

RECONCEPTUALIZING INCLUSIVE CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN TORONTO

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Written by

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Abstract

The City of Toronto has become synonymous with themes of culture and diversity. With close to one half of the city's population now comprised of those born outside of Canada, Toronto represents a dynamic and exciting cultural mosaic. Yet, underneath this surface exist real disparities in health and well being for many newcomers and racialized communities. In addition to and because of such disparities, changes in the demographics of Toronto have led to challenges and questions involving the participation of such communities within the formal political realm. Much research to date has focused on issues of representation and the exercise of political franchise within such communities.

As opposed to the formal political realm, the aim of this research is to better understand the substantive participation of newcomers and members of racialized communities in processes of government sponsored citizen participation at the municipal level by asking: what is the ability of this approach to policy making to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices? This question is important because it is decisions in this realm that most immediately impact residents of the city. Additionally, if social policy developers are to keep up with shifts in demographics and create inclusive and responsive policy, then consideration must be given to all community members.

To understand the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to be inclusive of a diverse range of voices, a literature review was conducted. Also, an analysis of the case of the 2000-2001 Community Consultations on Social Development held in Toronto was undertaken. Finally, five interviews were held with policy practitioners within Toronto to gain insight into the ability of practices of government sponsored citizen participation to be inclusive. The findings of this research study highlight that political will and increased funding must be directed towards the purposeful inclusion of newcomers and racialized communities in processes of government sponsored citizen participation so as to foster increased experiences of inclusion and the creation of responsive and effective policies of social development.

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Section One: Introduction

I live in the City of Toronto, a city that is vibrant, full of life, character and culture. At current estimates the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is home to over 5 million people and statistically, it is undeniable that Toronto is a city of incredible cultural diversity. According to the 2006 census, 45.7% of the population of the census metropolitan area (CMA) of Toronto was foreign-born (Statistics Canada, 2006a). Additionally, between 2001 and 2006, of the 1,110,000 immigrants to arrive in Canada, 40.4% of individuals chose to make Toronto their home and 89.1% of these individuals self-identified as belonging to a visible minority (Statistics Canada, 2006a; Statistics Canada, 2006b). Indeed, almost half of those residing in the city of Toronto now identify as being foreign-born and Statistics Canada has confirmed that Toronto is now home to the largest number of visible minorities amongst all metropolitan areas in Canada (2006b).

Consequently, Toronto has been described as a successful experiment in multiculturalism, a tolerant place and as a city in which individuals from multiple cultures live in harmony (Siemiatycki, Rees, Ng & Rahi, 2003, p. 454). The city of Toronto has done little to deny this perception and uses this assessment to its advantage as evidenced through the adoption in 2000 of the newly amalgamated city's motto, "Diversity our Strength." Siemiatycki et al. (2003) observe, "if Toronto resonates at all in the global consciousness, it is as a city where diversity has been fashioned into an urban strength" (p. 454). However, despite being a city of great diversity, Toronto is also a city of great disparity and disadvantage for many foreign born, racialized individuals.

In May of 2000, Michael Ornstein released a detailed report based on 1996 census data that showed Toronto is also home to “pervasive inequality among ethno-racial groups” (p. 131). In his report Ornstein was able to paint a reliable picture of the systemic disadvantage of numerous racialized groups by analyzing the census data to show multiple levels of disadvantage experienced across three socio-economic measures: education, employment and income (Ornstein, 2000, p. i). Although described as an oversimplification by Ornstein (due to the multi-dimensional nature of socio-economic disadvantage experienced within and between communities), the evidence was undeniable and showed that “the characterization of socio-economic polarization in Toronto as a division between a European majority and *a* visible minority community is correct” (p. i). With the help of Ornstein’s report and other prominent campaigns such as *The Colour of Poverty in Ontario*, attention has been called to this racialization of poverty.

As a social worker and advocate working in the area of income support in Southwestern Ontario, the racialization of poverty and disparities in health and well being of many vulnerable and marginalized groups, including newcomers to Canada, was glaringly obvious. I found that I was always left questioning why many individuals continued to live in poverty, struggling unfairly with unresponsive social policies that neglected to adequately meet their needs. After a year of advocacy work I began to notice that a clear pattern appeared amongst the hundreds of cases we were presented with. The individuals who came to meet with us were exhausted in their battle with income support systems that worked to further dehumanize them due to poor policy design, frustrate them due to inconsistent implementation and further silence and oppress them in their struggle

for equality. I felt that this pattern of unresponsive policy was only working to further marginalize these individuals through no fault of their own and this troubled me.

I began to question how things could be improved. I wondered why these individuals were not consulted at any point in the policy process. Not seeking their opinion or lived experience in processes of decision-making involving policy creation, implementation and evaluation seemed counterintuitive to me. I have come to understand that my question speaks to what Dahl refers to as the Principle of Affected Interests, which states, “those who are affected by a policy have a right to participate in its formation and in determining its eventual outcome” (as cited in McKenzie & Wharf, 2010, p. x).

It is this principle and the lived experience of many individuals I have encountered in my advocacy work that have propelled me to investigate processes of government sponsored citizen participation in the City of Toronto. I recognize that my original experiences in advocacy work with newcomers and racialized communities in South Western Ontario may vary widely from the multidimensional and unique realities of such communities in the urban landscape of Toronto (as evidenced in part by the dramatic changes in demographics in the CMA). However, it was these early experiences in South Western Ontario that have acted as the catalyst for larger questions on the subject of government sponsored citizen participation, that regardless of location have at their heart issues of inclusion and responsive and effective policy making.

It is my intention in this thesis to explore processes of government sponsored citizen participation by reviewing the relevant literature on the subject and speaking to

those who have experienced first-hand such processes, so as to better understand the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to be inclusive of diverse voices. I believe specifically focusing my research on the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to be inclusive of newcomers and racialized groups in the City of Toronto is of importance as these communities' voices and needs are often generally excluded from decision making. Additionally, the City of Toronto continues to grow and expand in size and diversity. If social policy developers are to keep up with these shifts in demographics and create policy which is truly inclusive and responsive to the needs of all members of the community, then consideration must be given to difference, opportunities for learning must be drawn from past consultative experiences, and recommendations for citizen participation in future planning must come from a diverse range of voices.

Terms and Definitions

Racialization/Racialized

It is important in this research study to define the term “racialization” and explain my decision to use this term in my work. As a qualitative researcher interested in exploring constructions of social difference as they relate to the ability of individuals to participate in government-sponsored citizen participation, I am wary of the consequences of “categorizing social identities” (Gunaratnam, 2003, p. 30) and giving such limited categorizations meaning and power. Gunaratnam (2003) explains:

Our very concern with naming and examining ‘race’ and ethnicity (often in order to uncover oppressive relations of power), always runs the risk of reproducing ‘race’ and ethnicity as essentialized and deterministic categories that can (re)constitute these very power relations. (p. 32-33).

Gunaratnam refers to this as a “treacherous bind” for researchers and it has been one that I have been challenged by throughout this work.

I believe that to utilize ‘race’ as the only signifier of identity in this research gives this now discredited tool of categorization power (Gunaratnam, 2003). Yet, in this research it is my intent to highlight the experiences of communities that have been pushed to the margins by this very socially constructed form of categorization. Gunaratnam (2003) suggests what she sees to be the best available remedy to this bind (at this time) and implores researchers to adopt a “double-practice” in their work (p. 35). This is accomplished by (1) “challenging and seeking to transform the essentialism of categorical approaches to ‘race’ and ethnicity in research” (p. 35) and (2) honouring the lived experiences of those who have experienced such categorization and connecting this to theory in a critical way to further processes of positive social transformation (p. 35).

Therefore for the purpose of this research study I use the term “racialized” as both a way to identify those who have been categorized based on ‘race’ and as a way to disrupt and challenge such categorization as I understand the process of racialization to mean “the forcible identification of people, solely on the characteristic of skin colour, and without the endorsement of the people in question” (Viswanathan, Shakir, Tang, & Ramos, 2003, p. 8).

Newcomer

For the purpose of this research I have selected to utilize the term ‘newcomer’ to represent those new to Canada who are foreign born. I have selected to utilize the term ‘newcomer’ as opposed to ‘immigrant’ because I believe this term more broadly captures the reality of all of those who are new to Canada, including refugees. Just as Canadian born citizens vary in their educational and economic position so do newcomers and this term should not be assumed to be synonymous with educational and economic marginality.

Government Sponsored Citizen Participation

It is helpful to begin an examination of government sponsored citizen participation by working to define its meaning and use in my research study. Within this work, I view, use and understand this concept to be a general description for any form of citizen participation invited by government. In this sense, when strictly looking at the term, citizen participation acts as an umbrella for forms of participation that can be multi-

dimensional and varied in their design and purpose. I understand such participation to be separate and distinct from traditional electoral processes and to generally focus on the involvement of residents “in making public-policy decisions or in setting strategic directions” (Graham & Phillips, 1998, p. 4) concerning issues of interest to them.

Meaningful Participation

What is the meaning ascribed to participation, what are the actions performed and to what degree do citizens execute influence over the process and outcome? These are all important questions to consider when attempting to define “meaningful participation”. For the purpose of this research study, I understand government sponsored citizen participation to be meaningful when the intent or meaning behind the desire to invite citizens into the policy-making process is transparently shared, citizens are equally and equitably recruited and engaged in a two-way discussion concerning decision-making as partners in this process, and that the ability to exert influence over the process, regardless of the outcome, is real.

Ideally, I feel that meaningful participation should result in some return to the individuals and communities involved, even if that return is as simple as a positive experience leaving those involved feeling like they were genuinely heard to something more purposeful such as the development of greater community capacity. Ultimately, what I believe to be a meaningful experience in participation might differ from the beliefs of others because everyone enters these processes with a variety of declared and undeclared personal interests, needs and desires. Nevertheless, I would like to propose the

above as a framework in an attempt to work towards animating the idea of meaningful participation in this work.

Inclusive Participation

For me, inclusive participation is grounded in concepts of social inclusion in which “the focus is on valued recognition and valued participation by those excluded from full participation in society and the benefits of society” (Saloojee, 2003, p.1) and not on the simple, unquestioned assimilation into processes of participation by such individuals (Viswanathan et al., 2003). Additionally, the underlying purpose of inclusive participation should be to challenge actions that exclude. In this way inclusive participation must be a purposeful and conscious decision on the part of government to open processes of participation to all members of society and value equally all voices as one way to assist in minimizing and ultimately eliminating experiences of exclusion.

Research Question

It is my intent in this research study to closely examine the practice of government sponsored citizen participation at the municipal level. My research interest within the topic of government sponsored citizen participation is quite particular and I have been guided by the following overall research question: what is the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices, especially those of newcomers and racialized communities? To answer this question I intend to explore how well newcomers and members of racialized communities are included in government sponsored citizen participation.

To help in answering these questions I intend to review the current literature on the subject and interview professionals in the field whose work is focused on issues of social policy, inclusion, social justice and community development. Additionally, I will examine a particular case of government sponsored citizen participation within the context of municipal social planning in the City of Toronto during the 2000-2001 Community Consultations on Social Development. This time period presents an excellent opportunity to explore the topic of government sponsored citizen participation and its ability to be inclusive of all voices, as this was a unique phase in the early life of the newly amalgamated City of Toronto in which a diverse range of communities were joining as one, the strategic plan for social development was being formulated and citizen consultation was actively sought.

Section Two: Theoretical Frameworks

Over the course of my graduate studies I have had the opportunity to critically reflect and examine my ontology and epistemology. It is important to comment on these as I see them as being intricately linked to my theoretical frameworks. Strega (2005) describes one's ontology as being their worldview (p. 201). I understand my worldview to be one that is grounded in issues of social justice. I believe that many groups in society are unfairly disadvantaged by societal structures set up to exclude and discriminate. I strongly believe that one's race, country of origin, heritage as a member of a First Nation, gender, ability, sexual orientation and age should have no effect on one's status in society or the quality of one's life and that anything less is blatant discrimination, perpetuation of inequality and continuation of the status quo.

Strega (2005) states that, "the world view of the researcher shapes the research project at every level because it shapes a researcher's epistemological foundation" (p. 201). There is no escaping the presence of my ontology and its effect on my epistemology in this work and it is important to remain transparent about their presence in my writing and my inability to claim complete objectivity as a researcher. Therefore, considering my worldview, my epistemology (or understanding of how knowledge is created) is very much focused on learning from and honouring the lived experiences of others who are often silenced due to marginalization and oppression. I believe that this learning can occur via dialogue and that this dialogic method can uncover truths about the world, which can lead to the changing of oppressive realities.

Considering both my ontology and epistemology I find that I most closely align

with the critical social science theoretical framework. According to Kreuger and Neuman (2006) this framework is most concerned with “revealing the underlying sources of social relations and empowering people, especially less powerful people” (p. 83). I am particularly drawn to this theoretical framework as it is not passive but active in its critique of injustice and power and it does not hide the fact that it is political and change oriented in nature (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006). The critical social science approach posits that “people are constrained by the material conditions, cultural context, and historical conditions in which they find themselves...(however) people can develop new understandings or ways of seeing that enable them to change these structures, relationships and laws” (p. 86). This framework has shaped my research project because I believe it is necessary that I produce research that not only adds to our knowledge and understanding of the subjective reality of others but that my research must also contribute in some way (large or small) to the changing of oppressive realities.

Despite my instinctual draw to a critical theoretical framework, I am cautious due to what Strega (2005) explains as its grounding in modern, enlightenment epistemology which believes that “reality” can be uncovered (p. 207). In both my practice in the field and through my academic studies I have learned that “*realities*” exist and that individuals are shaped by multiple and varied layers of identity and oppression. Therefore in compliment to a critical social science framework, I wish to also draw upon several theories that are considered to be both critical and difference-centered in their approach to the creation of knowledge and the understanding of subjective reality (Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Strega, 2005).

Consequently, I intend to be guided by anti-oppressive, anti-racist and third-wave feminist theorizations in my work and to allow these theories to engage in “conversation” with one another as opposed to remaining separate and distinct entities (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, p. 38). It is my hope through the application of these theories to critically analyze the participation of newcomers and racialized communities in government-sponsored citizen participation by: working to highlight and recognize the importance of the intersectionality of identity and oppression in such a discussion, remaining cognizant of dynamics of power and equality, analyzing whose knowledge and voice is considered in such processes, exploring who has been historically included and excluded from such processes and how this affects the wellbeing of particular groups in society and civil society as a whole.

Voice in Qualitative Research

Writing about the experiences of newcomers and racialized communities from my social location as a white, Canadian born woman has been an ongoing personal and academic challenge. I have not felt conflicted over my desire to write about injustice and oppression but I have felt very conflicted over whether it is my place to do so. Working to express the voices and experiences of newcomers and racialized communities as a woman who does not identify as either, has caused me a great deal of unease as to whether I have the *ability* and *right* to express these voices in this qualitative research. I still struggle as to my views on this, as it is not my intention in this work to “speak for” others but it is an undeniable and oppressive outcome that can often result from such work.

I have been encouraged to critically reflect on my own particular social location as a white, Canadian born woman in writing about the experience of newcomers and racialized communities by the work of Pease and Fook (1999). They suggest adopting a “weak” form of postmodernism in research as this forces one to “question how our cultural experience might cause us to privilege some aspects of reality and marginalize and disqualify others” (p. 12) In this sense, awareness of my own social location and how this influences my way of thinking is important. In her work Steinhouse (2001) challenges that, “understanding the fluidity, politicization and personal meaning of identity requires reflection” (p. 9).

This reflection has led me at times to feel uncertainty and discomfort in writing about the experiences of newcomers and racialized communities considering the unearned privilege that accompanies my skin colour. Steinhouse (2001) reflects on this concern in her writing about the experiences of racialized bisexual women and advises that as a white woman she feels that she is part of the problem and solution of issues of racism (p 9-10). In this way, Steinhouse views whiteness as “a site of both privilege and resistance” (p. 10). Privilege due to “unearned assets” accompanying skin colour but resistance in acknowledging this and working to eliminate such privilege and inherent racism (p. 10-11). Just as Steinhouse acknowledges, such reflection and work is a lifelong journey (p. 11) and as such it is my intention to always remain reflexively uncomfortable and self-conscious about these issues while working to be part of the solution to redress issues of racism, oppression and discrimination.

Section Three: Literature Review

The topic of citizen participation in government decision-making is not a new phenomena discussed in academic literature nor is it a new phenomena exercised in policy practice. In fact, according to Roberts (2004) citizen participation is the “cornerstone of democracy” and has been exercised within democracies since the Middle Ages (p. 320). Indeed, for countless decades groups of citizens have amassed to demand that their voices be heard and needs addressed in the creation or reformation of policies and legislation that have a direct impact on their lives and well being. This practice of citizen participation can be classified as being “bottom-up,” meaning a citizen-led initiative. Throughout history strong examples of citizen-initiated participation have penetrated our collective social action psyche including what Stroman (2003) describes as the personal transformation movements of the 1960s and reform movements such as the Disability Rights Movement of the 1970s (p. 44) which sent a commanding message to those in government holding positions of power in decision making: “nothing about us, without us” (Charlton, 2000). In this way, citizens have fought to have a seat at the decision-making table concerning issues of particular interest to them. But what happens when the tables are turned and citizens are invited into decision-making processes by government and asked to share their expertise and provide their input and feedback on issues of concern? Who is invited into such discussions, for what purpose and to what end?¹

¹ I do not wish to minimize the important role of “bottom-up” citizen participation in policy processes but I will not enter into an examination of these approaches in this literature review.

Today much of the discussion in the literature and the policy practice on the ground seems to have turned towards an analysis of *government sponsored* citizen participation, meaning those actions which are “organized, convened and paid for by government” (Phillips & Orsini, 2002). In this practice it is the decision makers in government who have invited the participation of citizens into decision-making processes concerning issues of interest to them. Within the literature, the discussion of government sponsored citizen participation is now one that crosses numerous disciplines including (but not limited to): Public Administration, Political Science, Political Philosophy, Urban Planning, Public Policy, Human Geography, and International Development. For the most part and especially within progressive Development literature, the current discussion on government sponsored citizen participation has moved away from being one which expounds the virtues and limitations of traditional, more passive forms of citizen participation such as simple consultation, towards one that calls for the active participation and engagement of citizens as co-creators of policy and co-contributors to decision-making at supranational, international, national and local levels of governance (Abele, Graham, Ker, Maioni & Phillips, 1998; Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001; Graham & Phillips, 1998; Phillips & Orsini, 2002).

This discussion of government sponsored citizen participation within and across such a diverse span of disciplines has made for a rich collection of writing on the subject and an examination of this practice from many points of view. Kweit and Kweit (as cited in Roberts, 2004, p. 318) capture this phenomenon best when explaining succinctly that, “research on citizen participation produces a complex and untidy literature.” Just as the

disciplines in which the discussion of government sponsored citizen participation vary, so to do the corresponding ideological and philosophical reasoning and explanations for such participation. On the whole the discussion of government sponsored citizen participation throughout these fields represents direct yet unadorned debates around the pragmatic benefits and limitations of this practice. As a researcher approaching this literature review with an anti-oppressive and anti-racist approach, it has been more difficult to locate research that critically “unpacks” this practice. In fact Thompson (2008) states:

A fundamental disconnect exists between Canadian demographic and social reality, which illustrates the significance of race, and the disciplinary silence of English-Canadian political science on both the conceptualization of race as a political production and the incorporation of race as a compelling explanatory variable in the analysis of political phenomena. (p. 525)

However several authors work to unlock interrelated issues such as citizenship and social inclusion, from lenses that are unabashedly rooted in concepts of social justice and anti-racism.

Therefore, the overall amount of general writing and opinion available on this topic can be a cause for excitement but the lack of critical writing a source of frustration to the critical researcher interested in the subject. Despite this, common themes prevail in the discussion of the issue of government sponsored citizen participation. It is my hope for this literature review to begin to synthesize this information and examine how the concepts discussed within the literature may have relevance and be applied to the discussion of how well newcomers and racialized communities are meaningfully included in these processes. I will attempt to do so by defining the concept of government-

sponsored citizen participation, exploring the renewed interest behind this practice, analyzing who is included in such participation (and alternatively who is not) and examining the strengths and limitations of this policy practice.

A Continuum of Participation

In a democracy such as Canada, Hemingway suggests it is best to discuss the idea of citizen participation as being on a continuum from a representative to a participatory democracy (as cited in Wharf Higgins, Cossom & Wharf, 2006, p. 133). It is along this continuum, that I believe the many labels applied to the more general concept of citizen participation fall such as: public participation, civic participation, civic engagement, citizen engagement, public partnership and collaborative governance. Often these labels are used interchangeably in the literature however I view these as distinct processes of citizen participation.

When utilizing Hemingway's idea of a continuum, we can assume differing degrees of action or intensity (Osmani, 2008, p.9) that can be applied to the processes of participation that fall between the two furthest poles. In fact, these levels of participation have been conceptualized within the literature as being either direct, "when citizens are personally involved and actively engaged" to indirect, "when citizens elect others to represent them in the decision process" (Roberts, 2004, p. 320). In addition, within her work Motsi (2009) creates a continuum based upon *citizen influence* over processes of decision-making. Her continuum ranges from communication as a method of participation representing a one-way information flow from either government to citizen

or vice versa, as providing the least amount of influence, to consultation as representing a two way dialogue, to finally engagement in which she defines citizens as having the most influence and as being “a discussion between government and citizens and among citizens, usually facilitated, and with more emphasis on arriving at a consensus or making a decision and working in partnership” (p. 3). This idea of influence is also echoed in the work of Verstichel (2010) who focuses her attention on the participation of minorities in government decision-making, by using the qualifier “effective participation”. She explains that this “refers to the fact that the ‘presence’ of minority representatives in decision-making processes should be translated into ‘influence’ on the outcome of the decision-making” (p. 75). These two notions of the degree of action involved and the amount of influence exerted over processes of government sponsored citizen participation are rather inseparable and appear quite often in the literature as authors attempt to define this concept.

In addition to discussions concerning these notions, the intrinsic meaning ascribed to such participation is also explored. In her seminal work on citizen participation Arnstein (1969) defines citizen participation as “a categorical term for citizen power” (p. 216) and expands this definition by explaining:

It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future...In short, it is the means by which they can induce significant social reforms which enables them to share in the benefits of the affluent society. (Arnstein, 1969, p. 216)

What is the meaning ascribed, what are the actions performed and to what degree do citizens execute influence over the process and outcome? These are all important

questions to be asked in defining processes of meaningful government sponsored citizen participation.

In her work Roberts (2004) displays an appreciation for Arnstein's definition of citizen participation and agrees that, "Arnstein's emphasis on power and decision making are central to the concept of direct citizen participation" (p. 320). Roberts utilizes the concept of power sharing in her definition of citizen participation and describes direct participation as referring to shared power between elected officials and those who are not elected or regarded as having any "formal governmental decision-making authority in the formulation or implementation of public policy" (p. 320). In her view this participation should not resemble "a form of control that enables those in authority to get citizens to do what they want them to do" (p. 320) but should instead actively involve citizens in decision-making concerning their communities.

Government sponsored opportunities for citizen participation can be multi-dimensional and varied in their design and purpose. Avenues for citizen participation can range depending on what stage in the policy process citizen participation is sought however, one of the most frequently cited opportunities for government sponsored citizen participation across the literature is that of consultation (Arnstein, 1969; Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001; Phillips & Orsini, 2002; McKenzie & Wharf, 2010). Indeed in Canada, government sponsored consultative processes seem to be the traditional and most popular method of choice for eliciting citizen participation and still provide the most opportunity for public involvement (Phillips & Orsini, 2002). However, "public consultation normally occurs quite late in policy processes, once problems have been defined in concrete terms

and a preferred policy option has been developed” (p. 19). With the agenda already set and priorities decided, this begs a number of questions as to the motives and values driving consultative processes and whether these processes are indeed truly inclusive of voices and input from citizens in regards to their concerns or views on particular policy issues. We will engage in a more detailed analysis of the issues surrounding consultation later in this research report.

Government Motivation for Participation

In recent history, examples of the practice of government sponsored citizen participation in decision-making have been especially present within the domain of urban planning in North America (Roberts, 2004), and in Canada citizen involvement in land-use management has been in effect for over twenty-five years (Graham & Phillips, 1998)². Currently there appears to be a resurgence in popularity of the practice of citizen participation but with a new twist. The issue of government sponsored citizen participation in decision-making has now bridged domains and local governments “increasingly are being confronted with the need to undertake citizen engagement in new areas such as budgeting, economic development, and political restructuring” (Graham & Phillips, 1998, p. 2). This increased need to employ the practice of government sponsored citizen participation across such new domains has been attributed to several interrelated factors including: the overarching presence of the neo-liberal agenda, restructuring of

² Two such examples include The Model Cities Program initiated in the 1960s in the United States (Arnstein, 1969; Roberts, 2004) and the Berger Inquiry into the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline in Canada (Phillips & Orsini, 2002).

government and the devolution of service, a dissatisfied and disillusioned citizenry, and the current movement towards modernization of government.

Neo-liberalism has been described as “theoretical fuel for restructuring” (Andrews as cited in Keevers et al., 2008, p. 464) and with an overarching agenda of cost cutting, marketization, privatization and deregulation of service, the shape of governance has been one which has undergone dramatic changes. These changes have reshaped forms of governance from an emphasis on and reliance upon government intervention and economic support in the past, to one in which the values of capitalism rule (McKenzie & Wharf, 2010). The restructuring of government fuelled by this neo-liberal agenda has been profound and “the current emphasis on public participation can be situated in conceptions of governance that result from the transformation of modern states” (Newman, Barnes, Sullivan and Knops, 2004, p. 203).

The downloading of services as cost-cutting measures has shifted the responsibility for the provision of service that used to lie with government, especially in the public sector, to both non-profit and for-profit non-governmental organizations (Keevers et al., 2008, p. 470). In turn, these organizations have also been affected by neo-liberalism and many have moved to adopt more “managerial” and corporate style structures that have changed the shape and meaning of service provision (Keevers et al, 2008, p. 461). Those who work for such organizations now identify themselves as “service deliverers” and as a result those individuals who seek out the assistance of such organizations have been “re-framed as service users or consumers with mutual responsibilities and obligations” (p. 461). In this way, not dissimilar to a transaction,

consumers of such service are active and involved players not simply passive recipients of service or care. Consumers have a right to choose and direct their care and there has been an increased emphasis in the UK, Australia and North America on user involvement (Keevers et al., 2008; Beresford, 2001).

It is important to note that although having a greater say and participation in service provision and policy design may seem quite positive, Hodgson (as cited in Keevers et al, 2008, p. 461) explains that this trend creates a “paradoxical relationship of simultaneous empowerment and manipulation.” A tension presents between service users who adopt their new roles and responsibilities as “consumers” and what Galbally (as cited in Keevers et al., 2008, p. 464) describes as the continued marketization of service which has encouraged “atomized and individualized services...and hindered a sense of belonging and control for community members accessing community services.” Despite an increased emphasis on service user involvement Powell and Geoghegan (as cited in Keevers et al., 2008, p. 468) warn, “there is a profound contradiction in the heart of partnership – the pursuit of social inclusion in market-led economies that widen social inequality as an integral function of wealth creation.” In this way, neo-liberalism and its subsequent restructuring at both the governmental and organizational levels, has been a “dominant discourse shaping the social policy space” (Keevers, Treleaven & Sykes, 2008, p. 462) and has contributed to fueling the push to increased government sponsored citizen participation.

An additional factor that has been cited as influencing a move towards more wide spread interest in employing methods of government sponsored citizen participation can

be attributed to what several authors refer to as the “democratic deficit” or what has been described as a growing divide between government and citizenry evidenced by a lack of voter turn-out and interest in political and policy related processes (Gaventa, 2002; Newman et al., 2004; Pal, 2006; Philips & Orsini, 2002; Siemiatycki & Saloojee, 2002). Many view citizen participation in social policy process as a way to mitigate the ‘democratic deficit’ (Motsi, 2009; Newman, Barnes, Sullivan & Knops, 2004) and Pal (2006) states, “citizens trust their governments and politicians less than they used to. If they trust less, they inevitably demand a different type of policy process. They want to be consulted, they want to participate, and they want their voices to be heard” (p. 68).

Disenchantment with government and its processes have spurred discussions on how to bridge the gap between citizens and government. Gaventa (2002) describes that now more than ever meaningful opportunities and mechanisms for citizen participation that actually allow for citizen influence over decision-making are of the utmost importance (p.1-2). Newman et al (2004), explain that “complex issues such as – social inclusion, elude traditional approaches to governing. The role of the state shifts from that of ‘governing’ through direct forms of control (hierarchical governance), to that of ‘governance’, in which the state must collaborate with a wide range of actors” (p. 204). This move to modernize governance has resulted in a more “hands off” form of governance in which according to Phillips and Orsini (2002) governments are to “*steer not row*, meaning that they should set basic priorities and policy directions but the actual delivery of services might be better done by the private or voluntary sectors” (p. 5). In addition, Newman et al., highlight that this new form of governance requires “co-

production with other agencies and with citizens themselves through partnerships” (p. 204).³

The renewed emphasis on government sponsored citizen participation can be traced to influences of the neo-liberal agenda. The downloading of the responsibility of service provision to communities has resulted in a “re-frame” of what it means to be a service user. Now, individuals are seen as active “consumers” of service and this new logic has reverberated back into government and acted as a catalyst for the increased participation of citizens in decision-making. Additionally, a desire to reignite citizen interest in politics and policy processes and the need to seek out creative solutions to complex social problems have contributed to the increased desire to include citizens in decision-making. Finally, as described above a potential negative motivation behind such processes, the unquestioned assimilation of citizens into neo-liberal forms of governance, must be critically evaluated as such processes have the possibility to manipulate when appearing to empower.

Who Participates?

After having worked to unpack the meaning of and motivation behind government sponsored citizen participation, the next logical question to arise is: who participates in such processes? Of course the obvious answer is, citizens do! However, Cornwall and Gaventa (2001) warn, “one important danger is that the language of citizenship can

³ This move to download the provision of social service to non-governmental organizations has its own set of worrisome consequences namely that the burden of care has now been transferred to communities and families removing financial and social responsibility for such care from government.

become associated with the language of nationalism, leading to exclusion of non-nationals” (p.7). This makes the answer to the above question far more complex, especially in a city such as Toronto where almost half of the population is comprised of newcomers.

Additional complexity surrounds this question because:

Citizenship must be viewed as gendered (Lister 1997, 1998; Phillips 1992; Yuval-Davis 1997), racialized (Lewis 2000a, 2000b; Parekh 2000) and structured around other conceptions of difference – age, disability, sexuality – that inform both access to dialogic process and the legitimacy of different voices heard within it (Barnes and Shaw 2000; Richardson 1998; Sayce 2000). (Barnes et al., 2003, p. 380)

Therefore, I believe asking *who* participates in government sponsored citizen participation is an essential question to ask as unfortunately processes of participation do not take place in a vacuum, protected from the damaging effects of racism, classism or any other destructive attempt to establish hierarchies of power in society.

Evidence suggests that newcomers and members of racialized communities experience increased barriers to participation in government sponsored decision-making, which negatively impacts their ability to participate. For one, Wharf Higgins et al. (2006) report that influences such as age, level of income, level of education and previous community involvement positively influence citizen participation (p. 137). Saloojee (2002) outlines similar factors that work to “determine the extent of political participation by members of racialized communities” (p. 40). It is clear that newcomers and members of racialized communities experience barriers to participation including their length of residency in Canada, their mastery of the English language and knowledge of the political system (p.40).

In addition, Saloojee highlights “the persistence and reproduction of racial oppression and discrimination” (p. 41) as being a barrier to the participation of racialized communities in government sponsored citizen participation. Arnstein (1969) provides sharp evidence for this by explaining:

The idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you. Participation of the governed in their government is, in theory, the cornerstone of democracy—a revered idea that is vigorously applauded by virtually everyone. The applause is reduced to polite handclaps, however, when this principle is advocated by the have-not blacks [sic], Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans, Indians, Eskimos [sic] and whites. (p. 216)

In this way, an analysis of who takes part in government sponsored citizen participation is also an analysis of who is included and welcomed into such processes and who is not. Here experiences of racism, discrimination and exclusion must be analyzed when considering the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to be inclusive of the voices of newcomers and racialized communities and the desire of individuals from such communities to participate. I believe a larger connection to ideas of social inclusion and exclusion are intimately tied to the discussion of who participates (this will be examined in further detail below).

Expressed most simply, Osmani (2008) states, “...the fact remains that for all the enthusiasm being shown in its support, examples of genuinely effective participation by all relevant stakeholders, especially by the marginalized, social excluded and disadvantaged groups, are still more of an exception than the rule” (p.1). This point has been echoed within the Canadian context by Graham and Phillips (1998) who state:

Faced with growing cultural diversity, most local governments have worked hard to broaden participation – to reach out to the non-white, non-middle class, non-

suburban citizens who normally have little contact with city hall. But in many cases, the relationship of local governments with cultural communities or marginalized groups remains tangential and sporadic. (p. 3)

Therefore, despite attempts to increase inclusive practices in government sponsored citizen participation, the evidence in the literature suggests that the voices of newcomers and members of racialized communities are less likely to be present in processes of government sponsored citizen participation due in part to systemic barriers and continued experiences of discrimination and oppression.

Strengths

For the most part government sponsored citizen participation is discussed in the literature in regards to its effectiveness and efficiency as a policy practice. These discussions work to frame participation across two poles. One is the benefit associated with this form of citizen participation, or its strengths. The other is the shortcomings or risks associated with this practice, or in other words its limitations. Most of the literature takes a measured approach in the evaluation of government sponsored citizen participation and consideration is paid to a balanced discussion of the topic (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001; Newman et al., 2004; Osmani, 2008). Conversely some literature, especially the work of Cooke and Kothari (2001), is focused solely on the risks and limitations associated with citizen participation in decision-making. I believe this can work to represent an important analysis of this practice but yet extremely narrow the view on this subject. I will begin with a look at the arguments for citizen participation and I

have subdivided the arguments for government sponsored citizen participation into three parts: a pragmatic approach, an inclusion approach and a rights based approach.

Pragmatic Approach

Perhaps the most basic argument for government sponsored citizen participation is that it will lead to better policy. Phillips and Orsini (2002) relate that:

By providing mechanisms through which citizens and their organizations can make claims for certain policy outcomes and through which information about public values, preferences, and priorities can be transferred, the resulting policy is likely to achieve its intended objectives and be perceived as legitimate. (p. 8)

In addition, citizen participation in decision-making ideally can work to bring alternative voices to the decision-making table, which may result in more creative or “alternative policy solutions” (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001, p. 8). Additionally, several authors highlight the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to strengthen the responsiveness of social policy to meet the needs of those it is intended, increase accountability amongst decision-makers, mitigate the perceived ‘democratic deficit’ and emphasize the importance of democratic processes in decision-making (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001; Newman et al., 2004; Osmani, 2008; Phillips & Orsini, 2002).

Inclusion Approach

I believe that government sponsored citizen participation can work to mitigate social injustice, namely racism and its effects. By its very nature racism works to exclude and “racial discrimination in all its forms and manifestations is the process by which that exclusion occurs” (Saloojee, 2003, p.2). Saloojee argues that representation and

participation of racialized groups in government decision-making is one mechanism for the advancement of social inclusion (p. 13). According to Saloojee, social inclusion is about “the political will to remove barriers to full and equitable participation in society by all, and in particular by members of racialized communities” (p.15). By politicizing inclusion Saloojee sees a role for government in increasing social inclusion via challenging racial discrimination and increasing meaningful consultations with members of racialized groups (p. 18).

For this inclusion to be realized, its spirit must travel below the surface of participation in decision-making and past the risks of co-option into “a *status quo* system of governance” (Viswanathan, Shakir, Tang, & Ramos, 2003, p.8). Its spirit must result in dramatic change to the exclusionary institutional workings of government (Viswanathan et al. 2003, p. 8). In addition, Saloojee states “those who recognize the salience of social exclusion as an explanatory tool need to be cognizant of one possible unintended consequence of the analysis – the re-victimization and marginalization of the excluded” (Saloojee, 2003, p. 1). It is crucial that those who experience exclusion in our communities drive the conversation on the “eradication of exclusion” (Saloojee, 2003, p.1).

Along this same vein of inclusion, run arguments that government sponsored citizen participation can work to increase social capital. In fact Osmani (2008) refers to what he calls a synergistic relationship between participation and the strengthening of social capital (p. 37). The merits of citizen participation such as active and ongoing dialogue with fellow citizens on issues of interest can reverberate through communities

and between communities, thus contributing to the potential for the establishment of increased social capital. It is also argued that empowerment is a likely outcome of inclusive citizen participation in government decision-making as at a basic level. Osmani states that the presence of participatory mechanisms is more empowering than the presence of none (p.7).

Rights Based Approach

Across the literature the argument for government sponsored citizen participation has been promoted by identifying such participation as a basic human right (Burton, 2009; Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001; Gaventa, 2002;Verstichel, 2010). Verstichel (2010) outlines in her work that the right to participation in public affairs for those identified as belonging to “minority groups” has been enshrined at the international level both legally (through the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in Europe) and politically (through the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities) for the last two decades (p. 74). This argument for participation as both a legal and political right is closely linked to the concept of citizenship and although this is a large topic to cover in the space of this literature review it is a linkage that must be discussed especially when considering the involvement of racialized, newcomer and non-naturalized citizens in such participation.

The conceptualization of citizenship can be broken down into two general discussions: citizenship as a legal concept and citizenship as a moral/ethical concept (Roberts, 2004, p. 318-319). A liberal definition of citizenship falls under the category of

a legal view of the term and citizenship in this sense is best described as “individual legal equality accompanied by a set of rights and responsibilities bestowed by a state on its citizens” (Gaventa, 2002, p. 2). In this understanding of citizenship, “democracy becomes procedural...citizenship serves its purpose to the extent that there are enough citizens to choose among leaders for the purpose of policy making” (Roberts, 2004, pp. 318-319). This is a lonely exercise in citizenship as it is constructed as being very individualistic and “self-interested” (Gaventa, 2002, p. 4).

Contrary to this, a communitarian conceptualization of citizenship views citizenship as closely connected to community and as being guided by a moral purpose (Roberts, 2004, p. 319) in which “an individual’s sense of identity is produced only *through* relations with others in the community of which she or he is a part” (Gaventa, 2002, p. 4). In this view of citizenship, the discussion of the rights and responsibilities of citizens is also present but it is cast much wider, beyond simple procedures of voting. In fact it is from a communitarian moral and ethical perspective on citizenship that an impetus for citizen participation springs and the right’s based approach calling for increased citizen participation in government decision-making flows.

As a matter of fact, ethical concerns in citizenship have actually acted to influence legal definitions of the term and worked to improve the democratic operations of government (Roberts, 2004, p. 319). Cooper (as cited in Roberts, 2004, p. 319) explains that this can be seen throughout history as a result of social movements successfully advocating for “the extension of the franchise to non-Whites and women, the abolition of slavery, the expansion of civil rights, the establishment of equal employment

opportunities, and the mandates for citizen participation in public policy making.”

Gaventa (2002) supports this claim when describing that this combined thinking on human rights and citizenship has continued to promote the discussion of citizen participation and “re-frame” participation as “a fundamental human and citizenship right” (p. 3).

Limitations

It is prudent to also be aware of the shortcomings of government sponsored citizen participation. Worries outlined in the literature include the possibility of consultation fatigue (Beresford, 2001), of co-option and assimilation of citizens’ issues into broader government mandates (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001; Viswanathan et al., 2003), of misuse of information (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001), of a hidden agenda of cross-cultural management (Cooke & Kothari, 2001), and the complexity of citizen participation in which the operations of power relations between decision-makers and citizens and citizen participants themselves may not truly be addressed (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; McKenzie & Wharf, 2010). McKenzie and Wharf (2010) elaborate on this last point in their work and caution that government sponsored citizen participation can possibly result in unintended or even detrimental outcomes (p. 126). They emphasize that there can be the potential that minority voices will be shut out of the policy decision-making process by those with greater privilege who may dominate participation processes and sway the outcome to suit their interests (p. 126). Also, the authors highlight the risk

that this type of policy making does not always lead to policy that can be “defined as progressive in social justice terms” (p.126).

Additionally in a discussion of limitations, real questions arise as to what extent public involvement can travel in policy making processes and to what extent ‘expert’ versus ‘experiential’ knowledge should come into play when making important social policy decisions (Newman et al., 2004; Phillips and Orsini, 2002). It is helpful and important to honestly examine the framing of citizen participation as both a positive endeavor and one in which negative consequences or unanswered questions may arise, as these possibilities must be given particular attention in relation to my research topic as the risks to further marginalize newcomers and racialized communities in the process of government sponsored citizen participation are real (Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001).

Conclusion

Despite an attempt in some of the literature (Osmani, 2008; Saloojee, 2003; Viswanathan et al., 2003) to link issues of race, racism, social inclusion and citizen participation in decision making, I have been surprised by the lack of attention to these details in other writing I have reviewed (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Cornwall & Gaventa, 2001; Newman et al., 2004; Phillips & Orsini, 2002). Saloojee and Osmani make such a strong case for the potential benefits citizen participation can confer onto racialized communities that I would have assumed this link would have been discussed in more detail in the other work I have reviewed. More plainly stated, in the majority of the literature the issue of citizen participation in government decision-making has not been

politicized, nor has it been examined critically from a social justice perspective. It is my intent to apply these approaches to my research on the issue, drawing upon the more progressive and critical discussions in the literature.

Another aspect that I have found missing from much of the literature are qualitative studies highlighting the voices of those citizens who have participated in government sponsored citizen participation. I believe leaving participant voices and experiences out of a discussion or evaluation of citizen participation in decision-making is counterproductive and works to minimize the citizen as an expert in the process of deliberation. I have found only one qualitative study that speaks directly to the experience of the users of service and their participation in government decision-making (Beresford, 2010). Additionally, I feel that issues of racism and intersectionality of oppression are overlooked in many of the analyses of citizen participation in decision-making. Citizen participants are often described as a homogenous group, neglecting intersections in identity and the effects this may have on the participatory process and those involved.

It has been these realizations drawn from the literature that has helped to shape and construct the types of questions with which I enter the remainder of my research. As governments continue to modernize and decentralize responsibilities, there has been an increased focus on inviting citizens into decision-making processes. Concurrently, globalization, growing transnationalism, and immigration continue to define the ever-changing urban and demographic landscapes in large cities such as Toronto. Therefore, an examination of the ability of processes of citizen participation in government decision-making to meaningfully include the voices and needs of newcomers and racialized

communities is of the utmost importance to ensure the creation of responsive, effective social policy and possibly lead to increased experiences of inclusion amongst newcomers and members of racialized communities. It is my hope in my research to explore how the inclusion of marginalized groups in decision-making has the potential to empower those involved, build social capital, increase social inclusion and challenge issues of racism and exclusion, thus having the potential to improve the condition of civil society for all.

Section Four: Methodology

For the purpose of my research study and because of the way I have conceptualized my research question (as a social justice issue); my methodological goals must work to honour the voices of newcomers and racialized individuals. Carter and Little's (2007) description of epistemology's action on methodology has helped me to understand the interconnectedness of my stance on the creation of knowledge and my desire to design my research project qualitatively. Carter and Little state, "methodologies justify methods, and methods produce knowledge, so methodologies have epistemic content" (p. 1320). I feel that my desire to honour and emphasize the voices of my research participants is best served by the use of qualitative research and therefore I have structured this work as a qualitative study.

Case Study Research

Besides designing my research as a qualitative study, I have selected to utilize case study research as my main methodological approach. Before explaining why I have chosen this particular approach it is helpful to develop an understanding of this methodology. Simply defined, a case study "may be understood as the intensive study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases" (Gerring, 2007, p. 20). Yin (2003) delves much further into the explanation of case study research, describing it as an all-encompassing research strategy defined by a study's intention, scope, data collection and data analysis strategies (p. 13-14). Yin (2003) states:

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident...The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence...[and] benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p. 13-14)

I have selected case study research because my research question is situated in the exploration of the process of citizen participation and I feel that the best and most logical way for me to examine and better understand this process is to study a past example or in other words a “case” of citizen participation in detail.

Utilizing a case study approach, the unit of analysis in my research or the “case”, will be the 2000-2001 Community Consultations on Social Development that took place in the newly amalgamated City of Toronto. This case represents a “spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time” (Gerring, 2007, p. 19), thus making it suitable for the application of case study research. However, this was an incredibly large community consultation that involved hundreds of people separated into focus groups based on both locality and groups of interest. To work to answer my particular research question, it is important to narrow the boundaries of this case by focusing my attention on one particular focus group within the larger consultation: the “Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural” focus group and the members within (Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, 2001, p. 52). Narrowing the boundaries around my particular case of interest is advisable in case study research as Yin (2003) suggests, “the more a study contains specific propositions, the more it will stay within feasible limits” (p.23).

Flyvbjerg (2006) explains that despite many past and some current misgivings related to case study methodology (see below) the application of case study research is central to learning and research in the social sciences. He outlines that all learning and knowledge creation is in fact context-dependent (p. 221) and that “the case study is especially well suited to produce this knowledge” (p. 223). Therefore an additional reason I have been drawn to this particular method of research is due to the fact that it allows for an in-depth understanding of the context of a particular phenomenon. As my research interest is keenly focused on developing a better understanding of the experience of government sponsored citizen participation for newcomers and members of racialized groups, an intimate examination of the context surrounding such practice in relation to my selected case is necessary.

As Yin (2003) highlights, “you would use the case study method because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions – believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study” (p.13). Therefore, it is my intention to work towards a better understanding of the context of my case via the particular experiences of those who took part. By utilizing case study research as a methodology in my examination of the experiences of those who took part in the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group, I will be able to critically evaluate and illustrate the ability of such processes of consultation to meaningfully include the voices of newcomers and racialized individuals. Additionally, it is my hope that this methodological approach to my research will allow me to arrive at some generalizations about the participation of such individuals

in instances of government sponsored citizen participation and potentially work to assist in uncovering ways to improve the inclusivity of such processes.

Like all methodologies, there are strengths and weaknesses associated with case study research. The strengths I have outlined above such as the ability to learn a great deal about a particular case and its associated context are very attractive to me as a researcher, however it would be careless not to consider the reasonable limitations of this approach to research. In investigating case study research I have been quite surprised to find that a number of authors have explained that case studies have routinely been challenged for their lack of rigor and perceived limited use in social science research (Flyvbjerg, 2006, Gerring, 2007; Yin, 2003). Additionally, Maoz (as cited in Gerring, 2002, p. 6) states:

Case studies have become in many cases a synonym for free-form research where everything goes and the author does not feel compelled to spell out how he or she intends to do the research why a specific case or set of cases has been selected, which data are used...how data are processed and analyzed, and how inferences were derived from the story presented. Yet at the end of the story, we often find sweeping generalizations and “lessons” derived from the case.

Therefore it is my intent in this research to remain cognizant of this and work to ensure rigor and keen attention to detail in all of the areas outlined above.

Data Collection

Case study research provides a variety of data collection tools and strategies that can be employed. According to Berg (2004), data collection of case study research focuses on life histories, oral histories, participant observation, in-depth interviews and documents (p. 251). In addition, Berg adds that, “extremely rich, detailed, and in-depth

information characterize the type of information gathered in a case study” (p. 251). For the purpose of this study, I have primarily gathered my data by conducting in-person, semi-structured interviews, ranging 60-90 minutes in length with those who chose to take part in my research study (for more detail on those who took part please see the section titled “Participants” below).

Additionally, I have collected and reviewed “gray literature”, namely reports prepared for the City of Toronto on the 2000-2001 Community Consultation on Social Development. The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto who was hired to conduct the community consultations prepared these reports that explain in detail the preparation for these consultations, the strategies employed during the consultations and the results of the consultative process. Also, I have reviewed a final report prepared by the City of Toronto on the Social Development Strategy that was informed by the findings contained in the reports of the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto. All of these documents combined with the information gathered from in-person interviews have assisted in developing my insight into the context of the particular case I have selected to examine and developing a broader understanding of the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices, especially those of Newcomers and racialized communities.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to beginning any communication with potential research participants I sought ethical clearance for this research project from the McMaster University Research

Ethics Board through the submission of a detailed ethics application. After approximately two weeks and a few slight revisions to the wording of my recruitment emails I received ethical clearance to pursue this research study. This was a valuable process that really forced me to place myself in my research participants' position and to design a project that was mindful of any potential ethical concerns.

As my study required that I hold face-to-face interviews with participants, there were several issues that required my careful attention. To begin, all potential research participants were provided with a letter of information and consent (see Appendices C and D). This began the informed consent process and allowed potential research participants to better understand the risks and benefits associated with my study. Although the risks in my study were minimal I was aware that some participants may have felt self-conscious about their responses to my questions and that some participants may have felt anxious that their responses might identify them to others. To mitigate and minimize this, participants were advised that they did not need to answer any questions that they did not wish to answer and that they might withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Additionally, participants were informed that once the interview had been transcribed, they would be provided with a copy of the transcription and would be able to amend or review any comments they wished. Finally, before completing the final draft of my research report, participants were sent a document containing their relevant comments and paraphrases I had selected for use in the final report for their approval.

As the policy community in Toronto is rather small and many individuals are familiar with one another, the confidentiality of my research participants was of the utmost importance. Participants were informed that their participation in my study was to be kept confidential unless they consented and wished to have their identity revealed.

Participants

In spite of my desire to carefully protect each participant's confidentiality, all of the individuals who selected to participate in my research study chose to have their identities' revealed. To establish context for the reader of this research study (with my participants' permission) I have included their names and places of employment below: Alina Chatterjee, Director of Redevelopment and Special Projects, Scadding Court Community Centre; Debbie Douglas, Executive Director, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI); Duberlis Ramos, Executive Director, Hispanic Development Council; Rob Howarth, Executive Director, Toronto Neighbourhood Centres; Uzma Shakir, Director, Equity, Diversity and Human Rights, City of Toronto.

Recruitment

Using a purposive sampling approach, I sought salient characteristics in a potential research participant. For the purpose of my study, research participants must have been involved in some way in the 2000-2001 Community Consultations on the Social Development Strategy in Toronto and/or were considered policy practitioners within the city of Toronto. Possible research participants were located through access to

information in the public domain. A recruitment email was sent to all potential participants (see Appendices A and B) inviting them to participate in my study. To this recruitment letter was attached a letter of information and consent form (see Appendices C and D). Two weeks following the initial emailing of the recruitment email, a follow up email was sent (see Appendix E) to those participants who had not yet responded. During my experience of recruitment I also employed snowball sampling with several research participants I had conducted interviews with, in the hopes of increasing a pool of possible research participants.

Data Analysis

General Analytic Strategies

Over the course of this research project I have come to learn that consistency in practice is key and I have found that this is no different concerning data analysis. The work of Yin (2003) has been particularly helpful in assisting me in the creation and application of an overall analytic strategy for my research project fitting of case study research. Yin stresses the importance of developing such a strategy as, “the strategy will help you to treat the evidence fairly, produce compelling analytic conclusions, and rule out alternative interpretations” (p. 111). Following the advice of Yin, I have selected to guide my data analysis upon two interrelated general analytic strategies: (1) my own theoretical propositions and, (2) remaining cognizant of the potential presence of rival explanations (p. 111-112).

Specific Analytic Techniques

Along with the need to develop an overall general analytical strategy comes the need to employ specific tools for analysis. For the purpose of my research project I have selected to analyze the data resulting from participant interviews with coding at three levels: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The process of coding data is closely associated with qualitative research and Kreuger and Neuman (2006) explain this process:

A researcher organizes the raw data into conceptual categories and creates themes or concepts, which he or she then uses to analyze data...Qualitative coding is an integral part of data analysis. It is guided by the research question and leads to new questions. It frees a researcher from entanglement in the details of the raw data and encourages higher-level thinking about them. It also moves him or her towards theory and generalizations. (p. 436)

As a new researcher, organizing my data using coding has been a challenging process but a helpful one as this has allowed me to recognize patterns and connections in the data and reduce large amounts of data into manageable and logical themes. To begin, I reviewed my data with three passes through each interview transcription. The first pass through each transcription is referred to as “open coding” (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p. 438) and this represented a more *literal* read of the data where I was able to locate many themes in the data based on my thinking around my research questions, my knowledge from the literature I had carefully reviewed and my early theoretical propositions. I feel that the discovery of these initial themes such as issues of exclusion/inclusion, issues of funding/resources and overall issues in regards to the design of government-sponsored citizen participation really represented early deductive thinking in regard to my data.

Next, I read over each interview transcript for a second time and conducted what is referred to as “axial coding” (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p. 439). Kreuger and Neuman (2006) describe this as a time then a researcher, “moves toward organizing ideas or themes and identifies the axis of key concepts in analysis” (p. 439). During this second pass over the data I kept my initial themes in mind and while focusing my attention on the initial themes I had discovered, I began to look more closely for connections between themes. This process allowed me to combine some themes such as issues of belonging to a larger theme of inclusion and divide other themes such consultative design into sub-categories such as accessibility and outreach. Additionally, during this second pass through the data there were new themes that emerged from my conversations with research participants some of which I had not anticipated and I have found these inductive findings to be just as interesting, exciting and needing of report. These themes included the notion of respect for participants, the overall experience of participation, the idea of “ethno-racial” leadership and representation, politics and best practices in participation.

Finally, a third pass through the transcriptions represented the final level of coding I applied in my data analysis, being “selective coding” (Kreuger & Neuman, 2006, p. 439). During this pass over the data I was looking specifically for evidence to support the major themes I had located in the data that had been informed by the previous two levels of coding. Utilizing coding as a tool for data analysis in this research was incredibly helpful as I viewed it as a purposeful and logical tool which worked to slowly trim a large amount of data down into a manageable amount of information that I could spend time reviewing and thinking about in order to arrive at some useful findings.

Section Five: The Case of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural Focus Group

Before commencing a report on the general findings and related discussion I have arrived at as a result of this research study, it is important to explain the thinking behind my approach to composing and sharing my findings. In this portion of my study I have selected to merge my findings and discussion together across two sections (Section Five and Section Six). I have struggled on how best to present in a comprehensive way, the particular case of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group with my learnings from this case (arrived at from my conversations with three research participants who were specifically involved in this case) *and* the results of my general findings about the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to be meaningfully inclusive (arrived at as a result of my conversations with all five research participants). To this end, I have found assistance in the work of Yin (2003) who explains that the composition of case study research does not follow a tidy recipe and can often present the greatest challenge to the researcher (p. 141).

Yin (2003) advises that one of the best places to begin in deciding upon how to compose a case study is to consider the audience you wish to target with your findings (p. 143). Yin states:

It [the case study] can have a more diverse set of possible audiences than most other types of research including (a) academic colleagues; (b) policymakers, practitioners, community leaders, and other professionals who do not specialize in case study research... (c) special groups such as a dissertation or thesis committee; and (d) funders of research. (p. 143)

In this case I have decided to target my research findings and discussion towards those who are active practitioners in the community, advocating for inclusive and meaningful

participation of residents in exercises of government sponsored citizen participation. In this way, Yin (2003) describes that it is “the descriptive elements in portraying some real-life situation, as well as the implications for action, [which] are likely to be more important” (p. 143). Therefore, after much deliberation in how best to present my findings and associated discussion, I have selected to create two distinct sections that work to capture my findings and discussions from my research in a way that I view as being of most use to community practitioners.

In this section I begin to present my findings and discussion based solely on the case of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group. Here, it is my intent to share the results of my exploration into the case of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group, as I believe the conclusions that may be drawn from this case are illustrative of the larger findings of my study. This first section is largely narrative in nature as opposed to the next section that follows which will focus on additional findings from individual interviews, that are more category based and illustrative of larger structural and practical issues impacting the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices.

The Case of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural Focus Group

Of the five individuals who took part in my research study, three individuals (Uzma, Debbie and Duberlis) were direct participants in the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group, which was one of a number of focus groups that made up the 2000-2001 Community Consultations on the Social Development Strategy in Toronto. As previously

stated the examination of this focus group is designed to act as a case study to help in answering my larger research question as to the ability of such types of government-sponsored consultation to be meaningfully inclusive of a diverse range of voices, especially those from racialized communities.

Context of the Case

In the fall of 2000 a process began to create a social development strategy for the newly amalgamated City of Toronto. The impetus for the development of this strategy grew out of the need to remedy growing disparities in wealth and wellbeing of residents (City of Toronto, 2001). As stated in “A Social Development Strategy for the City of Toronto” the intent of the Social Development Strategy (SDS) is:

To democratize prosperity and opportunity, so that all those who live in Toronto can lead healthy lives in a safe, socially cohesive urban environment. It values diversity and reaffirms the goals of achieving access and equality of outcome for all residents as expressed in the city’s access and equity action plan. (p. 3)

In August of 2000, a report titled the “Social Development Strategy Consultation Document” was approved by Toronto’s City Council to act as the basis for conversations with community stakeholders and residents regarding the formulation of a strategy for social development in Toronto (Community Social Planning Council, 2001). This report contained a set of proposed strategic directions for the City to adopt in its attempts to improve the quality of life of Torontonians. After its approval the document became “the basis for engaging the community in consultation on the further development of the strategic directions” (p.1).

What followed were a series of community consultations conducted by the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto who were hired by the City of Toronto to facilitate the process. These consultations were designed to “be an opportunity for people in all parts of the city to express their views on the social priorities facing Toronto” (Community Social Planning Council, 2001, p. 1). This was the beginning of the 2000-2001 Community Consultations on the Social Development Strategy that was a very ambitious undertaking by the city to collect input from a large number of residents. In late 2000 and early 2001 the first wave of consultations began with those whom the city identified as “selected civic stakeholders” (p.1). These were individuals who were active in community work in the city and they were divided into two kinds of focus groups. One set of groups was based on geographic location and the second set of focus groups was based on “sectors” of individuals grouped under headings such as: Social Justice and Advocacy Leaders, Urban Aboriginal Leaders, Children’s Services, Business Sector and Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural Group (p. 51-52).

It is important to note here that a *clear* explanation of the ultimate recruitment process of these individuals is missing from the city documentation I was able to uncover on the subject. A description of how stakeholders were selected to participate in focus groups based on *locality* is provided and I am left to assume that the same process was invoked for the selection of *sectoral* focus group members. According to the “Preserving Our Civic Legacy Report” (2001), “the names of potential invitees to the local area focus groups were generated by means of a questionnaire administered to known local contacts and telephone follow-up interviews with them” (Community Social Planning Council,

2001, p. 2). Additionally, it is important to note that pre-designed discussion guides were utilized in the focus groups based on “designated topics” which were “selected to test a set of proposed strategic directions outlined in the city’s Draft Social Development Strategy” (p. 4). Finally, in addition to discussing such topics as a group, focus group members were also able to submit written responses to “specific questions” (p. 4).

Experience of Participants

When speaking to Uzma, Debbie and Duberlis I was curious to find out their experience of their participation as members of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group (a part of the “sectoral” SDS consultations). I asked them several questions in regards to logistical aspects of the focus group and also about their experiences as members of the focus group (see Appendix F). Due to the fact that this focus group took place over a decade ago I was unsure as to how much information they would be able to relay. Although for each of them the memories of the logistical aspects of the group were a little bit foggy (and understandably so), I was surprised to discover that it was their memories of the *experience* of this group that were so strongly recalled.

Design

To begin, both Debbie and Uzma highlighted several general strengths in regards to the design of the overall consultation. Uzma stated, “I’m sure the strength is that when you know, you have consultations as far and wide as possible, that’s a good thing.”

Debbie echoed this in her interview by explaining:

“the strength of it though is that the city did recognize that it needed some sort of strategy if we are going to continue to work as a very multi-cultural, very multi-racial, heavily immigrant city...and that one way of doing that was to engage the citizens of the city regardless of whether or not they were officially Canadians.”

When asked more specifically about the design of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group and her experience of being recruited as an “ethno-racial leader”, Uzma raised several concerns. She explained:

“all the ethno-racial types were put into one group and the problem was that since we were just one group, our concerns were going to be precisely that, ‘this is what the ethno-racial community says.’ Our concerns become 'ethnicized' with limited relevance to the mainstream society. As if we have nothing to say about business and about the volunteer sector etc. What about the fact that we had concerns that cut across?”

Concerns about the homogenization of ethno-racial groups and the rather tokenistic practice of placing all “ethno-racial types” into this one focus group were also raised when Uzma shared her opinion further:

“how the hell can we represent the entire ethno-racial group out there? You know, it’s patently absurd! And anyway, why should we? That’s the point. You want to know what people are thinking? You go and find out! Don’t look for, um, you know a brown looking, black looking woman, preferably homosexual, preferable with disability. I mean, come on! I am not your lowest common denominator!”
When posing the same questions to Debbie an interesting tension presented in her

answers, between the desire and need to ensure that the voices of racialized communities are being heard and the wish not to essentialize such voices at the same time. The following quotes shed light on this tension. When asked about what it was like for her to be recruited as an ethno-racial leader Debbie shared:

“It always makes me smile because it’s interesting, right? Because you never hear about public officials or policy makers recruiting white ‘leaders’. It tends to be that only racialized communities have these ‘things’, these people who are designated as ‘leader.’ Nobody gets elected. I don’t know, what makes one a

leader? (*Laughing*) And if you speak to people in the Black community outside of those of us who have been designated as leaders, they would say, ‘yeah, no, not my leader.’ (*Laughing*) ‘I wasn’t part of that conversation.’”

The tension appears in Debbie’s thinking about this as a form of essentialism when she goes on to share that unfortunately having a focus group such as the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural group might be the only way to ensure the inclusion of diverse voices.

“So it, you know, it makes me smile. But, I do think that it’s important that we ensure, and unfortunately that’s the process that we have now to ensure that not only white folks are being heard and that other groups are being recruited. But it’s telling that when we think of general recruitment, it tends to be white recruitment. And so we have to have these add-ons like Ethno-cultural leadership or Aboriginal First Nations leadership and those kinds of things. Um, but that’s the place where we are still politically and so it’s better to have some inclusion than to have people left out. But hopefully we will get to a place that when we are recruiting generally it’s a matter of course that it’s an inclusive approach to recruitment.”

Out of these statements come clear concerns with the design of this focus group.

Although at the heart of the proposed SDS there was an explained desire to honour diversity, it can be argued that the design of this focus group did the opposite. By placing all those identified as “ethno-racial leaders” into one group, the multi-layered identities and interests of the individual members of this group were ignored and homogenized. Obviously we cannot conclude that essentialism was the goal of this group or the intent of those who designed this consultation. Perhaps, at the time this was a best effort on the part of the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto to be inclusive and ensure a platform for the concerns of members of culturally diverse communities in Toronto. However, both Uzma and Debbie have pointed to the fact that this was a problematic practice.

Process

When asked more specifically about their experiences of the process of the group and whether they felt it was inclusive of the voices of racialized individuals, it was Uzma who spoke to several flaws in the consultative process. She described a scene of confusion when the group members were presented with the predetermined questions by the group facilitators:

“I remember everybody turned around and said... ‘we don’t want to answer these questions. We are not interested in them. We want to answer different types of questions.’ And that threw the whole session into disarray because the consultants had come with predetermined questions in mind... the consultants were in complete disarray and didn’t know what to do and it turned into a bit of a disaster.”

This frustration with discovering that the agenda for the group had already been set and only “designated topics” and predetermined questions were on the table for discussion was highlighted by Duberlis as being a regular occurrence. He explained, “well, in some sense I think the issue with consultations, this one and many others, has been that, more or less we have anticipated expectations as to what the results would be.”

Duberlis also shared that one of the hopes of this particular consultation was to promote thinking about alternatives in planning that had begun across and between members of different groups in the city representing (at that time) the interests of the South Asian, Hispanic and Chinese communities (what was to soon become the Alternative Planning Group⁴). Duberlis explained:

⁴ The Alternative Planning Group (APG) formed in 1998 as a “unique collaboration of four major planning organizations representing four of the most populous ethnic communities in the City of Toronto” (Chatterjee, Tang,

“part of the process that we are looking for as well is to support an alternative planning notion or an alternative planning initiative that will support strengthening and broadening the work that had been presented and certainly that did not happen. Absolutely that did not happen...So in that sense, in some sense, I think we could, we may even say that there was a failure of this process, unfortunately.”

In predetermining the questions, the facilitators of this group overlooked the interests of its members and in effect were able to exert a great deal of power over the process. Uzma highlighted this as a limitation of the process and said:

“see our problem is we tend to homogenize everything. In order to deal with complex things we seem to think that everything has to be brought under one umbrella. But what gets brought under one umbrella of social planning are multiple players...And we just don't do very well with multiplicity of players and complexity of identities and relationships and needs because its easier to just say, you know, we have one pre-determined agenda and...you just tell us what your issues are and maybe we take it and maybe we don't. We never deconstruct the power relations in that process, the fact that someone has the power to construct questions & then report 'particular' responses.”

Finally, of interesting note was the fact that as a group, members were not asked by facilitators why the questions were not of relevance to them. Additionally, Uzma identified that these failures in the design and process of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group were never alluded to or included in the document “Preserving Our Civic Legacy” which was written by the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto to report on the final results of the consultation. In relation to this Uzma explains:

“to me an equitable process for consultation would be that you go in, even if you go in with certain pre-determined questions, and the group says ‘I’m sorry these are not the questions I am interested in’...Then you say, ‘okay, what are the questions that you are interested in?’ Have that discussion and then reflect it on

Torres, Douglas, Ramos, Raymond, & Shakir, 2004, p.9). The APG was developed “to create a new paradigm of social planning that reflects the demographic, racial, cultural and linguistic diversity of [Toronto]” (Viswanathan et al., 2003, p. 1).

the final report... If I were them I would have even used it to do some self-reflection.”

Learnings From the Case

The case of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group has been illustrative of a number of issues in the ability of government-sponsored citizen participation to be inclusive of the voices of newcomers and racialized communities. By placing, as Uzma described, all the “ethno-racial types” into one group it was assumed that these individuals would represent the “voice” of the “ethno-racial community”. This is quite limiting and essentializes those involved by placing emphasis only on their race and cultural identity above all else. Interestingly, there was a tension between this practice being seen as tokenistic and this practice being seen as an “unfortunate” necessary evil to ensure the presence of newcomers and racialized communities.

In addition, by entering the process of consultation with a pre-determined topics for discussion and questions to be answered the facilitators effectively shut down communication and also established a clear power divide in the process. The opportunity for the building of knowledge, sharing of ideas and democracy in decision-making was lost. When drawing upon the idea of a continuum of participation that was outlined in the literature review, we can see that the consultative process experienced by the members of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group resulted in little participant influence over the process and did not represent a two-way discussion on issues of interest. According to the continuum of participation proposed this case does not represent an example of effective participation.

Besides the above issues in design and process, this case has taught me that it is the *experience* of consultation that remains with participants. Uzma relayed that she didn't remember the process as being "particularly empowering or equitable" and I feel that this was a poignant point in relation to her experience of this consultation. Clear themes emerge from the issues with the design and process of consultation with the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group including: power, respect, tokenism and essentialism. Although these were themes that emerged from my analysis of this particular case, they were also themes that continued to present themselves in my discussions with all five participants more generally regarding the ability of government-sponsored citizen participation to be meaningfully inclusive of the voices of racialized groups and newcomers. The learnings from this case worked to inform my general research findings and next I will turn to a presentation and analysis of these findings.

Section Six: Findings and Discussion

I have been able to analyze the thematic codes that have emerged from the data and organize these into three main findings that emerged from five rich conversations with research participants. These conversations flowed from philosophical ponderings on the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to be more inclusive to important suggestions surrounding the “how to’s” of meaningful practice in consultation. In answer to my research question I have found that the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices, especially those of newcomers and racialized communities is impacted by:

- (1) The current economic and political climate of the City of Toronto
- (2) Experiences of exclusion and inclusion
- (3) The lack of any form of standing best practices in consultation

The Current Economic and Political Climate of Toronto

When discussing the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to be meaningfully inclusive of newcomers and racialized groups, research participants pointed to the current economic and political realities of Toronto as presenting a barrier to the greater development of such practices for several reasons. To begin, the overarching presence of a neo-liberal cost cutting agenda and its effect on both residents of Toronto and municipal governance were noted. Rob proposed, “it’s [neo-liberalism] a broad context piece that is the backdrop for why robust connecting and participation processes are not in place, I think.” Rob spoke to this theme on two levels. He first explained his

understanding of the effect of the current labour market on the ability of vulnerable community members to participate:

“on the individual and family level the nature of the changing labour market in Canada but in Toronto, means that the people who are most vulnerable...have less capacity to buy their needs on more private market basis in terms of childcare or housing or transit, cars...So, the people who most need government to be ensuring that there is a public function and public access to services and supports, are those who are probably facing the most significant challenges in terms of capacity to engage and get their voice...contributing to these decisions because they're busy trying to get their needs met out of the labour market right now which is really just spewing out more and more bad jobs which takes...more of their hours to get a living wage out of... So, just actual time in people's lives to engage is an issue.”

The literature supports the fact that a link can be made between changes in the labour market such as the emergence of perilous work (short-term, part-time and contract work) and the issue of neo-liberal globalization and that indeed one of the groups that have been affected by this change are new immigrants (Lightman, Mitchell & Herd, 2008). This type of work severely limits the ability, time and energy that these individuals have to contribute to the process of citizen participation. I believe this is indicative of the argument presented in the Literature Review that highlights both the ability of neo-liberalism to empower and manipulate. Neo-liberalism has fuelled the move to user involvement and participation but at the same time has restricted the ability of individuals to participate as they struggle to meet basic needs in a challenging labour market.

Also, for many individuals living in poverty and accessing income benefits a potential added layer of difficulty prohibits participation. Rob explained:

“add on top of that, for many low income people in the city, possibly a suspicion and frustration with systems, government systems having an overbearing influence on their lives. So actually engaging with those systems is a tall order

because they are not seen as friendly or a process you would go near in order to make your life better...even if somebody is dealing with social housing, affordable childcare, being on OW or ODSP, I mean all of those systems end up being incredible intrusions into how these people, you know the information you need to provide to people to navigate your life. And so the idea of engaging more in this system stuff even if you are being asked to freely, I think is a little tricky.”

Difficulties and frustration with systems of government (especially in the provision of income benefits) that have become more invasive, and suspicious of those in receipt of service has certainly appeared as a reality of my past work in advocating for recipients of income benefits. Restructuring of these services have been influenced by neo-liberal and conservative ideologies.

Of additional note is the effect of neoliberalism on the funding of such processes of government sponsored citizen participation in the City of Toronto. In four out of five of my interviews with research participants, participants shared that in their view funding of such processes must be increased to mount more inclusive and meaningful practices of citizen participation. When asked to imagine if she could build an inclusive process of citizen participation from the ground up, Debbie immediately stated “I would need someone to give me lots of money!” Amongst other things, Debbie pictured a process in which various community members could be trained to consult within their own communities but she followed this thought by adding again that it would require a lot of time and money to do so.

Within the City of Toronto, resident engagement work occurs as a function of both the municipal government (through the work of city councilors, community councils and community development officers) and through some funding provided to community

organizations such as the Social Planning Toronto (City of Toronto, n.d.; Viswanathan, 2010). Interestingly, at this point in time the city of Toronto has undertaken a Core Services Review in an attempt to balance the city's budget and minimize an over 700 million dollar deficit (Doolittle, 2011). Working to further exacerbate the results of a neo-liberal climate, all city programs and grants to community agencies are being analyzed for potential cost cutting and unfortunately I do not believe the current climate is best suited to provide an increase in the resourcing of practices of inclusive and meaningful citizen participation.

In fact Duberlis shared that he believed that the current state of the economy provides politicians with an excuse to turn their attention to fiscal policy and make this the topic of focus while neglecting social imperatives and perhaps even labeling the necessity to keep the wellbeing of racialized groups and Newcomers in mind as pandering to “interest groups.” Duberlis explained:

“the failure of the Western economies and ensuing economic turmoil, has in some ways made people think that...one way to respond to this is just fiscal policy in its crudest sense, without recognition of all of the nuances that exist within the country... I think from a perspective of leadership there is an absolute imperative to deal with these issues at this point. I don't see any actual impediment to be doing this right now... Certainly, I think right now we are at the time in which the economic and political conjuncture means that this is an issue that is a little bit moved off.”

Additionally, Rob touched on the issue of resident motivation to increase the funding of such processes with tax dollars:

“it's hard to know in these periods where, I mean it's difficult because if the public in general, the voting public, is open to the argument that they can pay less taxes and somehow get the same services or supports that they want, then as long as that's holding sway, we have a situation there all levels of government are

claiming they have more commitments than they have resources... So how do you get more resources dedicated to engagement when it sounds like unless people want to pay more taxes or go after those who have more ability to pay, unless that's going to happen, the only way to get more stuff is to take resources away from what?"

It was clear from the conversations I had with research participants that the need for increased funding and focus on activities of citizen participation was necessary to build more inclusive and meaningful practice in this area. Desires such as training community members to consult one another and improving the accessibility and design of citizen participation projects all require funding and support from municipal government and those who took part in my research were not particularly optimistic that the current economic climate of Toronto nor the political will of the current municipal government was particularly conducive to this. Perhaps most plainly stated, Rob shared, "I'd say there is a real problem with just... well two things, I mean, I think there isn't a vision of strengthening ethno-specific and communities of interest's capacity to engage and there isn't additional dollars committed to that."

Experiences of Exclusion and Inclusion

Besides the detrimental impact of the current economic and political climate of Toronto on the ability of government sponsored resident participation to include a diverse range of voices, I have found that experiences of continued social and political exclusion have an impact on this ability as well. When I spent some time asking each research participant what they thought of the term "citizen participation" and how they defined "citizen", our conversations always moved to the idea of citizenship and soon I was able

to identify a link between the concept of citizenship, ideas of inclusion and exclusion, and participation.

Anver Saloojee has done much work in the area of the political participation of newcomers and racialized communities and his writing on the substantive political participation⁵ of such communities has been most helpful for me in understanding the intersection of the issues of citizenship, exclusion, inclusion and participation. To begin, it is helpful to have an understanding of what is meant by the term “exclusion.” Saloojee (2002) discusses that there are both weak and strong versions in the discourse on exclusion and he illustrates that it is the strong version that speaks to aspects of substantive political participation (p. 35). Strong versions of social exclusion “would begin to assess the structural barriers to political participation by members of racialized and newcomer communities” (p. 35). Therefore according to Walker and Walker (as cited in Saloojee, 2002):

Social exclusion...refers to the dynamic process of being shut out, fully or partially, from any of the social, economic, political or cultural systems which determine the social integration of a person in a society. Social exclusion may therefore be seen as the denial (non-realization) of the civil, political and social rights of citizenship. (p. 36)

I have found concepts of exclusion and inclusion to be closely linked to the discussion of citizenship that emerged from this research study. When I asked those who participated in this study how they define a “citizen” all research participants made mention of the legal and technical definition of the term. However of special note was the

⁵ In his work, Saloojee makes a distinction between two types of political participation: (1) “formal political participation” which includes activities such as voting and (2) “substantive political participation” which includes “active engagement with political parties, engaging with the policy process as part of the policy community; ensuring that all have a voice in political decision making; advocating for electoral equity etc” (Saloojee, 2002, p. 39).

fact that in several interviews research participants placed the most emphasis on less formal and technical aspects of citizenship such as: belonging, respect, equity, entitlement, voice and trust. These aspects were then linked to the belief in a citizen's right to participate in substantive processes of politics. Debbie explained "citizenship is about having a sense of belonging and ownership of where you are located, of the place and the space. It's about being active in community. It's about being able to influence public policy. It's about being able to exercise your franchise." It became clear that these more "intangible" themes, which I believe speak to ideas of participation, are vital to the *experience* of citizenship and without which feelings of social and political exclusion are likely. Uzma explained:

"If I am a resident of this city and have been for awhile, I should be involved, I should be engaged. But we can't expect, and my concern is mostly with refugees, we can't expect people to have civic engagement if we do not create...mechanisms which make them feel like what they say matters."

Uzma continued by describing that:

"One of the reasons why immigrants continue to feel so disconnected to this place is because their experiences of exclusion overwhelm them and also outweigh the experiences of inclusion."

In this way, Uzma has linked the non-realization of the political rights of citizenship to the lack of meaningful and inclusive opportunities for resident engagement thus resulting in experiences of continued exclusion for the vulnerable newcomers she describes.

Additionally, for Uzma racism has the potential to erode citizenship. She stated, "if you are a person of colour...then chances are that your experience of citizenship appears less than that of somebody else. And that to me erodes citizenship." According to

Saloojee (2002), racism is indeed a tool of exclusion and therefore a factor that also impacts the ability of newcomers and those from racialized communities to engage in political participation (p. 40-41). Saloojee states:

Certainly, social identity has direct bearing on both the form and the extent of political participation. This is the substantive dimension of political participation. Racial discrimination leads to incomplete citizenship and undervalued participation and undervalued recognition. (p. 43-44)

Jedwab (2002), also highlights racism as a barrier to increased political participation and states that “the experience of discrimination and the perception of symbolic non-recognition by society are other important considerations” (p. 75-76) in the decision of newcomers and those from racialized communities to engage in participation. I believe these continued experiences of exclusion by civil society and the structures of society negatively impact the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices, especially those of newcomers and racialized communities.

I have noted above in my literature review that a significant strength of government sponsored resident participation is its ability to promote inclusion. Saloojee (2002) explains, “the opposite of political exclusion then could well refer to integration into the political process (through voting, through the political party system or more generally through active engagement with the policy process)” (p. 37). However, it cannot be assumed that just because diverse residents are included in government sponsored citizen participation that this results in increased inclusion of newcomers and

racialized groups. The structure of substantive political participation must adopt the discourse of social inclusion that is:

Intimately concerned with rights, citizenship and restructuring relations between racialized communities and the institutions of political life...the focus is on valued recognition and valued participation by those excluded from full participation in political life, excluded in the debates around public policy and excluded from enjoying the benefits of society. (Saloojee, 2002, p. 35).

It is from the standpoint of social inclusion that processes of government sponsored resident participation should be designed and evaluated. Additionally my discussion with research participants about the effect of experiences of exclusion has confirmed what I have found in the literature which suggests that those who experience exclusion must be the ones to share their experiences of exclusion in their own words and must be involved in discussions on how to end such exclusion (Saloojee, 2003).

Best Practice

One of the most interesting findings that I have discovered as a result of this work is something that I also believe to be the most practical. I have found that the lack of any standing forms of best practice in government sponsored citizen participation impacts the ability of these processes to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices, especially those of newcomers and racialized communities. In particular, my discussion with Rob is where the idea for the need for some form of standing best practice in regards to citizen participation in the City of Toronto really developed. I noted in our conversation that Rob often used terms such as “ground rules”, “good practice” and “best practice” when referring to ways to improve processes of participation so as to make them more

inclusive. In our conversation it became apparent that there isn't anything like this in place in the City of Toronto. Rob explained, "we definitely need, we need better, more standing processes that are part of the business of government...that can kind of help to ensure that engagement takes place and that voices are captured in a way that then the city councillors still can ignore or respond to."

Additionally, as a part of the development of this finding, in all of my interviews I asked each participant my version of the "miracle question": if you were to create an inclusive decision making process from the ground up, what might it look like to you? Answers to this question have worked to provide the groundwork for operationalizing best practice in this area. The "miracle question" provided research participants with the freedom to pull apart and reconstruct processes of government sponsored resident participation from each individual's particular area of expertise and experience, into the most meaningful and inclusive processes they could imagine. These discussions mainly focused on improving the inclusivity of activities of consultation as these are most widely employed by the City of Toronto when seeking citizen participation and involvement in decision-making. However at the same time the current practice of consultation was criticized as not being conducive to power sharing in decision-making, being a predetermined process with predetermined outcomes and being a passive mode of participation. As described by Rob, opinions and attitudes are requested, but there are no real expectations of residents to wrestle with the outcome of consultation.

With this in mind, it is important to note that alternatives to traditional consultation and examples of other forms of government sponsored citizen participation

were discussed as having the potential to be more inclusive. For instance Rob expressed his interest in the recent practice of establishing a citizen's assembly to analyze electoral reform in Ontario as an alternate format of citizen participation. In this method Elections Canada sent invitations to participate in the assembly randomly to Ontarians who were eligible to vote (Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, 2007). According to the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform (2007), over 12,000 individuals responded favorable to participating and of those 1,200 were invited to attend "selection meetings" eventually creating an assembly comprised of 103 individuals plus an appointed Chair (52 males and 52 females). The duty of this assembly was to examine the current electoral system and decide if it was indeed reflective of the values of Ontarians (Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, 2007). The assembly met for numerous weekend sessions (each member was paid \$150 per meeting day) between fall 2006 and spring 2007, where they discussed their opinions on the issue and the opinions of fellow Ontarians and eventually arrived at their recommendation to adopt a mixed member proportional system (Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, 2007). This recommendation resulted in the government holding a referendum on the subject during the provincial election in October 2007. Although, the referendum resulted in no change to the current "first-past-the-post" system the assembly represented a unique form of democratic citizen decision-making that had the ability to affect change.

At the community level, Alina shared a number of helpful insights into practices of participatory budgeting at Toronto Community Housing. Participatory budgeting (PB)

has been part of decision-making on directing “capital funds to be used for capital priorities identified by tenants” since 2002 (Toronto Community Housing, 2011). Through stepped democratic processes, tenants have the power to direct millions of dollars of funding to projects they deem most necessary. Tenant researchers with the support of several research facilitators conduct detailed evaluations of PB processes and recommendations are made to improve the process of PB for the following year (Lerner et al., 2010). Although neither the Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform or PB at Toronto Community Housing are examples of *government sponsored* citizen participation, these do represent successful attempts at more meaningful and inclusive practice allowing for real power sharing in decision-making that could represent alternatives to simple consultation at the municipal level.

Regardless of the process of citizen participation employed, I believe the suggestions that arose out of the “miracle question” have the potential of aiding all processes of government sponsored citizen participation to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices and operationalize processes of best practice to accomplish this. What follows are suggestions for a strategy of best practice in government sponsored citizen participation, grounded in ideas of critical social inclusion, that has been developed out of themes and learnings arising from this research.

1. What's in a Name?

At the beginning of my interviews, I asked each research participant how he or she chose to define the term “citizen.” This question was posed to deconstruct the label given to “citizen participation” and to open the discussion as to whether the naming of this practice perhaps worked to exclude those not legally considered Canadian citizens and thus affect who may or may not participate. All of the research participants in this study commented on the problematic nature of the term and several suggested that they prefer to use the term “resident participation” in reference to this practice. Therefore I would suggest that in any future work around the practice of engaging individuals in Toronto in activities of participation, the city adopts the term “resident participation” in reference to these practices. Additionally, from here on in, I will also adopt this expression in the remainder of this research study.

2. The Devil is in the Details

It became clear from interviewees that it is the overall design and process of consultation that matter the most in terms of the ability of such processes to be meaningfully inclusive of diverse voices. Uzma, Duberlis and Rob identified that it is the process of consultation that is most often the problem. Uzma shared, “how have you designed your consultation process? That’s the issue. It is the process really... The end product is going to be determined by the process.” Additionally, Duberlis explained:

“one key fundamental piece is how you organize that group or the initial working group that is going to do the consultation work and how enlightened that group is... I think the notion of whoever does the visioning, preparation and the thinking, I think that’s where the issue is.”

In this way it is important for those designing processes of government sponsored resident participation to spend careful time preparing for participation and considering their chosen design for participation while being open to alternatives. Research must be executed on the chosen design and those planning processes of resident participation would be wise to identify if their chosen process has been attempted before and if so, to what end.

Additionally, Alina shared:

“I think there needs to be stronger intentionality in the planning and design of consultation and that can often happen when you bring together a group of people to design it, you know at the resident level. As opposed to a bunch of bureaucrats sitting around a table designing a process for people. Figure out a way to get people interested and engaged in planning their own consultation with clear outcomes.”

This was a very important suggestion to improve the inclusivity of practices of resident participation. Additionally, including residents in the design, implementation and evaluation of practices of resident participation may have the potential to increase resident interest and ownership over such processes.

3. What is Your Intention?

Just as important as thoughtfully planning processes of participation is being clear on the intention behind such processes. Graham and Phillips (1998) explain that “the challenge too often ignored in the past, of determining the basic goal of public participation in the first place and the criteria for evaluating its success or failure” is of

the utmost importance (p. 2). Fundamental goals of participation must be decided upon early in the process and shared with participants. Have decisions already been made and you are simply seeking approval or disapproval? Are you looking for feedback and information that will actually affect a decision? Or are participants active and equal partners in processes of decision-making? As Alina described, “I think people in charge of leading processes of consultation need to be really clear on what the goal and intent is...it [meaningful consultation] has to be for the sake of something...Like participation in what, to what end, and for what goal?” Remaining transparent as to the goals of participation is a first step in establishing meaningful processes of participation as this allows for respectful communication with residents and offers the opportunity to make an informed decision of whether or not to participate based on all of the information provided.

4. Seek Out the Unusual Suspects

The improvement of outreach and the accessibility of processes of government sponsored resident participation arose as two major themes in my discussions with research participants. Debbie explained that:

“We often joke about the usual suspects. In consultations you tend to see the same people [professionals in the community] all the time. So, then it begs the question then, how do you reach out so you are speaking to the true community? You are speaking to the woman who works at the daycare and may have something to say about how she wants her community to develop? How do you ensure that racialized communities are truly engaged and involved and supported through that process? How do we build a consultation process that makes it comfortable for people to engage so that it’s not only those of us who have access to public spaces who are being listened to?”

As we can see the accessibility and outreach associated with activities of government sponsored resident participation are key in establishing inclusive and meaningful practice in this area. Suggestions from research participants themselves describe how this can best be accomplished. Uzma stated:

“Residents of the city are very diverse, and they speak multiple languages, and they have multiple issues in terms of accessibility. So, if you want true resident participation, I would think the best form of consultation would be to hold it in multiple languages, in multiple neighbourhoods, with a flexible framework without pre-determined questions and with a particular emphasis on those neighbourhoods and those places and those communities that are most vulnerable.”

Debbie echoed these suggestions:

“So you know, that means that you are looking at holding consultations in the churches, and in the temples and in the mosques, right? And in the synagogues. So that there is a real sense that this is who we are as Toronto, and these are the places where people congregate, right? At the hairdressing shops and salons is where you do recruitment.”

Alina also contributed to this discussion when sharing her past experiences of ensuring accessibility when seeking resident participation:

“We did have the resources to provide refreshments and provide Halal food and vegetarian food at that time, and we did have the resources to provide tokens...and childcare...Those are the things I think that really enable participation. Especially things like child care because you will not have low income women who are able to participate if you don't compensate them...how the hell are they going to get a babysitter, right?”

Here we have learned that if the intent is to conduct inclusive and meaningful participation then resident recruitment must be far and wide and information must be

available in a number of languages and mediums so as to reach the widest audience.

Uzma suggested that one of the ways in which to improve the outreach and accessibility of processes of government sponsored resident participation is to apply the strategy of targeted universalism which she describes as “using the experience of the most vulnerable to design a universal product as opposed to the other way around”. Powell (2008) explains, “a targeted universal strategy is one that is inclusive of the needs of both the dominant and the marginal groups, but pays particular attention to the situation of the marginal group” (p. 803). As an example, Uzma suggested the need to provide information and resources in plain language to increase the likelihood that those whose first language is not English will understand information that is distributed and that those who perhaps have difficulty in literacy may also benefit. Additionally, it was reaffirmed through my conversations with research participants that the processes of participation must in and of themselves be accessible in terms of language, times and locations of meetings and in terms of resources provided to residents such as compensation for transit, meals and/or snacks and assistance with childcare.

5. Expect and Accept the Unexpected

This theme arose out of a critique of traditional consultation that tends to involve entering consultation with pre-determined questions and desired answers in mind. One major learning to arise from the case of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group was that this particular strategy backfired and left consultants scrambling as to what to do and

participants frustrated that they had no say in defining the agenda for consultation. Here

Duberlis points out the necessity to expect and accept the unexpected:

“I think if you really want to have a consultation, in a consultation you would expect new ideas, new inputs and even surprises. In that sense, then it should be open and truly open because that is the problem with consultations, they never are sufficiently open. So in some sense then, I think you have to leave it as open as possible and you have to be ready to accept that maybe some of the answers you want, they may not be there, they may be different. And then, so the question is how ready are you as a person conducting the consultations to accept that there is a broader reality maybe or there are other emerging issues that may not have been considered initially.”

Therefore it is necessary that facilitators of activities of government sponsored resident participation adopt a dual role. Sometimes they must act as the teachers in terms of assisting participants to perhaps understand broader civic processes/organization or issues attached to the particular topic at hand. Alternatively, facilitators must also adopt the role of the student and remain respectfully curious and open to learning from participants. Additionally, power sharing in decision-making must be real. Participants should have the ability to set and adapt the agenda for discussion and mechanisms for feedback as to why or why not participant contributions/suggestions were utilized is a fundamental requirement of meaningful participation.

6. Identities Intersect

Additional findings to emerge from the case of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group and my interviews with research participants have been the themes of essentialism and tokenism in consultation. In creating the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural focus group, the facilitators of the consultation effectively denied all group members

anything but an “ethnic” identity and Uzma explains, “and even that was homogenized.” It did not matter that as Uzma pointed out the interests of group members cut across all sectoral groups or that this group was made up of men and women, individuals of different ages, ethnic groups, different immigration/refugee experiences etc. I believe this essential categorization of individuals severely limited the type of input provided and worked to further marginalize and oppress those present.

In contrast to this an intersectional perspective “acknowledges the breadth of human experiences, instead of conceptualizing social relations and identities separately in terms of either race *or* class *or* gender *or* age *or* sexual orientation” (Murphy, Hunt, Zajicek, Norris & Hamilton, 2009, p. 2). In addition “an intersectional perspective examines how two or more social constructions of oppression and/or privilege intersect to shape people’s social locations” (p. 2). The appreciation of the intersections of individuals’ identity is especially important in the field of social policy. In their work on incorporating intersectionality, Murphy et al. highlight the research of Lori Wilkinson who studies social policy in Canada and proposed that:

By identifying the intersections of relevant identity markers while creating public policies, the government would be better able to direct its limited resources to its intended target – the population of need in a particular policy area. Specifically, if public policy scholars were to incorporate intersectionality theory and methods into their research...the policies, and the front-line service workers and the agencies implementing them, would greatly improve the chances of the requisite services being provided to those most in need. (p. 66)

Although so many benefits in the recognition of multiple identities exist to both individuals and the social policy process, the examination of intersectionality in policy is still a developing area (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2010; Murphy et al., 2009). Uzma spoke to

this in our conversation by providing a potential reason for why this is and discussing the risk in not operating from this perspective:

“People get afraid because when you start unpacking um, this kind of stuff they fear it can become huge and it can become unmanageable or whatever. Of course, the real desire is to ‘manage’ and ‘contain’ and not question one’s own power to exercise that kind of control. But I think we should not shy away from complexity of lives just because it is complex and difficult. I think simplifying certain things does more harm and injustice to it because by definition it forces you to create structures/processes where none should exist and we become prisoners of those structures/processes, right? It is better to locate/name the power of the 'consultant' and then let the group define itself in all its complexity – the result will be richer data, more inclusive & equitable process and more empowered participants.”

Indeed this is not an easy or inexpensive process but it is an equitable one. Some individuals have begun to “unpack” the issue of complex identities in policymaking and create models that honour this theory. One such example to be learned from is the Multi-Strand Project in the United Kingdom, which has worked to include both policy professionals and residents in the construction of policies focusing on social care (Hankivsky and Cormier, 2010). What makes this project of resident participation unique and inclusive while honouring intersections in identity is the fact that instead of separating participants based on identity (religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, ability etc.), all “strands” were brought together and given equal importance in discussions concerning policy (p. 7). Individuals were asked to “vision” how policy could best “promote equality and human rights...So instead of investigating how best to address issues of equality for each individual strand, visioning entails revealing commonalities...to identify common solutions that will benefit all strands” (p. 9). These

are relatively new approaches to social policy analysis and design and further research and practice of such processes is currently underway.

7. A Fluid Versus Fixed Perspective

One of the most powerful themes to emerge from the research has been what I have labeled as “the need for fluidity.” The need for fluidity is essential in activities of government sponsored resident participation because as Alina explains:

“it’s [processes of resident participation] iterative, right? ...So, it will constantly change and evolve and the people who are responsible for those types of processes need to be comfortable with complexity, need to be comfortable with change, need to be very flexible and willing to just go with whatever becomes the important issue and not rigid in the thinking. And then sometimes you just have to get rid of whatever your original priority was and have a new priority or a different priority because you know we’re all people.”

Through my discussions with research participants I have learned that there is no one size fits all, or in the case of this research study, a “one size includes all” approach to practices of government sponsored resident participation. Instead there are opportunities to continue to remain open to learn from processes of resident participation and continue to try to build on past practice to increase opportunities for the meaningful inclusion of marginalized voices in these processes.

With this last point in mind, it is my intention that the outline of the above findings might serve as the beginning of a strategy of best practice in government sponsored resident participation. It is important that even a strategy of best practice not be confused with the need to standardize practices in this area. Processes of resident participation should be iterative by nature, as they must be designed to flex and respond

to the changing needs and desires of residents. However, there is no reason why these processes should not be guided by a strategy of best practice which works to enhance the ability of government sponsored resident participation to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices, especially those of newcomers and racialized communities.

Section Seven: Implications for Social Work

I believe there are several implications for Social Work that arise out of the findings of this research study. For one, as social workers we are called by our professional college and bound by our code of ethics to advocate principles of social justice (OCSWSSW, 2010). Regardless of either our clinical and/or policy focused work we cannot lose sight of this principal and advocating for the inclusion of marginalized residents in government decision-making around issues that effect their lives is of the utmost importance. As social workers and researchers we are in a pivotal position to honour the principals of social justice and contribute to improving important and necessary opportunities for resident participation in policy process. As social workers we should step to the forefront and advocate for the increased funding of such processes and promote practices of meaningful and inclusive resident participation.

Additionally, it is our duty to name this work in our own practice. We may unknowingly actually find ourselves engaged in forms of resident participation in our work such as explaining civic processes to individuals or assisting/encouraging an individual to depute or send a letter or email to their city councillor on an issue of concern to them. We must identify and name these practices as “civic engagement” in our work as a way to highlight the importance of resident engagement and to protect it and ensure that it remains an important aspect of the work and culture of our agencies and organizations.

Finally, as social workers we can get involved in processes of resident engagement. We should participate ourselves in such activities not only to help to have our own voices heard and to carry forward the values inherent in our profession but to

continue to disrupt mainstream processes of resident participation that may consciously or unconsciously be working to exclude. Like all aspects of our work, we should be continually striving to draw attention to and redress systemic issues of injustice including racism. Through our involvement in processes of government sponsored citizen participation we can help to ensure that this is a priority. As a last recommendation of this research study and a further implication for Social Work, I have come to the conclusion that the City of Toronto could benefit from a working group on resident participation and that this provides yet another avenue to become involved in this work as social workers. This group would ideally be made up of residents, community practitioners (including social workers) and city employees/officials. The task of this group could be to work to further design a strategy of best practice in resident participation, monitor such processes, research alternatives and design frameworks for evaluation.

Section Eight: Conclusion

I began this exploration into government sponsored “citizen” participation due to frustration I had experienced in the field as a social worker and advocate. I have watched individuals struggle with policy and governmental systems that do not adequately meet their needs and I felt there must be a better way to construct such systems to be more responsive to lived experience. Finding a place to begin this exploration led me to ask the simple question: what is the ability of government sponsored citizen participation to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices, especially those of Newcomers and racialized communities?

Over the course of this research I have found that this simple question requires a complex answer as there are many structural and practical issues acting on the ability of such processes to be both more meaningful and inclusive. I have discovered that the current neo-liberal reality in the City of Toronto has had a negative impact on the ability of processes of resident participation to become more inclusive and this may remain the case for the foreseeable future. Also, larger systemic issues of racism and discrimination continue to affect the ability of such processes to be welcoming and inclusive of newcomers and racialized communities. Although both of these findings can appear overwhelming and as if they are held in an untouchable macro realm of reality, I believe we can continue to chip away at such problems. One hands-on and practical way this can be accomplished is to establish best practices in the area of government sponsored resident participation to ensure that it is inclusive of all members of our community.

I understand that increasing inclusivity in resident participation will not solve issues of racism, exclusion and discrimination on its own. However, I believe asking such questions as the research question I have posed above, will continue to challenge us to disrupt mainstream thinking in policy making, to build theories and practices that challenge essentializing categories of identity and work to increase experiences of inclusion, while creating policy that is most suitable to the changing complex and diverse lived experiences and community that is the City of Toronto.

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Appendices

Appendix A - Recruitment Email for Those Who Participated in the 2000/2001 Community Consultation on Social Development

E-mail Subject Line: A Study of Inclusive Citizen Participation in Social Planning in a
Large Urban City

I am conducting a research study designed to examine social planning in the city of Toronto and more specifically government sponsored citizen participation and its ability to be inclusive of a diverse range of voices in this process, especially those of racialized communities. As part of the completion of a Master's in Social Work degree at McMaster University, I would like to invite you to take part in a 60-90 minute interview in which you can share your thoughts and ideas on the concept of citizen participation in social policy formation in this city and the ability of this approach to policy making to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices, especially those of racialized communities. I have selected you to participate in this research study due to your prior involvement in the 2000-2001 Community Consultations on Social Development in the City of Toronto, as I wish to find out more about your thoughts on the above issue in relation to your experience with these consultations.

It is expected that this study will pose minimum risk to you and you can withdraw at any time. I have attached a copy of a letter of information about the study that provides full details. This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Office of Research Services
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

I would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration. If you would prefer not to participate in this study, you may simply respond to this email with the word 'decline' in the subject line. If after two weeks I have not received a response from you, I will send you a one-time follow-up reminder.

Sincerely,
Vanessa M. Rankin, BSW
Master's in Social Work Candidate
School of Social Work, McMaster University
Hamilton, ON
rankinvm@mcmaster.ca

**Appendix B: Recruitment Email for Those Who Did Not Participate in the
2000/2001 Community Consultation on Social Development**

E-mail Subject Line: A Study of Inclusive Citizen Participation in Social Planning in a
Large Urban City

I am conducting a research study designed to examine social planning in the city of Toronto and more specifically government sponsored citizen participation and its ability to be inclusive of a diverse range of voices in this process, especially those of racialized communities. As part of the completion of a Master's in Social Work degree at McMaster University, I would like to invite you to take part in a 60-90 minute interview in which you can share your thoughts and ideas on the concept of citizen participation in social policy formation in this city and the ability of this approach to policy making to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices, especially those of racialized communities.

It is expected that this study will pose minimum risk to you and you can withdraw at any time. I have attached a copy of a letter of information about the study that provides full details. This study has been reviewed and approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is being conducted you may contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Board Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Office of Research Services
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

I would like to thank you in advance for your time and consideration. If you would prefer not to participate in this study, you may simply respond to this email with the word 'decline' in the subject line. If after two weeks I have not received a response from you, I will send you a one-time follow-up reminder.

Sincerely,
Vanessa M. Rankin, BSW
Master's in Social Work Candidate
School of Social Work, McMaster University
Hamilton, ON
rankinvm@mcmaster.ca

**Appendix C: Letter of Information and Consent for Those Who Participated in the
2000/2001 Community Consultation on Social Development**

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT

A Study of Inclusive Citizen Participation in Social Planning in a Large Urban City

Investigators:

Student Investigator:

Vanessa M. Rankin

BSW, MSW Candidate

School of Social Work, McMaster University

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

E-mail: rankinvm@mcmaster.ca

Faculty Supervisor:

Stephanie Baker Collins

Associate Professor

School of Social Work, McMaster University

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

(905) 525-9140, ext., 23779

Email: sbcollins@mcmaster.ca

Purpose of the Study

I am conducting a research study designed to examine social planning in the city of Toronto and more specifically government sponsored citizen participation and its ability to be inclusive of a diverse range of voices, especially those of racialized communities. I would like to invite you to take part in this study and share your thoughts and ideas on the concept of inclusive citizen participation in social policy formation in relation to the 2000-2001 Community Consultations on Social Development in the City of Toronto. It is my intention to better understand the practice of citizen participation in social development at a municipal level and the ability of this approach to policy making to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices, especially those of racialized communities.

As a graduate social work student, this research is being conducted to contribute to my thesis and the completion of a Master's in Social Work degree.

Procedures involved in the Research

I am inviting you to participate in this research by taking part in an individual interview that will last approximately 60-90 minutes in length. With your permission, I will take

handwritten notes and tape-record our discussion so that I do not miss anything said and so that I can accurately represent your thoughts and ideas. The interview will be scheduled at a time and in a location of your convenience.

It is my intention to conduct the interview in the form a discussion in which we can have a relaxed flow of conversation on the subject of citizen participation, being guided by some of the following questions:

- How do you understand citizen participation?
- What do you feel were the strengths and limitations of the 2000-2001 Community Consultations on Social Development?
- In your view, what might an inclusive process of social planning resemble?

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You may feel self-conscious about your responses or anxious that your responses may identify you to others. To assist in managing this, you do not need to answer any questions that you do not want to answer, and as your participation in this research is voluntary, you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Below, you will find a detailed description of the steps I will take to ensure the protection of your privacy.

Potential Benefits

The research will not benefit you directly. However, I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will have particular relevance to the advancement of knowledge in both the social policy and social work arenas. It is my hope that analysis of interview data combined with an analysis of literature on this subject, will offer new approaches and insights into ensuring that the question of difference be addressed so as to contribute to the development of effective forms of inclusive citizen participation and ultimately more responsive social policy that is best suited to meet the needs of diverse communities.

Confidentiality

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential and I will not identify you in the final research report without your consent and direction to do otherwise. Nevertheless, you may be indirectly identified based on references or comments you make. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me. If you would like to have your identity remain confidential, we will discuss the way in which you wish to be described at the time of your interview, so that your identity and organization cannot be guessed by others in the community. However, if you would prefer to have your identity known and revealed in the final research report this is also an option. You may highlight your wishes in regards to your preference around confidentiality, on the consent form below. If at any point prior to the submission of the final research report you wish to change your mind in regards to

your confidentiality, I will make the necessary changes required to reflect your wishes and provide you with a copy of an edited draft report for your review and approval.

Additionally, once the transcript of the interview is finished, I will ensure you receive a copy via regular mail or as an email attachment for your review. Should you have any questions or concerns with any parts of the transcript, you will have the opportunity to contact me directly and I will discuss with you any concerns you may have. At this time, you will have the opportunity to amend or remove any comments from the transcript that you wish. I will also ask you in advance if I can use particular direct quotes or paraphrases from our discussion in my report, taking care to disguise your identity in the way we have previously discussed, unless you tell me you would prefer to have it revealed.

Finally, the information you provide, and the audio tape recording of our interview will be kept private in a locked desk/filing cabinet where only I will have access to it. Any information transferred into electronic form will be kept in my computer which is password protected. All files will be stored for approximately 6 months and after that time will be shredded, deleted and disposed of without identifying information.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you can decide to stop at any time, even after signing the consent form or part way through the study. If you decide not to participate there will be no consequences to you or your organization. If you decide to withdraw at any point, any data you have provided to that point will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

Information about the Study Results

The final report is expected to be completed during late Summer 2011 and you will be able to see the aggregated results through this report. If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please let me know how you would like me to send it to you.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact myself at rankinvm@mcmaster.ca or by telephone (416) 471-7601.

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support
E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Vanessa Rankin, of McMaster University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. I agree that the interview can be audio taped.

- Yes
- No

2. Do you wish that your identity remain confidential in the final research report?

- Yes
- No

3. Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results?

- Yes
- No

Please send them to this email address:

or to this mailing address:

**Appendix D: Letter of Information and Consent for Those Who Did Not Participate
in the 2000/2001 Community Consultation on Social Development**

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT

A Study of Inclusive Citizen Participation in Social Planning in a Large Urban City

Investigators:

Student Investigator:

Vanessa M. Rankin

BSW, MSW Candidate

School of Social Work, McMaster University

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

E-mail: rankinvm@mcmaster.ca

Faculty Supervisor:

Stephanie Baker Collins

Associate Professor

School of Social Work, McMaster University

Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

(905) 525-9140, ext., 23779

Email: sbcollins@mcmaster.ca

Purpose of the Study

I am conducting a research study designed to examine social planning in the city of Toronto and more specifically government sponsored citizen participation and its ability to be inclusive of a diverse range of voices, especially those of racialized communities. I would like to invite you to take part in this study and share your thoughts and ideas on the concept of inclusive citizen participation in social policy formation. It is my intention to better understand the practice of citizen participation in social development at a municipal level and the ability of this approach to policy making to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices, especially those of racialized communities.

As a graduate social work student, this research is being conducted to contribute to my thesis and the completion of a Master's in Social Work degree.

Procedures involved in the Research

I am inviting you to participate in this research by taking part in an individual interview that will last approximately 60-90 minutes in length. With your permission, I will take handwritten notes and tape-record our discussion so that I do not miss anything said and

so that I can accurately represent your thoughts and ideas. The interview will be scheduled at a time and in a location of your convenience.

It is my intention to conduct the interview in the form a discussion in which we can have a relaxed flow of conversation on the subject of citizen participation, being guided by some of the following questions:

- How do you understand citizen participation?
- In your view, what might an inclusive process of social planning resemble?

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. You may feel self-conscious about your responses or anxious that your responses may identify you to others. To assist in managing this, you do not need to answer any questions that you do not want to answer, and as your participation in this research is voluntary, you may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. Below, you will find a detailed description of the steps I will take to ensure the protection of your privacy.

Potential Benefits

The research will not benefit you directly. However, I hope that what is learned as a result of this study will have particular relevance to the advancement of knowledge in both the social policy and social work arenas. It is my hope that analysis of interview data combined with an analysis of literature on this subject, will offer new approaches and insights into ensuring that the question of difference be addressed so as to contribute to the development of effective forms of inclusive citizen participation and ultimately more responsive social policy that is best suited to meet the needs of diverse communities.

Confidentiality

Your participation in this study will be kept confidential and I will not identify you in the final research report without your consent and direction to do otherwise. Nevertheless, you may be indirectly identified based on references or comments you make. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me. If you would like to have your identity remain confidential, we will discuss the way in which you wish to be described at the time of your interview, so that your identity and organization cannot be guessed by others in the community. However, if you would prefer to have your identity known and revealed in the final research report this is also an option. You may highlight your wishes in regards to your preference around confidentiality, on the consent form below. If at any point prior to the submission of the final research report you wish to change your mind in regards to your confidentiality, I will make the necessary changes required to reflect your wishes and provide you with a copy of an edited draft report for your review and approval.

Additionally, once the transcript of the interview is finished, I will ensure you receive a copy via regular mail or as an email attachment for your review. Should you have any questions or concerns with any parts of the transcript, you will have the opportunity to contact me directly and I will discuss with you any concerns you may have. At this time, you will have the opportunity to amend or remove any comments from the transcript that you wish. I will also ask you in advance if I can use particular direct quotes or paraphrases from our discussion in my report, taking care to disguise your identity in the way we have previously discussed, unless you tell me you would prefer to have it revealed.

Finally, the information you provide, and the audio tape recording of our interview will be kept private in a locked desk/filing cabinet where only I will have access to it. Any information transferred into electronic form will be kept in my computer which is password protected. All files will be stored for approximately 6 months and after that time will be shredded, deleted and disposed of without identifying information.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you can decide to stop at any time, even after signing the consent form or part way through the study. If you decide not to participate there will be no consequences to you or your organization. If you decide to withdraw at any point, any data you have provided to that point will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

Information about the Study Results

The final report is expected to be completed during late Summer 2011 and you will be able to see the aggregated results through this report. If you would like to receive a copy of the report, please let me know how you would like me to send it to you.

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or need more information about the study itself, please contact myself at rankinvm@mcmaster.ca or by telephone (416) 471-7601.

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Research Office for Administrative Development and Support

E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Vanessa Rankin, of McMaster University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____

1. I agree that the interview can be audio taped.

- Yes
- No

2. Do you wish that your identity remain confidential in the final research report?

- Yes
- No

3. Would you like to receive a summary of the study's results?

- Yes
- No

Please send them to this email address:

or to this mailing address:

Appendix E: Follow Up Reminder and Thank You Email

Email Subject Line: Reminder - A Study of Inclusive Citizen Participation in Social Planning in a Large Urban City

Hello,

Two weeks ago I sent you an email regarding an invitation to take part in an interview to share your thoughts and ideas on the concept of citizen participation in social policy formation in this city and the ability of this approach to policy making to meaningfully include a diverse range of voices, especially those of racialized communities.

I would like to remind you that, if you still would like to participate, you may contact me to set up an interview at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,
Vanessa M. Rankin, BSW
Master's in Social Work Candidate
School of Social Work, McMaster University,
Hamilton, ON
rankinvm@mcmaster.ca

**Appendix F: Interview Guide for Those Who Participated in the 2000/2001
Community Consultation on Social Development**

1. How do you define a citizen?
 - a. Who do you consider to be a citizen in the City of Toronto?
2. How do you understand citizen participation?
3. What do you feel are the strengths and limitations of citizen participation generally speaking?
4. What was your role in the 2000-2001 Community Consultations on Social Development?
5. How were you recruited to participate in these consultations?
6. When did your involvement begin and end with these consultations?
7. What was it like for you to be recruited as an “ethno-cultural leader”?
8. What do you feel were the strengths and limitations of the 2000-2001 Community Consultations on Social Development?
9. Do you believe that the consultations were accessible to all who wished to participate? Why or why not?
10. Do you believe that the consultative process was inclusive of the voices of racialized communities?
 - a. Who was included in this process and who do you feel was left out?
 - b. What was the intensity of this process (i.e. in your opinion was this a superficial process or were participants invited to be deeply engaged in this process?)
11. How was the input from racialized communities addressed (or not) during the consultative process?
12. In your opinion, was feedback given to these communities about the results of their input in the consultative process?
13. What does meaningful citizen participation resemble to you?
14. If you were to create an inclusive decision making process from the ground up, what might it look like?

15. Considering your experience within the 2000-2001 community Social Development Strategy Consultations, what recommendations if any might you make to improve the practice of citizen participation?
16. Is there anything else you might like to add or any other information that you feel might be of help to share at this point in time in regards to any aspect of our discussion or the topic of inclusive citizen participation?
17. Is there anyone you might recommend I speak with whom was also a part of the Community Consultations and a member of the Ethno-racial/Ethno-cultural Group?

**Appendix G: Interview Guide for Those Who Did Not Participate in the 2000/2001
Community Consultation on Social Development**

1. How do you define a citizen?
 - a. Who do you consider to be a citizen in the City of Toronto?
2. How do you understand citizen participation?
3. What do you feel are the strengths and limitations of citizen participation generally speaking?
4. Have you been directly involved in any City initiated and City sponsored community consultations? If so, which ones?
5. How were you recruited and what was this experience like for you?
6. From either your direct experience with community consultations or your work in the field, do you believe that consultations are accessible to all who wish to participate? Why or why not?
7. Do you believe that the consultative process is inclusive of the voices of racialized communities?
 - a. Who was included in this process and who do you feel was left out?
 - b. What was the intensity of this process (i.e. in your opinion was this a superficial process or were participants invited to be deeply engaged in this process?)
8. In your opinion, is feedback given to these communities about the results of their input in the consultative process?
9. What does meaningful citizen participation resemble to you?
10. If you were to create an inclusive decision making process from the ground up (concerning either social policy or social planning), what might it look like?
11. What recommendations if any might you make to improve the practice of inclusive citizen participation?
12. Is there anything else you might like to add or any other information that you feel might be of help to share at this point in time in regards to any aspect of our discussion or the topic of inclusive citizen participation?
13. Is there anyone you might recommend I speak with who might wish to share their thoughts and ideas on this subject?