

# **Sojourners:** *Undergraduate Journal of Sociology*

Volume 1 ♦ 2009

---



ISSN 1918-9052

Published by the Sociology Students Association  
of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver

Sociology Students Association  
c/o Department of Sociology  
6303 NW Marine Drive  
Vancouver, BC  
Canada V6T 1Z1

socio@club.ams.ubc.ca  
socjournal@gmail.com

© 2009 UBC Sociology Students Association

The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the individual authors.

*Sojourners: Undergraduate Journal of Sociology* is a peer and Faculty reviewed journal published annually by the Sociology Students Association of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. Our mandate is to provide a venue for the publication of outstanding undergraduate writing. Submissions are accepted in the fall of each year. Original research is preferred. Book reviews are limited to books published within the past five years. For more information about manuscript submission, please contact the Editor-in-Chief at [socjournal@gmail.com](mailto:socjournal@gmail.com).

Are you interested in volunteering for *Sojourners*? Do you have questions or comments about this year's edition? Please contact us at [socjournal@gmail.com](mailto:socjournal@gmail.com).

*Sojourners: Undergraduate Journal of Sociology*  
Volume 1 ♦ 2009

Editor-in-Chief  
Sierra Skye Gemma

Layout and Design:  
Esther Wong

Editorial Board:  
Hilary McNaughton  
Natasia Wright  
Yun-Jou Chang  
Alison Bailey  
Dmitry Yakovenko  
Bener Eshref  
Maureen Mendoza

Cover Graphic Designer:  
Marco R. Firme

Special Thanks To:

Dr. Neil Guppy for providing support and encouragement at every step.

The entire UBC Department of Sociology for their selfless assistance in getting the word out and sharing their expertise, with special thanks to Professors Richard Carpiano, Jennifer Chun, Gillian Creese, Dawn Currie, Sylvia Fuller, Edward Grabb, Amy Hanser, Nathanael Lauster, Renisa Mawani, Jim Ponzetti, Wendy Roth, Gerry Veenstra, Jim White, Rima Wilkes, and Daniyal Zuberi.

Sociology graduate students Mike Halpin and Chris Buse, for sharing their time and experience, and H el ene Frohard-Dourlent, for sharing her photographic talent.

Brenda Lee for suggesting the wonderful title of Sojourners for the new journal.

Esther Wong for her winning entry in the Sojourners logo design competition.

UBC Sociology Students Association (SSA).

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR .....	5
HUNGER REVISITED: ENTITLEMENT REMOVAL AND STATE-INDUCED FAMINE IN ZIMBABWE CONNOR CAVANAGH .....	7
A CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF FRIENDS-WITH-BENEFITS RELATIONSHIPS TARA WODELET .....	17
SPICE UP YOUR LIFE: POSTFEMINISM AND THE SPICE GIRLS MANORI RAVINDRAN .....	25
WHY THE SCHOOL SYSTEM FAILS TO EQUALIZE: THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND ON CHILDREN'S ACHIEVEMENT IN SCHOOL HÉLÈNE FROHARD-DOURLENT .....	37
SPORTS AND RECREATION: STRONG MEDICINE FOR ABORIGINAL YOUTH JOHN NASLUND .....	46
DURKHEIMIAN DEFICIT: THE STUDY OF QUEER YOUTH SUICIDALITY KALEV HUNT .....	53
"THREE STRIKES" STRIKES OUT: THE REAL IMPACT OF CALIFORNIA'S THREE STRIKES LAW MICHAEL KEHL .....	62
CULTURALLY APPROPRIATING THE INUKSUK BRIGITTE DRESCHER AND AMY TREBELCO .....	69
REVIEW OF <i>CAMBODIA NOW: LIFE IN THE WAKE OF WAR</i> BY KAREN J. COATES CHRIS SWEENEY .....	79
ABOUT THE AUTHORS .....	82
ABOUT THE STAFF .....	84

Dear Reader,

*Sojourners* began as a simple idea. Back in 2007, it was just “the journal”: a student proposal to provide a venue for the publication of outstanding undergraduate writing in Sociology. In early 2008, the Sociology Students Association transformed this idea into a reality by voting to make “the journal” one of the Association’s central projects in the upcoming school year. Immediately, I began planning the submission, review, and editing process, while Maureen Mendoza led an extremely successful fundraising campaign without which you would not be reading this first issue.

When we began taking submissions in the fall of 2008, the student response was overwhelming. Students from many departments submitted articles and book reviews and donated their time and talents to the journal. Hilary McNaughton, Natasia Wright, Yun-Jou Chang, Alison Bailey, Dmitry Yakovenko, Bener Eshref, and Maureen Mendoza provided their editing skills and H el ene Frohard-Dourlent offered the use of her expressive photographs. Marco Firme designed the cover art. Esther Wong volunteered her layout and design abilities and submitted the winning entry in the logo competition. Brenda Lee’s title suggestion, *Sojourners*, was selected from the many journal names put forward by students.

The students working on the project chose the title *Sojourners* not only because we were on a journey—traveling through the unfamiliar world of academic publishing—but also because we hoped to provide our readers with the opportunity to take a sociological sojourn in unknown places, (sub)cultures, and realms of thought. I believe we have succeeded in this endeavour.

The articles in Volume 1 exemplify the breadth of topics available for sociological study at the undergraduate level at the University of British Columbia. The articles span the globe, with Connor Cavanagh focusing on famine in Zimbabwe and Michael Kehl deliberating on the effects of the “Three Strikes” law in California. They also address a wide range of topics, from Manori Ravindran’s consideration of postfeminism and the pop music phenomenon of The Spice Girls to H el ene Frohard-Dourlent’s analysis of the impact of socioeconomic status on children’s success in school. Two authors ask their audience to rethink previous research: Tara Wodelet calls for a conceptual clarification of friends-with-benefits relationships and Kalev Hunt applies Durkheim’s findings on suicide to queer youth. Brigitte Drescher and Amy Trebelco look at cultural

appropriation of First Nations symbols, while John Naslund suggests the benefits of sports and recreation for Aboriginal youth. After reading these articles, as well as Chris Sweeney's review of Karen Coates' *Cambodia Now*, it becomes clear that undergraduate students at the University of British Columbia have a very diverse array of interests! These interests are no doubt inspired by the expert knowledge of the passionate and engaging professors in the Department of Sociology.

The authors and the staff of *Sojourners* owe so much to our supporters: the professors and graduate students who have shared writing, researching, and publishing insights with us, our friends and families, and you, the Reader. This support ensures that *Sojourners* will continue to be published in the years to come.

Sincerely,  
Sierra Skye Gemma  
Editor-in-Chief, *Sojourners*

# Hunger Revisited: Entitlement Removal and State-Induced Famine in Zimbabwe

*Connor Cavanagh*

On 9 November 2008, Morgan Tsvangirai—the leader of Zimbabwe’s Movement for Democratic Change—warned that “a million Zimbabweans could starve to death in a year” as a result of deteriorating food security and political deadlock (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], 2008). The fact that endemic hunger now prevails in a country that once served as the “granary” of southern Africa defies the logic of most traditional famine analyses (Chattopadhyay, 2000, p. 307). Many past examinations of endemic hunger in sub-Saharan Africa have relied on the Malthusian concept of Food Availability Decline (FAD), which focuses on demographic trends and technical failures in food production (Baro & Deubel, 2006). More recently, Amartya Sen’s (1976) concept of Food Entitlement Decline (FED) has been advanced as an alternative to Malthusian theories in order to explain famine in situations of food surplus. However, neither theory examines the possibility that states can intentionally create and maintain endemic hunger among certain groups for political or socioeconomic reasons. When famine is state-induced, it can be seen as a form of “structural violence,” which is defined as the “physical and psychological harm that results from exploitative and unjust social, political, and economic systems” (Gilman, 1983, p. 8). In the context of Zimbabwe, structural violence is embodied by the state-sanctioned removal of both individual and group “entitlements” to food.

In order to expose the presence of structural violence in Zimbabwe I will analyze inconsistencies between food production and consumption, the historical foundations of current land disputes, and the contemporary politics of state-run food distribution in the country. I will demonstrate that conditions of famine in Zimbabwe have been artificially maintained by the Zimbabwean African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party in order to suppress political dissent and to coerce the population into a relationship of food-dependence with the state. As a corollary, I suggest that the concept of “faminocide,” defined as actions which create or aid in the creation of famine (Marcus, 2003, p. 262), should be codified into international law in order to provide a legal framework for the prosecution of those who are found guilty of committing faminocide.

Four critical points inform the framework in which I deliver this argument. First, I challenge the Malthusian concept of Food Availability Decline (FAD) in the Zimbabwean context, which attributes food insecurity to the presence of a rapidly growing population amidst a stagnant or declining agricultural sector (Woodhouse, 1989; Baro & Deubel, 2006; Edkins, 2002). According to this perspective, food availability declines in accordance with population growth and results in diminished food consumption per capita. In a traditional FAD analysis, famine will become inevitable if population growth exceeds agricultural growth. Neo-Malthusian FAD analyses further note the “compounded impacts” which

emerge when several demographic and environmental conditions conspire to create “super-synergized effects” of disastrous proportions (Kent & Myers, 2001, p. 55). Such a synergy could involve environmental natural disasters such as drought or flooding, as well as demographic processes such as rapid population growth. In following such a neo-Malthusian tradition, the World Food Programme (WFP) has recently suggested that chronic food shortages in Zimbabwe are mainly a consequence of irregular weather patterns, the HIV pandemic, and hyperinflation (World Food Programme [WFP], 2008). Although these factors certainly contribute to food insecurity, the WFP’s Malthusian-style analysis ignored deliberate government failures to respond to these crises. The two central problems with both Malthusian and neo-Malthusian analyses, therefore, are that they fail to explain endemic hunger under conditions of food surplus or relative agro-climactic stability, and that they largely view hunger as a political and ahistorical phenomenon.

Secondly, I will utilize Amartya Sen’s (1980) definition of famine, which identifies starvation as a person’s inability to utilize his or her entitlements to food. This is in contrast with a Malthusian understanding of famine, which explains starvation as the direct result of a food shortage per capita. Sen’s definition implies that famine is not a technical food production failure; rather, it is the manifestation of a breakdown in the relationship of exchange between consumers and food producers. In other words, famine occurs when consumers lose (or as I suggest, when they are deprived of) the entitlements that they use to procure food from those who produce or distribute it. Such entitlements include: direct production (subsistence agriculture), trade, wage labour, and “inheritance or transfer” of economic resources (Baro & Duebel, 2006, p. 524).

Thirdly, this paper extends Sen’s (1980) entitlement theory. While it is useful for examining the causes of famine in a situation of food surplus, Sen’s analysis as a whole is largely apolitical. I assert that the cause of famine in a Sensian context is *still* a technical failure in food distribution, although it is economic rather than environmental or demographic in nature. Sen essentially sees the collapse of food entitlements as a rather “benign” occurrence and does not “consider the possibility that famines could be a *product* of the social or economic system rather than a consequence of its *failure*” (Edkins, 2002, p. 13, emphasis in original). In effect, Sen’s victim-oriented famine analysis fails to uncover a social or political impetus for the facilitation of “entitlement removal.” I therefore take the position that it is necessary to extend Sen’s entitlement theory in order to reframe it within a perpetrator-oriented rather than victim-oriented analysis. This extension illuminates the political and social motivations for famine, and analyzes them as the outgrowth of sociopolitical processes. As such, it challenges the traditional view of famine as an ahistorical, depoliticized and technical failure, and points to the existence of a category of crimes that can be labeled as “faminogenic.” A faminogenic crime, therefore, is one that has caused mass destitution or mortality through the systematic and deliberate removal of entitlements to food (Marcus, 2003). Thus, a perpetrator-oriented analysis of famine would serve to identify individuals or groups responsible for committing faminocide.

Finally, such a radical interpretation of entitlement theory does not assume that formal socio-political violence, such as civil war, is a necessary precondition for faminocide. Although over half of the most devastating sub-Saharan African famines in the twentieth century involved some sort of violent conflict, there are a number of cases in which violence is manifested more subtly (Baro & Deubel, 2006). Famines that involve violent conflict are some of the most devastating in terms of casualties (Baro & Duebel, 2006), but intense social or political struggles do not always translate into



physical political violence, and the absence of direct violence unfortunately does not equal the absence of structural violence in the form of famine facilitation—it just makes such violence harder to detect. Examples abound of famine co-occurring with a food surplus, the production of food for mass export, or environmental conditions which are agro-climatically favourable for the production of food (Sen, 1980; Baro & Duebel, 2006). These co-occurrences are indicators of structural violence.

Zimbabwe is a suitable focus for an extended entitlement analysis because it is not currently experiencing formal civil war, and because the presence of endemic hunger in the country co-exists with clearly evident structural violence. In an observation that is particularly relevant to the paradoxical existence of food insecurity in Zimbabwe, Galtung and Høivik (1971) note that structural violence is embodied by the processes that produce a “difference between optimal life expectancy and the actual life expectancy” (p. 74). Moreover, Paul Farmer (2004) notes that “the concept of structural violence is intended to study the social machinery of oppression” (p. 307). This paper examines the “social machinery” responsible for the removal of food entitlements in Zimbabwe. Food production and universal access to food commodities are necessary preconditions for an optimal life expectancy, and the fact that they have been neutralized in Zimbabwe suggests that structural violence in the form of state-sponsored entitlement removal is restricting the access of many Zimbabweans to food.

Ironically, Zimbabwe’s natural agro-climatic conditions predispose it to effective food production (Keyzer, Sonneveld, & Voortman, 2003; Sanchez, 2002; Chattopadhyay, 2000). It is among the most ideal sub-Saharan geographical locations for agriculture, because the majority of the country enjoys an average growing season of around 150-210 days and an optimal combination of environmental stability and fertile soils, which support the cultivation of a diverse variety of crops (Keyzer et al., 2003). As such, Zimbabwe is considered to be one of the countries that have “the potential of becoming the granary of the African continent” (Keyzer et al., 2003, p. 369). It has even been suggested that high-tech “Green Revolution” methods of yield increase are unnecessary to maintain food security in an agro-climatically favourable country such as Zimbabwe (Sanchez, 2003, p. 2019).

Neo-Malthusian analyses are likewise unable to explain the paradoxical occurrence of famine in Zimbabwe. Although climatic shocks (such as drought and flooding), biosocial disasters (such as the HIV pandemic), and hyperinflation have contributed to food insecurity in the country, government failures to respond to these crises have essentially turned a relatively minor food shortage into a full-blown famine. On several occasions President Robert Mugabe’s ZANU-PF regime has refused to accept food aid that would have alleviated food shortages, or has even diverted such aid to other countries in the region (Human Rights Watch [HR Watch], 2003, 2004). Moreover, the government has also prevented the distribution of state-owned food aid in ethnic-minority regions such as Matabeleland (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace [CCJP] & Legal Resources Foundation [LRF], 1999). Unfavourable environmental or technical circumstances are therefore not responsible for the presence of endemic hunger in Zimbabwe; rather, I assert that the root causes of artificially-imposed hunger in Zimbabwe lie in the nation’s recent history of socio-political conflict.

Farmer (2004) notes that “those who look only to powerful present-day actors to explain misery will fail to see how inequality is structured and legitimated over time” (p. 309). Likewise, any investigation of possible motivations for the facilitation of famine in Zimbabwe would be lacking without acknowledging the lasting implications of British

colonialism. As a colonial power, Britain imposed systems of capitalism and wage-labour on the tribal societies of what is now contemporary Zimbabwe. In the process, capitalism was fused with an ideology of white racial superiority to create a situation in which a “white settler minority class of 4000 commercial farmers with an average of 200 hectares [each] . . . marginalized about 1.5 million peasant families, and other *sub-altern* classes from the access to key resources” (Moyo, 2005, p. 187, emphasis in original). Africans were forced off the most fertile land and onto overcrowded reserves where it was a struggle to produce enough food for mere subsistence. The profound inequality of this racial relationship precipitated a number of land-based revolutionary movements in Zimbabwe, of which the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) emerged as the most significant (Moyo, 2005).

These two groups were divided along ethnic lines: ZANU’s support came mainly from the Shona areas of Zimbabwe, whereas ZAPU recruited almost exclusively Ndebele-speaking people (CCJP & LRF, 1999). This ethnic division within the Zimbabwean independence movement would later become the pretext for Robert Mugabe’s implementation of faminogenic policies to suppress ethnic dissent. Following a multi-sided civil war between ZANU, ZAPU, and Ian Smith’s republican Rhodesian forces, ZANU won the 1980 Rhodesian-Zimbabwean general elections. Shortly afterward, the newly-elected President Mugabe began a campaign of terror to crush any opposition from within the ZAPU movement. In doing so, he created the North Korean trained “5 Brigade,” a military force that became known in the Shona vernacular as “*Gukurahundi*” or “the rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains” (CCJP & LRF, 1999, p. 13; Power, 2003, p. 96). Almost immediately after its formation, the 5 Brigade began to “combat malcontents” in regions of Zimbabwe with large Ndebele populations such as Matabeleland (CCJP & LRF, 1999, p. 13). After its official formation in 1983, the 5 Brigade allegedly committed a number of crimes against humanity, including “the mass murder of whole villages, mass rape, and widespread torture” (Howard-Hassman, 2005, p. 502). Ndebele victims were reportedly often “forced to sing Shona songs before being beaten and killed” (Genocide Watch, 2002). However, these examples only show how *direct* violence was used to suppress dissent among the Ndebele population.

Although the 5 Brigade exercised direct violence against minority groups in Zimbabwe, its most powerful weapon was structural violence in the form of artificially imposed famine. Evidence suggests that, in the period between 1984 and 1985, the 5 Brigade forced as many as 400 000 people to the brink of starvation or beyond in the region of Matabeleland alone (CCJP & LRF, 1999). During this period Zimbabwe was experiencing severe drought, but the 5 Brigade actively restricted the distribution of food aid in Ndebele regions of Zimbabwe (CCJP & LRF, 1999). By 1984, regions such as Matabeleland were experiencing “the third consecutive year of drought and people had no food apart from drought relief from donors . . . [however] all drought relief was stopped, and all stores closed” (CCJP & LRF, 1999, p. 14). Structural violence in the form of entitlement removal became a much more useful tool for Mugabe than direct physical violence.

By October of 1987, Mugabe’s oppression of the Ndebele groups of Zimbabwe had become sufficiently brutal to coerce ZAPU into a veiled surrender, which came in the form of the 1987 Unity Accord (CCJP & LRF, 1999). The synthesis of ZANU and ZAPU was acknowledged in the renaming of ZANU as the ZANU – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), implying that the merger served the interest of national unity. Officially, the Unity Accord was a mutual reconciliation of ideological differences between the

ZANU and ZAPU parties, but in reality it implied the consolidation of national power under Mugabe, and the suppression of ethnic minority dissent. Without ZAPU, Ndebele Zimbabweans became quite vulnerable to the 5 Brigade's "*Gukurahundi*" campaign, which was designed to crush ethnically based political dissent (Power, 2003, p. 96).

Samantha Power (2003) notes that because "most blacks [in Zimbabwe] remained dispossessed two decades after independence, politics and land became inseparable" (p. 86). Indeed, the vast majority of Zimbabweans now secure food entitlements either directly through subsistence production or through wage labour on a commercial farm (Howard-Hassman, 2005). As a result, the rural classes are especially vulnerable to fluctuations in food entitlement decline (or removal). Furthermore, as this rural peasantry also constitutes the majority in Zimbabwean democracy, the major political parties must co-opt them to some extent in order to ensure victory in national elections. As a result, the government is often forced to buy votes with promises of land reform in an endeavor to diminish the relevance of the opposition's populist rhetoric. According to Mugabe, land reform would correct colonial injustices by redistributing to smallholding peasant farmers the land previously consolidated into huge white-owned agribusinesses (BBC, 2002).

The declining popularity of the ZANU-PF party in the period leading up to the 2002 national elections caused Robert Mugabe to pursue such a populist election campaign. In this case, the familiar rhetoric of land reform was actually implemented, but with an ulterior motive that was again decidedly 'faminogenic' (Howard-Hassman, 2005). Mugabe authorized land invasions of white owned farms by the black peasantry in a supposed attempt to correct the injustices of the colonial era. As noted by Samantha Power in 2003, however, "nearly two-thirds of these [white] farmers had bought their land after independence, and thus held titles issued not by Ian Smith or the British colonial regime but by the Mugabe government" (p. 88). These "land invasions" led to the unemployment of approximately 200 000 farm workers, who together with their families "constituted about a million and a half to two million people" that became destitute (Howard-Hassman, 2005, p. 501).

The new occupants of previously white-owned farms "often had no idea how to farm, or were subsistence peasants not able to produce for market," while any remaining white farmers were "ordered to vacate their farms immediately and were even forbidden to finish cultivating their crops" (Howard-Hassman, 2005, p. 502). As many as 4000 large white-owned farms were shut down as a result of the land reforms, but Mugabe and the ZANU-PF party elite maintained that the ensuing food shortages were mainly the result of "drought" (Cable News Network [CNN], 2002). It also soon became apparent that the land reforms were characterized by rampant corruption and mismanagement, as the best farms were "allocated to Mugabe's affluent comrades, including the police commissioner, the ex-commander of the 5 Brigade, and a Minister already charged with fraud and corruption" (Windrich, 2002, p. 1187).

After the land reforms took place, Mugabe "distributed state-owned food only to his political supporters and withheld it from those who he thought might vote against him in the farcical periodic elections still held in Zimbabwe . . . [he] also refused to permit international agencies to bring food into the country to feed the starving" (Howard-Hassman, 2005, p. 502). Indeed, conditions of food insecurity continued to prevail in the years after the 2002 land reforms, but on May 12, 2004, Mugabe's government declared that Zimbabwe did not "require general food aid from the international community or food imports in 2004-5" (HR Watch, 2004, p. 6). This statement blatantly contradicted several

expert analyses that predicted an imminent food crisis as a result of continually increasing food insecurity in the country (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2004; Mathys, 2004; HR Watch, 2004). Theoretically, it could be argued that the food insecurity was simply the consequence of drought and a poorly managed agricultural reform. However, the fact that Mugabe and ZANU-PF actively prevented food aid from reaching certain groups or areas of the country indicates a sociopolitical motive for the perpetuation of hunger. ZANU-PF did not create the drought, but they did capitalize on conditions of fragile food security in order to perpetuate hunger among certain elements of the population. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the land reforms were engineered by ZANU-PF in order to intensify an already existing food deficit. I would concur with Howard-Hassmann (2005) that “the core cause of the food deficit situation in Zimbabwe in the early years of the twenty-first century was clearly the interests and ambitions of Mugabe and his henchmen” (p. 502). The manner in which the ZANU-PF party distributed maize and other food aid between 2002 and 2008 reinforces this point.

ZANU-PF proved successful in winning the 2002 national elections, but the fallout from the land invasions caused untold misery for the majority of Zimbabweans. By October of 2003, “half of Zimbabwe’s population of nearly fourteen million was considered food insecure [which means] living in a household that is unable to obtain enough food to meet basic needs” (HR Watch, 2003, p. 5). In response to the rapidly rising levels of food insecurity, Mugabe’s government established the Task Force on Maize Distribution, which was supposedly intended to support smallholding farmers during the transitional land reform period until they once again became self-sufficient in the production of food staples. According to Human Rights Watch—one of the only international NGOs which has carefully documented the “politicization” of food aid in Zimbabwe—“the government’s grain importation and distribution program is widely criticized for political bias; lack of transparency and accountability; and excessive levels of corruption and mismanagement” (HR Watch, 2003, p. 38). Essentially, maize quickly became another mechanism Mugabe and ZANU-PF could use to buy support and thereby perpetuate the food insecurity they themselves had artificially created.

The official mandate of Mugabe’s Task Force on Maize Distribution was to “import maize and sell it domestically at a subsidized price” (HR Watch, 2003, p. 39). The maize was to be sold through local leaders such as chiefs, as well as local shops and wholesalers, and distributed—supposedly—on an equal opportunity basis. The reality, of course, was much different, and the distribution process was marred by violence, intimidation, and corruption (Howard-Hassman, 2005; HR Watch, 2003; Power, 2003). Evidence suggests that large quantities of maize were actually distributed from ZANU-PF party headquarters, where party membership was a prerequisite for the ability to make a purchase (HR Watch, 2003). Zimbabweans who wished to purchase grain from ZANU-PF locations were also forced to sing ethnic-majority Shona songs, to denounce the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), and to chant slogans such as “Down with whites!” (Power, 2003, p. 90). Maize shortages therefore enabled Mugabe’s ZANU-PF party to humiliate ethnic minority groups, to ensure ZANU-PF support, and to crush dissent within Zimbabwe.

The distribution of maize also indicates that food not only advanced political interests but also promoted the accumulation of private wealth among the ZANU-PF elite. In fact, the government took direct action to ensure that some food shipments never reached the segments of the population that they were intended for (HR Watch, 2003). Some of the maize intended as food aid for famine-stricken regions of Zimbabwe

was actually exported to Malawi, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (HR Watch, 2003). In other cases, food aid was simply seized by various ZANU-PF factions once it entered the country, and sold on the black market at a “hefty profit” (HR Watch, 2003, p. 42). Thus, the surplus value from the sale of food aid was used to fortify the very structures of the ZANU-PF party that were artificially maintaining conditions of food insecurity in the country.

More recently, the 2008 presidential elections in Zimbabwe involved a number of now-familiar themes: violence, intimidation, corruption, and the use of hunger as a political weapon (HR Watch, 2008; International Crisis Group, 2008). Nonetheless, the international community was infused with hope that the elections would be free and fair. Prior to the election, however, Mugabe launched a food-bribing campaign of gargantuan proportions, which concentrated on buying the votes and loyalty of the police, military, and bureaucracy in addition to the rural population (Phimister & Raftopoulos, 2007). The results of the election were widely disputed, but first-round results showed that the MDC won by a narrow margin (Economist, 2008). The victory did not deliver its promised hope, and widespread violence ensued in the immediate aftermath of the election, which eventually resulted in the mediation of the two parties by South African President Thabo Mbeki, and the creation of a “coalition government,” composed of both ZANU-PF and Tsvangirai’s MDC (Economist, 2008, p. 57).

A seemingly unbreakable stalemate has emerged within this coalition government, which has allowed conditions of famine to continue to ravage the Zimbabwean population. These conditions are what caused Morgan Tsvangirai to note that “at least a million Zimbabweans could starve to death in a year because of political deadlock” (BBC, 2008). Despite the deadlock, ZANU-PF is maintaining artificially constructed conditions of food insecurity to accomplish its political goals and maintain its grip on power. The party continues to systematically remove the food entitlements of most Zimbabweans in order to oppress them into total compliance. Although it is clear that Robert Mugabe is responsible for perpetuating conditions of famine in Zimbabwe, how he and ZANU-PF can be held responsible for their faminogenic crimes has yet to be determined.

David Marcus (2003) has suggested an international legal framework for the prosecution of political leaders responsible for faminogenic crimes. He recommends the following two-tier definition of “famine crimes,” in which:

An individual commits a first-degree famine crime by knowingly creating, inflicting, or prolonging conditions that result in or contribute to the starvation of a significant number of people . . . [And/Or] an individual commits a second-degree famine crime by recklessly ignoring evidence that the policies for which he or she bears responsibility for creating, inflicting, or prolonging are leading to the starvation of a significant number of people. (p. 262)

The codification of famine crimes into international law would not only constitute a means with which to prosecute famine-perpetrators, but would also create a value-laden term which could be used to motivate Western governments and international organizations to take anti-famine action. Marcus (2003) contends that if the term faminocide was institutionalized to refer to mass murder through the facilitation of hunger, the international community would no longer be able to “take advantage of the currently scattered state of the law to shield itself from honestly confronting those responsible for mass starvation” (p. 280). Similarities can be drawn with the codification of the concept of genocide into international law: when invoked, it has profoundly affected the responsiveness of NGOs, activist organizations, and other civil society groups to crisis situations.

In examining relationships of food production, food distribution, and land tenancy with an extended entitlement approach, this paper has shown that conditions of famine in Zimbabwe have been both artificially constructed and perpetuated by the state. In the process, it has shown that Malthusian, environmental, and other “technical failure” theories of famine causation do not adequately explain the presence of famine in Zimbabwe. Although certain phenomena such as drought or epidemics may limit a country’s capacity to produce food, the neo-Malthusian analyses which emphasize these factors often ignore the role of human agency in transforming a naturally-occurring food shortage into a full-blown famine. The limitations of such theories are explicit in the paper’s arguments. Given that such theories do not provide adequate explanation in the context of Zimbabwe, they may likewise fail to do justice in other cases of famine.

Furthermore, an analysis of the political, socioeconomic, and historical foundations of social conflict in Zimbabwe has yielded compelling evidence that Robert Mugabe’s ZANU-PF party is responsible for the systematic removal of food entitlements. The imposition of such conditions of food entitlement removal can be interpreted as an example of a “faminogenic crime,” which has an inherently political or socioeconomic motive (Marcus, 2003, p. 262). Unfortunately, there is little that the international community can do to end endemic hunger in Zimbabwe until the concepts of ‘faminocide’ and ‘faminogenic crimes’ are codified in international law. This paper suggests, therefore, that the legal codification of ‘faminocide’ should be a priority in order to prevent future faminogenic crimes, and to advance the mandate of the international community to combat gross human rights abuses across the globe. To realize this goal there is also a need for academic inquiries which explore state complicity in human rights abuses and provide new theoretical frameworks for delineating such complicity.

## References

- Baro, M., & Deubel, T. F. (2006). Persistent hunger: Perspectives on vulnerability, famine, and food security in sub-Saharan Africa. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 35, 521-538.
- British Broadcasting Corporation. (2002, March 17). Mugabe pledges rapid land reform. *British Broadcasting Corporation News*. Retrieved February 19, 2009, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1877156.stm>
- British Broadcasting Corporation. (2008, November 9). Tsvangirai ‘warns of starvation.’ *British Broadcasting Corporation News*. Retrieved November 9, 2008, from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7718225.stm>
- Chattopadhyay, R. (2000). Zimbabwe: Structural adjustment, destitution and food insecurity. *Review of African Political Economy*, 27(84), 307-316.
- Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace & Legal Resources Foundation. (1999). *Breaking the silence, building true peace: A report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980-1988*. Retrieved February 23, 2009 from <http://www.sokwanele.com/pdfs/BTS.pdf>
- Cable News Network. (2002, June 24). New crisis for Zimbabwe farmers. *CNN World News*. Retrieved February 16, 2009, from <http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/africa/06/24/zimbabwe.farmers/index.html>

- The Economist. (2008). They agree to talk, but nobody knows where it will lead. *The Economist*, 387(8590), 56-57.
- Edkins, J. (2002). Mass starvations and the limitations of famine theorizing. *IDS Bulletin*, 33(4), 12-18.
- Farmer, P. (2004). An anthropology of structural violence. *Current Anthropology*, 45(3), 305-325.
- Food and Agriculture Organization. (2004, July 5). *Special report: Zimbabwe*. Retrieved February 23, 2009, from <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/007/J2650e/J2650e00.pdf>
- Galtung, J., & Hoivik, T. (1971). Structural and direct violence: A note on operationalization. *Journal of Peace Research*, 8(1), 73-76.
- Genocide Watch. (2002, February). Politicide watch: Zimbabwe. *Genocide Watch*. Retrieved on February 16, 2009, from <http://www.genocidewatch.org/zimbabwepoliticidewatch.htm>
- Gilman, R. (1983). Structural violence. *In Context*, 4, 8-9.
- Howard-Hassman, R. E. (2005). Genocide and state-induced famine: Global ethics and western responsibilities for mass atrocities in Africa. *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, 4(3-4), 487-516.
- Human Rights Watch. (2003). Not eligible: The politicization of food in Zimbabwe. *Human Rights Watch*, 15(17A), 1-56. Retrieved February 23, 2009, from <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/zimbabwe1003.pdf>
- Human Rights Watch. (2004). The politics of food aid in Zimbabwe. *Human Rights Watch*, 12, 1-17. Retrieved February 23, 2009, from <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/africa/zimbabwe/2004/zimbabwe0804.pdf>
- Human Rights Watch. (2008). "They beat me like a dog": Political persecution of opposition activists and supporters in Zimbabwe. *Human Rights Watch*, August, 1-23. Retrieved March 3, 2009, from [http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/zimbabwe0808\\_1.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/zimbabwe0808_1.pdf)
- International Crisis Group. (2008). Zimbabwe: Prospects from a flawed election. *International Crisis Group Africa Report*, 138, 1-31. Retrieved March 3, 2009 from, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/southern\\_africa/138\\_zimbabwe\\_prospects\\_from\\_a\\_flawed\\_election.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/southern_africa/138_zimbabwe_prospects_from_a_flawed_election.pdf)
- Kent, J. & Myers, N. (2001). Food and hunger in sub-Saharan Africa. *Environmentalist*, 21(1), 41-69.
- Keyzer, M. A., Sonneveld, B. G. J. S., & Voortman, R. L. (2003). African land ecology: Opportunities and constraints for agricultural development. *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment*, 32(5), 367-373.
- Marcus, D. (2003). Famine crimes in international law. *The American Journal of International Law*, 97(2), 245-281.
- Mathys, E. (2004). *Community-managed targeting and distribution of food aid: A review of the experience of Save the Children UK in sub-Saharan Africa*. London: Save the Children. Retrieved February 23, 2009, from [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/docs/Community-managed\\_targeting\\_and\\_distribution\\_of\\_food\\_aid.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/en/docs/Community-managed_targeting_and_distribution_of_food_aid.pdf)
- Moyo, S. (2005). Land and natural resource redistribution in Zimbabwe: Access, equity, and conflict. *African and Asian Studies*, 4(1-2), 187-223.
- Phimister, I., & Raftopoulos, B. (2007). Desperate days in Zimbabwe. *Review of African Political Economy*, 34(113), 573-580.
- Power, S. (2003). How to kill a country. *The Atlantic Monthly*, 292(5), 86-100.

- Sanchez, P. A. (2002). Soil fertility and hunger in Africa. *Science, New Series*, 295(5562), 2019-2020.
- Sen, A. (1976). Famines as failures of exchange entitlements. *Economic and Political Weekly*, August, 1273-1280.
- Sen, A. (1980). Famines. *World Development*, 8, 613-621.
- Windrich, E. (2002). Then and now: Reflections on how Mugabe rules Zimbabwe. *Third World Quarterly*, 23(6), 1181-1188.
- Woodhouse, P. (1989). From green revolution to food security in sub-Saharan Africa. *Food Policy*, February, 7-12.
- World Food Programme. (2008, February). *Protracted relief and recovery operation Zimbabwe 10595.0* (Publication No. WFP/EB.1/2008/9/1). Retrieved February 23, 2009, from <http://one.wfp.org/eb/docs/2008/wfp150181~1.pdf>



# A Conceptual Clarification of Friends-With-Benefits Relationships

Tara Wodelet

Friends-with-benefits (FWB) relationships are increasingly prevalent in North American pop culture, including in the television series *Seinfeld* (David & Cherones, 1991), *Sex and the City* (Star & Taylor, 1999), and *Boston Legal* (Kelley, 2004); Alanis Morissette's hit single "Head Over Feet" (Morissette & Ballard, 1995); and articles in *The New York Times* (Carey, 2007; Denizet-Lewis, 2004). They are also a relatively new area of academic research. As a result, precise conceptualization of FWB relationships is needed in order to begin building solid theory.

Quite simply, FWB relationships refer to "friends" who have sex (Bisson & Levine, 2007). Although this non-romantic sexual coupling has likely been around for almost as long as sex itself, it has only recently been specifically labelled and studied as a phenomenon distinct from "hookups," which refer to casual one-night encounters (Paul & Hayes, 2002), and traditional romantic relationships. Unlike in hookups the sex partner is an established friend, which connotes a certain degree of liking and intimacy (Miller, 1990). Scholars currently distinguish FWB relationships from traditional romantic relationships by their differing levels of commitment and exclusivity: high levels of commitment and exclusivity characterize romantic relationships (Bisson & Levine, 2007; Simpson, 1987), while low levels of commitment and exclusivity characterize FWB relationships (Bisson & Levine, 2007; Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005). Furthermore, current FWB literature (Bisson & Levine, 2007; Hughes et al., 2005) tends to use the terms commitment and exclusivity interchangeably. This is problematic, however, because exclusivity can occur within FWB relationships, in the case of people who choose to have only one FWB partner.

In this paper I suggest a re-conceptualization of the term FWB to include two distinct types of FWB relationships: those that are high in exclusivity and low in commitment, and those that are low in exclusivity and low in commitment. My assumption is that once commitment within a sexual relationship has passed a certain threshold, the relationship is no longer defined as friends having sex, but rather sex within a romantic relationship (see Table 1).

I discuss how these two types of FWB relationships—exclusive and non-exclusive—fundamentally differ from one another, specifically in regards to the love styles (i.e. attitudes towards love) of the partners involved and the propensity for the FWB relationship to increase in commitment levels over time. If commitment levels were to increase sufficiently within exclusive FWB relationships, these types of unions would begin to resemble romantic relationships by being high in both dimensions. In order to move forward in research relating to FWB relationships, as compared to other sexual couplings, it is vital to explore and clarify the concept.

Bisson and Levine (2007) identified why people choose to engage in FWB relationships and the potential points of conflict in such relationships. The authors reported that the

**Table 1.** Relationship types by level of exclusivity and commitment.

		Exclusivity	
		High	Low
Commitment	High	Traditional romantic relationships	---‡
	Low	Exclusive FWB relationships	Non-exclusive FWB relationships

‡ While romantic relationships that are high in commitment and low in exclusivity likely exist, they are beyond the scope of this paper.

primary advantage of FWB relationships was non-exclusive sex with a known and trusted partner. Yet the primary disadvantage was a concern that sex in the FWB relationship might create unreciprocated desires for romantic exclusivity. “The findings revealed an irony that the primary reasons for [having a] FWB [relationship] are also a primary disadvantage” (Bisson & Levine, 2007, p. 8). Bisson and Levine’s findings suggest that conflict exists within FWB relationships regarding exclusivity. There is a desire for non-exclusivity and the threat that sex between friends may unleash desires for exclusivity in only one of the partners. One way to avoid this conflict would be for *both* partners to embrace exclusivity within the union, thus allowing for sex with a trusted partner without the fear that only one partner will begin to desire exclusivity. It is plausible that this type of exclusivity agreement occurs within some FWB unions. This may not be a satisfactory solution for everyone within these unions, however, as some people may enjoy the advantages of non-exclusive sex more than they fear the possibility of non-reciprocal desires for exclusivity. Accordingly, I suggest that the personal characteristics and values of those who choose to enter into exclusive FWB relationships differ from those who choose non-exclusive FWB relationships. These differences create a type of “selection effect,” where exclusive FWB unions are fundamentally different from non-exclusive FWB unions, due to the divergent commonalities of the individuals who seek each type of relationship. These differences, as will be discussed shortly, are likely to affect the propensity for the FWB relationship to begin to resemble a traditional romantic relationship.

Those who value exclusivity, and would thus enter into exclusive FWB relationships as a method for reducing exclusivity-conflict, can be seen as having different love styles than those who prefer non-exclusive FWB unions. Hughes et al. (2005) have discussed the impact of love styles, amongst other variables, within FWB relationships, using Lee’s (1973)

six basic love styles. Love styles not only influence motivations for being in FWB relationships, they also influence the outcomes of these relationships (Hughes et al., 2005).

Different love styles vary considerably with respect to both exclusivity and commitment. Exclusivity and commitment tend to be positively correlated (Rusbult & Buunk, 2005), with both being either desired or not desired based on the particular love style. Interestingly, Hughes et al. (2005) have reported that a Ludic or game-playing love style (Lee, 1973) is associated with a greater likelihood of maintaining a FWB relationship over time, possibly because Ludics avoid commitment and exclusivity and may be better able to separate issues of sex from feelings of commitment. Ludics, therefore, may be more likely to choose a non-exclusive FWB relationship because their risk of exclusivity-conflict within the union is lower. They are at lower risk of complicating the relationship by having unreciprocated desires for exclusivity due to the very fact that they prefer a game-playing non-exclusive style of love.

Erotics, on the other hand, who subscribe to a love style where a high value is placed on committed romantic love (Lee, 1973), are more likely to report dissolution of both the FWB relationship and the friendship with their previous FWB partner (Hughes et al., 2005). This could be because those with an Erotic love-style may enter into FWB relationships with the hope that they can turn them into romantic relationships, and if this does not happen then both the FWB relationship and the friendship end. Erotics likely report greater dissolution of the FWB relationship due to greater exclusivity-conflict. Because of their difficulties in separating romantic love from sex (Lee, 1973), they are at greater risk for developing un-reciprocated desires for exclusivity within the relationship. As previously discussed, a way to resolve this conflict could be for Erotics to embrace their desires for exclusivity within the union, establishing an exclusive FWB relationship with another Erotic who also values exclusivity. Those who form exclusive FWB relationships may be more likely to subscribe to an Erotic style of love, whereas those who choose non-exclusive FWB unions may tend to subscribe to a more Ludic style.

Considering that Hughes et al. (2005) found Erotics more likely than Ludics to end their FWB relationship entirely, it would be interesting to see if, with resolution of the exclusivity-conflict, those with an Erotic love style would be more likely than Ludics to develop romantic involvement with an exclusive FWB partner. This seems probable considering Erotics' enmeshment of love and sex (Lee, 1973), resulting in a more all-or-none attitude: love cannot exist without sex, and sex cannot exist without love. Therefore, while being more likely to end the FWB relationship altogether (Hughes et al., 2005), Erotics may also be more likely to progress an exclusive FWB relationship into a romantic one. This is especially likely given the positive correlation between exclusivity and commitment (Rusbult & Buunk, 2005). Those who value exclusivity within a sexual relationship, like Erotics, tend to also value commitment (Oliver & Sedikides, 1992). Over time, if exclusive FWB partners develop high commitment to each other, the relationship would begin to resemble a romantic union, by being high in both dimensions.



*Photo by H el ene Frohard-Dourlent*

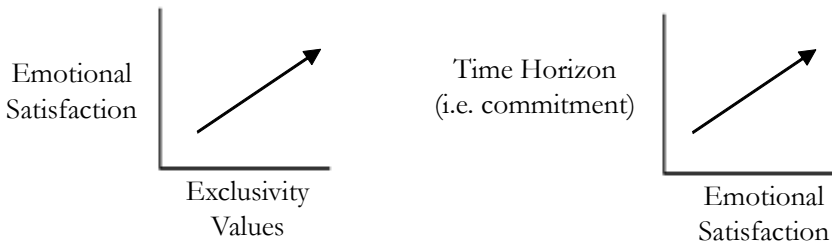
The relationship between exclusivity and commitment, and the value placed on each in relation to the other, may also depend on gender. Oliver and Sedikides (1992) examined gender differences in attitudes towards exclusivity that suggest a double standard between men and women regarding the desirability of a sexually permissive partner at different levels of commitment. The authors reported that women prefer exclusivity at both high and low levels of commitment, and rate exclusive partners higher on dating desirability. Men also prefer low levels of sexual permissiveness in highly committed relationships but prefer lower exclusivity for low-commitment partners (such as FWB relationships), and actually rate non-exclusive partners higher in dating desirability (Oliver & Sedikides, 1992).

Oliver and Sedikides' (1992) findings suggest a possible gender difference in FWB relationships regarding desires for exclusivity and commitment. Women may be more likely to desire an exclusive FWB relationship, even when the relationship has low commitment. Women may also be more likely to view their exclusive partner as having higher dating desirability, possibly causing them to put pressure on the FWB union to become romantic. For men, on the other hand, the connection between exclusivity and commitment appears less clear-cut. Oliver and Sedikides (1992) reported that men in low-commitment relationships, which would include FWB relationships, do not prefer exclusivity and actually rate non-exclusive targets higher on dating desirability. Men may be more likely to prefer non-exclusive FWB unions as a method of avoiding committed romantic relationships, whereas women may prefer exclusive FWB unions as a type of stepping-stone towards a romantic relationship. Clearly, this is an area which would benefit from future research. Regardless, Oliver and Sedikides's findings have illustrated the necessity to think about how gender differences may present in exclusivity-conflicts, love styles, and desires for future romantic involvement.

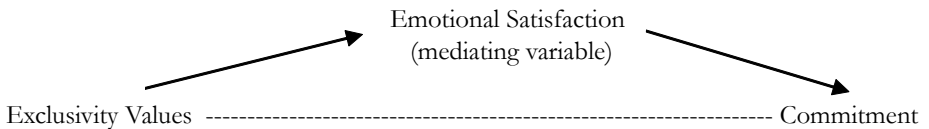
Waite and Joyner (2001) looked at the links between time horizon (length of time the participants expect the relationship to last), sexual exclusivity, and emotional satisfaction within sexual relationships. Time horizon, within the context of their study, can be conceptualized here as commitment. Waite and Joyner uncovered strong support for a positive correlation between exclusivity values and emotional satisfaction, and another positive correlation between emotional satisfaction and time horizon (see Figure 1). It may be that the relationship between exclusivity and commitment is indirect, with emotional satisfaction acting as a mediating variable (see Figure 2).

This would suggest that those involved in exclusive FWB unions may derive more emotional satisfaction from the relationship than those involved in non-exclusive FWB unions, which may in turn result in rising commitment levels. Should this occur, the exclusive FWB relationship would increasingly approximate the commitment and exclusivity levels that are characteristic of romantic unions. It is important, however, in considering Figure 2 to keep in mind that correlation does not immediately signify causation; the positive correlation between exclusivity values and emotional satisfaction does not necessarily imply that greater exclusivity causes greater emotional satisfaction, nor that greater emotional satisfaction causes greater commitment.

If the partners in an exclusive FWB relationship find the union to be emotionally satisfying, they are likely to have a vested interest in progressing the relationship to a traditional romance. A romantic relationship is more stable and secure than a FWB relationship due to the presence of reference groups—social groups that serve as frames of reference for expected behaviour and experiences, to which an individual's behaviour



**Figure 1.** Waite and Joyner's (2001) theory of the relationships between emotional satisfaction, exclusivity, and time horizon.



**Figure 2.** Alternative theory of the relationship between emotional satisfaction, exclusivity, and commitment.

is compared and evaluated—and proscriptive and prescriptive norms (Kemper, 1968). Labelling the relationship as romantic would provide more security for the participants and lower the chances that the satisfying union would dissolve. A FWB relationship, exclusive or non-exclusive, lacks clear reference groups and agreed-upon standards of conduct. This makes the relationship more ambivalent and possibly more transient.

Reference groups teach people the rules of significant social processes and how to play appropriate societal roles (Kemper, 1968). People in romantic relationships are taught how to play the part of a romantic couple through their interactions with normative groups, comparison groups (role models), and audience groups who provide positive reinforcement for proper role performance (Kemper, 1968; Turner, 2007). FWB relationships, on the other hand, lack readily available reference groups. Without reference groups, “achievement striving will be seriously hampered” (Kemper, 1968, p. 31). In other words, competence in role performance within FWB relationships is low, resulting in these unions being more likely to break up than romantic unions. If participants in exclusive FWB unions are receiving a great deal of emotional satisfaction from the relationship, they will likely be interested in preserving that satisfaction for as long as possible. Increasing their commitment levels and labelling the FWB relationship as romantic is one option. The couple will then gain access to prescriptive norms, role models, and positive social reinforcement (Kemper, 1968), stabilizing the relationship

within society and over time.

It is important, however, to consider that even if a FWB relationship has high levels of both commitment and exclusivity, and therefore objectively resembles a romantic union, it may not actually be labelled as such by the participants. For one reason or another, participants may choose not to define their relationship as romantic—possibly as a means of *avoiding* the social norms that accompany traditional romantic relationships. Furthermore, some people involved in exclusive FWB unions may not be exclusive by choice. Rather, they may be exclusive with their FWB partner as a result of a lack of other available alternatives—that is, other friends with whom to have sex. This will likely affect relationship outcomes. Looking at Rusbult and Buunk's (2005) study on commitment processes in close relationships allows further exploration of this idea.

Rusbult and Buunk (2005) explained how interdependence theory makes important distinctions between satisfaction and dependence (i.e. commitment), and suggest that commitment to a relationship increases not only as a consequence of increasing satisfaction, but also because available alternatives are perceived to be poor. In other words, although exclusivity is positively correlated with emotional satisfaction (Waite and Joyner, 2001), commitment within an exclusive relationship may be a function of a lack of available alternatives rather than a result of increased satisfaction. Therefore, participants in exclusive FWB relationships that are exclusive due to few alternative options, rather than because they value exclusivity, may find their commitment to each other increasing as a result of the lack of other sexual partners, yet not have any desire to label the relationship as romantic.

As illustrated within this paper, exclusivity within FWB relationships is an area of research that has yet to be extensively explored. Currently, scholars assume that FWB relationships are characterized by a lack of both exclusivity and commitment (Bisson & Levine, 2007; Hughes, Morrison, & Asada, 2005), and it is in this way that FWB relationships are distinguished from romantic relationships, which are characterized by high exclusivity and high commitment (Simpson, 1987). I suggest a re-conceptualization of the term FWB to encompass two distinct types: exclusive and non-exclusive. I argue that this distinction is important because these two types of FWB relationships are likely to differ fundamentally in terms of the characteristics of the involved participants and the propensity for the union to transition into a romantic relationship.

Although I believe all FWB relationships start out with low levels of commitment, some exclusive FWB unions may be prone to rising commitment levels over time. A selection effect may be in place, where those who choose exclusive FWB unions have different love styles than those who choose non-exclusive FWB unions. Those who value exclusivity within sexual relationships, such as Erotics (Lee, 1973) tend to also value commitment (Oliver & Sedikides, 1992). Furthermore, exclusivity is positively correlated with emotional satisfaction, which is in turn positively correlated with commitment to the relationship (Waite & Joyner, 2001). If commitment levels increase within an exclusive FWB relationship, it would begin to resemble a romantic union, and participants may have a vested interest in labelling it as such, as a means of socially recognizing and stabilizing the relationship (Kemper, 1968). However, in exploring the ways in which exclusive FWB unions may be more likely than non-exclusive FWB unions to become romantic, it is important to consider the value placed on exclusivity by the participants—whether or not exclusivity is a choice—and possible gender differences in preferences for exclusivity and commitment within FWB relationships.

Through a re-conceptualization of FWB relationships, exclusivity and commitment

can be examined as two distinct elements, which is something that current FWB research has failed to do. Although I suggest that love styles and likelihood of increased commitment leading to romantic involvement are fundamental differences between exclusive and non-exclusive FWB relationships, future research may uncover additional differences. Perhaps exclusive FWB relationships will become established as a type of transitory relationship, or “trial period,” where participants are able to test out whether or not to pursue a romantic relationship, whereas non-exclusive FWB relationships may become viewed as a type of stable alternative to romantic relationships, where participants are free to enjoy sex with someone they know and like while avoiding commitment and romance. In any case, good theory is based upon clear and precise concepts, making it vital to conceptually explore and clarify FWB relationships.

## References

- Bisson, M. A., & Levine, T. R. (2007). Negotiating a friends with benefits relationship. *Electronic Archives of Sexual Behavior*. doi:10.1007/s10508-007-9211-2
- Carey, B. (2007, Oct 2). Friends with benefits, and stress too. *The New York Times*. Retrieved February 28, 2009, from <http://www.nytimes.com>
- David, L. (Writer), & Cheronos, T. (Director). (1991). The deal [Television series episode]. In L. David (Executive Producer), *Seinfeld*. New York: National Broadcasting Company.
- Denizet-Lewis, B. (2004, May 30). Friends, friends with benefits and the benefits of the local mall. *The New York Times*. Retrieved February 28, 2009 from <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Hughes, M., Morrison, K., & Asada, K. J. K. (2005). What's love got to do with it? Exploring the impact of maintenance rules, love attitudes, and network support of friends with benefits relationships. *Western Journal of Communication*, 69, 49-66.
- Kelley, D. E. (Creator/Executive Producer). (2004). *Boston legal* [Television series]. New York: American Broadcasting Corporation.
- Kemper, T. (1968). Reference groups, socialization and achievement. *American Sociological Review*, 33, 31-45.
- Lee, J. A. (1973). *The colors of love: An exploration of the ways of loving*. Toronto: New Press.
- Miller, L. (1990). Intimacy and liking: Mutual influence and the role of unique relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59, 50-60.
- Morissette, A., & Ballard, G. (1995). Head over feet [Recorded by Alanis Morissette]. On *Jagged little pill* [CD]. Los Angeles: Maverick.
- Oliver, M. B., & Sedikides, C. (1992). Effects of sexual permissiveness on desirability of partner as a function of low and high commitment to relationship. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 55, 321-333.
- Paul, E. L., & Hayes, K. A. (2002). The casualties of ‘casual’ sex: A qualitative exploration of the phenomenology of college students’ hookups. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 19, 639-661.

- Rusbult, C. E., & Buunk, B. P. (2005). Commitment processes in close relationships: An interdependence analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 10*, 175-204.
- Simpson, J. A. (1987). The dissolution of romantic relationships: Factors involved in relationship stability and emotional distress. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 53*, 683-692.
- Star, D. (Writer), & Taylor, A. (Director). (1999). The fuck buddy [Television series episode]. In M. P. King (Executive Producer), *Sex and the city*. New York: Home Box Office.
- Turner, J. H. (2007). The production and reproduction of social solidarity: A synthesis of two rational choice theories. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 22*, 311-328.
- Waite, L. J., & Joyner, K. (2001). Emotional satisfaction and physical pleasure in sexual unions: Time horizon, sexual behavior, and sexual exclusivity. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 63*, 247-265.



# Spice Up Your Life: Postfeminism and The Spice Girls

*Manori Ravindran*

*Girls are doing just fine. Feminism is unnecessary. The movement is over.* These are some of the sentiments associated with what has been coined “postfeminism.” With feminist academics of various persuasions debating this “third wave” movement, the controversy surrounding postfeminism, which started in the 1980s, continues today (Tasker & Negra, 2007). The discord encompassed within this debate has been played out in the popular music industry, particularly with female musicians (Leonard, 1997). The all-female group The Spice Girls exploded onto the pop music scene in 1997 with catchy songs and five intriguing personalities. Coupled with praise and admiration from some was outrage and disdain from others who questioned, amongst other things, why diversity had to be restricted to five prototypes—Ginger, Scary, Baby, Sporty, and Posh (Tringali, 2008). The Spice Girls’ mantra “girl power” is the concept around which this paper revolves. It is the buzzword with which their young audience was inculcated with the courage to be strong women. Girl power was also the site of commodification surrounding The Spice Girls, as well as the perpetuation of female stereotypes that appeared to leave dominant and patriarchal power structures unblemished. The sphere of postfeminism has been closely linked to girl power, emphasizing new opportunities for women and sexual empowerment (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Postfeminism asserts that gender equality has been achieved in contemporary society, overtly utilizing the feminist framework to demonstrate that feminism is no longer needed nor is it relevant. In their book *Girl Power*, The Spice Girls shifted the scope of this ideology by stating, “feminism has become a dirty word. Girl Power is just a nineties way of saying it. We can give feminism a kick up the arse!” (as cited in Taft, 2004, p. 71). Thus, The Spice Girls initiated a watered-down version of what has ultimately been coined postfeminism.

By focusing on the discourses of capitalism, empowerment, beauty, sexuality, and race within the group, I will argue that by superficially identifying with the postfeminist movement, The Spice Girls represent a burgeoning trend among mainstream girl-groups that has led to an evident deviation from academic feminism. Finally, I discuss how The Spice Girls’ ideology of girl power has culminated with the contemporary music group The Pussycat Dolls.

## *Current Feminist Debates*

Historically, “first-wave feminism” revolved around the issues of basic civil and legal rights for women, while the “second wave” marked the separation of sex from gender, with sex increasingly seen as unrelated to gender roles. The second wave also questioned the production of femininity and masculinity as social forms through cultural processes and contexts (Oakley, 1997). In the early 1990s, third-wave feminism was promulgated as a kind of backlash to the second wave, denouncing the essentialist notions of the former movement and exploring the ambiguity of sex and gender (Rogers & Garrett, 2002). The

third wave, quite simply, looked at the second wave and identified a generational divide that warranted a new form of feminism: they felt that twenty-first-century feminists had become removed from the social issues of the 1960s and 1970s (Piepmeier, 2006).

Postfeminism is a term associated with this third wave, but it is different in several aspects. According to Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (2007), postfeminism has come to resist dimensions such as class, race, and age—categories that exaggerate group differences. Instead, it advocates individual action and personal empowerment. Tasker and Negra have asserted that postfeminism assumes that the lifestyles, themes, and values with which it is associated are universally shared and universally accessible, yet often obscures the social climates that make exercising individual agency impossible for some women. They subsequently argued that postfeminism postulates a complex and dynamic relationship between feminism, politics, and culture, using the feminist framework as a linchpin that is now *passé*—for better or worse.

Postfeminism differs from the “antifeminist” movement, which advocates that women’s hard won achievements were once won but have been subsequently lost due to feminism (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Antifeminist sentiments include claims that feminists have made women’s lives harder by advocating a universal femininity that not every woman can relate to. Other discussions identify the difficulty of garnering feminist support for women who want to become mothers and have families (Rogers & Garrett, 2002). Ultimately, antifeminists proffer the belief that women and men are inherently different and rely on these differences in order to co-exist; thus, male and female relations are not a matter of domination and submission, but rather a system of symbiotic relations (Kalb, 2004). Postfeminists, on the other hand, perceive women as empowered to such an extent that their place in society is no longer limited to a single sphere—the postfeminist woman has limitless possibilities that are attainable through individual agency (Tasker & Negra, 2007).

The postfeminist movement is broadly disseminated in the popular media, placing limits on the gender equality that is supposedly available to women (Tasker & Negra, 2007). The professional woman who excels in her male-dominated sphere is revered, drawing attention to the fact that she is, after all, a woman. Furthermore, women are increasingly under pressure to maintain both a youthful appearance and attitude as they age: restrictions that do not apply to men (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Thus, postfeminism is ambivalent in its account of gender and power, yet remains at the forefront of the media through its girl power rhetoric (Tasker & Negra, 2007). The girl power movement is temporal and focuses on the key word *girl*. By observing the age of fans for groups such as The Spice Girls, it is easy to recognize that Girl Power defines only a select number of years in a girl’s life (Lemish, 1998). Thus, postfeminism is inextricably connected to young women, while aging feminists are seen as a figment of a time that has come and gone (McRobbie, 2007).

This youthful nature of the postfeminist movement has led to the perpetuation of the woman as both the pin-up and the empowered consumer (Tasker & Negra, 2007). In her article “Postfeminism and Popular Culture,” Angela McRobbie (2007) described a television advertisement from the late nineties depicting a youthful Claudia Schiffer taking off her clothes as she descends a staircase and heads out the door to the endorsed vehicle. The image of feminism is purposefully evoked, but appears unnecessary precisely because Schiffer is enjoying this striptease and it is her choice to do so. McRobbie contended that feminism is suggested only to be dismantled, because how this woman chooses to present herself is her choice. She went on to explain that female viewers of the commercial witness

a comfortable sphere where they are autonomous agents, able to choose for themselves. Finally, McRobbie offered that female agency is further facilitated through the acceptance of pornography: a burgeoning site for the culture of commercial sexuality. Laura Kipnis (1996) has argued that pornography has become a form of cultural expression to the extent that its prevalence in society nullifies the question of whether or not it should exist because, frankly, it is here to stay. Women are capable of making informed decisions about how to conduct their lives, while recognizing that pornography is a business that has a meaningful place in society (Kipnis, 1996). The critique of these postfeminist exploits emerges when we consider women who steadfastly oppose the embracing of pornography as a facet of their sexual expression and liberation. Yet those women who may oppose these activities are called upon to be silent and to withhold their critique, as it is “un-cool,” going against the grain of the modern and sophisticated girl (McRobbie, 2007, p. 34). Women, therefore, are given an amount of freedom, yet are expected to be silent about potential feminist issues, as this is a condition of their emancipation (McRobbie, 2007). Undoubtedly, the concept of postfeminism continues to be controversial and debated among feminists. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, these discussions came to a head with the dawn of music television (MTV) and, in particular, the “Riot Grrrl” movement.

### *Women in the Music Industry*

The debates and controversy surrounding postfeminism propelled Ann E. Kaplan (2002) to argue that two forms of the movement exist. One form is the utopian postfeminism that moves beyond existing social institutions, classes, and race; the other is the capitalist postfeminism that is circulated by commercial entrepreneurs. Kaplan’s discussion is situated around MTV, a hotbed of the commercial strain of postfeminism, which has the power to subvert and destabilize dominant norms as well as to draw performers and viewers back into these norms. While female artists such as Aretha Franklin, Annie Lennox, and Madonna were addressing crucial issues like domestic abuse, racism, and rape, the ever-expanding influence of MTV was being heralded as a way for women to further carry out a “dialogic interchange between male/female categories and enjoy the opportunity for mixing of forms in the manner [postfeminism] had opened up” (Kaplan, 2002, p. 326). Women were no longer supposed to be subordinate and submissive in the background. Rather, they were free to express their sexuality in the forefront.

A pronounced shift from text-based and theoretical feminism to popular culture is thus embarked upon; postmodern media such as MTV allows women and minorities to identify with issues that are, in reality, unreachable (Kaplan, 2002). It is the effect of this shift that catapulted artists like Madonna to bridge the gap between popular culture and feminism in the 1980s. Madonna challenged hegemonic discourses about women’s sexuality with risqué music videos and public statements between 1981 and 1987 (Kaplan, 2002). In the following decade, another movement followed in Madonna’s path, and succeeded in bringing significant attention to the postfeminist debate.

The Riot Grrrl movement of the early 1990s was a testament to the shift in notions of femininity, spitting in the face of patriarchy and vocalizing the contradictions felt by women (Feigenbaum, 2007). Embedded in the musical stylings of punk rock, the idea behind Riot Grrrl was promoted by bands such as Bratmobile and Bikini Kill (Leonard, 1997) and spread through various media including independent ‘zines (small magazines with low production costs), local art reviews and, later, national newspapers (Feigenbaum, 2007). Riot Grrrl ‘zines were integral in discussing issues such as lesbian visibility and the

promotion of queercore bands (Leonard, 1997). In Leonard's (1997) discussion of Riot Grrrl bands, she demonstrated how Bikini Kill challenged the notion that independent music was free from the discourse of patriarchy. Leonard noted that prior to shows, Bikini Kill would hand out pamphlets encouraging women to stand near the front of the stage as, traditionally, this area was considered dangerous for women due to the violence of slamdancing or potential harassment. When male audience members voiced their frustration, shows would be stopped and house lights brought up. Leonard illustrated that these performances—whether encouraging of conflict or simply unavoidable—shone light on how performances are viewed on gendered terms. She argued that Riot Grrrl bands also challenged the notions of female display. For example, Leonard reported that Bikini Kill members would often wear particularly feminine attire and write words such as “SLUT” across their bodies in marker pen, preempting any insult that might be hurled at them and candidly confronting the viewer with the very dialogue that prevents female display and sexual activity (p. 235). Undoubtedly, as these protests and declarations gained power, media interest was also heightened. Rather than outright rejection of the media, however, the Riot Grrrls initially attempted to use the media to construct “girl lines of communication” (Leonard, 2007, p. 245). Eventually, though, most musicians and activists involved with the movement became responsive to the problems associated with journalistic misrepresentations (Leonard, 2007). Thus, Riot Grrrls staged a media blackout, refusing interviews and photographs in an attempt to reclaim their authority.

The Riot Grrrl movement eventually waned in the mid-1990s due to the unwanted attention roused by the media blackout (Leonard, 2007). The blackout had the opposite effect, garnering even more media interest than anticipated (Leonard, 2007). Ultimately, this was seen as defeating the media-free purpose of the movement, which caused it to slowly fizzle out in the following years. Through their exposure, the Riot Grrrl movement aimed to educate and empower girls to attain their potential on their own terms, liberated from any feminist ideology. This undertaking occurred without seeking the legitimating force of the mass media to label it as “authentically” rebellious (Leonard, 2007, p. 247). More importantly, perhaps, the goal of the Riot Grrrls had been to encourage women and girls to communicate with one another—an objective that was carried out before they knew it.

### *The Spice Girls*

In the mid-1990s, The Spice Girls' debut single “Wannabe” surpassed any UK group in history on the American music charts, including The Beatles (Leach, 2001, p. 6). The girl-powered group consisted of five women who answered an advertisement and auditioned to be in the band. Suddenly, they were thrust into popular culture, sparking both outrage and approval. The Spice Girls advocated girl culture in a way that suggested a nonpolitical and non-threatening alternative to feminism—identifying loosely with postfeminism (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Their desire to give feminism a “kick up the arse” outraged feminists who believed that the group's girl power alternative encouraged young girls to think about girlhood in “purely cultural ways,” such as developing new personal qualities and playing soccer instead of discussing social action to bring about political change (Taft, 2004, p. 71). Furthermore, the commodified nature of girl power itself was problematic: it appeared that the message of girl power went hand in hand with the myriad marketing opportunities that were omnipresent throughout The Spice Girls' careers (Tringali, 2008). This paradoxical message, then, begs the question: Is girl power solely about empowerment if it is located squarely within mainstream commercial culture? In addition to issues of capitalism, the perpetuation of female stereotypes within

The Spice Girls was dubious. It soon became clear that The Spice Girls' personalities did not adhere exactly to their constructed identities. Instead of complex characters without labels, there were only five prototypes that young girls could choose to emulate. This lack of diversity evokes questions about sexuality and race.

In contrast with these sentiments, however, there was also praise for The Spice Girls, who were seen as empowering young girls. The group penned songs about the importance of friendship and the relationships with their mothers, topics that most other artists in the contemporary pop music scene have avoided (Tringali, 2008). Despite these strengths, the contradictions and ambivalences present in the phenomenon of The Spice Girls were strikingly similar to debates about postfeminism. Does postfeminism make gender oppression invisible while also disguising racism, homophobia, and classism? It is difficult to categorize The Spice Girls as distinctly postfeminist because they were not a group of girls aiming to carry out an overt upheaval of feminist ideology. Rather, I believe that The Spice Girls were among the first to present a watered-down version of postfeminism. This movement is different from the Riot Grrrls who confronted feminist ideology directly. Although previous all-female groups deviated from academic feminism, The Spice Girls stand out because of the degree of international exposure and their particular brand of girl power, which is wrought with the contradictions and ambivalences that would come to define today's postfeminism.

### *Capitalism and Empowerment*

Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv, and Ben-Horin (1996) found that girls are pre-occupied with pop music; in fact, they are increasingly likely to idolize musicians in popular culture and to consume music passively and discretely. The authors reported that 85 percent of young girls between the ages of ten and eleven prefer female singers (p. 2). For The Spice Girls, this means that fans' interest in the band peaked during preadolescence. Young girls understood girl power as powerful. The Spice Girls' free expression of sexuality was empowering, giving women control in an otherwise patriarchal society (Lemish, 1998). This sense of control clearly filled a void for young girls during the mid-nineties: looking at Internet websites provides a glimpse of the effect of girl power. One girl writing on a web forum expressed her definition of the concept as the following:

GIRL POWER IS LIKE THE SPICE GIRLS WHEN THEY SAY GIRL POWER .THEY MEAN BE STRONG DON'T LET ANYONE PUT YOU DOWN FOLLOW YOUR HEART. DON'T DO BAD STUFF BECAUSE THE COOL PEOPLE DON'T DO IT JUST TO BE COOL. DO WHAT YOU WANT TO DO (as cited in Takayoshi, 1999, p. 98; capitalization in original).

Some feminists at the time did not interpret these sentiments as empowering. Instead, feminists who registered this alternative as a diffusion of feminism were often alarmed by these definitions of girl power (Takayoshi, 1999). Furthermore, feminists often took issue with the fact that self-affirming messages sent to girls, as seen above, were juxtaposed with The Spice Girls' indulgence in feminine stereotypes (Takayoshi, 1999). Feminists interpreted these messages as a mechanism for girls to resist the male-dominated culture without actually internalizing the underlying tenets pertaining to, in particular, second-wave feminism.

When participating in the consumer culture surrounding girl power, why is girl power, and not just power, important? The popularity of The Spice Girls suggested that

power was being presented to young girls who had rights and a special place in society (Banet-Weiser, 2004). This power translated into an economic power that recognized adolescent and pre-adolescent girls as a premium market segment—an important consumer group that had increasing amounts of money to spend on The Spice Girls (Banet-Weiser, 2004). Many young girls purchased Spice Girls merchandise, such as posters, clothing, and accessories, in order to create their own space in a patriarchal society (Lemish, 1998). Lemish (1998) has described her young respondents providing detailed descriptions of their favourite Spice Girl's accessories and clothing styles, indicating a prevailing and omniscient consumer culture associated with the group. In response to this, Catherine Driscoll (2002) has questioned whether feminism can be a mass-produced, globally distributed product and still have its merchandised relations with girls remain authentic. The answer reflects the ambivalent character of postfeminism. That is, girl culture is characterized by the inextricable connection between agency and conformity. While The Spice Girls call upon individual agency—girl power—in efforts to carve out a niche for their young fans, the very same girl power is also a part of a greater system of consumer citizenship where the lucrative nature of such an audience elicits conformity to the capitalist model. Although it is difficult to reconcile “merchandised relations” to “authenticity,” it is a necessary reality of postfeminism in today's globalized society.

### *Beauty*

Perhaps the distinct femininity represented by each of The Spice Girls facilitates the empowering messages heard by young girls during preadolescence. While Baby Spice (Emma Bunton) is innocent, Ginger Spice (Geri Halliwell) is sultry and provocative. Posh Spice (Victoria Beckham) is elegant and feminine while Sporty Spice (Melanie Chisholm) is athletic and boyish. Scary Spice (Melanie Brown), who identifies as black, is the only person of colour in the group, and is meant to be wild and crazy (Lemish, 1998). Each woman provides girls with an alternative femininity since, in recent years, dominant society considers the traditional female self as either non-existent or evolving from an essentialized identity. From a postfeminist perspective, this shift appeals to the ideals of moving past boundaries and denouncing the universal female identity; no longer would class, race, ability, sexuality, or age be seen as obstacles for women (Tasker & Negra, 2007).

The Spice Girls embodied these postfeminist sentiments through their appearance as ordinary and everyday girls: while traditional music groups spoke *for* their audiences, The Spice Girls were often seen speaking *as* and *with* their audience (Leach, 2001, p. 150). Even the video for their debut single “Wannabe” shows the girls walking down a London street and ultimately catching the bus home at the end (Dibbens, 1999, p. 350). Further providing evidence for their normalcy, they tease a wealthy family stepping out of their limousine, showing their distaste for boundaries of class.

Although The Spice Girls offer a down-to-earth quality for their fans, feminists argue that the distinct female identities present within The Spice Girls are still beautiful and catered very much towards a proportionate, attractive female model (Lemish, 1998). Moreover, the girls interviewed often agreed that Melanie C (Sporty Spice) was least popular, and corroborated it with the fact that “she is kind of sporty... and all the others are so incredibly feminine, so...the boys don't like her” (Lemish, 1998, p. 156). Geri (Ginger Spice), however, was almost always the fan favourite because of her provocative appearance which was clearly of primary importance to young girls. Dawn Currie's (1999) study found that looking good is automatically linked to feeling

good, indicating the internalization of appearance as part of the female identity.

### *Sexuality*

The significance of looking good is linked to the heterosexual nature of The Spice Girls. Why is it noteworthy that Sporty Spice is the least favourite? Does this have anything to do with baggy clothes and an interest in sports? Because of the young age of fans, it is difficult to interpret these findings as an “eroticized female gaze” (Griffin, 2000, p. 235), however, it is interesting that female empowerment and girl power are juxtaposed with the conventional and heterosexual images of The Spice Girls—that is, girl power for only a certain kind of girl. This questions postfeminism’s commitment to breaking down sexual boundaries. While the postfeminist approach reveals the futility of defining an essential female nature, even in the mid-90s, the unpopularity of an athletic female in one of the world’s most famous music groups is significant. According to theorists such as Albert Bandura (1977), learning gender is tantamount to learning any other social behavior. Through modeling processes where young girls pattern their own behavior based on the actions of their peers, they may not understand what they are doing and why, but interpret the consequences of their actions as either positive or negative and, thus, learn gender (Nelson, 2006). Therefore, a boy who dislikes Mel C because of her “tomboyish” look proffers a negative reinforcement that discourages girls from admiring or modeling themselves after her (Nelson, 2006). Furthermore, studies show that idolization is more prevalent amongst girls, who are also more vulnerable to group pressures, demonstrating the impact of observational learning on young girls (Lemish, 1998).

### *Race*

The Spice prototypes inevitably evoke the issue of race within the group with the wild and crazy Scary Spice, Mel B, who is the only Girl of colour. Mel B is of mixed race (her mother is white and of British descent and her father is black and from Jamaica), but she self-identifies as a black woman (Ali, 2004). This is a considerable issue when located within a group that finds its main audience in young children, who often use pop culture as a way of learning racial discourses (Ali, 2004). This process is not passive; rather, it occurs through a revision of available social texts within social groups. In Suki Ali’s (2004) study on race within The Spice Girls, the young white British interviewees (of about ten years old) often associated Mel B’s brown skin with exoticism and foreignness. Ali’s interviewees of colour, however, were more considerate of a range of possible origins. Ali found that children responded as a result of their environment. Furthermore, she suggested that the media’s saturation of dark images to produce lighter-skinned versions of black individuals, such as Mel B, was significant because it made it more difficult to distinguish racial type. Although the group of children identified Mel B as “exotic,” they were well versed in notions of “different but equal” and did not seem to hold her mixed-race against her (p. 152). In a study conducted by Lemish (1998), the young girls interviewed were accepting of Mel, although one participant added that, “It doesn’t matter that she is black. The most important thing is that she is pretty” (p. 162). As previously discussed, the femininities of The Spice Girls are thus accepted and embraced as long as they fit an idyllic beauty that is important to young girls.

Lemish (1998) also noted that the participants knew a great deal of Mel B’s history: that she may have been raped growing up and that her sister was murdered. If the environment influences children’s responses, outlets such as the media and the attention focused on black people and crime may explain the preoccupation with such violent

history (Lemish, 1998). Moreover, street life and gangster activity is often associated with rap music, which originates in hip hop and is sometimes used by The Spice Girls in songs such as “Say You’ll Be There” (The Spice Girls, 1996). In this example, Mel B is found rapping or singing in a soulful/funk style that is frequently connected with black people (Dibben, 1999). This is an indicator of how the marketing of The Spice Girls plays into existing discourses of racial difference in order to construct a specific identity for Mel B. The significance of this othering within a postfeminist framework lies in its creation of boundaries according to race (Mel B) and sexuality (Mel C). By producing five distinct femininities for young girls to relate to, The Spice Girls deviate from a traditional female self; yet the heterosexuality and whiteness of the group only perpetuates social stereotypes.

### *The Fans*

The contradictions of postfeminism are perhaps best portrayed in The Spice Girls through the bewilderment and ambivalence felt by their fans. On one hand, the band is a product of consumer society, brought together through an advertisement and using their girl power mantra to simultaneously empower and make millions of dollars in merchandising profit. If women are as independent as postfeminists believe, would not The Spice Girls be able to match their level of celebrity as solo-artists, or is this kind of success only attainable in a group? Similarly, why must The Spice Girls present such distinct forms of femininity? Why not have hybrid characteristics for each girl? Yet, girl power encourages women to resist authority, exhibit confidence and sexuality, and find empowerment amongst other women (Dibben, 1999). As a result of these contradictions, the most revealing findings show that young girls themselves are fully aware of the dialectics surrounding the group. In Lemish’s (1998) study, one girl stated, “I want to be like Geri...I care that she is a whore but she is so pretty and I want to dye my hair to that colour” (p. 158). Girls in the study often tried to justify The Spice Girls by separating personalities from their roles as performers, and also by claiming that in order to attract boys they needed to be marketed in a provocative manner.

### *Beyond Spice*

Throughout this paper, I have presented evidence of the contradictions and ambivalences present within The Spice Girls and the broader postfeminist movement. While The Spice Girls’ particular brand of girl power earnestly strived to empower young girls, the group was marketed in a way that perpetuated existing female stereotypes and capitalized on the consumer potential of pre-adolescent and adolescent girls. I now turn to the after-effects of such a widespread and engulfing pop music phenomenon. I question whether girl power managed to iron out its deficiencies and shortcomings in the twenty-first century, or are its inherent contradictions still in a state of muddled-up confusion?

Girl power met its terminus in 2000 when The Spice Girls decided to disband as a group and go their separate ways. While Geri Halliwell (Ginger) and Melanie Chisholm (Sporty) managed to find success in solo albums, the other Girls have turned to British politics, fashion, and television in the decade since the break-up (Tringali, 2008). It is, perhaps, not surprising that any modicum of feminist politics is missing from the respective individual pursuits of The Spice Girls. For instance, although Geri Halliwell was once the most outspoken of the group about gender politics, in a 2007 interview with *The Guardian* newspaper she claimed, “For me feminism is bra-burning lesbianism. It’s very unglamorous” (Moorhead, 2007). While Geri had also spoken about the need for empowerment through education, particularly for women in developing nations, she



conceded that the notion of feminism needed to be rebranded in the West, for she feared it emasculated and demoralized men (Moorhead, 2007).

These revelations indicate that The Spice Girls brandished girl power to a great extent but did not interact with its deeper meanings and implications like the bands borne of the Riot Grrrl movement. In contemporary society, The Pussycat Dolls, having sold more than five million records (Houton, 2007, p. 20), also profit from the guise of being postfeminists, yet endorse a superficial movement rooted solely in commercial interests. Thus, postfeminism in pop culture is still wrought with its ambivalences and contradictions because it is difficult, if not impossible, for women to make their music and media accessible and their incomes sustainable without modifying their political beliefs (Feigenbaum, 2007).

When The Spice Girls were formed through an advertisement answered by all five girls, the group became unique in their identity, building connections with their fans. Accordingly, fans were saddened to hear that Geri was leaving the group prior to the 2000 break-up (Tringali, 2008, p. 29). The Pussycat Dolls, however, follow a unique model. According to Interscope lawyer Darryl Franklin, the group members do not sign recording contracts but are salaried as regular employees of the music label: essentially, they are completely interchangeable (as cited in Houton, 2007, p. 20). The label also controls all CD sales, merchandise, live performances and other revenue sources with producer Ron Fair selecting every song (Houton, 2007). This is indisputably different from The Spice Girls who co-wrote all songs and assumed creative control from the song's inception.

The Spice Girls made immense profits from the success of their group, much like The Pussycat Dolls who stand to make millions of dollars from album sales and television deals alone. Unlike The Spice Girls, who partnered their marketing with the girl power mantra, The Pussycat Dolls fall short in producing a catchy slogan. Rather, they have fallen back on asking fans "Don't cha wish your girlfriend was hot like me?" (The Pussycat Dolls, 2005). According to 20-year-old Brittany, one of the Dolls, "The Pussycat Dolls are all about female empowerment!" (as cited in Houton, 2007, p. 20). The Pussycat Dolls are continuing the tradition started by The Spice Girls of a watered-down feminism that is counter-productive to female empowerment. While they are empowering only a limited sampling of women, the motives for empowerment are, more than ever, situated in commercial interests. For example, in response to questions about the hit single "Don't Cha," McG, producer of The Pussycat Dolls' reality television show, considers the lyric tantamount to asking "Don't you wish your girlfriend could be free and comfortable in her own skin and do her own thing like me?" (Houton, 2007, p. 20). Once again, lyrics such as these reference the slender and unblemished beauties who are omnipresent amongst the Pussycat Girls—hardly the average girl. Although The Spice Girls can be criticized for the lack of diversity and complexity amongst the five personalities, groups such as The Pussycat Dolls advocate only one type of girl: the burlesque dance troupe kind. Moreover, songs such as "Don't Cha" imply that girls, as they are, are inadequate for pop groups such as The Pussycat Dolls. Instead, listeners are impelled to compare their own partners to the free-spirited and sexy Pussycat Dolls whose free-spiritedness and sexuality are constructed by their record label.

Although they relied on female stereotypes to an extent, the version of sexuality put forth by The Spice Girls was less an objectification and more a fun and flirty form of personal expression; this is relevant considering the group spoke to a primarily young and female audience rather than confronting the male gaze, like The Pussycat Dolls.

Thus, there is a stark distinction drawn here between The Spice Girls and The Pussycat Dolls. Their reality show “Pussycat Dolls Present: The Search for the Next Doll” arguably appeals more to men than it does to women. The producer McG vehemently insisted that “Under no circumstances is this in the service of men” (as cited in Houton, 2007, p. 20). This declaration, however, is problematic considering McG stands to profit greatly from the antics of The Pussycat Dolls.

Lastly, postfeminist discourse permits and celebrates the sexual expression of women as it mirrors the acceptable behavior of men. A critique of this expression is that not all women may want or feel the need to express themselves in this way, but are pressured to participate since it has become the privileged mode of sexuality. Jacqueline Houton (2007) has offered The Pussycat Dolls’ reality television show as an embodiment of this dilemma. Each week, contestants are faced with a defining challenge, meant to test vocal and physical ability. One week, however, producers upped the stakes by expecting women to transform themselves into lingerie-clad, exotic dancers for a restaurant’s clientele and, of course, a national audience. While some happily took on the challenge, others were seen looking close to tears, yet all obediently carried out the task (Houton, 2007, p. 20). Herein lies the crux of the issue: while these groups claim to be predicated on empowerment, a particular kind of sexual expression appears to be the only medium available to wield this power.

Girl power was unable to iron itself out after The Spice Girls disbanded. Today, while we witness music groups such as The Pussycat Dolls endorsing their intention of empowering girls, the overtly commercial nature of the band and its profiteering pursuits have only emphasized the relationship between empowerment, sexuality, and making money. While artists involved in the Riot Grrrl movement aimed to speak out against the social injustices faced by women and abhorred the media attention that came with it, The Spice Girls supported a sugar-coated girl power with serious commercial interests. Today’s music scene is too embroiled in corporate interests to produce a beneficial manifestation of feminism. Postfeminism, therefore, has been vulgarized to become an incoherent account of gender and power that shouts “Empowerment!” and “Sexual Expression!” when asked the question “Why?”

### *Conclusion*

A final quote by a participant in Lemish’s study (1998) poignantly encompasses the ongoing dialectics of The Spice Girls: “Because it’s like...on one hand they stay away from men, alienate them, because they tell them not to control them, and then they go ahead and dress in all kinds of exposing clothes that attract men” (p. 158). This contradiction encapsulates The Spice Girls’ brand of postfeminism. Postfeminism, a movement that works towards the obliteration of racial, sexual, and class boundaries and the denunciation of a universal female identity, is put into question when these boundaries are observed within The Spice Girls. The women have different personalities and characters, but they are all beautiful and symbolic of sex in a distinctly mainstream way. The least favourite member violates gender norms and is summarily set aside. The only black member is associated with violence and wildness. At the same time, even through a consumer culture, young girls are able to empower themselves and find membership in an exclusive club. Ultimately, The Spice Girls presented the world with a “Feminism Lite” that deviated from academic feminism and only superficially identified with postfeminism.

In summation, postfeminism is a movement that groups like The Spice Girls and Pussycat Dolls tentatively identify with, yet emulate superficially and without the

volition of the Riot Grrrls. While the Riot Grrrl Movement critically confronted feminist ideology, The Spice Girls sought to reinvent feminism under the girl power brand which, observing the contradictions and disputes inherent to it, fell short of proving that girls were past feminism. The Pussycat Dolls of the contemporary music scene also operate under the semblance of empowering women through sexual expression, yet the group's transparent commercial interests and provocative identity intimidate young women rather than inspire them to be confident in their own skin. Eventually, it appears that the further these all-female groups deviate from academic feminism, the more young fans are led to believe that sex appeal is the only power they can possess.

## References

- Ali, S. (2004). *Mixed-race, post-race: Gender, new ethnicities and cultural practices*. London: Berg Publishers.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2004). Girls rule!: Gender, feminism, and Nickelodeon. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 21(2), 119-139.
- Currie, D. (1999). *Girl talk: Adolescent magazines and their readers*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Davies, J. (1999). It's like feminism, but you don't have to burn your bra. In A. Blake (Ed.), *Living through pop* (pp. 159-174). London: Routledge.
- Dibben, N. (1999). Representations of femininity in popular music. *Popular Music*, 18(3), 331-355.
- Driscoll, C. (2002). *Girls: Feminine adolescence in popular culture and cultural history*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Feigenbaum, A. (2007). Remapping the resonances of Riot Grrrl. In Y. Tasker & D. Negra (Eds.), *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the politics of popular culture* (pp. 132-152). Durham: Duke University Press.
- Griffin, C. (2000). Absences that matter: Constructions of sexuality in studies of young women's friendship. *Feminism and Psychology*, 10(2), 227-245.
- Griffin, C. (2004). Good girls, bad girls: Anglocentrism and diversity in the constitution of contemporary girlhood. In A. Harris (Ed.), *All about the girl: Culture, power and identity* (pp. 29-45). New York: Routledge.
- Houton, J. (2007). The Pussycat Dolls present: Feminism lite. *Bitch*, 36, 20.
- Kalb, J. (n.d.). Anti-Feminism. *Counter-Revolution*. Retrieved March 9, 2009, from <http://www.macumbeiro.org/forum/kalb.htm>
- Kaplan, A. E. (2002). The politics of feminism: Postmodernism and Rock. In J. Lochhead (Ed.), *Postmodern music/postmodern thought* (pp. 323-325). New York: Routledge.
- Kipnis, L. (1996). *Bound and gagged: Pornography and the politics of fantasy in America*. New York: Grove Press.
- Leach, E. E. (2001). Vicars of 'Wannabe': Authenticity and The Spice Girls. *Popular Music*, 20(2), 143-167.
- Lemish, D. (1998). Spice Girls' talk: A case study in the development of a gendered identity. In S. A. Inness (ed.), *Millennium girls: Today's girls around the world* (pp. 145-169). London: Rowman and Littlefield.

- Leonard, M. (1997). Rebel girl, you are the queen of my world. In S. Whitely (Ed.), *Sexing the groove: Popular music and gender* (pp. 230-257). New York: Routledge.
- Littlewood, B. (2004). *Feminist perspectives on sociology*. Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited.
- McRobbie, A. (2007). Postfeminism and popular culture: Bridget Jones and the new gender regime. In Y. Tasker & D. Negra (Eds.), *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the politics of popular culture* (pp. 27-40). Durham: Duke University Press.
- Moorhead, J. (2007, October 24). Girl power comes of age. *The Guardian*. Retrieved February 22, 2009, from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/oct/24/gender.pop>
- Nelson, A. (2006). *Gender in Canada*. Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Oakley, A. (1997). A brief history of gender. In A. Oakley & J. Mitchell (Eds.), *Who's afraid of feminism?* (pp. 29-55). New York: The New Press.
- Patai, D., & Koertge, N. (1994). *Professing feminism*. New York: BasicBooks.
- Piepmeier, A. (2006, March 17). Postfeminism vs. the third wave. *Electronic Book Review*. Retrieved February 22, 2009, from <http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/writingpostfeminism/reconfiguredrip2>
- The Pussycat Dolls. (2005). Don't Cha. On *PCD* [CD]. Los Angeles: A&M Records.
- Raviv, Amiram., Bar-Tal, D., Raviv, Alona, & Ben-Horin, A. (1996). Adolescent idolization of pop singers: Causes, expressions, reliance. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 25(5), 631-750.
- Rogers, M. F., & Garrett, C. D. (2002). *Who's afraid of women's studies?* New York: AltaMira Press.
- The Spice Girls. (1997). *Girl power*. London: Chameleon.
- The Spice Girls. (1996). Say You'll Be There. On *Spice Girls* [CD]. Toronto: EMI Music Canada.
- Taft, J. K. (2004). Girl power politics: Pop culture barriers and organizational resistance. In A. Harris (Ed.), *All about the girl: Culture, power and identity* (pp. 69-79). New York: Routledge.
- Takayoshi, P. (1999). No boys allowed: The World Wide Web as a clubhouse for girls. *Computers and Composition*, 16(0), 89-106.
- Tasker, Y., & Negra, D. (Eds.). (2007). *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the politics of popular culture*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Tringali, J. (2008). Remembering the spice wars: Can The Spice Girls live up to their girl power legacy? *Bitch*, 38, 29-32.

# Why the School System Fails to Equalize: The Influence of Socioeconomic Background on Children's Achievement in School

*Hélène Frohard-Dourlent*

---

The school system demands much not only of children, but also of their families. In Western society and North America in particular, the view that involvement in a child's education is a key parental responsibility (Gillies, 2006) is presently an opinion shared by teachers and educators, childhood specialists and pediatricians, as well as society at large. Since children of lower socioeconomic status (SES) fare less well in school (Lareau, 2003; Lipps & Yiptong-Avila, 1999; Guppy & Davies, 2006), we are often quick to jump to the conclusion that working-class parents do not value—and consequently do not get involved in—their children's education to the same degree as parents with higher SES. Krueger (2003), for example, notes this trend when he writes, "I suspect part of the association between [level of] education and parental income reflects intergenerational transmission of ability and motivation for school" (p. 59).

In contrast to this, I suggest that moving beyond blaming individuals to explore more systemic explanations of differences in achievement is essential to a better understanding of inequalities in education. What is the evidence that low SES hinders educational and life chances for children, regardless of parental aspirations and practices? If the evidence is conclusive, what are some explanations that have been offered in the literature to explain these disparities? Assuming that we can identify features of the educational system that intrinsically place low SES families at a disadvantage, is there anything we can do to challenge these structural factors? If we want to address the issue of low SES students faring poorly in school without stigmatizing disadvantaged populations, it is crucial that we move away from the "blame game" and focus instead on the complex processes that are at work in the creation of inequalities. We must look at the way that the societal expectations and the educational system itself are partial to middle-class conceptualizations and practices. Shifting our perspective from the failure of individuals to the bias of the system will allow us to make more effective policy decisions without further alienating low SES families from the educational system.

## *Differences in Children's Experiences of Education: Does SES Matter?*

Differences in children's experiences start at home, before they ever step into a classroom. Lam (1997) has suggested that material circumstances (i.e. class position) are less important in influencing educational performance than what he calls "family climate." His study demonstrates that high parental monitoring, high parental supportiveness, and high psychological autonomy have a positive influence on a child's grade point average (GPA) regardless of SES and family structure. Following this line of thought, extensive research has focused upon the positive effects of cognitive stimulation at home, which is exemplified in the attention paid to the time that parents spend reading to children or encouraging them to read (Lareau, 1987; Cheung & Andersen, 2003; Lipps & Yiptong-

Avila, 1999). Participation in extra-curricular activities and parent-child interactions are two other factors that have been linked to children's readiness to learn before they enter school (Thomas, 2006), and this relationship holds true from a very early age on. Attending an early childhood education program improves a child's performance in kindergarten and even has more positive effects beyond kindergarten (Lipps & Yiptong-Avila, 1999). Finally, parents' hopes and expectations for their children in terms of education have also been shown to influence academic achievement (Hill, 2001).



*Photo by Hélène Frohard-Dourlent*

There is proof that family processes and family climate have positive consequences for a child's readiness for school, regardless of the family's SES. However, it is important to note that these processes are not evenly distributed across SES lines. For example, numerous studies show that parents in high-income families spend more time reading to their children than those in low-income families (Lareau, 1987; DeBruin-Parecki, 1999; Winquist Nord,

Lennon, & Liu Westat, 1999), and rates of participation in extra-curricular activities such as arts and sports go up with levels of income (Thomas, 2006). Lam's (1997) study also confirms that there is a correlation between family climate and family SES since "children from families with high SES... reported having more parental monitoring, supportiveness and psychological autonomy than children from families with low SES" (p. 86). We will return to the structural reasons that can account for these differences between families of different class backgrounds, but for now the more interesting finding comes from Lam's (1997) claim that: "the GPAs of children from families with low SES but high parental monitoring, high parental supportiveness, and high psychological autonomy were not significantly different from those of the children from families with high SES but low parental monitoring, low parental supportiveness, and low psychological autonomy" (p. 82). Lam's (1997) discovery suggests that while certain parental practices have positive effects on their children's educational achievements no matter what, SES has its own story to tell, and high socioeconomic resources put children at a structural advantage for which a positive family climate cannot completely compensate.

Family SES has consistently shown to affect not only early school experiences, but also educational outcomes in general, in all measures of preparedness and achievement even when controlled for other factors (Guppy & Davies, 2006). A recent study by Statistics Canada shows that five-year-olds from lower income households "do not do as well as those from more affluent households in many of the readiness to learn dimensions" (Thomas, 2006, p. 48). Cheung and Andersen (2003) have demonstrated that this difference persists over time, with family material resources having "a direct effect on the reading habits of children and test scores of children at age 11, exam scores at age 16 and the chances of obtaining a university degree later in life" (p. 9). Indeed, Bowles has shown that children from the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile in terms of SES "may expect to receive four more years of schooling than [those from] the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile" (as cited in Lam, 1997, p. 19). In other words, how a child fares in the first years of schooling will affect their

whole educational career and, as a result, his or her labour market experience and social well-being (Knighton & Bussière, 2006). Because it is not only a child's school career that is at stake, but their life chances, it is crucial not only to recognize the effects that SES can have on children's educational experience, but also to understand the cause for that persistent effect.

### *Multiple Influences of Family SES Over Children's Achievement in School*

Now that we have established that SES is a salient factor in explaining differences in educational achievement between children of different class backgrounds, we must turn to the underlying reasons for this gap. According to Marks (2005), there are "three types of explanations for class-based inequalities in education: those that emphasize income or other material resources, those that emphasize cultural factors and a third group that focuses on the role of schools" (p. 3). It is imperative that we examine all three factors to better understand how class-based inequalities are established and perpetuated in the school system. Focusing first on cultural factors, this approach most easily shifts the blame for low SES children's educational difficulties to their parents. Gillies (2006) rightly reminds us that working class parents are often accused of failing to get involved in a child's education, but is this really a case of working-class parents valuing education too little to see the point of getting involved? Studies conducted by Lareau (1987), Hill (2001), and Gillies (2006) tell a different story. Working class parents "expressed deep concern about education and they worked hard to ensure their children were not left behind" (Gillies, 2006, p. 8). A study by Moles also showed that their expectations are high and they do want to be involved (as cited in Hill, 2001, p. 686; see also Chavkin & Williams, 1989). While this challenges the idea of a self-perpetuating "culture of poverty" and explains why many poor children do not do well in school, it does not mean that working and middle-class families relate to school and education in the same way. Both groups value school, however, they differ in the ways in which they promote educational success (Lareau, 1987). Lareau's (1987) claims change the research question, as the goal is no longer to explain why working-class families do not value school but instead to understand the various approaches to promoting educational success and how working-class families interact with the institution of schooling. Shifting the focus away from the assumption that families are doing something wrong also has important implications in terms of policy-making, something that we will return to later in the discussion.

For Lareau (1987), a key difference in the relationship between parents and the institution of the school is that middle-class parents view themselves as equals to the teacher and working-class parents, who do not have the same level of schooling, see teachers as professionals to whom they have "[relinquished] the responsibility for [formal] education" (p. 79). In Lareau's study, this perception influenced the relationship that parents had with the teachers and the school: working-class parents were less likely to challenge teachers or to gather precise information on their child's curriculum and performance, and were generally less involved in school processes when compared to their middle-class counterparts. Social networks reinforce this situation, as middle-class parents were more likely to know other parents from the school, while working-class parents' networks center more around extended family (Lareau, 1987).

Looking more specifically at working-class mothers, Gillies (2006) paints a slightly different picture of parent-school relationships. She depicts working class parents for whom "formal education [has] brought disappointment and failure, both in terms of being a pupil and being a parent" (p. 8). Conscious of the difficulties their children

were likely to encounter in school, these parents' response was to invest in emotional capital rather than the cultural capital that they lacked in comparison to the middle class. Therefore, "rather than emphasizing intelligence and academic attainment, the attributes most likely to be proudly described by working class parents were children's ability to stay out of trouble, get on with others, and work hard" (Gillies, 2006, p. 8). Differential parental practices are shaped by the contrasting ways in which parents view, and thus invest, in schools. Rather than a lack of investment from working-class parents, there is a different kind of investment.

Since parents' values and practices are not just shaped by their own experiences, but also by the different material realities that families face (Kohn, 1979 cited in Lam, 1997, p. 7), we now turn to access to material resources as another aspect of class-based inequalities. High SES parents are more likely to be able to afford tutoring or additional instructional resources such as exercise books and manuals. Thus, Gillies (2006) points out that it makes more sense to parents who have access to the resources that allow them to promote academic success to invest in that kind of performance. Additionally, if low SES parents want to get involved in the way that teachers expect them to, limited access to financial resources are a serious obstacle. For example, low SES parents are less likely to have flexible schedules or be able to take time off work to accommodate parent-teacher meetings, and it may be more difficult for them to arrange for transportation and childcare to be present at the school. They also do not have readily available money to pay for field trips or extra-curricular activities (Lareau, 1987). Lam (1997) goes as far as suggesting that, as a result of financial limitations, "families may lower their expectations for children's long-term educational attainment" (p. 90). Lowered expectations have been shown to have a negative influence on long-term educational achievement for children (Hill, 2001). When it is a stretch to pay for soccer lessons, saving for a college education may well be unrealistic. Some low SES parents may not view higher education as a possibility, let alone as the expectation (as middle-class families often consider it). This vicious circle that working-class families find themselves caught in is hardly an easy one to break. The problem is not an inherent lack of motivation of low-SES families and their children, but very real disparities in access to educational resources due to financial limitations. Although material hardship only hinders financially-based investment from low SES families, it is an essential kind of investment in terms of long-term educational possibilities.

### *Schools as Middle-Class Institutions That Sustain Class-Based Inequalities*

So far, I have focused on how individual families in different social positions establish different relationships to schools. However, the family-school relationship goes both ways. It is crucial that we question the educational institution and the role that it plays in perpetuating class-based inequalities. In *Class, Codes and Control*, Bernstein (1975) argues that there exists "a relationship between the mode of cognitive expression and certain social classes" (p. 24). Depending on which social classes they are from, children's sociolinguistic experiences at home do not prepare them equally for the classroom. For example, school encourages children to use different types of linguistic registers, and middle-class children are more likely to have unconsciously practiced switching from familiar to casual to formal register than their working-class counterparts. Kaplan's study found that in general, the value of the working-class's cultural capital is downplayed by dominant social institutions (as cited in Lareau, 1987), with schools valuing the kind of cultural capital that is more familiar to middle-class children whose families can afford



trips to museums and extensive libraries. In other words, school standards are not value-neutral. Even the type of parental involvement that is praised by both teachers and school officials is rooted in a middle-class ideology, assuming that parents have the time and resources to get involved in school life. Consequently, the fact that schools have the same expectations of parental involvement and child achievement regardless of the families' SES (Lareau, 1987) seems like an egalitarian ideal, but the different realities experienced by middle-class and working-class families means that this universalist claim in education yields unequal consequences for the children.

Building on Bernstein's (1975) insight on the differential use of language, Lareau (2003) argues that schools promote a style of parenting that is more congruent with a middle-class approach of child rearing. She distinguishes between two types of parenting, each valued differently along class lines: the middle class's approach of "concerted cultivation" as opposed to the working class method of "accomplishment of natural growth." The concept of concerted cultivation stems from the idea that a child has to be "developed" and emphasizes the importance of organized activities, while the notion of accomplishment of natural growth is rooted in the belief that children should be able to enjoy their childhood and organize their time more freely. Lareau (2003) insists that neither approach is intrinsically better than the other, as both have identifiable strengths and weaknesses, thus challenging the assumption that the middle-class raises its children better. However, she then points out that "the routine rituals of family life are not equally legitimized in the broader society" (p. 244). Expectations at schools are a continuation of middle-class children's home experiences, which places working class children at a structural disadvantage. On top of being economically underprivileged, working-class children have to deal with adapting to a school environment that does not build on their home experiences.

The notion of school readiness reveals the way in which school expectations for children provide differential opportunities for them depending on their class background. As we have seen, children are not clean slates when they first enter formal education through primary school, nor are they expected to be. They "should be prepared, or made ready to adapt to the demands of formal schooling" (Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2006, p. 116), and these are the very demands that Lareau (2003) identifies as characteristic of the middle class. School readiness implies expectations that go beyond classroom skills. A survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education in 1993 demonstrated that teachers primarily defined school readiness as including non-academic skills, such as the capacity to communicate needs and wants, curiosity, enthusiasm, and the ability not to be disruptive and to follow directives (as cited in Thomas, 2006, p. 16). Unlike academic skills such as composition or arithmetic, which the school is equipped to teach children from scratch, the same cannot be said of these non-academic skills. While they can be honed in the classroom because they are valued there, these skills are much more difficult for schools to generate without any previous foundation provided by their education in the home. This points once again to the importance of parents as early agents of socialization and further underlines the effects of social class. We have seen that social class provides children with environments that are uneven in their capacity to promote these skills both because of differences in parental attitudes and because of unequal access to resources. So the notion of school readiness implies that while schools can (and should) offer equal instruction in the realm of academic skills, children arrive at school with different backgrounds that will either benefit or hinder them in the classroom because, to a certain extent, social background—

as well as opportunities linked to financial resources such as day-care or preschool—predisposes them to success in the classroom setting.

*Can Schools Ever Be “Great Equalizers”? Opening Up Possibilities for Policy-Making*

The notion of school readiness has played an important part in providing focus for policy-making. The fact that children are unequally prepared has generated numerous attempts to address the problem through government-funded programs and other non-profit initiatives. Particular attention has been given to early education programs since they have been shown to improve children’s academic achievement and social adjustment and, without governmental help, they are disproportionately attended by middle-class children (Lipps & Yiptong-Avila, 1999). The Head Start Program in the U.S. is an example of a program that promises funding to agencies which “provide comprehensive child development services to economically disadvantaged children and families” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [U.S. DHHS], 2009). However, in light of the points made in this paper, the program’s description seems somewhat misguided, as the program’s self-proclaimed “special focus [is] on helping preschoolers develop the early reading and math skills they need to be successful in school” (U.S. DHHS, 2009). Reading skills are certainly a factor of advantage amongst children, but this focus on academic abilities misses the mark in a society where social class first and foremost creates inequalities in patterns of socialization. This relative disconnect is not unique. Wesley and Buysse have shown that teachers and principals emphasize “children’s ability to engage in meaningful interactions an important indicator of school readiness,” while legislators prioritize children’s readiness for specific pre-academic tasks (as cited in Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2006, p. 116). This is not to say that a program such as Head Start is not helpful to children. The program addresses a certain aspect of the inequalities faced by young children in school. However, it fails to address more systemic inequalities and as such, it is doomed to be a band-aid solution on a gushing wound.

Another aspect of government-funded programs is parental involvement, and once again, Head Start is a good illustration of the prevailing attitude. The services that the program funds are supposed to “engage parents in their children’s learning and help them in making progress toward their educational, literacy and employment goals” (U.S. DHHR, 2009). Unfortunately, this seems to address the symptom (working-class parents are not as involved) rather than the root cause of the problem (they do not have the means to be and the school does not reflect their values). While a portion of working-class parents do feel less capable of getting involved in their child’s education due to their own educational shortcomings (Gillies, 2006), this deficit of involvement is more likely to be explained by the parents’ lack of time, due to demanding work schedules and distance from their workplace, and lack of material resources. Does this mean that providing parents with the financial means to be available for their children would be a more successful approach? Lareau (2003) remarks that there are “a few indications that if parents’ economic and social resources were to change, their cultural practices would shift as well” (p. 251), so this could indeed be an avenue to consider. There are numerous, well-documented ways in which governments could supplement family allowances and publicly-subsidized childcare is another classic example of public aid, while a Guaranteed Annual Income is a more uncommon proposition. The catch, of course, is that while these solutions question our usual individualistic, parent-centered approach, they still do not challenge the problematic perception that the middle-class better educate their children. On the contrary, these suggestions actually reinforce this belief by being founded on the hope to

extend this style of parenting to working-class families.

A final suggestion would be to consider school calendar reform. There is evidence that the long summer break is a disadvantage to children with underprivileged backgrounds. The “summer setback,” wherein students lose much of the knowledge they had acquired in the year prior (Ballinger, 1988), is a phenomenon that affects all children, but the learning loss is greater for low SES children (Heyns, 1979; Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; Guppy & Davies, 2009). The summer break thus contributes to maintaining a middle-class advantage, which seems all the more illegitimate since the imperative for schools to follow a rural calendar has disappeared (Dosset & Muñoz, 2007; Vadenais, 1998). Spreading out vacation days more evenly over the year would not address the issues of problematic educational value systems, but it would eliminate at least one structural feature of schools that places low SES children at a disadvantage.

### *Conclusion*

Considering the high hopes that we have for our school system, and the idealistic universal mandate that it proclaims, it is ironic that schools do so little to erase or diminish the effects of SES, and even seem to exacerbate its influence. Assuming that social background is of little consequence in a child’s experience of schooling is dangerous, and a “socioeconomic-blind” approach systematically favors children from more privileged backgrounds. Families are unequally equipped to comply with equal demands from teachers and schools and universal expectations are never value-free.

This situation is a difficult conundrum that schools are faced with, especially since lines between social classes are not clearly drawn, and there will never be enough teachers to allow for a truly individualistic approach to education in which every child is taught according to personally-assessed needs and interests. Additionally, reforms—especially ones that require structural changes, for example with the school calendar—are often challenging to implement, with different social actors often reluctant to accept change if they feel their concerns are not heard (Shields and Oberg, 2000). To add yet another layer of complexity to this problem, we have to keep in mind that the school is an institution embedded in a greater social structure. Even if we could articulate a solution for education that ensured that low SES children would not suffer from systemic disadvantage, schools would still be part of an institutional system that is clearly partial to families with easier access to financial resources.

That is not to say that no improvement is possible or that all solutions are equally unhelpful, but that change is necessary at a number of levels. The policy changes suggested above are not mutually exclusive. Instead of looking for a panacea, we should strive to challenge the educational system in a variety of ways. We need to question the structures and expectations that inherently reward middle-class attitudes, as well as be flexible regarding the kinds of knowledge that children bring to school. This is especially important considering the latest trend of reliance on test scores for determining achievement, which represents a stiffening of the system that is doomed to further disadvantage working-class children. The middle-class bias is inherent in these tests, notably in the ways in which they test for literacy. Beyond philosophical concerns about educational approaches, there is a very practical need to address the re-emergence of practices that reinforce a bias already too pervasive in the school system. A near-complete overhaul of the system is a colossal task, and there is no hope for overnight change. The very first step is to prevent the school system from ingraining even more deeply within itself a middle-class privilege already too prevalent in schools.

## References

- Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Olson, L. S. (2007). Lasting consequences of the summer learning gap. *American Sociological Review*, 72, 167–180.
- Ballinger, C. (1988). Rethinking the school calendar. *Educational Leadership*, 45(5), 57-61.
- Bernstein, B. (1975). *Class, code and control*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Chavkin, N. F. & Williams, D. L. (1989). Low-income parents' attitudes toward parent involvement in education. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 160, 17-28.
- Cheung, S. Y., & Andersen, R. (2003). Time to read: Family resources and educational outcomes in Britain. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 34(3), 413-434.
- DeBruin-Parecki, A. (1999). *Assessing adult/child storybook*. CIERA (Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement) Report. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED447412)
- Dosset, D., & Muñoz, M. (2007). *Year-round education in a reform environment: the impact on student achievement and cost effectiveness analysis*. Louisville, KY: Department of Leadership, Foundations and Human Resource Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED464424)
- Gillies, V. (2006). Working class mothers and school life: exploring the role of emotional capital. *Gender and Education*, 18(3), 281-293.
- Guppy, N., & Davies, S. (2009). School's out for summer: Should it be? In E. Grabb & N. Guppy (Eds.), *Social Inequality in Canada: Patterns, Problems, and Policies* (5th ed.) (pp. 429-431). Toronto: Pearson.
- Guppy N., & Davies, S. (2006). *The Schooled Society*. Toronto: Oxford University Press
- Heyns, B. (1979). *Summer learning and the effects of schooling*. New York: Academic Press.
- Hill, N. E. (2001). Parenting and academic socialization as they relate to school readiness: The roles of ethnicity and family income. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(4), 686-697.
- Knighton, T., & Bussière, P. (2006). *Educational outcomes at age 19 associated with reading ability at age 15*. Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics Research Paper (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 81-595-MIE2006043). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.
- Krueger, A. (2003). Inequality, too much of a good thing. In B. M. Friedman (Ed.), *Inequality in America* (pp.1-76). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Ladd, G. W., Herald, S. L., & Kochel, K. P. (2006). School readiness: Are there prerequisites? *Early Education and Development*, 17, 115-150.
- Lam, S. F. (1997). *How the family influences children's academic achievement*. New York, NY: Garland Publishing.
- Lareau, A. (1987). Social class differences in family-school relationships: The importance of cultural capital. *Sociology of Education*, 60(2), 73-85.
- Lareau, A. (2003). *Unequal childhoods: class, race and family life*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Lipps, G., & Yiptong-Avila, J. (1999). *From home to school – How Canadian children cope*. (Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 89F0117XIE). Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada.
- Marks, G. N. (2005). Cross-national differences and accounting for social class inequalities in education. *International Sociology*, 20(4), 483-505.
- Shields, C. M., & Oberg, S. L. (2000). Choice and voice in school calendar. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 25(1), 27-40.

- Thomas, E. M. (2006). Readiness to learn at school among five-year-old children in Canada. Children and Youth Research Paper Series (Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 89-599-MWE2006004). Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2009). *About the Office of Head Start*. Retrieved November 23, 2007, from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/index.html#mission>
- Vadenais, K. R. (1998). *Parent/guardian attitudes on year-round schools, Scotland County, North Carolina* (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED440040). Retrieved from ERIC: [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/16/28/45.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/16/28/45.pdf)
- Winqvist Nord, C., Lennon, J., & Liu Westat, B. (1999). *Home literacy activities and signs of children's emerging literacy*, 1993 and 1999. (NCES Publication No. NCES 2000026). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

# Sports and Recreation: Strong Medicine for Aboriginal Youth

*John Naslund*

Numerous studies have shown that Aboriginal People are at an elevated risk for obesity and higher rates of diabetes (Canadian Heritage, 2005; Small, 2007; Waldram, Herring, & Young, 2007). Physical activity may serve as an important intervention in addressing these health concerns as evidence suggests physical and social health benefits may be gained through participation in sports and recreation (Findlay & Kohen, 2007). Given the large proportion of Aboriginal peoples under the age of 14 (Statistics Canada, 2003), sports programs reaching out to Aboriginal youth may be most effective in having a positive impact on life-long health (Findlay & Kohen, 2007). Findlay and Kohen (2007) have explained, however, that little is known about the patterns of physical activity for Aboriginal children in Canada. According to Paraschak (1997), for many Aboriginal youths, sports—especially organized sports—tend to reinforce dominant societal views, provoke displays of racial superiority, and promote systematic minority exclusion. It is important for Aboriginal youths to affirm their role in mainstream Canadian sports programs because, as Elliot (2007) has described, sports serve as an outlet, allowing them to escape the troubles that affect their daily lives. This paper discusses the historical significance, the unfortunate decline, and the recent re-emergence of sport participation among Aboriginal Canadians. I argue that sports and recreation are integral to both individual and communal well-being, and that such programs may contribute positively to the mental and physical health of Aboriginal youths.

From my observations, both as a minor hockey coach and as a player, I have learned that sports and recreation have the remarkable capacity to encourage interaction among children and to erode racial barriers separating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations. As Garfield Pennington, Professor Emeritus in the University of British Columbia School of Human Kinetics, stated: “Play, which encompasses both sport and recreation, is something that all kids can relate to, and it serves as a common language between cultures” (personal communication, April 14, 2008). Through playful participation in communal activities, there is a possibility of beginning to address some of the “social ills facing Aboriginal people” (Haslip, 2001, ¶ 2).

In order to understand why sport has been considered by some Aboriginals as “the strongest type of medicine” (Haslip, 2001), it is necessary to consider the cultural significance of sport for Aboriginal people. Sports and recreation form an integral part of Aboriginal culture, and are connected to all phases of life (Oxendine, 1988). Haslip (2001) has explained that sport is largely represented within the physical realm of the medicine wheel, while Oxendine (1988) has illustrated that it is deeply linked to ceremony and religion in First Nations communities. The strong link between sport and good health involves maintaining a balance among the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical aspects of life (Heritage Canada, 2005). The significant relationship between sport or recreation

and important community gatherings can be found in games, ceremonies, funeral rites, and celebrations (Oxendine, 1988). For example, Small (2007) has reported that Aboriginal dances including hoop dancing, pow wow dance, and Métis jigging, are important cultural activities with the benefits of fitness and skill building. Sports and recreational activities play a prominent physical and spiritual role within First Nations culture.

When consulting the literature on this topic, I noticed that most of the physical activity within Aboriginal communities prior to European contact was described in terms of activities required for survival: hunting, fishing, chopping wood, gathering berries, and collecting water (Waldram, Herring, & Young, 2007; Kirby, Lévesque, & Wabano, 2007). This Eurocentric view of Aboriginal activity has led to an inaccurate portrayal of Aboriginal peoples. First Nations communities are characterized as being unfamiliar with competitive and confrontational sports and too busy battling the hardships of the Canadian wilderness to participate in recreation (Condon, 1995). This is misleading, as there are a number of traditional Aboriginal sports and recreational games that were played for a variety of purposes besides survival.

The game of lacrosse, for example, which is referred to as *Tewaarathon* in Mohawk, *dehuntsigwa'es* in Onandaga, or *baaga`adowe* in Ojibwa, is a traditional team sport from northeastern North America with deep spiritual significance (Canadian Lacrosse Association, 2008; National Lacrosse League [NLL], 2008). Lacrosse was used to resolve disputes between neighbouring communities and served as an important component in spiritual gatherings and emotional celebrations (Haslip, 2001). Many First Nations consider lacrosse to be an important gift from the Creator that allowed men to display their bravery before their communities (NLL, 2008). Lacrosse also served as an important exercise in order to train warriors in teamwork (NLL, 2008) and is associated with honour and glory, as well as spiritual and emotional involvement (Canadian Lacrosse Association, 2008; Lavine, 1974). Children were taught to play lacrosse at a very early age (NLL, 2008) in order to develop their skills and to teach them values.

Aboriginal children throughout North America played a number of games, including various forms of tag, kicking games, ball games, tug-o-wars, footraces, and relays (Macfarlane, 1985). They also played versions of shinny, a game similar to soccer, either played on grass or ice, where the purpose was to kick a ball through goal markers (Lavine, 1974). Archery was particularly important among Plains First Nations, and children would often compete amongst each other at hitting targets, with the winner receiving the other players' arrows (Lavine, 1974). In throwing games, such as hoop and pole, children competed by trying to throw darts, spears, or stones through a rolling hoop, all of which developed their marksmanship skills (Lavine, 1974) and provided an enjoyable activity to occupy their time. Sports and recreational activities in the past clearly formed an essential part of life within Aboriginal communities. This reality informs current Aboriginal views, which insist that sports and recreation are necessary for physical and social wellbeing (Aboriginal Sports Circle, 2008). Before examining the re-emergence of sports as necessary for promoting good health in Aboriginal communities, it is important to understand some of the reasons why Aboriginal peoples are under-represented in contemporary Canadian sports programs (Haslip, 2001).

The decline of physical activity within Aboriginal communities is often attributed to their transition from an active hunter-gatherer lifestyle to a more sedentary lifestyle (Waldram, Herring, & Young, 2007). Modernization in the form of electricity, motor vehicles, and, in particular, television, has contributed to decreased physical activity in Aboriginal communities (Kirby, Lévesque, & Wabano, 2007). However, a shift in lifestyle is

not likely to be the only cause of decreased physical activity among Aboriginal Canadians. Other contributing factors include racial discrimination and exclusion, historical legislative measures, inadequate access to recreational facilities, and economic disparities.

Aboriginal peoples have systematically been excluded from sports and recreation by a number of means. Racial classification was used initially to prohibit Aboriginals from participating in “Indian-derived” sports such as snowshoeing or lacrosse (Haslip, 2001). For example, Aboriginal people were excluded from amateur lacrosse competitions because they were classified as “professionals,” largely due to their alleged prior skill and familiarity with the game (Haslip, 2001). Aboriginals were similarly excluded from snowshoeing competitions because they were classified as having a “natural ability” in the sport (Haslip, 2001). During the late nineteenth century, if an Aboriginal won a snowshoe race against a white Canadian, the word “Indian” would appear in brackets next to his or her name (Haslip, 2001). This act of classification reflected an attempt by non-Aboriginals to place Aboriginals’ achievements into perspective on the grounds of alleged innate abilities (Haslip, 2001). Haslip (2001) has suggested that many First Nations peoples may have abandoned traditional sports altogether as a result of racial exclusion. The continued effects of this withdrawal from traditional sports may be contributing to some of the current barriers to Aboriginal Peoples’ participation in sport (Canadian Heritage, 2005).

A further decline in Aboriginal Canadians’ participation in traditional sports and physical activities may have occurred due to the systematic removal of their culture as a result of the Indian Act. Residential schooling was designed to eradicate Aboriginal culture through assimilation and manipulation of Aboriginal bodies (Kelm, 1998). Haslip (2001) has convincingly argued, despite insufficient documentation, that there is a link between the effects of both residential schooling and the Indian Act on the participation of First Nations in traditional sports and sporting events. Sports and recreation, as described earlier, are deeply rooted within Aboriginal culture (Canadian Heritage, 2005), and an attempt to prohibit the expression of this culture through government legislation (Kelm 1998) would likely affect Aboriginal participation in traditional sports.

Exclusion of Aboriginal children from mainstream Canadian sports organizations persists even today. As recently as 2001, the First Nations Kainai Minor Hockey Association (KMHA) was banned permanently from the Foothills Hockey League in Southern Alberta (Robidoux, 2004). This occurred when several other teams from neighbouring non-Aboriginal communities threatened to withdraw from the league unless the Kainai teams were removed because of their “uncivilized behaviour” and failure to comply with league rules (Robidoux, 2004). The KMHA had committed infractions and was in need of organizational improvements, however, as Robidoux (2004) explained, their removal from the league was believed to be unjust and they were denied any opportunity to plead their case for reinstatement. This instance—where a First Nations hockey association was expelled for “organizational deficiencies” and for not following league policies such as providing officials for home games, having matching jerseys, and attending league meetings—was not the first of its kind (Robidoux 2004). While Robidoux (2004) acknowledged the difficulty in resolving this situation, he suggested that the removal of the KMHA stems in part from racial tensions and that it will generate greater hostility and further isolate First Nations children from mainstream Canadian sports.

One would expect that Aboriginal children living in remote communities would participate less in sports than those living in urban areas due to fewer opportunities and inadequate facilities (Skinner et al. 2006). However, this is not the case. According to a study conducted by Findley and Kohen (2007), differences in sport participation



attributed to geography were negligible. Economic disparity, on the other hand, is closely associated with regional differences and is a critical factor responsible for low participation rates in sports among Aboriginal youths (Kirby, Lévesque, & Wabano, 2007). Aboriginal Canadians in both rural and urban areas are more likely than non-Aboriginals to be situated below the poverty line (Small, 2007). Children living on a reserve, either in urban or rural areas, also have lower rates of participation in sports compared to off-reserve children (Findlay & Kohen, 2007). In contrast, Métis and Inuit children recorded higher overall participation rates in sports than First Nations children (Findlay & Kohen, 2007). These data indicate that financial constraints are largely responsible for the lack of participation in sports because off-reserve First Nations along with Métis and Inuit report a higher overall socioeconomic status than on-reserve First Nations (Waldram, Herring, & Young, 2007). In other words, while regional differences do exist in Aboriginal youth sport participation rates, these differences are primarily produced by economic disparity.

Kirby, Lévesque, and Wabano (2007) stressed the negative impact of economic disparity on sports participation in Aboriginal communities, stating that it is especially prohibitive when equipment or facilities are needed in order to participate. In their study, conducted in Moose Factory, many First Nations adults stated that they wished they had equipment, such as fishing boats or kayaks, to teach their children traditional recreational activities. Furthermore, they found that a lack of culturally relevant and gender specific opportunities were significant barriers for sports participation in Aboriginal communities.

Discrimination, unjust legislation, and inadequate access resulting from low socioeconomic status are among the factors that have contributed to decreased Aboriginal Canadian involvement and participation in mainstream sporting events. This decreased participation is partly responsible for the severe and chronic health conditions that exist today, including diabetes, obesity, and cardiovascular disease (Findlay & Kohen, 2007). The rate of diabetes among Aboriginals is more than double that of non-Aboriginals (Waldram, Herring, & Young, 2007). What is most alarming is that Aboriginal youth are five times more likely to develop diabetes than are non-Aboriginal youth (Waldram, Herring, & Young, 2007). In general, the Aboriginal population is more overweight compared to non-Aboriginals and Aboriginal children are at an elevated risk for obesity (Waldram, Herring, & Young, 2007). Keeping these statistics in mind, the re-emergence of sport within the Aboriginal community becomes essential for their health and well-being.

Many Aboriginal communities describe sport as a strong type of medicine because of its preventative nature (Haslip, 2001). The physical health benefits of sport are critical in alleviating elevated rates of diabetes and obesity that exist within the Aboriginal population (Findlay & Kohen, 2007). The implementation of sports and recreation is an effective strategy for promoting good health in Aboriginal communities, as it is less invasive and less costly than medical treatments or hospitalization (Small, 2007). There is also increased interest in the benefits of sport for children. Participation in sports has been found to engender positive effects on their mental and social health, increase opportunities for peer interaction (Findlay & Kohen, 2007), and improve self-esteem and self-identity (Elliott, 2007; Heritage Canada, 2005).

Aboriginal leaders in Canada have identified participation in sports as an effective tool to combat social ills, such as high rates of smoking, drug abuse, and youth suicide (Miller, 2002), as well as a means to promote community wellness (Grantham, 2000). The link between increased participation in sports and decreased alcohol abuse and criminal

behaviour (Elliot, 2007) is particularly important given that young Aboriginal Canadians are among the most highly represented in the Canadian criminal justice system (Grantham, 2000). Sports, as described by Elliot (2007), serve as an outlet for many Aboriginal youth, and allow them to escape the troubles that affect their daily lives. Teaching Aboriginal youth the value of sport and recreation can have a lasting impact on their health (Findley & Kohen, 2007).

Sports programs in Aboriginal communities should promote cultural and spiritual awareness surrounding recreation and incorporate holistic approaches to wellness (Grantham, 2000). Aboriginal leaders across Canada are encouraged to promote participation in sports and recreation within their communities through the development and implementation of culturally sensitive recreation programs and services (Elliot, 2007). In 1990, the first North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) were held in Edmonton, Alberta, with the purpose of bringing together Aboriginal peoples from across North America and contributing positively to the healing process of Aboriginal communities and to their members' physical and social health (NAIG, 2002). Elliot (2007) explained that the North American Indigenous Games were designed specifically to generate increased sports participation within Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal youths are motivated and want to participate in traditional Aboriginal sports, such as archery, long boat racing, and snowshoeing, as well as non-Aboriginal sports, such as ice hockey, baseball, and snowboarding. Initiatives such as the Aboriginal Sports Circle (ASC), founded in 1995, advocate the need for improved access and greater opportunities for sport among Aboriginal youth (ASC, 2008). The Aboriginal Sports Circle endorses hockey tournaments for both boys and girls, provides financial support to eligible athletes, and gives awards to outstanding athletes and team officials (ASC, 2008).

When promoting greater participation in sports among Aboriginal youth, it is important to consider the need for quality coaches with culturally specific training. The Aboriginal Sports Circle (2008) provides individuals interested in coaching Aboriginal athletes with opportunities to take specific training. Grants and bursaries are available to eligible coaches as a means to sustain their commitment to the community and the sport (ASC, 2008). Grantham (2000) has also emphasized the need for coaches in Aboriginal communities to create a positive learning environment and to ensure that participants feel welcomed and accepted.

In addition to well-trained coaches, positive role models are highly effective in encouraging Aboriginal youth to participate in sports. The First Nations Snowboard Team is an excellent example because this team provides Aboriginal youth with the opportunity to compete and to succeed in a supportive environment (Pettersson, 2007). Members of the First Nations Snowboard Team are exceptional role models because they are required to remain smoke and alcohol free as a means to encourage a positive health image (Pettersson, 2007). Other examples of Aboriginal role models include the significant number of First Nations athletes in the National Lacrosse League, as well as the success experienced by several Aboriginal hockey players in the National Hockey League.

Former NHL players such as Ted Nolan, Gino Odjick, and Reggie Leach are very important role models in First Nations communities across Canada, and are particularly important to Aboriginal hockey players. Ted Nolan's struggle to play in the NHL is both moving and remarkable. As an Ojibwa Native who battled extreme poverty, Nolan was forced to share a single set of hockey equipment with his brothers and experienced racism in the junior and professional levels of hockey (Ted Nolan Foundation, 2008). Nolan currently coaches with the New York Islanders, and during the off-season he is

committed to promoting healthy lifestyle choices for young First Nations people through his foundation (Ted Nolan Foundation, 2008). Aboriginal athletes who excel at the professional level serve as a tremendous source of inspiration for others.

Despite the challenges and struggles that First Nations people have faced when participating in sport and recreation within Canada, there remains a strong spiritual bond between their culture and sport. This bond is reflected in the National Lacrosse League, where there is a greater percentage of Aboriginal players compared to any other professional sports league, which is noteworthy considering the small number of First Nations players from which to draw (NLL, 2008). The influence of Aboriginal lacrosse players reaching out to reservation communities, combined with the inspirational stories of up and coming National Hockey League stars, such as Jonathan Cheechoo and Jordan Tootoo, should help to encourage a positive transformation in sports participation among Aboriginal Canadians.

If sports are to play a role in eroding racial barriers and bridging the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, then First Nations children must be given a fair opportunity to participate. Aboriginal children, like any children, value the benefits of play. However, although play is universal, access to it is not. Given the evidence shown here of the relative exclusion of Aboriginals from many sports, and the role of sports participation in the promotion of good health, it is clear that greater support is needed to encourage increased involvement by First Nations people in Canadian sports programs. Through the efforts of the Aboriginal Sports Circle, the federal government, the North American Indigenous Games, and other Aboriginal sports organizations, issues relating to access—either because of discrimination or financial constraints—can be overcome. Once the benefits of sport are witnessed within Aboriginal communities, more children will participate, thereby choosing the healthy lifestyles that lead to improved overall physical and social well-being.

## References

- Aboriginal Sports Circle. (2008). *Canada's national voice for Aboriginal sport*. Retrieved April 13, 2008, from <http://www.aboriginalsportcircle.ca/>
- Canadian Heritage. (2005). *Sport Canada's policy on Aboriginal Peoples' participation in sport*. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
- Canadian Lacrosse Association. (2008). *A short history of lacrosse in Canada*. Retrieved April 15, 2008, from <http://www.lacrosse.ca/Default.aspx?cid=83&lang=1>
- Condon, R. G. (1995). The rise of the leisure class: Adolescence and recreational acculturation in the Canadian Arctic. *Ethos*, 23(1), 47-68. Retrieved April 1, 2008, from JSTOR Archives.
- Findlay, L. C., & Kohen, D. E. (2007). Aboriginal children's sport participation in Canada. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 5(1), 185-206.
- Grantham, A. (2000). Ensuring diversity within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal classrooms. *Journal CAHPERD*, 66(1), 39. Retrieved April 15, 2008, from ProQuest CBCA Complete.
- Haslip, S. (2001). A treaty right to sport? *Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law*, 8(2).

Retrieved April 11, 2008, from <http://www.murdoch.edu.au/elaw/issues/v8n2/haslip82nf.html>

- Kelm, M. E. (1998). *Colonizing bodies: Aboriginal health and healing in British Columbia 1900-50*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Kirby, A. M., Lévesque, L., & Wabano, V. (2007). A qualitative investigation of physical activity challenges and opportunities in a northern-rural Aboriginal community: Voices from within. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 5(1), 5-24.
- Lavine, S. A. (1974). *The games the Indians played*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company.
- Macfarlan, A., & Macfarlan, P. (1985). *Handbook of American Indian games*. New York: Dover Publications.
- McCreary Centre Society. (2000). *Raven's children: Aboriginal youth health in BC*. Burnaby: The McCreary Centre Society.
- Miller, B. (2002). *Looking back... Moving forward... Accessing the future...: North American Indigenous games research symposium*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba.
- National Lacrosse League. (2008). *Native American players flourish in NLL*. Retrieved April 15, 2008, from <http://www.nll.com/article.php?id=3289>
- North American Indigenous Games. (2002). *Living traditions: Museums honour the North American Indigenous Games*. Retrieved March 7, 2009, from <http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Traditions/index.html>
- Oxendine, J. B. (1998). *American Indian sports heritage*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books.
- Paraschak, V. (1997). Variations in race relations: Sporting events for Native peoples in Canada. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 14, 1-21.
- Patterson, C. (2007). The First Nations snowboard team is smoke free on and off the slopes. *Bloodlines*, 7, 24-29.
- Robidoux, M. A. (2004). Narratives of race relations in southern Alberta: An examination of conflicting sporting practices. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 21, 287-301.
- Skinner, K., Hanning, R. M., & Tsuji, L. J. S. (2006). Barriers and supports for healthy eating and physical activity for First Nation youths in northern Canada. *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, 65, 148-161. Retrieved April 14, 2008, from Google Scholar.
- Small, S. (2007). Aboriginal recreation, leisure and the city of Calgary. *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, 5(1), 111-126.
- Statistics Canada. (2003). *Aboriginal Peoples of Canada: A demographic profile*. Ottawa: Minister of Industry. Retrieved March 7, 2009, from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/abor/pdf/96F0030XIE2001007.pdf>
- Ted Nolan Foundation. (2008). *Ted's story*. Retrieved April 15, 2008, from [http://www.tednolan.com/content/teds\\_story.html](http://www.tednolan.com/content/teds_story.html)
- Waldram, J. B., Herring, D. A., & Young, K. (2007). *Aboriginal health in Canada: Historical, cultural, and epidemiological perspectives*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

# Durkheimian Deficit: The Study of Queer Youth Suicidality

*Kalev Hunt*

---

The most prevalent approach to research regarding youth who exhibit non-heterosexual behaviours and who adopt, or are perceived as having adopted, non-heterosexual identities is a near-total preoccupation with investigating the suicidality of these “queer” youth. The rates of suicide and attempted suicide among queer youth have been widely reported to be significantly higher than the same rates among the entire youth population (Savin-Williams, 2005, p. 184). The bulk of such studies have sprung from the mental health disciplines—such as psychiatry, psychology, and social work—with assistance from researchers in education, and this particular origin of the research has resulted in the construction of queer youth as a perpetually at-risk population (Bagley and Tremblay, 1997, pp. 178–79). Little of such research has been truly sociological in focus and thus Durkheim’s (1897/1979) seminal findings in *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* have rarely been used to investigate or explain the issues at hand. Durkheim’s work has been so absent from this area of study that one researcher in the field is “always a little surprised that his work on suicide never makes it into discussions about queer youth suicide rates” (M.L. Gray, personal communication, July 7, 2005). Since the late 1990s, a handful of academics and social work personnel have attempted to move beyond the resulting pathologization of these youth (and their lives and experiences) to approach the questions surrounding suicide from a perspective that allows for the resiliency of queer youth (e.g., Dorais & Lajeunesse, 2004; Fenaughty & Harré, 2003; Russell, 2005; Savin-Williams, 2001, 2005); this fresh take on the issue makes room for the notion of protective factors which can serve to mitigate the extent of suicidality faced among sexual minority youth.

In this article, I will revisit Durkheim’s work on suicide and explore the relevance and applicability of his findings to the question of suicide and suicide ideation among queer youth in the present day. I will then provide some critiques of the literature on the suicidality of queer youth, examine certain methodological shortcomings of the bulk of the existing research on queer youth, and problematize their frequent construction as an “at-risk” population in order to make the case for a more sociological understanding of queer youth suicide.

Moving into a more personal realm, I will use my own personal narrative to illustrate some of the ways in which viewing queer youth as always imperilled obscures the fruitful application of Durkheim’s theories on suicide to the case of queer youth. Concurrently, I will broach the issue of the resiliency of queer youth in the face of social stigma and the various factors that may function to protect them from the risk of suicide ideation. Finally, I will discuss some of the potential issues involved in attempting to move beyond sexual identity as a paradigm for theorizing young queer sexuality and the challenges these youth face dealing with their same-sex attractions, closing with some suggestions for

future approaches to the topic of researching queer youth.

It is useful to delve a little more deeply into Durkheim's findings on suicide and explore how they might relate to the topic at hand. Durkheim proposed that suicide occurred in four main forms defined by two independent axes: one concerned with social regulation, the other measuring social integration (Dorais & Lajeunesse, 2004). Along the social regulation axis, "fatalistic suicides" occur when individuals are overwhelmed by the demands of their social group. "Anomic suicides" stem from "traditional rules [having] lost their authority," which leads to a "state of de-regulation or anomy...further heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely when they need more disciplining" (Durkheim, 1897/1979, p. 253). Turning to the axis of social integration: "egoistic suicides" are those which result from feeling completely disconnected from one's social group or groups, whereas the loss of individuality which comes from complete fusion with a social group leads to "altruistic suicides," those committed for the benefit of the group as a whole (Dorais & Lajeunesse, 2004, pp. 16-17). Of these four types, egoistic and fatalistic suicide seem most in keeping with contemporary understandings of queer youth suicidality, although Thorlindsson and Bjarnason's (1998) observation that "[in] a state of anomie, the individual lacks the essential tools to construct the social world in a meaningful way" (p. 97) also makes anomic suicide of particular interest when studying the lives of sexual minority youth.

To the casual observer, suicide must seem to be the scourge of all youth who experience same-sex attractions. Susan Birden, in her 2005 book *Rethinking Sexual Identity in Education*, referred to studies indicating that queer youth account for up to 30% of completed youth suicides no less than three times (pp. 14, 73, 177). *How Homophobia Hurts Children* began with the statement that "[too] many [queer youth] even come to feel that suicide is the only alternative to life as a homosexual" (Baker, 2002, p. 1). Overall, "[empirical] evidence supports the assertion that homosexual youth are at a greater risk for suicide and suicide ideation than their heterosexual counterparts" and that "[queer youth] face more risk factors for suicidality" (Lebson, 2002, pp. 110, 107).

Reviews of the literature on queer youth have highlighted common approaches to researching non-heterosexual adolescents: (i) the research relating the experiences of queer youth was often retrospective; (ii) there has been very little longitudinal research available on sexual minority youth; (iii) the focus of the research was often the already-troubled: those queer youth who have faced significant parental rejection, street involvement, homelessness, are involvement in the sex trade, etc.; (iv) the research focused on risks rather than the capacity to withstand and adapt to adverse circumstances; and (v) the literature treated queer youth as distinct from, rather than a subset of, youth in general (Savin-William, 2001, 2005; Cover, 2005; Thompson & Johnston, 2003; Dankmeijer & Kuyper, 2006; D'Augelli & Grossman, 2006; *The (re)searching of queer youth*, 2008). Defining and sampling the population under scrutiny in the case of queer youth research also poses significant challenges. Are youth "queer" based on their physical attraction to those sharing their gender, their romantic longings for them, or their actual sexual experiences with them, or some combination thereof? How does one ensure inclusion of the experiences of those who do not self-identify with one of the reified identity categories (gay, lesbian, bisexual) that have solidified in the popular consciousness since the 1970s, yet who experience same-sex attraction?

All these methodological challenges and research choices have led to a body of data that has been generated from non-normative queer youth populations. Convenience sampling has meant many youth involved in research are those who have sought out

“others like them,” for example in support groups, queer youth centres, and queer university student groups. This bias towards those who have already claimed some type of “gay identity” has led researchers to over-sample from queer youth who are more likely to have faced certain hardships and, as a result, sought out assistance to cope and to deal with those hardships. It is hardly surprising, then, that existing research on queer youth paints a picture of a group of young individuals constantly threatened by a combination of dangerous social forces that promise to end their tragic and fragile lives.

The risk factors associated with suicide and suicide ideation among queer youth identified by this body of research include a range of occurrences which may more accurately reflect features and experiences of the population studied than any generalizable risks facing all non-heterosexual youth. Those risks include facing verbal, emotional, and physical abuse, declining academic achievement, street involvement, sex trade involvement, and abuse by professionals (Lebson, 2002).

Ritch Savin-Williams (2005) suggested that queer adolescents were “invented” in the 1970s as an extremely troubled group whose members were in need of rescue. It is this conception of queer adolescents, he argued, which has served to point the way for nearly all subsequent study involving sexual minority youth and serves to help explain the preoccupation with suicide present in such research. Indeed, Savin-Williams pointed to the creation of a “suicidal script” that undergirded such studies well into the 1990s (p. 53–58). His contention that these early studies of queer youth were overly anecdotal and relied too heavily on recollections of queer adults was echoed by Dennis Anderson (1995), who asserted that “[m]ost of our information [on the development of sexual orientation] comes from adult lesbians, gay men, and heterosexual adults recalling their past” (p. 17). Savin-Williams (2005) saw the bias, which favours the construction of “queer youth as victims,” as a result of the social and political forces at play, as early researchers sought to not only call attention to the plight of these first identified sexual minority adolescents but also to obtain funding to study their circumstances (pp. 67–8). Traditionally, the research funding came from institutions whose members viewed suicide as a social disorder in need of “fixing” rather than an unavoidable facet of society.

While Durkheim (1897/1979) argued that the incidence of suicide speaks to the level of *social* pathology within a particular society, the initial institutional response to suicide among queer adolescents framed this phenomenon as the result of individual pathology, albeit an individual pathology triggered or heightened by social stigma fuelled by homophobia or heterosexism. Given the research on queer youth began in the 1970s (Savin-Williams, 2005, p. 53) at a time of considerable debate on the nature of homosexuality, it is unsurprising that the prevailing idea of homosexuality as an individual pathology (Kinsman, 1996) influenced how researchers of the time theorized queer youth. This bias led researchers to eschew broader sociological explanations of queer youth experiences and, in particular, to view suicide among this population as separate from



Photo by H el ene Frohard-Dourlent

the larger social fact of suicide throughout the entire society. As a result of the nature of these early approaches, queer youth suicidality was conceived as a phenomenon completely isolated from the incidence of suicide and suicide ideation in the greater youth population (except for summative comparisons), with suicide and suicide attempts considered as individual acts and as the result of *individual* risk factors. Suicide as it pertains to queer youth was not explored in a sociological manner that situated it in the context of the larger society; it was seen, ironically, as a very peculiar consequence of non-heterosexual sexuality.

More recent research on queer youth suicidality—such as Michel Dorais and Simon Lajeunesse's (2004) treatise on sexual orientation, masculinity, and suicide among young Quebecois men, among others (Russell, 2005; Fenaughty & Harré, 2003)—has begun to incorporate the study of factors which protect such youth from the risk of suicide ideation. In addition, this newer research is moving from a focus on victimization to a focus on the resiliency of queer youth in the face of varying degrees of hostile messages and action. This change is spurred, no doubt, by the realization that while queer youth suicide rates may indeed be noticeably higher than those of the entire youth population, even the most radical figures still indicate that the vast majority of queer youth never become stereotypical "suicidal gay teens" (Savin-Williams, 2005, p. 184; Russell, 2005, p. 8). A dialectic thus emerges from the research, where queer youth are postulated both as a uniquely at-risk group and as an "ordinary" group of young people whose members face some unique stressors (Savin-Williams, 2005, p. 183). Social forces within such institutions as law, medicine, and education have shaped the development of queer youth studies and led to a "traditional" view of suicide among this population as primarily egoistic and sometimes fatalistic. This perspective relies heavily on the notion that queer youth are categorically different from their heterosexual peers and thus face a lack of integration within their social worlds, thereby increasing their risk for suicide. In terms of regulation and the possibility of fatalistic suicides among sexual minority youth, again the traditional view of these youth as "other" perpetuated by the literature leads them to be conceived as being unable to cope with the rigorous demands of normative sexual roles.

While no individual person's experience can be considered representative of an entire class of individuals, I feel my experiences as a closeted queer youth in the late 1980s and early 1990s illustrate some of the ways in which invoking Durkheim's work on suicide enhances and expands the sociological understanding of suicide among queer youth. In general, my personal narrative does not confirm the view of queer youth that was developing in the academy during this period. As the understanding of sexual minority adolescents as perpetually at-risk and invariably damaged neared its ascendancy in both popular and academic arenas (Savin-Williams, 2005), I was attending a conservative all-boys school in the Vancouver area. While I certainly experienced feelings of isolation and an awareness of being different from my classmates during high school, I did not make a connection between those experiences and the fact that they might indicate that I was not part of the heterosexual majority. I felt no additional lack of social integration as a result of my burgeoning erotic interest in other boys than I had as a result of my non-stereotypically male affinity for academics in grade school.

One explanation for my lack of suicidal impulse growing up may have been the fact that I did not self-identify as gay until I was nearly 20 years old. This notion is supported by Bagley and Tremblay (1997) who noted that the risk of suicide among queer youth "decreases significantly with delay in the age of self-identification" (p. 186); that is, the younger an individual identifies as non-heterosexual, the greater their risk of



suicide. Sociologically, this type of self-identification corresponds to the point where an individual's sense of social integration becomes significantly reduced and, therefore, the likelihood of egoistic suicide is increased.

The fact that I had previously experienced a certain degree of ostracism and bullying because of my interest in things widely seen as non-masculine may well have served as a personal protective factor. As Dorais and Lajeunesse (2004) have related, overcoming previous adversity seems to be a factor affecting one's non-traumatic assimilation of a queer identity:

Interestingly, some youths previously exposed to problems such as divorce of their parents or the death of a loved one, and who have had the experience of resolution of these problems well before their homosexuality came to the forefront, sometimes appear to be better equipped to cope with the new crisis. That is, such experiences may help them to tackle other problems, including serious ones. (p. 86)

While it is outside the scope of this paper as to whether dealing with bullying equates with dealing with divorce or death, the fact remains that by high school, I already had experience dealing with social integration, or the lack thereof. As a result of this previous experience, as well as when I self-identified as gay, it is reasonable to eliminate egoistic suicide as a personal outcome.

While my educational environment was likely more socially regulated than if I had been attending a public school, I did not experience my high school as an institution that was impossibly strict and demanding, nor did I experience my family life as such either. I feel this explains my lack of impulse towards fatalistic suicide, yet Durkheim's construction of social regulation as an axis impels me to consider the other end of his scale.

Durkheim (1979) identified fatalistic suicide as being a result of extreme social regulation, with anomic suicide the flip-side result of a marked lack of social rules. "Anomic," stated Thorlindsson and Bjarnason (1998), involves "the absence of clear rules of behaviour [that] create[s] a state in which the individual is faced with uncertainty. This creates a social reality that fosters meaninglessness and injustice" (p. 97). If ever there was a situation characterized by the absence of clear rules of behaviour, I propose it is the negotiation of nascent same-sex affections in our heteronormative society. Thus, anomic suicide and suicidal ideation should not be overlooked as a possible outcome for queer youth attempting to negotiate the murky waters of sexual identity mediation. If this lack of "rules" when first negotiating same-sex desire proves to present a risk to same-sex-attracted youth, then the practices that deliberately neglect to acknowledge the existence and validity of such feelings likely contribute to an increased risk of suicidality among the youth who face them.

Dorais and Lajeunesse (2004) identified four possible protective factors when it comes to suicidality among young queer men: independence of thought and critical thinking skills, humour and creativity, well-established significant relationships, and awareness of one's potential (p. 85). Of these, at least three apply in my case, with "awareness of one's potential" being interrelated to my sense of belonging to a social group of students who excelled in academics. Although I was consequently labelled as a "nerd," Dorais and Lajeunesse have reminded us, echoing Durkheim, that "integration into a community, no matter what the community may be, reduces the individual risk of suicide" (p. 89). This fact also points to the danger of stereotypes, which serve to define certain communities as exclusively heterosexual. If my primary school-based community had been the rugby

team, my membership in that community would have been unlikely to shield me from the risk of suicide ideation based on the angst I suffered over my emerging attractions to other boys; rugby was such a “real man’s” sport at my school that it was inconceivable for rugby players to be non-heterosexual, whereas the possibility of a nerd being queer was, if not expected, then certainly plausible. My same-sex attractions did not, then, render me automatically outcast from one of my primary communities.

Fenaughty and Harré (2003) have also discussed protective factors extensively, as has Russell (2005), who labelled them the “precursors to resilience” (p. 8). Both articles validated Ritch Savin-Williams’ (2001; 2005) concern over the methodology and focus of investigation surrounding sexual minority youth, which Russell agreed is “a body of research ... that is arguably obsessed with risk” (p. 7). This obsession has led to resiliency becoming a “neglected dimension” that obscures an understanding of suicidality as “depend[ing] on the individual’s unique risk/resiliency balance” (Fenaughty and Harré, 2003, pp. 4–5). Fenaughty and Harré included an admission that studies of risk factors can illustrate possible protective factors by default through simple exercises in duality. For example, if low self-esteem is a risk factor for queer youth suicidality, then high self-esteem is likely a protective factor.

Despite an increasing awareness among researchers that “risk and resilience may operate at multiple levels or in multiple contexts” (Russell, 2005, p. 7) and admissions that “the extent to which ... resiliency factors ... may stem from race and class privilege needs further investigation” (Fenaughty and Harré, 2003, p. 18), those producing sexual minority youth studies, especially those pertaining to suicidality, seem doggedly intent on examining the effects of individual factors rather than broader sociological ones. What little research that includes institutional forces, such as class, educational attainment,



Photo by H el ene Frohard-Dourlent

and educational environment, often considers adolescence from a retrospective point of view (Botnick et al., 2002, p. 61). The research also seems exceptionally male-biased, with many studies focusing exclusively on young gay and bisexual male suicide and suicide attempts while ignoring these issues among young queer women (e.g., Bagley & Tremblay, 1997; Botnick et al., 2002; Dorais & Lajeunesse, 2004; Fenaughty & Harr e, 2003; Mutchler, Ayala, & Neith, 2005).

In *The New Gay Teenager*, Ritch Savin-Williams (2005) argued passionately for a radically new approach to sexual minority youth: that they be considered simply as youth who experience same-sex attractions, rather than as a whole different class of being distinct from their heterosexual counterparts. According to Savin-Williams, “only recently ... have young people incorporated these [same-sex] attractions into their sense of self, publicly announced their attractions to friends and relatives, and formed a personal identity based on their attractions. Gay adolescence is a modern invention” (p. 50). Not only would this attraction-based, rather than identity-based, approach more accurately reflect teenagers’ actual identity practices in the new millennium, he stated, it would serve to remove significant bias and possible error from the methodological approaches to queer youth,

which have often “remained obliged to social or mental-health agencies for recruitment” (p. 59). Savin-Williams has stressed that understanding queer youth in particular first requires an understanding of youth in general.

Savin-Williams (2005) has made a compelling case for new approaches to studying issues pertaining to queer youth. The overarching drawback of most research on queer youth suicidality is that it considers queer youth in isolation, both from the broader queer population and from the broader adolescent population. His suggested approach would more accurately situate the phenomenon of queer youth suicidality in the context of youth suicidality and suicidality in general, while also subtly moving the research towards a more sociological viewpoint, as queer youth are studied as part of the larger tapestry of an entire society, rather than as strange exceptions. Savin-Williams’ revised approach would effectively allow for the de-ghettoization of these youth.

While this type of approach has many benefits, it may be overly naïve to believe that sexual identity will cease to exist in the near future. Despite Savin-Williams’ (2005) clear longing for the recognition of “the *ordinariness* of most young people with same-sex desire” (p. 216), the eradication of sexual identity categories may have negative consequences with respect to suicidality, eliminating possible sources of social integration and social regulation. Nevertheless, his approach rejects a monolithic view of queer youth that stigmatizes them all as pathological while ignoring the variation within the population. It exposes the inconvenient fact that despite the prevalence of a deficit model approach to studying queer youth and the significant amount of attention that has been and continues to be drawn to the problem of queer youth suicidality, most queer youth become fully-functioning members of their societies without having ideated or attempted suicide.

The direction for future research addressing queer youth suicidality is clear: it must recognize that queer youth, whether they take on sexual identity labels or not, do not exist in a vacuum—they are subject to the social forces which affect us all, and most notably those that affect both their queer elders and their non-queer counterparts. Only by being able to compare and contrast experiences specific to such youth with those of their heterosexual peers and their elders will a vivid understanding of both risk and protective factors emerge. Some of these factors will be common to their entire society; others will be specific to their own lives, which are perhaps more ordinary than existing research suggests or can be imagined. Russell (2005) warned that “we must be diligent that research does not serve to marginalize or label individual sexual minority youth as unavoidably at risk” (p. 14). Researchers must resist the convenience of recruiting participants through existing queer youth support groups and mental health environments to avoid biasing their samples towards those youth who are already troubled enough to seek out such resources (Savin-Williams, 2005). Large-scale studies that focus not only on those youth who claim a sexual minority label but also on those who experience same-sex romantic and erotic attractions are needed, as are smaller-scale studies that do not look solely at queer youth in isolation but rather at queer and non-queer youth in similar social circumstances. New studies must not ignore young women, nor can they ignore the lessons that can be learned by examining how suicidality manifests among other minority youth.

Perhaps most importantly, new approaches to the topic should investigate the possible institutional forces at work from a sociological perspective that builds on Durkheim’s findings on suicide. Studies that look at social regulation and social integration would naturally be important avenues of investigation. Long-term longitudinal studies, which follow individuals through adolescence and into adulthood, would be useful for gleaning a better understanding of how different forces shape risk and resiliency over time.

Ultimately, factors which contribute to queer youth resiliency must be found, examined, and verified through replication in order to determine what can be done on both macro and micro levels to not only properly identify the incidence of suicidality among queer youth but also to develop and deliver effective support and resources to specific queer youth populations while avoiding, and reversing, the clinicalization of queer youth.

Durkheim's historic insights into the sociological nature of suicide, coupled with a willingness to widen the ontological lens through which queer youth have been viewed as a population to be researched, allow us to reconsider the existing research on queer youth suicidality and, in so doing, identify the impact of some of the bias in the literature. Savin-Williams (2005) maintains that the experiences of queer youth who never ideate suicide are as important as the experiences of those who do if we wish to fully comprehend the nature of both risk and resiliency within the queer youth population. Perhaps most importantly, the reintegration of Durkheim's theories into the study of queer youth suicide points to the limitations of the individualistic identity model of sexual orientation as a way of conceptualizing which youth are to be the focus of such investigations.

## References

- Anderson, D.A. (1995). Lesbian and gay adolescents: Social and developmental considerations. In G. Unks (Ed.), *The gay teen: Educational practice and theory for lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents* (pp. 17–28). New York: Routledge.
- Bagley, C., & Tremblay, P. (1997). Suicidality problems of gay and bisexual males: Evidence from a random community survey of 750 men aged 18 to 27. In C. Bagley & R. Ramsay (Eds.), *Suicidal behaviour in adolescents and adults* (pp. 177–195). Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing.
- Baker, J.M. (2002). *How homophobia hurts children: Nurturing diversity at home, at school, and in the community*. New York: Harrington Park Press.
- Birden, S. (2005). *Rethinking sexual identity in education*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Botnick, M.R., Heath, K.V., Cornelisse, P.G.A., Strathdee, S.A., Martindale, S.L., & Hogg, R.S. (2002). Correlates of suicide attempts in an open cohort of young men who have sex with men. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 93(1), 59–63.
- Cover, R. (2005). Queer subjects of suicide: Cultural studies, sexuality and youth suicide concepts in New Zealand. *New Zealand Sociology*, 20(1), 78–101.
- Dankmeijer, P. & Kuyper, L. (2006). Setting the agenda for LGBT youth research. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education*, 3(2), 95–101.
- D'Augelli, A., & Grossman, A. (2006). Researching lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth: Conceptual, practical, and ethical considerations. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues In Education*, 3(2/3), 35–56.
- Dorais, M., & Lajeunesse, S.L. (2004). *Dead boys can't dance: Sexual orientation, masculinity, and suicide*. (P. Tremblay, Trans.) Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Durkheim, E. (1979). *Suicide: A study in sociology*. (J. A. Spaulding & G. Simpson, Trans.) New York: Free Press. (Original work published 1897)
- Fenaughty, J., & Harré, N. (2003). Life on the seesaw: A qualitative study of suicide resiliency factors for young gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 45(1), 1–22.

- Kinsman, G. (1996). *The regulation of desire: Homo and hetero sexualities* (2nd ed.). Montréal: Black Rose Books.
- Kulkin, H.S., Chauvin, E.A., & Percle, G.A. (2000). Suicide among gay and lesbian adolescents: A review of the literature. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 40(1), 1–29.
- Lebson, M. (2002). Suicide among homosexual youth. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 42(4), 107–117.
- McNinch, J., & Cronin, M. (Eds.). (2004). *“I could not speak my heart”: Education and social justice for gay and lesbian youth*. Regina: University of Regina Press.
- The (re)searching of queer youth. (2008). *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 5(3), 1–3.
- Mutchler, M.G., Ayala, G., & Neith, K.L. (2005). Safer sex stories told by young gay men: Building on resiliency through gay-boy talk. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education*, 2(3), 37–50.
- Rivers, I. (2000). Social exclusion, absenteeism and sexual minority youth. *Support for Learning*, 15(1), 13–18.
- Russell, S.T. (2005). Beyond risk: Resilience in the lives of sexual minority youth. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Issues in Education*, 2(3), 5–18.
- Savin-Williams, R. (2001). A critique of research on sexual-minority youths. *Journal of Adolescence*, 24, 5–13.
- Savin-Williams, R. (2005). *The new gay teenager*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Thompson, S. & Johnston, L. (2003). Risk factors of gay, lesbian, and bisexual adolescents: Review of empirical literature and practice implications. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 8(2/3), 111–128.
- Thorlindsson, T., & Bjarnason, T. (1998). Modelling Durkheim on the micro level: A study of youth suicidality. *American Sociological Review*, 63(1), 94–110.

# “Three Strikes” Strikes Out: The Real Impact of California’s Three Strikes Law

*Michael Kehl*

Passed in 1994 amid an atmosphere of crime hysteria, California’s “Three Strikes” law eliminated the state’s indeterminate sentencing laws and replaced them with mandatory sentencing. This reform was not unique to California. Throughout the mid-1990s, over half of American states instituted similar policies. California’s law remains by far the strictest. It is also the most frequently enforced, with 90% of all third strike convictions in the United States (U.S.) coming from within that state (Shepherd, 2002). Proponents of the Three Strikes law argue that the law is effective at targeting violent and repeat offenders. As an indication of the law’s efficacy, they point to the drop in crime rates that occurred immediately following its implementation (California Attorney General, 2007).

While crime in California declined significantly following implementation of the law, it remains uncertain whether the Three Strikes law caused the decline. Taking a broader view—with fourteen years since the Three Strikes law was enacted—we are confronted with a more disturbing picture. Evidence shows that the Three Strikes law has disproportionately targeted minorities and those with low socio-economic status. With closer scrutiny it becomes apparent that California’s Three Strikes law is not responsible for the decline in the state’s crime rates. It has had significant negative social and economic effects, as well as overburdened the state’s prison and court systems, ironically exacerbating the problems that lawmakers had hoped to correct.

Leading up to 1994, public perception in California was that crime—especially violent crime—was on the rise. The 1992 murder of Kimberly Reynolds by paroled repeat offender Joe Davis during an attempted robbery brought the situation to a head, and led to the drafting of the first iteration of the Three Strikes legislation (Thompson, 2002). Originally titled “Bill 971,” the legislation went before the Assembly Public Safety committee in April 1993 and was soundly defeated (Vitiello, 2001). This might well have been the end of Bill 971 were it not for the kidnapping of Polly Klass the following year. Klass was kidnapped, and subsequently murdered, by Richard Allen Davis, a man who would quickly become an exemplar of the problems with California’s justice system. Davis had an extensive criminal record that was 11 pages long, including two previous convictions for kidnapping. Yet, he was released on parole (Vitiello, 2001). Klass’s death, combined with the already existing public perception that crime was on the rise, created a surge of voter support (Walsh, 2007; Domanick, 2008). Within weeks of Polly Klass’s murder, the Three Strikes law was on its way to becoming the fastest qualifying voter initiative in California’s history (Vitiello, 2001).

The implementation of the Three Strikes law did away with California’s indeterminate sentencing laws, and replaced them with mandatory sentencing schemes for repeat

offenders. Under the Three Strikes law, a defendant's first serious or violent offence is not subject to additional penalties other than those that would have been incurred under previous laws. It simply counts as a "first strike." If a defendant is convicted of a second violent or serious felony, however, the law mandates a doubling of the sentence for that crime. This second conviction also serves as the "second strike" (Cal. Penal Code § 18.3559, 1994). If a defendant is convicted of a third violent or serious felony, they would then be subject to a triple sentence, a life sentence, or an independent sentence by the court—whichever is *greatest* (Cal. Penal Code § 18.3559, 1994). This sentencing scheme differs from those of other states with similar laws in two ways. First, it automatically doubles the sentence for second offences. Second, and more importantly, the offender's "third strike" can result from a conviction for any felony, not just a violent one (Cal. Penal Code § 18.3559, 1994). The underlying assumption of this scheme is a simple deterrent mechanism: all things being equal, a person should be less likely to commit a crime if the penalty is increased.

Following the implementation of the Three Strikes law, crime rates in California experienced a significant decline. The violent crime rate dropped by nearly 50% between 1994 and 2005, from 992 to 512 per 100,000 people (California Attorney General, 2007). A similar decrease was observed in property crime rates over the same period (California Attorney General, 2007). What make these statistics even more striking is not only that these changes occurred immediately after the implementation of the law, but also that they marked an abrupt end to a trend of rising crime rates observed throughout the middle and latter part of the twentieth century (California Attorney General, 2007). While these statistics seem to indicate the Three Strikes law's success in reducing crime, when assessed within a broader context these results are less impressive.

Crime statistics across the U.S. reveal that the crime rates dropped in many other states by a similar degree, including those states that did not adopt a Three Strikes law. After 1994, crime rates in most states were essentially following the same downward trend as in California. Kovandiznik, Sloan, and Lynne (2004) compared the crime rates of 188 American cities and found that there was no statistically significant difference in the reduction in crime between the 110 cities in the study that had passed Three Strikes laws and those that had not. These results are consistent with those of Marvel and Moody's (2001) study involving a different sample of U.S. cities. Disturbingly, both of the aforementioned studies reported an increase in the homicide rate of 10-13% in all 24 of the states that had enacted Three Strikes laws. It appears that Three Strikes laws created a situation in which offenders facing their third strike had nothing—or too much—to lose. Knowing that they were already facing a life sentence should they be convicted, regardless of the severity of the crime, they became more likely to murder witnesses or police officers in order to escape prosecution. This hypothesis was supported by a recent study of inmates, in which 54% of respondents stated that they would be likely to kill a witness or law enforcement officer since they knew they were already going to receive a life sentence. These numbers jumped to 62% for those who claimed gang membership (Schafer, 1999).

Aside from the statistical evidence, there are several other reasons that suggest that the Three Strikes law did not cause the decline in crime rates. Murderers and rapists, the intended targets of Three Strikes legislation, would be undeterred by the new increased incarceration periods. Since first strike convictions carry no harsher penalties than prior laws, there is essentially no difference between the new sentences and those that would have previously been given for these crimes. For the vast majority of violent crimes, the

first strike sentences handed down under the Three Strikes Law are no greater, and in some cases are less, than those which would have been handed down under previous laws (Vitiello, 2001). In fact, the structure of the Three Strikes law ensures that the only major sentencing differences occur in cases involving minor crimes. For example, if a person is charged with murder as their third strike, they will receive the same 25-year sentence as they would have under previous laws (Thompson, 2002). Conversely, if that person's third strike conviction is for petty theft, they are now subject to the same 25-year sentence as the murderer, rather than the 6 months in jail or \$1000 fine that would have been imposed under previous laws (Thompson, 2002).

As first strike convictions do not require harsher penalties, any drop in crime rates produced by the Three Strikes law should have been delayed rather than immediate. "For example, the effects of a Three Strikes sentence for an offender sentenced to twenty-five-years-to-life instead of, say, six years, would not show up until after that sixth year of imprisonment" (Vitiello, 2002). It is only after this point that the Three Strikes law is increasing the duration of the inmate's sentence. Until this point there is no difference between the sentence received under the new law and that prior laws. The fact that the drop in crime rates occurred immediately following the law's implementation suggests the decline was not due to the longer terms of incarceration.

The argument remains that this immediate drop in crime rates was caused by the deterrent effect of the new, harsher sentences. This contention, however, assumes that criminals are constantly weighing the costs and benefits of their crimes, which is not always the case. A sample of burglars convicted as third strike offenders found that 80% of them had no expectation of getting caught and 83% were completely unaware that their crimes were subject to the Three Strikes law (Thompson, 2002). Criminals' lack of awareness that their actions constituted a third strike offence is not surprising, as a wide variety of offences can constitute a third strike.

Under California's Three Strikes law, the third strike does not have to be a violent crime. Indeed, this is the primary reason for the disproportionately high number of third strike convictions in California compared to the rest of the U.S. This stipulation ensures that the three strikes law tends to target petty—not violent—crimes. Approximately 80% of current third strike offenders are serving a life sentence for relatively minor felonies; of that 80%, a vast majority were convicted of drug possession (California Attorney General, 2007). Incarcerating people for minor offences does little to affect the overall crime rate as groups, and not individuals, typically commit these offences. This makes minor offences subject to what is described as "criminal replacement"—the process that occurs when a group member who is incarcerated is replaced by a new person who is recruited to fill the vacancy (Clear, 2007). Targeting minor offences then may actually serve to increase gang membership as, upon release, the original offender may rejoin their original gang, after the gang may have recruited another offender to fill the absence caused by the original member's incarceration (Vitiello, 2001).

Within ethnic minority communities, the effects of the Three Strikes law are felt the most. Although this situation is not unique to California, and may be a broader feature of the American legal system, members of minority communities in California are especially targeted due to a combination of the aforementioned discrepancies in California's drug laws as well as increased "quality-of-life" policing. Quality-of-life policing takes a proactive and preventative approach to policing, rather than the incident-based approach of traditional law enforcement (Xu, Fiedler, & Flaming, 2005). By subjecting people to regular searches and using minor offence arrests to detect and detain more serious criminals, proponents



of Quality-of-life policing hope that a sense of law and order will be introduced, and that crime will decrease (Xu, Fiedler, & Flaming, 2005). Inner-city communities, which are primarily populated by ethnic minorities, are the most common targets for these quality-of-life policing initiatives (Xu, Fiedler, & Flaming, 2005). As a result, ethnic minorities experience more frequent contact with police, as well as additional random searches. By simple probability then, ethnic minorities are more likely to be caught committing crimes.

This situation is further exacerbated by California's drug laws, which consider the possession of five or more grams of crack cocaine a felony. This amount is small enough to create a scenario in which personal use and commercial distribution are targeted in the same manner. Since the vast majority of crack cocaine users in California are either Black or Hispanic (Riley, 1998), a situation results in which those serving time for minor drug offences are ethnic minorities. Indeed, 90% of those prosecuted for possession of crack cocaine in California are Black (California Attorney General, 2000). The above situation is part of a larger overall disparity in arrests, with Blacks and Hispanics accounting for slightly more than half of all drug arrests, despite representing only 28% of the total adult population (California Attorney General, 2000). This situation was the same before the implementation of the Three Strikes law; however, once possession of crack cocaine became a "strikeable" offence, these same offenders began to rapidly accumulate strikes. The end result is an overrepresentation of ethnic minorities amongst first and second strike offenders, as well as those sentenced to life following their third strike (Walsh, 2007).

The lengthy periods of incarceration brought about by Three Strikes legislation have dire consequences for the families of the convicted. Children of an offender are forced to grow up without one of their parents. Further, if the offender was employed in the period before their incarceration, their family is now left without a major source of income. Placing a substantial burden on an already struggling family, the loss of income may even encourage some to turn to other criminal activity in order to attempt to make ends meet. There is evidence that children with an incarcerated parent are three to four times more likely to have a juvenile record (Clear, 2008). Another way families frequently respond to these financial pressures is by moving, resulting in more crowded living conditions (if the family moves in with relatives) or changes in education districts—both of which can lead to increased hardship for children (Clear, 2008). If the offender was violent, the danger posed to his or her family and community would undoubtedly outweigh these long-term consequences, but a look at the demographics of those incarcerated shows that the majority are non-violent offenders (California Attorney General, 2007).



In addition to increasing the minority population in prisons, the law is also increasing the average age of inmates. Under California's penal code previous strikes are never removed from an offender's criminal record, regardless of how long ago they occurred (Cal. Penal Code § 18.3559, 1994). As a consequence, many older people, who found themselves frequently involved in the criminal justice system in their early years, are now facing their third strike. Should they be convicted of a relatively minor offence, such as

petty theft or drug possession, they are given a mandatory life sentence, despite the fact that they are likely near the end of their criminal career and do not pose a threat to society which warrants 25 years in prison. Crime, especially violent crime, is committed primarily by young adults. Violent crime typically peaks at age eighteen and declines rapidly after that (Siegel, 2008). Those persons between the ages of thirteen and seventeen make up six percent of the U.S. population, but account for 17% of arrests for all crimes (Siegel, 2008). In contrast, those aged forty-five and older, who represent 32% of the U.S. population, account for only seven percent of arrests (Siegel, 2008). The average age of a person being sentenced on their third strike is 36.1, past the age when they are likely to be a significant threat to society (Males & Macallair, 1999).

Not only does the imprisonment of older, lower risk offenders fails to deter crime, but it also significantly effects the cost of the prison and court systems. One estimate puts the costs associated with the incarceration of geriatric inmates at three times that of normal prisoners (Vitiello, 2001). California now spends nine percent of its general fund—approximately \$4 billion—on corrections each year (Turner, Greenwood, & Fain, 1999). The increase in the incarceration rate is also accompanied by an increase in the operating costs of the courts. Three Strikes laws have removed all incentive for defendants to plead guilty, so most defendants attempt to stretch their trials out as long as possible by exercising every possible right afforded to them by due process, even if guilty. Olson (2000) reports that the number of cases that went to trial in Los Angeles increased 144% in the one-year period following the introduction of the Three Strikes law. She documents the situation in San Diego, which was even worse: prosecutors pled out only 14% of second strike cases and 6% of third strike cases. Eventually, the county had to come up with special courts whose sole purpose was to handle three strikes cases (Olson, 2000).

Funding for the criminal justice system competes directly with healthcare, welfare, and education; consequently, funding required to pay for the ever-increasing costs of the prison and court systems is taken directly out of these programs (Rand Corporation, 1994). California's first response to its rising prison costs was to increase university tuition. While the state's population has grown by almost five million in the last ten years, its university enrolment has declined by around twenty thousand (Thompson, 2002). It appears that channelling money out of higher education to implement the Three Strikes Law may have resulted in an ironic trade-off between funding for the justice system and education programs which could actually prevent crime. Merton's strain theory suggests that for society to maintain a normative function there must be a balance between aspirations and the means to fulfill such aspirations (Merton, 1968). If the goals are not attainable through an accepted mode, then illegitimate means might be used to attain the same goal (Merton, 1968). Looking at the situation in this light, it seems possible that compromising education may actually lead to an increase of the amount of crime. As the Three Strikes law continues to age the prison population, resulting in higher costs, the barriers to higher education will likely continue to get higher.

There is no convincing evidence that the Three Strikes law has had a deterring effect on crime in California. Though intended to deter violent crime, it appears as though the law has resulted in more severe sentences for relatively minor crimes. Three Strikes legislation created a much larger, as well as a much older, prison population. The escalating support costs of this population are already beginning to result in cutbacks to education and social programs. These trends may work to increase the amount of criminality within that state.

Three Strikes legislation has been both financially and socially expensive without clearly delivering on any of the proponents' promises. As the law continues to overburden the court and prison systems, there can only be two real outcomes. First, more money will have to be taken from education or social programs to support the additional incarceration of non-violent offenders—a situation likely to increase crime rates over the long term. Second, offenders serving sentences for minor crimes will likely be granted early release, which essentially defeats the purpose of the Three Strikes law. While the complete abolition of Three Strikes legislation would be somewhat extreme, and politically difficult, redrafting the law to target violent, rather than non-violent, offenders would represent a dramatic improvement. Clearly, a significant reworking of California's Three Strikes law is in order.

### References

- California Attorney General. (2007). *Key facts*. Retrieved November 5, 2007, from Criminal Justice Statistics Centre: <http://ag.ca.gov/cjsc/keyfacts.php>
- California Attorney General. (2000). *Report on drug arrests in California from 1990-1999*. Retrieved February 20, 2009, from Criminal Justice Statistics Centre: <http://ag.ca.gov/cjsc/publications/misc/drugarrests/drugarrests.pdf>
- Cal. Penal Code § 18.3559, 1994. Retrieved November 5, 2007, from Findlaw for Legal Professionals: <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/cacodes/pen.html>
- Clear, T. (2007). The impacts of incarceration on public safety. *Social Research*, 74(2), 613-630.
- Clear, T. (2008). The effects of high imprisonment rates on communities. *Crime and Justice*, 37(97), 97-132.
- Domanick, J. (2008, January 6). Prisoners of panic. *The Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved March 12, 2009, from [p://www.latimes.com](http://www.latimes.com)
- Kovandzic, T., Sloan, J., & Lynne, V. (2004). "Striking out" as crime reduction policy: The impact of "Three Strikes" laws on crime rates in U.S. cities. *Justice Quarterly*, 21(2), 207-239.
- Males, M., & Macallair, D. (1999). Striking out: The failure of California's Three Strikes and you're out. *Stanford Law & Policy Review*, 11(1), 65-74.
- Marvell, T. B., & Moody, C. E. (2001). The lethal effects of Three Strikes laws. *The Journal of Legal Studies*, 30(1), 89-106.
- Merton, R. K. (1968). *Social theory and social structure*. New York: Free Press.
- Olson, T. (2000). Strike one, ready for more?: The consequences of plea bargaining "first strike" offenders under California's "Three Strikes" law. *California Western Law Review*, 36, 545-570.
- Rand Corporation. (1994). *Three strikes and you're out: Estimated benefits and costs of California's new mandatory sentencing law*. Santa Monica: Rand.
- Riley, J. (1998). *Crack, powder cocaine, and heroin: Drug purchase and use patterns in Six U.S. cities*. Retrieved March 12, 2009, from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/167265.pdf>
- Schafer, J. (1999). The deterrent effect of Three Strikes law. *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 68(4), 6-10.
- Shepherd, J. M. (2002). Fear of the first strike: The full deterrent effect of California's two

- and Three-strikes legislation. *The Journal of Legal Studies*, 31(1), 159-201.
- Siegel, L. J. (2008). *Criminology: The core*. New York: Thompson.
- Thompson, C. (2002). The impact of Three-Strikes: A socio legal perspective. *Law and Society Journal at the University of California, Santa Barbara*, 1, 17-28.
- Turner, S., Greenwood, E., & Fain, T. (1999). The impact of truth-in-sentencing and Three Strikes legislation: Prison populations, state budgets, and crime rates. *Stanford Law and Policy Review*, 11(1), 75-91.
- Vitiello, M. (2001). Three Strikes: Can we return to rationality? *The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, 87(2), 395-481.
- Walsh, J. E. (2007). *Three Strikes laws*. Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Xu, Y., Fiedler, M. L., & Flaming, K. H. (2005). Discovering the impact of community policing: The broken windows thesis, collective efficacy, and citizens' judgement. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 42(2), 147-186.

# Culturally Appropriating the *Inuksuk*

*Brigitte Drescher and Amy Trebelco*

Much scholarly attention has focused on the complexities of the cultural appropriation of First Nations art and the impact of aboriginal tourism on First Nations peoples (Blundell, 2002; Coombe, 1998; Mawani, 2004). First Nations artifacts have been used to promote Canadian culture and tourism both in Canada and around the world (Mawani, 2004). First Nations totem poles have been appropriated by the Canadian government in order to encourage tourism to specific Canadian locations at which select histories are presented to show the First Nations involvement and impact in Canada, not necessarily to the advantage of the First Nations peoples themselves (Blundell, 2002; Mawani, 2004). This paper will explore the appropriation of First Nations symbols for use in Canadian tourism with a comprehensive examination of the selection and use of the logo for the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver. By reviewing the scholarly literature, and drawing from existing definitions and theories, we will argue that cultural appropriation of First Nations culture has occurred in the selection and use of an *inuksuk* as the symbol for the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games.

## *Mapping the Terrain of Cultural Appropriation*

A key aspect of cultural appropriation is the ownership or the design origin of the art or symbol and to whom the rights of use belong. Several scholars, such as Lisa Meekison (2000), Claire Smith, Heather Burke, and Graeme K. Ward (2000), and Charlotte Townsend-Gault (2004) have argued that the First Nations community owns the Indigenous art and symbols that are used in societies other than their own. The misuse and displacement of Indigenous art and designs by non-First Nations peoples is a form of cultural appropriation that can be likened to theft, in that when these images and designs become separated from the identities of Indigenous people they become disconnected from their origins (Brown, 1998; Smith et al., 2000; Townsend-Gault, 2004). In addition, Meekison (2000) has proposed that any representation of Indigenous culture that is done by non-Indigenous people is a form of cultural appropriation. Although the issue of image ownership is not always clear, cultural appropriation is further complicated in the First Nations community because the image or object in question is rarely owned by a single person—it is actually owned or created by the community or family line and has been passed through many generations (Townsend-Gault, 2004).

When it comes to using First Nations symbols or aspects of culture for non-Indigenous Canadian uses, First Nations involvement is vital in the selection and acquisition process. Even in a situation where informed consent has been given, it is difficult for any cultural group to predict the effects or the potential impact on

their culture resulting from the use of their symbols by others (Brown, 1998; Smith et al., 2000). In some cases, there has been aboriginal involvement in the selection and use of their cultural symbols for the benefit of other organizations. Both the Sydney Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) and the Vancouver Olympic Organizing Committee (VANOC) held design competitions to allow for such involvement (Godwell, 2000; Meekison, 2000). Godwell (2000) contended that Indigenous peoples in Australia, although involved in the creation of the logo, allowed appropriation to occur in order to support Sydney's Olympic bid.

To prevent cultural appropriation, the original, traditional, and intended meaning must remain attached to the cultural item and be preserved during its use. Townsend-Gault (2004) argued that sacred objects represent the "unrepresentable," referring to their ability to stand for cultural significance, which may otherwise be considered "invisible" (p. 197). Furthermore, she claimed that sacred objects should not be employed out of their cultural context or as a source of spectacle. Often when culture is appropriated, a loss of significance occurs. When First Nations symbols are presented out of their original and intended context, non-First Nations people may be unable to comprehend the sizeable cultural significance of the symbol, resulting in a lack of understanding and respect for the cultural group. The non-First Nations observer may romanticize the Other and seek something "authentically" First Nations, which can be attained by appropriating the culture; through this process the traditional meanings of culture are often distorted (Glass, 2002; Townsend-Gault, 1998, 2004). Culturally appropriated images tend to reinforce stereotypes of First Nations people, as opposed to First Nations' perception of themselves (Godwell, 2000; Meekison, 2000).

Society creates definitions of First Nations culture, often through marketing. Culture can be used for economic purposes, but any marketing should compensate the group to which the culture belongs. Transnational corporations often appropriate indigenous knowledge for commercial benefit, and in turn, First Nations seek their share of the profits (Brown, 1998). Brown (1998) and Meekison (2000) have asserted that the use of Indigenous culture in marketing is not problematic if it benefits Indigenous people.

Tourism can also be both empowering and disadvantageous to First Nations people. It can allow First Nations to express their authentic culture to tourists in an attempt to counteract stereotyping (Blundell, 2002). For instance, First Nations groups host their own museums so that they may "recontextualize and reappropriate" their culture (Glass, 2002, p. 103). There has been a need for restoration of the original representation and meaning of First Nations culture to counteract the appropriation through tourism that has been transpiring since colonialism (Glass, 2002). In a continuation of this appropriation, First Nations cultures in Canada have been promoted overseas merely as "cultural attractions," whereby "Canadian 'culture' including the presence in Canada of Native cultures [are] important 'drawers' of tourism dollars" (Blundell, 2002, p. 40). Tourism must find a balance between economic gain and an authentic representation of aboriginal culture (Blundell, 2002).

Although First Nations culture may not be acknowledged as an everyday national symbol in Canada, it is often used to represent the nation, and to attract tourism. For example, Canadian artist Ellen Neel showcased and sold her Northwest Coast art during a period of time in Canada when nationalism was thriving. Neel's "Totem Art Studio" in Stanley Park helped to create the moniker of "Totem Land" for British Columbia (Townsend-Gault, 2004, p. 194), which was a large draw for tourists to the area. As

a First Nations artist, Neel saw the sale of her art as economically benefiting to her native community, yet others considered it deplorable to use her culture as a lure for tourists (Townsend-Gault, 2004). As Mawani (2004) explained, Canada has used totem poles as a means of drawing tourists to an area in order to showcase Canadian culture. For instance, the totem poles found in Stanley Park not only represented First Nations culture, they also displayed British Columbia in a positive light. However, there was no mention of the negative circumstances that surrounded the totem poles in Stanley Park, which included the relocation of First Nations settlements, pending land claims, or the removal of the totem poles from their original locations in First Nations communities (Mawani, 2004).

Commodification of First Nations' cultures may bolster the tourism industry, but commodities are not treated with the respect that a cultural group would provide for their symbols; formerly highly valued cultural objects become circulated as "cheap" or "degraded" or "commercialized" versions (Townsend-Gault, 2004, p. 195). Frequently, "Native aesthetics serve as a resource pool for Canadian identity [which] Canadians dip into when they wish to give something 'very Canadian' to someone else" (Barsh, 2005, p. 273). However, when non-First Nations people use a First Nations symbol for their own advantage, whether to promote nationalism or as a logo for a mega-event, the First Nations community does not benefit (Glass, 2002; Meekison, 2000). Using a First Nations symbol "...is a way for non-Natives to replenish their own dwindling supplies of cultural capital" (Townsend-Gault, 1998). Although Canada may be trying to culturally benefit from the use of First Nations symbols to further its own cultural identity, the First Nations community becomes culturally disadvantaged. Too often, First Nations culture is depicted solely in terms of symbols—their art, crafts, and attire—and there is no reference to First Nations' contributions to economics or politics.

The use of the appropriated culture should accurately reflect the current social situation. Townsend-Gault (2005) explained Marxist theorist Guy Debord's conception of a "society of the spectacle," which has a "dazzle effect" that "deflects attention from political and economic realities" (p. 211). Moreover, Townsend-Gault (2004) acknowledged that there is a publicly supported liberal desire to correct historical injustices and this is attempted through "spectacularization" (p. 219). This spectacularization was exemplified during the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. Although Indigenous Australians were experiencing social and economic disadvantage, their lives and cultures were "sanitized" to promote tourism, advertising, and marketing (Meekison, 2000, p. 110). The current social situation in British Columbia includes much unresolved conflict for First Nations peoples, yet VANOC hides the atrocious historical facts and present-day struggles in their display of First Nations culture to the world. If and when First Nations issues are brought to the forefront, they are typically reduced to mere land issues, such as First Nations claims to specific areas in Vancouver, instead of focusing on greater issues which are prevalent in First Nations communities, including a lack of funding for communities and poor living conditions on reserves. The issues faced by First Nations peoples in British Columbia and the rest of Canada often relegate them to a subordinate position in Canadian society or, as Barsh (2005) has noted, the common belief that First Nations people have simply *contributed* to Canadian society, thus posing a challenge to the fact that First Nations are the *First Peoples* of Canada.

In summary, scholars have looked at many issues in regards to cultural

appropriation of First Nations culture (Barsh, 2005; Blundell, 2002; Brown, 1998; Glass, 2002; Godwell, 2000; Mawani, 2004; Meekison, 2000; Smith et al, 2000; Townsend-Gault, 1998, 2004, 2005). These issues include the rights and ownership associated with the image or culture of First Nations, as well as the degree of their involvement in the decision-making process for the use of the culture. Also important is how the meaning of the image in question is conveyed, and the economic benefit associated with its use. Finally, the acknowledgement of current social issues impacts the use of the image. We will address these issues further, specifically in the context of the use of the First Nations *inuksuk* as the symbol for the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games.



*The Inuksuk at English Bay, Vancouver, British Columbia*

*Photo by Hélène Frohard-Dourlent*

### *Investigating the Olympic Use of the Inuksuk*

With the selection and presentation of *Ilanaaq*, the logo for the 2010 Olympic Games, on April 23, 2005, we began an investigation into cultural appropriation and the new Olympic symbol. Using newspapers as data for our analysis, we focused on eleven articles published between April 23 and May 6, 2005, which pertained to the selection and unveiling of the Olympic symbol. These articles appeared in *The Vancouver Sun*, *Nunatsiaq News* (Nunavut's territorial newspaper), *Vancouver Courier*, *The Georgia Strait*, and *Edmonton Journal*. We utilized the data to obtain important information and logistics of the design competition and selection process for the Olympic symbol. We then focused particularly on the perspective of VANOC, as represented in quotes from CEO John Furlong, and the point of view

of First Nations in Canada. We extracted quotes from both parties and compared and contrasted them in order to understand conflicting opinions and reactions to the selection of *Ilanaaq*. With a foundation based on the scholarly literature on cultural appropriation, we will explicate our claim that the selection of *Ilanaaq* as the symbol for the 2010 Olympic Games is a form of cultural appropriation.

The Inuit in Arctic Canada have been living in the North for over 4000 years; they were one of the first peoples in North America, along with other First Nations groups residing in more southern regions (Wallace, 1999). One of the Inuit's most prominent cultural symbols is the *inuksuk* [ee-nook-sook]. In their simplest form, *inuksuit* [ee-nook-sweet], plural for *inuksuk*, are rocks balanced on one another in various arrangements. According to Norman Hallendy, an *inuksuit* expert, some *inuksuit* have been present in the Arctic for hundreds of years (Wallace, 1999). Thus, the Inuit people of Canada are



most likely the original creators of *inuksuit*. Despite the Inuit origin of *inuksuit*, *Ilanaaq*'s designer is Elena Rivera MacGregor from the Rivera Design Group, a non-Inuit and non-First Nations woman in Vancouver (Fowlie, 2005c). According to Meekison (2000) and Townsend-Gault's (2004) prior arguments, because a non-First Nations person designed the symbol, this could already be considered cultural appropriation. Nevertheless, there are more aspects that we wish to explore.

The second area of inquiry is First Nations' involvement in the selection and acquisition process. VANOC held a design competition to choose the logo for the 2010 Olympic Games. This competition was open to all people of Canada regardless of experience or age and allowed people nationwide to participate (Fowlie, 2005a). According to John Furlong (2005), CEO of VANOC, the goal of the design competition was to:

design an emblem that speaks clearly to both Canadian and Olympic values, a symbol that will strengthen over time, a once-seen-never-forgotten logo. It had to appeal to all—adults, children, males and females and it had to be rooted in Canadian culture. (p. A17)

*The Vancouver Sun* reported that the judges took 36 hours to choose one logo from 1633 entries (Fowlie, 2005b). The consensus on the emblem came from the following panel of nine judges: Ron Burnett, President of Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design; Brad Copeland, creator of Atlanta's bid logo in 1996; Scott Givens, Vice-President of Entertainment for Disney Entertainment Productions; Rod Harris, President and CEO of Tourism British Columbia; Theodora Mantzaris, Manager of the Image and Identity Department of the 2004 Athens Olympic Organizing Committee; Steve Mykolyn, Creative Director of Design and Interactive at Taxi Advertising and Design; Wei Yew, graphic designer; Terry Chui, Art Director for Electronic Arts Canada; and Dorothy Grant, a high-end fashion designer and traditional Haida artist (Fowlie, 2005b). Grant, who is of Haida origin and was born in Alaska, is the only First Nations person on the panel (Fowlie, 2005b). Her fashion designs, which are covered with Haida symbols, retail for hundreds and even thousands of dollars per piece (see [www.dorothygrant.com](http://www.dorothygrant.com)). Grant has commodified her culture for personal economic gain. Perhaps her unique career situation biased her decision to allow another First Nations symbol to be used for economic gain during the 2010 Olympics. Certainly, Grant's involvement alone does not qualify as adequate First Nations' participation in the selection and acquisition of the *Ilanaaq* symbol.

Before officially choosing the final design, it was necessary to gain approval from certain key players, namely the Premier of the territory of Nunavut, Paul Okalik, and President of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), the national Inuit organization in Canada, Jose Kusugak. Gordon Campbell "called Kusugak...to tell him an *inuksuk* [sic] was under consideration for the 2010 symbol" (Woolley, 2005). Okalik was quoted by *The Vancouver Sun* giving his approval of the symbol; he was also present at the unveiling on April 23, 2005 (Fowlie, 2005c). The symbol that was unveiled was named *Ilanaaq* [ih-lah-nawk], a "stylized" *inuksuk* (Fowlie, 2005c, p. B5).

There is contention over the meaning of the *inuksuk* symbol and how VANOC has conveyed it to the public. The majority of discussion surrounding *Ilanaaq* has been provided by Furlong (2005), and in an extensive article he defended VANOC's chosen symbol in the face of any criticism. He stated:

this smiling, stylized *inuksuk* [sic] reminds us of our own spirit, the humility of the Canadian character...our timeless tradition for endurance and

teamwork...our steadfast belief in equality for everyone and a constant reminder that to be here is to be safe. (p. A17)

Furlong's attempt to express the symbol's importance in terms of emotions and sentiments, rather than the traditional functions and significance, does not correctly convey the intended meanings of the Inuit *inuksuk* symbol. In an article in *The Vancouver Sun*, Furlong makes the universal statement that "an inukshuk [sic] is an Inuit symbol of friendship" (Fowlie, 2005c, p. B5). Although the Inuktitut word *Ilanaaq* does mean "friend" or "buddy" (Woolley, 2005), the meanings of *inuksuit* have been misconstrued. In *The Inuksuk Book*, Mary Wallace (1999) explains:

For those who understand their forms, *inuksuit* in the Arctic are very important helpers: they can show direction, tell about a good hunting or fishing area, show where food is stored, indicate a good resting place, or act as a message center. (p. 15)

This obviously does not coincide with Furlong's list of *inuksuk*-conveyed meanings.

In addition to this misinterpretation of the original meanings of *inuksuit*, the symbol has been further misconstrued through propaganda and misidentification. The explanation of *Ilanaaq's* colours is propagandist because it attempts to persuade the public that this symbol represents all of Canada. There are five different colors: the greens and blues stand for the coastal forests, mountain ranges, and islands; red signifies the maple leaf; and yellow represents the sunrise ("A bit of controversy," 2005). Beyond this aesthetic misinterpretation, the symbol has been improperly identified. The *Edmonton Journal* reported Arctic ethno-geographer Norman Hallendy clarifying that "the logo that is drawing so much attention isn't even an Inukshuk [sic]... Instead, *Ilanaaq* is an *innunguaq* [ee-non-WAWK], a more obscure Inuit symbol that resembles a human form" (VanderKlippe, 2005, p. A5). Additionally, while he confirms that *Ilanaaq* means "buddy," Jose Kusugak, ITK President, argues that the International Olympic Committee has consistently misspelled the name and that the correct spelling is *Illannaq* (Woolley, 2005). Due to their complex nature, First Nations symbols appearing outside of their original cultural context may produce confusion in non-First Nations audiences.

Economic benefit plays a large role in determining whether cultural appropriation is occurring. In the case of *Ilanaaq*, as a symbol for a moneymaking, mega-event such as the Olympics, we question whether or not the symbol owners are receiving economic benefit. For example, Elena Rivera MacGregor's winning design garnered her a \$25,000 cash reward, as well as two tickets to the Olympic opening ceremonies (Fowlie, 2005a). Where is the economic benefit for the First Nations people who have originally created this symbol? In Kalimantan, Indonesia, it is possible for cultural appropriation to occur by way of a formal ceremony, whereby the group wishing to use the "design" pays for the permission to use it, which helps to ensure a "profound respect for the cultural property rights of others" and the proper acknowledgement of the origins of the design (Smith et al, 2000, p. 10). In this example, proper economic remuneration occurs along with a special ceremony in order to transfer both the meaning and the rights to use the symbol from one group to the next. Perhaps there should have been a financial exchange and ceremony between the First Nations community and VANOC to use the First Nations symbol, more than just a simple phone call to ask for permission. It would also follow that MacGregor owes credit to the community and culture that inspired her Olympic design. The only *inuksuk* she has ever seen is located in English Bay (moved from its original Expo 1986 location) and was designed by Alvin Kanak, an Inuit artist ("Ilanaaq's inspiration," 2005).

Commodification, another element of economic gain, is a concern when using an *inuksuk* as the Olympic symbol. *The Vancouver Sun* sums up the end result with this: “It will be an image splashed on signs, embroidered on clothes, etched on pins and prominently displayed on advertisements around the world” (Fowle, 2005c, p. B5). Both VANOC and MacGregor feel that the logo “must reflect a national identity as well as be charming enough to sell millions of silk-screened t-shirts and baseball caps” (Fralic, 2005, p. B4). Tourists will want souvenirs to take home with them to remind them of their “Canadian experience,” and conveniently enough, the *inuksuk* can be made to fit in the palm of their hand in the form of magnets, pins, and key chains found in souvenir shops. In effect, VANOC will be the economic benefactor of what can be considered a “donation” of culture from the Inuit and First Nations communities. According to Denise Rideout’s 2003 article in *Nunatsiaq News*, the *inuksuk* was being commodified and misappropriated even before it became the Olympic symbol. It was found on t-shirts and key chains, company logos, and used by certain beer manufacturers (Rideout, 2003).

Canadians are able to use this image to symbolize a national culture. The image can be applied to the way of life and customs of the non-First Nations majority, in so far as it becomes an internationally recognized symbol of the nation. The same was done in Australia in 2000 when SOCOG used an Indigenous design to represent Australia and its people as a whole (Meekison, 2000). Because the Vancouver Olympics have yet to begin, it is impossible to foresee the entire impact that the use of this cultural symbol will have not only on Canadian culture, but more importantly, the First Nations culture from which the *inuksuk* is taken. Already, Grand Chief Edward John of the First Nations Summit has expressed his anger that this symbol does not represent his culture properly, and also fails to represent British Columbia (McMartin, 2005). Although John Furlong (2005) stated that the goal of the symbol was to represent “all of Canada” (p. A17), it does not take into account the fact that the Games are happening on the west coast of Canada and that the symbol chosen represents a very different region, northern Canada. It is obviously a challenge to represent all of Canada with a single image; however, the selected symbol is not representative of Vancouver, the host city for the Olympics, or British Columbia. The symbol does not incorporate Western Canadian First Nations art (“A bit of controversy,” 2005). Columnist Pete McMartin argues that VANOC is perpetuating the Canadian stereotype that “there isn’t any Canadian culture to speak of, other than rocks and ice and Mother Nature...” (McMartin, 2005, p. B6). While *Ilanaaq* is being used to symbolize the entire nation of Canada, it fails to accurately represent the host region for the mega-event for which it was designed due to a lack of relevant First Nations representation, as well as the issues of misinterpretation of the symbol itself.

As evidence of Guy Debord’s dazzle effect (Townsend-Gault, 2005), the current social issues faced by First Nations communities are masked by the seemingly positive contribution of their culture for Canada’s use on an international stage. This cultural appropriation is a tool to deflect attention away from the current social situation in which inequality persists. According to a November 2006 study conducted by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), entitled “Aboriginal Children Are Poorest in Country: Report,” one out of every four First Nations children live in poverty—this number jumps to two out of five when looking at those children living off reserve. The study revealed that the rates of disability among children and overcrowding in First Nations homes are double that of the rest of Canada. The article also reported that nearly half of aboriginal children live with a single parent, lack basic dental care, and/or

reside in a mould-contaminated home. *Nunatsiaq News* provides another example of the dazzle effect, in an article discussing the lack of funding for recreational facilities in the territory of Nunavut (“Hamlets struggle,” 2005). It is tragically ironic that the symbol for the Olympics—an international athletic and sporting event—has been taken from the Inuit culture, when many among the Nunavut population do not have adequate means to participate in sports (“Hamlets struggle,” 2005). Considering the inequality between Indigenous peoples and the rest of the Canadian population, it is irresponsible for VANOC to state that the Olympic symbol is representative of a “steadfast belief in equality for everyone” and to promote the “powerful message about our capacity to support and help one another” (Furlong, 2005, p. A17). This statement is an inaccurate portrayal of the social circumstances First Nations communities face in anticipation of the celebration of the Olympics in 2010.

### *Conclusion*

The use of the *inuksuk* for the logo of the 2010 Olympics is a case of cultural appropriation. Even though *Ilanaaq* was created by a non-First Nations person, its origins and ownership rights are with the Inuit First Nations community. There was not enough involvement of the First Nations people in the design and acquisition process, as only three First Nations representatives were consulted. With a population of hundreds of thousands First Nations peoples in Canada, there should have been a greater proportion of involvement. There is a significant cultural meaning behind the *inuksuk* and *Ilanaaq* in Inuit culture and this is being distorted and altered in order to propel VANOC’s profit-making endeavor to boost tourism by creating a national and economically viable Olympic logo. By using a cultural object of First Nations origin for the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games, it may devalue First Nations culture in the future by perpetuating stereotypes and misconception of meanings, as tourists lack the background knowledge about the culture to contextualize the importance of the symbol. The First Nations symbol is being used to positively represent Canada on an international scale, yet domestically, First Nations experience inequalities, which are masked by the spectacle of the Olympic Games. The use of this symbol creates a façade of equality and cultural contribution by all people of Canada regardless of ethnic group. Based on our analysis, cultural appropriation has begun with the selection of *Ilanaaq* as the symbol of the 2010 Olympics. As the mega-event approaches, cultural appropriation will likely amplify as the symbol is used.

### *References*

- A bit of controversy spices the launch of Olympic logo. (2005, April 26). *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A14.
- Aboriginal children are poorest in country: Report. (2006, November 24). *CBCnews.ca*. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2006/11/24/child-poverty.html>

- Barsh, R. L. (2005). Aboriginal peoples and Canada's conscience. In D.R. Newhouse, C. J. Voyageur & D. Beavon (Eds.), *Hidden in plain sight: Contributions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadian identity and culture* (pp. 270-291). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Blundell, V. (2002). Aboriginal cultural tourism in Canada. In J. Nicks & J. Sloniowski (Eds.), *Slippery pastimes: Reading the popular in Canadian culture* (pp. 37-60). Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier Press.
- Brown, M. F. (1998). Can culture be copyrighted? *Current Anthropology*, 39, 193-222.
- Coombe, R. J. (1998). *The cultural life of intellectual properties: Authorship, appropriation, and the law*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Fowlie, J. (2005a, April 23). Contest open to all. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. C3.
- Fowlie, J. (2005b, April 23). From a field of 1,600, they decide. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. C6.
- Fowlie, J. (2005c, April 25). Inukshuk picked as symbol of Olympics. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. B5.
- Fralic, S. (2005, April 28). Our logo gets a rocky ride. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. B4.
- Furlong, J. (2005, May 25). Ilanaaq certainly got us all talking. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. A17.
- Glass, A. (2002). (Cultural) objects of (cultural) value: Commodification and the development of a Northwest Coast artworld. In L. Jessup & S. Bragg (Eds.), *On Aboriginal representation in the gallery* (pp. 93-114). Hull: Canadian Museum of Civilization.
- Godwell, D. J. (2000). The Olympic branding of Aborigines: The 2000 Olympic Games and Australia's Indigenous peoples. In K. Shaffer & S. Smith (Eds.), *The Olympics at the millennium: Power politics and the Games* (pp. 243-257). New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Hamlets struggle with recreation spaces. (2005, May 6). *Nunatsiaq News*. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from [http://www.nunatsiaq.com/archives/50506/news/nunavut/50506\\_08.html](http://www.nunatsiaq.com/archives/50506/news/nunavut/50506_08.html)
- Ilanaaq's inspiration gets diddly squat. (2005, May 2). *Vancouver Courier*. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://archive.vancourier.com/issues05/051105/sports.html>
- Kramer, J. (2003, November). *Reading Vancouver's Olympic bid street banners*. Paper presented at the National Asian American Society of Accountants Conference, Salem, MA.
- Kramer, J. (2006). *Switchbacks: Art, ownership and Nuxalk national identity*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Mawani, R. (2004). From colonialism to multiculturalism? Totem poles, tourism and national identity in Vancouver's Stanley Park. *Ariel*, 35, 31-57.
- McMartin, P. (2005, April 26). Pardon me, but the Inuit are up north. *The Vancouver Sun*, p. B6.
- Meekison, L. (2000). Indigenous presence in the Sydney Games. In G. K. Ward & C. Smith (Eds.), *Indigenous cultures in an interconnected world* (pp. 109-126). Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Rideout, D. (2003, May 30). Intellectual property: A different kind of Inuit ownership. *Nunatsiaq News*. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from [http://www.nunatsiaq.com/archives/030530/news/nunavut/30530\\_04.html](http://www.nunatsiaq.com/archives/030530/news/nunavut/30530_04.html)
- Smith, C., Burke, H., & Ward, G. K. (2000). Globalisation and Indigenous peoples: Threat or empowerment? In G. K. Ward & C. Smith (Eds.), *Indigenous cultures in an interconnected world* (pp. 49-66). Vancouver: UBC Press.

- Townsend-Gault, C. (1998). First Nations culture: Who knows what? *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 23. Retrieved November 15, 2006 from <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/viewArticle/1021/927>
- Townsend-Gault, C. (2004). Circulating aboriginality. *Journal of Material Culture*, 9, 183-202.
- Townsend-Gault, C. (2005). Spectacular disentanglement: A talking stick for the Pope. In M. Coquet, B. Derlon, & M. Jeudy-Ballini (Eds.), *Les cultures à l'œuvre: Rencontres en art* (pp. 209-222). Paris: Biro: Maison des sciences de l'homme.
- VanderKlippe, N. (2005, April 27). 2010 Olympic logo inspires arctic youth. *Edmonton Journal*, p. A5.
- Wallace, M. (1999). *The inuksuk book*. Toronto: Owl Books.
- Woolley, P. (2005, April 28). Inuit praises logo. *The Georgia Strait*. Retrieved November 15, 2006, from <http://www.straight.com/content.cfm?id=9852>

# **Review of *Cambodia now: Life in the wake of war* by Karen Coates. Boston: McFarland, 2005, 382 pp., paper.**

*Chris Sweeney*

---

*Cambodia Now* explores a failed state from an outsider's perspective. Its author, Karen Coates, is a white woman from Oregon with a passion for the plight of Cambodians. Through a combination of descriptive text and photographs, she introduces the reader to dozens of individuals personally impacted by the underdevelopment of Cambodia's economic, social, and political infrastructure. One such person is Ly Chheng Ky, an elderly municipal councilor whose actions are limited due to corruption and extortion by the ruling party. Coates interviews many others that face similar challenges. Indeed, *Cambodia Now* dives ambitiously deep into the fabric of Cambodian society, however it does so without any tether to social theory. The result is a vivid description of corrupted development landscapes, but one that offers no useful solutions to the problems it addresses. Ultimately this limits the potential of the book to create social change.

Coates is clearly an outsider. Her habit of recreational running shows just how different the reality she lives in is from the one she covers. Phnom Penh is hot and sticky, littered with garbage and bustling with traffic, yet Coates will not give up her running habit. As she jogs through the city, she attracts puzzled stares but remains isolated from her surroundings by a Walkman.

To her credit, Coates writes what she sees and knows in great detail. She covers many aspects of life in Cambodia, and presents various chapters organized around different development themes. For example, separate chapters are presented on childcare, internal displacement, and environmental degradation. The problem is that little attempt is made to stitch the various threads into a useful fabric. No causal factor is identified as the source of underdevelopment, leaving the reader on a foundation too weak to formulate any sort of meaningful reform. To benefit the country and people that she so adores, Coates would have done better to target a specific issue and explore it thoroughly in relation to social theory. For instance, Coates could have identified government mismanagement (both foreign and domestic) as the primary cause of Cambodia's problems, and gone on to explore possible solutions by applying dependency theory or other development theories.

A brief history of Cambodia shows a violent pattern of counter-productive involvement by the international community (Springer, 2008). American bombings during the Vietnam War significantly damaged the country (Springer, 2008). The Khmer Rouge seized power thereafter, and began to destroy the country from the inside-out. Genocide occurred. Meanwhile, international development concerns were trumped by Cold War geopolitics (Springer, 2008). It was not until after the collapse of the Soviet

Union that the United Nations (UN) intervened in Cambodia. The UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) was a watershed moment for the UN because it marked the emergence of “second generation peacekeeping,” which transcended the objective of earlier peacekeeping operations—a ceasefire—with broader development goals (John Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies, n.d.). In this case, UNTAC’s mandate included issues pertaining to human rights, displaced persons, law enforcement, physical and bureaucratic infrastructure, and fair elections (United Nations, 2003). Given the laundry list of mission objectives, the officials behind UNTAC clearly recognized that Cambodia’s government was in desperate need of widespread assistance. Yet the mission failed to achieve its lofty ambitions. When UNTAC withdrew from Cambodia, it left behind a weak coalition government which has since festered into a “chronic abscess” in the eyes of one Cambodian reporter (Coates, 2005). Today, police officers and judges abuse the law that they are (under)paid to protect, and citizens resort to vigilantism and mob rule for justice (Coates, 2005). Moreover, development projects are left for foreign NGOs such as the Médecins Sans Frontières (Coates, 2005). This propels a cycle of government impunity, mismanagement, and corruption that continues to hinder Cambodia’s social and economic development.

The best solution Coates offers to Cambodia’s next generation—get adopted by an American family—is bleak. This is where her book falls short of its potential. If she engaged her material with relevant development theories, perhaps Coates could provide her audience with a notion of where to go next. For example, dependency theory, articulated by Andre Gunder Frank in 1966, states that positive national growth is best achieved through a closed economy that targets self-reliance through careful domestic planning. Only once a country has developed sound internal structures can it compete on equal ground in the international arena. This development strategy, however, is not being followed in Cambodia; in fact the opposite is happening. In August of 2004—one month after another gridlocked coalition government was formed—Cambodia ratified its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Coates, 2005). According to dependency theory, WTO entry allows developed countries to further dominate and control Cambodia by means of the free market capitalist system. The small nation will prove unable to match China in the scale economies of the textiles industry, and its agricultural infrastructure is designed for sustenance, not export.

Dependency theory is only one approach that can be applied to the situation in Cambodia; certainly other theories also apply. The point is that *Cambodia Now* provides no theoretical perspective that could otherwise connect the individual stories it tells to a larger, more useful framework. If Coates had included a discussion of relevant social theories, her book may have done more to induce the types of progressive reform that she so clearly desires.

The text does very well to provide an abundance of material. Coates goes far and wide to document numerous tales of poverty, physical and mental health issues, political corruption, racism, and more. The range of its content imbues the text with a scent of real life, foul as it may be. This is no small achievement. In a country where so many remain anonymous—killed systematically and buried en masse by the Khmer Rouge, or impoverished and without real hope for advancement—such a detailed recording of individuals, which will exist so long as the text does, can be considered a noble cause. Photographs are used to make the account more real and permanent.

Benevolence, however, is no substitute for rigorous social analysis (Wacquant, 2002). Even though Coates introduces the reader to Ly Chheng Ky, the reformist politician who



cites institutionalized corruption as the tallest hurdle to Cambodia's development, her book offers no coherent solution(s) to the development concerns it details. *Cambodia Now* fails to connect its observations with pertinent development theories, such as dependency theory. This obvious omission causes *Cambodia Now* to forfeit its potential to create social change. In the end, Coates gives little hope that anything can be done for Cambodia. As she puts it, "There is no answer" (Coates, 2005, p. 325).

### References

- Coates, K. (2005). *Cambodia now: Life in the wake of war*. Boston: McFarland.
- Frank, A. G. (1966). The development of underdevelopment. *Monthly Review*, 18, 17-31.
- John Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies (n.d.). Peacekeeping—Evolution. In *The conflict management toolkit*. Retrieved February 23, 2009, from <http://www.sais-jhu.edu/cmtoolkit/approaches/peacekeeping/evolution.html#anchor3>
- Springer, S. (2008). Violence, democracy, and the neoliberal "order": The contestation of public space in posttransitional Cambodia. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 99(1), 138-162. doi:10.1080/00045600802223333
- Wacquant, L. (2002). Review symposium: Scrutinizing the street: Poverty, morality, and the pitfalls of urban ethnography. *American Journal of Sociology*, 107, 1468-1532.
- United Nations (2003). *Completed peacekeeping operations: Cambodia*. Retrieved March 1, 2009, from [http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/co\\_mission/untac.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/co_mission/untac.htm)

## *About the Authors*

---

Connor Cavanagh is a third-year Sociology major at the University of British Columbia. He is currently studying on exchange at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB) in Aas, Norway. In June, he will begin seven months of field research with UMB in Kampala, Uganda. His diverse research interests include urbanization and socioeconomic underdevelopment, livelihood strategies, food security, and structural/symbolic forms of violence. In his spare time, Connor enjoys travel, the outdoors, philosophy, and contact sports.

Tara Wodelet is graduating this year with a double major in Family Studies and Psychology. In addition to her love of social science, Tara has enjoyed being actively involved in the UBC community through various roles, most notably as a Residence Advisor, Peer Advisor within Arts Academic Advising, Teaching Assistant within the Sociology department, and cast member in UBC's 2009 production of *The Vagina Monologues*. Finishing her last semester on exchange in Sydney, Australia, Tara plans to take time off after graduation to travel, learn new skills, and explore different avenues to pursue her interest in working with children and families.

Manori Ravindran is a fourth-year sociology major in her final year of undergraduate study. Her research interests focus on social inequality, immigrant identities, work, and gender. When she is not busy being a sociology student, she enjoys channeling Karl Marx and plotting the revolution. Manori will continue her studies in the sociology master's program at McMaster University in September. She is grateful to the editors and faculty supervisors for kindly helping her develop this paper.

Hélène Frohard-Dourlent is a moderately fresh French import who relocated to Vancouver in the summer of 2007 and enjoys confusing English speakers with her name (so familiar, yet so bizarre!). She is now a graduate student in Sociology at UBC. Her primary research interests are education, sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender. Hélène's Master's thesis focuses on elementary schools teachers in France and Canada and compares the ways in which they conceptualize themselves as educators. She misses French chocolate very much and smuggles bars of it into the country every time she gets a chance.

John Naslund recently completed his B.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of British Columbia. He is involved with youth sports programs in Vancouver, such as the Bridge Through Sport initiative at Musqueam, and he coaches with the Vancouver Thunderbirds Minor Hockey Association. John is the recipient of the William Staiger Award, recognizing his contributions to the organization as a former player in the capacity of coach. John continues to play recreational ice hockey, and he strongly advocates sports programs that encourage universal participation regardless of skill level and promote a welcoming environment.

Kalev Hunt is a fourth-year UBC Sociology major with a B.Sc. in Computer Science, a Minor in English, and a passion for defying conventional classification. Broadly interested in issues of sexuality and gender from a qualitative perspective, Kalev plans to synthesize his diverse academic backgrounds—after attaining his B.A. in Spring 2009—by pursuing a M.A. in Sociology, during which he will investigate how queer youth negotiate the coming out process online.

Michael Kehl is a third-year student, double majoring in Psychology and Sociology. His primary academic interests have been the interaction between law and society and the effects of the media on the law. His insight into these has been garnered from a number of sources. Outside of UBC, he has volunteered and done research for the YWCA Legal services, as well as other non-profit organizations in Vancouver. Michael has also studied these issues abroad, spending the majority of 2008 on exchange at the University of Otago in New Zealand. While there, he studied the factors influencing the socioeconomic disparity between the Maori and New Zealand Europeans.

Brigitte Drescher graduated from UBC with her B.A. in Sociology in May 2008. During her final year, she served as the Sociology Students Association's External Promotions Coordinator. Brigitte has studied advanced French at UBC and attended the *École internationale de français* at the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. She is a member of the Golden Key International Honour Society, Order of Omega Greek Leadership Honour Society, and Gamma Sigma Alpha Greek Academic Honour Society. Brigitte brings her sociological background to her work with BC Hydro Outreach, educating British Columbians about energy conservation. She currently resides in Coquitlam, BC.

Amy Trebelco received her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology in 2008, and went on to become a real estate agent in Vancouver. She is a member of the Order of Omega Greek Honor Society and the Leaders of Tomorrow program. Amy would like to thank her writing partner Brigitte Drescher, as the two worked very hard on "Culturally Appropriating the Inuksuk" together. There were many late nights and coffee shop meetings involved and through this endeavor, a great friendship formed. Amy is excited to finally see the paper in print and be able to share it with the academic community.

Chris Sweeney is an undergraduate student at the University of British Columbia, where he is an active member of the International Students Association. He is graduating in May 2009 with a B.A. in Economic Geography and International Relations. Chris's research interests include urban development, governance, and social enterprise; he envisions a world in which human needs are met through market means. He is a Research Fellow at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs in Washington DC.

## *About the Staff*

---

Sierra Skye Gemma is graduating in May with a B.A. in History and Sociology. In addition to managing two undergraduate journals, she is actively involved with the History Students Association and the Sociology Students Association. Sierra enjoys reading, researching, writing, volunteering, and training capoeira—a Brazilian martial art—with her wonderful husband and her humorous son. She plans to take a year off after graduation to research, write, travel to Brazil, and engage in some soul-searching to decide on a graduate program.

Hilary McNaughton is studying sociology at UBC, with a special interest in early childhood socialization, gender, and community. She plans to complete a degree in Elementary Education after her Bachelor of Arts, and looks forward to working with young children and families in either classroom or research settings. Other passions include singing, cooking, dancing, and generally having a good time. Working on the journal this year has been a great learning experience for Hilary, and she looks forward to applying the skills she has honed as next year's Editor-in-Chief.

Natasia Wright is completing her Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with Honours in May of 2009. Her honours research is on moral regulation and colonialism in the Progressive Era in British Columbia. In the fall she will be starting her Master's degree in Sociology at UBC, researching the sex trade and social space.

Yun-Jou Chang is a third-year English and Sociology major at the University of British Columbia. She is particularly interested in the media as a site of cultural production, and processes of translation and communication across cultural, linguistic, and temporal borders. Outside of class work, Yun-Jou enjoys reading, writing, cooking, and wandering the city blocks. She plans to spend a term or two studying or working abroad before completing her degree.

Alison Bailey is a fourth-year English and Sociology student graduating from UBC this spring. She will be attending BCIT this fall in the Broadcast Journalism Program. Alison has very much enjoyed working on *Sojourners: Undergraduate Journal of Sociology*. It has been a wonderful experience, and she wishes to thank all the other editors, and particularly Sierra for encouraging her to become involved in this project. Happy reading!

Dmitry Yakovenko is graduating this May with a B.A. in Sociology. In his years at UBC, he has taken an interdisciplinary approach towards studying the various modes of interaction and organization within modern human societies. He has completed an extensive coursework in Social Sciences and Humanities, including Anthropology, Economics, Literature, Philosophy, Political Science, Religious Studies and even Theatre Production. Dmitry has also been actively involved in volunteering for various student organizations. In his most recent appointment he served as the

Public Relations executive with The Sociology Students Association. Dmitry also holds an Associate of Arts Degree from Douglas College.

Bener Eshref is a fourth-year Sociology honours student at the University of British Columbia. His research interests include queer sexuality, international social injustices, and the role of socio-economic status within developed nations. Bener's interest in social injustices has led him to develop his second documentary regarding Vancouver's downtown eastside. This work has resulted in multiple community leadership awards, including UBC future leaders award. Bener enjoys travel and writing, and has been offered several internship opportunities with some of the nations' most prominent traveling publications. He wishes to continue his educational pursuit of a legal degree, after spending one year traveling abroad.

Maureen Mendoza is in her final year at the University of British Columbia, double majoring in English Literature and Sociology. She is thankful for her opportunity to be part of Sociology's first undergraduate journal and considers it a great process, excited that it will continue to be a yearly publication.

Esther Wong is a fourth-year Honours Sociology student at the University of British Columbia. Her passions are diverse, but she has a particular interest in community, interpersonal dynamics, and social problems. On campus, apart from sociology, she has been actively involved with the Navigators Christian student ministry. Outside of school, Esther loves spending time in the beauty of nature, hiking, gazing into the universe, reading, sketching, and being in the good company of others. After graduation, she sees many possibilities.