

Original Research

Discourses at work in media reports on Right To Play's "Promoting Life-Skills in Aboriginal Youth" programme

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Abstract

The Promoting Life-Skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program, developed by Right To Play, in partnership with First Nations communities and with the support of the Government of Ontario, has been used as an attempt to foster life-skills development in First Nations youth. In this study, we employ critical discourse analysis to investigate the way that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal media sources produce understandings of PLAY. Our results indicate that there is a sharp divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sources. Non-Aboriginal sources reinforced two deficit-based discourses about First Nations involved in the program: i) there is no hope for First Nations youth and they are thus prone to suicide and poor health, ii) and the Government of Ontario and Right To Play are responsible for the development of and financial contributions to PLAY. Conversely, Aboriginal media sources promoted two strength-based discourses concerning First Nations people: i) First Nations youth have hope, and ii) First Nations people play an integral role in the development of and financial contributions to PLAY. The findings suggest that non-Aboriginal media continues to reproduce colonial discourses concerning Aboriginal peoples while Aboriginal media actively challenges these discourses.

Introduction

In recent years, the number of international organizations turning to sport as a potential tool to tackle a variety of social issues has led to attention from both the United Nations (UN) and a growing number of non-governmental

organizations (NGOs) (1,2). Sport for development (SFD), also known as sport for development and peace (SDP), is a broad term that encompasses programs that use sport in attempts to foster individual and community development by confronting a variety of social, health, and cultural issues (2,3). SFD has gained considerable momentum and attention in recent years, despite concerns from authors such as Donnelly(4) who argue that Eurocentric sport promotes social exclusion and dominance and may not be the best tool for development initiatives. Nevertheless, during his 2006 address at the World Economic Forum, Kofi Annan, the United Nations Secretary-General from 1997-2006, hailed sport as a "global language capable of bridging social, cultural and religious divides. It can be a powerful tool for fostering understanding, tolerance and peace" (4)(p382). On November 3, 2003, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 58/5 titled Sport as a Means to Promote Education, Health, Development and Peace after a UN interagency task force determined that organized sports initiatives were cost effective tools with the potential to promote development and peace and to help the UN achieve its eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (5). Resolution 58/5 led to the UN declaring 2005 the "International Year of Sport and Physical Education," which formally recognized sport as an agent to achieve the MDGs and promoted SFD programs aimed at fostering development in marginalized communities around the globe (3). SFD programs have flourished in the wake of the UN's support and hundreds of programs are now running internationally, varying from small community-based sports initiatives to international corporate-sponsored programs (2,6).

Keywords: Aboriginal; First Nations; promoting life skills in Aboriginal youth; Right To Play; sport for development; media

Right To Play, a corporate-sponsored international SFD organization, has grown exponentially since its inception in 2000 when it transitioned from an Olympic fundraising program (Olympic Aid) to an NGO focused on promoting the potential benefits of sport to youth internationally (7). Right To Play programs are designed to target the needs of marginalized or Third World communities across the globe including Cote d'Ivoire, Rwanda, and Angola (7). Since Aboriginal peoples are the most marginalized peoples in Canada (8), and according to the UN, Aboriginal peoples in Canada presently live in Third World conditions, (9) Right To Play, in partnership with First Nations peoples and with support from the Government of Ontario, developed the Promoting Life Skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program. PLAY uses sport and recreation to attempt to improve the health and well being of northern Ontario's First Nations youth (10). PLAY is partly self-funded by the recipient First Nations communities, while additional financing is provided by the Government of Ontario and private sponsors.

In this study, we use postcolonial theory and critical discourse analysis to investigate the ways in which non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal media sources report on PLAY. We evaluated 26 online news articles, 19 from non-Aboriginal sources and 7 from Aboriginal sources, and identified the dominant discourses at work in the articles. We then analyzed the way that articles reinforced or challenged racist views of First Nations people. In this paper, we employ the term racist to describe beliefs about and the treatment of First Nations people as "lesser than" non-First Nations Canadians. Through our literature review we show that many colonial policies and resulting actions concerning First Nations peoples were racist in nature and we demonstrate how some of these views continue to permeate non-Aboriginal media in Canada today. Our results support our literature review and indicate that there is a sharp divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal media sources. Non-Aboriginal sources (re)produced two deficit-based discourses about First Nations involved in the program: i) there is no hope for First Nations youth and they are thus prone to suicide and poor health, and ii) the Government of Ontario and Right To Play are responsible for the development of and financial contributions to PLAY. Conversely, Aboriginal media sources promoted two strength-based discourses concerning First Nations people: i) First Nations youth have hope and ii) First Nations people play an integral role in the development and financial support of PLAY. The findings suggest that non-Aboriginal media continues to reproduce colonial discourses concerning Aboriginal peoples while Aboriginal media

challenge these discourses.

Literature Review

Though often portrayed as a recent innovation, sport for development has a long history in Aboriginal communities in Canada (11). In this section, we review the historical foundations of sport for development in Aboriginal communities, outline justifications for its use, contemporary approaches to sport for development, and media portrayals of Aboriginal peoples.

Historical Foundations

Despite the purported benefits of sport in Canada, researchers such as Paraschak (12) and Forsyth (13) have documented the extent to which sport has been used to control, suppress, and assimilate Aboriginal populations. The Indian Act (1867) afforded the Government of Canada the power to control First Nations peoples' ways of life (14), including participation in sport. Government officials dictated who could participate in sport, what sports could be played, and the level of competition available to First Nations teams and individuals (13).

Indeed, the Government of Canada has a long history of using sport initiatives to influence First Nations communities, seldom to the benefit of the recipient community. Paraschak (15) argued, "although few articles identify sport as a racist institution, the historical record supports this contention implicitly" (p60). Following the Indian Act of 1876 (14), First Nations populations were forced onto reserves and into residential schools that used Euro-Canadian sport as a means of oppression and control (13). Donnelly (4) explained that competitive Eurocentric sports are based on principles of social exclusion, dominance, and aggression, and reinforce concepts of patriarchy and capitalism. At the time of colonization, imperial powers, and later the Government of Canada, deemed Euro-Canadian social values to be civilized and necessary for First Nations people to acquire in order to integrate successfully within Canadian culture (14); thus, First Nations peoples were exposed to Eurocentric sports and inundated with Euro-Canadian social values on their reserves and in residential schools. According to Forsyth (13), First Nations peoples were encouraged to engage in Euro-Canadian sports to fill the void left when traditional physical and cultural practices were banned by government legislation.

The residential school system was one of the Government of Canada's most aggressive attempts to "civilize" First

Nations peoples (13). First Nations youth were removed from their communities and forced to attend the Christianized schools where First Nations cultural practices were banned and youth were obliged to adhere to Euro-Canadian values and ways of life (13). Sport was used to bring about fundamental changes in the values and behaviours of the First Nations students, most notably to break down communal values and foster an individual competitive spirit (8,13,16).

Aboriginal Health

Sport for development initiatives are often premised on the need to improve Aboriginal peoples' poor health. It is well-accepted that regular physical activity can contribute to the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle and decrease the incidence of preventable diseases such as coronary heart disease, type II diabetes, obesity, and hypertension (17). SFD programs often target youth populations because physical activity during their adolescence may improve adult health status by creating positive attitudes towards physical activity and contributing to maintaining an active lifestyle into adulthood (17). Beyond the physical health benefits, internationally, SFD programs have reportedly capitalized on the power of sport to foster individual and community development by attempting to improve the physical, emotional, economic, cultural, and social health of programs' recipients (5,7). The focus on the use of sport for development to achieve good health in First Nations communities in Canada may be, however, somewhat limited, as it fails to acknowledge the chronic underfunding of health care, education, and housing in First Nations communities as well as the long-term damage that colonial systems have and continue to bring about (18).

Contemporary Sport for Development in Aboriginal Communities

Since 2010, the Government of Canada has reportedly looked to the power of sport through structured SFD programs to assist in the development of Aboriginal communities in Canada (10). The Government of Canada recognizes that Aboriginal people are the most marginalized people in Canada (8) and that they experience major health disparities when compared to non-Aboriginal Canadians (8,19,20). The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) (20) stated that First Nations and Métis people have higher incidences of type II and gestational diabetes than non-Aboriginal peoples. Furthermore, Aboriginal individuals are generally diagnosed with diabetes at a younger age than non-Aboriginal populations (20). Compared to non-

Aboriginal populations, First Nations and Inuit peoples also have higher incidence of acute myocardial infarction, stroke, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, infant mortality, suicide and unintentional injuries resulting in death (19). There are also socio-cultural and economic disparities between Aboriginal populations and the rest of Canada including increased prevalence of family violence and substance abuse, increased time spent incarcerated, decreased employment and education rates, and dilapidated living conditions (8). Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health discrepancies in Canada have been linked to colonialism, dispossession of land, loss of traditional health practices, discrimination, food insecurity, lack of adequate housing, and unequal education systems and access to health care (18,21). Sport for development is used as a means to try to address the health inequities that result from these issues.

While sport may offer a means to improve Aboriginal peoples' physical health, sport initiatives need to be culturally sensitive and reflect Aboriginal cultural practices and values rather than those of Euro-Canadian origin (22-24). Drawing on existing literature, Sport Canada (25) explained that sport focused on holistic well-being and survival techniques have historically played a significant role in the lives of Aboriginal youth by reinforcing Aboriginal cultural and social teachings and connecting youth to their family and community; holistic sport "strengthens emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of Aboriginal life"(p4). Sport Canada (25) highlighted the need to integrate sports centred on appropriate cultural principles that parallel community beliefs and value systems into the lives of Aboriginal youth. Culturally appropriate sport can teach youth to balance mental, physical, emotional, cultural, and spiritual aspects of Aboriginal life and will also aid in the maintenance of holistic health (25). It is, however, important that cultural aspects of sport not be limited to static interpretations of culture. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (8) warned that Aboriginal people are not prisoners of the past; instead, they borrow ideas and adapt cultural traits in ways that they find appealing, similar to other cultures in Canada. Giles (22) further explained that "tradition" and "traditional games" in Aboriginal communities in Canada should be viewed as constantly changing: sport and physical activity should reflect the fluidity of culture and adapt to changing cultural ideals. SFD initiatives, such as PLAY, are developed in collaboration with First Nations people to ensure that sport programs are culturally sensitive and meet the specific needs of First Nations youth.

In June 2010, Right To Play partnered with the Government of Ontario and two Northern Ontario First Nations communities, Sandy Lake and Moose Cree, to initiate PLAY. PLAY was designed as a culturally sensitive SFD initiative that targets the specific needs of First Nations community youth. PLAY purports to use sport and play as a means to foster individual and community development (10). The program encourages the holistic development of Aboriginal youth using the Experience-Reflect-Connect-Apply approach that engages youth in conversation about the sports they play, the lessons learned through sport, and helps youth connect sports lessons to real-life situations (10). The PLAY program aims to be inclusive and respect the rights of First Nations youth and their cultures by involving community leaders, elders, parents and youth in the design and implementation process of the program to ensure that each component is tailored specifically to the needs of the community (10).

SFD programs such as PLAY demonstrate the potential for provincial governments to partner with First Nations communities to implement SFD programs aimed at improving the health of First Nations youth. Notably, it is the Government of Ontario and not the federal government that is funding PLAY, even though Aboriginal peoples are a federal responsibility. Hawkes (26) likened the confusion between provincial and federal responsibility for Aboriginal people to “the most appalling ‘political football’” (p374), explaining that the lines of responsibility are blurring and provincial governments are becoming more responsible for Aboriginal affairs. Hayhurst and Giles (in press) argued that this change may reflect the current conservative government’s neo-liberal mandate and the continued retreat of the welfare state. (11) While the federal government continues to fund some Aboriginal sports programs such as Motivate Canada and the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity’s (CAAWS) Team Spirit program, provincial governments across Canada have taken increased funding responsibility for Aboriginal SFD programs including the Aboriginal Youth Sport Legacy Fund in British Columbia, Alberta’s Future Leaders Program in Alberta, the Aboriginal Sport Development initiative in Saskatchewan and PLAY in Ontario.

Although the UN and various NGOs support the use of sport in development initiatives internationally, authors such as Donnelly (4) have warned of the potential confusion of using sport to foster development. Competitive sport is often based on principals of social exclusion, ideological conformation, nationalism, militarism, and discriminatory

attitudes toward gender and disability (4,27). Darnell (27) stressed the paradox inherent in sport: sport is used to improve social skills and promote development, but can foster dominance and antisocial behaviour in participants. Donnelly (4) also argued that SFD programs may perpetuate underdevelopment and inequalities in marginalized communities by focusing on “modernizing” the community and “improving” conduct, rather than challenging the power relations that caused this marginalization. Harding (28) stated, “white Canadians have historically enjoyed and continue to hold decisive advantages over Aboriginal people in all forms of institutional power” (p205). These power relations have rendered Aboriginal peoples the most marginalized in Canada (3,8). By perpetuating assimilation processes that reinforce Eurocentric values and marginalize Aboriginal values, SFD programs that promote Euro-Canadian sport within First Nations communities may be contributing to further racism instead of challenging power relations (4,27). Although Right To Play designed PLAY as a culturally sensitive SFD program (10), media reporting on PLAY may still be reinforcing racist, colonial discourses concerning First Nations people in Canada. Since media plays an integral role in constructing our social realities (29), negative discourses presented in mainstream media may contribute to perpetuating racism and promoting colonial views of First Nations people.

Aboriginal Peoples and the Media

Harding (28) contended that racist, colonial attitudes and discourses about Aboriginal peoples continue to be present in mainstream media. Harding (28) explained that the active racism that appeared in the news in colonial times has been replaced by a passive “ethnocentrism characterized by a creed of ‘identical treatment,’ which emphasizes equality of opportunity and cultural pluralism while denying the existence of contemporary racist practices, attitudes and outcomes” (p206). Today, Aboriginal peoples are included in mainstream media reports, but Knopf (30) explained that contemporary media attention given to Aboriginal peoples often references poor living conditions and poor health without discussing the colonial history that led to these conditions. This sustains stereotypes “of the lazy Indians on welfare and the Indians as victims to be blamed for their state” (30)(p91).

Portrayals of Aboriginal athletes can fall into this trope. Tom Longboat was an exceptional runner who dominated the international professional running scene in the decades before World War I. He also maintained ties to his home reserve and culture throughout his career and into his

retirement (2). He broke countless records during his professional career while struggling to overcome racism, skepticism, and media slander at the hands of the Canadian public and his own manager (2).

According to Paraschak (15), research into the history of Aboriginal involvement in sports in Canada demonstrates that Aboriginal athletes suffered from the distortion of their sport experiences due to the “ethnic chauvinism of the chronicler” (p58). Longboat’s career was no exception as the media used reports on Longboat to reinforce negative discourses about Aboriginal peoples, namely that all Aboriginal people were inferior to white men, impulsive, prone to drunkenness and lazy (2).

Certainly, mass media play an integral role in constructing our social realities (29); thus, deficit-based discourses concerning Aboriginal people that are reinforced in the media have the power to negatively influence the general public’s understanding of Aboriginal people. As such, Aboriginal peoples in Canada have created their own media sources and have taken the responsibility of representing their culture in the media into their own hands (30). Yet, it must be recognized that even Aboriginal media in Canada today are not free from the effects of colonization with Aboriginal media often producing content infused with both Indigenous and Western values and philosophies (30).

Our research addresses the question of how media reports on PLAY reinforce or challenge racist, colonial discourses concerning First Nations people. In short, we examine the varying roles that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal media sources play in reproducing or challenging these discourses.

Theoretical Framework: Postcolonialism

In general, postcolonial theory is used to understand colonialism’s ongoing impacts after independence from colonial powers (31). Postcolonial perspectives examine the impact of colonial practices on the construction of power relations that privilege the dominant race, class, or gender while rendering the dominated invisible (32). Since imperial Britain and France colonized Aboriginal peoples’ lands, the Aboriginal ways of life and cultural practices have been oppressed (13,14). Throughout the colonization process and in the years that followed, damaging Eurocentric discourses intertwined with formal legislature like the Indian Act of 1876 left Aboriginal communities isolated and oppressed by dominant Euro-Canadian culture.

The strength of postcolonial theory is that it allows for the

examination of the power relations and colonial values that render Aboriginal peoples invisible and allow for continued oppression by the dominant, non-Aboriginal, Canadian society. Postcolonial theory allows for the subjugated knowledge of the dominated group to challenge the notions of inferiority (3), potentially “disrupt[ing] the colonialist mainstream discourses” (33)(p13).

According to Hayhurst (32), “sport has been inextricably linked to colonialism” (p24). Despite Canada’s 2010 (late) affirmation of support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (34), which states, “indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health... and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions” (35), there remains a trend of unequal power distribution regarding Aboriginal SFD initiatives in Canada. Aboriginal peoples have limited input into SFD policy, despite the fact that they are often the intended recipients of such programs (3). Sports programs of the past were often oppressive for Aboriginal peoples because they were often developed and implemented by non-Aboriginal Canada with the intention of developing and civilizing First Nations people (36). Discourses today still promote a need for non-Aboriginal (dominant) cultures to develop SFD programs for marginalized Aboriginal communities (11).

In Canada, it remains all too clear that the damaging effects of colonization persist, particularly in relation to the treatment of Aboriginal peoples. The Indian Act (1867) today continues to dictate First Nations’ use of land and resources, outline First Nations’ government and education structures, and make First Nations peoples and their lands “a subject for government regulation, like mines or roads” (8)(p14). First Nations peoples have been subjected to uneven power relations with Euro-Canadian people since the start of colonization; thus, analysis of SFD initiatives that target First Nations populations in Canada must consider the history of colonization and the colonial constructs that have reinforced and legitimized these power relations and continue to maintain such relations today. To analyze these relations of power, we turn to discourse analysis.

Discourse Analysis

Discourse can be defined as ideas and knowledge, interrelated to texts, which are used to define the social realities that legitimize power advantages for some and disadvantage others (1,37,38). Following the work of

Michel Foucault, discourse analysis has come to reflect “a theoretical skepticism” (1)(p564) of social “truths” that enable uneven exercises of power. Discourse analysts explore how socially produced ideas were created in the first place and how these social truths, which are bounded up in the dynamics of power, reinforce themselves over time (37). It is within discourse that power relations are reinforced or challenged (3).

In this study, we engage with critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine the role that media play in sustaining or challenging unequal power relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in Canada. Harding (28) argued that CDA is “particularly well suited to studying the treatment of people of colour and other minority populations in the press” (p207) because of its ability to analyze subtle manipulations and variations in meanings that reproduce or challenge dominant discourses (29). According to Phillips and Hardy (37), language is constructive, constitutive, and social. Language enacts identity, has power, is active, and is political (38). Essentially, language is used to mean something and do something, and both of these are linked to the socio-political, cultural, and historical context of use (38). Thus, CDA is employed to examine the role that the media’s use of language plays in constructing social meanings (37,38), particularly how this language defines what it means to be a First Nations individual in Canada and the power relations carried over from colonialism associated with this constructed identity. Discourses reinforcing the necessity of

SFD programs to “fix” First Nations communities reflect relations of power that legitimize and privilege Euro-Canadian sport and their inherent ideologies over those of the First Nations people.

In this study, we focused on Canadian media that reported on Right To Play’s PLAY program from 2009 to 2012. We examined news reports including online newspapers, online news forums, and online magazines from local, provincial, and national Canadian news sources, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in origin. We also included official press releases from government organizations and Right To Play. We reviewed 26 articles in total: seven from Aboriginal news sources and 19 from non-Aboriginal sources. The articles are outlined in Tables 1 and 2. The imbalance between the numbers of articles in each category reflects the much larger numbers of non-Aboriginal media sources in Canada. Articles were retrieved from Internet search engines and the Canadian Newsstand Major Dailies database accessed from the University of Ottawa library’s website. Example search terms included “Right To Play PLAY program”, “PLAY”, “Promoting Life-Skills in Aboriginal Youth”, “PLAY Sandy Lake and Moose Cree”, “First Nations sport Ontario”, and “Right To Play in northern Ontario”. We identified thirty articles in our preliminary search, after which we eliminated four articles; two articles were identical to those from other news sources and two articles did not specifically discuss the PLAY program.

Table 1: Non-Aboriginal News Sources

Source	Type	Readership	Target Audience	# of Articles
The Toronto Star	News Article	3.1 million	Toronto, Ontario	7
The Globe and Mail	News Article	3.5 million	Canada	1
The Argus	News Article	3 000	Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario	1
Timmins Press	News Article	7 000	Timmins, Ontario	1
Ontario News North	News Article	50 000	Northern Ontario	1
Government of Ontario	Press Release	*	Ontario	2
Sport Research Intelligence Sportive	Press Release	3.5 million	Canada	1
Right to Play	Press Release	*	Canada	1
NetNewsLedge	News Article	50-100 000	Northwestern Ontario	1
CNW	Press Release	*	Canada	2
CBC Sports	News Article	2 million	Canada	1

* Readership not available

Table 2: Aboriginal News Sources

Source	Type	Readership	Target Audience	# of Articles
Active Circle	News Forum	*	Canada	2
Turtle Island - Native Network's Forum	News Forum	20 000	Northern Ontario	1
Wawatay	News Article	23 000	NAN - Northern Ontario	1
Native Journal	Journal Article	70 000	Canada	1
Windspeaker	News Article	140 000	Canada	1
Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians		20 000	AIAI communities in Ontario	1

* Readership not available

We then used CDA to analyze the articles by identifying discourses regarding First Nations people, especially how these discourses constructed First Nations people in Canada, and the way in which the language of each article was used to reinforce or challenge the dominant discourses about First Nations peoples. According to Willig (39), the first step of CDA involves identifying the ways in which a discourse is constructed within a particular text – in our case, the articles. In order to identify discursive constructions, Fairclough (40) suggests an approach that focuses on a problem, such as the ways in which First Nations peoples are represented in text.. Because discourses and their meanings are generated by the relationships between words, focusing only on a search for particular words will not yield a strong understanding of the discourses at work. As a result, Willig (39) suggested examining both implicit and explicit meanings in segments of text, as well as what is and is not being said in relation to the discursive object's construction. In the next stage of discourse analysis, one examines the broader discursive contexts in which discursive constructions are embedded. In this case, the context is the larger socio-politico-historico situation in which Aboriginal-settler relations and associated relations of power are embedded. It is of key importance to examine power and issues of dominance, since social life and social realities are produced by text and talk (40). In the final stage of discourse analysis, one identifies the impact(s) that discourses have on individuals and the ways in which these individuals reproduce or challenge these discourses.

Both authors completed the identification of discourses and then categorized the discourses into two broader categories. Four prominent discourses arose from the analysis; all discourses are presented in the results. Finally, we compared the difference in language and discourses between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sources and examined how the language of the collective articles in each category

legitimized or challenged dominant relations of power between First Nations and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Results

The results of this study indicate a divide between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal news sources. Non-Aboriginal sources reinforced two deficit-based discourses regarding Aboriginal peoples: i) there is no hope for First Nations youth in their current communities and First Nations youth are thus prone to suicide and poor health, and ii) the Government of Ontario and Right To Play developed PLAY to save First Nations youth, without contribution – either conceptually or financially from the First Nations communities themselves. Aboriginal sources, on the other hand, challenged these dominant discourses by promoting two alternative, strength-based discourses: i) First Nations youth have hope, and ii) First Nations people play vital roles in both conceptual and financial contributions to PLAY's development.

Non-Aboriginal Sources

First Nations youth have no hope and are thus prone to suicide. A dominant discourse that arose in non-Aboriginal news sources was that First Nations peoples, particularly First Nations youth, have no hope for social wellness or self-improvement in their current communities, and that PLAY is necessary to give youth hope. Twenty-three of the 35 statements made in the non-Aboriginal sources that alluded to this discourse occurred in the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail. A sample headline from the Toronto Star read, "Forgotten kids get a chance to play: Humanitarian group set to bring the spirit of the game to two tiny, isolated communities" (41). Similarly, MacLeod's (42) article in the Globe and Mail stated that PLAY would

give First Nations youth “hope that there could be a future,” but made no mention of current efforts by First Nations peoples to address the needs of their own youth. Articles by Romain (43), Simko (44) and NewsNetLedger (45) did use language such as “build on,” “improve,” or “helps” to imply that the First Nations youth were already on a positive developmental path prior to PLAY implementation, but the discourse that dominated all non-Aboriginal sources was that First Nations youth are hopeless without PLAY.

Non-Aboriginal news sources reported that PLAY was a necessary intervention for First Nations youth to counter the high suicide rates and poor health conditions in First Nations communities. One Toronto Star headline read, “Right To Play takes hockey north; Group, province offer program for community plagued by teen suicides” (46). In a later Toronto Star article on PLAY, Starkman (41) stated that there were “13 teen suicides in the isolated communities in the James Bay area in 2009. All the teens died by hanging. Another 80 tried to take their own lives.” MacLeod’s (42) Globe and Mail report, as well as reports from the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs (47), the Timmins Press (43), and Ontario News North (48), also highlighted the high rates of suicide and violence in their reporting on PLAY and stated that more than half of all First Nations youth were in poor health and were either obese, overweight, or struggling with type II diabetes.

Non-Aboriginal people save First Nations youth without First Nations’ contributions. Another deficit-based discourse that dominated non-Aboriginal sources was that the Government of Ontario and Right To Play designed PLAY as an intervention to save First Nations youth with little input from the community members themselves. Many of the articles focused on the “McGuinty [then Premier of Ontario] government’s plan” (47) or stated that PLAY was designed by non-Aboriginal peoples and organizations, giving First Nations people no credit for their role in PLAY. In her Toronto Star article, Talaga (49) credited the entire creation of PLAY to Brad Duguid, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs from 2008-2010. She stated that it was his “dream of teaching northern First Nations kids how to skate and play Canada’s game” (49) that led to the eventual implementation of PLAY in northern Ontario, again ignoring any influence and self-actualisation from First Nations people themselves. Throughout the non-Aboriginal sources, the Government of Ontario and Right To Play were the main partners credited with the creation of PLAY with no mention of First Nations contributions. Only two non-Aboriginal sources gave credit to First Nations people for their role in PLAY’s design and implementation: Right To

Play (50) and Sport Research Intelligence Sportive (SRIS) (51). SRIS quoted national director Robert Witchel, who thanked the “First Nations communities with whom we work” (51) for the success of PLAY and Right To Play highlighted that PLAY was developed “in partnership with the Ontario government, First Nations communities and other organizations” (50).

Non-Aboriginal sources also highlighted only the financial contributions made to PLAY by the Government of Ontario, Right To Play, or other non-Aboriginal title sponsors such as the Royal Bank of Canada (50). The Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) is the only First Nations partner mentioned in a non-Aboriginal article, but details of NAN’s role as a contributor, whether financial or not, are not highlighted (50). The Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs (52) press release stated that the Ontario Government had committed more than \$1.6 million dollars to the PLAY program over four years and private partners had contributed more than \$2 million, yet the article did not mention the contributions from First Nations communities or organizations. SRIS (51), Right To Play (50), the Ontario Newsroom (48), the Timmins Press (43) and the Toronto Star (46,53,54) also highlighted the more than \$1.6 million dollars invested by the Government of Ontario and associated partners, with no mention of any First Nations’ community or organization’s financial contribution.

Aboriginal Sources

First Nations youth have hope. Native Journal (55), a monthly national Aboriginal magazine, highlighted NAN Chief Stan Beardy’s perspective that, “First Nations are most disadvantaged when it comes to sports and recreation facilities and programs”. This indicated that PLAY was needed to expand current sports programs to give more youth access to sport, not that youth have no options or hope without the program. Aboriginal sources focused on how PLAY would “inspire and motivate youth to lead cultural and sporting events, build relationships with Elders and other community members, and plan activities to help address local social issues” (56), reinforcing the idea that First Nations youth were already setting goals, creating plans, and developing leadership, self-esteem, and confidence within their communities before PLAY.

First Nations people play an integral role in the development and financial support of PLAY. Aboriginal sources highlighted First Nations’ communities’ involvement in creating and implementing the PLAY program. Turtle Island (57), an independent Aboriginal

news and information network, emphasized that PLAY brought together the Government of Ontario, Right To Play and First Nations communities to “develop meaningful and sustainable programs to support healthy communities in Canada’s north” (57). Zayadin (58) and Native Journal (55) highlighted the role of the First Nations communities in the PLAY planning process and the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians (AIAI) (59) clarified that Right To Play worked directly with the Chiefs of Ontario to select successful community applicants.

Aboriginal sources also emphasized that First Nations communities that host PLAY are responsible for a fifty percent contribution to the salary of the Community Mentor along with providing office space and accommodations for the PLAY program coordinator whenever that person visits the community (59). Active Circle (56), an online Aboriginal initiative within Motivate Canada that posts news pertinent to Aboriginal peoples, also pointed out that “[a]lthough the Government and Right To Play Canada will provide some financial supports [to PLAY], there are additional costs to the First Nations community.”

Discussion

Based on our analysis, Aboriginal news sources focused on the strengths of communities and the positive relationships that are being built between the Government of Ontario, Right To Play, and First Nations communities through the implementation of PLAY in northern Ontario. Non-Aboriginal media sources, on the other hand, used deficit-based discourses of First Nations peoples, which in turn (re)produce colonial stereotypes and prejudices and perpetuate unequal power relations and social inequalities that continue to exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Strengths versus Weakness and the Politics of Selective Reporting

Harding (28) ascertained that “white Canadians have historically enjoyed, and continue to hold, decisive advantages over Aboriginal people in all forms of institutional power” (p205) and these power relations continue to be supported in the mass media (28,30). Promoting prevailing discourses such as First Nations youth have no hope and are prone to suicide and poor health preserves the long-standing notion that non-Aboriginal Canada needs to maintain control of First Nations populations (8,13) and that non-Aboriginal Canadians know what is best for First Nations people. Non-Aboriginal

sources failed to address the social and political histories that have led to these poor health and socio-economic conditions or to discuss how this history continues to shape power relations that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada today. According to Harding (28),

“While devoting considerable attention to reporting on the extreme circumstances in which many contemporary aboriginal people live – poverty, alcoholism, crime, and suicide – news media simultaneously eschew any analysis of the socio-political context of these living conditions and the impact of Canada’s long history of colonialism on aboriginal people (p206).”

This selective reporting disengages the historical influence of colonialism from the current state of First Nations communities and results in victim blaming, suggesting that First Nations people are at fault for their own poor health and are doing little to nothing to help their own youth.

Aboriginal sources actively challenged the dominant relations of power promoted in non-Aboriginal media sources by focusing on the strengths already held by First Nations youth and communities before the advent of PLAY. Aboriginal media promoted the discourse that First Nations youth were already hopeful and used language such as “build on” and “improve” to construct an image of First Nations youth who are strong, motivated, goal-oriented, and who intended to use PLAY to build on already present life-skills. Aboriginal sources did not focus on community deficits: the articles did not mention suicide or poor health in the PLAY recipient communities. Instead, articles from Aboriginal sources built an image of strong communities excited by the potential of the PLAY program, and specifically outlined PLAY’s role as improving sport infrastructure and making sport available to more youth in target communities.

Interestingly, Harding (28) argued that mainstream media today uses a more passive form of racism than previously seen in Canadian media, which can be observed through the use of Aboriginal voices in non-Aboriginal media sources. Non-Aboriginal media quote Aboriginal experts’ concerns about the health of First Nations people to legitimize deficit-based reporting. For example, NAN Chief Stan Beardy was quoted extensively in non-Aboriginal media sources, often to reinforce the poor state of health of First Nations youth. These quotes reinforced stereotypical representations of First Nations peoples and normalized racism toward First Nations peoples by other Canadians. Alternatively, Conrad

(60) argued that expert quotes may be used by media to provide context, implications, legitimation, explication, and/or balance: the use of experts' quotes to legitimize the concerns of First Nations people could be a strategic way for Aboriginal sources to garner much needed resources for First Nations people and programs. For example, *Native Journal* (55) quoted Chief Beardy saying, "NAN First Nations are most disadvantaged when it comes to sports and recreation facilities and programs." This quote draws attention to the chronic government underfunding that has disadvantaged Canada's First Nations communities (8) and sports programs. Active Circle (56) also used quotes from Grand Chief Randall Phillips to ask for funding from "corporations and business leaders" to support PLAY, explaining that the program will require funding beyond what is available from Right To Play and the Government of Ontario in order to make PLAY accessible to all First Nations youth in Ontario. Expert quotes may assist Aboriginal sources in drawing attention to the economic disparities occurring in today's disadvantaged First Nations communities as well as the lack of adequate funding from Canadian governments to rectify these issues.

Developing and Investing in Sport for Development Initiatives

The roles of First Nations people in PLAY's development were rendered invisible in non-Aboriginal media sources through the discourse that First Nations people did not contribute to PLAY. This discourse arose regardless of the fact that according to Right To Play (10), one of the main goals of the PLAY program is to respect the rights of First Nations youth and their culture by involving community members in all levels of program design and implementation. Right To Play (10) ascertained that First Nations community members must be actively involved in all levels of program design to ensure PLAY meets the specific needs of the community. Yet, non-Aboriginal media sources only credited First Nations people with the role of recipient. Nicholls and Giles (3) argued that a trend of unequal exercises of power and lack of Aboriginal input into SFD initiatives continues in Canada today. Non-Aboriginal media reinforced these power relations by rendering First Nations peoples invisible in any discussion about the development or implementation of PLAY.

Aboriginal sources, conversely, challenged the discourse that non-Aboriginal sources developed PLAY without input from First Nations people by promoting the fact that First Nations people not only contributed to program implementation, but also were integral partners in all levels

of PLAY's design. By actively promoting the role that First Nations people played in developing PLAY, Aboriginal media sources constructed First Nations people as motivated and willing participants in change, which reinforces strength-based views of First Nations people and challenges dominant deficit-based discourses.

Non-Aboriginal media further promoted discourse that First Nations peoples do not contribute financially to PLAY. This discourse produces First Nations people as financially dependent on non-Aboriginal Canada and unwilling to contribute financially to potentially beneficial youth programs. This legitimizes power relations that privilege non-Aboriginal Canada as superior to First Nations peoples and justifies the need for colonial legislation such as the Indian Act (1876) to govern the "deviant" (61) First Nations populations. This discourse effectively sanctions racism and oppression toward First Nations people by denying First Nations' desire to contribute financially to programs for their own peoples and by failing to discuss how government policies have contributed to the endemic poverty that forced First Nations people to be reliant on Canadian taxpayers (8). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (8) concluded that First Nations people want to be free of dependence on non-Aboriginal Canada and free of the shame and debilitating effects of poverty associated with this dependence. The PLAY program can be promoted to non-Aboriginal Canada as an example of First Nations peoples' financial capabilities and as an example of the cooperation and success that is possible through partnerships between governments, NGOs, and First Nations people. Non-Aboriginal media instead focused on negative discourses and continue the colonial practice of rendering First Nations peoples' contributions to investing in their youth invisible.

Aboriginal news sources also challenged the deficit-based discourse concerning financial dependence that was reinforced in non-Aboriginal media by actively promoting the financial contributions that First Nations communities were making to PLAY: half of the salary of the Community Mentor, contribution of space for the programs to take place, and contribution of accommodation for Right To Play staff during community support visits (10). This reinforced notions of First Nations people as strong and committed to improving the lives of their youth. Aboriginal discourse also promoted how First Nations people were able to contribute financially to programs such as PLAY, suggesting that First Nations people are becoming more economically self-reliant. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (8) ascertained that increased self-reliance could contribute to

future economic independence and freedom for First Nations people.

In light of the apparent discrepancies between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sources' reporting on the PLAY program and the potentially damaging effects that deficit-based discourses can have on First Nations peoples in Canada, discourses used in mainstream media reporting on First Nations peoples need to be more balanced. A potential medium for this change may be through Right To Play and the PLAY program directly. While the PLAY program had clear goals and guidelines regarding First Nations communities' involvement in program design and funding, the Right To Play press release reviewed in this study made little mention of either of these facts (50). The press release recognized First Nations people as program partners, but the specific roles and contributions of First Nations people were not highlighted. Instead the press release focused on the contributions of the Ontario government and private sector partners. More conscious reporting by Right To Play may help better inform non-Aboriginal writers and audiences, challenging the existing beliefs that First Nations people need to be saved and do not contribute to programs like PLAY. Press releases from the PLAY program itself, written by youth or community members involved in the program and released by Right To Play for distribution to major Canadian news centres, may also be means of clearly communicating First Nations' involvement in the program and thus avoid future deficit-based reporting. There may be a need for Right To Play and other SFD programs in the future to employ a media strategy that is aimed at preventing deficit-based discourses. A future area of study may be an examination of how SFD programs could implement such a strategy and the potential benefit, if any, these strategies may have on increasing strengths-based reporting in non-Aboriginal media sources.

A limitation of this study was that we examined only online English sources, which thus excluded articles in French, Aboriginal languages, and print, television, and radio news sources. A further limitation of this study was that a large number of non-Aboriginal news articles came from the Toronto Star (seven of 19 articles) and Talaga wrote three of these. As a result, the findings of this study may reflect the biases of the Toronto Star and Talaga in particular. Nevertheless, the themes that arose in the Toronto Star articles permeated all other non-Aboriginal sources, which led us to believe that the discourses that were presented in the Star do reflect the views across a broad spectrum of non-Aboriginal Internet reporting.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that non-Aboriginal media sources continue to reproduce deficit-based discourses concerning First Nations people while Aboriginal media actively challenges these discourses. Right To Play developed PLAY in partnership with First Nations people and with the support of the Government of Ontario. One of the goals of the program was to ensure that the rights of the targeted First Nations youth were respected (10). To obtain this goal, Right To Play (10) aimed to include First Nations peoples in all levels of the program development and implementation, and required the target community to provide a substantial portion of the financing to maintain the program. Yet, non-Aboriginal media sources reporting on PLAY failed to mention the role of any First Nations person or community in the creation, implementation or financing of PLAY. Harding (28) and Knopf (30) argued that when media fail to acknowledge the contributions of First Nations people to programs such as PLAY, these reports act to reinforce colonial power relations that privilege organizations – in this case, the Government of Ontario and non-Aboriginal institutions such as Right To Play over First Nations people. These power relations enable non-Aboriginal Canada to intervene in First Nations communities and reinforce the deficit-based discourse that non-Aboriginal people must save First Nations youth. Non-Aboriginal media sources reinforced deficit-based discourses that stressed the laziness and inability of First Nations people to help themselves and that there is no hope for First Nations youth and First Nations youth are prone to suicide. Non-Aboriginal sources reported only on the deficits of First Nations communities, without mentioning the colonial history that has rendered First Nations people “the most marginalized group in Canadian society” (62)(pXV).

Aboriginal sources, on the other hand, used reports on PLAY to challenge the dominant, deficit-based discourses that permeated non-Aboriginal sources, by emphasizing the current strength of First Nations youth and communities and highlighting the role the Aboriginal peoples played in all levels of PLAY design and implementation. Aboriginal sources used strength-based approaches when reporting and promoted an image of First Nations people as strong, financially independent, and willing participants in change. Our research thus supports Knopf's (30) assertion that “Aboriginal people are taking the representation of their cultures into their own hands to counter the still prevalent stereotypes and misrepresentation floating in the main-stream mediascapes” (p115). Given the extent to

which non-Aboriginal media sources outnumber Aboriginal media sources, non-Aboriginal media must recognize the way that they are reporting on First Nations people and strive to ensure that they no longer reinforce deficit-based, colonial discourses.

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