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Positive enough? A content analysis of settlement service organizations' inclusivity of LGBTQ immigrants

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ABSTRACT

Little is known about how effective Canadian settlement organizations are in meeting the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) immigrants. The authors conducted a two-stage content analysis of the inclusion of LGBTQ immigrants in 34 settlement organizations in Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador, and on the delivery of services by nine settlement organizations that self-described as LGBTQ-positive spaces. Stage 1 deductive content analysis findings revealed poor inclusion and support for LGBTQ immigrants. Stage 2 inductive content analysis findings revealed four service priority areas: health/well-being, community connections, advocacy/education, and disability. Recommendations for best practices are discussed.

KEYWORDS

immigration and settlement; settlement service organizations; positive spaces; LGBTQ immigrants; newcomers; inclusion; Ontario; Newfoundland and Labrador

Introduction

Since Confederation in 1867, immigration has been a constant feature of Canadian society (Statistics Canada, 2016). According to the 2016 Canadian census, immigrants as a group accounted for 21.9% of Canada's total population. Statistics Canada (2017) projected that by 2036 their numbers could reach between 24.5% and 30%. Earlier immigrants arrived in Canada from European countries, but as of 1971, a growing number were emigrating from non-European countries (Statistics Canada, 2013).

Immigrants choose to call Canada home for many reasons. Chief among them is the perception of Canada as a tolerant and inclusive society, impressions rooted in the country's history of multiculturalism (Fleras, 2015; O'Neill, 2006) and more than three decades of policies defending the rights and freedoms of all people. Arguably, most, if not all, immigrants imagine Canada as a land of opportunity (El-Lahib, 2016), a place where they can achieve their life goals and aspirations. Despite this shared outlook, immigrants are not a monolithic group; they have diverse backgrounds and needs. For a subset of this population, sexual

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orientation and gender identity are important dimensions of diversity that need to be considered when delivering settlement services (O'Neill & Kia, 2015).

Although lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) immigrants have much in common with their heterosexual counterparts, a key difference is the interacting dimensions of sexual orientation and gender non-conformity, which uniquely shape their experience (Fournier, Brabant, Dupéré, & Chamberland, 2018; O'Neill & Sproule, 2011). Heterosexual immigrants have not had to endure oppression based on sexual orientation or gender identity, as have many LGBTQ immigrants. Canada is a refuge for individuals wishing to escape such persecution. For many LGBTQ immigrants, the hope of being allowed to live life free from violence and others' judgment causes them to look to Canada as a safe haven (Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC [AMSSA], 2014; Jenicek, Wong, & Lee, 2009; Logie, Lacombe-Duncan, Lee-Foon, Ryan, & Ramsay, 2016; Murray, 2014).

LGBTQ people are persecuted in many countries around the world. The 2016 world survey on sexual orientation laws (Carroll, 2016) found that 73 countries criminalized same-sex relations either by having no laws or by having repressive laws regarding same-sex relationships. Thirteen of these countries had laws where LGBTQ relationships were punishable by the death penalty (Carroll, 2016). Canada is one of the few countries in the world where the human rights of LGBTQ people are enshrined in law. For example, Canada recognizes same-sex relationships in the process of immigration. Not only is persecution on the basis of sexual relationships an allowable ground for applying for refugee status in Canada, Canada allows its citizens and permanent residents to apply to sponsor same-sex spouses and common-law partners (AMSSA, 2014).

Settlement organizations have a crucial role to play in helping LGBTQ newcomers acclimatize to Canadian culture. Upon arrival in Canada, LGBTQ immigrants must quickly adjust to their new life. They may require help from settlement organizations to make a successful transition. Important areas of need are support with language training and education, employment, housing, and assistance navigating the immigration system (Logie et al., 2016). Additional support related to sexual orientation and gender identity may be required, as may help connecting with local LGBTQ resources and organizations (O'Neill & Kia, 2015). However, some researchers (Fournier et al., 2018; Kosnick, 2016; Luibhéid, 2008) have suggested that settlement organizations operate from a heteronormative logic, and thus may not meet the needs and concerns of LGBTQ immigrants. A universalizing language of immigration subsumes LGBTQ immigrants' experiences into those of their heterosexual counterparts, in effect erasing or pushing their realities to the periphery. In this way, LGBTQ immigrants are made invisible, with available support inadequate to respond appropriately to their multiple and interlocking identities.

This study sought to systematically examine the websites of settlement service organizations in Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador, to see how these organizations displayed their inclusiveness or communicated that they were welcoming

of LGBTQ immigrants. The authors also aimed to document the range of positive instances of inclusion of LGBTQ immigrants where available.

An organization's website is an important communication tool (Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009) for helping new immigrants to navigate supportive programs in the community. As such, it can inform understanding about the institutional culture of an organization, and its range of services for LGBTQ immigrants in particular. The focus on Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador is an interesting one. These provinces have distinct immigrant settlement patterns and racial/ethnic makeups. Ontario is Canada's most populous province and is generally viewed as an immigrant enclave because a high concentration of people from around the world lives there (Zucchi, 2007). Newfoundland and Labrador comprises two geographic areas: the island of Newfoundland and mainland Labrador. Compared to Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador is a predominantly White society (Baker, Price, & Walsh, 2016). These differences allow for a comparison of settlement support to LGBTQ immigrants in these regions.

Following a review of the literature, and alongside a consideration of the research questions, we delineate the study's data collection method and analysis. Next, we report our findings, which are then placed in conversation with existing literature in the discussion section. The article concludes with recommendations for best practices.

Literature review

Settlement needs of LGBTQ immigrants

Immigrant settlement generally refers to the initial period of adjustment to Canada and includes tasks and processes that immigrants need to complete in the years after they arrive, setting down roots such as securing employment and housing, enrolling children in schools, and acclimatizing to local surroundings and ways of living. Immigrant settlement is seen as an important component of the trajectory toward long-term integration wherein immigrants ideally participate as full members in Canadian society. *Settlement* is viewed as related to the "initial and short-term transitional issues faced by newcomers" while *integration* is viewed as "an ongoing process of mutual accommodation between an individual and society" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012, p. 23).

Settlement has been conceptualized as consisting of nonlinear stages. These include the survival stage, where immigrants are immersed in tasks related to language acquisition, and finding housing and employment; learning stage, where they need access to information and services, and clarification about values; and integration stage, characterized by mutual accommodation with the host society (DeCoito & Williams, 2000). Throughout the process of settlement and integration, information and orientation remain very important needs for new immigrants (George & Chaze, 2009; Sparks & Wolfson, 2001). The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR; 1998) has suggested indicators for immigrant settlement along four dimensions:

economic, social, cultural, and political. The *economic* dimension is characterized by immigrants finding work and becoming financially independent. The *social* dimension is where immigrants establish diverse social networks. The *cultural* dimension involves immigrants' adaptation to lifestyle changes. And finally, the *political* dimension is where immigrants become active citizens.

As in any new environment, newcomers need orientation to living in Canada. The need for information about almost all aspects of living in Canada is primary among their settlement needs (George & Chaze, 2009). They need information relating to the manner in which the educational, health care, and other systems, including the settlement services, function in Canada (Anisef & Kilbride, 2000; Anisef, Kilbride, Ochocka, & Janzen, 2001; George, Fong, Da, & Chang, 2004). These new immigrants also need to establish connections within communities—to find housing and employment; and they may sometimes also need to learn or enhance their language skills (George, Chaze, & Doyle, 2007).

Employment is an urgent need for immigrants as it provides them with economic security and allows them to feel a sense of contribution to Canada (CCR, 1998; Hum & Simpson, 2003). Research has demonstrated the impacts of employment on the physical and mental health of immigrants (Dean & Wilson, 2009; Kennedy & McDonald, 2006) and on relationships with others (Feldman, 1996; George, Chaze, Fuller-Thomson, & Brennenstuhl, 2012).

LGBTQ immigrants are often an invisible section of the larger immigrant community (Government of Canada, 2012). The existing literature tends to focus on the difficulties LGBTQ immigrants face in the process of immigrating and seeking refuge in Canada (see, e.g., Jordan & Morrissey, 2013; LaViolette, 2004; Murray, 2014), and on sexuality as a motivating factor in emigrating (Laing, 2008). However, their settlement needs and challenges are underrepresented in the literature (Laing, 2008; Logie et al., 2016; Murray, 2014).

The limited literature on the settlement needs and challenges of LGBTQ immigrants in Canada highlights the ways in which sexual orientation and gender identity exacerbate the existing challenges immigrants face in the settlement process. For instance, while seeking information on aspects of living in Canada is a task with which all immigrants are challenged, LGBTQ immigrants face additional challenges in finding information on LGBTQ-friendly settlement support (O'Neill & Kia, 2012). Likewise, while securing housing is a challenge for many immigrants (Wayland, 2007), LGBTQ immigrants may face additional challenges on the grounds of their sexual orientation and gender identity (Mulé & Gates-Gasse, 2012).

Racialized LGBTQ immigrants often perceive their ethno-racial communities as homophobic. In a study of Asian men who have sex with men (MSM; Nakamura, Chan, & Fischer, 2013), many participants reported that their communities' homophobia stemmed from the perception of sex as a taboo topic in everyday discourse, and also from stereotypes about MSM, including the relationships among being gay, HIV/AIDS, and religious affiliations. Important as these findings are, homophobia is found not only in racialized communities; thus, care

must be taken to not interpret these findings as evidence for linking homophobia with racialized communities (Giwa, 2016).

Immigrants are likely to underuse health services for a variety of reasons, including discrimination (Thomson, Chaze, George, & Guruge, 2015). For example, some organizations providing services to LGBTQ people are themselves homophobic. This can be distressing for LGBTQ immigrants—and can create significant additional barriers to accessing these services—since LGBTQ immigrants might not know whether it is safe to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to people providing the settlement service (Laing, 2008; Mulé & Gates-Gasse, 2012). This becomes even more problematic when, in light of current funding patterns, where organizations are expected to collaborate and provide referrals, LGBTQ immigrants might need to disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity to multiple service providers (Mulé & Gates-Gasse, 2012). LGBTQ immigrants might also feel unsafe approaching organizations geared toward supporting LGBTQ people in their geographic communities, for fear of being outed and facing rejection from their cultural communities and families (O’Neill & Kia, 2012).

It is important to recognize the ways in which race, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of immigrants’ identity—also including language ability, ethnicity, educational levels, age, socioeconomic status, and class of immigration—intersect to create oppression and marginalization for LGBTQ immigrants; such intersections can also impact the settlement process (O’Neill & Kia, 2012). Some participants in a study of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) newcomers in British Columbia (O’Neill & Kia, 2012) perceived that they experienced more disadvantage in society than either heterosexual newcomers or native-born LGB Canadians. LGBTQ immigrants might face pressures to identify as members of either their sexual or their cultural peer group, when neither alone would define their identity. They might experience homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in their cultural communities, and racism within the LGBTQ community (Nakamura et al., 2013). Consequently, to fit in, LGBTQ immigrants might be forced to hide one or another aspect of their identity (Giwa, 2016; Norsah, 2015; Walcott, 2006). It is also important to recognize the role that racialization plays at the intersections of sexual orientation, gender identity, and immigrant status.

Positive spaces

Organizations often work in silos, focusing on only one dimension of a person’s identity (newcomer status or sexual orientation) instead of viewing the individual as a complete entity, and offering services that address different needs of the same individual (Mulé & Gates-Gasse, 2012). The Positive Spaces Initiative (PSI) in Ontario is promising in its efforts to break down these silos. PSI was launched in 2009 by The Ontario Council for Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) with the aim of “shar[ing] resources and increas[ing] organizational capacity across the sector to more effectively serve LGBTQ newcomers” (OCASI n.d., “About PSI,” para. 1). The agency offered the following definition of a positive space:

Positive spaces are welcoming environments where Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, Genderqueer, etc. (LGBTQ+) newcomers are able to access culturally inclusive services with dignity and respect, and where service providers can work free from discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. (Ontario Council for Agencies Serving Immigrants, n.d., “What Are Positive Spaces,” para. 1)

PSI has various resources and tools that serve to educate settlement workers on issues facing LGBTQ newcomers, and offers suggestions on how this population can best be served. For example, the Positive Spaces poster and the Positive Spaces toolkit are freely available on the OCASI website (OCASI, n.d.), in various languages. The project also offers a training program to organizations interested in transforming their organizations into positive spaces, where LGBTQ newcomers can feel welcome in relation to all aspects of their identity (Government of Canada, 2012). The website also lists settlement service organizations that have undertaken the Positive Spaces training as resources.

Method

For the current study, the researchers were interested in identifying ways in which websites of immigrant-serving organizations in Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador were inclusive toward diverse LGBTQ immigrants. Independent reviews of websites were conducted between June 2016 and September 2016. The research questions that drove the study were as follow:

1. How do immigrant-serving organizations display inclusion of LGBTQ immigrants on their websites?
2. What kinds of services or programs do immigrant-serving organizations that identify as positive spaces offer specifically to LGBTQ immigrants?

We approached the research questions in two stages. In Stage 1 we started by selecting, through random number generation, one-third of all the organizations enumerated on a list of agencies serving immigrants in Ontario published on the Ontario government website, for a total of 33 organizations with English-language websites. In the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, there was only one English-speaking organization in the province that provided comprehensive settlement and integration services to immigrants and refugees, regardless of racial or ethnic origin, and without concern for differences on the basis of reproductive functions (i.e., sex). Thus, there was no requirement for a random number generation. Combined, 34 settlement organizations were included in this stage of the study.

To answer Question 1 we went through the websites of these 34 organizations to explore the following questions:

1. Is there an option to view content from the organization’s website in languages other than English and French?
2. Does the organization website have LGBTQ-friendly images (e.g., a rainbow flag or a positive-space image)?
3. Does the organization website mention services specifically for LGBTQ immigrants?

4. Does the organization website mention a diversity/inclusion policy/statement that specifically addresses LGBTQ immigrants?
5. Does the organization website display racially diverse images of LGBTQ immigrants?
6. Does the organization website provide links or references to LGBTQ community resources?

The authors used deductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Neuendorf, 2017) when looking for answers to these predetermined questions, which we felt depicted inclusivity in relation to LGBTQ immigrants. We focused on messaging that was fairly easily available on the organizational website. Our aim was to understand the kinds of information an immigrant visitor might encounter on a typical search of the website. Thus we limited our search to browsing the webpages of the organization and did not look for information embedded in annual reports or other agency publications. To ensure intercoder reliability (Neuendorf, 2017), both authors went through each website individually before coming together to discuss the findings. The separate coding by each researcher ensured accurate and consistent coding of data.

We had initially hoped to answer the second research question using the same randomly selected organizations sample we had identified in Stage 1. However, our initial analysis of Stage 1 findings made us realize that this would not be possible without compromising the confidentiality of the three organizations that we identified as having specialized services for LGBTQ immigrants. To counter this challenge, we decided to focus on organizations providing a range of direct settlement-related services to immigrants in Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador that were identified as positive spaces. For Ontario, we visited OCASI's PositiveSpaces.ca website. From there, we chose community links by sector, focusing on settlement services. Sixteen organizations matched this criterion. Of these, two were omitted: one organization appeared twice on the list and another did not offer direct settlement services. Of the remaining 14 organizations, nine were traditional community-/immigrant-serving organizations, offering a range of settlement services to immigrants.

Three other organizations primarily worked with LGBTQ individuals vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and offered some kind of settlement programming to their immigrant clients. Two additional organizations mostly offered health and recreational programs with some settlement services provided to newcomers. Since our intention was to discover what kind of welcome LGBTQ immigrants faced in organizations they were likely to approach for settlement services, we decided not to include these five organizations in our analysis of Stage 2.

An equivalent Positive Spaces website does not exist in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the province's only comprehensive settlement organization does not indicate that it identifies as a positive space on its website. Thus, it was not included in this analysis. The final sample for Stage 2 included nine settlement organizations from Ontario. Using inductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Neuendorf, 2017), we analyzed the websites of these nine settlement service- and community-based organizations to appreciate the range of services or programs

geared specifically toward diverse LGBTQ immigrants. The next section of this article presents the findings of Stage 1 and Stage 2 of our research.

Findings

Stage 1

Of the 34 websites selected for Stage 1 of this analysis, a minority ($N = 8$; 24%) had the option to view the website in languages other than English or French, through the use of tools such as Google Translate that the websites made available. Four organizations (12%) prominently displayed LGBTQ-positive images such as a rainbow sign or a poster, declaring the organization as welcoming and inclusive. In some cases, the organizations displayed their inclusiveness of LGBTQ immigrants by making announcements or posting messages on their websites that condemned instances of violence against LGBTQ communities worldwide. For instance, in June 2016, one organization released a news message on its website condemning the violence that affected LGBTQ people in the violent attacks in Mexico and Florida earlier that year, and reiterated the organization's commitment to continue to strive for positive change in societal attitudes toward LGBTQ people.¹ Similarly, some organizations displayed their support of LGBTQ immigrants when they advertised their expertise as trainers to other organizations in working toward creating Positive Spaces. Their websites also showcased them working collaboratively with other organizations to pilot projects aimed at creating positive and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ newcomers, including research and advocacy work. Another strategy employed by these organizations was to use positive/strengths-based language to address LGBTQ immigrants. For example, one organization began a webpage describing services for LGBTQ newcomers by stating that it "takes pride in providing" services to LGBTQ immigrants and included messaging that recognized the special challenge faced by LGBTQ newcomers. However, only three organizations (9%) mentioned services they currently offered that were specific to LGBTQ newcomers. Five organizations (15%) explicitly included LGBTQ people in their inclusion and diversity policy, or recognized sexism as a form of oppression. The inclusion/diversity statements of these organizations did one or more of the following:

- acknowledged the organization's value stance against all kinds of oppression, including those based on sexual orientation and gender identity;
- stated that the organization respected diversity and differences, among which sexual orientation and gender identity were included; and
- reiterated that the organization welcomed people of different backgrounds, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Some organizations included similar diversity/inclusion statements in job advertisements for staffing positions within the organization. One job posting, for example, recapitulated the organization's commitment to employment equity initiatives and encouraged members of marginalized communities, including LGBTQ

communities, to apply. The same advertisement also mentioned a preference for candidates who had experience working with diverse populations, including LGBTQ people. Two organizations (6%) had images of racially diverse people who were clearly intended to represent LGBTQ communities. Finally, four organizations (12%) provided external links to resources that could be helpful to LGBTQ newcomers. Overall, the snapshot of inclusion of LGBTQ people on settlement service organization websites was a dismal one.

Stage 2

Nine settlement organizations that identified as positive spaces delivered programs and services to address the unique needs of LGBTQ immigrants. These services focused on health and well-being, helping clients build connections within LGBTQ communities and surrounding areas, and providing information about resources in the larger society. Some organization websites provided LGBTQ-specific services to youths only, while others provided these services to all LGBTQ immigrants irrespective of age. Services to all LGBTQ immigrants, irrespective of age, included monthly drop-ins, field trips, community forums, yoga and meditation, healthy eating and cooking classes, and information on the website for resources offered to LGBTQ people outside the organization. One organization offered specific services to LGBTQ immigrants with intellectual disabilities. This organization also encouraged LGBTQ clients to become volunteers with the organization. Services for LGBTQ youths focused on building connections with other youths through support groups, LGBTQ blogs, and the use of an art network. Other services included counseling, anti-homophobia and anti-cyberbullying information, and education in schools and other places.

Discussion

Most organizations today have a website as the basis for promoting their services and programs to the public. An organization's website is an important window for learning about its values, principles, and possibly its ethics and morals. It is a communication tool for conveying important ideas about an organization's work, its clientele base, and its commitment to service users and other stakeholders. Websites can be important avenues to transmit ideas about inclusion and exclusion. An effective website can enable a service user to quickly assess if, and to what degree, the organization is able to meet a person's needs. In an information-saturated world, this is an important feature, crucial to the decision-making process of newcomers seeking settlement and integration support. Next, we discuss the findings of our two-stage study.

Stage 1

In Stage 1, the goal of the research was to find out how immigrant-serving organizations included LGBTQ immigrants on their websites. Our findings overwhelmingly

indicated that LGBTQ immigrants were a marginally recognized or completely ignored group in the immigration and settlement sector. With some exceptions, the prevailing logic seemed to be that immigrants were heterosexual (Fournier et al., 2018; Kosnick, 2016; Luibhéid, 2008). This thinking may help to explain the dismal representation of LGBTQ immigrants found across the six research sub-questions being investigated.

Question 1 asked whether the organization's websites were viewable in languages other than English and French. Only eight out of the 34 websites surveyed had this capability. Many reasons might be proffered to explain this low number. For example, some organizations might not be aware of free and for-payment website translator tools such as Google Translate, WordLingo, and Bablic. Also, the belief in the idea of Canada as a nation of two founding peoples, English and French (Fleras, 2015), may explain why roughly one out of four websites were not viewable in languages other than English and French. The expectation might be that immigrants should learn to speak either or both languages in order to improve their chances at successful settlement and integration. Making websites available in other languages might be seen to distract from this goal. In addition, settlement organizations might hold the view that, because immigrants generally settle in cities with people of the same linguistic and cultural profile, they would therefore have access to a support network of people who could help with language translation. Although LGBTQ immigrants might be able to find support from peers in racially and ethnically diverse cities like Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal, this might not be true in places like Newfoundland and Labrador, which does not have similar immigrant settlement histories and patterns. Indeed, for racialized LGBTQ immigrants, findings from one study (Nakamura et al., 2013) suggested that because racialized communities are hostile toward community members who are LGBTQ-identified, they are not seen as safe spaces for receiving and building social support. In this case, being able to browse an organization's website in languages other than English and French, especially for those whose mother tongue is neither English nor French, could improve access to settlement support and services for this group of people.

Ultimately, there is a need to recognize the intersectional identities of immigrants (Crenshaw, 1989; Mulé & Gates-Gasse, 2012) and the way in which these could lead to challenges in accessing settlement services. While economic immigrants who enter the country are tested for language skills prior to entry, family or refugee immigrants do not have stringent language criterion as a determining factor for entry. In the 2006 Canadian census, just over 9% of newcomers to the country reported that they spoke neither English nor French (Statistics Canada, 2009). It is important for organizations working toward the settlement of immigrants, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity, to be cognizant of this diversity and to provide information and/or services to meet the needs of this diverse population.

Findings from sub-questions 2 through 5 demonstrated that immigrant settlement organizations might not have enough knowledge about this segment of the immigrant population to effectively serve them. Notably, 30 (88%) of the organizations surveyed did not have LGBTQ-positive images displayed on their websites.

This lack of representation suggests that these organizations either did not recognize LGBTQ people as immigrants in need of settlement support, or else they perceived themselves inadequate to meet their needs (Laing, 2008) and thus refrained from incorrectly advertising their agencies as accessible to them. Abstaining from false or misleading advertising is preferable to an organization wrongly claiming to embrace the group's social difference, when neither the organization nor its staff has the cultural competency to serve LGBTQ immigrants effectively. However, the absence of LGBTQ-positive images communicates the group's exclusion and reinforces the view that they are not welcome to receive support and services from these organizations.

This message of exclusion fuels the assumption that LGBTQ immigrants do not exist, and contradicts the prevailing global narrative of Canada as a welcoming refuge for LGBTQ immigrants and refugees fleeing persecution because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Such an assumption could engender a self-fulfilling prophecy in which mainstream settlement organizations would not be motivated to recognize and respond to the needs of their diverse immigrant clients, including LGBTQ people. For LGBTQ immigrants, this also means that their settlement-related needs would be ignored; that they would be left to negotiate their new surroundings by themselves, with little or no support of any kind.

Combined with the stress of migration, the experience of being overlooked by systems meant to provide support could aggravate mental health problems (Logie et al., 2016). On this understanding, the display of LGBTQ-positive images would communicate a strong message of recognition, belonging, and inclusion—protective factors that can promote positive mental health and help-seeking behaviors.

Along with LGBTQ immigrants being inadequately represented on the websites of settlement organizations, the vast majority of these organizations ($N = 31$; 91%) did not offer programs or services specific to LGBTQ newcomers. This lack of attention reinforced the view that settlement organizations perceived immigrants to be a homogeneous group (Laing, 2008), with a presumption of heterosexuality (Fournier et al., 2018). With heterosexuality as the default way of being, settlement organizations might erroneously conclude that LGBTQ immigrants do not require targeted services, since they do not exist. Rather, it is likely that LGBTQ immigrants do not feel safe to identify as such (Crisp, 2005; Kama, 2006; Laing, 2008), out of fear that existing support might be withdrawn from them or that future support would be compromised. Thus, both LGBTQ immigrants and settlement organizations are caught in a catch-22. When LGBTQ immigrants do not identify themselves, settlement organizations will continue to overlook them, and services will not be developed to meet their unique needs. Likewise, if settlement organizations do not offer LGBTQ-specific support, LGBTQ newcomers will likely remain hidden to service providers.

Given that LGBTQ immigrants are vulnerable to the discrimination built into the structural systems of Canadian society and institutions, settlement organizations have the responsibility to demonstrate a level of welcoming that would encourage LGBTQ immigrants' self-disclosure and promote the development of services and

programs to meet their needs. For example, settlement organizations account for differences between immigrants who choose to leave their country of origin and refugees who are forced to leave because of persecution or war. The same recognition needs to be paid to the situation of LGBTQ immigrants. Just as the needs and priorities of refugee immigrants are different from economic-class immigrants, so are the needs and priorities of LGBTQ immigrants from heterosexual immigrants. The current one-size-fits-all approach normalizes a heteronormative immigrant script (Fournier et al., 2018) that undermines the contributions of LGBTQ immigrants to Canada's growth and prosperity. It is not the most effective way for successfully integrating them into Canadian society.

Given our findings suggesting that most settlement organizations were nonresponsive to the needs and realities of LGBTQ immigrants, it was somewhat surprising to find that five settlement organizations (15%) acknowledged the oppression of sexism or made explicit reference to LGBTQ people in their inclusion and diversity policy. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that, like other Canadian institutions, settlement organizations find themselves having to adhere to expectations related to political correctness. The prevailing narrative of Canada as an inclusive, diverse, and non-discriminatory society (El-Lahib, 2016; Poon, Li, Wong, & Wong, 2017) means settlement organizations must reflect these values and principles in their inclusion and diversity policies. Such an expectation is, of course, idealistic, since these policies often fail to align with direct, institutional practices. A policy on inclusion and diversity has little meaning if mechanisms are not put in place to monitor and ensure alignment of business practices with regulatory compliance.

Except in cases where a provincial government has the responsibility for settlement services, settlement organizations rely on operational funding from the federal government. Such reliance can coerce settlement organizations into adopting politically correct language, lest they risk jeopardizing future funding. It is equally plausible that some, perhaps all, of these five settlement organizations imagined themselves as welcoming environments for LGBTQ immigrants. Thus, reference to the group in all five organizations' inclusion and diversity policies might reflect their aspirational commitment. However, although disconcerting, more consistent with the rest of our findings was that 29 (85%) settlement organizations did not include LGBTQ people in their agencies' inclusion and diversity policies. In another catch-22, this finding suggests that most settlement organizations do not see fit to include LGBTQ immigrants in their inclusion and diversity policy, since they do not recognize LGBTQ immigrants as an important component of the immigration program. In a way, this thinking is understandable, since a lack of recognition that LGBTQ immigrants exist may be seen to justify their omission from policies on inclusion and diversity in the first place. Troubling as this finding is, we do not advocate that settlement organizations blindly or carelessly include LGBTQ people in their inclusion and diversity policies. To do so without a full commitment to meeting their unique needs would amount to a breach of duty and a violation of ethical standards of care (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005).

There is a tendency within the settlement sector to associate the work of settlement organizations with racialized ethnic groups who are not Aboriginal and not White (Laing, 2008). The settlement organizations included in our study did not deviate from this characterization. More often than not, they only displayed images of immigrants from racialized ethnic origins and excluded people from White ethnic groups, further perpetuating the myth of immigrants as people of non-White ethnic backgrounds. In this way, White people were not imagined to be immigrant settlers or newcomers to Canada.

Depicting the full spectrum of racial representation matters, as we found in our study. Specific to our research population, two settlement organizations (6%) included racially diverse images of LGBTQ people. The diversity of this representation is important for a couple of reasons. First, the portrayal of racially diverse LGBTQ people suggests that these settlement organizations recognized the exigencies of reflecting the kaleidoscope of the LGBTQ community, a space where racialized LGBTQ people are often made to feel and experience exclusion (Fournier et al., 2018; Giwa, 2016; Nakamura et al., 2013; Norsah, 2015; O'Neill, 2010). Second, including images of non-White LGBTQ people sends the message that the leadership of these organizations and their staff do not equate Whiteness and being LGBTQ. Such an attitude contradicts the notion that identifying as LGBTQ is the exclusive province of White people (Giwa & Greensmith, 2012).

This positive finding notwithstanding, we were struck by the inconsistent approach to LGBTQ diversity and inclusion among settlement organizations. Consider, for example, that five settlement agencies referenced LGBTQ people in their inclusion and diversity policies, yet only two had racially diverse LGBTQ people represented on their websites. This inconsistency suggested to us that, even among well-intentioned pro-LGBTQ settlement organizations, more work was needed to match words with actions. Displaying racially diverse LGBTQ people on the websites of settlement organizations is about recognition, which could spawn actions for developing services and programs to help the group integrate successfully into their host communities (O'Neill & Kia, 2012).

These concerns take on a greater importance in contexts where the society is homogeneously White, as in Newfoundland and Labrador. For White LGBTQ immigrants, the process of settlement and integration might be facilitated through connection to a predominantly White LGBTQ community, but this situation could be complicated for non-White LGBTQ immigrants, due to racism (Brennan et al., 2013; Giwa, 2016; Poon et al., 2017; Roy, 2012). It is important for settlement organizations to include images of racially diverse LGBTQ people on their websites, and to provide services and programs that meet their needs. If racially diverse LGBTQ immigrants do not see themselves reflected on these websites, the impression is that they do not matter or that their needs are not worthy of resource investment. Such a scenario could have a negative impact on racialized LGBTQ immigrants because of racism in the LGBTQ community (Brennan et al., 2013; Giwa, 2016; Poon et al., 2017; Roy, 2012), which can restrict their access to social networks crucial to community integration (Frost & Meyer, 2012; Nakamura et al., 2013), and the lack of

institutional support to help them navigate the complex immigration and settlement systems (Laing, 2008). For this group, the combination of these factors might be reason enough to leave Newfoundland and Labrador for a more racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse environment, where there is a reasonable expectation of their needs being met.

Although settlement organizations play a central role in immigrant settlement and integration, they do not work alone. To best meet clients' needs, they are often required to know and work with local groups and associations in surrounding communities. For example, it is not uncommon for a settlement organization to collaborate with an ethno-racial group in addressing the needs of a client from that racial or ethnic community. A settlement organization might then provide links on its website to community groups with which it has successfully worked, or considered helpful, as a resource for newcomers and interested others. We found that 30 out of the 34 (88%) settlement organizations we studied did not offer links to LGBTQ community resources on their websites. This finding indicates that these settlement organizations did not prioritize the concerns and needs of LGBTQ immigrants. By failing to provide links to LGBTQ resources, the implication is that either these organizations lacked knowledge about LGBTQ communities and support services, or did not care to include them on their websites.

Including such links would be helpful for LGBTQ immigrants in general, and even more so for those concerned about the effects that self-disclosure could have on current support (Crisp, 2005; Kama, 2006; Laing, 2008), thus promoting autonomy. Even if a settlement organization did not consider itself capable of serving LGBTQ immigrants, providing a list of known LGBTQ community resources on its websites could empower LGBTQ immigrants to contact these resources on their own. In this way, the provision of services would not be dependent on the comfort level of a settlement worker, or on the topic of sexual orientation and gender identity being raised by a client. The finding further suggests that LGBTQ and settlement organizations might be working in silos, without regard for intraprofessional collaboration. When a collaborative practice is avoided, knowledge of available services weakens. LGBTQ organizations could provide diversity training on sexual orientation and gender identity, and settlement organizations could share insights from their work with immigrants. Such collaboration could help to identify and/or support the development of services for LGBTQ immigrants by both organizations.

Stage 2

Our aim in Stage 2 was to explore the range of services and programs offered by organizations that identified as positive spaces for LGBTQ immigrants, in an attempt to offer a balanced view of the experiences of LGBTQ immigrants during the settlement process, compared to what they might experience in the organizations we studied in Stage 1. All nine settlement organizations we studied in Stage 2 offered a wide range of supportive programs to help LGBTQ immigrants adjust to their new life in Canada; these organizations were consistent in their words and actions. This point

is important to note, because of the 34 randomly selected settlement organizations we studied in Stage 1, only three offered services and programs to meet the needs of LGBTQ immigrants. Disconcertingly, although five of the 34 referred specifically to LGBTQ immigrants in their inclusion and diversity policies, they did not always follow through with concrete programs or services. Acknowledgment may be a first step in ensuring fully inclusive settlement programs, but it seems insufficient without an accompanying robust action plan for developing tangible support services.

Developing such services is important for another reason: when LGBTQ-positive settlement organizations designate themselves as positive spaces, we inferred that they would thereby be motivated to ensure that LGBTQ immigrants get the support they need. Such a designation can be seen as a social contract of a sort, whereby these organizations expected to be held accountable by prospective clients and other organizations looking to refer clients to them. If a settlement organization claimed to be a positive space but then failed to provide services and programs to the group concerned, its credibility could be undermined, and its competitive position for future funding jeopardized.

The programs and services offered by the nine settlement organizations that identified as LGBTQ-positive spaces spanned four areas: health and well-being, community connections, advocacy and education, and (dis)ability. These focus areas were consistent with available research evidence.

Health and well-being

The prevailing discourse of minority stress theory provides an important window for discerning the effects of a minority sexual or gender identity on health outcomes. This theory, as originally conceived by Meyer (1995, 2003), postulates that gay men are at heightened risk for poor mental health due to the experience of prejudice events, rejection expectation, concealment of sexual orientation, and internalized homonegativity. For LGBTQ immigrants, one or more of these factors could exacerbate mental health challenges (Logie et al., 2016). These challenges may stem from the stress and isolation encountered in their home countries due to their sexual or gender minority statuses, and during the emigration and settlement process in Canada. The response of LGBTQ-positive settlement organizations in developing programs to improve the health and well-being of LGBTQ immigrants should recognize the negative psychological consequences of minority stress. In our study, for example, programs that focused on healthy eating and the mindfulness practice of yoga and meditation found a need to counteract the “healthy immigrant effect” (Kennedy, Kidd, McDonald, & Biddle, 2015), which suggests that, although newcomer immigrants have better health compared to people born in Canada, the quality of their health deteriorates the longer they stay in Canada (Vang, Sigouin, Flenon, & Gagnon, 2017).

Many factors can account for the healthy immigrant effect, including poor diet choices, but the dynamic cannot be divorced from the broader structural inequities faced by some immigrants. In a snapshot of racialized poverty in Canada, the National Council of Welfare Reports (n.d.) indicated that 66% of people living in

poverty were non-White and non-Aboriginal immigrants. High rates of unemployment and the inability of racialized immigrants to make a decent wage that could lift them out of poverty prevented their access to affordable and nutritious food. The resulting stress from food insecurity can heighten poor mental health conditions, such as depression (Maharaj, Tomita, Thela, Mhlongo, & Burns, 2017), and have adverse effects on physical health, including obesity (Caspi et al., 2017).

Community connections

Several studies (Frost & Meyer, 2012; Ghabrial, 2017; Nakamura et al., 2013) point to the importance of community connections in helping LGBTQ people develop a sense of place and belonging, identity, and improved self-worth. LGBTQ communities remain sites of communal gathering, where people can build relationships and support one another. Pride festivals are a case in point. Helping LGBTQ immigrants build their connection to LGBTQ communities can help with their integration and settlement, and ease their anxiety and loneliness. They would be freed from the burden of being the only ones to identify as LGBTQ, a position that can be difficult for newcomers who may present with internalized shame and silence related to sexual orientation or gender identity (Sodhi, 2017).

Racialized LGBTQ immigrants may be the unfortunate recipients, even within LGBTQ communities, of discriminatory practices (Brennan et al., 2013; Giwa, 2016; Giwa & Greensmith, 2012; O'Neill, 2010; Poon et al., 2017) such as sexual racism and sexual objectification, due to White stereotypes about skin color. Such experiences could isolate them from the LGBTQ community at large, undermining their emotional and psychological health. Their physical health might also be compromised by engagement in unsafe sexual practices meant to curry attention and interest from White LGBTQ people, putting them at risk for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS (Brennan et al., 2013; Han, 2008).

Settlement programs and services must therefore go beyond LGBTQ immigrants' connection to the LGBTQ community, to help them build connections outside of the social networks of LGBTQ communities. Our findings confirmed that LGBTQ-positive settlement organizations were already doing this work. Some organizations provided resources for organizations that served LGBTQ people in the wider community, encouraging broader understanding and use of these services. For example, then, a racialized gay immigrant might seek out the service of an LGBTQ-friendly health and social service provider for support in dealing with the intersection of sexual racism and immigrant status.

Advocacy and education

LGBTQ immigrants are susceptible to homophobia and online bullying, an understanding that did not escape the awareness of the LGBTQ-positive settlement organizations in our study. Recognizing this reality, they developed information and educational programs that are being delivered in schools, as a way to raise awareness of the harmful effects of these behaviors on targeted groups. For members of target groups, they might also provide the opportunity to receive counseling.

Important as this finding is, it is not surprising. Nonimmigrant LGBTQ people also face discrimination in their daily lives, and this understanding may have helped to raise the profile of the issue as an area for intervention. Previous Canadian research, for example, has shown schools to be a toxic environment for the promotion and enactment of hatred toward LGBTQ youths (Taylor et al., 2011). A U.S. study conducted as part of the Teen Health and Technology survey reported that 42% of LGBTQ youths had been bullied or harassed online (GLSEN, CiPHR, & CCRC, 2013).

Of concern in our study was that, while the focus on anti-homophobia marks gay men and lesbians as groups of interest, it does not address the discrimination and structural violence faced by other marginalized segments of the LGBTQ community, such as bisexual and transgender people. The choice of language is perhaps understandable, given its historical—and to some degree, contemporary—currency. But with increased recognition of how life can be different for transgender people, for example, the continued use of the term *anti-homophobia* in reference to the collective experiences of diverse sexual and gender minorities does not do justice to their struggles. In fact, according to findings from the Trans PULSE project in Ontario (Bauer & Scheim, 2015), there is a need to be concerned about hate crimes directed at transgender people and the structural barriers that deny their full inclusion and participation in Canadian society. In Ontario, 20% of transgender people were found to have been physically and/or sexually assaulted because of their identity, and 34% reported being verbally threatened or harassed absent of any assault. Another 24% of transgender people indicated being a victim of police harassment (Bauer & Scheim, 2015). These statistics illustrate the hostile environment in which transgender people live in Ontario, and point to what the situation might be like for transgender immigrants across Canada, who also have to deal with the daily challenges of immigration and settlement. LGBTQ-positive settlement organizations, as we found in our study, can do more to respond directly to the issues and concerns faced by transgender people without assuming that their experiences are the same as those of gay men and lesbian immigrants.

(Dis)ability

Inclusion and delivery of targeted services and programs to LGBTQ people with intellectual disabilities would acknowledge them as important components of immigration to Canada, and recognize their right to be provided with supportive services that meet their needs. We did find one LGBTQ-positive settlement organization that offered such services to this population. However, our findings suggest that Canadian immigrant settlement organizations in general, like other public institutions in Canada, tend to operate from an ableist perspective (El-Lahib, 2016). As noted previously, we observed settlement organizations' possessive investment in a cis-heterosexual immigrant narrative. The consequence of the deficit approach implicit in such ideological positions is that programs and services that should be developed for people with intellectual disabilities and other disabilities are few and far between.

In this way, LGBTQ immigrants with disabilities may be ignored or consigned to the periphery.

Moreover, our data reveal that the concept of *intersectionality* may not be well-anchored in the practice of settlement services, or may be imperfectly understood by those who work in the sector. Intersectionality speaks to how multiple social categorizations (e.g., race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and ability) interlock to shape an individual's experience of oppression and privilege (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989). It also attends to the ways in which structural systems collude to deny or create unequal access to resources for marginalized individuals and groups (Southbank Centre, 2016), such as people with disabilities, racialized people, and LGBTQ people. With the exception of the one settlement organization that offered services to LGBTQ immigrants with intellectual disabilities, it is likely that other settlement organizations in our study conceptualized intersectionality in a limited way, thereby excluding immigrants with disabilities.

In failing to see how disability and other social identity categories are interdependent, these organizations may have reasoned that the need for programs and services for LGBTQ immigrants with disabilities was negligible. Such a view would be logically incompatible with the ethics of intersectionality. In practical terms, intersectionality promotes the delivery of holistic services, in which the totality of an individual is taken into account. The likelihood of this happening, however, is undermined by settlement organizations' narrow definition of *immigrant*. That is, while immigrants might be able to receive some support from a settlement organization, they may be required to visit another, non-settlement agency for care related to their disability or another aspect of their identity, such as their sexual orientation. Especially for a newcomer, such an approach to service delivery can be stressful, given the different agencies involved in providing social care. Thus, our finding is a reminder that settlement organizations must do better work in integrating LGBTQ immigrants with disabilities and other markers of difference into the overall structure of their work. This would help the group to feel respected and understood, and streamline the flow of service, reducing the need for services from multiple social and health care systems.

Recommendations for best practices

Immigration is key to Canada's future economic growth and prosperity. Settlement organizations have an important role to play in helping this host country to receive and successfully integrate immigrants into society, thus facilitating their social and economic contributions. However, when considering factors such as sexual orientation and gender identity, immigrants are a diverse group of people whose needs are not all the same. Understanding the diversity of the immigrant population is, therefore, critical to developing programs and services that meet their unique needs. This study has shed some light on how inclusive (or not) and welcoming settlement organizations are of LGBTQ immigrants. Next we provide a checklist of recommendations that could prove useful to settlement organizations to recognize the unique

needs of LGBTQ immigrants and better serve this subpopulation of immigrants. These recommendations, drawn from Stages 1 and 2 of our study, represent some best practices for serving LGBTQ immigrants:

1. Recognize the diversity in immigrant populations and the unique needs of LGBTQ immigrants in the settlement process. Provide Positive Space training for staff.
2. Increase access to linguistically diverse immigrants by providing an option to view the information on the agency website in a variety of languages.
3. Consciously identify/demonstrate support toward LGBTQ populations by prominently displaying signs of support for LGBTQ immigrants and by having inclusion/diversity policies that specifically reference LGBTQ populations and/or discrimination on account of gender identity and sexual orientation.
4. Include LGBTQ-immigrant-specific programming.
5. Use positive strengths-based language to address LGBTQ immigrants.
6. Include information and links to the websites of community agencies that serve LGBTQ populations.
7. Include diversity of the immigrant population in relation to race, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, and ability in website images depicting immigrant groups.

Our findings and suggestions for best practice are limited to the data we collected from Canadian websites. Future research might explore research questions similar to this study in other immigrant-receiving countries to document innovative practices in relation to serving LGBTQ immigrants as well as developing a more comprehensive list of best practices that might be applicable globally. Future research could also explore how immigrant-serving organizations address and respond to the complex intersectional identities of the immigrants they serve.

Conclusion

This study employed content analysis to explore how immigrant-serving organizations in the provinces of Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador displayed inclusivity toward LGBTQ immigrants on their websites. In addition, the types of services and/or programs offered specifically to LGBTQ immigrants were examined. We found that a preponderance of settlement organizations overlooked or undervalued the importance of websites in building client relationships (Ingenhoff & Koelling, 2009). Organizations' websites are often the first point of contact for the newcomer. Apart from communicating vital information about the organization's services, websites also reflect the values and priorities of the organization to viewers. Thus, it is important that LGBTQ immigrants see themselves reflected in the website content of settlement organizations.

Regardless of the province, the majority of settlement organizations displayed very little sign of being welcoming to, or inclusive of, LGBTQ immigrants. Only a small number of settlement organizations in Ontario that identified as

LGBTQ-positive spaces created a welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBTQ immigrants, with some programs and services offered. This should give cause for concern, given the implication that, on arrival, LGBTQ immigrants might not be well-served by mainstream settlement organizations in general. In Newfoundland and Labrador, all immigrants and refugees to the province are served by only one comprehensive settlement organization, heightening the need for LGBTQ awareness and sensitivity to the intersectional nature of their experiences. Racialized LGBTQ immigrants, in particular, may need to be assured of support as a critical strategy to attract and retain them in the province. Ultimately, settlement organizations need to recognize the unique challenges of LGBTQ immigrants and provide services that take these challenges into account (O'Neill & Kia, 2012). The organizations also need to ensure visible signs of inclusion, by making available webpage language-translation tools, displaying text and images of racially diverse LGBTQ immigrants, and offering services and programs specific to LGBTQ immigrants that are not confined to youths.

Considering the limited geographical scope of our study, future research should examine the LGBTQ-inclusion practices of settlement organizations in other provinces, so that a national standard for best practice can be developed. Further research should focus on the experiences of LGBTQ immigrants with direct settlement support, to understand the effectiveness of settlement services and programs in meeting their integration and settlement needs. Insights from this work could help researchers, policymakers, and settlement professionals understand where there might be gaps in LGBTQ settlement and integration services, so that steps can be taken to identify resources that could be leveraged for change.

Note

1. In May 2016 and June 2016, the world saw violent attacks on gay people in Xalapa, Mexico, and Florida, United States, respectively. In the former, an attack at Xalapa's gay bar, Bar Madame, left five dead and 14 wounded. In the latter, 49 people were killed at the gay nightclub, Pulse, in Orlando.

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