Indigenous Student Experiences with Racism in Winnipeg

By Jacqueline T. Romanow
Indigenous Student Experiences with Racism in Winnipeg

ISBN 978-1-77125-482-3

FEBRUARY 2020

This report is available free of charge from the CCPA website at www.policyalternatives.ca. Printed copies may be ordered through the Manitoba Office for a $10 fee.

Help us continue to offer our publications free online.

We make most of our publications available free on our website. Making a donation or taking out a membership will help us continue to provide people with access to our ideas and research free of charge. You can make a donation or become a supporter on-line at www.policyalternatives.ca. Or you can contact the Manitoba office at 204-927-3200 for more information. Suggested donation for this publication: $10 or what you can afford.

About the Author
Jacqueline T Romanow is a Red River Métis and is currently the Chair of Indigenous Studies at the University of Winnipeg. Her PhD is in International Relations from Queen’s University; she also has an MA in Economics from the University of Manitoba. Her research work and teaching currently focuses on indigenous rights and economic development, sovereignty, and governance.

Acknowledgements
This report is funded by the generous support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through the Manitoba Research Alliance grant: Partnering for Change – Community-based solutions for Aboriginal and inner-city poverty.

This report has been peer reviewed. The opinions and recommendations in this report are those of the author(s), and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders of this report.
Introduction

While racism in the United States receives a great deal of media attention, in Canada it is less so. Canadians like to see themselves — and are generally seen by nationals of other countries — as tolerant, multicultural and open minded, believing that all the people of the nation enjoy equal opportunities and cultural freedoms (Mackey, 2005, p. 15–6; Simpson et al., 2011, p. 287). The accuracy of this narrative, however, is belied by the reality on the ground (Clark et al., 2014, p.113). Although this state-sanctioned multiculturalism narrative remains dominant in mainstream perception, persistent disparities in living standards — along with bleak social and economic prospects — tell a different story for Indigenous people in Canada (MacDonald, 2014, p. 66).

Indigenous Canadians do not enjoy equal opportunities or freedoms, nor the same general standards of living as non-Indigenous Canadians. While Canada as a nation consistently ranks near the top of the United Nations Human Development Index, the low standard of living of its Indigenous population shows this status to be highly problematic. Poverty, marginalization and discrimination are reflected across numerous statistical categories; for example, nationally, Aboriginal1 children account for only 27% of the population under the age of 15, but nearly 83% of all children in foster care (Statistics Canada, 2016). Similarly, median after-tax income for Indigenous Canadians was just over $20,000 in 2011, compared to $27,600 for their non-Indigenous counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2015). Indigenous Canadians are also more likely to be unemployed, live in crowded housing conditions, and suffer poor health and food insecurity than their non-Indigenous counterparts (Statistics Canada, 2015).

These grave disparities can be linked to the impact of settler colonialism. Like the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, Canada can perhaps be most usefully understood as a “settler colony.” Unlike traditional colonies, a settler colony is characterized as one where the

1Note on language: Aboriginal vs. Indigenous: Aboriginal is the term used by the Canadian government. It is defined in the Canadian Constitution as referring to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. This term is not widely used outside of the Canadian government context. This paper uses the term “Indigenous” to refer to the same people (First Nations, Inuit and Métis); except where referring explicitly to government-related statistics, studies and policies that use the term Aboriginal. The term “Indigenous” is used much more widely in an international context.
“Indigenous [native] population was reduced to a small or tiny proportion of the overall population, [now overwhelmingly] composed of colonizers/migrants” (Docker 2004, p. 2). To legitimate this experience, colonial discourses marginalize native culture, knowledge and worldviews and privilege those of the colonizers; these discourses permeate (and are reproduced by) the settler state and its institutions. As Indigenous scholar Dr. Marie Battiste explains, “These systems have excluded, marginalized and diminished what remains of the Indigenous knowledges, judged those who have it [to be] uneducated, and shaped the beliefs around institutional and imaginative assumptions of colonization and modernism” (Battiste, 2013, p. 7). Overall, settler policies in Canada have sought either to assimilate or eliminate the Indigenous population in the name of a putative progress.

Upon arrival in North America, Europeans — with their linear view of progress and their belief in the fundamentally universal nature of humanity — could not engage the profoundly different philosophies, cultures and world views of North American Indigenous Peoples as the equals of the European standard. There were legal and political debates in Europe following the arrival of Columbus in October 1492 that sought to categorize the newfound territories as well as the peoples in them. Europeans debated whether Indigenous Peoples, as non-Christian “infidels,” were rational and subject to natural law or if they could — as uncivilized savages — be considered “natural slaves” (Castro, 2007). Because the underlying goal of these debates was the legitimation of conquest, the outcomes unsurprisingly generally supported Spain’s claim to the lands and resources of the New World. Indigenous “infidels” were to be converted to the one true god of Catholicism, thus justifying the Spanish usurpation of Indigenous Peoples’ land and marginalization (Castro, 2007).

The French approached colonization along similar lines. Their arrival and settlement in what Europeans called the “New World” followed shortly after its “discovery” by Columbus and was grounded in the principles similarly used to justify the European occupation and displacement of the Indigenous Peoples living in the territory. These principles included the Papal Bulls (the so-called “Doctrines of Discovery”) and Terra Nullius (Latin for “nobody’s land”). France did not want to be left out of the potential riches of the New World and by 1534 aimed to settle hitherto “unclaimed” lands north of the Spanish colonies regardless of who was living on them (Miller, 2017, 17). French control did not last long, however. Its colonies were later attacked and absorbed by the English, ultimately resulting in the creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867 under the British North America Act, i.e., Confederation.

Since Confederation, Canada has based its very legitimacy on its assertion of the inferiority of Indigenous Peoples. This ideology has served to justify the ongoing colonial ownership and control of Indigenous land and resources in the name of European-defined “progress.” Once Indigenous Peoples were no longer needed as allies, treaties were negotiated to remove them from their traditional territories with the promise of fair compensation and partnership in the new nation — but this was never the intent of the colonizers. The Indian Act (1876) deemed Indigenous Peoples “wards of the state” rather than partners; they were subsequently forced onto poorly situated reserves that often left them incapable of properly providing for themselves. Over time, this displacement starved them into subservience and rendered them dependent on meagre government handouts (Daschuk 2013, pps. 99–114). Reserves were established by the federal government intended as temporary holding camps, to be used only until the Indigenous population could be educated and assimilated into mainstream settler culture, after which they would presumably disappear. Residential schools, mandated through an amendment (1884) to the Indian Act, were meant to facilitate this
assimilation. In 1883, Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald explained:

> When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.

— The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, NNA, Library and Archives Canada, RG10, volume 6255, file 576-1, part 2, T. Ferrier to Secretary, Indian Affairs, 25 November 1926. [BRS-000219]

While few Canadians today share Sir John A. MacDonald’s opinion — at least openly — entrenched colonial ideas about Indigenous inferiority remain in the national imagination and are often expressed without reflection or remorse; for example, the qualitative data collected for this project recounts numerous instances whereas Indigenous students were called “dirty Indian” or “dirty squaw” by complete strangers. Indigenous Peoples are acutely aware of the racism and discrimination they experience almost daily, although not all may be cognizant of its root cause. It affects all aspects of their lives, including their economic and social opportunities, their personal safety, and their mental and physical health (Currie et al., 2012).

At the University of Winnipeg, Indigenous students have become increasingly vocal about the challenges they face due to racism and have played a direct and important role in resolving them. The mandatory Indigenous Credit Requirement (ICR) was initiated by the Aboriginal Student Council in 2015–16 to better educate students about Indigenous Peoples, their histories and cultures in North America and thus help eliminate pervasive and damaging stereotypes and attitudes. The Council played an instrumental role in its development and implementation with the support of faculty and administration.

While there have been a few recent surveys on racism and Indigenous issues (summarized below), quantitative data specifically on Indigenous people’s experiences of racism in the city of Winnipeg is difficult to find. The University of Winnipeg “Indigenous Student Experiences of Racism” survey was based on an earlier instrument first used in the United States, then adapted and applied to Indigenous students at the University of Alberta. The survey was conducted on campus at the University of Winnipeg from February to March 2016, just prior to the implementation of the ICR: it will provide valuable insights as to the ICR’s effectiveness after follow-up data is gathered in three to five years.

Theoretical and Empirical Context
Racism and discrimination against Indigenous Peoples are not unique to Manitoba, or even the Prairies; they are a problem throughout Canada. The Environics Institute, in partnership with a number of other prominent Canadian NGOs, including the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, conducted a broad national survey (n= 2001) of non-Aboriginal Canadians in early 2016 to measure attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples and related national issues (Environics Institute, 2016). The study concluded that nearly 90% of non-Indigenous Canadians recognize that Indigenous people experience racism often (46%) or sometimes (41%). This recognition has grown over the past decade, likely due to attention placed on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as increasing public awareness of the legacy of residential schools. The same survey reported that 65% of Canadians
believe “Most Canadians are prejudiced against Aboriginal Canadians, whether or not they are conscious of it” (Environics Institute, 2016, pps. 25–26). In 2009, the Environics Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (UAAPS) found that across 11 Canadian cities 70% of Indigenous adults had been either teased or insulted for being Indigenous, and more than a third felt they were not accepted by non-Indigenous people. Nine out of ten urban participants reported that non-Indigenous people behaved either unfairly or negatively toward them. They believe non-Indigenous people hold a range of negative stereotypes, most commonly about addiction problems and/or laziness (Environics Institute, 2010, pps. 82–3).

These reports are underscored by the handful of academic studies that have been conducted on Indigenous students’ experiences of racism in Canada. Currie et al. (2012) conducted a fairly comprehensive survey (both quantitative and qualitative) of Indigenous students’ experiences of racism (n=60) at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. The study found that Indigenous university students “experienced more frequent racism across a greater number of life situations than African and Latino-American adults in the United States” (Currie et al., 2012, p. 617). In addition, they concluded that the frequency and unpredictability of these experiences had adverse psychological impacts on students and suggested this may contribute to poor physical and mental health (Currie et al., 2012, p. 623).

Clark et al. conducted a small (n=6) but interesting qualitative study on Indigenous students’ experiences with racial microaggressions at a Canadian university. They argue that contemporary forms of racism are often more subtle and indirect, and so racial microaggression theory is particularly well suited to modern Indigenous experiences. Using focus group discussions with self-identified Indigenous students, the researchers identified five key themes: expectations of primitiveness, unconstrained voyeurism, jealous accusations, curricular elimination or misrepresentation and day-to-day cultural and social isolation (Clark et al., 2014, p. 117). While the findings are interesting, the sample’s small size indicates that more work is necessary to prove theoretical value.

This study was followed by a somewhat larger (n=17) study by Bailey (2016) at McMaster University. Aiming to better understand how Indigenous students experienced racism, and how they responded to it, they used semi-formal interviews to question Indigenous and non-Indigenous students about their experiences of racism on campus. This study confirmed the five key themes identified by Clark et al. while adding additional ones: interaction levels, perceptions of the university environment, audience effects, in-class and social experiences, the university system and the persistence of racism, noting these categories are not mutually exclusive (Bailey 2016, 1266). Both studies agreed that Indigenous students experience racism in and around the classroom (as well as socially and systemically) and that this is likely affecting their academic and personal success; however, the sample size (only 11 of the interviewees were Indigenous) again remains too small to make broad conclusions (Bailey 2016, p. 1266). The Association of Universities and Colleges Canada (AUCC) estimates that there are between 20,000 and 25,000 Indigenous students in Canadian universities, or about 3% of all undergraduate enrollment (AUCC, 2011, 19). More research, both quantitative and qualitative, is needed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem and suggest ways forward.

The focus of this study is to investigate racism in the city of Winnipeg from the perspective of Indigenous university students. It developed from informal discussions with first year First Nations, Inuit and Métis university students about the particular experiences and challenges they faced as they worked to improve their lives. Like Bailey and Clark et al., it focuses on the experience of racism and discrimination as reported by Indigenous students themselves; in this case
at the University of Winnipeg. Indigenous students are quite a diverse group, including First Nations (status), Métis, Inuit, and non-status Indians. Although it is recognized that few, if any of these students actually refer to themselves using the pan-indigenous term “Indigenous” it is used here for academic convenience. At the University of Winnipeg (UW), Indigenous students include Cree, Anishinabe, Oji-Cree, Dakota, Inuit, Métis, Dene and others. Although they come from different cultures and communities, they do share many of the same experiences of colonialism, marginalization, discrimination and racism — which is the focus of this research. Indigenous students at the UW also represent a wide age range, from 18 all the way up to 65 and above. Indigenous students are more likely than others to be female, mature students, and many have families of their own to support. Most have already overcome serious obstacles to get into the classroom. As a comparatively young and growing population in Manitoba, their retention by — and success at — the University of Winnipeg is vital, not only for the university (which has made Indigenousization an important strategic objective) but for the city and the province as a whole.
Measuring Racism

The Merriam Webster online dictionary defines racism as “a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race.” Despite its unscientific and irrational nature, racism leads to the negative treatment of and discrimination against targeted groups (Currie et al., 2013). Systemic examples from Canadian history are numerous. They include: the segregation of Indigenous Canadians from their traditional territories onto reserves; forcibly removing their children from the communities and placing them in residential schools; and requiring a pass to leave the reserve for even a couple of hours. These are all overtly racist acts for which Canada has apologized in the modern era. In its formal apology (2008) the Government of Canada acknowledged that the objectives of residential schools were: “based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal.... Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.” Although explicitly racist government policies have since been quashed, racist attitudes and beliefs persist, although few are likely to be open about it. A cursory review of the public comments section of any online newspaper article referring to Indigenous Peoples confirms that “lazy,” “alcohol/drug abuser,” and “burden on the taxpayer” are all-too-common tropes.

Measuring racism, or its prevalence over time, is complicated by the fact that few people openly admit to it; even when asked directly.

Respondents to social surveys are understandably reluctant to admit to socially sanctioned behavior, particularly if it is illegal (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). Thus, whites will tend to underreport discriminatory attitudes and behaviors and be unwilling to admit to perceptions or feelings that might appear to be prejudiced (a phenomenon known as social desirability bias) (Blank et al., 2004, 164).

Recent research suggests there has been a significant shift in the ways racism is expressed. Traditional direct forms of racism have largely been replaced by more subtle expressions that are harder to detect (Bailey 2016, 1263). This “subtle” racism occurs when overt discrimination is unacceptable, yet deeply impressed biases persist. For example, when a white person gets on a bus and instinctively chooses to sit beside someone who looks similar to themselves...
(also white) while avoiding others — it could be because they think they recognize the (coincidentally) white individual or it could be because they are afraid of the others. The exact meaning of the act (seat choice) remains open to interpretation on both sides.

Given this ambiguity, measurement could focus on the experiences of racism as reported by its victims, although this approach can also be problematic. First, as noted above, racism can be very subtle/ambiguous and may not be perceived by an individual. For example, an Indigenous woman denied a job or promotion may believe it is due to her own deficiencies rather than discrimination by the employer. This type of misperception may lead to incidents of racism being underreported. Alternatively, the risk exists that an individual may perceive racism when none is actually present; in this case the Indigenous woman may not get a job or promotion because another candidate was more suitable, or the position was cancelled for budgetary reasons, rather than discrimination against her. This could lead to the opposite problem of over-reporting. Nonetheless, it makes sense to focus on perceived levels of racism and discrimination. Indigenous students’ perceptions of racism (even if inaccurate at times) will influence their health and well-being and may consequently impact their education and their lives.
Methods

Data Collection
The survey instrument that was administered was a modified form of the Experiences of Discrimination (EOD) survey utilized in earlier research conducted by Currie et al. on Indigenous students at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. Their research, in turn, was based on work in the United States that examined the experiences of racism by low-income Black and Latino populations. The findings in Alberta indicated that Indigenous students in Edmonton experienced levels of racism two to three times higher than Black and Latino populations in the United States (Currie et al. 2012a, 623).

For this research, the EOD survey instrument was administered to volunteer students at the University of Winnipeg who self-identified as “Indigenous” (First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit) and resided in the city of Winnipeg. All participants were undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Winnipeg on either a full- or part-time basis. The survey was administered in various time slots during regular university hours over a two-week period. Although the survey was completed independently, two Indigenous research assistants were available to ensure written consent forms were signed and answer any questions that students had. Participants picked up, completed and returned the surveys in the University Indigenous Student Services Lounge. Private cubicles were available for students to use as they answered the survey questions and they were provided a $25 honorarium for their time and effort.

This study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Review Committee of the University of Winnipeg. Students were recruited using campus posters, as well as by word of mouth through instructors in the Indigenous Studies Department. In addition to written consent forms, students were provided with a list of available on-campus elders as well as counseling services should their participation raise any emotional issues. In total, 111 students completed the survey (n = 111); however, not every student answered every question.

Measurement
This project was designed to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data on the personal experiences of racism as reported by Indigenous students. The Experiences of Discrimination (EOD) survey was designed to measure self-re-
ported experiences of racism across nine different real-life situations: at school, hiring, work, securing housing, accessing medical care, getting services in store/restaurant, getting credit/bank loan/mortgage, on the street or in a public setting, and from the police and/or courts. Students were also given the opportunity to add other situations in which they have experienced racism, and their accounts vary. Participants were asked if they experienced racism in each of these circumstances (yes or no) and if yes, were asked to estimate the number of times this has happened (once, 2–3 times, more than 4 times). Participants were also asked to identify what they believed to be the specific cause of the discriminatory treatment (ancestry, gender, race, age, religion, height/weight, skin colour, sexual orientation, education/income level, physical disability or other).

At the end of the survey, participants were provided an open-ended question on the specific details of their personal experiences of racism. Nearly all of the participants (103 out of 111) responded to this question, and their responses are provided later in this report.

Data Analysis
In order to facilitate computing later results, any “Yes or No” questions were inputted into Microsoft Excel using a simple binary code, 0 for “no” and 1 for “yes.” Excel tools used in the procurement of the final results include COUNTIF, SUM, and simple statistics.

It is important to note that while there are 111 surveys in our sample, not all students answered all questions. Furthermore, while we identify the means and medians of experience frequencies in these eight categories (namely: discrimination, worry questions, global questions, filed complaint, major discrimination, day-to-day unfair treatment, response to unfair treatment, and recent experiences), many respondents failed to indicate beyond a confirmation of the occurrence the actual number of times they experienced such treatment leaving our data incomplete in some sections (filed complaint, discrimination, major discrimination, recent experiences, and response to unfair treatment). In an attempt to bridge this gap, a second median was calculated with a smaller sample size (eliminated 40 of the 111 surveys, based on results in the discrimination and major discrimination sections).

When calculating the means and medians of the Currie report criteria, the mean was obtained by simply summing the results using the COUNTIF function, and multiplying them by the appropriate coefficient, and dividing by the sample size (n=111). The section median is the average of the medians for the questions within that section. The same function was then conducted for sample size of n=71 in an attempt to find a truer median.

The University of Alberta (UA) survey included a number of covariates which were not replicated by the UW study. Indigenous students at UW were not asked to identify themselves as First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit. Instead students had only to self-identify as Indigenous to participate. The stratification of Indigenous identity into a series of sub-categories is more than anything a historical—and often arbitrary—distinction created by federal government policy to try and restrict access Indigenous access to their rights. The Supreme Court of Canada (2016) has recently ruled that the federal government had to recognize all three groups equally as “Aboriginal” with equal “Aboriginal rights” protected by the Canadian Constitution. Although the Indigenous-led UW survey team chose the word “Indigenous” rather than “Aboriginal” it followed the Supreme Court’s logic and decided to reinforce the solidarity of Indigenous experiences in non-Indigenous contexts.

In addition to these categories, the UA research group added an additional covariate which aimed to record students’ identification as traditional/cultural on a 5-point scale. This research project
chose not to employ this type of categorization. Pre-survey discussions with Indigenous students suggested that having an “Indigenous” appearance was more likely to be positively correlated to racist experiences than personal cultural beliefs. Indeed, many of the personal comments noted that racism was more likely to occur if the individual “appeared more native.”
Research Findings

Overall, the UW EOD survey found that Indigenous students at the University of Winnipeg experience some of the highest degrees of racism recorded in North America. They face racism and discrimination the minute they step out of their own homes and onto the street. Whether they walk or take the bus, at school and at work, in malls and restaurants, Indigenous students suffer threats, insults, ignorance, bad treatment and sometimes even violence. It is considered to be a common occurrence by far too many.

The following table compares the data collected at the University of Winnipeg with the data collected at the University of Alberta in Edmonton. The latter study included a comparison to data collected in the United States under the “United for Health study” project which targeted Latino and African American manufacturing and retail employees aged 25–64 years. Data from that study had been used as the validation cohort for the EOD measure and it represented a similar demographic in terms of income (Currie et al. 2012, 619).

In comparison to their colleagues at the University of Alberta, UW students were more likely to report more experiences of racist incidents in almost every single category. One exception was “at school.” Given the survey at UW took place amidst campus-wide discussions on “Indigenization” and the upcoming “Indigenous course requirement” (ICR) it is possible that these efforts may have already had a positive impact on Indigenous student experiences.

Currie et al. define experiencing discrimination across three or more of the nine given real-life situations as indicative of “high levels of racism” (Currie et al. 2012a, 620). It is not difficult to imagine, for example, that enduring racism on the street, at school and then in the shopping mall at the end of the day might have a cumulative impact. Under the Currie et al. definition, 60% — three fifths — of Indigenous students at UW experience high levels of racism in their lives. This is somewhat lower than the 2/3 of Indigenous students recorded at the University of Alberta (66%), and notably higher than the 1/3 of African Americans (33.3%) and ¼ of Latino Americans (25%) in the United States (Currie et al., 2012, p. 620). This data reinforces the findings of the CPOAP 2016 and the UAPS 2009. It thus confirms that racism is a very real problem, yet it tends to receive little public attention in Canada compared to the United States.

The three situations in which Indigenous students said they are most likely to encounter rac-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiences of Discrimination</th>
<th>Black, % (n = 156)</th>
<th>Latino, % (n = 299)</th>
<th>Aboriginal, % (n = 60 (UA))</th>
<th>Aboriginal, % (n = 111* (UW))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Times at school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>91.3</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>32.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>9.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>18.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;4</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>27.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Times getting hired or getting a job</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>53.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>12.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>16.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Times at work</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>51.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>8.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>12.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>18.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Times getting housing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>65.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>11.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>8.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Times getting medical care</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>82.7</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>61.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>11.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>18.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Times getting services in a store or restaurant</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>29.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>19.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>36.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Times getting getting credit, bank loans, or a mortgage</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>74.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>6.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>7.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;4</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6.31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* While 111 respondents completed the survey, not all indicated the frequency of such treatment (therefore when adding up the sum of %’s one would not achieve 100).
Nativism and/or discrimination are: i) on the street/in public, ii) in stores and/or restaurants and iii) in school. Although overall the experiences of students at the UW and UA are quite similar, there is one situation that UW students identified as being much more problematic than their UA counterparts: from the police or in the courts. At the UW, one in four students (25%) experienced racism/discrimination four or more times from the police or in the courts; at the UA only 13% indicated such frequency. Indigenous students who provided details of their experiences noted that they were treated differently by police than their non-Indigenous friends; they felt profiled and harassed for no reason. Nearly 50% of UW respondents reported that they had been unfairly stopped, searched, questioned, physically beaten or abused by the police at least once in their life.

Stress is a well-known feature of student life, and too much stress can have a negative impact on health and well-being. The majority of Indigenous students are worried about racism and discrimination in their own lives and in the lives of the people they care about. As Table 3 indicates, 82% of respondents reported that they had worried about being treated unfairly due to their race/ethnicity/colour while they were growing up either some or most of the time. Over the past year, a similar number reported they were still worried about these things for themselves (although more likely now to do this sometimes rather than often); and even more (92%) were worried about others.

This worry about racism/discrimination is in addition to the usual sources of stress university students are susceptible to, including economic pressures, family responsibilities, pressure to get good grades, etc. As already noted, high levels of stress have been associated with a number of health-related problems such as depression, obesity, anxiety and others (Currie et al., 2013).

While major acts of discrimination may not happen every day, it is clear that many Indigenous students believe they are treated differently than their non-Indigenous counterparts on a day-to-day basis. Table 3 illustrates the many ways that Indigenous students experience unfairness daily. The vast majority (ranging from 58–84%) of Indigenous students reported that they believe they are treated unfairly sometimes or often in all categories.

What is perhaps most surprising is that 60% of respondents reported that they were often
called names or insulted, while another 23% reported this experience sometimes. This explicit and direct racism leaves little room for confusion or misinterpretation. Unlike several of the other categories, which may be open to interpretation, such as “less courtesy” or “less respect,” it is difficult to mistake being called names and openly insulted. In the qualitative section of the survey, respondents indicated that some of the names they were commonly called by strangers included: “squaw,” “drunk,” “sniffer,” “dirty Indian,” and “bum,” among others. These terms are explicitly racist, and reinforce stereotypes about Indigenous people that are far too common among non-Indigenous Canadians.

Another experience that is less open to interpretation would be “being followed around in stores”: 53% of students reported that this happens to them often, and another 21% indicated sometimes. This strongly suggests that Indige-
Indigenous students in the city of Winnipeg are being racially profiled by store clerks and/or security.

The EOD instrument was designed to differentiate between subjects’ lifetime experiences of racism/discrimination and their most recent ones (over the past year). In both cases, the survey found that students were most likely to encounter racism in public settings, restaurants/stores, the university and on transit. Logistically, as soon as students leave their homes they are potentially subject to many levels of abuse and recrimination. Even stepping out on the sidewalk can be daunting. For young Indigenous women in particular, walking in a public space can lead to all sorts of insults and accusations, including solicitation for prostitution. The following excerpts from the qualitative data collected by the survey provide some examples.

“My sister and I were outside CanadInns with her boyfriend (who is white). These white women drove by and said, ‘Have fun with your hookers.’”

“Someone looked at me because they smelled alcohol and said ‘Must be her’ to his buddy. Sometimes white people move away from me. Got called a ‘Squaw’ at a bar once. There are racist people everywhere! Bottom line.”

“(I was) with two young daughters, a Caucasian called me a ‘Squaw on welfare,’ he waited for me to get off (the bus) with my kids, he then started yelling ‘Ready to fight?’ and all I could say was ‘You want to fight in front of my kids?’ No one on that crowded bus stood up for me.”

The EOD instrument asked students whether or not they had experienced experienced discrimination over the past year in each of nine different situations/locations. The following table summarizes the percentage of students (n=111) that stated yes.

Table 4 highlights the locations where Indigenous students are most likely to experience racism. Students reported a high degree of racist experiences (40% or higher) in shopping malls, on the streets, in restaurants and cafeterias, on public transit and in public services offices. Just over 43% of students reported having experienced racism in the classroom at the University of Winnipeg over the past year.

Everyday activities like going out for a coffee or buying a new pair of jeans can be fraught with insults, abuse and stress. Indigenous students who participated in the survey reported that they often get treated like criminals when they enter shopping malls. Although the survey did not differentiate based on skin colour, some students volunteered that skin colour made a significant difference in terms of how they are treated. Fair-skinned natives are less likely to be negatively stereotyped as shoplifters and/or so-
called “dine-and-dash” types. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents felt they were treated poorly when they entered malls, stores and restaurants. Both male and female students reported that they were followed around by security officers, harassed, asked to leave, and even subject to physical checks when they entered stores/malls.

One respondent explained:

“I was shopping and was asked to leave my bag outside the dressing room after I had already shown her how many items that I had. I had my white friend do the same thing the next day with the same employee. Not only was she allowed to bring her bag in, she didn’t see if she brought the items out with her…..”

Another added

“I mostly experience racism in stores. By being followed or asked to leave. When I am being followed or asked to leave….I don’t get mad or do anything about it. I just take my business elsewhere. It is what it is.”

“I’ve been followed around and accused of stealing because I ‘looked suspicious.’ My family got terrible service compared to everyone else at a restaurant who were non-native.”
Racism and Discrimination on Campus

The University of Winnipeg distinguished itself recently by making a strong commitment to Indigenous inclusion on campus and by requiring that all students take at least 3 credit hours of Indigenous content over the course of their degree. This change was initiated by the students themselves and championed through the Aboriginal Student Council. It was done in response to growing awareness of racist attitudes on and around campus (Klingbeil, 2016).

Although the process of Indigenization has been going on for a few years, many survey respondents reported that the on-campus environment, both in the classroom and outside, could be daunting. Twenty-eight per cent of Indigenous students reported experiencing discrimination at school “often” and another 19% “sometimes.” In terms of recent experiences (over the past year), 43% of respondents reported that they had experienced discrimination in the classroom and another 32% reported it had occurred on campus.

Several respondents provided specific examples of racist harassment that took place at the university. Professors, administrative staff and their classmates were all identified as a potential source of racism and cultural misunderstanding. Three respondents noted in particular that professors often did not correct students who made rude, racist and/or inappropriate comments in the classroom. This highlights the often damaging role of passive as opposed to active racism — racism is also perpetuated by those who witness it and say nothing. Indigenous students are left feeling isolated, unwelcome, or — worse — intimidated.

It is not difficult to imagine that while each of these single experiences is terrible, the cumulative impact would be devastating. It is not surprising to learn that many Indigenous students do not feel welcome on campus. This may be one of the reasons that the university’s retention rate for Indigenous students is lower than for their non-Indigenous counterparts. Yet for all the discussion that have taken place with respect to Indigenization, nothing has been done to address this serious issue.

On a positive note, there were a few situations in which more than half the sample had reported they never experienced racism/discrimination: job hiring (53%), work (51%) housing (66%) and securing credit, a loan and/or mortgage (75%). However, this may have something to do with the age and experience of typical university students. University students are less likely to have
Indigenous Student Experiences With Racism at University

“During group work, my opinion is not counted.”

“Students say all Aboriginals are homeless/bums. Students say Aboriginals receive free education.”

“Every time the professor would talk about the percent of Aboriginal people in jail she would look at me.”

“Professor told me Indigenous people are not sovereign and also told the class that Lockhart Hall smells like a hot box because of the Aboriginal Student Lounge.”

“A student in class rolls her eyes when we talk about Indigenous issues. ‘Oh look, another Native getting a free education.’ ‘Another drunken Indian.’”

Table 5  Response to Unfair Treatment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48.65%</td>
<td>Tried to do something about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47.75%</td>
<td>Accept it as a fact of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64.86%</td>
<td>Work harder to prove “them” wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.31%</td>
<td>Realized that they brought this treatment upon themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69.37%</td>
<td>Talked to someone about how they were feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60.36%</td>
<td>Expressed anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.93%</td>
<td>Prayed about the situation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

significant work experiences, and many are still living with parents, relatives and/or friends.

The final section of the EOD survey asked students what they did in response to the unfair treatment they experienced. This is important because it provides an indication of how Indigenous students cope with the extra stress placed on them because of their identity. Students could choose more than one answer. It is positive that nearly 70% of students reported that they talked to someone about their feelings. Although this may not solve the actual problem (the racist treatment), it may help the student cope with the negative experience by sharing it with others. This is especially useful if they share with other Indigenous students with similar experiences. It is important that Indigenous students realize how broad the problem actually is so that they might not think their experiences are due to some personal flaw or shortcoming. It is hard not to internalize insults and bad treatment, but this can be especially damaging to health and self-esteem. Sixty-five percent of students reported their negative experiences made them work harder to prove “them” wrong, while 60% said they expressed anger. Almost 49% of students said they tried to do something about it, while 48% said they simply accepted it as a fact.
Qualitative Data: Key Themes

The final section of the survey asked students if there were any specific details about their personal experiences that they would like to share. The vast majority of respondents (95%) shared details of their own experiences with racism. Some added only a few comments, but many others added long detailed stories. For many, these experiences begin when they are just small children in school. One student noted: “When I was younger playing sports ... my team often experienced racial comments from competing teams that were offensive.” Another added: “Most of my experiences with racism occurred as a child and throughout my youth.” Sadly, this experience tended to follow Indigenous students throughout their lives, through school, post-secondary education and into the workforce. One woman admits: “On a day-to-day basis I am surrounded by stereotypes, even from my boyfriend. He has said things like drunk Indian or made comments about welfare; he never directs it towards me but is unaware of the effect it has...”

Overall, five key themes dominate the personal stories: receiving poor service in restaurants, stores and health/social services offices; public insults and racial slurs, endemic racism throughout the school system via teachers and students, justice-related issues, including poor/threatening treatment by police/security; and the shaming of Indigenous women in particular, i.e., singled out as prostitutes, promiscuous, drunks, etc.

The single most common theme reported in the qualitative data was the noticeably different service Indigenous students received in the marketplace or at health/social service offices compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts. One student noted such poor service in a restaurant that even other customers complained on her behalf: “At Pizza Place, me and my kid waited an hour for service. Other customers got angry and stood up for us, they ended up giving us the pizza for free because the customer demanded it.” One waiter told another student's father “We don’t serve your kind.” A third student commented that they were “not served properly and people served before me even though they came after me.” Another noted: “Restaurant servers bring me cold coffee, slow service, don’t bring the condiments I ask for or put dressing on the side when I ask for it.”

It is especially disturbing to note that these cases of poor service also included treatment in health centres and emergency rooms. One re-
range of insults including “drunk Indian,” “dirty Indian” and “welfare bum.” For Indigenous women in particular, these slurs can include an element of shaming, such as being called a “hooker” or a “dirty squaw.” One student reported being told “Dirty Native, go back to the North End.” Another, as noted earlier, wrote that once while she was out with her non-Indigenous boyfriend and a girlfriend some unknown women drove past them and shouted, “have fun with your hookers.” A third student told the story of how, when he was walking downtown with one of his close friends “Some Caucasian male, who was clearly intoxicated, looked at us and yelled “Hey! Get a fuckin’ job, commit to fuckin’ society. Stupid fucks!”

The net effect of all this verbal abuse can be damaging. One student explained “Overall growing up I have experienced a lot of racism and that affected my cultural identity and self-esteem, To this day I struggle with my identity as if I was made to feel wrong or negative towards my race. I felt ashamed most of my life to be Aboriginal, but now I am ashamed that I let others strip me of my cultural identity.”

Another student respondent, who just moved into the city of Winnipeg one year ago to attend university, has had a hard time adjusting to the sheer volume of “hurtful things” experienced in everyday life. She notes: “In the past year I have cried more about my identity than in the last 19 years I’ve been alive.”

The second most common theme identified in the qualitative data was being the subject of public insults and racial slurs, often without warning. Students reported being called a wide
to be mature students and have families to take care. Sadly, they also have to worry about the non-Indigenous people around them. Although the majority are certainly not racist, there is a very vocal and ignorant minority intent on tormenting, insulting and intimidating Indigenous students; further, the data collected for this survey suggests that these atrocious acts can happen just about anywhere, even on campus.

The third key theme identified in the qualitative data was related to school. Nearly 40% of Indigenous students who responded to the survey had racist/discriminatory experiences that occurred in a setting that should have been set aside for learning. Many took place at university, either on campus or in the classroom, although some cited occurrences in either primary or secondary school. Unlike comments received on the street, racism on campus appears to be more subtle. Outright insults are uncommon, although some students did receive comments like “Go back to where you come from” or “You shouldn’t be in university.” On campus, students were more likely to receive dirty looks, feel marginalized/ignored during group work and/or feel tokenized by non-Indigenous professors looking at them to share their “Indigenous experiences” with the class. Numerous students reported frustration in the classroom when fellow students made inappropriate comments about Indigenous Peoples/communities and the professor did nothing to address the situation. For example, one anthropology student was upset when a fellow classmate made a reference to “drunken natives” but the professor did not point out the malicious stereotype.

Overall, the stories that survey participants felt compelled to share paint a picture of the truly horrible racism and discrimination they face on a daily basis. Even educated professionals, like nurses, doctors, teachers and professors appear to have internalized colonial discourses that marginalize Indigenous Peoples and their cultures; hence Indigenous Peoples are often left to feel they are “second-class citizens” in a country that was built over their traditional homelands. Their pain and frustration is palpable in the stories reported in this research.
Conclusions

The results of the Indigenous Experiences of Racism survey demonstrate that Indigenous students at the University of Winnipeg, like those at the University of Alberta, are facing significant racism and discrimination as they work to improve their lives and futures. They experience more racism, more often, than the more-commonly studied African American and Latino populations in the United States. Although the official multiculturalism narrative of the federal government suggests that Canadians are liberal, tolerant and accepting of diversity, the data collected here suggests that many still consider it acceptable to insult, discriminate against and/or marginalize Indigenous Peoples in a wide range of contexts. These negative — and at times even violent — attitudes suggest that Canada, as a “settler colony” continues to reflect the Eurocentric ideas about Indigenous inferiority that have permeated the national imagination for more than two centuries.

The data collected suggests that both the frequency and unpredictability of these racist experiences are extremely stressful for Indigenous students and have a concrete negative impact on their lives.

What are the possible impacts of these racist experiences on Indigenous students? Although obviously a source of stress, low self-esteem and anxiety, there are scant long-term studies regarding the potential consequences of these experiences on the physical and mental health of Indigenous citizens, as well as their economic and social security outcomes. Some studies have suggested that these racist experiences may explain at least part of the persistent gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health outcomes, but more research is needed to confirm and/or quantify this (Currie et all, 2012, 618). In the meantime, it is vital that universities and other post-secondary institutions recognize the need for healthy, inclusive and racism-free spaces for learning and living in the city of Winnipeg. Even though the current policy focus of the UW on Indigenization is positive, its focus on the ICR has limited benefits to current students and may, in fact, trigger some backlash. While the education of students is important, there is no evidence to suggest deeply ingrained prejudices will quickly disappear. Further, not all students, nor all faculty and staff have been supportive of this initiative. In-class experiences of Indigenous instructors of ICR courses have included micro-aggressions and the creation of racially charged environments that increase rather than decrease
the negative experiences of Indigenous students on campus. One important avenue for further research would be to re-survey Indigenous students after three or four years to see if the ICR project has had any impact on their experiences. Given the depth and breadth of the problem, it is likely that much more work will need to be done to address what is clearly a significant problem, not only at the University of Winnipeg but across the city and the nation.
References


