QUEERING CYC PRAXIS: WHAT I LEARNED FROM LGBTQI+ NEWCOMER, REFUGEE, AND IMMIGRANT STUDENT EXPERIENCES IN CANADA

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Abstract: This exploratory autoethnographic study, undertaken by a White straight cisgender child and youth care practitioner, seeks to understand the experiences of LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students in Canada. It highlights the nuances of creating safe spaces for young people who experience harm due to the intersections of systemic racism, xenophobia, transphobia, and homophobia. The overarching finding of this study reveals a culture of silence. Queer newcomer, refugee, and immigrant youth in Canada are often reluctant to disclose or explore their queerness due to their fears of discrimination and violence. This fear exists notwithstanding the pride Canada takes in its efforts to protect LGBTQI+ rights. Inspired by findings from interviews with two women, one who supports LGBTQI+ newcomers, refugees, and immigrants to Canada, and one who researches policy affecting all Canadian refugee experiences, I utilized a self-reflexive deep-dive approach to learn about the events and policies that have shaped LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students' access to postsecondary education in Canada. Central findings in this study point to barriers emerging from homonationalism, colonization, religion, culture, race, White-centred gay–straight alliances in schools, and immigration policies pertaining to sexual orientation and gender identity expression (SOGIE). These findings problematize the White, Westernized, liberal, out-and-proud policies that child and youth care practitioners are accustomed to.

Keywords: queer theory; feminism; political self-reflective praxis; postcolonial contexts; decolonizing CYC practice; LGBTQI+ refugee, newcomer, immigrant student experiences

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Prior to this special issue of the IJCYFS, it seems few scholars in the field of child and youth care (CYC) have explored the idea of queering our care. This is surprising given that queer theory and queer activism have flourished in academic and justice-oriented social service fields in North America for close to 30 years, since the height of queer activism in the 1990s (Berlant & Warner, 1995). Admittedly, if anyone had asked me how I might queer CYC before embarking on this study, I would have had nowhere to begin, given my uninformed privileged place of "heterocisnormativity" (Lee, 2018, p. 61). It was not until I dedicated myself to intentional and focused learning from the critical perspectives of CYC scholars working to disrupt oppression and normativity in our field that I came to realize there is much more to CYC practice than what was taught to me in school. This realization led to my undertaking the personal and professional research journey that I describe here.

I made this journey in response to calls from colleagues asking CYC educators and CYC practitioners (CYCPs) to engage in a more politicized and historicized CYC praxis with young people (Amponsah & Stephen, 2020; Igbu & Baccus, 2018). Igbu and Baccus (2018) argued that "an intentional relational CYC praxis must call on the profession and practitioners to name and discuss white heteropatriarchal supremacy" (p. 62). The emphasis on *praxis* — applying theory and knowledge to our practice skills — resonates strongly with my renewed sense of CYC responsibility as a White straight cisgender and non-disabled settler with European colonial roots, who, after more than 10 years of practice, has only recently begun to notice the harmful impacts of my lagging CYC education. For me, this important journey is what queering CYC is about.

My answer to the call to engage in a more politicized and historicized CYC praxis is long overdue and I take inspirational cues from other White cisgender CYCPs and scholars who have already begun to respond (see, e.g., Gharabaghi, 2017; Hillman et al., 2020; Mackenzie, 2020; Skott-Myhre, 2017; Vachon, 2018). Using an autoethnographic approach, I discuss the personal and professional insights I derived from writing a short graduate study paper on the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and other non-heterocisnormative (LGBTQI+)[1] newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students in Canada, many of whom are racialized. Inspired by the Black queer CYCPs and educators currently leading the research in this area (see Munroe et al., 2018a, 2020), I aim to answer the following research question: How do newcomer, refugee, and immigrant student experiences inform me as a White straight cisgender CYCP supporting multiply marginalised young people?

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[1]The '+' sign following the acronym LGBTQI is an increasingly common symbol in the English language to represent many diverse and evolving queer identity terms. While LGBTQI+ is not wholly representative of queer identities in other languages and cultures; as an English speaker and author, I use it throughout this paper for convenience and clarity (see Social Protection & Human Rights, 2015). I will also use the term "queer" interchangeably with LGBTQI+ to represent the vastness of queer identities globally. I have intentionally left out "two-spirited (2S)" as this refers to North American Indigenous community members, as opposed to the newcomers, refugees, and immigrants who are the focus of my analysis (see Khaki, 2018).

The objectives of this study are twofold: (a) to uncover the White colonial roots of queer intolerance that continue to oppress LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students in Canada; and (b) to share how a personal self-reflexive learning journey can help minimize biases that impede the ethical care of marginalized young people. I begin with my inspiration for this research topic followed by key conceptualizations of queering, along with the historical, political, and theoretical contexts that shape LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant experiences in Canada. I then provide a detailed description of my research approach, including a reflexive analysis of self discoveries, which I offer in conversation with data collected from two professionals in the fields of LGBTQI+ newcomer and immigrant support and refugee research. I conclude with implications for practice and thoughts on the potentials for queering CYC practice.

An Inspired Process

My focus on LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant student experiences was first inspired by the research of my school-based CYC colleague Tanitia Munroe and her team, which included a panel of Black queer youths. Shortly before beginning my study, I had listened to an interview (Munroe et al., 2018a) in which Munroe and her team discussed research aiming to dismantle nonfinancial barriers for Black queer students transitioning from high school to postsecondary education (PSE) in Canada. At the time, I was beginning an important personal and political journey out of heterocisnormative thinking in CYC practice that is now documented in a paper co-authored with two CYC colleagues Shadan Hyder and Matty Hillman (see Hyder et al., 2019). Shadan, Matty, and I had become aware of a growing schism in our field between academia and practice, one articulated by Thom Garfat in a listserv on CYC-Net as "a growing reality gulf between 'those who are doing' and those who are 'thinking about the doing'" (CYC-Net, 2010, 11th paragraph from the end). This schism continues to be discussed at professional gatherings, at conferences, and in publications (Hyder et al., 2019; Loiselle et al., 2012; Vachon, 2020). Tanitia and her research team, along with countless others leading work in the area of politicized praxis, have helped me to understand the false dichotomy between the academic "thinking" and the practical "doing" elements of our work. I now confidently align myself with CYCPs who bring critical theory to critical practice — those who do the practical work of supporting young people through intentional, theory-driven, political praxis (Loiselle et al., 2012).

Background

The Politics of Queering

While this study maintains a focus on the experiences of LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students in Canada, my learning from these experiences extends beyond the LGBTQI+ community. In its adjective form, the term "queer" is commonly used as an umbrella term for 2SLGBTQI+ identities (Khaki, 2018). As a verb, "to queer" connotes both a theoretical and practical critique relevant to the field of CYC: "to queer" means to reveal, contest, and resist the normative structures that underlie many human oppressions, including those that lie outside the realm of sex and gender politics (Vachon, 2020). But before the term "to queer" expanded beyond

LGBTQI+ communities and research, Berlant and Warner (1995) explained that an important goal of queering was to aspire to create more open and accepted "queer publics" that could "afford sex and intimacy in sustained, unchastening ways" (p. 344). Largely, this advocacy for queer publics, which emerged as a response to the injustices underlying the AIDS epidemic of the 1990s, offered a way of "bringing a queerer world into being" — a world that would respect the safety and belonging of all genders and all orientations in regard to loving one another (Berlant & Warner, 1995, p. 344). Indeed, Vachon (2020) noted that the kinds of care found in the queer histories of the HIV/AIDS era hold value for CYC practice, particularly when we reflect on how queer communities came to look after each other at a time when no one else seemed to care. This is a form of community care that, in many ways, mirrors the relational work we do in the life spaces of young people (Garfat & Fulcher, 2016) who often have nowhere else to turn (e.g., those in residential care, youth juvenile detention, shelters).

On a broader scale, queering has long been formulated through an intersectional lens. For example, the late Reverend Sheikh Ibrahim Farajaje, a much-loved and well-respected queer theologian, professor, and spiritual leader throughout the rise of queer activism and scholarship (Hamilton, 2020), defined queering as a way of "continually and simultaneously considering all of our own intersectionalities including … race, class, gender, … environmental issues, animal rights, sexualities, spiritual practices" (Farajaje as cited in Khaki, 2018, 4:02). In a similar vein, Alex Wilson, Indigenous professor and scholar, has called for queer reflection through traditional Indigenous land-based knowledge as a way back to precolonial anti-discrimination: "When you're on the land, all the socially constructed hierarchies around gender, around sexual orientation, around race, or around class disappear. The land engenders itself and we engender it" (Wilson & Laing, 2018, p. 134). Wilson's land-based education offers a solution to the "epistemicide" that not only cut off Indigenous people from the land, but cut off everyone from the knowledge that all belong (Wilson & Laing, 2018, p. 133). Queering in these ways brings humanity back to its roots before the onset of modern colonialist projects of human categorization based on ideas rooted in power dominance, capitalism, racialized political policies, and conformity to White heterosexual European norms (Lugones, 2010).

Ultimately, queering reminds us that there is "an invisible heteronormativity" underlying our politics, professions, and knowledge (Berlant & Warner, 1995, p. 348). Rooted in layers of history and politics on a global scale, this heterocisnormativity creates innumerable barriers for marginalized young people in Canada and all over the world.

The Intersections of Race and Queerness in Canadian Schools

Despite the diversity in Canada, Black queer newcomers continue to experience "triple times the difficulty" than their White queer counterparts due to racism and colonial oppression (Karlene Williams-Clarke as cited in Munroe et al, 2018a, 18:55). For this reason, queer racialized students are often forced into cultures of silence that protect them from abuse, torment, and even death (Cruz, 2008). Research on racialized newcomer, refugee, and immigrant student experiences is

still in its early stages in Canada. To my knowledge, Munroe and her colleagues (2018a, 2018b, 2020) were the first to discuss the complexities of newcomer, refugee, queer, and trans identities from the perspective of CYC in educational settings. In education research, the intersections of racism, structural inequalities, and attitudinal barriers have been identified as key factors limiting the success of all Black and other racialized students in Canadian schools, regardless of whether they are newcomers or not (James & Turner, 2017). Other studies, such as the seminal report on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in Canadian schools, *Every Class in Every School* (Taylor & Peter, 2011), found that LGBTQI+-identifying students with racialized backgrounds experience more barriers than their White peers due to the intersections of their sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, poverty, and cultural norms. The added layers of precarious newcomer status, complicated immigration processes, and adjustments to new communities compound the challenges for racialized newcomer students to Canada (see Munroe, et al., 2018a, 2018b, 2020).

Religion and cultural norms can contribute to a culture of silence among Black and other racialized queer students who fear reprimands and isolation from their communities, families, and peers if they come out as queer (Cruz, 2008; Munroe et al., 2018b, 2020; Taylor & Peter, 2011). Taylor and Peter (2011) also found that LGBTQI+ youth of colour were 14% less likely than their White peers to know "LGBTQ" students who were "out" and 17% less likely to know of supportive staff members and teachers (p. 21). In fact, heteronormative religious and cultural ideologies (e.g., those stemming from right-wing Christian and Islamic fundamentalism) can be powerful silencers of queer rights in public education. This was evidenced in 2018 in Ontario when lessons on LGBTQI+ sexuality were removed from an updated sexual education curriculum (Alphonso, 2018; CBC News, 2019; Levinson King, 2015; Munroe et al., 2020). In Canadian schools, this form of silencing results in a lack of visible minority students, whether in queer–straight alliances (QSAs) across the country, or in localized initiatives like Toronto's Safe And Positive Spaces[2] (Munroe et al., 2018b, 2020). Sadly, the Whiteness of these spaces purported to be safe for queer students exacerbates the exclusion of queer students of colour (Munroe et al., 2018b). Furthermore, Munroe (2018a) noted that the experiences of Black queer and trans newcomers in particular tend to be "silenced and invisible" (12:45). This is unacceptable given that three quarters of newcomers seeking services in urban areas like Toronto are racialized (Munroe et al., 2018a). Additionally, 60.2% of first-generation Canadians and 29.8% of second-generation Canadians are visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2011).

Some students feel postsecondary schools are more inclusive than high schools for Black and other racialized queer students (Munroe et al., 2018b). However, college and university campuses also struggle with racism, homophobia, transphobia, and stigma within White heteronormative school climates (Ecker et al., 2015; Patrick, 2014). In fact, a recent Canada-wide survey found that

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[2]"Safe and Positive Spaces" is a Toronto District School Board initiative: https://www.tdsb.on.ca/Elementary-School/Beyond-the-Classroom/Safe-and-Positive-Spaces

queer student centres vary greatly across Canadian PSE campuses and often lack the supports that students from different backgrounds require (Ecker et al., 2015).

Histories of Colonial Heterocispatriarchy

Long histories of colonial "heterocispatriarchy" (Lee, 2018, p. 63) are directly responsible for the challenges LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students face in Canada. Colonially imposed sodomy laws, stemming from long-standing relationships between state and religion, have worked to surveil and criminalize queerness around the world for centuries (Ahmed, 2015; Blake & Dayle, 2013; Gamble et al., 2015; Lee, 2018; Mendos, 2019; Murray, 2014; Nicol, 2014). A history of capitalism has further contributed to the heterocispatriarchal legacy of queer oppression by placing value on heterosexual patriarchic family norms (Lee, 2018; Lorde, 1984; Lugones, 2010). This power-driven colonial history of criminalizing same-sex relations and queer identities was enforced over 400 hundred years ago by British colonialist powers (and French colonialists, although to a lesser extent[3]) in countries throughout Asia, Africa, and the Americas (Nicol, 2014). In other countries, such as those with a Muslim-majority population, men in positions of power have propagandized heteronormative interpretations of religious texts such as the Quran (Ahmed, 1992; Khaki, 2018). These interpretations continue to perpetuate harmful views of queerness in several Canadian immigrant communities today (Levinson King, 2015). There are close to 70 countries worldwide where LGBTQI+ identities are persecuted by law, and in 12 of these countries, queer sexual relations are punishable by death (Mendos, 2019). Immigrants from all of those countries reside in Canada with varied newcomer, refugee, and generation statuses (Statistics Canada, 2019).

Canada as a "Safe Haven"

Of course, LGBTQI+ newcomers, refugees, and immigrants to Canada also experience discrimination due to the cultural, familial, and religious norms that afflict even countries where the persecution of queer identities is not official policy. Many countries, including Canada, do not criminalize same-sex relations or gender identities, yet homophobic and transphobic violence persists (Ecker et al., 2015; Gamble et al., 2015; Munroe et al., 2020; Taylor & Peter, 2011). The global history of queer intolerance sparked by British and French colonial conquests had a profound effect in Canada. Canada's mission to "civilize" Indigenous people through the residential school system was rooted in colonial heterocisnormative religious values dating back to 16th-century Europe and is responsible for the erasure of queer acceptance in Indigenous communities (Wilson & Laing, 2018; Woods & Yerxa, 2016). The same values are responsible for suppressing ancient traditions of queer acceptance in Commonwealth countries globally (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Nicol, 2014). Indigenous scholars (see Wilson & Laing, 2018) and queer activists (Woods & Yerxa, 2016) have begun to unveil Indigenous histories of queer acceptance. Yet, as Alex Wilson pointed out, it can be "a delicate topic to discuss" when elders

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[3]See Human Rights Watch (2008) *This Alien Legacy* for a complete history in brief:
https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/12/17/alien-legacy/origins-sodomy-laws-british-colonialism

and other Indigenous community members have internalized heteronormative values that deny queer rights (Wilson & Laing, 2018, p. 134). Indeed, it is ironic that descendants of heteronormative White colonial settlers in Canada now celebrate queer pride while in the historically queer-accepting Indigenous communities, it is necessary to fight for queer rights and belonging (Woods & Yerxa, 2016). This cruel irony plays out in former British colonies around the world while present-day Britain enjoys a reputation of upholding queer rights (Ahmed, 2015; Mendos, 2019).

When it comes to newcomers who are seeking asylum, Canada too takes pride in its reputation as a safe haven for LGBTQI+ refugees (Gamble et al., 2015; Lee, 2018, 2019; Murray, 2014). Nevertheless, queer asylum seekers continue to face barriers to successful settlement, including access to housing, education, employment, financial stability, and acceptance of refugee claims (Gamble et al., 2015; Lee, 2019; Munroe et al., 2020 Murray, 2011). One of the most significant barriers for LGBTQI+ refugees is the Basis Of Claim form (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada [IRB], 2018a; Immigration.ca, 2013), a requirement that asks claimants to prove the legitimacy of their claim within 15 days of arrival[4]. Queer and trans refugees often have trouble producing such evidence becuase in their countries of origin, any indication of their true gender identity or sexual orientation had to be hidden (Bielski, 2017; Dearham, 2017; Gamble et al., 2015; LaViolette, 2009; Mulé & Gates-Gasse, 2012; Murray, 2011, 2014; Rehaag, 2008). A further barrier, Bill C-31 (Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act, 2012), was intended to protect Canada's immigration system from false refugee claims through a list of 42 Designated Countries of Origin that were — unjustifiably in my view — deemed adequate protectors of human rights and freedoms and therefore not eligible for asylum claims related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE; Gamble et al., 2015; Lee, 2018; Mulé & Gates-Gasse, 2012; Smith, 2012). Fortunately, Canada has since "removed all countries from the designated country of origin list" (Government of Canada, 2019). However, rigid homonationalist constructions of who qualifies as an "authentic refugee body" (Murray, 2014, p. 29) continue to linger in the public consciousness.

Improvements to the LGBTQI+ refugee claimant process have included new guidelines that help Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB) officers understand the harm SOGIE claimants encounter due to intersectional marginalization and unrealistic requirements that they prove their queerness through the Basis Of Claim form (Government of Canada, 2017; IRB, 2018b). The new guidelines were "inspired and informed" (Government of Canada, 2017, para. 3) in part by the seminal work of Nicole LaViolette (2009), a law professor and researcher who was dedicated to dismantling barriers for SOGIE refugees. They address the unique barriers SOGIE claimants face when cultural, religious, and family backgrounds contextualize queerness in ways that do not conform to some IRB officers' understanding of LGBTQI+ expressions of identity

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[4]Due to the impacts of COVID-19, the Basis Of Claim forms have been granted temporary extensions at the time of this writing (see "Practice notice on the temporary extension of time limits for filing the Basis Of Claim form": https://irb.gc.ca/en/legal-policy/procedures/Pages/practice-notice-temporary-extension-boc-form.aspx)

(IRB, 2018b). According to the guidelines, IRB officers are now trained to understand the "non-linear process" of refugee claimants' diverse understanding and acceptance of their own SOGIE, which can differ widely from Westernized understandings of what it means to be queer (IRB, 2018b, Section 3, para. 1). However, human rights organizations have declared that these improvements are not enough: many queer migrants continue to fear rejection of their SOGIE claims by the IRB and seek entry to Canada through other means, such as temporary work and study visas, which can be difficult to obtain (Gamble et al., 2015; Lee, 2019; Mulé & Gates-Gasse, 2012). Additionally, many migrants who are eager to flee but do not have the resources to obtain a visa, nor the resources to make the long trip to Canada, are forced to live in limbo in refugee camps close to their home countries (Amuke, 2015). The impact of COVID-19 is not likely to diminish for long the influx of new immigrants to Canada. Recently, the government of Canada pledged to open its borders to over one million refugees and newcomers over the next 3 years (Harris, 2020).

Immigration Terminology in Canada

As this study is focused on newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students to Canada, it is important to clarify the terminology that defines their experiences. In Canada, the term "newcomer" or "recent immigrant" refers to a person who has arrived in Canada within 5 years of the latest census count (Statistics Canada, 2010). Refugees (also "Convention refugees"[5]) are those whose refugee claims have been officially accepted by the IRB, while "refugee claimants" are still awaiting decisions on their claims (Gamble et al., 2015, p. 12). Recent immigrants can also be holders of temporary resident visas (TRVs), which include student and work permits (Lee, 2019). In official statistics, first-generation immigrants include not only newcomers and refugees, but also Canadians born outside of Canada to Canadian parents (Statistics Canada, 2011). Second-generation immigrants are defined as "individuals who were born in Canada and had at least one parent born outside Canada … third generation or more refers to people who are born in Canada with both parents born in Canada" (Statistics Canada, 2011, p. 3).

Theoretical Context

Vachon (2020) invited CYCPs to queer our care work: to "consider a queer CYC imagination" (p. 64) — an imagination that he argues can open possibilities for thinking and doing our work differently, perhaps more politically, within the CYC ethic of "making moments meaningful" in the "minutiae" of young people's everyday life events (Garfat & Fulcher, 2016). I aim to queer my own practice by making connections between (micro) moments with young people and (macro) systems of politics that influence their lives. To do this, I aspire to what Amponsah and Stephen (2020) referred to as "an informed allyship" of action led by the communities I aim to support (p. 10). As a White straight CYCP, I am grateful to the CYCPs who have taught me that an informed allyship requires a historicized and politicized theoretical grounding (Amponsah & Stephen, 2020;

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[5]"Convention" refers to the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (UN Refugee Agency, n.d.)

Igbu & Baccus, 2018). For this paper, I draw on queer and feminist postcolonial thinkers who have thought deeply about the ways in which modern nation-states create precarious conditions for citizens through rigid notions of legitimate citizenship based on heterocisnormative conformity (Butler, 2009; Butler & Spivak, 2007; Lugones, 2010; Puar, 2013). These frameworks are concerned with the "dynamics of power" and "why some forms of sexual life are so much more possible than others, and why some seem to embody the unthinkable and even the unlive-able" (Butler, 2009, p. iv).

Puar (2013) explained the power maintained by White Westernized nations through a lens of homonationalism, a concept that recognizes modern and illusive "progress for gay rights … built on the backs of racialized others" (p. 337). Homonationalist rhetoric creates a binary of "us" versus "them": a way of othering queer outsiders who do not seem to "fit" White Westernized views of queerness (Murray, 2014; Puar, 2013; White, 2013). For example, visions of a monolithic homophobic Islam are socially constructed as somehow more deviant than the homophobia found in White Westernized nations (Puar, 2013). Meanwhile Islam, a religion already subjected to xenophobic White European supremacist views of "Oriental backwardness" (Said, 1978, p. 43), is richly diverse, and not the inherently queer-phobic religion many have made it out to be (Khaki, 2018). In the Middle East and elsewhere around the world, centuries of British and French colonial conquests have suppressed queer sexualities for the purpose of colonial capitalist gains that thrive on White heteronormative family values (Lee, 2018; Lugones, 2010).

I further look to a queer of colour analysis (Munroe et al., 2020) to disrupt the deeply problematic notion of Whiteness "as the entry point into goodness", which has been constructed through centuries of White colonial European oppression (Amponsah & Stephen, 2020, p. 7). This history reminds us that we cannot do our work solely from the dominant White neoliberal perspective manifested in the out-and-proud advocacy embedded within queer rights discourse across Canadian and global societies (Munroe et al., 2018a, 2018b, 2020). Rather, we must unsettle "White settler privilege in practice" (Mackenzie, 2020, p. 96) as we learn to respect the silence that queer newcomers and immigrants rely on for survival (Cruz, 2008; Munroe et al., 2020). The oppression of LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students is rooted in a historical colonial racism that falsely generalizes non-Westernized subjects as dangerous, strange, and uncivilized "others" (Blake & Dayle, 2013; Lorde, 1984; Lugones, 2010; Said, 1978). Through a lens of queer and feminist politics, subjects who are falsely constructed to be dangerous, strange, or uncivilized based on their non-conformity with White heterosexual norms are more accurately depicted as positive and necessary resisters of "the coloniality of gender" (Lugones, 2010, p. 746). Reframing stigmatized notions of non-Westernized and non-heteronormative subjects in this way is fundamental to queering CYC practice. Reframing young people's "dangerous" behaviours as forms of resistance is not entirely new to CYC practice (see, e.g., Brockett & Anderson-Nathe, 2016). However, reframing stigmatized notions of "strange" or "queer" into sources of pride for racialized newcomer, refugee, and immigrant queer young people is perhaps a new and important endeavour for our field.

I apply these queer and feminist postcolonial frameworks to my previous self-reflexive work using the feminist maxim "the personal is political" (see Hyder et al., 2019). I extend my work by taking note of Amponsah and Stephen's (2020) reference to Audre Lorde's (1984) important advice: "Reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside [ourselves] and touch that terror and loathing of any difference that lives here. See whose face it wears. Then the personal as the political can begin to illuminate all our choices." (p. 113). Reaching inward to challenge our own inner biases is a necessary step toward restructuring the normative hegemony of CYC practices wherein White straight cisgender CYCPs may "non-consciously" commit microaggressions due to the privileges they hold (Vachon, 2018, p. 15). Queer, feminist, and postcolonial frameworks join the personal with the political in ways that help me understand how to truly make moments meaningful for the young people I support. Through this project, my own way of reaching inward was operationalized through autoethnography.

Methodology

An Autoethnographic Approach

Autoethnography involves the application of critical self-reflexivity to qualitative research — "stories of/about the self told through the lens of culture" (Adams et al., 2014, p. 1). The inclusion of *self* in autoethnographic research is political: it aims to disrupt the colonialism reproduced by and through more traditional research methods that have historically represented cultures without critical reflection on power imbalances between the researchers and the often marginalised communities they study (Adams et al., 2014).

For the purposes of this paper, I applied an autoethnographic lens to a qualitative research assignment I completed in the Winter semester of 2019 for a graduate course in the Faculty of Education at York University. The assignment required us (the students in the graduate class) to seek further understanding of postsecondary student experiences that were distinctly different from our own. We were given the choice to either interview postsecondary students directly or to interview organizations and student centres that supported student success. I chose to interview staff members from organizations that supported or researched LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students' access to PSE in Canada. I found that this assignment aligned with the social justice aims of self-reflexivity in autoethnography, which encourage researchers to "interrogate the intersections between self and society" and "the personal and the political" (Adams et al., 2014, p. 2). As a result, two distinct research phases unfolded. In phase one, I used a semistructured qualitative interviewing method with each participant to gain their unsolicited insights, which were based on their positionality and expertise about PSE access for queer newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students in Canada (Creswell, 2013). In autoethnographic research, this can be referred to as a "topical interview" approach that works to either confirm or counter the researcher's own understanding of the research area (Adams et al., 2014, p. 54). In phase two, I applied an autoethnographic analysis to the interview data for the purposes of determining my inner professional growth out of heterocisnormative CYC practice.

Unlike many autoethnographic researchers, I did not engage in the direct ethnographic style of community fieldwork before interviewing my participants (e.g., collecting notes and observations). However, I had been employing an autoethnographic "keeping notes" approach (Adams et al., 2014, p. 3) for years, both in my fieldwork as a CYCP and as a budding academic interested in exploring my White CYC fragility (Vachon, 2018). I had typed notes and handwritten journal entries to draw from for self-reflexive analysis. By adding the element of self-reflexivity to this work, I aimed to reveal the ignorance that can accompany one's place of privilege and power in society, something that is particularly important for White straight cisgender colonial settlers in Canada to come to terms with.

Recruitment

To recruit participants in phase one, I used a convenience sampling approach (Lavrakas, 2011). Based on my literature review and prior community contacts, I emailed six organizations and centres across Canada that I knew employed workers who would have experience and knowledge about queer newcomer, refugee, and immigrant experiences and who I thought might be interested in speaking with me. In my message, I stated that I was undertaking research for a term paper on the inclusion of newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students who identified as LGBTQI+, and that I thought their organization could provide invaluable insight. I stated that my aim was to investigate and increase advocacy for the inclusion of these students who face myriad barriers. In total, two individuals from two organizations agreed to participate in this study. One agreed to a 45-minute face-to-face interview and the other responded asynchronously via email discussion.

My choice to recruit staff members rather than students was informed by my having learned, through my literature review, that LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students are often silent about their experiences due to fear of discrimination, abuse, and isolation (Cruz, 2008; Munroe et al., 2018b, 2020; Taylor & Peter, 2011). I further understood that LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students to Canada are an extremely vulnerable group. I felt that an interview process with these students would require much more relationship-building and trust than I would be able to offer as a graduate student completing a short research assignment.

Ethics

Ethics approval was acquired through the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee at York University, which conforms to Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics standards. Participants in the study consented to having their comments and recommendations included in future publications and presentations that could better inform graduate students, researchers, and student service professionals about the diverse experiences of LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students in PSE. I provided participants with an opportunity to review their contributions to my analysis in each phase of the study.

Participants

Both participants were in positions of managerial leadership in their organizations. The first participant I interviewed (in the face-to-face 45-minute interview) was a Black Jamaican immigrant to Canada who identified as queer and female. The second participant was a White Canadian researcher who identified as female but did not disclose her sexual orientation. Throughout this article, the participants will be referred to by the pseudonyms "Addy" (from organization A) and "Bailey" (from organization B) to protect their anonymity. The organizations they worked for were different in scope of service, practice, and focus. Addy worked for an organization that directly supported 2SLGBTQI+ communities with an additional focus on supporting LGBTQI+ newcomers, refugees, and immigrants. Bailey worked at a university centre for refugee studies and research.

Data Analysis

After collecting data from each of my interviewees, I conducted more targeted reviews of the literature and of my own personal notes documenting my journey in political self-reflexive practice. I organized my findings using an autoethnographic thematicizing approach, which encouraged me to pause, reflect, and connect important personal and professional learning to my collected data (Adams et al., 2014, p. 68). I repeated this thematicizing several times over until I was satisfied that I had invited enough vulnerability within myself to effect lasting personal change (Adams et al., 2014) in moments of my practice with young people. I was drawn to this process of analysis as I felt it aligned with the CYC tenet in relational practice of "making moments meaningful", which asks CYCPs to utilize everyday moments in their relational practice with young people to create opportunities for growth and positive change (Garfat, 2016, p. 2). The results that follow detail moments of reflexivity interwoven with knowledge gained from my research participants.

Findings

But, It's OK to Be Queer Here!

Throughout my CYC career, I have taken pride in my relational work with young people. Even on days when I felt my interventions and moments with young people had gone awry, I commended myself for learning from my mistakes. I believe in equal rights and I have striven to denounce racism, ableism, and homophobia in the spaces where I work. I often volunteered at Gay Pride events in my community and participated in QSA and Safe and Positive Spaces events at the school where I was employed. On more than one occasion, I had supported queer and questioning students in their coming out process with the aim of relational safety; I took care to check in with the "co-created space" (Garfat & Fulcher, 2016, p. 16) between myself and them with the aim of ensuring that they perceived me as a safe and non-judgemental person. I introduced them to activist voices from queer rights movements and was proud when I could assure them that, for the most part, it is safe to be queer here in 21st-century Canada.

I was therefore stunned to learn of the *lack* of safety in Safe and Positive Spaces within Canadian schools where Black queer students "are targeted" (Munroe et al., 2018b, 4:00). Despite my years of experience supporting LGBTQI+ students, I did not know that Black queer students, more than their White counterparts, avoided designated safe spaces at school. I wondered how Black students could be more at risk of isolation and abuse than White students. Did it have something to do with religion? With culture? Was it possible that Black communities are generally less queer-friendly than White communities? (This particular thought scared me — just thinking it made me feel I was racist.) Despite my limited education in history and global politics, I knew that some countries had extremely homophobic policies and criminalization laws, and that some of these were African and Asian countries from which many newcomers to Canada have emigrated. Yet I had not spent much time reflecting on these issues or how they might impact the students I work with.

One of the first discussion points in my interview with Addy centred on these issues as she commented on her experience supporting queer people from Jamaica and the Caribbean who were at risk of abuse and isolation in Canada:

> This is a very heavily Catholic community that doesn't recognize queerness as something that is acceptable, and that's brought here as a cultural norm to Canada even though they are now supposed to be in a place where hate and rejection is not acceptable….

> They largely live in the closet because of their Catholic communities. People are only "out" here in these walls [gesturing around the lobby of the organization where she worked]. Once they leave this space, it [queerness] is not a thing for them — they are not permitted or allowed.

Addy's comments confirmed my assumption that the apprehensions experienced by queer newcomer and immigrant students were rooted in religion. What I did not know was that it was not a matter of religion alone. Through further research, I learned that colonialism plays a large role in complicating the history of homophobia in countries around the world.

Commonwealth laws, such as the 1864 Offences Against the Person Act of Jamaica[6], have been established through centuries of colonial power concerned with bringing heteronormative nuclear-family norms into law as a way of regulating sexual acts for the purposes of moral civilization and economic benefit (Blake & Dayle, 2013; Lee, 2018). In fact, much of the global colonial spread of legally imposed homophobia and transphobia began in India in 1861 with the implementation of Section 377 of the criminal code by the British Lord Macaulay (see Human Rights Watch, 2008), which had its roots in King Henry VIII's Buggery Act of 1533[7] (Nicol,

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[6]https://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=&p_isn=73502&p_classification=01.04
[7]https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/the-buggery-act-1533#

2014). In the context of the Caribbean, these laws were perpetuated in Christian missionary projects to civilize African slaves in preparation for colonialized Caribbean life (Blake & Dayle, 2013). In a country like Jamaica, where the majority of the population are of African descent, such "civilizing" missions had a great impact. Historically, same-sex marriages were accepted and seen as contributing to economic stability in parts of Africa; lesbian partnerships in the former Kingdom of Dahomey provided one example of this (Lorde, 1984). Thus, it is possible that African slaves brought over to Jamaica in the 18th and 19th centuries to serve the aims of Western capitalist modernity (Blake & Dayle, 2013) were robbed of their queer-friendly heritage in the name of colonialism and assimilation.

Before learning this history, I knew intuitively that queer intolerance could not simply be a matter of culture, religion, or race, but I lacked the essential knowledge that would tell me precisely why. I began to understand the deep-seated roots of colonial heterocispatriarchal oppression and how seriously it impacts the lives of queer newcomer and immigrant students in Canada. My ignorance of White heterocispatriarchal queer oppression globally was a form of internalized racism; this ignorance allowed me to practise from a place of heterocisnormative privilege under the flawed assumption that other cultures were inherently more homophobic than my own.

Addy continued to discuss the consequences that religious belief systems can have on queer newcomers to Canada, particularly when they are courageous enough to express their gay pride alongside their Canadian peers. She explained that international students, for example, risk losing everything when they enjoy their new-found freedom of expression on queer-friendly campuses:

> They run out of money because their parents found out they were queer — they are caught up in the power of being out in Canada and their parents find out through social media or other people who snitch on them and they no longer get their school fees paid. I have heard horror stories of parents coming here to physically harm their children.

Research on the experiences of queer international and immigrant students in Canada is emerging. Patrick (2014) found that queer international students are often relieved to be able disclose their queerness here in Canada after hiding their identities in their home countries. Queer international students who transition from high school to PSE in Canada often find that college and university campuses are the first places they feel comfortable expressing their identities (Munroe et al., 2018b). However, these students still face immense risks; Canadian PSE queer student support centres have yet to develop adequate supports specific to the unique challenges confronting queer international and immigrant students (Ecker et al., 2015).

After the interview with Addy, I tried to recall the many QSA and Safe Spaces events I had participated in during my school-based CYC career. I could not remember there ever being Black students in attendance. Cannary, a Black queer lesbian member of Munroe's (2018b) research team, offered an explanation: "Often queer people who are of different nationalities feel like they

have to choose between their queerness and their racial identity" (Munroe et al., 2018b, 30:05). As an immigrant herself, Cannary explained that she could not speak freely about her identity if she wanted to be accepted and loved by her family. Clearly, many Black queer and newcomer students did not feel safe expressing their queerness here, and were in a quandary: they either suffered in silence or risked dangerous consequences by coming out. As I learned about these experiences, I reflected that, up until this point in my career, I had been practising a "more traditional liberal homonormative lesbian/gay studies approach" (Vachon, 2020, p. 67) that did nothing to address the challenges queer newcomer and immigrant students faced. I recalled how all that I had learned about LGBTQI+ issues came from textbooks taught by White straight cisgender teachers. I had been missing the deeper "queer critiques" that extend beyond pink T-shirts and rainbow-coloured triangles (Vachon, 2020, p. 68). A queer of colour critique has taught me that silence is a survival skill for many students and that my out-and-proud advocacy risked putting these students in danger (Munroe et al., 2020). I reflected on moments I had shared with LGBTQI+ youth, thinking I was supporting them with my message, "It's OK to be queer here!" Were any of them newcomers? Had I put any of them at risk of harm in my efforts to care?

It Really Is a Colonial Thing

My deep dive into the colonial roots of queer oppression continued as I exchanged emails with my interviewee Bailey in February of 2019. Bailey raised concerns about regressive changes to sexual education in Ontario:

> So, LGBTQ students face barriers because of the retrograde move by the government to revert back to the 1998 curriculum, which does not acknowledge, teach, or promote inclusion of LGBTQ students.

As an Ontario-based CYCP in schools, Bailey's concerns were not new to me; however, I realized there was much more that I needed to learn about the historical roots informing the Conservative government's 2018 decision to rescind the updated and more progressive sex education curriculum that had been introduced by the Liberal government several years earlier (CBC News, 2019). I recalled my own frustrations with this "retrograde move" and the Conservative promise of more consultation with the curriculum's opponents, identified as "mainly faith groups and socially conservative family organizations" (Alphonso, 2018, para. 4). Less than a year prior to this repeal, I had supported a male-identifying Middle Eastern Muslim newcomer student at the high school I worked at. He was joyful, bright, and full of energy. He was also quite vocal about his non-acceptance of gay rights, which he told me came from his family's culture and teachings from the Quran. This was my first experience working with a student who was so openly anti-queer in a school that prided itself on affirming LGBTQI+ rights and identities. The fact that he was Muslim reinforced my internalized bias that Islam was a homophobic religion. My experiences with this student, coupled with Bailey's concerns about the lack of LGBTQI+ inclusion in sex education curricula, prompted me to dig further into the history behind religious queer intolerance. It also helped me to unpack my own Islamophobic assumptions.

I remembered reading about some Muslim immigrants to Canada who had been quite vocal about their opposition to the updated sex education curriculum. I reviewed the media coverage and found an article detailing some handwritten letters in Arabic that had circulated in the Greater Toronto Area (Levinson King, 2015). One letter claimed, "It will teach Gay-Trans propaganda starting in grade 1 [age 6]. Destroy the idea of gender, natural law, heterosexual family normalcy" (Levinson King, 2015, para. 7).

The importance of protecting "heterosexual family normalcy" was what my student had tried to explain to me earlier that year. Because I felt my relationship with this student was good, we had often engaged in difficult dialogues about queer rights and homophobia at school. On one occasion, I came to tears listening to him engage in homophobic jokes with classmates. When he later apologised, I understood that he was likely grappling with the conflicting messages he was receiving at school and from his community. Due to his effeminate manner, I had also been wondering whether he was questioning his own sexual identity. I had empathy for what he might be going through but had not challenged myself to learn more about Islamic perspectives on LGBTQI+ rights and freedoms.

After my exchange with Bailey, I reviewed notes from an elective undergraduate course on women and gender in Islam that I had taken. I had learned that there were false stereotypes regarding women in Islam and wondered whether there were also falsely constructed histories of anti-queerness. I searched the assigned text, *Women and Gender in Islam* (Ahmed, 1992), for evidence of queerness in Islam's history. I discovered that Islam's reputation as a monolithic anti-feminist and anti-queer religion was unjust and unfair in many ways and that colonialism played a major role in constructing this history of Islam.

Ahmed (1992) explained that in the ancient Middle East (circa 6000 BCE and into the 2nd millennium BCE), many cultures worshipped female goddess figures within societies that elevated the status of women. Some feminist theories have suggested that over time the decline in women's status, along with the eventual "decline of the Goddess" (p. 13), were the consequences of emerging labour market needs that commodified women's reproductive means into the "property" of men for capitalist gain (p. 12). The rise of Islam in the 7th century adopted the patriarchal practices of monotheistic religions already in place, which assigned a male pronoun to one God; Islam, among other religions, effectively displaced a polythiest religion in the Middle East that worshipped three goddesses and a variety of family structures that were not limited to patriarchal family customs. Ahmed noted that "Mesopotamian, Persian, Hellenic, Christian, and eventually Islamic cultures each contributed practices that both controlled and diminished women"; each culture "borrowed the controlling and reductive practices of its neighbours" in ways that viewed the female body as "exclusively biological … a sexual and reproductive being" (p. 18). According to Ahmed's account of the history, when Islam conquered Middle Eastern and Mediterranean regions, it assimilated "the scriptural and social traditions" of existing cultural norms into "the corpus of Islamic life" (p. 4). Ahmed provided one example of "how easily and invisibly scriptural assimilation could occur": in its account of the creation of humankind, the Quran does not mention

whether the man or the woman came first or stipulate that Eve was born of Adam's rib; yet, traditionalist translations in Islamic literature written after Muslim conquests do depict Eve as "created from a rib" (p. 4).

Ahmed's feminist perspective of this history provides evidence of how patriarchal interpretations of religion, including (but not limited to) Islam, became culturally entrenched to serve the purposes of male dominance and capitalist colonial power that had been emerging for centuries. Male members of Muslim societies became primary interpreters of some of the more vague passages in the Quran and did so through a heteronormative patriarchic lens that valued male-headed households and heterosexual family norms.

For decades, queer Muslim activists have pushed back against heteronormative readings of the Quran. In a TEDx Talk on queer Muslim perspectives, gay Muslim refugee and lawyer El-Farouk Khaki (2018) explained that when the Quran's message of peace is interpreted through patriarchy and power, it is often used to justify hate against Muslim LGBTQI+ people. Khaki described this as a form of "spiritual violence and spiritual abuse" (4:31) that he had struggled with in childhood until he learned to resist the message that "you can't be gay and Muslim" (1:30). As an activist and human rights lawyer in Toronto since the early 1990s, Khaki has promoted an inclusive and accepting Islam with evidence from the Quran that depicts Allah as a queer-affirming and accepting God of all people regardless of "our social location, our physical location" (9:35). To make his argument, Khaki cited evidence of *Mukhannathun* (effeminate men) in Muhammad's quarters (3:10) and the fundamental principle of *Tawhid,* "the unicity of God" (9:15). Khaki interpreted Tawhid in the context of chapter 50, verse 16 of the Quran to mean "we are all interchangeable as human beings" (9:33). Through this lens, Khaki defined social and physical locations as "arbitrary distinctions" (9:38). His view aligns with Indigenous perspectives on the importance of queering land-based education, which understand arbitrary hierarchal categorizations of gender, sexual orientation, race, and class as modern colonially constructed concepts created for economic and capital gain (Lugones, 2010; Wilson & Laing, 2018).

Looking back, I wonder how I might have used this knowledge in my interventions with the Muslim student I supported. I am grateful for the motivation Bailey gave me to finally confirm what I thought could be true but needed to investigate further: Islamic and Muslim ways of being in the world can be as queer-affirming as any other culture and religion. Furthermore, violent heterocisnormative practices present in Middle Eastern nations are rooted in religious and cultural practices that existed long before the rise of Islam. Ironically, these practices shape the Western colonial powers that appear to be queer-friendly today.

In our email exchange, Bailey stated that there is "plenty of related potential for discrimination, exclusion, and hate without SOGI [sexual orientation and gender identity] curriculum promoting equality, inclusion, and legitimacy." I found myself reflecting on how the education system can effectively promote "equality, inclusion, and legitimacy" while also respecting young people's religious and cultural belief systems. As a White CYCP who does not observe any particular faith,

I know it is not my place to educate Muslim students on the history of their own religion, particularly when I have only begun to scratch the surface of this long and complex history. It is important I take the lead from my Black and Brown colleagues who try to ensure that newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students gain access to information about their sexuality in school curricula (Munroe et al., 2020). I also know that an important first step in promoting queer rights and inclusion in education is to equip myself with the knowledge needed to become an informed ally to these communities (Amponsah & Stephen, 2020). Europe's history, *my* history, of colonial supremacy has decimated human rights through its imposition of White European values and deprecation of anyone who presents as an outsider to traditional White heteronormative and patriarchic norms (Blake & Dayle, 2013; Lugones, 2010; Puar, 2013; Said, 1978). It really is a colonial thing, and it is my responsibility to understand this.

Prove It!

The following two sections of analysis relate specifically to queer newcomer and refugee students in Canada. Both Addy and Bailey identified SOGIE refugee issues that have unsettled my image of Canada as a safe haven for queer newcomers and immigrants. I begin with Bailey's explanation of why SOGIE newcomer and refugee issues are such an important area of research in Canada:

> A man is under threat of the death penalty in Iran if he is found … having sex with another man; others are tortured or persecuted in other ways until they have to leave. Where can they go and how they are welcomed (or not) are important questions … and Canada often excludes SOGI asylum seekers as much as it accepts them.

With my limited knowledge of refugee issues in Canada, I wondered what could be exclusionary about Canada's policies protecting such vulnerable asylum seekers. Following Bailey's recommendation, I reviewed seminal research in the area of Canada's SOGIE refugee laws (see, e.g., LaViolette, 2009; Murray, 2011, 2014; Rehaag, 2008). I learned that queer asylum seekers in Canada experience a disproportionately unfair "burden of proof" compared to claimants seeking refuge from war, violence, and other types of oppression (LaViolette, 2009, p. 454).

The burden of proof identified by LaViolette (2009) is the Basis Of Claim form (IRB, 2018a; Immigration.ca, 2013), formerly called the Personal Information Form (PIF), that requires claimants to narrate evidence of their need for asylum within just 15 days of their arrival in Canada (Bielski, 2017; Gamble et al., 2015). For SOGIE claimants from countries where queerness is not tolerated, or is even criminalized, the task of proving their queerness becomes impossible, since they have had to hide their identities to survive (Dearham, 2017; Gamble et al., 2015; LaViolette, 2009; Mulé & Gates-Gasse, 2012; Murray, 2011, 2014; Rehaag, 2008). To complicate matters, the Canadian definition of what it means to be queer can differ from definitions of queerness in other cultures. For example, queer terminology, along with queer lifestyle choices, activities (sexual or otherwise), and social norms, will be different depending on which country a refugee comes from

(Murray, 2011; Rehaag, 2008). Thus, claimants are caught in a dilemma: whether to be honest about lacking the kinds of proof that would satisfy a Canadian adjudicator's notion of queerness, or whether to create a credible narrative of queerness, even though the process of "becoming" Canada's version of queer may not feel genuine to their own experiences (Murray, 2011, p. 131). Either way, they risk not being believed by the IRB and having to return to their home countries (LaViolette, 2009; Murray, 2011, 2014; Rehaag, 2008).

In 2017, the IRB announced improvements to reduce the burden of proof after examining "the harm individuals may face due to their non-conformity with socially accepted SOGIE norms" (Government of Canada, 2017, para. 2). However, lack of evidence for LGBTQI+ eligibility continues to be a significant barrier for many claimants, particularly those from countries with the strictest criminalization laws (Lee, 2018). When I discussed the improvements to the SOGIE claim process in my interview with Addy, she explained that the changes had had little impact on the newcomers she supported:

> The [PIF] changes in 2017 have not changed anything — they [SOGIE refugees] purposely forget their experiences and this is difficult for the IRB because there is no proof … there is this idea of not being queer enough. It must be physical, based on stereotypical ideals.

I found examples of purposely "forgetting" and "not being queer enough" in several studies. Murray (2011) detailed the experience of a woman from St. Lucia who forgot to include on her form an incident in which a man threw a rock at her while calling her a "sodomite", which resulted in her getting stitches. Although this was a significant piece of evidence that could have helped her claim, the trauma associated with the incident caused her to block it from her memory. She had remembered the incident by the time of her hearing, but was prohibited from recalling it "since it wasn't in her PIF" (p. 132). In another example, I learned that it is common for a gay man from Africa to pretend to be heterosexual by marrying a woman and having children, because that is the only accepted way of having a family in many African countries (Gamble et al., 2015). Finally, I found graphic accounts of the "physical" proof needed to satisfy the IRB. For example, it is not uncommon for claimants to be asked intimate details about their sexual past. In one study, an IRB adjudicator asked: "'When was the first time you had sex?' … 'How did you feel?' … 'Tell me, because I wasn't there. Tell me.'" (Dearham, 2017, p. 11).

Learning of the ways in which queer asylum seekers to Canada have to prove their sexual identity, relive their traumas, and "become" Canada's version of a credible queer person has helped me recognize the extent of my heterocisnormative privilege. It is difficult to imagine telling a complete stranger, within 15 days of arriving in a strange country, the intimate details of your personal life, sex life, and past traumas. Moreover, even if SOGIE claimants are successful in proving their LGBTQI+ identity, they can wait years for their permanent resident status, which hinders their ability to get access to services such as formal education. Addy explained:

> A lot of people take the free entry-level English courses that are offered but end up doing dishes or bartending or something because they have other factors that intersect such as race and language skills, gender, identity …

Indeed, newcomers to Canada scramble to find adequate means to support themselves as they wait for the necessary temporary resident visas to work and attend PSE in Canada (Munroe et al., 2020). Meanwhile, they face racism and homophobia as they attempt to prove their worthiness to stay in Canada (Gamble et al., 2015; Lee, 2019; Munroe et al., 2020; Murray, 2014). They are often told that the PSE credentials they acquired in their home countries are not transferrable to Canada, or that, for trans-identifying newcomers, their credentials are unacceptable because the name on their documents does not match their perceived sex or current name (Munroe et al., 2018b, 2020).

Such burdens of proof, placed disproportionately on the shoulders of queer newcomers, exemplify Bailey's concern that Canada excludes SOGIE asylum seekers as much as it accepts them.

Are They **Really** *Refugees?*

For several years prior to this project, I had engaged in heated debates with people who believed that large numbers of newcomers take advantage of liberal policies to "fake" their way into Canada. Sadly, I lacked the knowledge and details to justify what I felt to be true: there is no such thing as an illegitimate or fake refugee. After learning about the struggles SOGIE refugees encounter when trying to prove their queerness, I can understand why people think refugees are "faking it", because they often are — just not for the reasons people think. Rigid and unjust immigration policies have given SOGIE refugees little choice. In our interview, Addy explained that queer migrants "must come from their country of origin through treacherous paths, so they find ways to fake their way in". Addy explained that "faking their way in" meant that queer migrants are often forced to find creative ways to avoid dangerous and precarious immigration routes and refugee camps, particularly if they are from countries with strict and violent anti-queer policies. Countries like Uganda, for example, enact strict regulations that prevent LGBTQI+ citizens from safely emigrating or seeking refuge (Gamble et al., 2015). Thus, queer migrants are often forced to falsify documents and to find the financial means to obtain the proper temporary resident visas (TRVs) in any way they can, although these bring no guarantee of stability in the destination country (Lee, 2019). Indeed, Lee's (2019) study revealed that, despite success in securing TRVs, many LGBTQI+ newcomers to Canada live precariously; barriers due to racism, xenophobia, and cisnormative policies prevent them from finding stable work and study opportunities, and they live in constant fear of deportation once their visas have expired.

For Global South migrants who cannot find the means to obtain TRVs, fleeing to the closest refugee camp with the support of a human rights organization often becomes the only viable option (Gamble et al., 2015). Unfortunately, this route is neither safe nor reliable, causing many queer migrants to avoid this option if at all possible. The Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights Canadian research team (Gamble et al., 2015) detailed the story of Ugandan refugees who fled to

the neighbouring Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya when the Ugandan government passed its short-lived (BBC, 2014) Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2013. These Ugandan LGBTQI+ citizens arrived in Dadaab, a place meant to be a temporary first point of safe asylum, only to suffer "homophobic attacks" by administration officers and other camp residents (Gamble et al., 2015, p. 10). Not only did these refugees live in miserable and violent conditions, but they also lived without much hope of safe or smooth resettlement. The extent of this problem was well-documented by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), which found that there were "13 million refugees spread across the world — with over 586,000 in Kenya as of May 2015 — and that only 100,000 of the global refugee population can be resettled annually" (Amuke, 2015, para. 8).

Addy explained that, for some refugees, the only alternative to the arduous immigration paths described above is the international student visa — a popular TRV option for many queer newcomers to Canada, even those from countries deemed less dangerous and more tolerant of LGBTQI+ rights and freedoms (Gamble et al., 2015; Mulé & Gates-Gasse, 2012; Murray, 2014). Prior to my interview with Addy, I had learned that the increased desirability of TRVs for queer and trans migrants to Canada was due, in part, to the implementation in 2012 of the controversial Bill C-31, which enacted a "designated country of origin" (DCO) practice that erroneously classified 42 countries around the world as safe for LGBTQI+ citizens, thus preventing many SOGIE asylum seekers from making a refugee claim (Smith, 2012; Murray, 2014). In fact, Bill C-31 was "profoundly unsafe" because it denied SOGIE refugees their right to protection from countries that did not criminalize same sex relations per se but that discriminated against LGBTQI+ citizens in other violent and oppressive ways (Mulé & Gates-Gasse, 2012, p. 20). Fortunately, in 2019, Bill C-31 was found to be in contravention of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and was finally rescinded (Government of Canada, 2019, para. 2).

At the time of my interview with Addy in April of 2019, Bill-C31 had not yet been rescinded. Addy explained that despite its aim of deterring false asylum claims from presumably "safe" DCOs, Bill C-31 did not succeed in deterring LGBTQI+ newcomers in need of asylum:

> Bill C-31 has had no impact, people are still making it here but are very creative in ways they get here and how.… They have done their research and that is why some are here as an international student and not a refugee.

Although Addy did not specify what she meant by newcomers getting here in "creative ways", I had read stories of international students falsifying their income and other documents as necessary in efforts to prove they had sufficient funds for studying abroad (Lee, 2019), which can amount to over $10,000 per year of study[8]. Indeed, all TRVs require proof of substantial finances (Gamble et al., 2015; Lee, 2019), absence of a disqualifying criminal record[9] (Lee, 2019), and a clean bill

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[8]See https://www.immigration.ca/financial-requirements-for-international-students-to-study-in-canada
[9]https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/inadmissibility/overcome-criminal-convictions.html

of health, including the absence of HIV/AIDS (White, 2013). This means that queer refugees escaping countries like Uganda, where same-sex acts are criminalized, would, at minimum, face complications in obtaining a TRV if they had ever been convicted of engaging in such an act. Similarly, anyone with HIV/AIDS would need to either forge their medical records or try their luck at a SOGIE asylum claim, which, as I explained earlier, may force them to fabricate evidence to "prove" they are queer. All of these examples reveal the circumstances in which queer newcomers find it necessary to "fake" their way into Canada.

The more I learned, the more ashamed I became of just how little I knew about the resiliency of queer newcomers who manage to come to Canada to build a new life. I now had a better understanding of how policies like those underlying Bill C-31 developed within the context of what Murray (2014) referred to as the "genuine/authentic versus fake/bogus refugee discourse" in the Canada refugee system, which draws on narrow presumptions "to determine who does and who does not qualify as a refugee" (pp. 25–26). This discourse influences the complex system of "forced-migration" whereby LGBTQI+ asylum seekers are structurally sorted into multiple precarious immigration categories, blurring the lines between newcomers and refugees (Lee, 2019, p. 77). Two separate newcomers may both be fleeing persecution and violence from their countries of origin due to their sexual orientation and identity expression, yet one could qualify as refugee and the other as an international student or temporary worker.

I further reflected on how queer and trans migrants who arrive via the "treacherous paths" that Addy had described bore the burden of "proving" their queerness within two weeks of arriving. To avoid this, many queer asylum seekers overcome tremendous hurdles to become an international student. The question of whether they "fake" their way in, or whether they are *really* refugees, becomes a moot point — some newcomers may not fit Canada's narrow definition of a SOGIE refugee, but are certainly worthy of protection.

As a White straight cisgender CYCP aiming to become an informed ally, I am again grateful for the knowledge to finally verify what I felt to be true but could not adequately explain: there is no such thing as an illegitimate or fake refugee. It is critical that CYCPs supporting queer newcomers to Canada gain knowledge of immigration policies that not only raise barriers to entry but also create unnecessary stigma associated with the "fake refugee" discourse. I am reminded once again of my privileged place of heterocisnormativity and how easy it would be to remain ignorant and silent on these issues. More than ever, I am reminded of my CYC responsibility to learn all I can about the communities I support.

Can't We Just Work with the Children?

Because this project began as a graduate term paper focused on the experiences of LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant PSE students in Canada, much of what I discussed with Addy and Bailey pertained directly to considerations for institutions, teachers, and school-based practitioners. While deciding which considerations to include (too numerous for one paper), I was reminded of the listserv on CYC-Net (see CYC-Net, 2010) that had, at the time of this study,

sparked a lot of my thinking on the need to politicize my own CYC practice (see Hyder et al., 2019). I was reminded that several participants on the listserv had shared concerns that the new political jargon of our field — words like "postmodern", "mutual liberation", and "intricacies of embodiment" — was perhaps unnecessary and too "hard to understand" (CYC-Net, 2010, para. 2). One respondent agreed that he had "no idea what those words mean" and concluded, "I guess we'll just work with the children" (para. 8). In 2010, when the listserv was posted, I would have agreed with this respondent. Now, with the knowledge I had gleaned from Addy, Bailey, and the many critical CYC scholars calling for more politicized, historicized, and critically self-reflexive CYC practices (Amponsah & Stephen, 2020; Igbu & Baccus, 2018; Loiselle et al., 2012; Mackenzie, 2020; Vachon, 2020), I understand that a historicized and politicized praxis is necessary if we hope to make moments meaningful for young people in truly ethical ways. If that work includes jargon, so be it. While I agree that academic jargon can, at times, be complicated and pose barriers to the accessibility of necessary discourse, I believe it is our responsibility to learn the jargon and engage with it when we can. I can no longer justify simply "working with the children" when I know that jargon can help improve our care of marginalised young people.

I will first attempt to illustrate my point, without the use of jargon, by noting Addy's recommendations to help postsecondary institutions create safe spaces on their campuses:

> Institutions that do have GSAs [gay–straight alliances] must be reminded that some of these students will not come out. They are working and going to school with their country people who might "out" them to their families, so they are not going to walk into a rainbow-coloured room and say "Hey, I am from Beirut and I'm a queer guy" … Provide broad supports so that I can pass by a table on any day and grab a leaflet that isn't rainbow-coloured — that can tell me what I can do as a queer person to get help without having to come to one of your meetings or stand in the middle of campus … because that is going to label me.

Addy's suggestion for broader, more inclusive supports echoed suggestions from school-based youth workers, like Tanitia Munroe, who have identified that entering a so-called "safe space" can be dangerous for many students. Munroe recommended that, "Everywhere should be a safe space … not just a small room tucked in a corner" (Munroe et al., 2018b, 4:27). I fear that without a historicized knowledge of the impacts of colonial queer oppression, CYCPs will benevolently practice the same out-and-proud rainbow-coloured versions of queer rights that they are accustomed to (Vachon, 2020). While it is true that out-and-proud policies have served an important function in establishing queer rights in Canada, I feel these practices are perhaps now best viewed as apolitical neoliberal versions of queer rights that place queer newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students at risk of harm in this modern society that has been organized through colonialized heterocisnormative aims (Lee, 2018; Lugones, 2010). It is important for CYCPs to understand the jargon of historicized knowledge: terms like "heterocisnormative violence" caused by "the coloniality of power" (Lee, 2018, p. 61) can help us to mitigate the perpetration of further harm in the physical spaces where we work.

It is further critical for CYCPs and educators to reflect politically, and with intention, on our professional places of privilege. This became clearer to me after Addy expressed her frustration with some PSE institutions that have done outreach with the queer community:

> They found the queerest person they could find, and I also find that offensive. Just send anyone. They [queer students] need to know that no matter who you speak to, you are going to be safe.… The admissions staff do not have to be queer for them to help you.

Addy's advice contrasts with the call to hire more queer CYCPs (particularly queer Black CYCPs) who can mitigate the risk of isolation in Canadian schools (Munroe et al., 2018b). At the same time, Addy's comment has helped me to understand that White CYCPs cannot get a "pass or a get out of jail free card" when it comes to issues of White colonial supremacy (Skott-Myhre, 2017, p. 12). We certainly cannot expect to get a pass because the jargon is just "too hard to understand".

I conclude this section with some final recommendations from Bailey relating to queer-inclusive sex education curricula in schools:

> All teachers must be required to teach the curriculum or ask for a different class to teach; this cannot be optional content, depending on the faith or views of the teacher.… Other SOGI kids and community leaders/resources should be part of school learning.

This final recommendation reminded me how important it is for educators to set aside biases, assumptions, and prejudices in order to genuinely uphold the rights of queer-identifying students. It also reminded me how important it is to take the lead from Black and queer community members, to centre their needs, and to listen "across difference" so that we do not create atmospheres of insincere, uninformed, or performative Eurocentric allyship (Amponsah & Stephen, 2020, p. 10). This work can only be done when we take time to learn the social-justice-oriented and politicized jargon such as "LGBTQI+", "queer" (adjective) and "to queer" (verb), "cisgender", "SOGIE", "neoliberal", and so on. We cannot shy away from this important politicized work.

Discussion

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. My findings do not reflect the lived experiences of LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students directly. Rather, they reflect my own views, experiences, and opinions as well as those garnered in conversation with two cisgender female participants, only one of whom is Black and queer. Nonetheless, I feel that consideration of the factors that led me to further study and reflect on these issues from the positionality of my participants' expertise would be of value to CYCPs and CYC educators who are exploring ways to grow out of heterocisnormative practices.

Implications for CYC Practice in Education

Knowledge of colonially influenced religious interpretations of queerness is integral to the CYC responsibility of supporting LGBTQI+ young people from all nations, backgrounds, and religions. As homonationalist discourses reproduce false narratives of "backward" and "uncivilized" nations in Africa, Asia, and the Global South (Lee, 2018, p. 63), false constructions of cisgender Muslim male sexuality (Khaki, 2018; Puar, 2013) have also justified what Edward Said (1978) described generally as feelings of "European superiority over Oriental backwardness" (p. 15). Of course, this superiority complex applies not only to socially constructed images of Asia, but also to other continents around the world, such as the construction of a monolithic "homophobic Africa" (Lee, 2018, p. 63). Knowledge and understanding of this history will not only work to reduce racism and xenophobia in our communities, it will provide avenues for CYCPs to work toward an "informed allyship" (Amponsah & Stephen, 2020, p. 10) that is genuine in its striving toward the decolonization of our care practices.

Conclusion

I have attempted to articulate the ways in which it is important to practise CYC within the context of the politicized and historicized influences that shape the experiences of LGBTQI+ newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students to Canada. I believe that this can be done through a queering of CYC that involves an intentional political praxis of decolonization. Similar to other White CYC settlers, I have come to realize that we "cannot just theorize about liberation and decolonization but must embody it, starting with ourselves" (Mackenzie, 2020, p. 82). In many ways, I see myself embodying in my work the 25 *decolonized*, *historicized*, and *politicized* CYC characteristics listed by Garfat and Fulcher (2016): "meeting them where they are at", "reflecting", "rituals of encounter", and so on. Such "intricacies of embodiment" are integral to our work (CYC-Net, 2010, para. 2).

Finally, if we are to trust that there once was a wholeness to humanity before the hierarchal constructions of gender in the idealized vision of the White Westernized man (Lugones, 2010), and before the capitalist agendas of power and domination (Wilson & Laing, 2018), then the decolonial mission is a valuable one. For CYCPs, one way this can be done is through centring the resilience of queer newcomer, refugee, and immigrant students and through listening "for what is not being said" (Cruz, 2008, p. 67). If we learn to listen to their silence and do our own politicized self-reflexive work, we will disrupt invisible heteronormative structures in CYC practice. We can learn to queer our practice for the betterment of all.

Recommended Resources

Vancouver-based Rainbow Refugee is a grassroots program to help settle queer and trans refugees: https://www.rainbowrefugee.com/. Its efforts are documented in the National Film Board's *Someone Like Me,* a beautiful portrayal of the challenges faced by refugees and the volunteers who try to support them: https://www.nfb.ca/film/someone-like-me/.

Founded in Canada in 2006 to address violence against LGBTQI+ people worldwide, Rainbow Railroad received charitable status in Canada in 2013, and in the United States in 2015. For information on how to support refugees in your area, visit https://www.rainbowrailroad.org/.

For resources and ways to support queer and trans newcomers, Ontario CYCPs can visit Toronto-based The 519: https://www.the519.org/, and province-wide Rainbow Health Ontario: https://www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/.

For insightful articles on queer and trans refugee issues, and more, visit *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*: https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/about.

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