A SECOND LOOK AT SECOND GENERATION

ABSTRACT

This article profiles the "new second generation Canadians," in a country experiencing change in its immigrant source countries, and therefore in the composition of its second generation. The author looks at the types of changes in the second generation, explores questions of upward economic mobility and "segmented" social integration, and identifies key issues and knowledge gaps. While economically still outperforming their immigrant parents, the social integration of the second generation appears to be "segmented" along the lines of race and ethnicity.

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The immigrant story contains two broad narratives, the experience of adult immigrants and that of their offspring. Much has been written about the barriers that newcomers experience in adapting to their country of settlement, especially in regards to a lack of proficiency in the official language(s) of the host country, cultural differences, devaluation of credentials and experience acquired in their home country, and a lack of social networks. By comparison, the narratives of second generation (i.e., those born to immigrant parents) and the 1.5 generation (i.e., those who immigrated at a very young age) are often described as positive with several common threads. Having spent their formative years in their adopted country, these individuals are believed to be spared from the hardships that their immigrant parents endured. Granted, they would still need to reconcile the values of their country of ancestry held by their parents with those of the country in which they live. Nevertheless, these individuals are expected to achieve a higher level of success than their parents and fully integrate into society, due in part to their parents' insistence on them excelling in the mainstream society as well as to their own perseverance.

Recent research findings in Canada and other immigrant receiving countries have revealed variants to this narrative, prompting the need to take a second look at second generation.[1] The reason is that, with a shift in immigrant source countries, the racial and ethnic composition of the second generation has become more diverse than before. Subsequently, the pathways of integration appear to diverge across ethnicity, culture, and social economic status. Moreover, as the world becomes more connected, international events often have domestic impacts that must also be considered within the integration narrative. In this paper, we review what is known about second generation Canadians within this emerging global context before proposing areas for research and policy.

Second generation in transition

In 2002, among non-Aboriginal Canadians aged 15+, 17% (3.9 million people) were second generation. The largest group (36%) consisted of those with only European origins especially German, Italian, Dutch, Ukrainian and Polish, followed by those of British, French, and/or Canadian ancestry (32%). One in ten second generation Canadians had only non-European origins, the most frequent of which were Chinese or East-Indian. This is largely a reflection of Canada's immigration trends up to the 1970s, which was predominantly Eurocentric (Statistics Canada 2003).

The distribution of second generation Canadians varies across regions. One in four British Columbians aged 15+ are second generation. The proportion of second generation among those aged 15+ was 24% in the Prairies provinces and 21% in Ontario. In comparison, 80% of the population aged 15+ in Quebec had been in Canada for three or more generations (Statistics Canada 2003).

While this is the situation, a number of profound shifts are currently underway that will transform the racial and ethnic composition of the second generation. In large part this is driven by an ongoing shift away from Europe as the primary source of immigrants. In 2002, almost one in two (46%) first generation Canadians aged 15+ reported non-European origins. Chinese, East Indian, Filipino and Vietnamese are the most common ancestral groups reported. By comparison, 31% of first generation Canadians were of European origins, mostly Italian, German, Portuguese and Polish (Statistics Canada 2003). This shifting composition within the first generation will naturally change the composition of the second generation that follows.

Like composition, distribution patterns also appear to be shifting. Second and 1.5 generations are more urban than those of third generation or more, but this is especially true among the visible minorities dominating current immigration cohorts; almost all of them (96%) reside in the census metropolitan areas (Boyd 2006). Further, with the concentration of immigrants in large urban centres and the increase of single ethnic neighbourhoods in these cities (Statistics Canada 2005), the current second generation is more likely to grow up in neighbourhoods with their co-ethnics. Hence, the new second generation may have different experiences in integrating into the Canadian society than previous cohorts.

Upward economic mobility and "segmented" social integration

It has been argued in the United States that patterns of adaptation may differ between descendents of immigrants of non-European origin and those of European origin for three reasons. First, compared to their European counterparts, non-Europeans could have more difficulty blending into mainstream society due to their skin tone. Second, immigrants tend to concentrate in neighbourhoods of native-born minorities who may be at the margins of the society, which could hamper or distort the integration of recent arrivals into the mainstream society. Third, labour market polarization could make it harder for the second generation to move out of the low-pay menial occupations held by their parents. Consequently, the integration of the new, mostly non-White second generation could be "segmented" depending on the adaptation strategies of different ethnic groups and the social milieu in which they circulate (Portes and Zhou 1993).

Given increasing race and ethnic diversity in Canada, will the new second generation encounter similar experiences as their counterparts in the United States? Preliminary evidence indicates that the answer may be yes. Regarding education, immigrant and second generation youth aged 15+ have higher educational aspirations than other Canadians in part due to the expectations of their parents. In particular, visible minority youth – immigrant or second generation – are twice as likely to aspire to university as other youth of the same age (Krahn and Taylor 2005). In terms of actual educational attainment, some inter-ethnic differences exist. Among second generation Canadians aged 25-39, Asians are more likely to have a university degree than other groups and Blacks appear marginally less likely to complete university (Reitz and Zhang 2006, Reitz and Banjeree 2005). In spite of these differences though, second generation Canadians generally exceed their immigrant parents in education (Reitz and Zhang 2006). This could change in the future as education level at landing is higher among recent immigrants to Canada than earlier cohorts. That being said, having obtained their formal education in Canada, second generation would not experience difficulties in recognition of their credentials.

Educational success often translates into upward income mobility between generations, provided that all have equal opportunity to advance in a society. In this regard, the experiences of second generation Canadians are very similar to those of other Canadians and compare favourably with other countries, such as the United States and the United Kingdom. Children of immigrants of Caribbean, Oceania and Central and South American origins make less earnings progress relative to the Canadian average than those from other source regions, but they still do better than their parents. It has been speculated that lower general education levels and different norms, expectations and resources within the communities where these second generation Canadians were raised may be a disincentive (Aydemir, Chen and Corak 2005). Research on visible minorities also indicates that there may be issues and challenges that may affect visible minority second generation Canadians; in particular, consistent findings that Blacks earn less than mainstream society at all education levels are cause for concern (Milan and Tran 2004, Flegal 2002). Overall, however, it appears that second generation Canadians enjoy a level of educational opportunity and labour market mobility similar to that of the general Canadian population.

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Nevertheless, other research suggests that social integration appears to be segmented across ethnic groups and more importantly, between visible minorities and Whites. While similar in regards to rates of voluntarism, second generation Whites and visible minorities differ in terms of life satisfaction, sense of belonging, and voting. Compared to Whites, visible minority second generation, Blacks in particular, are more likely to report lower levels of life satisfaction and sense of belonging. Visible minority second generation Canadians are also less likely to identify themselves as Canadian and are less likely to vote. In fact, visible minority recent immigrants seem to have a stronger sense of belonging than the visible minority second generation that was born here (Reitz and Banerjee 2005).

Visible minorities are more likely to report being treated unfairly at work and in other settings than those who are not visible minorities (Derouin 2003). According to the Ethnic Diversity Survey, among second or more generations, 18% of visible minorities reported being treated unfairly sometimes or often, compared to 5% among those who are not visible minority. The most common reason for perceived discrimination is race or colour for

visible minorities, and language or accent for those who are not visible minority (Statistics Canada 2003). Compared to lower household income and education, perceived discrimination has been found to play a much bigger role in social integration, negatively affecting one's sense of belonging and life satisfaction (Reitz and Banerjee 2005). These findings suggest that visible minority second generation Canadians may feel like outsiders and self-exclude.

Understanding the new second generation: Issues and knowledge gaps

It has been argued that how well the second generation integrates into mainstream society depends on three interrelated factors: government policies, the level of receptiveness of the society at large, and resources in ethnic communities (Portes and Zhou 1993). The changing ethnocultural composition of second generation Canadians could be attributed to Canada's colour blind immigration policy. As well, geopolitical trends must also be considered; more individuals from developing countries are seeking better economic opportunities in the developed world. Further, the country's approach to ethnocultural diversity could impact on the acculturation process of immigrants and their descendents (Phinney et al. 2006). Canada's multiculturalism policies encourage ethnic groups to integrate into the mainstream society without foregoing their cultural identities. Such an approach could alleviate the pressures of having to choose between the norms of one's country of ancestry and that of their country of birth or settlement.

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In this sense, it can be argued that second generation Canadians are doubly blessed. Growing up in immigrant families, second generation are likely exposed to their cultural heritage through their parents and relatives at the same time as being acculturated to their country of settlement. Such claims have yet to be tested empirically. Other than attitudinal measures, there is little research on the extent to which these individuals maintain links with their country of ancestry and their heritage, as it relates to the social and economic outcomes for these individuals (Patel 2002). More research on this topic is required.

Until now, there is scant information on the well-being of the second generation in Canada. The 2001 Census marks the first time that respondents were asked to identify the place of birth of their parents. The post-censual Ethnic Diversity Survey also allows for the distinction between first and second generation and more on a set of social and economic indicators. Comprehensive surveys, such as the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) in the US, could be useful in this regard.

Generally, Canadians appear to be receptive of immigration and multiculturalism. That said, this level of receptiveness appears somewhat subject to events at home and abroad, as well as how these events are played out in the media. On the one hand, Canada abounds with success stories of second generation Canadians in all walks of life including governor generals, entertainers, and other professionals. On the other hand, the June 2006 arrests of 17 terror suspects in the Greater Toronto Area, and similar arrests in the UK and the US, gave prominence to the issue of "home-grown terror," because many of those implicated were second generation nationals who were Muslims. At issue is why these young men would turn their back on the democratic society that welcomed their immigrant parents and offered them opportunities to succeed (Sibley 2006). Some have attributed multiculturalism with isolating Muslim and Canadian ethnic groups in general from the mainstream society (Zolf 2006). Others have argued otherwise, asserting that geopolitical realities, rather than multiculturalism, are the contributing factors of "home-grown terror" (Beyer 2006). The fact that violent radicalization appears isolated to only a very few would appear to support this latter position. Nonetheless, there is no sign that this debate is drawing to a close, highlighting the need for research in this area that would separate facts from headlines.

Such research will have to move beyond what is currently available. Most often, education and earnings/income remain the sole indicators for the integration of immigrants and their descendents. Such an approach overlooks the non-economic factors contributing to the integration of ethnic groups. The size and quality of social network is a key factor. Often, to move ahead in society depends not only on what you know, but whom you know and, more importantly, who knows you. As shown previously, social integration of second generation varies between whites and visible minorities as well as across ethnic groups. Further, studies on second generation in the United States illustrate that strategies of incorporation vary across groups, resulting in different social and economic outcomes (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Given the diversity of Canada's second generation, how would pathways into mainstream society differ across and within various ethnic groups?

In conclusion, as immigrant source countries change, so too is the composition of the second generation. This article profiles the new second generation Canadians. With increases in the percentages of skilled worker migrants, one could expect that second generation

Canadians would likely continue to have high education aspirations, and, consequently, may continue to be well placed to economically outperform their parents. Yet, given the possible or perceived presence of covert and overt discrimination, economic success may not readily follow and upward social mobility for visible minorities may be stifled. Reasons why a very few become violently radicalized also need to be more fully explored. Hence, the conventional narrative on second generation may not apply uniformly to the realities of the current and future second generation. New data should be able to shed light on the social and economic well-being of this population.

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Notes

[1] Second generation hitherto refers to both individuals born to immigrant parent(s) and those who immigrated at a young age, i.e., the 1.5 generation.