

**“It Feels Like Having a
Sugar Daddy. But Like
in the Worst Way”:**

**Thoughts from Racialized
2SLGBTQ+ Youth Artists in the
Toronto Arts Scene**

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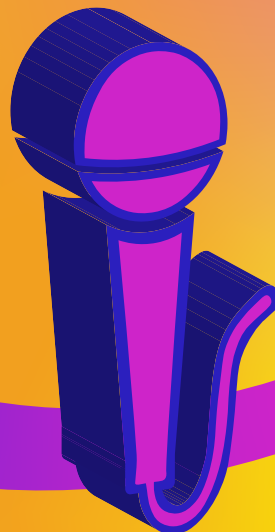


ABOUT THE FOCUS GROUPS

We found racialized 2SLGBTQ+ youth artists through online outreach

2SLGBTQ+

Some of the artists participated in *little sister's* 'hummingbird' open mic



Every participant received \$45 in honorarium, two TTC tokens, and a hot meal

Each discussion was an hour long, and the audio was recorded



We had a research team of 6 *little sister* members, and 12 participants



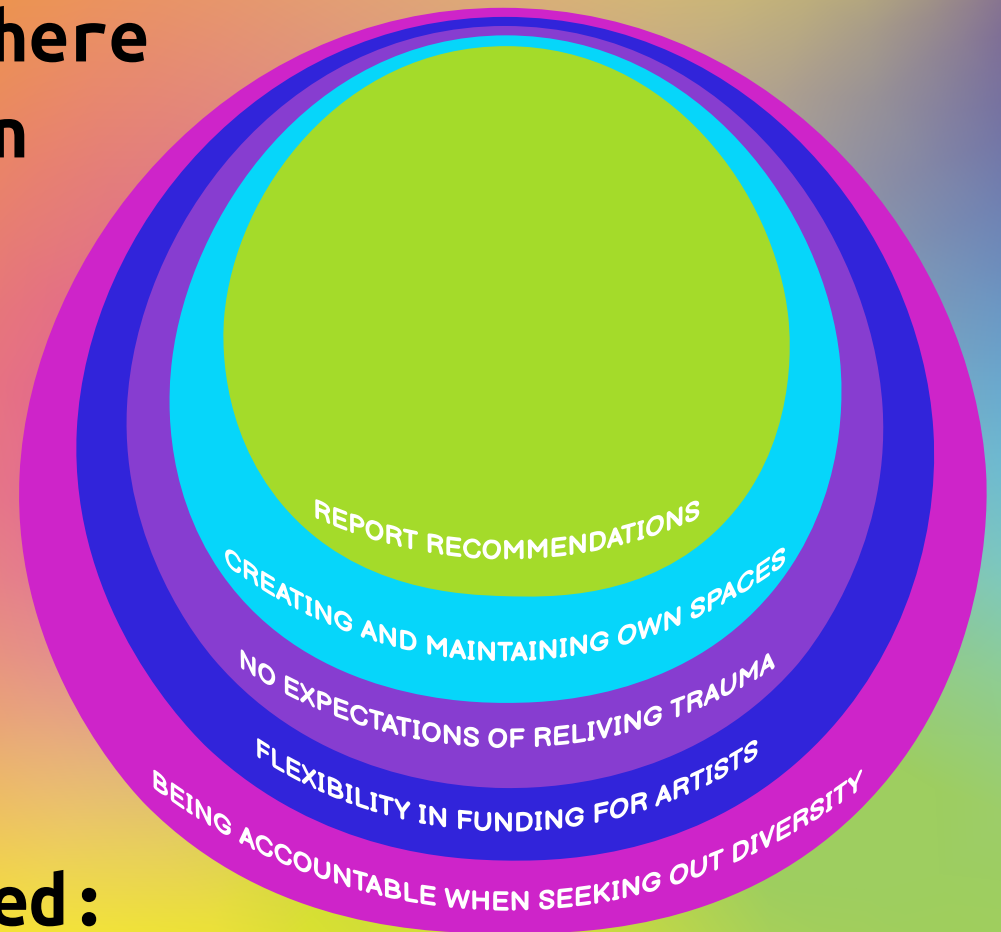
HOW WE REVIEWED THE DATA

- The focus groups were transcribed and then reviewed by the research team. 4 out of 6 members of the research team are Regent Park residents who participated in and/or worked in the *hummingbird* open mic events.
- The transcribed audio was then compiled into a list of general themes and common experiences.
- The themes were then coded by categorizing common experiences, and specific quotes from research participants were assigned to the general themes explored below.



♥ FINDINGS ♥

Artists reported that there are only small niches in Toronto where they feel safe enough to display and perform their work. While many experiences were shared, there were five common experiences that racialized LGBTQ+ youth artists articulated:



1 THE NEED FOR PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE SPACES IN TORONTO

Participants are looking for racialized 2SLGBTQ+ spaces to build community and perform for audiences they connect with. They describe their ideal community space as places that are:

**“RAN BY QUEER PEOPLE FOR QUEER PEOPLE,” TO
“GET TOGETHER AND TALK AND SUPPORT EACH
OTHER,” WHERE “YOU DON’T HAVE TO EXPLAIN
YOURSELF,” WHERE “YOU CAN JUST BE COMFORTABLE
BEING YOU,” AND WHERE “BLACK QUEER TRANS
PEOPLE [CAN] FACILITATE.”**



2 THE FEELING OF HAVING TO HIDE OR CENSOR THEIR ATTRACTION-BASED IDENTITIES, GENDER IDENTITIES, AND/OR RACIAL IDENTITIES

Participants often hide different parts of their identities in order to receive arts-based work and access community arts spaces.

“There’s sometimes the pressure to like, sacrifice parts of your identity to access certain spaces. Like, if you’re entering a space to specifically talk about being a person of colour, being LGBT person, like as much as these are different experiences, as someone who has experienced both, they both have a lot of overlap. Like, there’s a relationship there. And I sometimes feel like there’s pressure to not talk about certain things. Like, oh no, we’re focusing on this, don’t talk about being brown, like (laughter). Like tiny things, or not tiny things, but things like that that kind of just chip away at needing to separate the two. Sometimes, you’re just you, yeah.”



3 THE FEELING OF HAVING TO EXPLOIT THEIR IDENTITIES FOR FINANCIAL STABILITY, RESULTING IN FEELINGS OF DISCOMFORT AND EXPLOITATION

Participants shared experiences of applying for grants and other funding opportunities as feeling exploitative.

“If I’m writing a grant and I need that money I’m going to talk about what I’m coming with what I experience [as a queer and trans artist of colour], gotta milk it. And then it’s weird because it’s like, ok like, I just told you a very intimate part of myself in hopes that you’re going to give me x amount of money and also the more controversial I am, the more money I know I’ll get.”

“I’ve been to grant writing workshops, to like get myself amped up. I’m like this is dope, this is great, I love grant writing. And then realize I have to sell my art and myself in a very particular way to satisfy those giving me money and it feels like having a sugar daddy. But like in the worst way.”



4 THEIR CONCERNS THAT FOR ARTISTS OF COLOUR, PARTICULARLY BLACK ARTISTS, THE ARTS INDUSTRY EXPECTS TO SEE TRAUMA IN THEIR WORK, RESULTING IN DEFICIT NARRATIVES AROUND WHO RACIALIZED 2SLGBTQ+ ARTISTS ARE

“

THERE'S THIS FIXATION FOR PEOPLE OF COLOUR, ESPECIALLY BLACK PEOPLE ON PAIN PORN. LIKE THAT'S WHAT PEOPLE GET OFF ON, THAT'S WHAT PEOPLE LIKE TO SEE. THAT'S WHAT PEOPLE EXPECT TO SEE ... I THINK IT'S A DANGEROUS MENTALITY TO BLOCK PEOPLE INTO.

”



5

THAT ARTS GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS RECREATE THE SAME SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION IN THEIR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION WORK BECAUSE THEIR ALLYSHIP IS NOT THOROUGH OR ACCOUNTABLE TO THEIR MISTAKES, AND OFTEN PERFORMATIVE (LOOKS GOOD, BUT ISN'T ACTUALLY HELPFUL)

“There are a lot of gay male choreographers perpetuating the heteronormativity because it's instilled in them and taught to them and that's just kinda like a cycle that keeps being repeated and like I feel like in dance specifically there's not a lot of room for trans people and gender nonconformity”

“I went into a workshop that was focused on queer people of colour and this workshop was ran by a straight white person which was very nice (laughter) because they were interested to open a space and a voice, but the fact that it was ran by them still meant that a lot of rules and a lot of ways of thinking was based on this, it was just that the way that this was ran and edited was largely based on their perspective.”



RECOMMENDATIONS

ALLOW RACIALIZED 2SLGBTQ+ YOUTH ARTISTS TO CREATE AND MAINTAIN THEIR OWN SPACES WITH INDEPENDENCE

It sucks to have to report on everything that we are doing in order to be deemed “profitable” or a “good investment”. Consider having grants or programs that are drop-in, need few to no receipts, so that we don’t feel policed and micro-managed down to the last dollar. We already have strained relationships with most gatekeepers in the industry, so allowing us to do things with autonomy can help change that. There are many ways to build a positive rapport without forcing racialized 2SLGBTQ+ youth artists to “prove” how our art, spaces and events are worthwhile, or profitable.

MAKE ROOM FOR ALL EXPERIENCES OF BEING RACIALIZED AND IN THE 2SLGBTQ+ COMMUNITY, IN REAL WAYS

There are many lived experiences of racialized 2SLGBTQ+ youth artists and your programs and funding initiatives should reflect that. Don’t hire one gay artist and think you have met the needs of 2SLGBTQ+ communities. Have you reached out to artists that are non-binary, that are disabled, that are Indigenous, that are Black, that speak English as a 2nd, 3rd language, newcomers, homeless? Are you hiring people who have different skin tones than you? Darker skin tones? Are they in decision making positions or are they just being used to meet your diversity quotas? If you don’t, you are creating the same hierarchies that you’re trying to avoid.



DON'T EXPECT RACIALIZED 2SLGBTQ+ ARTISTS TO RE-LIVE THEIR TRAUMA IN THE NAME OF ART

Fund art and hire artists that make art without having to rehash our trauma related to racial identity, gender identities, and relationships unless we want to. We have so much knowledge, joy, laughter, happiness, sensuality, introspection, to share. This looks like hiring us at any given time instead of waiting for a special month or day, or a special ceremony. We're here, racialized and queer - ALL the time.

ALLOW FLEXIBILITY IN FUNDING AND ARTIST OPPORTUNITIES

Racialized 2SLGBTQ+ youth artists already face barriers trying to access the "grant world". Allow us to speak in our own dialects, to apply via video or in-person, rather than written essays that often do not allow for the nuances of our artistry. Trust what we say and our work without having to make it conventional to your board of directors or executives.



BE ACCOUNTABLE WHEN SEEKING OUT DIVERSITY IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

If you are going to label your organization as a diverse and safe space, remember that you need to make sure this is true at all levels. All staff should attend mandatory Anti-Oppression trainings (by someone with the right experience and knowledge - this is specialized work!), and you should have an Equity and Diversity audit to see where gaps might be in your service. This should be happening on a continuous basis, since social equity work is always ongoing. Check your leadership team. Does something need to change? If you have a jury of people deciding on artist funding, can you ensure that they are knowledgeable in anti-oppression and social equity?

Follow up after your outreach to see if you actually reached the people you hoped to, look who is in the room, and do the call out again if you haven't reached the right communities. Follow up with the artists to see how their experience was (check in during your time together too). You may have to do this many times. You need to build this into your outreach plans.

Finally, the people you want to be showing up might not show up because your organization hasn't done the necessary work to gain the trust of racialized 2SLGBTQ+ youth. Go back to the first point and do internal work in your organization, and yourself.





CONCLUSION



This report is intended to be a starting point for arts industry gatekeepers. We didn't force people to self identify their racial, gender or attraction-based identities, and there are still people left out of the conversations we had. Two focus groups are not enough to encompass the artist experiences of all racialized 2SLGBTQ+ youth artists in Toronto. That being said, these perspectives are important to keep in mind for your organizations plans!

This research report is an extension of the hummingbird open mic. hummingbird open mic was originally funded by the Daniels Corporation, Toronto Community Housing Corporation and Slaight Music. It is now one of the flagship events of LIL SIS. Special thanks to Sarah Switzer who helped guide us through community based research and report writing. For more information about us, visit LILSIS.CA



GLOSSARY

RACIALIZED

Refers to people who are non-white, and have a racial identity imposed onto them based upon their physical appearance. This term recognizes that race is a social construct rather than a biological fact and is based on the dominant (white) cultural ideas about race.

2SLGBTQ+

This acronym stands for attraction and gender based identities, including the Indigenous specific identity of Two Spirit people: Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans+, Queer and more.

ANTI OPPRESSION

Refers to the practice of fighting against all systemic oppression and injustice.

