Pride and Prejudice: The Ambivalence of Canadian Attitudes toward Disability and Inclusion

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Contents

I.   Introduction

What values and attitudes do Canadians hold on matters of impairments and handicaps, of who they think of as disabled, on what they understand to be a disability, and on which institutions in society are responsible for taking action for advancing the inclusion of persons with disabilities? To take up these questions, this paper examines the 2004 benchmark survey and focus group results on Canadian attitudes toward disability issues commissioned by the Office for Disability Issues, Social Development Canada.

This survey and focus group study are the first systematic national effort by the Government of Canada to measure and explore the attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of the general population on issues of disability. Information from the survey and focus groups is politically and policy relevant for several reasons. It is of interest for better understanding the political culture in this field, for effectively engaging with policy communities and networks, for managing public issues and agendas, perhaps even backing for policy and program solutions (Wamsley and Zald 1976; Pal 1997; Rioux and Prince 2002; Stienstra and Wight-Felske 2003). As a form of policy analysis, public opinion polls and focus group results can contribute over time to social learning and progressive change in what Ignatieff (1984, 9) calls the "moral relations between strangers in the welfare state."

My thesis is that public thinking on issues of disability is marked by contending attitudes and ideas of people with disabilities and by feelings of hesitancy and uncertainty over solutions for their social inclusion. Most Canadians hold a positive image of their own views towards and experiences with people with disabilities and believe that, over the last decade, progress has occurred in the inclusion of people with disabilities in community life. At the same time, most Canadians believe that discriminatory attitudes and behaviours toward people with disabilities are still widespread in society. Canadians are also inclined to think of disability in terms of visible physical disabilities rather than mental health, developmental and learning disabilities. The resulting public opinion environment is one of pride and prejudice. This ambivalence is complex and contradictory, undoubtedly challenging to governments as well as groups and organizations in the policy community committed to advancing the full citizenship of persons with mental and physical disabilities.

The analysis proceeds as follows: first, the impetus for the national survey and focus groups is discussed, along with the techniques themselves, thus highlighting the goals and methods for the research. Second, a range of findings from the survey and focus groups are presented and critically discussed. Third, the paper considers how the research results have so far been used by the federal government and national disability organizations. Finally, the paper raises challenges and issues facing governments and the disability rights community in advancing the inclusion and full citizenship of Canadians with disabilities. Given the ambivalence that surrounds public attitudes and beliefs regarding people with disabilities and disability, some cultural work seems required to improve the understanding of disability issues and mobilizing of public support and thus political interest in advancing the well being of people with disabilities.

II. Impetus for a National Study of Public Attitudes on Disability

After a period in the mid 1990s when it seemed the federal government was withdrawing from the disability policy field, prompting strong political reaction by the community and a response by the Chretien government, the federal government has gradually been articulating a more explicit role on disability issues (Prince 2004). Among these activities is the production a federal agenda on future directions, intergovernmental agreements on employment measures for people with disabilities, various tax measures, reports on key activities and outcome measures and indicators in selected policy areas, and the generation of statistical information on disability (Canada 2004). Nonetheless, community groups and even some government officials, strongly feel that disability as a public issue endures a status in which concern is routinely expressed by policy makers yet disability remains overshadowed by other issues, never attaining a high-priority place on government agendas for major reforms and transformative initiatives. Much of disability policy making and reform continues to be a hit-and-miss affair of piecemeal actions (Prince 2004).

The federal government has been assembling a national data base on disability through a number of survey instruments since the early 1980s, with the Canadian Health and Disability Survey in 1983/84 and the Health and Activity Limitation Survey in 1986 and 1991, succeeded by the Participation and Activity Limitation Survey of 2001 and 2006. In addition to these disability-specific surveys that focus on disability rates and the lived experience of people with different types and severity of disability, the federal government also collects information on disability in other major surveys, including the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics and the National Population Health Survey. Despite this growing source of statistical information, a gap exists in knowing the attitudes and beliefs of Canadians, those with and without disabilities, towards issues of disability. For officials in Social Development Canada, a national survey specifically on Canadian attitudes toward disability issues had the potential of shedding light on the puzzle as to why the disability file was never at the top of the agenda; always a bridesmaid, never the bride.

A national survey on attitudes, by assessing public opinion, was recognized as a useful input to inform strategic thinking and for shaping policy options within Social Development Canada and wider federal government policy structures and processes. In making the results freely available (Environics Research Group 2004*a*), the national survey and focus groups can also serve as a public good that the disability rights movement and other organizations can use with a prospect of shaping the attention given to disability issues on societal and governmental agendas.

The Research Methods and Objectives

The Office for Disability Issues in Social Development Canada thus commissioned Environics Research Group to undertake a national study of public awareness and attitudes toward disabilities, in two stages, one a qualitative study using focus groups and the second stage a quantitative study using a telephone survey.

Eight focus groups were conducted, two each in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, and Lethbridge. Both focus groups in Montreal were conducted in French while the others were carried out in English. The focus groups ranged between five to eight participants, with 49 participants overall. In the main, participants did not identify themselves as having a disability.[1] With advance consent of the participants, all sessions were audio-taped and videotaped. The focus group approach used was the Intensive/Interaction Workshop method (Morgan 1997; Krueger and Casey 2000), a method thought to be "comfortable for participants as it provides a forum in which they can collect their thoughts and share ideas about a subject that may or may not have touched them personally, or that they may only think about rarely" (Environics Research Group 2004*b*, 4).

The quantitative research phase of the study used the method of telephone surveys (Bourque and Fiedler 2002; Lavrakas 1993), the standard technique in polling the opinions of population groups on public affairs (Canada 2003*a*). The questionnaire design is unique, developed specifically for this study by officials in the Office for Disability Issues in conjunction with the Environics Research Group, along with input by some specialists in the disability community. Chief elements of the final questionnaire, which comprises 58 questions, are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1
Main Sections of the Final Questionnaire on Canadian Attitudes
Towards Disability Issues, 2004

A. Respondent Selection
B. Conceptions of Disabilities
C. Direct Experience with Disabilities
D. Barriers to Persons with Disabilities
E. Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities
F. Appropriate Roles with Respect to Persons with Disabilities
G. Supports for Persons with Disabilities
H. Respondent Characteristics

Source: Environics Research Group (2004*a*).

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[1] In terms of the composition of focus group workshops, in each group and across all eight groups there was a range of age groups of adults over 18, family incomes, household structures, and men and women. With the Lethbridge focus groups, several participants were First Nations Persons (Environics Research Group 2004*b*, 5 – 6.

As is usual with telephone surveys, nearly all the questions were closed-ended, with just three open-ended questions dealing with conceptions of disabilities, beliefs on barriers to fuller participation, and beliefs on important solutions to stop discrimination against persons with disabilities in Canada. Overall, the questionnaire is an ambitious, innovative research tool aimed at measuring general opinions, attitudes and perceptions on specific issues, reporting personal experiences, the level of awareness of barriers and existing sources of supports for persons with disabilities, plus certain socio-economic demographic characteristics of the respondents. More than an opinion poll on current events, the survey collected information on enduring attitudes of Canadians and explicates something of their core beliefs and values regarding disability, normality and human dignity.

Following a full pre-test and some adjustments, the survey was conducted over a three week period in January and February 2004 with a representative sample of 1,843 Canadians, of whom 521 respondents reported a self-defined disability as reflected in responses to specific questions.[2] The completion rate was 22 per cent, (1,843 completed interviews from the 8,562 qualified respondents contacted) which is within the range common for telephone surveys (Mendelshon and Brent 2001).

The research objectives were multiple and intricate, seeking to obtain a more in-depth understanding about numerous issues pertaining to disabilities and attitudes toward persons with disabilities. The workshops and the national survey aimed at dealing with the following topics:

- What the term "disability" means to Canadians (for example, as a medical/health versus rights/citizenship versus human capital/economic issue);
- Attitudes and perceptions of disabilities by severity and type;
- The degree of acceptance versus rejection of persons with disabilities in various settings (educational, workplace, community) and in various roles;
- Personal experience with disabilities, either first- or second-hand, and how this experience influences attitudes and perceptions;
- General opinions about prejudice and discrimination against persons with disabilities, and their role in society;

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[2] Respondents were asked if they or anyone else in their household had "any difficulty hearing, seeing, communicating, walking, climbing stairs, bending, learning or doing any similar activities." They were also asked if "a physical or mental condition or health problem reduce the amount or kind of activity you or anyone else in your household can do" at home, at work or at school or in other activities? (Environics Research Group 2004*a*, 1). The sample was stratified across the provinces and territories to enable regional analyses, as well as by age group and disability status. The sampling error is 2.3 per cent with a confidence interval of 95 per cent; that is, that 95 per cent of all samples taken from the same population using the same questions at the same time would be within plus or minus 2.3 per cent (Mendelshon and Brent 2001).

- Awareness and opinions about the barriers to inclusion created by disabilities (for example, physical access, social isolation, economic obstacles, absence of social supports);
- What barriers are perceived, and how they are managed or not managed now;
- Awareness of and knowledge about existing sources of support available to persons with disabilities;
- The range of beliefs about the appropriate roles for different sources of support for persons with disabilities (e.g., government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), families, local communities); and
- How awareness and attitudes vary, if at all, by population segment such as by region, demographic characteristics like age, and by extent of experience with disabilities (Environics Research Group 2004*b*, 3-4).

Using mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative research, the telephone survey generates statistically valid and measurable results of the topic, while the focus groups offer an understanding into people's experiences, interpretations and perceptions, as well as elicit their questions and beliefs in greater depth possible than in the survey. Findings from the focus groups also augment the national survey in providing concrete narratives and local textures to issues (Canada 2003*b*, 4; Morgan 1997, 10-15).

III.   The Findings: A Critical Overview

The findings, many of which but not all can be covered here due to constraints of space, can be presented in two phases along the lines of the national study itself, first outlining results from the qualitative research of the focus groups and then the quantitative research from the telephone survey.

Focus Group Workshops

Key findings from the focus groups are summarized in Table 2 in terms of main themes from the responses of the 49 participants in the workshops.

Table 2
Main Themes from the Focus Group Workshops

- Disabilities and disability-related issues are not "top-of-mind awareness" for most participants.
- Tendency to think of "disability" in terms of visible and physical limitations, especially by people with little contact with persons with disabilities.
- Confusion as to whether a disability is an illness or sickness.
- Agreement that people with visible disabilities experience discrimination in schools, workplaces, and in social settings.
- First Nations persons with disabilities living off-reserve face "double discrimination" and a jurisdictional maze of elusive service responsibilities.
- General belief there has been important progress in accepting people with physical disabilities into various spheres of mainstream community life.
- Little awareness and knowledge of actual supports available to persons with disabilities.
- Belief that funding and support is likely insufficient to help people with disabilities live with comfort and dignity.
- Families (immediate or extended) should be the first resource for people with disabilities, along with provincial health care systems and non-profit agencies.
- Raising public awareness through education and information is the most common suggestion for improving the status of Canadians with disabilities.

Source: Synthesized from Environics Research Group (2004*b*, 7- 45).

The pride and prejudice of Canadians is apparent in their attitudes and perceptions of disabilities, especially by type and severity of disabilities.

In terms of pride, the focus group interactions showed that most participants "like to think of themselves as being open to the idea of integration of persons with disabilities into their day-to-day activities" and that they "want to behave toward a person with disabilities in a kind and sympathetic manner. They don't want to appear uncaring or unsympathetic" (Environics Research Group 2004*b*, 9-10).

At the same time, though, the focus groups revealed certain predispositions or prejudices; for example, that "many [participants] were uncomfortable with some aspects involved in developing relations or communications with those who have various types of disabilities." In the blunt words of one participant from Toronto, with some post-secondary education: "I don't mind being around anyone with a disability as long as it is visible and not ugly" (Environics Research Group 2004*b*, 34). Similarly, as the final report on the focus groups states: "Many thought visible disabilities easier to 'assess' than invisible disabilities, including cognitive limitations and mental illness. Many admitted that they are made very uncomfortable by behaviour that doesn't seem 'normal'" (Environics Research Group 2004*b*, 9). In the words of a Halifax focus group participant:

> People tend to fear them, if you can't communicate with someone, a lot of people with cerebral palsy and that type of thing, they can't communicate properly. I've got to get away from them. Then, there are those that are not right, somehow – you will see people in malls and stores who are talking to themselves and stuff. What do we do? We get right away from them too (Environics Research Group 2004*b*, 9-10).

On interacting with a physically impaired person, a Montreal participant said: "Il y une couples d'années, quand on voyait un handicape on baissait les yeux;" or if the person was disfigured in the face, a Toronto participant admitted, "I just feel more self-conscious and it shouldn't be that way but I just do" (Environics Research Group 2004*b*, 29).

Canadians' ambivalent attitudes are further revealed in the degree of acceptance of persons with disabilities, the awareness and opinions about barriers to inclusion, and suggestions for improving the status quo for persons with disabilities. While participants felt people with disabilities deserve the same opportunities as other citizens to participate in social, economic and public affairs to the fullest, some participants expressed concern that the integration of people with disabilities in workplaces could negatively affect the rights of those who do not have disabilities to participation in the labour market (Environics Research Group 2004*b*, 9-10). Greater concern emerged in the focus groups about the integration of children with various "special needs" into regular classrooms. The mix of beliefs is obvious in this summary statement of participants' views:

> Some argue that it is important for people to become familiar with people who have either physical or mental disabilities. Some argue that class sizes are now larger and that teachers are stretched; integrating children with special needs into classes in the mainstream may compromise the quality of education. Some felt that if there is a way to "categorize" physical and mental disability, then it might be possible to integrate some students with disabilities and to offer special segregated opportunities to others [such as for children with learning and behavioural disabilities] (Environics Research Group 2004*b*, 10).

On suggestions for improving the present situation for persons with disabilities, "Many [participants] admitted that they are particularly uncomfortable with the idea of integration of those with mental illness into mainstream, work, and school. These participants feel almost "ashamed" of themselves for not knowing how to respond, or how to behave in the presence of someone with behaviour that is out of their "normal" experience" (Environics Research Group 2004*b*, 43).

The Benchmark Survey

As with the focus groups, the national survey found Canadians tend to think of disability firstly in terms of physical handicaps and that some people then think of mental, learning and developmental disabilities. The survey revealed that the type of disability under consideration matters as regards not only what is seen to be a disability but also people's experiences and feelings being around persons with disabilities, their support for integrated classrooms for children with different kinds of special needs, and their beliefs about people with disabilities experiencing discrimination (Environics Research Group 2004*c*, 3-4).

The Environics final report on the survey data has a section entitled "Direct Contact with Persons with Disabilities." It is reported there that on the question of does the respondent personally know someone with a disability, 75 per cent of the sample said yes they did. This does not necessarily mean, as the report implies, that most Canadians therefore have "fairly wide, if not extensive" experience with people with disabilities. True, the result shows that the person with a disability that the person has direct contact is most likely either a family member (48 per cent) or a friend (43 per cent). Yet, the results also show that these family members "are most likely to be someone outside of the immediate family, such as an uncle or cousin," and that of "those Canadians who have a family member with a disability, only 11 percent report that this individual is currently living with them in their home" (Environics Research Group 2004*c*,14). Comparatively few Canadians say that the person or persons with a disability that they know is a classmate or co-worker (9 per cent) or an acquaintance (6 per cent). The actual nature and extent of contact seems more akin to "a silent relation between us," at its best often a "solidarity among strangers" mediated through an assemblage of public and private services (Ignatieff 1984, 10).

The survey asked Canadians that when they encounter someone they do not know well who has an obvious disability, do they feel awkward, afraid of the person, sorry for the person, indifferent towards the person, or admiration for the person. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3
Personal Reactions to Someone with an Obvious Disability
(Percentages)

Reaction	Often	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Admiration	45	31	8	9
Sorry	21	33	17	24
Awkward	5	26	22	43
Indifferent	6	12	19	58
Afraid	*	4	13	80

* Less than one per cent.
Source: Environics Research Group (2004*c*, 16).

The Environics researchers properly point out that these results measure how Canadians think that they and others ought to respond to these items, rather than measure how they actually would behave in specific situations (Environics Research Group 2004*c*, 16). To these caveats, we can add that the items in this question do not include any emotional responses that relate to understanding disability in terms of human rights, citizenship or economic terms, feelings, say, of solidarity toward the person or equality with the person (Ignatieff 1984; Stienstra and Wight-Felske 2003). Indeed, one could argue that the choices available reflect aspects of the personal tragedy, charitable, and medical viewpoints of disability (Rioux and Prince 2002; Canada 2003*a*).

The survey data, augmented by the focus group results, suggest that much of the explanation Canadians hold of the exclusion of people with disabilities lies with cultural factors situated in society at large and personal factors situated in the individual, rather than systemic factors located in structural conditions or in the absence or inadequacies of public policies (Stienstra and Wight-Felske 2003). Marginalization and isolation of people with disabilities is thought by much of the general public to largely reside in attitudinal and personal factors, whether these factors are understood as intolerance and stereotypes, severe medical problems, physical restrictions of mobility, the lack of basic skills, or low self-esteem.

When asked what they thought to be important barriers facing people with disabilities, the most common responses dealt with attitudinal barriers (49 per cent), followed by architectural barriers such as physical obstacles (29 per cent). The next most commonly cited barriers focused on the persons with the disability, limited capabilities (17 per cent) and lack of self-confidence (15 per cent). The lack of government programs (13 per cent) and financial barriers (11 per cent) were identified by only a small number of respondents as the principal barrier to inclusion by disabled Canadians, even though in response to another question three-quarter of respondents recognized that people with disabilities face difficulties in achieving financial security, having access to reliable transportation services and raising a family (Environics Research Group 2004*c*, 21). So, while most Canadians see themselves as comfortable in the presence of

people with disabilities, they believe that prejudice on the part of other Canadians is the most significant barrier facing people with disabilities.

A related dichotomy in beliefs is that 83 per cent of Canadians believe there has been at least "some progress" attained in improving the social inclusion of people with disabilities over the last decade, but an almost identical number (82 per cent) believe that discrimination against people with disabilities still takes place in our society. This may be explained, in part, by the vagueness of the phrases "somewhat included" and "some progress" yielding majority responses in the survey from both people with and without disabilities. Ambivalence is apparent as well in perceptions and beliefs about workplace opportunities for persons with disabilities. Most Canadians strongly (40 per cent) or somewhat (24 per cent) agree that their workplace is accessible to employees with visible and non-visible disabilities. There is, however, a notable difference in views between persons without disabilities (65 per cent) and persons with disabilities (51 per cent) on this question of equal access to employment. Furthermore, a slender majority of Canadians agree (54 per cent) they would hide a non-visible disability such as dyslexia or depression from their employer and co-workers (Environics Research Group 2004*c*, 23-24), a finding that illustrates a widely perceived negative status and social stigma associated with these disabilities, among others no doubt.

On what to be do about furthering social inclusion and tackling discrimination, survey responses divide into three realms of actions. First, 62 per cent believe *personal awareness* through education efforts in schools and probably information campaigns more generally, is the primary solution to addressing discrimination and stigma, advancing inclusion, and enhancing the self-confidence of people with disabilities. Secondly, 30 per cent point to what we can call *community acceptance* as the main solution, involving such measures as the fuller integration of children with special needs in schools, better accessibility to public facilities, and continued efforts to improve the employment of adults with disabilities in the labour force. Thirdly, just 9 per cent indicate *government action* as the preferred solution to addressing barriers to inclusion for disabled Canadians through public programs, laws and regulations, benefits and services. This low identification of government action as the favoured strategy seems congruent with still another finding that only a few Canadians associate the term "disability" as an economic issue of employment or as a human rights issue of citizenship (Environics Research Group 2004*c*, 8). This last finding appears to expose a profound difference between public associations about disability and the dominant discourse of the disability community and advocacy groups.

A related survey question asked Canadians which of the following they feel plays the most essential role in helping disabled persons participate fully in society: disabled persons themselves, families of disabled persons, governments, voluntary organizations, religious organizations, or more than one is most important. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4
Most Important Role in Helping People with Disabilities Participate Fully in Society
(Percentages)

Families of the persons with the disability	31
Voluntary organizations	22
People with disabilities themselves	16
Governments	16
Religious organizations	5
More than one is most important	9
Don't know	2

Source: Environics Research Group (2004*c*, 32).

Public opinion on responsibilities for helping people with disabilities with social participation recognizes the pluralistic nature of the provision of benefits and allocation of resources in Canada for all sorts of groups, with multiple sectors and groups involved in a mixed economy of welfare. This result raises questions that go well beyond the survey or the scope of this article about the actual capacity of various groups to undertake these tasks, the quality and equity in the provision of help, among other issues (Rice and Prince 2000, 119-23).

A related question on the roles for supporting people with disabilities that was more detailed and concrete, generated results which indicate a public consensus on the primacy of government in several areas of life and less so in others. As Table 5 shows, the results to the question of supporting the needs of people with disabilities reveal three profiles of the place of governments vis-à-vis other institutions and actors.

Table 5
Most Important Role in Supporting the Needs of Canadians with Disabilities
in Specific Areas
(Percentages)

Areas of Life	Governments	Employees	Voluntary agencies	Families of people with disabilities	People with disabilities themselves
Health care	**71**	3	5	10	8
Transportation	**61**	3	14	15	5
Specialized equipment	**60**	3	15	11	7
Education	**54**	3	5	19	16
Housing	**47**	3	13	16	14
Financial security	**40**	14	4	16	20
Stable employment	28	**28**	7	16	16
Recreation opportunities	28	5	**33**	16	15
Raising a family	15	6	7	**38**	28

Source: Environics Research Group (2004*c*, 33).

For getting good health care, having access to reliable transportation, providing specialized equipment (such as hearing aids or wheelchairs), and getting a good education, Canadians see governments as playing the primary role over all other groups. Second, for the areas of finding adequate housing and achieving financial security, Canadians identify governments more frequently than the other groups as a leading player, but not in a dominant sense of majority support. Third, in the areas of maintaining stable employment, having opportunities for recreation, and raising a family, Canadians mention other groups as playing the most important role, namely, employees, voluntary agencies, and families of the disabled respectively. A fascinating difference in opinions about the importance of families and of persons with disabilities in supporting needs appears between English-speaking and French-speaking respondents. Except for the areas of stable employment and recreation, French-speaking individuals are far more likely to say that the individual person with disabilities rather than their family is responsible for addressing these aspects of their lives. In comparison, English-speaking Canadians are more likely to express the belief that families have more of a responsibility than the individual person with the disability (Environics Research Group 2004*c*, 34).

No unequivocal consensus exists among Canadians as to which level of government is best able to provide supports and services for individuals with disabilities. Results reflect the "federal condition" (Smiley 1987) of the country, the federalized nature of Canadian society as well as governmental arrangements. Canadian are divided as to whether the provinces/territories (37 per cent) the federal government (34 per cent) or municipal governments (14 per cent) is the best level to provide supports. Just 10 per cent expressed the opinion that it is all or some combination of these levels. Perhaps on disability issues Canadians hold more of a classical view of federalism of two independent orders of senior governments exercising their jurisdictions than a view that stresses the interconnections of responsibilities across levels.

Interestingly, most Canadians acknowledge they know very little about legislation and policies in place for people with disabilities; only 21 per cent claim to be aware of such state activities. Yet or, perhaps, because of this low awareness, 77 per cent of respondents believe governments are very or somewhat supportive in helping the needs of people with disabilities.

IV.   Applications of Public Opinion Results

The research findings are in circulation both inside the federal government and by at least one provincial government and a few community groups in the disability policy and mental health sectors. Office for Disability Issues staff have presented the survey and focus group results to officials in Social Development and other federal government organizations, and some of the findings have found their way into briefings to senior executives and ministers. To raise public awareness of disability and the availability of programs and service for Canadians with disabilities, the federal government is planning to profile disability issues in government advertising. No firm plan or decisions have been made in Social Development Canada for a follow-up survey. A second survey would be useful in the medium term, say three years after the benchmark 2004 survey, providing an adequate amount of time to track shifts in underlying attitudes or awareness, timed after the 2006 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey. Results from a subsequent surveys and possibly focus group workshops could inform a social marketing campaign, if government chose to undertake one.

Social Development Canada made substantial use of the research findings in the 2004 edition of *Advancing the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities,* the Government of Canada's accountability report to the public and parliament on federal goals, actions and outcomes on the disability agenda (Canada 2004). In addition to meeting accountability commitments of federal activities and plans, other purposes of this report, of which this is the second in the series, are to stimulate interest and dialogue on disability issues, to showcase or promote topics that warrant greater analysis, and to lever research and policy agendas. In *Advancing the Inclusion,* the federal government describes the 2004 national survey of Canadian attitudes toward disabilities as a major information source that, along with other recent surveys and reports exploring concepts and program definitions of disability (Canada 2003*a*), contributes "to our knowledge base on disability and our efforts to better understand disability and inclusion" (Canada 2004, 8). *Advancing the Inclusion* justifies the need for a public opinion survey on disability issues in advancing the disability agenda in these terms:

> Much evidence suggests that public attitudes may themselves be critical to either advancing or hindering the inclusion of people with disabilities in our society. What people believe about individuals with disabilities underlies the treatment of those individuals in all aspects of their lives. The cost of negative beliefs or inaccurate information is high, both for people with disabilities and for society as a whole (Canada 2004, 12).

In an overview section on Canadian attitudes toward disability, the report notes that most Canadians know someone with a disability; that most Canadians feel that despite progress on including people with disabilities in society over the past 10 years that people with disabilities are not fully included; that discrimination is seen as the most significant obstacle to full inclusion; that most Canadians support the goal of inclusion and community-assisted living; and, that most Canadians think governments play the lead role in supporting people with disabilities in a range of areas (Canada 2004, 13-14).

The rest of *Advancing the Inclusion* highlights select findings from the survey in what the report calls outcome areas of inclusion. In the area of skills development and learning, a box inset notes as barriers to fulfilling learning potential data from the survey that one in five Canadians with disabilities considers it "very difficult" for Canadians with disabilities to get a good education, and that one in four Canadians with disabilities has personally faced at least some discrimination in getting a good education (Canada 2004, 29). In a chapter on employment among Canadians with disabilities, results from the survey are reported that underscore the not infrequent experiences of discrimination and a widespread felt awareness of the stigma attached to disabilities in workplaces (Canada 2004, 45). Being a random sample of the general population, the survey offers findings that can, in certain aspects, corroborate findings from other studies, quantitative and qualitative, based on smaller samples. Focus group data are not noticeable in the report nor are survey results mentioned in chapters on disability supports, income, and health and well-being, perhaps because other rich information sources are readily available and since the survey on attitudes did not address all these areas in equal detail. The absence of quotes from the focus groups, however, limits the potential impact of real-life interpretations and statements on these policy areas.

A coalition of 50 disability organizations, led by the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) and the Canadian Association of Community Living (CACL), has employed findings from the Environics survey in two recent documents. [3]

One document calls for action by the federal government to combat poverty and exclusion of Canadians with disabilities by investing in disability-related supports, such as aids and devices, personal assistance, and environmental accommodations (CCD and CACL 2005*a*). In that paper, released just before the 2005 federal budget, the organizations quote from the survey research (Environics 2004*c*, 26) that "More than eight in ten [Canadians] ... agree with the statement that persons with even the most challenging disabilities should be supported by public funds to live in the community rather than institutional settings... By a wide margin, Canadians believe governments have the primary role for supporting persons with disabilities when it comes to

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[3] The supporting organizations, which encompass national, provincial, territorial, Aboriginal and foundations among other organizations, are listed in CCD and CACL (2005*b*, 4).

providing good health care, reliable transportation, specialized equipment, and good education." Citing that report along with others, the groups argues that "There is now an unprecedented consensus among the Canadian public, the disability community and experts about the need for national action on disability, in particular to ensure access to needed supports" (CCD and CACL 2005*a*, 1).

In the second document, circulated in July 2005 with an open letter to Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers of Social Services, the CCD and CACL and allied groups appeal to all governments to support a new strategic investment in disability-related supports. Once again, the coalition quotes the finding that: "By a wide margin, Canadians believe governments have the primary role for supporting persons with disabilities when it comes to providing good health care, reliable transportation, specialized equipment, and good education." As disability organizations emphasize, their "priority has been, and remains, an investment in disability-related supports that assist Canadians with disabilities to get an education, become employed, look after their families and enjoy the opportunities non-disabled Canadians expect as a right of citizenship" (CCD and CACL 2005*b*, 1).

That there is a compelling and urgent need to move forward on a national disability supports agenda invites little quarrel. Available research clearly documents the existence of extensive gaps in essential services and supports for children and adults with disabilities in Canada (Canadian Council on Social Development 2004). Then again, the ambivalent nature of the focus groups and survey data suggest a challenge to the disability community and sympathetic governments in advancing this agenda. Most Canadians have slight direct and concrete awareness of the met and unmet needs for supports of persons with disabilities or their families. Most are unsure if urban transportation services are adequate for people with disabilities and most have low awareness of issues of burnout among caregivers, some of whom have disabilities too. Many Canadians assume that people with disabilities are able to find the medical-related supports they require through provincial health care programs supplemented by the activities of non-profit agencies. Consequently, the general population has little appreciation of the everyday difficulties and heartfelt struggles of individuals and families in locating, accessing and affording necessary aids, devices and supports (Environics Research Group 2004*b*, 40-43). Alongside the research task of generating social data and evidence, an attitudinal challenge exists concerning social beliefs and value judgments in tackling the exclusion and poverty of people with disabilities.

V. Conclusions

As a social issue and policy area, the prevailing distribution of sentiment in Canada of disability is one of ambivalence, with an odd mixture of positive and negative attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, experiences and behaviours. Such features are not unique to disability issues, but rather are evident in other areas of social policy today and in other periods of human history (Ignatieff 1984; Pinker 1971). This points to the presence of constraints and challenges, as well as some opportunities of course, in building an understanding of, and mobilizing a strong consensus for major reforms on disability issues by governments. The reality of ambivalent attitudes among Canadians on disability and inclusion suggests there is cultural work required in getting the public to see disabilities and people with disabilities in more informed and positive ways than seems now the case (Rioux and Prince 2002). The value orientations and subjective perceptions of ordinary people on matters of social policy, disability, inclusion and citizenship can not be assumed to jive necessarily with the views of advocates or academics or, for that matter, government administrators.

There is work also to do in raising the low level of awareness that presently exists of public programs, laws and services, even among persons with disabilities. Put another way, a major social development knowledge gap exists among the Canadian population regarding the experiences, needs, contributions and activities of children, working-age adults, and seniors with disabilities. Unless this is addressed, through knowledge creation and dissemination, the risk is that public support for the mandate of social ministries in strengthening supports, opportunities, and the income security of individuals, families and communities will remain mixed, unfocused and thus politically feeble. Findings from the benchmark survey and focus groups constitute a useful policy tool. A welcome addition to the national inventory of disability-related information the 2004 survey on attitudes on disability helps identify issues, contributes to a better understanding of the public culture in this policy area, allows for comparisons between persons with and without disabilities, and poses some questions for policy makers.

For disability organizations and their allies, the national survey is both a focusing event and a fact finding exercise that concentrates attention and generates new information on public attitudes about disability and inclusion. National organizations in the disability community have taken the lead in using the survey results, in a strategic and timely fashion, as an analytical input to persuade governments to move forward on a federal/provincial/territorial disability support strategy and longer term vision of reform. For advocates and activists, certain findings from the survey represent a strong indicator of agreement within the general population about the importance of the issues and needs, and about the legitimacy of the solutions for disability policy making. Conflicting and uncertain attitudes in the public opinion environment on disability, however, creates political tensions and complexities that may deter

many government decision makers and policy advisory officials from being involved in a sustained and deliberative way (Pal 1997; Wamsley and Zald 1976).

If the Canadian public does not readily think about disability issues in terms of human rights, the test for the disability community, other social groups and governments is to find a new language that has currency and or provide information that resonates with the general population that then builds understanding disabilities in terms of the social context and regarding inclusion as nothing less than full citizenship.

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ableism â€" Negative attitudes and prejudice toward an individual based on physical, mental, or physical and mental disabilities.1. accessibility â€" Refers to the design of products, devices, services or environments for people with disabilities. Â anti-Semitism â€" Refers to prejudice and/or discrimination against Jews as individuals and as a group. Anti-Semitism is based on stereotypes and myths that target Jews as a people, their religious practices and beliefs and the Jewish State of Israel.12. asexual â€" Refers to a person who does not experience sexual attraction or has little interest in sexual activity.13. Â Pride, prejudice, and ambivalence: Toward a unified theory of race and ethnicity. American Psychologist, 63(8), pp. 651-70. 72 Santa Fe College Office of Diversity. } Prevailing sentiment by Canadians on disability and social inclusion is ambivalence. } Mixture of positive and negative attitudes and beliefs, and respectful and discriminatory behaviours. } Ongoing symbolic and material marginalization of people with disabilities from mainstream society and the Canadian state. } Suggests need for â€œcultural workâ€. 3. Â â€¢ Disabilities and disability-related issues not â€˜top-of-mind awarenessâ€™ for most participants. â€¢ Tendency to think of â€˜disabilityâ€™ in terms of visible and physical limitations, especially by people with little contact with persons with disabilities. â€¢ Agreement that people with visible disabilities experience discrimination in schools, workplaces, and in social settings. They both demonstrate pride toward each other and both think that the other one is snobbish and haughty. However, Mr. Darcy soon learns that Elizabeth is just cautious and responsible. Â Allegory: Pride and Prejudice shows the use of allegory in the initial line which discloses that the characters are going to represent abstract ideas such as Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth both represent abstract feelings of pride and prejudice. Antagonist: Although it seems that Mr. Darcy is the main antagonist of Pride and Prejudice in the opening chapters, it is Mr. Wickham who becomes the antagonist later when he causes embarrassment to the Bennet family and Mr. Darcy redeems himself from this initial impression by helping the Bennet settle the elopement affair of Lydia and Wickham.