

# Challenging Canadian multiculturalism: Lay perceptions of Canadian national identity

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## カナダにおける多文化共生主義への提言——カナダ人アイデンティティに関するしろうと理論——

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### 要約

カナダでは、様々な人種的、文化的背景を持つ人々が共生しているにもかかわらず、「白人」以外の人々は「カナダ人」として知覚されにくい現象がみられ、差別や偏見の対象となる。本研究の目的は、人が持ちえる最も基本的な要素である「人種」「出身地」「居住地」が自身や他者を「カナダ人」とであると判断する際に与える影響を検証することであった。108名のカナダ人大学生に、国民アイデンティティに関する質問紙に回答してもらった。まず、他者をカナダ人であると判断する際に「白人」要素の有無が基準になるという仮説を基に、外国生まれの白人と、カナダ生まれの非白人の、「私はカナダ人である」との主張に対する同意の程度を5件法で評定させた。その結果、参加者の「カナダ人」像に一致したのは、カナダ生まれの非白人であった。次に、同じ対象に関する「他の多くのカナダ人」の推測評定を求めたところ、非白人参加者の回答に、「白人」対象をよりカナダ人であると推測する傾向が見られた。また、参加者に自身の国民アイデンティティを規定する際に重要だと考える要素を順序付けさせた。その結果、非白人参加者は白人参加者に比べ、「人種」要素が自身の国民アイデンティティを定義する際に不可欠だと考える傾向が明らかになった。人種や民族性を理由とする差別や偏見の経験が、認知に影響を与えるという先行研究の知見と同様に、本研究においても参加者の人種によって自身や他者の国民アイデンティティ認知が異なることが明らかになった。

### Key words

Canadian national identity, multiculturalism, self-serving bias, lay beliefs, ethnicity

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Canadian national identity

A multicultural society like Canada comprises individuals of complex identities. Why, then, are non-Caucasian individuals often questioned about their ethnic roots? Despite the fact that Canadian public celebrates multiculturalism, what represents Canada is still the Caucasian identity. Such assumption of the stereotypical Canadian is often expressed in ways to exclude individuals of particular minority groups. In the present study, we proposed the importance of investigating the representations and understandings of stereotypical Canadians. Specifically, we examined how people living in Canada construe their own national identity and how they infer other Canadians' perception regarding the nationality. The findings were expected to provide insights into psychological bases of the ideal of multiculturalism as well as potential difficulties in its pursuit.

National identity is defined as an individual's subjective claim of belonging to one or more nations as per Kiely, Bech-

hofer, Stewart, and McCrone (2001). According to Bond (2006), individuals assume their own national identity and perceive identities of others by using three national identity markers: where they were born (birth place), where they have lived for the longest (residence), and their unique cultural and racial characteristics (ethnicity). Although the three national identity markers are found to be crucial for determining a national identity in daily situations, questions arise concerning whether people regard all of these aspects as equally important when they make instant judgments about nationality. Does underlying lay criterion differ when perceiving own identity and other people's identity? Is there any kind of bias involved when judging a national identity? How do people think national identities are perceived in general? If stereotypical Canadians are Caucasians, how would non-Caucasian individuals claim their national identity? All above are unanswered questions in the past studies that examined the perception of national identity. Especially in Canada, the diversity of its multiracial population poses questions about the characteristics of Canadian national identity. The present study tested whether ethnic differences probe differences in perceived 'Canadian-ness'. Specifically, how the national identity markers were used as justification for interpersonal perception

was examined.

Bond (2006) argued that characteristics and values of each national identity marker vary as a function of each nation. In other words, the truly essential of the three national identity markers should vary across various nations. What is the essential national identity marker for Canadians then?

Canadian studies of identities typically focus on ethnicity as a relevant variable. For example, Mahtani (2002) suggested that there are differences in experiences regarding claiming Canadian national identity between Caucasian and non-Caucasian individuals. Berry and Kalin (1995) discussed that immigrants from Europe are perceived more positively than are immigrants from places other than Europe, proposing that ethnic minorities may experience disadvantages in claiming identities. These research findings indicate that experiences and perceptions regarding national identity may depend on ethnicity. However, a limited number of studies have empirically examined the ways in which ethnicity is used as a criterion to determine one's Canadian national identity.

### 1.2 Interpersonal perception

As indicated in the study by Bond (2006), racial majority individuals may perceive other people's national identity in different ways than do minority individuals. Also, it is suggested that when ethnicity is used as a criterion, exclusive attitudes dominate interpersonal relationships (e.g., Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000). Similarly, Moghaddam and Taylor (1987) found that perceived prejudice was related to the feeling of exclusion which interfered with claiming own national identity and subsequently caused their exclusive judgment on others. Such discussions derive the possibility that non-Caucasian individuals may possess more exclusive perception regarding other people's national identity due to their own experiences of ethnicity-related prejudice. In order to test these possibilities, the current study aimed to provide empirical evidence concerning ethnicities of both perceivers and targets.

Ethnicity not only relates to perception of others but is also associated with how individuals think they are perceived by others. Moghaddam and Taylor (1987) pointed out that there was a discrepancy between Indian immigrant women's perception and majority people's perception of Canadian national identity. That is, immigrant women believed that the mainstream Canadian society would perceive them as immigrants, not as Canadians. Such tendency was especially strong for participants with longer residence in Canada. Interestingly, the longer the immigrant women lived in Canada, the more likely that they were to think that the majority of Canadians would perceive them as outsiders rather than as Canadians. Thus, the present study hypothesized that own feeling of exclusion would be related to their recognition of prejudice in general.

### 1.3 Biased perception of norms

A question still remains: Do people correctly understand how society in general perceives them? Past research shows that people's perceptions of social norms are often biased or even erroneous (Prentice & Miller, 1993). Despite the difficulty of correctly estimating the social norms, people often construct own judgment in comparison to such perceived social norms. Miller and McFarland (1991) suggested that people tend to believe that own attitudes are different from the public, even when they are actually very similar. In other words, people mistakenly perceive the discrepancy between own attitudes and the social norm.

Furthermore, people have tendencies to attribute positive acts to themselves (Bradley, 1978). Such self-serving bias is thought to be derived from the motivation for maintaining high self-esteem. The self-serving bias takes place when people believe that they are more tolerant and flexible in their opinions than others, and assume that others behave in a rigid and stereotypical manner. An experimental study of Farley, China, and Allred (1998) indicated that participants favored targets of socially disadvantaged groups for potential candidates of job positions with a rationalization that targets of advantaged groups might be chosen by the majority of other participants. In their study, the participants believed that people in general used a stereotypical criterion, but not themselves. Taken together, we can hypothesize that the perceiver's own judgment should be inferred as more tolerant than estimated majority people's perception.

These arguments suggest that people would have motivation to present socially appropriate self-perceptions in comparison to inappropriate social norms. For example, it is possible to report the prejudiced attitudes of the society in general while denying own stereotypical perception. However, few studies have investigated the effect of self-serving bias on perception of national identity. The present study predicts that participants' own judgments are predicted as more socially desirable than estimation of most other people's judgment on targets. In other words, the effect of pluralistic ignorance may be revealed when people suppress prejudiced attitudes.

### 1.4 Self-claimed national identity

Given that Caucasian characteristics may be prevalently used as a criterion to judge other people's Canadian identity, it remains unknown how non-Caucasian individuals identify their own national identity. Several researchers have suggested that minority ethnicity is important for their own feeling of belonging to a nation. For example, Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, and Vedder (2001) maintained that perspectives of ethnicity and nationality are positively correlated with psychological well-being. Thus, they suggested that the more individuals identify with their minority ethnic group, the higher their levels of feeling of belongingness to the nation. Using a series of questionnaires, Gong (2007) examined national identity of ethnic minorities in the United States. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis re-

vealed that strong minority ethnic identity was related to higher degree of identification with an American national identity for Asian American participants.

In contrast, Sodowsky and Plake (1992) argued that perceived minority prejudice interfered with one's sense of national identity. In their study, Muslim individuals were significantly more prejudiced than participants of other or of no particular religious beliefs, and they were less likely to associate themselves with the U.S. dominant society. It appears that how individuals think they are perceived by the dominant society influences their degree of association with that society. The acceptance from the society is important for self identification to a nation. Again, the importance of both self-claimed and perceived national identity is suggested.

### 1.5 The present study

The ways in which personal identities are perceived by others and the ways in which individuals represent their own national identity may be inter-connected. This research aims to understand perceptions of national identity from both external and internal perspectives. Given the paucity of Canadian empirical research on this field, studying Canadian national identity is essential for a desirable and tolerant multicultural nation.

In the present research, ethnicity is hypothesized as the primary national identity marker for determining own and other people's national identity. Personal experiences shape schemas for perceiving other individuals' identities. Possessing different ethnicities may be related to different views of other people's national identity. Also, such perceptions may be biased because of the self-serving bias.

## 2. Hypotheses

The present study explored the following four hypotheses:

- (1) Canadian participants perceive Caucasian targets as more Canadian than non-Caucasian targets even when the Caucasian targets were not born and raised in Canada.
- (2) Canadian participants estimate that most other Canadians would perceive Caucasian targets as more Canadian than non-Caucasian targets even when the Caucasian targets were not born and raised in Canada.
- (3) Canadian participants' self perceptions are more tolerant than estimation of most Canadians' perceptions when accepting other people as Canadian.
- (4) Non-Caucasian individuals are more aware of ethnicity as being an important identity marker than Caucasian individuals are.

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Participants

Students enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses at University of Victoria participated in the present study, in exchange for course credits. One participant was excluded from

data analysis because of missing values in three crucial items of the questionnaire. The final sample consisted of 78 females, with ages ranging from 18 to 28 ( $M = 19.58$ ,  $SD = 1.96$ ) and 29 males, with ages ranging from 18 to 23 ( $M = 19.38$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ). In order to control for unbalanced proportion of non-Caucasian and majority participants, 52 Caucasian participants were randomly selected for the first three analyses.

### 3.2 Design

A 2 (Participant's own ethnicity: Caucasian vs. non-Caucasian)  $\times$  2 (Target's ethnicity: Caucasian vs. non-Caucasian) factorial was applied. The former variable was between-subjects and the latter was within-subject.

### 3.3 Materials

A questionnaire named BER was developed for the present study. The acronym BER (Birth place, Ethnicity, and length of Residence) was named as the title to disguise the true purpose of the study in the early stages of the study. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first part asked perceptions of national identity and the second part collected demographic information. The inter-item reliability of the questionnaire was high (Cronbach's alpha = .77 for self perception of others and .81 for estimates of most Canadians).

The first part of the questionnaire was designed to accompany a Power Point slide show. Each statement was accompanied by 5-point Likert-type scales. Some statements followed the research of national identity (Bond, 2006). The photos were selected from several free face online database, with the final set of eight photos consisting of two Caucasian males, two Caucasian females, two non-Caucasian males and two non-Caucasian females. The non-Caucasian faces were chosen to represent several ethnic characteristics such as Middle Eastern, South Asian, Aboriginal, and East Asian. The four Caucasian individuals were described as foreign born and living in foreign countries, whereas the four non-Caucasian individuals were all described as Canadian born and Canadian residents.

First, the degree to which people accepted each of the eight target individuals to be Canadian was measured on a 5-point Likert scale such as "To what degree do you agree with this person's claim to be a Canadian?" (strongly disagree = 1, strongly agree = 5). Second, participants' estimation of acceptance among other Canadian citizens was measured. Presented with the same set of eight target photos previously used for their own judgments, participants were asked to estimate how most Canadian others would respond to the acceptance questions (e.g., To what degree do you think most Canadians would agree with this person's claim to be a Canadian?).

The demographic section of the BER gathered information about participants' (a) age, gender, place of birth, language, and ethnicity and (b) parents' and grandparents' national identities (e.g., What were your biological parent's nationalities?). These

questions were assigned to gather information about participants' ethnic category and to categorize participants to non-Caucasian and Caucasian groups in data analyses.

Also included in this section was a question concerning the perception of national identity. Participants were asked to rank-order the three factors of nationality (i.e., place of birth, length of residence in a nation, and ethnicity) with respect to the importance they found as a defining element of their national identity).

### 3.4 Procedure

The participants signed up for a designated time period and were tested in groups of about 10 participants in a university classroom. The order of measuring self and estimated estimations of targets and demographic part was counterbalanced. There was no time limit except for the Power Point part of the study in which participants were paced through by the slide presentations. The average time taken for the presentation of two sets of eight photos was five minutes. After the questionnaire was completed participants were given a written debriefing of the study.

## 4. Results

We separately analyzed participants' own rating of acceptance toward the target and their estimate of most other Canadians' acceptance rating with regard to the target individual's right to call him/herself Canadian. In addition, in order to examine the discrepancy between self-perception and most Canadians' estimated perception, a unified analysis was conducted with the agent of judgment (i.e., self vs. other) treated as a repeated measure. Finally, we examined whether participants' ethnicity related to their choice of the most important national identity marker.

### 4.1 Perception of Canadian national identity

#### 4.1.1 Self-judgment

The first hypothesis that Canadian participants perceive Caucasian targets as more Canadians than non-Caucasian targets

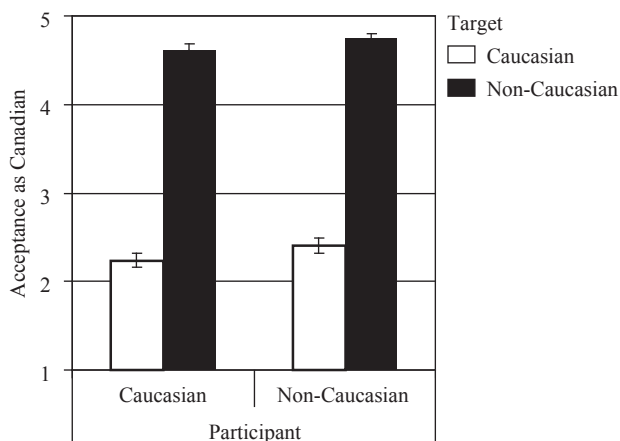


Figure 1: Acceptance for targets to be Canadians in relation to participants' ethnicity ( $n = 76$ )

regardless of the Caucasian targets' place of birth and residence was tested. A  $2 \times 2$  Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants revealed similar tendency when judging others (Figure 1). Both participant groups accepted the non-Caucasian resident targets as Canadian ( $M = 4.68, SD = 0.66$ ) than the Caucasian non-resident targets ( $M = 2.32, SD = 0.91$ )  $F(1, 77) = 4.21, p < .001$ . This finding indicates that participants theorized that residency and birth place were more crucial than ethnicity when determining Canadian national identity. The two way interaction between participants' ethnicity and targets' ethnicity was not significant  $F < 1$ .

#### 4.1.2 Estimation of most Canadians' perception

The next analysis tested our second hypothesis concerning the estimation of most other Canadians' perception. Mean acceptance scores were created from the same 5-point Likert scale ratings using the photos and descriptions of the target, but this time participants were asked to think how other Canadians would judge the targets' claim to be Canadians.

Again, a  $2 \times 2$  ANOVA was conducted. Both non-Caucasian and Caucasian participants recognized non-Caucasian resident target ( $M = 4.18, SD = 0.94$ ) more likely to fit social image of Canadian than Caucasian non-resident targets ( $M = 2.61, SD = 0.10$ ),  $F(1, 77) = 1.22, p < .001$  (Figure 2). This finding parallels the previous analysis of self-judgment. However, in this analysis, there was an interaction between participants' ethnicity and targets' ethnicity,  $F(1, 76) = 4.42, p < .05$ . Specifically, non-Caucasian participants accepted Caucasian targets to a greater degree than Caucasian participants did,  $F(1, 76) = 6.62, p < .05$ .

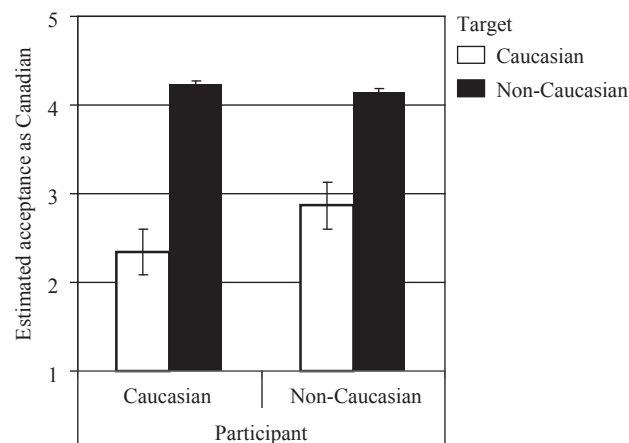


Figure 2: Estimated acceptance for targets to be Canadians in relation to participants' ethnicity ( $n = 76$ )

#### 4.1.3 Perceptual bias

In order to test the third hypothesis that participants perceive own judgment as more tolerant than others, means of acceptance of the targets as Canadians were compared between their own judgment and the estimated judgment among most Canadians. A  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  mixed-model ANOVA was conducted with the agency

of judgment (own vs. estimated for most Canadians) added as the last variable. There was a significant main effect for agency,  $F(1, 76) = 7.85, p < .01$ . Comparing to self-judgment, estimation of the majority judgment was significantly more tolerant when judging the Caucasian target. There was a main effect of target,  $F(1, 76) = 28.33, p < .001$ . However, these main effects were qualified by the interaction of target and agency,  $F(1, 76) = 44.97, p < .001$ . In addition, the three way interaction of participants' ethnicity, target, and agency was not significant,  $F(1, 76) = 1.99, ns$ . These results indicate that regardless of participants' ethnicity, perception of Canadian national identity depends on agency of perception. Specifically, a simple main effect of agency was found when participants were judging non-Caucasian targets,  $F(1, 76) = 60.43, p < .0001$ . In contrast, a simple main effect of agency was not found when participants were judging Caucasian targets,  $F(1, 76) = 2.99, ns$ . These results suggest that participants were inclined to distinguish own perception and the public perception especially when judging non-Caucasian targets.

#### 4.2 Importance of national identity marker

To examine the third hypothesis that there should be a difference between Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants' perceptions about own national identity, a Chi-square analysis was conducted. The three national identity markers of birth place, residence and ethnicity were analyzed in relation to participant's ethnicity. Figure 3 presents the responses for the most important national identity marker as a function of Caucasian and non-Caucasian participants. While 71 % of non-Caucasian participants responded that ethnicity was the most important national identity marker, only 31 % Caucasian participants reported ethnicity as the most important national identity marker. The analysis revealed that choice of the most important national identity marker was contingent on one's ethnic category,  $\chi^2(2, 104) = 12.34, p < .005$ . Caucasian participants' responses were equally distributed around three markers, while non-Caucasian participants' responses leaned on ethnicity as the most prominent

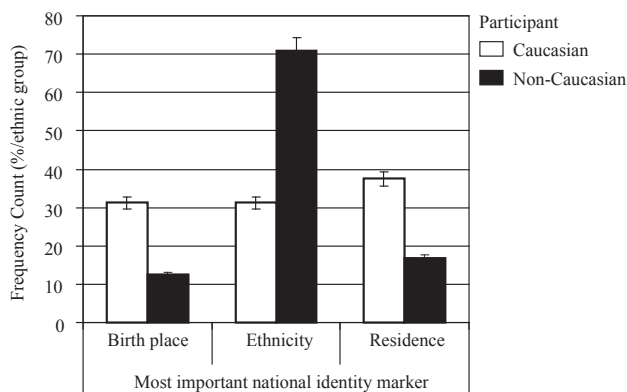


Figure 3: Proportion of most important national identity marker as a function of ethnicity (Caucasian,  $n = 81$ ; non-Caucasian,  $n = 26$ )

marker. The findings suggest that non-Caucasian participants' personal experiences in terms of national identity may be related to their perception.

## 5. Discussion

The current study explored Canadian national identity in relation to personal ethnic background and perceptions of targets' national identity. In particular, we examined how the three national identity markers (ethnicity, birth place, and residence) were weighted in the willingness to accept an individual as Canadian as well as in the estimation of such willingness among other Canadian perceivers. The primary finding was that Caucasian targets were not necessarily advantaged in being perceived as Canadians when they were not born and raised in Canada. Only when non-Caucasian participants estimated the public judgment, Caucasian targets were perceived as more Canadians than when they self-judged. Such perceptual bias was reflected in the analysis comparing self and estimated judgments: Participants in general were inclined to show a self-serving bias. Also, ethnicity played the major role in how non-Caucasian individuals perceive own national identity. The present study contributed to the literature of Canadian national identity especially in a way to suggest the discrepancy between self-judged and estimation of national identities.

### 5.1 Perceptions of Canadian national identity

Contrary to the first hypothesis that target's Caucasian characteristic will determine Canadian-ness, Caucasian characteristic was not used as a criterion to accept others as Canadians. This finding was consistent through own perception and estimation of most other Canadians' perception; both agencies used residency and birth place as crucial elements in the criteria. The finding did not confirm that stereotypical Canadians are Caucasian individuals. In other words, participants did not indicate exclusive attitudes towards racial minority targets.

This finding can be explained through effectiveness of Canadian multiculturalism, which encourages diversity of ethnic and racial groups to co-exist in Canadian society. Yet, this may also be treated as a social desirability effect, which participants were cautious of not showing racial prejudice to present better selves. Because it is more acceptable to exclude people who were not born in Canada and do not live in Canada rather than people who are visibly minority, they probably showed more tolerant perception for visible minorities. In addition, according to the study on "psychological essentialism," ethnicity and race tend to be considered as immutable and natural (Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2000). Excluding others due to their ethnicity would be socially undesirable because it would lead to denial of others based on their crucial essence.

The tendency to perceive more 'Canadian-ness' in Caucasian targets was only revealed when non-Caucasian participants estimated most other Canadians' judgment on the targets. In

other words, non-Caucasian individuals were more aware of racial privilege. The finding is consistent with literature that perception of national identity depends on perceivers' ethnicity (e.g. Bond, 2000). It can be interpreted that individuals who have experienced ethnicity-related prejudice are more likely to recognize prejudiced attitudes toward racial minorities in society in general. In addition, a longitudinal study suggests that people unintentionally conform to the previously distancing social norm (Prentice & Miller, 1993). This suggests that the non-Caucasian participants might have a tendency to shift own perception to the social norm in a long term.

### 5.2 Importance of national identity markers

The difference between non-Caucasian and Caucasian participants was apparent in their choice of most important national identity marker. Ethnicity was the most salient national identity marker for non-Caucasian participants but not for Caucasian participants. The finding is consistent with the result of Nasdale, Rooney, and Smith (1997) that non-Caucasian individuals maintain ethnic identity as a crucial component of their identity. Further, such non-Caucasian participants' strong association with their ethnicity may be reflected by the 'mosaic' ethnic diversity in Canada. As Phinney et al. (2001) suggest that minorities tend to be proud of their ethnic identity when a nation encourages assimilation and discourages pluralism. Still, it is questionable whether maintaining ethnic identity of non-Caucasian is related more to success of the promotion of multiculturalism or to the daily remainder of being different.

In contrast to non-Caucasian participants, Caucasian participants were evenly distributed in their choices for the most important national identity marker. As Knowles and Peng (2005) argue, being a member of a majority ethnic group makes their majority ethnicity to be ubiquitous, and ethnicity does not become a feature of their lives. It is an indication that the Caucasian characteristic is a dominant marker in Canadian society. Caution is necessary, however, because the judgment of most important national identity marker was assessed by a single item question. In addition, the present study is limited in a sense that the dichotomized racial categories of Caucasian vs. non-Caucasian do not reflect the actual representation of racial distribution in Canadian society.

To illustrate the difficulty in studying national identity, Phinney et al. (2001) explained that a positive relationship between ethnic identity and national identity would be achieved only if external factors such as supportive community and feeling of acceptance co-existed. The current study did not consider external factors that may influence perceptions of national identity. Further studies need to reveal the effect of external factors such as social support on perceptions of between and within individuals.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings of the current study indicate that perception of national identity, at least in part, depends on the targets' ethnicity and participants' ethnic background as well. Most importantly, the target individuals all claimed themselves as "Canadians." Viewing someone who is claiming his or her national identity to be Canadian as less Canadian would lead to social exclusion. The present research revealed that agencies of perception of national identity are interlinked and biased: People cannot freely claim own identities as 'Canadians' unless they perceive the social acceptance.

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