Re-Pressing Racism: The Denial of Racism in the Canadian Press

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Abstract: A long-standing and pervasive element of Canadian national identity is the idealization of Canadian society as uniquely tolerant and free of racism. This national myth was seriously challenged when the results of a federally commissioned survey on attitudes toward immigration were made public. Using the methods of critical discourse analysis, this paper examines how the results of this survey were presented and interpreted in The Globe and Mail. Specifically, the press reports are examined with respect to: (a) how the situation of discrimination and intolerance revealed in the survey is encoded, (b) the meaning of the terms “Canadian” and “Canadian culture” in the context of these texts, and (c) how the texts account for the reported change in “Canadian” attitudes towards “visible minorities.” I argue that The Globe and Mail adopted an overall semantic strategy of denial of racism which reinterprets, marginalizes, and mitigates evidence of racism in Canada, and thus reinforces the dominant and preferred view of Canadian society as tolerant, pluralistic, and free of systemic racism.

Résumé: Depuis longtemps, une caractéristique répandue de l’identité nationale canadienne a été l’idéalisation de la société canadienne comme étant singulièrement tolérante et libre de racisme. On a pu mettre en question ce mythe national, cependant, suivant la publication des résultats d’un sondage commandité par le gouvernement fédéral sur les attitudes envers l’immigration. Utilisant les méthodes de l’analyse critique du discours, cet article examine comment le Globe and Mail présenta et interprêta les résultats de ce sondage. En particulier, l’article examine ses reportages en ce qui a trait aux questions suivantes : (a) comment ces reportages encodent la situation de discrimination et d’intolérance révélée dans le sondage, (b) quel est le sens des termes « canadien » et « culture canadienne » dans le contexte de ces textes, et (c) comment ces textes expliquent le changement qu’ils perçoivent dans les attitudes « canadiennes » à l’égard de « minorités visibles ». Je soutiens que le Globe and Mail adopte une stratégie sémantique globale de déni du racisme qui reinterprète, marginalise et mitige les signes de racisme au Canada, et renforce ainsi le point de vue dominant et préféré de la société canadienne, qu’elle est tolérante, pluraliste et libre de racisme systémique.

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Introduction: Canadian national identity and the myth of tolerance

Contemporary approaches to national identity have stressed, following Anderson (1983), that nations are “imagined political communities” which are produced, reproduced, and modified largely through discursive and symbolic means. Thus, the shared mental construct of what constitutes the nation becomes “real in the realm of convictions and beliefs through reifying, figurative discourses continually launched by politicians, intellectuals and media people and disseminated through the systems of education, schooling [and] mass communication” (De Cillia, Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999, p. 153). Along with notions of common history and traditions and shared systems of cultural representations, a significant element in the discursive construction of nations and national identities involves the articulation of difference and contrast with respect to other nations and national identities (Benhabib, 1996; Martin, 1995). This process of differentiation and contrast becomes problematic when applied to individuals and communities within the national sphere, for as Hall (1992) has argued, “All modern nations are all cultural hybrids” (p. 297). Thus, those individuals or groups whose behaviour or characteristics fall outside the constructed norms of the “imagined” national collectivity become perceived as “others” and are excluded from that identity.

A key feature in popular conceptions of Canadian national identity and culture concerns the issue of racism. Canadian society, so the myth goes, is a uniquely tolerant one, free of the racism which mars social life in many nations, and particularly in that of its American neighbour to the south.2 This national self-perception is so positive and so certain that over two decades of historical and sociological research demonstrating the contrary has had little impact in eroding its strength or pervasiveness (e.g., Bolaria & Li, 1988; Li, 1990; McKague, 1991). The historical and continuing prevalence of systemic racism has been documented in a wide range of Canadian social institutions, including the legal and criminal justice systems (Backhouse, 1999; Mosher, 1998), immigration (Jakubowsk, 1997; Whitaker, 1987), education (Alladin, 1996), and employment (Loney, 1998). Others have focused on the discriminatory practices experienced by specific minority groups (see, for example, Li [1988] and Ujimoto & Hirabayashi [1980] on the experience of Asians; Hill [1993] on the black experience). Finally, and notwithstanding their considerable recent public attention, even such cases as the internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II and strained minority/police relations in Toronto, Montreal, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg have had little impact on this myth, at least among the socially dominant groups. Native, Japanese, and Afro-Canadians who lived through these experiences would have a different view.

A broad-based popular ignorance of Canada’s history of discrimination and civil rights abuses against visible and cultural minorities remains prevalent. According to a survey of senior high school students (Canadian Civil Liberties Association, 1995), “most are unaware of past discriminatory practices such as denying entry to immigrants on the basis of race, the legalized slavery of blacks and aboriginals and the internment of Japanese [Canadians] during the Second
World War” (Grange, 1995, p. A3). For example, fewer than 9% knew that “blacks had been refused entry to Canada on the basis of race and ethnicity; fewer than 20% knew that blacks in Canada encountered formal discrimination in access to hotels, restaurants, theatres, and public facilities such as parks and swimming pools”; and “only 20% were aware that Canada had refused entry to Jews fleeing the Nazis in 1939” (p. A3).

Alan Borovoy, the CCLA spokesperson, suggests that the survey results demonstrate “how little the school system seems to be conveying about the material facts about the discrimination experience in this country” (p. A3). The failure of the education system to successfully communicate these important aspects of Canadian social history does much to maintain our myth of tolerance. So too does the Canadian press.

**Critical discourse analysis**

Critical discourse analysis has emerged in the last two decades as an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the relationship between language and social practices (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). It is concerned, according to Wodak (1989), “with the social practice of language behaviour, with the dialectics between society (including its subsystems), power, values, ideologies, opinions expressed and constituted in and about language” (p. xiv). The research is critical in that it focuses upon language use in situations of inequality and injustice, where it attempts to “uncover and de-mystify certain social processes in this and other societies, [and] to make mechanisms of manipulation, discrimination, demagogy, and propaganda explicit and transparent” (Wodak, 1989, p. xiv). Critical discourse analysis is also “political in intent with its practitioners acting upon the world in order to transform it and thereby help create a world where people are not discriminated against because of sex, colour, creed, age or social class” (Caldas-Coulthard & Coulthard, 1996, p. xi).

Critical discourse analysis is both social and linguistic, and as such it utilizes many of the tools and methods of formal linguistic analysis. Features such as transitivity (or the linguistic coding of agency, responsibility, and causality), lexical choice, and metaphor (and its entailments) are examined in tandem with rhetorical features such as local and global semantic strategies, dichotomization (e.g., us versus them), exclusion, mitigation, and denial, to name but a few. (For a more thorough discussion of the aims and methods of critical language study, see Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew, 1979; van Dijk, 1993b; Wodak, 1989.)

While the breadth of such critical discourse studies has been wide (from informal interpersonal communications to formal political texts, for example), much attention has been focused upon the role of the mass media in the construction and reproduction of dominant ideologies of sexism, classism, and racism. Because they function to frame and contextualize news events and thus provide readers with a specific “definition of the situation,” the ideological characteristics of newspaper discourse have been particularly well documented (e.g., Fowler, 1991; Hall, 1982; Kress & Hodge, 1979; Trew, 1979a, 1979b).
In a number of publications, Teun A. van Dijk (1987, 1991, 1992, 1993a, 1994, 1995) has focused specifically upon the reproduction, communication, and maintenance of racism in Western democracies, and the central role of the press in that social process. Contemporary forms of racism (and ethnicism), he argues, are not restricted to the blatant white supremacist ideologies or overt discriminatory incidents reported (and typically deplored) by the mainstream media. Indeed, current dominant norms and values in Western democracies are such that overt racist discourse and discriminatory acts are prohibited and condemned when they do occur. In Canada, for example, the activities of Heritage Front, a neo-Nazi organization, have been brought before the courts and are routinely condemned in the mass media. More significantly, it is the repetitive, cumulative, and structural patterns of everyday racism which have the most significant impact on the lives and social well being of minority group members. For van Dijk,

Racism also involves the everyday, mundane, negative opinions, attitudes, and ideologies and the seemingly subtle acts and conditions of discrimination against minorities, namely those social cognitions and social acts, processes, structures, or institutions that directly or indirectly contribute to the dominance of the white group and the subordinate position of minorities. (1993a, p. 5)

Van Dijk attributes much of the responsibility for the perpetuation, reproduction, and justification of everyday racism to what he terms elite discourse, whose forms include media, political, corporate, academic, and educational discourses. It is through such public discourse, the control of which is in the hands of an elite white minority, that the particular ideologies and social cognitions underlying everyday racism are reproduced and reinforced.

The media are of particular importance in this respect because they constitute the most influential of several elite discourses which shape and change social perceptions. The production of news is largely accomplished by members of dominant groups and it reflects their interests; moreover, it is through the media that the other elite discourses (e.g., academic, corporate, and political) are communicated to their broadest public audience (van Dijk, 1993a). In this manner, the press and other forms of mass media circulate “definitions of the situation” which contribute significantly to the formation, maintenance, and reproduction of a dominant popular consensus.

In the case of Canada, a focus upon elite discourse is important because discrimination and antagonism towards visible minorities is most commonly attributed to an unenlightened public, and in its most visible and extreme form to fringe hate-groups, such as the Heritage Front, Aryan Nation, Identity Christians, and so forth. As in other Western countries, the overtly racist discourse commonly associated with many of these white supremacist groups is no longer acceptable in the dominant public discourse where it has been increasingly replaced by what Barker (1981) identified as “the new racism.” This new racism eschews the overt expression of racist ideologies and embraces instead a “new racetalk” (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000) characterized by more sophisticated discourses of exclusion.
Prominent in everyday and public discourse around minority group issues are the complementary semantic strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (van Dijk, 1993a). In other words, in-group members present themselves in a positive light, while representing the “Other” negatively. Given the existing social constraints against overtly racist behaviour and talk and the positive social valuation accorded to attitudes of tolerance and acceptance of difference, denial of racism routinely appears as a semantic move of positive self-presentation. These denials may be observed at both the level of individual conversational interaction (“I’m not racist but . . .”) and the more macro-social levels (e.g., organizational, institutional, or national) represented in elite public discourse. In this latter instance, denials may take the form of a shared opinion, as a consensus about the ethnic situation. For instance, since discrimination and racism are legally and morally prohibited, most western countries share the official belief that therefore [emphasis in original] discrimination and racism no longer exist as a structural characteristic of society or of the state. If discrimination or prejudice still exist, it is treated as an incident, as a deviation, as something that should be attributed to, and punished at the individual level. In other words, institutional or systemic racism is denied. (van Dijk, 1992, p. 95)

In the context of the construction and maintenance of Canadian national identity, the denial of racism thus has a dual function. First, it is a semantic and pragmatic move of positive self-presentation in the sense outlined by van Dijk above. Second, it creates and asserts a distinction and contrast between Canadian national identity and that of the United States. As was noted earlier, such processes of differentiation are important factors in the construction of national identity.

An application
Utilizing the methods of critical discourse analysis, I examine the reporting and subsequent analysis in The Globe and Mail of a federally commissioned survey of Canadian attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. Because the survey revealed significant levels of intolerance and discriminatory attitudes toward visible minorities in Canada (i.e., Canadian racism), the research had the potential to profoundly challenge the dominant myth of racial tolerance, referred to above. In what follows, I argue that the primary semantic strategy of The Globe and Mail reports is one of denial of racism. These texts function to reinterpret, marginalize, or mitigate evidence of racism in Canada, and thus reinforce the dominant and preferred view of Canadian society as tolerant, pluralistic, and free of systemic racism. In such a context, where the dominant consensus is that racism does not exist, it becomes more difficult for minorities to have their concerns taken seriously and acted upon by those who hold power.

The results of the survey on attitudes towards immigration were first reported in The Globe and Mail on March 10, 1994, in a front page story in the morning edition under the headline: “Too Many Immigrants, Many Say: Federal Survey Shows Relatively Less Compassion, Less Tolerance” (Campbell, 1994a; reproduced in Appendix A). The headline in the evening edition, also on page A1, read:
“Attitudes on Immigrants Harden: Federal Survey Finds Majority Think There are Too Many Newcomers” (Campbell, 1994b). Both reports continued inside the paper, under the headline: “Intolerance Linked to Insecurity.” The following day, March 11, The Globe and Mail published its analysis of the significance of the survey’s results under the title: “Cultural Insecurity Showing” (Sarick, 1994; reproduced in Appendix B).

The major findings of the survey^4^ were summarized in the initial report (Campbell, 1994a) as follows:

- Most Canadians believe there are too many immigrants, especially from visible minorities (para. 1);
- four in 10 Canadians believe there are too many members of visible minorities, signalling out Arabs, blacks, and Asians for discrimination (para. 2);
- about 16% [of Canadians] are hard-core xenophobes (para. 21);
- about one-quarter of the population is flirting with intolerance (para. 21); and
- another quarter of the population is becoming increasingly concerned about controls on admissions (para. 22).

In the discussion that follows, I examine these press reports with respect to:

- a. how the evidence of Canadian racism revealed in the survey is encoded;
- b. the meaning of the terms “Canadian” and “Canadian culture” in the context of these texts; and
- c. how the texts account for the reported change in “Canadian” attitudes towards “visible minorities.”

The first question concerns lexical style which is addressed by examining the lexical (i.e., vocabulary) choices made by the texts’ authors and those experts associated with the survey who are quoted in the reports. The second issue also concerns vocabulary choice but centres more directly on the semantic structure of the lexicon and its role in the process of classification. The third question—which is at the heart of the interpretation of the survey—requires a consideration of transitivity or the linguistic encoding of causality and responsibility. As I shall argue, each of these textual features contributes to the overall semantic strategy of denial of racism which dominates the texts.

Encoding discrimination and intolerance

Lexical style refers to the variations in vocabulary choice which emphasize or de-emphasize the positive or negative aspects of particular events, acts, individuals, or groups. Such choices not only reveal much about the ideological position of the writer but also function to communicate specific representations of the world. To cite a frequently used example, the selection of the term “rioters” as opposed to “protesters” reveals much about a writer’s ideological stance towards those participants in the event. As van Dijk (1991) has pointed out, “words manifest the underlying semantic concepts used in the definition of the situation”
The lexical style utilized by the authors of *The Globe and Mail* texts to encode the situation of discrimination and intolerance revealed in the survey contributes significantly to the more global semantic strategy of denial through omission, qualification, trivialization, and explicit denial.

Perhaps the most striking feature of these texts is the fact of omission—the terms “race” and its derivatives “racism” and “racist” are absent from both the initial news report and the analysis piece. As indicated in the brief summary provided above, the survey clearly indicated that Canadians signalled visible minorities as being too numerous (Campbell, 1994a [Appendix A], para. 1 and 2). Both the survey and the news texts, however, framed the issue in terms of “immigration,” “immigrants,” and “newcomers.” In the context of these texts, and in Canadian social and political discourse in general, these terms have come to signify a more restricted meaning than simply those individuals who have recently immigrated to Canada. “Immigrant” in this context refers only to individuals who are socially designated as “visible minorities,” that is, those constituted in current dominant discourse as “non-white.” Thus, an essentially racial issue comes to be summarized and discussed without reference to its most socially and politically salient feature, such as “a clear majority of Canadians surveyed have said there are too many immigrants” (Campbell, 1994a, para. 6).

Instead, *The Globe and Mail* relies predominately on the term “intolerance” (or closely related derivatives) which, although frequently associated with racism, nonetheless avoids its explicit expression. This is particularly true of the initial report (Campbell, 1994a) where 11 of the 16 references to the survey’s results were encoded in this manner. The distribution and frequency of “intolerance” and associated forms are listed below:

- “intolerance”: 5 instances (para. 8, 11, 20, 21, subtitle 2),
- “intolerant attitudes”: 3 instances (para. 3, 23, 24),
- “less tolerance”: 1 instance (subtitle 1),
- “less tolerant”: 1 instance (para. 10), and
- “intolerant views”: 1 instance (para. 15).

Other terms used in the article include: “discrimination” (para. 2), “less compassion” (subtitle 1), “less compassionate” (para. 10), “hard-core xenophobes” (para. 21), and, ambiguously, “the open society is under increasing pressure” (para. 9).

The analysis piece (Sarick, 1994 [Appendix B]) is even more elliptical in its representation of the results. It describes the situation as one of:

- “intolerance”: 2 instances (para. 11, 24),
- “a hardening of attitudes” (abstract),
- “a greater resistance to the presence of recent immigrants” (para. 1),
- “rising antipathy toward immigrants” (para. 6),
- “negative attitudes” (para. 10), and
- “resentment towards immigrants” (para. 21).
Given that both pieces are of similar length (864 and 794 words, respectively) it is noteworthy that the analysis contains only 7 references to the results (as opposed to the 16 references in the initial report). The specific function of the analysis, however, is to construct an interpretation which denies racism and thereby reproduces and maintains the myth of Canadian tolerance. De-emphasis through reduced reference to the findings is but one way this is accomplished.

The impact of the term “intolerance” and its associated forms, which do have a semantic association with racism, is diminished through qualification and trivialization as is shown by the following examples:

a. Canadian society is described as “relatively less tolerant, less compassionate” (Campbell, 1994a [Appendix A], para. 10);

b. One quarter of the population is described as “flirting with intolerance” (para. 21); and

c. One half the population harbours “intolerant attitudes” which are described as “soft.” This group consists of “just average Canadians” who are “cranky” (para. 23).

In example (a) “intolerance” is characterized less negatively by the terms “less tolerant, less compassionate” which, in turn, are further qualified by the adverb “relatively.” Examples (b) and (c) above reflect vocabulary choices which function to trivialize the importance of the intolerance revealed by the survey, that is, “flirting,” “soft,” and “cranky.” The result of this lexical selection is that the acts themselves become minimized and the responsibility of those responsible is thus partially mitigated (van Dijk, 1992).

Mitigation is also reflected in the textual treatment of the “hard-core xenophobes” who are described as “only a small percentage of Canadians—about 16 percent” (Campbell, 1994a, para. 21). Commonly used as a euphemism for “racist” in elite discourse, “Xenophobe,” which refers to a hatred or distrust of foreigners, conveniently avoids a recognition that the basis of this hatred is racial. The use of the qualifier “only” in this context functions to both marginalize the group and trivialize its significance despite what many might feel constitutes an alarmingly high number of individuals. (The thought that there are only approximately 5.25 million “hard-core xenophobes” in Canada is not a reassuring one.) This marginalization is further accomplished through the adjective “hard-core” with its connotations of fanaticism, lack of reason, and intransigence. The significance of this marginalization is that it functions to exclude these individuals from the “imagined community,” the community which embraces the myth of tolerance and the community to which the myth of tolerance refers, thus bolstering the legitimacy of the larger semantic strategy of denial.

Finally, in an explicit example of denial, the analysis asserts that “Canadians’ compassion is more deeply rooted than the intolerance currently being expressed might indicate” (Sarick, 1994 [Appendix B], para. 11). The lexical tactics of qualification and marginalization depend ultimately upon the myth of long-standing Canadian tolerance; tolerance and compassion are presuppositions essential to the
meaningful interpretation of claims that Canadians are “relatively less compassionate, relatively less tolerant” (Campbell, 1994a, para. 10). The historical accuracy of such beliefs is assumed by the writers, is assumed to be shared by the readers, and thus remains an unexamined and unquestioned proposition.

Contextual meaning of “Canadian” and “Canadian culture”
Lexical style as realized through vocabulary variation and selection is a significant aspect of the ideological construction of texts. Underlying the effects of this process of selection is the fact that “the vocabulary of a language, or a variety of a language, amounts to a map of the objects, concepts, processes and relationships about which the culture needs to communicate” (Fowler, 1991, p. 80). Fowler stresses the distinction between referential and sense meaning (derived from Saussure’s insights concerning word meaning, or what he termed “value”). While referential meaning is based on the actual application of a word to an object in the world, sense is defined as the relationship between words: “the value or sense of a word is given by its place within an system of related terms” (Fowler, 1991, p. 81). Thus, words not only label objects or events, they also locate these objects/events within a system of classification based on principles of inclusion and exclusion, commonality and differentiation. Key to understanding these differences in meaning is the contextual use of the terms themselves.

Just as the term “immigrant” has a specific restricted meaning (i.e., “visible minority”) in these texts, so too do the concepts “Canadian” and “Canadian culture.” Crucially, “Canadian” here does not refer, as one might assume, to a status of citizenship. The implicit referent is exclusively Canadians of “white” and Christian backgrounds. Evidence for this is revealed in the following statements that can only make sense if one assumes that “Canadian” excludes many Canadian citizens, such as immigrants and members of visible minority groups:

a. Most Canadians believe there are too many immigrants, especially from visible minorities (Campbell, 1994a [Appendix A], para. 1);  
b. Six of 10 respondents . . . agreed with the statement that “too many immigrants feel no obligation to adapt to Canadian values” (para. 11); and  
c. Four in 10 Canadians believe there are too many members of visible minorities, signalling out Arabs, blacks, and Asians for discrimination (para. 2).

Example (c) is particularly revealing in that it makes no explicit reference to immigrants or recent immigrants but would include groups with the very deepest historical roots in this country (i.e., First Nations) as well as Asian and Afro-Canadians, whose communities have had long histories in Canada.

Similarly, in the following two examples, statements attributed to the author of the survey reveal a profoundly ethnocentric and exclusionary conception of “Canadianness”:

d. Referring to earlier studies, the researcher commented that in the past one “would only occasionally hear complaints of too many foreign languages being spoken on the subway, or Sikhs wearing daggers in public.” *Everyone* in
Toronto will mention these things now”” (Sarick, 1994 [Appendix B], para. 8, emphasis added); and

e. “They’re just average Canadians who are feeling under pressure, a little cranky because . . . they see or hear, ‘Gee, my kids can’t say the Lord’s Prayer at school and we can’t have Christmas’” (Campbell, 1994a [Appendix A], para. 23).

Examples (a) to (e) above reveal that the “imagined community” referred to by the term “Canadian” is “white,” Christian, and monolingual—presumably Anglophone.

The underlying assumptions about what constitutes the “imagined community” of Canada are paradoxical. In the first instance, they reveal a narrow, ethnocentric, exclusionary, and ultimately racist view of who is Canadian and what constitutes Canadian culture; in themselves, these views, when recognized for what they are, profoundly challenge the national myth of tolerance and acceptance of diversity. On the other hand, this restricted view of Canadianness provides the necessary background against which an argument of denial through mitigation becomes possible and the myth of tolerance remains unchallenged, that is, the central issue becomes not racism and discrimination but fear of cultural change.

Assigning causality: Accounting for the change in “Canadian” attitudes

The concept of transitivity—adopted from Halliday’s (1985) model of functional grammar—has proven to be highly productive in critical discourse studies. Because such research is concerned with the textual manifestations of ideology and power, the identification of events and actions, participants and their roles, and attribution of responsibility is central to an analysis of textual representations of the world. Transitivity refers to the ways in which clauses are used to analyze events and, because there are different options available, the choices that a writer makes communicate a particular point of view.

Fundamental to transitivity are the basic semantic roles of event (typically a verb) and the participants associated with that event (typically nouns). Participants may be distinguished in terms of their role in the event, either as agents or causes of the event, or as patients or those affected by the event. These roles are illustrated in the example below:

\[
\text{John} \quad \text{hit} \quad \text{the ball.} \\
\quad \text{(agent)} \quad \text{(event)} \quad \text{(patient)}
\]

In such a clausal structure, responsibility for the event is clearly attributed. The selection of a passive construction, on the other hand, makes it possible for responsibility to be left unspecified, for example:

\[
\text{The ball} \quad \text{was hit.} \\
\quad \text{(patient)} \quad \text{(event)}
\]
Instead of focusing in detail on the clausal structures of the texts, however, I want to consider the role of transitivity at a more abstract level by examining the fundamental messages communicated by each text. In terms of the two texts in *The Globe and Mail*, the importance of transitivity becomes clear when we consider the event upon which the texts focus and the assignment of the roles of agent and patient.

The headline of the initial report of the survey results (Campbell, 1994a) captures its primary message: “Too Many Immigrants, Many Say: Federal Survey Shows Relatively Less Compassion, Less Tolerance.” Leaving aside the strategies to deny racism outlined above, the survey results were presented in terms of the following overall relationship of transitivity:

```
“Canadians” are intolerant of visible minorities.
(agent) (event) (patient)
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Responsibility, in this instance, is assigned to “Canadians.” In the analysis piece, responsibility for the situation revealed by the survey (i.e., “Canadians” being intolerant) is reassigned to “immigrants” and “visible minorities.”

As prominently displayed in the two headlines (“Intolerance Linked to Insecurity” and “Cultural Insecurity Showing”) and succinctly summarized in the abstract to the analysis, the ultimate cause for the reported change in attitudes lies in “Canadians’ cultural insecurity” (note, again, the restricted sense of “Canadian” is implicit and essential in this). *The Globe and Mail’s* analysis in particular stressed that the cause of the change in attitudes is not economic stress (e.g., job loss caused by the recession) but as the following quotes indicate, the cause is:

a. fear of the consequences of living with different traditions and values (Sarick, 1994 [Appendix B], para. 2);

b. the fear on the part of Canadians that waves of newcomers will alter their way of life (para. 5);

c. worries about the reshaping of the Canadian culture (para. 9); and

d. Canadians worried that their national identity would be submerged by waves of immigrants (para. 16).

Significantly, the analysis fails to repeat that this fear or cultural insecurity on the part of “Canadians” is linked explicitly to “the shift to non-European immigrants in the past three decades” (Campbell, 1994a, para. 9). Like the term “Canadian,” “European” here refers exclusively to Europeans who are socially designated as “white.”

What is most significant in these and similar statements is that the roles of agency and responsibility have been reversed. Instead of the situation being characterized as “Canadians” subjecting members of visible minority groups to intolerance and discrimination, the issue has been transformed into one in which visible minorities threaten “Canadian” culture and values. In a classic example of blaming the victim, those who experience social inequality are themselves held
ultimately responsible. The analysis piece thus interprets the meaning of the survey in terms of the following overall relationship of transitivity:

\[
\text{Visible minorities} \quad \text{threaten} \quad \text{Canadian culture.}
\]

The consequence is that Canadian attitudes of intolerance and discrimination against visible minorities which were revealed by the survey have been excused and mitigated in these texts, with the mitigating circumstance being simply the presence of difference in the form of visible minorities.

A frequent feature of denials of racism, mitigation provides a strategy for positive self-presentation by minimizing responsibility for negatively evaluated social acts (van Dijk, 1992). Increased discrimination and a decline in tolerance, while a cause for concern, are presented as an understandable, if not reasonable, reaction to a threat to “Canadian culture” posed by “others” by their mere presence and their difference—and the essence of this difference is not their cultural practices (for there is considerable variation, both culturally and linguistically, among Europeans), but particular aspects of physical appearance which have come to signify some essential social difference. As argued above, “immigrant” signifies “visible minority” and it is only the cultural traditions and values of “visible minorities” which are seen to evoke the threat to Canadian culture.

In addition to constructing a positive self-presentation, mitigation and the associated shift in responsibility also function as strategies of negative other-presentation—the “negative others” in this case being visible minorities. They are positioned as not only creating fear and insecurity among “Canadians” by threatening “Canadian culture” but also as being responsible for the erosion of an important feature in the construction of Canadian national identity, that is, the idea that Canadian society is tolerant and nonracist.

In closing, I would like to make two interesting comparisons, the first historical, and the second contemporary. Many associate the Nazi regime with an obsession with biological conceptions of racial purity, the notion of an Aryan race and Aryan blood which had been or could be contaminated and degenerated through mixture with non-Aryan Germans. However, as early as 1933, “cultural purity” was also highly significant in the Nazi agenda. German culture, according to Nazi ideology, was under threat and had to be protected from what were seen as degenerative influences in modern art, architecture, and music, the source of which was strongly associated with the Jewish population (Cohen, 1991). Although the social and political realities of Nazi Germany and contemporary Canadian society are very different, it is also important to recognize that the rhetoric of cultural insecurity revealed in The Globe and Mail’s analysis is not new.

The second example concerns contemporary racist organizations in Canada. Groups such as the Heritage Front have adopted a strategy of redefinition and denial in order to avoid prosecution under Canada’s Anti-Hatred legislation and to attract new members by softening their racist rhetoric. Even among some of these groups, the label of “racist” is one to be avoided. The Heritage Front, for example,
stresses in its publications (e.g., Up Front) that it is not “racist” but “racialist” or “racial idealist”—its leaders proclaim that they do not hate any race, they just think that the “races” must be kept separate and “pure.” They are not “white supremacist” but “white nationalist.” A key theme in their public communications, however, is an emphasis on “white” cultural pride and cultural superiority. The evocation of “cultural insecurity” as a motivation for racial discrimination and intolerance may thus have some serious unanticipated consequences in that it may provide legitimacy to the profoundly racist ideologies and political goals of such groups.

Conclusion
My goal in this analysis has been to reveal, through the microanalysis of a single example, how the powerful discourses of the press contribute to the maintenance of one of Canada’s dominant myths and a salient component of Canadian national identity. In this specific instance, disturbing evidence of racist attitudes in Canada was reframed and reinterpreted through discursive strategies of denial, mitigation, marginalization, and, in the case of those characterized as “hard-core xenophobes,” exclusion from the imagined tolerant community. In adopting these strategies, The Globe and Mail texts provide concrete examples of the “new race-talk” (Bonilla-Silva & Forman, 2000) in that they construct a very exclusionary vision of that imagined community through the dichotomization implied by the contrast between the terms “Canadian” and “visible minority.”

Denials of racism have important consequences. In that they reinforce the dominant consensus that racism does not constitute a significant social problem, such denials undermine social and political efforts which attempt to address the problem of racism in Canadian society and its role in maintaining unequal access to social and material resources. Denial also fosters an ideological context which ignores or trivializes everyday discriminatory practices. For those Canadians who benefit either directly or indirectly from the social asymmetry based on putative racial features, the myth of tolerance is clearly useful; but this not the case for all Canadians.

Notes
1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Canadian Communication Association/Association Canadienne de Communication Conference, Brock University, St. Catharines, ON, June 2-4, 1996.
2. A direct comparison of American and Canadian attitudes towards racial and ethnic minorities provided substantial evidence that while “Canadians have a conscious tradition of ‘tolerance,’ ” the actual differences between the experience of minority groups in the two countries was “more apparent than real” (Reitz & Breton, 1994, p. 133). Perhaps of even greater significance is their finding that with respect to immigrant populations “Americans favor cultural retention more than Canadians do” (p. 125).
3. At the time of the publication of the texts examined in this article, The Globe and Mail was considered to be Canada’s only national paper.
4. It is significant to note here that the actual levels of intolerance and discrimination in Canada are very likely to be higher than those reflected in the survey results. Bonilla-Silva & Forman (2000) report that in the investigation of racial attitudes the method of data collection is a significant
factor in the degree of racial intolerance revealed; specifically, survey results consistently indicate
a more positive picture of white racial attitudes than do studies based on data derived from inter-
views.

5. Similarly, van Dijk (1993a) has discussed how the implications of racist attacks on minority group
members are sometimes downplayed through the attribution of such violence to “social out-groups, such as football hooligans or skin heads” (p. 250).

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Appendix A
Too Many Immigrants, Many Say: Federal Survey Shows Relatively Less Compassion, Less Tolerance
Thursday, March 10, 1994
By Murray Campbell

The Globe and Mail
Most Canadians believe there are “too many immigrants,” especially from visible minorities, according to a new survey commissioned for the federal government.
Four in 10 Canadians believe there are too many members of visible minorities, singling out Arabs, blacks and Asians for discrimination.
And in Toronto, where the largest numbers of immigrants to Canada live, the survey showed a startling rise recently in intolerant attitudes. About 67 per cent of the respondents in Canada’s largest city said there were too many immigrants, compared with 46 per cent just two years ago.
In the poll, conducted last month by Ottawa-based Ekos Research Associates Inc., 53 per cent of Canadians questioned immigration levels, compared with 44 per cent two years ago and just 31 per cent in February of 1989.
About 37 per cent said admission levels were “about right,” and 7 per cent said there were “too few immigrants to Canada.”
Ekos president Frank Graves said yesterday he believes it is the first time a clear majority of Canadians surveyed have said there are too many immigrants. His company has been involved in social-policy research for more than a decade.
He conducted the study as part of an effort by Ottawa to reshape immigration policy for the next decade. He presented his findings last Sunday in Montebello, Que., to a conference staged by the non-partisan Public Policy Forum for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.
Mr. Graves said his “disturbing” survey does not mean that Canada has shed its tradition of compassion and embraced intolerance. Indeed, nearly three-quarters of those surveyed agreed that a mix of cultures makes Canada a more attractive place to live.
But Mr. Graves said a variety of factors, including the shift to non-European immigrants in the past three decades, means the open society is under increasing pressure.
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Intolerance linked to insecurity
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“What I’m saying is that it is relatively less compassionate, relatively less tolerant than it was a decade ago.”
He cautioned against interpreting the trend toward intolerance solely as a function of the economic recession. He said cultural insecurity—the fear that an ill-defined Canadian way of life is disappearing—ranked ahead of economic stress as a key factor in shaping attitudes. Six of 10 respondents, for example, agreed with the statement that “too many immigrants feel no obligation to adapt to Canadian values.”
Five weeks ago, Immigration Minister Sergio Marchi set this year’s immigration target at 250,000, a number roughly in line with the number of admissions in recent years.
Mr. Marchi said he was committed to an open immigration policy but wanted to hear from a broad range of Canadians in crafting an admissions policy for the next decade.

The Montebello conference was the first step in that process. The minister told the gathering of civil servants, academics, business executives and labour leaders that they had brought difficult issues out into the open.

McGill University sociologist Morton Weinfeld, who attended the conference, said the Ekos survey could be worrisome but it needs to be analyzed to determine the strength and source of intolerant views.

“Certainly it’s an important signal and I think we should pay attention to that, but it’s not clear how much attention,” Professor Weinfeld said.

Gerry Maffre, a spokesman for the Immigration Department, said the Ekos poll builds upon earlier surveys by the government and by private firms.

“It’s an issue that’s out there, that certainly there is a level of opposition to immigration,” he said.

Ekos surveyed 2,369 Canadians aged 16 and older, a sample that produces a margin of error of two percentage points 19 times out of 20.

Intolerance was highest among anglophones and was more predominant among older people and those with a high-school education or less. Concern about immigration varied according to political affiliation, with the Reform Party providing an ideological home for English-speaking Canadians who say there are too many immigrants.

Mr. Graves said only a small percentage of Canadians—about 16 per cent—are hard-core xenophobes. A larger group, representing about one-quarter of the population, is flirting with intolerance because it has seen its economic prospects dimmed by the recession.

Another quarter of the population, with middle-of-the-road views on immigration issues, is becoming increasingly concerned about controls on admissions, although it is less upset over the status quo.

Mr. Graves characterized the intolerant attitudes among these latter two groups as soft. “They’re just average Canadians who are feeling under pressure, a little cranky because they’re seeing their pay cheque not going so far and they see or hear “Gee, my kids can’t say the Lord’s Prayer at school and we can’t have Christmas.”

The Toronto numbers place the city well ahead of Vancouver and Montreal in intolerant attitudes. In Vancouver, 51 per cent of the respondents said there were too many immigrants, a level only a couple of points higher than recorded in a 1992 Ekos survey. In Montreal, 39 per cent were uncomfortable with current admission levels, compared with 29 per cent two years ago.

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Appendix B

Cultural Insecurity Showing
Friday, March 11, 1994

ANALYSIS / A recent national survey indicating a hardening of attitudes toward immigrants suggests a growing fear among Canadians that waves of newcomers will change their way of life.

By Lila Sarick
Are Canadians developing a greater resistance to the presence of recent immigrants in their midst? Or are their attitudes essentially the same as ever—an ambivalent mixture of tolerance and fear of the consequences of living with different traditions and values?

Those are some of the questions raised by a survey of attitudes toward immigration conducted for the federal government that concluded that most Canadians believe that there are “too many immigrants,” especially from visible-minority groups.

In the survey by Ekos Research Associates of Ottawa, 60 per cent of respondents agreed that “too many immigrants feel no obligation to adapt to Canadian values and way of life.” Just two years ago, the figure was 53 per cent.

That indicates the reappearance of a phenomenon familiar to experts who have studied reactions to immigration trends—the fear on the part of Canadians that waves of newcomers will alter their way of life.

Nostalgia for a past way of life, even if it was more imagined than real, is fuelling Canadians’ “cultural insecurity” and rising antipathy toward immigrants, Ekos president Frank Graves said in an interview.

Both in cities with large immigrant populations, such as Toronto, and in communities with very few immigrants, Canadians feel overwhelmed by the pace of change, Mr. Graves said.

In focus-group research conducted five years ago, he said, researchers would only occasionally hear complaints of too many foreign languages being spoken on the subway, or Sikhs wearing daggers in public. “Everyone in Toronto will mention these things now.”

In the survey, worries about the reshaping of the Canadian culture far outweighed concerns about economic stress or job loss in shaping attitudes toward immigration.

Negative attitudes toward immigrants have increased as the economy recovers slightly, and Mr. Graves cautioned that this may not change, even after the economy improves.

Nevertheless, he said he believes that Canadians’ compassion is more deeply rooted than the intolerance currently being expressed might indicate.

What is being questioned are settlement patterns, the degree of integration or the balance of immigrants being accepted, he said.

Mr. Graves noted that 73 per cent of respondents agreed that “a mixture of different lifestyles and cultures makes Canada a more attractive place to live.”

He added, “Quiet possibly the government can get people back on board by dealing with some of the perceived irritants.”

Ekos, surveyed 2,369 Canadians 16 and older, a sample that produces a margin of error of two percentage points 19 times out of 20. The most recent poll was conducted last month.

Canadians have always worried that their national identity would be submerged by waves of immigrants, but this anxiety is unwarranted, said Morton Weinfield, who teaches sociology at McGill University in Montreal.

“The overwhelming majority of immigrants share fundamental Canadian values . . . Even where there are some value differences, most of these are lost by the second or third generation.”

“We really are a model of diversity to many nations.”
Demetrios Papademetriou, a specialist familiar with worldwide immigration policies, said Canadians’ commitment to immigration and the integration of newcomers is unprecedented.

Only in Canada would the government pay for a focus group and survey on immigration, said Mr. Papademetriou, who is chairman of the migration committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development.

He said the growth in resentment toward immigrants should be an occasion for taking stock, not alarm.

He suggested that the poll results may reflect unhappiness about the economy and the previous Progressive Conservative government, while the Reform Party’s calls for lower levels of immigration may have led people to express unpopular sentiments about immigrants more freely.

The government needs to expose myths about immigration, but also to be sensitive to divisive issues, Mr. Papademetriou advised.

“The worst thing a government can do is encourage things that fuel distinctiveness or intolerance . . . Integration is about mutual accommodation. It is not unreasonable to expect immigrants to do most of that accommodation, and public policy should reflect that.”

But Andrew Cardozo, former executive director of the Canadian Enthnocultural Council, a national coalition of minority groups, said immigrants adopt Canadian values rapidly, regardless of the government’s policy.

Immigrants work at the same jobs, watch the same television shows and struggle to buy the same possessions as their neighbours, he said, adding that the amount of money that supports multicultural programs is a “pittance.”

The only way to end multiculturalism is to suppress other languages and religions, he added. But as the experience of the former Soviet Union illustrates, even nations that were suppressed for 50 years have reemerged.

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