

Real ____ would never do that!

By [Ryan Dueck](#)

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I just returned from a glorious five days spent motorcycling through Washington and Oregon. We crossed the border into the United States last Sunday and then headed over the Cascade Mountains, wound our way down to northern Oregon, then meandered through the central part of the state, before heading back north up the Oregon Coast, and catching a ferry back to Vancouver Island from Port Angeles, WA last night. All in all, a fantastic trip. We saw some absolutely spectacular scenery, from the majestic snow-capped Cascades to the rolling farm country of central Oregon, to rainforests, to lush forests along the Columbia River, to the beauty of winding roads along the Pacific Ocean. Simply incredible.

And, of course, as good Canadians, we made sure to find a pub somewhere on Monday and Wednesday to catch games six and seven of the Stanley Cup Finals between the Vancouver Canucks and the Boston Bruins. Both times, we would have been better off staying on our bikes as the Canucks were abysmal and embarrassing in their [capitulation to the Bruins](#). Even more embarrassing than the play of the Canucks themselves, as you have no doubt heard by now, was the [behaviour of some Vancouver residents](#) who spent the hours following the game seven loss rioting, burning, looting, destroying, fighting, and who knows what else in a display of petulant and boorish behaviour such as our country does not often see on such a scale.

Unsurprisingly, the social media world has been abuzz since Wednesday night with condemnations, explanations, and apologies pouring in from a variety of sources (two of the better ones, in my biased opinion, were written by friends of mine [here](#) and [here](#)). I have to admit, my first response to hearing the news of the riots

back home, was something bordering on apathy. Perhaps it's because I am not a native British Columbian and don't have a strong sense of personal identity tied up with the city of Vancouver. Perhaps it's because I don't really like the Canucks. Or, perhaps it's because people behaving badly is rarely surprising. For all of its self-understanding as a paradisiacal city that is the envy of the world, Vancouver is, last time I checked, populated by *human beings*, and human beings, wherever they live, are prone to stupid and destructive behaviour—especially when you throw 100 000 of them together into a single place, add a generous mix of alcohol, testosterone, and media-fuelled tribalism centred on a sports team. The only thing shocking about Wednesday night, from my perspective, was that people were shocked by it.

As I sifted through my clogged blog aggregator back at home last night, I couldn't help but notice how desperate people were to convince others (and themselves?) that the Wednesday rioters were not "real" Vancouverites. As I reflected upon this theme, it occurred to me that, structurally, these apologies for the city of Vancouver were virtually identical to what I came across researching the new atheism for my masters thesis a few years back.

Apologists for God/religion often attempted to explain away violent behaviour perpetrated in the name of God/religion as not in any way motivated by "real" religion. "Real Christians" would never do some of the atrocious things that they have been charged with historically. Similarly, atheists tried to explain away the behaviour of people like Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, etc as not "real" atheism (in fact—hooray!—why don't we just declare that the behaviour of these tyrants was, in fact, a kind of *religious* response!). "Real atheists," like "real Christians" (and "real Vancouverites, presumably), were virtuous, kind, progressive, rational, compassionate, and decent.

It's an understandable strategy, after all. If people we are identified with do things we don't like or that embarrass us and our group, we simply define them as not *really* belonging to our group. Whatever else might be said, it certainly has

simplicity to commend it as a strategy. After all, it's much easier to declare people who behave badly as *illegitimate* than to say that their behaviour is incongruous with our group's values, or what our group aspires to be. But, of course, declaring people not to be real ____ is never entirely successful. "Real ____" sometimes do really bad things, whether we want them to or not. It doesn't make them less "real" or legitimate members of the group, it just means that the group includes people who behave badly.

In truth, what we are saying when we say that "real ____" don't do x or y is that we really, *really* wish that these people who represent us, however tenuously the connection, would behave better. The word "real" is a synonym for "good" or "the kind I like." The statement "real Vancouverites" (or "real Christians" or "real atheists") wouldn't do x or y turns out to be little more than an expression of our ideals for the group we belong to combined with, perhaps, a thinly veiled claim that we and people like us are the true exemplars of what "real ____" are like. But that's a bit more complicated, and not as easy to fit into a headline. And it doesn't make us feel as virtuous. It does, however, have the benefit of more closely resembling the truth.

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