



BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY: POST-SECONDARY YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON IMMIGRATION, MULTICULTURALISM AND RACISM IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

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**“Building an Inclusive Society: Post-Secondary Youth Perspectives on Immigration,
Multiculturalism and Racism in Newfoundland and Labrador”**

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Introduction

Building an Inclusive Society: Post-secondary Youth Perspectives on Immigration, Multiculturalism and Racism in Newfoundland and Labrador is a project that seeks to understand

youth attitudes towards immigration, multiculturalism, and politics in addition to the experiences of racism among university students within the province. In addition, this project was designed to better understand the program needs and sociological circumstances of youth in St. John's and surrounding areas and involves surveying, and subsequently analyzing, the views of post-secondary students in Newfoundland and Labrador. It also aims to gain a better understanding of how and why such attitudes are formed in order to test existing theories established by scholars. By capturing and understanding the attitudes of students in Newfoundland and Labrador, this report will not only add to a growing body of literature, but will also complement existing community efforts to enhance the integration of newcomers. As such, this report is a step towards ensuring that newcomers not only integrate into Newfoundland and Labrador society, but feel welcomed while doing so.

Background

One of the factors explored most frequently by scholars in this field is the effect that personal (demographic) characteristics such as age, gender, education, and ideology have on opinion-formation (Zapata-Berrero 2009). These demographic variables have the potential to impact the attitudes of students regarding multiculturalism and immigration. As this study focuses on both first-year and second-year (and beyond) post-secondary students, it will allow for the comparison of two distinct age groups in different stages of their lives and educational careers. With a rapidly aging population, it is becoming increasingly essential to have a thorough understanding of the opinions, as well as the opinion-formation, of younger generations.

Existing research also points to the importance of a Newfoundland and Labrador-based study. The *Group Threat* hypothesis stipulates that an influx of immigrants will lead the public to perceive an increased threat to the dominant culture of the area (Berg 2009; Buckler et al. 2009;

Chandler and Tsai 2001; Espenshade and Hempstead 1996; Hood and Morris 1997). Tests of the *Group Threat Hypothesis* have been inconclusive thus far, as some scholars have found no evidence of the effect (Buckler et al. 2009), while other scholars argue in favour of an opposing effect, labelled *Contact Theory*. This alternative explanation also seeks to understand intergroup relations, but posits that contact with a new group acts to diffuse and reduce the effect of stereotypes (rather than threatening the dominant group), therefore leading to more harmonious interactions between groups in society (Allport 1954; Berg 2009; Pettigrew 1998).

Newfoundland and Labrador provides an ideal setting in which to engage in further study of these hypotheses, due to historic immigration patterns and the homogeneous nature of the population in the province. The proportion of the immigrant population has steadily remained at 1.5% since at least the mid-1980s (Akbari et al. 2007). In 2007, the province released its Immigration Strategy, *Diversity ~ Opportunity and Growth*, in order to increase in-migration to Newfoundland and Labrador. Through a combination of the Provincial Nominee Program and other federally administered immigration programs, the number of visible minority immigrants to the province has increased, especially in the city of St. John's.

Given the generally homogeneous population coupled with the fact that individuals who reside in urban centres are more likely (or have more opportunities) to interact with people of a variety of ethnic backgrounds, the St. John's CMA presents an unique opportunity to investigate whether these (conflicting) theories about contact amongst in-groups and out-groups are valid. As recent research in St. John's has shown that young visible minorities are experiencing racism (Baker, 2013), this research is especially timely.

In terms of national data, recent polls suggest that Atlantic Canadians hold rather positive attitudes towards immigrants, refugees, and immigration. A poll conducted by Nanos (2010) suggests that Atlantic Canadians are rather welcoming of newcomers to Canada as well as immigration as a population strategy. 63.6% agree and 19.4% somewhat agree that immigration is a key positive feature of Canada as a country; 47.7% agree and 25.2% somewhat agree that governments should do more to help immigrants settle; 54.3% agree and 20% somewhat agree that immigration is one of the key tools Canada can use to strengthen the economy and; 26% think we should increase the number of new permanent immigrants each year while an additional 35.8% think we should keep the same number. In terms of refugees, Atlantic Canadians also seem fairly welcoming, as 17.6% support and 30.2% somewhat support allowing people from countries the Government of Canada considers safe to appeal their claim for refugee status (Nanos, 2012).

However, recent polls also suggest that Atlantic Canadians are rather cautious at times. 48.4% are opposed and 17.7% are somewhat opposed to allowing temporary foreign workers into Canada while Canadians qualified for those same jobs are looking for work. In addition, 56.4% oppose and 15.8% somewhat oppose the statement that refugee claimants should be entitled to more free benefits beyond the basic healthcare received by many Canadians, such as dental care or drug plans (Nanos, 2012). Thus, it seems as though Atlantic Canadians are rather welcoming of newcomers to Canada, but only when they perceive no loss to themselves. In the polls mentioned above, Atlantic Canadians give the impression that they are eager to welcome and assist newcomers, but they also seem to understand immigration as a zero-sum game in the sense

that additional benefits for newcomers are perceived as resulting in a loss for local citizens. In this case, Canadians seem much less welcoming of newcomers when they perceive a potential loss to themselves, such as a loss of jobs or higher taxes to offset the costs of free benefits for refugees.

Methodology

This report is based on an on-line survey administered to post-secondary students attending Memorial University and its subsidiaries (Grenfell, Labrador Institute, and Marine Institute). The research team consists of three primary researchers. James Baker, the lead investigator, is a Research Coordinator with the Association for New Canadians. He initiated and supervises the direction of the project. Dr. Amanda Bittner, with Memorial University's Political Science Department, is a co-investigator. She has significant experience with survey research and has spearheaded large-scale, national surveys. Jonathan Price, the research assistant, is a recent MA (Sociology) graduate from Memorial University. He was responsible for the administration of the survey and data collection/input.

Initially, the research team intended to only survey first-year Memorial students in St. John's and surrounding areas. However, after a low initial response rate, it was decided to broaden the sample to all Memorial students as well as to include an opportunity to win one of five tuition vouchers as an incentive. The survey included questions that cover a range of topics related to racism, immigration, multiculturalism, and politics, as well as general demographic questions. Results from the surveys were inputted into, and subsequently analyzed with the use of SPSS computer software. The results of the survey are discussed below and are organized by the main

topics used to inform and guide the survey; these are: attitudes towards immigration; attitudes towards multiculturalism; attitudes towards, and experiences with, racism; and attitudes towards politics.

Results

Attitudes towards Immigration

Students in Newfoundland and Labrador seem to hold rather positive views towards immigrants and immigration in the country. First-year post-secondary students also indicated a great deal of support for immigration and immigrants. 86.03% of respondents think that the growing number of immigrants from other countries strengthens Canadian society. 67.96 % think that Canada should admit about the same number of immigrants as it does now, while another 20.96% think it should admit more. Further, 59.05% of respondents think that immigrants to Canada try their best to integrate into Canadian society. Finally, as seen in Table 1 below, a number of other questions from the survey indicate that first-year post-secondary students hold rather positive views.

Table 1

	Agree	Strongly Agree
Immigrants make a positive contribution to Canada.	59.25%	30.92%
Immigrants strengthen Canada.	63.88%	24.18%
	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Immigrants take jobs away from Canadians.	51.04%	20.77%
Immigration is bad for my province.	59.88%	35.03%
Immigrants are more likely to be on welfare than other Canadians.	53.43%	22.99%

Evidently first-year post-secondary students are rather welcoming of immigrants and supportive of immigration as a population strategy; however, it should be noted that they also seem to expect certain qualities of immigrants coming to Canada. For instance, 49.69% think it is

important, and 28.09% think it is very important, for immigrants to have good educational qualifications. In addition, 46.60% think it is important for immigrants to be able to speak English or French, with another 32.1% indicating it to be very important. First-years seem split, however, in regards to how they expect immigrants to integrate into Canadian culture. When asked if immigrants should be committed to adopting the Canadian way of life, 44.75% indicated it to be not important while 33.02% think it is important. For post-secondary students in their second year or beyond, results were similar to those of first-year post-secondary youth.

Table 2

	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Immigrants take jobs away from Canadians.	49.08%	30.18%
Immigrants are more likely to be on welfare than other Canadians.	57.34%	22.85%
We should first look after our own citizens and people born elsewhere second.	38.67%	33.40%

In addition, 82.59% of respondents think that the growing number of immigrants from other countries strengthens Canadian society and 57.02% think that immigrants to Canada try their best to integrate. Finally, 66.96% think that Canada should admit about the same number of immigrants as it does now while an additional 20.11% think it should admit more than it does now. Evidently both cohorts in Newfoundland and Labrador hold rather positive views towards immigration and immigrants coming to Canada. These are very promising results for interested parties, given the potential need for immigration as a strategy to meet labour market demands in the province.

Attitudes towards Multiculturalism

Based on the results of the survey, students in Newfoundland and Labrador seem to hold rather positive attitudes towards multiculturalism in Canada. For instance, 48.61% of first-year

respondents agree, and 45.56% strongly agree, that ethnic, racial and cultural diversity is important to Canada. Further, 54.87% agree, and 37.88% strongly agree, that ethnic, racial and cultural minorities should be given opportunities to preserve their heritage. As seen in Table 3 below, a number of other questions in the survey illustrated the positive attitudes towards multiculturalism that first-year students have.

Table 3

	Agree	Strongly Agree
In a democratic society it is very important that the needs and rights of minority groups be protected.	53.47%	38.05%
I was raised to accept and respect those of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.	31.20%	64.00%
Canadian institutions (e.g.: universities, colleges) should provide equal access regardless of one's ethnic, racial or cultural background.	37.15%	58.10%
The government should fund festivals and special events celebrating different ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds.	43.06%	21.94%
It is a good thing for a society to be made up of people from different cultures.	50.58%	46.24%
	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Canada is weakened by people of different ethnic origins sticking to their old ways.	47.84%	34.58%
I don't really feel like I fit in when I'm in a room full of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds acting in a different way or speaking with strong accents.	43.20%	19.47%

Post-secondary students in their second year or beyond appear to be comparable to first-year students. 52.17% of respondents agree, with an additional 42.28% strongly agreeing, that ethnic, racial and cultural diversity is important to Canada. Furthermore, 54.35% agree, and 39.13% strongly agree, that ethnic, racial and cultural minorities should be given opportunities to preserve their heritage. Table 4 provides a number of additional examples of the positive attitudes of post-secondary students regarding diversity and multiculturalism.

Table 4

	Agree	Strongly Agree
In a democratic society, it is very important that the needs and rights of minority groups be protected.	50.58%	42.08%
I was raised to accept and respect those of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.	35.64%	57.99%
	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I don't really feel like I fit in when I'm in a room full of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds acting in a different way or speaking with strong accents.	45.35%	22.40%
Canada is weakened by people of different ethnic origins sticking to their old ways.	46.85%	36.46%

It is evident that post-secondary students in Newfoundland and Labrador are very accepting and welcoming of multiculturalism in their province. These results paint a very favourable picture regarding the opinions of students in the province and illustrate a solid base from which to work when educating the population about newcomers, cultural diversity, and other related topics.

Attitudes towards, and Experiences with, Racism

In terms of issues related to race and racism, students in the province appear to be rather privy to racial discrimination. First-year post-secondary students seem to be very accepting of different races, as seen in Table 5 below. Further, 82.35% of respondents indicated that they have witnessed/experienced a racist comment/behaviour. First-year post-secondary students are also privy to racial discrimination as 60.58% disagree, and 31.01% strongly disagree, that there is no racial prejudice in Canada; while 44.35% disagree, and 14.2% strongly disagree, that there is no racial prejudice at their college/university.

Table 5

	Agree	Strongly Agree
All races of people are equal.	35.36%	57.10%
	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It is not a good idea for people of different races to marry one another.	26.59%	70.23%
There are too many visible minorities on television.	44.35%	46.96%

Post-secondary students in their second year or beyond are similar to first-year students with regards to their attitudes towards, and experiences with, racism. 90.48% of respondents indicated that they have witnessed a racist comment or behaviour; this is slightly higher than the rate found for first-year students. In addition, respondents indicated a mindfulness of racial discrimination in their country and institution. 53.85% disagree, and 41.43% strongly disagree, that there is no racial prejudice in Canada; while 54.23% disagree, and 19.65% strongly disagree, that there is no racial prejudice at their college/university. These results illustrate the awareness that students in Newfoundland and Labrador have towards racial discrimination in the province. These are very promising results for service providers and other interested groups, as it is evident that a majority of students already have a solid base from which to be taught cultural sensitivity and other related topics. These results also pose two questions: 1) why do older students (i.e. second-year > first-year) indicate higher rates of experiencing racism? And, 2) why is there a higher rate of students indicating the existence of racial discrimination in Canada, as opposed to their learning institution?

Attitudes towards Politics

First-year post-secondary students seem relatively interested in politics. 46.21% indicated being somewhat interested in politics, while an additional 11.83% said they are very interested. When asked what party they would vote for in a hypothetical federal election, 42.12% indicated the NDP, while 20.95% said Liberal, and only 11.49% indicated Conservative. In regards to a provincial election, 37.7% would vote for the NDP, with 22.8% indicating Liberal, and 15.58% saying Conservative. 16.7% said they would not vote in a provincial election, while 16.22% would not vote in a federal.

Similar to first-year students, post-secondary students in their second year and beyond seem fairly interested in politics, with 40.2% being somewhat interested and 19.7% being very interested. In relation to a hypothetical federal election, 45.73% would vote NDP, 23.76% for Liberal, and just 11.03% for Conservative. For a provincial election, 45.96% would vote NDP, 17.05% Liberal, and 16.35% Conservative. 13.52% would not vote in a federal election, while 14.86% would not vote in a provincial election. Interestingly, very few post-secondary students did not chose the "Other" option as often when indicating which political party they would vote for. Of the first-year sample, only 1.8% and 2.26% chose the "Other" option in regards to a federal and provincial election respectively, while the second year and beyond sample chose the "Other" option 2.49% and 2.89% of the time. Perhaps this is representative of post-secondary students being more interested in politics, thus already having established political loyalties and not requiring the "Other" option.

Analysis

Overall the results of this report paint an optimistic picture concerning the attitudes of students in Newfoundland and Labrador as post-secondary students seem to be rather welcoming of newcomers and appreciative of multiculturalism. Furthermore, this group seem to be aware of discrimination based on race, both in their institution as well as in their country. The only noticeable difference based on education level was awareness of racism, as post-secondary students in their second year and beyond reported witnessing and/or experiencing a racist comment and/or behaviour (see Table 6).

Table 6

Education Level	Percentage of respondents that have experienced/witnessed a racist comment/behaviour
First-Year	82.35
Second-Year and Beyond	90.48

This possibly indicates that higher level post-secondary students are more attune to identifying racism due to their educational environment, such as an advanced curriculum, including progressive theories and additional subject areas. Another puzzling question includes the opinions of students regarding racial prejudice in Canada as opposed to their learning institution. As seen in Table 7, more students perceive racial prejudice in Canada when compared to similar perceptions of their respective learning institutions.

Table 7

	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
There is no racial prejudice in Canada			
• First-Year	60.58%	31.01%	91.59%
• Second-Year and Beyond	53.85%	41.43%	95.28%
There is no racial prejudice at my (learning institution)			
• First-Year	44.35%	14.2%	58.55%
• Second-Year and Beyond	54.23%	19.65%	73.88%

While it is clear that first-year students are aware of racial discrimination, this data poses the question: why is there a higher rate of students indicating racial discrimination in Canada, as opposed to their learning institution? Perhaps this illustrates the familiarity that the respondents have with their respective institution. In other words, maybe it is possible that students indicate less racial prejudice in their school because they can observe for themselves the social interactions that take place within its boundaries; as opposed to Canada, for which they must rely on other sources, such as the news, to inform them on the possible presence of racial prejudice.

Or perhaps students indicate less racial prejudice in their school because they have a strong emotional bond/connection for the institution and the people within it, and are blind to any injustices that take place. However, this explanation would be making the assertion that the students do not feel strong emotions for Canada, which seems unlikely. Evidently, this question could be aided by further research.

Birthplace

For first-year post-secondary students, birthplace seems to influence their comfort level with diversity. When given the statement: “I don’t really feel like I fit in when I’m in a room full of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds acting in a different way or speaking with strong accents”, only 14.3% of respondents born outside Canada agreed; this is in contrast to 38.3% of NL born and 29.5% of CAN born. Post-secondary students in their second year and beyond exhibited similar tendencies. Of those born outside Canada, 23.2% strongly agree that immigrants work harder than other Canadians, in contrast to 2.3% of NL born and 3.5% of CAN born.

Racial Background of Friends

Those identifying as second-year and beyond appeared to be more racially accepting. When presented with the same statement, 36.6% of those with all and 28.1% of those with most of their friends as the same racial background agreed that they do not feel like they fit in; as opposed to 10.1% of those with just a few friends as the same racial background and 9.3% of those with no friends as the same racial background. First-year post-secondary students, however, did not exhibit a similar relationship regarding comfort with diversity; however, the racial composition of their friends does seem to influence their attitudes towards refugees and immigrants. As seen in Table 8 below, when asked to rank certain minority groups on a scale of 0-10 (where 10

represents “really liking” the respective group), those with more racially diverse social circles indicated more favourable impressions towards immigrants and refugees.

Table 8

Percentage of Respondents that indicated a 10				
	All	Most	Just a Few	None
Immigrants	26.1%	33.1%	52.4%	46.7%
Refugees	26.1%	31.5%	45.2%	46.7%

Conclusions and Discussion

This report has illustrated the positive attitudes that post-secondary students in Newfoundland and Labrador have towards immigration, multiculturalism, politics, and racism. Indeed, the majority of respondents appear to be welcoming of immigrants and a population strategy which includes immigration, accepting of multiculturalism and diversity, as well as aware of racial prejudice. Given the homogenous nature of the province, it was conceivable to expect less promising results. However, it is apparent that the majority of students in the province have very positive attitudes regarding newcomers and issues related to them.

This report has also presented the authors with a number of perplexing questions. First, both first- and second-year and beyond students appear to perceive racial prejudice in Canada at higher rates than they do at their respective learning institutions. Is this due to students having more first-hand knowledge of what happens inside their school, or is there a different explanation? Finally, why do more post-secondary students report having witnessed/experienced a racist comment/behaviour. As previously mentioned, perhaps this is because post-secondary students have more exposure to advanced theories and courses and, thus, they would be more capable of pinpointing racist activities; or maybe there is another explanation. Evidently there are

a number of questions emanating from this project that could be answered with the aid of future research.

Overall the results of this report indicate a rather advantageous situation to work with in Newfoundland and Labrador. The attitudes of post-secondary students in the province illustrate a solid base for service providers to work from in terms of creating a more welcoming province in which newcomers can successfully integrate. The majority of students in this report already exhibit an understanding of, and sensitivity towards, issues faced by newcomers. They also illustrate an appreciation of the diversity presented by newcomers and understand that they can contribute to society. The students in this report represent the voice and conscience of the future Newfoundland and Labrador. Based on the results, the future of the province, including its responsibility to welcome and integrate newcomers, appears to be in good hands.

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