

## Contact and the Personal/Group Discrimination Discrepancy in an Inuit Community

ABIGAIL G. POORE

FABY GAGNE

KELLY M. BARLOW

JOHN E. LYDON

DONALD M. TAYLOR

*Department of Psychology*

*McGill University, Canada*

STEPHEN C. WRIGHT

*Department of Psychology*

*University of California at Santa Cruz*

---

---

**ABSTRACT.** The personal/group discrimination discrepancy involves disadvantaged group members rating discrimination directed at their group considerably higher than ratings of discrimination aimed at themselves personally as members of that group. This robust phenomenon has been found in samples of women, African Americans, and aboriginal people. In the present study, the authors used a sample of Inuit from a remote Arctic community to confirm the perceived discrepancy. However, ratings for perceived group discrimination were surprisingly low. The authors argue that geographical isolation may have led Inuit to be unaware of the impact of discrimination on their lives. In support of this argument, findings showed that group discrimination ratings were higher for Inuit who did have contact with mainstream Canadian culture. Implications for the traditional contact hypothesis are discussed.

Key words: discrimination, intergroup contact

---

---

THERE HAS BEEN A GROWING INTEREST in the perceptions of discrimination from the point of view of the victim (Crocker & Major, 1989; Ruggiero & Taylor, 1995). One important finding to emerge is that disadvantaged group members respond quite differently to questions about discrimination directed at the group as opposed to such questions posed on the personal level. Consistently, ratings of group discrimination have been higher than ratings of personal discrimination—a phenomenon that has been labeled the *personal/group discrimination discrepancy* (Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990).

The personal/group discrimination discrepancy has proven to be extremely robust. The phenomenon has been reported for women, and for a wide range of linguistic, religious, and racial minority groups, including Anglophones and Francophones, Jewish Montrealers, and inner city African Americans (see Taylor, Wright, & Porter, 1993). The perceived discrepancy between personal and group discrimination arises not only among groups whose members perceive high levels of discrimination (African Americans, Haitian women) but also among those who perceive lower levels of discrimination (women in general).

### *The Personal/Group Discrimination Discrepancy in an Inuit Sample*

In addition to these minority groups mentioned, Taylor et al. (1993) reported unexpected results for a sample of Inuit from Arctic Quebec. Inuit ratings for personal discrimination were unremarkable; that is, they were low, as were those for Anglophones, Francophones, and African Americans. What was remarkable, however, were the comparatively low ratings for group discrimination, compared with the group ratings made by Anglophones, Francophones, and African Americans. The relatively low group-discrimination ratings for the Inuit sample were surprising not only because they are so different from the conventional pattern of findings for other disadvantaged groups but also because they belie the reality of the discrimination that the Inuit have confronted over the last century.

This reality of discrimination includes a history of institutional and interpersonal racism, especially in areas of employment, housing, and relations with public authorities (Cornell, 1988). Furthermore, inadequate jobs perpetuate extreme poverty in a context of poor social services and education. Frideres (1988) discussed the impact of the Canadian schooling systems in which provincial schools minimized contact with parents and community role models. Frideres also documented how aboriginal children at provincial schools, including those in Quebec, faced considerable discrimination by teachers. The short-term consequences have included dramatically lower grades, extremely high dropout rates, and in many cases the obliteration of heritage language.

A further illustration of discrimination experienced in Canadian native communities is the extremely high incidence of sexual abuse, estimated to be as high as 80% (Nechi Institute, The Four Worlds Development Project, 1988). Finally, most Inuit and other Native communities have had to face the total destruction of their social fabric through forced relocation and social reorganiza-

---

*This research was supported by grants from the Fonds pour la Formation de Chercheurs et l'Aide à la Recherche (FCAR), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). The authors give special thanks to Mary Aitchison and Doris Winkler who provide ongoing insights into the plight of society's most disadvantaged groups.*

*Address correspondence to Abigail G. Poore, Department of Psychology, McGill University, 1205 Dr. Penfield Avenue, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3A 1B1; abigail@ego.psych.mcgill.ca (e-mail).*

tion. Indeed, the relationship between mainstream Canadian and Native people, including the Inuit, has frequently been described as a classic case of internal colonialism (Frideres, 1988; Taylor, 1997). The relatively low group-discrimination ratings are therefore unexpected because one may assume that a group that has experienced such an objectively obvious disadvantage would report high levels of discrimination, especially at the group level.

One feature that makes the Inuit unique from the variety of other groups that have been investigated is their very limited access to mainstream North American culture. The Inuit are extremely isolated. The community that is the focus of the present study is one of 14 Inuit settlements located in Arctic Quebec that, until the 1950s, had little or no contact with mainstream Canadian society (Taylor & Wright, 1989). Although they are exposed to mainstream Canadian society through television, the geographical isolation of the community makes it one of the very few in North America that is relatively insulated from outside influences. Today, access to the community is still available only by ship or air.

### *Contact and Perceptions of Discrimination*

The relatively low reports of group discrimination by Inuit respondents are challenging because they are at odds with the predictions proposed by the traditional contact hypothesis—that interaction under certain conditions between individuals belonging to different ethnic groups reduces prejudice and intergroup tension (for a review, see Hewstone & Brown, 1986). Contact theory has traditionally focused on *perpetrators* of discrimination, emphasizing how intergroup contact facilitates a decrease in prejudice. In the present study, we examined the consequences of contact from the viewpoint of the *victim* rather than the *perpetrator*. That is, we focused on the experiences of the Inuit, not on the mainstream North Americans with whom they are in contact. It has always been assumed that contact between mainstream North Americans and Inuit will lead to more favorable views of the outgroup and less intergroup hostility for both perpetrators and victims.

According to traditional contact theory, it is contact, not isolation, that is usually associated with lower levels of intergroup hostility. Reduction of negative intergroup attitudes are thought to be achieved when certain prerequisite conditions, such as cooperative contact and status equality between groups, are respected (see Stephan, 1987). Stephan and Stephan (1984, 1985) proposed that these features contribute to the elimination of ignorance about outgroup members and consequently to reduced feelings of intergroup anxiety. This in turn, leads to more accurate, less polarized, and more favorable views of the outgroup.

Given the isolation faced by the Inuit community, the “elimination of ignorance” argument suggested by Stephan and Stephan (1984) has not been possible, at least in terms of face-to-face contact. One would, therefore, expect Inuit to rate their experience of discrimination as relatively high, especially considering their historical encounters with mainstream White society. The unexpected

finding of relatively low levels of perceived group discrimination in spite of objectively high levels of real discrimination, coupled with a lack of outgroup contact, therefore presents a dilemma for traditional contact theory.

It is our argument that the level of contact between the Inuit in Arctic Quebec and mainstream Canadian society may be so low as to lessen their awareness of systemic discrimination. This lack of awareness, then, is a possible explanation for the unconventional lower ratings of perceived group discrimination. Conversely, those few Inuit who *have* had contact with mainstream Canadian society should have a greater political awareness of the disadvantages that the Inuit face. Indeed, Inuit experiences of discrimination are reported to be elevated among those who have had contact with mainstream culture (Cornell, 1988). Furthermore, contact with mainstream culture is associated with adversity, including difficulty with adjustment and higher suicide rates (Kirmayer, 1994). In the present study, we expected that those Inuit who have had contact with mainstream culture would have higher group discrimination ratings than the majority of Inuit who have not had such contact.

The geographical isolation of the Inuit in Arctic Quebec provides a unique opportunity to investigate the effects of discrimination at a group level and the awareness of this discrimination for those who have had some direct contact with mainstream culture relative to those who have not. One of the advantages of the geographical isolation of this community, coupled with its small size, is that it ensures a homogeneous sample in terms of socioeconomic status, neighborhood, and cultural history (Wright, Taylor, & Macarthur, 2000).

In the present study, we investigated the hypothesis that contact with mainstream Canadian society may be associated with comparatively higher ratings of group discrimination. To test this hypothesis, we compared a subset of the Inuit population who have lived in mainstream society for a certain period of time with those who have never lived outside their isolated community. We also compared a subset of Inuit who work within the community but outside the home and who would encounter White superiors and co-workers with those who have less contact with the White community because they pursue a more traditional Inuit lifestyle centered around the home and land. We assumed that having a formal job in the community—such as working in a bank, a governmental organization, or a school—takes place in a context in which interactions and contact with mainstream society are a necessity. In contrast, working on the land or at home insulates an Inuit from interactions with mainstream society.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

We conducted the study in the largest of the remote Inuit communities located in the Arctic region known as Nunavik (Taylor & Wright, 1989). Only those

Inuit who were aged 14 or older and had parents who were both Inuit were included in the sample. The final sample comprised 191 Inuit of whom 97 were men and 94 were women. We then divided the sample according to whether they had lived in the Inuit community all their lives, which was the case for the vast majority ( $n = 161$ ), or had lived outside of their community for any amount of time ( $n = 15$ ). We also divided the sample according to those who did not work outside the home at all ( $n = 74$ ) and those who did work outside of the home, either full time or part time ( $n = 98$ ). Finally we deleted a portion of the sample because of missing data so that the final sample was fewer than 191 individuals.

We used two criteria to determine contact with mainstream Canadian culture. First, we compared respondents who had lived within an isolated Inuit community all their lives with those who had spent at least 6 months in a mainstream Canadian community or city. Data were gathered using two questions: "How long have you lived up North?" and "During your lifetime, how long have you lived in the South?" We compared respondents who endorsed the category *all my life*, referring to how long they had lived in the North, with those respondents who endorsed the category that they had lived in the South *more than 6 months and less than 2 years*.

Second, we compared respondents who had worked only at home with those who had worked outside the home either full time (8 hr per day) or part time (fewer than 8 hr per day). We obtained this information using a categorical question that asked respondents "Do you work outside of your home, in the community of Kuujjuaq?" The three response options were *full time* (8 hr per day), *part time* (fewer than 8 hr per day), and *not at all*. To test whether working outside the home was associated with contact, respondents were asked how much time they spent with English-speaking Canadians when working outside the home.

### Procedure

We distributed questionnaires with complete written instructions to every Inuit resident in the community. The research instrument was prepared initially in English, then back translated into Inuktitut and French. The instructions were repeated in the three languages over the FM radio station serving the community. Trained interviewers were made available to answer questions or offer help in completing the questionnaires. All questionnaires were completed within 2 weeks. For the purpose of the present study, only the data belonging to those who identified themselves and their heritage mother and father as Inuit were included in the analyses.

### Materials

The items used were extracted from a larger study (Taylor & Wright, 1989) and were designed to obtain ratings of personal and group discrimination. The

items resembled those used in other studies (Taylor et al., 1993) measuring group and personal discrimination. We asked specific questions:

1. In your opinion, is there discrimination against you personally because of the ethnic group you belong to?
2. In your opinion, is there discrimination against your ethnic group?

Respondents answered using an 11 point Likert-type scale in which 0 indicated that discrimination occurred *not at all*, 5 indicated that discrimination occurred *somewhat*, and 10 indicated that discrimination occurred *very much*.

## Results

To investigate whether contact with mainstream Canadian culture affects perceived discrimination, we performed two separate  $2 \times 2$  analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with one repeated measure.

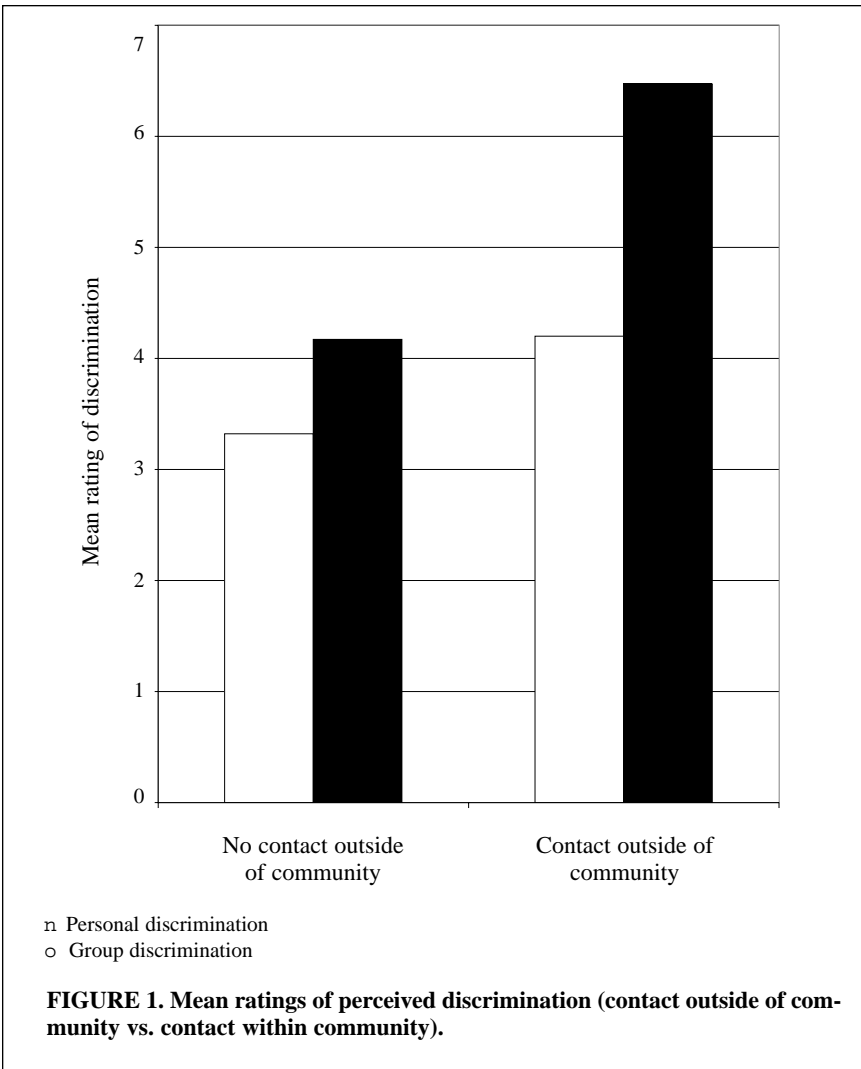
### *Contact Outside the Community*

No significant gender effects emerged, and therefore we collapsed all variables in subsequent analyses across gender,  $F(1, 169) = .62, p > .05$ . A  $2$  (have lived outside community or lived only inside community)  $\times 2$  (discrimination: personal or group) mixed model ANOVA with the second factor as the repeated measure revealed a significant main effect for the within-group factor, indicating higher levels of group discrimination than personal discrimination,  $F(1, 174) = 18.37, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$ . A significant main effect for the between-groups factor indicated that those who had lived in the North all their lives perceived less discrimination than those who had lived outside of the community,  $F(1, 174) = 5.18, p < .05, \eta^2 = .03$ .

A marginally significant interaction effect indicated that individuals who had lived in their remote community all their lives perceived less group discrimination ( $M = 4.17$ ) than those who had lived outside their community for more than 6 months and less than 2 years ( $M = 6.47$ ),  $F(1, 174) = 3.84, p = .05, \eta^2 = .02$ . The interaction is presented in Figure 1. Post hoc tests revealed that living outside the community had no significant effect on perceptions of personal discrimination ( $p > .05$ ) but that it did lead to the perception of more group discrimination ( $p < .05$ ).

### *Contact Within the Community: Working In or Outside the Home*

To test the assumption that working outside the home is associated with increased contact with mainstream Canadians, we performed a one-way ANOVA. Individuals who worked in their homes ( $M = 3.84$ ) spent less time with English-speaking Canadians than those who did not work in their homes ( $M =$

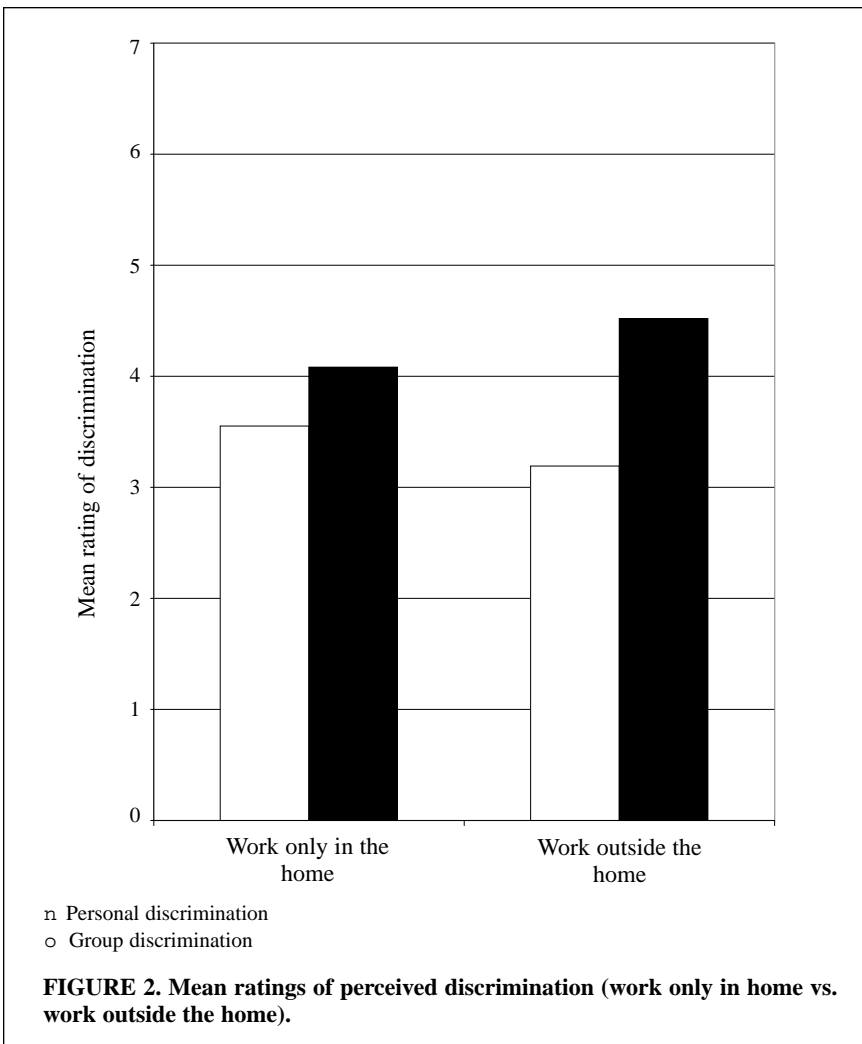


4.63),  $F(1, 176) = 3.98, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$ . Inuit who worked in the home did not have as much direct contact with English-speaking Canadians as those who worked out of the home.

There were no significant gender effects and therefore we collapsed all variables over this variable in subsequent analyses,  $F(1, 165) = .24, p > .05$ . We used a 2 (work outside the home or work only in the home)  $\times$  2 (discrimination: personal or group) mixed model ANOVA with the second factor as the repeated measure to test the effect of contact. The analysis revealed a significant main

effect for the within-group factor with higher ratings of group discrimination than personal discrimination,  $F(1, 170) = 21.12, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$ .

A significant interaction effect revealed that individuals who worked in their homes ( $M = 4.08$ ) perceived less group discrimination than individuals who worked outside their homes full time or part time ( $M = 4.52$ ),  $F(1, 170) = 3.93, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$ . The interaction is presented in Figure 2. Post hoc tests indicated that working outside the home had no significant effect on perceptions of personal discrimination ( $p > .05$ ) but that it did lead to the perception of more group discrimination ( $p < .05$ ).



## Discussion

We investigated the effects of contact on perceptions of personal and group discrimination in a remote Inuit village. Contact with mainstream North American culture was operationalized in terms of two factors. The first factor explained the effects of exposure to the dominant culture as a result of living for some period of time in a Canadian city or community. The second factor was based on the assumption and a formal analysis confirming the assumption that those Inuit who worked outside the home rather than in the home would have the opportunity to meet colleagues and superiors from the dominant culture.

The results indicated that Inuit who had contact with mainstream Canadian society perceived more group discrimination than Inuit who did not have such contact. However, this perception of increased discrimination was only at the group level, not at the personal level. Conversely, Inuit who had not had direct contact with mainstream society perceived comparatively low levels of discrimination directed at their group, although their ratings of personal discrimination were similar to findings by Taylor et al. (1993) that involved samples of Anglophone, Francophone, and African Americans.

The effect of isolation may explain the results. The isolation of community members from mainstream society makes it difficult to recognize systemic discrimination, first, because systemic discrimination is ongoing and is not a single dramatic event. Second, recognition may be difficult because it is not open face-to-face discrimination but instead takes on less visible forms. It is only those who have had contact with mainstream society, through working outside the home or living away from their community who become aware of the lack of opportunity that their group endures relative to higher status groups.

A third possibility evokes the relative deprivation theory, specifically, group-level relative deprivation (Runciman, 1966). That is, in order to perceive deprivation, individuals need a comparison. Those with contact would be prompted to make comparisons with better-off groups and therefore perceive relative deprivation and recognize discrimination. Those without contact may not be able to make comparisons and therefore would not feel relative deprivation. Thus Inuit who have contact with mainstream society may perceive that advantaged groups, and possibly even other minority groups, are better off than they are and believe this to be the result of discrimination.

The finding that increased contact between Canadian and Inuit cultures results in increased awareness of discrimination on the part of Inuit is contrary to the basic tenet of contact theory, which asserts that greater contact facilitates positive intergroup perceptions (Hewstone & Brown, 1986). Researchers have suggested various criteria as necessary for intergroup contact to facilitate more positive perceptions and relations, however, and it is likely that social factors—status inequality, group wealth disparity, political power, and a rigid majority/minority—may hinder positive contact experiences between Inuit and main-

stream society. It is plausible that these factors are not apparent to those who have been isolated and therefore do not have the expected negative impact on the perceived intergroup relationship. However, those who have come to realize that these factors are present would then perceive the relationship in more negative terms, the result of which would be enhanced perception of discrimination directed at their group.

The present interpretation, if confirmed, suggests an additional qualification to the contact hypothesis. That is, where contact is minimal, paradoxical positive intergroup attitudes are maintained not through positive experience but through a lack of awareness regarding systemic discrimination directed at the disadvantaged group.

The finding that low levels of contact results in comparatively low perceived group discrimination lends theoretical support to the two-factor theory that has been proposed as underlying the personal/group discrimination discrepancy (Taylor, Ruggiero, & Louis, 1996). According to Taylor et al. (1996), minority group members tend to minimize their personal experiences with discrimination on the one hand, while on the other hand, they evoke broadly based stereotypes when they focus on discrimination at a group level.

Ratings of group discrimination are believed to involve the activation of a shared stereotype about societal discrimination against one's own group. The isolation and reduced contact with mainstream society experienced by the Inuit may well limit the formation of a group-based stereotype regarding discrimination against them. Thus the "auto-stereotype"—the consensus among members of a group about the manner in which their own group is being treated (Taylor et al., 1996)—is affected by how much awareness the Inuit have regarding past and present discrimination against them. Awareness, in turn, differs according to whether Inuit group members have had the opportunity to live in mainstream society and work outside the home.

Current literature in cognition, especially in intergroup research, focuses largely on its functional aspects. It would be functional for Inuit who have commerce in an urban setting to form stereotypes of other groups. And how one's group is treated by another group would aid in defining the structure for interactions and expectations regarding how the advantaged groups may respond. In the broader environment, such autostereotypes may be useful in the construction of a social network within which each group would have its role. Inuit interacting with mainstream society would have a reference point from which to understand the other.

For Inuit who are isolated, however, such autostereotypes would not serve any function because they are less likely to interact with advantaged groups. Thus, there is a role for future researchers to focus on the functional aspects of autostereotypes in those from isolated communities who must adjust to the demands of a mainstream society within which they remain a disadvantaged minority.

A lowered perception of discrimination aimed at one's own group may not be limited to the Inuit. The same phenomenon may apply to other minority groups who live in extremely isolated or rural areas and who have limited contact with mainstream society. Indeed, groups who are in close proximity to mainstream communities may remain unaware of the discrimination that they confront, not because of geographical distance but because of social and psychological isolation.

## REFERENCES

- Cornell, S. (1988). *The return of the Native American Indian political resurgence*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Crocker, J., & Major, B. (1989). Social stigma and self-esteem: The self-protective properties of stigma. *Psychological Review*, *96*, 608-630.
- Frideres, J. S. (1988). *Native people in Canada: Contemporary conflicts* (3rd ed.). Scarborough: Prentice-Hall.
- Hewstone, M., & Brown, R. (1986). Contact is not enough: An intergroup perspective on the "Contact Hypothesis." In M. Hewstone & R. Brown (Eds.), *Contact and conflict in intergroup encounters* (pp. 1-44). Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell.
- Kirmayer, L. J. (1994). Suicide among Canadian aboriginal peoples. *Transcultural Psychiatric Research Review*, *31*, 3-58.
- Nechi Institute, The Four Worlds Development Project, The Native Training Institute and New Direction Training – Alkali Lake. (1988). *Healing is possible: A joint statement on the healing of sexual abuse in native communities*. Edmonton, Alberta: Nechi Institute.
- Ruggiero, K. M., & Taylor, D. M. (1995). Coping with discrimination: How disadvantaged group members perceive the discrimination that confronts them. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *68*, 826-838.
- Runciman, W. G. (1966). *Relative deprivation and social justice: A study of the attitudes to social inequality in 20th century England*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stephan, W. G. (1987). The contact hypothesis in intergroup relations. In C. Hendricks (Ed.), *Group processes and intergroup relations* (pp. 13-40). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Stephan, W. G., & Stephan, C. W. (1984). The role of ignorance in intergroup relations. In N. Miller & M. B. Brewer (Eds.), *Groups in contact: The psychology of desegregation* (pp. 229-257). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
- Stephan, W. G., & Stephan, C. W. (1985). Intergroup anxiety. *Journal of Social Issues*, *41*, 157-175.
- Taylor, D. M. (1997). The quest for collective identity: The plight of disadvantaged ethnic minorities. *Canadian Psychology*, *38*, 174-190.
- Taylor, D. M., Ruggiero, K. M., & Louis, W. R. (1996). Personal/group discrimination discrepancy: Towards a two-factor explanation. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, *28*, 193-202.
- Taylor, D. M., & Wright, S. C. (1989). Language attitudes in a multilingual northern community. *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, *IX*, *1*, 85-119.
- Taylor, D. M., Wright, S. C., Moghaddam, F. M., & Lalonde, R. N. (1990). The personal/group discrimination discrepancy: Perceiving my group but not myself to be a target for discrimination. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *16*, 256-262.
- Taylor, D. M., Wright, S. C., & Porter, L. E. (1993). Dimensions of perceived discrimination: The personal/group discrimination discrepancy. In M. P. Zanna & J. M. Olson (Eds.), *The psychology of prejudice: The Ontario Symposium* (Vol. 7, pp. 233-255). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Wright, S. C., Taylor, D. M., & Macarthur, J. (2000). Subtractive bilingualism and the survival of the Inuit language: Heritage language versus second language education. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 92(1).

*Original manuscript received November 13, 2000*

*Final revision received April 17, 2001*

*Manuscript accepted June 12, 2001*

