

I self-identify as a cis-gendered woman. I am able bodied. I am a racialized woman. Both my parents are from Algeria. My dad is mixed with black algerian and white algerian. My race varies from different spaces. Some consider me as being a black woman, others as being arab, other as only a woman of colour. I do not deny any of those identities. (i will say the N word)

I would like to start by a trigger warning. I will be talking about personal experiences on racism including the use of the N word, and experiences of others that i had the authorisation to share. Some things that i will say might be explicit for some folks. If you need a minute, please feel free to leave the room. I also might get emotional talking about those experiences, so i ask of you to bare with me as i share what i'm about to share. As i read my statement, I also ask everyone to stay respectful towards everyone in the room, and to reflect on themselves and on their actions or inactions.

While it is often assumed that racism is simply overt actions like using racial slurs, racism is a system of power and oppression which involves having the power to carry out systemic, discriminatory practices through covert actions and societal institutions.

I would like everyone to keep that in mind as I speak.

As many of you will remember, tensions regarding racism on campus erupted last March during the first In My Skin event when a closed group was planned to allow racialized students a safe space to share their experiences. Throughout this process, my name was then dragged by the medias, on and off campus and by some students, including some in the room creating an environment that made me nervous even walking on campus alone..

Growing up, I was told by my father that:

You will always need to work twice as hard as they do, to get half of what they get. Fight for your identity to be recognized in a society that taught you that you are not worthy of being.

Even with this warning, I wasn't prepared for the violence I faced this year. . Let me walk you through some of the things that i've been through.

Throughout the year, I have experienced many overt as well as covert examples of racism linked to my position at the SFUO. This includes someone remarking "Look at this N-word cleaning for us" while I cleaned up at the SFUO Detox event for 101 week guides, being tagged in statuses or receiving messages telling me to "Go back to my own country", and students saying that they wished that I would get into a car accident, and in some cases death threats comparing me to ISIS and stating that all muslims must die and that particularly I should be a muslim who is killed.

A couple of week ago, i was walking on Dalhousie with a friend when a group of 5 or 6 white men, students of the university of Ottawa, stopped us, circled us, and then one of them told me : With all the money that you're making why don't you buy a comb and comb your hair.

I have also received private phone calls from people calling me a terrorist, asking me if i'll bomb the university, telling me that my people are all monkeys, telling me that i'm their private zoo animal, calling my a N-word bitch, telling me that my people should've stayed slaves, to name a few. e.

Those are only SOME of the things I've faced as a racialized executive this year.

Unfortunately, I'm far from alone in facing experiences of racism on campus, and many students have shared their own experiences with me, sometimes just seeking out someone to listen to them. . After the Chapel Hill shooting, 10 students came to talk to me about their recent experiences of Islamophobia. These included a student being booed out of his class and another being forced to leave our University all together.

BlakCollectiv did a die-in in the memory of Michael Brown. Everyone could participate to the dying in various form. They invited black students to participate to the die in by lying down, symbolizing his death, and to non-black student to participate as allies by holding banners and taking pictures. That event was attacked by various students not understanding what allyship is about and

ignoring that the event is representative of the situation of black bodies in our society where they are targets of police brutality.

One black student came to me after the Michael Brown vigil to tell me about his experience in one of his classes. He was the only black student in his 4th year sociology class. His teacher was saying things like "Darren Wilson should be awarded for killing a thug" and the students were saying things like : "one less n-word out of the streets".

These real examples show that we are facing a bigger problem. All those students living traumatic experiences, and have no where to go on campus to find resources or to heal individually and as a community. Which brings me to talk about the racialized student center.

It is a fact that we have a predominantly white campus. As racialized students, we go through violence and racism on a daily basis. A space for racialized students is needed for our membership to heal, to vent, to find support, to be represented.

Something that was said about the referendum was the fact that white students did not identify with the center and couldn't see as white students how that center could've been useful to them. When we talk about racism, there's a whole spectrum of things that need to be talked about which include everyone because some are victims and some benefit from it. There is work to be done to deconstruct what we learn and relearn and to be accountable for our actions. This work must include closed spaces that provide racialized students a safe space to heal and share experiences.. What white students are really saying when they say "that center will not benefit me ", is "I am not responsible for racism and I'd rather ignore it than work against it". When we talk about racism, everyone should feel concerned. Like I said earlier, racism is more than racial slurs. Racism is about power and oppression and we need to be conscious about who hold the power in our society.

Racialized students faced racism once again when they were denied this space.

In a society that is moving more and more online, unsurprisingly, racism is being perpetuated through social media as well.

The "SFUO doesn't represent me" facebook page is a perfect example of this perpetuation of racism. A Federated Body VP Social commented on a status on this page claiming that i'm too busy fighting white supremacy to do my job; and several people, including student leaders, chose to like that comment, as if fighting racism on campus is a pet project rather than a necessity of this work. The page then decided to delete comments from racialized students challenging the racism of this post while leaving up comments that supported this racism. . To claim this work is a side project is denying my experiences and identity. It is denying the fact that racialized students live in a violent society. White Supremacy is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated, system of exploitation and oppression of peoples of color, benefiting white people, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege. Not recognizing that, by itself, is an act of racism.

I am sad to have learned that there are a number of students, including incoming executives, who know who the people are who manage this page and have chosen to remain silent rather than challenging this racism.

As student representatives of one of the largest universities in the country, we have a responsibility to challenge these behaviours and not just take the easy road. If anyone, in this room, knows who those people are and do not do anything about it, you are as responsible as they are and you are complicit in this violence.

To finish up, racism is also in the inaction. Racialized students don't have the privilege to simply choose not to engage in these discussions and work, we are forced to face it everyday. Simply choosing not to engage does not wipe hands clean of racism, it makes them complicit.

This week is the united against racism week. To launch the week, we decided to start a hashtag : #RacismAtUofO and invite students to share their experiences on campus and get the conversation about race going. I will ask everyone (who feels comfortable) in this room right now, to go on twitter, and use the hashtag sharing your experience as a student of colour or on how you can be an ally as a white student.

Please invite your friends to the events this week and share it.

Ikram Hamoud

V.-p. Aux Affaires Sociales / VP Social

Fédération Étudiante de l'Université d'Ottawa / Student Federation of the University
of Ottawa