Adaptation and Decolonization: Unpacking the Role of "Culturally Appropriate" Knowledge in the Prevention of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

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In this article I examine the perceptions of a group of young Aboriginal mothers attending an urban Aboriginal Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) prevention program toward the values and consequences of "culturally appropriate" pedagogies for FAS prevention. The women's insights inform a close reading of the policy texts of a contemporary Canadian FAS prevention initiative directed toward First Nations and Inuit women and communities. My analysis of their experiences and the policy texts explores the disjuncture evident in the "official knowledge" and "public pedagogy" of FAS/FAE to identify two distinct and sometimes competing uses of the term culturally appropriate: *culturally appropriate pedagogy as adaptation and culturally appropriate pedagogy as decolonization.*

Introduction

In 1997 the federal government of Canada expanded the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program with funds dedicated to initiatives that address the "epidemic" of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAS/FAE)[1] in Aboriginal communities. Administered by the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) and the Population and Public Health Branch of Health Canada, *The First Nations and Inuit Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects Initiative* (the Initiative) was a policy and program framework that claimed to be "based on the values, objectives, and needs identified by First Nations and Inuit communities across Canada." Through the Initiative, funds were made available to First Nations bands and tribal councils; national, provincial, and regional First Nations and Inuit organizations; and community-based organizations sponsored by First Nations or Inuit governments to develop their own regional and local projects that would "increase awareness" of FAS/FAE and contribute to "capacity building," to enable communities to develop and implement their own FAS/FAE prevention and support programs (FAS/FAE Technical Working Group 1997). The Initiative also provided funding for national "projects that provide leadership to the regions and have a national impact" (FAS/FAE Technical Working Group, 1997).

The primary document supporting the work of the Initiative *It Takes a Community* was published in 1997 by Health Canada. *It Takes a Community: A Resource Manual for Community-based Prevention of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome* *and Fetal Alcohol Effects* was prepared by a working group that included representatives from Health Canada; FNIHB; the Aboriginal Nurses Association of Canada; the Assembly of First Nations; Inuit Tapirisat of Canada; the Canadian Paediatric Society; the First Nations Education Council; and Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association; as well as a variety of Tribal Councils, urban and rural Aboriginal communities, and social service providers. Ten Aboriginal communities also reviewed *It Takes a Community* before its publication.

It Takes a Community has been used widely in Canada by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities on and off reserve to guide a variety of education and community development initiatives related to FAS/FAE. Indeed, the document states in its introductory pages: "The publishers encourage widespread use of *It Takes a Community* to any and all groups, Aboriginal or not, who strive to prevent FAS/FAE and undertake supportive interventions for persons already affected" (FAS/FAE Technical Working Group, 1997, p. 52). Similarly, the pamphlets, posters, and fact sheets produced through the Initiative have been circulated across Canada to on- and off-reserve Aboriginal individuals and communities.

Public policy in Canada (and elsewhere) tends to frame mothering, substance use, and FAS/FAE as simultaneously individualized experiences and national concerns. When policy talk positions these issues as individualized experiences, the challenges faced by mothers with substance use problems and their children are typically viewed as evidence of personal failure, as the structural conditions that mediate these struggles are frequently ignored, belittled, or misunderstood. Although Aboriginal mothers whose lives have included substance use and FAS/FAE have much to teach about FAS/FAE, substance use, and mothering in their communities, their voices and experiences have been largely absented from or neglected in this arena of debate.

In this article I draw on the perceptions of a group of young Aboriginal mothers attending a model FAS/FAE prevention program (highlighted in *It Takes a Community*) toward the values and consequences of "culturally appropriate" pedagogies for FAS/FAE prevention. In so doing I explore the disjunctures and contradictions evident in the "official knowledge" (Apple, 2000) of FAS/FAE as evident in the public health planning and education texts supporting the work of the Initiative, and in the light of the women's everyday experiences. My analysis emphasizes the complex relationships between agency, ideology, discourse, and experience that can be discerned in the Initiative. I conclude with an analysis of the institutional and discursive practices that give salience to the inclusion and exclusion of "culturally appropriate" and "traditional" knowledge in public policy and pedagogy.

Locating the Initiative in a Canadian Policy Context

In their struggles to achieve self-determination and decolonization, Aboriginal peoples in Canada have demanded that the State recognize the importance of cultural revitalization and renewal efforts. For many Aboriginal communities, this work continues to be central in and beyond education to supporting healing, recovery, and justice in overcoming the legacies of assimilationist and colonial State policies (Battiste, 2000; Cairns, 2000; Ward & Bouvier, 2001; Weiss et al., 2000). The importance of Aboriginal people's movements in constructing the current responses of the Canadian State to FAS/FAE in Aboriginal communities should not be overlooked or underestimated. One example of this influence is found in the affirmations in *It Takes a Community* of the importance of incorporating "culturally appropriate" pedagogies and traditional knowledge into community-based FAS/FAE education for Aboriginal Peoples.

Although some individual Aboriginal women, Indigenous organizations, First Nations, and Inuit communities provided consultations and shared expertise that shaped the direction of the Initiative, responsibility for conceiving, implementing, and administering this policy rested solely with the Canadian federal government. As Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, and Henry (1997) have demonstrated, social policies constructed in and through contemporary Western democratic nation states are fundamentally ideological texts, a terrain in which the State is continually contested and renewed. As products achieved through the negotiation of hegemonic and counterhegemonic ideologies and interests, policy texts are directly implicated in practices of nation-building (Hall, 1988; Torres, 1995). In this article the dual focus of my analysis is on how "culturally appropriate" knowledge and pedagogy are employed in the texts of the Initiative and on the understanding of the values and limitations of "culturally appropriate" approaches to FAS/FAE prevention articulated by women attending one such program.

Situating This Study: Examining the Interwoven Dimensions of Agency, Ideology, and Experience

The data and analysis presented in this article are drawn from a larger study of the Initative (Salmon, 2005). As a sociologist of education committed to understanding the gendered, racialized, national, class-specific and dis/ability dimensions of formal and informal public education, I encountered these texts as provocative and problematic sites of knowledge production and circulation and competing epistemic claims. Although the Initiative appeared to offer opportunities for understanding the importance of the historic, social, political, economic, and cultural context in responding to maternal substance use and FAS/FAE, I was struck by what I found to be an absence in the texts of the voices, needs, concerns, and interests articulated by Aboriginal women themselves. Accordingly, over nearly two years (between June 2002 and April 2004), I conducted an analysis of the official policy texts of the Initiative that was grounded in what I learned from a group of young Aboriginal women whose lives had included mothering, substance use, and FAS/FAE.

In this research I was particularly interested in understanding how the Initiative functions as a means for (re)producing official knowledge (Apple, 2000). *Official knowledge* is knowledge that is taken up and circulated by and through state institutions. Out of the "vast universe of possible knowledge," hegemonic institutions position official knowledge as the only "knowledge worth knowing" and "knowledge worth teaching" (p. 5). Apple argues that official knowledge is most evident in texts that are produced by or for hegemonic institutions such as government agencies. As such, Apple explains:

> Texts are really messages to and about the future. As part of a curriculum, they participate in creating what a society has recognized as legitimate and truthful. They help set the canons of truthfulness and, as such, also help recreate a major reference point for what knowledge, culture, belief, and morality really are. (p. 46)

Apple further notes that official knowledge is often positioned in public discourse as if its (re)production and circulation were a collective activity shared by all members of the society in which it is located, as "common sense" that "everybody" should know and agrees to. This, however, is misleading, as some individuals and groups are more responsible for and invested in the success of the texts and the knowledge they contain than others.

Using modified versions of Smith's (1987) institutional ethnography and approach to textual analysis (Smith, 1990, 1992, 1999), my study employed a qualitative, inductive analysis of key documents supporting the work of the Initiative—an analysis that was grounded in the experiences of six young Aboriginal women whose lives had included mothering, substance use, and FAS/FAE. Throughout the research process, the focus of my critique was the official policy texts of the Initiative and not the behaviors or practices of the women themselves. However, situating the analysis of these texts in the context of the voices, understandings, and relevances of young Aboriginal mothers who negotiate the complexities of FAS/FAE, substance use, and mothering in their daily lives was crucial to this research. This approach enabled me to develop an analysis that uncovered the points of contact and disjuncture between the discourses, relevances, and priorities articulated in the documents of an official State policy and the lived experiences of members of the most salient target population of the policy.[2] This understanding would have been impossible to develop using methods of textual analysis alone and underscores one of the primary deficiencies of this methodology and of the Initiative texts themselves.

The women who participated in this study were all attending one of the FAS/FAE prevention programs identified in *It Takes a Community* as a possible model for other Aboriginal communities. All the participants were self-identified young Aboriginal mothers, and had diverse experiences of FAS/FAE. All the women who participated in this study disclosed that while they were pregnant they had used alcohol and/or other licit and illicit drugs linked to birth defects or compromised fetal health. Although two of the mothers had children who had been formally diagnosed with FAS/FAE,[3] all the mothers shared concerns that their children were experiencing difficulties with their health, growth, and development that were related to their substance use during pregnancy. In addition, half the women expressed concerns that they too might be living with undiagnosed fetal alcohol effects. All the women articulated that FAS/FAE were significant challenges in the lives of familiy members, intimate partners, friends, and/or members of their communities. Five of the six participants were designated as Status Indians by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, and were registered members of a First Nation or Band. Like many urban Aboriginal women, half the participants regularly moved back and forth between the city and their reserve community, whereas others who did not regularly live in their reserve communities retained a significant connection to their band.

Presented with the option of individual or group interviews, the women who participated in this research chose to participate in two semi-structured group interviews. During the first interview, the women were asked to reflect on their understandings of FAS/FAE and what FAS/FAE has meant to them in their daily lives in their community. With their full consent, this interview was tape-recorded and transcribed. I analyzed these data using a coding schedule consistent with qualitative, inductive research methods to identify emergent hypotheses and conclusions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). In the second interview I presented the women with a copy of the interview transcript and a summary of my preliminary analysis of both their interview data and the policy texts of the Initiative. I asked questions to solicit the women's interpretation of the interview data and policy texts and to confirm whether my preliminary findings resonated with their own understanding of their experiences. Their feedback was incorporated into my final analysis as presented in this article. To protect their anonymity, I refer to all the participants in using self-selected pseudonyms, and the name and location of the model program they were attending has been changed.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitations of this study are consistent with those common to qualitative research. These interviews used a small sample size and were designed to focus on the experiences, needs, and interests articulated by a small group of Aboriginal mothers situated in a specific geographic, temporal, social, economic, and political context. Thus although certain resonant themes may occur, the results of this research may not be generalizable to all Aboriginal mothers across differences in age, class, geographic location, sexuality, or dis/ability, non-Aboriginal mothers, or Aboriginal peoples as a whole. However, this approach had the advantage of allowing me to probe in depth the experiences, observations, and insights of participants as larger sampling schemes that privilege quantity over quality of responses do not. In addition, the fact that I am non-Aboriginal and do not share many of the social locations of the research participants may have resulted in miscommunication, misunderstanding, or lack of attention to nuances that might be obvious to someone occupying a similar location to the research participants or to the research participants themselves.

In acknowledging this limitation, it is also important to note that my relationship with the women who participated in this study has not ended. My efforts to understand the effects of racism, ableism, sexism, and colonization on Aboriginal mothers whose experiences include substance use and FAS/FAE took root in five years I had spent researching with and learning from Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, and women living in poverty in an urban Canadian community. During this time Aboriginal mothers in this community taught me that issues such as substance use, pregnancy, and FAS/FAE cannot and should not be viewed or responded to as individualized experiences occurring in a vacuum outside the place, time, or context of women's lives, and of the importance of actively involving young Aboriginal mothers in building new knowledge to meet their needs. These insights continue to inform the community-based and participatory action research I conduct in this community with grassroots, women-serving organizations supporting Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) women with issues related to mothering and substance use. Through this work I have remained connected and accountable to most of the women who participated in this study and with other women equally concerned with developing women-centered, community-specific, and decolonizing approaches to maternal and child health.[4] In seeing the women and their children regularly, we continue our discussions about these findings, as well as new areas for doing research with and for Aboriginal mothers in the community.

Adaptation: "Culturally Appropriate" Pedagogies as Acts of Translation

In *It Takes a Community*, the texts repeatedly emphasize that FAS/FAE prevention efforts in Aboriginal communities should be grounded in education efforts that are "culturally appropriate." In outlining the Initiative's priorities for FAS/FAE prevention and underscoring the value of specific types of FAS/FAE prevention activities, the texts employ the term *culturally appropriate* in two distinct ways. The first understanding of "culturally appropriate" approaches suggests that traditional knowledge or "the old way of doing things" remain a significant mode of knowing and being for Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal communities. As such, the texts suggest that delivering "culturally appropriate" programming for FAS/FAE is accomplished by translating a predeveloped curriculum or intervention to ensure that the content is understood by members of diverse target audiences. Here it is implied that Aboriginal people's experiences are located primarily in and mediated by the traditional cultures and languages of their ancestors. Thus "culturally appropriate" programming is important because it ensures that the content is accessible and comprehensible to those for whom it is delivered.

To illustrate, the texts of the Initiative argue that the use of traditional knowledge can inspire positive approaches to FAS/FAE prevention, and improve the chances that such activities will be implemented successfully. For example, the introductory chapter of *It Takes a Community* notes:

> Before contact with Europeans, First Nations and Inuit societies across Canada had their own customs and laws that guided people through life. While many changes have occurred since time of contact, the old way of doing things and guiding people are still an important foundation for personal and community development. (FAS/FAE Technical Working Group, 1997, p. 59)

This passage exhibits a tension in the document's use of phrases such as *the old way of doing things* to describe the significance of traditional knowledge in FAS/FAE education and prevention. Despite the devastating effect of colonization on Indigenous languages, spirituality, family forms, and governance structures, Aboriginal cultures retain vitality—growing and changing in response to the contexts in which Aboriginal Peoples live. However, phrases such as *the old way of doing things* fail to acknowledge the important distinction between Aboriginal cultural practices of the past and the philosophy, values, and principles that guide those practices.[5] This view eclipses the vitality of Aboriginal cultures in contemporary contexts, presenting a romanticized construction of Aboriginal cultures as static and unchanging. As such, the texts demonstrate a significant disconnection between the assumptions and relevances of the Initiative and the realities of many Aboriginal women's everyday lives.

Elsewhere by contrast, the texts describe how old values and teachings can provide a useful frame for service providers, which recasts the special needs of people diagnosed with FAS/FAE in ways that suggest challenges to contemporary (medicalized) understandings of disability.[6]

> Resource workers, coming to terms with the special needs of these community members, sometimes look upon persons with FAS/FAE as teachers who challenge communities to rethink existing perceptions and remember old values and teachings. (FAS/FAE Technical Working Group, 1997, p. 53)

It Takes a Community provides many examples of how incorporating traditional knowledge and values as "guiding principle[s] in FAS/FAE prevention will promote positive development in the community" (p. 54). The guiding principles for FAS/FAE prevention drawn from traditional and "culturally appropriate" knowledge listed in the texts include: respect, hope, humility, compassion, patience, patience, and cooperation. Some of these principles are first introduced in the preface as gifts from the creator:

> Children are a special gift of the creator. An individual child is not owned by the parents- but borrowed for a time to be in the physical world and live as an integral part of creation. A new child has been given many "gifts" by the creator. These are interpreted differently by Aboriginal nations—but they are generally known as humility, respect, compassion, courage, truth, wisdom, and love. These gifts provide guidance and strength to the child. How these gifts affect a child's life will depend on the nurturing received in the child's home and community. (p. 47)

Decolonization and Revitalization: "Culturally Appropriate" Pedagogies as Acts of Cultural Renewal

The second approach to "culturally appropriate" pedagogies evident in the Initiative differs in important ways from the adaptation approach discussed above. In this second approach, there is less focus on translating a generalized program into the specificities of existing cultural practices of a particular group. Instead the emphasis is on efforts to counter the effects of colonization in Aboriginal communities by encouraging the revitalization and renewal of traditional cultural practices and teachings. This decolonizing approach to "culturally appropriate" pedagogies compels recognition of the historical, social, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of FAS/FAE in Aboriginal communities (Tait, 2003). It also supports understandings of Aboriginal cultures as generative and dynamic, changing over time in the light of the social, geographic, economic, and political contexts in which the culture is practiced (compare Geertz, 1973). The philosophy underlying this approach is well illustrated in the following excerpt from a section in *It Takes a Community* entitled "Understanding the 'root causes' of FAS/FAE in Aboriginal communities."

> FAS/FAE in Aboriginal communities can find its roots in Canada's colonial past. The deterioration of Aboriginal political and social institutions; the suppression of traditional spirituality, culture and language, the apprehension of Aboriginal children and loss of traditional lands and economies is the legacy of Aboriginal Peoples after European contact in the new world. The current health and socio-economic conditions trace their beginning to these historic events.
>
> But Aboriginal people have never ceased in their efforts to survive and flourish. Today Aboriginal nations work actively to counter the devastating impact of colonialism. They are regaining control over their lives through the development of Aboriginal community-based institutions in the areas of culture, education, health, economics, and justice, and it is these efforts which provide a foundation and give direction to successful FAS/FAE strategies.
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> People designing community-based FAS/FAE strategies need to consider the root causes of alcohol abuse and the community responses … Likely the important initiatives in the community involve efforts to counter the debilitating impact of colonialism— the root causes of many social ills such as loss of lands, language, culture and resources. If possible and appropriate … an FAS/FAE strategy could have linkages to a number of on-going community initiatives such as affordable housing, education, cultural programs, or recreation. (FAS/FAE Technical Working Group, 1997, pp. 65-66)

The significance of this approach to "culturally appropriate" FAS/FAE education is located in its affirmation of the connections between the health and well-being of Aboriginal women, children, and communities; the historical, social, political, cultural, and economic conditions in which they live; and their ability to influence or change these conditions. Recognizing these realities enables responses to FAS/FAE that not only challenge individualized understandings of the causes and consequences of FAS/FAE, but also creates space for actions that support social justice and decolonization for Aboriginal peoples.

Contextualizing the Promise of "Culturally Appropriate" Pedagogies: Lessons From Aboriginal Mothers

Although the utility of "culturally appropriate" FAS/FAE programming may appear promising, the young Aboriginal mothers I interviewed received this idea with more skepticism than enthusiasm. As is seen in our exchange below, Cheryl responded to my question by sharing her conviction that "culturally appropriate" information about alcohol use in itself would be inconsistent with her own culture's teachings about alcohol and drugs.

> AS: So in this Initiative … it says that Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal women in particular, need information about FAS and FAE and alcohol use during pregnancy that is culturally appropriate. What are some of your ideas about what's culturally appropriate?
>
> Cheryl: I don't really agree with that. Because well, for me, my culture, our beliefs are that alcohol is bad. Drugs is bad, you know? So if you're going to, not practice, but if you're going to start doing all the cultural stuff and all that, you don't drink. You don't do drugs. You know? It's really spiritual … Their beliefs are like that. I don't really know too much about what they believe, but that's just their beliefs. Cultural wise, if you're going to be practicing it, you're not going to be drinking.

Cheryl's observations that alcohol and drugs are considered bad in her culture and that "Cultural wise, if you're going to be practicing it, you're not going to be drinking" are noteworthy for two reasons. First, her understanding of what would be "culturally appropriate" in the context of her community suggests a potential incompatibility with harm-reduction approaches to FAS/FAE education. This is because harm reduction approaches are grounded in the assumption that women should be empowered to make their own decisions about substance use and should be provided with information and supports that enable safer use options apart from abstinence. Many Aboriginal women and their service providers in Cheryl's community favor harm-reduction approaches because they are seen they are seen to counter the stigma, shame, and blame that have been documented as barriers to care for substance-using Aboriginal women and families (Salmon, 2005; Tait, 2003). Second, Cheryl's comments are significant in that she describes her culture as something she is disconnected from, as "their beliefs" that "I don't really know too much about." This experience was shared by most of the women in the group, including women with close connections to their bands and home reserves. For example, in response to the same question I asked Cheryl, Jo-Anne said,

> I haven't participated in any of that until just recently. So, I don't know exactly what you mean by that. Like, I didn't know. There isn't a heck of a lot of information. All I knew was that you shouldn't drink when you're pregnant, it's bad for the baby. So what do they mean by culturally appropriate? Like, Native culturally? Or the whole community culturally? It's like, what does that mean? Which culture are we talking about?

As a member of an urban, multicultural Aboriginal community, Jo-Anne highlights an important issue overlooked in the texts of the Initiative: that many traditional Aboriginal cultures, values, and practices exist simultaneously in some Aboriginal communities and that not all aspects of a given Aboriginal culture may be shared by the whole community, particularly in urban contexts. Moreover, Jo-Anne's experiences and those of other women who participated in these interviews indicate that successful FAS/FAE education efforts exist in a context of cultural diversity and that an at-risk Aboriginal woman or family may identify with more than one cultural group.

Shannon's reaction to the issue of "culturally appropriate" FAS/FAE education strategies was similar. Her description of the context in which a "culturally appropriate" approach to FAS/FAE education could be useful was similar to the adaptation approach to "culturally appropriate" education described above. She said,

> Is there going to be a different pamphlet for every culture, or just one in particular? You know what I mean? Like, maybe in different places. Say, like [this city] has such a vast community of people that one particular way of teaching might be all right, and as they go along they could incorporate whatever kind of cultural things, depending on who's in the groups, or who's learning, or whatever. But, you know, if they're going to a reserve and teaching just people who are there, those people could be more comfortable if it was culturally, you know, made up for them. ... Like, in the one program I'm, it has something to do with owls, and then the culture that they're teaching, on one reserve, had bad stigmas about owls, so they had to change that ... Things like that are important, you know? But, you know, I personally wouldn't see the difference really for me. I would probably go to it regardless of whether it's Aboriginal focused or not.

Although she agreed that she would probably go to an FAS/FAE education program regardless of whether it was Aboriginal-focused or not, Shannon valued the opportunity to learn about and take part in traditional Aboriginal cultural and spiritual practices such as smudging that have been made available to her through her participation in the model FAS/FAE prevention program she has been attending. However, close attention to her narrative also points to the complexities of providing FAS education in a "culturally appropriate" context. She explained,

> I think that for me, personally, culturally wise, it doesn't really matter. I didn't really grow up with learning the culture. I mean, I don't really see it that way. I think it's good that with [the group she attends], there is some Native culture in there. And a lot of it she [the

program leader] taught me. She taught me smudge, she does that kind of stuff. And I like that, it was good to have that be a part of it. But I was really uncomfortable with it at first. Like, being Native, because I never grew up that way. Like, it might work for the people who grew up on a reserve, if they grew up knowing what basic culture for their area is. But if you didn't, it's really uncomfortable for you. You'd rather, it's like if you didn't grow up knowing what those things were, or whatever, that's when it is uncomfortable, if you didn't know what that was. It takes time. I think everyone's different. It's not to say that it won't work or it will. But I find, just what I've learned from [the program leader], it's been really helpful. But from her, how she's gone about it is good. But it took time for me to get comfortable doing smudge and being a part of that.

Shannon's description of her initial experiences with smudging as "uncomfortable" and as an activity that "it took time for me to get comfortable doing" suggest that designing "culturally appropriate" FAS/FAE education programs using an adaptation approach may not be sufficient to create conditions or experiences that are initially welcoming to all Aboriginal women. At the same time, Shannon's experiences in the program she was attending also point to the importance of incorporating decolonization and cultural renewal efforts as part of FAS/FAE prevention strategies.

For Wonder Woman, contemporary and historical manifestations of racism, colonization, and ableism were significant aspects of her experiences that provided additional dimensions to her disconnection from her Aboriginal culture and traditions. In our exchange below, she explained the reasons and the consequences of this disconnection.

Wonder Woman: I hate to say this, but I'm white and I'm Status. But I only recently learned that I was. So, up until a year ago, I was going around and living a non-Aboriginal lifestyle. And then I learned. So to me, either way, it's the same. And I only just in the last year got involved with help. Like, my daughter goes to extra preschool. We've just dove in. Because my adoption file was declared that it could be opened. And that's when I learned that I've been Status since I was born.

AS: But you didn't know?

Wonder Woman: I didn't know. They removed it from my foster care record after my car accident. Because try to adopt a Native disabled child (long pause), into a home, it's nearly impossible. I hate to say it, but it's nearly impossible. And because I was so white, they decided I could be passed off as a white child. And that's why. My family would have adopted me either way, they said. But it probably got me adopted quicker. And I didn't bounce around in foster homes.

The realities of child protection and adoption practices of the Canadian State for Wonder Woman and many other Aboriginal women (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Kline, 1993) and people with disabilities (Burns & Kellington, 2004) underscore the many ways interwoven legacies of ableism, racism, and colonization inform the complexities and contradictions of identity, experience, culture, and pedagogy. In the light of these experiences, it becomes apparent that the relationships between identity, experience, culture, and pedagogy are not always as straightforward as one might anticipate. Indeed, the Aboriginal mothers I interviewed emphasized that not only is it important to consider the information and structural supports an Aboriginal mother may need to access "culturally appropriate" FAS/FAE education and programs, it is equally important to consider the sociopolitical context in which "culturally appropriate" FAS/FAE initiatives are undertaken. As Jo-Anne explained,

> Last time I smudged, I must have been, like, 10. And then I finally started to feel somewhat, like ... just focus on Aboriginals, it makes you feel more ... what's the word? I don't know if stigmata [sic] is really applicable, but there's a lot all ready. Like people talk about treaties, and people already think badly about Aboriginal people. And, like, it's not ... it shouldn't ... I think for some people it might help, but then there's a lot of us, too, who don't really give a shit, you know? I'm sorry, but they don't. You know, like, I'm Native, and some people are really ashamed of being Native. When I was growing up I hated being Native. I always wanted to be like my best friend, my little white girl friend, because she had it so easy. But she didn't have it so easy.
>
> It's not just a racial thing, it's everyone. A lot of white people have FAS. A lot of Chinese people have FAS. A lot Native people have FAS. It's everywhere.... I think, too, it limits when you say "Aboriginals" and people who aren't. Or people who aren't aware they are. You know? Then they don't want to go. You know, like they feel they don't deserve the help. And then people who are racially biased, they'll be, "See, look." There are people who complain about, "Oh they get all these things. You can see this is why they need it. They can't not drink when they're pregnant." That's what I mean about stigmata, like, the bad label.

As Jo-Anne observed, FAS/FAE and maternal substance use are indeed found in all communities and occur in all cultural and racialized groups. However, not all communities and racialized groups have received equal attention in public education and public policy addressing the causes and consequences of FAS/FAE. Jo-Anne's statement that FAS/FAE is "not just a racial thing" speaks to the effects of commonsense constructions of FAS/FAE as an "Aboriginal problem" in the everyday lives of Aboriginal women, children, and communities (Tait, 2003). Indeed, Jo-Anne's experiences of racism in her community, particularly when considered together with historic and contemporary manifestations of colonialism, raise important ethical questions about the effects of "culturally appropriate" FAS/FAE interventions targeted at Aboriginal Peoples. As I have discussed elsewhere (Salmon, 2004), Aboriginal communities are frequently positioned in public discourse as making problematic claims on State resources, as people who, in Jo-Anne's words, "get all these things" (including, not insignificantly, entitlements connected to treaty rights). Moreover, Aboriginal women are often represented as people who, as Jo-Anne explained, "can't not drink when they are pregnant" and are consequently in need of certain interventions that other (non-Aboriginal) women are not (Tait, 2003). In her testimony, Jo-Anne demonstrated that the effects of these commonsense constructions of Aboriginal women and communities carry real material effects. In her analysis, not only do these discourses fuel the racisms of "people who already think badly about Aboriginal people," they consolidate feelings of shame and "hate" in relation to one's

Aboriginal ancestry, manifested in a reluctance to identify with a community or group that has been subject to this "bad label" or stigma. In this way, public education efforts that focus exclusively on Aboriginal peoples can be seen to reify climates and conditions that discourage Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) people from accessing resources related to FAS/FAE. At the same time, racializing FAS/FAE as an "Aboriginal problem" continues to result in responses to FAS/FAE prevention that do not similarly problematize white and middle-class women's alcohol use as risky or dangerous. Indeed, during the funding years for the Initiative's public education campaign directed at Aboriginal communities, no large-scale parallel FAS/FAE education campaigns targeting a non-Aboriginal audience were implemented.

Conclusion and Implications: Mentioning as a Tool for Unpacking the Context of "Culturally Appropriate" Pedagogies

As can be seen from the texts of the Initiative and the testimonies of the Aboriginal women I interviewed, the production (and reproduction) of "culturally appropriate" FAS/FAE education campaigns targeting Aboriginal communities raises considerations that are both provocative and problematic for advancing interests of social justice and decolonization. Incidences and experiences of FAS/FAE in Aboriginal communities are mediated by the contemporary legacies of state-sponsored activities designed to dismantle Aboriginal cultures, languages, spiritualities, families, and social and political institutions. Thus efforts toward cultural revitalization provide a foundation on which to build programming aimed at improving the health and well-being of Aboriginal women, children, families, and communities, including FAS/FAE prevention activities. The Aboriginal women I interviewed for this study welcomed the opportunity to participate in those aspects of the community-based FAS prevention program that taught them about Aboriginal cultures and traditions. However, the reality that most of the women, and many others, are disconnected in some respects from Aboriginal cultures demands recognition. Indeed, providing "culturally appropriate" FAS/FAE education is not simply a matter of translating information developed in one cultural context into the specificities of another. Rather, these experiences suggest that successful efforts to provide Aboriginal women with "culturally appropriate" FAS/FAE education also requires the creation of conditions that enable women to connect with the traditional knowledge of their cultures in ways that are welcoming and meaningful to them.

Attention should also be paid to questions about who bears the responsibility for ensuring that Aboriginal women have opportunities to access "culturally appropriate" programming, particularly in urban contexts. Aboriginal community-based organizations remain chronically underfunded in their efforts to provide even the most basic services. Local, provincial, and federal governments advocating for "culturally appropriate" programs and services must, therefore, share in the responsibility by funding them adequately. Efforts to provide "culturally appropriate" FAS/FAE education need to acknowledge how these activities may unintentionally fuel preexisting stereotypical and stigmatizing representations of Aboriginal women and communities that can in turn create barriers preventing access to FAS/FAE education and support.

Attempts to understand the overlaps, tensions, and disconnects between the discourses of the Initiative's policy texts, the content of its public education materials, and the insights of Aboriginal mothers about their preferred approaches to FAS/FAE education demands close attention to the contexts that mediate them. Historically, Canadian policymakers have favored the implementation of public education campaigns for mothers as a relatively inexpensive and uncontroversial way to respond to public health issues, including those related to infant mortality, malnutrition, and the spread of disease (Arnup, 1994). This approach to public health and welfare issues remains popular among policymakers as it costs little in comparison with the implementation of policies that would, for example, ameliorate the gendered, racialized, and ableist effects of systemic poverty.

The effect of dominant neoliberal global economic and political trends has served only to accentuate the effects of colonialist legacies. These trends include the restructuring of social programs formerly provided by nation states, and the creation of "lean states" that supposedly enable national economies to remain competitive in globalized markets. The imperative of restructuring favors initiatives that devolve responsibilities for ensuring the health and well-being of marginalized groups from the State to community-based or private organizations and promotes interventions to reduce individual dependency on or cost to the State. In practice, the neoliberal agenda results in policies that are "guided by a vision of the weak state leaving the development of society to the dynamics of private initiatives and cost-benefit analysis" (Aasen, 2003, p. 123). The Initiative, which relies on Aboriginal communities—rather than the State—to undertake public education campaigns for the prevention of FAS/FAE, on the grounds that FAS/FAE represent is an unjustifiable "cost to communities" (FAS/FAE Technical Working Group, 1997). At the same time, the stripping away of community contexts, concerns, and priorities in public health education campaigns targeting Aboriginal communities begs the question as to whether these "costs to communities" merit response because of the potential costs posed by "communities at risk" for FAS/ FAE to the State itself.

Although the global context is important for understanding how and why these policy directions may be favored by the State, it is not sufficient to account for how or why the vision, priorities, objectives, or relevances of the Initiative gain the support of Aboriginal women or communities. As

Apple (2000) has argued, countries with democratic traditions of governance rarely impose the curricula (or pedagogies) of dominant groups forcibly, or as Bennett (1986) puts it, "as an alien external force [applied] onto the cultures of marginalized groups" (p. 19). Rather, the process of enacting public pedagogy by or through the State is better understood as an active and contested process in which State institutions are continually engaging in the "rebuilding of hegemonic control" (p. 19). To be successful in maintaining control, dominant groups must gain at least the partial consent of the broadest possible constituency.

Apple (2000) contends that one way of maintaining dominance is through the process of "mentioning." As he uses the term, *mentioning* is a textual and discursive strategy in which "limited and isolated elements of history and culture of less powerful groups are included [in texts] ... but without any substantive elaboration of the view of the world as seen from this perspective." As such, mentioning provides a mechanism for "actually incorporating the knowledge and perspectives of the less powerful under the umbrella of the discourse of dominant groups" (p. 53).

The concept of the textual and discursive strategy of mentioning provides a useful tool for understanding how the texts of the Initiative operate. As I demonstrate, the policy texts of the Initiative go to great lengths to emphasize the importance of identifying the root causes of FAS/FAE in Aboriginal communities and of grounding FAS/FAE education and prevention efforts in "culturally appropriate" pedagogies and traditional knowledge. By incorporating some of the discourses, epistemologies, and priorities advanced by Aboriginal People's movements, the texts acknowledge the gains of these movements and appear to embrace their concerns as worthy of public attention and public funds. At the same time, incorporating these knowledges and perspectives into official State knowledge increases the possibility that Aboriginal communities will embrace the policy and practice of the State in the area of FAS/FAE prevention.

In fact the texts employ strategies that appear to exceed Apple's (2000) conception of mentioning in that some areas of the text include "substantive elaboration of the view of the world as seen from this [traditional Aboriginal] perspective." Discussion of the meaning of *respect* in traditional teachings and of the understanding of children as gifts of the Creator also demonstrate a strategy of incorporation that extends beyond mentioning.

The use of mentioning as a textual strategy in developing the texts of the Initiative also appears to have provided a discursive loophole for supporting the development of some First Nations and grassroots organizations to support decolonization and cultural renewal in Aboriginal communities. As such, mentioning seems to have had contradictory effects in the operationalization of the Initiative. For example, in the 2000-

2001 fiscal year, the Alberta Treaty 8 Health Council received funding from the Initiative to deliver awareness training on FAS/FAE to community health centers and schools in the 23 First Nations in their territory. Among the reported outcomes of this project is that the training "provided the parents of FAS/FAE children with a sense of hope, understanding, and inspiration to continue the challenging job of raising an FAS/FAE child without feeling isolated" (n.p.). The Taku River Tlingit First Nation received funding in 2000 from the Initiative to develop a "community mobilized social action justice plan" for FAS/FAE, which created "a support/respite network for FAS/FAE care givers." That same year the Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association received funding from the Initiative for their FAS/FAE Prevention/Community Mobilization project. Reaching 53 Inuit communities, this project extended beyond efforts to target Inuit youth by involving youth directly in the active production and creation of a "culturally and linguistically appropriate" radio play and video that "promoted healthy, alcohol-free pregnancies and encouraged discussion about FAS/FAE." Youth participated in this project as producers, directors, actors, and videographers of a story "about a young pregnant teenager and her journey through pregnancy," which includes a poster and viewing guide featuring art produced by a young woman from Labrador.

The fact that these projects (and others) were funded by the Initiative suggest that the loopholes provided by the use of mentioning (Apple, 2000) may have created some of the conditions that support actions to address social and cultural justice concerns through the institutions of the Canadian State. For example, as has been noted by feminist disability scholar Hillyer (1993), efforts to transform the conditions under which mothers care for their children with disabilities are integral to the advancement of social justice for women and people with disabilities alike. Martell (2003), a Cree counselor who works to support Aboriginal children, families, and communities living with FAS/FAE, underscores that the traditional teachings of many First Nations challenge workers to "explore the many factors woven into the fabric of a historical heritage that brought many Native people into the Twenty-First Century in pain" (p. 205) and that using traditional knowledge and cultures as a foundation for FAS/FAE prevention provides opportunities for "collective power in community development" (p. 211). Accordingly, Apple (2000) reminds us:

> Where something comes from … need not determine its political or educational use in any concrete situation. Context and the balance of power in the specific situation do count. This is one of the reasons we need to be cautious of what might be called the productivist or genetic fallacy. This assumes, often wrongly, that the politics of a commodity's production and where something comes from totally determine its ultimate use … While we must not be romantic about this, texts can be and are subjected to oppositional readings. (p. 14)

The Initiative was formally retired by Health Canada in 2004 with the introduction of a new national framework for addressing Fetal Alcohol

Spectrum Disorders in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Further research is necessary to evaluate the development, implementation, and outcomes of the projects funded by the Initiative to determine the extent to which these projects were successful in achieving empowerment or social justice objectives in Aboriginal communities. At the same time, it is equally important to heed Apple's caution against romanticizing the emancipatory possibilities presented by oppositional readings of texts, including the texts of the Initiative. The experiences and analyses shared by the Aboriginal mothers I interviewed confirm that the practice of translating "culturally appropriate" pedagogies, and traditional knowledge through the relevances of the State places limits on the ability of individuals, communities, and social movements, most particularly those supporting Aboriginal women and people diagnosed with FAS/FAE, to articulate concerns for social justice.

Notes

[1] Currently *Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder* is the term most favored by practitioners and researchers to describe the spectrum of physical, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics attributed to prenatal exposure to alcohol (Koren, Nulman, Chudley, & Locke, 2003). However, in this article I retain the use of the earlier terms *Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)* and *Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE)* in keeping with the terminology used in the texts of the Initiative. Throughout this artocle I use the term *FAS/FAE* to refer to the separate but related diagnoses FAS and FAE simultaneously. Where I use the term *FAS*, note that I refer specifically to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. Similarly, where I use the term *FAE*, note that I refer specifically to Fetal Alcohol Effects.

[2] For detailed discussion of the methodology employed in this study, including analysis of the effect of group interviews in mediating the research process and the responses of participants, see Salmon (in press).

[3] In this community, diagnostic services for fetal alcohol spectrum disorders are limited and can be difficult for many families to access.

[4] Exceptions to this are two women who have since left the community to live elsewhere.

[5] I thank Jo-ann Archibald for offering me this productive insight.

[6] For a detailed discussion of medicalization of FAS/FAE in the Initiative, see Salmon (2004).

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