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4. ANTI-BLACK RACISM, RESISTANCE, AND THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF BLACK BODIES IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

In educational spaces, Black educators, administrators, and learners are subject to oppression in the form of anti-Black racism. Experiences of racism, combined with other social and economic factors, have been proven to negatively impact the physical, emotional, and psychological health and well-being of African Canadians (see James et al., 2010). In this chapter, Newton employs Critical Anti-Racist Theory (CART) to explore anti-Black racism and its impact on the health and well-being of Black bodies in the field of public education. She draws on her lived experiences as a Black educator and on existing scholarship on anti-Black racism to discuss three processes which negatively impact the health and well-being of Black bodies in educational spaces: silencing; isolation; and tokenism. Newton then theorizes the transformation of educational spaces through anti-racist praxis and suggests policies and broader changes to address systemic anti-Black racism in public education, namely through: the creation of spaces for Black students, educators, and administrators to give voice to their experiences of anti-Black racism, breaking their isolation; the decentering of whiteness in the curriculum and classroom and creating space for Black voices, histories, and knowledges, which affirm Black identity; the creation of policies which hold educators and administrators accountable for anti-Black micro-aggressions; and the development of anti-racism training and professional development schemes in the public education system. Overall, this chapter suggests that CART must be central to understanding the experiences of Black bodies in public education and inform an anti-racist praxis capable of transforming educational spaces to ensure the health and well-being of Black bodies.

Keywords: Critical Anti-Racist Theory, anti-Black, health and well-being

INTRODUCTION

In educational spaces, Black educators, learners, and administrators are subject to oppression in the form of anti-Black racism. Experiences of racism, combined with other social and economic factors, have been proven to negatively impact the physical, emotional, and psychological health and well-being of African Canadians

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(see James et al., 2010). The purpose of this chapter is to explore—through both existing scholarship and my lived experience as a Black educator—anti-Black racism and its potential impact on the health and well-being of Black bodies in the field of public education.

As a Black woman in public education, I occupy spaces that were once the exclusive preserve of white people, and in administration, disproportionately white men. Although the teaching profession has become more diverse and multiculturalism and inclusivity initiatives have been introduced into curriculums, white supremacy and anti-Black racism continues to permeate public education in Canada (see Turner, 2015). In this chapter, I ask: What are the impacts of racism on the health and well-being of Black bodies in these spaces? How do Black bodies respond to anti-Black racism in educational settings? And finally, how can Critical Anti-Racist Theory (CART) inform anti-racist struggles in public education, transform educational spaces, and thereby improve the health and well-being of Black educators, administrators, and students?

I have chosen to center this essay on the experiences of Black bodies, as opposed to racialized bodies, in acknowledgement of the historical and contemporary specificity of anti-Black racism. Furthermore, CART emphasizes embodiment/lived experience as engendered through particular identities (see Dei, 2013). I write from my location as a Black woman attempting to grapple with my lived experience of everyday and institutionalized anti-Black racism in education. I also write with an understanding of my racial identity as a site of resistance and that my commitment to anti-racist praxis is grounded in the desire to improve the lives of Black people in educational settings, including my own, and ultimately to challenge and transgress white supremacy.

I begin by exploring the intersections of anti-Black racism, work life, and health and well-being through the experiences of my mother, a Black nurse who suffered with racism-related stress, and how her experiences parallel my own. I then discuss the forms anti-Black racism takes in education and how racism is related to processes of silencing, isolation, and tokenism, which negatively impact the health and well-being of Black bodies in educational spaces. I then outline what needs to be done in order to ensure the well-being of Black bodies in educational spaces. I offer some possibilities for a “pedagogy of hope” (Freire, 1994) and the transformation of educational spaces through anti-racist praxis. To this end, I suggest some policies and broader changes to address systemic anti-Black racism in public education, namely through: the creation of spaces for Black students, educators, and administrators to give voice to their experiences of anti-Black racism, break their isolation; the decentering of whiteness in the curriculum and classroom and creating space for Black voices, histories, and knowledges, which affirm Black identity; the creation of policies which hold educators and administrators accountable for anti-Black micro-aggressions; and the development of anti-racism training and professional development schemes designed to bring about long-term transformation in the public education system.

ANTI-BLACK RACISM, RESISTANCE, AND THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Marx (1845) once said, “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point however, is to change it.” My intention with this chapter is to draw on my own lived experiences as a Black woman, and more particularly a Black educator, and understand these experiences through the lens of CART. Theory informs my praxis as an anti-racist educator who hopes to not only interpret but also transform the spaces in which I work and my students learn.

ANTI-BLACK RACISM, WORK LIFE, AND HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

At a very young age, I became cognizant of what Fanon (1952) called “The Fact of Blackness”. Whether at school, in the shopping mall, or on the street, I was acutely aware that my race—i.e. my Blackness—shaped my experiences of the world and how I was to navigate everyday life. Like Fanon, through the gaze of non-Black people, their comments and stares, and the way they responded to my presence, I became conscious of myself as a Black body.

Race, and the politics around it, also shaped my home life. I was raised in suburban Toronto by a white, sixth-generation Canadian father, and an immigrant, Black Jamaican mother. Race, was at the center of many a family discussion and indeed, argument. My racial identity as a Black woman was shaped by a mother who instilled in me a sense of Black pride, endowed me with an understanding of Black history, and despite my father’s insistence that I was bi-racial, prepared me for a world that would read me as Black.

While I have always identified as Black, as a child many individuals insisted on identifying me as bi-racial or “mixed”. Like my father, they understood my identification as Black as a denial of my Irish-Canadian heritage and thus a denial of my racial identity—even as an act of self-hatred. This tension between my mother’s insistence on my Blackness and my father’s own claim on my racial identity was a source of tension throughout my childhood. My mother’s insistence on my Black identity was very much an attempt to prepare me for a world that would read me as Black. I understand now that her instilling in me a sense of pride in my racial identity was an attempt to inoculate me against the anti-Black racism I experienced and would experience. My experiences of racial oppression have never been due to my dual identity but to one specific aspect of my identity, my Blackness.

During high school, I became increasingly aware of the complexities of anti-Black racism, the way it is internalized, and the social and psychological legacies of colonialism in the Caribbean and broader African diaspora. For whatever reason, my mother did not provide me with a deep understanding of ‘pigmentocracy’ and intersection of class and race in Caribbean society. Nor did I understand how colonialism shaped how Black people of various complexions understood themselves, their identity, and self-worth in relation to one another. I became aware that I was the bearer of certain unearned privilege as a Black woman with a lighter complexion. I became cognizant of the reality of shadeism, or colourism, that pervades Black communities.

The lived experiences of my mother, my experiences as a youth, and in my current profession, bring me to anti-racism work. My mother was a registered nurse who, like many of her peers, left Jamaica in her early twenties. She moved to England for formal schooling and then on to Canada for work and settlement. For young Black Caribbean women who were interested in a career in nursing, the Canadian state's demand for cheap, 'unskilled' immigrant labour provided an opportunity for them to make a living. Before the Trudeau government officially ended Canada's whites-only immigration policy, the Canadian state, in concert with the British government, facilitated the migration of Jamaican nurses to Canada (Samuels-Denis, York, & Barrett, 2013, pp. 70–71). However, far from being the Promised Land, these nurses faced many challenges when they arrived in Canada. As Samuels-Denis, York, and Barrett observes, for Black nurses "Nurses recalled experiences undergirded by racism, discrimination, hierarchical oppression and the constant imposed idea that they were not good enough" (2013, p. 74).

Though she is now retired, as I reflect on my mother's well-being and mental health. I remember her workplace as a constant source of racism-related stress. I recall her talking about racism and discrimination on the job, the anti-Black micro-aggressions or overt racism experienced at the hands of her patients, fellow nurses, or managers. I now understand that these experiences of racism took a serious toll on my mother and can help explain her stress levels, and later, her battles with mental health. Her experiences have led me to ponder the impacts of racism on the health and well-being of Black bodies within my own profession and beyond.

After a long career in nursing, my mother developed Alzheimer's Dementia. As my family and I long to understand this complex disease and watch her slowly slip away, I have contemplated the relationship between the racism she experienced and her mental health. According to the Fisher Centre for Alzheimer's Research (2013), studies have shown that in the area of dementia risks, there is a direct correlation between midlife stress and an increase in dementia. Is my mother's deteriorating mental health a product of years of stress related to racial oppression within school, the workplace, and everyday life in the UK and Canada? On a recent visit to an emergency department in a local Toronto hospital for my mother's care, I was greeted by a former colleague of my mother's who fondly remembered my mother in her early years of nursing. During this short visit the attending nurse recalled how my mother was an advocate for equity and how she would help guide, assist and navigate many young Black nurses that were new to the field and country. I asked the Nurse quickly about my mother's colleagues and she informed me that many of my mother's colleagues, all Black Caribbean nurses had some form of dementia. I can only help but wonder the toll on Black bodies and their well-being.

I think back to the stories that my mother shared with me about growing up in colonial Jamaica in the 1940s and '50s, and then moving to England in the '60s before immigrating to Canada in the '70s. Her stories were always filled with adventure, nostalgia and hope, however the majority of her stories were tied to specific experiences as a Black body in these spaces. What I have garnered from

these stories is that her Blackness dictated how she would be perceived, how non-Black folks would relate to her, and that anti-Black racism determined what resources—from housing to employment—she would have access to.

I can recall stories about patients not wanting her to care for them because she was Black and requesting a white nurse, doctors discrediting her credentials and ability because she was from “the colonies”, or white Canadian-born nurses who were upset about the new wave of Black women entering “their” profession. One story that I remember particularly well, was about a patient who had injured his eyes and had to be bandaged during his care. After tending to this patient for a couple days she removed the bandages from his eyes and he said to my mother, “God, your Black and Ugly, I thought you were a beautiful white woman all this time, gosh your accent is deceiving”. It was moments like this that dehumanized my mother and devalued her care and worth. There were also many stories of resistance and individual and collective struggles for justice, dignity, and equity. Her experiences, and those of many of her Black colleagues who would frequent our house for dinner, told a unique story about being a Black nurse in Canada: a story of resistance, resilience, and dignity in the face of oppression, exclusion, and marginalization. But resistance itself takes a toll on the body (see James et al., 2010). My mother’s struggles against anti-Black racism, her willingness to call out the racism of white nurses, patients, and doctors, wore her down both mentally and physically.

Around the same time my mother retired from nursing, I entered the workforce as a teacher. My lived experiences as a Black body in my profession, mirror those of my mother. The struggles of my mother’s generation resulted in anti-discrimination policies, human rights legislation, and cultural norms in which racism is expressed less overtly than in the past. However, given my own experiences, I question if these policies and norms have resulted in real change. This is not to underplay the individual and collective struggles of my community’s elders. My critique is of institutions characterized by systemic racism, but unlike in my mother’s time, these institutions now attempt to mask these realities with the liberal discourse of multiculturalism, equity, and inclusion.

Although progress has been made, anti-Black racism remains a cause of ill-health for Black people (James et al., 2010) and continues to exclude, oppress, and marginalize Black bodies. I worry about the mental health of Black educators, administrators, and students. Many Black educators confide in me and discuss their anxieties, frustrations, and stresses within the workplace; experiences that are tied up in the bodies they occupy and the racism they confront. Many Black educators have been in tears and emotionally distraught when confiding in me. I have heard from enough of my Black colleagues to know that these lived experiences are not isolated but common to Black educators i.e. that anti-Black racism is systemic and works to not only marginalize Black learners but also Black teachers and administrators (see Turner, 2015). These realities bump up against the denials and silences over race in public education. On a weekly basis, white colleagues tell me that racism does not exist and that they are colour blind. As Dei (2013, p. 8) has argued, “The

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rhetoric of color blindness in schooling and education justifies the status quo of white privilege.” This rhetoric, and the hierarchies of power and privilege it upholds, spurs me on to continue in my work as an educator committed to critical anti-racist praxis.

Furthermore, as a Black educator responsible for equity work in predominantly white spaces, I am constantly reminded of how non-Black teachers have internalized and attached negative meaning to my Blackness and the Blackness of my students and Black colleagues. This creates an interesting dynamic when presenting to white educators on race and racism, and on other sites of difference and oppression, such as gender, sexuality, class, disability, language, and religion. I have found that liberal approaches to equity and inclusivity are near hegemonic in educational institutions in Ontario. Liberal preoccupations with managing difference and learning multiculturalism do not go deep enough and work to perpetuate denials and silences over race and racism in education. Thus, my work in professional development in equity and inclusivity must seek to further incorporate CART to challenge systemic racism in its many manifestations.

Finally, I acknowledge that too often I push aside my lived experiences and do not share these experiences for fear of this knowledge being deemed subjective or non-academic. To inhibit the Black body and not speak about race is problematic (Dei & Lecture OISE, 2016). We must speak about our identities not only because they are constantly imposed but also because histories and struggles and resistance are an integral part of identity. In sum, in working closely with educators, I have come to understand and witness the acts of racism and oppression in our schools firsthand. In my eleven years as an educator I have been disheartened and distraught with the treatment of Black bodies and systemic anti-Blackness that pervades educational spaces. I worry that should anti-Black racism persist, the health and well being of Black educators, students, and administrators will continue be negatively impacted. I must summon the courage to speak about the experiences of racism and their impact.

ANTI-BLACK RACISM AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Anti-Black racism takes on many forms in public education (see Dei, 2013; Turner 2015). Whether in an early years classroom or in a post-secondary setting, anti-Black racism exists and manifests itself in different ways. Whether as structural racism, micro-aggressions, or overt racist acts, it is important to understand how certain bodies are implicated in these processes and the effects that racism has on Black bodies. James et al. provides a clear picture of what Black students in particular encounter within educational spaces and how Black parents navigate anti-Blackness and experience stress because of it:

The education system remains a source of enormous stress for these parents and their children. African Canadian students face a variety of barriers and obstacles in the education system, including the largely Eurocentric curriculum,

under-representation of Black teachers and principals, negative stereotyping of Black students, lower expectations of Black students, harsher punishment of Black students when conflict arises, and the persistence of racist incidents and name calling. Many parents see the education system as one that does little to nurture African Canadian students and support their learning. Parents expressed anger and frustration at the system's failure to meet their children's needs and, even worse, for increasing their health risks and reducing their life choice. (2010, p. 91)

Furthermore, anti-Black racism and its impacts are masked in public education through a variety of processes. As I mentioned above, as Dei (2013, p. 8) has argued, "the rhetoric of color blindness in schooling and education justifies the status quo of white privilege." And while the discourse of multiculturalism and inclusivity moves beyond colour blindness, through the recognition of difference, its focus on managing difference rather than addressing institutionalized racism, does little to challenge anti-Black racism and white supremacy. Building from both lived experience and critical race scholarship, the following section explores a variety of ways in which anti-Black racism is manifest in educational settings. I focus on those manifestations of anti-Black racism I have continually experienced in my career before relating these experiences back to the question of stress, health and well-being of the Black body.

Silencing

"You need to pick your battles", "Be careful how you respond. You don't want to make people mad or they will ruin your career" or "Why do you have to be so sensitive and make a big deal out of it, they didn't really mean it". Too often, these statements have been said to me when I encounter different manifestations of anti-Black racism in my workplace. I have been conditioned over time to deflect, suppress and ignore the anti-Black racism I have experienced. For Black people, the fear of complaining about, and challenging, anti-Black racism exists across institutions, not only in the workplace. There is a fear that you might face backlash or punishment for doing so.

Many of my Black friends who have children have confided in me that they want to make a formal complaint about the racist treatment that their child experienced, but fear potential punishments that may affect their child's grades or daily treatment. And for Black teachers, Turner (2015) has describes a culture in which the voices of those who are Black or aware of issues of equity are silenced and "black listed" in public education in Ontario.

When Black students, parents, and educators seek avenues to voice their grievances, formal complaint systems are seldom in place, leaving only costly legal avenues. Many schools have accident report forms and health and safety report forms but do not have formal complaint systems for incidences of racism. Without these structures in place, racism can continue to further marginalize oppressed

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groups and reinforce silencing. For those that do make formal requests, many times administrators attempt to “deescalate” by promising to take corrective action that typically individualizes experiences of discrimination while failing to address systemic racism.

Silencing is one form of oppression that is imposed on Black bodies. Many times Black people have to work twice as hard when trying to gain access to institutions that are dominated by whiteness. These individuals are faced with historical systems of oppression that include racist policies that have created systemic discrimination within the institution, thus limiting access. This colonial oppression that is embedded in the institution acts as a limiting and regulating force that Black bodies encounter on a daily basis. Ahmed (2012) describes this as a ‘brick wall’ that creates resistance between institutions and change. And when institutions do make efforts to make more equitable and inclusive workplaces, often through diversity initiatives, racialized bodies take on a very important and significant role for the institution. As these bodies enter the institution some can experience an increased vulnerability, which leaves them at risk and further marginalized. Many times this vulnerability can take the form of physical and mental violence and the silencing and suppressing of speech and actions (Ahmed, 2012).

Monture (2010) provides an example of silencing in post-secondary education, describing instances where, as an Aboriginal woman, she felt vulnerability and was silenced as a result. She explains how she encountered backlash from white colleagues when she spoke out against racism. However, she also speaks to the need to resist silencing:

It has been suggested to me that speaking about issues of racialization in the academy is risky. Although I have indeed experienced the sharp edge of backlash, I speak to these issues because it is the only way to unmask and destabilize the power held over so many of us. And if I cannot hang on to the hope of transformative change, then I cannot continue to engage the university. (Monture, 2010, p. 26)

The concept of risk comes into play for Black people who must negotiate everyday racism by picking and choosing which battles to fight. White bodies never have to hide personal opinions and convictions because of risk. Black bodies face consequences like social isolation, verbal attacks from colleagues, reprimands, or potential termination; all are risks associated with fighting oppression within an institution (see Dei et al., 2013). Furthermore, professional mobility does not insulate one from these risks. According to Monture (2010), racialized bodies become institutionally bound; upwardly mobile racialized bodies may have more power in institutional settings but because of the body that you occupy, power and privilege is limited.

During my first years of teaching I made a number of observations: Why did none of the staff or senior leadership look like me? Why during our school’s honour roll ceremonies were Black students not crossing the stage? Or why were student success programs and alternative education programs clearly divided along racial and socio-

economic lines? I questioned whether others saw these differences. Did I see these things because the students reflected my identity and the rest of the teaching staff did not? I would ask my non-Black co-workers whether they noticed these similarities too and heard a variety of responses like, “what do you expect” or “you’re reading into things too much”. I wondered who is whiteness invisible too? Who has the power to ignore this politic?

This example of dialoguing with white educators about racialized differences in student achievement, treatment, and access to resources, was a quick reminder to know my place and not to worry or question, thus silencing me. The comments and lack of caring and support takes a mental toll because the comment is not just injurious to the student but to myself as I have the same racial identity.

The act of silencing and the mental and physical toll that is experienced by racialized bodies within institutions is a lived reality. James and Mannette (2000) explore the challenges that Black students face when entering university institutions through ‘access’ programs and illustrate the relationship between anger at racism, silencing, and stress on the Black body. They write:

In relating their experiences within the university, respondents reported that they were perceived as “access” because they were Black. This stereotyping and the resultant behaviors towards these students by both professors and peers contributed to the frustrations and sometimes anger that they felt in the university. Sometimes they would take actions and raise the issues that they perceived needed to be addressed, but they were usually dismissed as troublemakers. The idea of trouble is a key component in how access students are understood and perceived, regardless of what may or may not say or do. (ibid. 79)

Stories like this are very common for Black bodies that enter such spaces. Some individuals choose to be silent or are silenced because of fear of retaliation and lack of support. The institutional structures themselves restrict and place limitations on Black bodies and survivalist practices and coping mechanisms take over (see Turner, 2015). In spaces where only particular kinds of Blackness are accepted, playing the game of performing acceptable Blackness—i.e. Blackness that is not disruptive of white supremacy—becomes necessary to survive. In many spaces you will become isolated for not doing so, thus limiting your growth and success in the institution. The limitations that are placed on Black bodies ultimately limits one’s authentic self as you constantly learn to internalize the impacts of racism and silence yourself.

In James et al.’s (2010) study of anti-Black racism and well-being in Canada, participants shared experiences of the limitations of authentic self and the mask they feel they must wear in order to fit into mainstream society. One participant in the study exclaimed: “I cannot be myself. I am not being who I want to be... You want to be who you are, but people won’t let you. They feel they already know who you are just because you are Black. So we suppress ourselves to fit into the dominant society” (as qtd. in James et al., 2010, p. 65). Participants in this study commonly

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referred to the pressure to assimilate into white Canadian society, “which makes it hard for them to relax or be fully themselves, which then weighs heavily on their sense of identity” (Ibid.).

Silencing can also be seen in the spaces that Black bodies choose not to occupy. Many times I would tell my students about community events I might have attended on the weekend, only for them to tell me “that’s for white people,” or “we don’t go there; they don’t want Black kids there.” Over the years I have witnessed how my Black students police themselves within the city and self-regulate their access to spaces, thus limiting their experiences. This did not just manifest itself in the community but also within the school’s extracurricular programs where students would not sign up for certain activities because they were not seen as being for them or they did not feel welcome. These brief anecdotes suggest the need to engage in structural hegemonic rupturing within our everyday lives, challenging the silencing, forced narratives, containment of Blackness, and sometimes our own complicity with white supremacy.

Isolation

Black bodies also experience isolation within the educational spaces and other institutions (see Turner, 2015). When functioning in either the school or the workplace, moments of isolation occur when white peers either isolate you or you draw away from others and isolate yourself for safety. In *Friends in Deed, Friendship Indeed?* Leckie (2012) describes how isolation occurs in the institution by looking at female allies and friendship in the academy. Leckie suggests that our work in the academy across race is broken (2012, p. 106). This brokenness does not allow for authentic relationships, collaborative practices, and belonging within the institution. Instead, isolation for racialized bodies become routine and normalized. Leckie provides several examples where she was targeted for being an ally and shares many observations based on the treatment of racialized bodies. She notes examples where racialized bodies are left out of meetings, projects, and discussions. One troubling example is when Leckie (2012, p. 106) reveals that some “white women claim participation in diversity efforts to promote their own institutional status while simultaneously keeping women of color at a distance... this maintenance of spatial distance can happen regardless of the institutional responsibilities or power that women of color hold.”

Having a safe space to dialogue about experiences of isolation and share these realities is usually limited and discouraged and many times you are left alone as a racialized body in the institution to internalize and manage these oppressive systems. bell hooks refers to this as ‘racial distancing’ (hooks as qtd. in Leckie, 2012, p. 104). This is another example of how whiteness is enacted in the institution and how Black bodies experience self through the structures in the institution that create racial distance and thus isolation. Leckie suggests that “race is not named; however, it is important to create and maintain white bonds through exclusionary alliances.

These selective alliances create and maintain- unacknowledged- racial distance” (ibid.). Leckie refers to this systemic force as “an unspoken white solidarity” and this solidarity makes it difficult and sometimes impossible for Black bodies to trust and be fully included and valued within the institutional space (ibid.).

Another form of isolation that occurs within the institution for Black bodies can be a form of isolation from within the racialized group that you belong to. As your body enters spaces not dominated by racialized bodies some individuals who share your racial identity may question your racial authenticity and accuse you of being ‘whitewashed’, ‘being better than’ and a sense of ‘othering’ from within your own communities can occur. It is this feeling of being ‘an outsider’ that Harper (2004) discusses *Nomads, Pilgrims, Tourists: Women Teachers in the Canadian North*. Harper discusses the experiences of one Indigenous teacher starting a new teaching position in northern Ontario:

Sometimes I feel kind of strange because I’ve lived on reserves most of my life and hung around with Native people all of my life. And then I come here and [am] labeled as ‘teacher’. Here I’m hanging around with a lot of non-Native teachers. I don’t mind, but sometimes it’s kind of strange. You know, you’re ‘the teacher,’ even though I’m Native. But I’m still not from the community. I’m still an outsider. But I am Native, you know what I mean? (2004, p. 209)

Harper’s experience of not being seen as Indigenous but as a ‘teacher’ creates isolation from within the community and is an interesting burden because the lack of access to these institutions in the first place creates a sense of duality for the racialized body. So not only are you sometimes isolated from non- racialized members but also from those within your own community who see you as a traitor and potentially as one of the oppressors. However it is the history of colonial systems that have created this distrust, suspicion, and doubt. Once you are in the confines of the institution it becomes harder for Black bodies to pass certain agendas and fight for equity, inclusivity and anti-racist policies. Isolation is a major burden that Black bodies have to contend with in the institution and this takes on an added burden to one’s already existing role as a Black educator.

Tokenism

Tokenism refers to the practice or policy of admitting an extremely small number of members of racial, ethnic, or gender groups to work, educational, or social spaces to give the impression of being inclusive, when in actuality these spaces remain characterized by forms of systemic oppression and exclusion (James and Manette, 2000). According to Ahmed (2007), as institutions create a variety of diversity policies and initiatives, many struggle to create policies and practices that are truly authentic and create meaningful change to pre-existing racist and sexist structures. Many of these institutions are confused with how to make positive inclusive and equitable strategies that embody the meaning and purpose of diversity work. Instead

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many organizations produce diversity policies and projects that create tokenistic environments for racialized bodies. Ahmed describes this tokenism as a form of aesthetic or as she states the “Benetton model” of diversity, in which diversity becomes an aesthetic style or a way of “rebranding” an organization (ibid.).

More specifically, and perhaps given the widespread use of “business case” arguments for diversity within public and private sector organizations, “diversity has been identified as a management term. Diversity becomes something to be managed and valued as a human resource” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 53). Therefore, racialized bodies within the institution are reduced to a quota to fill. The act of tokenism once again adds to the burden through the diminishing a racialized person’s competency and worth to simply skin colour. Organizations then pride themselves on being diverse by crediting the number of racialized bodies that they have employed, disregarding whether or not anti-racist initiatives are taking place within the institution (see Ahmed, 2007).

In my experiences in public education, Black bodies are used as visible markers of institutional success in reaching diversity and inclusion goals. This act shows how the institution produces experiences for Black bodies that become a normalized practice. These tokenistic acts do not move diversity work ahead but only hinder progress. The inclusion of Black bodies is important but it must go beyond tokenism and must address the systems in place that restrict Black bodies from entering the institution in the first place, including anti-Black racism in the education system and racial bias in hiring.

Tutti et al. (2009, pp. 65–66) describe the burden of tokenism racialized bodies must endure, including “feeling like they must be exemplars of their entire race and work twice as hard to get half as far; feel obligated to represent one’s race or ethnicity on multiple committees that help the institution, but not necessarily the individual, and to mentor and advise many same-race students _ a huge hidden workload that goes unrewarded in the promotion and tenure system.” This experience is similar to a ‘glass ceiling’ for Black bodies. Access is granted for a small percentage of Black bodies, nonetheless it is only until these bodies try to gain power or move up that the glass ceiling stops them. The ceiling is glass so that the institution gives the illusion that it is doing equity work. The tokenism restricts movement and limits your relationship with other non-racialized bodies within the system. In some instances you are used to fulfill and paint a picture of a diverse institution when in reality the institution is characterized by systemic racism.

Anti-Black Racism and the Social Determinants of Health

For Black bodies in educational spaces, experiences of anti-Black racism can result in stress and anxiety. James et al. (2010) have documented how experiences of racism, combined with other social and economic factors, affect the health and well-being of African Canadians across a range of institutional settings and in different cities across Canada. From my own experiences as a Black educator, I can relate to the

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James et al.'s findings and connect this research back to the lived experiences of my mother. James et al. (2010, p. 132) argues that the heavy emotional impact of racism can result in chronic stress brought on by feelings of depression, panic, anxiety, and other psychiatric disorders. This research goes beyond just mental health impacts. As James et al. have found:

Institutional racism, personally mediated racism, and internalized racism – and stress, anger, and despair, other research have made a connection between these emotions and risk factors for heart disease, stroke, and cancer, among other health conditions. As research findings indicate, racism is a fundamental cause of health disparities and is undoubtedly a major factor in the overall health of African Canadians. (2010, pp. 139–140)

One participant in their study mirrored my own feelings and emotions, he said, racism “is a constant struggle. The unbearable stress, unbearable treatment, forces you to doubt yourself, your abilities, your values. [Racism] puts doubt in your mind. I become angry and defenceless. I experience anxiety, frustration, and stress. Sometimes I lose my motivation and spirit to carry on” (2010, p. 131). The findings of James et al. echoes Turner’s (2015) research on the impacts of anti-Black racism on Black teachers in Ontario and the disproportionate levels of stress experienced by Black educators.

TOWARDS A PEDAGOGY OF HOPE: TRANSFORMING EDUCATIONAL SPACES THROUGH ANTI-RACIST PRACTICE

The classroom of today cannot be a sanctuary free from discussions of race and social oppression. We must challenge the racist ideologies that filter through classroom teaching and curricular practices. We must critically examine the structures for educational delivery-structures for teaching, learning, and administration of education-to see how racism can be systemic and institutionalized within the setting (Dei, 2000, p. 9).

I had the honour of attending a class unlike no other in my educational career. It was my first educational experience in 34 years where the students in the class and the professor looked like me. Here was a space where we were to learn about the principles of CART and how to transform institutions with an anti-racist praxis. It was a space where my lived experiences mattered and where my epistemic knowledge could be counted as academic. A space where theory met action, where we met in community and where we learned from one another. It is here that I learnt how to transform my pedagogy and witness what CART looks like in practice. Our instructor created a learning experience that made us question, examine, and apply theory to our lived experiences, always connecting theory to praxis.

The class was incredibly diverse: mothers, activists, educators, all with a variety of different backgrounds and nationalities. Many of my fellow classmates were organizers with the Black Lives Matter movement, intelligent young women taking

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the streets to demand justice and an end to the anti-Blackness that pervades our institutions and everyday life in Ontario. I was honoured to be in the presence of these students once a week. The lives of my classmates and their stories were inspirational and I was able to witness a new wave of anti-racist activism and leadership. The different work that was being done by individuals in the area of CART was rich and it was special to meet in a space where we could openly discuss our challenges and success and apply theory to our work.

One memorable event that I will never forget is when one of my classmates who was pregnant for the majority of the term, was able to bring her baby into the class to introduce her to us. That moment when she paraded her newborn baby around the class really solidified for me why this work is important and why we must collectively transform our society and dismantle white supremacy. It was moments like this where I was reminded that I need to be fearless in responding to anti-Black racism and that if anti-racist work is to transform institutions then I must be prepared to face the consequences of this work. This must be done so my classmates baby girl will not have to endure the same experiences that my mother and I have lived through. Paulo Freire summarizes the fearless attitude that I must exude. He states:

[T]he more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, to listen, to see the world unveiled. This person is not afraid to meet the people or to enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of history or of all people, or the liberator of the oppressed; but he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side. (Freire, 2000, p. 132)

Using a “pedagogy of hope” is where I begin to understand how to transform educational spaces. I seek to use a pedagogy of discomfort where we learn from the pain and suffering and seek to change hearts and minds. In engaging with CART we can move beyond current neoliberal practices that pay lip service to equity and diversity while failing to confront institutionalized racism. Freire grounds my understanding of hope by moving me from a place of pain and hopelessness, and ill health, to one of hope and possibility. A place where the well-being and overall health of Black bodies will flourish.

Finding ways to combat anti-Black racism is important to breaking down the systemic and oppressive structures that plague educational institutions. Theory is essential to this work. However, as Dei (2000, p. 38) points out “theorizing about race does not certify anti-racist behavior/work. In truly progressive anti-racism work, practicality must acknowledge the limits of theory. It also implies developing a clear strategy to put theory into practice. Given the existence of oppressive social structure it may be daunting, but it is nonetheless a surmountable task.”

As I reflect on my formal and informal educational experiences I look forward and consider what methods and tools from CART are essential to transforming educational spaces. Three specific areas of CART speak to my work as an educator and will

ground my anti-racist praxis. The first is the creation of spaces for Black students, educators, and administrators to voice their experiences of anti-Black racism; second, we must decenter whiteness in the curriculum and classroom and create space for Black voices, histories, and knowledges; relatedly, we must create anti-racism training and professional development schemes that will bring about long term transformation in the education system; and in the immediate term, we must develop policies which hold educators and administrators accountable for anti-Black micro-aggressions.

Creating Space for Voice

As a way of knowing, it is important that we center the experiences of the oppressed. Black voices must be present in doing anti-racism work. Spaces must be provided where open discussions with Black students and the institution can be had. In doing this we can insure that we navigate discussions that do not assume the voice of the community. Epistemic saliency is critical to transformation; subaltern voices cannot be absent and the stories must be documented and used as evidence. One way that this voice can be captured is by the collection of race-based statistics. The surveying must allow room for voice. Anti-racism work goes beyond collecting surface data but gets at the root of the problem associated with the data results.

According to Delpit (1988), “The voice component of CRT provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step in understanding the complexities of racism and beginning a process of judicial redress. For example, the voice of people of color is required for a deep understanding of the educational system.” Delpit (1988) argues that “one of the tragedies of the field of education is how the dialogue of people of color has been silenced” (as qtd. in Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14).

Looking back on how my colleagues and students who would share their experiences of racism with me, and I with them, this experience validated the existence of anti-Black racism as real. When voices are silenced through self-regulation or externally, the cycle of oppression continues. According to Delgado and Barnes:

Stories provide the necessary context for understanding, feeling, and interpreting. The ahistorical and a contextual nature of much law and other “science” renders the voices of dispossessed and marginalized group members mute. In response, much of the scholarship of CRT focuses on the role of “voice” in bringing additional power to the legal discourses of racial justice. Indeed, Delgado (1990) argues that people of color speak with experiential knowledge about the fact that our society is deeply structured by racism. That structure gives their stories a common framework warranting the term “voice.” Consequently, CART theorists are attempting to interject minority cultural viewpoints, derived from a common history of oppression, into their efforts to reconstruct a society crumbling under the burden of racial hegemony. (as qtd. in Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14)

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Yet it is one thing to allow voice, however it must be followed up with some form of action. School boards need to have advisory councils for issues dealing with race that include the voices of Black people and their lived experiences, and students need to be allowed to have spaces where they can share, report and understand these experiences. Many times students would tell me stories but could not articulate that what they were experiencing was anti-Black racism. White bodies need to bear witness to the experiences of Black bodies and understand how they are implicated in racism and benefit from privilege.

Decentering Whiteness and Training

How do we teach about the possibility of change? Schick and St. Denis suggest that:

We need to offer ... teachers and administrators opportunities to learn more about racism and how its effects, especially the ideology of and belief in the superiority of whiteness, shapes both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of society. In other words, instead of assuming and hoping that a focus on the positive through the celebration of culture will be enough to disrupt ideologies of racial superiority and inferiority, we might all benefit from an anti-racist education. By ignoring the production of racial identities, whiteness remains at once invisible and a marker of difference in a Canadian context. (2005, pp. 1084–1085)

Educational spaces must decenter whiteness. This begins with decolonizing spaces and one simple thing to do is to start educating all engaged in education about what colonization is and how it manifests itself in education. As Dei (2016) states, decolonization must implicate the colonizer and the colonized. White bodies need to have conversations about the understanding of power and privilege and how they enact it on Black bodies. A de-centering of whiteness must be done to the curriculum by moving away from Eurocentric models of education. Educators need to think about how whiteness is made visible in their classrooms. We must break hegemonic thinking and allow Black voices, histories and knowledge to be present in the classroom. Dei (2000, p. 37) describes what a de-centering of whiteness would look like: “It is about allowing every student to share in the center. An inclusive anti-racist educational practice is the pursuit of interactive and co-operative learning strategies that teach all learners critical thinking skills to question the status quo. To accomplish the task of centering all students, the school system’s hegemony and dominance of whiteness must be ruptured.”

Towards New Policies

Dialogue and discussion is good but without it these groups must lobby governments to create programs and systems that remove these oppressive structures and it cannot resemble the broken diversity programs that already exist. Institutions must partake

in critical anti-racist educational programs that assist in teaching and unlearning past oppressive systems and practices. It must go beyond dialogue and into action. Educational spaces need to re-examine existing policies and create new policies that address the issue of anti-Black racism and provide accountability. Stricter policies against micro aggressions, and real tools to file complaints, with proper complaint systems and structures set in place. Annual anonymous surveys should be provided to students, teacher, and administrators that speak to the well-being of Black bodies and their lived experiences.

Ahmed (2012) points out that you have to become “insistent to go against the flow”; yet it needs to be more than this, a complete restructuring of power needs to occur and it might take government legislation to create this change. If Ahmed is correct, “An account of diversity as a phenomenological practice is an account of how racism is reproduced by receding from view, becoming an ordinary feature of institutional life” (2012, p. 182). Then we must break the routine and the ordinary by holding institutions accountable and place real consequences for violators. The successes of diversity work are hard to measure and assess. Instead stories of Black bodies must be documented and shared, institutions must be held accountable for their actions.

Safe spaces should be created for Black bodies. For example in the teachers’ union a Black teachers caucus should be created where Black teachers can discuss issues and concerns and have a voice within the decision making process. Anti-Black racism will only continue to flourish if nothing is done to shake the system at its core. The fight should not have to come from racialized people alone, thus creating another added burden, but until structures are corrected, racialized bodies will have to be pioneers and those who are allies must take up this fight and go against the grain.

Concrete action must take place that systematically ruptures institutions. But what does this look like? How do we move beyond discussion to action and change? How can you rupture systems that you do not have power in? How can you reclaim power or gain access to it when the systems are setup to limit your access to power? According to Ahmed (2012) we need to create a space where we can talk about diversity and the work that it does. We must find strategies that can address the systemic barriers and oppressive structures that exist within the institution. It is clear that Black bodies have to find ways to support each other and to not be alone. Once this happens then discussions need to be had with those in positions of real power to create change within the institution.

Monture (2010) calls for a type of solidarity amongst these bodies, a space where stories and experiences can be shared and where community is built. She suggests that we need to find ways to challenge existing power structures. This is a good start, however, spaces need to be created with the oppressor and the oppressed in order to create meaningful dialogue, unlearning, and understanding. A power play has to be created where the power is in the hands of the racialized bodies. There has to be a willingness to learn and understand one another in an authentic and genuine way. It

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cannot just be a patronizing act but a serious dialogue that creates action and change for a new understanding.

Ahmed (2012) argues for a similar approach to Monture in the sense that she agrees that spaces need to be created where we can talk about diversity and the work that it does and the bodies that it effects. However she uses a phenomenological approach that suggests change will come as a result of the experience within the institution. She states “they become conscious of “the brick wall,” as that which keeps its place even when an official commitment to diversity has been given. Only the practical labor of “coming up against” the institution, allows this wall to become apparent. To those who do not come up against it, the wall does not appear- the institution is lived and experienced as being open, committed, and diverse” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 174).

So how do we expose the wall to those who don’t see it or encounter the effects of it? The task is not a simple one and although many suggest dialogue, how does this dialogue become action. Ahmed claims:

Doing diversity work is institutional work in the sense that it is an experience of encountering resistance and countering that resistance. Each new strategy or tactic for getting through the wall generates knowledge of what does or does not get across. Perhaps diversity workers aim to transform the wall into a table, turning the tangible object of institutional resistance into a tangible platform for institutional action. (2012, p. 175)

The concept of institutional action will be challenging as long as constructs of diversity work continue to produce the same limiting results. Until non-racialized bodies have an in-depth understanding of the effects of racism on racialized bodies, systems of power will not change. According to Ahmed (2007, p. 158): “White bodies are comfortable, *as they inhabit spaces that extend their shape*. The bodies and spaces ‘point’ towards each other, as a ‘point’ that is not seen as it is also ‘the point’ from which we see.” It is time for non-racialized bodies to feel and understand the discomfort that is experienced by their racialized colleagues. Truth and an unlearning of racist practice and belief must be taught and limitations and rules must be created in order to limit and restrict power and abuses of power and privilege, ensuring accountability for oppression and institutional commitments to anti-racism.

CONCLUSION

Much more work is needed to combat anti-Black racism. The capturing of stories and experiences is integral to proving and acknowledging that anti-Black racism is alive and flourishing. However, anti-Black racism exists and hasn’t gone away. What will stop it is continued pressuring by the Black community to advocate change. Black bodies didn’t create this problem it was imposed on us. Now it is up to dominant bodies within education to listen, care, unlearn, and transform.

I have shown some of the impacts that racism has on Black bodies and the physical toll that it plays on their well-being. I have discussed potential solutions to address systemic anti-Black racism in educational spaces. As CART health advocates push for the inclusion of racism as a social determinant of health, many Black bodies are suffering in silence and don't have access to supports. One political request by many health care providers who use CART call for the following:

One of those actions would be to ensure that racism becomes listed, and recognized, as a key social determinant of health. If attaining the highest standard of human health is a universal human right, then Canadian society as a whole needs to take that crucial step in recognizing the impact of racism on the health of racialized people. Indeed, only by formally identifying racism as a social determinant of health and well-being issues of Black and other racialized communities be seriously addressed. In turn policy makers need to be aware, at the very start, of the great diversity of African Canadian communities, a diversity that points to the need for policy rethinking on several fronts, including health, social services, education, and justice. (James et al., 2010, p. 131)

Black lives do matter and we must work together collectively to ensure that the emotional and psychological well-being of Black bodies are protected. Even though it is easy sometimes to be complacent in this work we must engage in this discourse. It's always a fight, but one thing that I have learned from this class is that it is important to not face that fight alone. Critical anti-racism work starts in community, you must surround yourself with your community and critical friends who can assist in the struggle. It is only through this community that spaces of well-being for Black bodies will exist. For a school term my *Principles of Anti-Racism Education* class was that safe space where I received healing, strength and hope. I will seek to foster environments like this in my future pedagogical practices.

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