

Racism in Academia: Indigenous Students Share Their Stories of Racism in College

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Introduction

Indigenous post-secondary students are a growing population in Canada as higher education becomes an increasingly important asset to have, and it slowly becomes more accessible. Despite the increase in Indigenous learners, the education system often falls short in its treatment and education of Indigenous students. In its current state, the post-secondary system is an inherently colonial and racist system, which benefits white students and often allows Indigenous students to slip through the cracks or imposes racist experiences, both in their education and interactions with peers and educators. The relationship between Indigenous people and education has historically been one full of racism and trauma. The present study is interested in finding out more about Indigenous students' experiences with racism at Douglas College.

Literature Review

Racism has known impacts on health, both mental and physical, as well as lifetime self esteem problems (Anderson, 2012; Yang et al., 2019). Unfortunately, Indigenous Canadians face racism all the time, including in their education. Historically, Indigenous peoples faced extreme racism and abuse in Residential schools, which not only lead those who attended to experience trauma, but also pass on that trauma intergenerationally (Gaywish & Mordoch, 2018). This racism is not limited to the past, and many Indigenous children face racist, inaccurate, and insensitive educations, which may be a cause of the educational gap (Neeganagwedgin, 2013). This racism unfortunately follows students into post-secondary, where many Indigenous people face isolation, misrepresentation, and in-class discrimination, as well as other experiences of racism (Bailey, 2019; Clark et al., 2014).

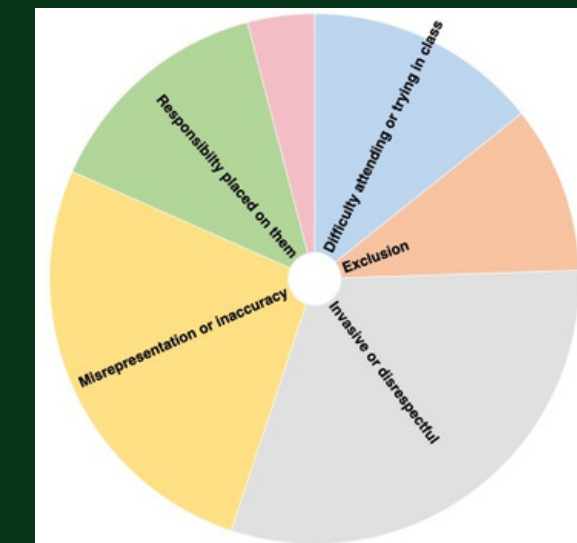
Methods

- Qualitative research, using interpretive phenomenology
- One on one interviews done on Zoom and audio recorded
- Recruitment was done through Indigenous Student Services online platforms as well as through snowball sampling

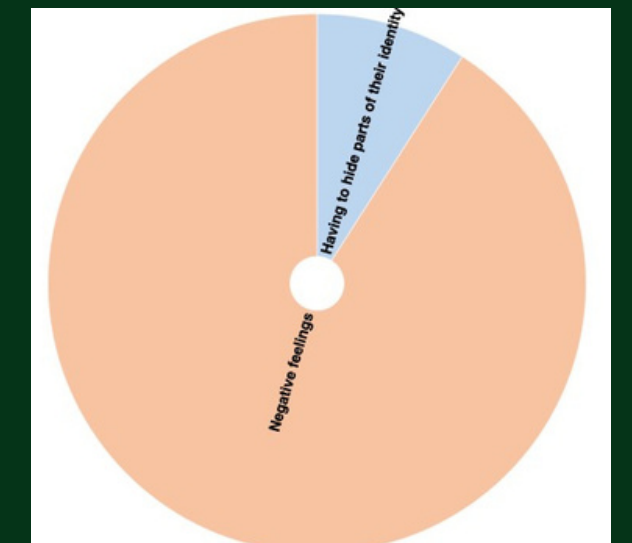
Participants

- 7 participants (3 were current students) (6 were female)
- 6 participants had status, 4 considered themselves as white skin presenting
- Participants ages ranged from 24-40+

Tentative Results



Themes of experiences



Themes of impacts

Discussion

- Coding not complete but major themes this far include invasiveness and disrespect, misrepresentations, and difficulties in attending class or doing well
- Consistent with literature
- More research should be done on this at many schools, see what is helping

References:

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- Yang, T.-C., Chen, I.-C., Choi, S.-W., & Kurtulus, A. (2019). Linking perceived discrimination during adolescence to health during mid-adulthood: Self-esteem and risk-behavior mechanisms. *Social Science & Medicine*, 232, 434–443. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.06.012>

Yeah, it was- it was- it was hard to say the least, to focus on my tests, to focus on my papers, to even have, like, joy coming to class at all. It was just hard enough being a college student. You're just like, you're tired. But, you know, to- Yeah, to just sit in a room with this person and these people was difficult. - Sam

I'm in my fourth year of studies but like I've been attending here for just over 10 years so it's just one of those things like when you don't feel like you belong or are included you just feel like it just took me so much longer to feel accepted or like I was doing the right thing in going here and pursuing my education. I guess it just felt like... you're just an outsider kind of like faking it until you get along or get to where you're going to. - Alexa

Again, it just kinda came up in conversation where I mentioned that I was Metis and um, a group of students then asked to see my status card. And I literally laughed cuz I thought that they were joking. But it was very clear that they didn't believe me and wanted proof. - Amber