HOW DIFFERENT ARE THEY?

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ABSTRACT

The author responds to the following questions on the topic of social inclusion/exclusion. This is done partly to critique recent findings by Jeffrey Reitz and Rupa Banerjee on the same topic, and more generally, in light of the author's concern for the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the analysis of social phenomena such as racial discrimination and visible-minority integration.

1) Who are the vulnerable groups, individuals and victims of racism and racial discrimination in services, employment and civic participation (e.g., political empowerment?)
2) What strategies can help build capacity including social capital for new and/or vulnerable ethno-cultural and ethno-racial communities?
3) What factors contribute to the exclusion of second-generation ethno-cultural and ethno-racial youth in Canada?

The answers to the above questions require research which fairly and accurately delineates the challenges, with respect to their nature and magnitude, and situates them in their appropriate context. Only then will such empirical findings make clear and effective policy suggestions, with the potential to apply all relevant knowledge.

A recent study by Reitz and Banerjee (2007; Reitz, 2005) speaks to the above questions and policy issues through an analysis of data from the Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS), conducted by Statistics Canada in collaboration with Canadian Heritage. The EDS, by virtue of its enormous sample of over 40,000, with over-sampling of recent immigrants and their offspring, provides an excellent opportunity to address these issues.

Reitz and Banerjee use the responses to seven questions – regarding citizenship, ethnocultural identity, trust, life satisfaction, belonging to Canada, volunteering, and federal voting – to compare visible minority and white respondents across immigrant generations. But because those authors do not fairly and fully present and consider their findings, the result is a distorted and insufficiently contextualized depiction of the policy challenges.

Incomplete Consideration of the Data

Reitz and Banerjee conclude that, compared to Whites, visible minority immigrants are slower to integrate, with the "gap" widening with experience in Canada and being greatest among the second generation. However, that conclusion is not justified by their analysis.

On their seven indices of integration, each of their four visible minority groupings (Chinese, South Asian, Black, and other visible minorities) and visible minorities, as a whole, score as more "integrated" than Whites on more indices than on which they do worse than Whites, in the analyses of immigrant respondents to the EDS. Yet, rather than see this overall pattern as evidence that visible minorities do better than Whites in the immigrant integration process, Reitz and Banerjee, by "hand-picking" comparisons, see a "gap" in the opposite direction from the overall tendency toward more favourable results. This enables them to see a "growing gap" in the second generation, where visible minority scores on the measures are, in fact, lower than White scores.

Reitz and Banerjee further exclude the admittedly sparse third-plus generation visible minority cases from their analyses. The Black grouping is the primary source of the second generation visible minority versus White differences. However, Black children of non-immigrants, the third-plus generation, show similar negative differences from Whites (Palmer, 2006a).

So, their conclusion of slower visible minority immigrant integration flies in the face of their own analyses, among immigrants, suggesting the opposite conclusion, if any. In addition, the analysis they failed to perform suggests differences from Whites in the responses of Black children of non-immigrants which are similar to the differences displayed by Black children of immigrants. In sum, they present no evidence of an overall visible minority immigrant integration deficit and exclude available evidence that the lower-than-White scores among Canadian-born visible minority youth appear to be unrelated to whether or not their parents are immigrants.

Thus, Reitz and Banerjee do not show that any differences between visible minority and White responses are related to the immigrant integration process. Those differences are more simply explained just as effects of discrimination, effects which are somewhat masked among immigrants by the fact that White immigrants also face some discrimination. The discrimination against White immigrants, because they are immigrants, "goes away" in later generations, while

discrimination against visible minorities, because they are visible minorities, does not.

Further, there is little evidence that first or third-plus generation visible minority youth are significantly less excluded than youth from the second generation.

This suggests that any focus on the second generation, to the exclusion of youth belonging to the first or to the third-plus generations, may be very ill-advised and risk neglecting the needs of persons equally deserving of research and remedial efforts.

Exaggerating Differences

A second major flaw in the Reitz and Banerjee study regards their presentation of results. They cite numerous percentage comparisons as examples of visible minority versus White differences, the most striking differences being found among second generation respondents. They then perform regression analyses showing that differences remain when age is controlled. But they present no percentage comparisons which control for age, nor do they report the strength of the age effect in their regression analyses.

The primary example of how this distorts their results regards second generation reported voting. They now cite a 20% visible minority second generation deficit on this measure. (It was 36%, but I prompted them to remove the under-18 kids from their calculations.)

Regression analysis shows age to account for 25 times as much variance in reported voting as does visible minority status. The age effect is 25 times as strong as the visible minority effect! But not worth mentioning, according to Reitz and Banerjee, despite the fact that the second generation visible minority sample in the EDS has an average age of 26, compared to 46 for second generation Whites.

Comparing that second generation visible minority sample to a similarly-aged second generation White sample reduces the reported voting gap to 6%. Yet Reitz and Banerjee, by citing the 20% number and saying that the effect of visible minority status remains significant when age is controlled, without providing any information about how much of that 20% is due to age, leave their readers thinking that most, if not all, of that difference is due to visible minority status.

The main finding of the Reitz and Banerjee regression analysis of reported voting is that kids do not vote: age is easily the most important factor according to the regression results. But that result is not even mentioned. Why? And why not show what the percentage difference is when age is controlled?

Well, one obvious possible reason is that a 6% difference, even if statistically significant, is not near as impressive as a 20% difference. And given a dramatic result describing what looks like an effect of prejudice and discrimination, there is motivation not to look too closely at it. Researchers in the area tend to care very deeply about the issue and want very much to make policymakers and the public realize what a serious problem discrimination is. So, when we get a dramatic result, aside from the normal self-serving desire to find something important, we have this additional, more "noble", motivation that can make us a bit sloppy in our efforts to present data in the fairest and most accurate possible fashion.

Another example is provided by one of the questions circulated for this special issue, which states that, according to the EDS, "65% of visible minority respondents have a perception that racism is prevalent in the workplace." This may be true but certainly cannot be concluded from the EDS.

The EDS question regarding workplace discrimination was only asked of respondents who reported recent experience of unfair treatment, approximately 35% of the visible minority sample. 53% of those respondents reported unfair treatment in the workplace. This provides no basis for saying that 65% of visible minority respondents overall would have said that racism is prevalent in the workplace. Around 20% of all visible minority EDS respondents reported recent unfair treatment in the workplace but, since only 35% of all visible minority respondents were asked about that situation, we really have no idea what the perception of the overall visible minority population would be in this regard.

As well as the obvious costs of inaccuracy, e.g., inefficient resource allocation, there are other dangers of exaggerating discrimination-related results.

First, any discovery of exaggeration can create an impression that discrimination is being exaggerated generally, that researchers in the area are sloppy and agenda-motivated. This will provide arguments against interventions combating discrimination or helping its victims.

A more subtle danger regards exaggerating results which may reflect effects of discrimination, such as the second generation reported voting numbers. Voting is valued, seen as the performance of an important civic duty. Exaggeration of a negative difference in voting behaviour may feed a negative stereotype of visible minorities, as deficient in performing their civic duty.

A third danger is that exaggeration of difference may incline us to overlook similarity.

A Common Psychology

As said earlier, the main result of regression analysis of the reported voting measure is confirmation of the well-known fact that kids don't vote. The more accurate way of describing the second-generation reported voting results is that they show that kids in general vote a lot less than their elders and that this deficit is more pronounced among visible minority youth.

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Kids are problematic from the perspective of societal integration: They do not hatch in a fully integrated form. Rather they take their time growing up and fitting in, creating much agony for parents and other authorities. You could probably even find a book or thirty thousand about youth alienation and rebellion, etc. Maybe even a couple of good ones.

That context, all those factors which operate on youth regardless of ethnocultural characteristics cannot be ignored when addressing the challenges facing a disadvantaged sub-group of youth. The EDS reported voting results show an exacerbation of a general phenomenon. This is not a unique challenge; rather, a slightly greater challenge, more similar than dissimilar to the challenge with regard to getting White kids to vote.

Framing the question in such a comparative fashion, rather than just referring to "exclusion of second-generation ethno-cultural and ethno-racial youth", will make it easier to bring to bear relevant knowledge and strategies derived from the study of youth problems in general.

Related to this, one of the most striking findings of analyses of the EDS is an astonishing consistency across ethnocultural boundaries, in the relations between perceptions of unfair treatment and some other measures. In group after group, across Canada's ethnocultural spectrum, those who report experiencing discrimination or unfair treatment are less trusting of others, feel less of a sense of belonging to larger society, and less satisfaction with life.

This cross-cultural consistency stands as testimony to the fallacy of the racist's assumption that "they" are "different". While the survey cannot conclusively demonstrate that these are effects of discrimination, that is certainly the most plausible explanation of the relations. But even if the causal flow is in the opposite direction in some, or even were it most, cases, the pattern's consistency testifies to a common psychology across cultural boundaries within Canada.

The ethno-cultural or ethno-racial exclusion referred to in the question is actually a matter of degree according to the EDS results, with groups falling under the rubric of visible minorities reporting experience of unfair treatment around three to four times more often, on average. But this is a greater frequency, 30-40% versus 10-20% rates for White groups. There is exclusion of individuals within all these groups, but exclusion of more members of some groups than are excluded in others. And there is evidence that the psychological processes surrounding the experience of discrimination are similar across those ethnocultural boundaries. So, again, there is a pattern suggesting a difference more of degree rather than of nature of the problem.

Further, concern for those who are victimized should not only address the needs of victims if they belong to the groups with the highest per capita rates of victimization. Is the injustice done to a victim of, say, anti-Catholic or anti-Semitic sentiment, of less concern, simply because those forms of prejudice currently may be less prevalent than Islamophobia, for example? That logic would dictate a sole focus on anti-Black discrimination, because the members of Black groups would seem clearly more frequently victims than members of other visible minority groups are, according to the EDS results (e.g., Palmer, 2006b).

The emphasis of research attempting to understand the problem, or policy and programs attempting either to prevent discrimination or to help its victims, will naturally fall on the groups most affected. But that natural emphasis should not be allowed either to impede our understanding, by over-narrowing our theoretical and research focus, or to lead to the injustice of neglecting victims of discrimination who, through no fault of their own, happen to belong to groups that are less often victimized.

Summary

There is little evidence which would justify any approach focusing on the second generation in particular, when addressing the challenges facing visible minority youth. Further, those challenges may be more similar than different from those facing youth in general. While the differences should not be overlooked, overlooking the commonalities might be even more costly to our understanding and ability to meet those challenges.

The EDS results suggest the need to more effectively address the incidence and effects of discrimination, particularly among Black youth but not to the neglect of other communities. The appearance of differences among the youngest age groups taking part in the EDS suggest that policy and programs should have added focus on the period of transition to the workforce but, as well, need an involvement of educational and other institutions that will enable better addressing the effects of discrimination at earlier ages.

Finally, we need to bend over backwards in our attempts to present research results fairly and accurately. Discrimination is an injustice sufficiently vile to obviate any need to exaggerate its incidence

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