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Symbolic violence and the Olympic Games: low-income youth, social legacy commitments, and urban exclusion in Olympic host cities

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Symbolic violence and the Olympic Games: low-income youth, social legacy commitments, and urban exclusion in Olympic host cities

Abstract: Drawing on a five year qualitative study on the impacts of the Olympic Games on low-income, homeless, and marginally housed youth in two Olympic host cities (Vancouver 2010 and London 2012), this paper explores the instances of ‘symbolic violence’ experienced by the youth and perpetuated by the institutional infrastructure associated with the Olympics. Following Pierre Bourdieu’s use of the term, symbolic violence here refers to the manner in which the young people in this study turned dominant notions of what the desirable Olympic city looks and feels like into a sense of their own non-belonging and/or inadequacy within the city. Feeling pressured to be less visible, to vie for elusive Olympic jobs and volunteer positions, and to perform particular forms of ‘civil citizenship’ in light of the arrival of thousands of tourist-spectators for the Games, youth in both cities reported a defiant mix of frustrated indignation and resigned acceptance that they did not ‘fit’ the image of the global Olympic city that organizers were trying to convey. The paper will argue that this social harm, difficult to measure yet real nonetheless, is an important though unintended legacy of the Olympic Games for the low-income, homeless, or marginally housed youth living in its shadows.

Keywords: homeless youth; Bourdieu; symbolic violence; Olympic Games; social exclusion.

‘Thank you, London, for ‘happy and glorious’ Olympic Games!’

- [olympic.org/london-2012-summer-olympics](http://www.olympic.org/london-2012-summer-olympics) <http://www.olympic.org/>

‘[The Olympics] bring joy and dreams.’

- <http://www.olympic.org/videos/what-makes-the-olympic-games-unique>

‘It’s not just for the athletes, it’s also for all the people that have that spirit’

- <http://www.olympic.org/videos/what-makes-the-olympic-games-unique>

In a video segment called ‘What Makes the Games Unique’ on the official Olympic website, [olympic.org](http://www.olympic.org), we see athletes from around the world speaking glowingly about the positive effects of the ‘Olympic movement.’ From motivating people to greater athleticism, to bringing post-apartheid South Africa together, this video clip is a classic instance of pro-Olympic boosterism, symbolically positioning the Games as irrefutably beneficial. With inspirational music swelling in the background, the stories of the diverse athletes are intended to move us affectively towards the Olympic Games as a force for good in the world, a force that ought to be supported and applauded. Such Olympic messaging is both typical and pervasive, particularly during an Olympic Games year. It also becomes part of the affective and symbolic work undertaken to persuade populations of candidate host cities to take on the expense, construction, and general mayhem associated with hosting the Olympics. This Olympic messaging readily aligns with wider circulating discourses about patriotism, global solidarity, meritocracy and the

efficacy of hard work, integrating seamlessly with dominant notions of the neoliberal self and the beneficent nation-state. As such, it becomes part of the ‘common sense’ associated not only with the Olympic Games but also with wider state-affiliated discourses surrounding the need for safety, prosperity, and cleanliness of the city and the state. Olympic ideologies and state ideologies become even more fiercely intertwined when the Olympics are being hosted within a particular country, and must thus be justified in terms of expense, displacement of competing interests, and increasingly, amplified incursions into citizens’ civil liberties through an enhanced security apparatus.

Juxtaposed with the pervasive and persuasive pro-Olympic messaging is the ever-increasing social scientific evidence demonstrating that the Olympics, and other mega-sporting events, in fact have quite negative effects on host cities, and most particularly on marginalized populations living there (Lenskyj 2002; Shaw 2008). In contrast with the rosy promises of national unification, inspiration, and the infusion of Olympic spirit, the Olympics have been shown to displace poor and ethnic minority residents (COHRE 2007), increase policing and surveillance over marginalized residents (Bennett and Haggerty 2011; Kennelly 2015b), and provide economic benefits for the middle and upper classes at the expense of the poor and working classes (Short 2008). In other words, the Olympics are demonstrably *not good* for many people, particularly marginalized residents in host cities.

This paper seeks to better understand the relationship between the widely circulating claims about the benefits of the Olympics and the negative experiences of the

Games, as perceived by homeless and marginally housed young people living in the Olympic host cities of Vancouver (host to the 2010 Winter Games) and London (host to the 2012 Summer Games). Through five years of ethnographic research employing interviews, focus groups, and visual and visceral methods with the youth in each city before, during, and after their respective Games, it became clear that the youth often struggled with feelings of ambivalence or uncertainty when attempting to articulate their political positions vis-à-vis the presence of the Olympics in their city. While this was certainly not always the case – many of the youth expressed very clearly their opposition to and frustration with the Games – this paper shall focus on those moments of ambivalence with an effort to theorize them via Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of *symbolic violence*. Even the youth who were critical of the Games would speak about the possibilities for global solidarity or community arising from them – in other words, echoing the messaging promoted by the Olympic movement itself. My aim here is to better understand and theorize some of these moments as examples of the *intangible injuries* produced by an Olympic Games – as opposed to the ‘intangible benefits’ that are often touted as an Olympic legacy.

In my focus on symbolic violence, this paper also contributes to ongoing conversations within the field of youth studies about the efficacy of Bourdieu’s concepts for understanding the nuances and complexities of young people’s everyday experiences under contemporary conditions of inequality. Bourdieu’s theories are commonly drawn upon within youth studies, and have in particular been a stalwart of more culturally-oriented approaches to the study of young people (e.g. Willis 1981; Bettie 2003;

Dillabough and Kennelly 2010; Kennelly 2011b). Bullen and Kenway (2004, 141) point out that Bourdieu's theories can help provide a 'less punitive theorization of marginalized cultures' than those provided by other common conceptualizations of young people's lives, such as underclass theory or risk/resiliency discourses (see also Foster and Spencer 2011). As such, youth theorists commonly turn to Bourdieu's concepts in order to articulate 'the ways in which young [people] in difficult economic circumstances understand and pursue their lives' (Bullen and Kenway 2004, 142). One concept that is commonly drawn upon is that of *capital*, in particular, *cultural capital*. Cultural capital has been co-opted by youth studies in a variety of ways, most notably through the development of the concept of *subcultural capital* (Thornton 1996; Bullen and Kenway 2004), but it has also been taken up in other forms such as 'negative cultural capital' (Barker 2013). Adaptations of the term signal the recognition within youth studies that forms of cultural capital are profoundly context-dependent and that, 'in communities where the cultural capital of the dominant culture is inaccessible, subcultural forms of capital take their place' (Bullen and Kenway 2004, 149). This focus on cultural capital is understandable, particularly in its adapted forms, as it helps to specify the means and modalities by which young people make meaning and take action from within their specific cultural (and subcultural) milieus. Cultural and subcultural capital is often taken up as modes of youth *resistance* to dominant cultures, and rightly so, but in order to appreciate the effects of such resistance it is helpful also to consider Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic violence*. Symbolic violence can help youth theorists articulate the manner in which young people experience the everyday harms of their marginalization from wider society, often incorporated into their own sense of themselves as somehow lacking.

Symbolic violence also helps to account for the reproduction of inequality, explaining how subcultural capital, or negative cultural capital, can be converted into increased marginalization. It is important to add here, however, that Bourdieu's theoretical corpus is broad, and each concept overlaps and connects with the other. Suggesting that symbolic violence ought to become the new concept-du-jour within youth studies would be absurd. Nonetheless, it does seem to be the case that some of his concepts have gained salience and momentum within the field at the expense of others. What I would suggest here, then, is an ongoing effort to widen youth studies' use of Bourdieu's theories, recognizing that each concept works best in relation to the others.

Engagement with symbolic violence has recently emerged within the field, particularly regarding how language and representation can perpetuate symbolic violence for youth (e.g. being labelled as 'at risk' (Foster and Spencer 2011) or policy gaps with respect to youth sexuality (Moore and Prescott 2013)). The concept has also been used to explicate the manner in which youth workers at youth centres can inadvertently perpetuate symbolic violence by reproducing 'a deficit model of youth' (Cooper 2012, 66). Use of the concept within the field has thus tended to focus more on what is done *to* youth rather than their own *experiences* within the specified milieus. Central to the concept of symbolic violence is the manner in which subjects *take up* the dominant circulating rhetorics about them, particularly those imposed by the state, and how this then manifests in their embodied experiences of the world. Below, I attempt to work with the concept in this light, seeking to use it to better understand the experiences of marginally housed and homeless youth living within two Olympic host cities.

Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic violence, and the inculcation of state norms

Pierre Bourdieu notes, ‘The primordial political belief is a particular viewpoint, that of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal viewpoint’ (Bourdieu 2000, 174). This dominant political viewpoint becomes the ‘common sense’ against which all other viewpoints are measured. The state plays a role in the dissemination of the dominant viewpoint, most notably through schooling but also through policing, the prison system, and other forms of institutional structure. Rather than remaining external to the individual subjects, as per Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), Bourdieu argues that the efforts of the state result in ‘the formation of durable dispositions’ (Bourdieu 2000, 175) which become incorporated into the bodily habits and preconscious cognitions of agents within the state. He notes,

Through the structuring it imposes on practices, the State institutes and inculcates common symbolic forms of thought, social frames of perception, understanding or memory, State forms of classification or, more precisely, practical schemes of perception, appreciation and action ... The State thereby creates the conditions for an immediate orchestration of habitus which is itself the foundation for a consensus on this set of shared self-evidences which constitute common sense (Bourdieu 2000, 175).

Important here is the connection between wider circulating State-led discourses, and the incorporation of such into the set of common sense beliefs and dispositions that are part of the individual's habitus. Bourdieu uses *habitus* to refer to the 'sense of the game', always existing in relation to the *field*, one of his other key concepts:

A field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations 'deposited' within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 16).

Key for our purposes, then, is to note that the *habitus* is shaped by the views of the dominant, via the mechanisms of the state. However, such views always contain the possibility of contestation, particularly if an individual is part of a *field* in which the 'common sense' views promoted by the State seem neither common nor sensible. But Bourdieu is clear in his exhortation that we can never be entirely free of the influences of the State, nor of the *field* in which we are located, meaning we can never transparently see through the messaging that is coming at us from all directions. It is this reality that forms the basis for symbolic violence, which Bourdieu defines as:

...the coercion which is set up only through the consent that the dominated cannot fail to give to the dominator (and therefore to the domination) when

their understanding of the situation and relation can only use instruments of knowledge that they have in common with the dominator, which, being merely the incorporated form of the structure of the relation of domination, make this relation appear as natural (Bourdieu 2000, 170).

In other words, those who are positioned at the lower end of the opportunity structure – in the case of my study, homeless and marginally housed youth – inevitably incorporate dominant understandings of their social circumstances into their everyday ways of being; this, in turn, means that even individuals who are objectively at the receiving end of negative state consequences have, to some degree, incorporated a belief about the rightness of their own domination. This is not conscious, nor does it rest easily; hence the ambivalence I referred to above. Such ambivalence can even become part of the *habitus* of marginalized peoples; as Diane Reay (2015, 10) has noted in a recent article, the dispositions that make up the *habitus* ‘can include a propensity to fatalism, ambivalence, resilience, resentment, certainty, entitlement or even rage, just as much as a tendency to either theatre-going or watching soap operas.’

One of the modalities through which symbolic violence occurs is via the incorporation of beliefs and values that contradict lived experiences, producing the ambivalence described above. The experience can be particularly difficult to make sense of as it is felt by the subject as personal, as happening *inside* of themselves, rather than being imposed from the outside. This takes the shape of thoughts and projections about the world, believed to be wrought from the individual’s personal ideas but in fact shaped

by dominant discourses into what is *thinkable* versus what is *unthinkable*. As Bourdieu notes,

[T]he constitutive power which is granted to ordinary language lies not in the language itself but in the group which authorizes it and invests it with authority. Official language ... sanctions and imposes what it states, tacitly laying down the dividing line between the thinkable and the unthinkable, thereby contributing towards the maintenance of the symbolic order from which it draws its authority (Bourdieu 1977, 21).

Returning to the video segment discussed above, this paper suggests that the broadly circulating discourses about the Olympics, promoted both by the IOC and by hosting states, and repeated endlessly through other sites such as media and schooling, have produced what is 'thinkable' in relation to the Olympics, amplifying the experience of symbolic violence for those for whom the experience of the Games is not one of 'joy and dreams.' While competing discourses were present, giving some of the youth a language to draw on to express their frustrations, such converse frames were not ubiquitous and, in particular, differed substantially between national sites (Canada versus UK). This manifested as greater or lesser capacities of the youth to provide cogent critiques of the costs and problems of the Olympic Games in their respective cities, a point that shall be developed further with the help of data below.

In what follows, I elaborate on the concept of symbolic violence as experienced by low-income, homeless, and marginally housed young people (ages 16 to 24) living in the Olympic host cities of Vancouver (2010 Winter Games) and London (2012 Summer Games). The youth in Vancouver were a mix of white working class, Aboriginal, and ethnic minority youth, about evenly split between men and women with some transgender participants. The London youth lived in Newham, one of the the Olympic host boroughs. Consistent with the demographic of the borough, they were majority Black (Afro-Caribbean) with a smaller minority of white working class youth; the London group included slightly more men than women. Over the course of 5 years, the author, a colleague,¹ and research assistants spent about 300 hours with the youth before, during, and after the Olympic Games in each city; we talked to approximately 200 youth across both cities. Over that time, we conducted focus groups, individual interviews, walking interviews, and photo-based methods in both cities (for more on context and methods for the study, see Kennelly 2016).

The first section of the paper considers the widely circulating discourse about Olympics employment and the opportunities that are supposed to abound for low-income or previously unemployed people in this domain when an Olympic Games is in town. The second section looks at efforts to ‘clean the streets’ through policing and other policy initiatives, to make the Olympic city look good when the ‘world is watching.’ My aim for the paper is both theoretical and political: in the first instance, I aim to illustrate the

¹ Dr. Paul Watt of Birkbeck College, University of London.

efficacy of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence in attempting to make sense of the conflicting accounts of marginalized peoples living in mega-event host cities. In the second, I aim to demonstrate the degree to which affective Olympic claims about the benefits of the Games are not only inaccurate but create their own specific forms of harm for marginalized residents in host cities. Such harm is complicit with that produced by state-circulated discourses about the 'good and deserving citizen' (Kennelly 2011a; Kennelly and Dillabough 2008) and the efficacy of a meritocratic approach to social welfare, also known as the 'deserving poor' ideology promoted under neoliberalism. It is a harm that is particularly difficult to recognize, as it is *symbolic* in nature, and 'symbolic power is that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it' (Bourdieu 1993, 164).

'Jobs, jobs, jobs'

One of the most widely circulated and broadly believed myths about the Olympics is that it will provide substantial employment opportunities, particularly for low-income and previously unemployed residents of host cities. Such promises formed an important aspect of the bids put forward by both the Vancouver and London bid committees to the IOC when trying to win the Games. Unfortunately, such promises were not matched by reality. In a study of employment created by the London Olympic Games up to and including 2011, the year before the Games and arguably the peak moment of Olympic-related employment due to venue construction, Dan Brown and Stefan Szymanski (2012,

563) found that ‘the direct employment effects of the Olympics are small.’ They note that this was true across London but particularly striking in the impoverished East London host boroughs, which were promised ‘wider employment opportunities and improvements in the education, skills and knowledge of the local labour force in an area of very high unemployment’ (London’s candidate file, as cited in Brown and Szymanski 2012, 546). In Vancouver, commitments were made to create a net increase in inner-city employment, but the four initiatives that were implemented to fulfill this commitment resulted, with the most optimistic of estimates, in 248 jobs – hardly an employment boom for inner-city residents, including youth (Kennelly 2016).

In the first instance, then, lies the ambivalence produced by the conflicting messages received about the costs of the Games versus the ostensible benefits. A great deal of effort and resources was put into making the case for the Olympics as being economically worthwhile; hugely exaggerated claims were made about economic benefits such as increased employment, tourist spending, and GDP (see Kennelly 2016 for details). Downplayed were the opportunity costs of the Games; in other words, money that is being spent on Olympic infrastructure and planning that is not being spent on social services and housing. This reality was, in some ways, quite apparent to the youth: in both Vancouver and London, they repeatedly commented on the absurdity of money being spent on the Olympics that could otherwise be spent on supporting themselves and their families. This refrain was common throughout all six of my fieldwork periods, before, during, and after the Olympic Games in both Vancouver and London. A few examples:

Vancouver (2009):

(Artemis)² I read the paper today and I think it was \$6 billion today. And that \$6 billion has to come from somewhere. And what \$6 billion could do for this city if the Olympics weren't coming? You know, why is this money just popping up now? Like, why couldn't they do this like four years ago, five years ago?

Vancouver (2010):

(Geoffrey) Well the Olympics are a giant waste of money. If they would have spent a quarter of that on subsidized housing there'd be no homeless. Instead it all goes to fucking rich developers and they'll spend it on bullshit. And we get shiny buildings like the Olympic Village, which is going to fall apart in 10 years.

Vancouver (2011):

(Focus Group 2) I just thought that the whole funding, like all the money that, I don't think it was a good time for Vancouver to be spending, you

² All names used in the paper are pseudonyms.

know, billions of dollars on something that only a small demographic of people were going to be [able to enjoy]. You know, it was exclusively for people who could afford to spend a thousand dollars on this. And considering that a lot of the funding, they cut, you know, arts funding drastically, as well as school funding for children. Which just seemed like complete bullshit to me.

London (2011)

(Faith) When I first heard it, I was quite excited, because I thought they were going to keep the Olympic hall and use it for the kids to go and practice and learn stuff there but, when they said they're going to change it to a football ground, I thought that was a waste of time really and a waste of money also.

(Focus group 3) How much have we got to scream for what we want before they stop throwing away all this money on the Olympics and they start doing things for everyone, things that benefit not just x amount, but everyone. If they were to just go through the whole of the borough and fix all the repairs for one, that's helping all kids, that's helping mums, that's helping families, that's helping people that work. That's helping the homeless, that's helping everyone.

London (2012)

(Rebecca) It's like, the Olympics are here, quick let's just waste our money. Get over it. It lasts like, what, six weeks. All that money for six weeks. Are you being serious? Wow. And they're saying about the recession. They are some funny people you know. We have no money, let's spunk it all on the Olympics.

London (2013)

(Scott) The Olympics was all just for money anyway, it cost like 9 billion [pounds] or something, most of it's getting knocked down and all that and then rebuilt, do you know what I mean, and like people didn't even do their job properly.

Despite the clarity with which the youth saw that public money was being spent on the Olympics that might otherwise have gone towards services that would assist them – such as housing, education, or employment programs – they still struggled with the sense that they might be able to benefit from the ostensible opportunities that were supposed to come with the Olympic Games. Their inability to do so, despite often heroic efforts to attain volunteering or employment opportunities, was sometimes internalized as a lack on their own part. This is consistent with the meritocratic and neoliberal ideology that circulates voraciously in the contemporary period, telling the youth they simply need to

‘pull themselves up by the bootstraps.’ The internal struggle between the ‘bootstrap’ ideology and the reality of structural barriers preventing them from accessing opportunities played out in the following focus group discussion in London in 2011:

Nkayawa: I think I’ve got something to say in terms of opportunities. I believe there are opportunities in abundance that you just have to seek for it. I believe a lot of people complain about lack of opportunities and government’s involvement in developing [them], but I believe if you really want certain services and certain help, you just have to find the right questions and go to the right places to get what you want, but you have to be willing and have the desire to go there.

Pete: Guidance is a big help.

Nkayawa: You have to go and seek for that guidance and be persistent.

Pete: You can seek but if things aren’t promoted, you can seek things and be looking for things in the completely wrong place. Eventually, you’re seeking, you’re seeking and not getting anywhere, you’re just going back to step one, so unless those things are offered to us to see that they’re there for us to take, how are we going to know?

I commented on this conversation later in my fieldnotes, remarking on the optimism with which Nkayawa approached the Olympics and the possibilities therein. A recent immigrant from Uganda, his public approach to the Olympics was consistent with his comments above, exhorting himself and others to work harder and grab the opportunities that abound, and the benefits that the Olympics could have for Stratford. In individual conversations, however, Nkayawa was much more measured and even pessimistic about the possibilities; this excerpt from my fieldnotes records the racism he had experienced in his own efforts to find work:

I had a stretch of time with just Nkayawa in the room, who at one point broke the silence to ask my opinion on which was better: Canada or the U.K. I asked him what he meant by 'better', and he said he wanted to know about which was more 'developed'. I gave some schpiel about the relative strengths and weaknesses of each, and when I was done he declared: 'Canada is better.' When I asked him why, he said he had friends from Uganda living in Vancouver, and they had been able to find jobs and were happy there. He talked about racism here (which I insisted was present in Canada, if not quite so overt), and the feeling that upon applying for a job that his CV is being discarded because the employer can't pronounce his name: 'What's this name? Too many K's. Shredder.' He recounted the experience of an aunt (or cousin?), with a British name (Brittany) and a British accent, who shows up for job interviews only to be told the position is taken. I replied that this happened in Canada as well, but he looked sceptical.

Despite his very real experiences of racism, Nkayawa persisted in his public insistence to his peers that their own efforts were the basis of their success, and they only needed to work harder in order to benefit from Olympic opportunities.

Nkayawa was not alone in this view. The youth in both cities were being told by youth workers and the media that the Olympics would provide them with jobs and

volunteer opportunities; all they need do is apply. And apply they did. The youth in both Vancouver and London tried through various avenues to secure employment; some succeeded, but many more did not. Those who did succeed were almost entirely men, and were generally employed in short-term and poorly paid security or construction contracts. More common was the story of multiple efforts to secure Olympic employment or volunteer opportunities, met with bureaucratic or systemic barriers preventing them from succeeding. Patrick's story, which he shared with me in London in 2012, is typical. After getting his security certification, through a training program that participants pay for themselves (though in Patrick's case, he was able to secure funding for it from the supportive housing centre in which he lives), Patrick applied for a security job with the Olympics. He received an interview, and at the end was told that he could have the job, and they would call him and tell him when his shifts were. When he did not receive such a phone call, he called them back but was told to phone various other places, including the original job centre that had helped him secure the job. This didn't make sense to him, so instead he wanted to go in and talk to someone, but he could not work out where to go or who to talk to. In the end, he was unable to get through to anyone who could help him figure out what had happened, and the opportunity disappeared.

Despite his own thwarted efforts to find work, Patrick remained optimistic about the Olympics as a venue for employment – for others. He notes:

For me like it's the Olympics, people get a job in there, you know, cos some of them before they was like they don't work, they don't do nothing, but

thank you God helped them get a job and now they start to work, they can look after themselves, they can look after their family, see the world, what's out there. [So] it's helping people, not me, but people in London. You know how many people get jobs in Olympics, and now they are happy because they get pay, they get this, they get that. It's nice.

With the messaging coming from the state and Olympics promoters that the Olympics was providing lots of jobs, the youth had to struggle to reconcile their own experiences of trying for employment but being unable to attain it. The argument referenced above, between Nkayawa and Pete, represents two sides of a polarized set of views that I heard throughout my fieldwork. Pete's perspective was more common; the youth in both cities had a pretty clear sense that there were barriers in place that prevented them from accessing opportunities. However, the notion that there are 'opportunities in abundance that you just have to seek for' (in Nkayawa's words) also emerged quite frequently. The related discourse was of being 'lazy' – usually an attribute the youth assigned to others, not themselves. From Isaac during an individual interview in London in 2011:

Because nowadays a lot of young people, even younger than me, I feel like, not that I feel lazy, but these young people nowadays they're very, they're just lazy, they'll sit down because there's nothing out there for them.

From Matthew during a focus group in Vancouver in 2009:

There are different classes and stereotypes that are different classifications of homeless people, right? There are people that are legitimately lazy. And they're just freaking lazy. I was lazy. And you know, like addictions and mental health and everything. I didn't have mental health problems before I became homeless. And now I do have mental health problems. So legitimately I cannot work.

Both of these excerpts contain the tension between the 'bootstrap' ideology and the clear recognition that structural barriers are preventing young people from accessing opportunities. Isaac describes 'young people nowadays' as 'very lazy' – suggesting that they themselves are not seeking the work or opportunities that they ought to, due to an inner lack. But he provides an important caveat at the end, when he states 'they'll sit down because there's nothing out there for them' – in other words, their 'laziness' stems from the recognition that there is no point in pursuing opportunities that do not exist. Matthew also describes himself and other homeless people as 'lazy', marking a distinction between different 'classes' of homeless people. But then he goes on to note the effects of homelessness on one's motivation and mental well-being – which are systemic and structural issues that could be addressed by adequate housing and mental health supports.

In a London focus group in 2011, Jessica provided a succinct overview of the process whereby structural barriers are converted into apathy or 'laziness':

Jessica: That is definitely the main problem it comes to finding [opportunities]. It kills a lot of people's motivation because when you go somewhere that you're told is supposed to help you and you don't get no help, you get told you're in the wrong place...

Pete: It knocks your confidence as well.

Jessica: You feel like okay, if I'm asking this person to tell me where to go as well so I have to take a step back all the way down there to find someone to actually tell me the right place to go, do you know what I'm saying?

People actually get lost in that, they don't know who to trust, who will actually get them somewhere. In a sense they do give up; I'm also very adamant that a lot of people also give up for an amount of time, [but then] people get sick and tired of sitting on their ass, they get tired of watching things go past, watching opportunities go past, watching other people get up and leave and leave them behind. That's when that urge comes, that's it, they push. It's bad but if they don't get nowhere when they push that last time that's when a lot of people break down and they give up entirely.

That's when people turn into alcoholics, drug users, all these things because they've given all they could give, they didn't get nowhere, they caught too many dead ends and for some people that's their nip in the bud, that's their journey over, they're not going to try again.

The series of excerpts above are from groups of young people in different countries, with different local histories, traditions, and customs (though shared in some ways due to the colonial relationship between Britain and Canada). What is constant between them is the presence of an Olympic Games, and their own structural position of marginality within their respective urban spaces. It is thus perhaps not surprising that they produced largely similar responses to the objective structures with which they were confronted, of a state apparatus promoting the Olympic Games as an economic opportunity from which they were told they would benefit. On the one hand, available discourses about the Olympics as a waste of money were somewhat accessible to them in order to articulate their discomfort with the ‘common sense’ with which they were being confronted. Notably, the degree to which they could access the idea of the Olympics as ‘waste’ and as resulting in ‘opportunity costs’ was shaped in part by the local activism in each city – whereas Vancouver had a very well-developed set of activist resistance to the Games, with clearly articulated critiques of the Olympics and their costs, the critiques of the Games in London, though present, were much more diluted. Despite the ability to access cogent critiques of the Olympics as a ‘waste of public money’, the competing message about the Games as providing ‘economic benefit’ and the ‘jobs, jobs, jobs’ rhetoric that accompanied it was much harder for the youth to see through. This was true more generally, as coherent critiques of the economic benefits of the Games were scarce in each city, made more confusing by the ‘mischievous practices’ inherent to economic impact statements and their offspring (Crompton 2006; Kennelly 2016). The youth were thus forced to reconcile their own experiences of systemic barriers to employment, such as racism and the inpenetrability of bureaucratic processes, with the dominant rhetoric

about the availability of Olympic opportunities. In order to make sense of this, they attributed ‘laziness’ as the individualized characteristic that could be used to explain the failure of themselves and their peers – but this jarred uncomfortably with their own knowledge of the efforts they had undertaken to find employment, meaning they might attribute this quality to their peers but hedge when applying it to themselves. Some of them saw quite clearly the manner in which the structural barriers in place were converted into individual traits such as ‘laziness’ or ‘apathy’; such a sophisticated interpretation provided some comfort but did little to change the objective circumstances in which they found themselves. As Bourdieu notes, ‘Each agent, wittingly or unwittingly, willy nilly, is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning’ (Bourdieu 1977, 79). In other words, whether the youth saw through the problematic elements of the ‘common sense’ notions of boundless Olympic opportunities or ‘bought into’ the notion that they only need work a little harder in order to succeed, they nonetheless ended in the same place: with no work and the vague sense of their own failure or loss in the face of the Olympic Games.

‘Cleaning’ the streets

Another source of ambivalence for the youth lay in their positioning vis-à-vis the dominant messaging about what an Olympic city should look like. In both cities, a great deal of emphasis was placed on making the city ‘look good’ when the ‘world is watching.’ In another article and two book chapters (Kennelly 2015b; Kennelly 2015a; Kennelly 2016), I document the manner in which the youth in Vancouver were policed

before and during the Games, leaving them with the clear message that they and their homeless bodies were not a welcome aspect of the Olympic vision for the city. In an article co-authored with a colleague (Kennelly and Watt 2013) and a chapter of my book on the impacts of the Games on poor youth (Kennelly 2016), we discuss the police ‘dispersal orders’ that were put in place throughout the London Olympic and Paralympic Games that authorized police to remove young people from public space, and forbade them from being in certain areas in groups of two or more. The message that youth in both cities received was that they were not to be seen during the Olympic Games, as their presence did not allide with the dominant messages about Olympic cities as cosmopolitan, humanitarian, safe, and secure. Scott summarizes this point succinctly in a London interview in 2013:

They don't want all the people in Stratford. Why do you think they've done all that crackdown on all the young boys around Stratford, all the drug dealers, everything, they don't want it to look like that no more, they want to try and keep it up like with the Olympics thing and that. But you need to remember where you come from, you need to remember what Stratford always was and what it always will be, do you know what I mean. That's it. Like I said, there'll always be a bad part everywhere you go, no matter where you go.

And in Vancouver, a similar sentiment from Diana in 2009:

I was on the street like four months ago and all that I would hear people talk about is when the Olympics come here they're either going to like find housing for people or stick them in jail when they see them on the street because we don't want to look bad because we're getting the Olympics. So what? You're going to toss us out because some richie-rich people have the Olympics for a few days? That's bullshit.

Both of these excerpts illustrate the youths' recognition that they were not welcome in the Olympic city, that they were in fact the subjects of the 'crackdowns' and efforts to make the city look 'good' – in other words, they themselves, the young marginalized residents of these host cities, were not a part of the global Olympic image that each city was trying to convey. (This despite the fact that purported benefits for young people played a key role in the winning of the bids, particularly in London, see Kennelly 2016.) When the city was trying to 'clean up' its image, the youth were forced to reconcile the fact that they were seen as the 'dirt' needing to be 'cleaned' (for more on this, see Kennelly 2015b; Kennelly 2016).

Although the details of this process are documented in other publications, what I have not had the chance to examine is the manner in which the youth responded bodily to these messages. In keeping with Bourdieu's theorizing about symbolic violence and the way in which dominant messages get incorporated into the bodies, thoughts, and dispositions of the dominated – into their *habitus*, in other words – I explore here the common phenomenon described by the youth of absenting themselves from the site of

Olympic revelries. This was not the case at all times – some of the youth described taking part in some of the street-level celebrations, particularly the free and accessible community events that took place alongside the Olympics. But also common was the statement that the youth had intentionally avoided being on the streets during the Olympics, citing in particular a fear of or aversion to crowds. This was repeated so frequently that it struck me as requiring further examination. Some examples below:

(Justine, Vancouver, 2010): People are taking over the city. It's like, so much to handle now. There's like so many more people. So, so many more rude people you have to deal with. And just day to day basics. Trying to get from one end of the city to the other end of the city for things you need. It takes a long time to do it. [Interviewer: Why is that?] Because there's more people on the streets. ...Just moving through the people is really hard.

(Ajax, Vancouver 2011): Lots of people. It was kind of scary, but... It's because I have anxiety, right, so, being around heavy crowds and energy like that, it's overwhelming. So, I just walked around the outskirts of downtown. I didn't bother coming down here.

(Focus group, Vancouver 2011): I pretty much was just on the street on the block parties, just enjoying the buskers and the freestyle artists that would come down. But other than that, it was too hectic, it was ruining our chance to be able to live. Because it's hard enough for us to get by already, now we

have another fifteen million people added into our city, when some of us do still, are still sleeping on the streets. We can't even get to sleep at night because the party's always on.

(Focus Group, London 2012): There's too many people. It's overcrowded [with] people as well as the traffic, there's too many people. [Other participant:] It's just too much. [General agreement from the group.]

(Julia, London 2012): [I]t's overcrowded, that's all. Yesterday I didn't go out...I couldn't even pass there, I had a buggy [baby stroller], people were like struggling to get in [through the adjacent Westfield mall to the Olympic site].

The common individualized explanation given for this was summarized by a Vancouver youth worker as follows: 'I think that some of the people we work with, they have an aversion to crowds.' As Ajax noted in the excerpt above, this aversion to crowds is also attributed to the mental health issue of 'anxiety,' something he describes as 'having' rather than 'feeling,' in keeping with the prevalent psychologistic explanation for mental health states that sees unhappiness as belonging to a spectrum of 'disorders' rather than as an understandable human response to difficult circumstances. Instead of applying an individualized psychological explanation to the group experience of 'aversion to crowds', this phenomenon can perhaps be more effectively understood as

one element of the incorporated habitus of the dominated in light of circulating messages about the desirable elements of an Olympic host city. As Bourdieu notes,

The passions of the dominated habitus... the law of the social body converted into the law of the body, are not of a kind that can be suspended by a simple effort of will, founded on a liberatory awakening of consciousness. A person who fights his timidity feels betrayed by his body, which recognizes paralyzing taboos or calls to order, where someone else, the product of different conditions, would see stimulating incitements or injunctions (2000, 180).

Rather than enjoying the ‘jubilation’ and ‘excitement’ of participating in an Olympic street-level party, or feeling part of the ‘happy and glorious’ Olympic Games, the youth experienced the crowds as an impediment to their capacity to move around the city, getting in the way of their bus routes, their baby strollers, and their daily routines. Having already internalized the clear message that the Games were ‘not for them’ (see also Watt 2013), it was a bodily impossibility for the youth to become part of the Olympic crowds, experiencing them instead as an unwelcome incursion on their everyday lives. Inundated with the message that their bodies were not the bodies that were welcome in the Olympic city, the youth experienced an ‘aversion to crowds’ that protected them from the negative feelings of unbelonging they were anticipating, at a bodily and emotional level, on the streets during the Games. It also served to reinforce the efforts of the dominant to ‘clean the streets’ – as the youth incorporated a feeling of aversion to crowds as part of their

habitus, thus keeping them off the streets during the Games, they also succeeded in reproducing the image of the ‘clean and liveable’ city that Olympics promoters so dearly wanted.

Conclusions

The ‘Olympic spirit’, an intangible benefit supposedly disseminated through the act of watching, hosting, or even talking about the Olympics, takes a very different form when viewed through the experiences of marginalized young residents of Olympic host cities. Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence is useful in trying to disarticulate the multiple forms of injury sustained by the dominated in the context of an Olympic Games. Such injuries are material – and I have sought to document their effects through other publications – but the focus of this paper is on *symbolic* forms of injury, no less painful for being so. I have drawn in particular on two instances of symbolic violence, as experienced by the youth in Vancouver and London: the first is the incorporated sense of worthlessness or failure at their lack of ability to attain Olympic employment or volunteer opportunities. This occurred in the context of exaggerated and continuously obfuscated claims about the economic benefits of the Games to host city residents, particularly in the form of the dominant rhetoric of ‘jobs, jobs, jobs.’ The second instance was the incorporated bodily habitus of ‘aversion to crowds’ that emerged conveniently in the face of wider circulating messages about what an Olympic city ought to look like, and who was welcome in it. Their embodied sense of fear or anxiety in relation to crowds served to keep homeless or marginally housed youth off the streets, meaning that they

inadvertently and unintentionally participated in reproducing their own domination through acquiescence to the dominant notion that their bodies did not belong in public space during the Games. This is the essence of symbolic violence.

In tracing these instances and theorizing them with the help of Bourdieu's concepts, I hope to illustrate the multi-level harms that occur for marginalized residents when their cities host an Olympic Games. This is not to suggest that marginalized peoples would be left unharmed without the Games; the Olympics are sought by states in order to accelerate pre-existing processes of securitization, marketization, and their capacity to compete on the global stage in a neoliberal world order (Horne and Whannel 2012; Boykoff 2014; Short 2008). Such harms were already part of the everyday reality of marginalized and homeless youth living in Olympic host cities. However, I would argue that the Olympics serves to amplify these harms, both material and symbolic, through its particular recourse to notions of benevolence, global harmony, and peace-building, each of which have been part of the so-called 'Olympic movement' since its founding by Pierre de Coubertin in 1896. The Olympics thus have access to a repertoire of affective claims that effectively disguise the harms that the Games produce for marginalized residents. This makes it more difficult, both for those who are subject to its harms, and those of us trying to study them, to account for the harms of the Games in terms that can compete with the dominant frame about Olympic goodness. This is why Pierre Bourdieu's concepts can be so helpful in this regard, concerned as he is with uncovering that which otherwise goes unsaid, unthought, or unnoticed.

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