

1 in 100,000

By Nathan Davis

Last week's featured article in The Buzz was written by Fred Bloom and titled "On the Resignation of Ian Buruma". Bloom's piece concerns gender dynamics, sex and sexual abuse, and what Bloom regards as the casualties of "the commercialization of our culture". It specifically deals with an essay by accused (and criminally acquitted) abuser Jian Ghomeshi in which Ghomeshi describes his womanizing behavior and expresses some remorse and more self-pity. Bloom writes: "The deepest sadness [that one feels in reading Ghomeshi's essay] is when one realizes how unlikely it is that a man in our day would ever know what Levin [a character in Anna Karenina] knew, would ever find himself transported into that plane of existence in which another person becomes more to you than you are to yourself."

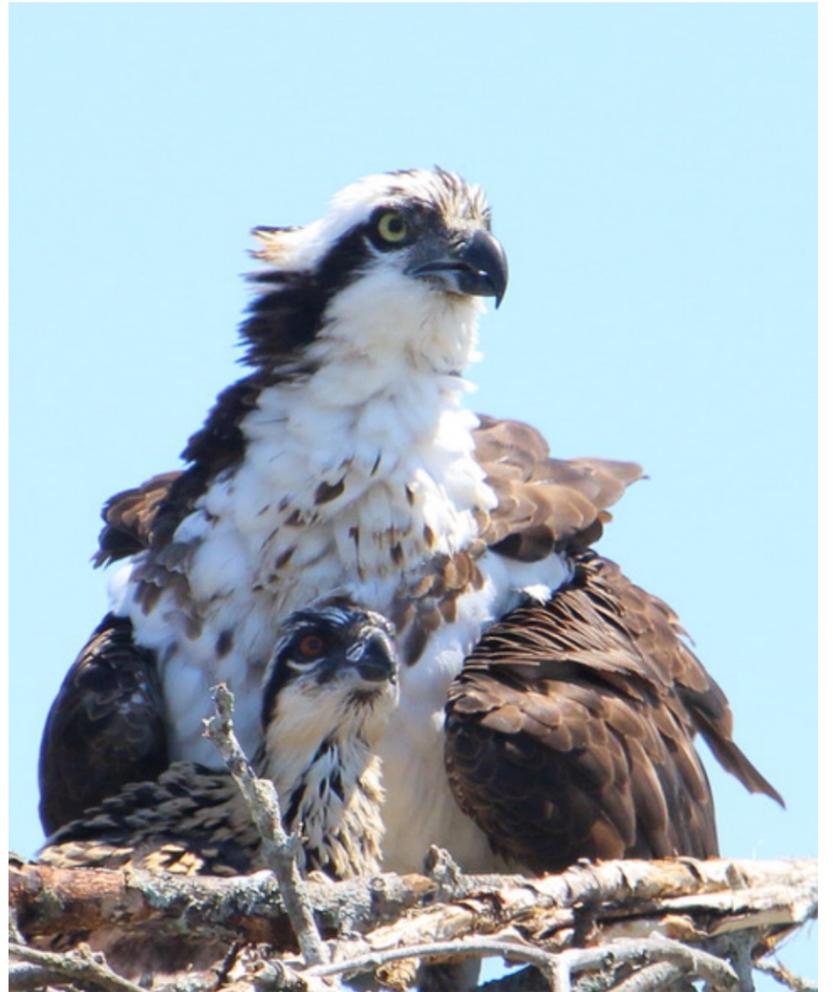
I appreciate Bloom's multiple contributions to The Buzz, but he is well wide of the mark here. Is it really the case that the deepest sadness of reading Ghomeshi's essay is that a man might not attain a transcendental experience of love? It's not — for example — that a self-described "player, creep, cad, Lothario" admittedly and repeatedly mistreated many women? Or how many other players, creeps, cads, and Lotharios (and worse) who have not been subject to public scrutiny are still treating woman? It's not that we live and labor every day under (or complicit in) structures of oppression that we have so internalized as to become part of the unremarked background of our lives? I think that we might draw better lessons.

Which brings me to the Kavanaugh hearings. According to the 2010 Census, the United States is approximately 72.4% white. According to the CIA World Factbook, the male-to-female ratio in the United States is approximately 0.97-to-1. It's difficult to find reliable statistics on nonbinary gender identification, but cobbling together data from several sources, I estimate that around 350,000 of the United States's approximately 330,000,000 people identify as neither male nor female. Altogether, therefore, approximately 35% of Americans are white males. (Take these numbers with a grain of salt: I am not a demographer, and I am inexpertly assembling public data.)

Consider now the eleven white males that comprise the entirety of the Republican side of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Given the data above, I calculate that the odds of a random sample of eleven Americans being all white males is approximately 1 in 100,000, or one-thousandth of one percent. To put this idea another way, if you randomly assembled 100,000 panels of eleven Americans, it is most likely that only a single panel would look like the Republicans of the Senate Judiciary Committee: all members of a minority group (35%!) that has held most political power throughout American history. This is an absurdity — a vulgar retort to the idea of representative democracy.

During the Kavanaugh hearings, we watched this demographically-improbable group judge and weigh the testimony of one of their own against that of an accuser in the context of a proceeding to determine the direction of our highest court, perhaps for decades. How can anyone possibly think that such a situation is in keeping with the generally agreed-upon American ideal of equality before the law? I invite you to imagine a panel of eleven black women conducting the hearings, and to imagine the public reaction.

It is damningly obvious that our federal representatives are not actually representative, but this situation and that of serial misconduct like Jian Ghomeshi's are not so far apart. In both cases, people with power or money or status (often the same thing) simply matter more than people without. I mean "matter more" in an ethical sense: we assign their lives and well-being greater value. This seems to be a general human trait, though it also seems to be worse in privileged groups. Fighting it — especially when you are a member of a privileged group — requires compassion, humility, and self-reflection, but it also requires a belief in the possibility of improvement. I think that human history in general and American history in particular support such a belief, but that is a topic for another Buzz!



Rockland resident osprey, photo by Alan Athearn

Buzz Assignment: *Battle of the Sexes*

by Glen Birbeck

Ah yes, the battle of the sexes! Was that the news this past week? Was it the classic battle of him and her? A center ring spectacle of "he said she said" played as millions watched? The histrionics on both sides fodder for one of "Saturday Night Live's" best send-ups. Was it anything new really? I don't think so. It is in a new context, the culture of 2018. A USA which has shifted slightly in its social reality. Contrasts were drawn with another Senate hearing in 1992. Another time with another candidate for the Supreme Court and another accuser. We are revisiting the same subject at decades long intervals. Like a planet in a wide elliptical orbit we brush against the hot sun briefly before we head out into the cooler regions of cultural norm. The norm of "Boys will be boys". The genes that got them into the right schools expect to be propagated and testosterone is doing what it was designed to do. The shame mechanism is trotted out to protect the powerful from the weak should they mention any indiscretion. The FBI was asked to discover the truth - an impossible task. Difficult enough the day after the party in question and impossible thru the fog of 35 years. Never the less tens of millions of people did decide on what the truth must be. How so many people managed what the FBI could not is another aspect of the culture. That the truth is must be what supports the outcome I want. What is the outcome driving all this? It is a court precedent called "Roe v Wade" the rights of a woman to an abortion. The political right and the President expect, in fact are betting a pile of political poker chips, that once on the court this candidate would vote to overturn that precedent. In the old testament are found many stories of man vs woman. Samson and Delilah for example. Samson is powerful and important in his society. His power derives from God thus his dominance is good and natural. The bad guys in the story, the Philistines want to weaken him but can't seem to manage it. That is until he falls for a Philistine woman. Thru her the Philistines bring him down. A woman costs him his God given power,

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