Canadian Grade Racism, (Eh!) - Cultivating the Resources and Supports to Address the Hidden Problem of Systemic Racism in Canadian Universities

Gurman Randhawa[1*], Gillian McCrudden[1*], Ciann L. Wilson[1], Vanessa Oliver[1], Paige Grant[2], Azka Choudhary[1&3], Joey Lee[1], Kate Harvey[1], Lauren Burrows[1] & Laura Mae Lindo[4]

[1] Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

[2] Algoma University, Brampton, Ontario, Canada

[3] Nippising University, Canada

[4] University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Correspondence: Gurman Randhawa, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON., N2L 3C5, Canada.

* Gurman Randhawa and Gillian McCrudden are co-authors.

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Abstract

In the emerging literature on understanding racialized university members' experience in the post-secondary space, there has been a focus on breaking down the components that make a university environment safer for racialized students, staff, and faculty. Among racialized students, studies have found that students' experiences at school have significant impacts on student's mental health and overall-being (Chu et al., 2022). The current work aims to unpack the findings of the Being Raced study in examining aspects of the campus that make post-secondary environments safer spaces for racialized students, staff, and faculty. The study consisted of online surveys (N=177) that were conducted at Wilfrid Laurier University (WLU) Campuses and interviews (N=37) that were conducted specifically at Laurier's Brantford Campus. For the purpose of this paper, we focus specifically on the interview data. The participant sample included alumni, current students, staff, and faculty members in the university community. This data was derived from the Being Raced study, and for this paper, the study data was thematically analyzed with a focus on racialized people's experiences of safer spaces at WLU. In this paper, we focus on the findings where racialized participants and members of the university community expressed a need for more formal supports and resources from the university, as well as emphasized the importance of in-group and peer-group social networks and educational opportunities. Participants also identified the significance of the racial composition of university institutions – including their staff and student body. This research sets the stage for post-secondary institutions in Canada to contend with systemic racism and addresses the ways inequities on their campuses impact the learning and work environment. This paper also contributes to a critical assessment on the ways to create a safer and more inclusive learning and work environments for racialized students, faculty, and staff members, which ultimately impacts valued university metrics such as student satisfaction.

Keywords: participatory research, systemic racism, safer spaces, inclusive spaces, student advocacy, mental health

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Research on the experiences of racialized students in the Canadian education system and at universities, more specifically, is not new. Research inquiry in these areas have been studied for decades. Some studies have compared the experience of marginalized groups to that of white students on campus (King & Ford, 2003; Holly & Steiner, 2005), while others have looked at systemic factors that contribute to an individual's overall well-being (Chavous et. al, 2002; Grant et. al, 2017). The relationship between safer spaces and the well-being of marginalized students is correlated with an increased psychological sense of community on university campuses as well as notable improvements in academic performance and outcomes (Berryhill & Bee, 2007). Experiences of racism have long-term ramifications on racialized students' mental health, relationships, and professional outcomes (Oliver et. al, 2018). The question therein lies, what makes a campus environment a safer space for staff and racialized students in the post-secondary space?

Safer spaces in this context are defined as environments that protect from physical, emotional, and psychological harm based on discrimination rooted in racism, xenophobia, or colourism (University of Victoria, 2020), and which cultivate a sense of belonging. The study aims to examine factors that aid in the creation of safer spaces to mitigate harm and psychological distress for racialized staff and students in the post-secondary environment.

2. Literature Review and Background

2.1 Racism in a Post-Secondary Context

Literature has identified the detrimental impacts of systemic racism on the well-being of racialized communities, especially in post-secondary institutions. Experiences of racism contribute to severe psychological harm which have long-term repercussions on racialized individuals' well-being, including trauma from mental, emotional, and physical harm (Carter, 2007). For example, Motz and Currie (2019) found that Indigenous students at Canadian post-secondary institutions reported facing housing discrimination which further impacted PTSD symptomology. More specifically, studies have explored students' academic progress at a predominately white institution (PWI). A predominately white institution is defined as a post-secondary space where White students account for 50% or more of the student population (Lomotey, 2010). A study conducted by Beamon (2025) reported racially charged occurrences experienced by African American students at a PWI had substantial hinderances on the students' academic progress, and this was directly related to experiences of exclusion bolstered by racism.

Additionally, there are considerable historical and social differences in the experiences of discrimination faced by different marginalized groups (Hurtado, 1992). For instance, intersectionality helps us understand that not all racism directed towards ethno-racially marginalized groups is expressed the same. The experiences of East and South Asian people in the academy might look different from the experiences of Black people, given the long history of anti-Black racism in North America that presumed Black people were less than human and thus, devoid of intellectual prowess (Walker, 1992). This can be seen conveyed in the restrictions and bans placed on Black student enrollment in programs such as medicine at institutions including the University of Toronto, McGill University and Queens University as late as the 1960s (Henry-Dixon, 2021). That has not been the historic relationship of East Asian and South Asian communities to the western education system. As such, at a PWI, this may lead to racialized students (and particularly Black students) feeling like they do not belong, and further ostracized from their racialized peers and campus community.

Canadian literature has investigated the contrasts in the experiences of discrimination faced by different racialized groups in other sectors such as health and the criminal justice system. Williams et al. (2012) investigated the events of racism that have a crucial impact on racialized Canadian's mental health and well-being. The study found that Indigenous and immigrant/refugee populations reported higher rates of health care discrimination. The study defined healthcare discrimination as including both stereotypes upheld by healthcare staff, as well as systemic barriers that hindered access to necessary healthcare services. Comparatively, Indigenous and Asian Canadians reported significant rates of systemic discrimination which was defined as institutional and societal policies and practices that create barriers to equal educational, social, and economic opportunities. For example, second-generation South Asian students have reported struggles with integrating into the Canadian academe and resisting stereotypes which can have lasting psychological impacts (Samuel, 2002). However, within the Canadian context and abroad, further research is needed to explore the institutional experiences of different racial and ethnic identities. Lastly, Black Canadians reported significant rates of racial profiling as Black Canadians in Vancouver were six times more likely to be carded by police and 2.3 times more likely to be stopped by police compared to White Canadians (Williams et al., 2012). The study conducted by Williams et al. (2012) highlights that the experiences of racism are vast and experienced differently between different structurally excluded groups.

2.2 Safer Spaces

Having a safe place to have open and critical conversations about diversity and racialized experiences (Grant et. al, 2017) has been identified as being of paramount importance to racialized students in a university space. Witnessing individuals of one's own ethnic or racial background in academic spaces or having racialized people in the space who are in positions where they can facilitate these open conversations about lived experience or service access needs within the broader institution and exchange relevant information, can aid in the creation of safer spaces (King & Ford, 2003). For example, East Asian Canadians have reported reluctancy to seek out support at institution due to cultural stigma (Sien et al., 2022). With having a safe space, this can afford a degree of anonymity and protection, as racialized students do not have to feel "outed" by being the "only" one from a particular group/community.

In addition to the racial composition of an institution, a clearer indicator of a university's ability to function as a safer space inclusive of racialized people is in how the university addresses the systems of inequality in a colonially rooted institution such as the academy (King & Ford, 2003). What (if any) policies, procedures, protocols, rules and regulations are in place to systemically address incidents of racism? This topic was further explored by King and Ford (2003) when they examined the experiences of African American students at predominately White institutions. Not surprisingly, the students found universities to be safer when there were lowered incidents of racism and verbal or physical aggression derived from racism, but also when institutions provided more appropriate support and had more open conversations surrounding race and race-related issues (King & Ford, 2003). When examining the supports available, the organizations/services for Black, Indigenous and racialized (BIR) students led by racialized and trained staff were regarded as effective in not only addressing racism, but also to incorporate multicultural perspectives and promote insightful conversations at the university (King & Ford, 2003). The study found that these forms of groups promoted both formal support and informal methods for racialized students to meet each other (King & Ford, 2003). These forms of support also fostered spaces that allowed racialized students to form strong in-group ties which can be defined as bonds associated with feelings of support, rapport, and belonging with others from racialized communities (King & Ford, 2003). Therefore, having strong ties to other individuals of one's race may decrease feelings of isolation or anxiety (King & Ford, 2003) especially in the face of adversity.

When it comes to staff and faculty employed at post-secondary institutions, there is limited research on the impacts of racism and supports needed. However, research has been conducted by Griffin et al. (2012) who investigated Black professors' responses to racism on the campuses at two American public research universities The professors' responses included institutional departure, psychological departure, and acts of agency which included seeking and forming external networks (Griffin et al., 2012. In addition, Cho and Brassfield (2023) conducted a study to explore racialized staff's experiences at their post-secondary institution. Cho and Brassfield (2023) found that participants reported discrepancies in the communication received by the institution when compared to the institution's lack of financial prioritization and care. Thus, efforts are needed to further investigate the research gaps in the racial climate for staff and faculty on campus and the adequacy of supports available to them to mitigate harm and navigate systemic racism.

2.3 Student Advocacy

While student voice is often acknowledged in the evaluation of teaching and learning at a university, students face significant dismissal by decision makers in the university, and limitations in the planning and provision of student support services (Allen, 2017). Institutions assuming the needs of racialized students without their collaboration can have detrimental impacts on students' performance (Student Voice, 2017). Racialized students' abilities to participate in advocacy are directly related to student satisfaction (Plageman, 2011) and increase skills such as self-management, communication, and critical thinking (Student Voice, 2017). Student advocates have an insightful and relevant perspective as they are the hands on the ground when it comes to understanding the most pressing needs of students. However, it is important to note that while student involvement is a critical part in the creation of policy and support, it is unfortunate that the burden of creating change lands on the shoulders of students who have been directly and/or indirectly harmed by problematic policies, practices, and protocols in their learning environments. Students, and racialized students more specifically, often have the least amount of power in relation to university employees such as faculty and staff (Holford & Sen, 2025). As such, self-advocacy can be a very risky and stressful act for students to undertake. Furthermore, time and energy expended on self-advocacy also means student energy is diverted away from academics and towards stress management (Franklin, 2016). Thus, it is of crucial importance to create a campus climate that is conducive to inclusion, learning, and community building for the success of students of all racial and ethnic identities.

2.4 Critical Frameworks Utilized

The present study aims to look at both subtle and overt forms of racial discrimination and racism that exist in a post-secondary institution, and how systemic racism can be challenged to form a safer and inclusive space for racialized members of the university. As such, in this paper we draw oncritical race theory. Critical race theory challenges the notion of colourblind race politics and suppositions about multicultural eutopias within Canadian society (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). As Canada, much like the United States of America (USA) was a nation-state established from its inception on the genocide of Indigenous peoples and their stolen territory across North America (Karuka, 2019). Canada cannot exist without racist and colonially violent processes that excluded Indigenous people from owning and inheriting their land (Karuka, 2019). In addition, Canada cannot exist without the enslavement of Black people, or the indentureship of East Asian and subsequently, South Asian people to engage in the back-breaking

labour of clearing the stolen land of its fauna and building infrastructure to secure the boundaries of white settler colonies (Karuka, 2019; Whitfield, 2018; Saunders, 2018). Critical race gives us a lens from which to refute ideas such as the meritocracy myth within the Canadian education and university systems (Crichlow, 2015), as these systems were founded on the idea of white male intellectual superiority to the utter exclusion of everyone else (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). In Canada, for over 360 years of the academy's existence, white men had the monopoly on post-secondary spaces not entirely because of merit, but rather white, cis, hetero-patriarchal privilege (Belliveau, 2025). The first woman scholar – Grace Lockhart – was admitted to Mount Allison University in New Brunswick in 1872 (Belliveau, 2025). Along with the example discussed above on the restrictions Black students faced when seeking admission to medical schools in Canada up until the '60s (Dixon, 2021), these examples demonstrate how intersectional oppression along the lines of race, in tandem with gender, class, etc. have and continue to demarcate the compositions of student, faculty, and staff bodies at Canadian universities. In this, a second framework that informs this paper is the Black feminist and Black-socio-political framework of intersectionality – or the idea that race cannot be separated out from other systems of oppression such as classism, sexism, hetero-patriarchy, and so on, because these interlocking systems of oppression are inseparably sewn into the fabric of society (Atewologun, 2018; Collins, 1990; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989). Thus, an intersectional approach helps us understand how systemically interconnected oppressions operate from the individual to the systemic levels.

2.5 The Being Raced Study

Conducted in 2017, the Being Raced study aimed to examine the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and racialized students, staff, and faculty at the mid-sized Canadian University - Wilfrid Laurier University (Grant et al., 2017). Wilfrid Laurier University is the institutional home of the research team, and thus the university environment the team was most familiar with. The mixed method study design consisted of a survey and interviews focused on experiences of racism that participants had witnessed or been victim to, specifically centering around harassment, stereotyping, tokenizing, systemic racism, racial profiling, and cultural insensitivity (Grant et al., 2017). The larger study focused on analysis of the data produced from the survey and interview data, with a keen eye to the application of a critical race framework in understanding participants' experiences. The Being Raced project team created a community report that was broadly disseminated throughout the university community, and at its multiple campuses. Researchers also created a list of calls-to-action for various departments and groups at Wilfrid Laurier University.

In recognizing that Wilfrid Laurier University is a predominately white institution, this paper seeks to build on the work of the preceding report to highlight the systemic barriers contributing to racialized students, staff, and faculty's experiences on campus and overall well-being. This paper will also focus on participants insights on the factors that create a safer space for racialized individuals on campus, and their proposed ideas to aid in fostering and cultivating these safer spaces for the future of the academy.

2.6 The Current Paper

Prior research has examined experiences of racism in American Universities. For example, Lee et al. (2012) conducted an online survey for students at a public university in the USA to explore the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and racialized students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education. The researchers explored the incidence rate ratios of the probability that a student will experience racial microaggressions (RMAs) (Lee et al., 2012). They found and reported that STEM students who identify as Black have a 57% increased probability of experiencing more frequent RMAs, demonstrating the presence of rife anti-Black racism in the university environment. However, there is limited research on exploring not only the nuanced experiences of racism that racialized and Indigenous people are confronted by on university campuses, but also the resources and supports that make environments more inclusive and healthier spaces of higher learning.

The current paper helps to unpack not only the difficult experiences of racism, but the initiatives and approaches that make university spaces safer for their engagement and sense of belonging. The primary research questions being addressed in this study are: what are Black., Indigenous, and racialized staff, faculty, and students' perceptions of the university when it comes to safety and inclusion?; and what can be done to increase their feelings of safety on campus? Towards this end, interview data from the Being Raced study will be used to identify barriers to safer spaces and analyze suggestions from racialized students, faculty, and staff for the cultivation of a more inclusive campus environment

3. Method

3.1 Participant Characteristics

In the Being Raced study, survey participants consisted of 177 students, staff members, and faculty at Wilfrid Laurier University. There were 93 participants from the Waterloo Campus, 3 participants were from the Kitchener Campus, 79 from the Brantford Campus, and 1 participant who was not situated at any specific Wilfrid Laurier University Campus. Of the total sample, 164 participants were students, 7 were staff, and 6 were faculty members. The full details on participant data can be viewed in Appendix A. For the purpose of anonymity, we have opted to provide no further details about participant identities in the writing of this paper, given the vulnerabilizing venture of being one of a few Black, Indigenous, and racialized people at a PWI. As such, pseudonyms were used when referring to the participants in the findings section below.

3.2 Sampling Procedures

The participants in the study were recruited internally through email from listservs that the researchers already had access to which included a Laurier faculty list and undergraduate student list from students and staff involved in organizations for racialized members of campus, social justice groups, and courses. While the larger study gathered survey data from 177 unique participants, there were 37 individual semi-structured interviews conducted with students, staff and faculty on Laurier's Brantford Campus exclusively. For the purpose of this manuscript, we will focus on the interview data that narrativizes these experiences of racism. The online surveys were close-ended and did not contain information relevant to the focused coding of this manuscript. Please refer to Appendix B to see full interview guide. The Being Raced project garnered ethical approval from Wilfrid Laurier University's institutional research ethics board and was provided with approval number of REB#4832.

3.2.1 Measures

This paper consists of a qualitative analysis of the Being Raced interview data. The data analysis was conducted using dimensional thematic analysis, a collaborative and inductive approach (Caron & Bowers, 2000; Schatzman, 1991). Participant interview data was transcribed and thematically analyzed by members of the original research team (Grant, Choudhry, Lee, Harvey, Burrows, Lindo, and Oliver). Data analysis begun by importing anonymized transcripts into the qualitative coding software NVivo. The data was then inductively coded by the research team using the DEPICT method (Flicker & Nixon, 2015). Codes were constructed using a combination of deductive and inductive approaches to capture meaning and maintain analytic power (Braun & Clarke, 2021). For the purposes of this paper, we conducted a secondary focused thematic analysis for the code "Safe Spaces" in the original data set. We analyzed this data for participant perspectives on what makes a safer space, perceptions of safer spaces and the importance of safer spaces. We also examined experiences of racism that participants reported on campus to better contextualize the importance of safer space creation. To maintain the integrity of our data, we followed Lincoln & Guba's (1985) criteria for building trustworthiness in qualitative research. We used member checks, thick description, and a consistent coding framework to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

4. Results

4.1 Forms of Overt Racism on Campus

The Being Raced study identified several common experiences of racism at Wilfrid Laurier University. These included (in order from most to least reported) street harassment, stereotyping, tokenizing, systemic racism, racial profiling, and cultural insensitivity (Grant et al., 2017). These incidents were reported as occurring in classrooms, residence buildings, walking to class, interacting with professors/authority figures, within the student's union/related clubs, and on-campus student supports such as the Diversity and Equity Office, Office of Indigenous Initiatives, the Wellness Centre, and Service Laurier (Grant et al., 2017).

"*Someone was like "you fucking terrorist" [to my friend] [...] and she was wearing a headscarf [...] this was right on Market Street*" (Sarah).

"*So, we were studying at the student centre and we're going to Lonnie's to grab some food, and then we're walking back [...] a ton of white guys were just throwing rocks at us, and they're just you know obviously screaming racial slurs [...] I've never experienced that very obvious type of racism because it was like literally being stoned*" (Bertha).

The above quotes highlight examples of verbal and physical aggression experienced by racialized individuals on Wilfrid Laurier University campuses. Despite the idea that post-secondary institutions are moving "rapidly" towards being inclusive (Ledesma & Calderón, 2015; Specht & Thompson, 2022),,' the experiences of verbal and physical harassment and racist violence recounted here paint a different picture in the space of higher learning. Namely, that

university institutions remain riddled with the same factions, divisions, and discrimination seen reflected in Canadian society at large (James, 2023). It is important to mention here that participants in this study identified limited reporting mechanisms to lodge complaints about racist experiences. Common reasons cited by participants for not reporting these incidents were cited as lack of information on where to report, as well as participants' uncertainty that the institution would take action, and participants reporting a lack of confidence and trust in the organizational structures at WLU, as well as the lack of trust in and belief that administrators actually care about addressing issues of racism. The following sections will explore in more detail actions that universities can take to ensure safer spaces are being created that are affirming for racialized individuals and their experiences, and acknowledge their needs, while also taking action to increase overall feelings of safety, inclusion and belonging.

4.1.1 Racist Microaggressions in the Classroom

Participants have not only reported racism in interactions with peers but also within the classroom setting. Respondents noted their experiences with staff and faculty at the institution.

"*But I have felt that there are teachers who favour the majority race*" (Gretel).

"*But also, I've been in classrooms where --- ah --- teacher will bring up race and stare at me the whole class. As if I'm gonna be like "Yeah. What you're saying is right." I'm not teaching the class and I'm not gonna tell you how to teach but you cannot stare at a racialized student when you're speaking about racism*" (Mindy).

The quotes above highlight how being a visibly racialized person within a PWI can lead to tokenization and being called on to weigh in on every discussion about racism in a way not expected of non-racialized people. This added burden and labour on the backs of racialized individuals to lead in the education of non-racialized others (including the instructor in this scenario) can cause undue hardship as it is contextualized by the ever-present power imbalances between professors and their students within a classroom setting. These experiences also elucidate the presence of microaggressions in the learning environment and raise concerns about participant's success and well-being. Experiences of racism and racist micro-aggressions have a significant impact on racialized participant's ability to perform well in their classrooms which are crucial learning environments, as well as their likelihood to leave the university that they are studying at if it is a space that is no longer safe and conducive to their learning (Luong et al., 2023; Stoll et al., 2025). Consequently, there is this chain reaction of cause and effect that occurs pertaining to student experience , which can go underrecognized by faculty, staff and university administration.

4.2 The Impact of Racism on Mental Health

Prior research has examined the detrimental impacts racism can have on an individual's mental health and overall well-being in post-secondary spaces (Carter, 2007). Respondents reported their experiences with their mental health as racialized people in a PWI, which speaks to the psychological harm inflicted by racism and violence on campus.

"*The tough part was that I had to figure out on my own that I didn't have someone else who was in the same boat as me to talk with all the time... But we need to look beyond the violence, and we need to understand the mental health behind it and how if someone is racially targeted, they feel uncomfortable. It does trigger mental health. It does cause certain reactions that aren't wanted. So, how are we going to just address all of that?*" (Gretel).

"*[Experiencing racist comments] was awful because no one else understood why we are upset*" (Joan).

"*Being raced can be sort of isolating*" (Faith).

In the quotes above, participants discuss not only overt acts of racism, but also more subtle forms that lead to racialized individuals feeling isolated from their peers, professors, and the institution as a whole. This can lead to racialized individuals experiencing a lack of a sense of belonging, disappointment and even resentment (King & Ford, 2003). As research has shown, connecting with others is an important factor to fostering a conducive space for an individual's success and well-being (King & Ford, 2003). In addition, when it comes to an university member's well-being, in the process of advocating for themselves, racialized individuals can experience significant emotional and mental burnout because they are not only having to contend with their own experiences of ostracization, microaggressions, and mental well-being, but also educating support personnel on the significance of what they are experiencing and why it is deleterious to their wellbeing. Thus, there is a need for appropriate resources to effectively help racialized individuals navigate and ideally implement policies that mitigate psychological harm. The following section will discuss what those resources and supports can look like for racialized individuals.

4.3 The Significance of Formal Supports

Participants discussed the forms of support and the importance of those supports in their experiences on campus. Participants specifically discussed the significance of the supports in relation to creating an encouraging and assuring

campus space where racism can be openly named, unpacked and engaged with.One respondent noted how on campus supports can aid in a more open and inclusive learning environment:

"*…with being raced, it's just, there is a lot, again like unspoken hardships, and unspoken things that you deal with, and just it makes the learning experience much better just knowing that it's a safe space to knowing that your voice is heard and it's just... that these topics are talked about. It's just, it just makes you feel better*" (Bertha).

Another participant noted feelings of reassurance in having formal spaces for reporting incidences of racism, especially in moments where the learning environment is hostile and thus no longer conducive to their success and overall well-being. In moments like this, accessible support services and resources on campus were deemed both necessary and important:

"*…at least with what the professor is saying in the classroom, that I'll be able to go knowing that I won't be hurt, traumatized or feel unsafe in this space--- because the institution has my back. And if that does happen, then I'll have a way of reporting it or I'll have way of telling someone about what happened and there could be a process to fix that so that other students don't have to go through that*" (Mindy).

Participants highlighted that having access to supports on campus provides an avenue to receive help which can further aid in mitigating the experiences of racism. This aligns with previous research on racism at post-secondary institutions where racialized participants reported that having access to information on how to address racism fostered a safer space on campus (Burke et al., 2021). In the current study, participants reported that having an accountability structure in place further aided in increasing their feelings of safety on campus. Thus, the utilization and implementation of formal, institutionally visible, and accessible supports are critical avenues that could aid in change at the various levels of an institution.

4.4 Formal Supports to be Implemented

Expanding upon the previous section, respondents identified the forms of support that are important for the environment to allow for their growth, learning, and overall ability to thrive in the enviornment. Participants discussed how these supports would increase their feelings of safety and belonging at the institution.

"*Laurier needs to create more place[s] where racialized students can go and speak about their experience or get help about their experience by another racialized individual who understands more about what they are going through*" (Mindy).

" *"This was a common theme throughout the research, students need to know that there are formal avenues of support that they can go to feel heard, supported, and validated in their experience as a racialized person at WLU*" (Gretel).

Participants in the study largely requested for more effective formal supports for racialized folks, whether that be through policies, education, racialized counsellors and personnel, or creating safer environments on campus. Participants identified that the university does not currently have adequate services in place to address the mental health challenges that accompany racial violence at the PWI. Without this formal support avenue, racialized individuals are expected to contextualize their experiences as racialized individuals to White professionals who do not have the lived experiences and often present colonial thinking. Racialized participants identified the importance of engaging in meaningful conversations with staff who understand their lived experience. Notably, at the time the Being Raced study was being conducted, Laurier had not created opportunities to allow for culturally inclusive services on its campuses. Currently, there are limited supports available including one Indigenous counsellor, two Black counsellors, and a Black student support role. However, it can be helpful to have different forms of support available, as well as specific services to support different mental health conditions within structurally excluded groups.

4.5 In-Group Ties

An area participants noted that contributed to healthy self-regard was community engagement in their social networks, acceptance from other peers, and closeness with similar others on campus. One respondent noted their experiences within the community on campus and how it was supportive to their mental health and well-being.

"*We are Black. I feel like that's the one place, not only do I get to like bask in the presence of God, but I can do it---and be Black. And be surrounded by Black people and--- one of the very few places that I get to be like, Black and myself*" (Bertha).In this quote, the participant reflects on their ability to be their whole, unapologetically Black self in what suggests to be a religious or faith-based space which highlights not only their intersectional identities as a Black person, but one who has a religious affiliation. In this quote, it is a religious space that this Black person finds their greatest sense of belonging communing with other Black people within the university walls. Further, previous literature has identified the importance of in-group ties for identity formation and socialization (King & Ford, 2003).

Racialized participantshave expressed the importance of connecting with similar others in identity formation. As this quote highlights, when racialized individuals can connect with similar others and form close connections, they can be an authentic version of themselves, which is a version that they may not feel safe to be with others. Having the space to be one's authentic self and be accepted for this is important to self-esteem and the development of a positive self-image and sense of self (Diehl et al., 2011). Thus, the formation of in-group ties extends beyond socialization and includes racialized individuals' psychological health and well-being.

Participants also identified that importance in having affinity spaces where they can have discussions with other Black, Indigenous, and Racialized folks without having to contextualize lived experiences.

"*I feel the most safe when I'm speaking with people of colour because I feel like people of colour have, even if they have a lot of internalized stuff going on they have an understanding of what I'm talking about*" (Abigail).

"*I turned race into kind of a feeling of community more than I do anything else. So, I think for me, race is -- race means community*" (Lee).

Participants identified that having discussions with other racialized individuals without having to contextualize lived experiences they have had based on their racialized identity as an important factor to increasing feelings of connectedness to the campus, fostering a sense of community, and safety. Formation of in-group ties with other racialized folks may act as a form of informal support, and facilitating opportunities to create these connections may be integral to universities fostering safer spaces and inclusion for racialized members of the university.

4.6 On-Campus Groups

Another key area respondents noted that has been supportive to their well-being are formal groups, committees and associations that allow for community-building and fostering connections with others who have similar interests and backgrounds. Participants discussed the importance of these spaces to foster inclusion, sense of belonging, and a healthy campus environment.

"*Being part of Soul (the Black Students Collective) is amazing. There's a very, very small black population at Laurier Brantford. And it's honestly a group where we unite, and when we have conversations, it is something that really can't be replaced with anything*" (Jessica).

"*When I go to MSA (Muslim Students Association), it's a place where, I feel I got a home because I can [talk] about anything with the people there. It's a place where we can talk about religion and how things affect us on campus or even with Trump coming in. I can even learn things and sometimes we have lectures. It's a space for me to still keep in touch with my religion even though I'm away from home*" (Faith).

On-campus groups that encourage students to form connections with similar others contribute to the formation of in-group ties. These groups include the Muslim Students Association and Soul which was the Black Student Collective on campus at the time of this study.. These groups were identified as important spaces to create religious and cultural connections. Participants reported that in these spaces, discussions on cultures, traditions, religion, and current political or social issues relevant to their communities occurred. These groups on campus aided in fostering a sense of belonging and community at WLU and overall, seemed to positively contribute to racialized students' well-being. The identified groups may have a significant contribution in creating safer spaces on campus. Physical meetings and offices where these groups are housed are examples of safe spaces where racialized individuals feel safer from harm, however, the community extends beyond the physical space. Discussions with other racialized individuals with similar shared experiences and insights can create feelings of psychological safety that extend beyond time spent at formal events for these groups. Therefore, the groups can positively contribute to community building as well as racialized individuals' psychological well-being, especially in academic institutions where racialized students comprise a minority within the broader student body.

In the dominant rhetoric spurred by the status quo in labelling such affinity spaces as "exclusionary," and "divisive," it is important to note that these groups are often created as spaces of refuge and safety for systemically marginalized members of the university community. As mentioned in the preceding sections, these members face systemic racism and violence in their classrooms and places of work. If the broader academic institution were perceived by these communities as a safe space for all, such affinity spaces would not be necessary. They are the response to exclusion and systemic violence, not the source of the problem.

4.7 Contending with Racism

Another key theme identified was addressing staff and faculty's understanding of systemic racism and awareness of their footprint when it comes to White privilege.

"---*Workshops or just educating yourself even more. But the audience you're talking with needs to be open to that. Otherwise it's not going to work. You're not going to get anywhere*" (Gretel).

This quote illustrates a prominent concern from racialized participants regarding white staff and faculty's likelihood to be receptive and responsive to having crucial conversations in which they have to contend with their privilege and the way their words and actions may have caused harm. Participants expressed concern that white faculty and staff were unable to contend with and move pass their feelings of discomfort to lean into the new and possible areas of growth and learning, which is necessary and important when confronting systems of oppression such as racism. This correlates with the data that indicates many racialized university members at WLU do not have confidence and trust that the institution will adequately address issues of racism. However, racialized participants still recognized and noted the powerful impact of incorporating and inserting conversations about racism into the institutional discourse:

"---*If you don't talk about it, if you don't care about these factors, you are going to have more people in the job market, the job industry, like more bosses, owners, managers who may be racist, or may make these comments that make other people feel uncomfortable*" (Mindy).

In this, racialized participants considered topics of race and racism from a macro-level and discussed the long-term repercussions of failing to address these concerns institutionally. Specifically, participants identified the repercussions of cross-institutional silence about racism being deleterious not only for those working under the people managers and administrators currently in university institutions, but also for future people managers and administrators who graduate from within a university climate where they did not have to contend with the way systemic racism has shaped their educational opportunities, privileges, and disadvantages. Racialized partipciants suggested that having a well-informed understanding of these topics is important for fostering a safer culture and society at large, as individuals may not be aware of the nuanced ways they may perpetuate systems of power. Thus, it is important to have these critical conversations and provide training opportunities within systems of power to dismantle intergenerational and systemic patterns of oppression.

4.8 Representation Matters

Participants discussed the lack of diversity in staff and faculty on campus. Participants identified the ramifications of this on the campus climate and seeking out necessary supports.

"*So I think racism can be confused with that, I think that in school, you don't really see a lot of Asian teachers, or brown teachers, or black teachers, and if you do, they are supply teachers, or Limited Term Appointments, or Education Assistants, they are not really, you don't see principals or like people in the ministry like that*" (Gretel).

"*I didn't feel comfortable going to my don because he is a white male himself. And I don't feel like he would understand what I'm saying*" (Arisa).

Participants discussed wanting to see more visibility of Black, Indigenous and racialized staff at all levels of the education system, and the university. From administrators and professors to residence life staff, to counsellors in the Wellness Centre – diversity and representation was deemed important for participants' ability to see themselves and their communities reflected on the university campus. This was also identified as integral to participant's sense of belonging and safety on campus.

4.9 Institutional Responses to Racism

Respondents discussed the way spaces of critical conversation and advocacy can be halted by policies and university administration as an approach which silences and erases conversations deemed necessary by systemically marginalized members of the university community. One participant discussed the school's role in the discontinuation of an event they had organized to emphasize key topics including diversity.

"*I honestly feel like they don't want--- controversy around the school's name. Because we're running an event and like somehow it got media coverage, and the school didn't want me represented in that way or seen supporting a certain group. We did this "Stop torture" event and didn't hear anything and we tried to do a diversity event, all of a sudden, there's a bunch of policies. So, it's very--- I don't know why like the only thing I can think of is they don't wanna be seen in a weird --- like in a bad lighting into the public but at the same time, it's just also just systematically oppressing us*" (Mindy).

Racialized participants felt that Laurier was working to silence their voices when they were voicing their lived experiences regarding racism and injustices they have experienced in their community, both at Laurier and more broadly. Participants felt that white voices or the issues voiced by white students were often amplified while racialized voices had to work harder to be heard in the same way and to be afforded the same opportunities. In the example above,

the student is referring to an event they were forced to cancel due to controversy surrounding the event. Silencing conversations about issues of racism can deter racialized individuals from actively seeking help, especially if the help needed centers issues of racism. Silencing discourse around the issues is to inherently problematize the naming of the issue, rather than address the issue of systemic racism itself. This in turn can result in decreased feelings of physical and psychological safety and belonging on campus (King & Ford, 2003). This quote illustrates the gaps in having clear and transparent policies and processes for contending with advocacy around politicized issues such as racial injustice on campus, as the measures taken by an institution often convey to the broader university community the bounds of its protections and its commitments.

4.10 Complicity in Systemic Racism

Lastly, participants discussed how power operates in the university institution to accumulate at the top of the hierarchy in the hands of those who can halt critical work happening to address issues of systemic racism, rendering the work of staff working at the lower layers of the institution both futile and tedious.

"*Because they are an institute. And being an institute, you play a part in the systemic racism*" (Mindy).

"*---Even though, there are people who are doing anti-racism work here, whether it's staff, faculty or students. At the end of the day, there's still the gatekeepers, right? They're still the ones that have real institutional power, and so, we wanted to make change. They have to approve it at the end of the day*" (Faith).

In this, participants critiqued the institutional bureaucratic structures and inherent hierarchy of university institutions, highlighting pervasive power imbalances which can frequently undermine genuine anti-racist and anti-oppressive efforts.

5. Discussion

In this paper, we have identified several key themes that were elucidated from the interview data. The core themes included addressing the forms of overt racism on campus, identifying the impact of racism on university members' mental health, highlighting the significance of formal supports, as well as identifying the formal supports to be implemented. In addition, the themes highlight the importance of in-group ties, the current on campus groups, as well as identifying and acknowledging actions contending with racism, addressing the ways representation matters, , as well as highlighting the institution's response to racism, and addressing the complicity in systemic racism.. These key areas were highlighted by racialized students, staff, and faculty as areas of improvement to reduce harm in their work and learning environments, as well as to enhance their feelings of safety, well-being and belonging on the campus at a mid-sized Canadian University. In the paragraphs below, we unpack these findings in a bit more detail. To further contextualize and inform the themes discussed in the following sections, we first outline the historical and geographical context of where Laurier is situated, and how it may be relevant to the experiences mentioned by participants above. We then delve into an overview of the current state of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) initiatives. We understand that university leadership agree upon institutional directives that are then implemented and initiated on campuses across Canada (MacKinnon, 2014) . Thus, we examine the EDI initiatives at Laurier specifically, as well as the Canadian academy more generally.

Black, Indigenous, and racialized students, staff, and faculty continue to experience discrimination on university campuses across the country, and Laurier is no exception. In recent research conducted at Toronto Metropolitan University, researchers investigated Indigenous students' campus experience and found that students reported encountering multiple forms of racism including interpersonal, internalized, structural, and institutional anti-Indigenous racism (Efimoff & Starzyk, 2025). However, in comparison to the large university institutions in Toronto, we would argue smaller institutions situated in predominantly white towns such as Waterloo and Brantford, Ontario are hotbeds for racist violence because they are often situated within surrounding communities that normalize a culture of white supremacy. When it comes to the Kitchener-Waterloo area, it is not a coincidence that this area was called Little Berlin up until 1916, hearkening on its German settler origin story, as well as the less discussed Nazi and neo-Nazi presence throughout the region up until the present day (Coschi, 2018). As such, it is no surprise that participants in this study described experiencing racist microaggressions to blatant expressions of bigotry, and thus, have reported feeling they cannot afford a moment of safety on campus. because they are perceived as being "out of place." These findings align with King and Ford's (2003) research that belongingness is a key component to fostering feelings of safety. Racist microaggressions and bigotry are detrimental to an individual's mental health and can hinder academic and career achievement long-term (Franklin, 2016; Beamon, 2025). This calls for systemic changes which will be further discussed in the sections below. Comparatively, Brantford, Ontario is an even smaller city in South-Western, Ontario with a predominately white population of just over 100,000 people (that is nearly ¼ the

population of Kitchener and Waterloo for reference) (Hodgkinson, 2024; Government of Canada, 2024). Based on recent literature and statistics, there have been high rates of homelessness and substance use reported in Brantford (Brant County Health Unit, 2023; Hodgkinson, 2024). Laurier's establishment of a campus in down-town Brantford has often been regarded as a project that was responsible for revitalizing the area (Garvey et al., 2017). It is reasonable to suspect that some local residents may have a great deal of resentment towards the university's presence in their community and the layers of gentrification it has brought, which often includes elements of diversification in the way of the student body, especially in a predominantly white area. Thus, Laurier's geographical and historical context is important to consider when examining racialized individual's feelings of belonging and safety on campus.

Additionally, to better understand and contextualize the history and current state of the EDI initiatives at Laurier and Canadian universities more broadly, it is important to mention that these initiatives in the post-secondary sector visibly progressed after the recorded murder of George Floyd in 2020, which occurred amid a broader pattern of police-related killings of Black men and women in the United States and Canada (Herhalt, 2022 ; Eizadirad & Walton, 2025). In Canada in particular, the Canadian Television Network (CTV) news reported disproportionately high incidences of police-related fatalities of young Black and Indigenous individuals across the country (Flanagan, 2020; Herhalt, 2020). In addition, several cases have documented police-involved deaths of Black individuals during mental health and "wellness checks" (Cooke, 2020). The outrage sparked by these evident acts of systemically racist violence prompted a surge of EDI initiatives, policies and programs that swept across university campuses in Canada (Eizadirad & Walton, 2025). At Laurier as was the case at other institutions, this prompted the hiring of administrative personnel, who it was hoped could provide a lens from lived experience(s) to conversations and decision-making about racism and discrimination more broadly (Eizadirad & Walton, 2025). This wave of EDI initiatives also brought with it inclusive excellence hires of the most structurally excluded groups of scholars, mental health counsellors, and other frontline student personnel – i.e. Black and Indigenous people. However, since that time, we have seen the politically and racially charged backlash to these initiatives, as well as their quiet and unceremonious repeal (Eizadirad & Walton, 2025). The ever-shifting political prioritization of the issues faced by systemically marginalized groups within the academy does not change the gaps in current supports and needs expressed by Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities such as those who took part in this study.

5.1 The Implementation of Formal Supports That Reflect Topics/Issues Addressed by Racialized University Members

Black, Indigenous and racialized students, staff, and faculty members in this study identified the importance of having access to formal institutional supports for dealing with issues of racism. This is in line with research that identifies formal supports as a mitigating factor if individuals are faced with experiences of racism (King & Ford, 2003). At the time of the Being Raced study, Wilfrid Laurier University lacked a formal and clearly communicated complaint process. Currently, the supports that exist at Laurier include a Human Rights and Conflict Management Office for individuals to access confidential support services. The office has distinct avenues of support, including Human Rights for access to harassment and discrimination, as well as Sexual Violence support, and Conflict Management and Ombuds Support, which provide resources for interpersonal challenges and/or unfair treatment, and misapplication of university policies and procedures. However, the processes for engaging this office have not always been clear, nor was it always clear to university members that issues of racism could be brought to this office for resolution. If racialized individuals do not have a clear and transparently communicated avenue for processing concerns and complaints, they simply cannot and will not take the actions to address the concerns. The lack of appropriate and effective supports can amplify the feelings of isolation and anxiety that accompany racist violence (King & Ford, 2003). Moreover, another example of a formal support that is currently available at WLU is the Reporting Incidents to Support Equity (RISE) tool, which was implemented in February 2025. It was originally marketed as a tool "developed to help the university understand patterns and trends of harm that take shape in the Laurier community" (Wilfrid Laurier University, 2025). However, it is not actually a formal complaints mechanism, unless the person reporting indicates they would like to engage in a formal process. We know that in instances of racism (like most forms of discrimination and harassment) are quite vulnerabilizing, and thus, there remain a shortfall in the implementation of effective supports that have a reporting process for the individual.

When it comes to formal supports, one of the challenges with making the space of conflict mediation the place where issues of racism should be directed is that, as Dr. Laura Mae Lindo has said, "racism is not really a conflict to be mediated. It is a form of systemic violence" (Lindo, 2016). As reflected in this quote, racism must be understood as a systemic issue. Combating it requires the implementation of transparent formal supports, as well as clear communication to university members regarding the purpose of the supports and their accessibility which could be communicated through visuals such as posters, social media, and email listserves. Another important factor to consider is the diversity in staff and personnel in the university community which includes staff who are part of the formal

support process. Participants alluded to the positive impact that encountering diverse staff on campus had on their sense of belonging at Laurier. While we contend that representational politics alone are insufficient to achieve the transformational systemic change that is needed to address racism, they can serve as an initial step forward in cultivating inclusive spaces for racialized individuals. However, placing focus solely on representation of diverse people and personnel in the university community disregards additional important factors. Individuals also require the necessary resources, training and supports to support students and the university community effectively.

5.2 The Cognitive, Emotional, and Behavioural Impacts of Affinity Spaces

Participants expressed the importance of having the opportunity to form affinity or "in-group" spaces with other Black, Indigenous and racialized people. They spoke specifically about the positives of communing with others of similar religious, ethno-cultural, and racial backgrounds – especially at a predominantly white institution. Spaces such as the Muslim Students Association or the Black Students Association were identified as being positive and comfortable avenues of support. Participants identified that within these spaces they could connect with and communicate openly and freely with others, as they highlighted it was a place where they did not have to explain the toll of discrimination. A key avenue for affinity space formation was through student clubs, associations, and committees on campus. These clubs created an avenue for racialized individuals to form meaningful group connections, friendships, and bonds. This is in line with the research that indicates having spaces to engage in open and meaningful conversations creates a conducive and safe space for individuals (King & Ford, 2003). These groups were a place where individuals were able to share cultural values, and where they felt safe to be their authentic selves without fear of discrimination, misunderstanding and conflict, or other harm. University institutions would benefit from continuing to allocate appropriate funding to student, staff, and faculty-run affinity spaces and organizations on campus. Creating opportunities for members of the university community to form deep connections will likely increase student satisfaction, and feelings of safety and belonging on campus. In turn, cultivating these spaces will also attract more diverse students, faculty, and staff to join the university community.

5.3 Breaking the Barriers of Ignorance around Racism in Predominantly White Institutions

Participants in the study discussed the importance of educating students, faculty, and staff on issues of racism, and how to engage in these conversations with an informed understanding and sensitivity to the issues. In their original report, the Being Raced project team called for anti-racism training for all university staff members (Grant et al., 2017). This is an ask that has yet to be completely implemented, in part due to the challenges accompanied with enacting changes in policy within a unionized work environment (MacKinnon, 2014). From staff to faculty to administrators, there is a glaring gap in the institution's response to overt and covert forms of racism. As elucidated in the results section, this is especially important in the classroom setting where faculty instructors hold power in terms of the course content covered. If a faculty member uses their classroom as a space to spread their own bias, opinions, worldviews and perspectives to the point of enacting harm on racialized students, and there are no clear mechanisms to hold them accountable, this creates a concerning dynamic in which the institutional leadership appears complicit in the violence perpetuated by their faculty.

Thus, it is recommended to reinforce university and provincial policies on human rights and harassment, as well as provide adequate training and resources to staff and faculty so that they are best informed about the diversity of the students they serve. While equity trainings are provided online at Laurier specifically, they are optional. In addition, research findings show increased and more active engagement in EDI initiatives from individuals from structurally excluded groups, and thus, initiatives mentioned above tend to be taken up by those who already have some understanding of and interest in how systemic racism functions in the university (Madzima & MacIntosh, 2021). Thus, it would require the institution to allocate funding to provide staff and faculty with resources to gain a sustained, engaged, and deeper understanding of evidence-informed knowledge that goes beyond mere opinions.

5.4 The Need to Systemically Entrench Anti-Racism Practice

The racial composition of an institution has been noted to have a significant impact on the quality of racialized individuals' university experiences (Foste, 2023). This includes the student body composition, as well as that of staff, faculty and university administrators. Previous research has indicated many white administrators have failed to consider racialized individuals's voices in a space of learning (Foste, 2023). The literature aligns with the current study's findings as participants reported they felt that Laurier as an institution did not care to take meaningful action to combat racism or attempt to uplift racialized voices, especially those that are vocal and critical. When racialized individuals' needs are not heard and they do not see themselves represented on campus, this can significantly contribute to a decrease in feelings of safety, inclusion, and protection (Carter, 2007). At Laurier, it was noted by participants that most of the professional staff are white and white-passing individuals. Thus, because the central

gatekeepers throughout the institution are part of the status quo, these individuals may have a harder time understanding and advocating for the lived experience of racialized individuals at the university. To better facilitate safer spaces, WLU will need to take diligent action to diversify their staff and faculty (beyond the spaces where EDI work is done) with highly qualified personnel who also happen to be racialized. This is an important point, since with the trend of EDI implementation within white supremacist structures such as the academy, a paradox has been created where well-intentioned, it is also performative. To demonstrate EDI commitments, leaders may hire the first or most palatable Black, Indigenous, and racialized person they encounter who makes them feel comfortable. As Johnson et al (2025) refers to this as performative initiatives that fail to address the people's concerns and hinder meaningful changes in the structures and systems of the institution. This results in a kind of representational politics, where Black and Brown faces "diversify" a space in the most superficial and performative way, but they do not challenge the way things are done which can perpetuate harm on other Black, Indigenous, and racialized people. Hiring for transformative Black, Indigenous, and racialized leaders with a thorough understanding and proven history of the tenets of this work is encouraged. Intentional hiring at the level of administrative leadership works in tandem with increasing education on race relations and racism across all levels of the institution from visibility in faculty and staff hiring, to staff training, and course curricula that decenters eurocentrism. Overall, diversifying in the ways mentioned above will not only increase feelings of safety and inclusion for Black, Indigenous, and racialized folks on campus, but will also ensure their retention and support for success in academic spaces.

5.5 The Implications and Mental Tax Self-Advocacy has on Racialized Individual's Performance and Well-Being

The advocacy for racialized issues is largely done by racialized individuals for whom these issues have real-world implications. This can be emotionally exhausting and distracting from other critical commitments. It is crucial to consider the implications of racialized peoples having to advocate for their rights on campus. Many racialized individuals have prior responsibilities which include completing their degrees with satisfactory grades, maintaining their social and familial commitments, as well as actively participating in paid or unpaid extracurriculars. However, racialized individuals also having to defend their rights and advocate for access on campuses is another mentally taxing addition. If changes are implemented that The Being Raced study put forth, in combination with suggestions to improve safer spaces presented here, racialized individuals would not have to take on the psychological burden of self-advocacy. Research has shown that this type of advocacy may lead to burnout and the cognitive load required may diminish performance on other tasks (Franklin, 2016). Further research from this study may delve into the psychological impacts that self-advocacy can have on students and the university community..

5.6 The Current Campus Environment and Identifying Future Action Items

Participants discussed systemic issues that contributed to and maintained the processes of racism and diminished their feelings of safety on campus. Racialized individuals voiced the need for the institution to make actionable changes to increase the on-campus experience of safety. Since the publication of the Being Raced study and its numerous calls to action, some action has been taken to improve Wilfrid Laurier University's school climate for racialized students in particular. A few key action items have been implemented since the Being Raced study which include: one Indigenous and one Black counsellor were hired to provide support to students; there was an internal review process to examine Special Constables Services on campus with hopes that student concerns would be centred; there are opportunities for residence and student life staff to undergo anti-racism training; and there are dedicated Black and Indigenous student success supports. In addition, the university hired its first Associate Vice-President of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in 2020. This Associate Vice President designed Laurier's first EDI strategic plan. However, as outlined in the strategic plan, the strategy can only be implemented if the necessary resources are provided by the institution to make it actionable. Despite the efforts made by WLU and other university institutions in Canada over the last several years to enhance EDI initiatives including hiring with diversity as one of the many priorities, and to increase feelings of safety for racialized students and staff, there remains significant gaps in the supports and resources available and areas for growth and improvement.

5.7 Limitations and Future Directions

A few major limitations of this study have been identified. First, the data collection occurred in 2017. We know on the ground the issues of racism are more important on post-secondary campuses today more than ever before, in particular with the roll back of EDI priorities in institutions across North America, and reverting back to the meritocracy myth with no analysis of how white supremacy, power, privilege, and nepotism have historically driven admissions and awards processes (Eizadirad & Walton, 2025). There does remain the question about the temporal nuance of the issues. That being said, there has been limited action taken since the Being Raced Study, and racialized students, staff, and faculty at Wilfrid Laurier University continue to identify feeling that the school is not a safe space for them – be that in

their classrooms, in the school hallways, or in residence. Thus, although the raw data may be a few years old now, the research is still relevant to creating safer spaces on Canadian campuses. An additional limitation may be that interviews were primarily conducted with students and thus the staff perspective is limited in these findings. This could present challenges with generating conclusions or solutions to issues that racialized staff and faculty experience in university bureaucracies. In the future, examining the experiences of racialized staff and faculty, as well as further examining the varied experiences of different racial and ethnic identities at post-secondary institutions would be important to capture another unique perspective that is limited in the current literature.

Furthermore, the interviews took place on Brantford Campus, which is a smaller campus in a small town when compared to Laurier's main Waterloo campus. In this, we acknowledge that experiences on this campus may be nuanced and textured in their specificity. However, given the fact that all but one of our authors has been a racialized staff, faculty or student at Laurier, we know intimately that experiences of racism are rife across the different campuses, irrespective of township or location.

6. Conclusion

This research can be used to inform future work on racial climate and racism within Canadian post-secondary institutions, and to inform approaches and strategies for the cultivation of safer spaces for-, and a sense of belonging among systemically marginalized communities within spaces of higher learning. In drawing from the politics of an intersectional Black feminist analytic (Almeida & Guillard, 2020), we endorse the approach of catering to the most marginalized members of our communities (i.e. racialized and Indigenous peoples in this case), we end up meeting the needs of all members of our communities who are positioned in a place of power in the intersectional hierarchies of race, class, gender, etc. When it comes to the creation of safer spaces at post-secondary institutions for racialized people, much of the literature is based in the American context. This study adds to these conversations from the context of a mid-sized Canadian university. This study also provides a starting point to effectively examine the racial climate, experiences of racism, and racially affirming actions at Canadian institutions. By amplifying the voices of marginalized communities on campus, only then can dominant discourse be intentionally disrupted and transformational change occur. These changes will not only improve the experience of marginalized students and staff, but impact sense of belonging and inclusion on campus - thereby encouraging more Black, Indigenous, and racialized students to stay the course and complete their post-secondary education.

In being mindful that policy reform often requires multiple iterations and long lead times, this study contributes to advancing the conversations around policy and organizational level change and provides additional insights into the processes involved in a unionized workspace. When examining the issue of racism and bigotry present at Canadian institutions, Black, Indigenous, and racialized members of the institution are looking for inclusive and safer working and learning environments, where there are tangible resources and support services. Participants also advocated for change by various means which included education/training on and about race and racism, which helps to address unawareness and gaps in knowledge; growing the representation of structurally excluded groups in Laurier's administration and staff bodies who are also competent about racism and intersectional oppression; as well as creating accountability mechanisms for professors' engagement in the classroom, especially in regard to perpetuation of biased ideologies and opinions not rooted in evidence. These efforts will help to cultivate environments of higher learning that encourage all members of the university community to thrive.

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Appendix A

Participant Relation to Wilfrid Laurier University

Participant	Percent	Response
Student	92.7%	164
Staff	4.0%	7
Faculty Member	3.4%	6

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Demographics:

1. Are you a student, staff or faculty member? Please circle all that apply.

   Student
   Staff
   Faculty

2. What campus do you work/study on? Please circle all campuses on which you work/study.

   Waterloo
   Kitchener
   Brantford
   Other _____

3. How do you self-identify? Please answer any and all that are relevant to you.

   Race:
   Ethnicity:
   Nation:
   Religion:
   Gender:
   Sexuality:

Being "Raced"

4. What does race mean to you?

5. How does race impact your day to day experiences?

6. Please provide an example

Being "Raced" On Campus

7. Have you experienced racism in the classroom? If yes, please provide an example.
   a. Has race impacted on your classroom experiences? Please provide an example.

8. Have you experienced racism on campus (residence, SU, clubs, Brantford, etc.) If yes, please provide an example.
   a. How has race and/ or racism impacted your overall campus experiences?

9. Are you a member of student groups that promote diversity and equity on campus?
   a) Tell us what it's like to be part of these student groups or why you aren't a member of these student groups.

Being "Raced" and the media

10. In the last 12 months have you heard about race and/ or racism in the news (i.e., from newspapers, social media, radio, the Internet etc.)?
    a. If yes, please provide an example of the subject matter.

11. If yes, please tell us about the impact of the implicit/explicit mentions of race and/ or racism in the news on your day-to-day life.
    a. At work
    b. At school
    c. In the community

Addressing Race and Racism in the Educational System

12. Please describe what systemic racism means to you.
    a. What does racism look like in social systems and institutions?
    b. How is it built into social and political systems so that it is expressed/shows up in your school/work/campus/community?

13. What does "Systemic Racism" look like in the educational system, in particular?

14. What can we do to address "Systemic Racism" in the university?
    a. What could WLU do to make racialized students/staff/faculty feel safer?

15. What is the biggest challenge in addressing "Systemic Racism" in the classroom?
    a. What do you wish you could tell your profs about being raced in their classes?
    b. Or what do you wish you could tell policymakers about being raced while working at WLU?

16. Why should WLU care about addressing "Systemic Racism"? How would it make your learning/working experience better?

17. Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't addressed in other questions?

Thank you for your participation. Sharing your ideas, suggestions and stories has been extremely beneficial.