JULIE CAOUETTE & DONALD M. TAYLOR

"DON'T BLAME ME FOR WHAT MY ANCESTORS DID"

Understanding the Impact of Collective White Guilt

INTRODUCTION

"Although textbook authors no longer sugarcoat how slavery affected African Americans, they minimize White complicity in it. They present slavery virtually as uncaused, a tragedy, rather than a wrong perpetrated by some people on others" (Loewen, 1995, p. 138). The same rationalization applies to the internal colonization of Aboriginal people by White European Canadians and, indeed, this is precisely how the treatment of Aboriginal people is portrayed in Canadian history textbooks (Colavincenzo, 2003). Such a negative portrayal is certain to impact White Canadians' perceptions of their involvement, or their perceived lack of involvement, in the genesis and maintenance of racial inequality.

Many Canadians claim that culpability cannot run in their bloodline. As one participant in our experiment declared: "The sins of the father should not fall on the children." Young mainstream Canadians distance themselves from responsibility by emphasizing that wrongful actions were committed in the past by some distant European ancestors. However, many fail to consider that we are all accomplices in a society that perpetuates past wrongs in the present day. We don't appreciate that historical events are linked first, to societal barriers faced by Aboriginal people and second, to the unearned privileges White Canadians have gained as a result (Feagin, Vera, & Batur, 2001; Rothenberg, 2002; Tatum, 1997, 2000). As one of our research participants proclaimed:

> The effects of brutally unfair and racist treatment by European settlers are still being felt today; however, Canadians today feel disconnected from the past so they have trouble feeling responsible. They also have trouble accepting the fact that they are benefiting from previous transgressions. No wonder there is little support to make changes to redress social inequality.

Our own work with Aboriginal communities revolves around research and teaching, and we are fortunate to be allowed to share in their experiences. It also serves as a constant reminder of the historically privileged position we, as mainstream Canadians, find ourselves in. Most mainstream Canadians do not benefit from first-hand experience and thus are oblivious to the plight of Aboriginal people. Many

Aboriginal people are destined to a life in the poorer, more invisible sections of our cities, or on reserves or isolated communities. Thus, most mainstream Canadians are unaware of their own relatively advantaged position compared to Aboriginal people, and unaware that the impact of centuries of colonization continues to this day.

At one level, we might expect high levels of collective White guilt among White Canadians when they are urged to reflect on the plight of Aboriginal people in Canada. Nevertheless, we have found surprisingly low levels of guilt in our research (Caouette & Taylor, 2005, 2006). In this chapter, we explore why this finding may not be so shocking and how White Canadians revert to a variety of psychological mechanisms to avoid possible guilt and, in the process, avoid any feeling of responsibility.

OVERVIEW

The present volume has evolved from the editors' observation that many Canadians do not realize or acknowledge the salience of their unearned White privileges in society today. Our own program of research (Caouette & Taylor, 2005, 2006) is designed to explore how White mainstream Canadians react when confronted with concrete evidence of their unearned privileges relative to Aboriginal people. Our particular focus is on the role of collective White guilt.

In social psychological terms, collective guilt is a group-based emotion experienced when people categorize themselves as members of a group that has committed unjustified harm to another group. More broadly, collective guilt is felt when the behaviour of group members is inconsistent with the norms and values cherished by the group, and foremost among the values that all groups respect is equality and fairness (Branscombe, Doosje, & McGarty, 2002). There is a growing interest in studying collective guilt (e.g., Barkan, 2000; Branscombe & Doosje, 2004) because it is a regulatory emotion that is strongly linked to support for corrective actions designed to alleviate intergroup inequality.

In this chapter, we present research findings that focus on one simple question: How can mainstream Canadians' belief in the egalitarian essence of society co-exist with obvious and persistent racial inequality? We found that, when confronted with evidence of racial inequality involving Aboriginal people, a majority of our young White Canadian participants experience surprisingly low levels of collective guilt. These same participants, nevertheless, strongly value egalitarianism. How can our participants endorse egalitarianism but not feel collective guilt, even when confronted with the reality of racial inequality? We argue that the explanation resides in how White Canadians interpret and understand the meaning of egalitarianism. Essentially, they have a particular interpretation of egalitarianism that paradoxically allows them to rationalize inequality and, as a result, avoid collective guilt.

The impact of collective guilt cannot be underestimated: it is a powerful psychological force. On the one hand, guilt motivates individuals to repair and make amends for their mistakes and transgressions. Importantly, such corrective actions are not undertaken as a consequence of external pressure, but as a result of self-regulation

(Mischel, Cantor, & Feldman, 1996). On the other hand, an absence of guilt is often made possible by psychological defence mechanisms, such as denial, dissociation, or distancing. In other words, the psychological avoidance of guilt is also a powerful motivator: the clearest example involves "blaming the victim" (Lerner, 1980).

We begin our analysis of White collective guilt by first exploring our own Whiteness, as White social psychologists conducting field research and teaching on the topic of racial inequality. Then we briefly explore how racial inequality is being maintained in Canada and review the social psychological literature on collective White guilt. Finally, we elaborate our own research findings related to egalitarianism and collective White guilt.

OUR WHITE PRIVILEGE… OUR WHITE GUILT

As mainstream social scientists and educators, our orientation no doubt originates from conscious and unconscious reflections on our own White privilege. For example, part of our involvement with disadvantaged groups includes research and teaching with a view to protecting and enhancing Inuktitut, the heritage language of the Inuit (e.g., Taylor & Wright, 2002; Wright & Taylor, 1995). In these contexts, our Whiteness is made very salient, and we are continuously compelled to contemplate our own White privilege. Although, at times, we feel angry, ashamed, or guilty about it, we remain resolved to continue studying group inequality. We hope it is because of our genuine conviction in the power of sound research to promote social justice, and not simply a rationalization on our part.

We acknowledge that there is always the possibility that our research is directly motivated by a need to assuage our own White guilt. If this is true, then we have to be careful that our research not be biased by our underlying motivation. If White guilt is the motivation, we may inadvertently be reproducing our position of privilege or, alternatively, we may inform policy through an overly optimistic representation of disadvantaged groups. Accordingly, we have a responsibility as scientists and as educators to be acutely aware of the underlying motivation behind our work, and to make sure to maximize the chances that it serves the genuine interests of disadvantaged groups, and not merely our need to deal with our own collective White guilt.

Conducting research, consulting, and teaching in disadvantaged communities may be one way that many mainstream White researchers and educators attempt to resolve their own distress about racial inequality, to come to terms with their own White guilt. In his book, Taylor (2002) points to an ongoing dilemma, and explains how defensive he initially was when writing about the plight of disadvantaged groups:

I have been privileged to learn firsthand from peoples in culturally different disadvantaged communities. By writing about their reality, am I robbing them of their identity, am I breaking their code? I do not know the answer to these

91

> questions except to feel a selfish need to share my observations in the faint hope that even if they are judged erroneous, they will have at least forced critics to confront the issues squarely. But I also know that I would feel equally distressed if I chose to remain silent. As an elder once said to me, "Please put a voice to our pain." (p. 6)

In a related vein, Steele (1989, 1991, 2002), an influential African American social scientist, has claimed that the motivation of many White individuals who champion the rights of racial minority groups is often more selfish than altruistic. He has argued that many White individuals are willing to capitulate to any requests from racial groups only in order to avoid potential guilt. He argues that Whites feel anxious when dealing with issues pertaining to racial groups, because they are afraid of what might be revealed about their deeper self:

> The darkest fear of Whites is that their better lot in life is at least partially the result of their capacity for evil- their capacity to dehumanize an entire people for their own benefit, and then to be indifferent to the devastation their dehumanization has wrought on successive generations of their victims. (1989, p. 54)

One striking example in Canada is the effect that residential schools had, and continue to have, on generations of Aboriginal people (Milloy, 1999). For instance, there has been some recent speculation about a link between the legacy of residential schools in the 1960s and an increased risk for HIV/AIDS in Aboriginal populations today. The loss of culture and marginalization suffered by the survivors of residential schools, and its related intergenerational impact on subsequent family members, are believed to be contributing factors to the HIV/AIDS problem (Barlow, 2003).

Ultimately, even if our intentions are altruistic, our position as White social scientists, whose research hinges upon group inequality, will always remain paradoxical: our careers are fundamentally built on studying the plight of the most disadvantaged. Even though our intent is to curb inequality, we are, in fact, earning a respectful living out of other people's disadvantage. For example, Taylor recalls a unique experience, during the 1990 Oka crisis:

> I was teaching on one of the reserves at the time and was shuttled back and forth across police lines by a group of Mohawk with a high-powered speedboat. During times of such high tension your own Whiteness becomes a complex and frustrating attribute. And yet I was still in a position of societal privilege! I had the advantage of being able to exit this thorny situation; I was able to leave, unlike people in the community who were left to deal with the tension.

Too often White individuals, including researchers and educators, think they share the same experience with their Aboriginal counterparts. They don't! White individuals need to fully understand the difference between occasionally experiencing a reality and the reality for Aboriginal people who have to continuously live it.

In sum, it can be painful to face our White privilege and our White guilt, and it can be frustrating to deal with issues related to our Whiteness and our White identity in a diverse nation such as Canada. Nevertheless, the quality of our relationship with disadvantaged groups depends upon our being vigilant about the implications of our position of privilege.

RACIAL INEQUALITY IN CANADA

Despite evidence supporting the reality of racial inequality, "historically, many Canadians have been reluctant to admit that they, their ideas and their behaviours have contributed to the social marginalization, denigration, and inferiorization of others based on the negative evaluation of 'race' difference" (Satzewich, 1998, p. 11). Indeed, most Canadians believe racism to be mainly an American problem. Reitz (1988) argues that such a myth could be based on the fact that while there might be less racial conflict in Canada, there is no less racial discrimination (for further insights on racism in Canada, see Henry, Tator, Mattis, & Rees, 2006).

One way racial inequality is maintained is through different ideologies that rationalize, legitimize, and sustain a pattern of uneven distribution of valued resources among different racial groups (Allahar & Côté, 1998; Curtis, Grabb, & Guppy, 1999; Li, 1999; Satzewich, 1998). Such legitimizing ideologies are effective because they are credible, and may even be partly true. One such ideology is the belief that our society is based on a meritocracy. In every life domain, from the world of work to intimate relationships, we believe that our outcomes are contingent upon our inputs.

For example, to be accepted into university you need to obtain good grades and by working harder you may even win a scholarship. On the surface, using grades as the sole criterion appears to be a prototypical example of a meritocracy at its best. Yet, it falls short of a genuine meritocracy when certain groups are denied entry to university because of systemic discrimination. Unfortunately, systemic discrimination is invisible and very difficult to document. Minority students often have parents with no experience with formal education, and may be surrounded by a school environment that is not very supportive of academic achievement. The social environment in which they find themselves systematically disadvantages these students. In this way, minority students are at a unique disadvantage when it comes to obtaining the grades they need to get accepted into university.

Another related legitimizing racial ideology is based on the belief among advantaged group members that members of racially disadvantaged groups are personally responsible for their lack of success in society because of their biological or cultural inadequacies (Barrett, 1987; Ponting, 1997). Suggesting that racially disadvantaged individuals could succeed by working harder and by developing further their personal assets legitimizes racial inequality. Such an ideology serves the interests of privileged White mainstream Canadians in two ways: (a) it legitimizes their own success as a result of their individual ability and hard work (meritocracy);

and (b) it denies the pervasive influence of structural forces at play that provide them with unearned systemic privileges, while systematically placing other racial groups at a disadvantage.

One obvious example of such discrimination is the institutional and cultural domination of mainstream White Canadians over Aboriginal people. This form of profound discrimination is difficult for many White Canadians to grasp since it is not intuitively obvious how past colonization still has a systemic impact today. For example, imagine how socially disruptive it was for nomadic Inuit people to be forced by the Canadian government to settle in permanent villages. This arrangement of permanent settlements was accompanied by the introduction of formal schooling. Inuit parents were forced into a hopeless dilemma; they could maintain their nomadic tradition, but this meant leaving their children behind at school for months at a time, or they could remain near the school and abandon their search for food. This forced choice undeniably contributed to the loss of tradition, culture and identity, undoubtedly affecting many Inuit today. For instance, one of the biggest issues today in Northern villages is coping with the fact that many young children seem to be left unattended in the village. Historically, there was no need to monitor children since they lived exclusively with their immediate and extended family. However, this lack of structure is problematic in a modern village now encompassing different clans or families, within the context of modern life, including education, work, and community obligations.

Another example is the negative impact of the rapid introduction of Western culture on the Inuit lifestyle, including media, culture and transportation. Western culture has had the luxury of many centuries to adapt to these technological changes; yet, many of us haven't adapted that well (e.g., increased in obesity and sedentary behaviours). We can only reflect on the massive challenge for Inuit to adapt to such changes, not only imposed by a foreign culture but also in the matter of a couple years (Taylor, 2002). Menzies (1999) has summarized the situation well by arguing that:

> the socioeconomic context of First Nations' people is one that is clearlydisadvantaged in comparison to mainstream society. Popular explanations of this imbalance of power and resources typically blame the victim…. Popular explanations deny the overpowering dominance of European traditions and economic processes that were forced upon Aboriginal people. An important and powerful set of explanations roots social inequality in the historical and cultural phenomena of colonialism, the expropriation of First Nations' land and resources, and government policies to undermine Aboriginal social institutions…. Mainstream Canadian society has to accept its collective responsibility for the legacy of colonialism. (pp. 239-240, 242)

Unfortunately, our research suggests that White Canadians are very reluctant to accept any collective responsibility. In a series of experiments (Caouette & Taylor, 2005, 2006), self-identified White Canadian students were presented with information about

94

the impact of colonization by White Canadians on Aboriginal people. These students were recruited from a liberal metropolitan Canadian university, and different regions of the country were well represented. When we presented these White Canadian participants with actual evidence of racial inequality related to Aboriginal people, they evidenced only mild levels of collective guilt, as measured by a well validated scale of collective guilt (e.g., item: "I feel guilty about the benefits and privileges that I receive as a Canadian, compared to Aboriginal people.")

COLLECTIVE WHITE GUILT

Guilt is experienced when we perceive that our behaviour has failed in relation to a set of standards, norms, values, or goals. We will only experience guilt if we feel personally responsible for our failed behaviour. In understanding collective guilt, research in the field of social psychology, most specifically social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), has pointed to the importance of distinguishing between two aspects of identity: our personal self (our individual unique attributes) and our social self (our shared group attributes). If my personal self is responsible for a wrongful act I will feel personal guilt. But if my social self is implicated in a wrongful act, through my membership with a wrongful group, I will feel collective guilt. Collective guilt can be avoided in two ways. First, I can distance myself from my group, or simply not categorize myself as a member of that group. Second, I can deny that my group is responsible for any wrongdoing, or also minimize the impact of the wrongful act.

In sum, we can categorize ourselves and our actions at either the individual or group level, and this categorization will influence how we think, feel, and behave. Accordingly, when we are placed in a situation where our social self becomes salient, for example when we need to face the historical transgressions of our racial group, our reactions or emotions will be experienced through our group membership, and the potential for collective guilt will be heightened (Branscombe & Miron, 2004).

Empirical evidence for the manifestation of collective guilt has been sought in a variety of contexts involving intergroup inequality (Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998; Swim & Miller, 1999; for a review see also Branscombe & Doosje, 2004). Despite clear findings supporting the existence of collective guilt, the measured levels of collective guilt are typically quite low, as measured by a valid scale of collective guilt. For example, when Dutch students were presented with the historical reality about their country's brutal colonization of Indonesia, a few individuals experienced high levels of collective guilt, but the vast majority of participants only reported low levels of collective guilt (Doosje et al., 1998). Upon reflection, these low levels of collective guilt may not be so surprising. People are fundamentally motivated to avoid or escape negative feelings of self-evaluation, often to the extent of psychologically denying the precipitating events themselves (Kugler & Jones, 1992; Tangney & Salovey, 1999): "from a self-interest perspective, the unfairly advantaged are most strongly motivated to eliminate their

guilt psychologically. If they do so, they need not redistribute resources, make more efforts, or treat those around them more fairly, to re-establish justice" (Tyler, 2001, p. 351). It is easy to alleviate collective guilt psychologically: Advantaged group members, such as White mainstream Canadians, need only deny that any real harm was done, argue that their group's privileged status is rightly deserved, displace any responsibility, distance themselves from their wrongful group, and deny group responsibility or dissociate themselves from any personal benefits as a result of their group's unjust actions (Branscombe & Miron, 2004).

Compared to personal guilt, collective guilt appears to leave open even more room for psychological maneuvering. Because, with collective guilt, the entire group is the perpetrator of the perceived wrongful actions, individuals can, with relative ease, escape any feelings of collective guilt. In the following section, we explore how even valuing egalitarianism can, surprisingly, still allow people to escape collective guilt.

COLLECTIVE WHITE GUILT AND EGALITARIANISM

Because egalitarianism is such a cherished value in North America, most people have internalized egalitarian standards; being non-prejudiced has become a personal value that is intrinsically important for most people (Devine, Monteith, Zuwerink & Elliot, 1991; Plant & Devine, 1998). However, recent research by Monteith and Walters (1998) suggests that the key issue may not be the extent to which a person has *internalized* egalitarian standards, but the *interpretation* of egalitarianism the person has internalized. They found that individuals who believe that egalitarianism is about meritocracy (based on their survey items; e.g., "Egalitarianism means that anyone who is willing and able to work hard has a good chance of succeeding") were not motivated to temper their prejudiced feelings. This belief in a meritocracy as an interpretation of egalitarianism is, of course, consistent with a racial ideology that legitimizes racial inequality.

A second interpretation of egalitarianism emphasizes a belief in equality of opportunity, and for many this interpretation appears to be more conducive to racial equality, although, as our results will show later, it is not. For example, many people advocate for the right of every child to have an equal chance to succeed at school and, accordingly, "special needs" children should be provided with special educational services to help them achieve. Achieving equality of opportunity is central to most liberal discourse. Interestingly, Feldman (1999) has argued that the meritocracy interpretation of egalitarianism, which we analyzed in terms of its relationship to the legitimization of racial inequality, is, in fact, consistent with an equality of opportunity interpretation of egalitarianism in North America. Thus, social inequality, in the form of socio-economic disparities, if based on hard work (meritocracy), appears to be quite acceptable to many people as long as there is parity in competition at the outset (equality of opportunity).

Accordingly, many North Americans believe that it is equitable if a person who works harder and who has more ability is rewarded with a higher salary, as long

as that person initially had no better or worse an opportunity to succeed. Thus, although many people believe that equality of opportunity is the gold standard in terms of fairness, unfortunately many perceive racial inequality to be consistent with this interpretation of egalitarianism. They accomplish this by believing that while differential levels of hard work and ability produce inequalities, everyone has genuine equality of opportunity. For example, many mainstream White individuals may not realize the inherent power and influence afforded to their group because of their "normative" status in society. For example in business and politics, opportunities are more plentiful because these are prototypical mainstream institutions. Mainstream Canadians may well cherish equality of opportunity in principle but may not be conscious of the fact that there are social groups in society that do not enjoy equal access to all opportunities.

In fact, Kluegel and Smith (1986) have shown that people only need to perceive that there are *some* opportunities for advancement in society for them to believe that people achieve the success they "rightly" deserve. Unfortunately, the mere illusion of equal opportunity seems to make people oblivious to systemic inequality. Specifically, advantaged people believe that individual ability and hard work can actually produce opportunities, and then, paradoxically, argue that it is the responsibility of the disadvantaged individual to make up for any systemic barriers that confront them. This paradoxical reasoning places the burden of responsibility on the wrong agent: instead, systemic barriers should be fought at the mainstream societal level, not the individual level. This is why programs designed to promote social equality, by providing more and better education for disadvantaged racial groups, can produce unwanted effects. Specifically, this interpretation of egalitarianism points to disadvantaged group members as having the personal responsibility to increase their capacity for hard work and ability through education, with no consideration for the systemic discrimination they will have to face. Forgotten in the process is that society needs to be restructured so as to "level the playing field."

If the social system does not provide for a level playing field, then disadvantaged group members will always suffer from inequality, despite their best efforts to increase their personal skills and abilities through education. For instance, in their study on the advancement of visible minorities in contemporary Canada, Hou, and Balakrishnan (1996) conclude that, "most visible minorities receive less income return from their educational and occupational achievement…. Therefore, income inequality on the basis of qualifications is most probably related to discrimination" (p. 324). Clearly, their higher levels of education did not make up for the unequal playing field. Thus, one main challenge with the equality of opportunity interpretation of egalitarianism is the difficulty associated with perceiving the many layers of discrimination (individual, social, institutional, and systemic). On the surface, society seems to be based on a straightforward meritocracy: most individuals who achieve higher education will receive a higher socio-economic status. However, the danger resides in the layers underneath, where systemic advantage and systemic discrimination may operate.

In light of these observations, it is clear that holding an equality of opportunity interpretation of egalitarianism does not necessarily produce feelings of collective guilt with regard to racial inequality. Thus, advocating the virtues of equality of opportunity to the wider public, in the hopes of promoting social justice, may be destined to fail: it will not guarantee that individuals will perceive racial inequality as being unfair. In our program of research, we found that whether or not participants highly endorsed an equality of opportunity interpretation of egalitarianism had no influence on whether they would experience higher levels of collective guilt and, thereby, support compensation for Aboriginal people. This finding arose in the context of a series of experiments (Caouette & Taylor, 2005, 2006), where we presented information to White Canadians students about racial inequality between Aboriginal people and White Canadians in the form of essays from a reputable journal. In these experiments, we measured participants' agreement with different interpretations of egalitarianism based on a scale used by Monteith and Walters (1998) in order to explore which egalitarian belief (individualism, equality of opportunity, social responsibility) would most strongly predict feelings of collective guilt and compensation for Aboriginal people.

The basic question we address, then, is what interpretation of egalitarianism might be related to collective guilt? Our research supports the conclusion that a belief in the equality of opportunity interpretation of egalitarianism fails to produce collective guilt when it is imbued with individualism, and this interpretation was endorsed by a majority of our White Canadian participants. But collective guilt did emerge when an interpretation of egalitarianism in terms of equality of opportunity was coupled with a belief in social responsibility. Unfortunately, this interpretation was less likely to be endorsed by our White Canadian participants. Firstly, we found that an underlying belief in individualism leads to a passive interpretation of equality of opportunity, as people are reluctant to sacrifice their feeling of individual freedom in order to change the social system. For example, an individual can endorse equality of opportunity in principle, but may not feel compelled to assure its actualization for everyone else in society. Even though some individuals recognize that not everyone has the same initial chance to succeed, they may still not believe that they should be responsible to actually assure equality of opportunity for all.

Our analysis is corroborated by an independent survey that found that 63 percent of a representative sample of Canadians agreed with the statement, "while equality of opportunity is important for all Canadians, it's not really the government's job to guarantee it" (Reitz & Breton, 1994, p. 64). Furthermore, Kluegel and Smith (1986) have shown that many people do not perceive racism and inequality as a systemic problem, but rather, as the problem of a few bigoted individuals. Accordingly, most people feel no personal responsibility for group inequality, and they feel no need to engage in, or support, systemic actions to alleviate it. Participants in our study might have experienced low levels of collective guilt, despite endorsing a belief in equality of opportunity, because they did not feel that Canadian society, or they themselves personally, should be responsible for taking action to resolve what

they perceive to be only occasional inequality between mainstream Canadians and Aboriginal people.

A second implication of individualism is exemplified by how many participants in our study seemed to legitimize inequality by emphasizing the importance of individual responsibility. As one participant expressed it:

> I agree that in the past Euro-Canadians have exploited Aboriginal peoples by taking their land, but I can't help feeling that they brought their problems upon themselves somewhat as well. I work hard, and am working hard so that I can live well in the future. A good life cannot be handed to you on a silver platter. Aboriginal people have to take responsibility for themselves.

It follows, then, that Aboriginal peoples are personally responsible for their socioeconomic disadvantage. In the words of Applebaum (1997), "this individualist understanding of moral responsibility functions to protect the privileges of certain groups of people and absolves them of any personal responsibility for their involvement in systemic oppressions such as racism" (p. 409).

Some White Canadians go even further by maintaining the belief that Aboriginal people are currently afforded even more opportunities than mainstream Canadians. They believe that Aboriginal people have special tax breaks that mainstream Canadians do not enjoy, and that Aboriginal people have all of their higher education paid for. These White Canadians are not likely to experience any collective guilt because of their belief that Aboriginal people are, in today's reality, actually in an advantaged position. One of our participants was surprised to learn that Aboriginal people are still disadvantaged today: "The suggestion that Aboriginal people are still in unfair conditions mixes me all up. I believed that Aboriginal people were receiving extra money all the time because of their ancestors. I think they are even better off than non-Aboriginal people." This belief is linked to an individualist understanding of responsibility. These mainstream Canadians believe that because Aboriginal people are provided with more opportunities than mainstream Canadians, it then follows that Aboriginal people are to be blamed personally for their disadvantage. As one of our participants claimed: "Aboriginals are not forcibly confined to reserves, but are free to be a part of mainstream Canadian society, just as everyone else, yet they are still granted many special rights. Thus they have all the opportunities of any other Canadian plus opportunities which are exclusive to their race." This excerpt clearly exemplifies the belief that Aboriginal people are provided with inordinate opportunities, that they are not disadvantaged by any external barriers and, accordingly, that their potential for achievement is maximized.

In this section, we have reviewed many interpretations of egalitarianism, and our research shows that none of them, taken individually or in combination, seems to be associated with collective guilt. In our research (Caouette & Taylor, 2005, 2006), there was only one interpretation of egalitarianism that did predict higher feelings of collective guilt. Only those participants who endorsed an interpretation of egalitarianism that emphasized *social responsibility,* while valuing the ideal of

99

equality of opportunity, had elevated levels of collective guilt. Such people would strongly agree with statements such as: "The economic system of our country has to be drastically changed to bring about equality of opportunity," "We should be willing to pay higher taxes in order to provide more assistance to the poor," or "Every person should give some of his/her time for the good of his/her town or country." In addition, they would highly disagree with statements such as "Maybe some minority groups do get bad treatment, but it's no business of mine," "A person does not need to worry about other people if only he/she looks after him/herself," or "I have never been interested in thinking up idealistic schemes to improve society" (all items from Starrett, 1996).

In a surprising way, we have found that promoting the value of equality in our society may not necessarily produce more racial inequality. One recurring challenge is that a majority of individuals maintain a narrow understanding of egalitarianism, one that is generally very individualistic and passive in nature. To achieve social equality, we will need to promote an understanding of egalitarianism that emphasizes social responsibility and socially proactive attitudes. In terms of fostering group equality, we need to examine fundamental Canadian values and determine what aspect of equality is typically emphasized. We argue that usually social justice efforts focus on the idea of equality of opportunity, but our results suggest that we should be emphasizing an interpretation of equality that highlights social responsibility, in order to offset the damaging interpretation of equality of opportunity that is usually coloured with individualism.

DISCUSSION

"People generally think of themselves as egalitarian, but some people may construe egalitarianism in a way that can coexist comfortably with prejudice tendencies" (Monteith & Walters, 1998, p. 189). Our research suggests that, even though most White Canadians highly value egalitarianism as a justice principle, most construe egalitarianism in both a passive and individualistic way. This passive and individualistic interpretation of egalitarianism allows them to cope comfortably with racial inequality and escape any feelings of collective guilt.

Clearly, Canadian society will need to go beyond an individualistic interpretation and understanding of responsibility, such as "Be responsible to yourself!" in order to achieve far greater social equality. Espousing the values of equality and fairness, or more specifically, endorsing the ideal of equality of opportunity, will not necessarily produce a society where group inequality is minimized. We need to go beyond systematically believing that people are personally responsible and in control of outcomes in their life. We need to acknowledge that external contingencies shape people's lives, and that systemic and structural factors beyond a person's immediate control can limit opportunities for achievement. It is difficult to accept that systemic barriers limit opportunities for certain groups (including racially disadvantaged groups) and, by the same token, advantage others (including White mainstream Canadians). However, it is

only by recognizing those limits that we will be able to change them. The rejection of an individualist understanding of responsibility is a necessary first step.

It would also seem to be important to shift our focus away from *attributing blame* and towards *taking responsibility*. Individuals often deny collective guilt by claiming that they are not personally responsible for what their ancestors did in the past, and that, therefore, they should not be blamed for their ancestors' actions, or the present consequences. However, "to say that it is not our fault does not relieve us of responsibility" (Tatum, 2000, p. 80). One does not necessarily need to have directly caused harm to another person in order to feel responsible for helping that person: "once we think about responsibility as having a duty to respond to one who has been harmed, the scope of responsibility widens considerably" (Radzik, 2001, p. 461). Put simply, we don't necessarily need to feel blameworthy in order to take responsibility for the well being of other individuals. Such a duty to respond may closely relate to feelings of guilt, but genuine care and concern for the other remains the core motive. Guilt comes from a sense of duty to respond.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. We have identified different ways to conceptualize egalitarianism. How do you define equality? How do you think other Canadians define equality? Would their definitions differ based on their race, class, gender, or ethnicity? Why?
2. Have you ever experienced or witnessed collective White guilt? If so, in which contexts? Can you recall how you coped with your guilt? Would you react differently after having read this chapter? If you have never experienced or witnessed White guilt, how did the present chapter make you feel?
3. Do you believe that most White Canadians would likely support actions to establish racial equality because they want to absolve themselves from White guilt, or because they genuinely care about the plight of disadvantaged groups, or a bit of both?
4. Besides White guilt, what other motivations do you think White Canadians could acquire that would lead them to support the interests of disadvantaged racial groups? How do those other motivations compare with White guilt?
5. Do you think that being motivated to fight racial inequality as a result of White guilt is necessarily a sign of an ill-guided motive? In which instances do you think White guilt could be beneficial, and, conversely, harmful?

NOTE

REFERENCES

Allahar, A. L., & Côté, J. E. (1998). *Richer and poorer: The structure of inequality in Canada.* Toronto, ON: James Lorimer & Company.

Applebaum, B. (1997). Good liberal intentions are not enough! Racism, intentions and moral responsibility. *Journal of Moral Education*, *26*, 409–421.

Barkan, E. (2000). *The guilt of nations: Restitution and negotiating historical injustices.* New York, NY: Norton.

Barlow, J. K. (2003). Examining HIV/AIDS among the Aboriginal population in Canada in the post-residential school era. *Aboriginal Healing Foundation: Research Series*. Retrieved from http://www.ahf.ca/assets/pdf/english/hiv_legacy.pdf#search=%22residential%20school%20aboriginal%20aids%22

Barrett, S. R. (1987). *Is God a racist? The right wing in Canada*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Branscombe, N. R., & Doosje, B. (Eds.). (2004). *Collective guilt: International perspectives.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Branscombe, N. R., & Miron, A. M. (2004). Interpreting the in-group's negative actions toward another group: Emotional reactions to appraised harm. In C. W. Leach & L. Z. Tiedens (Eds.), *The social life of emotions* (pp. 314–335). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Branscombe, N. R., Doosje, B., & McGarty, C. (2002). Antecedents and consequences of collective guilt. In D. M. Mackie & E. R. Smith (Eds.), *From prejudice to intergroup emotions: Differentiated reactions to social groups* (pp. 49–66). Philadelphia, PA: Psychology Press.

Caouette, J., & Taylor, D. M. (2005, July). *"Don't blame me for what my ancestors did!" Factors associated with the experience of collective guilt regarding Aboriginal Peoples*. Paper presented at the 14th General Meeting of the European Association of Experimental Social Psychology, Würzburg, Bavaria, Germany.

Caouette, J., & Taylor, D. M. (2006, June). *A social psychological analysis of mainstream Canadians' attitudes towards compensation Aboriginal Peoples for the harmful effects of their internal colonization*. Paper presented at the 67th Annual Convention of the Canadian Psychological Association, Calgary, AB, Canada.

Colavincenzo, M. (2003). *"Trading magic for fact," fact for magic: Myth and mythologizing in postmodern Canadian historical fiction*. New York, NY: Rodopi.

Curtis, J., Grabb, E., & Guppy, N. (Eds.). (1999). *Social inequality in Canada: Patterns, problems, and policies*. Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon.

Devine, P. G., Monteith, M. J., Zuwerink, J., & Elliot, A. J. (1991). Prejudice with and without compunction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *60*, 817–830.

Doosje, B., Branscombe, N. R., Spears, R., & Manstead, A. S. R. (1998). Guilty by association: When one's group has a negative history. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *75*, 872–886.

Feagin, J. R., Vera, H., & Batur, P. (2001). *White racism: The basics*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Feldman, S. (1999). Economic values and inequality. In J. P. Robinson & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Measures of political attitudes: Measures of social psychological attitudes* (Vol. 2, pp. 159–201). San Diego, CA: Academic.

Henry, F., Tator, C., Mattis, W., & Rees, T. (2006). *The colour of democracy: Racism in Canadian society.* Toronto, ON: Nelson.

Kluegel, J. R., & Smith, E. R. (1986). *Beliefs about inequality: Americans' views of what is and what ought to be*. New York, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

Hou, F., & Balakrishnan, T. R. (1996). The integration of visible minorities in contemporary society. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, *21*, 307–326.

Kugler, K., & Jones, W. H. (1992). On conceptualizing and assessing guilt. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *62*, 318–327.

Lerner, M. J. (1980). *The belief in a just world: A fundamental delusion*. New York, NY: Plenum.

Li, P. S. (Ed.). (1999). *Race and ethnic relations in Canada.* Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press.

Loewen, J. W. (1995). *Lies my teacher told me: Everything your American history book got wrong.* New York, NY: New Press.

Menzies, C. R. (1999). First Nations, inequality, and the legacy of colonialism. In J. Curtis, E. Grabb, & N. Guppy (Eds.), *Social inequality in Canada: Patterns, problems, and policies* (pp. 236–244). Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon.

Milloy, J. S. (1999). *A national crime: The Canadian government and the residential school system.* Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press.

Mischel, W., Cantor, N., & Feldman, S. (1996). Principles of self-regulation: The nature of willpower and self-control. In E. T. Higgins & A. W. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (pp. 329–360). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Monteith, M. J., & Walters, G. L. (1998). Egalitarianism, moral obligation, and prejudiced-related personal standards. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *24*, 186–199.

Ponting, J. R. (Ed.). (1997). *First Nations in Canada: Perspectives on opportunity, empowerment, and self-determination*. Whitby, ON: McGraw-Hill Ryerson.

Plant, E. A., & Devine, P. G. (1998). Internal and external motivation to respond without prejudice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *75*, 811–832.

Radzik, L. (2001). Collective responsibility and duties to respond. *Social Theory and Practice*, *27*, 455–471.

Reitz, J. G. (1988). Less racial discrimination in Canada, or simply less racial conflict: Implications of comparisons with Britain. *Canadian Public Policy*, *16*, 424–441.

Reitz, J. G., & Breton, R. (1994). *The illusion of difference: Realities of ethnicity in Canada and the United States.* Toronto, ON: C.D. Howe Institute.

Rothenberg, P. S. (2002). *White privilege: Essential readings on the other side of racism.* New York, NY: Worth.

Satzewich, V. (Ed.). (1998). *Racism and social inequality in Canada.* Toronto, ON: Thompson Educational.

Starrett, R. H. (1996). Assessment of global social responsibility. *Psychological Reports*, *78*, 535–554.

Steele, S. (1989). The recoloring of campus life: Student racism, academic pluralism, and the end of a dream. *Harper's Magazine*, *278*, 47–55.

Steele, S. (1991). *The content of our character: A new vision of race in America.* New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

Steele, S. (2002). The age of white guilt and the disappearance of the black individual. *Harper's Magazine*, *305*, 33–42.

Swim, J. K., & Miller, D. L. (1999). White guilt: Its antecedents and consequences for attitudes toward affirmative action. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *25*, 500–514.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/ Cole.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7–24). Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall.

Tangney, J. P., & Salovey, P. (1999). Problematic social emotions: Shame, guilt, jealousy and envy. In R. M. Kowalski & M. R. Leary (Eds.), *The social psychology of emotional and behavioral problems* (pp. 167–195). Washington, DC: APA Press.

Tatum, B. D. (1997). *Why are all the black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Tatum, B. D. (2000). Defining racism: "Can we talk?" In M. Adams, W. Blumenfell, R. Castaneda, H. Hackman, M. Peters, & X. Zuniga (Eds.), *Readings for diversity and social justice: An anthology on racism, sexism, anti-semitism, heterosexism, classism and ableism* (pp. 79–82). New York, NY: Routledge.

Taylor, D. M. (2002). *The quest for identity: From minority groups to generation Xers*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Taylor, D. M., & Wright, S. C. (2002). Do Aboriginal students benefit from education in their heritage language? Results from a ten-year program of research in Nunavik. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, *22*, 141–164.

Tyler, T. R. (2001). Social justice. In R. Brown & S. L. Gaertner (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of social psychology: Intergroup processes* (pp. 344–364). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Wright, S. C., & Taylor, D. M. (1995). Identity and the language of the classroom: Investigating the impact of heritage versus second language instruction on personal and collective self-esteem. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *87*, 241–252.