

Is multiculturalism  
bad for women  
sociology essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

There are many books, articles, academic and non academic papers have been written concerning Multiculturalism and its impact on Western and non-Western societies, religious or cultural groups. The aim of this critical review is to examine, give description, comparing and contrasting, conducting analysis and evaluation of two different articles that discuss the same theme of Multiculturalism. Both articles are written by feminist's writers who argue the issues relating to gender and especially women.

### Description of two articles

#### Article 1:

This article is written by Susan Moller Okin a feminist writer who argues that policy makers, defenders and advocates of multiculturalism in liberal and democratic countries, have not shown justice and fairness when it comes to the issue of gender especially women. She also argues about the issues of immigrants and raises the question that is why the immigrants, minority groups and indigenous people failed to be part of the majority cultures in Western Countries. Women were the most groups who felt that they were controlled by men in many aspects of life; therefore, the assimilation of women in Western cultures caused huge controversy in the field of multiculturalism.

#### Article 2:

This article is written by Mandy McKerl, another feminist writer who argues that women who come from different background, cultures, minority groups and live in multiculturalism societies, lack self-esteem and self respect due

to the pressure from the their own cultures and their own communities. She presents her arguments based on the status of these women in contemporary societies in which they encounter discrimination, prejudice, sexism, injustice and lack of opportunities. She also criticizes multiculturalism in Western liberal democracy societies in which freedom, social justice, social equality and political representation are terms made by certain establishment to serve only the male dominant and ignore women rights, freedom, and social justice. Again the emphases here are on women who belong to ethnic minorities and Muslim women in particular.

#### Comparison of the two articles

Similarities: The title of both articles indicates that there are similarities in the arguments particularly from feminist point of views. Both writers illustrate the depth of the problem that women are subjected to issue of inequality and social justice in multiculturalism societies and liberal democratic states. They criticize the policy makers and the government institution in failing to address the issue concerning gender especially women and to recognize that there is a gap in certain laws which left women to become vulnerable to sex abuse, clitoridectomy, rape, polygamy, domestic violence, and killings. In addition, they present similar cases and examples from within Western multicultural societies where women and girls from different cultural background have been subjected to force marriages, children marriages, threat, and in some cases kidnapping. According to both writers, this unjustified behavior led to create negative impact on women and girls, and it also has created fierce tensions between the feminist ideologies and defender of multiculturalism in Western states.

Points of differences and contrast:

The author of article 1 presents her arguments concerning multiculturalism in a broader picture, although her main argument deals with issue of women rights that has been violated and ignored. In contrast to article 2, the author expands her arguments and engages in more details to identify the core of the problem that is hidden behind the mask of multiculturalism. Article 1, rarely diffuses discussion on cultural groups and its role in multiculturalism societies. In contrast to article 2, where the discussion is more energetic to explore with the reader that cultural groups has the upper hand in controlling the lives and freedom of women. There are other views and comments regarding the issue of multiculturalism by anthropologist in article 2, which could not be found in article 1.

Analysis and evaluation:

As the title of both articles suggest “ Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women”? Arguably this is the main issue in both of the readings. The authors are not seeking a Yes or No answer here, but to illustrate statement if the society acknowledge and believe in the rights of women or believe in multiculturalism and ignore the rights of women. The other issue that the articles wanted to concentrate on is that in Western countries, immigrants, Muslim women have been deprived from their essence legal protections and have been looked at as third-class citizens.

Both authors argue that because of the dogma of multiculturalism, women from ethnic background and different cultures are exposed to violence, sexism, polygamy, and violation of human rights. According to Wihtol de <https://assignbuster.com/is-multiculturalism-bad-for-women-sociology-essay/>

Wenden, “ the French response to such practice as polygamy, excision, and headscarves has often taken the form of the imposition of unsuitable sanctions”. She suggests that “ such sanctions, far from helping migrant women, tend to isolate them further into a traditional world that deprives them from equal rights and equal opportunity”. (Wihtol de Wenden, 1998, p. 140). One can argue that some Western countries believe that all these immigrants and women cherish one single homogenous culture; therefore, they all should follow it, missing the fact that this misunderstanding in homogenous culture, has resulted in permitting most men to use the name culture for their own advantages by beating, torturing, and disrespecting women and girls.

Arguably, both authors are discussing the same problem regarding the issues of multiculturalism, women, cultural groups, human rights, and policy makers in same directions, but apply different approaches. For example, article 1 states that some group rights can, in fact, endanger and humiliate women. She illustrates her claim by giving an example of French government’s allowing few thousands of male immigrants from African colonized countries special permission to bring multiple wives into the country.

Ironically, the French laws do not permit polygamy and the wives’ own severe rejection to the practice of polygamy, did not stop these men to marry multiple wives’. (Okin, 1999, p. 10). Okin strongly emphasizes that women should not be considered as disadvantaged because of their sex and should not be treated as sex object to pleasure men. Volpp states that “ the assumption that women are by definition more oppressed in minority

cultures can be traced to several theoretical base: the history of colonialism, depictions of the feminist subject, the limits of liberalism, and the use of binary logic". (Volpp, 2001, p. 1195). If this is the case, than Western countries should reject group rights that allow the practice of polygamy on the foundation that they are essential to minority cultures whose existence may otherwise be threatened. (Okin, 1999, p. 11).

Similar arguments can be found in article 2, in which Mckerl highlights the issue of minority groups and their cultural rights of practices. She reflects and analysis the argument which is presented in article 1 from historical and political background and this method is important in raising the issue of multiculturalism and gender. She also illustrates opinions of multiculturalism from various thinkers, philosophers, and authors and comparatively weights them to separate facts from fiction. (Mckerl, 2007, p. 192).

There is a sense of creating a notion of balance between feminism ideology and the defender of multiculturalism and in doing so; she is establishing a link of mutual debate to highlights and bring the issue of women that has been ignored for sometimes to the surface. In contrast to article 1, these type of analytical approaches and references to other authors are not present which makes her arguments less energetic.

The issues of women and multiculturalism have been addressed by other writers such as, Johann Hari, Judit Hell, Himani Bannerji, and Sarah Song. The article entitled " How multiculturalism is betraying women" by Johann Hari can be seen as a direct criticism of multiculturalism in liberal and Western societies. She demonstrates her arguments by presenting several cases of

Muslim women who were subjected to violence, rape, discrimination, and have been treated as third-class citizens. (Hari, 2007). She writes in different style and more critical of social justice and inequality of human rights especially concerning women. Although, her writing may not be considered as an academic piece of work, but she engages extremely well in raising the issues of women especially in courts room. Arguably, there is a sense of resemblance in arguments between this work and the previous two articles despite the differences in approaches.

Another example of resemblances in arguments can be found in the report of Judit Hell “ Women’s Issue and Multiculturalism” in which the writer present her arguments about multiculturalism from feminist point of view to emphasis that there are many issues regarding women and girls needed to be addressed in both public and private sphere. (Hell, n. d.). Judit, like Okin concentrate in her discussion on the historical background to multiculturalism and elaborates on the gender issue, but this time on gender of male that use culture as an excuse to establish authorities upon women and to subordinate them.

In this respect, judit argues that multicultural societies are divided into two categories of societies, traditional societies and modern societies. She suggests that in Christian Europe the traditional societies were patriarchal by nature and male were the dominant figures, therefore the status of women was defined. The other ethnic communities groups, such as Jews, Gypsies and Muslims who arrived at later stage and settled in Christian Europe, once again male were the dominant figures in these groups. Comparing the patriarchal status in traditional societies to modern societies, the treatment

of women by these dominant male from these ethnic groups were harsh and primitive. (Hell, n. d.).

Himani in her essay “ A Question of Silence: Reflection on Violence Against Women in Communities of colour” raises issues concerning multiculturalism and women, but her style in this particular essay is completely different from Okin and Mckerl. She presents her writing in a form of a letter that is written to a friend in free verse style. She states “ Breaking with scholarly protocols, I am writing this piece as a letter to you because what I want to say needs an embodied reader”. ( Bannerji, 2000, p. 151). This piece of writing is dedicated to friends and in it the writer opens up her discussion addressing the violation of women rights with especial references to ethnic minorities’ women in Canada. The piece is well structured and full of technical words, but easy to follow its main argument.

Sarah Song, is another feminist academic writer who highlights issues of multiculturalism and women in America. In her arguments, she presents case studies of several women from Hong Kong, China, India, and America who have been kidnapped and raped by men. She states that “ not so long ago in the United States, unless there was obvious evidence of coercion, an American woman charging rape had to convince the court that she had resisted the defendant’s advances “ to the utmost”. (Song, 2007, p. 93). Because of the nature of the cases that she has presented, her style of writing is very descriptive and critical. Tradition and culture are the main themes that run throughout her arguments and seemingly it is critical rather than neutral.



In general, the above articles are written from feminist point of views and highlighted issues concerning multiculturalism and the status of women in the multicultural societies. The presentations of some arguments are convincing and straight to the point where social injustice and inequality of women were addressed throughout the articles. Article 2 in particular is more engaging and interesting because it involves depth arguments and involves the reader to make a decision for him/herself either to agree or disagree with the discussion that is presented. It is an intellectual article which contest political, religious, cultural, and gender issues that evolve around us to understand the core of the problems that we are facing in this multicultural societies.

## Conclusion

Feminist writers have presented theories and ideologies of multiculturalism in different perspectives and argued that culture, tradition, religion, and politics play an important role in shaping and controlling women.

The interpretation of multiculturalism in itself could be ambiguous and cultural differences in certain parts of liberal societies are governed by dominant male and this will not help in empowering women.

The articles presented views and challenged the defender and agents of multiculturalism through presenting cases of abuse, sexism, discrimination, social injustice and challenged the policy makers that certain laws are bias and prejudice towards women.

Each article has its unique way in style and arguments despite the differences and similarities that embedded throughout the discussion. Each article had delivered the necessary message profoundly.

The debate and the tension between feminism and multiculturalism supporters has created a balance of understanding each other views to some extent although the division in arguments will continue in years to come.

## References

Bannerji, H. (2000). *The Dark Side of the Nation- Essays on Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Gender*. Canadian Scholars' Press Inc. Toronto, Ontario.

Hari, J. (2007). How Multiculturalism is betraying Women [online] The Independent News Paper. Available from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/johann-hari/johann-hari-how-multiculturalism-is-betraying-women-446806.html>

Accessed: 4th November 2010.

Hell, J. No date. Women's Issue and Multiculturalism. [online]. Available from: <http://www.bu.edu/wcp/papers/Gend/GendHell.htm>

Accessed: 1st November 2010.

McKerl, M. (2007) ' Multiculturalism, Gender and Violence: is multiculturalism bad for women?', in *Culture and Religion*, Vol. 8, No. 2

Okin, S. M. (1999) ' Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?', in Cohen, J. and Howard, M. (eds) ' Is Multiculturalism Bad For Women'? Princeton University Press, USA.

<https://assignbuster.com/is-multiculturalism-bad-for-women-sociology-essay/>

Song, S. (2007) *Justice, Gender, and The Politics of Multiculturalism*.  
Cambridge University Press, USA.

Volpp, L. (2001). *Feminism versus Multiculturalism*. In JSTOR accessed online  
at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1123774>

Accessed: 1st November 2010.

Wenden, C. W. (1998). *Young Muslim Women in France: Cultural and  
Psychological Adjustments*. In JSTOR accessed online at <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3792118>

Accessed: 1st November 2010.