram, Twitter,

and YouTube (McPherson, 2019). Therefore, Black youth could view media without seeing negative representations of themselves, thus maintaining their self-esteem (McPherson, 2019). McPherson (2019) also found that social media has been used to generate narratives and images that empower and enlighten Black girls. For example, Akeelah's Room was created by the Engaging Girls Empowerment Leadership Development Action (EGELDA) program to promote creating media content and safer spaces for Black girls in the GTA (McPherson, 2019). It utilizes social media platforms, including Instagram and YouTube, to engage Black girls in discussing topics that impact their lives (McPherson, 2019). These spaces allow Black girls to resist the negative narratives and representations they see of themselves (McPherson, 2019). Social media also differs from mainstream media as it allows viewers to counter what they see, whereas mainstream media producers produce content without the opportunity to provide feedback (McPherson, 2019).

A sense of belonging and community also counteracts the negative effects of racism and increases well-being (Peel Region, 2021). A participant in the *Black Experience Project* found that surrounding herself with other Black girls helped her self-esteem, as they understood her experiences with racial microaggressions (York University, 2017). She said she became less passive and more confident (York University, 2017). Similarly, Sanni-Anibire (2022) found that play, friendships, parental involvement, and positive attitudes of educators helped foster integration and belonging for Nigerian immigrant children. Like collective coping and seeking out others for emotional support, Symonds (2017) identified self-preservation methods her Black female participants used to cope with racist encounters. Their methods included talking and venting, building community and engaging in culture, looking to positive examples, or choosing what thoughts would occupy their minds (Symonds, 2017).

Briggs (2019) wrote about a sense of belonging that Caribbean Black Male Youth (CBMY) in Toronto fostered for themselves out of necessity. CBMYs were forced to rely on their peers for encouragement and direction while looking for stable employment (Briggs, 2019). Negative perceptions of higher education, microaggressions in school impacting their employment trajectories, and insufficient structural, educational, and social support push them toward obtaining support within their peer groups (Briggs, 2019). Briggs (2019) found that some CBMYs discuss future employment goals but do not have tangible plans or guidance on achieving them. Others enjoy the company of their peers, which may not contribute to stable employment, yet they find enjoyment in their lives and in friendships (Briggs, 2019). Additionally, these friend groups enabled Black youth to exchange ideas and frustrations and be vulnerable with each other within the labour market (Briggs, 2019).

Cultural identity protects against anti-Black racism and is defined as "the identity or feeling of belonging to a group (Anucha et al., 2017). It is symbolic of a person's self-conception

and self-perception and is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality, or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture” (Anucha et al., 2017, p. 5). Conversely, Williams et al. (2022) found that many second-generation immigrants could potentially be at risk for discrimination because their cultural identity was an important part of their being Canadian. Houshmand (2017) also found that certain participants avoided discussing activities pertaining to their cultural identity to prevent being stereotyped and discriminated against.

### **The Black Community’s Perceptions of Other Races and Ethnicities**

This literature review section explores the Black community’s views towards other races and ethnicities within the Region of Peel. The academic literature reported narrow findings on this topic, and the social media posts found recurring themes. Conversations about people in Brampton were found on social media, and the literature demonstrated how the Black community views Asian people. It was difficult to understand how the Black community in the Region of Peel perceives other races and ethnicities due to the limited research and available social media examples.

However, Black Facebook and Twitter users made claims about Brampton being “overpopulated by Indians” and referring to Brampton as “Browntown,” “Singhtown,” or “Bramladesh” (see Appendix B29). Other social media users said that Indian people were “the most racist” and that they “hate Black people” (see Appendix B30). One Facebook user wrote a long post about how he never judges people on their “race, class, ethnic background, religion, or creed.” Yet, he was now concerned about people’s ethnicity as “Indians are swarming my community. They have taken over Brampton” (see Appendix B31). He referred to Indian real estate brokers as “very aggressive” and claimed that “every house in Brampton is for sale by an Indian” (see Appendix B31). He also raised concerns about “turban-wearing men” being in the Federal Cabinet as well as the “sensitive post of Minister of Defence” (see Appendix B31). Another common theme expressed by Black social media users was that people living in Brampton “refused to use deodorant or take showers,” as well as references to Brampton “smelling like curry and struggle” (see Appendix B32).

In 2020, Thomas-Reynolds hosted a series of interviews with seven Black university graduates who studied in the GTA during their academic careers (2020). Her study focused on the educational experiences of these graduates, and through these interviews, the stereotype of Asian people as the “model minority” came up (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020). One of her participants described their high school experience as positive, feeling the need to perform better as the students at her school were predominantly Asian (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020). She further stated that she felt she was falling behind because the student body was so high achieving and that if

she had gone to a school with more Black students or a variety of students, she might not have felt that way (Thomas-Reynolds, 2020).

## Recommendations

Racial microaggressions have no place in the Region of Peel. Therefore, we recommend that swift action be taken. As of September 2022, only five of the Ministry of Education's 27 directives, with more than 54 actions to dismantle systemic racism on the board, have been carried out (Feinstein, 2022). Implementing training and changes to the curriculum would be the most effective place to start. As the PDSB accepts the responsibility to prevent racism and racial microaggressions, we recommend immediately implementing staff training, beginning with senior leadership (Peel District School Board, 2022). The PDSB Anti-Racism Policy states that anti-racism training and resources will be provided with supplementary training when additional resources are requested and/or when the Board's race-based data analysis highlights shortcomings in anti-racist policy understanding and implementation (Peel District School Board, 2022). We recommend that this training be ongoing and fully comprehensive to ensure that PDSB staff constantly learn and improve and that we do not rely on them to initiate more training.

Further, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion/Inclusivity (EDI) training, specifically experiential and anti-racism training, is recommended (Sarr, Knight, Strauss, Ouimet, Cénat, Williams, & Shaughnessy, 2022). Experiential training is learning from experience, using a four-stage approach to all teachings (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). It begins with having a concrete experience; reflecting and observing; conceptualizing; and finally, partaking in active experimentation (Kolb & Kolb, 2017). Sarr et al. (2022) found that experiential training to increase interracial connectedness by decreasing microaggressions led to fewer microaggressions committed by white students, the increased ethnic identity of Black students, and increased positive feelings towards Black students by white students.

We agree with the policy's recommendation to provide Human Rights training and education to all Board members (Peel District School Board, 2022). We believe that a board that is adequately trained and reflects the demographic of students within the PDSB will be able to provide culturally and racially accurate training and know how to deal with transgressions by the PDSB staff, should that occur (Peel District School Board, 2022).

Making immediate changes to the curriculum to incorporate material that demonstrates and promotes Black excellence is recommended. We suggest shifting the curriculum from focusing on Black pain and American Black figures to highlighting the Black experience and Canadian figures (McPherson, 2022; CBC News Kids, 2022; Francis & Ngabo, 2020). This will prevent Black students from feeling unwelcome and as though their voice only matters when

school activities focus on Black pain (McPherson, 2022). We recommend using the course “A History of Black People in Canada,” which was implemented in September 2022 at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Secondary School in Mississauga, as a reference when building new courses into the curriculum (CBC News Kids, 2022). As Black students developed this course, it reflected their educational wants and needs. Further, we recommend that similar courses are implemented in all schools throughout the Region of Peel, are mandatory to take, and are taught by Black teachers. Additionally, incorporating material that directly addresses microaggressions and demonstrates their impact is recommended. The short film PICK, which focuses on microaggressions around Black hair, was suggested by its creators to be put online, played in schools, and have a program developed around it (Paradkar, 2018). Viewing this film is an accessible and engaging way to teach youth about the microaggressions their Black peers may experience regarding their hair and how to best prevent this from happening through education and discussions.

Our next recommendation is to hire staff that reflect the demographics of the student population. In 2020, the ministry reported that 70% of the PDSB’s staff were white, while only 16% of the board’s students were white, with no publicly available data updates since this finding was published (Feinstein, 2022). Throughout the literature, Black students expressed wanting more Black teachers and feeling excluded with low self-esteem when they do not see themselves represented in their teachers (York University, 2017; Briggs, 2018; Chadha et al., 2020). Black teachers make Black students feel supported and help manage issues related to race and racism in schools (York University, 2017; James, 2021). Black students stated that having Black role models or examples would have made achieving post-secondary educational goals easier (York University, 2017). The benefit of having more Black teachers is an inherent understanding of the Black experience without the need for training, thus immediately reducing the concern surrounding students experiencing racial microaggressions in schools (Chadha et al., 2020). In addition, having a diverse faculty of BIPOC members fosters creativity in solutions and dismantles groupthink (Sarr et al., 2022). Further benefits include higher GPAs, retention of BIPOC students, and a reduction in the achievement gap between white and BIPOC students (Sarr et al., 2022).

Similarly, hiring more Black guidance counsellors, particularly male guidance counsellors, is recommended (Chadha et al., 2020). For years, Black students have complained about white guidance counsellors not showing care or asking questions about their future interests and goals (Chadha et al., 2020). Additionally, the biases that white guidance counsellors hold directly lead to academic streaming, thus limiting the choices of Black students relating to post-secondary education and future career prospects (Briggs, 2021; Chadha et al., 2020). Further, the importance of guidance counsellors who reflect the student population and demonstrate care is evident when students claim that even when they have high achievement

levels, they feel lost without clear plans, as they do not have guidance counsellors to advise them (Briggs, 2018).

Finally, we agree with the policy's recommendation to develop a fair and judicious anti-racism program (Peel District School Board, 2022). We found this section of the policy to lack substance and would further recommend that this policy be implemented immediately but also address all issues regarding race, racism, microaggressions and more subtle or covert forms of racism. Further, we recommend that repeated transgressions by students, teachers or staff be dealt with in a manner that protects the well-being of Black students in the PDSB. We also recommend increasing the frequency of reports. The policy states that reports will be provided annually, with interim updates every six months. As racial discrimination in PDSB schools directly impacts the educational and career opportunities of Black students, it is important to ensure that their chances of higher education and professional success are not diminished.

Providing education and training in schools can help minimize microaggressions among school-aged youth, teachers, and staff. To reduce microaggressions Black youth experience outside of the education system, we recommend mandatory training and education in all workplaces within the Region of Peel. We believe this is the most effective way to reach the greatest number of people. Between those in the workforce and those in the education system, most of the population will have received education and training on microaggressions and their impact.

## **Conclusions**

Microaggressions are part of the daily experience of Black youth in the Region of Peel. This literature review sought to determine the most common types of microaggressions they face, where they face them, and how they are impacted by these subtle forms of racism, using academic and grey literature and social and local news media.

First, we examined Canada's multiculturalism and how its policies result in a society with colour-blind attitudes. Despite Canadians' desire to argue that we live in a colour-blind society, mainstream and social media demonstrate harmful stereotypes about Black youth. It was found that there were differences in the types of stereotypes portrayed in mainstream and social media, with some similarities. Criminality was found to be a predominant stereotype across all forms of media, with social media's portrayals of Black girls as sexual and screen media's depictions as aggressive. We also found that there were gender differences in stereotypes, although more research would need to be conducted to determine how these differences appear in mainstream versus social media.



Black youth in the PDSB described facing microaggressions from teachers, students, and staff. Our findings showed that the most common microaggressions Black students faced in school included surprise at high levels of intelligence, discouraging the pursuit of higher education, the association between accents and a perceived lack of fluency in the English language, assumptions of criminality, and insufficient attention and resources provided. These microaggressions, influenced by stereotypes portrayed in the media, resulted in harsher disciplinary measures Black students received compared to their white peers for the same 'indiscretions'.

While our research uncovered a wealth of information regarding the microaggressions Black youth face within schools in the Region of Peel, we had to rely more on social and local news media for public and social microaggressions. They revealed that Black youth are often suspected of criminal behaviour when driving nice cars and experience difficulties in the workplace, when applying for bank loans, looking for housing, or accessing healthcare services. Additionally, they experience people acting intimidated by them, wanting to touch their hair, and constantly being asked where they are from.

Microaggressions are correlated with negative mental health effects, including a loss of self-esteem, confidence, or motivation and experiencing stress and anger. These emotional impacts are associated with developing mental health disorders stemming from exposure to colour-blind attitudes, having to work twice as hard to succeed, rejecting negative stereotypes of Black people, and limiting their career opportunities, resulting in socioeconomic disadvantages. These are further exacerbated by the stigma around mental health within and outside of the Black community and the lack of access to culturally and racially sensitive mental health services. Additionally, there is very little research on the physical health impacts of microaggressions within the Region of Peel and even on a national and international scale. Despite this, mental health issues caused by experiencing microaggressions were found to result in physical symptoms.

There were significant findings on the educational impacts of microaggressions, which were discovered to worsen mental health symptoms. Black youth being overrepresented in the practice of academic streaming, suspensions and expulsions, drop-out rates, and police involvement in minor incidents pushed Black students towards precarious employment and resulted in limited beliefs about what they could accomplish. Feelings of abandonment by teachers and guidance counsellors and differential treatment lowered their self-esteem and often resulted in Black students mentally and physically withdrawing from school. As a result of their limited options in the school-to-work transition, Black youth experienced economic and social difficulties.

The significant mental, physical, economic, and social barriers and consequences faced by Black youth lead to diminished life satisfaction and well-being. While more research needs to be conducted on the impacts of racial microaggressions on Black girls' well-being, existing research shows that those who experience racism daily have less academic success, more economic disadvantages, and lower well-being. Our literature review also addressed the findings on negative and positive coping mechanisms used by Black youth to deal with the effects of racial microaggressions, with the literature citing many positive and negative coping mechanisms.

The biggest limitation we encountered when writing our literature review occurred while researching the Black community's perceptions of other races and ethnicities. Though we could find some evidence, it was limited to social media posts and comments from Black users regarding their views on Brown people living in Brampton. Furthermore, the existing literature only addressed Black people's perception of Asian people in the education system. Additional research would benefit from examining how the Black community views other races and ethnicities in academic, economic, public, and social settings.

Overall, this review has implications for the PDSB, the workforce, broader community-based organizations, social and mental health services, the public, and other stakeholders and funding bodies. It can help facilitate a better understanding of how racial microaggressions affect Black youth and their futures, thereby helping reduce them. By identifying the types of microaggressions Black youth face and who is committing them, adequate training and consequences can be developed and enforced to ensure the eradication of racial microaggressions within the education system, the workplace, and services, as well as in public and social spheres. Further policy development can benefit from this review, as it outlines specific recommendations to improve the lives of Black youth within the Region of Peel, both within and outside the education system.

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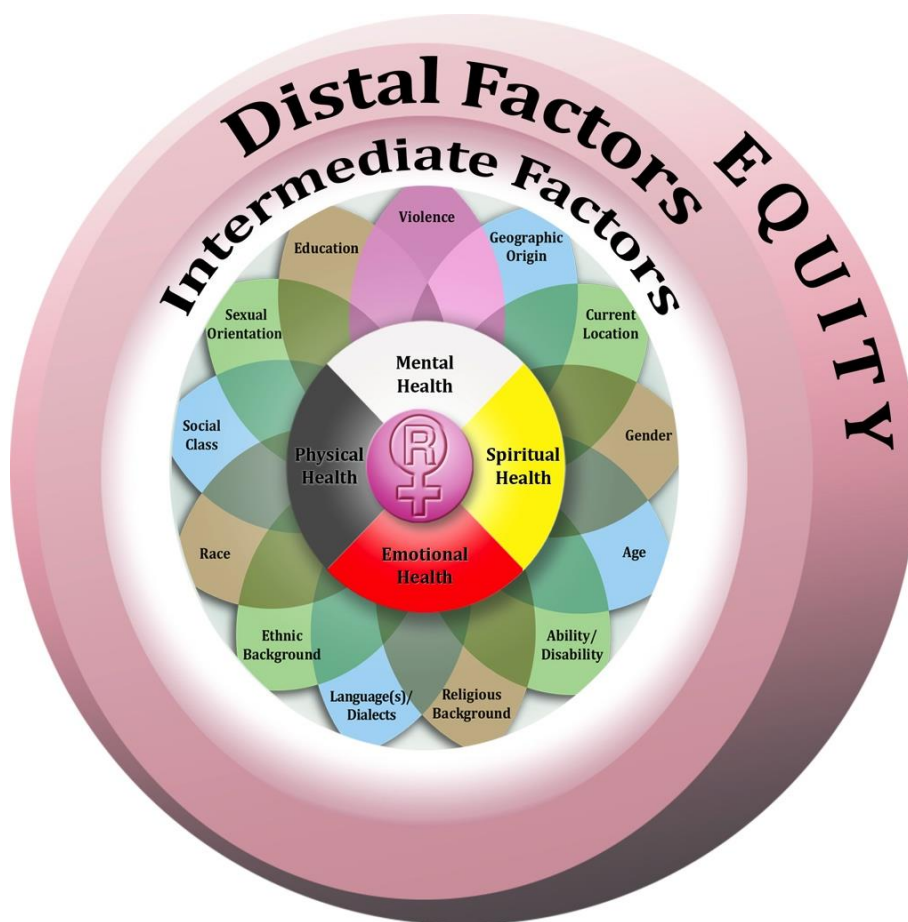
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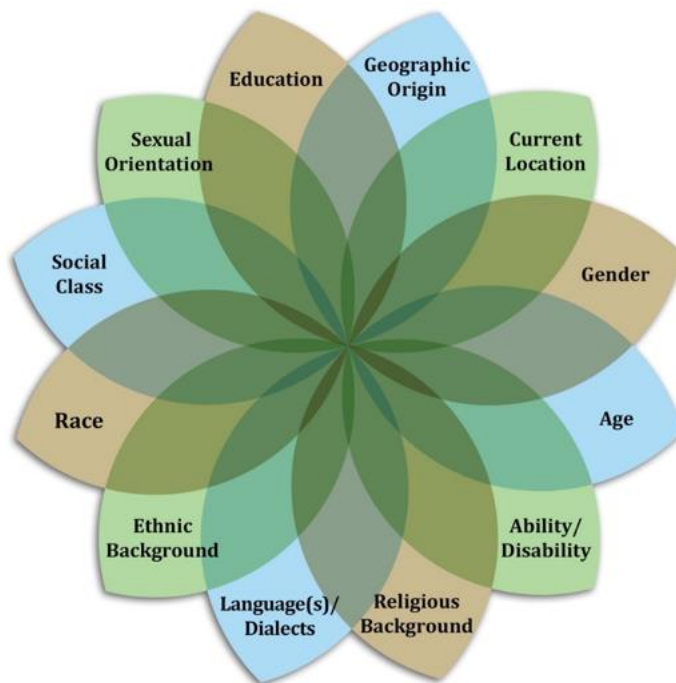
## Appendix A

This appendix describes Family Services of Peel's Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism, Equity Framework. Appendix A1 demonstrates the types of determinants that affect an individual's life. These include proximal factors, which are the most immediate behavioural and environmental factors to the individual. Following those factors are immediate factors, which consist of community infrastructures, systems, resources, and capacities. Finally, distal factors are the historical, social, political, and economic factors that affect individuals' lives. Appendix A2 describes an individual's intersecting identities that determine how they experience the world, with certain identities contributing to multiple forms of oppression. Appendix A3 shows a graphic showing the social determinants of health. This graphic demonstrates that an individual's health is not just determined by one thing but is simultaneously affected by their individual lifestyle factors, social and community networks, and general socio-economic and environmental conditions.

### Appendix A1: Types of Determinants



**Appendix A2: Intersectionality**



**Appendix A3: Social Determinants of Health**

