

Community-Based Research on Multiculturalism in Practice in a Canadian Context

Project Report

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July, 2020

Introduction

This project report, produced in partnership between Jing Li (Faculty of Education, SFU) and Asmita Lawrence (Culture Chats BC Association), presents findings from a collaborative qualitative study entitled *A community-based ethnography on multiculturalism in practice in a Canadian context*, funded by the Mitacs Accelerate Program and Culture Chats BC Association. The report has three objectives:

- 1) To provide an overview of the research;
- 2) To present findings of the research to the study participants, community members, and other relevant stakeholders
- 3) To contribute to knowledge about multiculturalism in practice.

The objectives and contextual background of the research

The objective of this research project is to examine how multiculturalism is experienced and practised by women from different cultural backgrounds in a Canadian context.

The concept of multiculturalism is well known in Canada as a goal or ideal; but it lacks a common understanding. Bloemraad (2006) describes multiculturalism as a philosophy centered on recognizing, accommodating, and supporting cultural pluralism. According to Murphy (2012), multiculturalism asserts the importance of respecting and accommodating objective cultural differences; but at the same time it also emphasizes the need to address other issues of socio-economic inequality. Ley (2010) refers to Kobayashi (1993) noting that multiculturalism refers in the first stage to the demographic make up of community comprising of multiple cultures. Secondly, the support and celebration of heritage cultures mark multiculturalism. In the third stage multiculturalism promotes active citizenship by fostering cross-cultural understanding, combating discrimination, promoting civic participation and making Canadian institutions more reflective of Canadian diversity. Informed by these and other descriptions, our understanding of multiculturalism has evolved during this study to critically appraise the foundational idea of multiculturalism with respect to newcomers. We aim to examine factors and affinities that support people to thrive together within society.

Multiculturalism was first adopted as an official policy in Canada in 1971. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed on 21st July, 1988. Over the past five decades, Canada has seen a rising number of immigrants from different categories. According to Statistics Canada 2016, the proportion of immigrants in Canada has grown to around 25 percent of the total population in 2016, projected to over 33 percent by 2036. The success of Canada in developing and implementing an effective policy of multiculturalism is widely recognized (Kymlicka, 2012; Sandercock & Brock, 2009). However, there is comparatively limited study of how newcomers experience multiculturalism in practice (Bloemraad, 2006).

Scholars continue to create frameworks and policies to support multiculturalism. Berry (2013b) identifies three components of multiculturalism, including cultural pluralism (the recognition and development of diverse cultures in society), the intercultural interaction (the promotion of intergroup cultural contact along with reduction of barriers to participation and equitable participation in the larger society), along with a common official language. These components are also highlighted by Kymlicka (2012) who reiterates that multicultural policy combines cultural recognition, economic redistribution and political participation.

Banting and Kymlicka (2012) developed the Multiculturalism Policy Index (MCP), which is widely used to track the evolution and implementation of multiculturalism policies. The MCP highlights eight policies particularly from the perspective of immigrant groups. They include, 1) constitutional, legislative or parliamentary affirmation of multiculturalism; 2) adoption of multiculturalism in school curriculum; 3) ethnic representation in media, 4) religious

accommodations and exemptions from dress-codes, 5) allowing dual citizenship; 6) the funding of ethnic group organizations to support cultural activities; 7) the funding of bilingual/mother-tongue education; and 8) affirmative action for disadvantaged immigrant groups. This multifaceted framework of multiculturalism provided a basis in our study for exploring how a group of new immigrant women experience multiculturalism. In this report, we also draw on the concept of “multicultural attitude” (see Arasaratnam, 2013; Colombo, 2015, for more discussions on the socio-psychological effects of multiculturalism) to examine study participants’ perspectives on multiculturalism.

Our research aims to develop insights regarding each of these components of the multicultural policy vis-a-vis practical experiences and also perspectives, understandings and expectations of the study participants – a group of immigrant women writers. Specifically, drawing on interviews with these women writers and narrative/creative writing they created in a community writing workshop setting, we examine multiculturalism as a policy and as an experience. We aim at developing empirical knowledge about factors that influence experiences of multiculturalism and to contribute to the ongoing discussion of multiculturalism as a policy ideal in the Canadian landscape.

Research team

- Jing Li (PhD), *Principal Investigator, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University*

Dr. Jing Li was born and raised in Mainland China and came to Canada to pursue her PhD at Simon Fraser University. Her cross-cultural learning and living experiences ignited her interests in (im)migrants’ life and learning experiences. She led this collaborative community research project in partnership with Culture Chats BC Association.

- Asmita Lawrence (MPhil), *Co-Investigator, Director and Founder of Culture Chats BC Association*

Asmita Lawrence is Founder and Director of Culture Chats BC Association. Her work at Culture Chats has provided her with practical insights into multicultural community engagement. This research was initiated directly as a result of some of her on-the-ground programming experiences and grassroots learning. Asmita coordinated the research project and participated in the data collection and analysis process to support her co-researcher and academic partner Jing.

- Advisor: Suzanne Smyth (PhD), *Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University*

Culture Chats BC Association (Culture Chats)

Culture Chats is a not-for-profit community-based association promoting community connections through engagement with literary and other arts. As a registered not for profit in BC, Culture Chats offers a writing program for adults, craft camps for children and performing arts workshops. Culture Chats participates in various local cultural festivals and organizes a flagship community multicultural event annually showcasing arts and art-based activities by immigrant artists.

Project Time frame: January – June, 2020

Methodology

Context

We drew upon qualitative research methods including interviews, field observation, and written documentation to record the rich accounts of subjective experiences and the process wherein women writers engaged in intercultural communication in a community writing workshop setting. A group of women writers participated in our study who were regular attendants of the Culture Chats writing workshop. The workshop was part of a cultural project organized by Culture Chats from March 2019 till March 2020 with overall participation of 18 women. Eight of these women

participated in this research study which began in January 2020. Participating writers in this workshop engaged with developing effective skills for writing, storytelling, reporting, as well as with intercultural communication. Regular writing sessions were held on a weekly basis with a writing facilitator to scaffold the writing (see Table 1 for discussion topics and writing prompts).

Table 1. Writing activities (January – March, 2020)

	Discussion	Writing prompts
1	Culture & linguistic self-portrait	Creative writing
2	Why write?	Creative writing
3	Multiculturalism	Free writing on the biggest challenges
4	Childhood stories	Exploring personal memories
5	Childhood story sharing	Expressive and fictional writing
6	Fairy tales across cultures	Frog prince
7	Readings and discussion regarding particular cultural values	Share the mythologies from your culture

Participants: Eight women writers participated in this study. Gaining informed consent was an important part of the process. After we clarified the purposes of this research and distributed the consent forms, eight writing workshop participants provided consent. Participation was voluntary, and data collection and reporting were anonymous so that individual participants could not be personally identified.

Observation: During the 7 weekly writing sessions between January and March in 2020, we engaged in a 90-minute session to write, read, and share everyday life stories on a wide range of topics. In addition, women writers and a facilitator hired by Culture Chats spent time engaging in creative writing skills, practising expressive writing and using personal memories to create fiction and content creation with the help of writing prompts. Participants also created content at home and shared as part of the project. We attended the weekly workshops, observing the processes of women writers engaging with the writing and discussion, interacting with the women and facilitator, and participating in writing activities.

- *Field notes*
- *People: Women writers and the researchers*
- *Focus: Writing sessions; interaction among the participants; insights into multicultural discourses in participants' writing and discussion.*
- *Length: 90 minutes/session.*

Interviews: We carried out semi-structured interviews with each of the eight participants. Participating women were asked questions around the themes including their perceptions of multiculturalism, integration experiences and practices in daily life, their vision of living together in intercultural communities, and how they identified themselves with their own and new hosting cultures. These interviews occurred on a one-on-one basis so participants' responses were free of peer influence. The interviews were recorded for transcription. Transcription enabled coding of themes of responses.

- *One-on-one interviews*
- *Participants: 8 workshop women writers.*
- *Focus: Perceptions and everyday experiences/practices of multiculturalism.*
- *Length: Between 40 minutes and 1 hour.*
- *The MCP index (Banting & Kymlicka, 2012) provided a guideline for our interview questions. These were framed more as open-ended themes or topics of discussion for the interview sessions.*

Places: Vancity Community Room & Burnaby Neighbourhood House

Time: January 25 – March 14, 2020

Findings

1. A multicultural and multilingual writing group

Women writers¹ come from different parts of the world with cultural and linguistic diversity. During the first writing session, women writers were invited to draw a linguistic and cultural self-portrait (see Figure 1) that reflected the linguistic and cultural resources they possessed, the language(s) they spoke, and the different languages and cultures that played a role in their everyday life. Then they each talked about their self-portraits, sharing with us their feelings and relationship with the different languages and cultures. This art-based activity was inspired by Prasad's (2013) arts-informed research tools. It provided an opportunity for women writers to engage in the discussion on their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and multilingual experiences and practices.

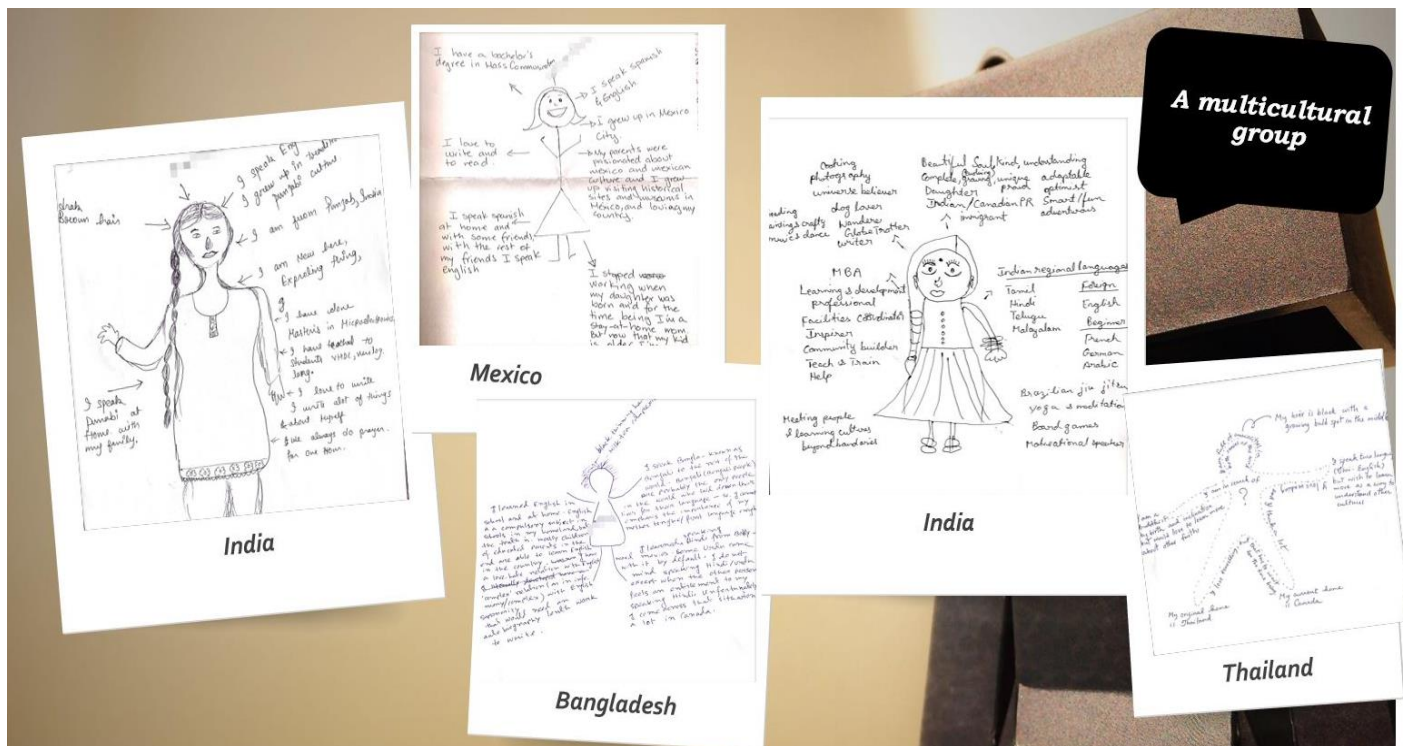


Figure 1. Linguistic and cultural self-portraits

2. Perspectives on multiculturalism

Endorsement of multiculturalism

Perspectives on multiculturalism is an important indicator in everyday predictions and explanations of peoples' action in multicultural discourses. To examine women writers' perspectives on multiculturalism, we draw on Van de Vijver, Breugelmans, and Schalk-Soekar's (2008) definition of multicultural attitudes which is referred to as "the acceptance of, and support for, the culturally heterogeneous composition of the population of a society" (p. 93).

In the interviews, women writers were asked about their understanding of multiculturalism and vision of 'living together' in intercultural communities. The questions solicited responses about the desirability of multiculturalism in the context of Canadian multicultural nation-building. The participating women spoke in epistemic terms about their views on multiculturalism and how they felt about living with cultural and ethnic diversity. A general trend of their responses

¹ To ensure participating women's anonymity, we randomly assigned a number to each woman (e.g., Writer-1) when quoting them.

indicated an “endorsement of multiculturalism” (Colombo, 2015, p. 814), suggesting an overall positive and preferable orientation toward Canada’s multicultural policy. The women demonstrated an appreciation for the diverse cultural and ethnic landscape in Canada and thought positively about the constructive role of a multicultural ideology in fostering intercultural respect, cultural tolerance, and harmonious communication. For example, one woman noted that “with Vancouver, it’s like there are so many immigrants, so many different people and cultures. So that makes people here to be more understanding and more tolerant to differences.” Relevant interview excerpts are presented below to show how the concept of multiculturalism was taken up with respect to the broader ideological environment.

Writer-1:

It is even better here [in Canada], I think. Here you have more freedom to follow what you want and it is respected [...]. So all these cultures, ideas and ideologies can interact, mingled together. Canada is one of the best examples that we can do it [...].

People from different cultures, backgrounds interact harmoniously together. This is what we call harmoniously interacting [...].

Writer-2:

In Vancouver, it’s like there are so many immigrants, so many different people and cultures. So that makes people here to be more understanding and more tolerant to differences.

So one of the assets of having so many cultures in Canada is that you have people speak different languages [...]. It becomes an asset for the country.

As shown above, most women were new to Canada with different cultural backgrounds. There were individual differences in terms of ages, personality traits, religious beliefs, educational backgrounds, and experiences of multiculturalism. Some women grew up in, or had previously been exposed to, multicultural environments; others came with limited experience of cultural diversity in their home countries. All these factors no doubt informed and impacted their social perspectives and attitudes toward multiculturalism, and thus were tied to different levels of endorsement of multiculturalism. Those with supportive views toward a multicultural society seemed to have upbringing and previous life experiences (Arasaratnam, 2013) in globalized societies. For example, Writer -1 grew up in an ethnic Korean family in Uzbekistan, a multicultural country where more than 100 nationalities co-exist. She described herself as “a product of globalization.” Extensive exposure to and familiarity with cultural diversity contributed to her endorsement for ethnic and cultural diversity in Canada. She explained:

Writer-1:

I was growing up in a multinational society. So multiculturalism is not new for me. I am used to it [...]. Among my friends, I have friends from many nationalities, cultures, different backgrounds.

We absorb all these differences. At the same time, we preserve our own identities. I think it is important. But when I came to Canada, I found Canada is even more progressive, even more people from more countries. It really enriched myself in terms of my knowledge, view and perception.

Although we cannot make claims in our small sample that there is a positive relationship between a positive view of multiculturalism and experience living in diverse societies, we nevertheless note this pattern in our study. Perspectives, as previously stated, can function as predictions and explanations of people’s action in multicultural discourses. In other

words, supportive perspectives can shape and affect acts and practices one employs in everyday multicultural life. Writer-1 said that engaging as a member in the pluralist immigrant society in Canada has changed her to be more “tolerant,” “humble,” and to “erase arrogance.” In the interviews with these women, adjustment, compromise, and mutual respect were mentioned as a useful mindset when living with cultural differences. For example:

Writer-4:

We have our own needs. We need to have mutual understanding and respect of each other's needs. Then we can better communicate.

Writer-2:

Every person is different. You can't expect that you and me are the same. And the same happens to cultures. Cultures are different. I mean, it doesn't mean it's bad, right? Or I have to change my culture to your culture. It just means that I have to adapt [...]. We can't be so stubborn and say oh this is my culture [...]. There is something you'll have to compromise, right?

Despite recognizing the importance of change, compromise, and mutual accommodation for full participation in the larger society, the conception of multiculturalism constructed by women also involved the rights of individuals to retain cultural and language practices of their own choice. Four women explicitly emphasized that integration into multiculturalism should still involve retaining elements of their own heritage culture. Similar points made by other women include:

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- *Multiculturalism recognizes people's freedom to preserve identity, cultures, religion.*
 - *It's like every community should be able to retain their cultural identity.*
 - *Multiculturalism allows us to retain one's culture.*
 - *There is something you'll have to compromise, right? And that doesn't mean that you have to get rid of your culture and let your culture go.*
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Furthermore, how women writers claimed to understand and feel about multiculturalism was tied to how they structured their sense of self, or their sense of their roots and of where they came from. Their perspectives reflected an expression of their own culture and ethnic identity. In particular, for these women writers, as a female immigrant and non-dominant group member, understanding and living with multiculturalism was also about (re)constructing identity and visibility through negotiation, compromise and mutual accommodation, while maintaining their sense of self. As one woman said, living alongside with multiculturalism was about “making yourself heard, whatever your gender, cultural backgrounds, and experiences are.”

Perspectives on language maintenance

Participating women represented a multilingual group and spoke English as an additional language. Most women viewed their heritage languages and cultures as an asset. All women supported the importance of learning the official languages as a basis for “full and equitable participation” (Berry, 2013b, p. 664) in Canadian society. They also stressed the importance of supporting heritage languages of immigrants as additional languages alongside the official languages.

Writer-2:

It would be good if the Government puts more funding into language studies. If citizens have dual language skills, then they can be an asset. This could be one advantage of welcoming so many people with different cultures and languages into the country. For e.g. the NAFTA agreement [...] you have this asset [...]. English will be the common denominator.

In Canada, multicultural policy has contributed to a high degree of cultural and linguistic diversity and such diversity is further promoted “in local communities through a network of ‘home language’ programs” (Fox, 2015, p. 3). One indicator used to build the MCP Index (Banting & Kymlicka, 2012) is the funding of ethnic group organizations and that of bilingual or heritage language instruction. This resonated with the independent inputs of the participants who referred to the same. For example, woman writer-2 told us she insisted that her daughter spoke Spanish, their heritage language, with her at home. “I think it is important for her to speak different languages,” she emphasized. She also told us how she tried to create opportunities for her daughter to maintain her own heritage language and culture, saying, “I try to go once a year to Mexico during the holidays and stay there for a month. She stayed there like for a month. She was forced to speak Spanish if she wanted to play with other kids.”

3. Cultural pluralism

The cultural component of Multiculturalism Policy (Berry, 2013b) advocates maintenance and development of heritage cultures. Berry (2013a) describes the ‘larger society’ that accommodates the interests and needs of numerous cultural groups which are fully incorporated as ethnocultural groups rather than minorities. Kymlicka (2012) elaborates that familiar cultural markers of ethnic groups such as clothing, cuisine and music are treated as authentic practices and preserved. Kymlicka (2012) also emphasizes that this recognition is necessary but not sufficient for successful multiculturalism. Berry (2013a) states that the multicultural view is that cultural pluralism is a resource, and inclusiveness should be nurtured with supportive policies and programmes. The interviews with women writers reflected their desire to maintain their own cultures and the appreciation of living in a pluralistic society, enabled by cultural diversity in Canada.

Writer-2:

It is hard to find a Canadian here who has been living here for many generations. There are so many different cultures in Vancouver.

Writer-6:

I think the open mindedness of the policy or the willingness to start to learn about different cultures – it is not one dominant ethnic group or culture that is super imposed on others.

One woman also referred to the cultural expectation in her ethnic community to show respect to colleagues at work who were older in age as the basis of their working relationship. It indicated that there are opportunities for ethnocultural groups to maintain their practices and on occasion the younger generations were indicating some degree of acculturation (Sam & Berry, 2016) to align with others in the larger dominant society.

Writer-3:

One of the challenges is having to deal with the generation gap. I am the youngest and my co-workers are from Philippines but they think that I am a junior and I should show more respect to maintain a harmonious relationship.

4. Economic integration

Watson (2016) discusses the paradox of the acceptance of multiculturalism as a Canadian icon without engaging with the entrenched inequalities. The lack of professional satisfaction and of social capital to achieve success are recurrent themes in many studies on resettlement (e.g., Nakhaie & Kazemipur, 2013; George, Selimos, & Ku 2017). The Metropolis Research Program² on immigrant integration published research on the challenges of economic integration into the labour

² Available at <https://ccrweb.ca/en/res/metropolis-research-program>

market. For example, Drolet, Yan and Francis (2012) identified eight factors affecting settlement, which include the impact of social capital and networks; employment opportunities; language skills; income and type of occupation; geographic location and type of neighbourhood; renegotiation of roles within the family; perceptions of the ‘host community’ and availability of support services. These are all references that highlight the importance of economic integration. Equal opportunity is included as an important component of multiculturalism policy (Kymlicka, 2012).

Similar experiences were shared by these women in this study. Equitable participation in the labour market was their primary concern and almost all mentioned that it was the greatest challenge they faced and continued to face. One woman, who was working with CRA in a temporary position the time when interviewed, found it very difficult to get full time permanent job. Another woman, who was trained as a medical lab assistant, did not land a job and told us she was working in the retail sector instead. Even if they successfully secured a job, it would not be “a prestigious job” or a job that related to their degrees. Writer-5 stated, “Was finding it very hard to get a job in my own field – employers do not trust me – I have different thoughts than native Canadians. It is also difficult for me to choose a different field.” She wrote about her frustration during one writing session:

**Writing from
Writer-- 5**

[...] But when I tried to look for jobs, it was so hard for me. it was difficult to think how to approach employers. Employers prefer Candidates with Canadian experiences. When I go to Work BC, the facilitator told me to do volunteer. For me it was so difficult to accept the volunteering because I thought I have done my masters in Engineering [...]. So I haven't applied for volunteer [...]. Sometimes I got phone calls for interview. But even my interview went well no one calls me. I started doing follow-ups even then there is no response. Then I thought maybe I didn't know the proper professional dress. I ask to my facilitator at Options. She told me about the professional dress. Even then I was unable to get the job. Then I tried to make my resume more updated. It was so difficult for me to change resume for each job. It takes too much time. I got to know about the cover letter, which no one asks in my country. I tried to write cover letters too. I put so much effort. I feel like depressed sometimes I start crying. I cry too much in those months [...].

Our study showed that economic participation and finding employment opportunities was the greatest challenge for the participants more so than maintaining their culture or enhancing intercultural interactions. Most women were very appreciative of the settlement and employment service providers and the government funding that drives these programs. Work BC and S.U.C.C.E.S.S. in Burnaby were mentioned. In another instance, a woman joined a program by YWCA, which provided training such as how to write a resume and cover letter and how to communicate with employers. Another woman described the numerous supports received by her local community center at the South Vancouver Neighbourhood House. All of them attested to the benefits and need of such affirmative actions to overcome barriers to employment which is a key element of the MCP index. Despite the challenges they encountered, the women we interviewed built their pathway to employment and social capital through the process of “occupational repositioning” (Shan, 2009), such as re-training, re-education, and volunteerism. These re-learning experiences helped them gain “Canadian work experiences” and reposition themselves in the job market and in society.

Berry (2013b) refers to Fleras (2009), describing a gradual and ongoing shift in the focus of multiculturalism policy from ‘ethnicity multiculturalism’ (focused on cultural diversity) to ‘equity multiculturalism’ (focused on equitable participation) to ‘civic multiculturalism’ (focussed on society building and inclusiveness) and finally to integrative multiculturalism (focussed on identification with Canada, and full incorporation into the larger Canadian society).

These women indicated a similar evolution in their focus on the various aspects of multiculturalism. Based on their success in the development of social capital and employment opportunities their focus then shifted from equity multiculturalism to civic multiculturalism and finally to integrative multiculturalism.

5. Intercultural interactions

Multiculturalism as a policy aims to not only support independent cultural communities but also to promote intercultural contact and to reduce barriers to equitable participation in the larger society. Berry (2013a) states that “intercultural relations become a focus of public and private concern” (p. 1123) in the formation of today’s culturally, ethnically and religiously plural societies. However, our findings indicate limited opportunities for cross-cultural interaction. When asked about specific challenges in social integration, one woman’s initial response was “I never tried to integrate.” She also expressed reluctance to get to know neighbours. She did not particularly enjoy the company of other members from her own ethnocultural community either. Her comments suggest that newcomers don’t always choose to be part of ethnocultural communities:

Writer-7:

One of the things I do not appreciate about the culture of Bangladeshi immigrants who are here: They throw lavish dinner parties where you are supposed to present yourself well. Married women wear jewelry, makeup and unmarried women do not wear any ornaments. People said to me you do not look married. So instead I mingle with my community on Facebook.

Another woman from Punjab, India shared a similar experience. Despite living in a neighbourhood where many people of her own community also resided, she said, “I have not made friends yet – In India we talk everyday – neighbours live close to each other.” Similar ideas of being “hard to find friends” were shared by other women as well. One woman said that she volunteered at a hospital nearby and offered a discourse over Buddhism. That was one of the few avenues she had to meet with other people.

The Connections and Engage Report (2012, 2017)³ released by the Vancouver Foundation reiterates the challenges of isolation and lack of connections with neighbours. We found challenges of similar sorts were commonly experienced by these women too. In general, they indicated there had few avenues to interact with people across different cultures. What appears to cause these challenges of isolation include a lack of sufficient common threads, cultural references, and communication opportunities. Another factor that causes isolation is some women’s role as the primary carer of their children in the family.

The response of the women provides a very nuanced understanding of the benefits and limits of intercultural interaction owing to their lived everyday experiences. In the words of one participant woman, multiculturalism represented “recognition of people’s identity, ancestry, respect of people’s values, interacting harmoniously together.” She also expressed the idea of coexistence, living together in an inclusive society. But she stressed that she was always careful “I take care not to offend anyone. If I want people to respect my culture then I should respect theirs.” Regarding the level of co-existence, however, she mentioned, “we should think of limits here as with coexistence there are certain accommodations and compromises” She thought it would be better to “maintain a respectful distance – you cannot get closer unless you have something in common.”

³ The 2012 Report is available at <https://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/about-us/publications/connections-and-engagement-reports/connections-engagement-report-2012>

The 2017 Report is available at <https://www.vancouverfoundation.ca/about-us/publications/connections-and-engagement-reports/connect-engage-2017-report>

The women's observations showed that they were open-minded and embraced intercultural interaction; but the lack of cultural references, a shared language or shared religion were barriers. Lack of opportunities to interact further with people from different cultures to develop common threads was another barrier. As a result, some of them chose to "maintain a respectful distance," while still supporting good intercultural communication and mutual respect of each other's cultures.

6. Civic participation

Bloemraad (2011) relates the consequences of multiculturalism to stronger immigrants' civic and political integration. The MCP Index assesses measures such as legislative or parliamentary affirmation of multiculturalism, ethnic representation in media to facilitate the civic and political participation of immigrant communities. In this study, we found that even though the majority of the participants were new to Canada, they all expressed a deep attachment to the country. Overall, the views of the participants and their expectations regarding political participation aligned with the policy and the measures included in the index that would indicate successful multiculturalism. For example, when responding to the question "Do you feel connected to Canada," some women replied:

Writer-1: *Yes, [I] feel a sense of belonging. I went to Atlanta on a business trip. We were standing for the national anthem of Canada. It was pleasant. I felt it deeply. The world likes Canadians. Something special about Vancouver, Canada.*

Writer-5 *Yes, I see Indians in the media and in politics.*

Writer-6 *When I cross the border, I can feel a vibration/negative energy of anger. I feel so relieved when I return to Canada – one of the borders that humanity should study and apply to their countries.*

7. A framework of key factors impacting the participant women's multicultural experiences

Table 2 (below) illustrates the components of multiculturalism as defined in the literature, and women's experiences of these components.

Table 2 A Framework of key factors impacting the participants' multicultural experiences

Components of multiculturalism	Participant Responses	Example Statements
Perspectives on Multiculturalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appreciation and acceptance of multiculturalism with endorsement; Recognition of change, compromise and mutual accommodation. 	<p>- I like the definition of multiculturalism I read in political science that it is a state's capacity to efficiently deal with cultural plurality.</p> <p>- There are so many different cultures in Vancouver [...]. It becomes an asset for the country.</p> <p>- You adapt to different cultures.</p> <p>- [...] like all cultures are like strands of hair, but when you comb it, it became straight and looks better.</p>
Official & Heritage Languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement with <i>both</i> languages: learning the official languages & maintaining heritage languages 	<p>- English is the common language.... When you speak your own language, it is an asset.</p> <p>- At the same time, we preserve our own identity and language. It's important.</p>
Cultural Pluralism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognition of the importance of heritage cultural maintenance; Appreciation of cultural maintenance and development across ethnic groups. 	<p>- Multiculturalism is a built-in spectrum of different heritages that people throughout the generations have discovered and passed on – it is open, not closed ... there are a multitude of possibilities.</p>
Economic Integration	<p><i>Barriers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of opportunities in the labour market; Lack of "Canadian work experiences"; Lack of recognition of foreign credentials or education. 	<p>- It is difficult for a foreigner to find a job.</p> <p>- It's better if I study something in technical university like BCIT. I think it's easier for people to see that you have some studies in Canada.</p> <p>- [The job] is totally different from my field. In India, I have a Master's in engineering.</p>
	<p><i>Enablers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Settlement and employment services; community-based programs; Need for more relevant and consistent service support. 	<p>- I'm amazed at how they [Work BC] work with immigrants.</p> <p>- The training they [YWCA] provided were very, very generic.</p>
Intercultural Interaction	<p><i>Barriers</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of cultural references; Lack of sufficient common threads; Lack of sufficient communication avenues; Language issues; Less interest in intercultural contact. 	<p>- You cannot get closer unless you have something in common.</p> <p>- I'm still learning some people's cultures.</p> <p>- It is hard to find friends.</p> <p>- I feel I should increase and improve my English. Sometimes it is really difficult for me when some Canadian people speak [English].</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong sense of belonging and citizenship. 	<p>- Yes, [I] feel a sense of belonging.</p> <p>- A group of elementary school students sang the Canadian anthem in one of the First Nations languages.</p> <p>- In order to be really part of the community, you have to give time.</p>

Summary and Conclusion

In this report, we present the findings of a qualitative study of a group of immigrant women writers' multicultural perceptions and experiences. Our research referenced existing literature about the components of multicultural policy and about multiculturalism as an attitude to record the participants' everyday multicultural experiences (as shown in Table 2). These include perspectives on multiculturalism and experiences related to language maintenance, cultural pluralism, economic integration, intercultural interaction, and civic participation. The report reveals how these women felt about multiculturalism, the barriers they encountered in the labour market and in intercultural interaction, and pathways they took to navigate the challenges for fuller integration in the multicultural society in Canada.

As indicated in the findings, the women voice a multicultural understanding that holds that cultural diversity is good for the society as a whole and its individual members. However, as newcomers experiencing socio-cultural transitions, they have to deal with multiple barriers to actually *living* multiculturalism. These include challenges to enter the labour market and inadequate opportunities for intercultural interaction and social networks. A practical issue that prevents these women's entry into the local labour market is said to be a lack of Canadian work experiences. In addition, de-valuation or un-recognition of their foreign credentials earned in other countries is another issue that impedes their economic integration. As shown in our findings, despite the fact that the majority of the women interviewed are highly educated professionals and have bachelor and/or master's degrees from their home country, they reported to experience the inaccessibility to satisfying professional occupation here in Canada. Apparently, there is a "discrepancy between discourses of immigration and multiculturalism on the one hand, and labor market practices on the other" (Sandercock & Attili, 2009).

On the other hand, we see these women actively engaged in "occupational repositioning" (Shan, 2009) – through re-education, re-training, or volunteering – and sought assistance from immigrant-serving and training organizations and resettlement and integration programs in order to acquire new skills and knowledge, gain Canadian work experiences and build their pathway to employment. In the meantime, through their participation in various community-based programs and organizations, these women reported to form informal networks of friends. Some women described awareness of many advantages provided by Canadian immigrant services and community-based programs to enable immigrants' integration and resettlement, but said they received either inadequate time or information as needed to navigate through these service assistances.

In short, the study suggests that the challenges and needs of immigrant integration are complex and multifaceted. They go far beyond the need for settlement services, to include the need for local and national multicultural-oriented policies and programs that counter gender and race discrimination. Partnerships that promote equity and create community platforms and spaces for arts-based and writing-based learning are also needed.

During the interviews and workshops, there were ample opportunities to learn about the daily lives of the participating women. Their active inputs on all the topics discussed at the workshops also enriched the findings of this study. It would be recommended to conduct further ethnographic research to gain deeper insight into experiences of intercultural interaction, and the promise of writing workshops as a context for these conversations. A potential limitation of the present research is the relatively limited scope and duration which did not allow for observations of changes over time in women's experiences, nor to deepen interpretations that prolonged participant-observation might afford. Further research could extend the scope and also invite the participating women for greater collaboration within the research. The participating women in this study, however, did provide access to their collection of writings created in the project which offers a further rich insight into their experiences of everyday multiculturalism, and opportunities for further research.

Acknowledgement

This work was supported by Mitacs through the Mitacs Accelerate Program. We also would like to thank the project advisor Dr. Suzanne Smythe for her advice and support at different stages of the study.

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