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Realistic Conflict for jobs, and Selection Bias against skilled immigrants during a Recession:

Does it apply in New Zealand?

A thesis presented as part of the course requirements for a

Master of Arts in Psychology

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Abstract

Only a short time ago in New Zealand, there was a shortage of people rather than places. However with the country having encountered an official recession, the purpose of this study is to determine whether Realistic Conflict plays a role in the selection of candidates. Realistic Conflict Theory states that competitiveness between groups is rational and 'realistic' to expect whenever resources (like jobs), are scarce. Hence greater perceived threat from immigration may predict greater job selection biases against skilled immigrants, in 'high-churn' nations like New Zealand. Previous research has not been able to test a role for this theory in selection bias, because there were too many jobs and too few job applicants/ candidates (Coates 2003). Based on the UN principle of Alignment (of research with core stakeholder values), this project focuses on immigrants rather than employers' perceptions, surveying *N* = 100 skilled immigrant job seekers in New Zealand who had looked for a job at least once in the last five years (2005 – 2010). Control measures included ethnicity, qualifications, number of years of experience. Antecedent measures focused on perceived realistic conflict. The criterion measure was obtaining employment, i.e.; how long a candidate had looked for a job before successfully gaining employment, and whether their country of origin was a common denominator in the success rate. The most important point of Realistic Conflict theory is that intergroup enmity and competition will arise whenever economic resources are scarce (Brewer, 1968). Analytically, key questions assessed the perceived intercultural similarity to New Zealand based on the country of origin, examined whether candidates have experienced favouritism or bias towards based on country of origin, and also the recognized socio-economic dominance of the candidates' country-of-origin. Realistic Conflict theory and Social Identity theory are complementary, with Social Identity theory providing a cognitive explanation of how intergroup conflict can arise (perceived or otherwise), and RCT addressing the consequences of this conflict.

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Table of Contents

Abstract..... Page i

Acknowledgements..... Page ii

Tables of Contents..... Page iii

List of Tables and Figures..... Page vi

Chapter 1..... Page 1

Introduction..... Page 1

The New Zealand Context..... Page 2

Chapter 2..... Page 5

Psychological Theories..... Page 5

Similarity Attraction..... Page 5

Social Identity Theory..... Page 11

Inverse Resonance..... Page 13

Social Dominance Theory..... Page 14

Realistic Conflict Theory..... Page 16

Chapter 3..... Page 23

Method..... Page 23

Participants..... Page 23

Measures..... Page 24

- Part A ..... Page 24

- Part B ..... Page 25
- Part C ..... Page 25
- Part D ..... Page 25
- Qualitative Measures ..... Page 27
- Part E/F/G ..... Page 27
- Procedure ..... Page 27

Chapter 4 ..... Page 29

Evidence of Bias? ..... Page 29

Similarity Attraction ..... Page 30

Social Domianance ..... Page 32

Realistic Conflict ..... Page 34

Qualitative Responses to Part A ..... Page 38

Qualitative Responses to Part C ..... Page 41

Qualitative Responses to Part D ..... Page 42

Qualitative Responses to Part D ..... Page 44

Job Seeking Activities ..... Page 46

Feedback on Questionnaire ..... Page 55

Chapter 5..... Page 56

Summary of Findings ..... Page 56

Links to theory ..... Page 58

Similarity Attraction ..... Page 58

Social Dominance .....Page 59

Realistic Con flict ..... Page 60

Summary ..... Page 61

Limitations of Study ..... Page 61

Future Directions ..... Page 62

Conclusion ..... Page 63

Appendices..... Page 64

Appendix I: Letter requesting permission of an Organisation..... Page 64

Appendix II: Letter requesting Participation in the Research Project..... Page 65

Appendix III: Information Sheet (Non-Student Category)..... Page 66

Appendix IV: Information Sheet (Student Category)..... Page 68

Appendix V: Questionnaire..... Page 70

References..... Page 80

List of Tables and Figures

Table 1..... Page 24

Table 2..... Page 29

Table 3..... Page 30

Table 4..... Page 31

Table 5..... Page 31

Table 6..... Page 33

Table 7..... Page 33

Table 8..... Page 35

Table 9..... Page 35

Table 10..... Page 37

Table 11..... Page 37

Table 12..... Page 40

Tale 13..... Page 41

Table 14..... Page 43

Table 15..... Page 45

Table 16..... Page 53

Table 17..... Page 53

Table 18..... Page 54

Table 19..... Page 55

Figures:

Figure 1..... Page 22

Figure 2..... Page 32

Figure 3..... Page 33

Figure 4..... Page 36

Figure 5..... Page 38

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