

Multiculturalism Research Synthesis 2009-2013

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Brief Overview of the Synthesis

- Roughly 180 works identified to address a broad range of issues pertaining to ethno-cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society
- The guiding questions mainly regarded issues of equal opportunity and discrimination as well as civic participation and engagement
- A “bottom-up” approach in identifying the themes:
 - Theme 1: macrosociological, macro-political and normative questions of multiculturalism in the Canadian context (\approx one quarter of the surveyed literature)
 - Theme 2: the notion of social differentiation, specifically the intersection of ethnicity, skin color/“race” and other categories of differentiation (such as age, sexual orientation, gender, religion) (\approx one third)
 - Theme 3: the practice of multiculturalism in public institutions defined broadly as including civil society, the public sector and municipal level of governance (\approx one fifth)
 - Theme 4: international perspectives on multiculturalism, particularly the assessment of the Canadian situation in the context of global concerns and debates ($<$ one tenth)

Theme 1: Debating Multiculturalism

- Critics and defendants elaborate on Canadian multiculturalism:
 - Critics from the “political right”: Multiculturalism entails the emergence of cultural, religious “ghettos” resulting in fragmentation and demise of Canadian society
 - Defendants: Multiculturalism policies have a positive impact upon immigrants’ basic liberal values of freedom, equality, and solidarity and do not undermine interpersonal trust
 - Critics from the “political left”: Multiculturalism fails to address issues of social inequality and racism
 - Defendants: Multiculturalism developed models of democratic citizenship defined by human rights ideals
- The Canadian way of dealing with diversity is interactive multiculturalism → strong moral bonds among individuals and groups, a cultural core and promotion of cross-cultural dialogue and exchange between ethnic and national groups
- Canadian multiculturalism is moving closer to interculturalism, Quebec’s version of multiculturalism

Theme 2: Social Differentiation

- Different dimensions of “social difference” (e.g. race/ ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation) translate into unequal access to (economic, political, and cultural) resources, opportunities, and life chances
 - Discrimination on the labor market, precarious life conditions, and poor health imply at emotional level negative self-esteem and undermined sense of belonging that, in the end, translate in limited civic participation and engagement
 - Among various vulnerable categories (i.e. women and youth whose identities are racialized, religious minorities, LGBTQ people, and immigrant seniors), Canada’s Muslim minority appears at higher risk as subject to stigmatization (in government policy and discourse, media representations, as well as public perceptions and attitudes)
 - Immigrant and ethno-specific organizations are a key means of social integration at community level, yet they appear to face significant limitations in terms of funding and capacity to address “real” community needs

Theme 3: Multiculturalism and Public Institutions

- Municipalities, the educational system, language (including official bilingualism), and the mainstream media are the institutions discussed in relation to multiculturalism from a double perspective: the potential for civic integration and engagement of ethnic and racial minorities and the existence of persistent discrimination
 - Educational system is portrayed as a relatively successful “hub” for fostering interethnic relations, multicultural learning and linguistic integration, yet racism in schools seems to be an ongoing issue
 - Proficiency in either official language is one of the most important factors fostering access to the labor market, upward social mobility and civic integration
 - The mainstream media’s capability and willingness to adequately reflect Canadian diversity is still considered as unsatisfying: evidence of under- and misrepresentations of cultural and religious minorities, specifically Muslims and Arabs, is still found in the media, increasing the risk of stigmatization for this category

Theme 4: International Perspectives

- In exploring how Canada compares in the international arena, research has shown that Canada has a distinctive story from its European and American counterparts:
 - Scholars defend the viability of the Canadian approach to immigration, ethnic diversity and multiculturalism as a society ethos, policy and national identity
 - Multiculturalism remains a strong part of Canadian identity. It involves encouraging the public expression of ethnic and racial identities and redistributive policies to support the poor
 - A multicultural national identity has helped to preserve social solidarity
 - Receptiveness to newcomers and immigration is higher in Canada than in the US; Canadian immigrants are better integrated than their American counterparts. Canada, by providing language integration courses, takes more advantage of the economic benefits provided by immigration

Key Questions for Further Research (1/2)

- Theme 1: Debating Multiculturalism
 - How much of a “cultural core” is necessary to make interactive multiculturalism work?
 - When does the insistence on this national cultural core turn into coerced assimilation or marginalization rather than into interactive multiculturalism?
- Theme 2: Social Differentiation
 - How is racism nowadays experienced and what is the impact on socio-economic integration, belonging and actual patterns of civic and political participation for various vulnerable groups (i.e. women and youth whose identities are racialized, Muslims, LGBTQ people and immigrant seniors)?
 - Ethno-cultural (faith-based) non-governmental organization may carry a significant input and a key role in fostering an inter-faith dialogue. Their “voice” should be heard more.

Key Questions for Further Research (2/2)

- Theme 3: Municipalities and Public Institutions
 - How does the education system “shape” Canada’s next “multicultural” generation? To what extent are equal opportunities created and how are civic participation and engagement encouraged and enabled? (systematic provincial studies)
 - How are interethnic, interfaith and inter-racial relations taking place in urban Canada (at various levels: neighborhoods, schools, colleges, universities) in case of 1.5 and second generation of immigrant youth?
 - To what extent do the media accomplish their role as providers of civic literacy and critical reflection of government policy?
- Theme 4: International Perspectives
 - The need for international comparisons remains as they help Canadian researchers and stakeholders to identify Canada’s strengths and weaknesses in building an ethnically and racially pluralist society that fosters intergroup relations, civic participation and, eliminates the conditions for racism and social inequality