Special Thematic Section on "Multiple Perspectives in Conflict Settings: From Diversity to Pluralism"

Preferences for Different Representations of Colonial History in a Canadian Urban Indigenous Community

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Abstract

When a social group's history includes significant victimization by an outgroup, how might that group choose to represent its collective history, and for what reasons? Employing a social identity approach, we show how preferences for different representations of colonial history were guided by group interest in a sample of urban Indigenous participants. Three themes were identified after thematic analysis of interview and focus group transcripts from thirty-five participants who identified as Indigenous. First, participants expressed concern that painful, victimization-focused representations of colonial history would harm vulnerable ingroup members, and urged caution when representing colonial history in this way. Second, while colonial history was clearly painful and unpleasant for all participants, many nevertheless felt it was important that representations of colonial history tell the whole truth about how badly Indigenous people have been mistreated by outgroups. Participants suggested these brutal representations of colonial history could also serve the interests of their group by bolstering ingroup pride when representations also emphasized the resilience of Indigenous peoples. Finally, participants described how brutal representations of colonial history could help transform intergroup relations with non-Indigenous outgroups in positive ways by explaining present challenges in Indigenous communities as the result of intergenerational trauma. We discuss findings in terms of their relevance for ingroup agency and their implications for public representations of colonial history.

Keywords: social identity theory, representations of history, ingroup agency, Indigenous peoples, colonial history

Résumé

Lorsque l'histoire d'un groupe social comprend une victimisation importante par un exogroupe, comment ce groupe choisit-il de représenter son histoire collective et pour quelles raisons ? En utilisant une approche d'identité sociale auprès d'un échantillon de participants autochtones vivant en milieu urbain, nous montrons comment les préférences des différentes représentations de l'histoire coloniale ont été guidées par l'intérêt du groupe. Trois thèmes ont été identifiés après une analyse thématique des transcriptions d'entrevues et de groupes de discussion auprès de trente-cinq participants qui se sont identifiés comme autochtones. Premièrement, les participants se sont inquiétés du fait que des représentations douloureuses de l'histoire coloniale axées sur la victimisation nuiraient aux membres vulnérables du groupe, et ont appelé à la prudence lorsque l'histoire coloniale est présentée de cette manière. Deuxièmement, alors que l'histoire coloniale était douloureuse et désagréable pour tous les participants, beaucoup estimaient néanmoins qu'il était important que les représentations de l'histoire coloniale révèlent toute la vérité sur la sévérité avec laquelle les peuples autochtones ont été maltraités. Les participants ont suggéré que ces représentations brutales de l'histoire coloniale pourraient également servir les intérêts de leur groupe en renforçant la fierté des membres du groupe alors que celles-ci mettent également l'accent sur la résilience des peuples autochtones. Enfin, les participants ont expliqué comment les représentations brutales de l'histoire coloniale pourraient aider à améliorer les relations entre les groupes autochtones et non-autochtones en expliquant les défis actuels des communautés autochtones comme résultant du traumatisme intergénérationnel. Nous présentons les résultats de manière à mettre en évidence leur pertinence en matière d'autonomie des membres du groupe et de leurs implications pour les représentations publiques de l'histoire coloniale.

Mots-clés: théorie de l'identité sociale, représentations de l'histoire, agence d'ingroupes, peuples autochtones, histoire coloniale

Non-Technical Summary

Background

Telling the story of how a social group has been historically victimized by another group raises complex issues. How can this be done in a sensitive way that will not increase harm? As accounts of the brutal history of the colonial residential school system that significantly harmed many generations of Indigenous people in Canada are increasingly being integrated into educational materials and public discourse more generally, it is important to understand the implications of different representations of this history for Indigenous peoples.

Why was this study done?

We wanted to understand how Indigenous people's preferences for different representations of colonial history were guided by a basic motivation to protect the interests of fellow group members and the group as a whole. Social Identity Theory predicts that the basic motivation to promote the interests of one's social group will guide group-related behavior when individuals identify strongly with their group. We expected that while there might be variation in preferences for representations of colonial history depending on audience or context, in each cause group interest would motivate these preferences.

What did the researchers do and find?

We analyzed qualitative data from focus groups and interviews with 35 Indigenous participants discussing an Indigenous culture-focused elementary school in Vancouver, Canada. Participants wanted the difficult realities of residential schools and colonial history to be represented in different ways for different audiences. In some cases, participants felt these stories should downplay the brutality of residential schools so as not to (re)traumatize vulnerable group members (e.g. children and residential school survivors). More commonly however, participants felt that representations of colonial history should describe the brutality of their collective victimization unflinchingly, so long as these accounts were paired with stories of the resilience and resistance of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples' continuing survival despite such brutal treatment was a point of collective pride. Finally, when representing colonial history to non-Indigenous people, participants felt these accounts should emphasize their collective victimization in order to increase non-Indigenous peoples' empathy and support for Indigenous people. Although different representations of colonial history were preferred for different audiences, in each case preferences were motivated by promoting the interests of Indigenous peoples.

What do these findings mean?

When telling painful stories about a group's historical victimization, it is important to grasp the complexity of how these representations might impact group members negatively or positively under different circumstances. Those tasked with developing curricula or communications about a group's painful history should proceed with caution and involve impacted group members in the story telling process to ensure their interests are protected.

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History can be painful. It would be understandable for groups with a history of collective oppression to avoid this pain by downplaying the traumatic instances of victimization in the stories they tell about their group. Yet, they do not always do so. How, and why, might a social group choose to represent its collective history when that history includes significant victimization and oppression? In this paper, we take a social identity approach (Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to examine the ways in which Indigenous people in Vancouver relate to their shared history of colonial oppression. We argue that people who identify as Indigenous are likely to prefer representations of their shared traumatic colonial history that they believe will benefit Indigenous people.

Colonization and the Indigenous Peoples of Canada

The long and ongoing colonization of the lands collectively referred to as "Canada" has resulted in the impoverishment and marginalization of Canada's Indigenous peoples (Taylor & de la Sablonnière, 2015). In the early stages of contact, European diseases decimated Indigenous communities, sometimes wiping out entire villages (Mann, 2006; Morin, 2015). Indigenous peoples were dispossessed of their traditional lands as the British and Canadian governments either forced tribes into treaties or simply took and settled Indigenous lands that had never been ceded or conquered (Adams, 1989; Daschuk, 2013). Soon after the colonial Canadian government confederated, the oppression of Indigenous peoples became organized under the terms of the 1867 Indian Act which relegated Indigenous peoples to confined reservations, controlled their movements, and outlawed key cultural and spiritual practices (e.g. Potlaches, Sun Dances), all in an attempt to promote the eventual erasure of Indigenous cultures and assimilation of Indigenous peoples into Canadian society (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015a).

One particularly insidious tool of colonialism in Canada was the Indian Residential School (IRS) system. This system of state and church-run boarding schools separated at least 150,000 Indigenous children from their families and communities from the 1840s to the 1990s, prohibiting them from speaking their heritage languages, forbidding the practice of cultural traditions and exposing students to myriad forms of abuse (MacDonald & Hudson, 2012; Milloy, 1999; TRC, 2015a). Staff at schools frequently cultivated an atmosphere of abuse, even encouraging students to engage in violence against each other (Matheson, Bombay, Haslam, & Anisman, 2016). At least 3000 and perhaps as many as 6000 children are believed to have died at residential schools in Canada, mostly as a result of disease, neglect, and abuse (Tasker, 2015; TRC, 2015a). The cycles of cultural dislocation continued as many residential school survivors had their own children taken from them, either to be enrolled in residential schools as they had been or, beginning in around the 1960s, adopted into non-Indigenous families where they were most often completely separated from their heritage cultures (Sinclair, 2007; Strong-Boag, 2004). This calculated and devastating program of assimilation amounted to nothing less than "cultural genocide" (Johnston, 2013; MacDonald & Hudson, 2012; TRC, 2015a), and has had a profound, negative impact on generations of Indigenous peoples in Canada (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2011, 2014). Many Indigenous communities in Canada continue to struggle with the intergenerational effects of the IRS system, often manifesting in the form of elevated rates of addiction, violence, suicide and mental illness (Bombay et al., 2011, 2014; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; EKOS Research Associates, 2007; Kirmayer, 1994; Ross, Dion, Cantinotti, Collin-Vézina, & Paquette, 2015; Taylor & de la Sablonnière, 2015).

While the devastation wrought by colonization in Indigenous communities has been significant, Indigenous peoples have also resisted their oppression since first contact, and continue to do so today (Hill, 2010). One significant area of Indigenous resistance that has received relatively little attention is the degree to which Indigenous students

and their families resisted residential schools (Dupuis, 2016; Haig-Brown, 1988; Marshall et al., 2012). Both the preliminary and final report of Canada's recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools (TRC, 2012, pp. 49-53, 2015a, pp. 116-122) include sections on stories of resistance from students and their families, including parents who refused to send their children to the schools or removed them once they learned of their mistreatment, students who ran away or organized hunger strikes and work strikes in protest of their harsh conditions, students who physically fought back against abusive teachers, and multiple cases of Indigenous students who burned down their residential school in protest. Furthermore, the resistance and political advocacy of Indigenous communities played a role in the eventual closure of the IRS system by the Government of Canada (Miller, 2012). Indigenous resistance to colonization continues in modern struggles against destructive resource extraction on traditional territories or fights against government policies that are seen to contribute to the ongoing assimilation of Indigenous cultures (Blomley, 1996). These struggles are often shared by many different Indigenous groups and broad social movements like "Idle No More" in Canada or the movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline in the United States demonstrate the willingness of diverse Indigenous groups to band together in collective opposition to ongoing colonialism (Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014; Solnit, 2016). Perhaps most significant of all, however, is the simple fact of Indigenous peoples' resilience after so many attempts to destroy their diverse cultures (TRC, 2015a). That Indigenous peoples have survived at all, and arguably are strengthening in a growing movement of decolonization and cultural resurgence (Corntassel, 2012; Fonda, 2012; Frideres, 1998; Simpson, 2014), speaks most clearly to the failure of colonial assimilation policies.

Given the painful nature of their shared experiences with colonialism, it would come as no surprise if Indigenous peoples preferred not to revisit or dwell on their traumatic collective history. Nevertheless, whereas the traumatic experiences of residential schools were for many years a silent history not spoken of by survivors, the past two decades have seen a gradual breaking of this silence (Assembly of First Nations, 1994). Due to the bravery of IRS survivors, including the pioneering public disclosures of Indigenous leaders such as National Chief Phil Fontaine, the sordid history of the IRS system in Canada has gradually entered public discourse in Indigenous communities and wider Canadian society. Increasingly, there are discussions around how best to incorporate stories of colonial oppression and residential school abuses in educational contexts, in part as a response to the "Calls to Action" included in the final report of the TRC (2015b). In the midst of these new developments, it is important to understand how Indigenous peoples themselves respond to different ways of representing the history of colonization. How do Indigenous people want this painful history to be represented, and what guides their preferences?

Representing History in Ways That Protect the Ingroup

Social Identity Theory (SIT, Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests people can define themselves in terms of their personal identity, but can also define themselves at a collective level, in terms of their collective or social identities. The way a group's history is represented can be an important facet of how the group constructs its collective identity. Representations of a group's history can provide a basis for group members to understand where they have come from and where they may go in future, including how they should respond to new challenges or threats (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Furthermore, representations of a group's history are not merely disinterested appraisals of the "facts" of history, but rather they are "world-making assumptions" (Elcheroth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011); that is, they help create the group's social world just as they are the product of reflection on the social world. Representations of a group's history are thus important for how group members come to see themselves as a collective (Breakwell, 1993). Furthermore, representations of a group's history can have implications for whether disadvan-

taged group members will feel empowered to take collective action and resist their oppression (Elcheroth et al., 2011; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). When disadvantaged groups understand their history as one of passive victimization, this might undermine a sense of agency in the present, and make collective resistance less likely (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Conversely, representing a group's history in terms of resistance to oppression can inspire group members to believe that their oppression is illegitimate, the social system is malleable, and change is possible (Reicher et al., 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

SIT argues that when people think of themselves in terms of their membership in a social group, they generally attempt to protect the ingroup identity (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Similarly, group members tend to prefer and are more likely to reproduce representations of the group's history that they believe serve the group's interests (McNeill, Pehrson, & Stevenson, 2017). Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, and Gundar (2009) point to a number of functions served by representations of a group's history of collective victimhood in "intractable" conflicts (e.g. the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), including providing explanations to interpret and assign blame in the ongoing conflict, meaning-making that allows group members to cope with trauma, preparing ingroup members for outgroup threats, increasing ingroup solidarity, catalyzing a sense of injustice that can mobilize defence of the ingroup, and attracting support from additional outgroups who may rally to the cause of the victimized. Some of these functions are more concentrated within the group itself (e.g. increasing ingroup solidarity) while others may have more relevance for intergroup relations (e.g. attracting outgroup support).

Groups can use representations of history flexibly to achieve different aims in different contexts, and the functions served by representations of history may vary further depending on whether the intended audience is the ingroup or an outgroup (Billig, 1987; Klein & Licata, 2003). When directed towards the ingroup, representations of a history of collective victimhood may serve to increase group cohesion, deny responsibility for ingroup transgressions or underscore the agency and resilience of the ingroup (McNeill et al., 2017; Vollhardt & Nair, 2018). When directed towards outgroups, representations may function to help the ingroup advocate for its interests (e.g. petitioning outgroup victimizers for reparations) or gain allies in their struggle for justice (Klein & Licata, 2003; McNeill et al., 2017). Therefore, representations of collective histories are not merely reflections of the state of intergroup relations, but can be deployed in order to change intergroup relations (Klein & Licata, 2003).

Finally, representations of historic victimization are not unidimensional, and are only one part of how history is represented. For many groups, representations of a history of victimization are likely to include or be complemented by a history of resilience and survival. For example, in their qualitative research with four diaspora groups with histories of collective victimhood, Vollhardt and Nair (2018) found that while group members commonly described many negative aspects of their collective victimhood (e.g. historical and ongoing pain of victimization, loss of family and culture), they also described many positive aspects of their group identities that their victimization had not erased, but had in some cases highlighted (e.g. ingroup resilience and strength, strengthened ingroup solidarity). Thus, representations of victimization did not exclusively focus on the victimization per se, but included ingroup strengths and stories of resilience that could foster a sense of ingroup pride. We suggest that the ways in which group members choose to emphasize or downplay these different aspects of history (i.e. victimization, resilience) in their representations of historical victimization will be determined by the strategic motivations associated with different contexts and audiences, but above all be guided by the motivation to benefit the ingroup (provided they identify with the group).

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The Present Study

Little research has examined the psychological ramifications of representations of colonial history for Indigenous people (though see Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015; Matheson, 2017). In this study, we examined how members of Vancouver's Indigenous community discussed representations of colonial history. Our research took place in the context of an Indigenous culture-focused elementary school in Vancouver, Canada. More than 50% of Indigenous peoples in Canada live in urban centres, and urban Indigenous communities are an important site of collective meaning-making for Indigenous peoples (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2015; Environics Institute for Survey Research, 2010; Peters & Andersen, 2013). Proximity and the use of shared Indigenous services can foster the emergence of a superordinate Indigenous identity based on the shared, lived experience of being Indigenous in the city (Peters & Andersen, 2013). Previous analysis of this sample suggests that most participants identified strongly with both their unique heritage cultures and with a superordinate Indigenous identity (Neufeld, 2016).

The data analyzed in this study were collected as a part of a larger research project on how Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members perceive a relatively novel "Aboriginal[i] Focus School" program in Vancouver (Neufeld, 2016; Neufeld, Schmitt, & Hutchingson, 2016). The Aboriginal Focus School (AFS) is a program created by the Vancouver School Board to provide a more welcoming and supportive learning environment for Indigenous students by incorporating Indigenous cultures into the elementary school classroom. Importantly, the school was a response by the school board to calls from the Indigenous community in Vancouver for an Indigenous culture-focused school (Archibald, Rayner, & Big Head, 2011). The AFS was (and continues to be) the only such Indigenous-focused school in Vancouver, though similar schools exist elsewhere in Canada. While the school is open to non-Indigenous students, at the time of data collection all students in the AFS program except one were Indigenous. Furthermore, while the school was ultimately funded and created by the mostly non-Indigenous Vancouver School Board, the school had an Indigenous principal and the two teachers in the AFS program both identified as Indigenous. Thus, as parents discussed either their experiences of the school so far, or their expectations for the school, they were for the most part imagining an Indigenous audience for the school curriculum and the representations of colonial history it might contain.

In this paper, we examine what members of a disadvantaged group say about representations of their own history, what representations they prefer, and the reasons they provide for preferring those representations. We therefore aim to add to the literature on the connections between representations of group history and social identity by investigating the extent to which Indigenous people include or emphasize the horrors of colonialism in their constructions of ingroup identity, and examining their motivations for preferring some representations of this history over others. Given the flexible nature of representations of history and the strategic, ingroup-serving functions representations of collective victimhood can serve, we expected that regardless of the types of representation of history that people who identify as Indigenous preferred, the reasoning they would use to explain those preferences would be based on whether they believed those representations promote the interests of Indigenous peoples.

Method

Participants

Thirty-five participants out of the larger study sample (Neufeld et al., 2016) self-identified as Aboriginal[ii] on a demographics questionnaire completed prior to interviews/focus groups and met criteria for inclusion in the sample[iii]. These 35 participants included 6 men and 29 women. Amongst participants who reported their age (n = 29), ages ranged from 21 to 68 years (M = 37.45, SD = 10.81). Reflecting the significant cultural diversity within many urban Indigenous communities, these 35 participants reported identifying with 33 unique Indigenous groups (e.g. Cree, Gitxsan, Métis) and 14 participants reported identifying with multiple Indigenous cultural groups. Prior analysis of these data indicated that participants were highly identified with their indigeneity, both in terms of their specific heritage cultures and in terms of the superordinate Indigenous category (see Neufeld, 2016 and Neufeld & Schmitt, 2019). Twelve participants were parents/guardians of children enrolled in the AFS and nineteen participants were parents with children enrolled in high schools, elementary schools or preschools located in the neighborhood of the AFS (i.e. within walking distance). Four participants were support staff or teachers working at the AFS or another nearby elementary school.

Data Collection

This study primarily employed focus groups; because of their natural, conversational tone, focus groups are an accessible methodology for marginalized groups with difficult histories of colonial research practices in their communities (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Smith, 1999) and traditionally oral cultures (Maar et al., 2011). Close collaboration with the principal of the AFS and wider Indigenous community (e.g. staff members at organizations who assisted with recruiting participants, Indigenous support staff at Simon Fraser University) helped to ensure our research strategy was culturally sensitive and respectful of the Indigenous community (see Neufeld, 2016 and Neufeld et al., 2016 for more details on the participatory, community-based aspects of this research, as well as recruitment strategies). Eight focus groups (ranged from 38 min to 1h33 min, 3-9 participants with 1-6 Indigenous participants) from the wider project included Indigenous participants and a further six Indigenous participants who could not attend a focus group were interviewed one-on-one (interviews ranged from 19 min to 1h28 min). Focus groups and interviews followed a semi-structured interview schedule designed to assess participants' perceptions of the Aboriginal Focus School, yet nevertheless elicited many conversations about participants' expectations and concerns for how colonial history would be taught and represented in the classroom, and their perceptions of how representations of history have implications for their group.

Analytic Approach

In analyzing participants' responses, we employed a critical realist approach that acknowledges a real world that can be examined empirically, but also that human knowledge and experience of the world is constructed in the interactions between personal and environmental factors, and is therefore subject to change (see Bazeley, 2013, p. 21; Willig, 1999). Beyond mere documentation of how people construct the social world, a critical realist approach enables the analyst to move further into explanations of why particular constructions exist and what functions they serve (Willig, 1999). This approach is particularly well-suited for examining the content of representations of a group's history and the variety of purposes these representations may serve.

Results are based on a thematic analysis (Bazeley, 2009, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013) to identify patterns in the ways participants discussed representations of colonial history. NVivo 11 qualitative software (2015) was used to organize and code transcribed data. The analysis proceeded in an iterative process that began with close reading of all transcripts. We used NVivo to flag excerpts that dealt specifically with representations of colonial history, residential schools, or how colonial history should be taught in the classroom. This set of relevant excerpts was then read closely again and coded inductively. Regular memo-writing and reflection tracked the addition of new codes, the evolution of code definitions and the merging of codes throughout the process of coding and analysis, creating an audit trail that traces how analyses developed and conclusions were eventually drawn out of the data (Bazeley, 2013; Carcary, 2009). Coded data were then analyzed through close reading to identify linguistic and conceptual patterns within coded extracts, and categorize these into sub-themes. Sub-themes were individually summarized alongside the original coded extracts and then discussed by the co-authors until any ambiguities were resolved and we reached an agreement on interpretations. During this process, patterns and sub-themes identified in different codes were sometimes merged, or patterns within the same code separated. In a final stage of analysis, the specific findings and sub-themes were summarized and re-organized in a way that best communicated the findings, in terms of the three first order themes presented here.

We used several strategies to enhance the credibility of our analysis (Carcary, 2009; Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999), including community presentations and feedback at the early stages of analysis and triangulation with media reports and community-based research that dealt with similar subject matter in Vancouver's Indigenous community (see Neufeld, 2016 for more details). The community presentations honoured participants' contributions to the research, in accordance with basic guidelines of respect for participants in community-based research. Throughout the research process, our analyses were informed by conversations with Indigenous colleagues in the community and our university, including our key community collaborator Vonnie Hutchingson (Haida, Tsimshian), the first principal of the AFS. As we (i.e., the co-authors) are non-Indigenous White men, the close collaboration with Indigenous colleagues and feedback from participants allowed us to conduct a culturally responsive study and analysis. It is also important to note that the identity of the interviewer (the first author) as non-Indigenous may have set up an intergroup situation wherein participants were more likely to represent colonial history in strategic ways that might elicit empathy and support from the first author as a representative of the oppressive/colonizing group (i.e. White, European settlers). Despite this context, participants discussed their perspectives on colonial history with candor and described a variety of representations of this history, many of them clearly ingroup-focused. When representations of colonial history were more outgroup-focused, they were typically directed at non-Indigenous employees of the school board (e.g. teachers, support staff, board members) or non-Indigenous students who might attend the school.

Analysis

Even though the larger study was not focused on representations of colonial history, the data collected nevertheless provided suitable material for analysis. Previous analysis of this data set (Neufeld, 2016) found that representations of colonial history were highly salient for participants. As participants discussed their expectations of the Aboriginal Focus School, they frequently highlighted the importance of teaching "Aboriginal history" to Indigenous children. Interestingly, in this sample, "Aboriginal history" was almost exclusively constructed as the history of colonialism, rather than, for example, the history of intergroup relations between Indigenous peoples prior to contact with Eu-

ropean settlers (Neufeld, 2016). All participants were clear that colonialism, and residential schools, were profoundly negative and damaging experiences for Indigenous peoples. This shared history of oppression was understood by participants as an important basis of Indigenous solidarity and collective identity (see Haber, 2007; Wilcox, 2010), especially in an urban context where people from a wide array of diverse Indigenous cultural groups live in close proximity. Participants also frequently expressed their perspectives on how they felt colonial history should be taught, including what they felt might be the dangers or benefits of different emphases in representations of their group's traumatic history. Furthermore, as participants discussed their own experiences with discrimination in the school system and their ongoing experience of colonial mistreatment, they made many references to the intergenerational harms of colonization, cultural loss, and residential schools[iv]. The frequency of these topics in the data, even though interview questions did not address them directly, suggests that colonial oppression, and how it is represented, was a salient and important issue for our participants.

We identified three key themes in how Indigenous participants preferred to represent colonial history to protect and promote the interests of their group. First, participants raised concerns around the potential for representations of colonial history to harm vulnerable ingroup members (i.e. residential school survivors and young children), and suggested that, at least in some contexts, colonial history should be represented in ways that downplay its brutality to minimize that harm. Second, participants more commonly expressed that the brutality of colonial oppression of Indigenous peoples should be emphasized in representations of colonial history because this could help bolster positive Indigenous identity by providing the context for stories of Indigenous resistance and resilience. Finally, participants underscored the importance of emphasizing the brutality of mistreatment when representing colonial history to outgroup members, hoping that such representations could positively transform intergroup relations with non-Indigenous people. Quoted excerpts included here were selected for their clarity and the degree to which they were representative of common patterns. Quotes were edited slightly for brevity and clarity and pseudonyms were used to protect participants' anonymity.

"It Really Is Too Gruesome": Protecting Vulnerable Ingroup Members From Trauma

Several participants suggested that representations of history that emphasized the brutality of colonization and residential schools could be harmful for certain Indigenous people who were perceived to be especially vulnerable. Perhaps most relevant to the context of data collection, several participants felt that elementary school students were too young to understand, and could potentially be traumatized by hearing the full truth about what happened at residential schools. For example, one of the teachers in the AFS explained her hesitance to even cover the topic of residential schools in her classroom:

> At this level, I don't focus so much on...the residential school stuff, um, it's quite traumatic for little-, I mean it's traumatic for anybody at any age, but, especially traumatic for little ones (Excerpt 1)

> In terms of like the residential schools and stuff like that, that history...like I said, it's pretty gruesome for kids that age, yeah, it's pretty gruesome for kids that age, so, we went to...the all canoe gathering [during the TRC national event in Vancouver] to see all the people come and sort of just support the residential school survivors, but we didn't go to any of the stuff at the PNE [i.e. where survivors recounted their experiences of residential schools] or anything, because it really is too gruesome for our kids...I'm probably going to continue to avoid the gruesome stuff, honestly, so, I'm going to avoid that (Excerpt 2)

This teacher felt strongly that the topic of residential schools, especially the abuses suffered there by Indigenous people, was simply too horrible for young children to comprehend. She worried that they would be negatively im-

pacted by this representation of their history, and elsewhere described how she preferred to emphasize the more positive interactions between Indigenous people and settlers throughout history (e.g. how Indigenous people shared effective crop-planting strategies with early European settlers).

Many participants in our sample were intergenerational survivors of the Indian Residential School system (i.e. their parents or grandparents attended), and three participants identified themselves as having personally attended residential school. Some participants expressed concern that the content of teaching at the Aboriginal Focus School would be "retraumatizing" for parents or grandparents of students in the program. That is, having their children or grandchildren learning about, or talking about, troubling aspects of the history of colonization in Canada (including residential schools) might trigger their own traumatic memories of the abuses they had suffered. For example, Erin, a mother whose children did not attend the AFS raised such a concern:

> The other thing I wanted to comment about was… maybe just noting the content, of what's being taught?…the reason I say that is because sometimes...you don't want to retraumatize people, with certain things right? (Excerpt 3)

In a later exchange in the same focus group, another participant, Joseph (a residential school survivor) expressed that when he had first heard about the Aboriginal Focus School it had made him think about "residential schools all over again", to which Erin replied that this was what she had meant about "retraumatizing" in her prior comment. Participants like Erin, and others, recognized that the pain experienced by their parents and elders as a result of residential schools was not something to be treated lightly, and they were cautious of triggering painful memories of residential school abuses for members of their community. Like many other groups that have experienced traumatic histories (see Vollhardt & Nair, 2018), our participants recognized that the history of colonialism, and residential schools, is a painful one and sometimes sought to protect vulnerable ingroup members from this pain by preferring representations of history that avoided, or at least did not emphasize, the brutal details of the colonial victimization of Indigenous peoples.

"The Suffering They Went Through and the Successes They've Had": Representing Both Victimization and Resilience to Bolster Ingroup Pride and Promote Ingroup Agency

Whereas participants in the previous theme described a need to protect vulnerable ingroup members from the trauma of colonial history, participants far more commonly preferred that representations of colonial history directed towards the ingroup portray their collective victimization more explicitly. Participants indicated that brutally honest representations of colonial history would serve the interests of the group and would promote a positive ingroup identity when representations of collective victimization were accompanied by representations of the resilience and agency of Indigenous people. If representations of colonial history do not emphasize the severity of Indigenous oppression, the survival of Indigenous peoples might seem less impressive, and thus provide a weaker basis for collective pride and cultural inspiration. Several participants explicitly condemned this softening of representations of colonial history. As one teacher at the AFS explained,

> Last year was the...reconciliation year, and...we talked about residential schools...and I was very…honest about those histories because, I don't think sugarcoating history serves...a purpose or does justice to anybody, really, I mean I'm not gonna show morbid videos or anything, but, if we're...gonna talk about...residential school we need to talk about the fact that they were abused! And they suffered…you know, they suffered immensely...from the trauma that they endured there (Excerpt 4)

For this teacher, communicating a "sugarcoated" representation of the history of residential schools is an injustice to survivors of the IRS system. Although this teacher too suggests age-level must be considered in the way these stories are communicated (i.e. not showing "morbid videos"), her approach differs from the teacher in theme one who felt such stories were simply "too gruesome" for children. Several parents shared this teacher's perspective. For example, Melissa was outraged that her daughter had heard an account of residential schools from a visiting Indigenous elder at the AFS that she felt was inaccurately benign:

> They sweeten it up a little bit, they're like, "Oh…some of the people were…living in a house with all these people they didn't know," "No, they were stolen (laughs) from their reserves, and forced into a residential school, where they were raped of their language and their culture, and their hair and were not allowed to speak their language!" and [my daughter's] like, "Wow, that's not what they told us." (Excerpt 5)

One can imagine the challenging task facing a visiting Indigenous elder to explain the residential school system for a group of Indigenous elementary school children in a way that might be both truthful and sensitive. Nevertheless, Melissa rejects this "sweetened up" version and presents her own brutal representation of residential schools to counter it.

Despite this importance placed on not sugarcoating representations of colonial history, participants were also clear that representations that focus exclusively on the victimization of Indigenous peoples were potentially harmful and should be avoided. Whereas in theme one participants wanted to protect certain vulnerable ingroup members from the trauma of this history (i.e. intragroup protection), in this theme participants recognized a need to alleviate potentially broader negative impacts of victimization-focused representations with the potential to perpetuate despair and passivity within Indigenous communities as a whole (i.e. ingroup protection). For example, near the end of her focus group discussion, after discussing the tragedies of colonial history, residential schools, and ongoing discrimination against the Indigenous community, Erin concluded:

> I'm tired now, I don't like thinking about this stuff too much, it just makes me too tired… it's just like "come here let's look at how dire our situation is and then go home" (general laughter) it's like you know what, it's… I just wanna go home and go to sleep now (Excerpt 6)

Erin suggests there is a negative pattern in the ways representations of Indigenous colonial history emphasize only the pain and victimization of Indigenous peoples, and stops there. If the history of your group is consistently represented as a story about your collective victimization by dominant outgroups it is easy to empathize with Erin that such representations of history can be exhausting, unpleasant, and something to avoid. Instead, Erin wanted:

> ...strength and resilience-based curricula…show role models, talk about Chief Seattle or you know the Crazy Horse… talk about you know, Sitting Bull, talk about all the strength-based, role models that they have…help our children to see things in a positive way...that's where I talk to my kids about…be proud of who you are…took me a long time to realize I wasn't proud of who I was…because of how I went through the school system (Excerpt 7)

Erin recognized that certain representations of colonial history can cause overwhelming despair, but that a re-orientation of this history towards the inspiring examples of Indigenous leaders who resisted colonialism can help bolster a sense of collective pride and ingroup agency. In another example, Crystal, a mother whose children did not attend the AFS, only wanted her children to be exposed to representations of colonial history if they combined victimization with resilience:

> I would love for my kids to learn about the history of like, colonialism, and ...the history, that the First Nations have went through...but also I would want them to learn, like where the Aboriginals are now, as opposed to, where they were...cause, like I don't want them to think like, "ohh poor, poor me, this is what my…the history of my family"...but...it's not really about that, it's about the strength that…the First Nations community had, going through, the things that they went through and coming out of it, stronger than ever and still able to stand on their feet and raise their children and (pause) get out of the abuse cycle that they were taught...so focusing on the strengths, on their…resilience (Excerpt 8)

Crystal hopes that representations of the strengths and resilience of Indigenous people in their ability to overcome great adversity will inspire and strengthen her children to achieve their full potential. Similarly, Melissa advocated for representations of colonial history that contain both the challenges Indigenous people have faced, and how they have been overcome. She suggested that the AFS should bring in local Indigenous elders to teach students, "the history behind the people, the suffering that they went through and the... successes that they've had...the way they helped their people." Melissa hoped the AFS would allow Indigenous students "to celebrate…we're here, look what we've done we've managed to make it through despite everybody's…concern for us…we're still here." Importantly, the supportive environment of the AFS was a space in which Indigenous participants hoped their children could be exposed to representations of colonial history that emphasized both the historical victimization of Indigenous peoples as well as their resilience and ongoing resistance to colonial oppression.

"Try to Understand Where We're Coming From": Representing the Brutality of Colonial History to Positively Transform Intergroup Relations

In addition to their concern with the potential intragroup and ingroup consequences of certain representations of colonial history, many participants communicated their hopes that representations of colonial history could also serve to transform intergroup relations when directed at the non-Indigenous outgroup. In the context of our data, descriptions of outgroup-directed representations of history arose most often when participants talked about either what they hoped non-Indigenous people within the school system would understand about colonial history, or what non-Indigenous students could potentially learn about colonial history within the AFS. In contrast to the way that many participants felt it was important that representations of colonial history depict Indigenous victimization and Indigenous resilience together when directed towards ingroup members, they seemed to prefer that representations of colonial history directed towards outgroup members only emphasize how the outgroup had victimized Indigenous peoples, and the challenges Indigenous peoples had faced as a result. Participants hoped this would help outgroup members increase their compassion and understanding of the ongoing impacts of colonial trauma in Indigenous communities. For example, Erin illustrated the importance of a comprehensive understanding of residential schools for outgroup members in an exasperated comment:

> The school board has to realize, why...somebody was late to pick up their child or why somebody's always late to get to school or why they always have dirty clothes on, it's like… try to understand where we're coming from, because I'm sure, not a lot of them heard our story, they're like "oh yeah yeah they went to residential school yeah I know" (pause) is that compassion for us? Mm-mm (shakes head). Curiosity and compassion about understanding who we are, where we come from, and what's happened…then they'll be able to understand what it is we want for our kids (Excerpt 9)

Erin suggests the school board has an inadequate understanding of the depth of residential school trauma and its intergenerational effects on Indigenous peoples. She wants the school board to expose themselves to the brutal truth of colonial history, rather than a sanitized representation of this history. In this way, Erin hopes they

can understand where Indigenous people are "coming from", a phrase used by several participants to communicate the importance of outgroup members taking into account the historical context of present challenges facing Indigenous communities. Above all, participants hoped that in learning this history non-Indigenous people would become more empathetic in their attitudes towards Indigenous peoples.

For many participants, their experience of racism was grounded in a perceived lack of empathy from non-Indigenous people for the challenges many Indigenous people face as a result of colonization. They hoped that representations of colonial history that adequately connected historical trauma from colonial victimization to present-day challenges in Indigenous communities could reduce this outgroup discrimination. Jason, a parent of children in the AFS, spoke strongly of discrimination from non-Indigenous teachers in other public schools in Vancouver as a leading cause of the high drop-out rate for Indigenous youth:

> Why would they wanna go to a class where teacher scolds you or shames you every time you come in the door for being late or not bringing your homework or... whatever it is? ...our community's dealing with all kinds of challenges... of the impacts of colonization... so these teachers are unempathetic...do not understand the impacts and are perpetuating the colonial impacts (Excerpt 10)

Jason feels these teachers do not understand, or have not been exposed to, representations of colonial history that might inspire more empathy for Indigenous students. Non-Indigenous teachers having a good understanding of the trauma created by residential schools and colonization for Indigenous people was very important to many participants. For example, Christina asked if the AFS would have Indigenous teachers, and if not, she questioned, "do they know any knowledge about our people, our history...what are they gonna do for our children for the future? Are they gonna stereotype them? Are they gonna belittle them?" For Christina, non-Indigenous teachers' knowledge of Indigenous history is not merely important for their ability to teach the material at an Aboriginal Focus School, it is directly tied to their likelihood of stereotyping and discriminating against Indigenous children. Parents hoped that knowledge of colonial history would foster the empathy they felt their children needed to excel in school. For example, Crystal felt that many schools "don't understand where Aboriginals come from, and their history" and that this created environments that made it difficult for Indigenous children to learn. In contrast, she expected that teachers at the AFS *would* be "more aware of where the Aboriginals are coming from...like the history behind their learning skills" and saw this is a positive reason she might consider sending her child to the school.

Participants also frequently brought up representations of colonial history in the context of justifying additional supports for Indigenous people. For example, Amanda expressed her surprise that the AFS did not have enough additional staff to support her children, and many others at the school, with special learning needs. She attributed the high concentration of Indigenous children "diagnosed with lots of high special needs" at the school to "all the intergenerational stuff that happened" and felt that the school board should have known about "residential school and all of their effects" and thus more appropriately prepared for an "influx of children with high special needs". Such claims for the necessity of outgroup support hinge on effectively communicating to the outgroup the debilitating and traumatizing effects of colonization and residential schools. Participants hoped that when colonial history was represented effectively to outgroups they would become attuned to the realities of harm caused to Indigenous peoples by settler institutions, and accept their commensurate responsibility to help Indigenous people deal with the intergenerational impacts of colonialism.

If representations of colonial history directed at the outgroup could adequately increase outgroup empathy, reduce outgroup discrimination, and mobilize more supports for Indigenous peoples, this might transform intergroup relations

in ways that would improve the status of Indigenous peoples. This may explain why several participants even suggested that it was more important that non-Indigenous people be exposed to brutal representations of colonial history than it was that colonial history be taught to Indigenous people. Mary, a mother of children who did not attend the AFS, felt that the resources spent on setting up the AFS should rather go towards expanding Indigenous-focused curriculum throughout the school district:

> I would rather that money go to them to enrich more in all the different schools...because, the number one thing with our people is...the lack of...knowledge that...you know the Caucasian and non-native people have of our people, and the things that they don't know, well they're not gonna learn it if we segregate ourselves into a separate school (Excerpt 11)

Similarly, one of the teachers at the AFS itself agreed that much of the course content she taught on colonial history and residential schools would be just as, or even more beneficial for non-Indigenous students to learn than for Indigenous students:

> I really think it's beneficial for...the non-Aboriginal students maybe even more so, or as much as, the Aboriginal students to have…these experiences and learn about Aboriginal peoples because, it's generally non-Aboriginal peoples who have stereotypes, in their minds or, you know, um, have misunderstandings about Aboriginal people and Aboriginal cultures? so I think the best way to kind of educate...our- our city or our community as a whole is to educate everybody (Excerpt 12)

This teacher then described the positive outcomes of the first year of a mandatory course on Indigenous peoples and colonial history at a local university's teacher training program. Her perception was that "once [teachers in training] heard the history of Canada and they especially of course heard from residential school survivors and learned...about those histories of marginalization and oppression, they understood". She felt a similar process would be at work for non-Indigenous students who enrolled in the AFS. In general, participants expected that once outgroup members were exposed to accurate representations of the brutality of colonial history they would understand the collective trauma that impacts Indigenous peoples in the present, and subsequently gain a sense of empathy and support for Indigenous peoples.

Discussion

In this study, we used data from Indigenous participants discussing a novel, Indigenous-focused school to explore how Indigenous peoples preferred to represent their collective history of colonial victimization in different ways and for different reasons. Following SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we expected that people in this highly-identified sample would prefer representations of their group's history that they perceived might benefit their group. In our first theme, participants wanted to avoid representations of the victimization of colonial history that could potentially (re)traumatize fellow group members who were seen as especially vulnerable (i.e. young children and residential school survivors). While colonial history was clearly painful and unpleasant for participants, in our second theme many nevertheless felt it was important that representations of colonial history tell the whole truth about how badly Indigenous people have been mistreated by outgroups, but that these brutal representations of colonial history would only serve the interests of their group if they were coupled with stories of Indigenous resistance and resilience. Brutal, victimization-focused representations of colonial history were seen as a potential threat for all Indigenous peoples because they could promote collective despair and passivity. However, brutal representations

of colonial history also provided the necessary context to fully comprehend the significance of Indigenous resilience and resistance, thus serving to bolster ingroup pride and help reclaim ingroup agency. Finally, in our third theme, participants also hoped that when non-Indigenous outgroup members were exposed to brutal representations of Indigenous victimization throughout colonial history this would make clear the intergenerational impacts of policies like residential schools in Indigenous communities and help positively transform intergroup relations in ways that could improve the status of Indigenous peoples.

This study adds to past research on social identity, representations of history, and the ways in which disadvantaged group members make sense out of their historic and ongoing victimization. Importantly, we explored how Indigenous people themselves feel about representations of colonial history, allowing us to examine how disadvantaged group members perceive certain representations as serving the interests of their ingroup more than others. Like Bar-Tal and colleagues (2009), our analysis shows that representations of collective victimhood can function to benefit a group. We also found that these representations can be used in ways that are flexible and strategic (McNeill et al., 2017). Representations directed at the ingroup that downplay victimization serve to protect vulnerable ingroup members, representations directed at the ingroup that emphasize both victimization and resilience serve to benefit the entire ingroup by warding off collective despair and bolstering ingroup pride and agency, and representations directed towards the outgroup that emphasize colonial victimization can engender outgroup support by highlighting their moral culpability in the harms suffered by Indigenous peoples. Thus, while the representations of history varied with their intended audience and strategic function, in all cases participants preferred representations they saw as benefitting the ingroup.

This analysis provides two key examples of flexibility in how ingroup benefits are perceived and achieved. First, representations of history may aim to protect certain ingroup members (intragroup) or the ingroup and use different approaches to representations (i.e. sugarcoating versus emphasizing victimization and resilience) for both. What is good for the group may not be good for all group members. Second, while in theme two participants felt that a victimization-focused representation of history would harm the ingroup, in theme three they perceived that a victimization-focused representation of history would benefit the ingroup when targeted toward an outgroup audience because it could engender outgroup empathy and support. Conversely, the representation of history that participants favored in theme two (i.e. victimization with resilience) may work less effectively to engender outgroup support (e.g. "If you're so resilient, you don't require our help"). Thus, the content of ingroup and outgroup-directed representations may contrast, yet still serve the same intended purpose of benefitting the ingroup (Klein & Licata, 2003).

By taking a qualitative, community-based approach to this research we were also able to examine participant responses in a meaningful, real-world context when representations of history and group processes were not the explicit focus of interview questions. This added to the ecological validity of our results, and allowed for the possibility of serendipitous findings. Finally, it is important to explore the concepts and processes theorized in the social identity approach (primarily developed in Western and European contexts) in a wide variety of cultural contexts. Social identity-based research in Indigenous contexts may require novel methods (e.g. qualitative) and approaches (e.g. community-based research), but when such studies find support for the collective behavior processes predicted by a social identity approach they demonstrate the robustness of this theoretical perspective (Hopkins & Reicher, 2011).

Representations of History and Ingroup Agency

By emphasizing the resistance and resilience of Indigenous peoples despite significant collective victimization, representations of colonial history can serve to foster a positive Indigenous identity, and crucially, maintain a sense of ingroup agency. As Indigenous scholar Kam'ayaam/ Chachim'multhnii (Cliff Atleo Jr.) points out, "...the story of settler colonialism in Canada is not simply a story of what happened to us. To discount *our agency* as historical events unfolded is dangerous and eschews our ability to imagine a different future" (2016, p. 75, emphasis in original). Maintaining a sense of agency is crucially important for fostering collective resistance to inequality and injustice as it allows group members to feel that oppression is not inevitable, social change is possible, and the collective actions of one's group can bring it about (Drury & Reicher, 2009; Elcheroth et al., 2011; Haslam & Reicher, 2012; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This aligns with recent research in social psychology that has examined how collective autonomy promotes psychological well-being (Kachanoff et al., 2019), and the importance of ingroup agency within the context of intergroup reconciliation (Kachanoff, Caouette, Wohl, & Taylor, 2017; Shnabel & Nadler, 2015). As our participants suggested, representations of colonial history that solely emphasize the victimization of Indigenous peoples can strip this agency away, and portray Indigenous peoples as conquered, beaten cultures with no hope of self-determination. Ultimately, these representations may promote passivity and despair in Indigenous communities if the weight of historical victimization and the significant challenges of inequality and ongoing oppression become overwhelming. Instead, our participants felt strongly that representations of colonial history that balance stark accounts of victimization with narratives of Indigenous resistance and resilience are beneficial for their ingroup. Our analysis demonstrates that in contrast to merely choosing to identify as a victim or not, the flexibility of representations of historical victimization gives group members the power to choose how and when to emphasize their collective victimhood and its impacts on their community in ways that best meet their needs. Furthermore, while past research (e.g. Vollhardt & Nair, 2018) has identified the multi-faceted positive and negative nature of representations of collective victimhood, our analysis (i.e. theme two) finds that the negative (e.g. brutal reality of victimization) and the positive (e.g. resilience of Indigenous peoples) are not always distinct "sides" of victimhood but can be intrinsically connected. Emphasizing the negative creates the context for amplifying the significance of the positive. Tentatively, we might think of this as "resilient-victimhood", a concept that could be a topic of future, more concentrated investigation.

Representations of History and the Transformation of Intergroup Relations

Our participants commonly expressed a desire for outgroup members to learn more about colonial history so that they might better understand the plight of Indigenous peoples and transform their racism and prejudice into empathy and support. Wider evidence of the desire of Indigenous peoples for outgroup members to attribute the crises in their communities to the fallout of intergenerational trauma is seen in a recent article in The Atlantic (Wong, 2017). The reporter asked several Indigenous residents of the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota what they wished outsiders knew about their poverty and alcohol abuse-stricken community. Multiple respondents stated that they wanted people to know "It's not our fault", and that the dysfunction in their community was the result of a systemic lack of support, and coping with the pain of ongoing colonial oppression. Importantly, these are messages directed at the outgroup like the representations summarised in our third theme. They emphasize ingroup harm in order to engage the understanding and support of outgroups. In our analysis, participants were wary of using the same kinds of representations of history for ingroup audiences. For example, as our participant Crystal pointed out in her interview (Excerpt 8, p. 12), she was deeply concerned that the link between historical victimization and dysfunction in Indigenous communities not be used as an excuse for passivity within Indigenous

communities. Nevertheless, this is an important issue worthy of further exploration. How can victimization-focused representations of history directed at outgroups be communicated in such a way that the ingroup does not receive the same victimization-only message without the important context of ingroup resilience and strength? As Vollhardt and Nair (2018) point out, more research is needed to examine "how individuals and groups balance the need for empowerment and recognition of resilience and strength with acknowledgment of their group's vulnerability and victimization" (p. 430).

As some of our participants noted, the extent of outgroup empathy for Indigenous people in response to representations of colonial history may depend in part on how severely colonial victimization is described. "Sugarcoating" the brutality of residential schools and other colonial injustices may result in outgroup members having an insufficient understanding of the connection between historical trauma and present challenges in Indigenous communities, presenting a potential impediment to the shifted intergroup relations our participants hoped would transpire (see Matheson, 2017 for an excellent discussion of strength versus deficit-based discourses related to contemporary Indigenous communities in terms of Social Identity Theory).

Implications for Creating Representations of Colonial History

Our findings hold relevance for curriculum developers, museum curators, and other people and institutions charged with representing the history of colonialism in Canada. These issues are timely in the wake of the final report of the TRC (2015a), and its 94 "Calls to Action" (TRC, 2015b), which advocate above all that the true story of residential schools in Canada be told more widely. Educational institutions, museums, media, and governments are now wrestling with how they will meet their newfound responsibility to communicate the truth of residential schools, and the wider legacy of colonialism in Canada, and work towards reconciliation between Indigenous and settler peoples. While there is much enthusiasm for this work, there are also many unanswered questions of how best to represent these painful, even frightening, histories. As our participants made clear, representations that "sugarcoat" what happened at residential schools can lessen the significance of representations that emphasize Indigenous resilience and leave outgroups without a sufficient explanation for the intergenerational impacts of harmful colonial policies in Indigenous communities. However, participants also stated that representations that emphasize the victimization of Indigenous people without reference to their resilience and resistance can be painful and demoralizing for Indigenous peoples. If our participants' intuitions are correct, representations of residential school history in the classroom, museums, and in public discourse that are most likely to benefit Indigenous peoples should emphasize both the real victimization, and the admirable resilience of Indigenous peoples. The relative obscurity of residential school resistance stories (see Matheson et al., 2016), and the mostly victimization-focused narrative of the IRS system in public discourse (see Niezen, 2013; Morden, 2014), suggest that more could be done to amplify stories of students' resistance[v]. Furthermore, this points to the importance of continuing to emphasize the impressive fact that Indigenous people are "still here" despite centuries of attempted assimilation and cultural genocide that have ultimately failed in their objectives. Perhaps most importantly, and in accordance with the findings of prior analysis of our data (Neufeld, 2016), representations of colonial history, and of Indigenous peoples more generally, are most likely to serve the interests of Indigenous people if they themselves are empowered to choose how these histories will be represented. For non-Indigenous teachers or content creators, this will mean building collaborative relationships with Indigenous community members who can share their experience and insight into how colonial history can be represented in ways that will truly benefit, rather than harm, the interests of Indigenous peoples.

Limitations and Future Directions

As a community-based, qualitative study, our analysis has several limitations that curtail our ability to generalize these results, but also point towards interesting new areas of inquiry. First and foremost, throughout the paper we have consistently referred to "Indigenous peoples", an extremely diverse superordinate category made up of hundreds of distinct cultures, languages, and historical experiences, as a single, homogenous entity. However, our participants employed this level of categorization almost exclusively when speaking about colonial history. As many scholars have pointed out, the common experience of colonization is one of the most important bases for the "Indigenous" superordinate category (Haber, 2007; Neufeld, 2016; Wilcox, 2010), so it makes sense that participants would employ this category when talking about colonial history. However, individual subgroups of Indigenous people across the vast territories of Canada have had very different experiences with colonization, in part due to differences in treaty-making, time of first contact with Europeans, integration with European economic systems (e.g. the fur trade), extent of collective resistance and proximity to European settlements. Our focus on the superordinate Indigenous category and the similarly homogenized "representations of colonial history" raises important questions about the extent to which our results may have changed if participants had spoken about the specific colonial histories of their families or more unique cultural groups (e.g. Cree, Tsimshian). For example, would hearing a story of resistance to residential schools have the same impact if it came from a non-heritage Indigenous subgroup when subgroup identities are made salient? Do subgroups with fewer examples of resilience and resistance in their history of colonization associate more meaning, and draw more inspiration from identification with the superordinate Indigenous category?

Another limitation of this study is that the original project focused on perceptions of an Indigenous-focused school, not representations of colonial history. This may have limited the extent and depth of our data as participants only spoke about colonialism or residential schools when these topics seemed relevant and important to them in the context of conversations about the AFS. Future studies could examine Indigenous peoples' responses to different representations of colonial history by asking participants more explicitly about these topics. However, our indirect approach may also be a strength of our data, as participants were speaking about representations of history in a context that truly mattered to them, the education of Indigenous children, rather than in the potentially more artificial context of an interview focused on representations of history.

One final limitation may have been that the interviewer for this study was a non-Indigenous, White male in a position of relative economic and racial privilege. This dynamic of the data collection context may have made participants feel uncomfortable or less willing to share certain aspects of their experiences, thus presenting another potential limitation to the depth of these data. However, participants generally seemed to speak easily and openly, sometimes sharing very personal stories of abuse, discrimination and historical trauma. Nevertheless, future research could explore if there are differences in the ways Indigenous peoples talk about representations of colonial history when the interview context is exclusively intragroup (i.e. with an Indigenous interviewer).

Conclusion

The way in which colonial history is represented can help, or harm, the plight of Indigenous people. As our participants suggested, representations of colonial history that both emphasize the severe oppression and mistreatment of Indigenous peoples, as well as their inspiring resilience and resistance in the face of severe hardship, can help the group by bolstering ingroup pride and agency, and fostering more favorable intergroup relations with non-Indigenous outgroups. In a time when conversations about colonialism, residential schools, and reconciliation are

increasingly featured in public discourse, and beginning to enter mainstream school curriculum across Canada, it is more important than ever that we understand the implications of representations of history for the well-being of Indigenous people. Ensuring that such representations help Indigenous peoples, rather than perpetuating colonial harms, may be most effectively accomplished by ensuring Indigenous peoples themselves have control over how their history is represented.

Notes

i) While the name of the school program is the "Aboriginal Focus School" we have chosen to use the term "Indigenous" to refer to the first peoples of Canada in this paper. This term aligns with language in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2008) and is increasingly the preferred term used by Indigenous peoples and government officials in Canada. In practice, the terms "Aboriginal" and "Indigenous" are synonymous in that they both encompass the diverse cultural groups that have inhabited the lands referred to as Canada since time immemorial.

ii) The study materials asked participants if they "identified as Aboriginal", which is why the term is used here.

iii) One parent who indicated that she identified as Aboriginal on her demographics form was excluded because she did not list any First Nations she was affiliated with, listed several non-Aboriginal ethnicities, and contributed only one small phrase to the focus group discussion that implied that she did not consider herself Aboriginal. Another parent who identified as Aboriginal was excluded because she suddenly left the focus group after just ten minutes and her single verbal response in the focus group did not reference Indigenous identity or history.

iv) Although not a focus of the analysis here, it is interesting to note that experiences of discrimination were exclusively constructed as resulting because of membership in the superordinate Indigenous category (Neufeld, 2016). Furthermore, and of more relevance to the present paper, almost all participants also discussed representations of colonial history in terms of the superordinate category of "Indigenous people", rather than their more unique subgroup identities (e.g. Cree, Tsimshian), even though these identities were also very important to them (Neufeld, 2016; Neufeld & Schmitt, 2019).

v) One admirable example is the TRC-funded "Residential School Resistance Narratives" digital media project where Indigenous youth on Vancouver Island interviewed IRS survivors and created short videos celebrating the resistance narratives and strategies for surviving residential schools (Marshall et al., 2012, see http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/youthsociety/resources/digital-stories/index.php).

Competing Interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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