

## **Systemic Racism in Canadian Higher Education: A Rapid Scoping Review of 22 Years of Literature**

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Résumé de l'article

Les idéaux de l'enseignement supérieur favorisent l'apprentissage et le développement personnel de l'individu, indépendamment de son intégration sociale et de sa race. Le racisme systémique continue toutefois de soumettre les étudiants, le personnel et les professeurs Autochtones, Noirs et autrement racialisés à des cultures universitaires peu accueillantes. L'objectif de cette rapide étude de portée était d'identifier et d'analyser les documents de recherche publiés entre 2000 et 2022 et axés sur le racisme systémique dans le contexte de l'enseignement supérieur au Canada. Les auteurs ont analysé trente-deux articles afin d'identifier les cadres théoriques utilisés pour situer chaque étude. De plus, l'analyse a fait ressortir des concepts liés à la manière dont le racisme systémique est structuré et mis en œuvre. À l'aide d'une analyse thématique, un résumé narratif est également présenté pour décrire les expériences du personnel, des étudiants et des professeurs Autochtones et racialisés. Cette étude offre un aperçu à ceux qui s'engagent à bâtir des communautés universitaires plus saines grâce à une compréhension du racisme systémique tel qu'il est théoriquement encadré, conceptualisé et vécu.

# SYSTEMIC RACISM IN CANADIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A RAPID SCOPING REVIEW OF 22 YEARS OF LITERATURE

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## Abstract

Although the ideals of higher education promote learning and personal growth irrespective of an individual's social identity including their perceived or declared race, systemic racism continues to subject Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized students, staff, and faculty to unwelcoming academic cultures and, at times, hostilities. The aim of this rapid scoping review was to identify and analyze some of the available peer-reviewed, published research literature between 2000 and 2022 focused on systemic racism in the Canadian higher education context. The authors analyzed 32 articles included in the scoping review to identify the theoretical frameworks used to situate each study. In addition, the analysis surfaced concepts related to how systemic racism is structured and enacted. Using a thematic analysis, a narrative summary is also presented to describe the experiences of Indigenous and racialized staff, students, and faculty. This study offers insight to those committed to building healthier academic communities through understandings of systemic racism as it is theoretically framed, conceptualized, and experienced.

**Keywords:** rapid scoping review, systemic racism, Canadian higher education

## Résumé

Les idéaux de l'enseignement supérieur favorisent l'apprentissage et le développement personnel de l'individu, indépendamment de son intégration sociale et de sa race. Le racisme systémique continue toutefois de soumettre les étudiants, le personnel et les professeurs Autochtones, Noirs et autrement racialisés à des cultures universitaires peu accueillantes. L'objectif de cette rapide étude de portée était d'identifier et d'analyser les documents de recherche publiés entre 2000 et 2022 et axés sur le racisme systémique dans le contexte de l'enseignement supérieur au Canada. Les auteurs ont analysé trente-deux articles afin d'identifier les cadres théoriques utilisés pour situer chaque étude. De plus, l'analyse a fait ressortir des concepts liés à la manière dont le racisme systémique est structuré et mis en œuvre. À l'aide d'une analyse thématique, un résumé narratif est également présenté pour décrire les expériences du personnel, des étudiants et des professeurs Autochtones et racialisés. Cette étude offre un aperçu à ceux qui s'engagent à bâtir des communautés universitaires plus saines grâce à une compréhension du racisme systémique tel qu'il est théoriquement encadré, conceptualisé et vécu.

**Mots-clés :** étude de portée rapide, racisme systémique, enseignement supérieur canadien

## INTRODUCTION

Although a range of factors shapes well-being and success in higher education for Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized faculty and students, systemic racism—namely, institutional and societal structured allocations and denials of privilege based on the concept of race—plays an important role in generating and reinforcing inequities based on race and racialization (Bonilla-Silva, 2021). Understanding how systemic racism is theoretically framed, conceptualized, and discursively represented as experienced can help scholars and system leaders who want to examine and assess the impact that systemic racism has within Canadian universities (Henry, Dua, James, et al., 2017). The authors hope that this rapid scoping review and thematic analysis of 22 years of published, peer-reviewed literature focused on Canadian higher education is one more step that addresses the paucity of research-informed literature on the topic of systemic racism in Canadian universities.

## THEORETICAL FRAME

The theoretical frame of this study drew on a diverse body of critical race and race-conscious scholarship (for examples, see Bonilla-Silva, 1997, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Graham et al., 2011; Henry, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race and race-conscious theoretical frameworks may be used to scrutinize the ways in which race and racism directly and indirectly affect ethnic Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized peoples. Critical race and race-conscious theoretical frameworks allow for an examination of racism as both an individual and group phenomenon that functions on many levels, and it offers a means by which to identify the functions of racism as an institutional, structured, and systematic phenomenon (Graham et al., 2011).

The theoretical frame of this study adopted the stance that race, racialization, and systemic racism have become normalized, structured, and systematized into the everyday ways in which life is lived and experienced by Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized people in

society. Systemic racism refers broadly to the laws, rules, policies, and norms woven into the social system that result in an unequal distribution of economic, political, and social resources and rewards among various racial groups. Systemic racism is the denial of access, participation, and equality in both opportunity and outcomes to Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized peoples in social systems such as justice, housing, health, employment, and education (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Henry, 2004; Henry, Dua, James, et al., 2017).

## SYSTEMIC RACISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Racism can be hard to narrowly define and often goes unrecognized (Heschel, 2015). Heschel (2015) contends that the tenacious roots of racism need to be unearthed and exposed “not simply through their outward manifestations but also in our deepest, most hidden, and even unconscious motivations” (p. 23). Racism in its many forms works in mutually reinforcing ways to take on new properties to adapt to its environment and, thus, has remained resistant to intervention and has withstood efforts to eradicate it. Among its forms, the National Museum of African American History and Culture (n.d.) identifies five forms of racism, which are: individual, interpersonal, institutional, structural, and systemic racism.

Individual racism refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism in conscious and unconscious ways. Interpersonal racism occurs between individuals. These are public expressions of racism, often involving slurs, biases, or hateful words or actions. In either case, the dominant Eurocentric cultural narrative about racism typically focuses on it at the individual and/or interpersonal level and fails to recognize racism in its institutional, structural, and systemic forms (National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d.).

Institutional racism can be understood as any institutional policy, practice, and structure in government agencies, businesses, unions,

schools and universities, places of worship, courts, and law enforcement agencies that unfairly subordinate Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized people while allowing those who are racially White to be advantaged or profit from such actions (Sue, 2007).

Structural racism can be defined as the macrolevel systems, social forces, institutions, ideologies, and processes that interact with one another to generate and reinforce inequities among racial and ethnic groups (Powell, 2007). The term structural racism emphasizes the most influential socio-ecologic levels at which racism may affect racial and ethnic health inequities. Structural mechanisms do not require the actions or intent of individuals (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

Systemic racism is an interlocking and reciprocal relationship among the individual, institutional, and structural levels which function interdependently as a system of racism. It is a foundational, large-scale, and inescapable hierarchical system of racial oppression devised and maintained by racially White people and directed at Indigenous and racialized people. Systemic racism is both a social and legal concept connoting a particular type of racism which occurs within social systems and is reproduced by the same systems (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, n.d.; Feagin & Elias, 2013).

Systemic racism occurs when racially unequal opportunities and the resulting outcomes are inbuilt or intrinsic to the operation of society's structures. Systemic racism, wrote Banaji et al. (2021), refers to:

the processes and outcomes of racial inequality and inequity in life opportunities and treatment. Systemic racism permeates a society's: (a) institutional structures (practices, policies, climate), (b) social structures (state/federal programs, laws, culture), (c) individual mental structures (e.g., learning, memory, attitudes, beliefs, values), and (d) everyday interaction patterns (norms, scripts, habits). Systemic racism not only operates at multiple levels, but it can also emerge with or without animus or inten-

tion to harm and with or without awareness of its existence. (p. 2)

Decades ago, Ture et al. (1967) argued that systemic racism involves predication of decisions and policies on considerations of race and racialization for the purpose of subordinating racialized groups. While identifying the insidious nature and impact of individual racism, Ture et al. (1967) focused attention on the fact that systemic racism is less overt and identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts. "Systemic racism," wrote Feagin and Elias (2013), "is not some unfortunate appendage to society that is now largely eliminated. Racial oppression persists as foundational and integral to society in the present day" (p. 2666).

To dismantle the tenacious nature of systemic racism within the context of higher education, analyses are needed that expose systemic racism's ability to alter manifestations and to appear through various institutionalized and structured shapes and forms (Denaro et al., 2022; Lin, 2023; Museus et al., 2015). For the purposes of this study, the authors focused on understanding systemic racism within the context of Canadian higher education as both a social and institutional arrangement and as understood as encompassing the descriptions of institutional, structural, and systemic racism offered by the National Museum of African American History and Culture (n.d.).

## SYSTEMIC RACISM IN CANADIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

"Universities are not" color-blind, race-neutral, meritocratic educational organizations, nor were they founded to be that way" (Byrd, 2021, p. 7). Rather, they "emblematically represent privilege. Whether it be race, gender, sexual orientation, class, abilities, religion and so on, universities have historically served White, Christian, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, male-dominated identities" (Accapadi, 2007, p. 208). The fact is that "the academy"—as universities are oft-referred—never stood apart from American slavery, but rather stood beside

church and state as the third pillar of a civilization built on bondage (Wilder, 2013).

While Canadians may want to wish differently, the truth is that many of Canada's most prestigious universities, as is the case in the United States, are intricately woven into the fabric of settler-colonialism as they were established as a means to educate a narrow demographic segment of the population (for example, see Altbach et al., 2011; Byrd, 2021; Cranston & Jean-Paul, 2021; Dua, 2018; Harris, 1976; Henry & Tator, 2009; Henry, Dua, James, et al., 2017; Louie et al., 2017; Neatby, 1987; Tuck, 2018). Initially, the role that Canadian universities played was to train children of the political elite and serve as a finishing school for their daughters and for their sons as they were prepared for admission to the liberal professions (Neatby, 1987). As Neatby (1987) noted,

these social functions were understood by governments and university officials; there were no major confrontations over admissions, over course content or over student discipline because both groups shared the same social values. Cabinet ministers and members of the Board of Governors might belong to different parties, but they were all men of substance with similar views of the social order. (p. 34)

The old liberal university both in spirit and in action, "actively excluded difference, carefully rationing the rare appearance of social diversity, including students from the working class, women, and anyone racially different" (Smith, 2018, p. 23).

As Louie et al. (2017) stated, "With its historic roots in the Anglo-European Enlightenment, the modern university is the epitome of 'Western' institutions, having played a key role in the spread of empire and the scientific study and colonization of Indigenous peoples and cultures" (p. 17). According to Dua (2009), there is documented evidence of an enduring persistence of overwhelming patterns of racism and Whiteness in the Canadian university sector.

Acknowledging this history in its contemporary forms is important because the impact of hegemonic Whiteness and the process of racialization continues to function in the Canadian post-secondary sector (Henry & Tator, 2009). Drawing on an extensive body of literature and empirical investigations of racism in Canadian academic institutions, numerous authors (for example, see Dua & Lawrence, 2000; Henry & Tator, 2009; James, 2009; Kobayashi, 2009; Monture, 2018) have explored how access and progression to degrees and careers for Indigenous and racialized students, staff, and faculty is often derailed and sometimes denied in post-secondary contexts through the everyday adherence to values and norms, discourses, and practices within a dominant Eurocentric, White, and racialized culture, as well as a lack of resource commitments to the equity initiatives and/or programs that might lead to real and sustainable change.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Our review followed the methodological framework of a rapid scoping review outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). More specifically, where appropriate the authors followed the methodological manual published by the Joanna Briggs Institute for scoping reviews (Peters et al., 2015, 2020). Scoping reviews, while less common in the social sciences and humanities in comparison to their prevalence in the health sciences, are intended to offer a transparent and replicable approach to summarize a field of research on a given topic to uncover key concepts underpinning it and identify and analyze knowledge gaps on the literature being analyzed (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Peters et al., 2015, 2020).

Given budgetary and timeline restraints, the authors selected a rapid review scoping methodology in which components of the traditional scoping review are simplified or omitted (e.g., one reviewer versus two, and data collection over the period of a single day) to produce results in a timely manner as the most appropriate approach to address our research objectives (Khangura et al., 2012; Tricco et al., 2017).

## Limitations

As noted by Tricco et al. (2015; 2017), rapid scoping reviews are a form of knowledge synthesis in which components of the systematic review process are simplified or omitted to produce information in a timely manner. Table 1 outlines the search parameters used as the inclusion criteria and, by extension, makes clear what was excluded. As such, the authors acknowledge the limitations of their methodological choice and accept that there is a rich and diverse scholarly body of literature—such as unpublished theses and dissertations, commentaries, editorials, opinion pieces, peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed books, and non-peer reviewed articles—that were excluded from this rapid scoping review.

## Search Strategy

The authors performed detailed searches in the following electronic databases: ERIC, PsycINFO, ProQuest, and JSTOR. We conducted an additional search of the University of Regina Libraries through the Primo by Ex Libris search engine. To manage volume and resources, we used search engine optimizing by which the most relevant articles were prioritized and the results of the first four pages of the University of Regina Libraries searches were reviewed.

The authors chose to limit the search to publications from 2000 until 2022. This 22-year period was chosen as it represented the beginning of the third millennium and a hope that the world might be edging closer to a something akin to a post-racial social arrangement as described in the United Nations (2002) *Declaration and Programme of Action, World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance: Durban Declaration*.

We filtered our searches from 2000 to 2022 and no language restriction was applied. All searches were conducted on March 4, 2022. Search strategies used a combination of controlled vocabulary and keywords (e.g., Black, Canada, Canadian, Indigenous, racial bias, racial discrimination, racialized, racism, higher education, university, and college).

## Study Eligibility Criteria

Table 1 outlines our study inclusion and exclusion criteria following the Population, Context, and Concept (PCC) framework (Peters et al., 2015, 2020).

We included empirical studies as defined in the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (VandenBos, 2007), which states that an empirical study is one where the findings are “derived from or denoting experimentation or systematic observations as the basis for conclusion or determina-

**Table 1**

*Study Eligibility Criteria*

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Population	Institutions of higher education (e.g., university and colleges)	N/A
Concept	Institutionalized, structural, and/or systemic racism	N/A
Context	Canada	N/A
Study design	Empirical study published in a peer-reviewed journal	Commentaries, editorials, opinion pieces, books (peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed), and non-peer-reviewed articles.
Language	English	N/A
Dates of publication	2000–2022	N/A

tion, as opposed to speculative, theoretical, or exclusively reason-based approaches” (p. 327). In addition, the inclusion criteria were limited to studies published in peer-reviewed journals that evaluated institutionalized, structural, and/or systemic racism within Canadian institutions of higher education (e.g., university or college).

## Study Selection

The rapid scoping review selection process consisted of two phases: (1) title and abstract review and (2) full-text review. All references identified in our search strategy were uploaded into a reference management software, “Covidence,” for study selection. For both phases, references were screened by a single reviewer (AB or JC) following our study eligibility criteria. Any uncertain references were discussed by both reviewers.

## RESULTS OF THE SEARCH

The electronic search yielded 1,018 references with an additional 78 unique references identified through the University of Regina search. After duplicates were removed, 958 titles and abstracts were screened using our eligibility criteria. Based on further analysis of the 958 articles initially screened in, 875 were determined to not match the criteria for inclusion. The authors reviewed 83 full-text articles of which 32 were included in this review. The results of this search, with reasons for exclusion and inclusion, are outlined in Figure 1, below.

Several significant details about the 32 articles are detailed in Table 2, as well as a summary of included articles.

In total, 30 of the studies included in the review evaluated a university setting, while two studies focused on medical schools (Beagan, 2001; Ly & Crowshoe, 2015). Of the 30 studies, 10 were published prior to 2010 and the remaining 22 were published from 2011 to 2022. There were 19 studies that focused on the experiences of Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized students, 12 studies that focused on faculty and staff, and one study focused on both staff and students.

## Charting the Data

Charting describes a technique for synthesizing and interpreting qualitative data by sifting, charting, and sorting material according to key issues and themes (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). All included full-text articles were reviewed and charted by one reviewer using a data-extraction form in Excel for study characteristics and nVivo software for key concepts and themes (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2020). To summarize the body of literature, we captured data items on the author, journal of publication, study design, year of publication, population, study aim, and overall conclusions.

## Data Analysis

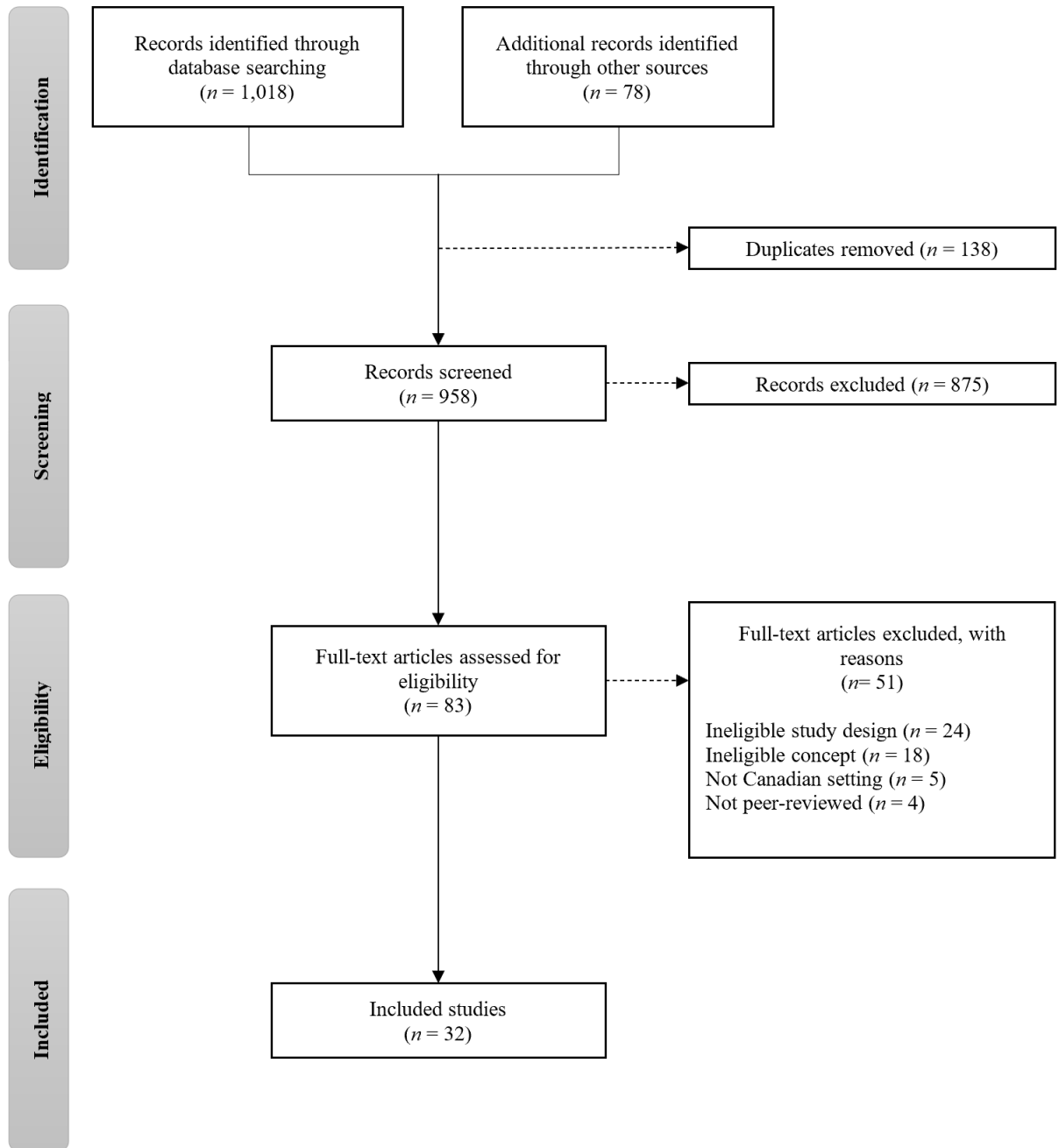
As noted by Grant and Osanloo (2014), a researcher’s choice of a theoretical framework provides “a grounding base, or an anchor, for the literature review, and most importantly, the methods and analysis” for a study (p. 12). Therefore, our analysis began with an examination of the theoretical frameworks used in the studies, because as Lysaght (2011) noted:

A researcher’s choice of framework is not arbitrary but reflects important personal beliefs and understandings about the nature of knowledge, how it exists (in the metaphysical sense) in relation to the observer, and the possible roles to be adopted, and tools to be employed consequently, by the researcher in his/her work. (p. 572)

This was followed by the application of a deductive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to explore concepts and generate themes that describe how systemic racism in its various forms, including institutionalized and structural racism, was first conceptualized and then experienced. Throughout the process, to meet the “trustworthiness criteria” the authors: (1) familiarized themselves with the data, (2) generated initial codes, (3) generated themes, (4) reviewed the themes, (5) revised the themes as necessary, and (6) present the themes (Nowell et al., 2017).

**Figure 1**

*PRISMA Flow Diagram*





**Table 2**

*Characteristics and Summary of Included Articles*

<b>Year: Author(s)</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Study population</b>	<b>Study design</b>
2022: Park & Bahia	Exploring the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and racialized graduate students: The classroom as a space of alterity, hostility, and pedagogical labour	Canadian Review of Sociology	Black, Indigenous, or racialized graduate students ( <i>n</i> = 22)	Qualitative (interview)
2021: Houshmand & Spanierman	Mitigating racial microaggressions on campus: Documenting targets' responses	New Ideas in Psychology	Black, Indigenous, or racialized undergraduate students ( <i>n</i> = 36)	Qualitative (focus group)
2020: Bailey	Indigenous students: Resilient and empowered in the midst of racism and lateral violence	Ethnic & Racial Studies	Indigenous students ( <i>n</i> = 27)	Qualitative (interview)
2020: Shankar et al.	Addressing academic aspirations, challenges, and barriers of indigenous and immigrant students in a postsecondary education setting	Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work: Innovation in Theory, Research & Practice	Indigenous and immigrant students ( <i>n</i> = 14)	Qualitative (interview)
2020: Johnson & Howsam	Whiteness, power, and the politics of demographics in the governance of the Canadian academy	Canadian Journal of Political Science	Central and senior academic administrators ( <i>n</i> = 1,299)	Mixed methods (descriptive study)
2019: Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani	Indigenous Canadian university students' Experiences of Microaggressions	International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling	Indigenous students ( <i>n</i> = 7)	Qualitative (survey)
2018: Bajwa et al.	Examining the intersection of race, gender, class, and age on post-secondary education and career trajectories of refugees	Refuge	Refugees ( <i>n</i> = 41)	Cohort study
2018: Caxaj et al.	How racialized students navigate campus life in a mid-sized Canadian city: Thrown against a white background but comfortable enough to laugh	Canadian Ethnic Studies	Black, Indigenous, or racialized students ( <i>n</i> = 34)	Qualitative (interview)
2018: Mohamed & Beagan	Strange faces in the academy: experiences of racialized and Indigenous faculty in Canadian universities	Race, Ethnicity and Education	Racialized and Indigenous academics ( <i>n</i> = 13)	Qualitative (survey)
2018: Schaeffli & Godlewska	What do first-year university students in Ontario, Canada, know about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and topics?	Canadian Journal of Education	First-year students ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Quantitative (survey)

<b>Year: Author(s)</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Study population</b>	<b>Study design</b>
2016: Henry et al.	Race, racialization, and Indigeneity in Canadian universities	Race, Ethnicity and Education	Faculty (n = 89)	Mixed methods (survey, descriptive)
2017: Wijesingha & Ramon	Human capital or cultural taxation: what accounts for differences in tenure and promotion of racialized and female faculty?	Canadian Journal of Higher Education	Racialized faculty (n = 1,580)	Qualitative (survey)
2016: Bailey	Racism within the Canadian university: Indigenous students' experiences	Ethnic and Racial Studies	Indigenous students (n = 17)	Qualitative (survey)
2015: Ly & Crowshoe	Stereotypes are reality: Addressing stereotyping in Canadian Aboriginal medical education	Medical Education	Medical students (n = 38)	Qualitative (focus group)
2015: Katchanovski et al.	Race, gender, and affirmative action attitudes in American and Canadian universities	Canadian Journal of Higher Education	American faculty (n = 1,644) and students (n = 1,632) and Canadian faculty (n = 1,514) and students (n = 1,509)	Qualitative (secondary survey analysis)
2014: Houshmand et al.	Excluded and avoided: Racial microaggressions targeting Asian international students in Canada.	Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology	South Asian students (n = 12)	Qualitative (interview)
2014: Poolokasingham et al.	Fresh off the boat? Racial microaggressions that target South Asian Canadian students	Journal of Diversity in Higher Education	South Asian students (n = 7)	Qualitative (focus group)
2014: Clark et al.	Do you live in a teepee?: Aboriginal students' experiences with racial microaggressions in Canada	Journal of Diversity in Higher Education	Indigenous students (n = 6)	Qualitative (focus group)
2013: Nakhaie	Ideological orientation of professors and equity policies for racialized minorities	Canadian Ethnic Studies	Faculty members (n = 10,000)	Qualitative (survey)
2013: Douglas & Halas	The wages of whiteness: Confronting the nature of ivory tower racism and the implications for physical education	Sport, Education and Society	Kinesiology and Physical Education faculty members (n = 40)	Qualitative (survey)
2012: Currie et al.	Racial discrimination experienced by Aboriginal university students in Canada	Canadian Journal of Psychiatry	Indigenous students (n = 60)	Mixed methods (survey)

<b>Year: Author(s)</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Journal</b>	<b>Study population</b>	<b>Study design</b>
2012: Dua & Bhanji	Exploring the potential of data collected under the federal contractors' programme to construct a national picture of visible minority and aboriginal faculty in Canadian universities	Canadian Ethnic Studies	Visible minorities and Indigenous faculty ( <i>n</i> = 50)	Quantitative (descriptive study)
2010: Perry	No biggie: The denial of oppression on campus	Education, Citizenship and Social Justice	Students ( <i>n</i> = 807)	Qualitative (survey)
2007: Mayuzumi et al.	Transforming diversity in Canadian higher education: A dialogue of Japanese women graduate students	Teaching in Higher Education	Japanese graduate students ( <i>n</i> = 4)	Qualitative (interview)
2006: Spafford et al.	"Navigating the different spaces": Experiences of inclusion and isolation among racially minoritized faculty in Canada	Canadian Journal of Higher Education	Racially minoritized academics ( <i>n</i> = 42)	Qualitative (interview)
2005: Samuel & Wane	Unsettling relations: Racism and sexism experienced by faculty of color in a predominantly white Canadian university	The Journal of Negro Education	Women of colour in academe ( <i>n</i> = 9)	Qualitative (interview)
2004: Nakhaie	Who controls Canadian universities?: Ethnoracial origins of Canadian university administrators and faculty perception of mistreatment	Canadian Ethnic Studies	Administration and faculty from 45 universities	Mixed methods
2004: Samuel	Racism in peer-group Interactions: South Asian student's experiences in Canadian academe	Journal of College Student Development	South Asian students ( <i>n</i> = 40)	Qualitative (interview)
2003: Samuel & Burney	Racism, eh?: Interactions of South Asian students with mainstream faculty in a predominantly white Canadian university.	Canadian Journal of Higher Education	South Asian students ( <i>n</i> = 22)	Qualitative (interview)
2001: Beagan	Micro inequities and everyday inequalities: Race, gender, sexuality, and class in medical school	The Canadian Journal of Sociology	Medical students ( <i>n</i> = 148) and faculty members ( <i>n</i> = 23)	Qualitative (survey)
2000: Dua & Lawrence	Challenging white hegemony in university classrooms: Whose Canada is it?	Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice	Indigenous women and women of colour teachers ( <i>n</i> = 14)	Qualitative (round table discussion)
2000: Levine-Rasky	The practice of whiteness among teacher candidates	Race, Ethnicity and Education	White teacher candidates ( <i>n</i> = 35)	Qualitative (interview)

Drawing on the theoretical framing of this rapid, scoping review (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Graham et al., 2011; Henry, 2004; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), the data was analyzed to surface details of some key conceptual indicators of systemic racism. Specifically, the following aspects of systemic racism were examined: (a) power, (b) access, (c) opportunity, (d) policy impacts, and (e) treatment.

To aid in the analysis the following analytic definitions were used (Banaji et al., 2021; Braveman et al., 2022):

- i. Power is understood as the agency and control of the major resources and the capacity to make and enforce decisions based on agency and control.
- ii. Access is understood as access to the goods, services, and opportunities of society, such as services and programs.
  1. Opportunity is understood as a favourable juncture of circumstances that creates space for something to happen.
  2. Policy is understood as a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government, party, or business.
  3. Treatment is understood as the manner someone behaves toward another person as experienced.

## FINDINGS

### Systemic Racism as Theoretically Framed

The analysis began with an examination of the theoretical frameworks to better understand how the authors theoretically framed their studies and subsequent analysis. This was an important first step, as a researcher's choice of a specific framework is not arbitrary. Rather, it shapes the types of questions asked, the method by which data are collected and analyzed, and informs the results of the study and shapes the discussion. The choice of the theoretical framework can also reveal a researcher's beliefs and assumptions, and their subjectivities and perspectives (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

Table 3 illustrates the eight explicit theoretical frameworks used in the studies. These were: critical race theory, theory of everyday racism, microaggressions theory, post-colonial theory, critical Indigenous study, micro-interventions, colour blind racism, and anti-racist framework. These frameworks were used in the various studies and the frequency of their use is indicated. A brief description of each theoretical framework is provided in Table 3 as well as the various studies in which each framework was used.

### Systemic Racism as Conceptualized

In addition to the primary data analysis described above, the authors applied an inductive analytical approach through which emergent concepts were derived from the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive analysis is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame or the researcher's analytic pre-conceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Table 4 describes the 11 concepts that the authors generated from an analysis of the data. These are (1) microaggressions, (2) stereotypes, (3) alterity, (4) representation, (5) modern racism, (6) Eurocentrism, (7) emotional labour, (8) community support, (9) intersectionality, (10) intimidation, and (11) lateral violence. A brief description of each of the concepts is offered in Table 4 and included in the table are the various studies in which each concept was surfaced.

**Table 3**

*Theoretical Frameworks*

<b>Theoretical frame</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Used by</b>
Critical race theory	Critical race theory is derived from postcolonial theories and challenges the dominant discourses on racism. It examines how laws, social and political movements, and media are shaped by social conceptions of race and ethnicity.	Henry et al., 2017 Park & Bahia, 2022 Shankar et al., 2020 Spafford et al., 2006
Theory of everyday racism	Theory of everyday racism outlines how racism can be investigated at the intersection of macro sociological structures and micro sociological processes, primarily general daily interactions.	Bailey, 2016 Samuel, 2004
Racial microaggressions theory	Microaggressions theory provides a way to understand marginalized populations experiences with subtle racism. Microaggressions are defined as a brief and commonplace verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities that communicate negative racial insults to marginalized populations.	Houshmand & Spanierman, 2021 Poolokasingham et al., 2014
Postcolonial theory	Postcolonial perspectives are used to understand how colonial education has, “propagated discourses that reinforces the hegemony of western forms of knowledge and has perpetuated the power and interests of postcolonial elites, rather than of the population.”	Shankar et al., 2020
Micro-interventions framework	The everyday words or deeds, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates to targets of (a validation of their experiential reality, (b) value as a person, (c) affirmation of their racial or group identity, (d) support and encouragement, and (e) reassurance that they are not alone.	Houshmand & Spanierman, 2021
Psychological wages of whiteness	The notion of psychological wages of whiteness refers to the various tangible and intangible components of the operation of white racial power as they are made manifest through the structure, norms, priorities, and practices of these programs.	Douglas & Halas, 2013
Colour blind racism	The central frames of colour-blind racism include abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism.	Perry, 2010
Anti-racist framework	Anti-racist critical theory argues that (1) racialization has and continues to be a fundamental organizing principle of society; (2) racism is “normal” in that it is “the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color”; (3) racially minoritized people have a unique voice because of their social position and experiences of oppression; and (4) social justice is a central goal of anti-racist frameworks.	Spafford et al., 2006

**Table 4**

*Emergent Concepts from the Literature*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>References</b>
Microaggressions	Indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group (e.g., presented as humour, invalidation or denial, unconstrained voyeurism)	11 studies (Bailey, 2016; Beagan, 2001; Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019; Caxaj et al., 2021; Clark et al., 2014; Houshmand et al., 2014; Houshmand & Spanierman, 2021; Park & Bahia, 2022; Perry, 2010; Poolokasingham et al., 2014; Shankar et al., 2020)
Stereotype	Generalized negative perceptions about a certain category or group of people	11 studies (Bailey, 2016; Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019; Dua & Lawrence, n.d.; Houshmand et al., 2014; Ly & Crowshoe, 2015; Mayuzumi et al., 2007; Park & Bahia, 2022; Poolokasingham et al., 2014; Samuel & Burney, 2003; Shankar et al., 2020; Spafford et al., 2006)
Alterity	Positioned as not belonging, feeling as an outsider (e.g., objectification, segregation)	9 studies (Bailey, 2016; Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019; Caxaj et al., 2021; Currie et al., 2012; Houshmand & Spanierman, 2021; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Park & Bahia, 2022; Samuel, 2004; Spafford et al., 2006)
Representation	Racial and class domination of a racial group over others (e.g., racial hegemony)	8 studies (Douglas & Halas, 2013; Dua & Bhanji, 2012; Henry, Dua, Kobayashi et al., 2017; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Nakhaie, 2013; Nakhaie, n.d.; Shankar et al., 2020; Spafford et al., 2006)
Modern racism	Expressing and/or endorsing racist viewpoints, and perspectives	6 studies (Bailey, 2016; Beagan, 2001; Canel-Çınarbaş & Yohani, 2019; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Park & Bahia, 2022; Shankar et al., 2020)
Eurocentrism	Worldview that is centred on European and/or Western civilization, culture, and values	6 studies (Caxaj et al., 2021; Currie et al., 2012; Dua & Lawrence, n.d.; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Samuel & Burney, 2003; Shankar et al., 2020)
Emotional labour	Labour and/or work associated with the emotional costs of educating peers on issues of race, equity, and social justice (e.g., pedagogical labour)	6 studies (Caxaj et al., 2021; Douglas & Halas, 2013; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Park & Bahia, 2022; Poolokasingham et al., 2014; Shankar et al., 2020)

Themes	Definition	References
Community support	Building sense of comfort and culture within a racialized group	6 studies (Caxaj et al., 2021; Douglas & Halas, 2013; Houshmand et al., 2014; Houshmand & Spanierman, 2021; Samuel & Wane, 2005; Spafford et al., 2006)
Intersectionality	Interconnected nature of social categories such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage	2 studies (Bajwa et al., 2018; Henry, Dua, Kobayashi, et al., 2017)
Intimidation	Dominance and/or intimidation used to silence, discipline, and manipulate racialized students, faculty, and/or staff into accepting oppression (e.g., benevolent paternalism or bullying)	2 studies (Mayuzumi et al., 2007; Shankar et al., 2020)
Lateral violence	Anger and rage directed toward members within a marginalized or oppressed community rather than toward the oppressors	1 study (Bailey, 2020)

## Systemic Racism as Experienced

The findings that follow present an analysis of the literature by examining how systemic racism is experienced in Canadian higher education by students and faculty across five intersecting domains of oppression and marginalization (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, 2021; Denaro et al., 2022).

### Power

A number of studies (Douglas & Halas, 2013; Johnson & Howsam, 2020; Nakhie, 2004) evaluated the demographic characteristics within Canadian universities and noted that racially White, cisgender men are the dominant group within the administrative structures. It was noted that there is an overrepresentation of both White men and women at the most senior administrative levels within Canadian universities given the overall racialized demographics of the students, undergraduate and graduate. Additionally, there is an under-representation of Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized tenured faculty members in Canadian universities.

The net result is that racially White men and women have the greatest amount of power and authority throughout the university structure and can maintain disciplinary policies and disciplined spaces for racialized students by excluding the presence, perspectives, experiences, and contributions of Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized faculty and staff.

### Access

A number of studies concluded that access and equity are denied to both racialized faculty and students through the everyday values and norms, discourses, and practices that exist within the dominant White, Eurocentric, and racialized culture of Canadian universities (Bailey, 2016, 2020; Caxaj et al., 2021; Douglas & Halas, 2013; Houshmand & Spanierman, 2021; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Nakhie, 2004; Shankar et al., 2020).

Students described barriers such as limited program opportunities and difficulties in accessing education that is grounded in Indig-

enous pedagogy. Students also reported that there was lack of Indigenous faculty who could provide experiential insight into Indigenous perspectives (Bailey, 2016; Houshmand & Spanierman, 2021).

Students identified that there are few formalized services that they could access that could provide them with an opportunity to understand and create counter-narratives to dominant White normativity and superiority embedded in higher education (Bailey, 2016, 2020; Caxaj et al., 2021). Indigenous, Black, and racialized students found it difficult to maintain their eligibility as students due to the structured financial barriers to student aid that do not consider the socio-historical effects that systemic racism has on them or their families (Shankar et al., 2020).

Faculty members felt that their universities and home faculty-units were not taking concrete measures to provide access to adequate course offerings with respect to race and racial differences (Douglas & Halas, 2013; Henry, Dua, Kobayashi, et al., 2017; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Nakhie, 2004).

### **Opportunity**

A number of studies noted that the profound lack of racial diversity and a prevalence of Whiteness and White normativity within Canadian universities limited academic opportunities for students and faculty members (Douglas & Halas, 2013; Henry, Dua, Kobayashi, et al., 2017; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Wijesingha & Ramos, 2017).

Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized scholars are less likely to get hired and their consideration for promotions and tenure can be more difficult. Oftentimes, their work is less valued within the traditional normative frameworks of what constitutes meritorious research and scholarly work (Henry, Dua, Kobayashi, et al., 2017; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Wijesingha & Ramos, 2017). The absence of a racialized and/or Indigenous academic community for academics can limit their opportunities for mentorship (Douglas & Halas, 2013).

While students celebrated the opportunity to help shape university-specific programs and/or events geared toward racial or cultural diversity, they also noted the burden they feel to take on

these initiatives as the programs and/or events often lacked institutional support in terms of actual resources (Caxaj et al., 2021).

### **Policy**

From a policy perspective, Canadian universities vary in the kinds of policies available to address inequities and racism (Caxaj et al., 2021; Henry, Dua, Kobayashi, et al., 2017; Shankar et al., 2020). Many universities have developed dedicated offices that are directed to address harassment in the workplaces, including racism, and attempt to enhance equity by focusing on faculty and staff concerns (Henry, Dua, Kobayashi, et al., 2017).

It was noted by students that even with the equity, diversity, and anti-harassment policies that exist in Canadian universities, many appear to be riddled with procedural bureaucracy and informal processes that lack public accountability and that contain mandates that are not enforced (Caxaj et al., 2021). Students felt that policies and procedures governing the assistance scheme were inflexible, punitive, and far removed from the reality of their life experiences of racism (Shankar et al., 2020).

### **Treatment**

Several studies noted that although universities may overtly commit to diversity and inclusion and profess to challenge the existence of colonialism and racism, Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized faculty and students reported numerous instances of overt and covert racism (Caxaj et al., 2021; Henry, Dua, Kobayashi, et al., 2017; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019; Poolokasingham et al., 2014; Wijesingha & Ramon, 2017).

In some instances, overt racism detrimentally affected tenure and promotion processes and outcomes (Henry, Dua, Kobayashi, et al., 2017; Mohamed & Beagan, 2019). The failure to recognize racial and cultural differences in the classroom can contribute to institutionalizing disadvantages for Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized in academia (Caxaj et al., 2021). Feeling marginalized and alienated by dominant group members, Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized students become disengaged from social life on campus, where-



as others disengaged from class participation (Poolokasingham et al., 2014).

## DISCUSSION

By focusing the rapid scoping review exclusively on a narrow band of published, peer-reviewed, empirical research, several potentially important publications would have been omitted from our analysis. For example, graduate theses and dissertations were excluded as they are unpublished. This was a deliberate choice as it is common for published theses and dissertations to be revised, submitted, and published once they are completed. Other potentially valid forms of scholarly work, such as peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed books, conceptual, philosophical, and theoretical contributions, and narrative or autobiographical accounts were also excluded from this rapid scoping review. The research team chose to exclude books, whether peer-reviewed or not, because some books are edited collections that include chapters based on empirical research alongside chapters that are philosophical, theoretical, or conceptual. The exclusion of scholarly works should not signal that the authors felt the insights offered by them were not valuable. Instead, their exclusion demonstrates one of the limitations of this rapid scoping review methodology.

However, in acknowledging the limitations identified above, one of the benefits of this study was that it created an opportunity for a rapid scoping review methodology to be applied to a body of peer-reviewed, published literature over a 22-year period focused on Canadian higher education to better understand how systemic racism is theoretically framed, conceptualized, and experienced. It appeared that this approach to analyze a body of literature focused on systemic racism in the Canadian higher education context over a two-decade period had not been done.

Additionally, a rapid scoping review provided an opportunity for an interdisciplinary team, a scholar with an extensive background in epidemiological research, and another with an extensive background in higher education, to apply a methodological approach that is less commonly used in social sciences and human-

ities research. The insights offered by this interdisciplinary analysis lie less in the exactitude of the findings, and more appropriately can be found in the application of this methodology to a body of research published over a long period of time focused on a such a complex topic as systemic racism in Canadian higher education.

The rapid scoping review identified thousands of articles focused on institutional, structural, and systemic racism in higher education. Systemic racism in its various forms has clearly gathered scholarly interest. By following the disciplined PRISMA approach, 32 peer-reviewed articles that focused on student and faculty experiences of systemic racism in Canadian higher education, over a 22-year period beginning in 2000 and ending in 2022, offered a much broader understanding than could be presented by a single review of a study, or only a few studies over a shorter period. The analysis allowed the authors to “map” the literature deemed relevant in the field of interest, synthesize evidence, and assess the scope of literature on systemic racism in Canadian higher education. The findings illustrate the many ways that systemic racism is theorized, conceptualized, and experienced in the Canadian higher education. These alone are important outcomes of the study.

## Theoretical Framing

As Grant and Osanloo (2014) stated, “Without a theoretical framework, the structure and vision for a study is unclear, much like a house that cannot be constructed without a blueprint” (p. 13). By contrast, a research study plan that contains an explicit theoretical framework allows a reader to be better understand it in terms of how it was structured and with an organized logic flow from one chapter to the next (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

It is worth noting many of the studies included in this rapid scoping review, specifically 19 of 32, did not identify or articulate a theoretical framework. Given that a theoretical framework is considered the “blueprint” for the entire study or inquiry, the absence of an explicit theoretical framework in most of the studies does call into question how, at a foundational level, a study focused on systemic racism was framed.

The absence of a theoretical framework is important because, as Graham et al. (2011) noted, “research starts with philosophical assumptions and investigators’ worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs that inform the way studies are carried out” (p. 81). Without knowing an author’s theoretical framing, it becomes difficult to understand how the study was positioned epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

In addition, of the 13 studies that did have a clear theoretical framework, eight different frameworks were used. The variability among the theoretical frameworks of the studies does not diminish the scholarly insight each one offers. However, the variability among them does create challenges with respect to finding alignment and coherence among the studies when analyzed as a collective body of scholarly work focused on systemic racism in higher education.

## Conceptualizations of Systemic Racism

The emergent concepts identified in the findings should not be regarded as abstract, inert ideas that are held by some people. Rather, they should be understood as structured and structural enactments of systemic racism that have immediate and lasting consequences for Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized students and faculty. Three of the most prevalent concepts that surfaced are microaggressions, stereotypes, and alterity.

Microaggressions were a key conceptual element in 11 of the studies. Racial microaggressions are “a form of systemic, everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place” (Pierce, 1970, p. 472). Microaggressions can exist as verbal and non-verbal assaults directed toward Indigenous and racialized people, and are oftentimes conducted in subtle, automatic, or unconscious forms; or as layered verbal assaults that are based on race and racialization, and how these intersect with gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname. Microaggressions have, at times, been positioned or misperceived as Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized

persons simply being hypersensitive or unfairly playing the race card (Harper, 2012). Microaggressions are cumulative assaults that take a psychological, physiological, and academic toll on Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized students, staff, and faculty (Pierce, 1970).

Racialized stereotyping surfaced in 11 of the studies. Racialized stereotyping is a social-psychological predicament that can arise from widely accepted negative stereotypes about what is perceived to be true about someone’s racialized group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). While Eurocentrism is generally understood to be a largely accepted cultural phenomenon that views the histories and cultures of non-Western societies from a European or Western perspective, it also minimizes or dismisses any value that is not regarded as being European or based on the valued centrality of Western culture (Pokhrel, 2011). Racial stereotyping acts in tandem with academic, cultural racism, whereby Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized students and staff are positioned as not understanding the normative culture of academia, and as not fitting in (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

Alterity is anchored in being positioned as an outsider and not belonging to the university community based on race and racialization (Muhammed, 2023). Alterity and “Otherness” were found as key concepts in nine of the studies reviewed. Alterity as experienced positions Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized students at the margins of higher education and reminds them that even within the university context their racialized identity keeps them at the edges of society (Rollock, 2012). Alterity is a term that means “otherness” or “being otherwise,” and is used to position some individuals as “the other” to maintain, in these instances, a race-based superordinate-subordinate relationality and social structuring (Huett & Goodman, 2014). Alterity produces and forces an inequality of social relations among social collectives and, at times, among racialized categories. Alterity is structural and embedded in discourses of power and representation, and can lead to legitimizations of disadvantageous institutional structures and social practices within higher education (Akbulut & Razum, 2022).

## Systemic Racism as Experienced

How systemic racism is understood—theoretically and conceptually—provides a basis for how it is experienced by students, staff, and faculty. It is important to note, as Bonilla-Silva (2021) reminds us, that systemic racism exists when access, opportunities, and rewards are partially allocated along racial and other identity lines, because systemic racism involves a system of unfair treatment across more than a single axis of social division and stratification. Systemic racism involves mutually constitutive forms of social oppression of difference across multiple axes of difference (Hopkins, 2019). Intersectionality is not only about multiple identities, but is about relationality, social context, power relations, complexity, social justice, and inequalities (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Hopkins, 2019).

Almost 30 years ago, Canadian scholars Henry and Tator (1994) noted that students and faculty had identified that Canadian universities were racially hostile environments. At the time, Henry and Tator reported that racialized students and faculty faced harassment in the classroom, in the corridors, and in other public spaces that exist on campus.

While overt racist actions may have become less frequent, Bonilla-Silva (2021) contends that insufficient attention is paid to the subtleties of racialized behaviours and actions because of the systemic nature of racism. A lack of commitment to understand the systemic nature of racism has permitted a particular discourse to surface that accepts that while systemic forms of racism may well exist in small spaces within the broad context of higher education, it occurs in an environment where there are no actual racist actors (Bonilla-Silva, 2021; Harper, 2012).

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The Eurocentric, White normativity of higher education allows for the reproduction of racism without disruption because it has become institutionalized and systematized (Irwin, 2022). The colour-blind cultural norms of higher education in Canada are so deeply rooted that they allow

those in university leadership positions to lament that while racism continues to plague campuses, it seems as if racism is simply one of those wickedly unsolvable problems that plague us (Harper, 2012). Yet, it does not have to be.

Our individual and collective capacity for conscious awareness, deliberate thought, and our ability to link values to behaviour and action should not be underestimated. The truth, albeit a hard one to enact, is that if we choose to put our minds to work on examining the evidence of how systemic racism is structured, reified, and experienced in higher education, we have a better chance at seeing it for what it is and then dismantling it. The authors hope that this rapid scoping review offers insight that might translate into actions through which every student, staff, and faculty member, and especially those who are Indigenous, Black, and otherwise racialized, have access to an equal opportunity to be fully engaged, participate, and be supported to find success in higher education.

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