



Background

The scholarly community generally agrees that race is a modern phenomenon. Ancient western civilizations, such as the Greeks and Romans, did not use discrete racial categories as a way to classify human beings. For example, it was believed that Aristotle's well-known division between Greeks and Barbarians was not made on biological race, but on a pragmatic distinction between those who politically organize into city-states (Greeks) and those who do not (Barbarians) (James, 2011).

Our concept of race is an overwhelmingly social creation. There is little to no biological basis supporting distinct races (Racism Free Edmonton, 2012; Angier, 2000; Ossorio, Unk.). In fact, the results of ranking people in terms of intelligence and morality can reasonably be explained by social and cultural factors; not biology or race (Ossorio, Unk.). Indeed, 23 per cent of those living in Canada incorrectly believe that some "races" are genetically smarter than others" (Racism Free Edmonton, 2012).

Racism is a set of beliefs, attitudes and behaviours which assert that one race is superior to another in terms of intelligence, morality or culture; based on the colour of their skin or other physical characteristics (Racism Free Edmonton, 2012).

Racism can exist in different forms. Three common ways to characterize racism include institutionalized racism, personally-mediated racism and internalized racism:

- Institutionalized racism focuses on societal structures (i.e. educational, legal, and governmental). This form of racism exists when race determines the extent of a person's access to societal goods, services and opportunities and is often manifest as inaction in the face of need.
- Personally-mediated racism is characterized by prejudice and discrimination. Prejudice occurs when an individual makes assumptions about a person's abilities, motives or intent because of their race. Discrimination, on the other

hand, focuses on treating others differently because of their race.

- Internalized racism occurs when individuals experiencing stigmatization accept negative claims about their abilities and self-worth (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010; Jones, 2000).

Canada

In Canada, we often think that racial discrimination is obvious and overt, like a scrawled slur on a wall, but that is not necessarily the case. Sue et al (2007) describe what they call microaggressions: "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults." This is the reality of much racial discrimination in Canada. When a person talks to someone from another cultural or ethnic background in a way that makes them feel like aliens in their own lands or criticizes communication styles of people from cultures that are different from their own (i.e., assuming that 'they' should talk and interact 'like us'), we discriminate. When we assume that people of a certain background are less intelligent or well-spoken than others, we discriminate. Words like these chip away at a person's self-esteem and social and cultural identity. We can, however, combat this in one small-scale but concrete way. We can reflect on and be conscious of what we think, do, and say, and remember just how powerful our words can be.

- In 2006, 20 per cent of Canadians were born in another country (Statistics Canada, 2006).
- A survey conducted by Statistics Canada on the country's ethno-cultural mosaic found that 24 per cent of visible minorities in Canada aged 15 years and older reported feeling out of place or uncomfortable because of their ethno-cultural characteristics some, most, or all of the time. [Note that 'visible minority' does not reflect Aboriginal populations.] (Statistics Canada, 2003).
- The same survey estimated that up to 35 per cent of visible minorities over the age of 15 have at some point in the last 5 years experienced discrimination based on ethnicity, culture, race, skin colour, language, accent, or religion. The most common place for this to occur was at work or when applying for work (Statistics Canada, 2003).

On top of the social and moral consequences of racism in Canada, it also leads to social and economic inequalities. In Canada, members of racialized groups earn 28 per cent less than whites (Racism Free Edmonton, 2012).

Edmonton

A cooperative effort between the City of Edmonton and a variety of Edmonton based organizations to eradicate racism and promote a healthy inclusive community led to the collaborative group 'Racism Free Edmonton'.

In June 2012, Racism Free Edmonton published results from a survey of Edmonton residents' experience and perceptions of discrimination. According to the findings, the majority of survey participants consider Edmonton to be a very welcoming place to live and believe that diversity improves life in the city. Nevertheless, survey responses felt that race-related discrimination remains a significant issue in the city. In their assessment of what others were experiencing, 59 per cent of respondents agreed that aboriginal residents often experience discrimination, while 36 per cent of respondents felt that non-white residents face racism frequently. In contrast, only 12 per cent of respondents agreed that white residents were subject to discrimination on a regular basis (Racism Free Edmonton, 2012).

In Edmonton, "Aboriginal and non-White residents are more often perceived to be treated unfairly by the police, when looking for jobs or housing, and when shopping." (Racism Free Edmonton, 2012).

The percentages differed when compared to self-assessed experiences of racism. Aboriginals, as well as Canadian and foreign-born visible minorities, often report perceptions of discrimination in Edmonton. The percentages of those who reported a personal experience of discrimination within the last year are as follows:

- 36 per cent for Canadian-born visible minorities
- 21 per cent for visible minority immigrants
- 19 per cent for Aboriginals

The authors of the study surmise that the higher rate of reported discrimination among Canadian-born visible minorities is due to their ability to better grasp subtle signs of discrimination. Moreover, Canadian-born visible minorities may be more familiar with Canadian language and culture, and could pick up on covert discrimination more readily than recent immigrants (Krahn and Haluza-Delay, 2011).

Local Resource



Racism Free Edmonton. (2012). *Experiences and Perceptions of Discrimination in Edmonton: A Survey of Edmonton Residents*. Retrieved from http://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/05_17_ReportRFEsurvey_Findings_2012.pdf

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