

## **GOOSE HUNT OR RAP: MEDIA EFFECTS ON A GROUP OF NATIVE-CANADIAN PREADOLESCENTS**

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### **Abstract / Résumé**

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of popular media on one group of Native-Canadian preadolescents in a remote Cree community, and the effects of media on self-concept and future aspirations. While family and community influences were still prevalent, the media played an increasingly significant role in the social development of these preadolescents. They identify role models from both the traditional members of their community and celebrities of popular media. It appears that these young people have opted not to choose between traditional and contemporary cultural influences, but rather to value both—goose hunting and listen to Rap music.

L'étude avait pour objectif l'examen de l'influence des médias populaires sur un groupe de préadolescents autochtones d'une collectivité crie éloignée et des effets des médias sur le concept de soi et les aspirations futures. Bien que les influences familiales et communautaires demeurent prévalentes, les médias jouent un rôle de plus en plus important dans le développement social des préadolescents. Ces derniers suivent des modèles de rôle offerts par les membres traditionnels de la collectivité et les célébrités dont on parle dans les médias populaires. Les jeunes semblent avoir choisi de ne pas faire un choix entre les influences culturelles traditionnelles et contemporaines. Ils accordent plutôt une valeur aux deux genres d'influences : ils vont à la chasse à l'oie et écoutent de la musique rap.

## **Introduction**

As they move from childhood (up to 9 years of age) to preadolescence (10-13 years of age), boys and girls begin to redefine themselves. Preadolescence is a complex stage that includes developing moral and ethical codes, constructing a new self-image and clarifying gender role conceptions (Harter, 1999). It is also a stage when most young people adopt role models in order to develop their self-identity (Bhabha, 1987; Howe & Strauss, 2000). Traditionally, children have found their role models in parents, teachers and community leaders (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov & Sealant, 1993; Catalano & Hawking, 1996). Furthermore, Fraser (1996) stressed that experiences gained within family setting, shape and influence future behavior of children.

There has been a shift in contemporary society, and ideas, values and belief systems are often presented through the media (Giles & Maltby, 2003). According to Bandura (1977), learning new behaviors and new attitudes is acquired by observing models. He stated that: "The salient symbolic modeling through the electronic media pervades peoples' daily lives" (p. 169). Thus, the media play an important role in shaping preadolescents' beliefs, attitudes and perceptions (Bibby, 2001; Wartella, O'Keefe & Scantin, 2000).

Some research has been conducted on media influence on children in Canada, but there is a gap in the research on elementary school children in Native communities concerning their media related habits and attitudes.

The purpose of this study was to explore how preadolescents in a remote Cree community in Canada, discuss their self-identities and their future aspirations, and disclose their patterns of media use. In particular, this study addressed three questions:

1. What patterns are evident in these preadolescents' habits of watching television, movies, music videos and listening to music?
2. Where do these preadolescents find their heroes and role models?
3. What impact, if any, do the media have on their future aspirations and their concept of self?

## **Background**

According to Harter (1999), early adolescence is a period of rapid change and sometimes it can be a very confusing time for young people. Wexler (1992) described this period of life as a time when young people try to construct a personal identity to "become somebody." This is also a period of adjustment to physical, social, emotional and intellec-

tual changes as well as a progressive development of the sense of “Who am I” (Harter, 1999). Preadolescence is a period when young adults start to find role models away from their parents (Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Linebarger & Wright, 2001). In a recent study of celebrity influence, young adults reported a very strong attraction to celebrities and they disclosed that celebrities influenced some aspect of their attitudes and values (Boon & Lomore, 2001). Thus, in this period of particular sensitivity and vulnerability, the impact of media messages and images can be very powerful. Moore and MacKinnon (1999) stressed that one pervasive media message is that appearance is of paramount importance. They stated: “All of us, actors and spectators alike, live surrounded by mirrors. In them we seek assurance of our capacity to captivate or impress others, anxiously searching out blemishes that might detract from the appearance we intend to project” (p. 310).

In her research about media influence on constructing identities within a group of preadolescent girls, Lowe (1999) found that those girls pick their future careers by using female characters from their favourite television shows as role models. She stressed that girls see those careers as true future possibilities no matter how unrealistic they may appear. Many preadolescents enjoy fantasizing about what they see on the television screen and, if they like the show, they often choose actors as role models (Anderson et al., 2001; Kantrowit, Wingert, Springen, Figueroa & Joseph-Goteiner, 1999). Hence, the media can have a big impact on how they perceive and present themselves (Daniluk, 1998; Gilbert, 1998; Poulton, 1996).

## **Method**

In this paper, we have been guided by two principles. First, we have sought to relate our findings to existing knowledge about media influence on young people. Second, we examined existing research to determine if results were applicable to the group of preadolescents in a small remote Native-Canadian community.

This paper was a part of a longitudinal project entitled “Children’s Stories as Cultural Mirrors” that explored the impact of popular media on children’s values and beliefs over a three-year period (Elliott & Murray, 2003). The primary intention of the study was to explore the self-declared media patterns and habits of a sample of Canadian boys and girls in elementary school through self-reported questionnaires, individual interviews and field notes. Interviews and questionnaires can give researchers a vivid picture into the thoughts of young adults (Rice & Dolgin, 2005). The study followed the grade one students through grades two and three; the grade four students through grades five and six, and the

grade six students through grade seven and eight. This paper was based on data from one group of elementary school children in grade eight who live in a remote, northern Cree community in Canada. The data were collected in spring 2004. The participants were 13 preadolescents who ranged in age from 11 to 13.

The school where the data were collected is situated in a small community in the north of Canada with a population of approximately 3,300 people. The community has been searching for viable local educational, social and economic development programs to meet the needs of a growing population. The community has numerous regional offices, including the Educational Services of the School Board and the Board of Health and Social Services. The services are provided by many public institutions and facilities within the community, including the Wellness center and Telecommunication center (Faries & Paschagumskum, 2002).

The school provides educational programs from pre-kindergarten to secondary school for over 1000 students. Cree is the language of instruction until grade three and either English or French is selected as a second language of instruction for the remaining school years. The Internet was introduced to the school in 1998. In this remote Cree community, the fundamentals of respect, courage, stewardship, and patience are reflected in community life. Traditional Native values generally consist of sharing, cooperation, sense of being, harmony with nature and a deep respect for Elders (Garret, 1995). Their values include respect for the land, respect for the family, respect for the Creator, and respect for the Cree language and culture. The young people learn the traditions and a skills related to surviving on the land primarily from their parents and grandparents. For instance, as in the past, community life is halted in the fall and in the spring and family groups go to their traditional camps on the land for the goose hunt. The hunt lasts for two to three weeks and preadolescent boys are taught by their elder male relatives to how to hunt. At the same time, preadolescent girls are involved in traditional female roles in plucking, cleaning, and smocking the geese. The camps are medialess consisting of rudimentary cabins and teepees. This twice yearly goose hunt is a time of family bonding, sharing of traditional values and highly anticipated enjoyment. Stories, legends, and prophecies are handed down orally from generation to generation and the goose hunt provides a good opportunity for sharing these traditions (The Cree project, 2002).

Television has only been present to a pervasive degree in this community for about twenty-five years. In the past, isolation from the mass media in Aboriginal communities has helped them to acculturate and maintain their traditions (Michaels, 1985). Now, almost every house has

a satellite dish, and the one of the most visited stores is the video store equipped with the newest movie releases and video games (Field Notes, 2003). Apart from the goose hunt, this community is plugged in and turned on.

### **Data Collection**

In this study, each preadolescent completed a twenty-four page self-reporting questionnaire that was administered in grade eight over about a sixty-minute period. The questionnaire contained quantitative and qualitative questions related to media habits and preferences. Specifically, in order to identify their media patterns, preadolescents were asked to estimate the amount of time they spent watching TV shows, movies, music videos and listening to music, to identify their preferences and to describe the reasons for their choices. Similar questions were asked with reference to listening to music. Finally, they were asked two questions related to their self-concepts: first, to identify their future aspirations (What is the kind of person that you would like to be when you grow up and why?), and second to describe themselves (Write any five words that describe you). We conducted individual interviews with two boys and two girls from each class. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed for future analysis. A team of researchers also made detailed field notes after they visited the school.

Conducting research across diverse cultural group is a challenging task. The language in which research is conducted can limit interpretation of results (Taylor & George, 2000). In this particular study, English was not a first language for most of the preadolescents. And according to the field notes, expectations regarding responses in questionnaires and interviews were limited with a natural reticence toward non-community members (Field Notes, 2004).

### **Analysis**

All data were entered into SPSS and Ethnograph software programs for analysis (Ethnograph v5.0 Software for Text Based Qualitative Analyses). The Ethnograph v5.0 is versatile computer program that searches and notes segments of interest within the data and marks them with code words and identifiers. Sections about television, movies and music as well as future aspirations and self-descriptions with respect to these thirteen participants were analyzed for this paper. Descriptive and inferential statistics were conducted.

## Findings

### Television

For television watching habits, preadolescents were asked how many hours they spend watching television during the week and during the day. According to the results, every child in this study watched television at least two times per week, eleven or 84.6 % of them watched television every day. Eleven or 84.6% watched television at least one hour per day and four or 30.8% of all preadolescents watched television more than two hours a day. Television is clearly an integral part of the after school activities of these preadolescents.

### Favourite Television Shows

When asked to identify their favourite television show, seven preadolescents or 61.5% chose *The Simpsons*. Their favourite character from the show was Homer for various reasons. For instance, "I like Homer because he reminds me of my uncle" (Questionnaire, Boy, 2004), "Because he is funny" (Questionnaire, Girl 2004), "Homer, because he is dumb" (Questionnaire, Boy, 2004). The second favourite television show was the sitcom *Friends* with six preadolescents or 46.2% making this selection. They chose this show because: "Good friends, funny, respect" (Questionnaire, Girl, 2004), "They are good friends" (Questionnaire, Girl, 2004). Three preadolescents or 23.1% chose various sports on television. Specifically, they identified hockey as a favourite sport to watch on television. All three participants also played hockey in the community.

### Movies

There are no movie theatres in this community so all movies are either watched at home or they travel for about two hours to a neighboring community that has a theater. Preadolescents were asked to identify how often they watched movies. Seven preadolescents or 53.8% watched movies more than once a week while ten preadolescents or 76.9% watched movies at least once a week. The most popular movies were: *Dumb and Dumber* (38.5%), *Scary Movie 3* (31%) and *Wayne's World* (31%). It is interesting to note that these movies were identified as the most popular with preadolescents in other schools that participated in this study. All these movies were comedies. When they were asked why they liked these kinds of movies, eight preadolescents or 61.5% replied, "Because it is funny."

### Music

Preadolescents were asked how often they listened to and watched

music videos on television. Eleven or 84.6% listened to music every day, seven preadolescents or 53.9% watched music videos every day, and two preadolescents or 15.3% never watched music videos. When asked what kind of music they preferred, twelve preadolescents or 92.3% chose Rap. They identified Eminem (46.5%), 50 Cent (30.8%), and G-Unit (23.1%) as their favorite music artists. All three of these artists belong to the Rap music scene.

### **Aspirations and Self-descriptions**

The future aspirations of these preadolescents fell into two main categories: role models found within family and community members and, role models found in media heroes or celebrities. In the first category, six preadolescents or 46.1% chose community professions such as cashier, police officer and hunter. They explained their aspirations with: "A cashier, like my aunt" (Girl, 2004), "Police officer, like my father" (Boy, 2004) and, "I like to be a hunter like my father" (Boy, 2004). In the second category, five preadolescents or 38.5% provided answers such as: "I like to be a mechanic like Jessie James" (Boy, 2004), "I like to be like Michael Jordan" (Boy, 2004) and, "I like to be a famous hockey player like Patrick Lalime of the Ottawa Senators" (Boy, 2004). These comments reflected a direct media influence on preadolescents' future aspirations.

When the preadolescents were asked to describe themselves using five words, it appeared that eight of them (61.5%) described themselves with physical attributes such as: skinny, athletic and tall. Another group of four preadolescents (38.5%) described themselves with internal attributes such as smart, shy, nice and quiet. This self description appeared to be a challenge for these preadolescents as none of them offered all five self-descriptive words.

### **Summary of Results**

It was evident from the study that this group of preadolescents in this Native community were regular media users (television, movies, videos and music) and that they were very well informed about popular television shows, movies and current music trends. More than half of preadolescents were exposed to television every day for at least one hour. They tended to watch popular television sitcoms such as *The Simpsons* and *Friends* as well as sports. These choices were typical of all preadolescents in the larger study. Humor was clearly a strong motivator in television choices.

Watching movies was a weekly activity for most of the preadolescents and similar to television the most desirable movies were the ones that are humorous. According to their choices, it appeared that they valued

friendship, humor and altruism. Unlike television, their movie choices were affected by the fact that there was no movie theater in the community and they primarily watched movies that had been released in video.

According to the results, the presence of music was obvious in the lives of these preadolescents as most of them listened to music every day. Rap appeared to be the most popular choice of music and preadolescents appeared to be well informed about popular music artists. Several of these preadolescents imitated the dress style of rap musicians (Field Notes, 2003). They were observed after school in the central mall dressed in a similar manner as the rap stars. For instance, they were wearing headbands, baggy pants, vests and sneakers. Girls were also very fashionable wearing tight shirts and dangling, sparkling earrings (Field Notes, 2004).

According to the data from interviews, some preadolescents stressed that they enjoy goose hunting. Jason, a twelve-year-old boy, said that he watched television and listened to Rap music, but he liked it more when he was out hunting geese. Timmy, another twelve-year-old boy declared that his grandfather taught him how to use a gun and how to shoot an animal. When asked about their future aspirations, some preadolescents in this group declared that they want to be like their media heroes and found their role models within media celebrities. The other half of the participants wanted to be like their parents or grandparents. This dichotomy reflected the duality of their colliding cultures.

## **Discussion**

All of these findings confirmed the claim the media have the potential to influence preadolescents' attitudes and future aspirations (Durkin 1995; Wartella et al., 2000). Therefore, for some of these preadolescents the heroes from the media appeared to be supplanting traditional patterns of finding role models within family and community members.

According to Catalano and Hawking (1996), a child's social development is deeply rooted in skills and opportunities that happen through early interaction with family members, neighbors, and others. Furthermore, Fraser (1996) stressed that: "Perhaps more than any other setting in the social ecology of childhood, conditions, processes, and experiences in the family shape the behavior of children" (p.349). This study also indicated that family and community members influenced preadolescents' future aspirations. It was interesting to find that parental influence still persists despite the claim that early adolescence is the time of detachment from parents (Blyth & Traeger, 2001). It may be that the maintenance of some traditional Native rituals promotes the formation of self-identity with vestiges of cultural roots.

It is a well known fact that for many preadolescents, changing physically can effect the way they see and evaluate themselves (Blyth & Traeger, 2001). This study showed that the majority of the preadolescents described themselves with attributes regarding their physical appearance confirming that physical appearance is important to them. It might be that the images provided by the media affect their self-descriptions. The inner attributes of “quiet and shy” were dominant perceptions of self, which might be rooted in the culture and tradition of Native people (Plank, 1994). Silence is valued in Native culture, for silence is the token of acceptance, the symbol of peace and serenity, and the outward expression of harmony between the human and natural world (Plank, 1994).

Overall, this study showed that the media and family have parallel influence on the self-concept and future aspirations of this group of preadolescents. These influences may cause future dilemmas and confusion for this group of preadolescents as they move into adulthood. Such dilemmas may affect their decisions regarding staying or leaving their community later in their lives. These preadolescents live in a dynamic and challenging culture where family values and contemporary media influences are on a collision course and it will likely present an enormous future challenge to reconcile these two sets of values.

This study showed that within this preadolescent group some aspects of traditional culture are retained while aspects of the popular culture are adopted. Therefore, if you happen to visit this Native community during early spring, and you see young boys dressed like rappers in buggly pants and sneakers with shot guns in their hands, do not be surprised, or scared. It is only beginning of hunting season.

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