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Religious Settler Identity: The Complex Relationship of Reconciliation and Religion

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Abstract. *Objectives.* This qualitative research explores the narratives of three Canadian Catholic and Christian post-secondary students and their complex relationship of reconciliation and religion. The central research question being: What are the nuanced ways in which Indigenous history and culture was taught or excluded in the Canadian education system, and how does this affect the relationship towards truth and reconciliation, as well as spiritual relationships for Catholic/Christian post-secondary students? *Methods.* Both anti-racism and decolonization frameworks created a foundational lens as within the context of the Canadian education system, they inform how colonization and colonial practices have/continue to influence curriculum. A narrative methodology was used, focusing on storytelling, the individual, and uniqueness of experiences, highlighting both the individual experience while sharing common themes. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted. I included an Indigenous faculty consultation group with three Indigenous professors to help guide my research. *Results* It highlights the stories of three Catholic and Christian post-secondary students, exemplifying their complex relationships with reconciliation throughout their faith journey. Through analysis of interviews, themes of religious settler identity and Indigenizing and decolonizing education are discussed. *Conclusion.* This research challenges academia and institutionalized conceptions of reconciliation, decolonization, and Indigenization, emphasizing the importance of the effects that curriculum changes and the implementation school practices has on Catholic and Christian students. It explores religious settler identity as a complex ongoing journey of self-discovery, challenge, and education that portrays the unique responsibility of religious settlers' accountability in reconciliation.

Keywords: Reconciliation, Indigenous, Decolonizing Education, Catholic, Christian, Open Access.

Introduction

In the journey of truth and reconciliation, truth is truly needed before reconciliation; as to work toward true healing, the truth must be acknowledged and honoured. After the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, amongst the various calls to action were calls towards education for reconciliation. This research explores the nuanced ways in which Indigenous history and culture was taught or excluded, and how that affects reconciliation and religious relationships. As post-secondary students enter professional disciplines and become the catalysts for change, Indigenous education must be prioritized.

My personal epistemology implicates my research because unlearning, questioning, and exploring my faith has resulted in forming my research topic. I identify as a cisgender, able-bodied, bisexual woman who grew up in a middle-class Roman Catholic Filipino family. Exploring further, during the American occupation, harmful anti-Black and anti-Indigenous sentiments were instilled by calling Filipino people the n-word and ‘savage black bodies’ (Balce, 2006 p. 25; Kramer, 2006, as cited in de Leon, 2012 p. 386). I believe that unfortunately as a way of survival, my people have perpetuated the same racism and hatred that was brought upon us to differentiate themselves so further harm would not continue. Thus being socialized in this way and having to unlearn it has been extremely difficult. However, there is an evident tension between honouring cultural roots and seeking to adapt to Western ideals that align with the Model Minority Myth; whereby Asians have been perceived as successfully adapting and integrating into Western and neo-liberal ideals (Maclear, 1994; Pon, 2000 as cited in Coloma, 2013). The danger of believing this myth of being the superior minority, is that we become tools of Whiteness used to subjugate other racialized groups. Further, Chilisa (2012) mentions a colonization of the mind that becomes normalized/after hundreds of years of domination; as such, it becomes embedded in society. Many of our people are seeking to reclaim and relearn our culture, however much is still rooted in practices that were taught to us.

Upon discussing with other colleagues in the faith, this conflict and questioning has become a more prevalent discussion further prompting my inquiry for this research. It is a response to various epistemological issues I have identified and others have echoed. Thus this research is a qualitative research study that highlights the stories of three Catholic and Christian post-secondary students, exemplifying their complex relationships with reconciliation throughout their faith journey. This research challenges academia and institutionalized conceptions of reconciliation, decolonization, and Indigenization, emphasizing the importance of the effects that curriculum changes and the implementation school practices have on Catholic and Christian students. For the purposes of this research, the following can be found in Lavallee’s (2020) work: reconciliation is defined as “a restoration of friendly relations (p. 130), decolonization is “the action or process of a state withdrawing power from a former colony,

leaving it independent” (p. 129), and Indigenization is “a term used to describe incorporating Indigenous worldview, knowledge, and perspectives” (p. 130). Specifically within this context of academia, colonialism “acknowledges the privileging of Western-dominant knowledge and the minimizing and discrediting of Indigenous knowledge” (Lavallee, 2020, p. 130). This paper explores Religious Settler Identity as a complex ongoing journey of self-discovery, challenge, and most importantly education, that portrays the unique responsibility of religious settlers accountability in reconciliation. It is also important to note that the words Indigenous and Aboriginal will be utilized interchangeably; within the literature, Aboriginal is used in reference to specific Indigenous groups in Canada including the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was first established in 2008 and issued a report that summarized the findings and discussions meant to document the experiences of Aboriginals students who had survived the residential school system (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015a). Ninety-four Calls to Action were developed to demand government intervention (Truth and Reconciliation, 2015b). Throughout the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a significant topic of discussion was education, recounting details of the realities of residential school life and assimilative practices. It also reveals the systemic and institutional discrimination towards Aboriginals students, portraying the educational funding inequities for all levels of education (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015a).

The Calls to Action (2015b) are a collection of demands on the government and other institutions, such as the church and education system, in hopes of working towards true reconciliation and healing. Below is a table of the four calls to action that pertain to education for reconciliation.

Education for Reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015)

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.
- ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
- iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
- iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

64. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.

65. We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation

The four calls above exemplify the evident need for concrete actions that implement Indigenous history and knowledge into the Canadian education system (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015b). The calls include curriculum changes, elimination of funding inequities, and the importance of Indigenous collaboration, ensuring that their input is prioritized throughout all processes and procedures from conceptualization to implementation (Truth and Reconciliation, 2015b).

David MacDonald (2020) explores both settler and Indigenous critiques of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, discussing both perspectives and arguments. In order for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to portray the truth and promote reconciliation properly, it must have the space for both voices to be heard (MacDonald, 2020). He mentions that, "One of the overarching and yet unspoken assumptions seemed to be that things were better now, and that Indigenous peoples had

to move on; the past was a different country (MacDonald, 2020, p. 166).” Settler perspectives lack the understanding of why the report was created, because its purpose was not to present various perspectives of residential schools but instead give voice to the student survivors whose stories were ignored and hidden. Contrastingly, Indigenous critics, including anthropologists Audra Simpson, Glen Coulthard, and Leanne Simpson, mention that although it is imperative to portray survivor narratives, the way the information was presented was not done well. They state that, “the Commission was too government-controlled, too weak, too focused on victimisation and healing, and insufficiently turned towards promoting Indigenous rights (MacDonald, 2020, p. 166-166).” Their further critique was, “...of Truth and Reconciliation Commission public events as a spectacle, where Indigenous pain and victimisation were on display for largely white settler audiences to consume as entertainment (MacDonald, 2020, p. 167)” because ethical practices within the report processes could have been done better.

Canadian & Ontario Education System

Due to the nature of the education curriculum being the respective responsibility of each province and territory (Government of Canada, 2022), the implementation of Indigenous history has varied across Canada. The Ontario Government (2021 p. 1) has stated their commitment to improving the education sector in partnership with Indigenous Nations which includes, “closing the achievement gap between Indigenous students and all students, and increasing every student’s knowledge and awareness of Indigenous histories, cultures, perspectives and contributions.” Within elementary and secondary schools, subjects such as Native Languages were introduced and changes to History can be seen (Government of Ontario, 2021). Further, the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework outlines the government support of Indigenous students and their learning, identifying two challenges to be addressed by 2016: the need to improve achievement, and to close the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Government of Ontario, 2021).

Frank Deer (2022) also discusses the post-Truth and Reconciliation Commission era sharing that despite implementing subjects such as treaties and culture, which of course are important aspects of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action, these should only be a starting point for education (Deer, 2022). He also mentions how there is a, “need to address how reconciliation may be approached in a manner that departs from the frequent, singular focus upon just the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action (Deer, 2022, p. 4).” Although the various calls to action are significant healing aspects, other nuances and issues must also be addressed and considered.

Colonial History and Evangelization

Colonial history and evangelization have undoubtedly intertwined with the residential school system and overall the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Colonialism can be understood as, “The practice of domination involving political and economic subjugation of one group over another” (Lavallee, 2020, p. 130). The residential school system was a product of the colonial mission, utilized as a tool by the Canadian government to colonize Indigenous populations throughout the country (Morrison, 2014). Religious scholars also mention that specific interpretations of the Bible and its teachings were significantly misinterpreted and instead utilized as a weapon for colonization (Morrison, 2014). Therefore, there is a substantial shift, especially following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to seek to transform and heal missiology in the present by shifting towards the true teaching of religion and purpose of missiology as, “Christianity is both the source of the atrocity and the means to address it (Dube, 2016, p.155).” Evangelization, whether by means of historical brutal military conquest or within this context religious practices, the results were the same, “the destruction of a people and their way of life (Andraos, 2017; 2018, p. 297).” This implicates historically how Christianity and Catholicism viewed what it means to be human (Slabodsky, 2017, as cited in Robinson, 2019), and by their dehumanizing practices in turn whom they deemed inhuman. Thus, many Catholic Canadians struggled and are still struggling to come to terms with the truth of what had happened within the residential schools (Andraos, 2019) and how to navigate their faith moving forward.

There is also exploration of church repentance: how it can be approached and what it looks like in practice. There is a specific discrepancy however, in that the church confesses their sins in regards to the residential school system, but not claiming and taking ownership of these sins (Flanagan, 2014, as cited in Robinson, 2019). There has been a creation of the theology of apology whereby the church begins to reconcile apparent realities of residential schools which create a systemic silence (Robinson, 2019). Theologians must then ask the critical question: “How can theology work alongside the churches and the broader society, by supporting the emergence of a praxis of decolonization? (Roussel, 2017, as cited in Robinson, 2019).” Finally, Winkler (2004, as cited in Robinson, 2019) gives an example from an Indigenous perspective that according to,

"the ancient dictum articulated by the Iroquois — that no community decision should be enacted without first taking into consideration the effects of the decision on at least the next seven generations ... working towards reconciliation is, in fact, ensuring a future for the seventh generation of both First Nations and Christian communities."

Gaps in Literature

There is an evident shift within the literature that deviates from traditional perspectives which is a significant strength. However, due to the constraints of the scope, the research includes succinctly specific literature for this research, acknowledging that while limited in quantity it is not limited in content. These scholars are part of the catalysts for change within academia, creating the groundwork for future research. In addition, most existing literature on this topic is either from academic and institutional perspectives, focusing on scholars and governments rather than those directly affected and is not representative of everyone. This top-down perspective exemplifies that although it is imperative and systemic change is needed, it negates the importance of knowledge from the community and those directly impacted. It is also important to note, however, through the literature search, as the topic becomes more specific towards reconciliation, it revealed more Indigenous and racialized scholars. Therefore this allows a broader recognition of different perspectives, more “radical” perspectives pushing forward voices of Indigenous and racialized scholars who have been long excluded from academic discourses.

METHODS

All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000 (5). Informed consent was obtained from all participants for being included in the study.

Theoretical Frameworks

Anti-Racism Framework

George Dei (1996) states that anti-racism uses race as the primary lens through which to view and address interlocking oppressions. It is how intersectionality and its positive, negative, and compounding effects can affect individuals and communities differently. The anti-racism framework emerged in Canadian Social work in the 1990s (Pon, Giwa, & Razack, 2016), significantly influenced by, “...the decades of activism by Black-Canadian parents, teachers, students, and community leaders that gave rise to what is called Black education or anti-racism education (Bramble, 2000; Calliste & Dei, 2000; Clarke et al., 2015; Williams, 2005, as cited in Pon, Giwa, & Razack, 2016, p. 42).” Anti-racism and anti-racism education therefore emerged by the resistance of Black folks who paved the way for other communities, creating the foundation of activism and scholarship that changed academia. Further, Dei (2011, p.17) discusses anti-racism education stating that it, “uncovers the ways in which race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, ability, power, and difference influence and are influenced by institutional processes.” Learning about anti-racism is

inherently difficult for students because it calls them to fully implicate themselves within the process, including confronting privileges, being vulnerable, and examining power relations (Ladhani & Sitter, 2020).

Before discussing how I will be utilizing the anti-racism framework within my research, it is imperative to highlight the historical discourses. Sharma and Wright (2008/2009) discuss that Aboriginal peoples' concerns have been excluded, resulting in community members not seeing themselves represented in anti-racism contexts and without People of Colour as allies. This is significant because Indigenous Peoples are not only excluded but are further ostracized from other marginalized groups. Lawrence and Dua (2005) further critique that anti-racism must then consider how colonization has constructed knowledge about racism, and that it must in turn account for Indigenous realities as foundational. As with all frameworks, there is much work to be done.

This framework is incredibly significant for this research, especially given the racist underpinnings of the creation of residential schools. It is evident through the literature that the residential school systems were created based on racist ideologies, and that discrimination still occurs within the Canadian education system. Therefore, this framework within the educational context is imperative.

Decolonization Framework

With respect to my research, I want to first clarify what is meant by decolonization in this context. Especially when discussing education, decolonization can often be associated with tokenization and checkboxes.

Baikie (2009, p. 58) states that Indigenous-centred social work education, "must continue to evolve and to prepare and position Indigenous social workers to decolonize their practices, their identities and their minds in order to recreate Indigenous-centred social work in meaningful and effective ways." Therefore to clarify, a decolonization framework is used to explore the decolonization of language, actions, and epistemology; indicating a journey of unlearning. It is essential to also note that, "... social work education and practice are not free from colonial influence (Sinclair 2004, as cited in Hart 2009, p. 28)"; this also pertains to the Canadian education system. Within my research there is an evident tension in one's pursuit of decolonizing the mind while learning in colonial systems.

Yellow Bird (2008, p. 284) mentions that decolonization involves, "the restoration of cultural practices, thinking, beliefs and values ...[and] the birth and use of new ideas, thinking, technology and lifestyles." The journey of unlearning must also come with action; thus by decolonizing I also emphasize the importance of causing no further harm, and blurring the boundaries that once seemed clear. Thus, decolonization cannot simply be a term used lightly nor can it be a metaphor with a need for protocols that are implemented and real implications that ensures accountability (Koleszar-Green, 2019).

Moreover, I want to preface that within this research paper the choice of heavily utilizing quotations when referencing literature has been a conscious and informed decision. Throughout academia there is a strong push towards paraphrasing when citing literature. I am challenging this notion, because as a researcher I hold immense privilege and power with my words, thus I wish to present their work authentically.

Overall, both frameworks will help to guide my analyses of my research. With critical considerations, both strengths and critiques, these frameworks have guided my understanding and purpose. Especially within the context of the Canadian education system, they inform how colonization and colonial practices have and continue to influence curriculum. They ensured that all aspects of my research are informed of the greater implications that contribute to student learning of Indigenous history and knowledges that are prominent within this research.

Methodology

Through this research study I want to share the experiences of three Catholic/Christian post-secondary students utilizing a narrative methodology that focuses on storytelling, the individual, and uniqueness of experiences while sharing common themes (Creswell, 2012). McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2017, p.196) discuss narrative resistance in social work research and practice, precisely how, “opening these spaces requires a deep consideration of the meanings and power inherent in our invitations, including (but not limited to) the words we mobilize and the spaces we inhabit.” Specifically in language and words, there must be a consideration of the impact and power, and the meanings behind them (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2017) and how it shapes reality (Creswell, 2013), because they have the ability to create space for voices that have yet to be heard. It is imperative to consider researcher responsibility to portray narratives authentically, thus participants were consistently consulted for clarity to properly reflect what they wanted to include in this work.

Data Collection

Through narrative methodology I conducted three semi-structured interviews, utilizing an interview guide. Its purpose was to act as a reference point for essential questions, however organic discussion occurred.

Participants were obtained by posting flyers through social media. Interested participants then emailed self-identifying as Catholic or Christian, and briefly discussed their qualifications for the study and any other concerns/questions before signing the consent form. The interviews were audio-recorded (via Zoom for accessibility - only audio was used and the videos were discarded) and further transcribed. A qualitative analysis of the transcripts was then conducted, uncovering significant themes later explored in the paper. Creswell (2012) mentions that restorying, being able to situate stories within various contexts including historical, cultural and

personal, was a way to create foundational insight that supported analysis and discussion.

My methodology also included forming an Indigenous faculty consultation group, where various consultations occurred to ensure that I critically analyzed my work and how it may impact Indigenous communities. Although I understand that these individuals do not speak for all Indigenous peoples, their different backgrounds and relationships to their communities add insightful value to my research.

Ethical Considerations

There are various ethical considerations for my methodology choice and research overall. There were various risks, given the conduction of primary research; including personal identity, legal, and dual-role. These risks include different aspects such as duty to report, confidentiality, and voluntary explicit consent from participants. I ensured transparency with participants, informing of my limitations and responsibilities as a researcher. I further created a list of support and resources, as well as my contact information should any further issues arise.

Given the nature of narrative methodology, as aforementioned there is evident power towards the researcher and how they choose to present the narratives of their participants (Creswell, 2013). Frazer and Jarldorn (2015) mention that while analyzing narratives, it is essential to pay attention to the researcher's responses to the participants' stories. Due to the scope of research and my personal experiences that inspired this research, I have a unique perspective as an insider-outsider of the community. Humphrey (2007) gives important insight into this perspective stating that through this process the researcher can lose their sense of self. As an insider-outsider researcher, I must ensure that I am clear of my positionality and aware of biases that may influence my interpretation of the data given my personal connection to the research. Baksh (2016, p.647) also mentions the importance of, "[needing] to be aware of how [researchers'] identities and ways of knowing may infuse in... research." Therefore, it is imperative to analyze each transcript in their own light (Frazer and Jarldorn, 2015), ensuring open communication with participants to be co-constructors in this process. My approach is similar to an article by Jenny Gray (2007) who portrayed a split journal with the transcript on one side and the researcher's interpretations on the other.

RESULTS

This paper brings forth the narratives of three Catholic/Christian post-secondary students. Some participants have chosen their pseudonyms, while others have allowed me to choose for them. Identifying information has also been omitted to protect participant safety.

I want to sincerely thank all of my participants for their vulnerability and courage to speak about undoubtedly difficult topics. You have made this experience incredibly memorable.

Introducing Amber, Xavier & Tristan

Amber (she/her) identifies as a cisgender, Polish Catholic woman majoring in Social Work. She attended both Catholic elementary and secondary schools. Xavier (he/him) identifies as cisgender, African Christian/Catholic man majoring Computer Science. He attended public elementary and Catholic high school. Tristan (he/him) identifies as cisgender, African Christian/Catholic man and majoring also in Computer Science. He attended both Catholic elementary and high school, however finished in public school.

Categories & Themes

These findings portray their complex journeys of religion and reconciliation. It is important to note however, that I have consciously chosen to heavily utilize participant quotations as the primary means of portraying findings. This was an informed decision as their expressions and descriptive words that they use to share their stories holds immense power that I wish to emphasize.

Religious Education

For all participants, there was little to no Indigenous education present in their early schooling. Amber shares: “I didn't even get that at any point in my Catholic high schools... So that came for me, as I was already an adult, and as I was already being challenged in my faith, my values, the colonial ideas.” For Tristan, he mentions, “I learned quite a lot about them, the First Nations, the Métis... So, it [was] just about the history.” For Xavier he did not recall receiving much Indigenous education, rather he learned directly from Indigenous peers: “Apart from you know learning deeply about their personal life, I didn't learn more [in school]. Just the school activities”. In post-secondary education, Amber was the only participant who learned about residential schools: “I didn't learn about any Indigenous history until that first year class... I read the whole thing (Truth and Reconciliation Commission). And I was appalled.” Meanwhile Tristan conducted self-education through social media and articles: “I've really gone through some media, social media posts that talked about them, [and learned] from their own viewpoint... It also mentioned the ‘Indians’ in terms of Status Indians... It has really influenced the knowledge I have about reconciliation.”

Religion and Current Situation

Creating Own Meaning of Faith

Throughout all conversations, it was evident that meaning-making was a significant part of all of their religious journeys. All participants engaged in questioning their faith, discerning what they truly believed in. Amber shares: “I think right now I’m at a point where my faith and religion isn’t as strong... Trying to tease that out of culturally remaining Polish, but finding my own avenue that isn’t traditional in religion, I’d say?... You can have an appreciation for the religion but have a problem with how it’s institutionalized.” Especially given that Amber has struggled within her faith journey, she shared being able to continue a relationship with faith is incredibly important to her. Xavier mentions his personal convictions being an important aspect of his life, meaning that he will consider his religious teachings but still discern for himself: “I’d come to you know understand it, my faith and also my own personal belief, because I’m not just about what I-, about going to church and what I’m being taught. I also have my own personal conviction.” Xavier also shares the value of discerning his own meaning of faith and how both have positively contributed to his perspectives and how he interacts with other people: “As I said earlier, I had not just tried to put my, you know, religion ahead of my personality, but I tried to put myself first because I believe you know existing in a multi-religious environment... I need to also see other people’s from, from their own perspective, and not just from mine.”

Reconciliation Efforts in Community

All participants shared the various efforts of their religious community to participate in reconciliation through different means. Amber mentions an Indigenous voices session with her religious community, whereby Indigenous folks are able to speak to the community on various topics: “I started going to an English church since moving to [City Name], and they have a whole Indigenous voices... So, things are happening. But it was never in my experience [in my old parish].” Xavier shares Indigenous led initiatives and collaborations with his parish: “It involves you know working together to address ongoing supports in Indigenous led initiative, during partnership and, you know, collaboration... [it has] peaked my interest and need [in my community].” Tristan also adds his experience of conversations within his youth group where they propose topics for discussion: “During our activities we normally devote time to [educate] ourselves on things we think we actually need to get more knowledge on.” He follows by mentioning that they share knowledge and engage in collaborative learning, which has been a supportive and powerful experience.

Relationships

Roles of Institutions

All participants emphasized the importance of the role of education within reconciliation. Institutions need to be at the forefront of change because as shown through their experiences, without proper education it can significantly and negatively impact their faith and reconciliation efforts. Amber mentions education as a stepping stone: “Education is definitely just a starting point...The Canadian government should look at the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] as a serious document, and enact those changes. It’s] supposed to be an ongoing project because this is an ongoing issue.” Xavier mentions the importance of educating youth as the knowledge will remain with them as they grow: “Make [youth] aware of this idea of reconciliation...I believe, maybe not immediately, not an immediate result but gradually it could actually be changed.” Tristan follows by mentioning how education can combat prejudices and stereotypes, as education can ensure that the truth about Indigenous history and culture is being shared: “When you have more knowledge about something, there is little chance of you having a wrong perspective about it...To find a way to incorporate reconciliation in that curriculum, in order to equip the students with more knowledge.”

Roles of Non-Indigenous Students

Xavier shares from a Settler perspective, what he believes his role and our roles as non-Indigenous people are in reconciliation efforts: “Starting from self-determination, restorative justice and, and [from ours] you know education and awareness. I think [as] non-Indigenous people, [we] have a great role to play.” He continues emphasizing the need for collaborative effort on all ends to occur, and the need for accepting differences and living together with respect and not just tolerance is important: “I kind of feel that you know all hands needs to be on deck...Once these two parties are able to understand the differences and also how they could you know, live together...it could actually go a long way.” Tristan emphasizes the importance of education as a means of learning and not a point for creating guilt/shame, and to treat Indigenous people with respect as everyone else: “Everyone that has to be [part of the] effort...To not to really have these guilt against the Indigenous...Then you treat them equally the way you treat non-Indigenous people, you tend not to discriminate them.”

Reflections

The narratives portrayed in the findings share the complexities of religious settler identity and the important role of education within reconciliation. Through the stories of their faith journeys, not only what they learned but how they learned about Indigenous culture and communities greatly affected their religious settler identity, which in turn greatly affected

their participation in reconciliation efforts. It can be seen through Xavier and Tristan's experiences that education within their religious communities in a safe learning environment positively impacted them. Through Amber we see the harms of the lack of religious community support, and how the presentation of guilt/shame can hinder learning and growth. Thus, it is imperative not only to ensure there are curriculum changes at the institutional level, but also a consideration of how this material is taught and supports for students is needed.

DISCUSSION

Indigenizing/Decolonizing Education?

As echoed throughout this paper, the importance of language has been a significant emphasis in its purpose of creating meaning. Many scholars also explore this, as the definitions and meanings of Indigenization and decolonization within education are interpreted differently. They explore how academia has taken these terms and interpreted them into action that is often not aligned with what Indigenous communities advocate for. Dr. Lynn Lavallee (2020) explores decolonization in the academy and whether or not it is possible to truly do so. She states that, "Using the terminology reconciling, decolonizing, or Indigenizing the academy may indicate a strong commitment to advancing Indigenous knowledge in the academy and an attempt to be inclusive of Indigenous peoples and initiatives; however, institutions need to define what they mean by reconciling, decolonizing, or Indigenizing' (Lavallee, 2020, p. 118)." She further continues that because of this, an interpretation made in this attempt at inclusivity can be to check box these terms as a means for academics to portray their respect and commitment to reconciliation without truly recognizing true accountability (Lavallee, 2020). In the act of contrition, reconciliation through Christ is meant to emphasize the importance of no repetition of sin and sinning no more, yet injustices and violence against Indigenous communities still continues (Lavallee, 2020). Lavallee (2020) asserts, "The term reconciliation is a neocolonial term meant to free non-Indigenous peoples from their sins against Indigenous peoples, but the harms are still happening (p. 119)." Therefore, "The entire concept of reconciliation in the academy can be paralleled with the persuasive techniques of a batterer in an abusive relationship, whereby an abusive person apologizes for harming their partner and in due time the abusive and apologetic behaviour continues in a cyclical fashion" (Schutte, Malouff, & Doyle, 2010, as cited in Lavallee, 2020 p. 120)." Institutions, in relation to reconciliation, are meant to commit to bettering conditions and supporting Indigenous peoples, however anti-Indigenous racism, whether intentional or unconscious, is still prevalent (Lavallee, 2020). Lavallee (2020) contends, "Healing, let alone reconciliation, cannot occur in this environment. As such, the academy remains a violent colonial institution for Indigenous bodies (p. 120)."

Grafton and Melançon (2020) explore the dynamics of decolonization and Indigenization in an era of academic reconciliation. They mention that these terms change depending on those participating in them, and therefore are not static of universal meanings (Grafton and Melançon, 2020). However, despite the pursuit for transformative practices, decolonizing and Indigenizing can produce negative and harmful outcomes (Grafton and Melançon, 2020). An example of this is that Indigenization, “has the potential for cooptation of Indigenous ways of knowing and the legitimization of colonial systems. Decolonization can result in marginalization or the exclusion of Indigenous peoples in colonial institutions (Grafton & Melançon, 2020, p. 136).” Therefore, it is imperative to be cautious and consider the effects, both positive and negative, in order to understand how education can be sustainably changed as it is an ongoing process.

It can be seen throughout literature and institutions; the terminology and its meanings change significantly within various contexts. What is therefore needed are Indigenous scholars, both faculty and students, to be supported within academia. As Dr. Lynn Lavallee (2020) mentions, this will ensure that academia goes beyond performative allyship and truly supports Indigenous communities and efforts. Grafton and Melançon (2020) support this by stating, “It ought to go without saying that settlers cannot Indigenize universities by themselves without an application of Indigenous ways of knowing accessed through Indigenous collectivity. The inclusion of Indigenous voices, knowledges, materials, and epistemologies requires the inclusion of those who bear them, use them, and develop them (p. 142).”

Social workers specifically have a significant role to play within education, especially given the historical and current implications of the profession’s apprehension of Indigenous children. As non-Indigenous social workers, it is our responsibility to ensure that Indigenous voices are heard within all spaces we occupy whether that be in academia or beyond in practice. It is a shared responsibility that everyone needs to partake in reconciliation efforts, and to participate in advocating for educational changes that better support Indigenous communities.

Limitations & Future Research

Given the nature of the exploratory scope, there are various limitations of my research. The first being the small sample size, as the study cannot be generalized nor speak to the greater Catholic/Christian post-secondary community. With three participants, highlighting their experiences and perspectives more in depth was a beautiful opportunity to explore this topic given the limitations; including how many themes can be analyzed and how comprehensive the literature review can be. Therefore, I believe that this topic has the potential of instigating significant change if the shift continues from theoretical explorations to practical implications. Areas of future research could include an analysis on the effects of teaching colonial and reconciliation curriculum for Indigenous students.

Given my subjectivity and theoretical frameworks that have been guiding this work, my work has focused on non-Indigenous students and the Settler identity. However, it is imperative for further research to explore possible triggers and supports for Indigenous students within learning spaces, because the content is undoubtedly personal and the unique challenges and hardships that Catholic and Christian Indigenous students experience must be considered.

Conclusion

Reconciliation, what it means, and how to “do” it, has and continues to be a contentious subject within academia. As explored through this research, participating in reconciliation differs for everyone depending on their personal journeys and their relationships to the land, however education is at the core. Specifically for Religious Settlers, this means a journey of learning and unlearning in order to understand how to practice within a faith that has and continues to harm Indigenous communities. This qualitative research study highlighted three narratives of Catholic and Christian post-secondary students, exploring education and their relationship with reconciliation and religion. This paper challenged academia and institutionalized conceptions of reconciliation, Indigenizing, and decolonization, highlighting the importance of the effects that curriculum and school practices has on Catholic and Christian students. The purpose of this work is not to outline a list of tasks that can magically fix generations of harm, but rather to emphasize the importance of education within religious and academic institutions. It emphasizes the responsibility the education system and its members have for teaching and student learning. That education goes beyond simply teaching the material, but further being intentional of how it is taught and the learning environment they create. Education is evidently an ongoing process that goes beyond the schools grounds. Students must be able to explore their relationship to the land and what their roles as Settlers entail in a safe non-judgmental environment such as their faith communities; this is where honest discourses and questioning regarding faith can occur organically. Thus, the important takeaway here is to highlight that there truly is no quick fix or “best” solution, as the complexities and nuances must be addressed in their own right. This process is undoubtedly uncomfortable, but it is in this very discomfort where we can challenge and change for the safety of Indigenous friends, colleagues, classmates, and service users.

Therefore I also encourage my religious community, Catholics and Christians alike, to have open minds and hearts and a willingness to learn and grow. With the education process, have a humbleness to admit mistakes and do better moving forward. As emphasized, we need to take accountability for our responsibility on this land and to the people living on it, and thus learning and education is where this must begin. As the great scholar Bell Hooks states, “A radical commitment to openness maintains

the integrity of the critical thinking process and its central role in education. This commitment requires much courage and imagination (2010 p. 10).”

Conflict of Interest

N/A

Ethics/Informed Consent

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