

UNDERSTANDING ETHNOCULTURAL
INCLUSION IN 2019: SHOULD WE MOVE
BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL VISIBLE
MINORITY CONCEPT?

3RD ANNUAL FORUM ON MEASURING IDENTITIES

Panel November 22, 2019

Rubin Friedman

IS "VISIBLE MINORITY" A USEFUL TERM?
IN THE PRESENT? DOES IT STILL MAKE SENSE?

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What is the basis of “visible minority”

- First consideration was history of discrimination against various groups in Canada and perception that it is ongoing – to correct historical wrongs and exclusions and monitor evidence of discrimination.
- Treatment of groups as based on hypothesized “visiblity” NOT like “majority”; primarily facial characteristics, hair, degree of melanin, mixed with culture and suspicion of not wanting “to be like US”.
- Other aspects also taken into consideration – Area of origin, existence of self-identification by individuals as members of group NOT like the majority as above, current economic disadvantages

“Visible Minorities”: disparities in education, employment and representation

- When Category of Visible Minority was created, it was understood that origin from specific areas of the world would only be a rough (likely over-) estimate of total.
- Was understood that proportion of non-caucasians in e.g. “West Asian and Arab” or “Latin American” would vary by country and by immigration category, etc.
- But since goal was increased representation and participation and since application depended on self-ID, was not a major concern

WHAT IS THIS PERSON'S ORIGIN?



Critiques of “visible minority” concept - 1

- Many groups discriminated against in history of Canada at different times and for a combination of reasons
- Notion of visible based first on skin colour where relatively less melanin is US and relatively more melanin is NOT US. But degree of melanin varies along a gradient; perception is subjective – Border of US vs. NOT US has shifted over the years
- As per UN definition of racism: any discrimination based on race, colour, [descent](#), or national or [ethnic](#) origin. Also specific references to racism on the basis of religion.

How Canada has changed

- After immigration reforms IN 60'S & 70'S – most new immigrants did not come from Europe or Caucasian Majority countries.
- Special programs allowed specific European groups to enter – refugees, those living in poverty
- Since intro of term, huge increase in refugees and migrants seeking safety mostly from parts of the world with violence and insecurity, some based on political affiliation or religion and religious practices
- Within Canada, rise of negative attitudes to “visible” religions and “traditional” religious beliefs re: LGBTQ, women, abortion

WHAT IS THIS PERSON'S ORIGIN?



Critiques of “visible minority” concept -2

VISIBLE MINORITY OVERGENERALIZED – MISSES GRANULARITY OF ISSUES

1. MISSES DIFFERENCES AMONG VISMINS
2. MISSES SIMILARITIES BETWEEN VISMINS AND NON-VISMINS
3. MAY HARM MOST DISADVANTAGED BY MIXING WITH LESS DISADVANTAGED; MAY MISS GROUP SPECIFIC ISSUES
4. MISSES RAPID CHANGES IN POPULATION OVER DECADES - **RELIGION**

Critiques of “Ethnic Identity” concept

ETHNIC IDENTITY CAN CHANGE RAPIDLY WITH PERCEIVED SOCIAL VALUE/ADVANTAGE/DISADVANTAGE OF PARTICULAR GROUPS AND NATURE/FORMAT OF QUESTIONS

1. “CANADIAN” CAMPAIGN BY SUN NEWS MEDIA
2. ALLOWANCE OF MULTIPLE ORIGIN ANSWERS
3. EXACT FORMULATION OF QUESTION - ORIGIN VS. IDENTITY
4. LISTED VS NON-LISTED OPTIONS (E.G. “JEWISH”)
5. WHAT IS VALIDITY OF USING HISTORICAL DATA GIVEN CONTINUITY ISSUES?

WHAT IS THIS PERSON'S ORIGIN?



ORIGINS OF PERSONS IN PHOTOS? – All me

Age 23

Age 48

Age 71

