EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF PREJUDICE TOWARD ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN CANADA

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Abstract

Limited attention has been devoted to examining why non-Aboriginal Canadians may harbour prejudicial attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples. The current study addressed this gap by employing a 2-part mixed-methods approach. In part 1, a questionnaire was administered to 192 non-Aboriginal undergraduate students attending a prairie Canadian university. Respondents who self-identified as white/Caucasian and obtained scores denotative of prejudice (i.e., above scale midpoints) were subsequently invited to participate in part 2, which consisted of a series of personal interviews ($N = 13; 9$ women, $4$ men) that occurred either face-to-face or online (instant messaging). Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), 3 broad themes were identified to represent participants' views and experiences relating to Aboriginal peoples. First, the socialization process emerged as a key contributor to participants' attitudes toward this group. Second, beliefs grounded in modern prejudice were frequently noted (e.g., Aboriginal peoples receive "special" treatment denied their white counterparts). Third, old-fashioned prejudice was evident (e.g., the belief that Aboriginal peoples possess intrinsic deficits and, thus, are culpable for the social problems they encounter). In addition to these three themes, certain communication patterns were observed, such as the use of disclaimers and qualifiers to ostensibly appear non-prejudiced. We propose that participants engage in surface-level evaluations of Aboriginal peoples. Further, their prejudice appears to partly be due to lack of awareness and understanding of concepts such as white privilege, the intergenerational effects of colonization, and institutional and structural factors that serve as obstacles to the socioeconomic advancement of Aboriginal peoples.
Résumé

On a accordé peu d’attention à la question suivante: pourquoi les canadiens allochtones éprouvent-ils des préjugés envers les canadiens autochtones? Cet article cherche à combler ce vide en faisant usage d’une analyse en deux parties. Dans la première, on a administré un questionnaire auprès de 192 étudiants de premier cycle dans une université canadienne des prairies. Les sujets se considérant de race blanche et dont les résultats indiquaient un niveau de préjugé anti-autochtone plus élevé que la moyenne furent invités à participer à la deuxième partie de l’enquête, consistant en une série d’entrevues individuelles (les sujets -9 femmes, 4 hommes—pouvaient ce faire en personne ou via internet). Trois thèmes généraux se dégagent chez ces sujets en ce qui concerne leur vision des autochtones: en premier lieu, le processus de socialisation se révèle important pour ce qui est des attitudes des sujets envers les autochtones. En second lieu, on a souvent remarqué qu’il existait chez les sujets des croyances fondées sur des préjugés (ainsi, ceux soutenant que les autochtones recevraient des « traitements spéciaux » auxquels n’auraient pas droit leurs concitoyens blancs). En troisième lieu, des préjugés purs et simples étaient souvent flagrants (ainsi, on croyait que les autochtones souffraient de carences inanimées et sont de ce fait responsables des problèmes sociaux dont ils souffrent). À ces trois thèmes s’ajoutent certaines façons de communiquer, comme par exemple l’utilisation d’un vocabulaire servant à adoucir leur discours afin de ne pas paraître raciste. À nos yeux les sujets évaluaient les autochtones d’un point de vue superficiel. Qui plus est, leurs préjugés paraissent découler partiellement d’une ignorance et d’une incompréhension face à des concepts tels que le privilège racial des blancs, les effets de la colonisation transmis de génération en génération, et l’ensemble des facteurs institutionnels et structuraux qui bloquent chez les autochtones les progrès socio-économiques.

European colonialism in Canada served to systematically erode Aboriginal culture and place Aboriginal peoples at a considerable socioeconomic disadvantage relative to the white majority (Shepard, O’Neill, & Guenette, 2006). Morrison, Morrison, Harriman, and Jewell (2008) discuss the history of the Canadian government’s implementation of several oppressive and assimilative policies, such as the residential schooling system, all of which had deleterious consequences for Aboriginal peoples (e.g., the loss of their culture and language, and experiences of sexual and physical abuse at residential schools). The intergenerational impact of these practices also has been documented (see Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman [2009] for a review). Prejudice toward Aboriginal peoples in Canada has recently received mainstream media attention,
with Maclean’s magazine publishing two articles on the issue (Gilmore, 2015; Macdonald, 2015). One of these articles opens with the following Facebook quote from a teacher living in Winnipeg, Manitoba: “Oh Goddd how long are Aboriginal peoples going to use what happened as a crutch to suck more money out of Canadians?...They have contributed NOTHING to the development of Canada. Just standing with their hand out. Get to work, tear the treaties and shut the FK up already” (Macdonald, 2015, para. 1). Such negativity points to a need to investigate the social psychological underpinnings of Canadians’ attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples.

**Old-fashioned and Modern Prejudice**

This study was guided by the constructs of old-fashioned and modern prejudice. Old-fashioned prejudice involves the perceived innate inferiority of a social group (Morrison et al., 2008) as well as overtly prejudiced attitudes (Clark & Tate, 2008). Modern prejudice is said to reflect moral concerns that minority groups are “making illegitimate (or unnecessary) demands for changes in the status quo” (Morrison & Morrison, 2002, p. 18) or that they receive unfair advantages (e.g., preferential government spending; Durrheim & Dixon, 2004).

**Research on Prejudice toward Aboriginal peoples**

The scant literature focusing on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination toward Indigenous persons in countries such as Australia and Canada suggests that this research may be placed in one of two broad categories: (1) the white majority’s attitudes and behaviours toward the minority group, and (2) the minority group’s personal accounts of prejudice and discrimination (e.g., Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2010). Research illustrative of the former category, stratified by geographic location, will be reviewed briefly.

**Australia**

Researchers have identified the role of values (e.g., egalitarianism) and negative personal experiences in non-Aboriginal Australians’ prejudice toward Aboriginal Australians (e.g., Pedersen, Griffiths, Contos, Bishop, & Walker, 2000). Other research has found that a number of factors may play a role in white/non-Aboriginal Australians’ attitudes toward Aboriginal Australians, including level of empathy, level of collective guilt over injustices against Aboriginal peoples, number of friendships with Aboriginal peoples, symbolic (cf. modern) racism coupled with perceiving the in-group as deprived relative to Aborigi-
inal peoples, group-based guilt for majority group wrongdoings, and perceiving non-Aboriginal peoples as relatively advantaged compared to Aboriginal peoples (Barlow, Louis, & Hewston, 2009; Leach, Iyer, & Pedersen, 2007; McGarty et al., 2005; Pedersen, Beven, Walker, & Griffiths, 2004).

With regard to qualitative research, Augoustinos, Tuffin, and Rapley (1999) analyzed university student group discussions surrounding the topic of Aboriginal social issues. Some of the resultant themes reflected old-fashioned and modern prejudice. Another study involving university students focused on affirmative action programs (Augoustinos, Tuffin, & Every, 2005). In two group discussions, opposition to such programs was frequently rationalized on the basis of meritocratic ideals (i.e., individual achievement should determine outcomes, not membership in a particular social category). Participants also appeared to take their own social status for granted and assumed that the advantages of the majority group were earned.

Moran (2009) utilized in-depth interviews to examine the ways in which non-Aboriginal peoples perceive Aboriginal peoples. One general observation was that individuals often discussed Aboriginal issues in relation to the principles of individual responsibility and equality rather than historical factors or the rights of Aboriginal peoples.

Canada

Langford and Ponting (1992) investigated the dynamics surrounding non-Aboriginal Canadians’ attitudes toward Aboriginal-related policies, and found that less favourable responses emerged when higher levels of prejudice were combined with higher perceived intergroup conflict. Haddock, Zanna, and Esses (1994) assessed the differential roles of cognitive, affective, and behavioural/experiential variables in predicting attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples. In Study 1, affective responses to the category “Native Indians” provided the strongest unique contribution to the prediction of attitudes compared to stereotypic (i.e., trait-based) and symbolic (i.e., value-based) beliefs. For Study 2, the 1990 Oka land dispute in Quebec permitted the researchers to test the impact of a significant sociopolitical event on participants’ views. Findings similar to those noted for Study 1 were obtained, with one exception: symbolic beliefs rather than affective responses emerged as the strongest unique predictor of attitudes.

Few qualitative studies could be identified. However, Browne’s (2007) investigation of female nurses’ encounters with First Nations women revealed that some participants articulated difficulties in establishing connections with First Nations patients due to uncertainty about whether a patient might be “angry with white people” (p. 2170). While the nurses in this study may not intentionally “other” their patients, for

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some, tensions were evident between their egalitarian ideals and seemingly innocuous, subtle practices that may serve to reinforce Aboriginal peoples’ marginalized status.

Research on perpetrators of prejudice

The vast majority of qualitative studies reviewed focus on the experiences of the targets of prejudice rather than the perpetrators. Although there is a large body of literature on the white majority’s writings and everyday conversations surrounding racial topics (see Tuffin, [2008] for a review), it appears that, to date, no researchers have interviewed individuals known to possess racial prejudice via direct measurement of their attitudes. While discourse analysis permits one to extract themes reflective of racism, the current study aimed to collect introspective accounts of factors that may contribute to one’s own prejudice, enabling the extraction of themes that may illuminate the aetiology of racism. A better understanding of prejudiced individuals’ thought processes and feelings can advance prejudice theory and measurement, and inform strategies aimed at reducing racism and racial inequality.

We focused on individuals identifying as white/Caucasian because of the legacy of European colonizers’ mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples (Shepard et al., 2006) and the resultant rift between the European settler community and Aboriginal peoples. White Canadians of European descent represent the dominant group in Canadian society and are, therefore, positioned to maintain institutional and structural racism (Pincus, 1996). Thus, we reasoned that it would be appropriate to focus on the views of white students.

Situating the researchers

We are white Canadians who espouse social justice principles, particularly with respect to stigmatized minority groups. Thus, we acknowledge anti-prejudice/racism motivations for pursuing this research. To safeguard against biased analyses, we followed Reid, Flowers, and Larkin’s (2005) recommendation to work in “flexible collaboration” with participants to identify meanings that appeared most relevant to both them and the purpose of the study (p. 22). We also adhered to the principle of “bracketing off” (setting aside) our preconceptions about participants’ responses (Tufford & Newman, 2010). These practices required continual reflection on our subjective roles in the interpretation and presentation of the data. This reflexivity was ongoing during data collection and the analysis phase, primarily in the form of journaling and in-person discussions.
Method

In part 1 of the study, prejudice scales were administered to a sample of 192 non-Aboriginal undergraduates attending a prairie Canadian university. Then, in part 2, invitations were sent to respondents who satisfied the following criteria: (1) they scored above the midpoint on a measure of old-fashioned prejudice toward Aboriginal peoples and/or a measure of modern prejudice toward Aboriginal peoples, and (2) they self-identified as white/Caucasian. In total, 41 individuals (21.4% of the sample) met these criteria.

Participants

Of the 41 invitees, 13 (nine women, four men) agreed to participate. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 27 ($M = 20.62$, $SD = 2.81$; see Table 1). Seven participants scored above the midpoint on the old-fashioned prejudice measure, and all scored above the midpoint on the modern measure.

In terms of exposure to Aboriginal peoples, most reported growing up in Saskatchewan ($n = 10$), a province tied with Manitoba for the highest proportion of Aboriginal peoples across the provinces (Statistics Canada, 2011). In addition, roughly half the participants grew up in or near a community with a relatively high Aboriginal population (e.g., an Indian reserve). Hence, the reader should interpret the results with this geographic context in mind. For example, it is possible that the participants in this study have been more likely than students living in other parts of the country to have observed Aboriginal peoples in adverse socioeconomic situations (e.g., panhandling on street corners, poverty and other social issues on reserves).

This study received ethical approval from the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Pseudonyms are used when reporting direct quotations in order to maintain participants’ confidentiality.

Measures

Part 1: prejudice toward Aboriginal peoples. Morrison et al.’s (2008) 11-item Old-fashioned Prejudiced Attitudes toward Aboriginals Scale (O-PATAS) and 14-item Modern Prejudiced Attitudes toward Aboriginals Scale (M-PATAS) were used. Morrison et al. (2008) observed scale score reliability coefficients of .92 for the M-PATAS and .91 for the O-PATAS, while construct validity was evidenced via correlations between O-PATAS scores and old-fashioned prejudice toward gay men, and between M-PATAS scores and modern homonegativity toward gay men. See Morrison, Morrison, and Borsa (2014) and Nesdole, Leipurnur, Noonan, and Voigts (2015) for further evidence attesting to the psycho-
metric soundness of these instruments.

**Part 2: interview guide.** Open-ended questions were developed in accordance with past research, conceptualizations of old-fashioned and modern prejudice, and the objectives of the study (see Appendix).

**Procedure**

As racial topics can be considered sensitive, in addition to traditional face-to-face (FtF) interviews, a second interview method was employed: online instant messaging (IM). It was felt that a less direct approach could reduce the potential for socially desirable responses (Tourangeau & Smith, 1996).² Approximately half the female participants were randomly assigned to an FtF interview, with the remainder assigned to an IM interview. Due to the small number of male participants, only FtF interviews occurred with this group.

All interviews were conducted by the first author in a university campus office. For the IM interviews, the interviewer and the participant were in adjacent offices and could not see each other. Prior to asking any questions, the interviewer informed the participant about the purpose of the interview, his/her rights as a participant, and matters such as confidentiality. FtF interview participants also were told that the interview would be audio-recorded. Participants then were given a consent form to read and sign. Interviews generally lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. When interviews concluded, participants were provided $20 compensation, thanked, and debriefed.

The FtF interviews were transcribed verbatim. IM transcripts were created by copying conversations and pasting them into Word documents. In total, approximately 390 pages of single-spaced text were analyzed.

**Textual Analysis**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was selected as the analytic tool for this study because it is well suited to exploratory research focused on perceptions and experiences surrounding a particular phenomenon (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). All textual data were analyzed by the first author, using the guidelines offered by Smith et al. (2009)³. First, descriptive notes that focused on the content of the participant’s responses as well as his/her speech patterns (in the FtF interviews; e.g., degree of fluency) were made. Second, concise statements capturing the psychological essence of the participant’s perceptions and experiences were formulated and used to assist in the identification of emergent themes. Third, upon completing these analyses for all transcripts, the superordinate and nested themes evident in the data, along with illustrative quotes, were recorded.
Results

Three superordinate themes were selected to represent participants’ views and experiences relating to Aboriginal peoples: (1) the role of socialization in the formation of attitudes, (2) expressions of modern prejudice toward Aboriginal peoples, and (3) expressions of old-fashioned prejudice toward Aboriginal peoples. Each theme will be described in detail.

The Role of Socialization

Participants identified various sources of information, both direct (personal experiences) and indirect (sociocultural agents such as family, friends, and media), that they perceived as having influenced their attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples. Participants also seem to have formed stereotypic and factually incorrect perceptions of Aboriginal peoples based on what they have seen and heard around them. Socialization is, arguably, the most crucial theme, as it represents the foundation of participants’ views toward this group.

Direct experiences. All participants discussed negative personal experiences involving Aboriginal peoples, though all but one participant also indicated having had positive experiences. In many cases, growing up in or near a community with a high proportion of Aboriginal peoples (e.g., a reserve) was implicated as a reason for participants’ negative experiences. The effect of location was particularly relevant for Heather, who lived on a reserve in Saskatchewan for one year when she was 12 or 13 years old:

When you go out of Saskatchewan, it seems that natives change. [...] In Alberta and BC, I’ve met a lot of natives there and they’re very nice – like, some of the nicest, classiest people you’ll ever meet. [...] But it seems to be, in Saskatchewan, there’s something wrong. I don’t know why. (FiF interview)

Heather’s negativity was generally geared toward Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan rather than Aboriginal peoples as a whole. In contrast, for some participants, their negative experiences and observations were generalized to all Aboriginal persons. Jill, for example, had been sexually assaulted by a former boyfriend who was Aboriginal and noted that her interactions with Aboriginal peoples had been uniformly negative. Consequently, when asked about her feelings toward future relationships or interactions with Aboriginal peoples, she responded, “No chance.”

Variability was evident in terms of the number of Aboriginal peoples that participants reported knowing. Seven participants reported having few or no friendships with Aboriginal individuals, three had more than
a few friendships, and one had many friendships. Three participants said that one of their best friends has an Aboriginal background; three others previously dated an Aboriginal person, and one (Heather) indicated that she was in a relationship with an Aboriginal man. With the exception of Jill, participants generally expressed fondness toward their Aboriginal friends and acquaintances. In spite of this positivity, participants often described their favourable views in counter-stereotypical terms, implying that they view their friends as exceptions to the norm (the norm presumably being that Aboriginal peoples meet negative stereotypes):

He seems outgoing. Nothing too radical or anything like that. He does smoke, but there’s lots of people who smoke – doesn’t really mean too much. [...] Yeah, he seems like a decent... No trouble with the law, sort of thing. (Adam)

Participants tended to regard their Aboriginal friends or acquaintances as tangible “proof” that stereotypes about this minority group are not always correct. This may illustrate subtyping: “a phenomenon whereby individuals who disconfirm a group stereotype are functionally placed outside the group boundary and not ‘counted’ when thinking about what the group is like” (Park, Wolsko, & Judd, 2001, p. 325). Subtyping could, in part, be a function of some participants indicating that their friend does not “look” Aboriginal.

**Indirect experiences.** Participants’ direct experiences, especially negative ones, played a key role in their attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples. However, indirect socialization experiences appear to have exerted a comparable influence: analyses revealed that, while half the participants were primarily influenced by personal experiences, the remainder were affected more by indirect exposure (i.e., what they have heard from others or from media).

When asked to articulate their family members’ views toward Aboriginal peoples, some participants’ descriptions of their father’s, but not their mother’s, views most closely resembled their own. Fathers’ attitudes were typically described as being more negative than mothers’ attitudes. Participants also discussed the views of their elementary and high school friends, with some recalling racist jokes about Aboriginal peoples being shared within their peer group. The general role of others was intimated several times, through mentioning word of mouth as a source of information about this group. Despite claims of questioning and being critical of the information they receive from others, some participants appear to have acquiesced to what they perceive as the dominant view of white Canadians. The negative valence of this dominant view, and the manner in which it can be unconsciously absorbed via socialization, is supported by Chad’s experience as an immigrant who
moved to Canada five years ago:

Well, for some of [the scale items], like, I felt more negatively towards them as a people, um, but I wouldn’t say that I was that kind of person, that would feel that way in general. [...] And I don’t know if that’s my view or whether that’s a view that’s been put upon me, maybe, ‘cause I’m not from here originally – I’m from England – so...all I know is what I’m absorbing from everybody else.

Lastly, depictions of Aboriginal peoples in media, particularly in negative news stories, were discussed by several participants, who noted that such coverage creates and reinforces stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples.

**Stereotypic and factually incorrect perceptions of Aboriginal peoples.** A few participants suggested that intergenerational transmission of stereotypic beliefs and prejudicial attitudes serves to maintain intergroup conflict. For example, Bryce thinks “a lot of the barriers are passed down through family,” while Megan believes that prejudice “comes from previous generations.” Some participants seemed to use the presumed preponderance of negative stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples to externalize the reasons for their views, by suggesting that the influence of society in creating and maintaining stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples is inescapable. Many also discussed the confirmatory or reinforcing role of personal experiences on stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples, highlighting the probable role of confirmation bias in participants’ evaluations (i.e., interpreting information in a manner which supports one’s existing beliefs and expectations; Nickerson, 1998). For example, Amy implies that seeing Aboriginal peoples in certain contexts confirms her belief that they receive hand-outs from the government:

Well, it’s something that we kind of see. Like, certain days of the month there would be a lot of—you’d see a lot more Aboriginal people at the bank or at the grocery store in town, just pretty much, like, stocking up, and they’d always have, like, these big wads of cash, so you’d know that it was, like, their family allowance day. (FtF)

Most participants discussed stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples (e.g., poor/welfare dependent, prone to addictions, lazy) as associations they have learned over time and that come to mind automatically when they see or hear about Aboriginal peoples (cf. Devine, 1989). For many, the automaticity of their stereotypes has made them susceptible to negative preconceptions when seeing or interacting with an Aboriginal person. Some also talked about the influence of stereotypes being
stronger for Aboriginal peoples than for other minority groups. A few participants remarked that their negative preconceptions of Aboriginal peoples have led to a tendency to look for or expect confirmation of their stereotypical views. This thought process created inner conflict for several participants, with some trying to suppress stereotypes in interactions, presumably because it is seen as wrong or unfair to pre-judge Aboriginal peoples whom they know nothing about. This conflict is well illustrated by Megan:

Another thing that I’ve heard people say is that they can be violent. [...] I guess there has been kind of a bit of a fear. Like, if you were to see an Aboriginal male walking down the street, maybe...you wanna switch to the other side of the street. [...] But then it’s like, no, that’s never happened before. [...] So maybe from hearing those things, there’s that first thought of, oh, avoidance, but since I’ve never encountered a situation like that, I just usually try to push it aside. (PtF)

While it is encouraging that several participants indicated engaging in bias suppression, considering this sample consisted entirely of individuals known to possess prejudice toward Aboriginal peoples, their ability to suppress bias can be questioned.

Several participants hold misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples that appear to be driving their negative attitudes. For instance, many believe that Aboriginal peoples do not have to pay taxes, which is only true for a minority of the population (i.e., Status Indians who earn income on reserves; “In Depth: Aboriginal Canadians,” 2005). Participants also admitted to having limited knowledge about Aboriginal peoples, as evidenced by comments such as “I don’t really know the history that well” (Krista) and “I’m not sure about specific stats” (Danielle). Participants’ difficulties in substantiating their views with factual information suggest that their negative attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples may be largely based on what they feel versus what they know; and what they feel seems to be primarily informed by what they have learned via the socialization process. Consequently, as illustrated by Bryce, participants may have a vague sense of the nature of, and reasons for, their views toward Aboriginal peoples:

I can’t quote exact things, but this is what my mind has assimilated into, you know [laughs], some sort of vague impression about the situation.

The majority of participants perceive that Aboriginal peoples receive unfair educational and financial advantages compared to non-Aboriginal Canadians. These perceptions appear to be strongly influenced
by the learned values of individual responsibility and egalitarianism. Many participants believe that Aboriginal peoples violate the former by exhibiting entitlement to and dependence on government financial assistance, and the latter by being the recipients of benefits not available to non-Aboriginal Canadians:

They just expected [money], um, and it was more self-absorption of—or expectancy, I guess, of the handouts, and that they should just receive it and have absolutely no idea why they’re receiving it other than that the white man screwed them. Does that make sense? (Heather, FfF)

These perceptions were often linked to the belief that Aboriginal peoples do not face barriers to socioeconomic advancement; rather, for all Canadians, advancement is a function of individual life choices:

Like, they could be ambitious and they could do whatever they want if they tried. (Michelle, FfF)

[White Canadians and Aboriginal people] both have the options to do good or bad things. They both have the choice whether they do or don’t, and it’s completely optional. (Adam)

Expressions of Modern Prejudice

The core tenets of modern prejudice were evident across the sample, particularly in the forms of perceiving that Aboriginal peoples are receiving unfair or undeserved advantages; and that, despite past injustices and conflict, all Canadians should be treated the same in today’s society.

Government support is inappropriate/misdirected. The majority of participants expressed sympathy toward Aboriginal peoples due to the injustices associated with colonization; however, there was general opposition to what were perceived as “special privileges” granted to this group. Resentment toward Aboriginal-related government spending and programming represented the most common expression of negativity among participants:

I don’t see why they kind of get the upper treatment and don’t—not that they get an upper treatment, but that they don’t have to pay, you know, certain taxes, or they might get, like, cheques every here and there or whatever. Like, I just think that, I mean... everyone’s here now, kind of, right, that I think everyone should be equal in the world, kind of thing. And...I mean, every person’s living should be kind of the same. (Krista, FfF)
Having secondary education institutions strictly for Aboriginal people does not seem fair to me since it would not be fair to have schools strictly for Caucasian people or anyone else for that matter. (Eve, IM)

For some, the Canadian government has overcompensated, such that the attention devoted to Aboriginal peoples has backfired by increasing inequality. This dynamic was articulated by Bailey:

Yes, our ancestors did horribly wrong things in the past, and devalued and made Aboriginal people unequal to white people back then, but now the government is doing it all over again but flipping it around [...] [by] giving the Aboriginal people more privileges than Caucasian people. Therefore now making the equality unbalanced again but in favor of the Aboriginal person this time. (IM)

Many participants appear to take their social status for granted. Participants' assumptions that prejudice and discrimination toward Aboriginal peoples have “died down a lot” (Krista), primarily in an interpersonal sense, suggest that societal barriers are granted little, if any, attention. This perspective may contribute to the view that Aboriginal-specific government spending and programming are unfair or, at best, misdirected. Jill, for instance, said she would view Aboriginal programming more positively if it were aimed at Aboriginal children, because “why waste it on their parents who no longer care or can be changed?” (IM). For others, government spending should be designed to provide Aboriginal peoples with opportunities (e.g., educational programs or incentives) that will give them the tools to become independent, contributing members of society:

They should give them help or schooling and make opportunities available for them, but not just give them our money if they’re gonna waste it. (Dustin)

Together, these insights suggest that participants' views toward government funding aimed at Aboriginal peoples are conditional, with support only being provided if the funds are seen as contributing to Aboriginal peoples' increased ability to participate in mainstream Canadian society. Resentment toward “unfair” government spending and programming was compounded by the belief that Aboriginal peoples manipulate “the system” for personal gain. Bryce, for example, expressed strong disapproval over what he saw as an abuse of fishing rights (i.e., catching more fish than needed for sustenance and selling it to make a profit).
Dustin feels that government funds are misappropriated:

You see things on the news, like chiefs who are getting paid these, like, ridiculous amounts sometimes, so it makes me wonder a lot [...] If the chiefs are making a lot of money and then you still got a lot of social problems, it's like, 'kay, what's going on?

**The past cannot be undone.** While sympathetic to the injustices Aboriginal peoples have faced, participants' sympathy was coupled with the beliefs that (1) historical injustices cannot be erased; and (2) other ethnic groups, despite being subject to similar oppression, have adapted "successfully" to living in Canada. The former sentiment is illustrated by Bailey:

I get that it's because Europeans deprived them of a lot of privileges and things back in the day but I don't see why other races, including my own, should be having to pay for it now. (IM)

Heather demonstrates the latter view:

Um, there've been several other groups that have immigrated to Canada that don't receive anything - like the Ukrainians; they were horribly mistreated. There are several other [...] European-based cultures that came over that were poorly treated in much the same way - um, or Asian cultures - and they didn't get any of that...and they're fine. (FtF)

Some participants feel that Aboriginal peoples' rights should be "modernized" to reflect the socioeconomic realities of present day Canadian society. Consonant with the idea that "the past is the past," it appears that most participants perceive the current structure of society as simply "the way it is"; therefore, Aboriginal peoples must, and should want to, adapt to this structure.

**Expressions of Old-fashioned Prejudice**

Some participants alluded to the perceived inferiority of Aboriginal peoples through negative comments regarding Aboriginal peoples' work ethic, social problems, parenting skills, and adaptability to mainstream Canadian society.

**Character deficits.** A number of participants think that certain social problems are typical of the Aboriginal population, particularly poverty and substance abuse. Certain expressions (e.g., the use of "they") evoked notions of essentialism (i.e., believing that Aboriginal peoples
inherently possess certain characteristics; Morton, Hornsey, & Postmes, 2009). Amy and Jill, for instance, believe that Aboriginal peoples do not think the same way that other people do. Jill also concluded that “in general [Aboriginal peoples] are drunks, they cheat, lie and are sneaky. They use and abuse other people for their own benefit” (IM). Heather thinks that “there’s something wrong” with Aboriginal peoples in Saskatchewan (FtF); and Michelle does not dislike Aboriginal peoples per se - “it’s just the way they are, the way they act and stuff” (FtF). Some participants implied that, in order for their impression to improve, Aboriginal peoples would have to change. For example, Chad and Dustin said that their views may become more favourable if the number of Aboriginal peoples meeting stereotypes begins to decrease.

Aboriginal peoples also were perceived as generally lazy, apathetic toward work or school, not motivated to advance themselves, and content to live off of the government/taxpayers. For some participants, discussions of these characteristics were reflective of benevolent prejudice, which operates under a guise of compassion but implies incompetence (Werhun & Penner, 2010). That is, a few suggested that the government needs to assist Aboriginal peoples in rectifying social issues or teach them how to do so themselves. This view is demonstrated by Dustin:

Basically, they’re, like, getting a lot better and their situation is improved, but I recognize they do need some help too. So I think they’re all—um, as people, they are equal and there’s no difference between us, but as a culture, they need some help from the government to get out of their situation.

According to some, Aboriginal peoples take their rights for granted and would benefit from having them removed because it would foster motivation to fend for themselves rather than rely on the government/taxpayers for financial support:

I think that they would be forced then to have more respect for themselves and the world and learn that you have to work hard to get things, and that they aren’t always just going to be handed to you or baby fed to you. (Bailey, IM)

I think the social funding for some things should be cut because it doesn’t foster an ability to create independence whatsoever, and it’s a vicious cycle of giving them money, creating dependent people on that money, and then having to give the next generation the money because there was no independence passed down; like, here – go get a job, go learn, go do something. (Heather, FtF)
“Faulty” parenting. When discussing their views toward Aboriginal peoples’ work ethic and susceptibility to social problems, some participants implied that these issues have stemmed from inadequate parenting within the Aboriginal population. A few think that Aboriginal parents lack parenting skills, are not instilling proper values in their children, and are not encouraging their children to go to school or to work:

Like, um, and I’m not sure that it was that they didn’t think that they were fulfilling [their children’s] needs. Like, yes, the baby is drinking a liquid, which is awesome, but not pop or Tang [laughs], or... You know what I mean? Like, it’s like they didn’t understand the concept of health, um, and that you couldn’t abuse your body like that, or that, uh, nutrition was something that was important, at such a young age especially. (Heather, FtF)

I do an Aboriginal program with a friend for Aboriginal children to come get out of the house and play 3 times a week. All of their parents are alcoholics, none of their parents pick them up [or] drop them off or even care if they are warm on their walk to and from. I also worked at a crisis nursery where I was wiping blood off of abused babies or babies addicted to drugs. Or sad Aboriginal kids that were dying for love and attention. (Jill, IM)

Communication Patterns

Comments reflecting modern prejudice toward Aboriginal peoples were far more common than those reflecting old-fashioned prejudice. In the FtF interviews, it was also observed that participants generally appeared more comfortable, as evidenced by fewer hesitations and qualifiers, when discussing notions of modern prejudice than when making comments about Aboriginal peoples that were more blatantly negative. In both types of interviews, when more unfavourable comments were made, they were normally preceded by disclaimers or followed by qualifiers.

Disclaimers came in various forms. Many were used to justify opposition to the perceived special treatment of Aboriginal peoples (e.g., “They did get their traditions stomped on when the Europeans came to Canada, but [...]”; Bailey, IM). Others included assertions of: (1) neutrality (e.g., “I don’t really have any...negative or positive thoughts about them”; Heather, FtF); (2) colour-blindness (e.g., “I mean, you could be black, brown, yellow, pink, blue”; Megan, FtF); (3) being non-prejudiced/racist; (4) egalitarianism (e.g., “I think that everybody should be viewed as equal”; Dustin); (5) open-mindedness (e.g., “I have always thought the best of people”; Jill, IM); (6) valuing individuality (e.g., “I
don’t like making generalizations about groups of people” (Bryce); (7) non-endorsement of stereotypes (e.g., “[The stereotype] comes to mind, but it’s not what I personally view” (Krista, FDr); and (8) independent and critical thinking (e.g., “Now that I am older and do form my own opinions more than what others tell you [...] I think I have not been so judgmental” (Danielle, IM).

In terms of the use of qualifiers to (ostensibly) soften certain statements, phrases such as “Not all of them are like that” and “It’s not just Aboriginal peoples” (Amy) were frequently used. It was also common for participants to juxtapose their views toward Aboriginal peoples with how they would view similar situations involving non-Aboriginal peoples.

In addition, participants appeared to use deflection and minimization to project a non-prejudiced stance toward Aboriginal peoples. With deflection, some participants accused others of being racist or closed-minded but asserted that they, themselves, were not. By minimizing or defending the prejudiced attitudes and actions of people they know, it seemed that some participants were not only trying to assert their own non-prejudiced stance but also that of family or friends. For instance, even though a few of her friends likened having Aboriginal employees to “babysitting children,” Amy claimed that her friends “think they’re good people and... have no racist opinion on them.” A few also minimized their own prejudiced behaviours, including Bryce and Dustin, who do not see a problem with the fact that they have, and still do, make or laugh at racist Aboriginal jokes.

An interesting observation in the IM interviews stemmed from a feature of the software program that was utilized. An icon appeared when the participant was typing, and in many cases, the icon would appear then disappear, but no response was received by the interviewer. This indicates that the participant began typing then either paused before continuing to type or edited what had already been typed.

Discussion

This study has served to address an important gap in the literature; namely, exploring some of the social and personal dynamics surrounding the nature of, and reasons for, white Canadians’ prejudice toward Aboriginal peoples. The themes that emerged from the interviews demarcate how old-fashioned and modern prejudiced attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples are formed and maintained among a group of white university students who primarily grew up in Saskatchewan, a province with a relatively large Aboriginal population.

Personal observations and experiences, family members, friends, members of one’s community, and media emerged as social factors that
have informed participants' general impressions of Aboriginal peoples. It appears that various social psychological processes, many of which likely become internalized via socialization, may be underlying participants' attitudes, including (1) the tendency to disproportionately attend to negative information and experiences when forming impressions of others (Gray-Little, 1973); (2) attribution errors (i.e., overemphasizing internal/personal factors and underemphasizing external/social factors when evaluating out-group members; Hewstone, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979); (3) in-group bias (e.g., forming negative generalizations about out-groups, but not the in-group, based on negative encounters with individual group members); (4) subtyping out-group members who demonstrate favourable behaviours and lifestyles; (5) using the perceived similarity between an out-group member and oneself to form impressions of the out-group member (e.g., based on socioeconomic status or skin colour); (6) ambivalence/mixed feelings toward an out-group, a hallmark of modern prejudice, which involves conflict between individuals' desire to be egalitarian and their underlying animosity toward an out-group (Bell & Esse, 2002; McConahay, 1983); (7) acquiescing, perhaps unconsciously, to what is perceived to be the in-group's dominant view toward an out-group (e.g., Chad's experience as a newcomer to Canada); (8) externalizing the reasons for one's negative views toward an out-group (e.g., several participants suggested that the actions of Aboriginal peoples are the cause of their negativity); (9) automatic activation of negative, ingrained stereotypes when observing or interacting with out-group members (Devine, 1989), which can result in negative preconceptions of out-group members; and (10) confirmation bias when stereotypical traits or behaviours are observed.

In line with previous Canadian studies, most participants exhibited modern prejudice in the form of opposing Aboriginal-related funding and programming because it is seen as unfair or unnecessary (e.g., Atkinson, McGrane, Berdahl, & White, 2012; Langford & Ponting, 1992). This is similar to what Moran (2009) and Augoustinos et al. (2005) observed with respect to non-Aboriginal Australians' discussions of Aboriginal Australians, and with Tuffin's (2008) review of racial discourse pertaining to Indigenous persons in Australia and New Zealand. That is, participants appear to view Aboriginal peoples through a lens of individual responsibility and egalitarianism rather than historical factors, thereby deflecting consideration of the socioeconomic disadvantages accrued by Aboriginal peoples due to colonization. In addition, as evidenced by these studies and the current study, majority group members often construct past injustices as irrelevant to present day affairs. Tuffin (2008) notes that the similarities found between racial discourse in Australia and New Zealand, who, like Canada, have Indigenous populations which have been subjected to colonization, point to the powerfulness and pervasiveness of these views. The findings of the current study
further suggest that a shared narrative may exist among majority group members in terms of their views toward Indigenous persons.

Participants’ misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples may be attributable to a lack of awareness or acknowledgement of “white privilege” and institutional barriers, which both serve to maintain racial inequality. According to Tuffin (2008), endorsement of “the past is the past” argument allows individuals to distance themselves from the impact of colonization, thereby effectively maintaining white privilege. The failure to consider white privilege was most evident in participants’ assumptions that “a level playing field” exists, giving Aboriginal peoples the opportunity and choice to achieve socioeconomic success. As with Augoustinos et al.’s (2005) findings on university students’ discussions of Aboriginal programming, participants appear to take their social status for granted and assume that one’s socioeconomic standing is earned, not inherited. It was common for participants to discuss an Aboriginal-related social issue but not reflect on and discuss its origins. A strong indication that participants do not factor structural and institutional barriers into their views stems from their discussions of prejudice and discrimination solely in interpersonal terms. Together, these findings indicate that participants may take what they see and hear around them at face value, with little to no regard for the root causes of the social problems facing the Aboriginal population. In part, these evaluations may be a function of incongruence with personal and/or societal values, and an inability to relate to those with lower socioeconomic status due to one’s upbringing in a middle- or upper-class home.

With regard to communication patterns, participants generally seemed to experience difficulties articulating where their views have come from and why they feel the way they do toward Aboriginal peoples. This may reflect the unconscious internalization of stereotypes and negative attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples via the socialization process. The interviews elucidated some of the patterns of discourse that surface when white Canadians attempt to make sense of and discuss their views toward a stigmatized minority group such as Aboriginal peoples. Attitudinal conflict and fluctuations (Bell & Esses, 2002) manifested in participants’ reluctance to respond in a manner that could be construed as overtly racist; hence, attempts to come across as non-prejudiced and egalitarian were frequent. (Indeed, at the outset of nine of the 13 interviews, participants made statements reflecting either colour-blindness or favourable views toward Aboriginal peoples.) If the delays in sending IM messages were due to participants pausing, it could be a sign that they experienced difficulties in articulating their views, which also seemed to be the case in most of the FtF interviews. On the other hand, if the delays were due to editing, this could be indicative of impression management (i.e., reviewing and editing one’s responses to appear non-prejudiced). Collectively, these findings closely map those of researchers who have
examined contemporary racial discourse and point to the importance of examining the ways in which prejudiced individuals communicate their views toward the targets of their prejudice (e.g., Augoustinos & Every, 2010; Van Dijk, 1992).

Participants' views toward Aboriginal peoples provide compelling evidence for the continued tendency to see prejudice through a lens of blatant negativity. Indeed, many participants appear to think that being prejudiced toward Aboriginal peoples means perceiving them stereotypically or as inferior, bad, or horrible people; and/or committing overtly discriminatory acts toward them. This myopic perspective of what constitutes prejudice renders its modern counterpart invisible and, consequently, much more difficult to redress.

Limitations

The conclusions that can be drawn from the data are limited by two factors. First, qualitative research methods tend to operate under the assumption that participants are able to articulate their views and experiences fluently, and the phenomenological approach that was adopted in this study has been criticized for downplaying how social context influences participants' responses (Gough & Madill, 2012). Second, the idiographic nature of this study precludes the formulation of conclusions about white Canadian university students, and white Canadians as a whole, with respect to attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples. Further, the fact that the sample was mostly comprised of students who grew up in rural or urban Saskatchewan means that the views expressed could, to some extent, be a function of an upbringing in these specific contexts.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that blatant and subtle forms of negativity toward Aboriginal peoples are complex psychological phenomena that are primarily learned and maintained via the socialization process. The ways in which direct and indirect socialization experiences were discussed by participants suggest that these experiences inform and reinforce various psychological processes (e.g., in-group bias, stereotyping) that seem to be underlying their prejudiced attitudes toward Aboriginal peoples. It was evident in participants' responses that they have internalized the values of egalitarianism and individualism, which, consciously or unconsciously, are used to guide their evaluations of Aboriginal peoples. Participants' prejudice appears to partly be a function of lack of awareness and understanding of concepts such as white privilege, the intergenerational effects of colonization, and institutional and structural factors that serve as obstacles to Aboriginal peoples' socioeco-
nomic advancement. While there is likely myriad mediating and moder-
ating relationships among these factors that require further inquiry, this
study has uncovered several social psychological phenomena that may
be operating in white Canadians’ negative evaluations of this group.

Notes

1. The data from part 1 of the study were analyzed and reported on
   in the first author’s master’s thesis.

2. No notable differences in response patterns were observed, which
   precluded conclusions about which method may be more effective
   when interviewing prejudiced individuals.

3. The second author conducted an independent audit of the themes
   and the quotations used to contextualize them. As well, he re-
   viewed a subset of transcripts to determine if a shared framework
   emerged.

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Table 1: Characteristics of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Locale of upbringing</th>
<th>Grew up in or near community with high Aboriginal population</th>
<th>Type of interview(^a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Rural Saskatchewan</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>FtF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bailey</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Rural Saskatchewan</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>IM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krista</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Rural Saskatchewan</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>FtF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Rural Saskatchewan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>IM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Rural Saskatchewan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>FtF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eve</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Rural Saskatchewan</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>IM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Urban/rural Saskatchewan and Alberta</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>FtF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Urban Saskatchewan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>IM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Rural Saskatchewan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>FtF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Urban Saskatchewan</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>FtF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bryce</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Rural Alberta, urban British Columbia</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>FtF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>FtF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dustin</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Urban Saskatchewan</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>FtF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\) FtF = face-to-face; IM = instant messaging.

Appendix

Interview Questions

Note: in an effort to attend to participants’ topics of interest, not all questions were asked in each interview nor were they necessarily asked in this order.
1. What are your thoughts on Aboriginal peoples?

2. What are your parents' thoughts on Aboriginal peoples?
   a) Why do you think they feel that way?
   b) How do they express their views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples to you?
   c) How do you think their views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples have influenced your own views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples?

3. What are your siblings' thoughts on Aboriginal peoples?
   a) Why do you think they feel that way?
   b) How do they express their views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples to you?
   c) How do you think their views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples have influenced your own views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples?

4. What are your friends' thoughts on Aboriginal peoples?
   a) Why do you think they feel that way?
   b) How do they express their views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples to you?
   c) How do you think their views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples have influenced your own views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples?

5. Are there things about Aboriginal peoples that you dislike?
   
   If yes:
   a) Can you tell me what some of those things are?
   b) Why do you think you feel that way?

6. Are there things about Aboriginal peoples that you like?
   
   If yes:
   a) Can you tell me what some of those things are?
   b) Why do you think you feel that way?
7. Have your views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples changed over time?

*If yes:*

a) How have they changed?

b) Why do you think your views and feelings have changed?

8. Can you share some examples of times when you’ve seen Aboriginal peoples in different situations; for example, in public places, at an event, in someone else’s home, or anywhere else?

a) Would you say that those experiences have affected your views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples

*If yes:*

i) How so?

9. Do you know any Aboriginal peoples?

*If yes:*

a) How many Aboriginal peoples do you know?

b) What is your relationship to each person; for example, acquaintance, friend, family member, etc.?

c) What do you think of [person named]?

d) What kinds of interactions have you had with [person named]?

i) Would you say that those interactions have been positive experiences, negative experiences, or somewhere in between?

e) What are your thoughts on [his/her] race and cultural background?

f) Do you view [him/her] differently than Aboriginal peoples in general?

*If yes:*

i) In what ways?

g) Would you say that your experiences and interactions with
[person named] have affected your views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples?

*If yes:*

i) How so?

c) through g) for each person named.

10. What are your thoughts on government policies and spending directed at Aboriginal peoples?

11. Do you think that Aboriginal peoples are facing prejudice and discrimination in today’s Canadian society?

   a) Can you tell me more about that?

12. What are your thoughts on the past treatment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, such as the residential schooling system?

13. Where would you say that you get most of your information about Aboriginal peoples from; for example, friends, family, media, personal observations or experiences, etc.?

   a) Can you share some examples of the kinds of information you’ve seen or heard about Aboriginal peoples?

   b) How do you think the information you’ve seen or heard about Aboriginal peoples has affected your views and feelings toward Aboriginal peoples?

14. Have you ever acted in what could be considered a discriminatory manner, toward an Aboriginal person; for example, a verbal insult, purposely distancing yourself from someone – any type of behaviour that could be considered anti-Aboriginal?

   *If yes:*

   a) Can you tell me about what happened?

15. How do you think you’d feel in a direct interaction with an Aboriginal person whom you’ve never met?

16. Is there anything Aboriginal peoples could do to change your impression of them?

   *If yes:*

   a) What could they do?
17. Generally speaking, how do you think White Canadians view Aboriginal Canadians?
   a) Alternatively, how do you think Aboriginal Canadians view White Canadians?

18. In what ways do you think Aboriginal Canadians differ from White Canadians?

19. Do you think Aboriginal peoples pose a threat to Canadian society?
   If yes:
   a) Please tell me more about that.

20. Do you think Aboriginal Canadians and White Canadians are equal, unequal, or somewhere in between?
   If equal:
   a) In what ways do you think Aboriginal Canadians and White Canadians are equal?

   If unequal:
   a) In what ways do you think Aboriginal Canadians and White Canadians are unequal?
   b) Do you think it’s a problem that Aboriginal Canadians and White Canadians are unequal?
      i) Why [do/don’t] you think it’s a problem?

   If somewhere in between:
   a) Please tell me more about that.

21. Is there anything else you’d like to say about your views or experiences relating to Aboriginal peoples, that we haven’t discussed?

22. Where did you grow up (rural or urban centre)?

23. What is your academic major?

24. What year of university are you in?

25. What is your age?
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