

JUST SIX  
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH  
SUMMARY



## “The Real Toronto”: Black Youth Experiences and the Narration of the Multicultural City

### Key Details

#### KEY WORDS

Black Youth; Toronto;  
Multiculturalism; Canada

#### POPULATION GROUP

Racialized Youth; Newcomer Youth;  
Youth Workers

#### STEPPING UP THEMES

Strong, Supportive Friends & Families  
Diversity, Social Inclusion & Safety  
Civic Engagement & Youth Leadership  
Coordinated & Youth Friendly  
Communities

#### RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

#### SOURCE

Academic

**“Youth name their own vulnerabilities and challenge us as Canadians to move from behind the veil of racial and class assumptions, and the colour-blind discourse of multiculturalism to engage honestly with the experiences that mark their differential location in Canadian society” (p. 743).**

### 1. What is the research about?

This article looked back at more than 45 years of official multicultural policy in Canada. It studied the experiences of Black male youth in Toronto and the ways in which race, class, age and gender intersect to alienate them from full access to educational and employment opportunities. The article argues that the marginalization of urban Black male youth destabilizes or directly challenges dominant views and perceptions of Canadian society. Black youth are routinely criminalized, pathologized and denied access to upward mobility. In short, they don't have access to the better life promised in Canada's multicultural democracy.

### 2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place in Toronto - Canada's most diverse city. Canada is framed as a multicultural democracy.

### 3. Who is this research about?

The article looks at the experiences of poor, Black male youth in Toronto. It centres the voices and perspectives of these youth, drawing on *The Real Toronto* - a documentary made by a Toronto filmmaker in 2005, during what was known as the 'Summer of the Gun'. Additionally, the article explored findings from a three-year transnational study of the effects of violence on Black youth in Canada and Jamaica, collected eight years later in 2013.

### 4. How was the research done?

The findings used in this article were taken from two all-male focus groups with 24 participants in total, between the ages of 18-24. Participants were asked to reflect on what it means to grow up in the city. The focus groups gave youth space to explore marginalization, using questions as prompts for discussion. The research approach is qualitative.

### 5. What are the key findings?

Several findings emerged from the article:

**a) The marginalization of Black youth troubles or unsettles the idea of Canada's multicultural democracy.**

The segregation and marginalization of certain groups, including Black youth, challenges dominant notions about Canada and the “Canadian dream” (p. 728). The Canadian dream is not accessible for all.

**b) Difference is heavily managed in Canada.**

While the Canadian state does not erase difference, it does attempt to “institutionalize, constitute, shape, manage and control difference” (p. 730). Individuals who do not conform to dominant expectations are marginalized.

**c) Multiculturalism has failed to challenge the power and privilege of whiteness in Canada.**

Multiculturalism creates a cultural hierarchy which privileges whiteness and depoliticizes the issue of racism in Canada. This makes it difficult to meaningfully explore issues of systematic racial discrimination and exclusion. In fact, the policy of multiculturalism makes invisible the ways in which race and discrimination inform cultural values that are afforded higher worth in Canada.

**d) Black youth’s lived experiences are undervalued.**

As opposed to promoting meaningful appreciation of plurality, multiculturalism in Canada encourages uniformity. It severely limits what is tolerated and celebrated. The inability or refusal to conform to dominant expectations leads to Black youth’s cultural perspectives being rendered illegible, invisibilized and dismissed.

**e) Associations between Black masculinity and violence are harmful to Black youth.**

The reduction of Black males to series of stereotypes leads to Black youth being seen as pathologically criminal. This can lead to the legitimization of harmful policies towards Black youth.

**f) The emphasis on individual-focused approaches harms Black youth.**

Dominant narratives put primary responsibility for social problems on individuals rather than exploring how living in racist and class-based societies drive disparities.

**g) Confinement of Black youth within geographical regions leads to negative impacts.**

Black youth’s containment within specific marked communities in urban settings strips them of social citizenship rights and limits their access to full economic participation and consumption.

**h) Modelling and Mentorship can be transformative.**

Both approaches can be critical tools which help youth to imagine and enact alternative possibilities for themselves.

**6. Why does it matter for youth work?**

This article explored the impact of identity and social location in determining outcomes for youth in Canada. The article argues that Black male youth experience marginalization specifically because of difference. The author draws on the work of multiple scholars and thinkers to argue that difference should not be used as a tool to guide separation and marginalization. This article can help youth workers to understand contextual factors affecting Black male youth in urban settings in Canada. Additionally, the findings in the article can act as guides helping youth workers to develop strategies to address marginalization and exclusion.



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