National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health | Centre de collaboration nationale de la santé autochtone

Webinar

Pathways to Indigenous health - Truth before reconciliation: How to identify and confront residential school denialism

Description

This first webinar of the *Pathways to Indigenous health series* explores what denialism is and how it undermines efforts to decolonize Canada's healthcare system. Dr. Sean Carleton, Assistant Professor of History and Indigenous Studies at the University of Manitoba, examines how a speech delivered by Canadian Senator Lynn Beyak in 2017 uses residential school denialism as a strategy to legitimize settler privilege and defend anti-Indigenous racism. He proposes practical strategies to address and confront denialism and advance health equity for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples in Canada.

Pathways to Indigenous health is a series of webinars hosted by the NCCIH. Between September 2023 and April 2024, this series of webinars explores a variety of topics related to the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. The series intends to strengthen the links between knowledge, policy, and practice, by supporting the educational journeys of healthcare workers, public health audiences, and beyond.

Bio

Dr. Sean Carleton is a settler historian and Assistant Professor in the departments of History and Indigenous Studies at the University of Manitoba. He is the author of *Lessons in Legitimacy: Colonialism, Capitalism, and the Rise of State Schooling in British Columbia* (UBC Press, 2022).

Transcript

Daniel Sims: Today you're joining me for the first session, and hopefully eight sessions, dealing with Pathways to Indigenous Health. Our speaker today is Sean Carleton. He's a settler historian, Assistant Professor of History and Indigenous Studies at the University of Manitoba, and the author of a relatively new book, *Lessons and Legitimacy: Colonialism, Capitalism and the Rise of State Schooling in British Columbia*. This is available through UBC Press.

Before we begin, just a little bit of housekeeping regarding the webinar. As you've already heard, it is being recorded. I believe that was something shared with you when you signed on. I know what was shared with me, just want to report that or say again that it is being recorded.

I'll just talk briefly about the National Collaborating Centre's *Pathways to Indigenous Health Series*, and some of the expectations or guidelines for how we're going to proceed today. So just to begin with, the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health is one of six collaborating centres in Canada. These centres were established by the Public Health Agency of Canada in 2005 in response to SARS, and they deal with different aspects of public health in Canada.

Ours is unique in that we are focused on a population group, so Indigenous Peoples in Canada—First Nations, Métis and Inuit—and we're looking at actually improving the health of all three groups, as well as other Canadians, through fact-based research and understanding. And maybe perhaps compared to some of the other institutions, we do try and strive for the inclusion of things that aren't necessarily considered to be 'health' in other areas, although I know the other centres are doing that as well. I just wanted to mention that briefly.

Just with regards to the webinar itself, any questions for the panelists as well as any technical questions, we're asking you to actually submit those in the question-and-answer forum, which should be available on your screen. We have disabled the chat for this webinar, so there is no ability to chat. Please feel free to post your questions and we'll answer as many as we can at the end of Sean's talk.

Links to resources mentioned in the talk will also be posted in the chat window as well. And then, as mentioned, we are recording the session. It will be available on the NCCIH website in the near future. So, if you know somebody who is unable to attend, or if you have to leave early, or you just want to view Sean talking again, that will be an option in the future.

Just briefly going over some of the things that Sean will talk about—I believe he'll mention this as well—but we are talking about residential school denialism today. Just as a trigger warning to everyone in attendance or anyone listening to the recording in the future, when we talk about Indian residential schools in Canada, this can be quite traumatic for residential school survivors, the children of residential school survivors and their descendants, and people in general.

As we know, there was abuse that occurred at residential schools, both physical and sexual, and talking about this can be quite traumatizing in many ways. For the topic today, we'll be talking about denialism in relation to colonialism, with an emphasis on Canada's Indian residential school system. That can also be traumatizing as well.

What does it mean to actually deny people's experiences, particularly when those experiences were ones that contained abuse in very overt ways? Another aspect of the talk will be understanding residential school denialism as part of a strategy that legitimizes and defends colonization and undermines Truth and Reconciliation efforts.

For a part of this talk, we'll be actually talking about the TRC, about the Calls to Action, about how we respond to that, and to some extent how people respond to it by denying it—not actually engaging in reconciliation of those aspects.

And then finally, we'll be exploring practical strategies for identifying and addressing denialism to support decolonization efforts in Canada's healthcare system. We are the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health. We are tying it into health in that aspect there, and it's important to bear in mind that when we talk about the residential school system, it may not seem obvious with regards to the connection to health, but it did impact people's trust in authorities, including medical professionals, trust in institutions established by the state—provincial or federal—and education level in general.

Residential schools, I would just say, weren't the best education institutions in Canada at any given point in time, so that's putting it rather mildly.

Without further ado, I will pass it over to Sean.

Sean Carleton: Okay. Thanks so much, Daniel, for getting us started in a good way, and for the introduction and invitation to speak today. And thanks to all of you for gathering, witnessing, and holding space virtually today. I'm glad there's so many folks out today.

I'm really grateful for you all making the time to connect and learn more about residential school denialism, the negative effects it can have for Indigenous Peoples and residential school survivors specifically, and to talk about how you can identify and confront residential school denialism to help put truth before reconciliation, which is the title of my talk.

I'm just going to share my slides to get started.

While I am a non-Indigenous scholar, I have a residential school survivor in my family, and I have a responsibility to honour him and the courage it took for him and others to break their silence about their experiences in the schools that Daniel talked about.

And as I mentioned, I hear a lot from survivors that engaging or hearing denialism, having their experiences questioned and undermined, is detrimental to their health in a variety of ways—triggering trauma. As many of you who understand the social determinants of health will understand, these are not just mean things that people say; they have very real consequences for people.

So given my audience today, I thought that might be a helpful way of understanding or framing this. Though I am admittedly a historian and not a health expert, I've really been looking forward to having a conversation with you folks in the questions to think more industry-specific about some strategies to identify and contain this as you see it.

What I want to do this afternoon is talk more about some of my new research that is trying to grapple with and confront the growing phenomenon of residential school denialism in Canada, focusing

specifically on the case of former Senator Lynn Beyak and what it can teach us about how to identify and confront denialism more broadly.

Now Beyak, as perhaps the most notable person spreading denialism, has made a lot of news in recent years. She illegally donated to Donald Trump's failed re-election campaign. She sat maskless in the Senate during the height of the second wave of the global COVID-19 pandemic. And then in January 2021, when she announced her early retirement from the Red Chamber, mostly because the Senate was—thanks to the work of Indigenous Senator Mary Jane McCallum—going to hold a vote to expel Beyak, and if expelled she wouldn't be entitled to her full pension. She decided to retire instead of facing that vote.

Denialists desperately want a platform to spread their ideas, but they don't like facing the consequences for their actions. There is, in short, a lot to the Beyak saga, and I don't have time to go over all the twists and turns today.

Instead, my work looks specifically at Beyak's controversial 2017 Senate speech and the hundred letters of support she received and then posted to her Senate website and refused to remove for years, which is really at the heart of the Beyak story and I think reveals a lot about how denialism works and what we can do to confront it.

As an outline, this is where we're going today: my talk aims to historicize, contextualize, and theorize residential school denialism to give us a frame and then I will use that frame to critically examine Beyak's public comments and her support letters to show how they embrace and promote residential school denialism as part of the attack on Truth and Reconciliation here in Canada.

And all of this, really, I think can teach us important lessons about how to both identify and confront the growing phenomenon of residential school denialism. And I'll note that while I've taken care to try and avoid traumatic content about residential schools, as Daniel mentioned the presentation does contain details that may be upsetting.

I know you've got some supports there in the chat. I've also put the Indian Residential School Survivors and Family Crisis line there for those of you who feel the need to reach out and I've also put my information on the slides so you can always email me or get in touch, send me a message on social media to talk more about resources, if you want them. This isn't a one and done thing. We now have a connection, so feel free to reach out at any time.

Okay, to begin.

In March 2017, Lynn Beyak, a Conservative Senator and a member of the Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, delivered a speech defending Canada's Indian residential school system as being "well-intentioned".

Beyak briefly admitted that mistakes were made, but she spent the majority of her speech insisting that an emphasis on the system's positives will "help Canada's native people to thrive as victors not victims".

Beyak's speech, made only a year after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, showed Canadians the evidence of how residential schooling constituted genocide, sparked an intense public controversy.

The Senator's attempts to put a positive spin on what even Stephen Harper, the Conservative Prime Minister who appointed Beyak to the Senate, called a sad chapter in Canada's history, were not appreciated by many, including her fellow Senator and the former Chair of the TRC, Murray Sinclair, who suggested that Beyak and other residential school deniers or denialists were “dimwitted”.

Even the Anglican Church, which ran a third of the schools across the country including the Pelican Lake Residential School near Dryden, Ontario, where Beyak lives, weighed into the debate to clarify that in fact, nothing good came from the schools.

The Church, like the TRC and historians such as myself, noted that while a small minority of survivors speak of some positive school experiences on a personal level, those experiences must be understood as occurring in the wider context of a genocidal school system designed to kill the Indian in the child.

Now, despite facing widespread criticism, Beyak refused to apologize for her comments. Instead, the Senator stood behind her positive perspective, even attacking criticism of her speech as fake news and exaggeration. Beyak doubled down on her defense of residential schooling, arguing, “there are shining examples from sea to sea of people who owe their lives to the schools.”

When pressed on how Indigenous peoples, especially many former students who were physically and sexually abused in these schools, might feel about such statements, Beyak elaborated, “I've suffered with them, I appreciate their suffering more than they'll ever know, but the best way to heal is to move forward together, not to blame, not to point fingers, not to live in the past.”

Now, you know you've really stepped in it when The Beaverton, a satirical news site, kind of like The Onion in the United States, has a good laugh at your expense, saying here: Senator Beyak demands residential school survivors apologize for her suffering, right? But when she was confronted by reporters and asked directly if she had even bothered to read the TRC report to better understand the history and ongoing legacies of the school system, Beyak simply stated, “I don't need any more education to tell you pretty much where we're going.”

As a result of her comments, Beyak was removed from the Senate Committee on Indigenous Issues in 2017 and she was later kicked out of the Conservative caucus, but she retained her Senate seat for another four years and used her platform and position to popularize residential school denialism. Which, to be very clear, is not the denial that the system existed, but rather by definition, denialism is the rejection or the attempt to twist, misrepresent, distort or discredit basic facts rooted in well-documented evidence in favor of more controversial opinions or positions. In this way, residential school denialism is similar to climate change denialism or science or vaccine denialism, right? Denialism in general is a deliberate strategy used to try and shake public confidence in something. In this case, it is about Truth and Reconciliation, and I'll explain why in a moment.

While not wanting former students of residential schools to dwell on their victimization at the hands of State and Church officials, in the aftermath of her 2017 comments, Beyak quickly constructed herself as a victim of politically motivated attacks on what she called “free speech”. Rather than reflection, Beyak dug in and fortified her position by using her Senate website (of which you can see a screen grab up here) to post the full text of her speech as well as further personal statements and a selection of letters she received supporting her comments in the Senate.

Now it's tempting to stereotype those who engage in residential school denialism as ignorant bigots or to simply ignore them so as to deny them the recognition they seek for themselves and their ideas. Silence, some say, starves denialists of their sustenance, which is dialogue, a platform. Some turn to authority, institutions, police or even the government to shut down or make such a discourse illegal, but this often tends to give denialists what they want most, a greater platform to spread their ideas further.

Murray Sinclair, however, the Chair of the TRC, suggests a different approach that I try to amplify and build on in my work and I want to emphasize today and invite you folks to consider. Sinclair argues that it is not enough for us to simply yell at denialists and knock them down; instead, we need to try to understand their reasoning and do the work to show that they are wrong. He elaborates saying, “I've always been convinced that while we may not deal with all of the denialists, we can at least take away their tools”. By challenging the comments of high-profile people like Beyak and others, Sinclair is hopeful that denialists will have a diminishing population of people who will believe them. Sinclair, in short, advocates a strategy of engagement to contain, disprove, and discredit denialists.

Taking away the tools of residential school denialism requires a better understanding of those tools and how and why people employ and defend them. In that spirit, my work documents and interrogates the Beyak controversy as a way of comprehending and confronting not just Beyak, but the phenomenon of residential school denialism in Canada generally.

Now it's important to begin by emphasizing that residential school denialism is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, downplaying or minimizing the destructive effects of residential schooling for Indigenous children has a long history in Canada, going back to the origins of the system, officially in the 1880s.

For much of the system's history, State and Church officials likened the schools to a humanitarian, even sacred or divine – in a Christian sense – enterprise designed to save Indigenous communities from extinction in the face of a so-called higher form of civilization. That was the rhetoric.

Even when faced with irrefutable evidence of poor instruction and horrific conditions in many of the schools, leading to deaths and disease, officials mostly clung to the humanitarian discourse and discredited the system's detractors including some Indigenous parents and students, of course, but also non-Indigenous experts as well.

I decided to include this, given our audience of health experts here.

In the early 1900s, as the system was still getting started, Dr. Peter Bryce, for example, published a report for the Department of Indian Affairs slamming residential schools for their abnormally high rate of student death and disease that he suggested was exacerbated by overcrowding, poor nutrition, and a lack of proper sanitation at many of the schools resulting from poor funding in part.

Instead of rectifying the system's obvious problems, the Department buried Bryce's report. He was ignored.

As a medical expert, Bryce tried to blow the whistle on the school system in its initial phase and he even published a book about his findings in 1922 called *A National Crime*, but officials chose to selectively focus on the positive results the system was having at this time or more correctly that they hoped it would have. And the system was allowed to continue until the mid-1990s.

It was only when former students began publishing accounts of their abuse in schools and organizing for redress in the 1980s that the humanitarian discourse about residential schooling started to shift significantly. As more students spoke out about their school experiences, they emboldened others to come forward, eventually sparking a movement led by former students to collectively seek compensation for their time spent in the institutions.

With many State and Church officials still denying any wrongdoing in the 1980s and 1990s, students forced the issue by launching the largest class action lawsuit in Canadian history, which the government of Canada chose to settle out of court by agreeing to the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement in 2006–2007, which put in motion the government's official apology in 2008, and the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) to research and raise national awareness about residential schooling as part of the remedy of that lawsuit; not out of the goodness of their heart or because they thought it was the right thing to do, but because they were being forced by this class action lawsuit and that was part of the conditions of the settlement.

The TRC published its final report in 2015 and the conclusions shocked many Canadians but confirmed what generations of Indigenous Peoples and historians already well understood. The Commission, however, made clear that shaming and pointing out wrongdoing was not the TRC's mandate. Instead, the focus on truth determination was intended to lay the foundation for the important question of reconciliation. The TRC argues that we must have truth before reconciliation.

Now many Canadians have embraced the challenge put forward by the TRC and its calls to action and are in differing ways are engaged in reckoning ways of engaging with Canada's colonial past to create a better future, including in the industry of health. Others like Beyak, however, are choosing to dispute, deny, and discredit the Commission's findings as an excuse to avoid participating in reconciliation. You don't have to deal with the history that you deny or distort.

To be sure, grappling with matters of genocide is not easy, but it is the task that Indigenous and, in particular, non-Indigenous peoples living in what is currently called Canada, like me, are being asked to do in the era of Truth and Reconciliation.

So how can we do this? Well, scholarly literature in the field of genocide studies can help shed light on how different countries around the world have been dealing with legacies of different kinds of genocide and addressing the phenomenon of denialism, in particular.

Political scientist Adam Jones, a Canadian, argues that the manipulation of memory and history often occurs in the aftermath of genocides. Genocide (…) denial is often understood as the final step of genocide and in looking at Germany's grappling with the Jewish Holocaust, Jones shows how a willful amnesia and what he calls a politicized forgetting emerge in the immediate post-war period as a way to distance the country and its citizens from its very recent Nazi past and its ongoing effects.

Insights from genocide studies overlap with lessons from recent Indigenous studies literature on the role of denialism in Canada. Scholars such as Gina Starblanket and Dallas Hunt illustrate how Canadians like to imagine that they've always acted with peaceful good intentions. Canadians do not like to hear that their country was founded through frauds, abuses, theft, and violence perpetrated against Indigenous peoples. Instead of confronting this reality, Canadians seek refuge in myths of benevolence and self-

congratulatory accounts of the past that justified colonial policy as being well-intentioned, even necessary and enlightened.

It's also helpful here to theorize the role of denialism in colonial societies. Canada is not alone in seeing a rise of denialism, and here I turn to the work of writers like Aimé Césaire and Franz Fanon and, in particular, Albert Memmi, and Memmi's book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. If there are any psychologists out there, Fanon and Memmi were working in psychology in the 1950s and 1960s, thinking about how to understand that in the context of colonial societies, particularly in Africa.

Memmi's book, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, which I've got on the screen, consists of a psychological profile of both the colonizer and the colonized based on the author's experiences in North Africa. And it's especially insightful because it looks at the role of denialism in legitimizing colonialism as commonsensical, something that you just can't see as normal.

Well Indigenous scholars such as my colleague Emma LaRocque at the University of Manitoba have examined Memmi's portrait of the colonized in relation to Indigenous struggles in Canada. I think it's helpful to focus on Memmi's portrait of the colonizer and its applicability to Canadian settlers. This aspect of Memmi's work has received less attention and, I think, is particularly relevant to our discussion today. So, I'll just talk about this briefly.

Memmi argues that colonizers are daily confronted with the reality of the illegitimacy of their status. Their very existence is a crisis of legitimacy. Whether colonizers are immigrants or are born in the colonies, they are always, even if only subconsciously, plagued by the question: what entitles me to live here? Fears about retribution and revenge by the colonized only stoke a kind of ever-present anxiety – as I think Starblanket and Hunt's new book on the Gerald Stanley trial and “settler reason” made clear – are evident here in Canada as well.

In an attempt to resolve those unsettled feelings, colonizers invent and deploy a whole host of strategies to protect their position of power and privilege in the colonies and prove to themselves and to others the legitimacy of their existence, their right to live and prosper.

In addition to creating specific laws and the creation of ghettos, prisons and schools to contain and control the colonized physically, Memmi contends that colonizers invent and invest themselves in a series of myths and stereotypes - propagated through various channels including art and education, the writing of history – to rationalize the oppressive colonial relationship that underpins the material prosperity of colonizers as natural, inevitable and, most importantly, unchangeable. Although Memmi argues that all colonizers benefit from colonialism in different ways, he differentiates the behaviour of two main groups: the colonizer who refuses and the colonizer who accepts.

In short, the colonizer who refuses comes to the realization that colonialism is in fact unjust and vows to challenge that oppression of the colonized and fight for their freedom. This is no easy task, though, because the liberation of the colonized requires colonizers to question and challenge the legitimacy of their own existence and devise different ways of being in relationship. As a result, Memmi argues that most colonizers simply resign themselves to accept colonialism and its benefits, becoming a colonizer who accepts.

Properly historicized, contextualized, and theorized, I argue that denialism can thus be understood as a powerful way for protecting the status quo in colonial settings, including in Canada. Rather than unsettle the history of Canada and confront the ongoing legacy of colonization – including things like residential schools, as Memmi's colonizer who refuses might do – some Canadians, like Bayek, are employing the tools of Memmi's colonizer who accepts. That is, they deploy a denialist discourse that justifies their existence, their home on Native land, through a combination of degrading Indigenous Peoples and clinging to selective and self-congratulatory accounts of the past that they think absolves them of any wrongdoing and thus justifies their lack of support and effort for reconciliation.

Okay, back to Beyak. Senator Beyak's controversial comments in the Senate in 2017 defending residential schooling and the kinds of comments they catalyzed need to be understood in this wider context as a strategy, as a tool for denying the injustices of the past and present to safeguard colonial power and privilege in the unsettling time of Truth and Reconciliation. Now I don't have time to get fully into Beyak's speech, but just a couple of points I want to make before I move on to talk about her support letters, which is the real focus of my analysis (…) how people pick up on denialist discourse and spread it.

Beyak's speech promoted a whole host of ignorant and incorrect views about Indigenous Peoples, including her belief that on balance residential schooling should be considered beneficial for Indigenous peoples. In her speech, Beyak used what is known as false balance, a form of bias that suggests an issue is more balanced between opposing views than the evidence actually suggests; to contend that the good and the bad are actually equal parts of the whole residential school story. Beyak explained that people only focus on the bad for political reasons and noted that it was her duty to stick up for “the other side”.

The problem with Beyak's premise is that it is not supported by evidence or historical scholarship. Beyak's equal weighting of good and bad reveals her fundamental misunderstanding of the historical consensus here that the problems of the Indian residential school system were systemic. That the problem with residential schooling was not only the individual cases of neglect and abuse, but that for over 100 years, the government colluded with Churches to devise, deploy, and defend a genocidal system that removed children from their families, often by force, putting them in dangerous situations, all in an effort to undercut and attack Indigenous lifeways, to support colonization and Canadian nation-building.

Whether some former students recall positive experiences or whether employees believed in their benevolent intentions – which the TRC and historians like myself do acknowledge in our work – this does not change the genocidal effects of the system, full stop. Despite the inaccuracy of her comments in the Red Chamber, Beyak nevertheless received a lot of support. On the 6th of April 2017, a month after making her speech, Beyak used her Senate website to release a statement defending her position and thanking people for their support. She claimed that her supporters represent the silent majority of Canada and she wanted to write to encourage their support. She says: “you are not alone, you are the majority as has been shown to me with all of the support I have received.”

Though declaring that the majority of Canadians supported her position based on “an avalanche of support”, this Senator was more cagey when pressed on evidence for that support. Beyak claimed to have received 700 letters that overwhelmingly supported her views. This, however, does not reflect reality. It is a misrepresentation of evidence.

We know this because an investigation by the Senate Ethics Officer into Beyak's use of her website revealed that the Senator in fact received a total of 6,766 letters. Of that total number, only 2,389 supported Beyak's speech in the Senate, but 4,282, the vast majority, were very critical of her speech. Though promising to make all of these letters publicly available, Beyak only published a handful of these statements, 129 in total, and all of them in support of her comments in 2017. Though she deleted all of them in 2017, the support letters which I downloaded before they were deleted, need more critical analysis, especially because the 100 letters dated between the 8th of March and the 11th of April in the month after Beyak's speech openly engaged in residential school denialism and show how misinformation can grow and spread quite quickly.

So, turning now to the selected support letters that Beyak chose to showcase on her website between 2017 and 2019, I just want to give you a sample of them today. And I cluster the comments in three broad categories. The first is personal knowledge, the second is ignorance and anti-Indigenous racism, and the third is something I call world views in collision or those that promote assimilation. So, what I want to show is that those writing to support Beyak drew in differing ways from all of these categories, further advanced denialism in keeping with Memmi's view of colonizers who accept.

Let's start with personal knowledge, as this might be something that you encounter working with patients or colleagues. So many of Beyak's support letters defend residential schools based on various kinds of personal information. Some authors admit to having direct experience working in the schools, and it is clear that they are seeking refuge in Beyak's comments as a kind of absolution of wrongdoing for themselves and family members. The very first letter to be posted on Beyak's website, in fact, is from Richard who writes on behalf of himself and his partner who have a combined experience of 26 years in Aboriginal and Métis schools and thus witnessed “firsthand” the positive anecdotes and experiences of those who gained from their attendance at residential schools.

While some authors chose to defend their work or the work of family members in residential schools, others spoke of their positive personal experiences of talking to Indigenous Peoples. Here we have a writer who wrote to thank Beyak for “having the courage to say what millions of Canadians have been thinking for years, that yes, there were terrible things that happened at residential schools, but not everyone that attended a residential school had a bad experience”. The author bases this conclusion on her experience of once having attended an art exhibit in Fort McMurray in Alberta, where she “met a Native artist who told me how grateful she was to the nuns and priests in her community who ran the school.”

All of these writers gained personal knowledge from family members or former employees or students who spoke favorably about their time in residential schools, in a variety of interpersonal situations, and as a result they thus have a hard time accepting the overwhelmingly documented evidence about the system's overall genocidal effects. They can't square those two things away.

While some authors wrote to Beyak based on their personal experience, others admired the Senator's stance on residential schools simply because it created a space for them to voice their ignorant views about Indigenous Peoples and openly perpetuate anti-Indigenous racism. These writers remain unconvinced that they should care about Indigenous Peoples and, as a result, they generally accept, buy into, and even propagate racist stereotypes that demean, diminish, and dehumanize Indigenous peoples

and deny any responsibility for colonization and, by extension, efforts at reconciliation or efforts to strengthen relations with Indigenous people. They just don't care.

The worst of these letters have gotten a lot of public attention. I do talk about them in the academic article I published that was shared in the chat, so I'm not going to give the most racist ones more of a platform here and I'm sure you can imagine what they say, but I do want to give you some of the ignorance on display, as I think this is more helpful in getting behind some of the logic here.

In terms of ignorant views, Beyak's support letters, like Beyak's original speech, are full of incorrect assumptions rooted in misinformation. Denialism, in fact, thrives on it.

Kevin writes, “your remarks to the effect that teachers and leaders involved in the program were by and large well-intentioned are obviously true; it's too bad you're under attack for speaking truthfully.” The evidence presented by the TRC reveals that such an assumption is in fact not obviously true. That's the problem.

Similarly, C. wrote to support Beyak and explains: “I feel the current dialogue around this part of our history is grotesquely unbalanced. You're right to mention that it was neither the residential school employees or government intention to be cruel or to wipe out an entire race.”

Again, here we see the idea of false balance on display, and the TRC report and the weight of scholarly research, including my own, presents the full evidence to show that while not all employees were cruel, many were and the government's clear intention from the beginning, according to the people that created the system, was to use it to “kill the Indian in the child” and bring about the end of Indigenous lifeways through coerced assimilation to support Canadian nation-building.

Though many of the support letters Beyak received used personal knowledge or racist and ignorant views to downplay the negative effects of residential schooling, others simply doubled down on the need for assimilation to force Indigenous Peoples to participate in Canadian society. And this aspect of the letters, and denialism generally, have received less attention, but I think need to be directly confronted.

Many of the authors cannot or are unwilling to comprehend that Indigenous Peoples have their own cultures, languages, spiritualities, economic practices, approaches to health that the residential schools deliberately and systematically sought to eliminate, eradicate, and replace, borrowing the language of Indigenous studies scholar Patrick Wolfe. Simply put, many letter writers lament the closure of the schools because they still believe in the value of forced assimilation as a beneficent project of civilizing Indigenous Peoples. Here, we have such a letter by Linda who wrote to Beyak: “Like you, I believe the institution of residential schools was well intentioned and was an attempt to solve the Indian problem by integrating the children into the new way of life in order that they could function better with language, health, and skills.” Similarly, Terry, in a letter that draws on all of the categories here, argues: “Certainly, the decision to assimilate First Nations into Canada was and remains the correct one.” B. takes it further, suggesting: “I think residential schools were a noble and honest attempt to treat Natives as equals and integrate the community into the new productive, rewarding Canadian life.”

Roy personified the unquestioned acceptance of assimilation by defending residential schools in the most self-centered, ethnocentric way possible: “The fact is that there are two good things that came out

of residential schools. The two are: when I see an Aboriginal person, I can talk to him or her. Second, is they can operate in our modern world." The author then concluded: "Please hang in there and do not let the fools who think they can implement all of the recommendations of the TRC Committee. It would destroy our nation." Pretty obvious *where* that author is thinking.

So, these writers promoted the merits of forced assimilation and defended residential schooling and attacks on Indigenous lifeways, generally, as immensely beneficial to Canada and Canadians because it protects and extends the status quo. Whether through personal knowledge, ignorance, and anti-Indigenous racism or a belief in assimilation as beneficent, or a combination of these, Beyak supporters employed denialism to distance themselves from the effects of residential schooling and to defend ongoing colonization and the power and privilege it affords them as commonsensical. Indeed, Memmi explains that this kind of behavior reassures "colonizers who accept" that colonization is eternal and it encourages them to look towards their future without any worries of any kind.

Okay, to conclude and then we've got lots of time for questions and discussion.

Although Beyak has now retired, the residential school denialism she helped popularize remains a barrier to reconciliation, as Murray Sinclair recently pointed out. Indeed, Beyak's comments defending residential schooling, and trying to undermine public confidence in the TRC's report and her support letters, are but one example of the growing phenomenon of residential school denialism.

More recently, a teacher in Abbotsford, BC, assigned a homework assignment where students were instructed to search for online articles outlining the positive experiences of residential schooling, suggesting a couple of sources there that talk about denialist talking points, kind of leading students towards this particular conclusion. Similarly, former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien spread denialism on a talk radio show where he suggested: "I went to a private boarding school and my experience was fine", so therefore he had a hard time thinking of the residential school systems as being detrimental, even though he was in charge of the Department of Indian Affairs in the 60s and directly complicit.

Former Federal Conservative leader Erin O'Toole was caught on camera, in 2021, coaching young Conservatives on how to manipulate residential school history to score political points on the Liberals, basically, "don't focus on the fact that John A. McDonald helped create the system, focus on other Liberal engagement with the system," so always trying to misrepresent the history in ways that looks favorable to Conservatives.

As well, a number of academics have engaged in or have supported denialism, vocally denigrating Indigenous communities searching the former sites of residential schools for potential unmarked graves, suggesting that it's all just fake news, a big hoax or a lie meant to attack Christianity and destroy Canada, etc., etc.

It's all pretty disgusting. It's mostly just a handful of the same sad people, the usual suspects, but increasingly, politicians have started to legitimize denial as discourse as a way of garnering support among far-right conspiratorial types, which has meant that these denialist talking points are spreading even further and passing as legitimate talking points.

Alberta Premier Danielle Smith spread the mass grave hoax narrative on her for-profit social platform here, suggesting that it's all just fake news. And current Conservative leader Pierre Poilievre was in

Winnipeg recently giving a fundraising talk for the Frontier Center, a far right think tank that has done much to spread residential school denialism, including in 2018 taking out radio ads questioning the truths about the system to listeners.

(There was) an alleged serial killer here in Winnipeg who targeted Indigenous women and, at the time that he was doing that, he was posting residential school denialism, including the mass grave hoax narrative, at the time of his alleged acts.

These examples – and there are many more that I could talk about, in the discussion perhaps, that you've come across – all seek to misrepresent residential school history and the experiences of survivors in ways that downplay the system's devastating effects and its ongoing legacy. And we must take these attacks on Truth and Reconciliation seriously.

So, denialists, in the end, are not just simply dimwitted, they are afraid that reconciliation will unsettle their material interests and position of power in colonial society, personally or politically.

The TRC had a very clear formula: we have to have truth, then we can have healing and justice, then we can have reconciliation. Denialists understand this formula very clearly and are trying to discredit and undermine people's faith in the truth part so we don't have to do the healing, justice, and reconciliation part.

In keeping with Memmi's profile of the colonizer who accepts, Beyak and other residential school denialists are seeking or choosing to seek refuge in an assemblage of misinformation and untruths. This, however, I argue is a false refuge.

Denying the colonial past and present prevents settlers from being part of the project of reconciliation and the efforts to build sustainable and reciprocal relations with Indigenous peoples. It could actually resolve their crisis of legitimacy and help them to live in the lands currently called Canada in a good or at least better way.

That's contrary to Beyak's response, when pressed by a reporter about her defense of residential schools, that she didn't need any more education. It's clear that actually what is needed in our current era of Truth and Reconciliation is more and not less education about the ongoing effects of Canadian colonization and the opportunities for all in deep, unsettling, and meaningful reconciliation. In fact, Murray Sinclair always says that education is what got us into this mess, and education is what is needed to get us out. And I want to commend all of you for coming and committing to that path of learning. Because the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was clear in its final report: that reconciliation is not an Indigenous problem, it is a Canadian responsibility, and learning how to identify and confront residential school denialism at home, in the workplace, in the community, in your faith-based groups, on your sports teams, is an easy way for Canadians, folks like you, to individually and as a community help put truth before reconciliation.

Okay, thanks so much, I'm going to hand things back over to our host Daniel, and we're going to have some Question and Answer, and discussion.

Daniel Sims: Great, thank you for that, always appreciate hearing from you and it's an important topic to have, as you know, we are still dealing with the calls to action of the TRC, still trying to work towards reconciliation, indigenization, and decolonization in a host of disciplines and institutions in this fine

country of ours. So, it was really good to hear you talk about denialism, what it means, what it represents, and the one thing that struck me from your talk was at the end saying that people who are denialists aren't simply dimwitted.

This is something that struck me. I've done work looking at things like Bigfoot or Sasquatch and why people believe in them or don't believe in them, from a cultural perspective, but also from a very colonial perspective – and it's the same idea with regards to vaccines and vaccine hesitancy and things like that – is that the assumption that the people who are opposed to what you believe in are simply dimwitted is rarely the case and I would say is almost never the case. There are reasons why people believe what they believe. You may not agree with those reasons, but it is the moment you assume that they're simply dimwitted that also prevents any chance for conversation or any talk about what actually is occurring as well.

Sean Carleton: Yes, just quickly on that before we get into some of these great questions that folks have dropped, and maybe to give folks more time to drop more questions in there if you want, I think that that's worth pausing a little bit on, Daniel, because as you were saying, it's almost easy to just dismiss them as dimwitted. That let's us off the hook from doing the work of figuring out what those reasons are and figuring out ways to discredit those reasons so that we don't have to engage with this kind of hurtful discourse.

And I think it's also just writing people off as bigots or as sort of "lost in the woods". I think what we're learning in this age of misinformation is that this is how conspiratorial arguments gain steam, because they're not being challenged, they're being dismissed: "I'm not going to engage with it, I'm not going to discredit it, I'm not going to challenge it". But the problem is that it grows, and more people, you know – it's a snowball effect – more people then believe in it because nobody's challenging it.

And I think that that's why (…) I talk to so many people that say: "Well, I've read the Truth and Reconciliation calls to action, but I'm not in government, I don't know what I can do personally". If you look at the calls to action, many of them are the government will do this, the government will do that, different levels. There's not actually like: what can ordinary Canadians do on a day-by-day basis to help ensure that we're moving in this direction, that we can actually achieve some of these bigger things.

And my argument is that you've got to fight for the truth. And that happens around the kitchen table, that happens in awkward conversations, in our communities. It's not big grand acts of reconciliation, it's on a daily basis, taking that responsibility of being, of holding space for truth, of learning – because we all need to do learning, including myself.

Learning is an ongoing process. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is not the end of the learning, it's really just the tip of the iceberg.

And so, I think that committing to that education piece, of all of us learning (..). Now my basic argument is that a more informed populace, about these things, will be able to identify and discredit these talking points as they happen. But if we don't commit to that education, we don't know, then they can seem like a good rigorous question, a skeptical, you know, question that nobody's thought of. "Oh, that's really good!", instead of being like, "No, that's some denialism right there, and here's me using my knowledge about the system to discredit that".

In the health context – now we've got lots of questions, so I'll wind this down. In a health context, a lot of the denialists will say: "Well, you know, these deaths are really overblown. It was really just tuberculosis in the early 20th century, lots of people were dying from tuberculosis, so this is no big deal."

This is of course the denialist talking point, because we know there's a grain of truth there, that a lot of people died of tuberculosis in the early 20th century, but what we know from reports, by people like Dr. Peter Bryce, is that conditions of overcrowding or nutrition, malnutrition, or sanitation – all of these different things, ramming people into small spaces with no ventilation – facilitated the spread of tuberculosis and the death of more Indigenous children as compared to children who went to public schools and went home to, for the most part, better conditions at home.

So, it's about twisting that. It's well, what's the big deal, a lot of people died of tuberculosis, and if you don't know anything about the nuances of that history, that can seem like a good, reasonable point. But if you understand the full (…), if you've read the TRC report, which lays out all of this very clearly, you'll know that it's a denialist talking point and you can say, well, actually, that's a misrepresentation of what's going on there, which perhaps some folks here would be able to better counteract that particular denialist talking point about health.

Okay, I'll be quiet so that we can get on to some of these great questions.

Daniel Sims: Just looking at the questions here. There's a lot of comments that are thanking you for the talk. So, for example, Donna says the information you're sharing is necessary. In order to let something go, we must first embrace it. So I just wanted to acknowledge that and recognize that we are recording this. We're also hoping to turn it into an audio podcast, so that aspect there.

Lynn asked: "How can public servants hopefully call out residential school denialism in public and inside the public service without being punished, scapegoated, or fired? It's unsafe to call out denialism publicly and that silence comes across as support for denialism".

Sean Carleton: That's a good question, Lynn, because you know, I think we need to understand that denialism operates in all sorts of different contexts, but the strategies to confront it look differently depending on where you're at, where you're positioned. Sometimes it is hard to challenge denialism at work. What happens if someone above you, a manager, a boss, is peddling some of this stuff. The power relationships there make it more challenging.

It's not like fighting your racist uncle at the next family dinner. It's a bit of a different context, so it requires different kinds of tools. It might not be a directly confrontational approach, at first. It might slowly, over time, be trying to have conversations about these kinds of issues. And to your point – sorry, the question disappeared … there it is – you know that the fear of being punished or scapegoated or fired is real.

Look at Dr Peter Bryce who was working for the Department of Indian Affairs, he made his report as asked, and they basically didn't like what he found and tried to push him out and they were successful. Because they didn't want to hear that.

So, my response to your really good question here is that there's not a one size fits-all approach to combating denialism. The answer is truth in every context, but how you operationalize that truth-telling needs to be tailored for particular situations.

Working with a patient, working with a superior, working with a co-worker, working with someone in your faith-based organization, in your community, all of those might look different. So, I think that that's at least important to acknowledge.

It doesn't mean that you let people off the hook that are in positions of power over you, but you do need to think carefully about how you respond to these things over time. Maybe invite them to a book club that's perhaps reading a memoir by an Indigenous author about their experiences. There's lots of good ones out there in the British Columbia context. Bev Sellars has a book called *They Called Me Number One*. If you're in Manitoba, there's a good one by Ted Fontaine, it's called *Broken Circle*. If you're in Ontario, Basil Johnston has one called *Indian School Days*. That was one of the first in the late 70s, early 80s. So, maybe even just having a conversation like that. Maybe you don't want to invite your boss to your book club, but there's different kinds of strategies. And sharing learning opportunities like this with folks that might be in a position of power over you might be a way of, hey I'm wanting to bring you into this conversation rather than I know you're a bigot and let's confront this at the water cooler.

So, thanks so much, Lynn, for that question. I think being careful about how you do this – committed but careful – is important for sure.

Daniel Sims: I think that's key, and you making sure that conversation is ongoing and that you're not just shutting things down as well. Because you know when people shut down, then there's never any change.

Sean Carleton: Yeah, and I think that's important. And the other thing that I'll just quickly say is that if you are encountering some of these things, like I offer myself out there as a resource. You can contact me and say, "I need a resource, I need something". I'm happy to kind of walk you through any situation as part of my commitment to being a public intellectual about these issues.

Daniel Sims: The next comment we had was regarding Conservative MP Pierre Poilievre in the comments that he made in June 2008. Donna just mentioned that she was hoping that you would mention that, so I believe you did in your talk.

Sean Carleton: I don't think I mentioned that in 2008, during that apology, Poilievre actually skipped out and went on a talk radio show and blasted Indigenous people as lazy, money grubbing, blah blah blah, all the normal anti-Indigenous racist stereotypes. And he was called out for it, he apologized.

He has interestingly stayed silent on the issue of denialism, despite (the) many prominent politicians and far-right pundits that he promotes, including Jordan Peterson, Jon Kay, all the normal folks, Poilievre has stayed silent on it. In fact, he was actually in the House of Commons when the Canadian legislature unanimously supported a motion describing the Indian residential school system as genocidal. So, interestingly, he has not - despite all the other kinds of conspiratorial talking points that people on the far right have mobilized – he hasn't engaged in that in a while. And I'm hoping that that is a sign that some of the work that we're doing to confront denialism is working, but we'll have to see what happens in the next couple of years.

Daniel Sims: This gets back into what I said earlier about making sure those conversations are happening. You don't want to create a no-win scenario where if somebody said something in the past, you then decide that they are incapable of ever changing, and that their views were going to remain consistent, because then again people have no incentive to actually change.

Sean Carleton: For sure, we don't want this to become part of a right-wing identity, like anti-vaccine mandates, all of these kinds of things that people just perpetuate without thinking, they're in a "group think" situation. My hope is that people, when confronted by the truth, will do the work required to understand why talking about a mass grave hoax being pushed by the mainstream media and First Nations, etc., is rubbish. But that's part of doing that work of not writing people off, trying to keep an open mind and encourage that dialogue. That's part of our work in holding space for Truth and Reconciliation.

But thanks for the question.

Daniel Sims: Just looking at the next comments from Carrie: "Just wanted to let you know that this is a fantastic webinar, fantastic information and the presentation is great, very powerful."

Sean Carleton: Thanks, Carrie.

Daniel Sims: Then Edith had a question regarding the letters that you talked about in your presentation and just asking: do these letters have verified coordinates, for example, full names, emails, etc.?

Sean Carleton: Yes, good question, Edith. The short answer is that in the article that I published, you can see the information that was made available publicly by Beyak on her website, and the information is inconsistent. Some people use their full names; some people just used a first name or they wrote anonymously. There was no contact information that Beyak posted publicly, although I would imagine perhaps an ATIP request might reveal more information about these people. But I treated them essentially like comments on an online news article. And there's lots of theory about understanding these. Again, to Daniel's first point, it's easy to cast these off as comments written by trolls, etc.

But I do think that they do a few things. One, there are kernels of what people believe in those comments. And two, regardless, they are presenting misinformation that nevertheless people kind of spread. And these talking points unfortunately have picked up and gained more steam. So, they will require – regardless of who is doing it and what their intentions are – it's necessary to confront them nevertheless. But thanks for your question.

Daniel Sims: And then the next comment is from Kristen, just "thank you". And Mari says the same thing. "Such an informative session, thank you". And then Caitlyn – and my apologies if I mispronounce people's names, I'm going based on what I'm seeing written here: "Can you give some tools and a way to call in and engage, educate people who deny mass graves, so lack of exhumation."

Sean Carleton: Yes, that's a good question, Caitlyn, and I'm just mindful of time because I'm about to release a major report specifically on debunking the mass grave hoax. So, I'll try not to talk too long about this, I'll be brief here.

But essentially – for those of you who have not heard this particular element of denialism – in response to the Kamloops First Nation's announcement in 2021 about the identification of sites of interest related

to potential unmarked graves based on community knowledge – some reporters and journalists, in a rush to understand what was going on, reported erroneously that what was being discovered was mass graves instead of, as the communities were explaining, as *potential unmarked graves* identified through ground-penetrating radar (which doesn't actually show graves but identifies sites of interests), and – based on a variety of other kinds of research – (which) *could potentially be graves*. All of that nuance got lost as people were trying to understand what was going on.

And what denialists do is say that the mainstream media pushed a false narrative; that what was being reported as mass graves rather than unmarked graves, (was an attempt) to try to guilt and shock Canadians into caring about reconciliation. And this is a very popular denialist talking point.

So, what I did with a colleague is try to take those points seriously and fact check them, essentially. And so, what we did is we looked at five news outlets: CBC, National Post, Toronto Star, Globe and Mail, and the Canadian Press. We looked at 386 articles published between May 27, 2021, and October 15, 2021, so the window of that spring, summer, and early fall leading up to the First National Day of Truth and Reconciliation.

And we looked at what did reporters actually say here. And we found that only 6.5% of the articles referenced a mass grave, so 93% did not. That of that 6.5%, 13 of the 25 articles quoted someone else in using the words "mass graves" and often clarified in their own terms that these were not mass graves; they were unmarked graves.

And essentially, the other main finding is that the reportage over that period improved, as people understood and communities clarified that what was being reported was not a mass grave, but rather potential unmarked graves that required further research. The reporting gets better over time.

So, there's no mass grave hoax. What's going on is denialists are cherry-picking some errors made by some journalists as they were trying to understand things, and using that as sort of a conspiratorial cornerstone to suggest that you were misled in caring about this, and now you don't have to care about it. So, I think some of the tools to kind of challenge this – hopefully when this report gets released in a week and a half – is people can point to the evidence and say, "some journalists made mistakes but they fixed those mistakes over time and the mistakes in context were smaller, it was not a universal reporting here".

What really was going on is that Canadians were confronted by the reality that they really hadn't read the TRC report fully, and that most people understood residential schools as being about abuse physically, sexually, mentally. They did not read the whole Volume 4 on *Missing Children and Unmarked Graves* that lays out all of the evidence about what's going on here. And so, they were shocked by the Kamloops announcement into the realization that this wasn't just about abuse; this was also about mismanagement that led to student death. And Canadians, confronted by that information, felt differently about reconciliation. They were not being misled by some kind of conspiracy or hoax.

So, I hope that this report will give further tools for folks wanting to discredit this particular talking point, which has now been spread by far-right people in the U.S. and the U.K. recently and requires, I think, that more evidence-based approach to challenge this.

Okay, we've got 15 minutes left, so let's keep going.

Daniel Sims: Our next question comes from David and is: "Can building an inclusive and equitable education system, sustainable development goal #4, contribute to minimizing denialism?"

Sean Carleton: I'll be brief on this one, David, yes. Growing up in North Vancouver in British Columbia, I knew very little about Indigenous people despite there being three reserves in close proximity to me on the North Shore. I lived down the hill from a residential school and did not know that until I went to university.

I do think that things are changing, however. I think education, curricular change in the education sector, people taking the TRC's calls to action seriously, are very heartening.

When I went to talk in a grade five-six split here in Winnipeg recently for *I Love to Read Month*, I was reading a short story about residential schooling and I opened up by asking students, well what do you know about residential schooling, assuming they'd know very little. And this kid puts his hand up at the back and he's like: "Well, residential schools were a Church and State partnership that operated for over 100 years, sought to remove children from their families, many people had negative experiences, and we remember this on Orange Shirt Day, and we know a lot about Truth and Reconciliation."

I'm thinking: "In grade five or six, I was still wearing sweatpants because I couldn't figure out how to wear jeans, and this kid is light years ahead of where I was". And I'm thinking, that's the answer. That education, over time, will win on these issues, that people more educated about this history and about these ongoing legacies will be able to identify and confront this denialism much better than it took me 15 extra years to figure out how to do this effectively.

So, I do believe in education as a key contributor to helping to minimize denialism over time.

Daniel Sims: Great, thank you, and I can say as somebody who's been teaching about residential schools for 10 years at a university level, students are coming in knowing more and more as time goes on, and I'd update my curriculum for the simple fact that the basic information is no longer required. We can have more in-depth conversation. So, that change is underway.

Sean Carleton: I'll select some of these, I know we've got lots of them. If there's a way that I can answer these after, or if your question doesn't get answered, feel free to reach out to me and I'll happily give you the information, just because I know we're running tight on time.

But maybe you would like to choose a couple of these? And maybe I can find a way to group them?

Daniel Sims: I know Derek Deluca has a comment about rhetoric versus rhetoric, but Ellen has a question: "What advice would you have for speaking to people who just stonewall or become combative when presented with fake facts about colonization and so-called Canada?"

Sean Carleton: Yes, Ellen, I think about this quite a bit. And maybe it relates to Derek's point that this feels like a losing proposition sometimes. What I would say is that, based on my experience, it's not a losing proposition, that education does win out over time. That people presenting conspiracy theories increasingly alienate themselves in ways that it makes what they're doing – like they believe in it so wholeheartedly, but their talking points are so ridiculous – (that) they have to continuously stretch them out over time. I still think it's not a losing proposition. It's difficult. And those two things are different.

And not all of us do the same work. This might not be the thing for you. You might be wanting to work on the policy angle of ensuring that the calls to action get implemented. But for those of us who do have people in our lives, in a variety of different ways, that push this misinformation, challenging it with truth, with resources, with evidence is something that is required of us in today's age of misinformation.

Not just about residential schools, but on all sorts of fronts. There is an attack on the University, there is an attack on health, there is an attack on people who want to preserve the world in which we depend on for our survival. And so, I think fighting misinformation, sadly, is something that we are all going to have to get better on doing if we want to live in a better society.

And so, I think it is important that we recognize that there will be people who, regardless of how well you do this, will keep their head in the sand. Sometimes you have to cut your losses and understand that this might be a person that is not going to change. So, have conversations with people who will be more receptive. Be strategic with your time and your energy. And know that, at the end of the day, I'll be doing this work for as long as it is out there, and we all have different roles to play in creating the paths towards Truth and Reconciliation.

Daniel Sims: Nice. Just skipping ahead and realizing we only have a few more minutes, so we are skipping some questions. There is one that came in from Kathy, and I think this one's relevant as a day-to-day thing people can do, because people do land acknowledgements. Like today, I acknowledge that I am coming to you today from the traditional territory of the Lheildli T'enneh. Kathy's question is: "What, if any, role do land acknowledgements play? Should we do them?"

Sean Carleton: There are so many great questions here, I just want to find (it) so that I have the wording in front of me. Anyway, land acknowledgements. Here's what I'll say about land acknowledgements. You know there is a critique of land acknowledgements, they are sort of performative, that they don't really do much, it's just about acknowledging without actually changing the relationship. But I have two thoughts about land acknowledgements. The first is that there is an acknowledgement built into the idea of an acknowledgement, that at least is getting at the greater recognition of the fact that Canada is a colonial country and that has, at least in the area that I live, which is Treaty One territory, the homeland of the Métis Nation, that there are actual agreements in place that are about fostering a reciprocal relationship built on the betterment of both parties. And that, if your government is not working in that interest, then you have responsibility to change that government, to challenge that government, so that you can be in alignment with your responsibilities as a Treaty person.

Treaty is not just for Indigenous people. Treaty is two-way. And so, at least in areas with treaties, that the land acknowledgement is actually important, and it serves the role of reminding us that we are in a relationship with the original peoples of these lands and that we have responsibilities as a result. And it might seem weird to do it at the beginning of a staff meeting, but it is a reminder that if someone in that staff meeting introduces the denialist talking point, that whether you confront them in that moment or after, you have a responsibility, it's a reminder of the responsibility.

So even if they feel performative, I do think that they help set the tone and then they can help people reflect on the reality that Canada is more complicated than we've been taught in high school. And that can open conversations to help bring people in, to learn more.

Daniel Sims: I think we have time for just one more question. And I guess I'll go with Sarah's question like the last one just because it does have a sense of continuity. “Really enjoyed this presentation, would love a suggested reading list”.

So, in the last few minutes here, what would you recommend? We've provided things in the chat, we'll provide them through the NCCIH, but what would you recommend?

Sean Carleton: (That’s a) great question, Sarah, I'm glad that at the end of this you're interested in more resources. That's the point; these are supposed to spark interest in learning more.

On denialism specifically, I think in the chat somewhere is the full article that today's presentation was based off and you can look in the notes and find a lot of the sources that I engage with to help understand this. But if you're looking for more general resources, one of the things – and I won't be able to type and find this and drop it into the chat, but maybe it can be circulated later – is that the Winnipeg Public Library recently created a list of resources on residential schooling, from history to literature to films, for all varying levels from young to adult.

So, these lists of resources are out there. An easier one, the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation, if you go to their website, I think it's nctr.ca, they have a list of educational resources. Again, (they are) sort of organized by age-appropriate levels.

So, there are a lot of things out there. I know I repeat myself often, and one of the things that I say is that I hear people say: “I've read the TRC report”, but they haven't, or they've looked at it, or they skipped to the end and looked at the calls to action. And that's good, you know, everybody has differing time commitments and differing levels of interest and things, but I really think that if you have not read the Truth and Reconciliation Report (…). All of them are available for free online as PDFs on the NCTR's website. You can find the summary of the 6-volume report. There's also a shorter book called – I'll just grab it off my shelf – it's called *A Knock on the Door*, which is the essential history of the TRC, from the TRC report. It's a really good overview of everything in a much shorter form.

And I really think that – without having to go and do a lot more research than people have time for – if we all just read this and understood it and created connections between our understanding (and) the way that we operate in the world, the pressure we put on government and industry and policy to move forward on those calls to action, I think that we can continue to see progress on this particular issue.

So, I know it sounds silly but the TRC, if you haven't read it, it's very helpful. And people will say: “Oh well, the TRC was just biased, it's political.” It really wasn't. In many ways, it's like a summary of what historians have written about this for the past 30 years combined with survivor testimony. And so, you should really take some time to sit with it, if you haven't. And (if) a number of your co-workers or community members haven't read it, create a book club, let's all read this, come back in a month or two and have a conversation about what we thought about the experience of reading this collectively.

Try to make it something that you do with other people rather than as a sole individual thing. Because reconciliation requires collaboration, and I think that that might be a fun – maybe fun's the wrong word – it might be a more enjoyable way of dealing with very difficult knowledge.

Daniel Sims: We have four minutes to go. Any last thoughts, Sean?

Sean Carleton: Well, I mean, I'd love to read through all of these questions again. If I didn't get a chance to answer your question, you can reach me on my email. You can send me a message on Twitter or social media and I'll be happy to answer your question. But I guess for me in terms of concluding thoughts, there were a lot of people here today. I really appreciate you taking the time.

Reconciliation is action. And some people, I think, they get stuck because it feels like such a daunting task: "How could I possibly change the direction of Indigenous-settler relations here?" It's by showing up and learning more, I think, is the answer that I've at least come to. And I am actively trying to engage both. I teach, but I also am constantly learning and engaging with community to listen and learn and figure out in what ways can I use, in my small time on this Earth, to try and make it a bit of a better place.

I just want to double down by saying thank you for taking the time to be a part of that. And I know it's easy to do it in September because there's lots of events around Orange Shirt Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. But the showing up is a constant process. And here in Winnipeg we often think of it as a Treaty responsibility, as something that we do as much as we can.

If someone in your community is struggling, that's not something that you do one time a year. You want people to be healthy, you want to be in good relationship with people in your community. And the Truth and Reconciliation's calls to action are saying there's a lot wrong with Indigenous-settler relations in this country right now. And it's going to require, as the TRC says, lots of hands and heads, all kind of pulling together to try and make things better.

And the healthcare industry in particular – I have lots of nursing students that come through my classes – they want to learn, they want to be able to understand how they can be better health practitioners. And I think that's encouraging is what I'm trying to say.

Thanks for spending your time with me and Daniel today attending this and good luck for the rest of the month, the rest of the year, and please always feel free to be in touch and ask questions. That's what I'm here for.

Daniel Sims: Thank you, Sean, I do appreciate you coming and talking today. I appreciate everyone in the audience, actually, coming and spending some time listening to Sean and I talk. It's very important work that's being done. And just to let people know, next month we will be having Chris Andersen, noted Metis scholar and Dean of the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta, talking about his research, particularly regarding the Métis in healthcare. And then actually one of the individuals that Sean mentioned, Gina Starblanket, is currently scheduled to be our speaker in February. So, there's a lot more events that are going to take place.

Sean Carleton: Don't miss it.

Daniel Sims: Yeah, hopefully people will be able to make it. So, thank you!

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