

## Preliminary Report on Culture of Belonging Interviews

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Report compiled by Elaine Power

In the 2019-20 academic year, three graduate students of colour volunteered to interview other students (undergraduate and graduate), either currently enrolled or recently graduated, to understand their experiences of belonging and not belonging in SKHS, and their recommendations to generate a more diverse and inclusive culture in SKHS. They interviewed 10 students of colour, 7 women, 3 men. These participants included undergraduate, graduate and international graduate students..

The transcripts were littered with hesitations, uncertainties and questions about subtleties that the students felt only other people of colour would understand. For example, an undergraduate student of colour, a woman, said that she felt awkward when white men asked for her phone number because she wondered if she was being exoticized. Several students asked “do you know what I mean?” to the interviewer. In one interview, the interviewer asked the student if she would feel comfortable expressing the same issues to a white person. The student replied that she would probably apologize more. Many student participants gave the impression of not wanting to offend anyone.

Students’ perceptions of belonging/not belonging, racism and microaggressions varied considerably. This is a small sample, so the data need to be interpreted cautiously. Overall, one student’s comment sums up the experiences of most:

*“I feel welcomed but I don't feel connected”*

Most students felt that other (white) students are “nice” or “friendly” (in a Canadian kind of way) but do not make an effort to become friends. For example, one graduate student expressed:

*“They’re trying, but they’re not trying super hard. They’re not trying to actually change their behaviour, you know?”*

International students had the extra adjustments and shocks of moving to a new country, along with entering grad school & the culture of SKHS.

*“The shock is so much .... You don’t know how you're going to cope.”*

Undergraduate students spoke of how appreciative they were of classes where racism was discussed and where there were opportunities to get to know other students. At the same time, they felt that white students tended to congregate with and do assignments with other white students. They tried to make sure they had brown or black friends in their classes so they wouldn’t feel left out.

Graduate students really appreciated their supervisors, especially their supervisors' efforts to connect them with other students, check on them, support them in difficult situations, and create a welcoming environment in the supervisor's research group. They also spoke enthusiastically about the "very nice and helpful" SKHS staff.

Some students reported particular incidents of racism and microaggressions

- reported by women of colour
  - o a graduate TA reported incidents of racism & sexism experienced in tutorials/seminars
  - o undergraduates reported racism & sexism in social situations (e.g., parties, on the street, in residence)
- one student, a man with an Arabic name, reported that an SKHS instructor (not a faculty member) publicly singled him out, repeatedly, with comments about his name. He found this uncomfortable. This same student said that he and another Arab man were repeatedly asked in class about their lives and backgrounds in ways that other students were not. He thought it "weird" to be singled out so often.

In contrast, a racialized immigrant man who was a graduate student TA said that he expected to experience racism from the undergraduate students in his tutorial and was surprised that he was treated well. *"I felt like they [undergraduate students in his tutorial] were super nice and kind. No one was ignorant and I didn't feel excluded."*

One transcript stood out from the rest, a graduate student of colour. They appreciated their supervisor and their supervisor's support but felt disrespected and badly treated by particular faculty members, exploited as a TA, and underfunded. Although they recognized the power dynamics inherent in university culture and graduate school in general, they thought Queen's was a particularly exclusionary with a white and wealthy dominant culture. They found SKHS overall to be racist, sexist, classist, ableist, and unwelcoming. This student said that they would have left the School if not for their supervisor.

Troublingly, the graduate student interviewers reported that three students signed up for interviews and later withdrew. One student of colour experienced racism from an SKHS faculty member but was unwilling to share the details because they thought nothing would be done about it. An LGBTQ+ student felt that their experiences were too sensitive to share and could have negative consequences for the student and others. Another student of colour, who was busy with work, didn't want to take time for the interview because they didn't believe anything would change. Finally, one student, who did participate, expressed frustration to the interviewer that it is always the person of colour who is repeatedly asked to describe their awful experiences of racism, to teach or change others. This student thought white people should also be included in the study.

## Recommendations:

### Undergraduate Courses

- more diversity of content in lower year courses that focusses on minority groups (i.e., racialized groups, LGBTQ+, etc)
- inclusion of content re health of racialized groups, not just Indigenous people
- acknowledgement and discussion of racism & its health impacts, especially mental health
- courses about racism and health
- a course on racism and mental health
- more inclusion of intersectional identities in the readings
- less “whiteness” in the readings
- more courses at the lower years where students can interact with each other and the professor (not just sit in lectures)
- decolonize the curriculum
- discuss race & racism in the science courses

### Undergraduate Culture

- actively recruit more students of colour
- more support, including financial support, for clubs and programs to support racialized students
- more mental health supports, peer and professional, for students of colour, particularly to address racism

### Grad students

- develop an international student handbook, tailored to SKHS
  - o includes information about housing, health insurance, navigating government bureaucracy (QUIC is not that helpful)
- very challenging to start out of sync (e.g., Jan) especially as an international student
- create opportunities for international students to support each other
- senior peer mentors for new international students
- more activities that are not oriented around alcohol and athletics.

### Faculty & staff

- recruit more faculty & staff of colour

### SKHS

- better integration of Kinesiology and Health Studies at the undergraduate level
  - o more activities that are not oriented to athletics/physical activity
- support students in learning to interact with those who are different than they are
- celebrate the diversity of students
  - o set up more opportunities to learn about the cultures and countries of students of colour
  - o hang the flags of the countries of origin of students

- display a world map with pins showing where students originate
- cultural awareness training for grad & undergraduate students
- create more space for racialized, non-normative, trans, queer students
- advertise in multiple ways the services offered by the Queen's Human Rights Office to support students who feel their human rights may have been violated. Similarly advertise the services of the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Coordinator.
- more anti-racism training and education for students, faculty and staff
- a persistent and pervasive campaign that SKHS will not tolerate racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, ableist, classist, xenophobic or fatphobic behaviours or comments and actively strives to create a welcoming, diverse and inclusive environment

### **A Few Quotes On belonging/Not belonging**

“For someone who is a visible minority and whose like... whose like, visible, visible minority, you know, it is very easy for us to detect when you're being marginalized or when people are not being friendly to you, even if they're not aware that they're not being like that.”

“I mean, most of them are friendly but they're not friends, you know?” student of colour speaking about white students.

“Coming to Queen's ... sometimes it definitely felt like I didn't fit in ... I did have hard time and until this day I still do when I go out and feeling like I stand out. Like, for example, I don't wear red lipstick when I go out because—I know it sounds dumb—but I am already so different and if I wear red lipstick I feel like I will pop out more.” participant grew up in Toronto surrounded by others who looked like them

“It's not what people do but it's what they don't do... you kind of feel like you are being distanced in a way even though they're not trying to do that. But that's kind of what I feel. ... It's so hard to explain cause it's hard to explain the connection you can have with people.”

“[White] people also just know that they will have to probably work harder to get to know this [racialized] person because we probably don't have the same experiences. They might not be thinking all of these things but they probably will just as they go about doing their thing, they will think 'Oh let me talk to this person cause this person is from Kingston as well, and we both like the same shows, and we like doing the same things. It will be way easier to talk to them.’ “

“Queen's plays a big role in people feeling left-out in general and SKHS is part of the Queen's community”

“The readings are very white, some of them were written by old White men and they were sometimes, like I think because now I am more critical than at that time, I didn't realize it but they weren't necessarily inclusive of all the identities in the department. It [the assigned

readings] didn't take into account a lot of the other stuff and the different intersections would completely challenge the stuff that is being taught"

"SKHS in general has cultivated a culture of racial exclusion and socio-economic privilege and ableism that has made being part of the community very difficult."

"Earlier last year, in September, I was walking in the night to a club with two of my blonde, white friends. Two men driving in a car shouted at me, "go back to your country." Yeah, I was so taken aback. I don't think they were Queen's student because they had reflective vests on, so I assume they were street workers, construction workers. So that was the first time I ever experienced intense, like direct [racism]. That one hit me really hard, and I cried one whole night."

"You have to consider how ingrained the culture of exclusion is [at Queen's and in SKHS]. And the culture of exclusion works because by excluding people you feel included. You feel part of something."

## Sample Recruitment Poster



# Creating a Culture of Belonging for All in SKHS

Are you interested in helping SKHS be more welcoming and inclusive? We are inviting SKHS undergraduate students who identify as a person of colour, black, Indigenous, or a religious minority to participate in a discussion about your experiences of being a student in our School. You may choose an individual or a small group interview.

We would really appreciate your input. Tea, coffee, juice & snacks will be provided.

If you are interested in participating, please contact Zahraa, Florence and Eun at [skhs.belonging@queensu.ca](mailto:skhs.belonging@queensu.ca) by February 14th, 2020.

### Interview Questions:

1. Please introduce yourself, with your name, your program and year, where you grew up, and your self-identification
2. Please tell us what drew you to Queen's and to SKHS in particular. Did you have any reservations about coming to Queen's or Kingston?
3. Tell us about what it has been like being a student here. Please tell us about your academic experiences and your social experiences.
4. Are there particular aspects of your experiences here or particular events that have given you a sense of belonging?
5. Are there other aspects of your experiences or particular events where you have felt left out or that you didn't belong?
6. Have you witnessed events where other students have been left out or felt that they didn't belong?
7. Do you feel that you and your experiences are represented in course material?
8. What kinds of changes would make the School and the student culture more inclusive?