Reframing Discourse Working Group

'Trouble and Triumph': Discursive Framing of Jane-Finch Youth
Outline

- Review of Research Objectives
- Overview of Critical Discourse Analysis
- Key Findings
- Potential Implications
Research Objective

• How can the Jane/Finch community reframe the negative public discourse about youth to a public discourse that is supportive of positive youth development policies?

  – **Focus of Critical Discourse Analysis:** What are the discursive strategies deployed by mainstream media (MSM) to frame J/F youth? What are the key trends and what are the potential implications to policy and programming?
Key Concepts

- **Discourse** is both a theory of and a method to study the social significance of language.

- **A Frame** is schema (how we make sense of things, a ‘short cut’ for processing information) used to interpret and present social experiences.

- **Text** is written/spoken language & images but for clarity we refer to them separately as ‘texts and images’.
Theoretical Frameworks

• The discourse of the ‘new’ racism* and its interlock with gender and class.

• The ‘positive’ discourse of governmentality* that individualizes improvement and responsibilizes community, and tethers ‘positive’ to negative frames.
Methods

• Informed by Fairclough’s tri-dimensional model (2004) and van Dijk’s (1993) principles for CDAs
  – Adopted a grounded theory approach to generate multiple theoretical frameworks to interpret and interrogate the texts.
  – The keywords ‘Jane Finch’ and ‘youth’ were used to search the FACTIVA and Toronto Sun databases for the period of January 1, 2008 to August 25, 2010* - total of 148 texts were retained for analysis.
  – A preliminary headline analysis mapped key discursive trends and generated theoretical frameworks to focus the close analysis of 17 exemplar ‘positively’ framed texts.
• **Headline Analysis**
  – **Negative Frames** (violence, contagion, parasite, new trends, hyper-masculinities / femininities)
  – **Positive Frames** (Individual Improvement, Responsibilized Community, Challenges to Structural Deficit & Discrimination)

• **Full-Text Analysis**
  – Individual improvement
  – Structural Deficits & Discrimination:
Headline Analysis: Negative Frames

- Negative frames replicate and expand on those found in previous analyses:

  - **Violence**: articulated through the discursive strategies of gangs, ‘cops and robbers,’ security, drugs, guns & moral panic

  - **Contagion**: articulated through the discursive strategies of dirt, disorder, pathology, promiscuity, dysfunctional family & spatial encroachment/exclusion

  - **Parasite**: articulated through the discursive strategies of neoliberal residualism - ‘tax drain,’ ‘dependency,’ needs & fiscally imprudent households
Headline Analysis: Negative Frames (cont’d)

• ‘New’ trends: the hyper reality of discourses of ‘cops and robbers,’ and the ‘threat’ of spatial encroachment

• Hyper-masculinities/femininities that discursively interlock race and gender.

• Avoided reproducing the ‘spectacle’: by confirming negative trends and then refocusing on emergent ‘positive’ frames.
Headline Analysis: Positive ‘Positive’ Frames

• ‘Positive’ frames are increasingly common: E.g., from the initial time period of 2005-2010 to the revised timeline 2008-2010 the proportion of ‘positive’ frames has doubled.*

These include:

– **Individual Improvement**: discursive strategies of sports, music, leadership, camping/wilderness & general educational strategies

– **Responsibilized Community**: discursive strategy of foregrounding negative framing of the community to emphasize what the individual has ‘triumphed over’; place-based analysis of poverty places problem & solution as community responsibility
Challenges to Structural Deficit & Discrimination: discursive strategies of challenging racialized practices such as the police ‘carding’; or the ‘stigma’ (not racism or classism) attached to J/F

Trends across MSM: follow predictable political leanings with significantly higher incidence of positive framing in the Toronto Star than Sun, and the Globe and Mail versus the National Post
Individual improvement:

— strands of ‘beats’ & ‘hoops’ articulate the ‘new’ racism by re-inscribing racialized stereotypes; or deploy colonial tropes such as improvement through the white spaces of hockey arenas or opera halls.

— strands of wilderness camps articulate the ‘new’ racism through the trope of naturalizing inner city ‘disorder’ and ‘civilizing’ youth through the ‘innocence’ of ‘nature’.

— strands of educational reform (the most dominant of the discursive frames) articulate the ‘new’ racism through dysfunctional family environments that require that youth are rehabilitated by educators.
 Structural Deficits & Discrimination:
—very few and these strands are strongly tethered to needs & dependency frames; privilege class over race analyses; and individual acts over institutional discrimination; deploy ‘soft’ or ambiguous semantics
Learnings and Contributions

Preponderance of negative frames: Congruent with the literature, as well as the findings of the two recent dissertations of media representations of J/F; Expanded on frames not well explored in the literature such as: the ‘threat of race’ articulated through: the hyperreality of ‘cops and robbers’ tropes & spatial encroachment.

Emergent and ascending deployment ‘positive’ frames: Inscription of the ‘new’ racism through the governmentality discourse of individualized improvement and responsibilized communities.
Addressed a gap in the literature: Little has been written about the interlock of ‘positive’ and negative frames in media texts, nor of how governmentality is deployed by MSMs to bypass structural disadvantage and discrimination.

Overall, the findings suggest shifts in discursive trends and strategies that while promising, may be potentially challenging to frame in ways that promote community well being and progressive policy development.
Implications of the negative frames: tend toward surveillance, ‘broken windows’ and incarceration interventions; rehabilitative and ‘domestic’ interventions largely targeted to children, youth and families; interventions that spatially resource places rather than people (i.e., create ‘service dependent’ zones); and interventions that invest in ‘competing marginalities’ and demand increasingly stringent audits/accountability.
Policy Implications of ‘Positive’ Frames

The implications of the ‘positive’ frames of individualized improvement: tend toward policies aimed at individual rehabilitation to produce ‘exceptional’ lives that, nevertheless, preserve institutional patterns of privilege and penalty. As for the few texts that articulate challenges to structural deficits, though promising, they remain rare and rarely articulate our collective responsibility to support policies for social transformation.
Comments? Questions?

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