Immigrants’ Perceptions of Housing Discrimination in Toronto: The Housing New Canadians Project

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The Housing New Canadians project investigated recent immigrants’ perceptions of discrimination in finding rental housing since arriving in Toronto, Canada. Respondents from three immigrant communities—Jamaicans, Poles, and Somalis—indicated how much housing discrimination they had personally experienced and how much discrimination they perceived to have been directed toward their group. They also rated how much each of several factors, including race, income level, source of income, immigrant status, language, ethnic or national background, religion, and family size, contributed to each type of perceived discrimination. Jamaican and Somali immigrants perceived greater personal and group discrimination and also showed a greater discrepancy between personal and group discrimination than did Polish immigrants. Implications are discussed.

Countries receiving substantial numbers of immigrants and refugees today have become increasingly diverse in the racial and ethnic composition of their populations. How successfully the diverse immigrant groups become incorporated into these receiving societies is obviously important, both at the “micro” level of the immigrant and her or his family and at the “macro” level of the receiving

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society as well. Identifying barriers to incorporating immigrants may assist in their successful settlement in the receiving country.

One way to gauge the success with which a receiving society incorporates its immigrants and ethnic minority group members is to assess the extent of discrimination they perceive to be directed toward them in various domains by the majority group or larger society (Breton, Isajiw, Kalbach, & Reitz, 1990; Gordon, 1971). Perceived discrimination by immigrants inversely reflects their satisfactory or successful incorporation: The greater the perceived discrimination, the less successful the immigrants’ incorporation into a receiving society. Surveys of perceived discrimination and audits are alternative methodologies for gauging the extent of discrimination toward an ethnic or immigrant group, which are described below with examples from Canada and the United States.

**Surveys of Perceived Discrimination**

Between the 1970s and 1990s, several survey studies compared some of Toronto’s numerous ethnic groups in terms of perceived discrimination. (The term “perceived discrimination” is used because in these studies the victims’ or targets’ perception of having been discriminated against on the basis of their race or ethnicity is assessed, typically by self-report measures in questionnaires or in interviews.) Breton et al. (1990) surveyed more than 2,000 community respondents in the late 1970s from seven ethnic groups in Toronto: West Indian Blacks, Chinese, Germans, Italians, Jews, Portuguese, and Ukrainians. Of these, the two “visible minorities” (namely, the Chinese and the West Indian Blacks) perceived considerably more discrimination toward them and reported greater problems with respect to being incorporated into Canadian society than the other five “nonvisible” or White minorities.

In the 1980s and 1990s, K. L. Dion (1989; K. L. Dion & Kawakami, 1996a) and his colleagues compared approximately 1,200 respondents from a “Minority Report Survey” of six ethnic groups in Toronto—Blacks (from both the West Indies and Africa), Chinese, South Asians (i.e., East Indians and Pakistanis), Italians, Jews, and Portuguese—who had been interviewed by telephone in 1985 and 1992 in separate cross-sectional surveys and questioned about their perceptions of discrimination in different domains, among other issues. At both times, the visible racial minorities (namely, Blacks, Chinese, and South Asians) reported considerably more perceived discrimination as being directed toward them in various domains (e.g., economic, political, and social) than did the White, nonvisible minorities (namely, Italians, Jews, and Portuguese). In these Minority Surveys, respondents also reported on the extent of perceived discrimination in two regards: personal (i.e., personal experiences of discrimination) and group (i.e., the extent to which they felt their group was the target of discrimination).
This distinction between personal and group discrimination derives originally from research on relative deprivation (RD). RD theory assumes that one’s perceptions and feelings about discrimination depend upon whom one compares with (K. L. Dion, 1986; K. L. Dion & Kawakami, 1996b, 2000). Whether the focus of social comparison is the individual or the group defines two (of several) types of RD: egoistic and fraternalistic. Egoistic RD occurs when a person feels more deprived or discriminated against than other members of her or his own group (i.e., an individual vs. ingroup comparison). Fraternalistic (also known as collectivistic) RD arises when one’s own group is perceived to be at a disadvantage with respect to or liable to more discrimination than other groups (i.e., an ingroup vs. outgroup comparison).

Since the late 1960s, accumulating evidence has suggested that perceived personal and group deprivation or discrimination predict different types of criteria in studies of various natural groups. Gurin, Gurin, Lao, and Beattie (1969) found that among Black respondents in the United States, attributing responsibility for failure to systemic racial discrimination was associated with a stronger desire to participate in collective action for civil rights. Drawing on studies with diverse samples of ethnic and racial groups as well as women in different countries, K. L. Dion (1986; K. L. Dion & Kawakami, 1996b, 2000) showed that perceived group discrimination, but not perceived personal discrimination, is important for predicting protest, militancy, and desires to take collective action against perceived inequities. Similarly, Walker and Mann (1987) found that perceived group discrimination predicted protest among unemployed Australian workers, whereas perceived personal discrimination predicted personal stress reactions in response to unemployment.

Since personal and group deprivation or discrimination predict different criteria, it is important to assess both types in surveys of perceived discrimination. Moreover, recent evidence suggests that “double deprivation”—that is, the combination of both egoistic and fraternalistic relative deprivation—predicts tendencies toward collective action in women better than either alone (Foster & Mathewson, 1995), providing yet another rationale for assessing both personal and group discrimination when surveying perceived discrimination among members of oppressed groups.

The Personal-Group Discrimination Discrepancy

Research in the RD theory tradition was also first to suggest that individuals in subordinate and oppressed groups typically perceive more group than personal discrimination. In testing models of egoistic RD, Crosby (1982) observed that members of a sample of working, White women in Massachusetts believed that they, as individual women, were personally less deprived and discriminated against in terms of income and employment opportunities than women as a group. Crosby, Pufall, Snyder, O’Connell, and Whalen (1989) attributed the tendency for
women to perceive less personal than group deprivation or discrimination to a denial of their personal disadvantage.

This “personal-group discrimination discrepancy” (PGDD) has since been observed among ethnic and racial minority groups and other samples of White women in Canada, the United States, and elsewhere (Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990; Taylor, Wright, & Porter, 1994). Extending Crosby (1982), Taylor et al. (1990) found that Haitian and East Indian women in Montreal reported more group than personal discrimination—that is, the PGDD—across four sources of potential discrimination (namely, race, culture, status as newcomers to Canada, and sex). K. L. Dion and Kawakami (1996a) likewise found the PGDD across several domains for all six ethnic groups included in the Minority Survey Report described above, though it was stronger for visible than nonvisible minorities.

In sum, surveys of perceived discrimination indicate that members of visible racial minorities report more discrimination toward them than those from nonvisible, White ethnic minorities, thus providing “known groups” validation for measures of perceived discrimination. That is, if perceived discrimination measures in these surveys are indeed assessing actual individual and group differences in experienced discrimination, one would certainly expect visible racial minorities to exceed White, nonvisible minorities on these assessments. The distinction between personal and group discrimination is also important for surveys of perceived discrimination. The tendency to perceive greater group than personal discrimination has been consistently observed in subordinate and oppressed groups, though more strongly in visible than nonvisible, ethnic minorities.

Audits

Another technique for estimating the extent of discrimination toward racial and ethnic minorities in various domains comes from quasi-experimental “audits,” in which trained pairs of observers or “auditors” pretend to seek employment or housing in response to a newspaper advertisement or to seek service in facilities serving the general public, such as restaurants and hotels. The audit procedure was first developed by Sellitz (1955) and her colleagues (Schuman, Singer, Donovan, & Sellitz, 1983) to document racial discrimination toward Black patrons in New York City restaurants in the vicinity of the United Nations. Black and White pairs of auditors in these studies were both present in restaurants at the same time, thus being able to serve as independent observers of one another’s relative treatment by the restaurant and its staff. Sellitz (1955) and her colleagues subsequently informed managers of restaurants found to be discriminating against Black diners and later revisited them to check whether the racially discriminatory practices had been ameliorated.

In the audit procedure for assessing discrimination in the housing domain, one member of the auditor pair is from a minority or subordinate group and the other
from the majority or dominant group. Team members are selected so as to vary in only one regard, such as race or ethnicity, but are matched and presented as identical in other relevant regards (e.g., occupation, sex, marital status, reported income, educational background, and previous job experience). Members of auditor teams are carefully trained to respond in a professional, standardized manner during an audit and subsequently take extensive notes privately of different aspects of the interaction, usually with a highly detailed set of standard questions and probes concerning the interaction.

Less favorable treatment of the minority than the majority auditor provides direct, unambiguous evidence of housing discrimination, since auditors presumably vary only on the dimension of interest, usually race or ethnicity. (For various quantitative measures of discrimination that can be derived from housing audits, see Yinger, 1988, 1995.) For this reason, audits are believed to provide objective evidence of actual housing discrimination toward minority groups. Yet audits in the housing domain rely solely on individual auditors’ reported accounts, and researchers are rarely, if ever, able to assess interobserver agreement or reliability, by having one or more other observers independently verify the individual auditor’s account at the time of the audit or later.

Without corroboration of an auditor’s judgment by an independent observer (a standard requirement of observational procedures), auditing studies provide, in fact, an index of perceived discrimination, though one superior to surveys of perceived discrimination in which respondents retrospectively report whether they have encountered discrimination, and if so, its nature and severity. The audit’s methodological superiority and greater objectivity is due to the auditors’ careful training as observers. Auditors’ observations avoid contamination by possible memory lapses, biases, and confabulations by being detailed and recorded shortly after the discrimination has occurred. Auditing studies are considerably more expensive to conduct, however, than perceived discrimination surveys, and in large-scale, multicity audits in a domain such as housing, they require federal government funding.

Beginning in the 1970s, auditing studies were extensively used to assess discrimination in the housing sector (see Pearce, 1988), especially as a result of civil rights and “open housing” legislation in the United States banning racial discrimination. In these “fair housing” audits, each pair of auditors reports an income level that clearly qualifies her or him for the rental or sales property being sought (see Yinger, 1995). Indeed, the minority group auditor typically reports a slightly higher income than her or his majority group counterpart (see Yinger, 1995). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) sponsored several large-scale housing audits in the 1970s and 1980s that revealed considerable evidence of racial and ethnic discrimination and differential treatment of minorities across major U.S. cities.
The 1989 Housing Discrimination Study (HDS) is the most recent and comprehensive of these HUD-sponsored housing audits to date. Prior to this study, the U.S. Supreme Court granted housing auditors the right to sue landlords and realtors who discriminate against them even though they are not bona fide home or apartment seekers. As a consequence, housing auditors may have a financial self-interest in perceiving discrimination. To avoid this potential bias in reporting by housing auditors, the HDS project required auditors to agree that they would not exercise their right to sue in cases of apparent discrimination (Yinger, 1995).

Summarizing the most striking HDS findings, Yinger (1995) reported that Black and Hispanic auditors posing as home buyers and apartment seekers were shown 25% fewer units than matched White auditors with comparable income qualifications. Black and Hispanic auditors were “excluded” — that is, ignored and given no information whatever by the rental or real estate agent — between 5% and 10% of the time. Black and Hispanic home seekers were also “steered” to neighborhoods with concentrations of minorities (see Pearce, 1979). In short, the HDS study provided clear and compelling evidence of racial and ethnic discrimination in housing against Black and Hispanic home and apartment seekers by landlords, real estate agents, and brokers in the United States.

In Canada, only small-scale housing audits have been completed in individual cities such as Montreal (a predominantly Francophone city) and Winnipeg (a predominantly Anglophone city; Mugford, 1995). A Montreal audit, for example, compared White, Euro-Canadian rental applicants to two groups of Black applicants: French-speaking Haitians and Black Anglophones (Garon, 1988). More than a third of the Haitian applicants reported confronting some form of blatant housing discrimination (e.g., being refused an appointment over the phone or not being shown an apartment), and 16% of Black Anglophones suffered negative experiences while seeking housing. In general, though limited in scope, audits suggest that Black and First Nations (i.e., aboriginal) people suffer the most discrimination in seeking housing in Canada.

Neither housing audits nor perceived discrimination surveys in the United States or Canada have explored the discrimination in housing confronting newly arrived or recently settled immigrants to these countries. This issue of housing discrimination experienced by immigrants from several different countries who settled in Toronto, Canada, during the 1990s was the specific focus of the Housing New Canadians (HNC) project. Before describing this project, however, some background about Toronto as a venue for studying immigrants and immigration deserves mention.

Toronto: An Immigration Center in Canada and North America

Immigrants often settle within metropolitan areas of their adopted countries. Toronto is the largest and most populous city within Canada, accounting for 13%
of Canada’s population. Toronto has been and continues to be the principal reception and settlement area for immigrants and refugees to Canada. As of 1991, Toronto had the largest immigrant population of any census metropolitan area in Canada, with these immigrants comprising 38% of its population (Badets, 1993). The proportion of immigrants to Canada settling in Toronto increased steadily throughout the 1990s, reaching more than 40% in 1997 (Housing New Canadians, 2001).

Until the late 1960s, Toronto’s immigrants originated mainly from Britain and European countries. Since then, the primary sources of Toronto’s immigrants have shifted to Asia, Africa, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. In 1998, approximately half of the immigrants coming to Toronto originated from Asia and the Pacific Rim, 20% from Africa and the Middle East, and 10% from Central and South America and the Caribbean (Housing New Canadians, 2001). Only 19% of newcomers to Canada in 1998 came from European countries. The varied racial, ethnic, cultural, and national backgrounds of today’s newcomers to Canada are largely responsible for Toronto’s becoming one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the world.

Immigrants to Canada also represent a wide spectrum of economic wealth ranging from refugees with few, if any, financial resources to wealthy business people and entrepreneurs. In 1998, approximately 11% of Toronto’s immigrants arrived as refugees, 28% were sponsored by family members residing in Canada, and nearly 60% of Toronto’s immigrants arrived in Canada under the category of business people and skilled workers (Housing New Canadians, 2001).

Immigrants to Canada face considerable difficulties, from finding a place to live and employment to accessing social services and becoming familiar with a complex array of public agencies in different levels of government. Securing adequate, affordable housing is certainly one of the most important and immediate tasks confronting a newcomer. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom offer shelter allowances to immigrants, whereas Canada does not (Housing New Canadians, 2001). For lower income immigrants whose housing opportunities are restricted to the rental market, Toronto is an especially difficult challenge, of which most immigrants are unaware until they arrive in Canada. Rental vacancy rates in Toronto are very low, averaging 1.2% in the 1990s (Housing New Canadians, 2001). Virtually no new rental housing was built in Toronto in the late 1990s.

The Housing New Canadians Project

The HNC project aimed to find out how immigrants from several different countries fared in securing rental housing in Toronto. The project was launched as a participatory research group and a partnership among researchers from several disciplines—most notably, social work, geography, and psychology—based at several Toronto-area universities. The HNC project originally concentrated on
three immigrant communities in Toronto: Jamaicans, Poles, and Somalis. Representatives from each of these groups have participated in inaugurating the HNC project and served on its steering committees throughout the project.

These three immigrant groups provide several important contrasts. First, Somalis and Jamaicans are both visible, Black minorities, one originating from Africa and the other from the Caribbean. Poles are an example of a nonvisible, White ethnic minority and immigrant group in Toronto. Thus, selecting these three immigrant groups for the HNC project permitted a comparison between visible and nonvisible minorities. Poles also represent Eastern European immigrants, the largest category of European immigrants to Canada in the latter part of the 20th century.

Second, Jamaicans and Poles each have long-standing, well-established communities in Toronto to which newcomers can turn for assistance and which provide services to immigrants from their home countries, as well as an ethnocultural community infrastructure. By contrast, Somali immigrants arrived in Toronto in substantial numbers only in the late 1980s, in response to the civil strife in Somalia. Though the first Somali newcomers lacked an infrastructure of people from their home country, they have quickly established networks of support for Somalis. Somali immigrants also differ from the other two immigrant groups in religion, as the vast majority of them are Muslim.

The Conceptual Framework

The HNC’s conceptual framework views housing experiences of immigrants from a multilevel perspective. At the “macro” or societal level, each receiving country has defining institutional arrangements for incorporating newcomers, such as whether or not they provide immigrants and refugees with financial assistance for housing. Below that is the “meso” or group level, at which differential incorporation and access to resources by ethnic and immigrant groups takes place. Different factors may serve as barriers to incorporation of different immigrant groups at the meso level.

Prior to the HNC survey itself, focus groups with members of the three immigrant communities identified primary and secondary barriers to housing access (Housing New Canadians, 2001). The primary barriers were threefold: race (conceptualized as a social construction rather than a biological category), ethnicity/culture/religion, and gender. Primary barriers are personal characteristics that the immigrant cannot change easily, if at all. Secondary barriers, by contrast, are changeable with time and experience and include personal characteristics such as level and source of income, language/accent, knowledge and experience of the housing system in the receiving country and of its institutions and culture.

Finally, at the “micro” level of the individual household, the housing career concept served as a key construct in the HNC project (Housing New Canadians,
“Housing career” refers to the ways households change their consumption of housing as they move through the life cycle or life course. Households are assumed to attempt to improve their housing circumstances over a career. In fact, though, the housing career of a household may move sideways and downward as well as upward.

Research Themes and Objectives

The HNC project had two major themes and five objectives (Housing New Canadians, 2001). One major theme was to investigate the housing careers of the three immigrant groups and the changes over time across several moves. To chart the respondents’ housing careers, extensive information was obtained about each of three separate rentals and the reasons prompting the moves. (This theme is not dealt with in the present article.) The second major theme was to document the nature, extent, and impact of any housing-related discrimination encountered by newcomers to Canada during their initial years of settlement in Toronto, by assessing perceived discrimination in the housing sector.

As noted above, there were also five research objectives: (1) to address substantive issues about housing immigrants and refugees in Toronto, (2) to determine the impact of race (viewed as a social construction), gender, and class on the process of obtaining housing, (3) to appraise the participatory approach as a strategy for conducting research with immigrant and ethnocultural communities in Toronto, (4) to contribute to the research literature concerning housing and social policy, and (5) to generate hypotheses and ideas for further research.

Implementation

The HNC project interviewed and administered a questionnaire survey concerning housing experiences to 60 or more respondents of each group, approximately half women and men. In order to assess changes in housing career, the HNC survey focused on respondents who arrived as immigrants or refugees in Canada between 1987 and 1994; were beyond an initial, temporary settlement stage; were currently living in rental accommodation; and had made at least three moves. Respondents were gathered by “snowball” sampling, with face-to-face interviews by trained interviewers from the immigrant groups.

Respondents were also asked specifically about discrimination in Toronto’s housing system, as they perceived it. “Housing discrimination” was explicitly defined for respondents as “actions by landlords or their staff which means [sic] you are refused an apartment for unfair reasons, and/or have to pay higher rent than others for no valid reason, and/or have fewer neighborhoods to choose from than others simply because you are a [group name] newcomer.” There were two classes of perceived discrimination measures: personal discrimination (i.e., the personal
experience of the respondent and his or her immediate family) as well as group discrimination (i.e., to what extent respondents thought their ethnic group was facing housing discrimination in Toronto).

Respondents rated overall personal and group discrimination, respectively, on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (none at all) to 5 (very much). Within each type, they further indicated, on the same scale, how much personal or group discrimination was due to each of various factors, such as race, income level, source of income, immigrant or refugee status, language or accent, ethnic/cultural background, religion, family size (and in the case of personal discrimination, sex of the respondent). These “attribution” dimensions for perceived discrimination emerged from several focus group sessions with each of the three immigrant groups preceding the HNC survey that identified barriers to finding housing and “incorporation.”

The attribution ratings detail what feature(s) of themselves and their group respondents thought were implicated in housing discrimination they perceived or experienced in Toronto. A Somali woman, for example, could theoretically be discriminated against for several different reasons: being Somali, being Black, being a woman, and/or being a Muslim. To those can also be added yet other factors, such as being poor, an immigrant, or a refugee; having a large family; and/or relying on social assistance for income. The attribution ratings, then, provide a detailed picture of perceived housing discrimination toward Jamaican, Polish, and Somali “newcomers” in Toronto, as seen by the immigrants themselves. They also identify barriers to newcomers to Canada in obtaining housing during the initial years of their settlement.

Finally, although respondents were asked to make “overall” ratings of perceived discrimination themselves, summary indexes of personal and group discrimination, respectively, were also created by pooling scores across the attribution ratings in each case. (The rating dimensions for personal and group discrimination were the same, except for the addition of sex discrimination among the personal discrimination ratings. To make the personal and group discrimination indexes comparable with one another, the sex discrimination item was not included in creating the index of personal discrimination.) This pooling of items within each type of perceived discrimination is warranted because both of the indexes attained excellent levels of scale reliability and scale homogeneity. These summary indexes of perceived discrimination provide a quantitative “snapshot” of the HNC’s findings regarding perceived discrimination, in that they reflect the aggregated attribution ratings.

The respondents’ overall ratings, their attribution ratings for individual dimensions, and the discrimination indexes were analyzed in 3×2 univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to assess the effects of immigrant group (i.e., Jamaican, Polish, and Somali) and gender of respondent, both singly and jointly. These ANOVAs revealed numerous main effects for immigrant group and for gender as well as interactions. Immigrant group had the strongest and most consistent
relationship to perceived discrimination measures. Mean personal discrimination scores for each immigrant group are presented in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, three patterns are evident for perceived personal discrimination as a function of immigrant group. First, the two Black immigrant groups, Jamaicans and Somalis, perceived greater personal discrimination than the European immigrant group, the Poles, on overall personal discrimination as seen by the respondent and on personal discrimination on the basis of race and the respondent’s language or accent, ethnic background, and family size. Second, on other items, the results arranged the three immigrant groups in a three-level “hierarchy” of perceived discrimination, with Somalis at the top, Jamaicans in the middle, and Poles at the bottom. This three-level pattern emerged on income discrimination, income source discrimination, religious discrimination, and the personal discrimination index.

Third, a few items showed that one immigrant group perceived greater discrimination than the other two, perhaps reflecting an aspect of housing discrimination especially salient or problematic for that particular group. Although perceived personal discrimination on the basis of one’s sex was very low overall, Jamaicans perceived more problems in that domain than did Poles or Somalis. Similarly, Somalis perceived greater personal discrimination on the basis of ethnic background and immigrant/refugee status than did Jamaicans or Poles.

Table 2 presents immigrant group differences in perceived group discrimination. Perceived group discrimination measures reveal two of the three preceding patterns. First, as the predominant pattern, the three-level hierarchy, with Somalis perceiving greatest housing discrimination, followed by Jamaicans, and then by Poles, emerged on six group discrimination measures: items concerning income, income source, immigrant/refugee status, religion, and family size, as well as the group discrimination index. Second, on the other four dimensions of overall group discrimination, Somalis perceived greater discrimination than the other two groups, perhaps reflecting an aspect of housing discrimination especially salient or problematic for that particular group.

Table 1. Perceived Personal Discrimination as a Function of Immigrant Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal discrimination measures</th>
<th>Jamaicans</th>
<th>Poles</th>
<th>Somalis</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall personal discrimination</td>
<td>2.72b</td>
<td>1.86a</td>
<td>2.68b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial discrimination</td>
<td>2.60b</td>
<td>1.24a</td>
<td>3.00b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex discrimination</td>
<td>2.07b</td>
<td>1.32a</td>
<td>1.63a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income discrimination</td>
<td>2.70b</td>
<td>2.03a</td>
<td>3.47c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income source discrimination</td>
<td>2.51b</td>
<td>1.52a</td>
<td>3.41c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant/refugee status discrimination</td>
<td>1.88a</td>
<td>1.65a</td>
<td>3.18b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language/accent discrimination</td>
<td>2.42b</td>
<td>1.70a</td>
<td>2.83b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic background discrimination</td>
<td>2.91b</td>
<td>1.20a</td>
<td>3.08b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious discrimination</td>
<td>1.46b</td>
<td>1.02a</td>
<td>2.38c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family size discrimination</td>
<td>1.94b</td>
<td>1.38a</td>
<td>2.37b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal discrimination index</td>
<td>2.31b</td>
<td>1.47a</td>
<td>2.98c</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Each personal discrimination measure yielded a significant main effect for immigrant group in the ANOVAs. Means in a given row with different superscripts differ significantly by Tukey multiple range test. Scores varied from 1 (none at all) to 5 (very much).
discrimination and on discrimination on the basis of race, language/accent, and ethnic background, Jamaicans and Somalis did not differ from one another, but both exceeded Poles in perceived group discrimination in housing.

The three immigrant groups can also be compared across both personal and group discrimination indexes (see Tables 1 and 2). The three-level hierarchy emerges across both personal and group discrimination, with Somalis being highest, Jamaicans in the middle, and Poles at the bottom. Also, Jamaicans and Somalis perceived higher levels of group than personal discrimination than did Poles.

### Gender and Perceived Discrimination

Examining gender as a correlate of immigrants’ housing experiences was one of the research objectives of the HNC project, with members of both sexes about equally represented among the respondents. Gender, as noted above, was also an independent variable in the ANOVAs on the perceived discrimination measures. The ANOVAs did indeed reveal significant main effects of gender on perceived discrimination.

Specifically, women perceived greater discrimination than men on almost every individual dimension of personal discrimination and the pooled index as well as on several of the group discrimination items—notably the two income items and religion—and the group discrimination index. Gender also interacted significantly with immigrant group on the same measures on which significant main effects for gender were obtained. For the most part, these interactions indicated that gender differences were strongest among Somalis, with Somali women generally perceiving the highest levels of perceived personal discrimination. Gender differences, with women again perceiving greater discrimination than men, were also apparent and salient for the Polish immigrant group on several dimensions of group discrimination, especially on the basis of income, income source, immigration/refugee status, and language/accent.

| Table 2. Perceived Group Discrimination as a Function of Immigrant Group |
|-----------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Group discrimination measures| Jamaicans | Poles | Somalis |
| Overall group discrimination | 4.06<sup>b</sup> | 1.86<sup>a</sup> | 4.18<sup>b</sup> |
| Racial discrimination | 3.94<sup>b</sup> | 1.27<sup>a</sup> | 4.27<sup>b</sup> |
| Income discrimination | 3.71<sup>b</sup> | 2.15<sup>a</sup> | 4.43<sup>c</sup> |
| Income source discrimination | 3.93<sup>b</sup> | 2.25<sup>a</sup> | 4.70<sup>c</sup> |
| Immigrant/refugee status discrimination | 3.31<sup>b</sup> | 1.76<sup>a</sup> | 4.17<sup>c</sup> |
| Language/accent discrimination | 3.67<sup>b</sup> | 1.98<sup>a</sup> | 3.92<sup>b</sup> |
| Ethnic background discrimination | 4.06<sup>b</sup> | 1.50<sup>a</sup> | 4.11<sup>b</sup> |
| Religious discrimination | 1.55<sup>b</sup> | 1.10<sup>a</sup> | 3.45<sup>c</sup> |
| Family size discrimination | 2.97<sup>b</sup> | 1.71<sup>a</sup> | 4.82<sup>c</sup> |
| Group discrimination index | 3.40<sup>b</sup> | 1.72<sup>a</sup> | 4.23<sup>c</sup> |

*Note.* Each personal discrimination measure yielded a significant main effect for immigrant group in the ANOVAs. Means in a given row with different superscripts differ significantly by Tukey multiple range test. Scores varied from 1 (none at all) to 5 (very much).
Summary and Discussion

The HNC project extends our knowledge base about the housing experiences of immigrants by comparing the perceptions of personal and group discrimination among Jamaican, Polish, and Somali immigrants in Toronto, Canada. The perceived discrimination measures offer insights into the specific problems that these newcomers confronted in the rental housing sector. Overall, a consistent ordering of perceived housing discrimination emerges, with Somali immigrants perceiving greater personal and group discrimination than Jamaican or Polish immigrants and Jamaican immigrants, in turn, perceiving greater personal and group discrimination than Polish immigrants. Moreover, gender differences were also apparent, especially among Somalis and Poles, with women consistently perceiving greater personal discrimination as well as some aspects of group discrimination than men (see K. K. Dion & K. L. Dion, this issue, for further discussion of the importance of gender for immigration issues).

The preceding findings accord well with similar studies of perceived discrimination and audits of housing discrimination in the United States, Canada, and other immigrant-receiving countries. For example, the 1992 Minority Report survey of perceived discrimination in Toronto also showed that Black respondents were less satisfied with their housing or accommodation than were Italians, South Asians, or Portuguese respondents and also more likely to report experiencing prejudice or discrimination as being directed against them when they moved into a new neighborhood. Similarly, Sidanius and Pratto (1999, pp. 131–134) summarized studies of perceived housing discrimination in Sweden in 1996 and Great Britain in 1976, each showing proportionally more Black respondents reporting discrimination in housing than other groups of immigrants to those countries.

Studies of perceived housing discrimination and “fair housing” audits, however, both underestimate the amount and severity of discrimination in housing that members of visible minorities confront. In studies of perceived housing discrimination, foreign- and native-born members of visible (and other) minorities can often preclude being discriminated against by seeking housing within their own ethnic community neighborhoods and by relying on friends from their own ethnocultural community as informants and/or landlords.

Housing audits underestimate the extent and severity of housing discrimination because members of the auditing team both report approximately the same level of income and one appropriate for the accommodation sought. As a consequence, HDS’s findings can be generalized only to the population of “income-qualified” Blacks and Hispanics seeking housing accommodation (Yinger, 1995). Black and Hispanic Americans with less adequate or marginal income qualifications would undoubtedly fare even more poorly than “qualified” counterparts.
Indeed, in the HNC study, respondents from each of the three immigrant groups indicated that income level and source of income were important factors underlying the housing discrimination they perceived. Specifically, income was the dimension with the highest level of perceived personal discrimination for Poles and Somalis, respectively, and received the second highest attribution rating from Jamaicans (see Table 1).

It is hard to overestimate the negative impact of housing discrimination upon immigrants and visible racial minorities, whether native or foreign-born. Being forced to live in inadequate housing in a less desirable part of a community also often means substandard educational opportunities for oneself, one’s partner or spouse, and one’s children, fewer and less desirable employment prospects, and poorer access to a wide variety of services, including health care and transportation. Housing discrimination is an integral part of an overarching, interlocking system of discrimination that Sidanius and Pratto (1999) aptly termed “the circle of oppression.” Housing discrimination also has very real economic costs in terms of lengthier searches and more expensive accommodation and other foregone opportunities. Yinger (1995) has estimated that within the United States in the 1990s, housing discrimination cost Black and Hispanic Americans more than $4 billion every year. Galster and Keeney (1988) have estimated that eliminating racial discrimination in housing in the United States would reduce residential segregation by more than 30%, decrease occupational dissimilarity between Blacks and Whites by more than 20%, and result in an improvement of more than 6% in the ratio of Black to White median incomes.

Housing discrimination creates and maintains residential segregation of Blacks and Whites (Galster & Keeney, 1988; Pearce, 1988). Residential segregation, in turn, maintains racial inequality (Pearce, 1988) and considerably reduces intergroup contact, thus potentially slowing improved relations among different racial groups. Using U.S. Census data, Darden (1989) argued persuasively that residential segregation has “perpetuated and reinforced” Black-White racial inequality in income, education, occupation, and employment. As a consequence of residential segregation in inner cities and lack of suburbanization among Black Americans, little real progress was made in reducing racial inequality in the quarter century after 1964, when a landmark Civil Rights Act prohibiting discrimination in employment and housing was passed. Galster (1991) has similarly linked housing discrimination and poverty among urban Black Americans.

Audits and perceived discrimination studies help in estimating the scope of housing discrimination, identifying its principal victims, and suggesting which factors and attributes underlie experiences of housing discrimination. With systematic evidence of perceived and actual discrimination, it becomes more difficult, if not impossible, to deny a problem exists. With evidence of housing discrimination, and in the tradition of action research, social scientists can then press public officials to enforce existing legislation banning racial discrimination in housing, to
enact more progressive legislation, and to help to provide better housing for all of a city’s residents. Publicizing findings of discrimination in press conferences and in meetings with representatives of government and organizations (e.g., realtors and landlords) found to discriminate against immigrants and minorities can help instigate corrective actions (see Saltman, 1975, for an example of social action from housing audits). Finally, by identifying barriers to newcomers in finding housing, policymakers can try to develop more effective and responsive urban environments and housing options for immigrants and others.

The HNC study focuses attention on housing discrimination perceived by several groups of recent immigrants to Canada in the 1990s. According to the 1996 Census, approximately 20% of all Canadian households are headed by an immigrant (Meltzer, 2000). Although the majority of these immigrant households have adequate and affordable housing, nearly half a million of them do not and are classified by the Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation as being in “core need.” These core need households are predominantly recent immigrants to Canada (Meltzer, 2000). Immigrants to Canada who have resided in the country more than 20 years have housing indistinguishable from native-born Canadians. Evidence therefore converges in pointing to recent immigrants in Canada as confronting the greatest barriers to proper housing. Remedial efforts at reducing and eliminating housing barriers and discrimination in housing should, accordingly, focus on helping these immigrants to Canada, especially those from visible minorities.

References


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