

The Pain of Experiencing Anti-Asian Racism and Discrimination

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Abstract

The poem addresses various forms of oppression and discrimination experienced by individuals of Asian heritage in Canada. It is a summary of a report for one of the largest school boards in Canada. The poem humanizes the experiences of the research participants. It reflects the voices of 1,300+ research participants which included Grades 7 to 12 students, educators, and administrators.

Keywords

anti-Asian racism, discrimination, pain, Asian studies, ethnicity and race, Asians in Canada

The poem addresses various forms of oppression and discrimination experienced by individuals of Asian heritage in Canada. It gives voice to the daily realities and experiences of marginalized individuals, shedding light on their perspectives and emotions. It emphasizes the importance of listening to and understanding these perspectives. Overall, the poem is a summary of a report for one of the largest school boards in Canada (Reid & Eizadirad, 2023). The full report can be accessed via the following link: <https://www2.yrdsb.ca/sites/default/files/2023-06/DAAR%20YRDSB.pdf>.

The poem humanizes the experiences of the research participants, making them relatable and emotionally engaging. It reflects the voices of 1,300+ research participants which included Grades 7 to 12 students, educators, and administrators.

Where are you from?

Where are you REALLY from?

Ant-Asian racism. . . is that even a thing?

Aren't you all good at math and come from dual parents' households?

What are you complaining about?

Daily realities for Asian affirming identities.

But first a bit of a geography lesson with a sprinkle of statistics. . . .

Asian diasporas and identities are vast, complex, and rich.

#Represent: East Asia, South Asia, South-East Asia, and West Asia.

According to the York Region municipality census report, the two largest visible minority groups are Chinese (45%) and South Asian (22%), and the top 5 regions for recent immigrants to York Region are China, Iran, Philippines, India, and Pakistan (Statistics Canada, 2021).

Most popular languages spoken at home other than English are Mandarin, Cantonese, and Farsi.

Pan-Asian diversity encompasses unique cultures which have enriched and strengthened the social fabric of Canada.

Almost half of the immigrant population in Canada was born in Asia.

In 2016, 48.1% of all immigrants were born in Asia including the Middle East (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Asia has remained the top source continent for immigrants in recent years.

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From 2017 to 2019, 63.5% of newcomers to Canada were born in Asia including the Middle East.

In 2016, Asian countries accounted for seven of the top 10 countries of birth of recent immigrants: the Philippines, India, China, Iran, Pakistan, Syria, and South Korea.

By 2036, immigrants born in Asia could represent between 55.7% and 57.9% of all immigrants in Canada.

Thanks for the statistics, but what's your point? What exactly is anti-Asian racism?

You want the dictionary definition?

“It’s the historical and ongoing discrimination, negative stereotyping, and injustice experienced by peoples of Asian heritage, based on others’ assumptions about their ethnicity and nationality.” This includes overt and subtle racist tropes and stereotypes at the micro and macro levels contributing to their ongoing social, economic, political and cultural marginalization, disadvantage, and unequal treatment.

You got all that? I know that’s quite academic and a mouthful.

Let me break it down.

It’s when they invite you to come to Canada to build the railroads but then charge you a head tax to become Canadian because in their eyes you don’t belong. You are just a guest good for your labor (#100YearLater and #ChineseHeadTax).

It’s when your children tell you, pack me a sandwich because I am scared they will make fun of me again when I warm up my traditional food.

It’s when people have self-doubt and hate themselves for their eyes, willing to spend thousands of dollars to have eyelid surgery.

It’s being blamed for not being able to drive properly. Not every car accident involves an Asian.

It’s when you have to change how your name sounds, to simply get access to opportunities.

It’s when people want to bleach their skin to look whiter, because ideal beauty is socioculturally constructed based on colonial standards rooted in whiteness and body-shaming.

It’s the exclusionary and discriminatory immigrant policy which required all immigrants to arrive on Canadian shores by a continuous journey, excluding immigrants from India, as at the time there was no continuous service as ships would have to refuel by making a stop.

It’s Canada using the War Measures Act to send 21,000 Japanese residents into crowded internment camps where they were treated as prisoners of war and their properties and assets seized and sold, with many deported back to Japan.

It’s being blamed for the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center.

It’s being afraid to walk in public in your hijab, being spat on or people pulling it off your head.

It’s being called a terrorist, with a chuckle seconds later that it’s just a joke.

It’s looking for representation of Muslims on TV, but all the representation is in the form of stereotypes, either extremists or violent terrorists.

It’s being blamed for the cause and spread of COVID-19.

It’s being spat on or randomly attacked because there needs to be a scapegoat for a world wild pandemic.

It’s not seeing yourself at school in the books or the curriculum.

It’s not having a teacher or an administrator that looks like you.

It’s feeling like you don’t belong leading to self-hate and wanting to be more white.

It’s being told what you should be and how you should act, instead of allowing us to be our authentic selves.

#ShitIsReal

#We Live It Daily.

#We Need Systemic Change.

So please listen with an open mind, heart, and soul.

We don’t want to discuss Olympic of oppressions. Today is about Asianness and anti-Asian racism. Let’s try to stay focused on the topic.

We are sharing with you what we know from our daily realities.

There is something there which speaks to how systems have failed us, including the education system. Including higher education.

If I love you, I got to criticize you so you can be the best version of yourself.

We tell that to our kids. Why can't we do it as openly with our institutions?

Who holds institutions accountable? How should we hold them accountable?

Questions I leave with you to ponder in your respective roles.

Naming Systemic Racism, Acknowledging Complicity, and a Commitment to Action (checkout the full report).

Don't read all 75 pages at once. It can be dangerous and triggering. Pace yourself.

Over 1,300 research participants through focus groups and surveys.

Working together to capture perspectives of students in Grades 7 to 12, teachers, administrators, and community members.

Boldly and bravely sharing their pain, trauma, and frustrations.

There is responsibility as researchers to handle this with care.

And as readers, there is responsibility, to not dismiss their truths but rather indulge in it.

Listen to what they are trying to tell you. Listen through all your senses.

Because an improved education system from an equity approach mitigating anti-Asian racism is an improved education system for all.

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