Introduction

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Collected within this special edition of the Disestablishmentarian are 5 academic articles written by undergraduate students from the Sociology and Anthropology department at Concordia University. On April 11th, students from both the Sociology honours class and the Anthropology honours class presented their papers at the “Sociology and Anthropology Undergraduate Honours Conference” at Concordia University. The papers within this journal are based on the ones presented at the conference and are the culmination of almost a year's work of research and writing.

Twenty-one sociology and anthropology students presented their papers at the conference, of which 5 students submitted and were selected to the Disestablishmentarian. The conference contained papers on various topics which included Health, Politics, Gender/Sexuality and Media. Likewise, the articles contained within this special edition cover various topics which cannot be reduced into one category. In fact, because of this, the only similarity these articles share with one another is their diversity. The disciplines of Anthropology and Sociology are incredibly diverse not only in terms of their topics of interest but also in their use of methods, which range from qualitative interviews, ethnographies and to the use of statistical methods. Furthermore, both disciplines draw heavily from different theoretical traditions, whether that be Marxism, post-structuralism, feminist theory and many more.

The articles in this journal cover such diverse topics as sexual assault, social movements, religion, child studies and memes! Furthermore, the articles build off of fields outside of sociology and anthropology to include disciplines such as political science, philosophy, psychology, law and more. From my own experience, the disciplines of sociology and anthropology are always apt for a cross-disciplinarily approach and this explains the eclectic nature of the articles contained within this special edition.

The first article is Terry Newman’s article “Towards a Theory of Virtual Sentiments” which examines the differences between “real world affect” and affect generated online through the use of internet memes. Using such diverse theories from Adam Smith as well as recent neuroscientific research, Newman analyses real world affect and how individuals attempt to compensate online for a lower ability to empathize with individuals through the use of Internet memes. Given the prevalence and popularity of online memes on the internet today, this is a timely topic to study.

My article “Protests in the 21st Century: Autonomy, Multitude and Global Dissent”
Dissent” examines the philosophy and theories of Micheal Hardt and Antonio Negri and applies it to the recent social and political protests which have arisen since 2010. Since 2010 we have seen the emergence of the Arab spring protests, the Occupy movements, and closer to home we have witnessed the 2012 Quebec student strike and recent protests against austerity in Quebec. While these protests were varied and diverse they all share commonalities which leads me to label them as autonomous social movements (movements without a hierarchical leadership system for example). I argue within my paper that Hardt and Negri’s theories can explain the recent emergence of these social movements, as well as explain why they protest the way they do.

Next we have Frances Smyth’s article “Childhood: A Shifting Construct”. She explains/explores how children are conceptualized (primarily in the field of psychology) through a biological deterministic conception of childhood. Furthermore, she argues the perspectives of children are rarely accounted for as childhood is constructed through the eyes of adults. She draws on theories from psychology, anthropology and of course sociology. Smyth argues that we need to celebrate childhood rather than construct it around notions of pre-adulthood. Finally, she hopes that a sociology of childhood could prevent the taken for granted notions of “adultism”.

Dahlia Belinsky’s “Innocent Until Proven Guilty: Interpretation of Consent and Sexual Assault Laws” explores how sexual assault is handled within the Canadian legal system. Her paper also explores how university student’s beliefs surrounding consent are problematic, as they are unable to distinguish between consent and non-consent. Jian Ghomeshi’s trial features prominently within Belinsky’s paper which perfectly illustrates the pitfalls of the Canadian legal/justice system when it comes to prosecuting sexual assault cases. This research is integral given the prevalence of sexual assaults on university campuses and as Belinsky explains, the problems imbedded within the Canadian legal system which protects rapists and demonizes the victims.

The last article in this Journal is “It isn’t my parents’ religion anymore”: Embracing the family Faith in the Bahá’í religion” written by Caroline Belso and is the only anthropological paper in this journal. Also, unlike the previous four articles, this paper includes field research. It explores the processes through which religion is passed on to children from parents who have very recently converted to that religion. Belso’s essay covers the Bahá’í faith and conducted four interviews with members of this religion in Montreal.

Towards a Theory of Virtual Sentiments

TERRY L. NEWMAN

ABSTRACT This article aims to examine the differences between real-world and online affect through an analysis of internet memes. Real-world affect is described through the lens of Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments combined with modern scientific mirror neuron studies which confirm many of Smith’s ideas, especially in regards to the central role physical proximity and relational distance play in the generation of empathy. Studies of emotion online provide evidence that the ability to empathize in the virtual world is greatly diminished due to lack of visual cues, and the analysis of internet memes in this study suggests that memes are attempts to compensate for the “affect deficit” which we experience when we go online.

KEYWORDS internet memes, empathy, affect, internet, online communication, Adam Smith, materiality

In an age of increased globalization and conflict over cultural differences, understanding the nature of how we communicate has never been more pressing. This need, furthermore, has only been exacerbated by the existence of a separate, parallel world, where communication has been extended by the availability and speed of the medium itself but has in other ways been diminished by the medium’s exclusion of some of our senses: the internet. Certainly, we are only beginning to understand the differences between how we behave and react in the real world and how we behave and react on the internet, and one object of study that has proven fruitful in research into how people behave online has been internet memes. Internet memes are tangible cultural products, artifacts we can examine to reveal the differences between real-world and online communication. Recently, Miller et al., (2016) have stressed the use of internet memes as a tool used by individuals across cultures to morally “police” norms (p. 172), and these writers offer compelling examples of
such moral policing in cultures as disparate as England and Brazil. What their study
does not take into account, however, is that while users are fulfilling intellectual and
moral needs by using internet memes in order to police, they are at the same time
fulfilling a more basic emotional need for respect and for the formation of social
relationships.

A large global study by Tay & Diener in 2011 showed that across 243 cultures,
the desire for respect and the formation of social relationships is a universal need
(p. 362), and it is the contention of my research that a study of internet memes can
uncover useful information about how the basic human need for social intercourse
and approbation manifests itself in the virtual world. To use a meme is not, after
all, merely a moral or intellectual act – it is an emotional one, stemming from basic
emotional needs, shared by all, that transcend cultures and national boundaries.
This research explores the motivations which underlie the actions of individual
meme users before they become moral crusaders, motivations which find their source
in basic emotional desires described at great length over two centuries ago by the
economist, moral philosopher, and, I believe, proto-sociologist, Adam Smith.

In his Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759/2006), Smith describes why and how
we feel as we do when we interact with other people: what drives those interactions,
and what stalls them. He wrote of our desire to match emotional “pitch” with those
around us so we can “enter into” the feelings of others, an achievement which Smith
argued is a human being’s greatest satisfaction (p. 8). As we will see below, contempo-
rary social scientists have confirmed many of Adam Smith’s theories regarding emo-
tional pitch and our desire to match emotions with others. The aim of this paper is
to apply the theories of Adam Smith, combined with some relevant ideas from affect
studies and other fields, to address the following questions: how does affect function
online? What happens to our Moral Sentiments when we enter the virtual world? Do
we have Virtual Sentiments? Do they function the same way? Do they function at all?

Fellow-Feeling

According to Adam Smith (1759/2006), nothing makes us happier than seeing
our feelings mirrored in someone else (p. 8). For Smith, this is the primary aim and
underlying cause of the majority of our social interactions. We are delighted when
others share our feelings, which is a sign of solidarity, but dismayed when they do
not, which is a sign of disharmony. We are “mortified” when we tell a joke that fails to
make a friend laugh because the purpose of the joke was for us to share that laugh, to
have our feelings correspond. If we later lend that friend a book we used to love, and
if we are lucky enough to have that friend enjoy it, then we can observe her love for
it, re-experience that love through her eyes, and see the book the way she now sees
it. We can enter into her surprise and admiration for the work and feel excitement as
we empathize with her excitement. This, in turn, re-ignites our own lost love for the
book, and we seem to love it again, as if for the first time. Smith describes this as a
sort of feedback loop. In this context, my friend and I are sharing that feeling of love
for this book, our feelings are in correspondence with one another, and we both feel
a sense of completion, of satisfaction. Smith’s argument is that this correspondence
of feelings between ourselves and others causes us pleasure, while the lack of corre-
spendence causes us pain (p. 9). Correspondence of feelings, then, which Smith calls
“sympathy” but which today we would refer to as “empathy,” is, for Smith, the goal of
most human social intercourse.

We can never directly access the feelings of others, though, so when we
empathize, we are empathizing only with the impressions of our own senses (Smith,
1759/2006, p. 3). This is why empathy generation benefits from a heavy dose of im-
agination. We must use our imagination to place ourselves in another’s situation; we
must imagine ourselves experiencing the same pain or pleasure; we then enter, in a
sense, into that other person’s body, thereby coming to understand (or believe we do)
whatever that other is feeling, which leads to our feeling something similar, if to a
lesser degree. Smith notes, however, that imagination is not necessarily the only way
to make empathy happen. Empathy can arise merely by viewing a person exhibiting
an emotion (p. 5). If we see a person smile, for example, we might smile back, without
thinking or imagining anything. Likewise, if we see a person about to be smacked in
the leg, we move our own leg in shared feeling. There is no time for imagination in
such a process; it is practically instantaneous. In this way, “passions” often seem to be
“transfused” from one person to another, instantly, even if we have no idea why that
person is feeling the emotion (p. 5). I do not, in other words, need to know the reason
you smile; my face reacts physically to what I see happening on your face, and my
smile is a physical, even non-conscious, reaction to your smile, without my needing
any knowledge whatsoever regarding your reasons for being happy. This transfusion
of feelings, this easy correspondence between people, is of course not a foolproof sys-
tem. In his book, Smith explores various problems involved in empathy generation,
and these problems mainly involve the importance of meeting, or coming close to
meeting, somebody else in “pitch.”
Entering into Another's Pitch

For Smith, we can see emotion in others, but before we can be in “concord” with their emotional state, we must first be able to meet the intensity of their emotions, or their “pitch” (p. 17). For him, “pitch” is the intensity of the expression of an emotional state; he describes matching pitch by using expressions such as “beat[ing] time” (p. 16) and “lowering passions” (p. 17) and explains the necessity to “flatten the sharpness of our natural tone” (p. 17) in order to match the tone of another and to “reduce the violence of the passions to a pitch of moderation” (p. 21). Just as “pitch” in music suggests “the quality of a sound governed by the rate of vibrations producing it; the degree of highness or lowness of a tone” (“Pitch,” n.d.), Smith’s notion of emotional pitch, with its flattening of sharpness, beating in time, correspondence, concord, and harmony, all suggest, like in music, degrees of intensity. Once a person comes into the presence of another, his or her initial instinct is to undergo an instantaneous, unconscious transfusion of feelings, but before that can take place, one first makes an assessment of pitch. This assessment, too, is non-conscious and instantaneous. We want others to be in accord with our feelings, but for this to happen, we must start off relatively close in pitch. If we are close enough, we can raise or lower our passions to match that of the other person (p. 16-17). If I pass a young man sobbing on a park bench, for example, I may be able to match my pitch with his, enter into his feelings, and thereby feel empathy for him. I may be less able to enter into the feelings of a messily dressed person screaming at nobody on a street corner, because I am too distant from him in pitch. If a friend of mine has a birthday party, I can likely raise my pitch to join her in her happiness, but if she just won twenty-six million dollars in the lottery, I will likely be unable to meet her pitch, especially if I am depressed and deeply in debt. So, if the pitch of someone’s passions is too high or too low compared to our own, there will be a problem of emotion transfusion and empathy (p. 23). If we cannot enter, we may instead be repelled.

Smith describes other obstacles to entering another’s pitch, such as relational distance, when individuals are too dissimilar in culture and interests. According to him, those unable to find common ground will make “bad company” (p. 30). A second relevant challenge is physical distance. In Smith’s world, if a person was far away then you could not see him, and this lack of a picture of that person would be a strong impediment to empathy. For Smith, fellow-feeling requires visual access to the other. Smith contrasts the concern an individual feels if he loses a finger with the apathy he feels at the deaths of a hundred strangers (p. 132). He stresses that to be able to empathize, we must have a vivid conception of the other’s situation (p. 4), a strong picture either before us or in our minds of what the other is experiencing. According to Smith, then, the greater both the relational and physical distance between bodies, the less intense the shared feelings. If we do not share common ground and are on opposite sides of the Earth, it is likely we will have trouble empathizing with one another.

What Adam Smith Got Right

Now, Adam Smith may have been writing over two centuries ago, but he was clearly on to something. Mounting evidence from more recent studies (Adolphs, 2009; Chartrand & Bragh, 1999; Jackson et al., 2006; Keysers et al, 2004; Preston & Waal, 2002; Singer et al., 2004, 2006; Wicker et al., 2003; Wilson and Knoblich, 2005) suggests a scientific basis for many of Smith’s intuitive observations. Molnar-Szakacs (2011) summarizes research that describes how the human neurological system can explain Adam Smith’s concept of “fellow-feeling.” Human mirror neuron areas of the brain mediate our understanding of the intentions behind others’ actions (p. 78). He compares mirror neurons to “neural Wi-Fi” that scans the minds and bodies of others, tracks their emotions, movements, and (perceived) intentions, and then activates in our brains the same areas that are active in the other person’s brain, putting us automatically, unconsciously, and instantaneously on the same wavelength as that other person. When we observe someone in a particular emotional state, this activates a representation of that state in our own minds. This research provides strong evidence of a neurological basis for empathy and confirms Smith’s idea that visualizing the physical manifestations of another person’s emotions enables us to feel the emotion too. In his research, he used various indirect, neuro-imaging techniques and measured Motor Evoked Potentials (MEP’s) while observing participants; all his observations, it must be noted, involved empathy between people in physical proximity.

The research by Molnar-Szakacs (2011) also explored factors that may enable or inhibit the production of empathy between individuals. He showed, for example, just as Smith argued before him, that the more similar and socially close two individuals are, the easier they identified with one another. Earlier studies by Batson (1987, 1991) confirmed Adam Smith’s notion that witnessing someone in a low to moderate level of distress results in an increase in desire to help that person, or to be pro-social, while observing someone with an excessively high degree of distress results in
Towards a Theory of Virtual Sentiments

The Deterritorialization of Affect

Affective resonance, then, seems to require the presence of bodies if it is to operate in its most natural sense and at its highest capacity. How, then, does affective resonance function online? Or does it? When on the internet, users attempt to transcend their physical environment, in a sense leaving their bodies behind, such that their physical bodies become what may be referred to as deterritorialized. Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of deterritorialization involves a set of relations being decontextualized, rendered virtual, and then prepared for more distant actualizations (Soulier, 2012, p. 4). While Deleuze and Guattari (1987) were using the concept to explain the changing set of relations that took place when labour power was freed, and had to reterritorialize as a set of new relations that essentially only signified the first set, this concept also helps elucidate what happens when embodied communication relations are broken and driven into a new realm, where they are forced to take on new forms and meanings. When we go online, affect is deterritorialized from its original habitat - the physical world involving physiological bodies - and attempts to reter-
ritorialize itself in the virtual world, with one body trying to extend itself outwards towards another body via a computer screen and fibre cables. The interactions that once occurred between two bodies in visual and physical proximity are now fragmented. Although two bodies in the same room share a mass of sensory information from visual cues, postures, and vocalizations, two individuals separated by a screen and joined by a network of fibre cables are operating in an environment that I would characterize as possessing an “affect deficit.” When sitting at a computer, those affects which are normally part of the feedback loop between physical bodies are directed at the computer screen and, essentially, blocked.

**Literature Review and Discussion: Virtual Sentiments**

**Challenges: What exactly is missing when we go online**

Empathy does not manifest in the virtual world the way it does in the physical world as described by Adam Smith. Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012) suggest that web surfers experience an “online sense of unidentifiability” when interacting online with unknown users (p. 440). The online world makes relational distances difficult to know. Lin and Utz (2015) investigate the emotional consequences of browsing Facebook, particularly in regards to the emotions of happiness and envy in respect to social tie strength between people, and, overall, they found that tie strength, or relational distance, matters (p. 37). The problem is, when we are online, most people are “unidentifiable,” in the sense conveyed by Lapidot-Lefler and Barak. Online, we often do not know who these people are; we do not know if we have much in common with them, and we therefore have little relational proximity to them. Despite these difficulties regarding relational distance and unidentifiability, however, and despite the CBC website’s hope that making commenters use their real names on the site will suddenly enable affect to flood back into the system on a wave of good feeling (CBC News, 2016), studies, as we will see below, show that the key factor in preventing fellow feeling and empathy among users online is not the lack of proper identification or biographical information at all, but rather the lack of eye-contact.

Lapidot-Lefler and Barak reached the same conclusion. They cite a multitude of real-world studies (p. 436) that confirm the importance of eye-contact. For example, Kleinke (1986) stresses the importance of “eye-contact” and “gazing” for a number of purposes, including the provision of personal information, such as another person’s attentiveness and credibility, the regulation and synchronization of interpersonal interactions, and the expression of emotion (p. 436). An experiment by Doherty- Sneddon et al. (1997) further points to the major significance of eye gazing in providing interpersonal feedback (p. 436). Some research into real-world gazing and eye contact found that the dynamics of eye contact communication greatly affect emotions such as trust, security, confidence, embarrassment, confusion, honesty, admonition, and pleading (p. 436). A paper by Walther (1999) shows that even webcams fail to provide adequate information about facial expressions, and fail to deliver the kind of information that can be gathered through eye-contact (p. 436). Thus, visibility alone is insufficient – eye contact itself is an essential ingredient.

**Effects of lost signals: Affect Deficit**

In their study of virtual empathy, Carrier et al., (2015) were interested in uncovering the positive and negative impacts of going online for young adults. They defined empathy as “the understanding of, and sharing in, another’s emotional state or context as well as the behaviour of comforting others” (p. 39). Their most interesting finding is that the relationship between virtual empathy and feelings of social support is nearly five times weaker than the relationship between real-world empathy and feelings of social support. In other words, to experience the feeling of social support you might get from a single hug or from one real-world conversation, you might need five to six times more empathic attention online (p. 46). Another interesting, but perhaps not surprising, finding is that female real-world empathy is significantly and negatively impacted by time online, suggesting that the internet is a more negative place for women and/or that women are more likely to take that negative experience offline with them (p. 41).

In any case, for both sexes, Carrier et al’s. (2015) research demonstrates that real-world empathy scores were higher than virtual empathy scores (p. 45). They also point to other studies that indicate online activity reduces an individual’s capacity to empathize. A study by Small and Vorgan (as cited by Carrier et al., 2015) focused particularly on the lack of non-verbal communication signs that are essential to reading emotions, consisting of “facial expressions, body posture, eye-contact, gestures, and touch” (p. 40), all factors, as we have seen, necessary to the proper functioning of affective resonance.

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1. On March 17th, 2016, after complaints of hateful remarks against the French speaking community, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation decided that they would be phasing out pseudonyms in favour of real names in the interests of encouraging civil conversation between commentators under its online news stories.
Attempts to compensate online

Given what has been established as an affect deficit online, the human desire to match other people’s pitch and then enter into their feelings becomes, in the virtual world, highly problematic. Both Smith (1759/2006) and Forman-Barzilai (2005), as mentioned earlier, suggested that the normal physical cues for empathy can be replaced by text, although much of the research just reviewed seems to indicate this is not the case. There is, however, evidence of a concerted effort among internet users to overcome what they evidently feel is an obstacle to their achieving fellow-feeling with one another. Some of them have become creative with their use of text. Hammond (2015) found that with the absence of face-to-face communication, online support group users applied emoticons or used special punctuation to communicate their emotions through text. They also employed personal narratives to elicit empathy (p. 179). According to Suler (2004), internet users engage in “solipsistic introjection” to induce higher levels of empathy and support (p. 323). A person may internalize another person’s voice when reading text, for example, or read another person’s words in one’s own voice. While this minimal amount of compensation for the affect deficit online may be enough for some, there is plentiful evidence that many users are seeking more expressive, more intense, more non-textual methods to fill the gap left by the affect deficit.

Baralou and McInnes (2013) investigated how internet users try to compensate for lost physical cues online and found that emotions are indeed co-constructed. Their participants, members of a virtual IT team who had never personally met, struggled to locate others in relation to themselves and tried to establish relational proximity among co-workers (p. 168). Another common method internet users use to compensate for missing visuals and other emotional cues are emojis. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, an emoji is “a small digital image or icon used to express an idea or emotion in electronic communication” ("Emoji", 2015), an icon that, according to the dictionary entry, “liven[s] up your text messages with tiny smiley faces.” Every year, the OED staff chooses a word or expression that best captures either the “ethos,” “mood,” or “preoccupations” of the year in question, and on November 17th, 2015, in Oxford, United Kingdom, the OED staff announced for the first time that the word of the year would not be a word at all, but rather an emoji, “Face with Tears of Joy” (Oxford Words blog, 2015). According to usage statistics gathered by SwiftKey, “Face with Tears of Joy” was the most heavily used emoji in both the United Kingdom and the United States for the year.

Figure 1 “Face with Tears of Joy” Source: Oxforddictionaries.com

On February 24th, 2016, Facebook added to its “like” button a new series of “reaction” emoji. These new reactions, released after, apparently, months of consultation, are: “love,” “haha,” “wow,” “yay,” “sad,” and “angry.”

Figure 2 “Facebook Reaction Buttons” Source: Today.com

The release of these new “reaction” emoji strongly suggests there was a prior feeling of deficiency in communication of emotions, that internet users were feeling frustrated or limited by their inability to convey certain visual cues to help express the pitch they were trying to achieve when commenting online. Text is only part of a message. An emoji’s laughing or angry face as replacement for a missing body is meant to assist in communicating meaning. Observe, however, how much assistance we seem to need. These reaction emoji are akin to Max Weber’s “ideal types” (Kim Sung-Ho, 2012), in that they appear to represent the most concentrated, pure form of an emotion. For example, the “angry” emoji is a distillation of pure anger, not mild irritation but temper-tantrum level anger. The “wow” is wide-eyed and open-mouthed in wonder and amazement, not just slightly surprised. The “haha” has its eyes shut, mouth wide open, and is laughing hysterically. It is unlikely that these emoji accurately convey the emotions that Facebook users are honestly feeling at those moments. The intensity of the eyes-shut mouth wide open “haha” emoji is at a much higher level than the true emotional tenor of the user at his or her keyboard.
When mildly amused online, we use the intense “haha.” When slightly frustrated, we use the red-faced “angry” emoji. When vaguely surprised, we use the “wow.” It is as though the emotions we communicate through these emoji need to contain the highest possible intensity to even register as present; anything less would seem insufficient. These emojis, as added Facebook options, are strong indicators that internet users are striving to transmit their feelings into the virtual space, while struggling to overcome the emotional dampeners that are a natural product of cyberspace.

*Emotional Contagion Online*

According to Hatfield and colleagues (1993), emotional contagion is the “tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person, and consequently, to converge emotionally” (p. 96). But what happens to emotional contagion when it does not have a body to mimic and synchronize with, vocalizations to attune to, or postures and movements to reposition one’s self accordingly to? How is emotion caught and spread online? Guadagno et al. (2013) observed that internet users who reported a strong affective response to a viral video also reported a greater likelihood of spreading the video (p. 29). They also found that videos that made internet users angry were more likely to be forwarded, but only when the anger-producing video came from a source other than their particular in-group (p. 29). This is a fascinating qualification – perhaps anger from our friends is too predictable, too much a part of our everyday interactions, too commonplace, and therefore fails to arouse in us a sufficient level of intensity. Anger from a stranger includes elements of novelty, surprise, and abnormality, and we may surmise that the emotions that shake us out of our virtual complacency are the ones we feel prompted to disseminate. A more every day, run-of-the-mill emotion, it seems, just sits there, failing to become contagious.

Nelson-Field et al. (2013) also found that the more highly arousing the online video, the higher the propensity for it to be shared, even when the emotions were negative, as in sadness or disgust (p. 210). Nelson-Field’s article points to two other studies; one by Dahl et al. (2003) shows evidence that “norm violations” (behaviours typically considered offensive and/or outside acceptable behaviour) are particularly good at gaining our attention and measure high in recognition and recall (Nelson-Field, p. 210). The other study (Dobele et al., 2007) found that emotional arousal, when coupled with an “element of surprise” generated through “amazement and astonishment” (p. 206), was a key factor when determining whether something would spread online. It seems, then, that online content, to make up for the lack of synchronized bodily expressions we find in the real world, has to evoke high levels of arousal, strong emotion, and surprise in order to get any attention. This aligns with our observations earlier regarding the emoji, and the necessity for them to symbolically communicate only the most intense of emotions. Everyday feelings, everyday responses, and everyday videos fail to register in the virtual world – it is as if they hardly exist, or can barely rise above a whisper.

**Literature Review and Discussion: Internet Memes**

According to Gabriel Tarde, we should try to examine the social world not through the more traditional units of analysis (e.g. the individual, the group) but instead by adopting the point of view of the products, acts, and ideas created by those individuals and groups (Mardsen, 2000, p. 2). Internet memes are an ideal product for examining the social world of the internet. They leave concrete, tangible traces of interactions. According to Shifman (2013), the term “internet meme” can describe jokes, rumors, and videos that spread from one person to another via the internet (p. 362). Memes can spread in their original form, or they can be modified. There has been much debate surrounding the question of the usefulness of analyzing memes, with Shifman suggesting they may be useful for “something” (p. 362). He also suggests that “longevity” should not be the key focus of academics when analyzing memes (p. 364). Wiggins and Bowers (2015) see memes as conversational (p. 1886), stating we should view memes as “artifacts of participatory digital culture” (p. 1891). The virtual physicality of memes informs us about the social behaviour of their users, and the process of engaging with memes can be described as purposeful (p. 1891). Shifman (2013), similarly, argues that internet users who share memes should be treated as “actors” and not mere “vectors” of cultural transmission (p. 366). Thus, if internet users are actively participating in the creation and dissemination of memes, and if that process is purposeful, then by examining these cultural products we can begin to understand the social world of their creators. Jenkins (2014) surmises that memes circulate because of affect. He says: “Rhetorical texts are not texts but bodies endowed with affective capacities; that audiences don’t merely read texts but interface with them, via their own affective capacities, in a variety of ways” (p. 452). I will argue that memes are evidence that people on the internet are struggling to compensate in an environment of affect deficit in the online world.
Traits Common to Internet Memes

If we look at the traits that appear to be common to most internet memes, we see evidence of the intentions and affective states of the meme creators and users. The first trait covered by the literature is that memes are used for shared amusement. Sci and Dare (2014) argue that meme circulation is “driven by the pleasure, expressed humorously, that people experience while using memes as a form of postmodern play” (p. 30). They see this type of play as thriving because of its lack of rules when it comes to production (p. 30), but in fact, as Wiggins and Bowers (2015) point out, memes have, in a sense, very specific rules, using repeated tropes, images, and structures in a genre that users are intimately familiar with (p. 11). The second trait of internet memes is their easily recognizable structures. Jenkins (2014) examines the fail/win meme phenomenon, for example, and decides that what makes these particular memes able to circulate is the fact that they are a mode (p. 446). He considers the fail/win meme phenomenon a mode because it is instantly recognizable and has an implicit set of rules or instructions on how they are meant to be constructed and interpreted. Memes by their very nature are formulaic and imitative. Many memes will use the same image and alter only some of the words. Others will use many of the same words, but slightly alter the image. Users pass a meme around the internet like a hacky sack, each altering perhaps a single element, or perhaps using the same pop song but altering the lyrics, often maintaining the same basic framing device. It should be noted that these users being playful and deriving pleasure from engaging with internet memes is a consequence of their desire to be sharing feelings with others.

To Rentschler and Thrift (2015), memes can create online spaces that allow for consciousness raising and community building (p. 329) because, of course, memes “produce shared feelings” (p. 350), thereby becoming the building blocks of a community based not on “physical proximity” but on “communication at a distance” (p. 341). These memes are the attempts of internet users to play a game together in a world with an affect deficit. Memes are a method of trying to overcome the relational distances, lack of eye-contact, lack of visual cues regarding posture and other movements, and lack of vocal tone, among other things, that serve as obstacles to the development of fellow-feeling online. The question is how to transmit affect between bodies when the key sensory agent, the eyes, and the body to look upon, is removed, disrupting a normally continuous feedback loop. The intensely structured and formulaic nature of memes provides an answer. If memes are an attempt, essentially, to find water in the desert, to bring a game into existence which allows the players to enter into each other’s feelings, in a virtual world in which the transfusion of feelings has so many obstacles, it is no surprise that the memes have such easily recognizable structures. Having a structure or template already in place makes people more apt and able to enter the game. With meme-generators, a novice to meme creation can learn in minutes how to join in, rapidly creating or remixing his or her own meme, and because these memes often have the same foundational base, say, a shared background image or, as Wiggins and Bowers (2015) suggest, a text formula like “I don’t always x, but when I do, I y” (p. 1901), the stage is set for simplifying the process of meeting other individuals at the same register or pitch as oneself. The playful tone of the meme, then, invites participation, while the formulaic structures keep the game open to all.

There are limitations, however, when it comes to what kinds of images or other content serve to establish and sustain these affect-seeking communal online games. Anything that is “too common” or “too literal” does not circulate; what is required for circulation is for the content of the meme to be “out of the ordinary” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 451), something we have seen with other internet content, like emoji and videos. The third trait common to most memes that I found in the literature was the tendency for memes to be over-the-top and outlandish. As the memes get passed along from person to person, with changes, like a story circle where each participant must add to the story, the intention seems to be to make each new meme a bit more absurd, more
Surprising. Internet memes require a sense of intense superreality to gain attention. The related fourth trait I found is that memes only really become significant when they have reached a critical mass of audience and participants. So, not only must the content of the meme be *more*, but the number of people sharing it must be *more*. A meme shared by a mere handful of people is of less import than one that millions of people share.

Leigh (2009) argues that highly spreadable memes move from being an in-joke to becoming a “sustainable part of popular culture” (p. 132), and indeed holding a central place in popular culture appears to be one of a meme’s primary goals. It is as if unless a million people notice you, no one is noticing you. When a meme reaches millions of viewers, a critical mass of participants has recognized it, played with it, taken pleasure from it, shared it, and perhaps modified it to participate in the conversation. These last two factors, over-the-top absurdity and critical mass, both reflect the necessity for virtual affect to be five to six times the intensity of real world affect in order to feel satisfying to an individual (Carrier et al., 2015, p. 46). In fact, the over-the-top emoji, the over-the-top viral videos, and the over-the-top memes requiring half a world’s worth of attention and approval all reflect this need on the part of internet users to have their feelings recognized, to match the pitch of others, and to enter into correspondence with those others. Because virtual feelings only get noticed, let alone shared, if they are five to six times louder than those in the real world, the memes strive for both volume and vastness. Anything less, and the feelings may as well not exist at all.

The final trait the literature revealed was the visual nature of memes, be they image-macro text, animated gif’s, or viral videos. Memes, in all cases, involve a visual component, such as a picture of “The Most Interesting Man in the World” sitting down to enjoy a Dos Equis, an animated “Birdie Sanders” smiling as a finch lands on his podium, or “Star Wars kid Drunken Jedi” fighting off laser blasts with a metal pipe some creative animators have transformed into a light sabre. Piepmeier (2008), referring to feminist zines, says that “materiality,” in the sense of a “tangible object,” can transform “an imagined relationship into an embodied one” (Rentschler and Thrift, 2015, p. 82). This is a crucial transformation – imagined relationships, as we have seen, do not function like embodied ones. As previously suggested by Adam Smith (1759/2006) and Forman-Barzilai (2005), vivid depictions help mediate the emotional gap exacerbated by relational and physical distance. It seems as if image-macro memes, for example, are an attempt to give a material, corporeal existence to affects expressed online. Memes as visual aids help us conjure up the imagining tools Smith thought were necessary in the sharing of feelings, especially in the absence of a physical body with which we could instantaneously gauge pitch.

So, when we examine the creation and circulation of memes, what we find are essentially bodiless individuals, unable to gesture their intentions, unable to make eye contact, sending out images, sending out jokes, sending out absurdities, craving for others to share in their jokes and absurdities, screaming out into the vast darkness of cyberspace at five to six times the emotional level that would be required for attention in the physical world, hoping above hope that someone, anyone, will see them.

**Analysis of Two Viral Memes: ‘Pepper Spray Cop’ and ‘Binders Full of Women’**

Let us now examine two viral memes in order to show how people online use the memes as a method of entering into the affective states of others.

**Pepper Spray Cop**

On Tuesday, November 18th, 2011, Lt. Pike was photographed pepper spraying some students protesting tuition hikes at the University of California, Davis (Gould, 2011). Within days, that photograph had become a meme, and Lt. Pike had been photoshopped with his pepper spray into various different backgrounds and contexts, many of them reaching high levels of absurdity. Sci and Dare (2014) note that when Lt. Pike is playfully placed into other backgrounds as a meme, the focus moves away from a discourse about his actions during the Occupy UC Davis movement to a judgment of his behaviour in new scenes (p. 30). For example, when an internet user photoshops Lt. Pike into a background where he appears to be casually pepper spraying Mother Teresa, the meme that is created is divorced from the context of that protest movement. Lt. Pike as a meme ceases to be effective politically once he leaves the context of the students at UC Davis, and the people who create memes of Lt. Pike afterwards are not being politically active at all. They are instead engaging in attempts to enter the in-joke and thereby make it easier to match others in pitch – they seek affective resonance. This is participatory culture, but not in the interests of any political community. It is about entering into a pronounced, affective state with other internet users.
The “Portland Mercury” blog on November, 21st, 2011, referred to an image of the Pepper Spray Cop meme as “Occupy Art” (Portland Mercury, p. 2011). Art, of course, is an affective medium. The whole purpose of art is to make us feel. In one image, created by internet user Suzette Smith, Lt. Pike has replaced Venus in Botticelli’s “The Birth of Venus.” The caption from Suzette clearly shows what her primary concern is as a creator and sharer of this internet meme. She asks, “Hey, I’m Photoshopping Pepper Spraying Cop onto The Birth of Venus, do I leave in his pepper spray can?” If Lt. Pike has been moved into a mythological environment, as far away as possible from UC Davis, and the creator of the meme is questioning whether to remove the pepper spray can for aesthetic reasons, then clearly, at least for some, memes are less about political activism than they are about creating art that resonates with the affective states of other users online.

Binders Full of Women

We may all recall Mitt Romney’s infamous gaffe during a 2012 presidential debate, when Romney recounted approaching women’s groups to help him find some “folks” who were not men. He said they had brought him “binders full of women,” and almost instantly, the internet responded affectively to Romney’s gaffe, even while the debate was still going on (Franke-Ruta, 2012). Rentschler and Thrift (2015) found that the ‘Binders Full of Women’ memes were easily remixed, making it simple for users to respond for what Rentschler and Thrift believed was the purpose of biting commentary (p. 331). The meme was quickly and easily turned into many variations of image-text macro, animated gifs, a Tumblr page, and a Facebook page (p. 330). But the comments on the Facebook account for ‘Binders Full of Women’ do not indicate a primary interest in, say, the feminist cause, or any biting commentary. The comments largely expressed desire, excitement, and delight in the existence of the meme itself, and during this process, they engaged in mutual recognition (p. 336). They expressed awe at how quickly the Facebook account was created after Romney’s gaffe. They made statements such as, “I love how quickly this page was created”, “I love how many likes it already has LOL”, “Hysterical!!”, “oh how quickly this web moves”, and “wow, just wow, at both the comment and the speed of this page and the speed of the likes” (p. 337). Other comments show that users felt “excited” and “connected” upon identifying the memes on the Facebook page. For example, “YES THIS IS A
THING” and “Oh Internet, I knew you’d never let me down” (p. 337) suggest a focus on interconnectedness, excitement, and shared expressions of joy and delight, rather than on critiquing the gender ideology implied in Romney’s comment. These users were engaging in fellow-feeling.

**Conclusion**

The results of this research suggest that in order to continue to understand the nature of online communication, we must consider the ways and reasons we share feelings. And while Adam Smith is most recognized for his contributions to economics, his insights into human interactions in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* would serve as an effective starting point of inquiry. It also may be useful to revisit other nonverbal studies such as kinesics and proxemics to help us understand the role the body plays in helping to structure the meaning of the messages that we convey. And, as suggested by Mulhoff (2015), the concept of affective resonance can and, perhaps, should be regarded not only from the cognitive sciences of emotion, sociology, phenomenology, or affect, but also from mathematics and physics (p. 1003). There is value in creating a unified interdisciplinary theory regarding Virtual Sentiments. Smith’s notion of pitch is well-supported by the scientific and social-scientific research, which stresses the importance of visually perceived stimuli, or affect resonance, in helping us share feelings with one another. This paper’s research supports the notion that affect is, indeed, deterritorialized in our online communication. When it reterritorializes in the virtual world, it does so with some major handicaps: a lack of eye-contact, and general invisibility to others online, consequently complicates our ability to converge emotionally. This leads to an affect deficit, as text is not substantial enough to gesture or convey meaning or emotions. We struggle, then, to use images such as emoji, or memes in their static, animated, and video forms, to correct this deficit. These images, I have argued, are intended to stand in for the corporeal existence of a body, and are characterized by their open, playful nature, their easy-to-enter game-like rules with formulaic bases, their super-real, over-the-top nature, the critical mass requiring them to become a “thing,” and their visual nature. But these are all insufficient.

We still access our Facebook page five times a day. We still update our Facebook status constantly, desperate for approbation. We post a picture, then anxiously await the “likes”, the number we accumulate never being enough. We sign off every business email with “thanks!” because the exclamation mark is necessary to avoid sounding cold and abrupt. When a friend posts a comment, we “like” it immediately, understanding the sense of isolation and anxiety she will feel without my instant approval. We comment under news stories with insanely over-the-top rhetoric, hyperbole, offensiveness, things we would never dream of saying in person, as if testing to see if anyone out there is alive. The deficit remains, and the task going forward will be to figure out how to compensate in our virtual world.
References


Towards a Theory of Virtual Sentiments

The Disestablishmentarian
Towards a Theory of Virtual Sentiments


Protests in the 21st Century: Autonomy, Multitude and Global Dissent

ALESSANDRO DRAGO

ABSTRACT Hardt and Negri’s work remains relevant to explain the current “wave” of social protest (from 2010 onwards). This paper argues that Hardt and Negri’s concepts of Empire, Multitude and, more specifically, those of immaterial labour, the commons and biopolitical production all adequately grasp the current state of social movements today. Through a re-examination of Hardt and Negri’s autonomist roots, I argue that the main driver of social protest today is the intrusive arms of Empire on the productive capabilities of the multitude. The multitude wishes to rid itself of the parasitic constraints imposed upon it by Empire and to re-appropriate the commons. Since 2010, there has been an explosion of social unrest beginning with the Arab Spring and continuing with movements like Occupy and the Quebec Student Strike. While many protests begin and then seem to fizzle out without leaving any lasting structural changes this paper argues that the very act of protesting creates new/radical subjectivities within individuals and causes them to be more critical and more apt to protest other injustices. Finally, this paper argues that both the quantitative (their sheer numbers) and the qualitative (the forms they take) aspects of social movements today is reason for optimism.

KEYWORDS political protest, social movements, multitude, empire, autonomy

Introduction

This paper will discuss the collaborative work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and will attempt to test whether their theories can adequately grasp the current wave of social protests since the year 2010. After situating their work within the Italian “workerist” tradition, I will discuss some of their key concepts and beliefs.
After this, I will analyze the current wave of social protest (from 2010-onwards). In my essay I will argue how the productive capabilities of the multitude are constrained by the intrusive arms of Empire. Thus, the focal point of struggle will be the multitude’s desire to rid itself of Empire’s parasitic nature and the constraints it imposes. This, I argue, is the primary reason for, and the principle driving force behind the new cycle of social movements we have seen since 2010. Furthermore, I contend that we should be optimistic about the current wave of social movements because of their sheer numbers, their demands, their organizational structures and their tactics.

Autonomous Social Movements

I will begin my paper by examining autonomous social movements and will discuss some of their features and characteristics. As I will show in the concluding sections of my paper, many social movements today share the same characteristics as autonomist social movements.

The specific manifestations of autonomous social movements vary tremendously depending on their country of origin and the particular issues which they mobilize against, yet they do have commonalities. One key aspect of all of these movements, though, is their creation of spaces outside of capitalist structures. These spaces prefigure the communities activists wish to establish (Newman, 2011). The state is not used by Autonomous Social Movements (ASM’s) as a “vehicle” for liberation in that activists will work outside of state structures for solutions to their problems (Day, 2005, p. 124; Holloway, 2010). Resistance for autonomists does not mean appealing to the unconstitutional nature of a specific law, since this itself only serves to strengthen the proletarian, through their resistance, is the force which invents the future productive capabilities of the multitude. Thus, the focal point of struggle will be the multitude’s desire to rid itself of Empire’s parasitic nature and the constraints it imposes. This, I argue, is the primary reason for, and the principle driving force behind the new cycle of social movements we have seen since 2010. Furthermore, I contend that we should be optimistic about the current wave of social movements because of their sheer numbers, their demands, their organizational structures and their tactics.

Workers’ Struggles

The central thesis of autonomist Marxism is that capital continually restructures itself in response to labour’s “refusal to submit” to capital’s exploitation (Tronti, 1980, p. 31). In other words, “the struggle of labour is the motor force of capitalism” (Eden, 2012, p. 28). Autonomist Marxism gives workers agency and does not simply treat labourers as “victims” of capitalist expansion but as active agents causing changes in the composition and structure of capitalism (Weeks, 2005, p. 118). Autonomist Marxists prioritize an analysis of the “shifts in workers struggles” rather than focusing on “changes in capital”. Thus, their approach was centered on the worker (Clough and Blumberg, 2012, p. 345). Negri (2009) theorized that the resistance of the workers is what causes changes to the formations of capitalism, not the other way around. For instance, workers’ struggles in the late 1920’s and early 1930’s caused the state to create the welfare economy (Negri, 2009, p. 158). Hardt and Negri claim that during the 1960’s, diverse struggles (the counter culture movement in the U.S., the events of May 1968 in Paris and the student protests of the 1960’s and 1970’s in Italy to name a few) linked up and caused large changes in the composition and organization of capitalism, which gave rise to neoliberal economic policies and a decrease in the regulatory power of the state (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 261). Therefore, the proletariat, through their resistance, is the force which invents the future productive apparatuses that capitalism will take up in the future (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p.
Capitalism's Parasitic Nature and Capitalism as Constraint

According to Tronti (1980) the capitalist class is “subordinate to the working class” and this is why the capitalist class needs to exploit the working class (p. 30). Capitalism is inherently weak because of its parasitism, since it needs to exploit labourers in order to exist (Eden, 2012, p. 13). Capital can be best described as a “parasite”. For example, when a parasite infects a human body, one obviously assumes that the individual who has been infected is the victim, and they would be right. However, just like the relationship between capital and the workers, the parasite’s relationship to the human body is one of subordination. This is because the parasite is dependent on the human body for life, without it, it would die. This is exactly the relationship Tronti speaks of between capital and labour. Even Marx (1867) was aware of such a relationship, though he used a different metaphor: “Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (p. 1). However, what’s most important is that capital is an impediment to the full productive capacities of the proletariat. A parasitical infection impedes the functional capabilities of the human body. And just like a parasitical infection, Capitalism is an inherent constraint on the productive capabilities of the working class. As I will discuss later, Empire is subordinate to the multitude, since it needs the multitude to exist, and it is also a constraint upon the true productive capacities of the multitude (Keucheyan 2013, p. 86). Hardt and Negri, although aware of the concept of capital as constraint, I argue, severely underplay it within their work.

Refusal of Work and Exodus

Finally, I will discuss the refusal of work concept and the concept of exodus. For Negri, the workers’ labour is most valuable when it is decoupled from capitalist production, decoupled from profit and put into the service of social cooperation. This is the “refusal of work” strategy (Righi, 2012, p. 142). “Refusal of work implies a social industrious-ness that increases circulation and exchange in a non-exploitative direction” (Righi 2012: p. 144). The “refusal of work” is an important tool that can challenge the dominant discourses of labour in today’s capitalist society (Weeks, 2000, p. 109). The refusal of work then is both an escape and a creation. Refusal means to “exit” the form of domination imposed by capitalism. While in “exodus” from traditional labour relations, individuals can form new relationships and gain new creative capacities free from domination. This allows us to create new “subjectivities” and desires which are no longer tied to capitalist exploitation (Weeks, 2005, p. 122). “Exodus rather is a desertion of a mode of being” and replacing it with a more radical and democratic “mode of being” (Eden, 2012, p. 73). It is the creation of a new society; it is a “creative process” where the old society disintegrates into an anti-capitalist and democratic one (Eden, 2012, p. 70). Virno (2004) describes how exodus helps weaken capitalism by depriving it of the surplus value made from workers, saying that “defection allows for a dramatic, autonomous and affirmative expression of this surplus, and in this way it impedes the “transfer” of this surplus into the power of state administration, impedes its configuration as productive resource of the capitalist enterprise” (p. 71).

Empire and Multitude

In the next two sections, I will explore concepts which I argue are central to Hardt and Negri’s work and which, as I will demonstrate in my discussion of social movements today, allow us to understand the reasons, goals and aims behind the wave of protests since 2010. I will explore Hardt and Negri’s concepts of Empire, multitude, the commons, immaterial labour and biopolitical production.

Empire

Hardt and Negri came to international attention when they released Empire in the year 2000. Empire is described by the authors as a conglomeration of supranational and national entities which have created a “new form of sovereignty” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p.xi). This new form of sovereignty is composed of multi-national corporations, international institutions (such as the U.N. and WTO), NGO’s and nation states. Empire is “a decentred and deterritorializing apparatus of rule” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p.xii). There is no “center” of power within Empire, no one entity which controls its inner workings. All actors within Empire relate to each other in a network structure. Importantly, this is one of the main distinctions between Empire and imperialism, since unlike imperialism, Empire has no “center” where it can project its power throughout the world (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p.xiii). Furthermore, Empire
is “called into being”. It is established when a situation arises where force needs to be exerted, and Empire presents itself as the necessary and legitimate use of force needed to restore order (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 15).

This new form of sovereignty does not need to be maintained by a superpower as some international relations scholars like to claim (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 3). In fact, no territorial entity can stop Empire’s spread and growth (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p.xiv). While nation states still have a role to play in the global community, this role is increasingly mediated by the INGOs. (Hardt, 2016, p. 125). In fact, Hardt and Negri claim that the influence of nation states has declined; they are no longer the major forces on the world stage. Empire then, is a form of global sovereignty.

**Multitude**

Hardt and Negri’s second famous concept is the “multitude”. Multitude is Hardt and Negri’s expansive concept which refers to the political/social/economic subjects in society who resist Empire. The multitude is composed of individuals with different religions, “races”, ideologies, beliefs, and ways of life. “The multitude is a multiplicity of all these singular differences” (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p.xiv). Importantly, even though it is a “multitude”, it is not “fragmented”. The multitude, while being composed of various groups, is not irreducible into any one category or identity. It can act together based on “what it has in common” rather than based on a pre-fixed identity or concept (such as nationalism). Therefore, the multitude is separated conceptually from the concept of the “people” which designates them as sovereign subjects under the control of a sovereign power. In political theory, the multitude is contrasted with Thomas Hobbes’s concept of the “people”. The concept of the multitude is disliked by Hobbes since it cannot be reduced into a unity like the “people” and because the multitude “resists authority” and does not become a subject to a sovereign (Virno, 2004, p. 23). The multitude can never become a “unity” because of its heterogeneous composition. On the multitude the authors state “there exists sufficient common basis, interaction, and communication among various singular figures of production to make possible the construction of the multitude” (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 158).

As was stated above, Empire is “called into being” by the multitude (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 43). This is in line with autonomist Marxist theory where workers’ struggles cause changes in the composition of capital. The struggles of various peoples throughout the world caused the restructuring of capitalism and the restructuring of the sovereign order into Empire. Empire is dependent on the multitude to survive but the multitude can survive autonomously without Empire (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 225). Furthermore, unlike the bourgeoisie in the 17th century, who needed to rely on a new form of sovereignty to consolidate its power, the multitude emerges within this new form of sovereignty (Empire) and does not use it but “looks forward” beyond it towards democratic alternatives of rule (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p.xxvi).

Just like Empire, the multitude is a network structure and is decentralized. While Empire is organized in a network structure, Empire continually attempts to hierarchize and impose “segmentary” practices onto its citizens, whether it tries to divide people by race, gender or income. However, these practices cannot be overused, since Empire recognizes that it is the network structure of the multitude that allows goods, information and labour to flow throughout the world and this is what maintains worldwide productivity (Hardt & Negri, 2000, p. 62). Empire then, needs to straddle a fine line between remaining productive and making sure that the multitude does not become too strong and begin to protest their conditions.

**The Commons, Immaterial Labour and Biopolitical Production**

**The Common**

Hardt and Negri’s concept of the common is an integral term to explore because, as I will argue below, the majority of protests today are fought in order to free the commons from the continued grip of governments and forces of privatization. The authors admit that the challenge for the multitude is the fact that since it is composed of such a diverse array of groups it may be difficult to communicate or “act in common” while not negating any of their differences (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p.xiv). To act together the multitude needs to figure out the “common that allows them to communicate and act together”. This common is mutually produced by everyone (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p.xv). The common refers to material things (the land, air, water) and all immaterial things which are produced through “human labour and creativity” (such as knowledge, ideas etc.) (Hardt, 2010, p. 350). In other words, the common includes all of the “natural” world but also all “constitutive elements of human society” like gestures, languages etc. (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 171). There exists a mutual relationship between creating the commons and subjectivities; they both feed one another (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 190).

The multitude defends the common (land, water, knowledge) from the expropriation of capitalism (through privatization) and socialism (which turns the commons into state controlled property) (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 111; Bailey & Mattei, 2013,
Neoliberalism attempts to privatize the commons through the establishment of “rents”. This is done in order to keep the multitude divided and to profit from economic resources (Hardt, 2010, p. 350). The privatization of public land and resources is an increasingly common practice under capitalism which the authors call “expropriation of the common” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 137). Neoliberalism privatizes the common and uses it as one of its major tools to keep the multitude divided (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 138). The creation of a dam, which is an example of the expropriation of the commons, benefits the rich and not the poor, whose traditional land and methods of fishing are encroached upon. The common land in which they made their living is privatized (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 283). However, whenever the intrusive arms of capitalism attempts to privatize the commons, the multitude is ready to fight back. Therefore, the expropriation of the commons (whether it is material or immaterial objects) is a flash point for struggle (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 188).

Immaterial Labour

While Hardt and Negri claim that the multitude will soon be able to recognize the common goals and desires they share, they still have to discover the tools needed in order to work together collaboratively towards these shared goals.

One of the factors that will allow the multitude to work together is immaterial labour. The authors argue that immaterial labour is “biopolitical” because it produces social relationships and social life more generally (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 66). Immaterial labour refers to the production of ideas, knowledge, social relationships etc. It has taken over from industrial labour as the “hegemonic” form of labour within society (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 108). Immaterial labour is hegemonic not because quantitatively more people produce immaterially but because new technological innovations change the way work is done and the workers’ relationships with one other. Therefore, even though there are quantitatively more industrial labourers then immaterial labourers, immaterial labour is becoming hegemonic since “labour and society have to informationalize” today (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 109). Immaterial labour is influencing all aspects of life and all aspects of work (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 109). “Thus various tasks- making shoes, teaching high school students, etc. – all conform to the hegemonic form of labour” (Eden, 2012, p. 49). This allows workers to share more in the common with one another because they share similar work experiences and similar tools to complete their tasks. Immaterial labour stands in a similar position to Marx’s industrial working class. Marx was aware that the industrial class was not hegemonic around the world in any quantitative sense but he ascribed to this class revolutionary primacy over others. Hardt and Negri however do not believe that immaterial labourers are the new revolutionary force in any teleological sense, only that immaterial labourers have acquired more of the tools needed to resist.

There are two principle aspects of immaterial labour, the first being that it is composed of intellectual or cognitive labour (labour whose primary instrument is knowledge) and secondly the affective forms of labour (labour that produces emotions etc.). Immaterial labour and production is fundamentally social because it involves communication and collaboration between people. Work today requires more communication and collaboration between individuals (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 66). Importantly, because immaterial labour produces immaterial products, the laws of scarcity no longer apply since immaterial products are reproducible. Not only this, but these products are no longer “exclusive” but can be shared and held in common because of their reproducibility (Hardt, 2010, p. 349). The value or “utility” of an immaterial product increases rather than decreases when it is shared with others. Privatizing ideas, information, etc., reduces their productive potential. Incidentally, the continued privatization of the common will ensure the reduction of productivity (for example, the continued privatization of universities has made it harder for individuals to attend and to succeed at University), and thus Hardt points out a central contradiction at work within the logic of capital (Hardt, 2010, p. 349-50).

The revolutionary and subversive potential of immaterial labour is that it allows for a network of communication to be established between labourers (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 66). Immaterial production, because it is fundamentally biopolitical, creates “social life itself” (Hardt & Negri, 2005 p. 146). Because of its biopolitical nature, immaterial production involves the “production of subjectivity” (our beliefs, “who we are” etc.) (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 66). Through immaterial labour, we gain the tools and skills to work and communicate cooperatively. These tools and skills, however, are transferable outside of the workplace and can be applied in everyday contexts (in particular to politics) (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 152).

Biopolitical Production

One of Hardt and Negri’s most central and difficult concepts is biopolitical production. Biopolitical production refers to the creation (production) of subjectivities, ways of life and knowledge. Biopolitical production does not just create material objects but political and social facts of life (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. xvi). Therefore, our subjectivities are also produced biopolitically. As I will explain below, one of the primary goals of social movements today is to create radically new subjectivities free from capitalist domination. The philosophy of the subject, whether the subject was
completely constituted by society, and what effect this had for the political nature of the subject was a contentious debate in the 1980’s (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 172). While scholars debated whether the production of subjectivity was good or bad, Deleuze and Foucault did not say either. Instead they discussed how “the production of subjectivity...is the primary terrain on which political struggle takes place” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 172). According to Hardt and Negri (2009), what is needed is the *autonomous production* of subjectivities (autonomous from the intrusive arms of Empire) (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 172).

It is often thought that individuals, to accomplish anything, will need to be led by some sort of leader. Hardt and Negri reject Lenin’s belief, for example, that a leader will initially be needed because individuals will not have the adequate consciousness to rule themselves (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 175). Because the multitude is able to work cooperatively to produce immaterial products, it is also capable of producing political decisions. The same “capacities” used to produce immaterially allow the multitude to communicate and cooperate politically together (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 174). The biopolitical production employed by everyone demonstrates how the multitude does not need a political “boss” or leader as Lenin claims. It is through this ability to produce together in common that they will be able to act collectively and collaboratively without the need for a “leader” (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 353).

Once realized by the populace, the “coming battle” will be an exodus from the continued control of capital over the production of our subjectivities. Biopolitical production will continue, with the workers creating their new communities. However, they will be without the intrusive arms of capital (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 152-3). Empire is fundamentally an “apparatus of capture” which appropriates the value produced by the multitude (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 258-9). The next crisis of capitalism will not be caused by capitalism's inherent contradictions, but because of a global struggle waged by the multitude against the parasitic and fundamentally unproductive forces which impede the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Furthermore, because we are all constituted by biopolitical production, the next step is to gain control of this production if we want to rid ourselves of all of Empire's corruptions and parasitism. Once this is done, we can produce collectively while maintaining our singularities. Therefore, because of the constraints imposed by capital, the multitude will resist, but as we will see, this mostly takes the form of short movements which flare up and die away. As I will argue below, while the type of protest popular today does not leave behind any “fixed” organizational structures, it does, however, alter people’s subjectivities.

### Analysis of Contemporary Protests from 2010-Onwards

In the last section of my essay, I will analyze the current wave of social movements (from 2010-onwards). In my analysis, I will explain why Hardt and Negri’s theories are still relevant to explain this new protest cycle.

There was a great deal of optimism surrounding the release of Hardt and Negri’s books *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2005). This optimism was caused by the proliferation of anti/alter globalization protests sweeping across the world (Hardt & Negri, 2009). Struggles and protests which seemed to touch the global were abounding everywhere. In the quintessential example, the protests which arose in Bolivia in the year 2000 in response to the World Bank’s proposal to privatize the water supply of the third largest Bolivian city truly demonstrated the power of the multitude combating the *global forces* attempting to expropriate and privatize the commons (Hardt & Negri, 2009, p. 111). Hardt and Negri’s books gave activists the possibility to learn a new, subversive and theoretical vocabulary in which to frame their particular situations.

However, from 2004 onwards, there has been a change in the dynamics of global protests. In fact, the cycle of anti/alter globalization protests ended and were replaced with more localized sets of protests (Frassinelli, 2011, p. 128). There has been a decline in protests relating to transnational issues; instead, protests focus more on local contexts (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 8). From 2006 to 2013, 80% of the targets of protestors were national governments (Ortiz, Burke, Berrada and Cortez Saenz, 2013, p. 34). Only 29% of all protests included some form of grievance directed against global corporations (Ortiz, Burke, Berrada & Cortez Saenz, 2013, p. 35). Therefore, it seems as though the real target of the majority of protests over that time period were national governments, rather than INGOs and the global state of affairs.

This seemed to contradict what Hardt and Negri (2000) argued within their work. They explained that protests would be “nomadic” and would increasingly begin to recognize their common enemy, Empire, and would direct their anger globally (p. 61). Furthermore, while the anti/alter globalization protests did not have an organizational structure, they were omnipresent whenever there was a global summit meeting and this led to the establishment of the World Social Forum. Today, protests are not only local but tend to flare up and then die away without leaving any lasting changes or organizational structures (Vey, 2016). However, I argue that this is not a time for “despair”, in fact, I believe that Hardt and Negri’s theses work better to explain this new “cycle” of protests. Since 2010, we have seen the emergence of the
Arab spring, the Occupy movement, along with the Quebec student strike and many other protests against austerity measures (Ortiz, Burke, Berrada & Cortez Saenz, 2013, p. 17).

From 2010 Onwards

I will first explore some of the commonalities shared by the current explosion of protest movements from an autonomist Marxist perspective. Today’s social movements are fighting against the increased precarity of labour and against the increasingly exploitative form of capitalism (Raunig, 2013, p. 150). Protests today, in particular Occupy, are directed towards the political system but are also used as a way to experiment in new ways of living and acting together (Raunig, 2013, p. 153). These movements also wish to discover “new forms of organization” (Raunig, 2013, p. 153). Typically, the organizations of protest groups are non-hierarchical, non-representative and inclusive (Raunig, 2013, p. 154). The movements are “transversal” and not universal, are “radically inclusive” and create spaces in which they act on their beliefs instead of simply demanding them. Therefore, they are put into practice at the same time as they are demanded, as was seen during the Occupy protests, where direct democracy was practiced within the encampments (Raunig, 2013, p. 155).

I will now explore three principle reasons why we should be optimistic about the new wave of social struggles. Firstly, the amount of protests has increased dramatically across the world. In fact, it has been said that we have the largest number of protests and protestors in world history (Kaldor, Selchow, Deel & Murray-Leach, 2012, p. 1; The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013, p. 3). These movements can be characterized by their heterogeneity and as being very diverse in their aims and goals, rather than being considered as one homogenous mass movement (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 1; Basok, 2014). Today there has emerged protests in every region of the world and against every “regime type” (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 6). Importantly, the largest concentration of protests has been in the regions with the highest income, thus lending credence to Hardt and Negri’s beliefs pertaining to the hegemony of immaterial labour and its facilitation of indignation (Ortiz, Burke, Berrada & Cortez Saenz, 2013, p. 12).

Secondly, what is motivating these protests is a desire for real democracy. Real democracy works through a consensus style of decision making and gives all individuals a voice. A distrust of conventional politics is common amongst all protestors today (Kaldor, Selchow, Deel & Murray-Leach, 2012, p. 10). “Indeed, what is so remarkable about our research is that a deep disappointment with the political system as such was found in every single one of our case studies, even though there was little connection between them” (Kaldor, Selchow, Deel & Murray-Leach, 2012, p. 11). Many of the movements that arose during 2011 set their sights against the representative forms of democracy which are cherished and celebrated in Western societies (Hardt & Negri, 2012, p. 26). This is because representative democracy is an “obstacle” to the realization of true democracy (Hardt & Negri, 2012, p. 26). Furthermore, protestors took issue with the fact that many accords are signed at the global level away from any form of democracy, thus, doubly disenfranchising citizens (Hardt & Negri, 2012, p. 29). This desire for democracy is the common factor that connects protestors together. “By and large, protests are not about austerity per se but rather about the failures of democracy as currently practiced” (Kaldor, Selchow, Deel & Murray-Leach, 2012, p. 8). This concern for democracy causes movements to prefigure the alternative democratic strategies they wish to be implemented (Kaldor, Selchow, Deel & Murray-Leach, 2012, p. 14). In sum, people are motivated not only by their poverty and dire economic situations but also for a desire for real democracy (Hardt & Negri, 2005, p. 67).

Thirdly, the organizational structures of this new “cycle” of protests are similar to autonomous social movements. These new movements have been noted for their disdain for traditional politics, for their refusal to organize hierarchically or to have clear leadership, and for their diverse, varied, and at times unclear set of demands or goals (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013, p. 3). In other words, many of these protests have not clarified their demands or made a clear set of goals they wish to attain (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2013, p. 6). These new movements are concerned with horizontality (as opposed to a vertical style of leadership) and the inclusion of everyone participating in the decisions taken (Kaldor, Selchow, Deel & Murray-Leach, 2012, p. 18). Hardt and Negri (2011) describe the Arab spring as a horizontal movement which remained leaderless throughout its protests.

Trade unions still play a large part in social movements today (Peterson, Wahlström & Wennerhag, 2015, p. 305), however, Hardt and Negri argue that even though some traditional organizations played a role in the protests, these organizations were never able to take over and impose their hegemonic vision on the protestors themselves (Hardt & Negri, 2011). The multitude does not need leaders since it is able to organize itself spontaneously through the actions of multiple individuals, for example, through social media as occurred during the Arab Spring. The revolts of the Arab spring were quintessentially a revolt of a young generation of people who wanted to remove the impediments to their creativity, intelligence, and capacities, allowing them to produce autonomously (Hardt & Negri, 2011).
Autonomous forms of leadership are now becoming common amongst protest movements today (Western, 2014; Frenzel, 2014). Fixed leadership is rejected, as are individual leaders since leadership is considered undemocratic (Sutherland, Land & Bohm, 2014, p. 768). Direct democratic approaches are favoured over representative democracy, as is consensus style decision making (Sutherland, Land & Bohm, 2014, p. 769). While the media characterized these movements (especially Occupy and the Egyptian revolution) as leaderless, this is a misnomer. The Arab Spring and Occupy were “leaderful” movements instead of leaderless, since many people of multiple backgrounds and beliefs helped create the encampment, its organization and its political nature (Chalcraft, 2012, p. 8). Finally, movements today are theoretically diverse, enacting the theories of post-Marxism, anarchism, autonomist Marxism and more (Kiersey & Vrasti, 2016).

Hardt and Negri (2012) wish to challenge the claim made by some scholars that the media “caused” the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement (p. 21). Media technology has definitely helped increase protest movements by enhancing the ability of protestors to communicate with one another (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 9). Social media was integral for the revolutions during the Arab Spring. The use of this new media has led to a new process called “horizontal connectivity”, where multiple individuals are connected to one another in real time without a hierarchal structure. This distinguishes them from protests led by unions or political parties where there is a chain of command and where communication amongst activists follows a specific hierarchy (Khondker, 2011, p. 675). However, the prevalence and use of social media by these protestors should not be mistaken for the organizational structure of the multitude. Instead, the use of media technologies should be seen as the ability of the multitude to use readily available tools in order to be autonomous (Hardt & Negri, 2011). Social media did not cause the Arab Spring, but only helped to perpetuate it (Chalcraft, 2012, p. 8). Furthermore, Hardt and Negri claim that while social media facilitates protests, it is being together in protest, physically occupying a square which is the best form of communication (Hardt and Negri, 2012, p. 21).

All of the movements seemed to learn from each other, use the same tactics, the same slogans, the same logic and they all communicated through the internet and other mediums. Protests today are “contagious” in the sense that they quickly spread across regions and have their methods and goals copied by other protest movements (Carothers & Youngs, 2015, p. 6). Hardt and Negri claim that the cycle of protests in 2011 were all interconnected, they were all singular struggles which were local yet they still, through their common recognition of economic inequality and through a desire for real democracy, touched upon the global (2012, p. 5). All of the movements fed off one another, copying each other’s tactics, goals and desires. The multitude (best represented by the Arab spring and Occupy protestors) are increasingly combatting the ills of neoliberalism. These two specific protest manifestations lend credence to Hardt and Negri’s assertion of the emerging multitude, as these two movements contained a diverse array of “actors” working together in concert (Hatem, 2012, p. 414). Some movements have found that an effective strategy is to find linkages with other struggles so as to do battle together like in the case of Idle No More. Idle No More found broad support amongst various groups and organizations like political parties, environmental groups, and students. At times, local struggles can be linked directly to global issues. This occurs when local appeals and demands (like reduced bus fares or access to public green space etc.) come to symbolize one key demand such as “the city is ours”, and thus these local issues are turned into global demands through the linkages made with protests around the world (Ortiz, Burke, Berrada & Cortez Saenz, 2013, p. 27). As people continue to witness the decline of state power and the increasing power of INGO’s, they will continue to direct their anger and frustration at this undemocratic social formation (Bailey & Mattei, 2013, p. 976).

Prefigurative Politics and Occupation

The Arab Spring protests are an example of “prefigurative politics”, the creation of political spaces that prefigure the society one wishes to live in the future (van de Sande, 2013, p. 236). The most recent protests were all linked through their tactic of occupation, from Tahrir to Gezi, to Wall Street. Occupation has the benefit of allowing groups to prefigure the politics they wish to see implemented (Vasudevan, 2015, p. 331). For instance, the Occupy movements were a continuous struggle to articulate new ways of being and acting but it is through physically congregating within the occupied site and the encampments that allows politics to be played out. The actual occupation of physical space can help our articulation of theory, rather than having theory applied and then put it into practice (Arenas, 2014, p. 446). Occupying physical space is very important since it allows multiple groups to prefigure the societies they wish to live in in the future.

This demonstrates how one of the principle aspects of autonomist Marxists theory, exodus, is very helpful for contemporary movements today. The strategy of occupation has its links to squatters’ groups whom would take over abandoned buildings or city spaces to create freely accessible and inclusive living spaces for marginalized populations. These “autonomous” spaces are an example of the prefiguration of
the societies squatters wish to live in (Prujt, 2003). The occupations allow individuals to be free (for a limited time) from the intrusive and divisive arms of Empire. However, it is important to remember that while within the encampment a very open and inclusive politics may be taking place, “corruptions” will still penetrate the occupied site because people carry their oppressive/racist/sexist views from the old society into the new society. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that the refiguration of politics within the camp is never a completed process, but a continuous one.

One common criticism of Occupy was its inability to create a lasting organization. Instead, it was simply a flare up which quickly died away (Vey, 2016). These flare-ups may not seem like they contribute much, however, they contribute in the creation of new subjectivities. By protesting, you are gaining experience and creating new forms of subjectivities, this is why we cannot discount protests which “flare up” and then “die” later on (Kiersey & Vrasti, 2016). Being a part of the protest, being in the camp, making decisions collectively, “putting them into action” etc. helps to create new subjectivities amongst activists. This experience can be drawn on later, regardless of whether the protests failed or not, and the knowledge gained can be used for new movements (Kiersey & Vrasti, 2016). The fact of being in the camp, deliberating at the assembly, collectively working to solve problems helps to shape the individuals conducting such actions. While many of these actions may appear to be “micro” and therefore inconsequential, “these micro changes are undoubtedly the basis for the next wave” of protest and occupation (Fernández-Savater, 2014, p. 3). Furthermore, a social movement does not end when the spatial encampment is overrun and removed by the police because it lives on in the minds of the participants (who go on to form other movements) but it also lives on in the minds of the general public (Bratich, 2014, p. 70). For instance, 47% of people in the U.S. believed wealth inequality was very high in 2009, however after the Occupy movement that number rose to 66%. (Morin, 2012). The very fact of struggling has the potential to change the “grammar of political and social ideology” of the state and its citizens regardless of whether the movement was successful or not on a whole (Purakayastha, Chakrabarty & Das, 2014, p. 75).

An Example: The Quebec Student Strike

I want to apply some of the conclusions reached throughout this paper on a local example: The 2012 Quebec student strike. To start, the Quebec student strikers are immaterial labourers since they primarily produce immaterial goods and are likely to find employment in occupations which also produce immaterially (Fournier, 2014, p. 172). The Quebec student strikes contained a diverse array of groups such as militants, Marxists, anarchists, “mainstream” political parties etc., and its diversity was one of its strengths (Fournier, 2014, p. 172). The strikes occurred because of the proposed 75 percent tuition hike to be applied to all Quebec universities. Therefore, the battle waged was against the increasing “privatization” of the commons. Universities are a sight of knowledge production and creative sharing amongst multiple different individuals. The proposed tuition increase imposed more barriers to the access of the university and the production of knowledge that comes from it. The productivity of the multitude was thus reduced because of these barriers. Overall, the Quebec student strike did not represent a struggle which was directly engaged against Empire or global organizations even though some student associations like ASSÉ (Association pour une Solidarité Syndicale Étudiante) were aware of the global implications and causes of the tuition increase (Fournier, 2014, p. 175). However, what I argue is that in the battle against the increasing barriers placed upon individuals by the Quebec government, by protesting the imposition of these barriers, the Quebec student strikes were touching upon global issues and desires: namely the desire for the freedom from the constraints imposed by Empire upon the creative capacities of the multitude. One of the main battle cries of the 2012 student strike was “À qui la rue? À nous la rue” (To whom does the street belong? It belongs to us). This captures the protestors’ anger at the continued expropriation of the commons by undemocratic bodies and their belief that it is they (the multitude) that really control the commons. Furthermore, the Quebec student strike helped to create new radical subjectivities within students and the general public. The areas of this creation of new subjectivities was in the protest marches, but principally in the autonomously run student assemblies. Furthermore, the radical subjectivities created during the 2012 student strike helped create the general climate of protest and helped facilitate mobilization against the Quebec Liberal government’s 2015 austerity budget. What was learned during the 2012 student strike was utilized for a new social struggle.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the writings of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri and situated their work within the autonomist Marxist tradition before applying their theories to the current wave of social protests which started in 2010. In this essay, I emphasized autonomist Marxism’s belief that capitalism is a parasite and a constraint and explored their strategy of exodus. I also argued that due to the amount of protestors, what they are motivated by, and their organization and composition, Hardt
and Negri's theories adequately explain this new cycle of protest. Finally, I argued that while the new wave of protests has been unable to create lasting institutional structures, we should not become pessimistic because they will still lead to the creation and proliferation of radical subjectivities which will in turn lead to more social movements and protests in the future.

References


Childhood: A Shifting Construct

FRANCES MARIE SMYTH

ABSTRACT

This paper provides a critical account of the history of child studies, with an emphasis on why the Sociology of Childhood should be more carefully considered in child studies. The paper starts with a critique of the foundations of child studies with psychologists Piaget and Vygotsky. This critique shows how our idea of childhood is not natural but is culturally and socially constructed. It then goes on to show how some important new perspectives coming out of the Sociology of Childhood address missing aspects in the study of childhood by considering the child both as a constructed cultural being and as a valuable active and social agent rather than in terms of deficiency. To do this William Corsaro’s idea of interpretive reproduction is used to revamp the idea of socialization showing that children contribute to culture by interpreting and creating their own peer cultures. Then the current restrictions on our conception of childhood are exemplified by taking the work of Jens Qvortrup, Martin Woodhead, and Chris Jenks, three prominent contemporary Sociology of Childhood scholars, and putting them in dialogue with each other to discuss how ideas of children’s inferiority are ingrained in language and how children’s rights currently may be more prohibiting than protective.

KEYWORDS sociology of childhood, childhood, education, play, developmental psychology, socialization

Introduction

In this paper I will provide a critical account of the history of child studies, with an emphasis on why the Sociology of Childhood should be more carefully considered in child studies. I will also discuss important new perspectives coming out of the Sociology of Childhood that consider the child both as a constructed cultural
being and as valuable active and social agent. Play will be a starting point for my study because that is where most study of childhood has been focused. I will then move on to revamp the idea of socialization with help from the work of William Corsaro. Finally I will discuss how everyday language enforces the boundaries of childhood by looking at three prominent contemporary childhood scholars: Jens Qvortrup, Martin Woodhead and Chris Jenks.

Psychology of Childhood

Plato was one of the earliest philosophers to talk about play. He said that play was a way for people to reveal their underlying dispositions and an ideal way for children to learn. Though the actual content of play has changed, our conception of what play is has remained fairly stable through time (Brooker, Blaise, & Edwards, 2014). The psychological perspective has long been the dominant perspective for looking at play and childhood. Sociological and anthropological study on play has yet to be very central in discussions of play and childhood. Since the dominant mode of looking at childhood is based on psychology and because the Sociology of Childhood has been greatly influenced by psychology, I will start by discussing the psychologists who set the foundation.

Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget have been two of the most influential play theorists within psychology and child development, and because of this one cannot study play without coming across their theories. Vygotsky wrote in the 1920s and Piaget wrote in the 1930s. Vygotsky’s (1966) main theory is about what he calls “the zone of proximal development”. This ‘zone’ is made up of what the child is in the process of learning at a given moment. Through play the child enters and moves through zones. Play allows children to develop into new zones by giving them a chance to learn and practice skills they have not yet learned to use in everyday life.

Vygotsky examines zones of learning whereas Piaget (1936) gives his attention to developmental stages and schemas. Schemas are the categories children form and then adjust using the information they receive from the world. Play is used as a way to assimilate new information into their categories. However, Piaget does not think that play helps to accommodate information - meaning it does not create new categories for information, but only reinforces already formed categories. Piaget’s theories focus on childhood development in preset phases. This aspect of psychology has been especially influential in sociology, policy, and common-sense assumptions (Erneling, 2014; Honig, 2011; James & Prout, 2015; Woodhead, 2011; Woodhead, 2015).

Piaget discusses six stages of physiological and psychological development that children are supposed to go through at certain ages. These stages are marked by qualitative differences having to do with sensory skills, organizing thoughts and meanings, and becoming rational (Piaget, 1936). Piaget’s stages are chronologically ordered, but also implicitly hierarchically ordered on a continuum from low status to high status; the highest status and the goal of development being adult “operative” intelligence. Adulthood seems to refer to being complete and rational, and, most significantly, it is the desired outcome of childhood (Jenks, 2005; Woodhead, 2011). Piaget’s ideal of adult cognitive competence is a Western philosophical one. The goal of cognitive development within his stages is an ability to think about the world with the concepts and principles of Western logic such as space, time, and causality (Archad, 1994; Piaget, 1936, 1945). Piaget does not seem to be aware of the Western orientation in his writing and he presents his goal for children as a universal goal (Piaget, 1936,1945).

An important point that Piaget did not pay attention to is the social nature of play. He paid attention only to its impact on cognitive development. Vygotsky, in contrast, takes play in itself a bit more seriously and does not focus solely on how activities contribute to biological development. Rather, Vygotsky’s theories are focused on the child as a social actor interacting with his natural environment. Piaget thinks of play as practicing learned skills but not developing new ones, whereas Vygotsky thinks of play as the thing that stimulates learning and new thoughts (Goldstein, 1994; Burman, 1994; Honig, 2011; Piaget, 1945; Vygotsky, 1966, 1978).

Piaget’s regard for play as non-serious and trivial emphasizes the future oriented nature of child psychology. For Piaget, play merely distracts the child from his or her true goal of rational thought. An important point I will continue to come back to throughout my essay is that treating play from the perspective of ‘rational adult’ undervalues is as an important aspect of the expression of the child in his own world. The main flaw in this view is that it disregards the child’s experience within childhood, and concerns itself solely with the child as working towards adulthood, thus undermining the child’s true experience as a human being (Jenks, 2005).

Despite differences between Piaget and Vygotsky, they both discuss ‘the child’ and ‘the mother’ as if they are universal roles. When talking about interactions within family and the way children play and develop it is never acknowledged that they are taking a Western approach. Rather it is worded as if child development, relationships, and play are universally and timelessly applicable. The problem with this is that play in children and the way it changes is seen as something biologically determined and
so it ignores the ways play is shaped by society and the fact that it is a cultural activity (Burman, 1994; Evaldson, 2011; Piaget, 1936, 1946; Vygotsky 1966, 1978; Woodhead 2011, 2015). From this foundation of child psychology, much of contemporary psychology continues to take a similar approach.

Childhood Sociologists such as Allison James & Allan Prout (2015), Martin Woodhead (2015), and Chris Jenks (2005) have noted that psychologists generally look for universal laws for the universal child and see social relationships, like the mother and baby, as taken for granted and predetermined by nature: psychological studies are rarely placed in a specific social or cultural context. Furthermore, ideas of development are individualistic; they don't look at children as part of a cohort within culture and history, but as isolated individuals.

Today, the ideas of predetermined stages related to age, thinking of children only in terms of becoming adults, and the idea of the universal child still seem to be part of common-sense assumptions and have greatly influenced education, child rearing, pediatric care, and policy. Although Piaget's exact stages have been questioned and adjusted with time, his model of children as advancing in biological stages predetermined by age has set the foundation for other psychologists' work as well as more general policies and programs (Erneling, 2014; Honig, 2011; James & Prout, 2015; Jenks, 2005; Woodhead, 2011, 2015). Piaget and Vygotsky remain hugely influential play-theorists; both Piaget and Vygotsky are still consistently referred to in education and child study programs. Both theories have influenced children's actual experiences. For example, the way school curriculum is developed is based, in part, on Piaget's stages (Erneling, 2014; Jenks, 2005 ; Woodhead, 2015). Conventions, discourses, and lasting institutions that process the child, like families, nurseries, schools, and clinics, are very often influenced by the idea of biological development of children. These institutions maintain the norms of childhood as well as enforcing the way adults conceptualize childhood (Jenks, 2005). Most importantly, “Piaget has had an immeasurable impact upon the everyday common-sense conceptualization of childhood” (Jenks, 2005, p.27) so that these ways of thinking about childhood are consistently being reinforced through discourse, language, and institutions.

Socialization Theory of Childhood

The Sociology of Childhood was developed out of psychology, and so it has a foundation set on developmental theory. Because of this it is naturally future oriented in its discussions of childhood. In other words, it has a focus on the outcome of childhood: namely, how childhood affects adulthood. Sociology does start to alter the psychological foundations of Child Studies and explore new areas of play research by bringing in social and contextual aspects. However, even in sociology children's actual play and their point of view is often ignored. Instead there is a focus on the adult's perspectives on parenting, and the adult creation of children's culture (through toys and media, for example). Regardless, including sociological perspectives on children has made radical contributions to the study of children by moving forward from development theories that are focused on biological determinism and bringing a social element into traditional theories.

To start, the Sociology of Childhood initially brings forward what has been called the functionalist idea of socialization as its foundation (Alalen, 1988, 2011; Honig, 2011; Smith, 2014). Frederick Elkin and Gerald Handel's book *The Child & Society* (1960) offers an integrative foundation on what socialization is all about. It is an influential book that is still in print today. Elkin and Handel define socialization as “the process by which we learn the ways of a given society or social group so that we can function within it” (p. 2). Note that this perspective continues the pattern of looking at children as passive and conforming receivers of information with a focus on childhood only as a precursor to being an adult. At this point studying childhood is justified because “the direction the person's development takes in later years cannot help but be influenced by the foundations established in childhood” (p.8). As in psychology, socialization theories are still generally concerned with the outcome of socialization in reference to adulthood rather than the experience of children being children. As Elkin and Handel put forward, and as Enid Schildkrout (1978) observes later on (and which can also be observed ingrained in everyday thoughts about childhood), socialization theory brings forward the popular idea of childhood as being a rehearsal for adult life and as a way of reproducing the social order.

Socialization has stayed the dominant paradigm in Sociology of Childhood. This approach makes it so that a common feature amongst play scholars from different disciplines is the lack of interest about play from the child's perspective. As Chris Jenks notes, “everyday common sense and many discourses on childhood are taken for granted, the actual experience of the child is glossed over in place of development and socialization” (2005, p.7). Children are most often studied from the point of view of adults and in relation to adult life. As well, not only in psychology, but also across the disciplines, most notably in sociology, children seem to be commonly regarded as not yet a part of society and therefore not necessary to be studied in and of itself (Alalen, 1988; Corsaro, 2011; Jenks, 2005; Kalliala, 2006).
Although socialization theory is narrow, it is still important and valid. As it has developed, it has provided great insight into cultural reproduction. Most significantly, socialization research has shown how social class, race, and gender inequalities are reproduced in play (Auster & Mansback, 2012; Brooker et al., 2014; Corsaro, 2011; Crook, 1998; Edwards, 2000; Frones, 2011; Kalliala, 2006; Kline, 1993; Murnen et al., 2016; Shultz et al., 2012). Although Pierre Bourdieu, a prominent contemporary sociologist, does not talk specifically about children, his concept of habitus is one example of how social differences are reproduced. Habitus is the way one learns to talk, act, and use the body, which is learned from the environment one grows up in; it is an internalization. This particular term is primarily about reproducing class differences, but could be applied to other areas (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). For example, the child of a professor is more likely to get a job in a university later on because he or she grew up hearing the language and rituals of academia. Leena Alanen, Liz Brooker, and Berry Mayall (2015) write that for Bourdieu, “the ‘primary’ habitus is the basis for the development of the ‘secondary’ habitus by various agents of secondary socialization (schools, peer groups, the media and so on) which people meet in their social trajectory during their lifetime” (p.6). This clearly points to the relationship between habitus and socialization. I have not found that there is much work done on Bourdieu in connection with childhood, and although I am not able to cover it in this paper, I think approaching childhood through Bourdieu could be an important connection to explore. In general, socialization and, more specifically, cultural reproduction, is a crucial perspective in the study of childhood and play. It is important to keep developing this perspective in order to work on some of the criticisms discussed above.

One example of socialization theory used in the Sociology of Play examines the way children’s play often exaggerates and reinforces differences, particularly in looking at gender. This is seen both in the way children themselves play and in the way adults structure play. Boys and girls play differently, are dressed differently, are given different toys, and have different expectations put on them. The different play styles are meaningful because they explicitly reflect the gender-based worlds children grow up in. Adult producers of children’s culture bring these gender differences to toys and media. Toys are never gender neutral; children learn from their parents, their peers, and the media what toys are appropriate for them to play with (Auster & Mansback, 2012; Brooker et al., 2014; Corsaro, 2011; Crook, 1998; Edwards, 2000; Kapur, 2005; Kalliala, 2006; Kline, 1993; Murnen et al., 2016).

Although socialization theory plays an important role, it does not show the full picture of childhood. It adds a social aspect to development; however, socialization theory continues to present itself as universal and timeless even though it tends to focus on children in a Western setting. Additionally, it puts the child in opposition to the adult, and does not allow for any agency in children to construct their own lives. It places children as objects of socialization and “makes it hard to even imagine, and even harder to conceptualize, children as veritable social actors” (Alenan, 1988, p. 57) thus justifying the social marginalization of children as well as creating a norm of childhood to measure against. This framework discourages studying children in their own right and encourages looking at them simply as receptacles of adult teaching (James & Prout, 2015; Throne, 1987; Qvortrup, 1985, 2005). Overall, socialization theory is not formulated in a way to really better understand the lives of children; it is used more as a reason not to study childhood as a phenomenon in and of itself.

As the Sociology of Childhood has progressed it has begun to include more perspectives. This inclusion of other perspectives has led to a shift towards thinking of childhood as constructed as opposed to natural. Moreover, an important development in realizing the constructed nature of childhood has been getting away from the idea of a ‘universal child’ (James & Prout, 2015; Jenks, 2005). As I will show, the disciplines of History and Anthropology have both been influential in this development of the Sociology of Childhood.

Other Influences (History and Anthropology of Childhood)

In his book, Centuries of Childhood, Philippe Aries (1960) puts forward the idea that “in medieval society, the idea of childhood did not exist” (p.125). Aries claims that the “idea of childhood” is a modern invention. What he means by the idea of childhood is our society’s belief that childhood is naturally different than adulthood. According to Aries, children were just small adults and were treated as such. In other words, in medieval times there was no discourse around childhood like there is today. He tries to show that we have moved from a complete ignorance of childhood to the “discovery of childhood” in the 19th century to sentimentalizing childhood in the 16th century. This theory shows how childhood is, in fact, an idea, not a consistent and natural ‘fact.’ Although his method for making these claims has been criticized, he is still very influential in triggering the idea that childhood is constructed. Whatever we think of his method, it is productive to think of his perspective as a heuristic tool (Alenan, 1988; Aries, 1960; Corsaro, 2011; James & Prout, 2005; Kline, 1993; Qvortrup, 1999; Zelizer, 1985).
Anthropology has also been influential in showing how experiences of children in different contexts, like the way they play and develop, changes drastically between cultures. Ethnographic anthropology, like the work of Margaret Mead’s famous *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1955), emphasizes culturally specific ideas of childhood not only across time but also across locations. This is done by studying childhood in different cultures and showing that what we believe to be natural is not universal and thus not actually natural, and conversely, is actually constructed by society. Mead criticizes psychological and educational ways of studying development and puts forth anthropology as an alternative (Evaldson, 2011; James & Prout, 2015; Mead, 1955). By showing the different way children act in other cultures, “Mead’s early findings cast doubt on Piaget’s theory of universal stages and highlight the need for cultural explanations” (Evaldson, 2011, p. 317). Mead observed that children of Samoa commonly do not participate in symbolic fantasy play because of the more natural environment they grow up in. This refutes Piaget’s so-called biological stages, showing how play styles may not be age determined, but rather culturally determined.

Together, historical and anthropological studies show how childhood changes over time and space, and moves the idea of socialization away from universality and toward cultural contexts. This is an important development that has many implications in the way childhood should be studied and conceptualized in academia. This development was accomplished by studying children not only from a psychological viewpoint but by also allowing other disciplines to inform the study of children. Despite the development of new perspectives, psychology is still the dominant way of viewing childhood and the Sociology of Childhood more seriously may help with some criticisms and blind spots within these dominant and influential views.

**The New Sociology of Childhood: Socialization Theory Rethought**

As I have begun to argue, to understand play and childhood they should not be understood only in terms of one social structure, as there are significant differences cross-culturally in beliefs about what is natural and what is valued in children’s activities. For example, some cultures think children should learn from verbal lessons, whereas others think they should learn from observation and participation. The lives of children and the way children play are influenced by these different perceptions of childhood. In cultures where children’s contributions to the adult world are more valued, play takes on a less significant meaning. In others, like Western culture, play is seen as a learning tool that needs fostering (Brooker et al., 2014; Corsaro, 2011; Edwards, 2000; Scarlett, 2005). Not only are there cultural differences, but children can also be studied as active social agents imposing their own will and taking part in their own socialization. Now that childhood is studied from many cultural perspectives, I think one of the most important aspects missing from views of childhood is how children contribute to culture by interpreting and creating their own peer cultures. Furthermore, there is little research done from the perspective of children as active meaning makers in their own socialization.

One instance of research that considers the social context and the perspective of children as active social agents is Karen Malone’s study of children of the Cook Islands (2011). Malone uses the children of the Cook Islands as an example of children who are both modern children and also part of a traditional culture. Children of the Cook Islands actively seek to preserve their culture and language as the world around them quickly changes with the influx of more tourists. Children use technology to become keepers of cultural knowledge by recording songs, dances, and language. At the same time, they merge their two worlds by doing things like altering traditional dances to suit modern pop music. By doing this they are creating a unique peer childhood culture alongside adult culture that they actively shape. This example shows how socialization is not simply a child’s private internalization of adult skills and knowledge but that children are active in the construction of their own lives. This view “opens up possibilities for viewing childhood as a dynamic complex social process with a variety of cultural possibilities” (Malone, 2011, p. 466).

What this example makes clear is that childhood, and particularly play, is an important element in the development of society. Play is not separate or isolated from the rest of culture; play is more about influencing and being influenced by others than it is about the game itself (Henricks, 2006). In contrast, as studied in socialization theory, play is also a rehearsal for adult life and the actions of play validate and reinforce dominant cultural practices (Elkin & Handel, 1960; Schildkrout, 1978; Shultz et al., 2012). At the same time, as other research shows, children contribute to creating culture. “Children are human beings with their own peer cultural groups. Children negotiate, share, and create culture with adults and with each other” (Corsaro, 2005, p. 18). Play behaviours and cultural products like toys are influenced by one another and are both greatly influenced by the overall social structures and cultural values (Roopnarine et al., 1994).

Children’s appropriation of adult culture and their contribution to the reproduction of larger societal culture is what William Corsaro (2011) refers to as the concept of interpretive reproduction. As a scholar, he focuses on showing that children...
Moving Toward a New Conception of Childhood

To summarize: there are two distinct ways of looking at childhood: either by focusing on the way structure imposes itself on children or focusing on children as culturally active social agents imposing their own will. As seen in the example of children bringing toys to school, these two perspectives can overlap. However, these two main perspectives are often positioned as a dichotomy that creates a divide between structural (socialization) and interpretive ways of looking at childhood (Prout & James, 2015). The dominant socialization structural view follows from psychology: that is, treating children as passive receptors of adult knowledge and social norms. The less pervasive view looks at the child as able to negotiate their own relationships and create their own meaning (Alanen, 1988, 2011; Archad, 1994; Corsaro, 2011, 2015; Jenks, 2005; Lee, 2001; Prout & James, 2015; Smith, 2014; Uprichard, 2008; Qvortrup, 1993, 2005, 2011, 2015). Children have been shown to be culturally constructed beings by history and anthropology. I would argue that for them to be cultural, they must also actively participate in their culture and create meaning.

Following from socialization, the common sense view of children is that they are not fully formed; in other words, they are in the process of becoming adult. This view, like the socialization view, stems from the psychological view of development. However, recently there has been a push to view children as being ‘becoming’ suggests that the child is incomplete and is described by deficiency, whereas the ‘being’ perspective suggests that children are competent and active constructors of their own experiences and are an important subject worth studying in and of itself (Alanen, 2011; Lee, 2001; Smith, 2014; Uprichard, 2008; Thorne, 1987; Qvortrup, 1993, 2005). The idea that children are not yet competent or rational is the dominant ideology and this greatly affects their lives, specifically how they are allowed to participate in society, and the general conceptualization of children (Honig, 2011; Jenks, 2005; Thorne, 1987; Qvortrup, 2015; Woodhead, 2015).

The novelty of the ‘being’ approach is that childhood is considered in terms of its present status - as in, what childhood means for children while they are still children, and not what it means for their future adulthood (Uprichard, 2008; Lee, 2001). In order to change the way we think about childhood, I believe this argument and this view of children as ‘being’ needs to become more mainstream. If Psychology stays the dominant form of conceptualizing childhood without influence from The Sociology of Childhood, it will be difficult to make the idea of children as being a mainstream way of thinking. The Sociology of Childhood should move forward to

collectively participate in society. The word “interpretive” captures the child’s creative ability to appropriate and contribute to culture and society rather than simply internalizing it, as the idea of traditional concept of socialization suggests. The word “reproduction” means children are actively contributing to the societal and cultural reproduction not only within childhood but also within their larger social structure.

Overall, Corsaro shows how children are cooperative actors in their own socialization, not passive receptors. In other words, children are innovative and strive to make sense of their culture and, importantly, they strive to participate in it. To do so, they create peer culture. Peer culture stems from creative appropriation of information from the adult world to address their own relationships and concerns in childhood. Adult culture could be said to be the raw material that children take to create something new, positioning children’s peer culture at the core of reproduction and change (Corsaro & Johannesen, 2007; Corsaro, 2011, 2015). This perspective seems to be a transformation of the concept of socialization. It turns socialization into, not something that people are subjected to, but rather something they cooperatively participate in. As well, in interpretive reproduction, childhood socialization can mean socialization towards being a child - as in integrating into a children’s group with its own norms, not only developing into an adult (Honig, 2011).

Examples of reproductive interpretation and peer culture often take place in school, where children do not simply take what they are told by authorities and culture at face value, but rather, are often trying to push the limits of rules. As I am about to describe, children take advantage of moments to rebel when possible. In most schools there is a rule against bringing in your own toys. In one particular study, it was noticed that children would sneak small toys into class in their pockets, not to play with but simply to break the rules and show their friends, creating a kind of rebellious peer culture. The teacher noticed these acts, but as they were being discreet, it was not worth it to get them in trouble. The children were able to create a peer culture and have influence on their teacher (Corsaro & Johannesen, 2007). This is an example of children finding strategies to challenge adult authority. These strategies are thoughtful and feasible, not simply an outward clash. Children try to push local limits and experiment, but within the limits of the larger social structure. By keeping the toys discreet they reinforce the rule while at the same time they rebel against it and thus exert their autonomy. This shows that children desire and fight for control and when they access it they tend to share control with their peers. This is type of action is not used to develop towards adulthood, but to create bonds through their own culture as children (Corsaro, 2011, 2015).
get away from the problematic areas of the foundation of the study of children, and bring the Sociology of Childhood to the foundation (like psychology and education), allowing for the study of children to take on a new perspective.

Although both ways of looking at childhood have merit, the idea of children as passive receptors of culture and structure is already so ingrained in common-sense thinking (Jenks, 2005), so I will put forward the idea that there needs to be a focus on developing The Sociology of Childhood to include the less pervasive view of children as active in their own development. To address this, I will discuss some theories that are more radical and disrupt the traditional ways of analyzing and thinking about childhood.

I have discussed how children desire to and have the ability to exert agency. Next I will disrupt taken-for-granted ways of thinking by addressing children's right to agency. Rather than focusing on children as defective adults, I will try to emphasize that children have the potential to be more capable and responsible than we give them credit for, but that they are greatly restricted from accessing the autonomy and agency necessary to reach this potential (Archad, 1994; Freeman, 2011; Jenks, 1989, 2005; Thorne, 1987). Children are undoubtedly physically different than adults, but as shown through history and anthropology, the consequences of these physical differences change across time and across culture depending on how they are conceptualized. This is comparable to the way the consequences of the physical difference between men and women change depending on context. This suggests that the lack of ability we see in children may not be biologically innate but actually a cultural consequence (Jenks, 1989, 2005; Thorne, 1987; Qvortrup, 1993, 2005).

Children's agency is restricted in various ways. To exemplify this, I will take the work of Jens Qvortrup, Martin Woodhead, and Chris Jenks, three prominent contemporary Sociology of Childhood scholars, and put them in dialogue with each other and some other childhood sociologists and researchers. I will be focusing on how ideas of children's inferiority is ingrained in language and how children's rights currently may be more prohibiting than protective. Qvortrup (1993, 1999, 2005, 2011, 2015) and Jenks (1989, 2005) argue that children only have freedom and the right to agency in very defined places such as in the home or in parks (i.e. designated children's spaces). Many important arenas of society are 'children-free zones'. There have even been suggestions to make stores and restaurants children free zones (Qvortrup, 2005). In terms of discourse, children are often either excluded or included only as an afterthought. The lack of consideration of children may be justified because they are viewed mainly as on their way to adulthood. Consequently, for much of society children are invisible in both discourse and physical space, thus contributing to their marginalized status (Jenks, 2005; Qvortrup, 1999, 2015).

It has been difficult for me to think critically and to reach outside the realm of the dominant ideologies to see that our conceptualization of children may be restricting their right to agency. This is because the idea of children as becoming, as I have noted, is extremely ingrained in common sense thinking. Jenks (2005) claims that "such social hierarchies are taken for granted in our cognitions because we do not examine the assumptions on which they are based. These assumptions embody the values and interests of the theorist and the contemporary culture, which in turn generate normative expectations within the wider society. The child, like the ‘savage’ of an earlier epoch, is either excluded from our analysis or reimported as an afterthought" (2005, p.3). Because theory and general conceptualizing of children has huge weight on their actual lives and experiences, I think a big push in the new Sociology of Childhood should be to question the common discourses around childhood that positions them as lower and less human than adults.

To move forward from dominant discourses of childhood, I will start deconstructing our taken-for-granted understandings of childhood by showing how the idea of children as inferior is reinforced in our everyday language and expressions. To start, as Qvortrup (2005) points out, ‘colloquial expressions such as ‘children are the future of society’, ‘children are the next generation’ and ‘children are our most precious resource’ tend to deprive children of an existence as human beings in favour of an image of them as human becomings, thus underlining the suggestion that children are not authentic contemporaries of adults” (2005, p.5). This statement emphasizes the way, as I have pointed to throughout the essay, we value children not for being children, but for the adults they will become. When first reading these common phrases, it seems they place a great value on children; however, with a closer reading you can understand that the value placed on children is narrow and restricts us from considering and valuing them as children in childhood.

Furthermore, in the Merriam Webster Dictionary the definition of the word “childish” is: “of a child or typical of a child; especially: having or showing the unpleasant qualities (such as silliness or lack of maturity) that children often have,” or “marked by or suggestive of immaturity and lack of poise” and “lacking complexity”. This definition clearly highlights the way we think of children as inadequate. It is accepted for children to be ‘childish’ of course, but as adults, it is used as an insult clearly exemplifying the fact that adults are placed above children in social status.

To summarize, in the words of Jenks (2005), the archetype of the child is “struc-
tured as becoming, not as a social practice nor as a location of the self” (p.11). As shown above, this archetype of childhood is sustained through language. Significantly, this type of adult conceptualization of childhood regulates the relationship between adults and children as well as constituting the child’s capacity to participate in public life; the assumed lower status of children justifies their exemption from most of society. Namely, their exclusion from any type of decision-making, thus hindering their right to agency.

The word ‘need’ is also often used when discussing children. This is surprisingly problematic because it is often used in the wrong way. The word ‘need’ has been found to be prevalently used in associations of social work, the UN declaration of rights of Children, the Department of Education and more. For example, you can find claims like “children need to learn pottery and math” (Woodhead, 2015, p. 63). However, children have not always ‘needed’ to learn math, but rather to be successful in Western culture it is desired. This is problematic as the word ‘need’ implies universality, inevitability, and timelessness when really it is used culturally or for a personal and/or conventional opinion of childhood. This assumption of universality regresses back to the views that anthropology and history worked to change, as in the idea that childhood is constructed as opposed to natural. This suggests that perhaps in our common sense thinking we still do not think of childhood as a cultural construct. Furthermore, the word ‘need’ continues to position the child as helpless, passive, and ‘in need’ (Holt, 1974; Woodhead, 2011, 2015).

Woodhead (2011, 2015) suggests using the word ‘right’ in place of need, as it is a more empowering term; however, he adds that, it’s not that simple: “there is a tension between asserting children’s autonomy and rights to self-determination and asserting that they must be protected from harmful influence” (2015, p. 68). For example, according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to not to participate in labour. But can the prohibition against being active in societal activities be a right? Furthermore, for some children working is the only way to survive the poverty their families face. There is not enough structural support in place to have all proposed rights of children match their realities. I am not advocating for child labour; however, I do think that rights of children should not be taken for granted. There needs to be a way to protect, without cutting off the participation and visibility of children in society. Cutting off children from being visible in society leads to a decrease in agency and a decrease in ability to have meaningful contributions as children. However, I would argue that overall the word ‘right’ still does break off from the construction of children as separate and powerless, and it is a step in the right direction from the overuse of the word ‘need’ (Archad, 1994; Freeman, 2011; Woodhead, 2015).

It is interesting to note that in practice children’s rights tend not to give children more power, but instead control the parents’ authority so that it is in line with approved societal goals (Smith, 2014). John Holt (1974) says that legal and social arrangements that influence children’s ‘rights’ are produced by the construction of children as dependent, pre-rational, and vulnerable thus giving them a limited status as ‘super pet’ (Holt, 1974; Smith, 2014). In this position, children can only have power through manipulating adults. Children who exercise power are thought of as ‘tricky’. Children ‘negotiating’ for things brings to mind children pushing the limits of parents, and the parents possibly losing some control. I believe that children trying to gain power does not have to be seen as a negative, and perhaps children actually should be allowed and encouraged to negotiate and make decisions in more areas of their lives.

The idea of children as becoming is naturalized through language, but according to Jenks (2005,1989) it is also naturalized under the guise of care. Jenks shows how the parent-child relationship is displayed as a relationship of altruism, with the parent giving only for the sake of the child. This view is possible in modern Western society because the child is viewed as a cost, benefitting parents only with emotional fulfillment (Zelizer, 1985). However, the sense of altruism displayed in parent-child relationships can also be seen as a disguise for control. The dependency of children on adults (both on parents and the state) becomes “an instrument in the process of social and cultural reproduction” (Jenks, 2005 p.40). In other words, care is part of an ideology that “positions [adults] on the moral high ground, defines opposition, and exercises a continual control over the other in the name of ‘what is best for them’” (Jenks, 2005, p.40).

The word ‘need’ again plays a part in this. Woodhead (2015) shows that “Children’s ‘needs’ have been constructed as part of a standardized model in which childhood is a period of dependency, defined by protectionist adult-child relationships in which adults are dominant providers and children are passive consumers” (p. 66). In other words, having children completely dependent on adults helps sustain the status quo. This is because if children are not acting as they ‘should’ be parents and institutions (like schools, hospitals, etc.) are easily able to attempt to change the child’s natural behaviour to the ‘ideal’ child behaviour (Jenks, 2005; Woodhead, 2015). The ideas that psychological development theories put forward emphasize this ability and obligation for adults to judge children’s actions, as development theory...
creates age specific norms to compare to. Developmental psychology tends to draw attention away from the diversity of development and as a result pathologizes any kind of deviations from the pre-established norms (Woodhead, 2015). Basically, in this situation the binary between adult and child with adult as superior allows one generation to put judgement onto another. This judgement and authority stops any transgression from standardized societal norms, thus enforcing social and cultural reproduction.

With adults positioned as the superior altruistic providers, Qvortrup (1993, 2005, 2011, 2015) is concerned with the lack of value we put on children. Most notable for me is the fact that children's education is not seen as a division of labour, but as a gift to children. Qvortrup (2005) argues that "children have been deprived of a visible role in the (diachronic) social division of labour and are instead reduced to receptacles of knowledge from adults – parents and teachers. The reverse side of their being sentimentalized therefore has been a silencing of their competences and capabilities, which apparently have all to be taught and learned as they grow up" (p. 6). The hard work children put in at school should be viewed as competency in children and be recognized as preparation to enter the work force, not only as a privilege for the children, but as a contribution to society.

A fundamental argument put forward to defend the ideology of care is understandable that children are a special category with limited capacities that are slowly developing. This defense justifies the restrictions and judgements on their actions (Smith, 2014). However, I would argue that overall we undervalue children and don't recognize their capabilities. Although children are not completely physically and mentally developed, autonomy and choice can still be available to them, perhaps in the form of something as simple as more choice in school subjects and self-guidance in learning.

In Uprichards's (2008) study she points out that children are competent in their own right; for example, today many children are more skilled at using digital technology than their parents. Furthermore, Anne Solberg's (2015) study shows how children can be active contributors in their household and are the new 'home stayers' who contribute to the household by doing chores and being home to answer the phone and take messages. She found that as females have entered the work force, children have taken over of some of their household responsibilities. Yet children are rarely conceptualized as contributing to society or even to their households in more than an emotional way (Zelizer, 1995).

Using reasons like the examples seen above, Qvortrup (1993, 2011, 2015) tries to argue that children are productive contributors in society. However, I'm not sure that childhood should be studied based on the adult notion of 'productivity'. Although viewing children as productive is a radical change, it extends the notion that children's main goal and success is acting as rational beings comparable to adulthood. It continues the forward-looking way of studying and discourages studying childhood in and of itself. In addition, the idea of productivity is unclear: what constitutes productivity? And can a child only be valued on an equal level if they meet adult expectations of 'productivity'?

To put it simply, what this disruption of taken-for-granted thinking about childhood that Jenks and Qvortrup put forward does is address the idea of 'adultism'. Adultism is the "behaviours and attitudes based on the assumptions that adults are better than young people, and entitled to act upon young people without agreement" (Bell, 1995, p.1). As shown throughout this paper, adultism is unreasonably natural-seeming in Western culture, and results in a casual removal of children's agency. The emerging Sociology of Childhood will hopefully address the adultism underlying people's common sense thinking about children, as well as affecting the way prominent childhood disciplines like Psychology and Education conceptualize children.

Before I conclude I must address the fact that, although I am arguing for children to be given more opportunity for agency, I do realize that there are still some universal needs of children that differ from adults. However, I agree with Qvortrup that "the good reasons for protecting children against exploitation and subjugation do not justify depriving them of a right to conceptual autonomy, that is, an autonomy which allows them to be heard and seen in their own right" (Qvortrup, 2005, p.10). In other words, while childhood is an area of society that should have the right to protection, school training and time for play, this should not necessarily eliminate their role as valuable social actors. In the future, we need to weigh the requirement to protect with the requirement to allow children to be social agents who can meaningfully participate in society. What I'm essentially arguing is that childhood as a concept should not be taken for granted. I think it is important to explore the value of children to a greater degree and to make greater attempts to present a picture of the child's world from the child's view. Approaches that view children as competent and as constructing their own experiences and importantly as being a subject worth studying in and of itself will benefit sociology because these approaches are more likely to bring forward what the experience of childhood is actually like and what makes a child a child.

In practice, where rights to agency would not conflict with basic development, there should be a push to promote these rights. In other words, policy should emphasize self-determination over traditional protective approaches and "we should
recognize children’s ‘integrity and decision-making capacities’ while bearing in mind ‘the dangers of complete liberation’ (Smith, 2014, p. 183). One example I touched on is allowing children to shape their own learning. Another would be to have a democratic environment within the family, allowing children to have a meaningful role and position in making decisions. I believe, given the opportunity, children are more capable than we imagine; however, with our culture of ‘helicopter parents’ this is hard to see, and they may be losing their capabilities because they do not have the right to exercise them. At this point, the ultimate goal should be to raise the status of children in society and stop defining them by deficit, not to completely abolish the distinction between adults and children.

Overall, the common sense assumptions behind childhood and play need to be further questioned. Our understanding of childhood is still rooted in an era that assumes there is such thing as a universal and natural child. Changing the way we conceptualize and study childhood is important because it will change the actual experiences of children by affecting the way they are treated and by altering the macrostructures around them. New sociological perspectives of childhood bring forth the idea that children are just as, and perhaps more so, constrained by their societal structure as adults, and at the same time show how children have potential to be active members of their society with their own peer cultures.

References

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Innocent Until Proven Guilty: Interpretation of Consent and Sexual Assault Laws

Dahlia Belinsky

Abstract
This research seeks to understand why sexual assault occurs so prominently on university campuses. Sexual assault's definition is based on the Canadian Criminal Code Section 263, Section 272, and Section 273 and is composed of level I, II and III of increasing severity respectively. The first argument brought forward is that the Canadian Legal System, based on how the “reasonable person” would interpret consent and concerns of intent in cases of sexual assault, is flawed. There is a difficulty for people to properly interpret consent and non-consent, primarily because of rape myths and heteronormative sexual scripts enforced by gender roles. There are also fundamental issues with reporting sexual assault that dissuade victims from coming forward that leads to minimal consequences for perpetrators. I argue that, in addition to gendered systems of power relations, these three components contribute to high levels of sexual assault in Canada and point towards substantial policy changes that could be made to lower these rates of violence.

Keywords
sexual assault, Canadian law, rape myths, gender roles, consent, sexual scripts, R. v Ghomeshi

Introduction
Sexual assault impacts women all across the world. In this paper, I will focus predominantly on heterosexual interactions between cis-gender individuals. In addition, I will narrow my research to the Canadian legal system in particular while using...
supplemental data and research from the United States and the United Kingdom. All three regions have similar rates of sexual assault and similar brands of discourse around university campuses. According to Jozkowski, Peterson, Sanders, Dennis, and Reece (2014), 15 to 38 percent of women will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime (p. 905). While this is a figure for the United States, it does not differ greatly from Canadian statistics that cites 40 percent of women will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime (DuMont, 1999, p. 1) and one in four women will be assaulted during their time in university (McGregor, 2005, p. 4). According to Koss, Gidycz, and Wisniewski (1987) the most common age for women to be assaulted ranges from 16 to 19 years old, however, closely followed by that is the average age for university students, between 20 and 24 years old (p. 163). Overall, according to Statistics Canada (2008), for people 15 years or older there were 512,000 incidences of sexual assault in 2007. However, only 24,200 cases of sexual offences were reported to the police.

Sexual assault occurs in different forms for a multitude of reasons. Looking specifically at the genocidal form of rape for a moment, it is a clear enforcement of power and violence with direct intent, “a way of damaging both men and women in communities (rape to inflict terror)” (Canning, 2010, p. 852). Sexual assault is considered gendered violence as the majority of victims are women and the majority of perpetrators are men. Only three percent of people charged by police are women, while women encompass 80 to 86 percent of the victims (Denike, 2002, p. 101; Johnson, 2012, p. 613). As a result, many discourses around why rape occurs are formulated around rape as a form of dominance and power of men over women. MacKinnon (2003) brings the argument a step further saying it is not biology that genders sexual assault, but rather the social construction of gender itself: “in genocides, in which women of the group to be destroyed are systematically raped by men of the group intending to destroy them, nothing biological has changed from a prior non-genocidal era” (p. 266). Feminists in the 1970s to 1980s brought forth the argument that “radically insisted that rape was about ‘power not sex’” (Bourke, 2007, p. 13; DuMont, 1999, p. 2). Susan Brownmiller (1975) was a feminist at the forefront of the movement who asserted that sexual assault was about power and argued that sexual assault was “nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear” (p. 15). Her stance understood rape as a way to extend patriarchy and for men to impose their dominance over women. Power in some form implies intention as seen in the example of genocidal rape; there is a desire to assert a form of dominance that disrespects and belittles female partners.

Brownmiller’s (1975) research also helped to argue that legal discourses and practices include patriarchal undertones and misogynistic assumptions, a position that contemporary feminists continue to argue: “our law and legal system reflects the extent to which women is ensnared by a cultural semiotics that, in the discourses of our everyday life, casts woman as the less rational, unreliable, unpredictable, feeble-minded other to man” (Denike, 2002, p. 102). The law projects an image of women as hysterical.

In terms of theory, Foucault’s theories are frequently mentioned since ruling discourses play a prominent role in how victims are perceived: “the repressive and coercive functions of law need to be downplayed in favour of an analysis of law’s constructive functions as discipline, surveillance and normalization” (Gotell, 2002, p. 257). The law must be subtle so that decisions reflected in court become normalized in everyday life. The discourse of law trickles down to perceptions held by the targeted audience of university students. As Munro (2001) argues using a Foucauldian analysis of law, there is a “close relationship between the operation of power regimes and the individual’s conception of self” (p. 549). How power functions at a macro-level is closely tied to how people internalize it in the same way at a micro-level.

While gender roles, misogyny and theories of domination do play a part in why sexual assault occurs, the overall intention in law is highly prioritized. I argue that there is not always intention to commit sexual assault, especially in the cases on university campuses. Rather the reasons students are at high risk of sexual assault is due to a lack of consequences, how consent is misinterpreted, and the misplaced significance of intent. To supplement this argument, I will start by explaining the prevalence of how specific rape myths appear. Examples such as “no means yes” and that women must withhold and men must pursue sex will reappear in all of my sections. In addition, I will use relevant studies to show that rape myths are primarily patriarchal ideologies, not fact.

I will look in depth at Canadian Sexual Assault laws as well as the cases of DPP. v. Morgan (1976), R. v. Seaboyer (1991), R. v. Ewanchuk (1999), and R. v. Ghomeshi (2016), to look at how arguments of perceived consent are accepted and how the definition of a reasonable person is manufactured. Furthermore, I will explore the different arguments defendants use such as reasonable doubt, honest mistaken belief, and difficulty to prove intent. Still within the confines of the law, I will look at the problems to do with “innocent until proven guilty” in the cases of sexual assault, particularly the case of R. v. Ghomeshi (2016). With this section I will explore how some cases of sexual assault are conducted in a manner that attempts to discredit the complainants. The gendered nature of sexual assault results in the majority of
complainants being women who are also victims of rape myths that emerge in the context of the law. The addition of Rape Shield Laws does help to protect victims’ credibility from being based on their sexual history; however, the main goal in sexual assault cases is to prove the complainant is lying rather than trying to verify if the defendant is guilty. Finally, in this section, I will explore how looking at consent as “yes means yes” as opposed to “no means no” helps to regulate the reasonable person as in the case of R. v. Ewanchuk (1999). The reasonable person becomes someone who should seek affirmative consent rather than accepting non-consent.

In the third section I will continue with a more in-depth discussion of interpretations of consent and why consent is misunderstood, specifically looking at the presence of rape myths and stereotypes of sexual assault. This will extend into my discussion of gender roles and sexual scripts. I will present several studies of how university students express and interpret consent and what rape myths and sexual scripts emerge from those actions. I will present how people who have committed sexual assault either justify or rationalize their actions as not truly looking to cause harm or not understanding why they committed their actions, relating back to the non-importance of intent.

In the final section, I will explore the lack of consequences faced by people who commit sexual assault. I will look at reporting rates brought to the police and how those are interpreted at initial contact. Within this portion, I highlight where rape myths play a role in situations of reporting, specifically issues of victim blaming. Next, I will look at the case of Doe v. Metropolitan Toronto Commissioners of Police (1998) to show how even before a case is brought to court there is still a need to discredit the victim entirely by gatekeepers such as police. I will use this information to then explain why victims are dissuaded from reporting their assault to police. Overall, this paper looks to examine the ways sexual assault occurs from a practical context of the law. The addition of Rape Shield Laws does help to protect victims’ credibility from being based on their sexual history, however, the main goal in sexual assault cases is to prove the complainant is lying rather than trying to verify if the defendant is guilty. Finally, in this section, I will explore how looking at consent as “yes means yes” as opposed to “no means no” helps to regulate the reasonable person as in the case of R. v. Ewanchuk (1999). The reasonable person becomes someone who should seek affirmative consent rather than accepting non-consent.

In the section I will cover three primary rape myths that re-occur in subsequent sections. The first is that women are liars and hysterical, for this I will draw on the research of Joanne Burke in particular. I will look at the idea that women are unable to voice their consent and from this derive the idea of “no means yes,” and the myth that men are responsible for coercing consent out of women. Finally, I will look at how rape is perceived by the general population and how the image of a “real rape” leads to further biased perspectives that discredit victims.

There is a consistent belief that women in particular lie about their assault, especially given the nature of sexual assault where it is one person’s word against the other. As Bourke (2007) outlines, there are examples where women have lied about their assault, but while “the consequences for men they accuse are ruinous, fear of being falsely accused with rape has been stoked up by vastly disproportionate media attention” (p. 28). The fear that men can be falsely accused is detrimental to the victim as it takes precedence over the idea that assault rates are much higher than false conviction rates. According to the Commander of New York City’s Rape Analysis Squad, “only about 2 percent of all rape and related sex charges are determined to be false and this is about the same as the rate of false charges by other felonies” (Greer, 2000, p. 956). In Greer’s article, they look to discredit the “two percent” for false accusations, as they believe there is no empirical evidence to support it. However, in a ten-year longitudinal study of sexual assault on a university campus in the United States, researchers found that 5.9 percent were considered false accusations (Lisak, Gardiner, Nicksa, and Cote, 2010, p. 1330). To widen the margins, I verified other sources and according the FBI (1996), the data showed that eight percent of forcible rape accusations were false (p. 24). Even at eight percent the false accusation rate is low and would not discredit the remaining 92 percent of sexual assault victims. The construction that women are emotional and thus lie about their assault is false based on the data above, however as Bourke mentioned, the false accusation cases receive more attention than sexual assault cases since they are rare and play directly into the maintenance of men’s continued domination over women.

The idea of the hysterical woman also becomes evident in the idea that “no means yes” and women must be coerced into sexual activity. There is historical medical data that can be in part sourced as a foundation for the rape myth that women will say no, when they mean yes. Bourke (2007) cites Bartley’s 1859 research that claimed a female orgasm was impossible during rape (p. 53). Asserting a “fact” to the
public that if a woman orgasms, but is saying no, then she is lying. This discourse and belief plays out years later in Paul Hugo’s Cry Rape: Anatomy of the Rapist text citing, “women who work in isolated areas [...] who are not more cautious [...] will often shun public transportation in favour of walking along lonely dark streets [...] we must surely regard such behaviour as ‘rape-prone’” (Bourke, 2007, p. 69). This idea also leads into the rape myth that women are asking for it and that certain actions warrant them responsible for their assault. Bourke (2007) continues to provide a helpful analysis of the discourse present on sexual assault from the 1940’s to the 70’s, which treated what women said as untrustworthy and believed that “women needed to be overpowered by men in order to experience sexual pleasure” (p. 71). Bourke also cites Freud (1914) who made similar assertions, claiming “whoever believes in the occurrence of semi-intentional self-inflicted injury [...] will become prepared to accept through it [...] with unconscious intention” (Bourke, 2007, p. 50). To demonstrate this psychoanalysis, Freud uses the example of a woman who would be unable to use force because the woman wanted to be injured or raped. With these ideas as the main understanding of women’s psychology and biology it is no surprise that people believe women were secretly asking to be assaulted and why the script between seduction and rape are confused.

Seduction scripts and how people view a “real rape” show that one of the most common assumptions is that people expect and describe a certain amount of resistance and violence. A study conducted by Littleton and Axsom (2003), who compared university students’ understanding of rape scripts and seduction scripts, illustrated that more participants categorized “the man persuades the woman to leave with him/have sex with him” as seduction (32 percent), rather than rape (24 percent) (p. 469). They also highlight an excerpt from a participant that described a seduction script, “you try to say ‘no’ but the person persists [...] you can't seem to say no to him, ending up doing things you don't want to do” (Littleton & Axsom, 2003, p. 470). The supposedly consensual scripts read as a situation of non-consent. In a similar study conducted by Ryan (1988), who also looked at university students’ comparison of rape and seduction scripts, it was found that the male participants described a similar amount of resistance in both the rape and seduction scripts (p. 242). Ryan (1988) is another example how, even in seduction scripts, women are expected to resist. Compared to women in the study, there was a high level of resistance described in the rape scripts (Ryan, 1988, p. 242). There are several assumptions made about what both a rape and a victim look like. Here we can understand the myth that a victim secretly wants to be attacked based on the idea that women will put up a futile resistance, but secretly be aroused. There are other concerns with how rape is perceived as it creates a false idea of how a victim is expected to act and how sexual assault is understood by the population.

When asked to described rape script the majority of participants “described a blitz rape: a woman who was outdoors was attacked by a male stranger who was mentally or socially unfit” (Ryan, 1988, p. 237). This falls in line with general rape mythology that rape is committed by a stranger, involves violent force, and is usually done in a public, but deserted place (DuMont, Miller, & Myhr, 2003, p. 469; Johnson, 2012, p. 622). These beliefs are also seen in the Littleton, Tabernik, Canales, and Backstrom (2009) study whose participants described date rape scripts as a rape that was violent despite the fact that less than ten percent of sexual assaults use violent force such as “hitting, choking, slapping, [or] using a weapon” (p. 801). DuMont et al. (2003) found similar findings in their research where a minority of victims (27.5 percent) were physically coerced into sexual activity (p. 475). These general understandings of what sexual assault and rape look like are problematic as Justice L’Heureux Dube, who identified several rape myths, found that they have skewed not only the perception of the general public (including university students) but also the law’s treatment of sexual assault cases (Johnson, 2012, p. 624). Some of the rape myths they view in the court of law are as follows: “the rapist is a stranger [...] women will always struggle to defend their honour, [...] women mean “yes” even when they say “no”” (p. 625). These rape myths found in law are similar to what students in Ryan (1988), Littleton et al. (2009) and Littleton and Axsom (2003) described in both their rape and seduction scripts.

These myths are false, as in most cases sexual assault does not usually happen in a public space (Gottell, 2008, p. 885), contrary to what Ryan’s (1988) participants described. Additionally, in most cases of sexual assault, the perpetrator is someone known by the victim, not a stranger (DuBois, 2012, p. 203; DuMont et al., 2003, p. 475). Rape myths are problematic as they create a wrongful discourse at a systemic level where victims are responsible for their assault and characteristics about sexual assaults are incorrectly presented. We see the presence of rape myths frequently in cases of law, but also in reporting and in micro interactions, all of which are harmful to victims.

Section 2: Canadian Sexual Assault Law

There are several components needed to convict a defendant of a crime. These
include intent and the action itself, mens rea and actus reus respectively, as well they
must be held to the standard of the reasonable person and proven beyond a rea-
sonable doubt that they are guilty. With this final criterion, defendants are afforded
the right of innocence until proven guilty. This section will show different ways the
Canadian justice system is influenced by rape myths. I will define how the reasonable
person is understood in the case of sexual assault alongside what can be considered
“Honest Mistaken Belief” and “Reasonable Doubt.” To explore these concepts, I will
look at the case of DPP. v. Morgan (1976). I will look at the concept of “innocent until
proven guilty” to compare the treatment of the defendant and the complainant. In
cases of sexual assault, which as discussed, primarily occur without witnesses (Gotell,
2008, p. 855) it is one person’s interpretation of the same act over another’s. However,
the defendant is offered innocence, while the complainant is assumed to be lying.
This plays into the rape myths discussed earlier that also situate women as untrust-
worthy. For example, in the case of R. v. Ghomeshi (2016), the victims were completely
discredited with the assumption already in mind that they were lying. The case of
R. v. Seaboyer (1991) enacted Rape Shield Laws and showed a positive step towards
protecting complainants who are often vulnerable populations like women. In cases
where affirmative consent must be proved as opposed to the defendant claiming they
did not see signs of non-consent, the law benefits the victim and works against the
rape myth that women are asking for it as seen in the case of R v. Ewanchuk (1999).

The reasonable person is meant to act as an objective standard to “measure
certain behaviours qualitative or quantitative deviation from the norm, meaning the
behaviour expected by society” (Mikus, 1995, p. 5). Currently, as discussed in the rape
myth section, the norm is detrimental to victims. In addition, the reasonable person
is subjective in every situation. I argue it would be effective to have the reasonable
person, the “norm,” installed as someone who is seeking affirmative consent.

Moving forward to the case of DPP v. Morgan (1976), which highlights the idea,
and flawed nature of mens rea in the case of sexual assault. Daphne Morgan was the
victim of a gang rape committed by her husband and his three friends after he con-
vinced them his wife had a rape fantasy. Mistaking her cries for help and verbal and
physical non-consent as acting into the fantasy the three men presented their defense
case as reasonable doubt (Bourke, 2007, p. 50). Regardless of whether the three men
genuinely did believe they were not committing sexual assault the complication with
mens rea is that the victim could have been raped, but no one is guilty of raping her.

The idea of reasonable belief and honest mistaken belief in the case of sex-
ual assault are rooted in rape myths, and I would argue should not be permissible
in the case of sexual assault. Thorton (1982) argues that in this case, rape would be
considered a crime of negligence, “the agent unreasonably believes that the woman
consents when she does not consent, he is negligent as to whether or not she con-
sents” (p. 124). Someone can genuinely believe someone was consenting, however,
if they are unable to pick up on cues, either verbal or physical, it is not a justifiable
excuse. McGregor (2005) brings forward that for mistaken belief to be considered rea-
sonable defendants must prove that “he really held a false belief about the woman’s
consent” (p. 202). Rape myths allow for the emergence of defences that even when the
victim said “no” the defendant can claim the honest mistaken belief that the victim
actually did want to engage in sexual activity as is seen in R v. Ewanchuk (1999). In this
case the complainant said “no” however the defendant claimed they understood the
“no” to mean no to having sex without a condom, as a result the trial judge acquitted
the defendant on “the complainant had not expressed by words or conduct a lack
of agreement to engage” (Ruparelia, 2006, p. 168). This example leads into another
problematic aspect within sexual assault cases that the defendant is assumed inno-
cent until proof stating otherwise. This places significant responsibility on the victim
to express consent, but none on the perpetrator to seek and check for continuous
affirmative consent.

The concept of “innocent until proven guilty” for the defendant is problematic
since it is one person’s word against another’s in cases where there are no witnesses
and no visible physical injuries (DuMont et al., 2003, p. 478; Gotell, 2008, p. 855). As a
result, the complainant is forced to disclose their interpretation of their assault while
the defendant has the option not to speak and not to be questioned with the same
rigor and stress that the complainant must endure. Seeing as most victims are women
and the main role of the defense is to discredit and prove the complainant is lying,
this only furthers the idea that women are lying: “men charged with rape, and those
who defend them, have few options, but to argue the credibility of the woman victim”
(Gotell, 2002, p. 245). While the defendant is considered innocent, the complainant
is already assumed to be guilty of lying and it is the job of defense lawyers to prove this.
This is well exemplified in the case of R v. Ghomeshi (2016). In this trial, it is extremely
telling by Judge William Horkins’ decision in the trial:

> Even if you believe the accused is probably guilty or likely guilty, that is not suf-
> ficient. In those circumstances you must give the benefit of the doubt to the accused
> and acquit because the Crown has failed to satisfy you of the guilt of the accused
> beyond a reasonable doubt. (R. v. Ghomeshi, 2016, p. 21)

This highlights that despite the likelihood that the defendant is guilty, it is
more necessary to protect the defendant’s rights, even when the complainant is part of a vulnerable population.

One positive step forward to balance the scales for the complainants are Rape Shield Laws put in place in 1992 in order to not disclose the sexual history unless deemed pertinent. Rape Shield Laws help to protect against rape myths and discredits the idea of an “ideal victim” who prior to the assault was chaste and pure (Gotell, 2002, p. 255; Johnson, 2012, p. 622; Randall, 2010, p. 414). In the case of R v. Seaboyer (1991), Seaboyer was charged with sexual assault and tried to use the complainant’s sexual history as a defense to prove that any bruises on the complainant were from a past sexual encounter (Wagner, 1993, p. 644). Justice L’Heureux-Dube argues that rape myths “pervade every step in the process of a sexual assault case” (Wagner, 1993, p. 654) and in uncovering a complainant’s sexual history, the dangers and implications heavily outweigh the evidence (p. 655). With Rape Shield Laws it is more difficult to discredit the complainant based on questions and proof that stems from rape myths rather than actual evidence and can allow for a more substantial discussion as to whether the defendant is guilty or not.

Finally, there is the idea of only “yes means yes” when understanding sexual assault in the court of law. As seen in the cases of DPP v. Morgan (1976), R. v. Seaboyer (1991), and R. v. Ghomeshi (2016) none of the complainants explicitly said yes or consented at the time of their assault (Bourke, 2007; R. v. Ghomeshi, 2016; Wagner, 1993). To set up the reasonable person as someone who is actively seeking consent as opposed to simply accepting that there are no signs of non-consent, greatly shifts the discourse and further protects the complainant. This change could encourage the defendant to take the stand to argue how they understood consent was given and allow for them at this point to be questioned at the same level as the complainant.

Defendants would have to allege that there was affirmative consent as opposed to alleging that they interpreted the complainant’s non-consent as consent. We see the concept of “yes means yes” in R. v. Ewanchuk (1999), which “clarified the defence of honest, but mistaken belief in consent in sexual assault cases and emphatically rejected a defence of implied consent” (Ruparelia, 2006, p. 167). The motion that implied consent was not legitimate faced several criticisms saying that it “burdened men” who could be accused of sexual assault if they did not “explicitly [seek] consent before each sexual act” (Ruparelia, 2006, p. 167). In addition, as MacKinnon (2003) would add, “consent to sex is not the same thing as wanting it” (p. 268) meaning that it is still possible to not say no and still not want to engage in sexual activity.

These reformations such as Rape Shield Laws and the perseverance of only “yes means yes” are important and necessary to law especially when the current proceedings are continually entrenched with rape myths. If we look at the idea of male dominance and female subservience, “the law of rape finds consent to sex, it does not [...] require mutuality or positive choice in sex” (MacKinnon, 2003, p. 267). Relating back to why sexual assault occurs especially on college campuses, the idea of intent being necessary and the concept that anything other than “yes means yes” is consensual, is problematic as we will explore in the next section, not all perpetrators are necessarily aware that their actions were considered sexual assault as in so many cases, especially high-profile ones like R. v. Ghomeshi (2016), where the complainants were able to be completely discredited.

Section 3: Interpretation

To better understand why interpretation differs amongst men and women given the already highlighted gendered nature of sexual assault we must look at studies specifically on university campuses that look at heteronormative sex scripts and gender roles where “men are taught to be the aggressors and to be persistent, and women are taught to be passive and appear reluctant” (McGregor, 2005, p. 7). When I look at the expected behaviour of men in sex scripts, as already explained, I see that women are expected to resist, but that is still considered consensual since “no means yes.” Next, I look at how men and women interpret and affirm consent from their partners and discuss the differences found and how this may explain why consent cannot always be interpreted by male partners given that “98 percent of sexual assaults are perpetrated by heterosexual men” (Johnston, 2012, p. 278). Finally, for this section, I will look at how people who have committed sexual assault justify their behaviour to understand if perpetrators genuinely believed they were committing assault or not.

To start, it is important to highlight a distinct case of assault that can be understood very differently by two parties. Below is an excerpt saved from a Reddit thread that asked rapists to anonymously explain why they committed rape:

I can’t remember how it happened, but me and the girl (she was maybe 17) ended up play wrestling with me pinning her down. We were all laughing, but when we made eye contact...it was “that” look we exchanged. The...I’d fuck you” look. Now, I remember exactly what I was thinking at the time. This girl gave me “the look” earlier, she invited me into her bed. What teenage girl would pass up the opportunity [sic] to be with a 22 year old guy? She MUST want it. I tried again, and slid my hands...
In this scenario we see the perpetrator did not have direct intent to rape the woman he was with. Relating to the prior section, intent is difficult to prove and sometimes there genuinely is no intent to cause harm, but the situation stands that one person left the interaction having been assaulted. However, for the cases of interpretation, the perpetrator understood the girl’s body language to be consenting and based on the information given, not more than that. While looking within sexual scripts Jozkowski et al. (2014) found that “men were far more likely than women to assume consent to sexual activity via nonverbal cues exclusively” (p. 910). Comparatively, women that relied on verbal signs to interpret consent expected phrases such as “if he said he was going to get a condom or asked me if I want to have sex” (Jozkowski et al., 2014, p. 910). Some of the examples cited as to how men interpreted consent with body language were “if she just did not seem into it, wasn’t making eye contact” (Jozkowski et al., 2014, p. 911). Already, there is a sense of confusion as Jozkowski et al.’s (2014) illustrates when it relates to gender roles “men are expected to always want to engage in sexual activity [...] so men may not think that they have to vocalize their consent [...] and women may think that they do not need to obtain direct verbal consent” (p. 913). Ideally it is the responsibility of both partners to ensure consent.

Eaton and Matamala (2014) had similar findings in their survey composed of university students; the participants believed that men are always responsible and “ready for sex” (p. 1443) and that there was an increase in verbal sexual coercion. For men or women not to obtain verbal consent would be detrimental as this view relies heavily on assumptions of body language, which can easily be misinterpreted as “a man might think that a woman is giving him signals of consent, when in fact she does not intend to consent” (Jozkowski et al., 2014, p. 913). Any confusion in consent is detrimental as Aronowitz, Lambert, and Davidoff (2012) found that men in university were likely to have beliefs rooted in victim-blaming and rape myth discourses where 41 percent of students believed if a woman is drunk she is in part responsible and “65 percent of the sample agreed that if a woman makes out with a guy, it is okay for him to push for sex” (p. 179). Similar to what Jozkowski et al., (2014) brought forward there is the double standard that men are constantly looking for sex and must be the active participant, “social norms of male sexual dominance and female sexual submission add to the trivialization and/or justification of male sexual coercion towards women” (Aronowitz et al., 2012, p. 179). The double standard places additional pressure on men to try and encourage consent.

We see these perceptions in studies conducted by Scully (1990) and Wegner, Abbey, Pierce, Pegram, and Woerner (2015) who both researched the justifications rapists have for their actions. Wegner et al. (2015) found that the perpetrators used rape myths to justify their actions with assumptions where “forty percent or more agreed at least somewhat that the woman was responsible, that she led him on, or that they believed she would enjoy it once it started” (p. 1028). There is a similar thread here of gender roles that the man should push until they are given consent and that women to an extent are asking for it without actually saying “yes” at any time. There are similar justifications in Scully’s (1990) research that studied convicted rapists where they continued to view themselves as nice guys, such as “I’m against hurting women. She should have resisted [...] I loved her – like all women” (p. 129). There is a distinct perception of how predators view themselves and again, with these interviews there is a trend that a physical assault needs to accompany the sexual assault for it to be considered valid or serious. Even in the examples where perpetrators murdered their victims they defended themselves “I was always kind and gentle until I started to kill them” (Scully, 199, p. 130). Perpetrators found guilty still do not completely view their behaviour as their responsibility and that women are expected to resist, even so, as has been explained, resistance is the gender role women are meant to play.

Section 4: Lack of consequences

In this section, I will look at the final reason I’ve brought forward as to why sexual assault is so prominent on university campuses: there is a lack of consequences for the perpetrator. I will look at the reporting rate for sexual assault and from there how it is decided that cases are founded or unfounded. Furthermore, I will delve back into the discussion of law and look at the case of Doe v. Metropolitan Toronto Commissioners of Police (1998) to show how even in initial reporting there is significant issues of rape myths discrediting victims’ experiences. I will analyze reasons as to why women are dissuaded from reporting their assault and what possible connections there could be to rape myths and law discourses. According to Statistics Canada (2008), 91 percent of sexual assault crimes are not reported to the police. From there, compared to almost 50 percent of other types of violence, only one third of the sexual assault cases had charges laid (Statistics Canada, 2008). The general statistic from 1993 to 2004 for how many cases of sexual assault are not reported to police is less than one in ten (Johnson, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2008). Johnson (2012) outlines a pyramid of attrition that shows that of the 460,000 sexual
assaults reported to survey interviewers, only 13,200 ended with charges being laid and only 1,519 of those lead to convictions (p. 631). Also notable is that since 1999 to 2004, the reporting rates decreased from 12 to 8 percent (DuBois, 2012, p. 194; Johnson, 2012, p. 615). Statistics Canada (2014) found that there was a decrease in police-reported sexual assault and no reason is cited for this decrease. However, Statistics Canada (2014) does acknowledge that the number of sexual assaults are underestimated as “self-reported victimization data [suggests] that the majority (88 percent) of sexual assaults [...] are not brought to the attention of police” (p. 17). Within this data, it is critical to focus on which cases are reported to police, compared to how many people are charged as this directly impacts the consequences perpetrators can face. According to DuBois (2012) research done in the province of Ontario showed that 17 percent of sexual assault cases brought to the police were decided as “unfounded”, meaning the victim’s cases were dismissed before charges were laid (p. 195). While the number may not seem large, the significance becomes apparent when compared to unfounded rates for other crimes: “in 2002 [...] 16 percent of all sexual offences reported to the police were deemed to be “unfounded,” while other types of violence offences were “unfounded” at a rate of 7 percent” (DuBois, 2012, p. 196). That is more than double the unfounded rate for cases of sexual assault compared to other crimes.

Rape myths and the higher percentage of sexual assault deemed “unfounded” by law enforcement are closely connected. Police officers act as the gatekeeper between deciding if a case is founded or not and as a result, while objectivity is expected, it is difficult when tools to help with objectivity are based in assumptions prominent with rape myths (DuBois, 2012, p. 204). For example, police officers have been trained in the past with the advice that: “a rape victim might be lying if she uses the pronouns “we” to describe herself and her alleged attacker because “normal” rape victims prefer to put distance between themselves and their attacker” (DuBois, 2012, p. 203). In addition, another example of subjective testing to decide if a case is unfounded or not is to use the “Baeza False Report Index” and this list includes: “victims [...] who cry [...] or who have a psychiatric history should be investigated more thoroughly” (DuBois, 2012, p. 206). The myth and assertion that women are inherently lying about their assault is present in this method of deciding if a case is founded or not. DuMont (1999) in their research highlights that “[women] aged 14 – 19 [...] who was known to the assailant” amongst other factors were more likely to have their case classified as unfounded (p. 36). Other criteria entrenched in victim blaming such as how the victim dressed, their sexual history, and where the attack took place are also used by officials to help them decide if the victim is someone who can or cannot be raped (Hodgson, 2002, p. 174). This is problematic as Koss et al. (1987) showed that women ages 16 to 19 had the highest rate of sexual assault and most victims know the perpetrator prior to the attack (DuBois, 2012, p. 203; DuMont et al., 2003, p. 475). Some tools and suggestions of how to tell if a woman is lying go directly with rape myths as opposed to what is actually proven to be true.

In the case of Doe v. Metropolitan Toronto Commissioners of Police (1998) five separate women were sexually assaulted at knifepoint all within a five-block radius of each other. Police, when investigating, looked more at what they believed to be the moral character of the women as opposed to crime scene evidence and victim testimonies (Hodgson, 2002, p. 176; Sheehy, 2012, p. 31). For the first and second victim, the police officer focused on the state of the room to decide the chastity of the victims. The first had pornographic material in the room and was therefore dismissed. The other had a bowl of potato chips on the bed that remained undisturbed during the assault meaning she did not put up a fight (Hodgson, 2002, p. 176-8). Furthermore, for Victim B there was the victim’s blood as evidence as well that fell in line with being attacked at knifepoint (Hodgson, 2002, p. 178). Until three more attacks occurred, the victims were presumed to be lying based on rape myths and misogynistic assumptions (Sheehy, 2012, p. 24). In this case, sexual assault with a weapon was not taken seriously until “informal discussions with the office” revealed a link that emerged and the victims became more credible in numbers (Hodgson, 2002, p. 180). However, the slow uptake meant a fifth woman was assaulted since there were no warnings of a serial rapist attacking women in the area.

This case is a useful example to show how rape myths, victim blaming and misogyny play a role in the lack of consequences for perpetrators. The trend of officers in sexual assault cases describing women as “liars and as fantasizers” undermined the victim’s testimony (Sheehy, 2012, p. 34). The perpetrator was able to continue to assault additional women before the trend was recognized. The primary concern in this section is that when cases are determined to be unfounded, but are based on rape myths, this means that perpetrators are not even brought to court for any reason other than the belief that the victim is lying. In the case of Jane Doe, the perpetrator was able to assault an additional four women because the first victim’s character was tarnished based on the state of her apartment. This, accompanied with low reporting rates in general prevents perpetrators from being charged for their actions.

The vast majority of sexual assault cases are not reported (Statistics Canada, 2008) meaning there are additional perpetrators who do not face consequences for their actions and can possibly be repeat offenders. According to Statistic Canada
anything other than non-consent in that context means there are rape myths that skew the perception of defendants if it is truly an honest mistaken belief. In addition, there is also the dichotomy between the defendant, who is usually male, granted the assumption of innocence; and the complainant, usually female, who is interrogated without the assumption that they are innocent, especially when keeping in mind the misogynistic beliefs that women are lying about their assaults. From law discourse, these beliefs trickle down to a micro-level such as interpretations of consent between university students in a heteronormative context. There are mirroring effects between law discourse and the sexual scripts where perpetrators do not necessarily have intent/mens rea to sexually assault, but they do regardless. Furthermore, the gender roles for men and women are also related to rape myths that the man must push to match the woman’s resistance. The lack of consequence due to the lack of reporting, which is due to a misunderstanding of what sexual assault looks like for both victims and gatekeepers such as police officers, make it more difficult for victims to come forward. The topic of sexual assault is vast and littered with stereotyping and hegemonic constructions that cause harm. Sexual assault occurs due to a conjuncture of factors. I believe if the idea of intent becomes less prioritized, the opportunity for perpetrators to face some form of consequence and seek continuous affirmative consent as opposed to looking solely at body language could greatly lower rates of sexual assault on university campuses.

Conclusion

Rape myths, misogyny, victim blaming are highlighted throughout this paper whether it is in the context of law, reporting, or interpretation. Starting with an understanding of rape myths and dispelling them allows the argument as to why rape occurs to begin with its interpretation at a macro-level with the law and cases brought to the Supreme Court. The defendant is protected under the idea of innocent until proven guilty and with the concept of mens rea, they can claim reasonable doubt and honest mistaken belief. However, as seen in R. v. Ewanchuk (1999) to have “no” mean

References


CRIMINAL CODE, R.S.C. 1985, c.46, s.269(1).

CRIMINAL CODE, R.S.C. 1985, c.46, s.272.

CRIMINAL CODE, R.S.C. 1985, c.46, s.273.
"It Isn’t My Parents’ Religion Anymore": Embracing the Family Faith in the Bahá’í Religion

CAROLINE BELSO

ABSTRACT The aim of this research project is to define and analyze the different mechanisms through which religious values and belief systems are transmitted by setting out to discover the determining factors of religious socialization when one or both parents have converted to a minority religion. Participants were recruited from the Bahá’í community because of the religion’s practice of allowing children to choose to remain within or leave the religion when they turn fifteen years old. Ethnographic data elicited from intergenerational pairs of Bahá’í family members revealed a two-step process of religious socialization where agency is transferred from parent to child and whereby later stages of spiritual development depend on the child’s own agency. The Bahá’í model illustrates how these progressive stages mirror the levels of religious involvement in the context of conversion introduced by Henri Gooren (2007), as well as highlights the role of agency in religious socialization as a whole. Finally, the concept of religious bias that is developed in childhood is described as a key element in the potential outcome of the socialization process. In sum, this paper claims to answer why – and the process of how – two particular young adults chose to remain in the Bahá’í Faith.

KEYWORDS Religious socialization, minority religion, agency, religious bias

Introduction

Families and religious communities no longer have a monopoly on the socialization of children; exterior influences have multiplied, and youth are understood to be “active participants who exercise a high degree of ‘critical autonomy’ in decisions about religious beliefs and actions” (Lövheim, 2012, p. 152). Meanwhile, the world in which we live – including the contemporary paradigm of “the autonomous, individual self” (Addelson, 1994, p. 19), along with religious pluralization – also frames religion as a choice (Khüle, 2012, p. 120). I believe that this very aspect of choice is precisely what draws interest in religious socialization.

The aim of this research project was to define and analyze the different mechanisms through which religious values and belief systems are transmitted in a context of conversion; it was meant to discover the determining factors of religious socialization when one or both parents have converted to a minority religion. My intention in undertaking this research was to help the reader understand the religious socialization process of a minority religion found within Montreal’s pluralistic society. One of the reasons that the Bahá’í community was chosen for this research is because it is a rather new and growing minority religion where a considerable proportion of its members are converts (were not born within the Faith).

The Bahá’í religion is premised on the notion of progressive revelation – God’s teachings were progressively revealed by different Manifestations (such as Abraham, Moses, Krishna, Zoroaster, Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammed) at different times and locations – and professes principles of equality, respect, and unity that foster and promote world peace. According to the official website of The Bahá’í Community of Canada (2014a):

The Bahá’í Faith is the youngest of the world’s independent religions. Its central message is that humanity is one single race and that the day has come for its unification in a global society, characterized by both spiritual and material prosperity.

It was founded in Iran in 1844. Bahá’u’lláh, the Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, taught that God has revealed Himself to humanity through a series of divine Messengers, whose teachings guide and educate us and provide the basis for the advancement of society. [...] All of the world religions come from the same divine source and represent successive stages in the spiritual education of humanity.

Besides being “distinguished by its diversity and unity” (The Bahá’í Community of Canada, p. 2014b), one of this religion’s particularities is its complete lack of clergy; the administrative body of the religion consists of groups of nine believers called
Assemblies, whose members are elected annually by their respective local, regional, or national communities. Any Bahá’í of 21 years of age or older that is in good standing is eligible to vote and to be elected. Every five years, the entire membership of all national Bahá’í assemblies elect the nine members of the Universal House of Justice, the international governing body which oversees the global community from the Bahá’í World Center in Haifa, Israel (The Bahá’í Community of Canada, p. 2014d). As with the practice of consultation fundamental to all Bahá’í gatherings, this most equalitarian form of democracy assures that every member of the Faith is valued on an equal basis.

However, the most significant aspect of using the Bahá’í religious socialization model to study the transmission of values and beliefs is its practice of allowing children to choose to remain within or leave the Faith when they turn fifteen years old. This practice allows children to decide for themselves, through individual investigation, therefore, making them responsible for their own spiritual development. The propensity for allowing children to choose their own paths is in accordance to the overarching precept of respecting individual opinions reflected in the Bahá’í principle of Independent Search for Truth (The Bahá’í Community of Canada, p. 2014c).

It is pertinent to note that I am a member of the Bahá’í community, which factored highly in my focus on the Bahá’í Faith in terms of personal interest as well as for the practicality of access to the community. Although this meant that my familiarity with the Bahá’í Faith allowed for a higher level of understanding of my participants’ viewpoints than if they were of a different religion, it also meant that I had to be aware of my personal bias and presuppositions throughout the process. Anthropological ethnography endeavors to attain an emic perspective. In fact, some claim that subjective experience can itself count as data, such as Jeanne Favret-Saada (2015) who purposely undertook “to make ‘participation’ an instrument of knowledge” (p. 102) and found that being affected allowed for unspoken communication between herself and her participants (p. 105). I thus believe that my membership in the Bahá’í religion was more likely an asset than a hindrance to my research.

As my interest was intergenerational in terms of religious socialization, the research method comprised of semi-formal individual interviews of parent-offspring pairs in two Bahá’í families; Annie and her daughter Valerie, as well as Bill and his son Brian. For ethical reasons, all participants were adults; while both parents were in their early fifties, Brian and Valerie were in their early twenties. A questionnaire (Annex 1) conceived to reveal religious values was also completed by all participants for comparative purposes. The interview questions, as well as a short email survey (Annex 2), were designed to allow participants to expand beyond the formal questions on what was most important to them, yet to cover specific topics for comparison between families and individual family members. The interviews revealed that both parents had converted to the Bahá’í Faith in their early thirties, at the dawn of parenthood, and that they remain the only members of their families to have converted. Meanwhile, all four participants happen to be active members of their respective Bahá’í communities. One of the families was known to me beforehand, while I met the other as a result of recruiting for this research. Although the participant answers were not anonymous to me, great care was taken to minimize personal information to protect their identities even from within the Bahá’í community.

The premises on which I grounded my research were that religious socialization is not passive reception or heritage, and emotional capital plays a part in religious socialization. My research indicates that the aspect of the Bahá’í Faith that assures continuity of family relationships no matter the child’s choice of spiritual path permits religion to be an individual choice. This paper, in its small scope, claims to answer why – as well as to explain the process of how – two young Bahá’ís chose to embrace their parents’ religion when they could have chosen not to.

**Literature Review**

Exploratory research revealed limited research on the effects of religious conversion in terms of subsequent generations, and thus on the effects of discontinuity of religious traditions. In fact, a call for more research generally on the religious socialization of children and youth is a recurrent theme in the literature I consulted. The following sections serve to unpack key terms or notions of different aspects of my research topic and to contextualize them within current literature.

**Religion**

Michael Lambek (2008) stated that there are many different definitions of religion depending on the anthropological tradition it stems from (p. 4) and the theoretical standpoint of the author (p. 9). He guarded against treating religion as a bounded and discrete category saying that “definitions, contents, and boundaries should be held in question and the frame should be understood always as only one among many through which any particular set of human phenomena can be viewed”
(Lambek, 2008, p. 12). Lambek (2014) also recognized the tension that exists within anthropology between the conceptualization of religion as either “socially immanent or as a set of explicit beliefs and practices constitutive of the transcendent” (p. 145). His solution was to treat both anthropology and religion as traditions (p. 146).

In this research, I am presenting the Bahá’í Faith as a religion despite ongoing difficulties within Anthropology in establishing what a ‘religion’ is. I thus wish to assert what the Bahá’í Faith is not: a “new” religious movement. According to Rebecca Stein and Philip L. Stein (2011), new religious movements are part of a continuum of existing or older religious traditions (p. 246) that are part of a natural process of evolution. They claimed that changes occur for diverse reasons and categorized the resulting forms as syncretism, revitalization movements, neo-paganism and revival, cults, and fundamentalism (Stein & Stein, 2011). I classify the Bahá’í Faith as an independent world religion because it follows the teachings of a new Messenger; it breaks away from other world religions in its principles, practices and rituals, and its teachings are meant to apply to all of humanity instead of a particular group or culture.

The study of religion in the social sciences has been predominantly focused on “religion as a form of practice” (Baldacchino & Kahn, 2011, p. 3). While recognizing the need to understand religion “through the social practices that constitute it”, Social Science scholars have been nonetheless concerned with what they considered “neglect of a dimension of the religious lives of our research subjects, […] what it is like for them to partake in religious practice, what it is like for them to ‘be religious’” (Baldacchino & Kahn, 2011, p. 3). Thus, the experience of belief and how an individual makes practical and social choices according to this main framework seems to be a recognized yet fairly unstudied object of study.

Conversion

While there is ample literature about conversion to dominant religions, I found these focused on the social context where mass conversions occur, especially in colonial contexts. Literature about converting to minority religions is rare, as is literature on how conversion to minority religions affects the family, with the exception of research on cults and other new religious movements. Pierre Beaucage and Deidre Meintel (2007) conceded that despite extensive literature on conversion, focus has tended to be on the “spread of Islam and Christianity via conquest and colonization” (p. 11) and, in reference to urban minorities, conversion can sometimes be viewed as “a mode of integration to the host society” (p. 13). They also claimed that there is generally “little consensus on how to define conversion, except for the notion of change” (Beaucage & Meintel, 2007, p. 11).

Roger A. Straus (1979) argued that sociologists have generally approached conversion as “something that happens to the person who is destabilized by external or internal forces”, representing a “passivist paradigm within the mechanistic world view of classical science” (p. 158) and alternatively proposed to treat conversion “as the accomplishment of an actively strategizing seeker” (p. 158). What interests me is how he saw conversion as a transformative process which did not end upon the moment of becoming “changed”, but rather as active, conscious work aimed at maintaining and expanding the results of one’s “personal and collective organizations of experience, identity, and reality” (Straus, 1979, p. 163). He found that “it is not so much the initial action that enables the convert to experience a transformed life but the day to day actions of living it” (Straus, 1979, p. 163).

The idea of conversion as active and conscious mirrors Lewis Rambo’s conception of conversion as a “multiple, interactive and cumulative” process, rather than a single, dramatic act of rupture” (Beaucage & Meintel, 2007, p. 11). Henri Gooren (2007) went even farther and developed a “conversion career approach” which classified conversion as one of five levels of religious involvement which he described as preaffiliation, affiliation, conversion, confession, and disaffiliation, any of which may happen successively during one’s life-cycle (p. 350). Gooren’s career approach to conversion, portraying individuals choosing their level of religious participation on a continuous basis, was based on the notion that religion – and religious identity – was not a static aspect of a person’s life. Beaucage and Meintel’s study corroborates Gooren’s insight by enumerating additional evidence of “highly variable and even reversible” (2007, p. 14) conversion of individuals in recent literature, as well as addressing the problem with understanding the concept of conversion “in the narrow sense of complete rupture with past affiliations, followed by unequivocal adhesion to new ones” (2007, p. 15).

Transmission of beliefs and values

According to Lene Kühle (2012), “religions are fragile constructions” which depend on the transmission of its core aspects to avoid extinction (p. 113). Scott M. Myers (1996) addressed this issue in an attempt to estimate the “magnitude of religiosity inheritance” (p. 858). He used an intergenerational data set of parents and their offspring made up of interviews spaced out over twelve years. He concluded that the “logical and causal antecedent of religiosity in adulthood is family influence” and that this has “considerable staying power even as offspring move out of the home

Interestingly, Elisabeth Arweck and Eleanor Nesbitt (2010) observed that in religions where religious outlook on the world is also a way of life, “transmitting the one often means transmitting the other” (p. 70). They also distinguished ‘passive’ from ‘proactive’ transmission in terms of “(a) the reproduction aspects of parents’ culture and faith tradition by their children, as members of this younger generation copy and internalize parental behaviour and attitudes, and (b) the deliberate and often planned activity of parents and others in perpetuating aspects of their culture or faith traditions by passing these on, consciously, to their children” (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010, p. 70).

Religious socialization in a plural society

The problems inherent in the Secularization theory, which presupposes that ‘modernity’ brings about the gradual loss of religion, has led sociologist Peter L. Berger (2012) to find that his discipline has “made a category mistake: we confused secularization with pluralization, secularity with plurality” (p. 313). Religious pluralization refers to the multiplication of religions coexisting within the same society. He claimed that modernity “does not necessarily produce a decline in religion; it does necessarily produce a deepening process of pluralization – a historically unprecedented situation in which more and more people live amid competing beliefs, values and lifestyles” (Berger, 2012, p. 313). This competition leads Berger to conclude that pluralism results in “religion as a choice” (Kühle, 2012, p. 120).

If the manner in which religion is experienced has evolved in contemporary societies, then it should follow that how people are socialized within religion has evolved as well. Jordi Collet Sabe called this evolution “The Crisis of the Model of Transmission of Religious Beliefs” (Kühle, 2012, p. 117). In this model, Collet Sabe (2007) described a new reality; an emerging “regime of ‘religiosity’ starting from the well-established formula of ‘believing without belonging’. That is to say, of the person who believes, but whose belief is not determined or taught by any institution nor by any great meta-narrative, nor by any stable belonging, and also, the formula of ‘belonging without believing’, which represents all those people who ‘use’ religion and religious institutions in the key moments of their life when they are useful” (p. 100). In other words, Sabet (2007) thought that belief and religious belonging have evolved as well, and described a religiosity that is individually created rather than transmitted intergenerationally.

Kühle’s opinion is that “elements like secularization, pluralism, deinstitutionalization, and the new forms of religious identities deeply influence the socialization of religious beliefs” (2012, p. 117). She argued that religious socialization should be defined in a way that is “broad enough to mean more than religious transmission from one generation to the next” (Kühle, 2012, p. 114). She listed “family, peers, school, workplace, community, the media, the state, and the cultural belief systems” as being among the most important sources of socialization, religious or otherwise (Kühle, 2012, p. 119).

Furthermore, Mia Lövheim (2012) argued that religious socialization in contemporary society should be understood to “incorporate changes in the forms in which values and ideas are transferred between generations, as well as the content of these values and ideas” and that this new definition “incorporates continuity through the focus on inheritance, but also includes a more outwardly directed, active element of dissemination, which indicates more of a dynamic two way transferring of knowledge and values” (p. 152). The studies she explored described young people as becoming “active participants who exercise a high degree of ‘critical autonomy’ in decisions about religious beliefs and actions” (Löveheim, 2012, p. 152).

This insight underscores the particular reality of youth, especially from minority groups, in terms of a constant social struggle between who I am and how I represent myself. I feel this reflects Michael Jackson’s perception of the state of ‘being’, as he asserted that “most human action is less a product of intellectual deliberation and conscious choice than a matter of continual, intuitive and opportunistic changes of course – a ‘cybernetic’ switching between alternatives that promise more or less satisfactory solutions to the ever-changing situation at hand” (2005, p. xii). Berger (2012) similarly claimed that people today have developed the ability to “successfully alternate between secular and religious definitions of reality” (p. 315). I consider that the self-directed switching from individual to member of society is part of this process, and that might be particularly relevant within minority groups, such as religious minorities, who experience an added component of sometimes intermittent, overlapping, simultaneous, or contradictory minority and dominant society memberships.

Childhood influence

Jean Pouillon (2008) stated that “it is not the believer, I would say, who affirms his belief as such, it is rather the unbeliever who reduces to mere believing what, for the believer, is more like knowing” (p. 94). This indicates that belief is interrelated...
with morals/ethics and identity; if someone were to say they wouldn’t be caught dead’ stealing from their boss’s office, they would be asserting who they are as much as what they know is right and wrong. There is much evidence that this type of ‘knowing’ of how things ought to be reflects a process that started in childhood. In fact, Myers (1996) believed that “transmission of religiosity may also depend on the accumulation of religious capital during childhood, through household participation and beliefs and parent-child relations” (p. 899).

Similarly, Barbara Myeroff (2008) depicted Judaism as a “domestic religion” because “the beliefs are laid upon and empowered by the original mixture of household odors, habits, gestures, sounds, tastes, and sentiments, the accumulation of historical moments – perhaps no longer consciously remembered but nonetheless effective” (p. 347). Although she was describing the Jewish religion, this idea can easily apply to socialization as a whole; it starts in the home. Myeroff (2008) exposed how boys and girls were traditionally socialized differently in Judaism; boys were taught by rabbis while girls became through family relationships (p. 343). The embeddedness of family values within childhood experience can most succinctly be elicited from Meyerhof’s observations that:

Survival comes in cultural inflections. The infant is fed particular foods, lulled with particular words and songs, wrapped in particular garments. Desire, appetite, fundamental feelings are inflected in local, household idioms that once acquired are not interchangeable. These forms precede ideas or words. They become expressible later in the child’s life, and then their meanings may be overly taught, but this teaching is an overlay that rarely penetrates the same ground of being in the same way that the first inexpressible meanings do. (Myeroff, 2008; p. 347)

Meanwhile, in a 30-year Longitudinal Study of Generations (LGOS) with grandparent, parent, and child participant triads, Vern L. Bengston and his research team found evidence “that orientations toward religious beliefs and practices that are formed within nuclear and extended families persist into adulthood with parents and grandparents simultaneously serving as independent and joint agents of religious socialization” (Bengston et al. 2009, p. 340). Later, in an independent study based on the findings of the LGOS, Casey Copen and Merrill Silverstein (2007) found that grandparent influence was directly affected by the strength of beliefs of the parents, which confirmed for the researchers that “the family operates systemically in the socialization of children to religion, and as a social organization represents more than the sum of its parts. Indeed, it may be more accurate to characterize intergenerational resemblance as the manifestation of a family-wide religious orientation” (p. 506). These findings concur with Stephen Armet’s study of religious socialization and identity formation of high tension religions which provided evidence that “parents continue to be the primary influence in shaping their children’s religiosity, even when considering changes in maturity and increased autonomy that accompany young adulthood” (2009, p. 291).

The primacy of parental influence is particularly relevant in consideration of Kühle’s conclusion that, in contemporary times, “it is likely that parents have less of a monopoly than they used to in relation to religious socialization” (2012, p. 121). This may be explained by a general rhetoric of choice that inhabits youth culture in terms of shying away from simply accepting “what their parents have taught them about religion and carry on the same religious tradition as their parents would represent a kind of failure, an abdication of their responsibility to think for themselves, become independent from their parents, and decide on their own beliefs” (Kühle, 2012, p. 123).

The concept of teenage questioning of parental values evokes Jackson’s notion of struggle for existence that is engendered by “the imperative need of every human being to be recognized as a person in his or her own right, and not be reduced to an object of other people’s wills” (2005, p. 181). Indeed, Pamela Estbyne King and Chris J. Boyatzis (2004) found that adolescence is particularly significant “for the emergence of important personality constructs potentially related to spirituality and religion: identity, faith orientation, civic engagement, and vocation, to name a few” (p. 4). They also claimed that adolescence is “an age period of intense ideological hunger, a striving for meaning and purpose, and desire for relationships and connectedness” (King & Boyatzis, 2004, p. 2). Equally important was that “the potency of the peer group during adolescence calls for a clearer understanding of how spirituality and religion are involved within this social ecology” (King & Boyatzis, 2004, p. 4). I think these scholars are specifically addressing the individual will and personal preferences of youth and the potential for breaks in intergenerational transmission.

Findings and Discussion

This research project meant to explore the religious socialization process of a minority religion in order to expose how the transmission of beliefs and values occurs from one generation to the next. The interviews with the participant parents, Annie and Bill², revealed that they used a systematic approach to instill Bahá’í val-

² Pseudonyms
ues to their children through family rituals and repeated activities. These included practices such as weekly Bahá’í children’s and youth classes, daily prayers, and ongoing – almost ritualistic – participation to Bahá’í events and activities such as Bahá’í 19-Day Feast (monthly religious gatherings according to the Bahá’í calendar of nineteen months of nineteen days) and Bahá’í Summer school. Moreover, Annie and Bill purposely integrated Bahá’í principles such as consultation in their daily lives and reaffirmed values on a continual basis. Additionally, they both described their religious practices and dedication augmenting with greater deepening. Each parent individually described how they came to let their Faith guide their career paths, choices, and lifestyles. Bill and Annie described how they served the Faith in their own capacities, using Bahá’í principles to guide the way they lived and raised their children and embodying their religion as a means of conscious and active socialization. For example, they integrated consultation within family practices and stressed the need to make a positive impact on society.

Interviews with the participating offspring Valerie and Bryan⁴ revealed that although both stated that they did not find religious activities necessarily fun when they were children, they are grateful today for the experience they had. However, their interest to deepen themselves in the Writings grew only at or around the time they declared as part of active service with other Bahá’í youth. The interviews also uncovered that part of their spiritual growth came from personal action; participating in activities of their own accord gave the activities more meaning than when they were imposed on them as children, indicating that self-motivation augmented interest. Additionally, Bryan and Valerie claim to have had their first real Bahá’í friends in their late teens despite having ongoing relationships with Bahá’í peers through regular religious activities. This seems to be explained by the fact that service projects undertaken while they were older fostered relationships with people who were like-minded and strengthened over time. Furthermore, both offspring identified the ability to be able to talk about any subject without restraint or shame as the key element in who they considered their best friends, Bahá’í or not. Both also described the progression of their spiritual development as appropriating the Bahá’í Faith on their own terms. As Valerie put it: “It isn’t my family’s religion anymore”.

As there were profound similarities between members of the same family in terms of general belief, perceptions and ideals, I feel these intergenerational pairings exhibited a particularly high degree of unity within both families. The participants also described close relationships with other family members. A conscious effort was made by Annie and Bill to achieve this; they described specific practices, such as having rules about how to treat family members and family consultation. Attendance to Bahá’í activities and events were consistent, regular and on-going, so the Faith was a present and shaping aspect of life for Valerie and Brian. Overall, the interviews allowed me to hone in on five major insights: 1) the transmission of religion is conscious and proactive ‘work’ on both the part of the parents and their children, 2) religious bias developed in childhood influences later choices, 3) the level of parental influence is determined by the strength of family relationships, 4) the Bahá’í model of spiritual development progresses in steps and stages, and 5) determining what beliefs and values are actually transmitted in adult children is complicated by the offspring’s own spiritual development.

‘Reception’ as a conscious and proactive activity

As mentioned earlier, Arweck and Nesbitt (2010) distinguished ‘passive’ transmission in terms of “the reproduction aspects of parents’ culture and faith tradition by their children” from ‘proactive’ transmission as “the deliberate and often planned activity of parents and others [...] to their children” (p. 70). I feel that this distinction obscures the agency of children in the socialization process. Although the interviews with the participant parents undoubtedly indicated deliberate and planned activities to inculcate their beliefs and values in their children, my research also revealed how Brian and Valerie did not absorb religion passively from their parents; conversely they actively and consciously decided to choose it. Furthermore, I think there is wisdom in having youth arrive at such a decision in their mid-teens as adolescence has been found to be “an age period of intense ideological hunger, a striving for meaning and purpose” (King & Boyatzis, 2004, p. 2) and associated with a particularly high level of identity-making activity.

Religious socialization is not a definite science with guaranteed results, as is illustrated by the numerous studies that involve research into the likelihood of children practicing their parents’ religion. Amongst others, Copen and Silverstein (2007) were concerned with “the ability of parents to reproduce religious orientations in their children” (p. 497), Myers (1996) attempted to estimate the “magnitude of religiosity inheritance” (p. 858), while Smith and Sikkink (2003) were interested in “religious retention and switching” (p. 188). No matter the conclusions these studies came to, it is impossible to miss that interest in these themes imply that not all children adopt their parents’ religion, and when they do, it is not necessarily in the same form or to

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⁴ Pseudonyms
the same degree.

Moreover, the notion of children's agency in the transmission of religiosity has been a recent and growing theme in social science and religious studies. According to Susan Ridgely (2012), “children have always sorted through the networks of support and influence in their lives to find meaningful ways to express their religious beliefs and to develop practices that synthesize adult teachings with their own interpretations and needs” (p. 245). Similarly, Lisa D. Pearce and Arland Thornton (2007) have “conceptualized religious identity to be a cumulative, multidimensional force involving, among other things, one's mother's religious affiliation and practice as well as one's own eventual self-identified religious affiliation, practice, and the importance of religion” (p. 1239).

Meanwhile, Michael Jackson (2005) noted that “the human capacity for creating culture as second nature obviously entails a capacity not only to reproduce what is given, but to reimagine and rework, even negate and confound, the given” (p. xxi). Jackson was influenced by Sartre, who “defines human freedom as our capacity to make ourselves out of what we are made” (Jackson 2005, p. i). In fact, Jackson (2005) claimed that it is an “existential imperative’ to convert givenness into choice, and live the world as if it were our own” (p. xxiii), and that the need for individuality “is more than a need for individual identity; it is a fundamental aspect of sociality” (p. 183). I find it very pertinent for my research interests that all these assertions indicate that children are understood to play an active role in their own socialization.

**The development of religious bias**

Although Myers (1996) asserted that studies found that recent adult experience – including events such as marriage and parenthood – “determine adult religiosity more than do earlier parental influences” (p. 860), I believe that my research demonstrates that bias towards or against the parents’ religion might be one of the most important aspects of “receiving” transmitted values and belief systems. This is quite relevant when considering that marriage andparenthood can be perceived as transmitted religious values.

When Myeroff (2008) was describing growing up in her Jewish family, the memories she cherished most evoked how much she loved her grand-mother. Although neither Bryan nor Valerie had particularly great memories of childhood Bahá’í activities, they both felt they had a good childhood. Furthermore, the close relationships they have with their parents today testifies to a long-term investment of their parents in their relationships. Additionally, they felt their families were loving and united. In turn, Bill and Annie strove to build a strong relationship with their children over time.

I believe that relationship-building is enactive because it is a deliberate and continual act, and I feel it is an important aspect of socialization because I consider that the conditioning children receive in their formative years helps to build a religious bias. I choose the word bias to describe a non-committing (or potential) inclination towards or away from something. I prefer ‘religious bias’ over “religious capital” (Myers, 1996, p. 859) because ‘capital’ only evokes the accumulation of positive meaning towards religion. With religious bias, normativity builds up over years of experiencing life through family interactions, leading children to associate religion with either positive emotions such as love and appreciation, or negative emotions such as unmet needs and hurt. In the case of Bryan and Valerie, the association they make between family and religion translates more or less as ‘family = Bahá’í = love and unity’. If we assume that this is true, then we can imagine how this perception coloured how they envisioned the Bahá’í Faith as something positive, albeit constraining and boring at times. In a very real sense, the “knowing” of what is good or is not good that Pouillon (2008) implied in spiritual belief can be applied to bias as being learnt knowledge informed by experience.

**The link between family relationships and parental influence**

Since children have the last word in how they choose to integrate beliefs and values in their own lives, the bias formed by childhood conditioning is pertinent in how much influence parents have on their children’s futures. Although this research was extremely limited in terms of participants, it did show that it is highly likely that the close relationships that the parents cultivated with their children had a twofold impact. First, the emotional capital Brian and Valerie accrued over time produced a positive bias toward their childhoods which was extended to the Bahá’í Faith, despite ambivalent feelings about attending Bahá’í activities as children. I feel that the fact that my participant offspring chose to remain within the Bahá’í Faith and then grew to embrace it wholeheartedly is evidence of this.

Secondly, since there is evidence of multiple influences that affect which and how much of a religion a child eventually adopts, the level of parental influence must necessarily affect the transmission of beliefs and values. Of several studies which revealed such evidence, Bader and Desmond (2006) found that their findings suggest that “the more religious behaviors parents display (such as church attendance) and the more positive their attitudes toward religion (such as how important they believe
religion to be), the greater will be the transmission of religiosity to their children, in a variety of forms” (p. 326). I feel that these same findings, however, could have the opposite effect if the child develops a negative bias toward his or her parents’ religion; having the parents very religious in the context where the religion is associated with something negative, such as separation, pain, or shame, could inversely result in the child eventually rejecting the parents’ religion.

Furthermore, I discerned from the interviews a high level of compatibility between parent and offspring. Bill and Brian both described having similar interests and sharing a passion for skiing. Spending time together was and continues to be a pleasant affair in their relationship. While Bill mentioned that converting was mostly a logical decision as he found the Bahá’í Writings made sense to him, his son Bryan researched other religions to inform his decision to remain with the faith and similarly found that the Bahá’í religion was the one which made the most sense to him. Although Valerie conceded that she and her mother Annie have totally different personalities, she described an affinity with her mother’s beliefs that has strengthened and increasingly converged with her own as her understanding of the Bahá’í Faith has developed. I think these examples of compatibility played a role in developing a positive religious bias of the Bahá’í Faith as the children were more likely to identify with their parent and their relationship to the Bahá’í Faith. This reiterates my belief that parental influence in religious socialization is more likely to be determined by the positive religious bias fostered by emotional capital rather than by ‘religious capital’.

**Spiritual development in steps and stages**

The interviews revealed a two-step process of socialization in the Bahá’í Faith: 1) the child is conditioned through repeated exposure and experiences of the religion through the medium of the family (and, to a lesser degree, the rest of the religious community), and 2) the child is given the choice to adhere to the Faith or not. Declaration is premised on two conditions. First, because adhering to the Faith is optional, it is expected that the decision must be personal and thoughtful. The focus on choice reflects the Bahá’í principle of individual research, or making one’s own mind about the world. Brian mentioned that he clearly understood as a teenager that the decision to declare was not to be taken lightly and so took the time to investigate other religions before deciding that he wanted to remain with the Faith. Meanwhile, Valerie did not sign her Bahá’í declaration card (the accepted manner that people become Bahá’í in Canada) until she was ready. Secondly, the youth needs to accept that there are obligations that come with declaration. Bahá’í children are taught that believing is just the first step; with belief comes the responsibility of adhering to Bahá’í laws, thus continued and persistent action is required.

Although this is not always the case, Valerie and Brian exemplify what can happen when the choice is made freely. Allowing youth to take responsibility for their own spiritual path can foster the desire to deepen themselves – to study and become more familiar with the Bahá’í Writings – in order to better understand what is expected from them and to transform participation in Bahá’í activities into a personal endeavour. Brian and Valerie acknowledged that this did not happen overnight and even necessitated more committed participation, but eventually, they each embraced the Faith as an integral part of their lives.

Here, I’d like to consider how spiritual development occurs through a theory developed to research conversion. According to Henri Gooren’s ‘conversion career’ approach, people converting to a new religion do so within specific stages of individual involvement:

- **Pree affiliation**: the worldview and social context of potential members of a religious group in their first contacts to assess whether they would like to affiliate themselves on a more formal basis;
- **Affiliation**: being a formal member;
- **Conversion**: a comprehensive personal change of worldview and identity;
- **Confession**: a core member identity, involving a high level of participation inside the new religious group and a strong ‘missionary attitude’ towards non-members outside of the group; and
- **Disaffiliation**: a lack of involvement in an organized religious group” or “an unchurched religious identity: either an apostate rejecting a former membership or an inactive member who still identifies as a believer” (Gooren 2007, p. 350).

It is worthwhile to note that Gooren (2007) acknowledged that people don’t all reach the same stages and converts may disaffiliate at any time.

I found that the religious socialization process in the Bahá’í Faith encompasses different progressive stages of spiritual development that resembles the categories of religious participation Gooren described. First, Brian and Valerie developed a specific worldview as children through socialization (the pree affiliation stage). They were then told they needed to choose, at the age of fifteen years old, whether or not to enter...
the Faith officially. Their declaration symbolized their official affiliation with the group. Although this in itself did not necessarily "make" them Bahá’í in their hearts, declaring was nonetheless the social marker of belonging to the group. Later, when they got involved in Bahá’í activities and deepened themselves by reading the Bahá’í Writings – with internal, rather than external, motivation leading to genuine interest – a transformation happened (conversion) in how they identified themselves and how they understood their role in life. Finally, Brian and Valerie developed a passion for the work they accomplish in service (a confession) and have an outward-bound focus in terms of ongoing and deliberate actions. At this stage, Brian and Valerie have embraced the Bahá’í religion and made their Faith an integral aspect of their lives. Their path contrasts with others who either never declare or disaffiliate themselves later on in life, becoming less active (or no longer participating) whether or not they still adhere to some fundamental Bahá’í beliefs.

**Determining which beliefs and values are transmitted inter-generationally**

At the onset of this research, I wanted to find out what (and why) some aspects of religion stick while others don’t; in other words, how young people filter beliefs and values. Pearce and Thornton’s research on adult religious notions of marriage and family suggested “that much of the relationship between religiosity and family attitudes in young adulthood is reinforced by cumulative participation in religious congregations where particular ideas about family life are encouraged and expected”, which indicates that “the public interactions within religious congregations may have an influence separate from the personal importance placed on religion” (2007, p. 1240). However, noting how religiosity was positively affected by the life-cycle stages of marriage and parenthood, they also found that “for the most part, these relationships are explained by the adult children’s own affiliation, attendance, and personal importance of religion on the cusp of adulthood” (Pearce & Thornton, 2007, p. 1240).

What Pearce and Thornton’s conclusions demonstrate is that despite the religious biases and worldviews children have gained by the time they are adolescents, their own maturity and spiritual development allows for change, deeper understanding, and the opportunity of adopting old and new religious beliefs and values. I consider that my ethnographic data indicates that either 1) the offspring espoused the values and beliefs of their parents, or 2) the offspring adopted and applied the beliefs and values of the same religion as their parents. The different theories can be totally distinct or quite interrelated, but I feel that it would be extremely difficult (if not impossible) to determine which is the case by relying only on my interviews. I feel the difficulty lies in the access to the root of the present state; a similar challenge would be to determine if a boy likes cookies because he has the same genetic disposition to like cookies as his father, if he learnt to like cookies because of his father, or alternatively, if he just loves cookies because of personal preference.

Although Bryan and Valerie seemed to be ambivalent about the religious doctrine of the Bahá’í Faith as children, these beliefs and values have since become consciously embodied. Syphoning out the initial beliefs and values that were instilled in Bryan and Valerie after they had deepened themselves with the same Writings as their parents ended up being much trickier than I had expected because I had not taken into account adult Bahá’í spiritual training. Ruhi Study Circles, through the study and deepening of particular compilations of specific Writings (of which participation is voluntary, thus more likely to foster interest and commitment), are designed as a systematic program of growth intended for adults and youth over fifteen years old which produces spiritual transformation. In turn, the service projects that older youth and adults participate in are often inspired by the Ruhi program. As a result, most participants who follow the study sequence of the Ruhi program end up with similar perspectives.

Evidence of this is the fact that all four of my participants answered the questionnaire in essentially the same manner, with subtle differences that were family-specific, indicating that their belief systems were based on the same teachings which each individually studied. In fact, I wonder the means by which it may be possible to determine to what extent Bryan and Valerie had regurgitated the information they had learnt in childhood, reflected a moral core built into them over the years, or developed their belief systems independently.

**Conclusion**

My initial ideas and expectations changed when confronted with the data I collected. As a result of the experiences of my participants, I feel that my research did not maintain the focus on conversion to a minority religion I had initially started with. In the end, I did not find that the parents’ conversions had a particular effect on religious socialization in terms of a break in religious tradition because the two parents interviewed were highly deepened. I think the parents’ study of the Bahá’í Writings resulting from conversion – in terms of spiritual attitude – was more significant than the conversion itself. I thus believe Annie and Brian’s high level of spiritual deepening (which contributed to choosing the approach they used to educate their
children) may have mitigated any lack in terms of their family's religious continuity.

While conversion and the minority issue became less relevant, the significance of other aspects of religious socialization emerged. As a result, I paid particular attention to the religious bias the children developed in childhood, the active roles of the parents in influencing this bias through the combination of loving and conditioning their children, as well as the agency of the offspring in determining how much of their parents' religious beliefs and values they would eventually embrace, reject, or adapt. Furthermore, it became clear during my analysis that the deepening the participating children undertook as older youths and adults made it extremely difficult to ascertain what beliefs and values might have been transmitted by their parents and which ones they embraced or adopted through self-initiated spiritual development.

For both Brian and Valerie, participation in service activities acted as a catalyst for integration within the community as individual agents and for further deepening. It can thus be said that their childhood socialization brought them to a point where they actively chose to get involved with the community, leading them to enact their Bahá’í identity and embrace the Bahá’í Faith as individuals. Although their path was a progressive one, what is important to note with Brian and Valerie's religious biographies is how one stage affected another. It is my belief that the two-step process – characterized by having the responsibility for spiritual development shift from parent to child – is significant because the later stages are dependent upon the will and agency of the child rather than the parents'. Meanwhile, children and their parents have some influence in the socialization outcome during both steps.

The Bahá’í religious socialization of children involves a broad range of intersecting elements which makes it relevant beyond the scope of this study. I think the Bahá’í model my participants exemplified may simply be a much more conscious and transparent version of a similar process in other religious contexts. I feel that agency is not enacted equally at all times during religious socialization; parents are more active during the conditioning stage of childhood while the children are more active at the stage of deciding to what degree to affiliate with (or disaffiliate from) their parents’ religion. Additionally, I feel that the shift from parents to child in their capacity to enact greater agency takes place even when it is not consciously acknowledged as it is in the Bahá’í Faith. For example, even when religious traditions expect children to automatically adopt their parents’ religion, disapproval with and concern about young people’s religious practices reveal that the new generations of those traditions are exercising their individual agency despite their parents’ best efforts to instill their religion’s beliefs and values in their children. In fact, I think it might be worth explora-

It must be noted that the religious socialization process I have described does not occur in a vacuum. Arweck and Nesbitt (2010) explained that religious preference not only “informs commitments to religious organizations or choices of religious affiliation”, but in fact changes “both through endogenous and exogenous processes, which means that change is generated respectively by the individuals (through individuals’ agency in making choices) and through social influence” (p. 68). Meanwhile, Kathryn Pyne Addelson (1994) ascertained that communities – a social or religious “we” – are built from interactions, interpretations, and reinterpretations between people. She claims that as with culture, societies create the individuals from which they emerge, but it is relationships between people that create societies: “the nature of the relationships is an integral part of the social order. [...] Selves cannot be explained by talking of individuals being socialized into an existing cultural or moral system. These living selves generate the system” (p. 24).

As culture and religion are interrelated, I conclude that the religious socialization process is not simply applicable in the situation of religious/cultural change, but actually explains it. Children, it is known, are not carbon copies of their parents. Meanwhile, religions and cultures are not bounded entities but rather reflect the individuals who compose them. Since religions and cultures are in a constant state of friction between continuity and discontinuity, viewing either religion or culture is akin to looking at an historical and geographical snapshot of what has filtered through as well as what has filtered in or out. I believe that my research indicates that what lies at the heart of religious and cultural shifts or changes is the agency of the children who grow up to embody – or not – their parents’ religion and culture in their own particular and unique way.
References


