

# **Exploring Conservative Perspectives in Canadian Sociology**

Ben Date

Lakehead University

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

As a Christian and conservative, my academic endeavours in Canada have seldom been enjoyable. Throughout my post-secondary pursuits, I have had to tactfully navigate the liberal bias of academia. As my education progressed, I increasingly suspected that the discipline of sociology not only prefers, but prioritizes, liberal perspectives and theory. Conservative approaches, or perspectives that do not tightly align with liberal politics and a social justice orientation, seemed not only to be rejected, but also admonished and condemned. In fact, there has been such little good-faith engagement with conservative perspectives that I have often found myself being lectured about “what conservatives believe” by overtly politically far-left professors. The term ‘conservative’ is routinely conflated with ‘fascist,’ ‘sexist,’ ‘racist,’ and a plethora of other inflammatory terms, many of which are being taught to the younger generation of scholars who already struggle to fully grasp the complexity of politics and society. My own experiences navigating Canadian sociology inspired me to pursue the matter further within this research. Experiencing Canadian sociology in a rather negative light in relation to my own positionality made me wonder: how are other conservative Canadian sociologists experiencing the contemporary discipline?

We must first develop an understanding of what conservative perspectives are relevant to sociology, as well as where they actually come from. With such little representation, and a reluctance to engage with politically-right viewpoints, it felt necessary to explore foundational figures in the development of what we now know as modern conservatism. As such, the thesis firstly discusses the history of conservative thought; exploring the likes of Hobbes (1651), Burke (1790), and Tocqueville (1835) and their contributions to conservatism. We then turn to conservative contributions to the discipline of sociology more specifically. Spencer (1860),

Durkheim (1893), and Parsons (1951) are discussed in relation to their emphasis on structural functionalism; explaining the importance of social institutions and the cohesive element of religion. Scruton (1980) and Nisbet (1986) are also discussed in relation to their conservative ideas. Once the foundation of conservatism has been set, and relevant contributions to sociology addressed, the thesis explores extensive literature in relation to an identifiable political-bias within Canadian sociology.

The work of Lukianoff & Haidt (2018) is engaged with to highlight the increasing polarization of academia, and related consequences. The impacts of this perceived division is not precluded to just the political right. Pawluch (2019) and Steeves (2022) discuss the pressures put on social constructionists, or scholars with a more neutral positionality, to adopt a more critical lens in ‘doing’ sociology. I discuss how the current climate of academia is reflective of Fuller’s (2002) Authoritarian Theory of Knowledge (ATK), and how such a paradigm pressures scholars, and especially students, to conform to perspectives which echo politically left sentiments (Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan 2006). From there, I further draw on literature to discuss the erasure of conservatism in Canadian sociology. Real-world examples are drawn upon; from the works of Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin (2024), the censoring and condemnation of Jordan Peterson in relation to his expressed conservative sentiments is discussed. I consider the paradoxical nature of sociology in accordance to Burrowoy’s (2005) observation of the scissors movement, whereby society leans more to the right at the same time as sociology leaning more to the left. Related consequences of scholarly impression management under an ATK paradigm (Fuller 2002) are further elaborated through the works of Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan (2006), Weber (1919), Feralles & Fine (2005) and others.

The literature review was intended to accomplish two primary tasks. Firstly, it was important to explain where conservatism originates, as well as how the political perspective helped forge some of the most prominent theories and theorists in sociology. Conservatism should be understood as a useful analytical tool for sociology, not an inherently incompatible viewpoint. Indeed, everyone who wants to conserve what they have (including nature) means they exist somewhere on a spectrum of conservatism (Scruton 1980). At present, there is very little good-faith engagement with perspectives that lean even slightly to the right on the political spectrum. Secondly, the concerns surrounding the one-sided nature of Canadian sociology further justify exploring conservative perspectives which have become marginalized within the context of the discipline. There is a significant amount of literature and research done on the socio-political state of academia, but very little which allows conservative sociologists to discuss their experiences within the discipline first-hand. Harding (1986) and Haraway (1988) have thoroughly discussed the partiality of knowledge production, and how marginalized positionalities can offer unique perspectives due to having to navigate both the dominant culture and minority subcultures. Similarly, conservative scholars have had to carefully navigate the discipline; being exposed to left-liberal viewpoints while feeling like it is necessary to hide their authentic perspectives, or save them for a ‘backstage’ audience (Goffman 1959).

After the literature review, I discuss the methodology of grounded theory, and discuss my research design. Once the origins of grounded theory are explained (Glaser & Strauss 1967), more contemporary discussions of grounded theory are had, drawing from the likes of Charmaz (2014, 2017), Puddephatt & McLuhan (2019), and Prus (1987). Like any researcher, I held my own perspectives on the state of Canadian sociology, but my intention was to allow the participants to form themes and key takeaways as they saw fit. As such, grounded theory was a

logical methodological framework to guide the study. It was important to provide an opportunity to conservative Canadian sociologists to express their authentic perspectives, as well as recall their lived experiences, as there has been so little chance to do so in the discipline thus far. The participants shaped the key findings and themes, offering surprising insight and takeaways I could have never discovered employing a deductive approach. Their qualitatively-rich responses illuminated the realities of navigating a discipline which expresses disdain for perspectives that are against the mainstream political grain.

However, every study possesses limitations. In short, there are discussed challenges relating to sample size and the problems of gatekeeping. The target population of conservative sociologists was a perceived minority within the discipline to begin with, but it also proved difficult accessing this population. Of the 45 Canadian universities I contacted, I received merely 18 replies; a fair-sized handful of which expressed hesitancy or downright refusal to assist in disseminating the research tool. This leads into the subsequent section of methods. I opted to use a qualitative survey for this project. Several factors led to this decision; including geographic constraints for in-person data collection, relative convenience for participants, and the ability to ensure absolute anonymity to elicit uncensored, authentic responses. As discussed in the methods, surveys are often unfairly dismissed in qualitative research; serving as an immensely valuable qualitative tool when designed properly (Braun, Clarke, Boulton, Davey, & McEvoy 2021). Open-ended surveys, particularly those executed through an online medium, have the ability to maximize participant autonomy and authenticity (Thomas, Pitt, McCarthy, Arnot, & Hennessey 2024).

Within the research findings, three main participant-driven themes are explored: (1) Contextual Conservatism and the Relativity of Political Identity, (2) Marginalized Perspectives

and Areas of Contention, and (3) Perceived Ideological Homogeneity and Self-Censorship. These primary themes are composed of several subthemes, and are explored through the analysis of participant responses. Participant quotes are worked into the analysis, revealing authentic experiences and perspectives provided by contemporary conservative sociologists across Canada. Participant responses, in relation to survey questions, discuss the left-liberal bias of academia, intolerance for conservative or politically-right viewpoints, and the inability to express conservative perspectives on a variety of complex socio-political topics. Participants recount their own experiences, as well as explain how they have been forced to hide their authentic beliefs to appease the normative politically-left rhetoric. Participant responses are analyzed at face-value, avoiding speculative interpretations, but drawing from related literature and scholars when applicable. The subsequent discussion and conclusion do not simply summarize the findings, but explores untapped potential for related future research.

By the conclusion of this thesis, it should be clear to the reader that Canadian sociology possesses a rather prominent left-liberal bias which is effectively shutting down holistic sociological engagement; subsequently reducing the credibility of the discipline as a whole. This thesis does not attempt to influence personal opinions or political positionality, rather it advocates for the inclusion of intellectual *diversity*. Just as extensive literature points out the one-sided nature of academia, so too do conservative sociologists within this study. Further, the lopsided political nature of Canadian sociology has become so extreme that the very meaning of ‘conservative’ in a sociological context must be understood, as it is a stark contrast to conservatism present beyond the walls of academia. In other words, I find that conservatism is itself a contested and relativistic notion, whereby centrist views are interpreted as conservative in a context where leftwing politics is the norm.

It is my desire to see a resurgence in Canadian sociology through the encouragement of viewpoint diversity, celebrating academic contestation and ideological plurality rather than homogeneity. Popper (1963), Fuller (2002), Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan (2006), Lukianoff & Haidt (2018), McLaughlin (2024), and others have encouraged intellectual diversity; as authentic contestation is how sociologically-rich knowledge is cultivated. No one is being done any favours by suppressing perspectives which challenge the dominant perspectives in the current discipline of sociology. Such an approach merely lays out conditions conducive to an intellectually weak echo chamber. Furthermore, participants experiencing the discipline of Canadian sociology from the notable minority position of ‘conservative’, offer nuanced insight into how conservative sociologists struggle to dialogue within the discipline and feel coerced into hiding their authentic selves. This thesis serves as an eye-opening exploration into the darker side of Canadian sociology; revealing how discrimination and intolerance has been allowed to flourish in an academic environment which advocates, ironically, for inclusion, diversity, and equality.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **History of Conservative Thought**

This thesis does not seek to develop a singular definition of conservatism, nor is the intent to produce an exhaustive list of every possible conservative standpoint. Instead, I want to highlight patterns of conservative thought which have remained sociologically relevant and have been reflected in contemporary contexts. As we explore early theorists of conservative ideas, we can better understand the origins of conservative thought and how conservatism has undergone gradual change into modernity. Even today we see variations of conservatism within Canada. For example, you have conservative voters who support the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC), yet oppose the political movement for Alberta to separate and join the United States of America; indicating variation under the broad political umbrella of conservatism. Much like the political-left, the political-right also varies in degrees of intensity. Conservatism can therefore be understood as a somewhat fluid term, adopting different stances in relation to time, geographic space, and social and political contexts. In this thesis, I therefore hold the view that there is no one, unitary definition of conservatism, since the definition of what this means and entails will differ according to varying group interpretations and shifting contexts of use. As such, how people define conservatism differently becomes an important part of my analysis in this thesis.

Despite degrees of contextual variation, as well as temporal evolution, esteemed scholars of the past provide benefit for framing, analyzing, and discussing current conservative perspectives or socio-political topics which continue to reflect patterns of early conservative thought. I believe early theorists who expressed conservative sentiments, such as Hobbes (1651), Burke (1790), and Tocqueville (1835), offer important insight to the foundation of conservative

perspective and argumentation. Despite alterations in conservative thought reflective of changing times, these former scholars express important sentiments that are echoed by contemporaries in a more nuanced context. Further, early conservative thinkers built theoretical foundations allowing for conservative sentiments to flourish sociologically, and providing footing for more contemporary conservative scholars such as Spencer (1860), Durkheim (1893), Parsons (1951), Scruton (1980), and Nisbet (1986). I wish to use this chapter as an opportunity to explore the patterns of early conservative thought, followed by reputable sociological themes promoted by contemporary sociologists who reflect conservative sentiments.

Thomas Hobbes was born in Malmesbury, Wiltshire the United Kingdom. He acquired a Bachelor of Arts degree from Oxford University, and afterward he spent most of his adult life employed by the aristocratic Cavendish family as a tutor and travelling companion (Brooke 2017). During political turmoil and civil war in 1640, Hobbes fled to Paris. The same year the English Civil War concluded, 1651, is when he published *Leviathan* (Brooke 2017). Hobbes' *Leviathan* has become a renowned piece of literature for scholars and political actors alike, describing concepts modern sociologists still discuss today such as the state of nature and the metaphorical social contract of governance. Hobbes' approach to governance possesses considerable similarities to modern conservative thought with some of the overarching themes and lines of logic which persist to this day.

The state of nature, or natural condition of mankind, is violent and brutish according to Hobbes (1651). He argues that humanity's state of nature is one of pure equality, where every person possesses the natural right to obtain resources and power through whatever means are available. In this state of relative equality, there is competition for resources, precarious security, and a lack of trust among individuals. This state of nature results in violent,

perpetual conflict, where the strong can take from the weak and ‘society’, or lack thereof, is a primitive, chaotic, bloodbath.

Hobbes’ believed the only escape from this violent fate is through the imagined social contract. Hobbes’ social contract is based on the premise that rational human beings would willingly give up a portion of their inherent freedoms, by sacrificing some of their natural rights, in exchange for protection granted by a central government or authority. Hobbes posited that this central authority, or sovereign, ought to be one of great strength and absolute control. The governing sovereign must therefore be powerful and absolute, protecting society by reasonably constraining human nature.

Thomas Hobbes was not a ‘conservative’ in a modern sense, but his perspectives on human nature and the importance of a strong government reflect similar sentiments held by modern conservatives. Like Hobbes, conservatives today also advocate for strong governance, especially in reference to longstanding institutions such as police, military, and law, which provide the security necessary for cultural and economic progress.

Edmund Burke is largely considered to be the founder of political conservatism as we understand it today. Burke was born in Dublin near the end of 1728 or beginning of 1729, eventually becoming a member of Parliament in 1765 as a member for the borough of Wendover (England) (Selby 1890). In 1774, Burke became a member of Parliament for Bristol (England), a position he held for 6 years where he became a staunch supporter of abolishing restrictions on Irish trade, making himself unpopular with many of his constituents (Selby 1890). In 1777, Burke wrote on the affairs of America in his letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol. He argued for a characteristic defence of freedom, urging a preference for utilitarian considerations as opposed to abstract ideas (Selby 1890). Burke never shied away from conflict, making his stances well-

known and consistently opposing political adversaries. Burke's career in politics is fascinating, his impact undeniable, but the most defining moment of his career manifested through his "Reflections on the Revolution in France" (1790).

In 1790, Burke supported a bill to increase the English army to prevent uprisings in the wake of the French Revolution, utilizing the occasion to declare he would not remain on good terms with anyone who suggested a democracy similar to the likes of France (Selby 1890). When his 'Reflections on the Revolution in France' was published in 1790, the Crown and Tories applauded his works (Selby 1890). His work was as much a criticism of the French Revolution as it was a Philosophy of Politics. "Never again, perhaps, will whatever is good in Conservatism be so thoughtfully or so attractively set forth, as it is in the pages of Burke" (Selby 1890: xiv). Burke's perspective on the French Revolution was that the French suffered from a fit of delirium, and that whatever good men held sacred and what made a country loveable, had been overthrown by a hideous revolution (Selby 1890: xiv). By exploring his work first-hand, we can better understand Burke's mindset, rationale, and conservative sentiments which are still applicable today.

Burke's reflections were originally written in a letter of correspondence between himself and a gentleman in Paris who had requested his insight on the affairs which had transpired in France. Within the opening of his writing, Burke admirably declares "My errors, if any, are my own. My reputation alone is to answer for them" (Burke 1790:3). Burke, much like modern conservatives, applauded liberty, but recognized the importance of stability and structured order for a condition of true liberty to exist. "I flatter myself that I love a manly, moral, regulated liberty as well as any gentleman of that society" (Burke 1790:7). He argued that circumstances dictate political principles and their distinguishing colours, as well as

discriminating effects, and that “the circumstances are what render every civil and political scheme beneficial or noxious to mankind” (Burke 1790:8). The circumstances, or specific contexts, of political policy and paradigm define what is justified, or righteous, good or bad. Burke argued the concept of liberty is abstractedly good, yet the conditions surrounding a nation’s liberty are imperative to comprehend before making a moral or political verdict with finality. Therefore, the liberty derived from the French Revolution, according to Burke, was condemnable. Burke (1790) argued the abject violence employed to carry forth the French Revolution and produce France’s relative liberty cannot be awarded merit, the end result did not justify the radical means.

Burke (1790) argues that liberty in an abstract sense is a blessing, but the accompanying circumstances of a nation’s liberty determine its merit. As an example, he asks “Am I to congratulate an highwayman and murderer, who has broke prison, upon the recovery of his natural rights?” (Burke 1790:8). The tangible conditions of liberty determine whether it is worthy of scorn or praise. To drive the point home, Burke writes “we ought to suspend our judgement until the first effervescence is a little subsided, till the liquor is cleared, and until we see something deeper than the agitation of a troubled frothy surface”. Despite his aversion to applaud France’s newly found ‘liberty’, Burke did in fact support liberty if the circumstances were agreeable. He argued that such circumstances were a strong military, effective wealth distribution, a firm grasp on morality and religion, clear property rights, peace and order, as well as civil social mannerism (Burke 1790). Burke’s (1790) conceptualization of liberty, or freedom, is not equal to absolute freedom. His perspective reflects a society which has reasonable constraints on individual behaviour, constraints intended to maximize collective well-being. Just as Hobbes (1651) emphasizes strong governance instead of absolute freedom (the state of

nature), Burke (1790) also recognized the importance of reasonable constraint. For Burke, these constraints often took the form of traditional institutions.

Burke was a strong advocate of religion, namely Christianity. On the topic of faith, Burke states “Surely the church is a place where one day’s truce ought to be allowed to the dissensions and animosities of mankind” (Burke 1790:12). The social cohesive properties of religion have long been recognized, aligning with Burke’s vision of the Church as a unifying institution of solidarity and faith. I am inclined to agree with Burke, as most, if not all, of our socio-political conflict stems from competing values, beliefs, and conceptualizations of morality. A nation unified under one religion would no longer navigate a social world with ambiguous morality and competing perspectives of what is right or wrong. Durkheim, for example, often emphasized the importance of social solidarity, often manifesting through shared values and beliefs; particularly under the umbrella of an identifiable religion (1893). Burke makes his perspective on religion clear: that churches which spread contradictory messages are not good for society, heavily implying the need for a unified faith (Christianity) not a plethora of competing sects or other religions (Burke 1790).

Despite being a harsh critic of the French Revolution, Burke was not entirely opposed to social, or political, change. Burke’s approach to societal change was one of temperance, graduality, and respect for tradition. This was a glaring contrast to the emotionally fueled French Revolution which resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands, as well as setting the stage for the militaristic dictator, Emperor Napoleon Bonparte, to seize control of the nation amidst the chaotic revolutionary wake. Burke argues “A state without some change is without the means of its conservation” (Burke 1790:23). He emphasizes the importance of conserving tradition, while simultaneously being able to adjust political apparatuses without doing away

entirely with the binding fabrics. This displayed respect for tradition is reflective of sociological functionalism, discussed notably by Durkheim (1893) and Parsons (1961). Societal change, in accordance with Burke, should uphold a degree of continuity with the past, altering elements of the existing system only when absolutely necessary, and preserving historical institutions and tradition. The preference for gradual change, rather one of revolutionary proportions, continues to occupy the minds of conservative politicians. In contrast, the conservative mind may recognize the pitfalls of capitalism, but still support the overall system. But why? Well, as discussed by Burke, conservatives believe that gradual change yields the most beneficial results for a society. Rather than ripping apart historical institutions and the very fabric of Western democracy, conservatives are far more inclined to adjust how these institutions and policies operate, making necessary changes while attempting to maximize continuity and stability. Although the context of 1790 and 2026 are dramatically different, the conservative preference of conservation, tradition, and continuity persists as a logical mainstay.

Burke, in line with his emphasis on tradition and continuity, and in reference to the French Revolution, declared to his French correspondent, “You had all these advantages in your ancient states; but you chose to act as if you had never been molded into civil society, and had everything to begin anew. You began ill, because you began by despising everything that belonged to you” (Burke 1790:39). In today’s world, institutions such as the church, police, military, and even the government itself are under constant attack from the political left who, much like the French Revolutionaries, advocate for the abolishment of such sacred and necessary institutions. Burke’s critiques of the French Revolution translate rather nicely to our contemporary political strife. As unbiasedly as possible: certain viewpoints on the political left have a tendency to advocate for dramatic, rapid, and often revolutionary change, whereas most

conservatives are keen on preserving our defining Western features and changing gradually with respect to tradition.

In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville (1835) perceived democracy as a potential strength, delivering a new form of equality by breaking with traditional lines of nobility, such that all individuals had the opportunity to succeed. However, he argued that democracy, if not executed thoughtfully, can actually weaken freedom, tradition, and social cohesion. Tocqueville was concerned that the conditions produced by democracy, those of freedom and equality, could condition people to prioritize individual needs over those of society. Individualism was thus the greatest threat to democracy as equal citizens, no longer connected with traditional social ties from Europe, may retreat from collective politics and group associations. Tocqueville thus saw democracy as being in danger due to individualism dividing people apart and weakening their collective political will. As such, the masses blindly accept centralized authority, effectively causing people to become passive and dependent on their government. In short, Tocqueville was concerned with a new manner of tyranny unique to democracy: a paternalistic, all-controlling state. Not violent oppression, but rather a gradual reduction of the independence of citizens, requiring them to rely more heavily on the government to provide for their needs as they sacrifice freedom for state-sanctioned equality; not dissimilar to Hobbes' (1651) conceptualization of the state of nature: sacrificing natural rights in exchange for state protection and greater equality than a society built to only favour the strongest. Paradoxically, Tocqueville (1835) is also concerned with independence; insisting that laymen ought to work together in order to recapture political power in a democracy. However, this suggested interconnectedness leads to a new perceived dilemma: the tyranny of the majority.

Tocqueville coined the term 'Tyranny of the Majority' which essentially refers to the democratic phenomenon where the majority dominates, potentially at the expense of a considerably sized minority. Tocqueville's remedy to the potential pitfalls of democracy was placing an emphasis on "free institutions" such as the newspaper and local organizations, so that isolated individuals can be brought together for common purposes, and to solve problems together. Much like Tocqueville, Burke (1790) also emphasized the importance of strong social institutions, highlighting the cohesive effect of traditional institutions; paving the way for later developed functionalist approaches to studying society.

### **Conservative Ideas in Sociology**

Herbert Spencer was by no means a conservative in the traditional sense, but his work pertaining to society as an organism (1860) certainly demonstrated sentiments akin to conservatism. Additionally, his work set the foundation for structural functionalism; a sociological theory formalized by Emile Durkheim and employed as a conservative approach to analyzing society. Spencer (1860) argued that society was akin to a living organism; as societies grow, they become more complex and interconnected. Spencer described this societal shift as similar to the organs of a body. Broader society is the body, and social institutions such as religion, politics, and economics function as organs; specialized and interconnected parts which work together to ensure the functioning of a given society (Spencer 1860). Spencer (1860) argued that no social institution operates in isolation, but that alterations, or breakdowns, of one institution would have an impact on the others. However, unlike Durkheim (1893) who saw social institutions as a site of socialization and producers of social solidarity, Spencer (1860) was far less focused on social cohesion. Instead, he framed these interconnected institutions as necessary components to the

survival of a society; maintaining order and stability. Spencer's (1860) framing of society as an organism, and subsequent emphasis on the importance of social institutions, certainly reflects conservative sentiments. Just as Burke (1790) and Tocqueville (1835) highlighted the importance and stabilizing effect of social institutions, so did Spencer (1860); insisting these institutions were vital for the survival, as well as functioning, of a society.

Durkheim (1893) is considered to be one of the founding fathers of sociology, and his work regarding functionalism builds upon Spencer's (1860) conceptualization of society as an organism. It is impossible to pursue sociology without encountering ideas and theories posited by Durkheim, which still maintain relevancy today. Durkheim promoted conservative sentiments and ideas such as social solidarity, functional equilibrium, and the cohesive properties of religion. Durkheim's life experiences and social perspectives were formed during the peak of the industrial revolution, an unprecedented, and dramatic shift in social relations. Prior to the industrial revolution, people in Europe lived an agrarian life; living in rural countrysides and working the land. The industrial revolution brought massive amounts of people from the countryside to metropolitan areas in the hopes of better employment and prosperity. Having such a dramatic shift in social and economic development during this time allowed Durkheim to develop observations and theories which were considered groundbreaking for his time and continue to be relevant in contemporary society.

Durkheim believed social solidarity was imperative to the healthy functioning of society. Social solidarity, according to Durkheim, can be produced in two profoundly different ways: mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. Despite an arguably misleading name, mechanical solidarity refers to pre-modernity, to simple hunter-gatherer societies. Social solidarity in this context was due to a sense of 'oneness'; a possession of shared beliefs, values,

norms, and ways of life. On the other hand, organic solidarity was applicable to modern societies, including the one in which Durkheim was studying. This form of solidarity is produced by a fixed interdependence on one another due to complex divisions of labour yielding a surge of specialized jobs and trading arrangements. Shared values and norms were becoming less prominent, but this was made up for by social interdependence necessitated by complex industries.

Durkheim's anomie is essentially a breakdown of norms, a social condition where social rules are unclear and traditional institutions fail to serve as a useful guide. Durkheim argued this is a prominent issue in societies that undergo rapid, and significant, social change, such that social regulations cannot keep up. This state of anomie, or normlessness, can result in increased feelings of disconnectedness, alienation, and even contribute to an increase in suicides according to Durkheim. This is where Durkheim's functionalist approach to sociology, as well as his views on religion, become relevant to the conversation. Durkheim, like his predecessor Spencer (1860), believed society could be conceptualized as an organism, as a living entity possessing interconnected parts (institutions) just like a human body possesses organs. Each organ, or institution, performs a specialized role to contribute to the overall healthy well-being of society. Much like early theorists with conservative sentiments such as Burke (1790) and Tocqueville (1835), Durkheim (1893) emphasized the social importance of traditional institutions, particularly the cohesive effect these social structures can have. According to Durkheim (1893), one of the most important social institutions was religion. Durkheim was not religious, but much like Burke (1790) he recognized the cohesive and stabilizing effect religion has on a society. Durkheim (1893) wasn't overly concerned with the specifics of a religion, but he insisted that religion produces a stabilizing effect by instilling the aforementioned shared

norms, beliefs, values, and ways of life. Durkheim's main sociological contributions continue to be echoed, whether intentionally or not, by modern conservatives. There is a conservative emphasis on social cohesion and solidarity, often manifesting in the promotion of patriotic Nationalism and the preservation of traditional institutions

Much like Durkheim (1893), Tocqueville (1835), and Burke (1790), Parsons (1951) also emphasized the importance of social institutions in conservative-esque fashion. Parsons (1951) viewed society as an interdependent system; possessing various social institutions which perform necessary functions to stabilize society. According to Parsons (1951), some of these institutions are family, education, law, and religion. He posited that these institutions help socialize people to understand acceptable behaviours, that each social institution is connected and necessary to ensure a stable, cohesive society. Traditional institutions permeate shared values which are learned via socialization, these shared values then shape a predictive social order, and this relative order demands a degree of continuity and predictability (Parsons 1951). Just as Durkheim (1893) and Burke (1790) emphasized the importance of religion, so too did Parsons (1951). In the context of the collective West, "the fact that much of our cultural tradition derives from the institutionalization of the values and ideologies of such movements—notably the various branches of Christianity and the rationalistic-revolutionary 'ideas' of the Enlightenment—means that these elements have played a very prominent part in the cultural tradition of Western society" (Parsons 1951:200). Parsons (1951) key takeaway is traditional institutions socialize members of a society to understand acceptable behaviours and values, while also serving as a point of reference for how to go about making gradual changes to a society without radically turning things upside-down. Much like Tocqueville (1835), Parsons (1951)

believed it was of utmost importance to preserve these institutions, subjecting them to gradual reformation as needed rather than radical transformation.

Roger Scruton (1980) was a prominent British, conservative scholar who provided important conservative theories and perspectives similar to our previously discussed conservative thinkers. Scruton, much like Hobbes (1651) and Burke (1790), emphasized the importance of a strong system of government. Scruton posits individual liberty is not absolute, and that it must be secondary to the higher value of established government and authority (Scruton 1980:19). This sentiment closely mirrors Burke's (1790) own belief regarding reasonable constraints being imposed on a society rather than absolute freedom. Scruton also believed political order depended on socially accepted institutions, and that these institutions ought to be viewed as legitimate. Unsurprisingly, and reflective of Burke (1790), Tocqueville (1835), Durkheim (1891), and Parsons (1951); Scruton (1980) advocated for gradual change rather than radical reform or revolution. In his own words, he viewed conservatives as 'restorationists'; where instead of destroying all that has become sick the conservative puts forth a concentrated effort to restore society through the remediation of social pathogens. Not only did Scruton advocate for strong governance and stability, he also highlighted the importance of patriotism. Scruton believed patriotism was the ultimate 'end' of conservatives, not just a means. The conservative, in Scruton's words, views patriotism as the culmination of social consciousness, building upon an understanding of "tradition, custom and ceremony" (Scruton 1980:38).

Subsequently, Scruton also highlighted the importance of tradition as a form of inherited knowledge. Scruton's perception of tradition involves "all manner of custom, ceremony, and participation in institutional life, where what is done is done, not mechanically,

but for a reason, and where the reason lies, not in what will be, but what has been". For Scruton, tradition is not an abstract concept based antiquated customs; tradition is our shared heritage, culture, and social norms which have shaped contemporary realities and institutions. He posits that tradition transforms history into reason, something tangible, rational, and logical to guide our decisions and actions. Additionally, Scruton argues traditions arise in virtually every institution in society. "Traditions arise and command respect wherever the individual seeks to relate himself to something transcendent" (Scruton 1980:40). Clubs, local life, religion, family, education, and all other venues where people come into contact with each other possess traditional influences (Scruton 1980), a sentiment previously posited by Tocqueville (1835) placing an emphasis on "free institutions" such as the newspaper and local organizations. Tradition can therefore be understood as a guiding social force, the influence of those who forged the traditional institutions and bodies of government which preside over daily life.

Scruton's conceptualization of the state, or nation, is one of an inherited society based on tradition and accumulated wisdom. A healthy nation possesses social cohesion and a collective recognition of membership to the state (Scruton 1980). Our inherited nationhood includes shared customs, language, and tradition, binding citizens together as members of shared culture rather than individual subjects of law. For Burke (1790), shared religion and adherence to tradition helped produce solidarity; providing a clear direction for society and a recognizable social hierarchy. Tocqueville (1835) saw local institutions as a way to bring people together; a perspective developed in greater functionalist depth by Durkheim (1891) and then later Parsons (1951). Scruton (1980) rationally discusses the importance of social cohesion and a collective identity. He argues that although people are individuals, their individual autonomy only exists because they are a member of something greater: a society, group, class, nation or arrangement

they instinctively call home (Scruton 1980:34). It is this shared recognition of ‘home’ which binds people together, which reinforces a collective social membership. Much like Tocqueville (1835), Scruton is also concerned about the social consequences excessive individualism may have on a society. Individuality, according to Scruton (1980), is transcended by group membership. When individuality is prioritized over collective values and norms, civil order is threatened as such a prioritization rejects the institution, traditions, and related conditions which have allowed it to flourish (Scruton 1980). Scruton uses the family as an example, where an individual’s desires or needs are often willfully forfeited for the benefit of the larger collective (the family). It is in the same breath Scruton lays out allegiance to the state, and the merit of patriotism, where individual liberties are reasonably sacrificed for the benefit of broader society; the collective in which individuals possess membership to, and subsequently have been granted a degree of autonomy and protection. Scruton’s patriotic sentiment is not distant from Hobbes’ (1651) predated perspective of a centralized government as a protector; as the apparatus of equality through reasonable constraints intended to sacrifice individual liberties for collective security.

Robert Nisbet’s (1986) book *Conservatism: Dream and Reality* discusses conservative concepts which hold relevancy in modern explorations of conservative thought in the discipline of sociology specifically. Much like Scruton and others previously discussed, Nisbet also emphasizes the importance of history and tradition in conservative thought. According to Nisbet, conservatives prefer to rely on experience derived from history rather than abstract and deductive thought (Nisbet 1986:23). The legitimacy of society is the culmination of “history and traditions which go far beyond the resources of any single generation” (Nisbet 1986:23). Conservatives subsequently recognize the important influence history has on the

present. Nisbet suggests tradition is preserved within structures, communities, and habits, which can also include social norms and values. According to Nisbet, the conservative can better understand society through a historical lens which recognizes the influence of longstanding traditions and ways of life. Society, in accordance to conservative thought explained by Nisbet, is not mechanical; it “is organic in its articulation of institutions and interrelationships of functions; also in its necessarily, irreversibly cumulative development over time”. Much like Scruton, Nisbet recognizes the inheritance of society through fundamental social institutions which permeate history and tradition. These institutions possess considerable power, and can manifest as family, religion, local community, guild, and other similar institutions (Nisbet 1986).

Nisbet also discusses the conservative value of social cohesion, a pattern of conservative thought which has regained heightened relevancy in a contemporary society characterized by political division, individuality, and competing values. Nisbet claims conservatives emphasize the importance of social groups such as family, church, and local community as they possess integral social roles (Nisbet 1986). Nisbet argues that conservatives view liberationist movements as a threat to social order, and that such movements threaten to erode collective consciousness; putting society and culture on a path of individualistic nihilism (Nisbet 1986:50). Part of the conservative aversion to radical change and social movements stems from the “incessant liberationist work” (Nisbet 1986:50) to dramatically alter traditional authorities, institutions, and social roles founded upon historically rich tradition and wisdom. It is through these traditional institutions and norms that citizens of a nation can develop shared culture and norms that allow for stability. Eradicating, or altering beyond recognition, these institutions and shared values is destined to erode a society’s sense of oneness, amplifying individual needs and suppressing the needs of the many.

Nisbet also takes time to explore the conservative link between religion and morality. “Conservatism is unique among major political ideologies in its emphasis upon church and the Judaeo-Christian morality” (Nisbet 1986:68). Nisbet argues the institutional aspect of religion alone is relevant to political conservatism. Nisbet claims it is the institutional loyalty, obedience to the church, in which conservatives place the importance of religion; and how the religious institution plays an integral role in forming collective values and consensus. Nisbet makes a clear distinction between faith, or lack thereof, and religion as an establishment, insisting that conservatives value religion as an institution of authority rather than a genuine display of faith (Nisbet 1986:70). Nisbet posits the conservatives see religion as an establishment to legitimize government functions as sacred, as well as a way to pacify the masses to behave in a mutually agreed manner.

Nisbet’s (1986) perspectives offer a rather original, and conservative, approach to sociology. His emphasis on the importance of social institutions cannot be overlooked. The family, education system, workplace, church, and local community offer genuine spaces of social cohesion and meaning; these are institutions with a legitimate social function, not antiquated relics to be dismissed (Nisbet 1986). The social influences of traditional institutions offer a space of legitimate sociological exploration and knowledge cultivation. Nisbet also promotes the importance of studying social cohesion and related topics, not exclusively focusing on conflict as much of modern sociology tends to do. Additionally, Nisbet (1986) highlights the importance of tradition, framing it as accumulated social knowledge rather than outdated beliefs or ways of being. Subsequently, he also cautions against rapid social change and the potential detriments of rejecting longstanding traditional institutions. Such an approach to sociology could offer a refreshing departure from the norm of modern sociology which tends to examine institutions

critically, often encouraging expedited change and rather intense social change. Although conservative paradigm and thought has a rich history and is reflected in our remaining traditions, it has certainly been pushed to the bottom of a sociological hierarchy. This section should serve as a reminder of conservative roots, and how these origins paved the way for some of sociology's most prominent scholars and theories. A resurgence, or renaissance if you will indulge me, of conservative perspectives in modern sociology could provide original approaches to socio-political topics; while also contrasting left-liberal theory to challenge, and refine, the discipline as a whole.

### **Pressures to Conform: Political Polarization and Erasure of Conservatism in Modern Sociology**

In Greg Lukianoff's and Jonathan Haidt's (2018) *The Coddling of the American Mind*, they argue that recent cultural shifts in Western academia have unintentionally reduced the psychological resilience, and aptitude, of university students, while also narrowing the range of acceptable discourse. According to Lukianoff & Haidt, these cultural shifts are characterized by the paternalistic approach adopted by universities in an attempt to 'protect' students from being exposed to potentially triggering, or challenging, perspectives. The authors describe this problem not as deliberate censorship, but rather what they call "well-intentioned bad ideas" (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:1-3). that reshape institutional norms around permissible academic discourse or exploration. Lukianoff & Haidt claim the rationale on campuses for limiting certain viewpoints stems from a place of benevolence, hence the "well-intentioned bad ideas" rhetoric. For example, they claim that many of these changes stemmed from a medicalized approach, with some students claiming "certain kinds of speech-and even the content of some books and courses-

interfered with their ability to function” (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:6). Subsequently, according to the two scholars, this has created a generation of intellectually fragile students who have been sheltered from challenging perspectives behind the cloak of “trigger warnings” and the avoidance of difficult subjects.

A central framework of the book, and immensely relevant for this thesis, is the identification of three pervasive cognitive distortions that accompany modern higher education. Lukianoff & Haidt describe these distortions as the “three Great Untruths” (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:4). The first “Great Untruth” is “What doesn’t kill you makes you weaker,” which the authors argue serves as a direct detriment to psychological resiliency; promoting intellectual fragility. The second “Great Untruth” is “Always trust their feelings.” Lukianoff & Haidt argue this sentiment encourages emotional reasoning rather than evidence-based approaches, treating subjective emotional states as evidence of objective reality. Finally, the third “Great Untruth” is “Life is a battle between good people and evil people.” In short, Lukianoff & Haidt argue this sentiment is linked to the rise of moral polarization and identity-based interpretations of disagreement. I will expand on each of these “Great Untruths” in further detail, while also highlighting the relevancy of these claims for my own thesis.

Lukianoff & Haidt’s first “Great Untruth”; “What doesn’t kill you makes you weaker” draws on cognitive behavioral therapy and developmental psychology to argue that exposure to manageable stressors is essential for emotional and intellectual growth. From a physical standpoint, the authors make an interesting comparison to peanut allergies. In short, prior to the mid-1990s a study found that “only four out of a thousand children under the age of eight had such an allergy” (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:20). By 2008, this rate had nearly tripled. Why? In the early 1990s, parents and teachers starting ‘protecting’ children from nut allergies by prohibiting

nut-based foods in the classroom, effectively reducing immunity to this allergy and causing a surge in severe allergies. The authors argue a similar psychological effect is present by shielding, or ‘protecting’ students from ideas or viewpoints that some might find triggering or psychologically harmful. Essentially, “by shielding children from every possible risk, we may lead them to react with exaggerated fear to situations that aren’t risky at all and isolate them from adult skills that they will one day have to master” (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:22). The authors connect the lack of intellectual exposure and challenge to muscular atrophy; the loss of cognitive ability due to an abject lack of intellectual exercise. This troubling phenomenon, according to the authors, is linked to the rise of “safetyism”; a concept which, in terms of academia, prioritizes emotional safety at the expense of intellectual development. “Safetyism is the cult of safety-an obsession with eliminating threats (both real and imagined) to the point at which people become unwilling to make reasonable trade-offs demanded by other practical and moral concerns” (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:32).

Lukianoff’s & Haidt’s (2018) concept of “safetyism” is no doubt linked to the rise in academic cancel culture in conjunction with a noticeable ‘scissors’ phenomenon. The scissors movement is a concept coined by Burawoy (2005) which addresses the trend of sociology gravitating further to the political left, while the broader society in which sociologists study is drifting further to the right. “Safetyism” is defined as the elevation of emotional safety into a “sacred value” that overrides competing educational and intellectual goals; creating conditions conducive to the perpetuation of the three “Great Untruths.” Haidt and Lukianoff argue that while physical safety has always been a legitimate concern, the extension of “safety” to include protection from challenging or offensive ideas marks a significant shift in institutional norms, yielding significant intellectual consequences. They suggest that this shift contributes to the

proliferation of practices such as trigger warnings, speech restrictions, and formal bias-reporting systems on campuses. They identify several contributing factors, including increased political polarization, rising rates of adolescent anxiety and depression, changes in parenting styles often described as “helicopter parenting,” and a decline in unsupervised free play among children (for helicopter parenting see also Randle Nelsen 2018 *Degrees of Failure*). They also point to expanding university bureaucracies and shifting interpretations of social justice, which they argue increasingly emphasize protection from harm or exposure to disagreement.

This begs the question as to who’s safety this phenomenon is ensuring? It is admirable to desire everyone to feel comfortable in academia; but such a circumstance should not come at the expense of others. If conservative scholars or perspectives are feeling unwelcome or ‘chilly’ (Pawluch 2019), is academia really enhancing the ‘safety’ of all constituents or only the ones who align with a left-liberal standpoint? Steve Fuller (2000) discusses the ideal of a ‘Republican Theory of Knowledge,’ arguing that everyone has the right to be wrong in academic discourse, such that one’s professional status should not be harmed on the basis of the claims made. Fuller opposes risk-averse science, encouraging authentic knowledge cultivation through autonomy, mutual dissent, and even mistakes (Fuller 2000). He further encourages competing viewpoints to enhance knowledge production, effectively strengthening scientific disciplines (Fuller 2000). The inverse of Fuller’s intellectual desire has manifested in the results of Haidt’s and Lukianoff’s (2018) identified phenomenon of safetyism.

Clark et al. (2023) studied scientific censorship, providing further insight into potential motivators for positional conformity or avoidance. The authors make a relevant distinction between “hard” and “soft” censorship (Clark et al. 2023:2). Hard censorship is formally sanctioned and codified, whereas soft censorship involves social punishment or threats. The

authors explain how soft censorship present in academia often involves censoring research by preventing dissemination or publication (Clark et al. 2023). Within the limitations section, I discuss some of my own difficulties with disseminating the research invitation; addressing the potential for gatekeeping to inhibit politically-right research. Lukianoff & Haidt's (2018) concept of 'safetyism' displays patterns of soft censorship (Clark et al. 2023), which is not to imply the consequences are not damaging. The authors further discuss potential motivators of scientific censorship, confirming a degree of bias, but not necessarily in a malicious sense. The authors discuss how scientific censorship may manifest from a place of benevolence; that promoted censorship may be done with the intent of preventing harm or protecting vulnerable populations (Clark et al. 2023). This perspective is not dissimilar to Lukianoff & Haidt's (2018) "good intentions, bad ideas" argument. Clark et al. (2023) further explains how despite good intentions, censorship is not an appropriate solution. The authors argue that censorship in science, despite potentially benevolent intentions, compromises the accuracy of knowledge being produced, can develop into systemic censorship, and shake public trust (Clark et al. 2023). Whether intellectual censorship derives from authoritarian-esque intolerance (Fuller 2000), or places of good intention (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018, and Clark et al. 2023), there appears to be consensus among the discussed authors that censorship produces undesirable results.

Lukianoff & Haidt's (2018) second "Great Untruth" is "Always trust your feelings". In academic environments, Lukianoff & Haidt suggest this can lead to interpreting discomfort or disagreement as harm, rather than as a normal feature of intellectual exchange. This sentiment rather straightforwardly leads to the use of emotional reasoning; developing viewpoints based on one's emotions and looking for pre-ordained conclusions, rather than being curious about a topic, or at the very least, engaging with contrary points of view or conflicting evidence. The authors

frame emotional reasoning as akin to cognitive distortion, a not-so-academic way of seeing the world in a light that aligns with what you believe, or want to believe. I should not have to elaborate further as to why emotion-based analyses are contradictory to academia. In sociology, as social scientists, we ought to use evidence and real-world data to formulate positions and theory. Lukianoff & Haidt further argue that blindly trusting one's own feelings over rational argument also produces a habit of "overgeneralization, dichotomous thinking, and simplistic labeling" (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:39). Lukianoff & Haidt unsurprisingly point out that this phenomenon is inherently contrary to "critical thinking," a concept universities were previously thought to encourage before the rise of "safetyism."

The third and final "Great Untruth" presented by Lukianoff & Haidt is "Life is a battle between good people and evil people." This belief is linked to the rise of moral polarization and identity-based interpretations of disagreement, something we see a great deal of in wider society as well. A relevant example can be found on the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA 2026) website as they advertise their upcoming conference: Harbours of Hope: Sociology in a Divided World, reinforcing perceived division and how to do sociology. One might interpret this conference as a call to heal an increasingly divided world, which is agreeable and likely true to an extent. However, there is a notable pattern of the CSA adopting left-liberal stances on political affairs. Also located on the CSA website is a list of their subcommittees. Most of these subcommittees are based on Canada's vast geography, serving as a representative for scholars across the country. However, it is impossible to ignore the more politically-charged ones. On the website, in reference to subcommittees, it states "Three additional elected members will hold cross-appointed positions on this subcommittee representing (and liaising between) the Black Caucus, Decolonization, Equity Issues, and Francophone Affairs Subcommittees" (CSA 2026).

Although likely well-intentioned, it raises the question as to whether formalized political stances push the discipline in a ‘desired direction’, or widen the growing ideological gap. Lukianoff & Haidt (2018) argue the framing of ‘right vs. wrong’ or ‘good vs. bad’ encourages a simplified moral worldview in which opposing perspectives are not merely wrong, but illegitimate or dangerous. According to the authors, student protests often construct a narrative about who is wrong or to blame, as well as what ought to be done; often unfairly demonizing or lionizing certain people or groups (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:53).

Lukianoff & Haidt provide two examples of student-led campus-based protests steeped in misplaced outrage stemming from moral polarization. The first example pertains to a student from Claremont McKenna College from 2015. The student was of Mexican descent, and sent an email to the dean regarding the lack of Latino representation on campus. The dean responded with an empathetic email, encouraging the student to meet with her to discuss a strategy to improve this. The last line of her email read: “They are important to me and the [dean of students] staff and we are working on how we can better serve students, especially those who don’t fit our CMC mold” (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:54). The student was outraged by the last two words: “CMC mold”. For reference, the “CMC mold” the dean referred was a concept meant to validate the student’s concerns by acknowledging the predominant demographic of students enrolled at Claremont McKenna College (CMC) at the time. The student spread the email around on social media, sparking a large-scale student protest to demand the resignation of the dean. Despite the dean apologizing for a “poorly worded” email, which, was intended to be sensitive and supportive, the protests endured in extreme fashion until she eventually resigned.

The second example pertained to another conflict stemming from an email, occurring simultaneously at Yale. Erika Christaskis was a lecturer at Yale in Early Childhood Education.

Christaskis wrote an email questioning if it was appropriate for Yale administrators to decide what Halloween costumes are ‘appropriate.’. She encouraged the use of free speech to talk to each other, as well as the importance of being able to tolerate offense in a free society. The result? Another massive student-led protest, eventually leading to Christaskis’ resignation. Lukianoff & Haidt use these examples to segway to their concerns surrounding identity politics and their relation to the aforementioned “Great Untruth” which frames the world in a dichotomous good vs. evil sense. The authors argue identity politics has been rapidly rising on college campuses, used to form “an effort to unite and mobilize multiple groups to fight against a common enemy” (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:62). In short, the authors are concerned with the academic identity politics of the political left, often reacting to provocations from the political right occurring primarily outside of academia.

Issues of polarization stemming from a surge in divisive rhetoric surrounding identity politics is not exclusive to America, permeating North of the boarder in Canada as well. Jordan Peterson, a Canadian psychologist and author, suffered severe social and professional backlash originating from his opposition to Canada’s Bill C-16 which compelled the use of gender pronouns; something Peterson argued to be a compromise to free speech. In *Erich Fromm and the Jordan Peterson Problem*, Neil Wegenschimmel and Neil McLaughlin (2024) discuss how psychoanalysis has become increasingly difficult in such a polarized political climate. The authors explain how the profession has adopted a left-liberal bias, akin to academia, in a rather authoritative manner. Peterson and his contentious perspectives are inappropriately categorized as inherently problematic, but the authors posit his criticisms of the field are symptomatic (Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin 2024). Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin (2024) argue his rise in popularity is reflective of the theoretical weakness within the field of psychoanalysis; that

weakness persisting in the form of authoritative left-liberal bias and aversion to reputational scrutiny. Erich Fromm, according to the authors, offers a potential remedy to the field's departure from individual healing, to society-wide healing. Fromm's commitment to viewpoint diversity, as well as his criticism of authoritarianism in any political direction, can serve as a promising framework. Fromm "was both aware of the dangers and committed to the therapeutic enterprise in conjunction with communicating psychoanalytic ideas to a mass audience and addressing himself to myriad left-wing political concerns" (Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin 2024:65).

Peterson's emphasis on individual responsibility is bracketed into the political right, while the political left focuses on structural influencers. Fromm's humanistic approach encourages intellectual pluralism by combining individual influencers with structural and historical factors (Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin 2024). Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin (2024) argue the insular position of modern psychoanalysis, one of politically-left bias, created the conditions necessary for Peterson to rise to such a grandiose level of fame. They are advocating for balance within the field, not a reversed tipping of the scales. "Psychoanalysis can only effectively engage in public dialogue in opposition to both left and right-wing authoritarianism" (Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin 2024:67). Although Fromm's approach to psychoanalysis, one which refutes authoritarianism in either direction and recognizes the interdependent relationship between individuality and structure, is only so effective. Much like Peterson, Fromm adopted several social roles such as political activist, scholar, celebrity, and even prophet. This served as both an advantage and detriment to the coherence of his approach (Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin 2024:67). The authors suggest a nuanced approach is needed, one that emphasizes transcendence from polarization and a pursuit of healing, rather than focusing on polarizing figures or ideas.

In a separate, but related, article Wegenschimmel and Neil McLaughlin (2024) explore Peterson in the context of Canada's political liberal-left stance and relative absence of far-right politics in comparison to other countries such as the USA, Germany, and France (Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin 2024). At the time of their writing, they note that there are 300 far-right extremist groups in Canada; some warranting immediate action and others reflecting overexaggeration (Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin 2024). The authors point out how Canada has produced 'far-right' figures, despite mainstream Canadian media leaning heavily to the left (Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin 2024). In a country known for a traditional liberal politics, with the predominant media outlets reflecting politically left prioritization, why are high-profile figures, such as Peterson, emerging and being ascribed the label of far-right? Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin (2024) argue it is ironically due to Canada's relative absence of a far-right political party; in conjunction with the rise of populist movements following the footsteps of Trump's success, as well as the utilization of online platforms to garner political-right support. Jordan Peterson, Ezra Levant, Lauren Southern, and the 2022 Freedom Convoy are, according to the authors, far-right examples which manifested due to Canada's notably weak right-wing party; pushing Canadian figures online and garnering international support, and appearing larger than they really are domestically due to online mediums of publicity and support (Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin 2024).

In a separate piece, Neil McLaughlin (2021) considers why Peterson's book, *Beyond Order: 12 More Rules for Life*, resonated so strongly with those disillusioned by contemporary progressive politics. McLaughlin argues that part of Peterson's widespread fame stems from the diverse roles he occupies intellectually: "political provocateur, academic researcher, and media entrepreneur, as well as a therapist, father figure, and spiritual leader" (McLaughlin 2021:447).

McLaughlin suggests Peterson's popularity is primarily a result of the combination of roles he occupies with his emphasis on personal responsibility, the essence of suffering, and order. Peterson encourages his readers to face their fears, challenges, and perceived dangers head-on (McLaughlin 2021); a stark contrast to Lukianoff's & Haidt's (2018) observation of 'safetyism' which emphasizes avoidance and sheltering from uncomfortable topics or situations. Peterson, according to McLaughlin, also garnered appeal through his "frailties and errors, alongside his creative successes that explain much of his appeal" (McLaughlin 2021:449). McLaughlin (2021) posits that Peterson is here to stay, intellectually speaking, but will have to adopt less-contradictory roles as support grows.

McLaughlin (2021) concludes with his own perspective on Peterson, one that challenges the pervasiveness of identity politics and the inability, or refusal, to dialogue about complex socio-political topics. McLaughlin argues "It is not true that Jordan Peterson is an alt-right figure, nor is he a "far-right favourite" (McLaughlin 2021:450) and is more of a centrist, despite ascribed labels of being far-right. Peterson's politics are complex, "Peterson is clearly anti-fascist, and he is critical of white nationalism, Nazism, and communism from a pro-market, capitalist perspective that opposes violence, authoritarianism, the suppression of political and free speech rights and statist tyranny of both the left and right" (McLaughlin 2021:450). McLaughlin does not imply Peterson does not possess politically-right sentiments, rather he argues Peterson's politics are too nuanced to be boxed into a narrow political paradigm. McLaughlin argues Peterson's impact is here to stay, including on academic campuses, which is not a bad thing. Simply stated, McLaughlin's "view is that we must dialogue with, debate, and engage with Peterson inside well-funded public institutions without engaging in polarizing personal attacks on him and his family" (McLaughlin 2021:452). However, it is clear that many

Canadian academic institutions do not share the same nuanced perspective as McLaughlin; identity politics continue to permeate and enhance division, while also falsely narrowing complex socio-political positions into extremist categories.

What is the rhetoric of identity politics on academic campuses that stem from this false dichotomy of the world being about good vs. evil? Typically, a push against the political-right, or “whiteness.” An example provided by Lukianoff & Haidt (2018) comes from a Latino student from Texas State University who wrote an opinion piece for the student newspaper titled “YOUR DNA IS AN ABOMINATION.” The essay brought up the problem of “whiteness,” a hidden source of privilege and racist power. In reference to this claim, the student wrote: “Ontologically speaking, white death will mean the liberation for all....Until then, remember this: I hate you because you shouldn’t exist. You are both the dominant apparatus on the planet and the void in which all other cultures, upon meeting you, die” (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:63-64). The backlash to this was severe, ultimately leading to the article being retracted and the writer fired. According to Lukianoff & Haidt, the student was calling for the cultural genocide of white people, rather than physical genocide. They claim this sentiment fits into Marxist approaches to socio-political analyses; stating the student “was using a set of terms and concepts that are common in some academic departments” and that such Marxist views perceive power to be held by one group over others, where moral polarity manifests as “groups seen as powerful are bad, while groups seen as oppressed are good” (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:64). At any rate, the authors argue that this false-dichotomy, or learned moral polarization, produces a “call-out culture in which almost anything one says or does could result in public shaming,” creating an us-versus-them mentality which is incompatible with “research missions of universities, which require free inquiry, dissent, evidence-based argument, and intellectual honesty” (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018:77).

I would argue that the polarizing stance academia has adopted over recent years produces extremist views similar to the one expressed in the Texas State Opinion piece previously discussed. By boxing out viewpoints which compete with the left-liberal lean of academia, students are not being exposed to holistic arguments that might reflect both left-liberal and right-conservative sentiments. At best, they are examining the most extreme conservative views so as to demonize them, framed as generalizable to the broader political-right spectrum. Subsequently, it is natural to view non-conforming viewpoints in academia as dangerous or hostile; reinforcing the mentality of ‘us versus them’ and ‘good versus evil’ and perpetuating aggressive campaigns of intellectual censorship or suppression.

Howard-Hassman & McLaughlin (2022) discuss the pitfalls of online petitions and open letters. The authors argue these apparatuses of dissent often inhibit good-faith discourse, often operating as a tool to enforce public shaming, cancel culture, and ultimately the erasure of complex viewpoints instead of academic debate. Instead of existing as a benevolent force, these petitions and letters reduce viewpoint diversity in academia; producing faculty-imposed, or self-imposed, censorship surrounding controversial topics (Howard-Hassman & McLaughlin 2022). They attribute this cancelling force to the growing “massive polarization in society and the new dominance of social media,” particularly within the last 5 years of the time of their writing (Howard-Hassman & McLaughlin 2022:464). The authors also recognize connection of this rise in intellectual suppression to Michael Burawoy’s (2005) scissor’s movement. Burawoy posited that “Over the last half century the political center of gravity of sociology has moved in a critical direction while the world it studies has moved in the opposite direction” (Burawoy 2005:6). As sociology drifts further to the political left, rates of conservatism in North America seem to be increasing. It is ironic that a discipline dedicated to studying society has displayed reluctance,

and I do dare say refusal in many cases, to engage with political viewpoints which represent the political perspectives of roughly half of North Americans.

The consequences of this trend, according to Haidt and Lukianoff (2018), include reduced tolerance for opposing viewpoints, increased polarization within academic communities, and weakened resilience when encountering intellectual or emotional discomfort. They further argue that these dynamics can unintentionally discourage viewpoint diversity, as students and faculty may self-censor or avoid controversial topics due to reputational or institutional risks, a sentiment also expressed by Howard-Hassman & McLaughlin (2022). Lukianoff & Haidt (2018) do not argue that universities are formally unified ideological institutions or that censorship is always explicit. Rather, they suggest that cultural incentives, social pressure, and administrative risk management can produce environments where dissenting perspectives are less likely to be expressed or seriously engaged with (Lukianoff & Haidt 2018). In this sense, the “echo chamber” effect is framed less as a coordinated ideology and more as an emergent property of institutional norms and psychological incentives.

This is an important distinction from Lukianoff & Haidt (2018), as it recognizes the potential for perceived ideological homogeneity in academia to emerge as a response to normative institutional practices. Neil Gross (2013) is even more skeptical of deliberately implemented pressures to conform in academia. Gross (2013) does not deny the left-liberal bias of academia, but he does offer a distinct explanation which is a departure from the previously discussed scholars. Gross argues that although the professoriate does lean disproportionately left, this is not the result of a concentrated effort to avoid non-politically-left viewpoints. Instead, he claims this disproportionate representation of the political-left stems from social perceptions of academia. According to Gross, over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, academia received the public

perception as a liberal-leaning institution; as a place inherently liberal (Gross 2013). Gross (2013) posits that this public perception generated a self-fulfilling prophecy, and individuals opting to pursue academic careers already possess liberal orientations when they enter academia (Gross 2013). This perspective implies that rather than deliberately pushing out politically-right viewpoints and pressuring scholars to conform, academia naturally attracts people from left-liberal orientations; subsequently influencing the normative structure of academic institutions. Despite his reasoning as to why, Gross (2013) still acknowledges that academia does in fact possess a considerably disproportionate degree of liberal perspectives. This also further pushes the primary purpose of my research: how do conservative Canadian sociologists navigate the discipline, especially in light of an identifiable preference for left-liberal perspectives?

As a solution to perceived academic bias, Lukianoff & Haidt propose reforms aimed at restoring intellectual pluralism and resilience. These include reaffirming norms of free expression, reducing overreliance on avoidance-based coping strategies, and encouraging exposure to challenging ideas as part of education. They also draw on cognitive behavioral therapy to suggest that students benefit from learning to reinterpret discomfort as an expected and manageable part of intellectual life rather than as evidence of harm. Taken together, the book presents a psychological and institutional account of why modern campus environments may be less conducive to open disagreement than in previous generations, and argues that restoring intellectual diversity requires both cultural and institutional change.

Lukianoff & Haidt's book should be a "must read" for serious academics and laymen alike; becoming more relevant with each passing year. My desire to explore the perspectives of conservative Canadian sociologists navigating the current discipline is derived directly from my own first-hand experiences and observations within the discipline as a conservative. My own

research serves more as an opportunity for other conservative Canadian sociologists to illuminate their own concerns and observations from within. I will say, however, that Lukianoff & Haidt's three "Great Untruths" are glaringly obvious in both academia and in the real world which sociologists are meant to study. Intellectual fragility is no doubt on the rise as it becomes increasingly difficult to voice a conservative perspective without being met with adverse hostility on most university campuses.

Dorothy Pawluch (2019), writing from a strict constructionist perspective rooted in Spector and Kitsuse (1977), emphasizes that sociologists of social problems should focus on claims-making processes rather than moral evaluation. According to social constructionism, the role of the sociologist is not to determine whether a condition is good or bad, but to examine how groups construct, as well as contest, social problems through discourse (Pawluch 2019:204). This approach aligns with Joseph Gusfield (1984), who similarly highlights the symbolic and political dimensions of social problems. Pawluch (2019) specifically reflects on the struggle to maintain neutrality in a discipline moving increasingly to the political left, pressuring constructionists to adopt the coveted social justice agenda. Pawluch, in true social constructionist form, does not explicitly state whether or not she believes the discipline's shift to liberal politics and social justice is good or bad, but simply that this cultural context of social justice agendas influencing scholarship and teaching is evident.

As previously mentioned, Pawluch argues that the role of a sociologist, or more specifically a social constructionist, is to focus on the definitional process of social problems, not advocate for a push in either direction (Pawluch 2019). Drawing from Spector & Kitsuse (1977), "sociologists of social problems ought to be studying not conditions, but the definitional processes that constitute social problems" (Pawluch 2019:204). Pawluch recognizes the difficulty

of achieving value neutrality, as all sociologists are in fact also members of society (Gusfield 1984). Nonetheless, Pawluch remains firm in her position of social constructionism and the importance of trying to understand others' definitional processes and claims without moral judgement, despite pressures to conform to a social justice agenda within academia.

Pawluch argues, and I would agree, that the discipline of sociology has narrowed to the point of almost exclusively discussing the topic of social inequality, particularly in relation to race, gender, and sexual orientation (Pawluch 2019). In my experience these topics are also only engaged with from a liberal lens, while conservative perspectives are seldom acknowledged unless they are used as a straw man to justify liberal perspectives. Pawluch discusses how the push for a social justice agenda seems to be entrenched throughout the discipline of sociology puts undue pressure on social constructionists to abandon their position of neutrality as they are accused of 'not doing enough' or being detached from reality (Pawluch 2019:206). While individual researchers surely have political biases, by striving to understand the perspectives of competing groups in their own terms, the less likely the personal biases will dominate. Hence, Pawluch tries to occupy a position of value-neutrality, yet claims to feel hostility and a pressure to conform to a more "critical" mode of scholarship. If a social scientist striving for neutrality is not spared liberal admonishment, how can we expect the treatment of conservative scholars to bode any better?

Pawluch posits the social justice telos permeating the sociological discipline is reflective of broader discussions surrounding the role of academia in contemporary society (Pawluch 2019). Scholars such as Jonathan Haidt and Jordan Peterson "have fueled a lively debate about the liberal bias on university campuses across North America, particularly in the social sciences and humanities" (Pawluch 2019:208). According to Pawluch, there is little

disagreement that ‘progressives’ (liberals) run academia, and according to critics the outcome “is that students are exposed to a limited range of political viewpoints on various social issues, and are not so much taught as indoctrinated in a liberal ideology” (p 208). Empirical studies of academic culture support these sentiments. Danny Michalski (2016) discussed ideological homogeneity within sociology, while Nakhaie & Brym (2011) examined how Canadian professors disproportionately identify with left-leaning political positions. These structural patterns help explain why certain perspectives may feel marginalized within academic spaces. Within the classroom, I have witnessed this phenomenon first-hand, to the point of normalization. Liberal perspectives are presented as progressive, benevolent, and humanitarian, whereas conservatives are presented as the source of social problems requiring vanquishing. This is a particularly concerning rhetoric to be pushing on young minds, many of which have not had an opportunity to learn about politics holistically. Lukianoff & Haidt (2018) argue that ideological imbalance in academia may limit viewpoint diversity and constrain open inquiry, particularly in the social sciences.

“Whether the politicization of university campuses is to be applauded or decried is not the question here. In the context of this discussion, its significance lies in the chilly climate that this politicization has created for anyone not on board with a social justice agenda.” (Pawluch 2019:208). Conservative scholars have expressed that academic life has become difficult, awkward, and unpleasant, particularly over the past decade (Steeves 2022). These observations and critiques mirror my own experiences navigating Canadian sociology. I have often felt uncomfortable sitting in classrooms where conservatives are posited to be these upper-class, disconnected, and uneducated fascists. Class discussions, assigned readings, and evaluative assignments began feeling like morality tests, designed to favour one particular mindset and

condemn ideas that challenge left-liberal ideology. In fact, I have noticed a significant variation in my grades throughout my academic career depending on whether or not I decide to ‘play the game’ and write to a standard of liberal bias, or if I express educated arguments grounded in my own authentic beliefs.

Kathleen Steeves was a former student of Dorothy Pawluch, often receiving guidance and much valued mentorship (Steeves 2021). Steeves reports on her own difficulties navigating the liberal field of sociology, particularly as a woman of faith and a symbolic interactionist. In her own experience, Steeves has noted that “work coming from perspectives that are not as left leaning politically or does not seek to advance any political agenda may be seen as less valued or legitimate” (Steeves 2021:188). Steeves makes references to Pawluch’s ‘chill’, as the discipline of sociology continues to narrowly converge on political leanings and agendas (Steeves 2021). Steeves also references Neil McLaughlin (2005) who states that the chill has a unique impact on academics from less left leaning political positions, as well as Dorothy Pawluch (2019) who points out it also negatively affects those who wish to separate their research from politics and social justice agendas (Steeves 2021). In simple terms, this ‘chill’ can be understood as academic environments which invoke feelings of not being welcome, fears of punishment, and self-censorship or managing one’s own stigma for not tightly aligning with the political left (Steeves 2021).

Within her own research, Steeves studied women who were living in highly traditional Christian communities. She did not seek to ‘emancipate’ these women, rather she sought to understand their lived experiences and shared meanings. As a result, Steeves “felt a sense of dissonance in sociology classrooms, conferences, and other scholarly environments where different agendas are preferred” (Steeves 2021:190), alluding to the social justice agenda.

If someone wants to change, or emancipate, a group or demographic, common sense would suggest that the target group should, at the very least, be holistically understood. There is no greater irony than ‘liberating’ a group that does not wish to be liberated. As “the discipline of Sociology has been narrowing its focus to issues of inequality and political claims making of its own” (Steeves 2021:190), it becomes increasingly difficult for symbolic interactionists (Steeves) and social constructionists (Pawluch) to navigate complex social conditions in a satisfactory light. I believe it is safe to claim such troubling patterns of intellectual conformity have only worsened in recent years. Steeves (2021) suggests that non-conforming sociologists, that is the ones who are not on board the social justice train, may feel the need to refrain from providing alternative perspectives in order to avoid stigma. Similarly, Pawluch (2019) also expressed concerns about stigmatization in relation to the social justice agenda present within contemporary sociology. Pawluch pointed out how social constructionists are often criticized for “not doing enough”; condemned for remaining impartial rather than promoting a particular cause or viewpoint.

This fear of stigma, or negative social and professional impacts, undoubtedly hinder the development, and dissemination of, diverse and insightful sociological knowledge and theory. Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan (2006) examined graduate student culture in sociology in Canada, exploring the structures and implications of the graduate student experience. The authors argue that authenticity is required to maximize innovation and creativity within the discipline of sociology (Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan 2006). While Feralles and Fine (2005) argue for the need to “present a false ‘front stage’ self” for individual advancement, adopting such a strategy as a normative course of action for the collective field can be “detrimental to the cultivation of scholarly culture” (Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan 2006:85). In clever fashion, the

authors suggest that Haas and Shaffir's 'cloak of competence' (1991) often translates into a 'cloak of conformity' (Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan 2006:85). In relation to Pawluch's (2019) 'chilly environment' produced by left-liberal bias in sociology, Steeves (2021) argues "some scholars may feel less welcome, more in danger of punishment or censure, and powerless in fully achieving authenticity while managing potentially stigmatizing identities or research agendas" (Steeves 2021:193). Steeves makes reference to one of her former professors who proudly proclaimed, "it is important to take children to church young, so they are inoculated against Christianity and don't want to go back", which was apparently accompanied by laughs and claps (Steeves 2021:193). I could provide a rather exhaustive account of similar statements and experiences I have endured as a Christian-conservative sociologist at the university. The intolerance of viewpoints which diverge from liberal rhetoric is hidden in plain sight, manifesting in socially acceptable mockery of dissenting views and beliefs, while simultaneously claiming to be righteous heroes of the social world. Steeves goes on to point out the more tangible impact of the 'chilly' academic environment, claiming she felt pressured to connect her own research to a more left-leaning approach in order to secure funding (Steeves 2021). If Steeves felt the pressure to conform as a promising PhD student, imagine the pressure placed upon young and inexperienced students. Public shaming, or 'cancel culture', can cause students to self-censor, limiting dialogue and suppressing alternative viewpoints (Steeves 2021).

Sociologist Scott Grills (1998) felt similar pressures to conform with his own PhD research on the Christian Heritage Party. Grills recalls how his research topic made some colleagues uneasy; leading to false assumptions about his personal beliefs and questions of credibility surrounding the topic itself. Grills recounts how some faculty assumed his own beliefs aligned with those of the group he was researching, while others implied he should take a more

critical stance against the group (Grills 1998). This pressure to align with a normative social justice approach reflects the same concerns argued by Pawluch (2019) who has felt pressured to adopt a partial stance rather than a neutral one, and Steeves (2022) who also felt coerced to adopt a critical stance in her own research regarding women in traditional Christian communities.

Steve Fuller (2000) advocates for the “right to be wrong”, condemning risk-averse science and shying away from contentious topics. Fuller discusses what he defines as an Authoritarian Theory of Knowledge (ATK); an academic paradigm which pressures students to conform to the beliefs and expectations of more esteemed scholars. Fuller (2000) argues that authentic knowledge cultivation under such a paradigm cannot flourish, and scholars ought to have the right to challenge normative perspectives and theories. Inversely, Fuller (2000) supports a Republican Theory of Knowledge (RTK) to support his aforementioned “right to be wrong”. A RTK paradigm involves open debates, exploration of alternative perspectives, encouragement of authentic knowledge cultivation, and the “right to be wrong”: the prerogative to make mistakes in the pursuit of knowledge. In relation to Pawluch’s (2019) ‘chilly climate’ for non-liberal thinkers, and Steeve’s (2021) identified pressures to conform, we see an academic environment more reflective of Fuller’s (2000) ATK or Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan’s (2006) cloak of conformity.

According to Steeves, “in an academic environment, understanding does not preclude disagreement, but might rather flavour the nature of how we disagree” (Steeves 2021:200). I thoroughly enjoy this quote, as it is representative of my own perspective. As a Christian and conservative navigating Canadian sociology, I have had plenty of exposure to liberal, as well as far-left, viewpoints in relation to complex socio-political topics. I do not lament this. In fact, I am quite appreciative of having had the opportunity to understand the

motivations and sentiments driving perspectives which may come into conflict with my own. By better understanding competing perspectives, I can more effectively defend my own positionality in intellectual debates or discourse. In an ironic manner, I feel as if my education has been strengthened; not by having my beliefs confirmed, rather by having them tested and scrutinized on a daily basis. Lukianoff & Haidt (2018) address the pitfalls of not engaging with perspectives which depart from the normative mold of contemporary sociology, pointing out how such an approach can weaken intellectual development and resilience. Just as a lack of engagement with diverse perspectives could lead to intellectual atrophy, challenging one's own beliefs in comparison to contradictory perspectives serves as an opportunity to either refine said perspectives, or adjust them to be more nuanced or holistic.

It is my opinion that pushing a politically left social justice agenda weakens, and ultimately discredits, the discipline of sociology due to a lack of holistic engagement with perspectives held by a large portion of society which sociologists ought to be studying. Coercing young, malleable students to conform to liberal rhetoric and ideology stifles opportunities to authentically cultivate sociologically rich knowledge. Max Weber (1919) warned about the blurring of academic and political lines. Weber argued “the qualities that make a man an excellent scholar and academic teacher are not the qualities that make him a leader to give directions in practical life or, more specifically, in politics” (Weber 1919:13). Weber (1919) describes students as a captive argument “condemned to silence”, explaining how the time for professors to do politics is not on stage in front of a constrained audience; rather out in the real world. He explains that professors ought to present students with different theoretical choices and paths, but to choose on behalf of their students turns the professor into a demagogue rather than a teacher (Weber 1919). Weber suggests teachers ought to resist “the desire personally to

impose upon or suggest to his audience his own stand” (Weber 1919:14), recognizing the profound influence someone in a position of power can have on an imposed audience.

If people in positions of power (professors) use their platform to impose their personal beliefs as objective truths, we produce Fuller’s (2002) ATK paradigm. According to Fuller, contemporary science already suffers from the existence of an “Authoritarian Theory of Knowledge” (ATK), reflected by the ever-present dynamic of power where “constant deference to the relevant experts is the norm, even in cases where this is not warranted.” (Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan 2006:93). Academic knowledge can thus be understood as hegemonic, where the few at the top determine the inquiries which shape the field. Success under an ATK paradigm requires a subscription to established norms and trends, a prevalent pattern in academia which promotes dogmatic conformity, which comes at the cost of innovation, creativity, and authenticity (Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan 2006).

To respond to these pressures, Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan (2006) emphasize the importance of cultivating the authentic self. The authors make mention of Marshall Berman (1970) who has argued “radical individualism associated with the increasing modernization of Western society serves to alienate the authentic self by suppressing it in the pursuit of upward mobility” (Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan 2006:87). Fuller’s (2000) Republican Theory of Knowledge, his concept encapsulating “the right to be wrong”, could serve as a far more productive and authentic paradigm to develop knowledge. Not simply allowing, but encouraging students to challenge dominant perspectives, present new ideas, or explore avoided topics could produce an environment of good-faith debates, sociologically-rich knowledge production, and the development and refinement of an authentic generation of scholars.

Ferrales & Fine (2005) discuss how at the graduate level, students must cultivate a favourable impression to win favour from the faculty and avoid potentially negative designations, or strained relationships. During social and political dialogues, I have felt a profound shift in tone from the class when expressing my own conservative viewpoints, and I have also experienced the ripple effects of being ‘outed’ as a Christian-conservative. An environment of conformity, or an echo chamber, does very little, if anything, to foster substantial intellectual growth. Existing theories go unchallenged, and complex socio-political topics are examined exclusively through a narrow lens which excludes alternative or dissenting, but equally legitimate, perspectives. “A discourse of oppositions contains the seeds for innovation and the maximizing of creative products of knowledge” (Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan 2006:94). It is through academic contestation and good-faith debates where existing theory is refined, and new knowledge is produced. In accordance with the authors, full agreement manifested via impression management does not offer any insight into existing topics or assist with knowledge advancement (Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan 2006). Indeed, Karl Popper (1963) argued long ago that scrutiny through diversity maximizes creativity and knowledge production. On the other hand, the impression management game encourages students to use academic environments as arenas for status-attainment, not authentic knowledge cultivation or intellectual exploration (Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan 2006).

The knee-jerk deference students express toward university professors should be enough to caution educators about the power imbalances existing within classrooms. No matter how benevolent or transparent a professor may be, they are still ultimately responsible for passing or failing students, and students are acutely aware of this (Ferrales & Fine 2005). Fuller’s concept of an ATK paradigm is manifest in the contemporary classrooms, warranting the

consideration of adopting a Republican Theory of Knowledge instead. I have yet to encounter other students who have spoken out against the liberal rhetoric often being promoted in sociological settings. Is this the result of legitimate agreement, dogmatic conformity, inexperience with the subject matter, or an effect of impression management and fear of dissent? Professors are going to have their own perspectives, but as Weber (1919) would argue; it is important to guide students toward various conceptual approaches, rather than impose a universal perspective or stance, especially in the realms of science or politics.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology, Limitations, and Method**

### **Grounded Theory: Roots, Principles, and Relevancy**

This research endeavour was created with the intent to gauge the attitudes and perspectives of conservative scholars in relation to their experience navigating Canadian sociology. The research project is intended to illuminate conservative viewpoints which are often lacking representation in mainstream Canadian sociology, while also providing participants with an opportunity to express their authentic perspectives without fear of social, or professional, backlash. As such, it was important to consider a methodology which could maximize participant autonomy while amplifying their voices, and also mesh with the research method. Grounded theory proved to be an attractive research approach as it emphasizes inductive practices intended to develop theory directly from data provided by participants, rather than test a pre-existing theory deductively. With grounded theory as a guiding research framework, the utilization of an in-depth qualitative survey instrument was selected to be the research method. By using grounded theory to shape the survey structure, I was able to ensure participants could comfortably express their authentic viewpoints in a safe and anonymous manner. Subsequently, the data provided by participants shaped the key findings and takeaways, empowering participants and forming nuanced theory shaped by lived-experiences of the target population.

Grounded theory was originally developed by Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss (1967), where the emphasis is on the generation, rather than verification, of theoretical ideas (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Unlike deductive research paradigms which seek to test or refute, existing theories in relation to the research, grounded theory operates under an inductive lens; allowing patterns within the data to generate theory organically. Often aligned with qualitative approaches to research, Glaser & Strauss posit that “Since accurate evidence is not so crucial for generating

theory, the kind of evidence, as well as the number of cases, is also not so crucial. A single case can indicate a general conceptual category or property; a few more cases can confirm the indication” (Glaser & Strauss 1967:30). Thus, the development of theoretical ideas starts from the very beginning of data collection in the research process, as the “constant comparative method” is used to work from data points to generate novel theoretical ideas.

“Grounded theory can be presented either as a well codified set of propositions or in a running theoretical discussion” (Glaser & Strauss 1967:32). What begins as rather flexible concepts are eventually refined through the development of participant data, yielding a more formalized theory. This rather flexible nature of grounded theory is adaptable enough to be useful across a diverse range of settings, and is particularly helpful for exploring and discovering new subcultural realities. As long as the researcher intends to derive information and theory directly from the analyzed data, grounded theory exists as an attractive guiding lens. Glaser & Strauss (1967) divide theories derived from grounded theory into two main categories: substantive and formal. Substantive theories, according to Glaser & Strauss, consist of flexible approaches to particular sociological research topics or settings, such as “patient care, race relations, professional education, delinquency, or research organizations” (Glaser & Strauss 1967:32). Formal theories possess a more well-defined conceptual nature that transcends the field site itself, and can then be applied across other research settings such as “stigma, deviant behavior, formal organization, socialization, status congruency, authority and power, reward systems, or social mobility” (Glaser & Strauss 1967:32).

Regardless of the kind of theory being produced, Glaser & Strauss emphasize the importance of developing these theories directly from the data, rather than trying to test out or apply existing theories obtained from the literature review. This way, researchers have the ability

to generate more original ideas that are not biased from the theoretical positions already established. Glaser & Strauss (1967) acknowledge the propensity for researchers to have a degree of bias, recognizing that most researchers approach topics with, at the very least, a semblance of preconceived notions. However, grounded theory operates under the pretense that researchers can compartmentalize their bias and stay true to the research findings by staying close to the data itself and exploring the natural patterns encountered through “the constant comparative method.” (Glaser & Strauss 1967:101).

According to Glaser & Strauss, a good theory produced by grounded theory involves both categories and properties. A category is a broad conceptual element, whereas a property is a component of said category (Glaser & Strauss 1967). To provide an example, I will briefly draw from my own research. Within the findings, you will find the category, or theme, of “Marginalized Perspectives and Areas of Contention”. Within this category are several properties, or subthemes, one of which being “Concerns surrounding transgenderism, specifically regarding children and athletes”. As per Glaser & Strauss, strong theories produced utilizing a grounded theory approach possess categories (themes) and properties (subthemes).

### **Contemporary Approaches to Grounded Theory**

Glaser & Strauss coined grounded theory methodology in 1967, but several more contemporary scholars have further refined the approach to better reflect current understandings of research processes. Kathy Charmaz (2014) emphasizes the value a constructionist approach to grounded theory offers when conducting qualitative research. Charmaz argues that grounded theory is not inherently neutral, rather it involves the use of reflexivity, interpretation, and critical analysis.

This is an important contrast to Glaser & Strauss' notion that grounded theory is objective, impartial, and purely reflective of the data alone. Charmaz argues that with constructivist grounded theory, data is co-constructed between researcher and participant; making a degree of interpretation necessary (Charmaz 2014). This change in conceptualization recognizes the potential for researchers to influence findings through their interpretations of data analysis, whether intentional or not. As such, researchers cannot be understood as neutral, "blank slates," as Glaser and Strauss (1967) might have assumed. As such, there is no need to delay a literature review, and researchers are encouraged to read widely and enrich their sociological imagination, making for more astute interpretations.

Despite the potential for researcher influence, Charmaz insists a constructionist grounded theory approach is highly valuable for critical inquiry, particularly topics pertaining to power, justice, and equality (Charmaz 2014). This holds particular relevancy for this research project as conservative perspectives in Canadian sociology occupy a minority position within the discipline, warranting the use of critical inquiry. Interestingly, Charmaz also warns researchers to avoid methodological individualism. Charmaz claims that focusing solely on how individuals conceptualize, or construct, their realities create the potential to overlook broader social influencers such as institutions, policies, history, and social structures (Charmaz 2014). Charmaz also recognizes the pragmatic roots of grounded theory, discussing the interdependent relationship between action and meaning, as well as recognizing people do have agency, but within structural constraints (Charmaz 2014).

In light of her constructionist approach to grounded theory, Charmaz encourages methodological self-consciousness, reflective of Sandra Harding's (1991) concept of strong reflexivity, and advocates for the ability to "interrogate how, when, and to what extent taken-for-

granted individualism shapes our assumptions and actions” (Charmaz 2017:37). The author also mentions that a significant number of “researchers write for the audiences with which they are most comfortable or with whom they can have a voice” (Charmaz 2017:37). I believe this to be an important statement in relation to my own research. Conservative viewpoints are seldomly recognized as valid intellectual standpoints in relation to Canadian sociology, subsequently making sociological research on the matter potentially contentious, or at the very least, uncomfortable and lacking in-depth exploration. As such, it is my belief that there is the existence of curious, well-intentioned researchers who have deliberately avoided topics related to conservatism within Canadian sociology, unless said research is designed to support existing theories or perspectives which align with the dominant socio-political norms of the discipline.

Puddephatt & McLuhan (2019) discuss the merit of applying Robert Prus’s (1987, 1996, 1997, 2010) generic social process framework to grounded theory, building from Charmaz’s more modern approach. Prus’s ‘Generic Social Process’ refers to a recurring pattern of human interactions spanning across multiple social contexts; adopting a ‘generic’ position as they are not inherently linked to a singular time or place (Prus 1987). Prus argues that ethnographic research should not stop at describing a particular group or setting. Rather, further considerations should be given to the general social processes occurring both within the observable study and beyond (Prus 1987). Prus insists such an approach makes findings more generalizable and useful, avoiding overly complex descriptions which lack theoretical relevancy. However, Prus’s concept of generic social processes has been heavily critiqued; being accused of lacking contemporary nuance, not as generalizable as implied, and neglecting issues of research reflexivity or lack thereof (Puddephatt & McLuhan 2019). Despite these criticisms, Puddephatt & McLuhan posit

that the search for “universal features of humanity” should not be entirely dismissed as outdated or incompatible with modern research goals (Puddephatt & McLuhan 2019:147).

Rather than dismissing generic social process entirely, Puddephatt and McLuhan suggest the concept is modernized to be applicable to constructivist grounded theory approaches. Instead of stating that generic social processes reveal universal “laws”, the authors suggest GSPs should be seen as historically and contextually situated, as well as open to postmodern critiques (Puddephatt & McLuhan 2019). This conceptualization of GSPs, according to the authors, can turn the concept into a useful tool for grounded theory research. Instead of heavily descriptive research bound to highly specific contexts, a modernized use of GSPs within grounded theory studies has the potential to produce formal theories which can shed light on broader social phenomena and systems of power at play (Puddephatt & McLuhan 2019). Like Charmaz (2014), Puddephatt and McLuhan (2019) agree that reading widely in the literature enables more creative and better thought-out categories within the GSP schema.

### **Why it Works: Employing a Grounded Theory Approach**

Grounded theory provides a logical research framework to utilize for this study. The essence of this research project was to provide conservative Canadian sociologists an opportunity to discuss their experiences navigating Canadian sociology in relation to their political affiliation.

Subsequently, the participants were providing the data first-hand, determining themselves what key themes would be raised and what might be most emphasized. As a conservative Canadian sociologist myself, I undoubtedly have my own preconceived notions of the state of Canadian sociology, as well as a good idea as to what the participants might provide in terms of data.

Further, my readings of contemporary critiques of the discipline (Haidt, Pawluch, Steeves) also informed my survey questions and how I interpreted some of the responses. Using a grounded theory approach allowed me to listen to the voices of other ‘conservative’ sociologists within the discipline, using plenty of open-ended questions to encourage longer, text-based descriptions of their experiences and perspectives. This means I designed the survey so as not to lead respondents, but rather to allow them to communicate their perspectives in their own words however they wished.

The survey itself had a total of 26 questions which participants could complete at their own leisure. The first 8 questions were multiple-choice and pertaining to demographic questions such as age, sex, role within Canadian sociology, citizenship status, ethnic background, first language, religion, and level of religiosity. The subsequent 10 questions were designed to understand how participants view the current state of Canadian sociology, as well as discover their perspectives relating to how conservative sentiments are navigated and represented within the discipline. These questions were created with a Likert scale to gauge agreement levels, with each question possessing an optional text-box for participants to elaborate or share related perspectives or experiences. For an example, some of the questions were: “Please rate how much you agree with the following statement: Conservative viewpoints are welcome in Canadian sociology”, “Please rate how much you agree with the following statement: Conservative viewpoints are accurately portrayed in Canadian sociology”, and “To what extent do you agree that Canadian sociology has a left-liberal bias?”. The 8 questions were entirely open-ended, asking participants to share first-hand experiences or viewpoints related to the research topic. These questions included asking what ‘conservatism’ meant to participants, how their political

affiliation shapes their sociological interests, experiences dialoguing with left-liberal colleagues, and more.

The general intent was to provide conservative Canadian sociologists with an opportunity to share their perspectives, and experiences, within contemporary sociology. More specifically, the survey questions were designed to address concerns surrounding the belief that Canadian sociology has adopted a politically left-liberal bias, and has pushed out dissenting intellectual arguments in favour of conformity. Although this research operates on the premise that there is a left-liberal bias, at least to some degree, the survey questions are not meant to 'lead' participants down a certain line of thinking. Instead, questions and agreement scales are created to reflect open exploration of the topic. This is done by having generalized agreement scales, with optional text-boxes to allow participants to provide elaboration, context, and insight regarding the question itself. Furthermore, the open-ended questions allow for tremendous flexibility, with the final question simply asking participants if they would like to share any further ideas, perspectives, or experiences not previously addressed. This style of survey maximizes participant autonomy by allowing them to provide additional context for every question (minus 8 demographic questions), complete the survey entirely anonymously, and provide first-hand perspectives which might not fit neatly under the scope of individual questions. Subsequently, the data provided by participants was used to shape the key findings and themes in a largely inductive fashion. To see the complete breakdown of the survey, please refer to APPENDIX (1).

Due to the contested and political nature of my inquiry, I believed it vital to provide an opportunity for participants to be able to discuss what was most important to them. I did not want to impose my own political beliefs, or lead the respondents in any way. That said, previously discussed modern approaches to grounded theory suggest that research questions do not arise

from nowhere, and researchers must employ reflexivity throughout the data analysis, and make use of theoretical and substantive ideas while interpreting data. Nevertheless, the intention was to provide as much power to the participants as possible, allowing their responses to shape the themes influencing the potential to develop formal theory. In fact, I was quite surprised at my most prominent theme: most participants did not explicitly identify as politically conservative despite the eligibility criteria clearly stating participants must “Identify as politically conservative (however this makes sense to you)”. In retrospect, the “however this makes sense to you” line opened the doors to participants I had not anticipated and who, to my surprise, provided incredibly relevant and insightful responses. I am of the opinion that part of the beauty of grounded theory research is that you are exposed to new ideas, patterns, and points of interest that would otherwise be overlooked in a more deductive approach.

Many of the themes prominent within the data include stigma, social persecution, professional strain, and social condemnation. The research builds off substantive theory relating to how Canadian sociologists with conservative sympathies navigate the current discipline which has displayed a politically left-liberal bias. From a formal theory standpoint, this research further explores themes of stigmatized viewpoints, acceptable rhetoric within the discipline, and impression management in terms of concealing political affiliations, or sentiments, not confirmative to the left-liberal mold of Canadian sociology.

As discussed, many of the questions included in the survey were explicitly designed to elicit open-ended responses to generate qualitatively rich data. Subsequently, a wide variety of perspectives, sentiments, and concerns were provided by participants. For example, the category, or theme, of “Marginalized Perspectives and Areas of Contention” contains several properties, or subthemes, such as concerns surrounding transgenderism in relation to children and athletes,

condemnation of antisemitism and anti-Israel rhetoric, and the importance of not discounting the influence of individual agency, as well as the pitfalls of EDI/DEI. The proponents, or subthemes, are elements of the broader category or theme. Each major category presented, as well as the interconnected properties, were developed exclusively through the data provided by participants.

Finally, the use of comparative analysis persisted throughout the research. Throughout the data analysis, I was constantly comparing themes, categories, and properties in the search for wider theoretical patterns that might be at work. My final list of categories appeared dramatically different compared to the original list of categories, as participant responses continued to shape these categories and properties in a rather fluid manner. As I worked through each participant's response, and as more participants trickled into the study sporadically, I had to adopt my themes and subthemes to reflect the data being provided by participants. Colour-coding served as an invaluable technique to keep ideas and perspectives organized, but even the colours utilized adopted different meanings as the analysis progressed.

### **Ethics and Participant Recruitment**

This research project was ethically approved by Lakehead University's Research Ethics Board (REB Approval Number: 1471361). As such, all material intended to come into contact with participants had to be approved prior to dissemination. The REB-approved information letter, consent form, and email template can be found in APPENDIX 2, 3, and 4 respectively. As seen in APPENDIX 4, an REB-approved email was sent out to 45 sociology departments across Canada; requesting their assistance in disseminating the research invitation throughout their department. The 45 universities contacted were selected from an online Google search listing all

known universities in Canada with a sociology department. Once I had a list compiled, I went to each university website to acquire contact information for the department head, as well as related administrative staff. Only Canadian universities with a sociology department, and online contact options (email), were contacted.

As seen in APPENDIX 2, 3, and 4; sociology department heads, and related admin, were kindly asked to disseminate the research invitation throughout their department. The information letter (APPENDIX 3) outlined the requirements to be eligible to participate; including being at least 18 years of age and identifying as politically conservative. The survey link was placed at the end of the consent letter, ensuring participants had to go through the document prior to completing the research instrument. As seen in APPENDIX 3, the consent letter very clearly states that participation is entirely voluntary and anonymous. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey, the consent letter explains that by proceeding to the survey the participant consents to the listed conditions. The study only had one participant self-reference their affiliated academic institution, and that information was not included in the findings to ensure anonymity.

Additionally, the 45 Canadian sociology departments were contacted in early December. The inopportune timing was not lost on me, fully recognizing the busy time of the year preceding the Christmas break. Subsequently, I sent a gentle follow up to all the sociology departments I had previously contacted. This follow up was sent out near the end of January, trying to account for unaddressed holiday emails and workloads. See APPENDIX 5 for the follow up.

## **Limitations**

This study encountered several methodological limitations related to recruitment, sample composition, and the interpretation of politically sensitive qualitative data. These limitations are important not only for understanding the scope of the findings, but also for situating the research within the broader institutional context in which it was conducted. Following ethics approval, the plan to disseminate the research survey appeared relatively straightforward: to contact sociology department chairs across Canada and request their assistance in circulating the survey among their faculty and affiliated members. However, as discussed in the literature review, individuals who identify with conservative perspectives occupy a minority position within Canadian sociology. This reality introduces an immediate complication: many individuals who hold such perspectives may not openly identify as such, particularly within professional or institutional settings. In this sense, the study was not simply attempting to recruit participants, but to reach a population that may, by necessity or choice, remain partially concealed.

As aforementioned, a total of 45 sociology departments across Canada were contacted. I reached out to sociology department chairs and related administrative assistants to request assistance in disseminating my survey throughout their [TP1.1] departments. This approach was designed to account for variation in departmental structures and communication pathways, while maximizing the potential for survey dissemination. Of the 45 departments contacted, 18 responses were received. Of these, 11 indicated willingness to disseminate the survey, while 7 declined or expressed reservations. The remaining 26 departments, representing 58% of those contacted, did not respond. While it is not possible to determine the precise reasons for non-response or refusal, the pattern itself is difficult to overlook. At a practical level, it indicates that access to this population is not straightforward. At a more interpretive level, it raises the

possibility that the topic itself, conservative perspectives within sociology, may be perceived as sensitive, uncomfortable, or institutionally undesirable.

This limitation therefore operates on two levels. First, it represents a barrier to recruitment, shaping both the size and composition of the final sample. Second, it offers indirect insight into the broader disciplinary environment in which the research is situated. The difficulty of accessing participants may itself reflect the conditions under which certain perspectives are expressed, negotiated, or withheld within academic contexts. The nature of some responses further reinforces this point. While many departments responded in a neutral or supportive manner, others appeared cautious or hesitant in their engagement. This caution did not always take the form of explicit refusal, but was evident in the framing of responses, the conditions attached to participation, or the absence of follow-up communication. While it would be inappropriate to draw definitive conclusions from these responses alone, they contribute to a broader pattern that is relevant to the study's focus. There is also reason to potentially be concerned with gatekeeping, as several replies implied a reluctance to be connected to the research project in any capacity, even if that only meant forwarding a survey invitation.

It is necessary to clarify I am not implying that deliberate gatekeeping accounts for the entirety of non-responses. As mentioned, the busy time of year surely influenced the first round of contact. There are also many other possible explanations such as administrative oversight, department policies, and concerns surrounding distributing external research. This reality is not lost on me, however, the seven negative replies certainly insinuated deliberate gatekeeping to be a legitimate concern. Of these 7 refusals, 3 were quite adversarial; expressing negative perspectives directed at conservatism in general. Although it is impossible to determine the specific reason for every non-response, or refusal, one should not discount the possibility of a

concentrated reluctance to engage with politically-right research in the ideologically hegemonic climate of Canadian sociology as discussed within the literature review.

The sample ultimately consisted of 13 participants. While this is a relatively small sample, the study is qualitative in nature and is designed to prioritize depth of insight over breadth of representation. The goal is not to produce generalizable findings, but to explore a set of experiences that are not widely documented in existing literature. The findings should therefore be interpreted as exploratory, while still recognizing the consistency that emerges across participant responses.

At the same time, the size and composition of the sample introduce important limitations. The sample is relatively homogeneous and is weighted toward mid-to-late-career academics. This raises questions about whose perspectives are represented and whose may be absent. Individuals earlier in their careers, or those in more precarious institutional positions, may be less likely to participate in research on politically sensitive topics. As such, the findings may reflect the perspectives of those who are, to some extent, more secure in their professional standing.

Political affiliation within the study was self-reported. Participants were asked to identify as politically conservative or aligned with conservative perspectives. However, as the findings will demonstrate, this is not a straightforward classification. Several participants explicitly rejected identification as conservative in a broader societal sense, yet still experienced their views as “conservative” relative to the discipline. This complicates categorical distinctions and highlights the importance of understanding political identity as relational and context-dependent.

Finally, the study relies on self-reported qualitative data. While this allows for rich and detailed accounts of participants’ experiences, it also introduces the possibility of bias, including

selective recall, interpretation, and the influence of personal experiences. At the same time, this subjectivity is central to the research itself. The study is concerned not only with what participants believe, but with how they experience those beliefs within a particular disciplinary context.

### **Method – Survey: Why it Works and the Connection to a Grounded Theory Approach**

Surveys can adopt a wide variety of formats and styles, ranging from an efficient quantitative tool for large sample sizes to a highly effective qualitative instrument designed to elicit in-depth responses from smaller participant pools (Braun, Clarke, Boulton, Davey, & McEvoy 2021). The questions employed within the survey instrument were designed to elicit in-depth qualitative responses, combining Likert scale questions with optional text boxes to elaborate and open-ended inquiries. The survey was disseminated by contacting Canadian sociology department heads, and related admin, requesting the consent and information letters to be forwarded to members of the department.

Although surveys are largely understood to be a useful research tool, “the rich potential qualitative data can offer is often not realized” (Braun et al. 2021:641). Exclusively qualitative surveys are seldom employed, but these can elicit qualitatively rich data while they also “prioritize qualitative research values alongside qualitative techniques” (p 641). The key attribute of a qualitative survey is the use of open-ended questions, allowing participants to answer questions in a variety of ways while producing qualitative data. These qualitative responses can include “subjective experiences, narratives, practices, positionings, and discourses” (p 641). According to Braun et al., qualitative surveys can also allow participants to guide the research

toward what they find to be particularly important, while also gaining insight to participant language, attitudes, and perspectives.

Despite the potential for surveys to produce in-depth qualitative data, the research instrument is often overlooked in qualitative research in favour of interviews (Braun et al. 2021). In her writing on mixed methods, Lisa Pearce (2012) discusses the value of surveys within qualitative research. Pearce argues that the utilization of surveys supports more mainstream approaches to qualitative research, such as interviews, and can provide insight into lived experiences and contextual interpretations. Pearce's main argument is that surveys can support qualitative research and are not inherently incompatible. Additionally, contemporary scholars have discussed how online surveys offer the potential for qualitatively-rich data, while often being subjected to unnecessary skepticism and underutilization (Thomas, Pitt, McCarthy, Arnot, & Hennessey 2024). Thomas et al. (2024) argue that qualitatively-rich data can be produced when surveys are designed to prioritize open-ended questions, reflexive analysis, and allow participants to express their own perspectives and meanings. The authors also argue that surveys, particularly online ones, reduce barriers to participation, can empower participants via a heightened sense of autonomy, and have the potential to produce themes more applicable to broader populations (Thomas et al. 2024). I would also add that surveys offer the benefit for respondents to remain entirely anonymous, allowing for more authentic answers, especially on contentious points of interest. Additionally, and as mentioned by Thomas et al. (2024), surveys provide greater participant autonomy, allowing participants to complete the survey on their own time and decide which questions they answer. The open-ended nature of the questions ensures that respondents determine the issues that are most relevant to them, subsequently empowering them. Despite these inherent advantages, poorly designed surveys are at risk of producing

surface-level data, and may limit how much information participants are willing to provide without a direct probe from an interviewer (Braun et al. 2021).

The survey method was a logical research tool to employ for this study. There were four primary driving forces which led to the decision of utilizing a survey for the method of data collection: geography, time, anonymity, and participation. This study sought to understand the experiences of conservative sociologists navigating Canadian disciplines across the country. In-person interviews were not economically feasible, as this would require myself, or participants, to travel across the country. An online survey could realistically be disseminated to any part of Canada possessing the internet, making it cost effective and accessible. However, one could argue instead for the use of online or telephone interviews. This is where time became a factor. Rather than connecting with each potential participant, scheduling an interview date, administering the interview, and transcribing the data; a survey would allow participants to complete the data collection component at their own leisure, while simultaneously allowing me to allocate more time to understanding their response. Additionally, the added layer of anonymity present in the survey route felt like a major advantage for this topic. If conservative perspectives are increasingly condemned in Canadian sociology, it may cause potential concern for participants to participate. With an anonymous data collection medium, participants not only have the benefit of feeling safe while participating, they are also likely more at ease to provide raw, authentic responses they might otherwise suppress, or soften, in a face-to-face or virtual interview.

The geographic and temporal benefits, as well as the added advantage of anonymity, led me to select a survey tool as the method of data collection to maximize participation. Ultimately, regardless of the research medium, my goal was to hear from as many conservative Canadian

sociologists as possible. However, this proved to be quite challenging, which is reflective of the notably low number of participants. Conservative sociologists in Canada were anticipated to be a relatively small sample size to draw from, but there was the unforeseen challenge of gatekeeping, which is discussed in greater detail within the limitations section. Although I cannot make a fully conclusive statement, I suspect several departments ignored, or refused to assist, my research request due to personal aversion to the research topic. I received several negative email responses, some outright refusing to assist in anyway and taking jabs at conservatism and related viewpoints. Despite a relatively low number of total participants, the data provided by participants was qualitatively rich and allowed for the emergence of interesting themes.

As per Braun et al. (2021), a good qualitative survey ought to be designed in a way that elicits in-depth participant responses, primarily through the use of open-ended questions. For my survey, I used a variety of questions in order to keep a broad scope which both accurately described participants, while allowing them to guide the dominant narratives, themes, and theories. This was done by employing Likert scales to measure levels of agreement relating to statements about Canadian sociology, while also providing an optional space for participants to elaborate or explain their responses via text boxes. There were also open-ended questions, designed to allow participants to share as much relevant information as they desired. As an example, some of the open-ended questions were “What does being a conservative mean to you? How would you describe your core political beliefs and values?”, “How, if at all, do your conservative values shape your sociological interests in unique ways?”, and “In the context of sociology, were there ever situations where you felt you were treated unfairly, or met with hostility, due to your perspectives related to your political affiliation? If so, please provide an example”. The final question served as an opportunity for participants to share anything they felt

was important that might not have been covered in the survey. Please see (APPENDIX 1) for a complete view of the survey.

The survey implemented was designed to elicit in-depth responses related to how conservative Canadian sociologists have experienced the contemporary discipline of sociology first-hand. Additionally, questions were designed to guide participants toward specific topics related to the research question, while simultaneously granting participants the autonomy to decide what, or how much, to share. I cannot emphasize enough the added value of absolute anonymity. Participants overwhelmingly pointed out the difficulty surrounding raising conservative perspectives, many fearing social, and even professional, persecution. Without having an established rapport with myself, the researcher, I am hesitant to believe I could have been fortunate enough to receive such authentic and thoughtful responses if anonymity was not guaranteed.

## **Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion**

This chapter presents the findings of the study based on qualitative responses from 13 participants. With the exception of demographic questions, the survey consisted primarily of open-ended questions, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives in their own words. This approach generated responses that were both detailed and, at times, notably candid. The analysis follows a thematic structure informed by grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Charmaz 2014), allowing key themes to emerge inductively from the data rather than being imposed in advance. While participants were varied in their individual experiences and viewpoints, there was a striking degree of consistency in how they described their positioning within Canadian sociology. Three primary themes were identified:

- 1. Contextual Conservatism and the Relativity of Political Identity**
- 2. Marginalized Perspectives and Areas of Contention**
  - a. Gender/Biology**
  - b. Israel-Palestine/Antisemitism**
  - c. Pitfalls of DEI/Importance of individual agency**
- 3. Perceived Ideological Homogeneity and Self-Censorship**
  - a. Experiencing intolerance for conservative viewpoints**
  - b. Misrepresentation of conservative perspectives**

These themes reflect not only what participants believe, but how those beliefs are shaped, interpreted, and, at times, managed within the discipline of Canadian sociology.

### **Demographics**

Of the 13 participants, 5 were full-time professors, 4 were associate professors, 1 was a doctoral student, and 1 identified as a non-academic employee. The majority of participants were male and between the ages of 45 and 54. Most identified as White and reported English as their first language. Religious affiliation varied, though most participants reported low levels of religiosity, with several identifying as atheist or non-religious. While religion was not a central focus of the study, it provides additional context for understanding participants' broader social positioning. The sample is therefore relatively homogeneous and skewed toward mid-to-late-career academics. This is not incidental. Several responses suggest that institutional position or status, particularly tenure, plays a significant role in shaping comfort with expressing politically sensitive views. Participants who are more established in their careers may experience greater freedom to articulate dissenting perspectives, while those in more precarious positions may be more cautious. This dynamic becomes more apparent in later sections of the analysis, particularly in relation to self-censorship and professional risk.

### **Theme 1: Contextual Conservatism and the Relativity of Political Identity**

One of the most consistent and, in many ways unexpected, findings of this study is the distinction participants draw between their political identity in a broader societal context and their positioning within Canadian sociology. Many participants explicitly rejected identification

as politically conservative in a traditional, mainstream sense. For example, one respondent stated: *“I can't think of any of my views/opinions/beliefs/etc that would qualify as socially conservative to the average person.”* Despite this, the same participant acknowledged that within academic contexts, some of those views had nonetheless been labeled as conservative. This pattern appears repeatedly across responses. Another participant noted: *“Most socially conservative views are repellent to me.”* Yet, like others, they still experienced their perspectives as being interpreted as relatively conservative within the discipline. These responses point to a recurring dynamic: many of the participants do not necessarily identify as conservative in a conventional sense, but become positioned that way relative to the dominant discourse within Canadian sociology. This suggests that “conservative” in an academic context does not operate as a fixed ideological category. Instead, it functions as a relative designation, one that is shaped by the surrounding environment and the boundaries of acceptable discourse within it. This relativity is captured clearly by a participant who explained: *“I am only socially conservative because what counts as ‘conservative’ has shifted.”*

This statement reflects a broader pattern across responses: the idea that political labels are not stable, but instead move in relation to the perceived center of the discipline. When that center shifts, positions that might otherwise be considered moderate can take on a different meaning. Several participants described themselves as politically liberal or centrist, yet still experienced marginalization within sociological discourse. One participant explained:

*“I would rate myself as left of center, but this seems to be defined as too “liberal” and not critical enough to promote real social change. So I don't want to announce myself as conservative*

*because (1) it is not entirely true, I am more left than this; and (2) I fear being labelled and pigeon-holed by my more critically oriented colleagues.”*

Another participant added:

*“Many of my views on taxation, for example, would probably be more accurately described as classical liberalism. But in the context of the university system, that seems to be considered quite conservative these days.”*

Put quite simply by a respondent: *“I am a slightly conservative sociologist, but I am politically Liberal”*

This suggests that the boundaries of acceptable discourse may be narrower than participants expect, particularly for those who do not fully align with dominant perspectives.

Another participant described their political orientation as situational rather than fixed:

*“I don't vote based on a party, I vote based on context... I do have some conservative opinions”*

This might be reflective of the fact that conservatism is a spectrum; it is hard to imagine someone not having at least some conservative sentiments, for example, in preserving certain aspects of their cultural and institutional order. Liberals might take on conservative positions occasionally, and vice versa, depending on the particular issue at hand. In the context of academia, one participant added:

*“While I generally identify as a person with socially liberal attitudes, there are several key issues for me that I feel are pushing me out of liberal spaces because the stance being struck*

*inherently prioritizes the interests of one (or some) groups over others rather than striving for genuine equity.”*

An insight provided by an additional participant:

*“I think that "liberal" viewpoints have come to be the label put on what I would actually consider very radical viewpoints (e.g., defunding policing) and I take issue with being pushed out of a liberal designation because of how it has been redefined.”*

This reflects a broader theme in which participants resist rigid political categorization, instead emphasizing nuance, context, and issue-based reasoning. However, this nuance does not always translate clearly within academic environments, where labels may be applied more broadly or more quickly than participants feel is warranted. Participants also expressed hesitation in adopting the label “conservative,” even when acknowledging that some of their views might be interpreted that way. This hesitation was often tied to concerns about how the label would be understood by others. In some cases, participants described the label as carrying assumptions that did not align with their actual beliefs. In fact, many participants defined conservatism in relation to Canadian sociology, suggesting Canadian sociological conservatism is closely linked to a centrist position. When asked what conservatism meant to the participant, one respondent mentioned: *“I consider conservatism in Cnd sociology as a centrist position.”* As stated by another participant when asked about contemporary conservative sociologists in Canadian academia:

*“I think the "social constructionist" wings of the discipline might be deemed conservative leaning, since they try to maintain a neutral view and avoid getting pulled into political sides.”*

In reference to having concerns about ‘gender politics’, one participant indicated they had been labelled as both a centrist, and a conservative, conflating the two distinct positionalities into one:

*“I have similar mixed views on what could be called "gender pronoun politics" that have resulted in academic colleagues calling me "centrist" or "conservative.””*

When asked whether or not conservative viewpoints are welcome in Canadian sociology, one participant further alluded to the perceived conflation of centrism and conservatism:

*“Depends on what is meant by conservative. I publish many center-right arguments. I always have to qualify, however, in a way that left sociologists do not.”*

When answering a question pertaining to the political climate of Canadian sociology and perceived levels of acceptance for conservative viewpoints, another participant pointed out the middle-range position for conservatism when discussed in the context of Canadian sociology:

*“At conference venues, I do not see the same frequency of presentational choice for middle-range exploration as I see for social justice issues.”*

Taken together, these findings suggest that political identity within Canadian sociology is not simply a matter of personal belief. It is shaped by context, interpretation, and the boundaries of acceptable discourse within the discipline. “Conservative,” in this setting, appears to function less as a self-defined identity and more as a relational category; one that emerges through contrast with perceived disciplinary norms. This has important implications. It suggests that the experience of being “conservative” within sociology may not be defined by adherence to a

specific set of beliefs, but by one's position relative to the dominant ideological framework of the discipline. In this sense, political identity becomes something that is not only held, but assigned, negotiated, and, at times, resisted.

This interpretation of conservatism within a sociological context is a notable departure from previously discussed sociologists who displayed more 'traditional' applications of conservative sentiments within their work and theories. Hobbes (1651) and Burke (1790), for example, both emphasize the importance of a strong government, a sentiment later reflected by Scruton (1980) and Nisbet (1986). However, the participants displayed very little concern for the state of Canada's government overall, focusing on conservatism in a strict sociological context. Functionalism, a sociological approach reflective of conservative sentiments in its inherent value placed on traditional institutions, also persisted as a prominent socio-analysis in sociology; emphasized by notable sociologists such as Durkheim (1893) and Parsons (1951). However, in a somewhat ironic sense, participants often accused the left-liberal discipline as focusing too heavily on structural influencers; often advocating for a resurgence in recognizing the influence of individual agency. Although seemingly paradoxical, this is not overly shocking considering participants were discussing concerns specifically pertaining to Canadian sociology. That said, it is significant to recognize how narrow the scope of conservatism becomes when boxed out of broader disciplinary discourse. Participants are having to 'start over' in a sense when it comes to politically-right discourse, as functionalism appears to have been co-opted and reimagined by the political left as structural constraints; and individual agency has seemingly been dismissed to the point of erasure.

In a sociological context, participants seldom emphasize core conservative attributes promoted by esteemed conservative thinkers: strong governance (Hobbes 1651, Burke 1790,

Scruton 1980), importance of traditional social institutions (Burke 1790, Tocqueville 1835, Durkheim 1893, Parsons 1951, Scruton 1980, Nisbett 1986), and social cohesion produced through shared beliefs stemming from religion (Hobbes 1651, Burke 1790, Tocqueville 1835, Durkheim 1893, Scruton 1980). In relation to participant-identified political positionality, this makes sense. Most participants make it quite clear that their conservative sympathies are contextually bound, and outside of sociology they no longer view themselves as ‘conservative’. The contextual nature of political identity, particularly within Canadian sociology, warrants further exploration in order to determine just how flexible political terminology is; and what the implications of political fluidity within academia might be.

## **Theme 2: Marginalized Perspectives and Areas of Contention**

A second major theme that emerged from the data relates to specific topic areas where participants perceived normative limitations on open engagement with conservative perspectives and ideas. These were not simply areas of disagreement, but areas where participants felt that certain perspectives, particularly those interpreted as more conservative, were difficult to express, qualify, or explore without risk of negative consequences. Across responses, participants did not frame these topics as inherently controversial. Rather, they were described as areas where the conditions of discussion appeared particularly constrained. In other words, it was not disagreement that was being highlighted, but the perceived limits on how disagreement could be expressed. Several clusters of concern emerged consistently across participants, which I group here as: (1) gender/biology, (2) the Israel-Palestine/antisemitism, and (3) pitfalls of DEI/importance of individual agency.

Discussions surrounding gender, particularly in relation to transgender issues, were among the most frequently identified areas of tension. Importantly, participants were deliberate in clarifying that their concerns were not rooted in opposition to transgender individuals themselves. Instead, they described difficulty engaging in discussions that involved progressive nuance, competing interests, or policy-specific considerations. One participant articulated this balance directly:

*“I support the right of all people to live their lives adopting the gender identity that they wish... but there is a point in which promoting one group’s interests starts to compromise the interests of others and, for me, that point has been hit at the inclusion of trans-women in elite sports.”*

This suggests that the challenge is not simply disagreement, but the perception that some issues are framed in ways that limit the range of acceptable engagement. Closely connected to this was the perception that certain distinctions, such as those between adult and youth contexts, or between rights and policy implications, are difficult to discuss openly. Participants described a tension between supporting individuals and raising questions about broader implications, particularly in institutional or policy settings. Another participant explained:

*I do think more caution is needed with teenagers getting ‘gender-affirming surgeries.’ It’s not that I’m against such surgeries, and I think that respecting trans people is important, but I don’t think teenagers should be making such life and body-altering decisions at such a young age.*

When asked how many peers or colleagues in the discipline are conservative, one participant mentioned the clandestine conservative conversations that are had in private, never public:

*“I do hear whispered arguments about trans-athletes... whether trans kids should be able to undergo surgery prior to 18.”*

A related, but distinct, concern involved what several participants described as a reluctance within sociology to engage with biological explanations of social behaviour. While the discipline has historically emphasized social constructionism, relativism, and progressive thought, participants suggested that, in practice, biological perspectives may be treated with heightened skepticism or discomfort. One participant described this directly:

*“Sociology still suffers from bio-phobia and it will be the downfall of the discipline. This matters because identifying biological explanations strikes sociologists as “conservative” and “discriminatory” because to them, everything is “social” (as if the two were separate).”*

Another respondent added: *“I do not think that it makes sense to throw “gender” out as a meaningless concept that is unrelated to biology.”* Additionally: *“...there is a very irrational turn against all that is biological”*

The issue, however, is not just passive dismissal of biological explanations or influence. The issue appears to be an absolute rejection of biological discussions behind human behaviour within Canadian sociology. One participant recalled their own experiences with this issue, stating: *“Acknowledge the significance of biology in the field of deviance or criminology, and watch how fast students call you names online.”*

A statement provided by a participant which alludes to the dismissal of biology in favour of structural explanations:

*“I believe this is because “narratives” and “voices” are much easier to spin than hard social science results, in terms of actual statistics and myth-busting evidence. Those who are afraid of the truth are not interested in methods to achieve truth. Those who push politics as the goal want the most laissez-faire methods possible, so as not to constrain the political mission.”*

These responses do not suggest a rejection of sociological approaches. Rather, they point to a perceived imbalance in the range of acceptable explanatory frameworks. Participants described situations in which incorporating biological considerations could be interpreted as aligning with particular political positions, regardless of intent. This highlights an important theme: the perceived relationship between ideas and identity. Participants described how engaging with certain types of explanation could lead to broader assumptions about their political orientation. Taken together, these responses suggest that debates about methodology and explanation may be intertwined with broader perceptions of ideological alignment. As a result, what might otherwise be considered an analytical choice becomes socially and politically charged.

The perceived incompatibility between biology and sociology noted by participants is a false dichotomy, as there has been some notable sociological works produced in relation to the topic of biology. As an example, Jonathan Turner (2002, 2005) discusses the linkage between interpersonal interactions and emotions with biological hardwiring; exploring how human biology influences our emotions, and subsequent decisions, and vice-versa. Additionally, Steven Pinker's (2003) *The Blank Slate* explores the essence of human nature. Pinker argues that human nature is a real biological concept, our social institutions, norms, and inequalities are forged upon patterns of human behaviour and desire steeped in biological influence. Although far less common in contemporary sociology, arguably non-existent, the blending of sociology and biology is not an inherently incompatible mixture.

The Israel–Palestine conflict, as well as the issue of antisemitism, emerged as another area where participants described it as significant difficult to engage with in open and balanced discussion. Compared to gender-related responses, which emphasized nuance and context,

responses in this area often focused more directly on perceived consequences, or lack thereof, depending on the positionality presented. In relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict, one respondent explained: *“I have mixed views and can sympathize with different perspectives.”* However, the same participant noted: *“For that I have been variously labeled conservative, ignorant, “okay with genocide,” “heartless,” among other things.”*

This reflects a recurring concern that attempts to engage with complex socio-political topics in a more nuanced, manner may be interpreted as taking a definitive ideological stance. In Goffman’s (1959) terms, it is an impression “given off” that might indicate signs of an underlying and problematic conservative standpoint, with all of the stereotypical baggage attached to it. Another participant described a more direct experience:

*“The only place that I have expressed my political views among sociologists has been to oppose our faculty association from taking a stand on Israel and Palestine. I have been shunned as a result.”*

However, not all participants adopt such a ‘centrist’ position on the conflict. Some participants are more firmly set to defend Israel, while also pointing out the increase of antisemitism experienced as a result. In reference to the hushed conservative conversations had in private, one participant mentioned: *“I do hear whispered arguments about... defense for Israel's war in Gaza”*. One participant pointed out how conservatives are more likely to condemn Hamas, rather than follow the far-left pattern of framing the terrorist organization as a ‘social justice’ movement: *“I also think conservative voices might question the “social justice” of organizations like Hamas.”* The following is a participant response directly addressing antisemitism linked to the Israel-Palestine conflict:

*“Antisemitism is rampant with almost no consequences...Anti-Israel protestors are permitted to take over the streets in violation of multiple laws with impunity because the police are told to keep the peace at any cost and everyone knows that trying to enforce the laws would result in violence from the Anti-Israel protestors. Israel is fighting a necessary and just war. Carney should not have recognized Palestine until the conditions that he set for that recognition were met.”*

While individual experiences vary, these accounts align with a broader pattern in which participants described navigating the topic cautiously, often choosing only to engage in private among close peers. This participant-described experience is rather reflective of Goffman’s (1959) impression management, particularly dramaturgy. Goffman (1959) explains how people learn through socialization to adopt certain social masks depending on context, possessing an authentic backstage self and a deliberately cultivated frontstage self. Participants may feel the need to carefully navigate politically-charged topics, opting for a frontstage impression of conformity to avoid stigmatization; reserving their authentic backstage performance for their previously mentioned close peers and trusted colleagues. That said, participants did not present a unified position on the conflict itself, but presented the topic, and related antisemitic rhetoric, as a significant area of concern. The common thread lies in how discussion of the topic is often unfairly structured and experienced. The issue, as described by participants, is not the presence of disagreement, but the perceived limitations on how that disagreement can be expressed, or the social and professional consequences of opposing the majority “progressive” opinion.

A third cluster of concerns pertains to DEI-related issues and the role of individual agency. These responses were often framed in more analytical terms, focusing on how certain frameworks are prioritized within the discipline, while others are dismissed and condemned.

Several participants described a perceived emphasis on structural explanations of inequality, paired with a dismissal of individual agency. In terms of DEI, several participants emphasized merit-based hiring and the significant influence of individual agency on human behaviour. While participants did not reject structural frameworks entirely, some expressed concern that alternative perspectives, particularly those emphasizing individual-level factors, were more difficult to engage or discuss. One participant stated:

*“The Conservative is at least willing to entertain the possibility that self-control and self-agency play a role in shaping one's outcomes. The mainstream approach in sociology is grounded in "structural" oppression and the denial of agency when convenient.”*

When asked how conservative values shape their sociological interests, one participant added: *“I think I am more willing to entertain non-structural explanations and solutions to social problems. I am open to attributing agency and behavior to problems.”*

These responses suggest that participants are not opposing structural analysis, but are instead questioning how it is applied and whether it allows for sufficient consideration of individual variation. Individual agency is frequently referenced as an important factor to consider when analyzing social phenomena. When asked what a conservative conceptualization of social justice might entail, one participant mentioned: *“I think much more emphasis on individual responsibility and accountability would probably have a greater role.”* These statements reflect recognition of the influence individual agency can have on social outcomes, but don't dismiss structural influencers entirely. The value placed upon individual agency by participants naturally segways to concerns expressed pertaining to DEI/EDI initiatives. One participant simply stated: *“We should reward merit, not identity categories.”*

Another participant stated:

*“Conservative values are more interested in better defining merit and using that as the basis of social change.” When discussing possible blind spots created due to Canadian sociology’s left-liberal bias, one participant thought that the majority in the field do not adequately consider “...the downsides of EDI and social programs.”*

When discussing employment, one participant alluded to the lack of merit-based hiring by pointing out biased hiring processes:

*“Many job ads are explicitly or implicitly ideological in nature. Even if they aren't, in Canada you're probably getting sanctimonious liberals with weak publication records on the search committee, who will filter based on who they personally and intellectually like.”*

These responses highlight a recurring pattern. Participants are not necessarily rejecting dominant frameworks, but are instead expressing a desire for a broader analytical space, one in which multiple perspectives can be explored without being immediately categorized or dismissed. Structural explanations are not discarded, yet there is a desire to see a less dogmatic approach to analyzing complex socio-political topics by the inclusion of non-structural explanations; such as individual agency. The emphasis on promoting merit-based employment and position allocation is prominent enough to be included but was not fully explained in the participant responses. Despite the lack of depth explaining concerns related to DEI/EDI policies, the value placed on individual agency goes hand-in-hand with assuming that people should be evaluated based on their individual merit, as opposed to matching a perceived identity category.

Taken together, the topics discussed in this section are diverse in content, but similar in how they are experienced. In each case, participants describe a tension between complexity and constraint. They are describing how certain topics appear to be structured in ways that shape what can be said, how it can be said, and how it is likely to be interpreted. This does not mean that discussion is absent altogether. Instead, it suggests that discussion may be unevenly distributed, with some perspectives more easily articulated than others. Donna Haraway (1988) discussed the partiality of all realms of knowledge, including in science. She argued that all knowledge is produced with a degree of bias or partiality; requiring systems of knowledge to deliberately exercise reflexivity and recognize the limits of positionality. Sandra Harding (1986) developed feminist standpoint theory which describes how all knowledge is socially situated, and that marginalized positions can provide a unique advantage in understanding social relations due to their unique experience navigating both dominant and subordinate viewpoints. Participants illustrate how Canadian sociology displays a considerable degree of partiality in terms of what topics are discussed, as well as what kinds of perspectives are welcomed. This recognizable pattern of partial knowledge, in comparison with Haraway (1988) and Harding (1986), legitimize concerns surrounding the lack of inclusion of conservative standpoints. It could therefore be understood that conservatives occupy a unique marginalized standpoint within the discipline, having to navigate the dominant left-liberal culture while simultaneously existing within their own niche standpoint. By making space for conservative viewpoints to emerge, there is reason to believe conservative scholars could offer social perspectives and approaches to socio-political topics that would otherwise go overlooked; challenging existing theories which have been allowed to flourish with relatively little contestation and providing contemporary conservative sociological analysis.

### **Theme 3: Perceived Ideological Homogeneity and Self-Censorship**

The most consistent, and arguably most consequential, theme emerging from the data relates to participants' perception of ideological homogeneity within Canadian sociology and the ways in which this perception shapes academic expression. While participants varied in how they described the discipline, there was a strong and recurring sense that Canadian sociology is politically oriented to the left, and at times, the far-left. Nakhai & Brym (2011) similarly noted in their own research how Canadian professors disproportionately align themselves with left-leaning political positions, and Michalski (2016) also recognized the ideological homogeneity permeating contemporary society. Additionally, participants did not simply describe this as an abstract observation, but as something that has direct implications for how they think, speak, and engage within academic environments. Across responses, there is a clear pattern of caution, as well as recognition of intolerance directed at conservative viewpoints. Participants frequently described monitoring how they express their views in relation to perceived, or experienced, consequences of expressing a dissenting viewpoint to the dominant social justice rhetoric permeating Canadian sociology. The intentional cultivation of an acceptable sociological persona further reflects Goffman's (1959) impression management as conservative sociologists must engage in dramaturgy to the most accurate sense of the concept. When asked if Canadian sociology possesses a left-liberal bias, several participants offered passionate responses. There was overwhelming consensus among participants that not only does Canadian sociology display a left-liberal bias, but said bias is quite extreme and impossible to ignore:

*“It is extremely biased to the left, such that it is bordering on political irrelevancy (sociology debates within a very narrow slice of very critical, left-wing positions), such that majority political positions held across Canada are ignored or dismissed entirely”*

*“It's almost comical how bias it is. Have you ever read the CSA website closely? It has become an activist group and they don't give a damn whether people think differently. The explicit link to "social justice" has made this all the more difficult to manage”*

*“Oh, it is mad. The CSA keeps harping on "doing sociology", as though it's 2001 and Harper is PM. We have made ourselves completely irrelevant, as far as serious policy debates are concerned. We have ceded the field to more serious disciplines, by claiming that hard evidence doesn't matter”*

Within the literature review, I previously discussed the CSA and their notable tendency to adopt, as well as promote, an overtly politically-left positionality. It is interesting to note a couple of participants also echoed concerns about the CSA; accusing the association of resembling an activist group and jeopardizing the credibility of the broader sociological discipline. Although I suspect the CSA's political standpoint is well-intentioned, there is reason to believe adopting a firm political stance on behalf of Canadian sociologists can be problematic, divisive, and not entirely reflective of the potentially diverse range of sociological perspectives. Weber (1919) argued against ideological authoritarianism, encouraging educators to guide young minds to potential paths rather than select these ideological paths for them. Formally, and consistently, taking a politically-left stance on behalf of a much larger discipline fails to represent marginalized perspectives within the discipline, while further reinforcing the immensely problematic ‘us vs. them’ mentality which Lukianoff & Haidt (2018) have pointed out. Participants further stated:

*“I don't know how anyone, left or right, could contest this”*

*“Sociology leans more toward a tool which social engineers wield, and this worries me”*

And rather simply put:

*“Cult.”*

Participants displayed notable consensus, with virtually all respondents agreeing that Canadian sociology does in fact possess a strong degree of ideological homogeneity in terms of possessing a significant left-liberal bias. Possessing ideological homogeneity is concerning for a realm (academia) which is supposedly the promoter of critical thinking and intellectual diversity in contemporary society. However, does this ideological slant equate to intolerance of alternative viewpoints? The participants seem to think so. When asked whether they believed conservative viewpoints were welcomed in Canadian sociology, several participants offered their insight:

*“They are not welcome at all.”* And *“Last I checked, they most certainly are not.”*

*“Oh, come on. When I was a grad student, there were certain professors in our department who were conservative. Many were Catholics and I think that faith was reflected in their politics. This is no longer the case. I can't confidently name a single conservative in our department. There might be some, but the fact that I don't know about it suggests that this viewpoint is not welcome”*

*“I think conservative views tend to be characterized in straw-man terms, usually as indefensible positions that lead naturally to a progressive/liberal argument. They give the illusion that liberal positions are rationally derived while conservative positions are based on maintaining generational privileges and power”*

Participants express not only an abject lack of conservative representation within the discipline, but also concerns surrounding how conservative perspectives are characterized. Michalski’s (2016) recognition of the homogeneity of modern sociology, paired with Nakhaie & Brym’s (2011) observation of Canadian professors disproportionately leaning left, provide additional context to what participants may have experienced. The remarks made by participants further substantiate concern surrounding the perceived ideological homogeneity of Canadian sociology. Further, another participant remarked:

*“The organizational and intellectual weakness of Canadian sociology has rendered most departments as ideologically captured by champagne socialist views. This is also a problem in American sociology and in the ASA, but I think it is more acute in Canada and the CSA.”*

Champagne socialism is a rather original description of Canadian sociology, implying the discipline’s obsession with identity politics persists within a rather comfortable ivory tower. Identity politics, especially when thrust to the forefront of seemingly every sociological conversation, certainly furthers concerns of polarization and an increasingly narrow intellectual scope. Lukianoff & Haidt (2018) discuss the dangers of excessive identity politics and polarization. Related to ideological division, Fuller (2002) emphasized the value of possessing the “right to be wrong”, and how intellectual cultivation requires contestation and mistakes. Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan (2006) have also expressed the detrimental effects of education operating under an Authoritarian Theory of Knowledge (Fuller 2002), a damaging paradigm

which coerces conformity to dominant perspectives; an educational approach Weber (1919) adamantly warned against.

Additionally, one participant added:

*“Absolutely not. I would take it step beyond “unwelcoming” and say that conservative views are enough to get one blacklisted in sociology”*

The insight provided by participants reflect a perception that conservative viewpoints are not only lacking representation in Canadian sociology, but are vehemently rejected and met with hostility. The perceived ideological homogeneity of Canadian sociology inadvertently revealed a second theme expressed by participants: an inclination to self-censor. This engagement in self-censorship and deliberate presentations of the self display Goffman’s (1959) impression management in real time; participants feel obligated to cultivate a sociological persona which is not necessarily representative of their authentic self, a concern expressed by Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan (2006) in relation to the discipline adopting a paradigm in-line with Fuller’s (2002) ATK. Self-censorship, as expressed by participants, is employed as a protective mechanism, a way to maintain social and professional connections. Many participants discussed their concealment of political affiliation, or perspective on politically-charged, topics. The reasons for concealment were all linked to the perceived intolerance directed at conservative viewpoints, alongside legitimate concerns surrounding social or professional consequences. One participant simply stated: *“Most conservative thinkers keep their mouth shut in Canadian sociology.”* When asked how comfortable they were raising conservative viewpoints, one participant mentioned:

*“It completely depends on the context. Among a closer-knit group, I have no issue voicing my viewpoints and standing my ground. Outside of that group, however, I am very cautious (e.g., conferences, classrooms, committee work).”*

When asked how comfortable they were identifying themselves as conservative to colleagues or peers, the majority of participants indicated they were either uncomfortable or very uncomfortable. Participants stated:

*“Again, would never do it. Even the implication is enough to jeopardize the good faith that relationships are built on. And, as a student, I view those relationships as everything.”*

This sentiment undoubtedly reflects the work of Ferrales & Fine (2005) who discussed the importance of impression management for graduate students. As a contrast to the answer provided by the student above, a professor who had secured tenure said: *“Again, I am getting more comfortable with this. I am a full professor and don't need anyone's approval.”* A different participant who had achieved tenure added: *“Pre-tenure, I felt very uncomfortable at times - for instance, expressing my opposition to the defund police movement (for which I was called a racist in an anonymous student evaluation).”*

From a student perspective again:

*“As a student keen on generating good-faith relationships, it is unwise for me to engage in any kind of honest political dialogue. Therefore, I do not do it.”*

This quote reflects the primary problem surrounding my research; implying the current state of Canadian sociology does not welcome a diverse range of viewpoints, especially ones reflective of the political-right. This perceived lack of inability to dialogue authentically, particularly from the perspective of a student, gives rise to considerable concerns about the quality of knowledge being generated within the discipline and how that influences upcoming generations of scholars. Popper (1963) advocated for intellectual contestation, positing that theoretical challenges help refine existing theories and produce new ones. Without the perceived ability to voice dissent with mainstream sociological perspectives, conditions conducive to an echo chamber start to manifest within an institution founded upon the concept of critical thinking. An additional participant explained:

*“While I don't think I could lose my job over my views, I think I could be prevented from getting a job. I think there are people who refuse to work with me on research projects. And I have no doubt that attempts to get TriCouncil funding for a project deemed "conservative or too conservative" would be unsuccessful. I also suspect if reviewers know or believe someone to be conservative, that this information would color their assessment of research. Come to think of it, I think social stigma in the classic sense is relevant here.”*

This suggests that self-censorship is not limited only to formal settings, but extends into broader social and professional interactions. The distinction between public and private expression becomes significant, with some conservative views reserved only for trusted contexts. This highlights the extent to which impressions must be managed. It is not simply a matter of silence, but how their political expression has to be carefully curated in terms of what can be said, how it can be said, and in what context it might work or be unwelcome. It is also important to recognize the protective factor that tenure and seniority can provide for people possessing

conservative viewpoints. It is very likely that one's academic status, or career stage, plays a significant role in shaping their willingness to express dissenting views. This gives way to concerns surrounding intellectual authenticity, as previously mentioned by Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan (2006). Are newer generations of scholars truly buying into the social justice campaign of Canadian sociology, or are they learning to 'play the game' and keep their mouth shut on certain topics? When asked to recall experiences trying to dialogue with left-liberal viewpoints, one participant noted: *"I can only recount the myriad occurrences where I have held my tongue."*

Another explained:

*"Of course. I tried reminding graduate students what cutting edge research in behavioural genetics and neuroscience is quickly revealing what a lot of what sociology believes is bonkers... In response, a few of them suggested I embraced eugenics. Yep ... that's the type of high end thinking we're generating."*

Additionally, a different participant said:

*"I have experienced a level of disgust about my beliefs after I expressed my own political position than before I had revealed my leaning. It probably lies in the 'us versus them' that many politically associated individuals have when it comes to the other side."*

These responses suggest that the boundaries of acceptable discourse are not always formalized, but are nonetheless communicated through first-hand experience and observation. The result appears to be a breakdown in socio-political discourse, further creating the conditions for an ideological echo chamber where conflicting perspectives are absent, allowing dominant

left-liberal rhetoric to continue dominating Canadian sociology with little, to no, checks and balances. One respondent stated:

*“I am crucially aware that conservatism is reviled within sociology. Therefore, I do not speak about politics with anyone. And, as a consequence, I rarely think about politics in any focused way. Since expressing my ideas would only serve to hurt me, I do not sharpen them in the way that one might sharpen their thesis.”*

This lack of broad socio-political engagement jeopardizes the legitimacy of Canadian sociology. If Canadian sociology is so blatantly intolerant of conservative viewpoints, according to participants, how does that reflect within knowledge being produced within the discipline? It is worth mentioning Burawoy’s (2004) scissors movement here, his argument that sociology moves increasingly to the political left, while the society which they study drifts further to the political right. It is difficult to perceive sociology as a public-facing discipline, or representative of the society in which it claims to study, when a viewpoint held by roughly half of all North Americans (conservative viewpoint) is outright rejected with very little honest engagement.

One of my questions asked participants if they could discuss who they believed were the most important conservative Canadian sociologists, or theories, in the contemporary era. The overwhelming majority of participants could not name a single contemporary conservative sociologist or theory, with a handful referencing conservative sociologists of old (such as Durkheim) who still offer insight. In relation to the question, one participant said:

*“I can't think of a single "conservative" sociologist in Canada. Some might do adjacent views or studies (which may or may not be linked to personal conservatism or being moderate). In contrast, the list of critical/feminist/Marxist/lefty sociologists is long and prominent in Canada.”*

Another participant added:

*“I don't know of any contemporary conservative sociologists. I think Robert Nisbet, Peter Berger, and Seymour Lipset still have a lot to offer contemporary sociology. I suppose by today's standards, Durkheim and Weber would be run out of town as conservatives, yet I think their work is still invaluable.”*

Several respondents simply replied: “*Couldn't name any,*” “*No answer,*” and “*Not sure.*”

The inability of participants to provide examples of contemporary conservative scholars is telling of the times. Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan. (2006), Michalski (2016), Lukianoff & Haidt (2018), Pawluch (2019), Steeves (2021), and Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin (2024), have directed attention to the ideological homogeneity of academia, as well as related pressures to conform. The lack of ability to name contemporary conservative sociologists or theories not only further justifies concerns of intellectual conformity within academia; it also suggests conservative, or conservatively-themed, sociological perspectives are being buried to the point of relative erasure.

These responses bring us to the final question I want to explore in relation to the broader theme of ideological homogeneity and self-censorship. If Canadian sociology is perceived to be compromised by a left-liberal bias, and sociologists are struggling to name any contemporary conservative scholars or theories, where does that leave conservative viewpoints in terms of representation? If conservative sociologists aren't promoting conservative perspectives, how are conservative ideas being presented to young minds in academia? As mentioned previously, one participant said:

*“I think conservative views tend to be characterized in straw-man terms, usually as indefensible positions that lead naturally to a progressive/liberal argument. They give the illusion that liberal positions are rationally derived while conservative positions are based on maintaining generational privileges and power.”*

Another said:

*“I think the problem is cherry picking and generalization...I think it's also fair to say that the harshest viewpoints tend to be those that are most often emphasized and generalized. As a result, I think conservatives are often dehumanized and seen for only those viewpoints.”*

Similarly stated by a different participant: *“Most of the discipline in Canada reproduced putative truths about inequality and injustice. Conservatism is treated rhetorically as 'unethical', a kind of strawman.”* Additionally: *“I cannot speak on this because I do not know enough about their portrayal. I only know that they are generally vilified.”* And finally: *“There is some difference between what is portrayed in standard texts and the messages that are portrayed in verbal exchanges in and outside of classrooms. Texts tend to be a little more even-handed, but still biased.”*

The consensus among participants is that conservative viewpoints are primarily presented in a strawman-like fashion to support perspectives aligned with a left-liberal political orientation. This raises considerable concerns regarding ethics and intellectual integrity. Many sociology students, and post-secondary students in general, are not exposed to politics in a meaningful way until they start their post-secondary studies. This is in part due to age, but largely due to a lack of political exposure in daily life, as only having recently gained the right to vote. Subsequently, young students sitting in sociology classes across Canada are consuming their first lessons in

politics in a socio-political environment, as described by research participants, as one that demonstrates intolerance to conservative viewpoints; while simultaneously misrepresenting conservative sentiments to justify the ideological positioning within Canadian sociology. How can we feel confident about the potential for nuanced socio-political analyses by our next generation of sociologists when they are receiving a lopsided education with regard to political sentiments and solutions? Concerns with appealing to a higher authority (your professor), not standing out in a negative light, and maintaining social, as well as academic or professional relations, are legitimate realities undergraduates navigate on a daily basis. The lack of conservative representation outlined by participants, as well as the condemnation directed at conservative viewpoints and the ‘straw-manning’ of conservative arguments certainly give reason to be concerned about the ethical, and intellectual, integrity of Canadian sociology, as well as the next generation of sociologists navigating a slanted intellectual playing field.

## **Discussion**

This study shed some light on how political identity and academic discourse is experienced within Canadian sociology. Firstly, political labels such as “liberal” and “conservative” appear to function as relative and context-dependent categories in Canadian sociology. Participants’ accounts suggest that these labels are not fixed, but are shaped by the environments in which they are applied. As a result, individuals may find themselves positioned in ways that do not align with their own understanding of their beliefs. For example, most participants indicated they are politically liberal, or at least a liberal voter, but feel conservative relative to a sociological context. Participants also explained how the term “liberal” in academia is frequently being applied to standpoints which are more akin to radical and far-left positionalities. In line with this

flexible use of political terminology, participants consistently indicate how ‘conservative’ in a somewhat tolerable sociological sense is aligned with ‘centrist’ or ‘neutral,’ much like the traditional standpoint of a social constructionist. Ironically, Pawluch (2019) has discussed how even being a social constructionist is often criticized for not being critical enough; pressuring social constructionists to abandoned their position of neutrality in favour of a more activist approach. Several respondents were thoroughly liberal, but had strong conservative sentiments about certain topics being presented in a one-sided fashion in Canadian sociology. Essentially, the political label assigned to participants is only partially self-ascribed in relation to the positionality the broader discipline has labelled and applied; while in other part the ‘conservative’ label is used as a derogatory marker.

We can see Howard Becker’s (1963) labelling theory at play in conjunction with Charles Cooley’s (1902) looking-glass self. Becker’s (1963) labelling theory is often applied to deviance, arguing that behaviours or beliefs are not inherently deviant, rather it is the social response and deviant label assigned to said behaviour which makes it unacceptable. Cooley’s (1902) looking-glass self posits our sense of self is developed through social interaction and how we imagine we are perceived by others. Participants who are not quite conservative in the traditional political sense are being labelled as conservative for expressing sentiments which may reflect conservative viewpoints, or a neutral stance. Such a label carries a negative connotation in a sociological context, as expressed by participants. Subsequently, the way participants view their own positionality in relation to how they have been described by colleagues or peers is reflective of Cooley’s (1902) looking-glass self. Participants are being ascribed a label, one which holds a negative connotation in a sociological context, and are adopting a positionality based on how

their perspectives are being received; a positionality which does not necessarily reflect the entirety of their beliefs.

Secondly, participants identified specific topic areas where they perceived limitations on open engagement. These areas included gender/biology, Israel-Palestine/antisemitism, and concerns surrounding DEI/the importance of individual agency. These areas of concern were described as sites of tension, where the range of acceptable discourse has been largely constrained and framed to only include perspectives supporting left-liberal politics. Several participants expressed concerns surrounding transgenderism in relation to children and professional athletes. It is important to note that the participants who indicated concern about transgenderism in connection to children and athletes, took the time to explain they are not opposed to transgenderism generally, rather their hesitancy is tied to sensitive contextually-bound situations, such as youth surgeries, bathroom policies, and rules for elite sports. Additionally, most participants mention the importance of biology, often doing so inversely by describing the problematic pattern of sociologists doing away with biological explanations of constructs such as gender altogether. The Israel-Palestine conflict, and the related problem of antisemitism, is referenced less frequently than gender/biology, but is also mentioned as a blind spot in the field, or a place in which certain forms of discourse are unwelcome or out of school.

Multiple participants criticized faculties taking a formalized stance on the Gaza conflict, with one participant recalling they were shunned as a result. Another participant mentioned how they expressed recognition of the complexity of the situation, in which they were called a “genocide supporter”. The perceived inability to be impartial to the conflict, let alone to hold a pro-Israel stance, within Canadian sociology is telling. Antisemitic demonstrations in Canada were also brought up in participant data, indicating that geopolitical conflicts have implications

on sociologists beyond the constraints of formal classrooms and academic settings, warranting passionate perspectives. Finally, many participants were concerned with the complete dismissal of individual agency, as well as interrelated concerns surrounding DEI. Participants did not dismiss structural analyses of social phenomena, rather they vouched for the inclusion of individual influencers into sociological discourse. Akin to the emphasis on the importance of individual agency, many participants implored that hiring should be done on a merit basis. Participants frequently discussed the difficulty of discussing these topics from an openly conservative standpoint, with many citing concerns related to professional, academic, and social prospects; opting to talk about these areas of concerns only among close circles, or not at all.

Thirdly, and most significantly, participants indicated a perceived left-wing ideological homogeneity within Canadian sociology, and a subsequent need for self-censorship in challenging these views. This perceived ideological homogeneity, as well as use of self-censorship, stems from an observable intolerance of conservative perspectives within the discipline. As a result, Canadian sociology struggles to accurately represent conservative viewpoints, often resorting to straw-man misrepresentations utilized to support perspectives aligned with left-liberal sentiments. Participants provide numerous examples, oftentimes with great depth, of when they had been treated poorly due to their conservative beliefs. Multiple participants discuss their use of self-censorship to protect their social and professional connections or reputations. Professors who have achieved tenure, however, indicate increased confidence to speak out due to job security, although admit to having heightened reservations prior to tenure. Participants struggled immensely to name contemporary conservative sociologists, and also pointed out how conservative perspectives are frequently ‘straw-manned’ to support left-liberal theory. Participants express a reluctance to articulate their conservative

viewpoints, while the dominant left-liberal discipline promotes material which could be disconnected from reality and misleading. For many respondents, this raises several concerns pertaining to the ethical, as well as intellectual, integrity of the discipline.

These findings do not resolve intellectual tensions or biases within Canadian sociology, nor do they establish definitive claims about the discipline as a whole. However, the results of this study illuminate a set of experiences that are consistent across participants and therefore difficult to dismiss as isolated experiences. What emerged from participant data in an inductive fashion is not a simple narrative of the inclusion or exclusion of ideas, but a more complex picture of how Canadian sociology is navigated by right-conservative scholars, as well as what potential consequences a politically biased discipline might produce. This raises broader questions about the nature of academic inquiry. To what extent is Canadian sociology able to accommodate internal, or even external, disagreement? How are the boundaries of acceptable discourse established and maintained, and what are the long-term effects related to new generations of sociologists navigating this environment? How do individuals with non-conforming perspectives, such as conservative ones, maneuver those boundaries? While this study does not attempt to answer these questions directly, it highlights their relevance and the need for further research, and in my opinion: reformation. At minimum, these findings suggest that the relationship between political identity and academic discourse is dynamic, contextual, and at times contentious. This study also points toward the need for continued reflection on how academic environments can be designed to support open, rigorous, and holistic engagement across a diverse range of perspectives, rather than maintain the status-quo of encouraging left-liberal conforming thought and paradigm.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion – Key Takeaways and Future Research Considerations**

The left-liberal bias of Canadian sociology, and related concerns of ideological homogeneity and pressures to conform, have previously been discussed by scholars such as Puddephatt et al. (2006), Brym & Nakhaie (2011), Michalski (2016), Lukianoff & Haidt (2018), Pawluch (2019), Steeves (2021), Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin (2024), and others. Most discussions on the current state of academia revolve around ideological homogeneity, intolerance or avoidance of dissenting viewpoints, and the perceived need to conform to dominant rhetoric in order to have social, as well as professional, success (Ferralles and Fine 2005) The result has been a ‘chilly’ academic environment for scholars who do not tightly align with politically-left perspectives and social justice approaches (Pawluch 2019). The few outspoken sociologists and scholars who have approached this problem have done an excellent job describing current conditions of academia; including in Canadian sociology. However, this research project offered a unique opportunity to explore the effects of liberal hegemony in Canadian sociology by engaging with a small but focused sample of conservative scholars, using qualitative survey methods.

Rather than further discussing the socio-political conditions of Canadian sociology, this research explored the perspectives and lived experiences of conservative sociologists navigating a field that is overly biased toward left-liberal viewpoints. The findings of this research project provide an original contribution to the human consequences of pushing particular political preferences onto others. By providing conservative Canadian sociologists with an opportunity to express their perspectives, concerns, and experiences; we can recognize the very real, and human, consequences of socio-political intolerance within Canadian sociology. Participants directed attention to several areas of concern in relation to the left-liberal bias of Canadian sociology, such as how the definition of conservatism must be understood as unique to

sociological constructions of same, hence the relativity of political identity; further, a frustration with not being allowed to present more nuanced arguments to understanding politics and identity, since they might be interpreted as signs of unwanted conservatism. Despite explicitly searching for ‘conservative’ Canadian sociologists to complete a qualitative survey on their experiences within the discipline, several participants explained how they are not really ‘conservative’ in a traditional sense, rather they adopt, or are ascribed, said affiliation in a specific sociological context where centrist and right ideas are not tolerated.

Several participants who claim to vote for, and support, liberal politics, recounted instances where they were labeled ‘conservative’ for taking a position they believed to be centrist. One participant discussed how the term ‘liberal’ has been conflated with ‘far-left’ in sociology; far-left movements such as defunding the police are promoted under the guise of liberalism. Traditional liberals found themselves adopting a conservative positionality relative to the discipline, while remaining politically liberal; indicating an alarming contrast between sociological political reality and the actual political world beyond academia. Political identity can therefore be understood as contextually-bound, where terms like conservative or liberal take on different meanings. In Canadian sociology, according to my findings, conservative in a non-derogatory sense takes on a centrist standpoint, similar to a social constructionist, while the term liberal is used loosely to describe far-left political viewpoints. This begs the question: where does that leave traditional liberals and conservatives within the discipline? How accurately are political labels and theory being applied or explored?

Participants further expressed difficulties engaging in politically-charged topics from a conservative standpoint, identifying several complex socio-political areas of contention. Exploring complex, and oftentimes emotionally challenging, social phenomena is the essence of

sociology. Popper (1963) argued that quality scientific knowledge is produced through intellectual contestation, debate, and even mistakes. Fuller (2000) advocated for a Republican Theory of Knowledge; including the ‘right to be wrong’ and also encouraging authentic intellectual exploration. Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan (2006) discussed concerns surrounding pressures to conform in academia, diminishing the quality of education and sociological knowledge. Lukianoff & Haidt (2018) also pointed out the polarization of academia due to the rise of identity politics, explaining how an obsession with intellectual ‘safety’ has eliminated holistic discourse and pushed out perspectives not aligned with the political-left.

Subsequently, participants pointed out how dialogue on politically-charged issues is borderline impossible unless one is willing to sacrifice social and professional relationships. The Israel-Palestine conflict, transgenderism in relation to children and athletes, and the pitfalls of EDI/DEI are few examples provided by participants, of topics exclusively engaged with from left-liberal perspectives within Canadian sociology. Some participants expressed support for Israel, as well as concerns with the rise of antisemitism in the West. One participant who spoke up and insisted the faculty did not adopt a formal stance on the conflict, reported being subsequently shunned. Another who expressed their ability to see the conflict from both sides was labelled a ‘genocide supporter.’

The three primary topics of contention mentioned are highly complex and surely worth exploring from a diverse range of perspectives. Sociologically, there is overwhelming support for Palestine; little, if any, sympathy for Israel and the apparent rise of antisemitism. Transgenderism is lauded as a harmless expression of gender, with very little discussion of legitimate biological concerns and the malleable nature of adolescents. EDI/DEI is championed as the great equalizer, but the trade-offs and often discriminatory practices involved are not addressed. The point here is

not to persuade sociologists to abandon their personal beliefs, but rather encourage them to engage in reflexivity (Bourdieu 2004); recognize that their positionality does not define reality for all, nor does it dictate the righteous stance of a falsely-dichotomous battle of ‘good vs. evil’ (Lukianoff and Haidt 2018). By adopting a hegemonic left-wing political stance, the discipline of Canadian sociology implies an abject lack of concern with the cultivation of truth; compromising authenticity in favour of political expediency. If sociologists cannot dialogue about various perspectives surrounding highly complicated social and political affairs, how are we to realistically believe we are producing anything representative of actual movements in broader society? In other words, is the discipline really one of social science or does the discipline, at present, exist as a carefully curated echo chamber and a political think tank for the progressive left?

As aforementioned, the ideological homogeneity of academia has been well-documented (Puddephatt, Kelly, & Adorjan 2006, Brym & Nakhaie 2011, Michalski 2016, Lukianoff & Haidt 2018, Pawluch 2019, Steeves 2021, Howard-Hassmann & McLaughlin 2022, and Wegenschimmel & McLaughlin 2024). However, participants explain just how adverse the consequences of this homogeneity are, indicating a rapid erasure of conservative viewpoints and related discourse. Participants struggled to name any contemporary conservative sociologists, while also expressing concerns about how conservative perspectives are misrepresented within the discipline; often the most extreme perspectives are used to “strawman” conservatives and justify political homogeneity within the discipline. While scholars have also previously discussed the ideological homogeneity of academia, participants in my study reveal just how intense these pressures can be. Conservatives, or those with a degree of conservative sentiments, are described by participants as being met with disdain, hostility, or at best; dismissal. The lack of non-

politically-left viewpoints is only part of the hegemonic problem; the overt condemnation and intolerance directed at conservative viewpoints further suppresses minority positionalities.

Participants explained how presenting certain conservative viewpoints would often result in being given derogatory labels by others. Racist, sexist, eugenicist, and genocide supporter were a few examples provided, but that is not an exhaustive list. Furthermore, participants explained how they felt it was necessary to conceal their conservative identity or perspectives, voicing concerns about social and professional backlash. The only participants who described a degree of comfort in breaking the normative ideological mold were a couple of professors who have already achieved tenure; explaining how otherwise, they would likely not speak up at all. A PhD student displayed the damage this kind of intolerance is having on the next generation of scholars. The student expressed how they have suffered a degree of political atrophy; stemming from an inability to dialogue about politics and explore perspectives they found merit in if they were too far from the leftist political consensus.

The findings of this research not only provide original insight through the eyes of marginalized conservative Canadian sociologists, but also justify further research on the matter and raise legitimate concerns surrounding the trajectory of contemporary sociology. The insight provided by participants was invaluable, their authentic and in-depth responses offered a glimpse of conservative perspectives in relation to sociology; while also illuminating how the discipline is being experienced by those who do not align themselves with far-left politics, including traditional liberals and political centrists. The political homogeneity of Canadian sociology appears to be far narrower than previously described, boxing out politically-left perspectives that are accused of being not critical enough. Contemporary Canadian sociology is experienced and

described by respondents as having intellectual atrophy, insular discourse, and hypocritical displays of intolerance.

There remains a considerable amount of space for sociological research pertaining to the political bias of Canadian sociology and related consequences. Although revelatory in terms of authenticity and originality, the generalizability of my own research is somewhat limited due to the small number of participants (13). Conservatives are no doubt the political minority within Canadian sociology, but the potential for gatekeeping when it comes to politically-right research should not be overlooked. The participant responses were reflective of the literature in terms of identifying a left-liberal bias and an inability to present dissenting viewpoints. However, their illustration as to just how severe the intolerance is directed at conservatives, as well as their perceived need to conceal their authentic views highlights how damaging predominant sociological rhetoric and normative practices may have become. Further, their remarks regarding impression management, particularly concealment, gives reason to believe there are more conservative Canadian sociologists than one might think; potentially fronting as centrist or liberal, while hiding their true beliefs out of fear of social or professional persecution.

With this in mind, how many conservative sociologists are really out there? Surely a minority, but perhaps not as few as previously considered. With the contextual relativity of political affiliation in mind, it would be fascinating to conduct a macro-level study on the politics of Canadian sociologists, including how they define their positions on various social and political issues. Perhaps a more pressing issue, however, is how do young generations of sociologists understand politics and related sociological topics? This is my biggest concern. For many, politics are seldomly discussed in the household and academia serves as their first legitimate exposure to political ideas and theory. If the discipline is operating with political hegemony,

framing the world as good vs. evil or left vs. right, how confident can we be in their ability to fully grasp the complexity of politically-charged topics? In my own anecdotal experience, I have encountered several young scholars who have displayed a narrow understanding of politics, but a vehement commitment to far-left approaches and an obsession with so-called social justice. I can't help but think of the PhD student who expressed a desire to grow their political understanding, but, in their own words, feel as if their brain has suffered from political atrophy due to an inability to dialogue openly. I'll reiterate: what are the political affiliations of Canadian sociologists and how do young Canadian sociologists understand politics? Two separate, but related, potential research questions.

It is also worth exploring how conservative viewpoints are defined and understood in a sociological context. Many of the participants discussed areas of contention they feel passionately about, but elaboration was limited. The scope of the survey was to gauge how conservative Canadian sociologists have experienced the discipline in relation to their political positionality, so the specifics of their conservative perspectives could be explored further. How do Canadian conservative sociologists view individual agency in relation to structural determinants? How can biology and sociology operate more interdependently? What are the pitfalls of EDI/DEI? These are a few questions based on my own findings, but conservative sociological research endeavours could encapsulate a wide range of topics. As a conservative myself, I have often mused about the consequences of normalizing mental illness. With a surge in mental health diagnosis, alongside campaigns to encourage 'openness,' how have severely mentally ill people experienced treatment? Do they feel more understood by society, or overlooked? Is treatment more accessible, or is there increased competition? Relatedly, is the rise in mental health diagnoses reflective of worsening mental stability, or have these diagnoses

become markers of coveted identity in an increasingly individualistic world? Has the decline of religiosity and traditional family values pushed the decreased levels of mental health to where they are today? These are the kind of conservatively-charged questions that are absent in Canadian sociology, but would stand to enrich it.

Although future research on conservative sociological viewpoints or areas of interest remains plentiful, I believe there is ample evidence at present to advocate for a reformation of Canadian sociology. As mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, my intention was never to influence the individual positionality of readers. On the contrary, this thesis was intended to expose the consequences of political polarization and hegemony in academia; specifically, how conservative Canadian sociologists have been experiencing a discipline identified as possessing a strong degree of political bias and intolerance. These findings, in collaboration with existing literature, suggest a decline in the intellectual integrity, as well as generalizability, of contemporary sociological knowledge. By pushing out non-left-liberal viewpoints, and presenting the world in a rather dichotomous light, the applicability, as well as credibility, of Canadian sociology is called into question. If sociologists desire the discipline to thrive, it is imperative to take a break from the political activism. In a rather conservative sense, we must return to our sociological traditions. Good-faith debate, open dialogue, intellectual diversity, and genuine curiosity should be guiding the direction of our discipline, not personal preference or opinion. I do not regret my exposure to left-liberal academia, for it has blessed me with the ability to truly understand positionalities entirely foreign to my own; an ability perhaps exclusive to the conservative mind in the current conditions of academia. By becoming knowledgeable on left-liberal viewpoints, I can further refine my own position, adjusting for nuanced counter-arguments and ceding ground when necessary. I am skeptical to say that a scholar who

personally aligns with the political left, and has experienced sociology in a hegemonic echo chamber, could hold their weight in a serious intellectual debate against a conservative scholar who has been exposed to both sides of the coin.

We are stronger, both individually and as a discipline, when we collaborate and challenge each other. Ideological differences should not automatically equate to adversaries, especially in academia (Selg 2013). In an institution where critical thinking is triumphed, we ought to think critically about our current state of affairs. As dedicated as I am to my own convictions, I am grateful to have tested my beliefs against left-liberal viewpoints. I am also grateful to be able to recognize intellectual disagreement should not be conflated with moral incompatibility. In my own experience, I have often found the political-left and right have more in common than at first glance, frequently desiring the same goals, but often advocating different means. Peace, equality, economic prosperity, and a fulfilling life are agreeable sentiments regardless of political affiliation. Not only would open dialogue test and refine sociological theory and expand the intellectual capability of newer generations, but it could also reveal commonality between two political leanings which have been consistently framed as mortal enemies. At present, the left-liberal bias of sociology is damaging knowledge production and sending conservatives into hiding. It is my hope that we can depart from Fuller's (2002) negative ideal of an Authoritarian Theory of Knowledge and arrive in a state more reflective of his hope for a Republican Theory of Knowledge. Dogmatic agreement seldom yields positive results. It is through good-faith dialogue and fair representation that we can start to heal the self-inflicted intellectual damage permeating Canadian sociology. If we do not alter our current trajectory, I fear sociology will morph into a simulacra as posited by Baudrillard (1981). A copy of a perceived ideological

discipline forged upon an imagined reality; where the essence of sociology is long forgotten and we perpetuate activism in an artificially sustained intellectual husk.

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## APPENDIX

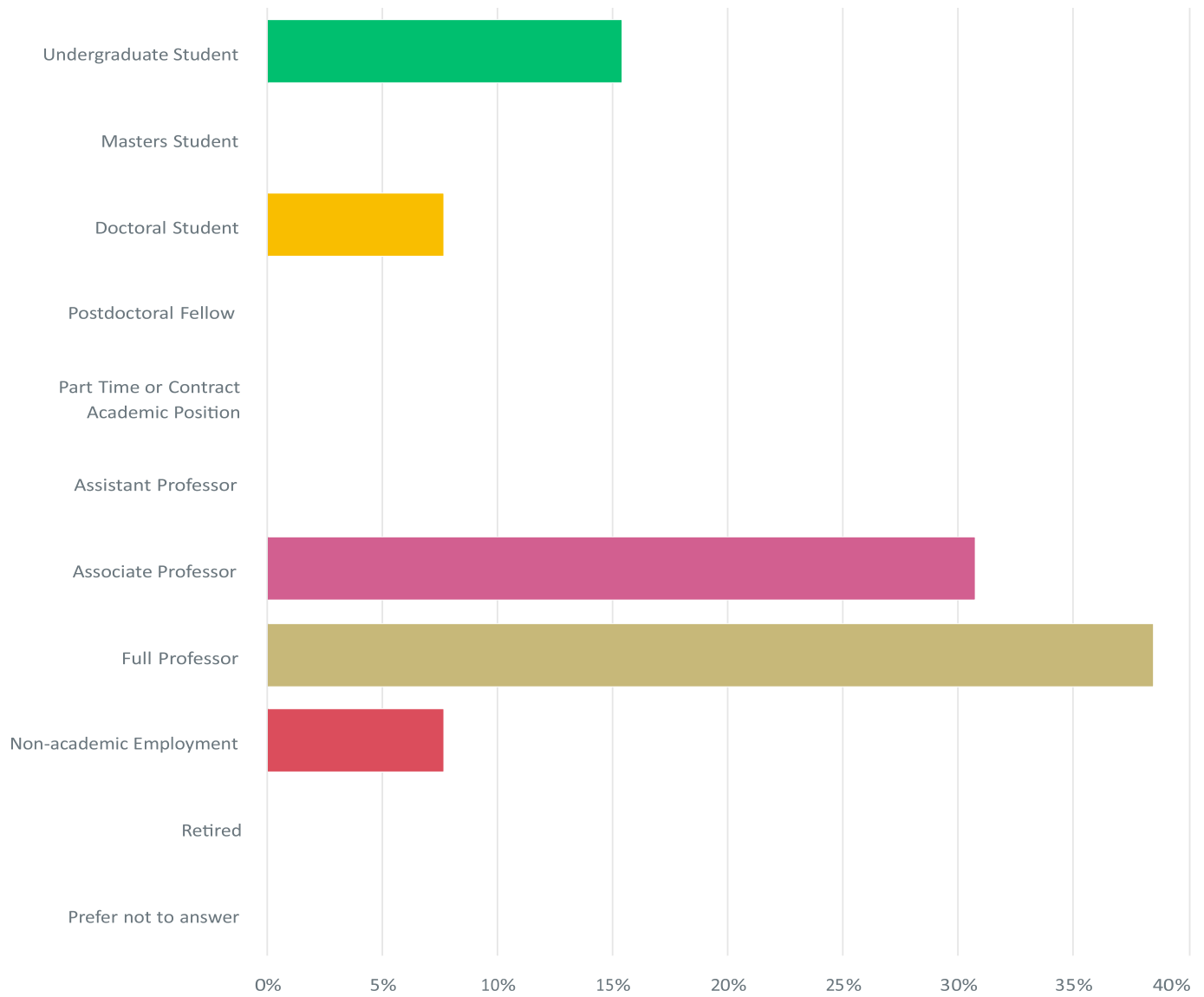
### (1) Research Instrument: Survey

Please note that questions 9 through 18 possessed an optional text box for participants to elaborate on their responses. This text box is clearly visible on the online medium (SurveyMonkey), however is not able to be shown via Word.

Q1

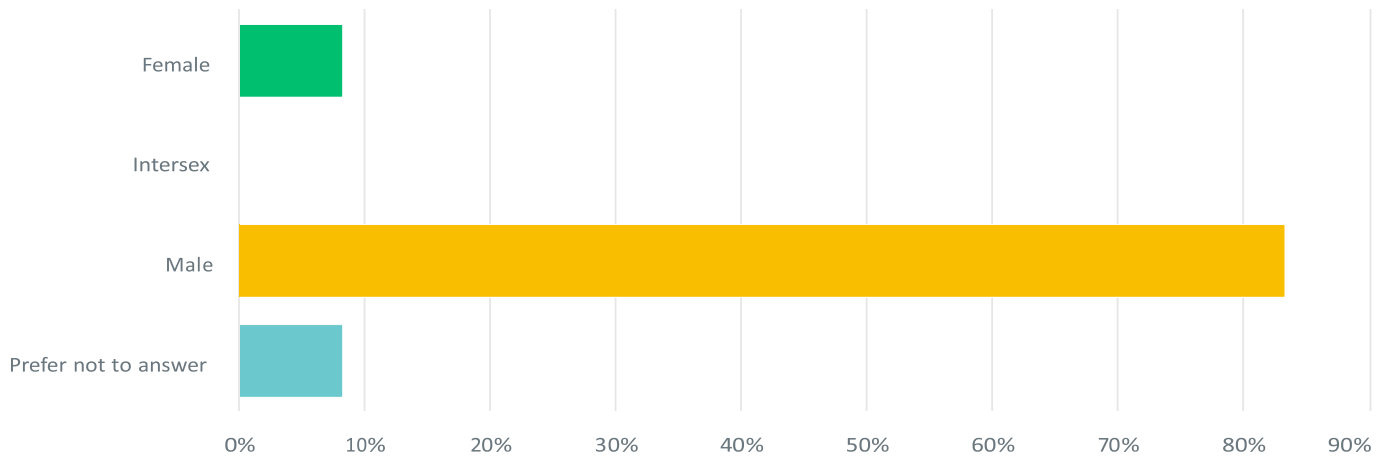
13 responses

What best describes your role in the discipline of sociology?



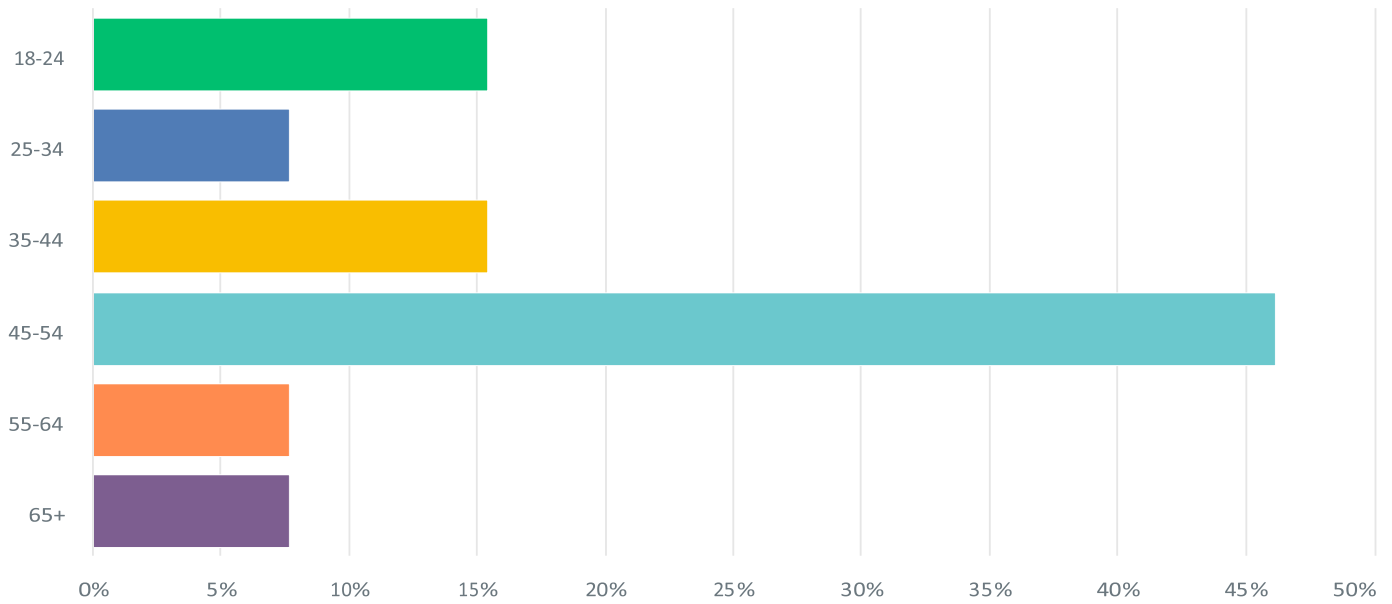
Q2 12 responses

What was your sex assigned at birth?



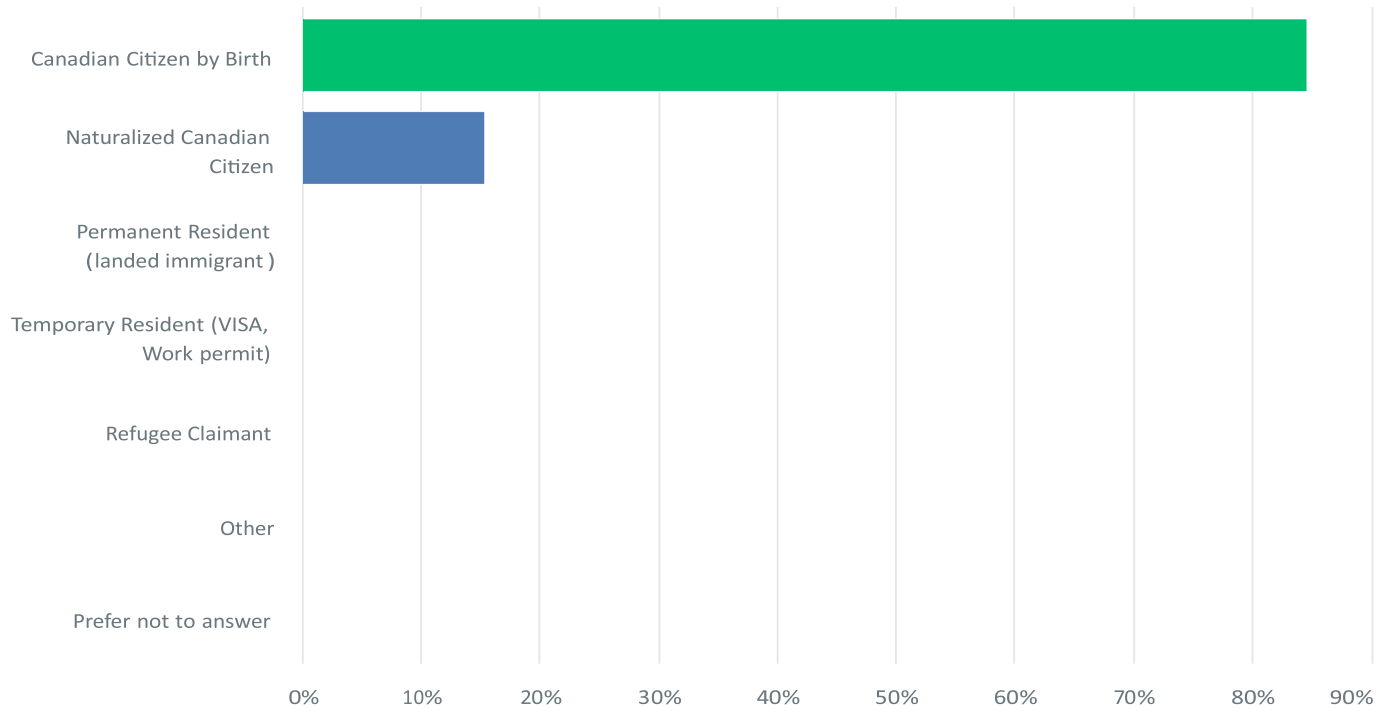
Q3 13 responses

Please identify your age group.



Q4 13 responses

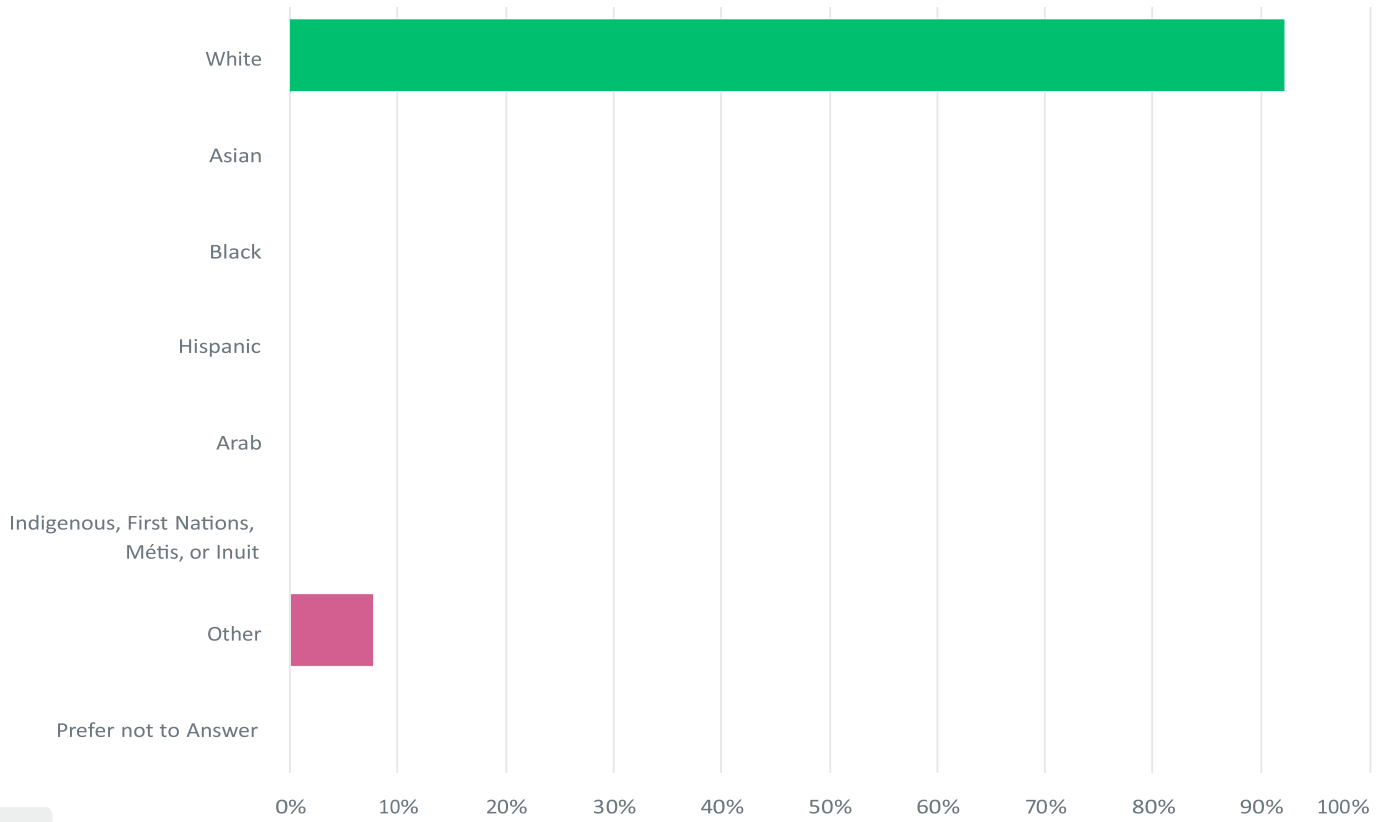
What is your Canadian citizenship status?



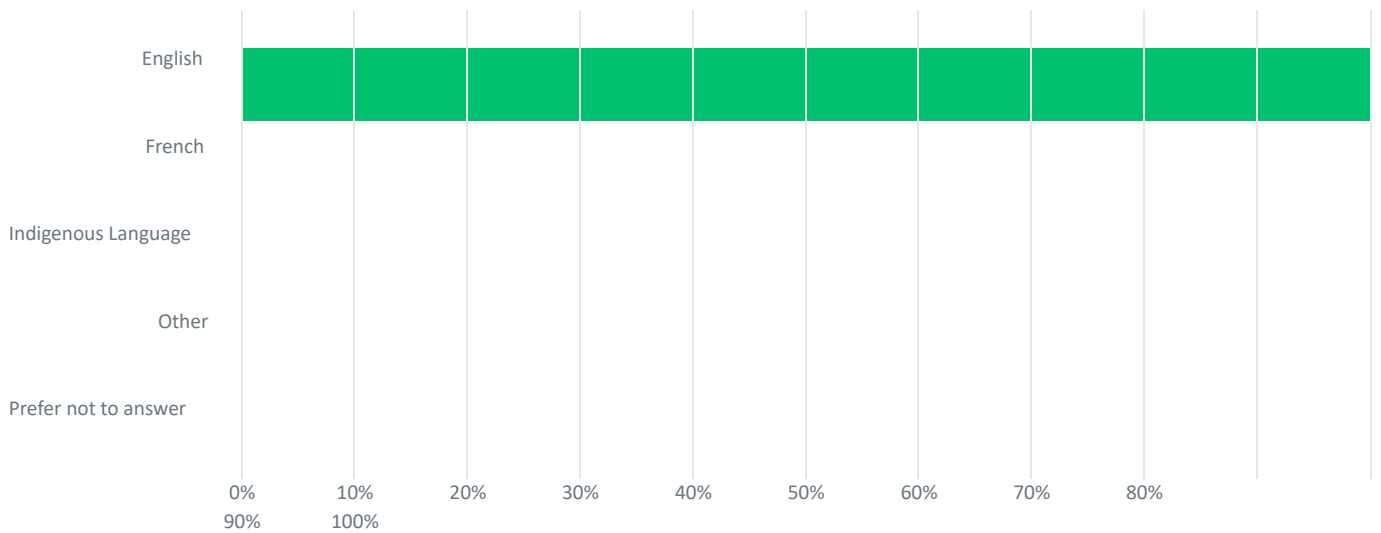
Q5

13 responses

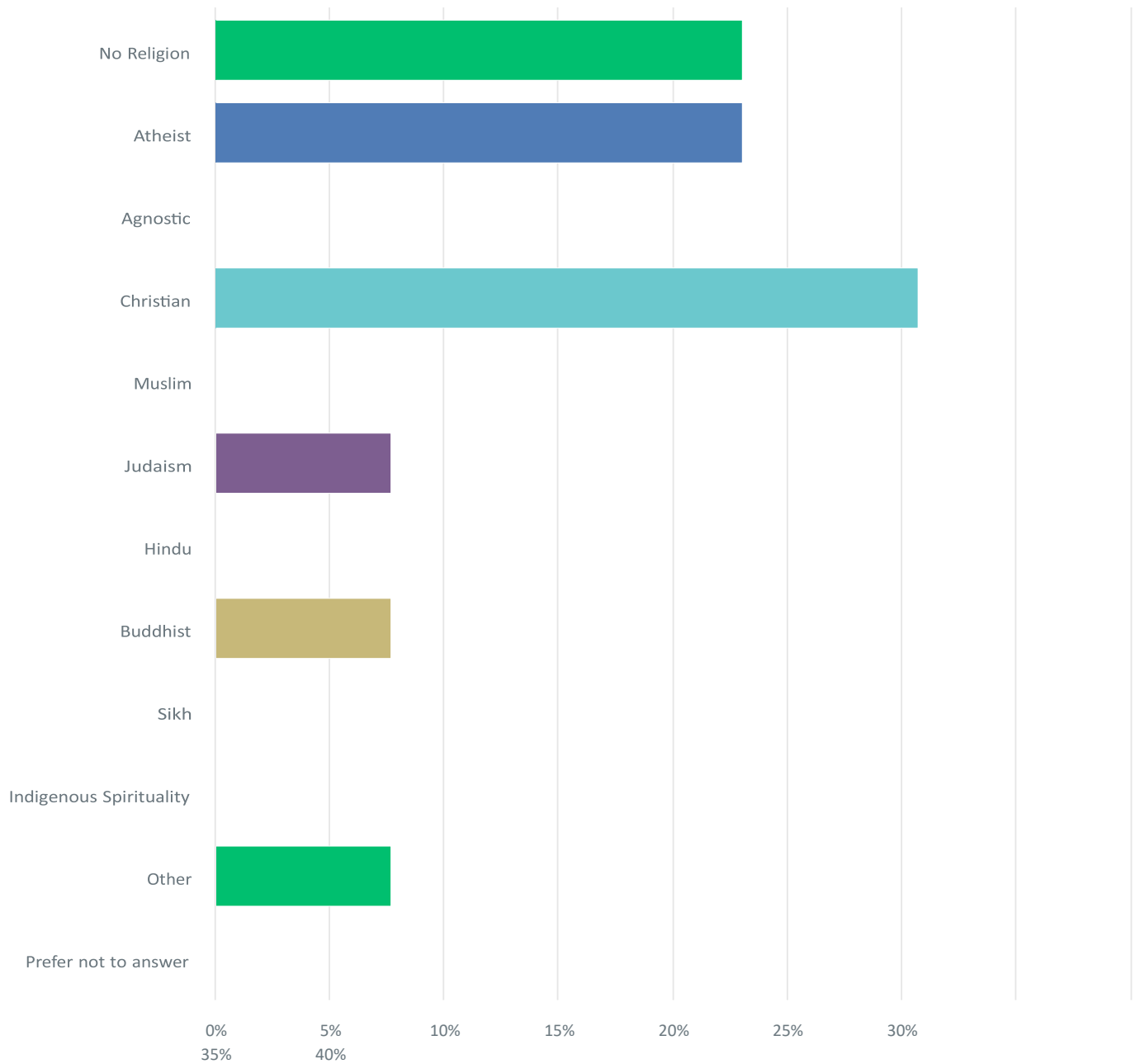
What population group do you belong to?



### What is your first language?

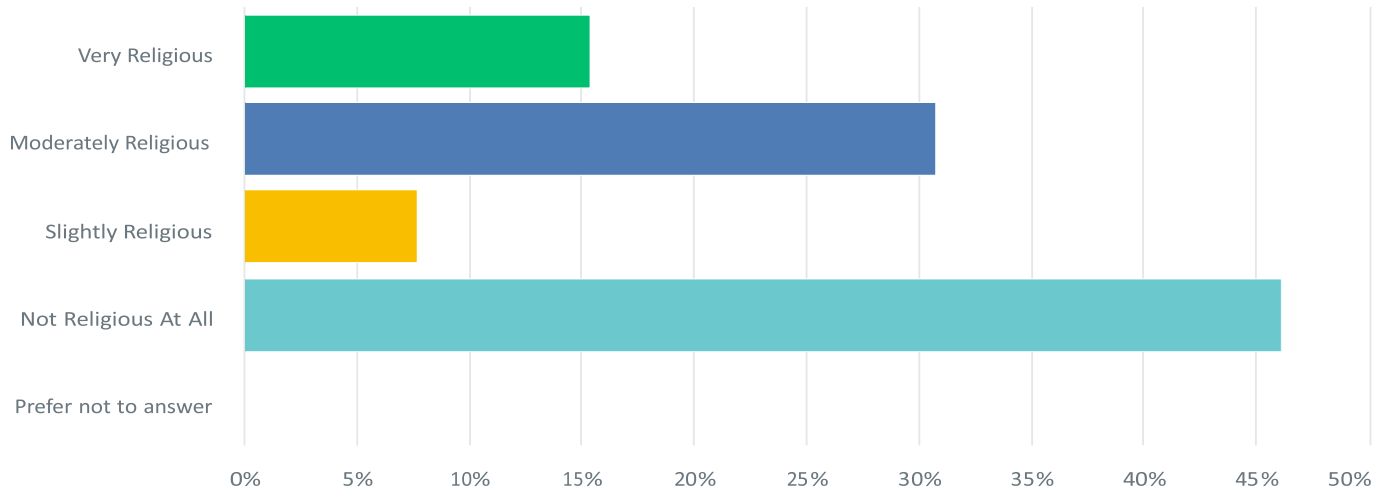


### What best describes your religious affiliation?



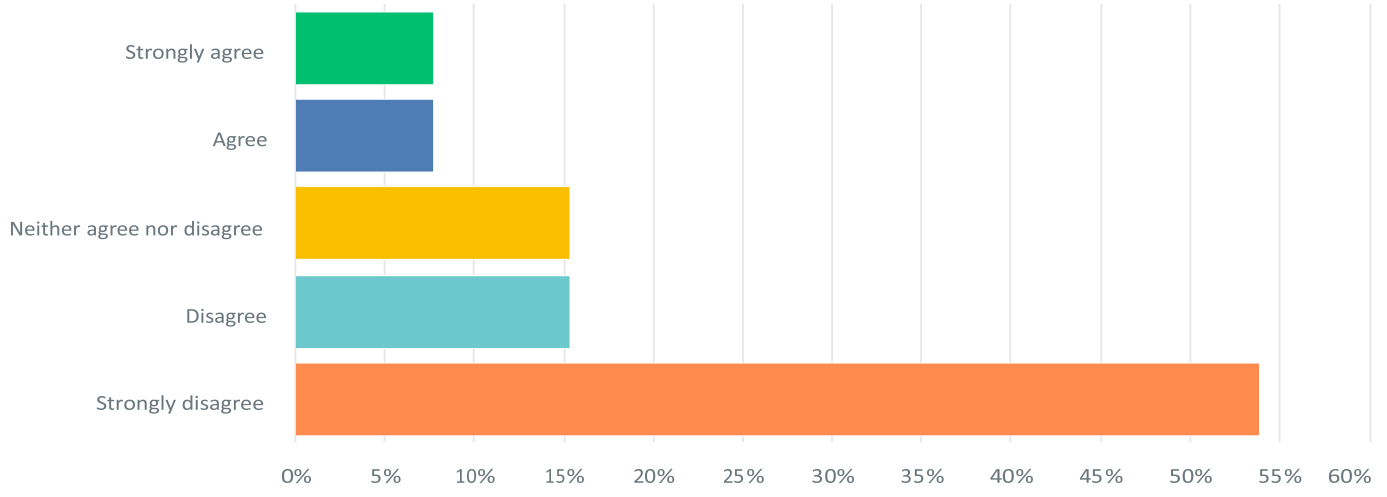
Q8 13 responses

What is your level of religiosity (religious commitment)?



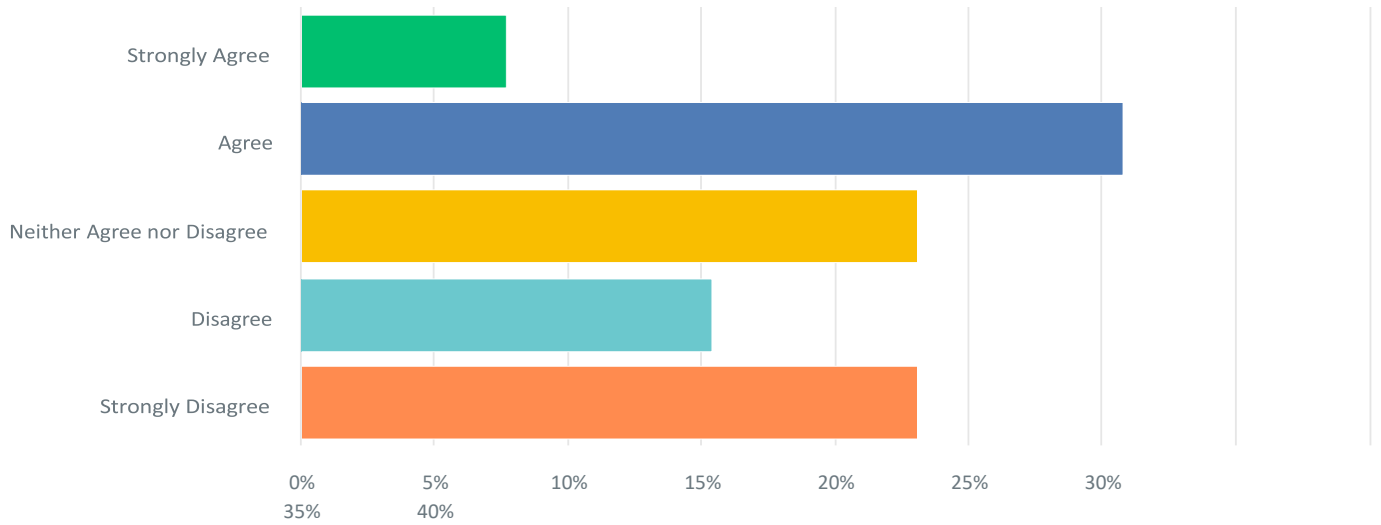
Q9 13 responses

Please rate the following statement: "My conservative values are closely linked to my ethnic and religious background".



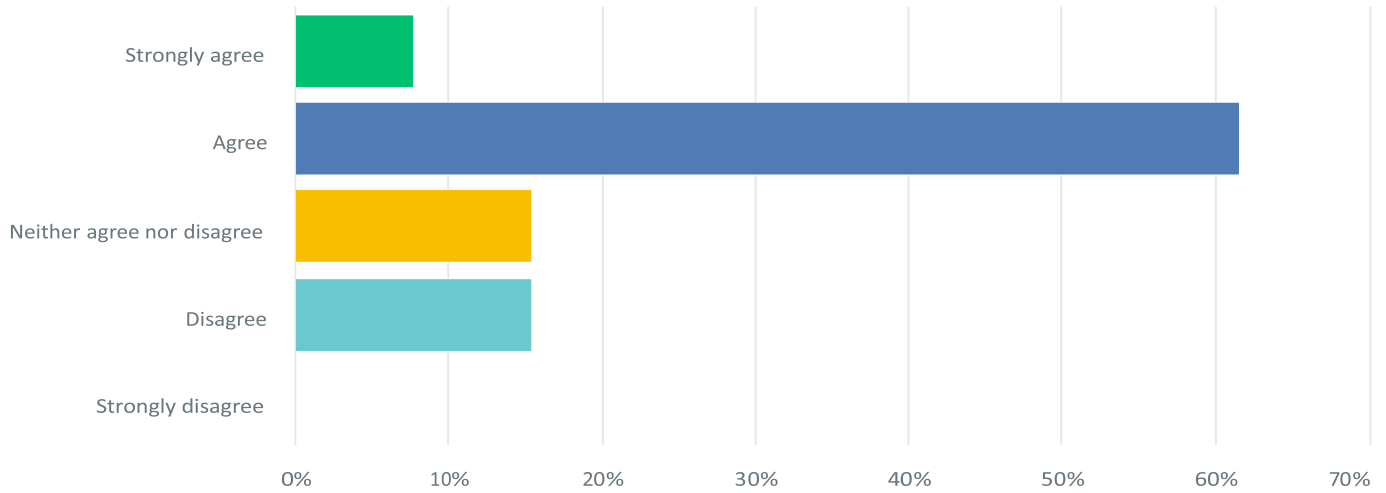
Q10 13 responses

Would you describe yourself as socially conservative?



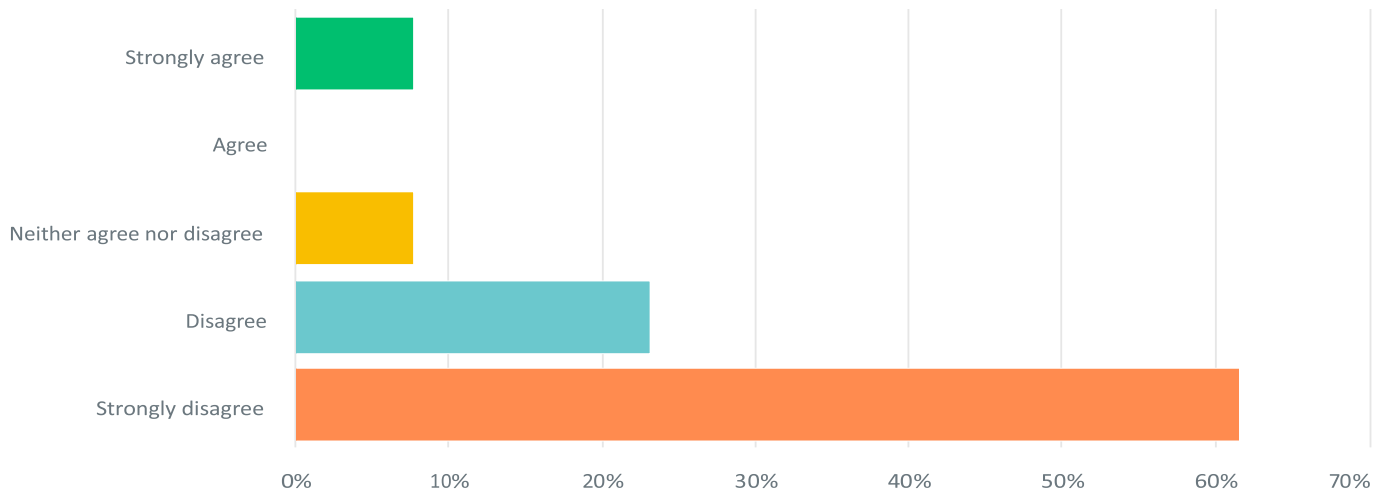
Q11 13 responses

Would you describe yourself as fiscally conservative?



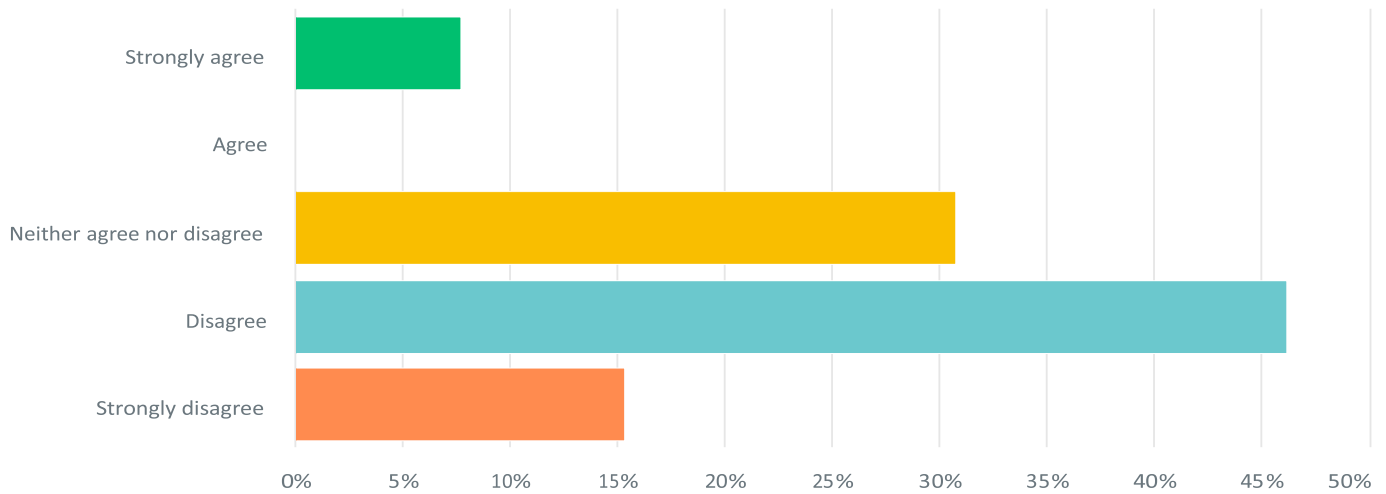
Q12 13 responses

Please rate how much you agree with the following statement: "Conservative viewpoints are welcome in Canadian Sociology".



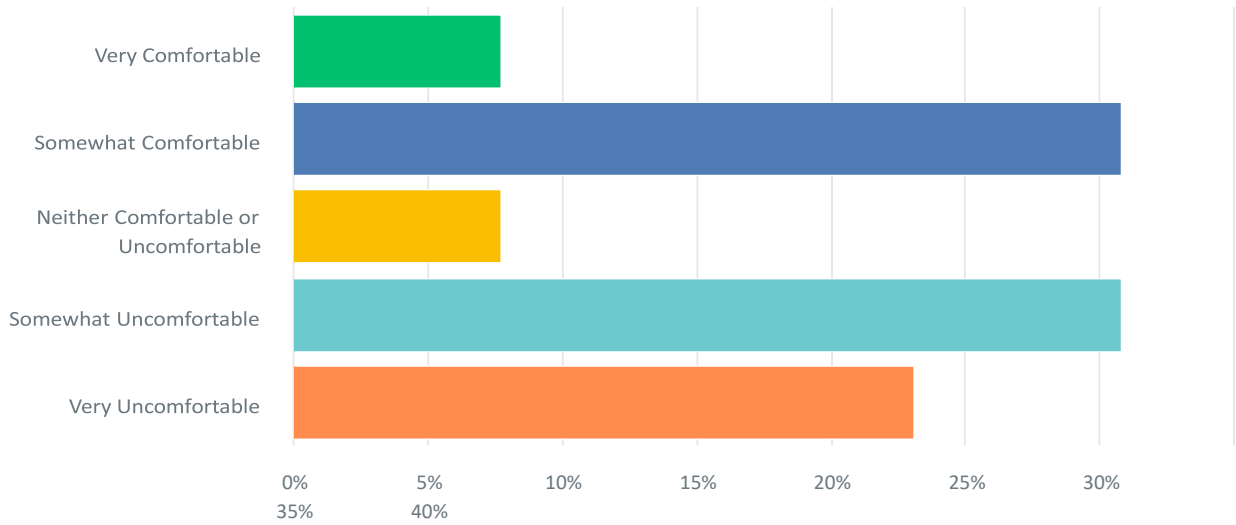
Q13 13 responses

Please rate how much you agree with the following statement: "Conservative viewpoints are accurately portrayed in Canadian sociology".



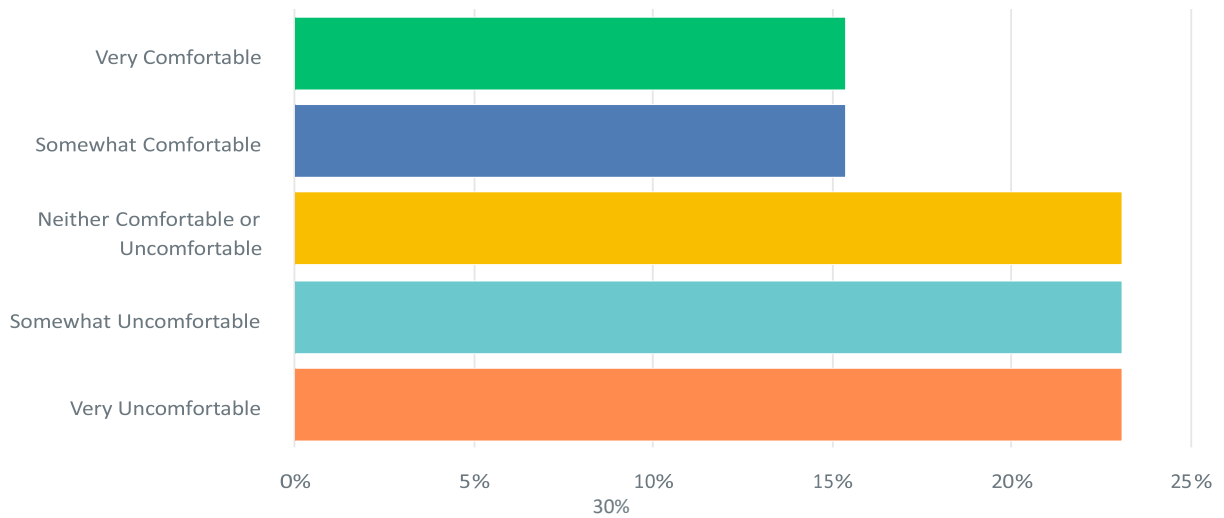
Q14 13 responses

How comfortable are you in raising conservative political views in the context of Canadian sociology discussions?



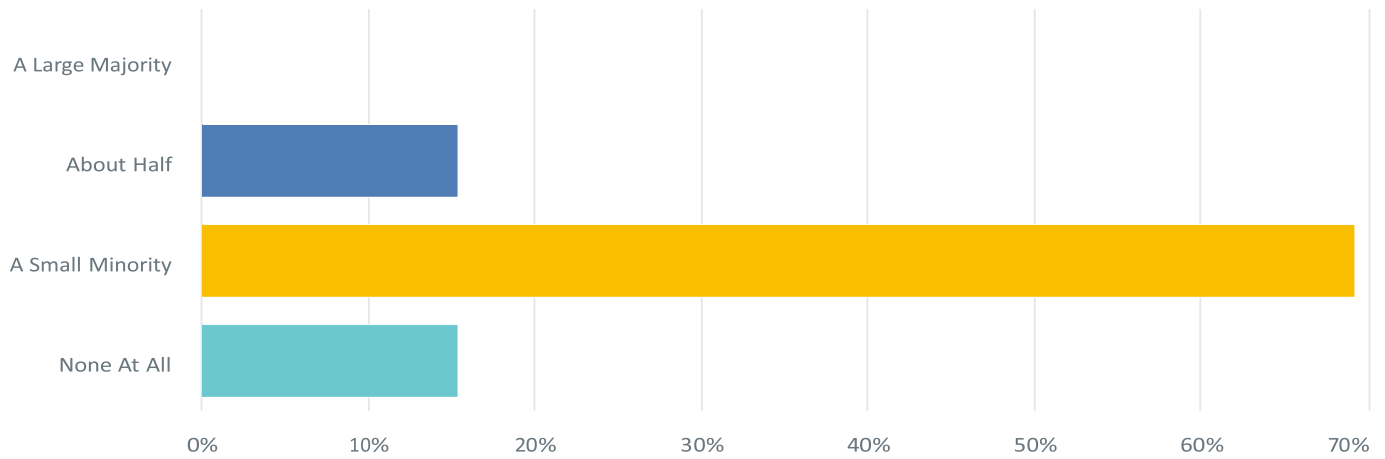
Q15 13 responses

How comfortable are you identifying yourself as conservative to your colleagues and peers in sociology?



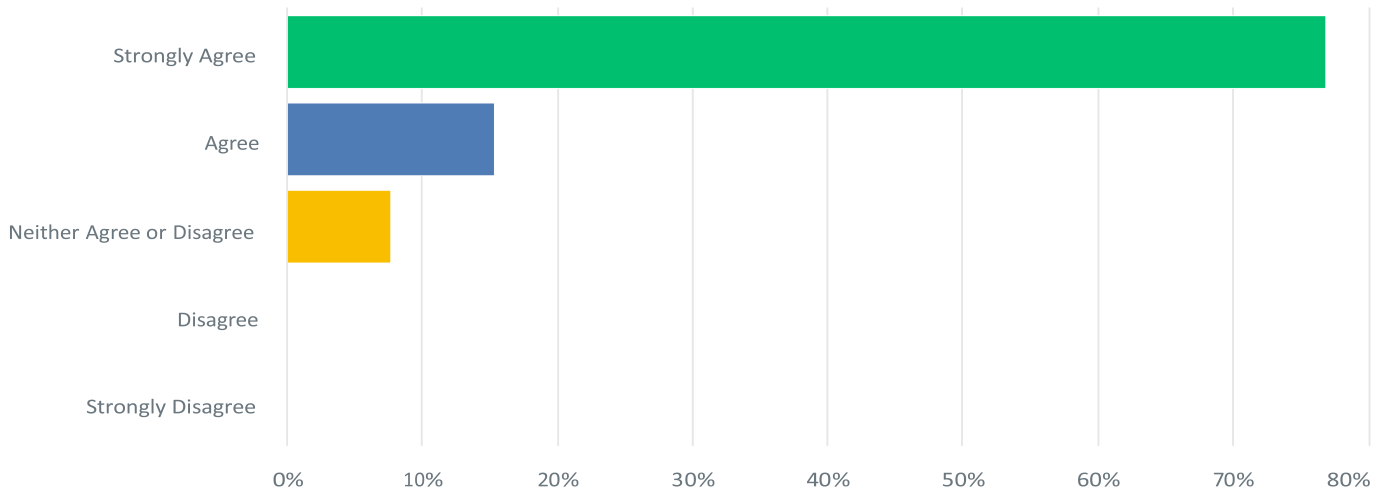
Q16 13 responses

How many of your teachers or peers in the discipline express conservative viewpoints?



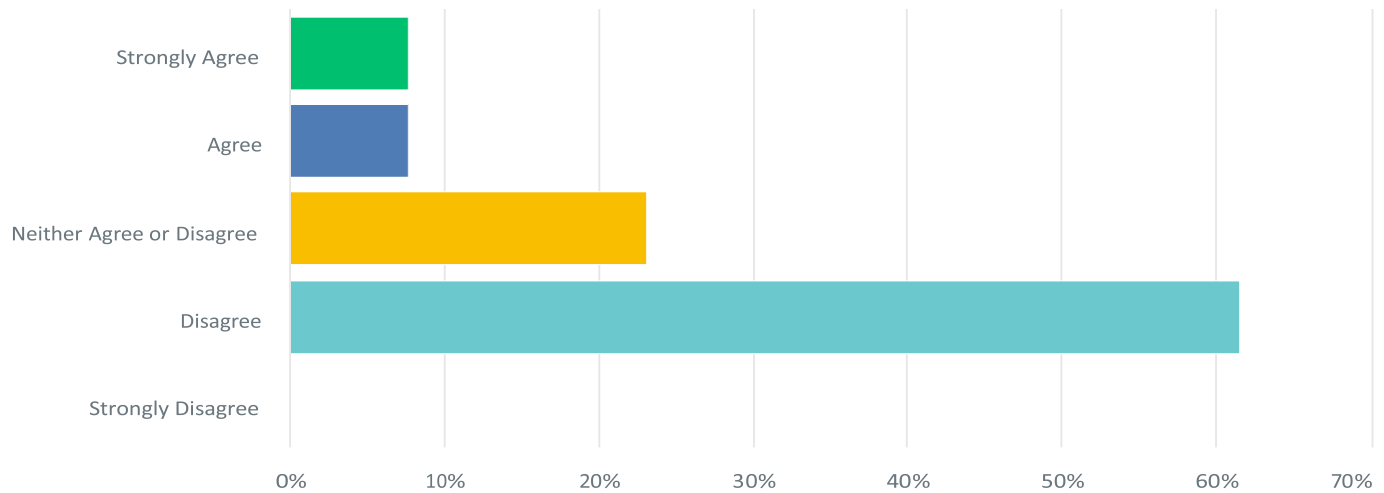
Q17 13 responses

To what extent do you agree that Canadian sociology has a left-liberal bias?



Q18 13 responses

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? "I feel welcome in the current political climate of Sociology in Canada."



**Q19 What does being a conservative mean to you? How would you describe your core political beliefs and values?**

Answered: 10 Skipped: 3

**Q20 How, if at all, do your conservative values shape your sociological interests in unique ways?**

Answered: 9 Skipped: 4

**Q21 Do you believe there are theoretical or topical blind spots in Sociology as a result of its left-liberal orientation? In what ways might a conservative standpoint provide the basis for new and interesting research questions in the field?**

Answered: 11 Skipped: 2

**Q22 In the context of sociology, were there ever situations where you felt you were treated unfairly, or met with hostility, due to your perspectives related to your political affiliation? If so, please provide an example.**

Answered: 10 Skipped: 3

Q23 Topics related to "social justice" often arise within Canadian sociology.

How might a conservative conceptualize morality and social justice differently than the mainstream of the discipline?

Answered: 11 Skipped: 2

Q24 Can you recount any experiences you may have had in trying to dialogue with liberal or left leaning viewpoints in the discipline of sociology?

Were they positive or negative interactions? Please explain.

Answered: 11 Skipped: 2

Q25 Who do you believe are the most important conservative thinkers, or most important theories, in Canadian sociology today? Why?

Answered: 9 Skipped: 4

Q26 Please use this box to share any experiences, comments, or sociological interests you think are particularly important and may not have been covered sufficiently in the previous questions.

Answered: 6 Skipped: 7

## **(2) Information Letter**

### **Invitation to Participate in Thesis Research**

#### **Study Name: Exploring Conservative Perspectives in Canadian Sociology**

Dear potential participant,

My name is Benjamin Date, and I am a graduate student at Lakehead University. I am in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of my Master's program, conducting research on politically conservative sociologists in Canada. My supervisor is Dr. Antony Puddephatt, in the department of Sociology. If you define yourself as a *conservative* (*however that makes sense to you*), I am greatly interested in learning about how you have experienced the discipline of sociology in relation to your political affiliation. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Before deciding whether to participate or not, I would kindly like to request you take a moment to read through this letter. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at [bupdate@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:bupdate@lakeheadu.ca).

#### **Purpose of Research**

This research will be led by myself (Benjamin Date – Sociology - Lakehead University) and supervised by Antony Puddephatt (Sociology – Lakehead University). I can be contacted via email at [bupdate@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:bupdate@lakeheadu.ca). Numerous sociologists have raised concerns about the narrow political spectrum and a left-liberal bias in the discipline (Lukianov and Haidt 2018; Pawluch 2019; Steeves 2022). Given this context, I am interested in learning about the first-hand experiences, observations, and ideas of conservative sociologists occupying a minority position in the discipline. The purpose of this research is to give conservative sociologists an opportunity to share their perspectives regarding the current state of Canadian sociology, as well as provide a chance to share their own experiences navigating the discipline. Further, I also hope to explore new emergent themes from more conservative positions, which might identify new promising and neglected directions for sociological research.

#### **Participation Eligibility Criteria**

In order to be eligible to participate in this research project, participants will be:

- ➔ 18 years of age or older
- ➔ Identify as politically conservative (however this makes sense to you)
- ➔ Be a current, or former, member of the Canadian Sociological Association

Participation is entirely voluntary, and participants are not obligated to answer all questions or to finish the survey. Although participants can withdraw from completing the survey at any time, once the survey has been completed, withdrawal from the study will no longer be possible due to its anonymous nature. All surveys will be completely anonymous and confidential.

### **What Information Will be Collected?**

The survey will collect a combination of demographic information and sociological perspectives/experiences related to your political affiliation. Demographic questions can include, but are not limited to, age, gender, ethnicity, language, religion, and citizenship status. The survey will also ask questions relating to conservative experiences, perspectives, and critiques pertaining to the Canadian field of sociology, and how conservative ideas might provide interesting new research directions in the discipline.

### **What is Requested of me as a Participant?**

This survey consists of 18 multiple choice questions with the option to provide additional information if desired. There are then 8 open-ended questions designed to allow you to discuss these complex issues in your own words. It is expected to take no more than 45 minutes to complete. If you do not want to answer certain questions, or decide not to complete the survey, that is your right. Your experiences, perspectives, and feedback are tremendously valued!

### **What are my Rights as a Participant?**

As a participant, you have the right to decline participation or withdraw from completing the survey at any time. I will have no way of knowing who decides to participate or not. However, once the survey has been completed, you will no longer be able to withdraw from the study. This is due to the anonymous nature of the survey itself. Once completed, the results will be fully anonymous and therefore not possible to remove individual contributions. You also have the right to access the findings. Once the study is complete, I can provide a summary of the results upon request. Additionally, I can also provide you with a copy of the thesis in its entirety.

### **What are the Risks and Benefits?**

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study due to the anonymous nature of the data collection and publication. The benefit to participating is allowing you the opportunity to voice any concerns you may have about the political leanings of the discipline, and express your views and experiences without worrying about social or professional backlash. This is a chance to present your perspectives authentically and free of political censorship, which might be cathartic. The findings of this study will not only indicate patterns of conservative thought and experience in the context of Canadian sociology and allow for critical disciplinary reflection, but may also indicate potential blind spots along with new and creative ideas for the discipline.

### **Will I Receive an Honourarium/Incentive/Compensation?**

There are no honorariums, incentives, or compensation offered for participating in this study.

### **How Will My Confidentiality be Maintained?**

The survey will be completed electronically online, using SurveyMonkey, and is completely anonymous. There will be no request to provide a name or any identifying information. In the rare case that potentially identifying information of any kind is provided in the text boxes, I will be sure to alter or omit this in any written reports.

### **Who Will Have Access to my Data?**

The only people who will have access to the data are myself, as well as my supervisory committee, Dr. Antony Puddephatt and Dr. Chris Sanders, at Lakehead University. All this data is anonymous and cannot be connected to any particular individual.

**Disclaimer:** The research team will not share any personally identifiable information with anyone outside the study, except in the following cases and only if required by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. The Research Ethics Board may review the study records to ensure compliance with the approved research ethics guidelines. All information collected during this study, including your personal information on the consent forms, will remain confidential.

### **Where Will my Data be Stored?**

Data from the survey will be exported from SurveyMonkey to my personal laptop computer, which is password protected. After exporting the data for analysis with SPSS and NVivo, I will delete the project from the SurveyMonkey account. Once the project is complete, I will transfer all the data to Dr. Puddephatt's office computer, which is also password protected, where it will be stored for 7 years as per the requirements of Lakehead University.

**Disclaimer:** Due to the use of online tools in this study, there is a small risk that your data could be accessed by third parties, including government authorities, under applicable privacy and national-security laws. While all reasonable efforts will be made to protect your confidentiality and anonymity, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed when data is transmitted or stored online.

### **What Will my Data Be Used For?**

Your data will be analyzed to better understand the experiences and perspectives of those occupying conservative positions in Sociology, for the purposes of my MA thesis project. There is a possibility I will attempt to publish my thesis in a relevant sociological journal or present my findings at related sociological events. In those instances, the anonymity and confidentiality of participants will continue to be maintained.

### **How Can I Receive a Copy of the Research Results?**

All participants will have access to the study findings upon request. You can send me an email at [bpdate@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:bpdate@lakeheadu.ca) and I can send you a summary of results, or the entire thesis if preferred. Please note, by reaching out to access the findings, I will know you have participated in the study. Your identity will be kept entirely confidential in that case, and I will still have no way of knowing which specific survey results are yours.

### **What if I Want to Withdraw from the Study?**

As aforementioned, participation is entirely voluntary. If at any time you wish to withdraw from the study, simply do not finish the survey. However, once the survey has been submitted, withdrawing from the study will no longer be possible due to the anonymous nature of the results. Due to the inability to withdraw anonymized survey results, please take the time to consider whether you would like to participate or not. There is no penalty or consequence if you want to look at the survey questions before deciding to fully participate or not.

### **Researcher Contact Information**

Researcher: Benjamin Date/Graduate Student of Sociology/Lakehead University

Email: [bupdate@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:bupdate@lakeheadu.ca)

Supervisor: Antony Puddephatt/Professor of Sociology/Lakehead University

Email: [apuddeph@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:apuddeph@lakeheadu.ca)

### **Research Ethics Board Review and Approval**

The Lakehead University Research Ethics Board has reviewed and approved this research study. If you have any questions related to the research ethics and would like to speak to someone outside of the research team, please contact Sheena Beach at the Research Ethics Board at [807-343-8010](tel:807-343-8010) ext. 8933 or [research.ethics@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:research.ethics@lakeheadu.ca).

### **(3) Consent Letter**

#### **Consent Form**

I agree to the following:

- ✓ I have read and understand the information contained in the Information Letter.
- ✓ I agree to participate.
- ✓ I understand the risks and benefits of the study.
- ✓ I am a volunteer and can choose not to complete the survey.
- ✓ I understand that I can stop participating and leave the study at any time. However, once the survey has been submitted it will no longer be possible to withdraw my answers due to the anonymous nature of the survey.
- ✓ The data will be securely stored at Lakehead University on a password protected computer for a minimum period of 7 years following completion of the research project as per the requirements of Lakehead University.
- ✓ I understand that due to the use of online tools in this study, there is a small risk that your data could be accessed by third parties, including government authorities, under applicable privacy and national-security laws. While all reasonable efforts will be made to protect your confidentiality and anonymity, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed when data is transmitted or stored online.
- ✓ I understand that the research findings will be available to me upon request.
- ✓ I will remain anonymous throughout the entirety of the study.
- ✓ All my questions have been answered.

By consenting to participate, I have not waived any legal recourse in the event of research-related harm. You can provide your consent by proceeding to the survey, after you have read and agreed to the above terms. There is no need to identify yourself at any point. If you have questions or concerns that you would like addressed before agreeing, please feel free to contact me via email ([bpdate@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:bpdate@lakeheadu.ca)). In this case, your participation will still be entirely anonymous and confidential.

If you have read the above and consent to participate, please proceed to the survey.

**LINK TO SURVEY:** [LINK WAS HERE]

Thank you very much for your participation on this neglected area of study in Canadian Sociology!

#### **(4) Email Template for Recruitment**

To your department of Sociology,  
My name is Ben Date, and I am a 2<sup>nd</sup> year MA student of sociology at Lakehead University.

I am conducting research on Canadian conservative sociologists for my thesis project. More specifically, I am seeking to survey Canadian sociologists who identify as conservative, or leaning to the right on the political spectrum, to explore their experiences and perspectives in the discipline. I plan to reach out to all sociology departments across Canada, to better understand the minority perspectives of conservative thinkers.

My hope is that you are willing to disseminate my survey invitation to your sociology department so I can recruit research participants. The survey would take approximately 45-minutes to complete and can be done online at the participant's leisure. I have attached a copy of the information letter and consent form below, as well as a link to the survey itself for reference. All components of this research study have been approved by the research ethics board at Lakehead University.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at this email, or my thesis supervisor Dr. Puddephatt at [apuddeph@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:apuddeph@lakeheadu.ca). I would be immensely grateful for your assistance in forwarding this survey to invite participants from your department.

Thank you for your consideration and all the best,  
Ben Date  
[bupdate@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:bupdate@lakeheadu.ca)

[Attached was the REB-approved information letter and consent form. See APPENDIX 2 & 3).

**(5) Email Follow Up**

Hello,

I hope the new year has been treating you well! I wanted to follow up as I know the timing of my previous email may have been less than ideal, I understand the Christmas holidays can be quite busy, and emails have a tendency to get lost. On that note, I wanted to reach out once more in case my previous survey invitation was lost in the electronic holiday mail. Please see the attached/replied email for information regarding an invitation to participate in my thesis research, as well as the information and consent letter attached. As per my previous email, if you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you and all the best,  
Ben Date  
Lakehead University