Mix and Match:

THE FAST EVOLVING CHARACTERISTICS OF CANADIAN ETHNICITY

ABSTRACT

By 2006 it is clear that a majority of Canadians will have something other than Canadian, British and French as part of their ethnic identification. Some 36.3 percent of Canadians gave multiple responses to questions on ethnic origins in 2001. By contrast in the United States in 2000 the question on ancestral origins yielded 27.5 percent of respondents giving multiple answers. Growing multiple identifications may diminish singular ties to ethnic communities and if not reduce, then certainly redefine, the sense and orientation of community belonging as well as the oft-related link to countries of origin. By consequence in future ethnic connectedness will not be confined to ascribed or transmitted status as more individuals will choose to define themselves ethnically according to their preferences.

JACK JEDWAB
Jack Jedwab is Executive Director of the Association for Canadian Studies.

A recent series of projections by Statistics Canada looking at the Canada of 2017 predicted considerable change to the country's landscape with the heightened degree of cultural diversity. But one of the areas that the projections did not address was the rise in multiple identifications amongst the population. By 2006 it is clear that a majority of Canadians will have something other than Canadian, British and French as part of their ethnic identification. This was already the case in 2001 for a majority of the population below the age of 35. This scenario is a function of the combined number of persons reporting only 'other' ethnic origin and those reporting other in combination with another origin. The phenomenon is more common amongst longer established-mostly European descendant-Canadians than more recently arrived immigrants. Such shifts represent an important dimension on the changing patterns of Canadian identity.

Table 1 – Declarations of Ethnic Origins and declaration of ethnic origins of persons other than Canadian, French and British (single and multiple) by age cohort, Canada, 2001

Canada	Total Age and sex	0-14 years	15-24 years	55-64 years	65 years and older
Total – Ethnic origin	29,639,030	5,737,675	3,988,200	2,847,955	3,624,850
Other with/without Canadian, British or French	13,892,970	3,101,550	2,036,630	1,133,460	1,375,075
% Other with/without Canadian, British or French	46.9	54.3	51.0	39.8	37.9

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2001

Overall, 36.3 percent of Canadians gave multiple responses to questions on ethnic origins in 2001. By contrast in the United States in 2000 the question on ancestral origins yielded 27.5 percent of respondents giving multiple answers. Multiple identifications are far more common amongst Canada's younger generation. Some 44.3 percent of Canadians under the age of 15 gave multiple responses to the question on ethnic origin, 35.3 percent between the age of 35 and 44 did the same and 24.1 percent above the age of 65 gave more than one response to the question on ethnic origins.

More multiple ethnic responses to the 2001 consisted of two answers often referred to as dual identity. Still, one out of six Canadians gave at least three responses when asked about their ethnic background (9.6 percent gave three responses and 6.7 percent gave four answers). Persons that included American, Swedish and Norwegian origin responses were most likely to give as many as four responses when asked about their ethnic background. On the other hand single origin declarations were most common amongst those reporting Korean (93.6 percent), Haitian (85.8 percent) and Chinese origins (85.5 percent). Amongst European ancestry groups it is the Portuguese and Greek that reported the least ethnic mixing. Single origin declarations were less common amongst the German (25.8) Polish (32.1) and Ukrainian groups (32.6).

Table 2 – Declarations of Single Ethnic Origin for selected groups, Canada, 2001

Canada	% of single origin
Total – Ethnic origin	**63.7**
Korean origin	93.6
Haitian origin	85.8
Chinese origins	85.5
East Asian origins	84.9
East African origins	83.5
South Asian origins	83.1
East Indian origin	81.5
West Asian origins	80.5
South East Asian origins	78.4
Portuguese origin	70.7
Greek origin	66.9
North African origins	65.4
Middle Eastern origins	64.9
Caribbean and Bermudan origins	64.2
African origins	63.5
Canadian origins	62.7
Latin American origins	61.2
Italian origins	57.1
Jewish origin	53.5
American origin	43.1
Ukrainian origin	32.6
Polish origin	32.1
British origins	26.9
French origin	26.5
German origins	25.8

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2001

Hyphenated Identities

Some describe the condition of dual individual and/or multiple identities as hyphenated identity. The notion of a hyphenated identity is usually thought of as combined national with ethnocultural identity (i.e. Canadian and other) and its increased presence in the census is a result of people being encouraged in the late 1980's to respond that they were Canadian on the question of ethnic origins. Of those Canadians who have increasingly chosen to do so many combined their answers with another ethnic response.

Hyphenated Canadian identities have become an important part of the way our origins are reported. It is a significant by product of the campaign designed to get the population to respond Canadian to the census as a way to affirm their attachment to the country. The authors of this idea may have better succeeded in getting those of European origin to hyphenate their Canadian identification than in getting people to dismiss backgrounds other than Canadian.

Those reporting either British or French origins only are generally seniors. Those reporting more multiple or hyphenated identities tend to be younger and have low shares of persons under 65 thus suggesting an important trend.

The group that was most inclined to add Canadian to the response to questions about their backgrounds were persons of American descent. In effect, the most hyphenated Canadians were those with some ancestors that hailed from the melting pot. Thereafter Metis and Dutch origin respondents were most likely to include Canadian in their response. Asian groups were amongst the least likely to have included the Canadian response in their census declaration.

Having a majority of 'other ethnicities' does not imply a rise in hyphenated identities as much as the new immigration has yet to encounter significant mixing, something which as we noted is far more common amongst the more established largely European descent segment of the population. An important number of younger Canadians have likely rolled multiple identities into the Canadian only category. Still, one observes an important generation gap in the reporting on origins with those below the age of 14, approximately 26 percent that might be described as hyphenated (3,104,235) while in the 65 and over category only 6.1 percent are hyphens. Overall in the 2001 census some 16.5 percent or one of six Canadians reported hyphenated identities.

Only 2.7 percent of persons with origins other than Canadian, French or British combined Canadian with their response in dual declarations. However when multiple declarations where Canadian is present with 'other' identification are included, the percentage rises to 6.3 percent. Not surprisingly considering more mixing of the 'other ethnics' occurred with persons of British as opposed to French descent. As observed below the group that was most inclined to add Canadian to the response to questions about their backgrounds were persons of American descent. In effect the most hyphenated Canadians were those with some ancestors that hailed from the melting pot. Thereafter Metis and Dutch origin respondents were most likely to include Canadian in their response. Asian groups were amongst the least likely to have included the Canadian response in their census declaration.

Table 3 – Declarations of Ethnic Origins in Combination with Canadian response for selected groups, 2001

Canada	Canadian and other only	Total Other with Canadian
Ethnic origin	**2.7**	**6.3**
American origin	17.6	43.8
Métis origin	9.1	28.7
North American Indian origin	6.6	18.2
German origins	6.4	17.3
Ukrainian origin	7.2	15.9
Canadian origins	6.7	15.5
Russian origin	8.7	15.4
Polish origin	7.4	14.8
Italian origins	6.7	13.2
Jewish origin	9.0	13.1
Caribbean and Bermudan origins	6.3	9.5
Guyanese origin	6.3	9.2
African origins	5.7	7.9
Latin American origins	5.7	7.7
Chinese origins	2.8	3.7

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2001

Conclusion

Defining the notion of community is continually the object of discussion amongst policy-makers. What terminology is best suited to characterizing persons of diverse origins and backgrounds that form communities? In the lexicon associated with diversity we have described our aboriginal population as First Nations. The British and French have been referred to as founding peoples and those who have immigrated to Canada have been called new Canadians and their children as descendants of immigrants. Each of these categories in some manner touches on the importance of ancestry in the identification of Canadians. In recent years ancestral ties have come under scrutiny from observers who believe that strong links to ethnic origins undercut attachment to Canada. But a large scale study on ethnic diversity conducted by Statistics Canada in 2003 suggested no significant contradiction between such expressions of identity. Attachment to Canada is strong amongst many individuals that retain strong ties of either a symbolic or instrumental character to countries of origin.

Growing multiple identifications can have certain policy ramifications as they may diminish singular ties to ethnic communities and if not reduce, then certainly redefine, the sense and orientation of community belonging as well as the oft-related link to countries of origin. By consequence in future ethnic connectedness will not be confined to ascribed or transmitted status alone but will increasingly include persons who choose to define themselves ethnically according to their preferences.