

A research Report on  
Youth Civic Engagement in Anti-Racism  
by  
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**Preamble:**

This research was funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage, Multiculturalism Program for the period 2005-2008. Issues explored in this study emerged out of previous work with youth in the City of Hamilton, Ontario, in a project aptly titled Ontario Partners Against Racism (OnPar). The OnPar initiative began as part of a larger strategy following post 9/11 events which unfolded in the small city of Hamilton, Ontario, significantly threatening the security of citizens. The large community initiative titled Strengthening Hamilton's Community Initiative (SHCI) was aimed at community capacity building toward strengthening intercultural relations.

The youth project title OnPar deserves more than footnote reference. It was the intellectual brainchild of McMaster University and Mohawk College students who participated in the first phase of work. Following focus group discussions and research into the potential of local youth in anti racism work the group conclusion that a future goal should be focussed on enabling youth to engage in community building *work which was on par with our national ideal of cohesive cultural coexistence*. This conclusion indicated good youth political understanding of the state of social relations in Canada and morphed into the working title of the current PAR study.

Two senior research assistants and eight project outreach workers carried out this work in major cities across the province of Ontario. Participatory Action Research through focus groups and structured individual interviews provided data and findings which were tabulated and interpreted in this report.

**Introduction:**

Canada's multicultural nation has social and political challenges associated with racism. Successive reports by Statistics Canada's 'Ethnic Diversity Survey' highlight racism as a

continued barrier to social inclusion and economic equality (Canada 2005). The literature shows agreement over time regarding the history and forms of racism in Canada (Razack 2008; Daenzer 2008; Malhi & Boon 2007; Bannerji 2000) Yet, there are debates about the type of racism which persists in Canada and there is confusion between issues common to the politically problematic notion of racialization and the easier to admit to discomfort with cultural differences (Razack 2008; Fernando 2006; Teelucksingh 2006)).

The more frequent misunderstanding is that racism is caused by intergroup dislikes for differences among diverse groups; a social people-made problem. The more informed view is that racism is an institutional political design driven by the need to control power and dominate groups thought to be less desirable on the human scale (Teelucksingh: 2006, 3-5) Razack 2008, 8-11). Not surprisingly, social action targeted at racism proceeded along those bifurcated agendas: one targeting cultural relations between groups and the other striving for relative structural equality while at the same time targeting the eradication of the myths which feed stereotypes and diminish certain groups (Garcea, Kirova & Wong 2008).

Emphasis on finding ways to harmonize social relations among Canada's diverse population began in the 1960s. Canada's Royal Commission into Biculturalism and Bilingualism was the start of explorations into co-existence within diversity. This led to political acknowledgement that diversity had to be acknowledged and legitimated as a Canadian reality.

Multiculturalism was legislated in Canada in 1988 following years of experiment with this principle which derived from a policy statement introduced by the federal liberal government in 1971. From the early nineteen seventies to the early nineteen eighties government-funded community initiatives were structured with emphasis on managing diversity through cultural awareness and celebration (Daenzer 2002). The thinking which informed this phase of work was that information about ethno-cultural characteristics would promote acceptance and understanding between population groups. That assumption is now widely questioned (Garcea et al. 2008).

Multiculturalism advanced the idea that racism was attributable to negative relations between groups with different ethno-specific characteristics. Understandably those early attempts to advance inter-racial appeasement were more often aimed at community at the exclusion of institutional change. This followed logically from the popular perception that racism was a consequence derived from preferences based on misinformation about cultural traits and nuances of certain groups.

Not surprisingly, there appears to be no positive correlation between the emphasis on multiculturalism as an intervention strategy and the decrease of racism as a national social problem (Teelucksingh 2006; Daenzer 2002a). While the use of multiculturalism as a tool for promoting ethno-racial awareness and interaction has had other benefits, this emphasis seems to have been a distraction from the more serious problem of institutional racism. (Fernando 2006; Daenzer 2008; Daenzer 2002; Bannerji 2000).

Since the 1980s the concept of racism has been given more visibility in official documents and discourses in Canada. The concept 'race' although long used with academic caution in the literature (Satzewich 1998) came to be seen as the social indicator for societal privilege and power on a declining scale. The most desirable profile of acceptability was whiteness, with less accrued deservingness, privilege and acceptance the further social identification deviated from the whiteness point of reference Razack 2008, 8-13). The notion of racism was then popularized to include unequal social and economic rewards between whites and less desirable ethno-racial groups.

The shift toward institutional change was hesitant and compromised by the continued emphasis on 'race relations' 'multiculturalism' and support for recreational ethnicity (Daenzer 2008). Successive periods of denial of racism as a Canadian problem, resistance to institutional change and the continued distraction by funding of the recreational showcasing of culture stood in opposition to serious work on targeting the eradication of institutional racism.

In 1984, the publication of an all-party House of Commons (of Canada) report '*Equality Now*' clarified that ethno-racial identity was linked to preferential treatment and institutional exclusions from important aspects of Canadian life (Canada 1984). People of colour, (Blacks, Asians, Aboriginal Peoples) were shown to be most penalized and ostracized in social and economic life because of their ethno-racial visibility leading to undesirability. The prevalence of systemic racism was finally acknowledged to be a serious problem in the Canadian nation in the late 1980s.

It is therefore now commonly accepted that systemic racism is the situation through which institutions and societal systems operate to exclude these 'visible' groups from the full benefits of citizenship. This exclusionary process is embedded in the access procedures to social benefits, political participation and rewarding economic opportunities. A serious challenge to the exclusion of racialized persons from beneficial systems in Canada had to be facilitated through work aimed at dismantling systemic procedures which operated to exclude some while benefiting others primarily due to their whiteness. This newer focus on equality and social inclusion through the eradication of obstacles to social and economic participation is the current albeit compromised phase of Canadian work in progress.

The acknowledgement that racism was a national obstacle to social cohesion in Canada led to activism in the form of anti-racism. The latter represents a shift from theorizing to action and is intended as more direct confrontation of the underlying causes of economic, social and political marginalization (Satzewich 1998: 11). Support for some anti-racism work comes from the Multiculturalism Program which is part of the broad structure of The Department of Canadian Heritage. This shift in focus from purely celebratory ethnicity events to more serious civic activism validates concerns that harmonious cultural co-existence and benefits can only be achieved if we dismantle structures which operationalize racism.

Anti-racism work occurs in both local community groups and in larger coalitions. Activities which focus on anti-racism have flourished in the last ten years but results are

uncertain. Curricular content used at post-secondary institutions and staff development training tools in major organizations now commonly include some reference to anti-racism and equity. The hype however, is more prominent than the internalization of any principles related to anti-racism. In our project we set out to determine if and how youth were involved in the anti-racism agenda and with what results. This was accomplished through structured research in tandem with analysing their work toward a product creation.

### **Youth and social activism:**

Overall, it could be challenging to involve some youth in civic action. Surveys found that only 65% of American youth were active participants in civic engagement in some capacity (Ibid). Similar trends are noted in Canada with 59% of youth participating in general elections and related activities (Milan: 2005). American researchers studied voting statistics for 1992 presidential election in the United States (Dodson et al., 2004: 2) and found similarities between youth and adult voting patterns. They found that only 48% of persons between the ages of 18-20 voted (Ibid: 4) and that race and economic status were important indicators. In the 1992 presidential election “41 percent of whites voted compared to 32 percent of African Americans and 16 percent of Latinas” (Ibid). Registered membership in groups was a useful early indicator; involvement in scouts, religious youth groups, non-school team sports, 4-H, YM/WCA, and boys’ and girls’ clubs increases the chance of youth registering to vote (Ibid: 9). Participation in scouts, religious youth groups, non-school team sports during grade 7 and 8 increases chances of voting while participating in 4-H and boys’ and girls’ clubs reduces chances of voting (Ibid: 12). Latinas were least likely to participate in voluntary organizations (ibid: 13).

African American youths were most likely to participate in 4-H clubs and the YM/WCA (Ibid). This means that organizations with a historical mission of building morale and a sense of civic responsibility may do so more successfully than those with more open agendas (ibid: 14). There is strong relationship between early extra curricula involvement and race and socio-economic status. This would suggest that in anti-racism work, poor

and racialized groups who would tend to have the most benefits from participation might also have the least opportunity due to their socio-economic statuses. Linking anti-racism activities to school attendance, then, increases the likelihood of including a diversity of youth.

Other research shows that community based institutions provide youth with the ability to understand the notion of being part of a community (Flanagan 2003: 257). The institutions give youth the ability to build relationships and encourage the growth of their identity in a social setting (Ibid). Nonetheless, 'connections to others through family, religious institutions, and extracurricular activities were significantly related to political and civic engagement in young adulthood' (Ibid). Studies show that political participation is fostered through institutions where respect is developed for the youths and their opinions (Ibid). Youth must feel appreciated to effectively and positively be engaged.

Experiences of group solidarity are important because, with few exceptions, political goals are achieved by collective action (Ibid). Another positive outcome from membership in organizations is the creation of trust among youth, which is found to be integral for civic and political engagement (Ibid: 258). Trust is created among youth when each individual accepts and keeps their responsibilities to allow the group to continue functioning (Ibid). Building solidarity through enabling trust leading to collaboration are key objectives of the OnPAR project.

Important too for youth, are non-hierarchical organizations which provide them with a structure that does not involve ranks (Ibid). This structure permits equal inclusion of ideas and minimizes the instances of inter-personal conflicts. This project took guidance from that knowledge and structured layers of responsibility with open channels for equal voicing.

Personal interest still serves as the motivator for participation for post-secondary students. Studies have found that undergraduates exercised choice and interest to screen out political information which seemed distant from their immediate lives. (Dudley &

Gitelson 2003: 2). Conversely, when interest was high and issues relevant to their lives, post-secondary youth had high capacity for developed knowledge about their chosen interests (Ibid). The challenge in this project was to sell the anti-racism idea to show relevance in the lives of all youth and to highlight benefits in participation. So, with the post-secondary group we marketed racism as an issue relevant to our Canadian society and not simply the concern of victim groups.

Political knowledge is shown to be central to civic participation. It was evident that youth with knowledge about the state of racism in Canada would be more likely to participate in the political process of anti-racism (Ibid). Our strategy had to include the production of information which showed anti-racism as responsible activism and one with good human outcomes for youth.

We also realized that school populations would differ in their level of enthusiasm for anti-racism involvement because of the different patterns of teaching student about citizenship or civic engagement. Each school emphasizes different levels of ideas and in turn students are differently influenced. In our case, a good strategy was to also involve secondary school teachers in the anti-racism strategy and to rely on classroom follow through on relevant information and action. So, teachers assisted in creating the change agents at the secondary school level.

Our project publication material also delineated citizenship benefits through anti-racism activism. Studies showed us that with youth, citizenship is often difficult to define; it tended to be broadly general and included doing good deeds or political participation. Others had more specific criteria: for them citizenship consist of four components: participation and tolerance of others different from oneself; altruism; patriotism; and productivity” (Ibid). Most youth tended to associate citizenship with obeying the law and helping others. A small minority included actions such as protesting or challenging the status quo, or political activities such as voting (Dudley & Gitelson 2003).

Canadian youth showed different trends: Statistics Canada data showed that young adults are more likely to participate in alternative political participation than any other age group. In fact, 3 out of 5 young adults engage in alternative political activities. These activities include signing a petition, boycotting a product, expressing opinion in a newspaper or by contacting a politician, overt protest, researching political issues and attending a public meeting ((Milan: 2005). Findings seemed not disaggregated by race and economic status but post-secondary education seemed relevant. Milan suggests that sixty nine (69%) of young adults with a university degree participated in alternative political participation (Ibid, 3). This guardedly suggests that Canadian youth might be both informed and willing participants in structured and directed anti-racism work. This because, although young Canadian adults are more likely to seek information on political issues, they are less likely than other age groups to directly speak their opinions at public meetings or to a politician (Ibid, 3). Missing from their general lived experiences was action which can be categorized as ‘taking charge; on the main stage of political reform.

We expected that students from post-secondary and secondary institutions would have different views on citizenship. Activities built into the project included educational forums to bring students up-to speed on language, to develop a working vocabulary and objectives and to explore and review the current reality concerning racism. The forums were also useful in peer development; students learned from each other and formed bonds which carried forward into more specific tasks.

Our challenge of moving students through varied stages of anti-racism work and enhancing their understanding of civic engagement took its starting points from the work of those who have studied youth activism and youth civic engagement. In one British study of 670 youth age 16-29, only 18% of this group were shown to be participating in any type of social capital activity (Fahmy 2006: 6). It was found that only 14% of the sample had ever written to a newspaper and only 15% had been involved in a protest (ibid, p.7). An interesting result is that high levels of mistrust had a negative effect on political participation among young people while high education deterred people from participating in protests (Fahmy 2006: 13). If youth believe that all is well with their



political system, they are not inclined to show challenging behaviour such as protesting. Correspondingly, any issues which engage them tend to be those which have direct impact on their quality of life or their freedoms.

The implication for OnPAR is that our study includes only students. While we expected that higher education would make university students aware of the national trends in racism, we also expected that only those who perceived racism to be a social threat might be eagerly engaged in anti-racism work. University students largely self-selected and peer enticed for involvement in this project. In the case of the secondary school participants, we depended on teachers to act as mediators in identifying and screening students' interest in anti-racism work. Unlike university students who were independent thinkers and actors, high school students tended to see teachers as guardians and relied on their approval and guidance in this matter. Teachers were strategically essential to this process since Ontario secondary school students have limited opportunity to spearhead activism in their schools unless these are first sanctioned and approved by teachers.

We noted from the literature that while working with adults, however, teens still required an effective balance of freedom and constraints that support them in learning on their own and through experience (Wulff: *ibid*: 4). The literature also suggested that teenagers tended not to originate discussions about civic issues among themselves, although if given the opportunity to engage in structured dialogue, participation did occur (Wulff: *ibid*). We found that our strategy of including secondary school teachers as guides and mentors to high school students, and also supplementing our own youth outreach mentors increased interest and participation among high school students.

### **The Scope of this research and work:**

This research project investigates activism among Ontario youth to better understand their interpretations of anti-racism and the dynamics of their activism and outcomes. The research explores the occurrences and outcomes of youth engagement through the following:

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*Research Assistants for this project were Fida Hindi (McMaster University, Political Science) and Andrea D'Souza (McMaster University, Social Work)*

- (1) Youth inter-group understandings of ‘anti-racism’
- (2) The experiences of youth in anti-racism work
- (3) The potential of youth for negotiating institutional supports or obstacles which impact outcomes of their work
- (4) Presence and models of consensus building among youth in anti-racism work
- (5) Youth analyses of ‘acceptable outcomes’ of anti-racism work
- (6) The response of youth to province-wide task-driven collaboration
- (7) The potential for mobilizing Ontario youth into one activist body pursuing defined anti-racism outcomes

To maximize the relevance of participation for youth, a second objective was to have youth develop a *Charter on Anti Racism* to give them concrete evidence of the results of two years of work and a sense of achievement through the production of a useable tool.

### **(1) Inter-group understandings of ‘anti-racism’**

The transition from the emphasis on multiculturalism and race relations did not occur in a clearly articulated context. There were no public debates about the need to redefine issues, or to pursue different outcomes. There was no defining moment of recognition when the Canadian activist community agreed that we had been pursuing the wrong ends, and that we were changing direction. In fact, anti-racism work is funded from the same public envelope as is multiculturalism. Anti-racism has simply become another dimension of activity supported by the same funding source.

Organizations and groups which had been receiving funding to promote multiculturalism and to engage in race relations work were essentially the same ones which began shaping proposals to respond to new funding opportunities. So, the diversified growth of the anti-racism movement has meant that groups and organizations receive funding to pursue objectives defined and measured quite differently. It is not known how youth activism groups define anti-racism. In order to explore the connection between the increased

emphasis on anti-racism and the concurrent increase in racism we need to investigate how youth understand racism and correspondingly, how they define and measure anti-racism.

## **(2) The experiences of youth in anti-racism work**

There are concerns among community organizations that ‘mission drift’ (Scott 2002) has become a consequence of funding shortages. At the same time of funding decreases, opportunities for community activism have been decreasing; funding bodies have limited the amount of advocacy which can occur in community work. Since anti-racism can be largely about advocacy this project investigated how youth activism balanced the agreements imposed by funding bodies and the protection of the integrity of anti-racism activism

In addition, anti-racism activism is not without risks. The very nature of the subject evokes discomfort associated with the acknowledgement of racism and displaced feelings of guilt associated with white privilege. This research also focussed on the relationship between the goals of youth activism and their outcomes.

## **(3) The potential of youth for negotiating institutional supports or obstacles which impact outcomes of their work**

Civic engagement in anti-racism work is mostly carried out through public funding. Important research concerns were how youth groups mediated the increasing difficulties in obtaining funding; if their work did in fact depend on funding, and how they negotiated the challenges to obtaining funding and legitimacy for their work.

In addition, during preliminary work completed by this research team we found resistance by School Boards and teachers to acknowledging the presence of racism, and a corresponding reluctance to have high school students participate in anti-racism activities. This research, then, examined whether this reluctance to acknowledging racism and challenges to getting secondary school students involved impacted possible outcomes of youth civic engagement work in anti-racism. Was there in fact the exclusion

of a significant portion of an age cohort from anti racism work because their mentors resisted the notion of social activism related to the ‘fearful’ issue of racism? And if there was evidence of this resistance, what was the potential of the secondary school youth sample in navigating this obstacle?

**(4) Presence and models of consensus building among youth in anti-racism work and inter-group differences and similarities**

Youth civic engagement work involves collective efforts to achieve defined ends. This collective work takes for granted productive collaboration and the potential to diffuse conflicts and disagreements and to move beyond these and build consensus. Our team utilized ethnographic research method to assess whether the resilience of racism superseded anti-racism work, or, whether the strength of youth anti-racism work strengthened their capacity to reach consensus for change.

**(5) Youth analyses of ‘acceptable outcomes’ of anti-racism work**

This research is measuring anti-racism work and its outcomes. This required an understanding of youth-defined outcomes. Since this research would speak to the ability of youth anti-racism groups to achieve acceptable outcomes, it was essential to understand how this ‘acceptability of outcomes’ was framed in their voices.

**(6) Youth response to province-wide task-driven Collaboration:**

The OnPAR project embodied two parts: (a) the inter-institutional mobilization of students who caucused, deliberated and developed the Charter Principles; and, (b) the field research with students/youth engaged in anti-racism work. In addition, students who gathered to caucus and deliberate the Charter Principles were systematically observed for their participation styles, their decision making process and their response to mobilization and collaboration; all groups were observed using the same criteria. The student population included Aboriginal students who attend Aboriginal-only schools on the Six Nation of the Grand River Reserve in Southern Ontario.

Although the initial proposal articulated plans to include youth who are street involved and out of school, this was later perceived as a difficulty. Participants were recruited based on age (17-25) and current full-time attendance in school in Ontario. Including only those who were current students was preferable because of the logistical ease of locating them in established collectives.

The development of the Youth Charter on Anti Racism included several sub-components which were pre-requisites to the final document. These included:

- a. Educational sessions on definitions of racism and anti-racism through (b)
- b. Forums to explore experiences with racism and anti-racism
- c. Forums to promote working relationships among participants
- d. The development of a sense of focus and purpose among participants

Bringing students together on multiple occasions to work through tasks provided good opportunity for the research team to observe their interaction and results: of particular interest was, patterns of collaboration among youth from different educational institutions, their process toward consensus building and their methods of problem-solving and conflict resolution. Since all these skills are essential in responsible civic engagement the research team used the forums as the arena for ethnographic study, and findings complemented the field surveys.

### **(7) The potential for mobilizing Ontario youth into one activist body pursuing defined anti-racism outcomes**

The success of this applied research project depended on mobilizing youth and enabling them to work collaboratively on the development of the Youth Charter on Anti-Racism. In this process, we also hoped to learn about youth processes in sensitive anti-racism work. In order to evaluate the success of the project scrupulous documentation was essential throughout the process.

**Methodology:****Recruitment:**

Research assistants contacted funding agencies to obtain lists of youth anti-racism projects publicly funded during the last five years. These federal and provincial agencies were contacted by e-mail and telephone. We asked federal and provincial personnel for contacts at other funding bodies (foundations, etc..) which may also have funded youth anti-racism projects. Since this is public information we were not violating confidentiality.

We obtained named groups from these lists and made contact by e-mail or phone. We communicated our project objectives and sent our information packages to contacts after determining their interest in networking and working with us. The project and OnPAR are fully described in the information packages.

The research team also conducted internet searches for anti-racism youth groups who have established web pages and who have been doing anti-racism work. The National Anti Racism Youth Group is such a group. Contact was made with members of these groups who have their e-mail information listed on the internet. The fact that they were listed on the internet indicated that they were open to networking. We took advantage of this accessibility and engaged them in our planned work.

Internet searches were made for youth societies on university web pages or those listed on their own web pages. Students at Ontario universities were asked to share with us information about established groups known to be doing public advocacy or other forms of anti-racism work or those who have attempted this work. Following contact, we issued our consent forms and followed the protocol which protects those whom we intended to ask for information.

The research team later traveled to Ontario Universities for meetings with students who were members of youth groups established on campuses and those known to be engaging in anti-racism work. Structured interviews were conducted at nine Ontario Universities. The research team also obtained information about **other** youth engaging in anti-racism work through social justice initiatives. Contacts followed with those groups.

### **Focus Groups:**

Following the survey for youth groups and our determination that they were suitable for our study, the research process escalated. Consent to participate was obtained in writing (see appendix 1).

Focus groups were conducted with twenty-four (24) anti-racism youth groups across Ontario. Contacts differed depending on the Ontario location of the respondents. Our research team made visits to the groups at their locations across Ontario as necessary. Research assistants explained the process to participants at first contact and give them time to think about and reconsider their participation. Subsequent visits at mutually suitable times were arranged during which data gathering began.

These information gathering sessions were structured as focus groups. Focus groups in this case comprised setting the structure for information we were seeking and then establishing a communication context for enabling participating members to discuss this information.

Information sought from the focus groups included:

- (a) How they experienced their anti-racism advocacy or social justice work
- (b) How they understood and evaluated their outcomes
- (c) How they understood intervening circumstances which influenced their outcomes
- (d) Types of supports which impacted their outcomes

- (e) Types of hurdles which may have impacted their work
- (f) Funding advantages to carrying out their work (if applicable)
- (g) Funding disadvantages which impacted their work (e.g. funding constraints if applicable)
- (h) Community advantages which aided their work (support, acceptance)
- (i) Community disadvantages which impeded their work (rejection, opposition)
- (j) Their expanded understanding about (h) and (i)
- (k) Conditions which they deem ‘ideal’ for engaging in anti-racism work
- (l) Policies which might enable more youth to engage in anti-racism work
- (m) General discussion about the merits or issues related to anti-racism work

### **About Risks:**

We anticipated few risks related to youth discussing their anti-racism work since we were engaging youth who had been **doing** anti-racism work. Nevertheless, university reviewers who reviewed the application for ethics approval for this project had concerns about ‘risks associated with youth talking about racism and anti-racism’ so we developed a letter to address this issue. All participants received a copy of the letter. See appendix II.

### **Confidentiality:**

All research assistants signed contracts which covered the issues of confidentiality and data ownership. Research assistants were trained in qualitative research methods, in managing focus groups and in recording observations during ethnographic research.

### **Findings:**

#### ***(1) Youth intra-group understandings of anti-racism:***



What youth understood about racism and correspondingly anti-racism was not always reflected in their work. Work undertaken by the 24 groups studied fell into three broad categories shown in Diagram #1.

Anti-racism was the primary agenda of 8 of the 24 groups and all others had anti-racism as occasional events which fitted into assorted agenda. Our findings indicated that university age groups tended to address racism more directly, while high-school age groups tended to take a more indirect and cautious approach through non-confrontational language such as ‘race-relations’ and ‘multiculturalism’.

The majority of youth understood what racism was and had some awareness of anti-racism. Their responses ranged from very direct language (confronting racism by action) to more benign expressions (creating awareness to reduce discrimination). Our evidence is that youth on the whole have good appreciation for the meaning and potential impact of anti-racism but did not always engage in very assertive anti-racism activism. This is further discussed in our analysis below.

One group saw the need for a redefinition of anti-racism and greater communication of the definition. The observation here is that youth are differentially engaged in activities which are supposed to be anti-racism but variations in context and outcomes are often in tension. These differences were attributable to adult-structured agenda which sought to employ youth to address objectives in which they had no input. This is a case made to give youth greater control in defining priorities and controlling the anti-racism agenda.

Diagram #1  
Categories of activism undertaken by Youth Groups

Category 1 Activities	Category 2 Activities	Category 3 Activities
Forums on anti racism and islamaphobia and anti-Semitism	Anti-racism couched in discussions about justice and human rights	Inter-cultural awareness; these are facts about my culture; tell me about yours
Hosts invited speakers to address racism and promote anti-racism	Speaking out about diversity inequality on campus	Discussions about getting along with each other race or culture notwithstanding
Frequent caucusing about racist incidents on campus	Speaking to high schools to sensitize racialized youth about aiming for post-secondary education	Showcasing culture with discussions about cultural pride
Focus on international events and includes these in anti-racism education (e.g. the Danish cartoons)	Using videos and speakers to educate on the history of racism	Plans entertaining multicultural events for racialized youth
Records and complains about hate crimes on campus Advocates for redress	Production of a youth magazine which includes subjects such as anti-racism, anti-oppression, media relations, human rights, social justice and cross-cultural communication	Encourages youth to show mutual appreciation of diverse cultures
Producing posters and information pamphlets to	Runs support groups for racialized and aboriginal	Encourages racialized youth to showcase talents at

educate about racism	youth who experience racism	school events
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- (1) *Activism work directly addressing racism*
- (2) *Human Rights and justice issues with anti-racism as the sub-context*
- (3) *Race Relations and multiculturalism with no explicit anti-racism*

## (2) *The experiences of youth in anti-racism work*

Most groups studied worked in relatively safe environments. They were either on university campuses or in regional groups which met in great numbers to caucus. Only two groups engaged in assertive anti-racism challenging when the need arose. The latter took the form of reports to university officials, protests and forums to debate and seek solutions. These were associated with incidents on campus, or, incidents discussed in the media which impacted youth in their midst. There were no reports of hostile incidents occasioned by the group's anti-racism focus and no youth reported fears associated with their connected to the anti-racism agenda.

However, one university group expressed great resentment and dissolution with the ever-present racism on their campus and the lack of institutional support in creating a more racially friendly climate. Their experience with racism was the impetus for the emergence of their group and they actively seek support from off campus as supports for their concerns and activities.

Funding served opposite ends in the groups studied. The presence and receipt of funding did not alter the stated agenda of groups; funding led to possibilities for action and the attainment if results. If the group was funded to engage in anti-racism then no funding constraints were imposed after the fact to divert the group from this agenda. Conversely, the absence of funding limited activities which groups could undertake. In the absence of funding, groups attempted to seek donations and to engage in fund-raising. Donations

came with expectations of agenda curtailment; only non-controversial work was possible through funds from benevolent supporters. Where groups did community fund-raising anti-racism became a secondary and unarticulated agenda.

The experiences of high-school aged groups were shaped by school norms. Most high school anti-racism activism occurred in school. These tended to be directed by teachers and related to curricula. School acknowledgement of racism and support for anti-racism varied considerably. The approach to anti-racism depended on the teacher's comfort level and internal supports for youth activism work.

A second scenario shaped the anti-racism work of high school aged youth. Since they tended not to be able to obtain independent funding they were recruited as participants in projects designed and administered by either community groups or individuals. Some youth complained that the agenda for such work was not one constructed by youth but instead 'youth tended to be co-opted into someone else's agenda and used to serve cosmetic ends'. It was also reported that too much of youth anti-racism engagement focussed on interpersonal communication. Youth tended to be encouraged to speak to each other and not to institutions which are responsible for creating change. Substantive change was not seen to be on the agenda of youth activism. Some expressions shared with the research group saw this as control and limits placed on youth activism. Youth were supported as long as their activities were not too strident and challenging to the status-quo. What was articulated was that instead of limiting youth activism, the focus should be on education which enabled youth to pursue structural changes defined by them.

**(3) *The potential of youth for negotiating institutional supports or obstacles which impact outcomes of their work***

Negotiating institutional resistance to racism was an experience reported by only one (1) of the 24 groups interviewed. One group located at one post-secondary institution reported that they were successful in alerting their institution when anti-racism change

was required. This was however episodic and in extreme cases; when ‘major’ incidents occurred on campus (hate crime), the group rallied, engaged in public education and mobilization and demanded changes. This was always post crisis change. Important too that this group was funded by their institution, the latter which in turn made modest changes when occasional demands were made.

Negotiating obstacles was not a frequent experience for most groups. However, high frustration levels were reported by four (4) groups with the slow pace of institutional change and the resistance by institutions to acknowledge and act on racism in their environment. Frustration was reported by the post-secondary groups only. Our analysis concurs with the literature that higher education tended to increase awareness and critical analysis of the racist environment.

In contrast, high-school students however, only spoke about enduring racism when they caucused at the OnPAR forums and when their discussions were led by expert facilitators. This group of high school youth reported frequent activities related to multiculturalism in a climate of ever-present racism. The high school group reported no attempts to effect change. Their activities tended to be less activist and guided by adults.

Youth groups in the larger community, outside of educational institutions did not report institutional change as an immediate goal. The anti-racism process, however defined, became an end in itself. Membership and engagement in an anti-racism group was understood to be ‘civic-engagement’. Many community groups had national and regional affiliation with each other and shared information, caucused, operated websites and acted as clearing houses for information. The unspoken understanding is that information dissemination would lead to the social change of reduced racism.

Six of the twenty-four groups have current and informative websites. Potential for sharing and dissemination of information is made more feasible by opportunities and skills to use the internet. Maintenance of websites, however, requires funding to pay for technical support or administrative staff. Those groups with funding have updated

websites and those without funding and expertise struggle to keep their flow of information constant. Information exchange appeared to be an obstacle in the absence of funding. There were no measures of how well or how often web sites were visited. More important, we had no way to measure the impact of websites on visitors. One group attempted a managed forum on their site and found this to be labour intensive and cost ineffective. Youth rarely visited and rarely contributed to concerns posted on the site.

(4) **Presence and models of consensus building among youth in anti-racism work and intergroup differences and similarities**

Consensus potential among youth was measured in two ways. (1) Youth were brought together in forums to discuss racism and anti-racism issues and arrive at consensus regarding tasks, and (2) youth were interviewed about their inter-group work in anti racism.

Trained facilitators attended, mediated and documented at each group session and at all forums. Consensus among groups engaged in anti-racism work was evident in the degree and tone of inter-group communication and the absence of debate of, or disagreement on the aims and ideas of others in their groups. There was no evidence that groups rejected the work of other groups or the ideas expressed within groups. Our analysis is that youth came to the forums to share experiences and understand the perspectives of others, rather than to confront, critique and compete for dominance.

Our analysis suggests several reasons for this:

- (1) Youth are less interested in dominating issues
- (2) Youth are comfortable sharing agenda with others of similar interest<sup>1</sup>
- (3) Youth share mutual inter-personal respect when engaged in the same experience
- (4) Youth who are still in school are very interested in peer-group learning

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In addition, findings from the forums showed that the majority of youth had uncertainties about structural definitions of racism and tended to focus on inter-personal experiences and anecdotes of peer groups. Since much of the dialogue focused on experiences, there tended to be sensitivity about the experiences of others and a willingness to learn possible interventions for these experiences.

The atmosphere of inter-personal sharing and caring existed across educational levels. While post-secondary students were more knowledgeable about structural racism, and while they expressed more anger and frustrations, they tended to be supportive of peer views and shared rather than debated ideas.

We found no single model of consensus building among youth studied. However, characteristics observed differ markedly from similar adult meetings where racism and anti-racism is the main agenda.

These characteristics included:

- (1) A willingness to listen to the experiences of others
- (2) A willingness to validate each other
- (3) A willingness to work at issue resolution

The particular strength of the youth studied was their predisposition to hear each other out and give support. We observed that youth tended to arrive at our forums in a 'learning mode'. For secondary school students, there may have been no agenda differentiation since they arrived in the company of teachers and the day was seen as just another day of school. Many post-secondary students saw forums on anti-racism as a benefit and resource; they used the experience as a support mechanism. In contrast, non-student adults in anti-racism work tend to display greater motivation to dominate and seize control of agenda issues (researcher's notes).

Both similarities and differences were found among the youth engaged in anti-racism work. For purposes of our analysis we divided youth into four categories:

- (1) Aboriginal youth on Reserve
- (2) Urban Aboriginal youth
- (3) Secondary non-aboriginal students
- (4) Post secondary non-aboriginal students

**Aboriginal youth living in aboriginal communities** tended to have similar social patterns as youth in the urban setting. However, there are differences with regard to civic engagement. The aboriginal community is not a closed community and youth travel to and from urban settings. Many are schooled separately in the Aboriginal community. The structure of community life, though, for aboriginal youth living in Aboriginal communities shapes their experiences. Civic engagement for this youth group takes a different form. They engage in supervised social customs which bring youth together in which they are taught social responsibility. Aboriginal youth see ‘social responsibility’ as a sacred principle. Their civic engagement takes the form of justice and political work among other Aboriginal youth and has the strict function of building links among peers and developing a sense of political ownership for their destinies. Their justice and political work (writing documents for Elders and the United Nations) is aimed at major institutions.

The paradox for Aboriginal youth was that they reported no anti-racism work among their peers, but emphasized that they existed in a society of troubling racism. Their experiences of racism are structural and social. Institutions which dominate their lives (law enforcement, media and health) are seen as obstacles to their development. Their sense of community is heightened by engagement within their community and separate from the activities of youth in urban settings. They expressed a need for greater linkages with urban youth.

In contrast, **urban Aboriginal youth** are part of the public or separate school community and the larger urban social community. Their civic engagement is related to school volunteering, includes multiculturalism work and tends to address local issues shared by their family of schools. These experiences include activities mandated by schools and



also voluntary community experiences selected by youth in the areas of anti-violence, poverty issues and homelessness issues. Anti-racism work occurs under the multiculturalism and race relations agenda (see diagram #1). Our researchers noted that urban Aboriginal youth tended not to relate enthusiastically to multiculturalism. The latter is understood as policy which attempts to accommodate Canada's diverse immigrant populations.

**Secondary Non-Aboriginal students**, and urban Aboriginal youth share the same broad civic engagement agenda with exceptions previously noted. Our research found that youth who expressed interest in anti-racism work had other community civic engagement experiences. Family income category, school type (public or separate), early family influence and urban neighbourhood were factors which led students to take responsibility for involvement in civic work during the secondary school years. Students who were not required to work part-time during the school year had more time for civic engagement.

**Post secondary non-Aboriginal students** tended to be most involved in civic engagement and more directly in anti-racism work. This category of youth had greater technology access and expertise and had access to on-line sharing of ideas. This age group also had more freedom to attend youth gatherings across the country and had the ability to champion issues in sophisticated ways. All of the functioning anti-racism networks were established and maintained by post-secondary students. This group also had the expertise to apply for and receive funding for their work. The comparative analysis and discussion of the four groups will follow below.

##### **5) Youth analyses of 'acceptable outcomes' of anti-racism work**

Diagram #1 shows that not all youth studied shared similar definitions of anti-racism. Definitions ranged from 'being nice to each other' to 'direct confrontation of racism by discourse and action'. In between that range of definitions were education, advocacy and policy intervention.

The post-secondary group definition anti-racism was more developed and subsequently their focus was on structural racism. This group understood racism as the root cause with experiences linking the structure of racism with social relations stemming from racist frameworks. Outcomes for this group included:

- (a) systemic changes
- (b) measurable actions
- (c) altered relations

Secondary school youth shared variations of the definition of racism and thus aimed differentially at anti-racism. Their focus included creating awareness of the pain of racism, and demonstrating to their peers that they were valued in spite of their cultural differences. Activities which stemmed from this included:

- (a) Cultural awareness
- (b) Multicultural celebration
- (c) some anti-racism discussions
- (d) inter-faith conferencing

A third group included both post-secondary and some secondary school students. This group shared national affiliation through e-networks and occasionally caucused on the anti-racism theme. There is e-networking sophistication among this group and benefits include

- (a) accessible information sharing regarding anti-racism issues
- (b) timely dissemination of relevant material to members
- (c) national conferencing on anti-racism

No measurable outcomes were observable from this group. Our analysis is that (for this group) the process of connecting and sharing serves as an end in itself. Belongingness is important and being ‘a member of’ and being ‘connected to others with the same interest’ is equated with civic engagement in support of anti-racism. Further and different research

is required to determine other possible outcomes derivable from ‘on-line issue-support groups’.

**(6) *The response of youth to province-wide task-driven collaboration***

In addition to the field research with youth groups we also studied the response of youth to province-wide task-driven collaboration. We obtained this data from five forums held during 2006 and 2007 and facilitated by the team of OnPAR field workers. Focus groups were facilitated.

Focus groups were structured as developmental steps to the larger goal. That goal was to negotiate and produce the Youth Charter on Anti-Racism. Our questions regarding youth’s potential for collaboration were:

- (a) What can we learn about the collaboration patterns of youth?
- (b) What mobilization potential is observable from the forum focus groups?
- (c) How is interest developed, sustained and shared during collaboration?
- (d) Is there evidence that youth can be mobilized into a provincial body?

**Collaboration Patterns:**

Since the overarching goal of the OnPAR project was to mobilize youth from across Ontario to form a provincial anti-racism body we needed direction and knowledge about how youth went about collaboration on a specific task. It was important to learn about challenges, social predisposition trends and the willingness of youth to form alliances with youth from outside their neighbourhoods and schools and to work together toward the same ends.

Youth responded with eagerness and excitement to meeting other youth and to being recognized as persons who self selected as participants and leaders in a anti-racism. Facilitators analysed the focus groups as cooperative, sharing and striving to reach consensus and to being included as individuals who were situated on the inside of the anti-racism issue rather than someone who was on the sceptical fringe of the issue. There

was no indication that collaboration would become a stressful process. The fact that youth were participating seemed to motivate them to belong and to agree on issues without losing either their unique perspectives or their voice. Our team judged team collaboration to be an asset in this experience.

**Observable Mobilization Potential:**

Our question then was how easy would it be to mobilize participating youth into a provincial group? We found no social challenges to mobilizing youth; we however analysed that there could be logistical challenges because of the size of Ontario and because many high school youth are not as free to travel. and conference as are many university students. Most however are immersed in electronic communication and we believe that communication for youth would not be problematic if e-channels were maintained and accessible.

A number of indicators supported our observations about the absence of challenges to mobilizing across geographic boundaries. Youth readily developed an e-mail list and exchanged coordinates to facilitate contact. They expressed a need for on-line forums and suggested eagerness to chatting about anti-racism on line. There was a comforting and welcome absence of ‘turf’ competition. There was good socializing among participants; students from respective schools did not segregate themselves and facilitators noted sociable mixing regardless of area of province origin or school.

In spite of the fact that Aboriginal youth from the Six Nations community attended segregated forums they made clear demands to work with youth from other urban schools and to have youth exchange visits which can facilitate opportunities to learn about each other. Students for the Six Nations community and youth from Sioux Lookout were just as eager to work with youth from other areas toward advancing anti-racism.

Our analysis is that mobilization among youth would proceed with social ease and might include some logistical challenges in the short term.

**Developing and sustaining interest:**

There was some advantage to bringing youth together based on interest in a specific issue. It is highly likely that their interest in anti-racism preceded the OnPAR forums. It is also possible that some youth were hand-picked by teachers to attend the forums and later developed longer-term interest in anti-racism. It is also very likely that our outreach workers who visited schools in the Greater Hamilton area high schools to inform and recruit students created the climate for developing interest in anti-racism.

Whatever the intervening variable(s) there were no challenges associated with sustaining interest in the anti-racism agenda and moving all participants toward the development of the *Youth Charter on Anti-Racism*. Sustained interest in the OnPAR initiative is of course still a work in progress and represents the truest test of mobilization potential for the longer term. In the local Hamilton-Wentworth area, for example, an anti-racism Youth Council has been formed by participating high school students. This council is an arm of OnPAR. Youth in the Council are developing plans to advance anti-racism work and they are eager to continue with articulating the principles of the Youth Charter on Anti Racism. Overall, provincial youth are still expressing interest and are anxious to begin the next phase of work in *Youth in Media*.

While university students continued interest in program activities throughout the two-year project, it is difficult to assess their sustained interest at this time. This group has less mobility stability than high school students since they tend to graduate and shift into the labour market and become consumed by different life experiences. However, our observation was that university students tended to have more clear understanding of structural racism, were more empowered to take civic action and were enabled to pursue anti-racism at the institutions of higher learning. Based on our observations, prior knowledge and findings we believe that the university cohort will become good social capital for the future of anti-racism.

Aboriginal students in both southern and northern Ontario have demonstrated continuing interest in anti-racism. Findings from the forums showed that Aboriginal students experience multiple forms of racism and their interest in anti-racism corresponds to the intensity of racism present in their lived experiences. Our analysis is that Aboriginal youth are quite committed to using anti-racism strategies as a solution to public education and as a mechanism for diminishing racism in their experiences. Our observation is that Aboriginal youth are serious about, and capable of carrying on the OnPAR work.

Finally, we found that the sustained interest of youth participants in anti-racism is associated with the degree of control and interest they have in the initiative. Our findings concurred with the literature that youth stay interested if they have some control of the agenda and if the issue corresponds to their interests. The OnPAR initiative gave youth control in planning initiatives, in contributing to the Charter and in structuring collectives in their local areas. As long as we continue to provide guidance without nullifying the leadership and creativity of youth participants they will function as a viable activist body for anti-racism.

*General Discussion and Analysis:*

**(8) The potential for mobilizing Ontario youth into one activist body pursuing defined anti-racism outcomes**

This project achieved its main objective of mobilizing Ontario youth to produce a Youth Charter on Anti-Racism. See, *Document #1*. We also set out to investigate the experiences of youth engaged in anti-racism work and to evaluate and understand the nature of anti-racism-driven civic engagement among youth participants. In addition, we studied the potential for mobilizing youth into a provincial body with the agenda of clarifying and communicating anti-racism, advancing anti-racism through focus on selective institutions and in creating a youth culture of anti-racism.

Our findings suggest that youth who participated in our project share varied levels of commitment to addressing racism through anti-racism. We also found that though not all youth shared the same definition of anti-racism, they were connected to the activities they

engaged in and showed willingness to learn from peers and older youth. Different level of collaboration also exist among youth; while there are national anti-racism groups and regional anti-racism groups not all participants were aware of these or had opportunities to communicate with these groups. Communication emerged as a need for improved anti-racism youth-driven work.

Although our youth participants made generous contributions to the project and the forums, they articulated needs for changes in future work. They expressed the desire to control initiatives which include them, and the freedom to plan and deliver their own programs aimed at anti-racism. This desire to control the agenda is consistent with the literature reviewed above. It is suggested that youth are most enthusiastic participants when the agenda resonates with their interests and when they have control of design and delivery. The OnPAR project concurs and future phases of work have made youth-control central.

We also found that youth intention and willingness to engage in anti-racism work was impeded by lack of funding opportunities. The incidence of volunteering is high among youth in anti-racism work. Youth told us that they are often appended to projects run by adults because adults have the capacity to obtain funding while youth do not. But, there have been opportunities for youth groups to collaborate in anti-racism activities. Aboriginal youth in particular stressed that these opportunities for collaboration should increase and the anti-racism agenda should be structured to accommodate youth in their respective regions (less travel, more local events). They also stressed that there is great need for more youth-generated dissemination of information about racism and anti-racism.

We also heard from youth that there is often resistance among their peers to anti-racism work while at the same time racism is a severe problem among those in their age group. They reasoned that if their activities had greater continuity more youth would ultimately get involved. They also speculated that the resistance was only fear of not understanding what anti-racism was really about. They evaluated widespread mobilization among youth

on anti-racism to be ‘difficult’. Yet, they agreed that mobilization does not have to mean coming together in groups in the same physical space. They agreed that youth should have a medium of communication which reflects their concerns and beliefs and which is readily accessible. Information dissemination would not have the same intimidating effect as asking youth to get involved in action. Media emerged as a means toward that end.

In the Youth Charter on Anti-Racism which follows, four areas were identified by youth as areas for future work. However, ‘media’ seemed to be where they are most interested in starting. The Charter includes the principles which youth understand to be important in anti-racism work.

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