

Cultural Wellness of Equity-Denied Racialized Youth: An Avenue for Mental Health and a Foundation to Justice, Equity, Diversity, Decolonization, and Inclusion

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Introduction

Equity-denied racialized youth are integral to organizational change in justice, equity, diversity, decolonization, and inclusion (JEDDI). This work is intensive, oftentimes demanding mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual labour to be spent. To keep this ongoing change moving forward, these efforts need to have youth be connected with their heritage and culture to maintain their own wellness. For equity-denied racialized youth, especially Indigenous and diasporic youth, cultural wellness is an avenue to mental wellness. Connecting young people with their ethnic communities allows them to understand their ancestral and cultural knowledge and incorporate it into practice. Mental health practitioners and advocates need to be intentional when co-creating spaces with equity-denied racialized youth that roots this work in cultural wellness and community connections.

Objectives

Foundry's Anti-Racism Organizational Change (AROC) team continues their engagement with youth, giving opportunities for young people to be involved in co-creating these spaces. These spaces not only address anti-racism but will also be paired with gatherings that promote cultural wellness and community connections. With racial caucusing, individuals will be able to make connections between their lived experiences as equity-denied racialized youth while sharing their cultural stories and knowledge within these circles. Discussions in these gatherings will identify how young people can connect with their culture and heritage in order to ground their work in JEDDI. With this fostering of cultural wellness, it will promote young people's mental wellness and sustain organizational change in JEDDI.

Approach/Methods

As a team of Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour (IBPOC), we will draw on our personal reflections of our own cultural wellness and community connections as well as our experiences in engaging with equity-denied racialized youth. The young people of this team will also incorporate their lived experiences as youth navigating JEDDI work and IBPOC spaces. The work found in academic journals and the wisdom held by cultural knowledge holders will be explored and learned from to understand how connecting to one's culture can promote mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual wellness.

Results

Mental health practitioners and advocates need to prevent young people from the fatigue and burnout that is associated with the labour of anti-racism organizational change. Especially within youth mental health organizations, it is necessary that youth also receive fulfillment and not leave without support and care when providing labour related to JEDDI. Particularly within IBPOC-only spaces, bringing our own cultural and ancestral knowledge to the circle is fundamental in grounding ourselves in organizational and societal change. At a micro-mezzo level, young people's mental health will be promoted through cultural wellness which will in turn impact macro level changes in JEDDI.

Conclusion

Settler countries with diverse populations, such as Canada, have Indigenous and diasporic youth who are feeling disconnected from their cultures and ethnic communities, yet who are still active in anti-racism work. By bridging one's culture and heritage into their involvement with JEDDI, we ensure that youth are able to maintain their wellness through these relations that brings them joy and connection.

