

Reversing Racism in the Time of Reconciliation?: Settler Colonialism, Race, and Alberta Teachers

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Abstract: With Alberta Education planning new policies and curricula that focus on Indigenous content, it is important to see how educators recognize and explain racism. This quanti-qualitative study examines the ways in which Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) members understand and articulate racism through their responses to an anonymous online survey. This is investigated through an interrogation of the idea of "reverse racism." Utilizing settler colonialism as a theoretical framework, this article uses the history of race as a concept and an exploration of terms related to racism to refute the possibility of white people experiencing racism in Canada. The article concludes that settler colonialism and racism are coexisting and oppressive systems that prohibit reconciliatory thinking for settlers.

Keywords: Settler Colonialism, Reverse Racism, Alberta Education, Quanti-Qualitative Method, Reconciliation.

Introduction

Canada is a white settler colonial nation-state; it is, as Razack (2002) explained, a country Europeans created for their own benefit on the unceded lands of Indigenous peoples. Awareness of the origins of Canada and its implications is necessary to provide context in an era where Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (2016) believes is moving towards reconciliation. Not only does Canada paint over (Donald, 2004) colonial and genocidal acts as part of its settler nation-building practices (Razack, 2002), it refuses to reconcile with its colonial past. Despite subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980) and histories increasingly coming to light in Canadian educational institutions, the potential for reconciliation does not appear on the immediate horizon since settler colonial narratives remain predominant (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015; Mackey 2016; Razack, 2002; Regan, 2010). This is related to the responsibilities of K-12 educators in Alberta classrooms. Settler teachers—usually possessing limited understanding or experience of Indigenous contexts due in part to the various provincial and territorial curricula that replicate the ideologies of the nation-state—often teach Indigenous students in provincial schools, yet feel uncomfortable teaching Indigenous subject matter for three reasons. First, they explain being uncomfortable with the little knowledge of Indigenous topics they possess (Battiste, 1998; Donald, 2009; Kanu, 2005, 2011; Nardozi & Mashford-Pringle, 2014; Restoule, 2011; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003; Taylor, 1995). Second, teachers cite few classroom resources relating to Indigenous topics being a deterrent (Kanu, 2005, 2011). Third, they indicate they receive insufficient administrative support (Kanu 2005, 2011). Kanu (2005, 2011) also provided a fourth rationale for not wanting to teach Indigenous content: some teachers do not believe that Indigenous content is worthwhile or important to learn. Knowing there are several reasons why educators will not teach Indigenous content, what happens within classrooms if curricular and policy changes mandate Indigenous content from Pre-Kindergarten to grade twelve?

In June of 2016, Alberta Education gave two announcements about forthcoming changes to the province's Pre-K to grade 12 education system. First, a six-year long curriculum redevelopment would include "Education for Reconciliation, which includes ways of knowing and diverse perspectives" (Alberta Education, 2016b, para. 12). Second, in-service teachers would be provided "professional development to ensure that all students learn about First Nations, Métis and Inuit history, perspectives and contributions" (Alberta Education, 2016a, para. 1). These announcements followed Alberta Education's commitment to reconciliation, where Kindergarten to grade 12 curricula would include mandatory content "on the significance of residential schools and treaties" as well as "the history and legacy of residential schools, along with the history of First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples of Canada" (Alberta Education, 2014, paras. 7-8). Seeing that the Indigenous population in Alberta is growing twice as fast as the settler population, that 63% of that population lives in urban areas, and that close to a third of the population is under 14 years of age (Schmold, 2011), the need for updated curricula and greater teacher understanding is imperative.

The guiding purpose of this paper is to learn how Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) members understand and articulate racism through responses to a survey on Aboriginal education in Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programs and Pre-K to grade twelve classrooms. In this paper I argue that the majority of

ATA members surveyed believe that reverse racism is something white settlers can experience, despite the fact that white people cannot face oppression due to their race. Since settler colonial constructs are maintained by the surveyed ATA members—albeit seemingly unknowingly—I argue that this research demonstrates, along the same lines as Epp (2008, 2012), that reconciliation is a settler problem: the mythologies and mentalities reproduced by non-Aboriginal peoples stand in the way of Canada’s progress.

Terms and Terminologies

My choice in using settler in this article rather than the term migrant is a conscious and purposeful political act. A settler is commonly understood as someone who settles in a new place (“Settler,” 2017), but as Phung (2012) problematized, the term does not exist as a binary between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples because of processes of racialization. For example, Lawrence and Dua (2005) outlined the ways in which people of colour “settle” while being complicit in the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples. Along similar lines, as Thobani (2007) argued in her triangulated idea of racial hierarchy in Canada, even though many immigrants and refugees are leaving places where they have been dehumanized, they are nevertheless gaining—or in the process of doing so—rights that Indigenous peoples do not have in their own territories. A *settler*, therefore, moves to a country constructed according to EuroWestern ideologies and belongs there, while a migrant is part of a diasporic community who is treated as Other in the same place (Veracini, 2010). As the “founders” of a white settler colonial society, white settlers have integrated—some consciously, others unconsciously—oppression against the Other as part of the rationale for settling.

Oppression is the way in which ideologies of constructed inferiority are detrimental to an individual or groups of people. As Abberley (1987) outlined, oppression is identified by “certain generally common features of economic social and psychological disadvantage suffered by the oppressed group” (p. 13) those of the targeted group. An individual may be oppressed due to any number of social identifiers, such as gender, race, ability, or sexual orientation. In turn, due to oppression, someone will not have the same access to aspects of a society or culture due to being treated inequitably by those who have established that difference as deficient and/or Other. This is related to other ways bias is enacted in a society. *Prejudice* is an opinion based on preconceived notions about a person or group (“Prejudice,” 2017), while *discrimination* is prejudicial treatment of a group or individual based on social identifiers (“Discrimination,” 2017). Further, the two can be differentiated between, because prejudice is based on thought, while discrimination is based on action.

Although related, and sometimes used incorrectly as a synonym, racism is a more complex idea than either prejudice or discrimination. The difference is that racism is discrimination—which you will recall is acting on prejudice—that has been integrated into the ideologies and systems of a culture. In sum, racism is stereotypes that have been legalized or been made culturally acceptable by the group(s) that hold power in a society. Described as “sadistic self-deception that equips the powerful with a convenient justification to terrorize the powerless” (McGettigan & Smith, 2016, p. xi), overt acts of physically violent racism are no longer permissible by law in Canada. But at the same time, racism is often overlooked by non-Indigenous peoples—particularly when enacted against Indigenous peoples—when it occurs in more covert manners (e.g., Lawrence, 2004; Monture, 2014; Simpson, 2014; Wildcat, 2015). The reason for this, according to Van Dijk (1992), is that racism is still tied to explicit laws and ideologies of biological inferiority from history, as well as the ways in which other cultures are described as being “too different” than the origin culture. As such, racism as it is applied within the context of this article, comes from the work of Bonilla-Silva (1997): racism, or racial ideology, is “the ideological structure of a social system that crystallizes racial notions and stereotypes” (p. 474). In other words, *racism* is prejudicial ideas about a racialized group that have been acted upon in such a way that they have purposefully and seamlessly integrated into the framework of sociopolitical systems and institutions. Simply, racism is built into all aspects of Canadian society due to colonialism, and cannot be turned back on to those in society that maintain power. Racism is therefore contrary to what those who believe in reverse racism think it is.

Fish (1993) explained reverse racism as a way for white people in the United States to be against affirmative action policies, because they were “discriminatory” against white people. James (2007), building on Fish’s explanation, theorized reverse racism as a way for white people to claim they are not being treated equally in a democratic system: we do not live in a true democracy since differences in power afford more

rights to some over others, and what is considered fair (or not) “cannot be evaluated independent of the histories of the respective groups to which individuals belong” (p. 357). From these works, I refine *reverse racism* in the Canadian context as the way in which white settlers believe they are facing systemic race-based oppression from Indigenous peoples and/or people of colour within a white settler colonial nation-state, when it is not possible for a white person, such as myself, to experience racism. White people cannot be systemically discriminated against due to race, and therefore cannot be subjected to racism or reverse racism.

Social Location

Given that no research is truly subjective in nature (Absolon & Willett, 2005)—a researcher’s onto-epistemological and axiological orientation is derived from the culture(s) they are from, the place(s) they live, and their experiences in the world—a brief description of my subjectivities, intersections, and privileges positions me within my research and this article. I frame my doctoral research—of which this article is based on a small aspect—as resisting some of the status quo embedded in the academy. This is a way for myself, a white settler, to push back against the hegemonic processes of Eurocentrism (Strega, 2005), while simultaneously unlearning colonial research norms and methodologies (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Smith, 2012) embedded in the systems and structures of academia. For that reason, I am using this article as part of a provisional and relational process that ties me to my institution, research communities, and education as a discipline (herising, 2005) while my research is in progress. In other words, this article, and eventually my dissertation, is a way for me to do ethical research as a white settler for other white settlers living in Canada.

Though it is important to locate oneself in the research, including relationship to place (Krahn & Donald, 2014), providing one’s social location “does not necessarily translate into ‘better’ research or research that has greater methodological or scientific rigour” (p. 136). More simply, merely stating who you are does not mean you will have the awareness to be able to conduct ethical research; however, knowing the ways in which social location impacts your ability to interact with the world and vice versa, this awareness of self can allow someone to be more introspective about their research. Sometimes simplified as forms of privilege in social justice literature, social location can include, among others, ability, age, class, education, sex, gender identity, race, religion, and sexuality (Goodman, 2011; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Using some of these identifiers to define myself, I describe myself as a highly educated, straight white dis/abled¹ ciswoman,² who is a colonizer on Indigenous lands. As my articulation of my social location indicates, while there are parts of my identity that marginalize me, for the most part, I retain a lot of privilege in my daily life. Indeed, as Potts and Brown (2005) indicated, it is necessary for researchers to recognize themselves “as potentially both oppressor and oppressed” (p. 258). As a woman and as someone with a dis/ability I have faced oppression, but at the same time, as someone who is white I cannot face oppression due to my race (McIntosh, 1990), nor can I be oppressed as a settler occupying Indigenous lands. Recognition of intersections within one’s identity is a key aspect of anti-oppressive research practice: it is important “For White, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual people” to recognize our privileges while “working to dismantle the unjust systems that keep us in that privileged space” (Potts & Brown, 2005, p. 258). My focus on settlers in my work—as I am doing in this article—is another way for me to do this. Instead of directing my research to focus on the colonized, a practice that has been normalized through the field of anthropology and others (TallBear, 2014; Smith 2012). I am endeavouring to turn the gaze inward on to the colonizer, and ultimately within my dissertation, on myself. Therefore, as a white settler, it is important for me to use the privileges I do have and work alongside Indigenous peoples to disrupt normative educational discourses that maintain settler colonial practices.

¹ I use dis/abled rather than disabled for two reasons. First, the slash operates as a means of disrupting the detrimental notion that to be disabled is to be in some way “less than” someone who is not. Second, the slash acts as a visual marker that identifies the ways in which my ability levels may be impacted by any number of other factors—this is to say, my having a dis/ability, like many others, is representative of a spectrum of ability rather than a binary.

² The term *cis*, as in *cisgender* means that a person’s gender identity and their “sexual morphology” are identical (Johnson, 2013, p. 138). In other words, someone is *cis* if the sex they are assigned at birth aligns with their gender. In an effort to disrupt gender norms and be inclusive to trans experiences, I use “ciswoman” to refer to myself as someone whose biological sex matches my gender orientation.

Alberta Teachers

As the professional organization for teachers in the province of Alberta, the Alberta Teachers' Association, or ATA, "promotes and advances public education, safeguards standards of professional practice, and serves as the advocate for its members" (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2017d, para. 1). The organization has approximately 43,500 members from five different categories:

- Active Membership: teachers employed by a school board in Alberta (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2015a);
- Associate Membership: educators of sixteen different subcategories, including superintendents of school boards, retired teachers, faculty members in departments of education in public universities and colleges, faculty members in departments of education in private colleges and universities, teachers in Government of Alberta schools, teachers in private schools (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2015b), and educators in some First Nation reserve schools (Fox, 2000);
- Life Membership: following retirement, members who have served at least twenty years in the teaching profession (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2017d);
- Student Membership: following application to and payment of membership, students registered in full-time undergraduate teaching programs in Alberta (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2017f); and
- Honorary Membership: persons inside or outside the Association who have provided to the advancement of education and/or the teaching profession. (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2017c)

Governed by the *Teaching Profession Act* (2015) and the *School Act* (2015) (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2017a), ATA members are subject to the *Code of Professional Conduct* (2004) which stipulates the minimum standards of conduct—though not an "exhaustive list"—for practicing teachers (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2017b, para. 1). These standards are applied in relation to students, colleagues, school authorities, and the profession as a whole (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2017b). Educators, Ghosh and Abdi (2013) argued, should have an understanding of the ways in which inequities are "defined, operationalized, and lived relative to the dominant group, and with respect to race, gender, social class, and a number of other differences" (p. 2). Indeed, these principles are echoed in the first standard of the ATA *Code of Conduct*: "The teacher teaches in a manner that respects the dignity and rights of all persons without prejudice as to race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical characteristics, disability, marital status, family status, age, ancestry, place of origin, place of residence, socioeconomic background or linguistic background" (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2017b, para. 2). In consideration of a) the words of Epp (2008, 2012) that point to settlers inhibiting reconciliatory practices, and b) the fact that most surveyed teachers believe reverse racism can be experienced by white people, there is an existing discord between what is mandated in the ATA's *Code of Conduct* and teacher praxis.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical grounding that underpins this work is settler colonialism. The term was first defined in Emmanuel's 1972 essay "White-settler colonialism and the myth of investment imperialism"; by the release of Wolfe's (1999) *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology*, an academic specialization began to emerge. As Pasternak (2014) explained, "Settler colonial studies is a field of inquiry that examines a specific type of European colonialism premised on land acquisition and population replacement" (p. 147). To clarify how settler colonialism is noticeable in Alberta's K-12 education system, a brief explanation of history is necessary.

In the Canadian context, the impetus for colonialism was the arrival of the English and French in what would become Quebec and Ontario; they, and Europeans from elsewhere, then moved West, and later, North (Miller, 2001). The lands that would be named Canada, however, were never formally surrendered by Indigenous peoples as the *Royal Proclamation* (1763) indicates³ (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, 2016b). This was, and still is, Indigenous land: "Canada, as a nation and a state, is dependent on the land

³ Though some Indigenous nations did enter into treaty agreements with the Crown, and some of these agreements did surrender land, the geopolitical landmass that now encompasses the nation-state of Canada as a whole was never given to settlers (i.e. Coulthard, 2014; Mackey, 2002, 2012, 2016; Monture, 2014).

taken from Indigenous nations, land that those nations still contest” (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015, p. 3). Even though the overarching narrative—employed not only by the Government of Canada (2015), but also provincial and territorial governments vis-a-vis curricula and textbooks—is that Europeans *settled* in what would become Canada, “settler” is a word that non-Indigenous people are sometimes offended by (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015). What people seem to find objectionable is the association with settling and violent colonial practices. Using the 2000 *Massey Lectures* as an example, Razack (2002), problematized Michael Ignatieff’s rejection of the term settler-colonials: “‘To speak this way, as if settlement were merely a form of imperial domination, is to withhold the right of the majority to settle’” (p. 2). Razack explained that Ignatieff’s words perpetuate the idea that “violent colonization simply did not happen,” thereby sustaining a national mythology that leaves out the histories of people of colour and Indigenous peoples in favour of those of white settlers (2002, p. 2). In the same manner, Snelgrove, a white cismale scholar who self-identifies as “a white settler, a colonizer” discloses that “if we do not want to, my family and I do not have to think about, let alone experience, the violent processes that condition(ed) how we came and come to be here” (Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2014, pp. 3, 5). Ostensibly the antipathetic response to being labeled a settler is symptomatic of the disdain that comes with encountering difficult knowledges (Crowell, 2015; Garrett, 2011; Pitt and Britzman, 2010; Zembylas, 2014). This is shown by the unmistakable ways Canadians choose to ignore the colonial past while simultaneously disregarding the colonial processes that are still occurring (Battell Lowman & Barker, 2015; Mackey 2016; Razack, 2002; Regan, 2010). This convenient ignorance of not only the history, but also the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, is at the crux of settler colonialism as it operates in Canada.

In Wolfe’s (1999) account, “settler-colonization is at a base a winner-take-all project whose dominant feature is not exploitation but replacement” (p. 163); in essence, “settler colonialism destroys to replace” (2006, p. 388). Furthermore, settler colonialism naturalizes the discourses that classifies the Indigenous Other and settler as binaries (Andersen, 2014; Coulthard, 2014; Fanon, 1952/2008; Hall, 1995, 1997; Morgensen, 2011; Veracini, 2010; Wolfe, 1999, 2006). This settler colonial logic (Tallie, 2014) manifests in Canada through the “painting over” of Indigenous histories in favour of settler ones (Donald, 2004). Moreover, it crafts Canada’s official narrative (Donald, 2004, 2012; Mackey, 2002, 2012, 2016) in such a way that favourably represents the Canadian nation-state and its settlers while brushing Indigenous peoples aside. In sum, as the theoretical framework for this paper, settler colonialism situates the ways in which colonialism has structured Canada in such a way that Indigenous knowledges, histories, and peoples have been willfully and purposefully erased from popular narratives and understandings of the nation.

Methodology

My dissertation research—from which the data for this article derives—utilized a quanti-qualitative method (QQM). More specifically, as Grim, Harmon, and Gromis (2006) indicated, QQM is “the strategic incorporation of quantitative techniques into a qualitative method in such a way as to make the results more empirically transparent” (p. 517). The research was comprised of an anonymous, mixed-methods online survey and ten semi-structured interviews. The use of mixed-methods in the survey—which contained a combination of quantitative and qualitative questions—was desired to make sure all possible aspects of the research question would be covered (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). A semi-structured interview was preferred, because although they are designed around specific questions, they allow for questions to be created depending on the respondent’s answers (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Whiting, 2008). As an entry into publishing about my dissertation work as well as a(n honest) reflection of where I am on my project to date, this article only examines data from the survey. The survey invited responses from Alberta Teachers’ Association members on their opinions of Aboriginal content in Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) programs and Pre-Kindergarten-12 curricula.

Survey Design

Closed and open-ended questions were used in the survey, again to try and solicit the best possible responses from participants. Closed questions only allow the respondent to select a pre-determined answer as developed by the researcher, while open-ended questions allow the participant to answer in the way they feel is most applicable (Reja, Manfreda, Hlebec, & Vehovar, 2003). This type of mixed-method construction allows for both open and flexible responses from participants (Hernes & Metzger, 2017). In terms of analysis, as Kufs

(2011b) made clear, closed questions are easier to analyze because they can be used for statistical modeling, while open-ended questions allow for answers the researcher may not have anticipated. Survey questions are organized into three kinds of measurement scales. Nominal scales are grouped characteristics that do not have a sequential or hierarchal relationship, such as gender, race, or highest level of education; these scales are qualitative (Kufs, 2016). Ordinal scales—which are quantitative—measure ranking, order, or sequences such as in opinion questions (Kufs, 2016). Ratio scales, which are also quantitative as Kufs (2016) explained, measure units in a ratio to others, such as with time (i.e. years taught).

The survey questions were organized into five themes:

- Demographic questions: these focused on both identifying characteristics of the participants (i.e. race, gender) and teaching experience (i.e. grades taught, type of ATA membership). These questions predominantly used nominal scaling, though ratio scales were also employed. They were multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and long-answer questions.
- Value questions: these asked the respondents how they understood race, racism, tolerance, and multiculturalism. These questions utilized a Likert-type scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree), with sub-questions that asked participants to elaborate if they desired (long-answer questions). The Likert-type scale questions exercised ordinal scales, while the long-answer questions would be interpreted using qualitative analyses.
- B.Ed. experience questions: these were used to determine if there were commonalities between B.Ed. programs across the province. Since most of these questions applied the Likert-type scale questions, ordinal scales appear again.
- Assessment Questions: these came from the standards written in the Spring 2016 draft versions of the *Teacher Quality Standards* (TQS) and *School Leadership Quality Standards* (SLQS).⁴ These questions also used Likert-type scale questions—and ordinal scales—with qualitative long-answer follow-up questions.
- Policy Questions: these asked for participants' opinions on the then-called TQS and SLQS policies that were purported to be released by the Fall 2016 school term, as well as the government's proposed changes to curricula. Once again making use of ordinal scales, these questions used Likert-type scale questions with a long-answer follow up.

The variance in the types of questions asked, as well as the kinds of responses requested from respondents, was an integral part of the survey's design. Diversity in question length and type is recommended in the literature (e.g., DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Johnson et al., 2007; Reja et al., 2003; Whiting, 2008) to maintain participant interest and yield the most comprehensive data possible.

Recruitment

Potential participants were recruited using a) education student association listserves, b) social media (Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr), and c) emails sent by school board officials. I contacted 39 of the 42 Alberta public school boards and 14 of the 15 Alberta separate school boards—via the superintendent of the board or, if not available, the general email for the school board—using contact information on school board websites. Two boards declined because the study was not related to their board. The ATA was also contacted to disseminate the survey, turning down my request, stating they had too many studies going on in the 2016-2017 academic year.

Sampling

Sample design, Faugier and Sargeant (1997) demonstrated, is dependent on the goals of the research, the amount of time available to conduct the research, and the funds to do so. Discussing the collection of quantitative data within a qualitative research design, Van Meter (1990) differentiated between two types of data collection methodologies: descending methodologies use quantitative methods to examine the totality of a population using standardized questions, while ascending methodologies use qualitative methods to

⁴ The TQS, at the time of writing, is an existing teacher evaluation policy that is being reviewed and rewritten, while the SLQS is a proposed school leader evaluation policy.

explore smaller populations. An example of descending methodologies are census surveys, while ascending methodologies are often typified by graduate-level studies such as this one. In its design, my survey contains quantitative and qualitative questions within a broader qualitative research project. As a result, the sample used an ascending methodology to examine a specific population (that is, members of the Alberta Teachers' Association) within a larger one (on the smaller side, the population of Alberta, while at the largest, the population of Canada). The initial goal of the study was for the survey to be disseminated to all ATA members through its listserves; this is a type of random (or probability) sampling, because all members of the study population had an equal chance of being selected for participation. The ATA membership listserves are what is known as the frame, or a way to access potential survey participants (Kufs, 2011a). Yet, as Davidson (2006) noted, if populations are "difficult to access, or where a complete list of the population (sampling frame) is not available," (para. 5) this sampling method will not work. Since the ATA declined to disseminate the survey—thereby removing my proposed sampling frame—I used opportunity sampling, a type of sampling that relies on those who are willing and/or able to take a survey (Brady, 2006). I implemented this kind of surveying by emailing school board superintendents, asking for an email to go out on listserves, and using social media to disseminate the survey.

Finding 10 percent of the ATA's 43,500 members to take the survey was an appropriate—yet estimated as possible—representative sample. As Jansen (2005) explained, the *Law of Large Samples* indicates that "the ratio of the number of successes and the number of trials or the proportion of successes converges in probability to the success probability" (p. 1). More simply, as Kufs (2010a) outlined, the larger the size of your sample, the more likely it will be representative of the population being studied. A survey with $\pm 5\%$ error and 95% confidence of accuracy requires 400 participants (Kufs, 2010a); thus, the goal representative sample size was suitable.

Data Interpretation

Descriptive statistics were used to interpret 29 questions in order to quantify the data for the purposes of transparency. Though frequencies and percentages were calculated for these questions, those that had ordinal and ratio scales utilized more methods (i.e., mean, median, first quartile, standard deviation). The Likert-type scale questions were also changed from being subjective in nature to quantitative in order to facilitate more statistical analyses of the data. More specifically, number values were attached to each of the responses, where Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Neutral = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly Disagree = 1. The policy-themed questions also had a value of zero when respondents selected the response *I Have Not Heard of/Don't Know About [the curricular update and/or the policy being described]*. The 26 long-answer questions that yielded qualitative data were thematically coded to determine if there were patterns in the data. One of these questions, *White people in Canada can experience racism*, is analyzed in this paper. The focus on the survey question for this article allows an in-depth analysis of an issue that relates to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) *Calls to Action* (2015)—a policy statement that outlines 94 recommendations from TRC commissioners on how to move forward with reconciliation following over 6,750 survivor and witness statements about the federally-mandated Indian Residential Schools program that lasted over a century. The tie that binds the survey question and the policy together is the need for white people to understand how being racialized—and consequently the corresponding racism—impacts the day-to-day lives of Indigenous people and people of colour.

Analysis

Qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data have been conducted on the 168 survey responses. However, due to the length restrictions of this paper, only limited demographic data is provided (birth year, gender, location of birth, racial identity) to provide some understanding of the survey participants. Subsequently, only some of the data surrounding teaching has been included (membership, graduation year, years of teaching, grades taught, education achieved). The primary focus of the analysis, however, is on the long-answer responses corresponding with the evaluative statement *White people in Canada can experience racism*.

Demographics

The 168 respondents were born between 1953 and 1995, averaging 40.13 years of age. Most of the respondents described themselves as female (70.83%), while 28.57% categorized themselves as male, and 0.60% identified as androgynous. The teacher demographic data available from Alberta Education (n.d.) provides similar statistics: most teachers are between 22 and 75 years old,⁵ have an average age of 42, and 71% are women. 65.48% of the survey participants were born in Alberta, 30.38% were born elsewhere in Canada, and 4.17% were born internationally. Alberta Education (n.d.) does not collect data on the birthplace of teachers, but does indicate that about 1,500 Alberta Bachelor of Education graduates are hired annually, with another 700 being hired from out-of-province or other countries; however, location of degree completion and place of birth may not necessarily be the same. When participants were asked to identify their race, there were 12 different responses (see Table 1), with white being written by participants more than any of the other responses combined. Gambhir, Broad, Evans, and Gaskell (2008), as well as Ryan, Pollock, and Antonelli (2009) have identified that the teaching profession in Canada is mostly white; be that as it may, there is currently no statistical data publicly available about how teachers in Alberta or Canada identify racially. These results indicate that most of the surveyed ATA members are white women with an average age of just over 40 years.

Also of note is that 2.98% of the survey respondents self-identified as being Indigenous; 1.79% were Métis, and 1.19% were First Nation. Though there is no public data on how Alberta teachers identify according to race, Alberta Education (n.d.) suggests that since 3% of graduating B.Ed. students self-identify as Aboriginal,⁶ a similar percentage of Alberta teachers may also be Indigenous. The work of these educators within Alberta schools is of critical importance: in a study of Aboriginal teachers nation-wide, St. Denis (2010) affirms that the educators interviewed remained teachers “because they valued the opportunity to teach Aboriginal culture and history, to foster responsible citizens, to challenge negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people, to serve as role models, and because they believed they could have a positive impact on children” (p. 7). Though this article and my Ph.D. research focuses on settler experiences and understandings, recognizing and promoting the knowledge of Indigenous educators within the teaching profession is imperative.

Table 1: Racial Self-Identification

<u>Response</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Asian	1	0.60
Caucasian	16	9.52
European Descent	1	0.60
First Nation	2	1.19
Hispanic	1	0.60
Human	1	0.60
Métis	3	1.79
Mixed Race	3	1.79
White	134	79.76
White Although I Would Reconsider the Use of the Term Race	1	0.60
White European	1	0.60
Do Not Want to Answer	4	2.38
Total	168	100.03

⁵ The report indicates that some teachers may be younger than 22 and are lumped in with those who are 22, and at the same time, some may be older than 75 and are lumped in with those who are 75.

⁶ The *Canadian Constitution Act 32(2)* defines Aboriginal peoples as “the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada,” whereas Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) describes Indigenous peoples as a “collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants” (2016a, para. 1). Though the words are often used interchangeably, they have definitive and politicized meanings tied to the resistance of colonial and settler colonial policies and norms. More simply, *Aboriginal* is a government-derived term with specific historical, social, and political meaning in the Canadian context, and is the preferred term used by governments to track demographic data. *Indigenous*, on the other hand, recognizes peoples with “historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies” (United Nations, n. d., para. 4), and in turn how borders and nations are arbitrary settler-colonial constructs.

The teaching demographics of the participants indicated that the majority (86.90%) were Active members of the ATA, 3.57% were Associate members, 2.38% were Life members, and 5.36% were Student members. Provincial data indicates that 83.33% of teachers work in Alberta classrooms, while the remaining 16.67% hold Bachelor of Education degrees but may otherwise be employed by school boards in other capacities (Alberta Education, n.d.). Participants indicated graduation dates (or anticipated graduation dates) between 1976 and 2018, which is a range of 42 years. 28.57% of respondents had spent between five and ten years teaching; some participants had not taught yet while others had over 31 years of experience. Though Alberta Education (n. d.) reports a 25% attrition rate between years one and five, and a decreased likelihood of leaving the teaching profession over time, this is not represented in the survey data. There was a large variance in the combination of grades respondents taught, though the most frequent result, grades 7-12, was taught by 25% of teachers. Most participants had attained post-secondary education: 1.79% indicated their highest degree completed was a high school diploma, 1.19% indicated a college diploma, 66.07% completed an undergraduate degree, 29.17% a Masters degree, and 2.17% a doctorate degree. These results demonstrate that the respondents are mostly classroom teachers that have a variety of years of experience in teaching, and are also highly educated, which is contrary to the statistics for Alberta. For those aged 18-34, 17.5% of Albertans were enrolled in post-secondary education in 2011 (Campus Alberta, 2011), while 17% were enrolled in 2015 (Campus Alberta, 2015); this percentage of enrollment was lower than all the other provinces (Campus Alberta, 2011, 2015). In addition, 28% of the Alberta population aged 25-64 had at least a bachelor's degree, which was comparable for the statistics for the rest of the country (Campus Alberta, 2015). Even though a B.Ed. degree is required to teach in Alberta, over 30% of survey participants had completed a graduate degree, implying that they enjoy learning and will have been exposed to a variety of different perspectives and knowledges.

White People and Racism

For the evaluative statement *White people in Canada can experience racism*, a significant portion of the participants (64.29%) believed racism against white people was possible, while 21.43% did not (see Table 2). Examining the following long-answer question, "Please elaborate on your answer above, if desired," 44.64% (n = 75) of participants elected to provide a response. Themes that emerged include the belief in reverse racism, not understanding terminological differences (i.e. between racism, prejudice, and discrimination), conflation of the racial categories of white and Caucasian, and refuting that white people could experience racism.

Table 2: Ability of White People to Experience Racism

	<u>Response</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
5	Strongly Agree	36	21.43
4	Agree	72	42.86
3	Neutral	24	14.29
2	Disagree	26	15.48
1	Strongly Disagree	10	5.95
	Do Not Want to Answer	0	0
	Total	168	100.03

Discussion

Present in both the qualitative and quantitative data surrounding the statement, *White people in Canada can experience racism*, was a lack of understanding of the sociopolitical history of race as a term. From this shortcoming there is an implication that settler colonialism is intricately tied to an individual's ability to understand race as a concept. In order to problematize settler colonialism in Canada, three ideas need to be examined in detail. First, an outlining of the ways in which race was developed as a construct during earlier

colonial times must occur. Second, definitions of terms “racism,” “discrimination,” and “prejudice” must be contextualized in relation to the idea of race and racism. Third, and finally, the perception that reverse racism is a legitimate form of oppression white people can experience must be refuted to disrupt settler colonial discourses that continue to harm Indigenous peoples as well as people of colour.

The Historical Construction of Race

At the very onset of an incorrect ability of respondents to discern between racism, prejudice, and discrimination is that participants do not seem to have learned about the ways in which race is socially constructed. Originating in the fifteenth century from the Latin *ratio*, “race” was used in animal breeding to determine chronological ancestry (Memmi 1982/2000). The term was not used to define humans until the early seventeenth century (Banton, 2009; Bernasconi, 2009; Memmi 1982/2000). In this time, Europeans used binary oppositions in order to differentiate themselves from non-Europeans: they were smart, cultured, and civilized, while racialized Others—which in the Canadian context were Indigenous peoples⁷—lacked intelligence, refinery, and sophistication (Hall, 1997, 2007). In order to capitalize from Indigenous lands while claiming space for settlers as part of the colonial project, violence was used to establish the rights and superiority of the colonizer over the colonized (Bernasconi, 2009; Thobani, 2007); this occurred through governance, policy, and force (i.e., forced settlement on reserves, creation of residential schools) among other means of domination. European settlers were then able to construct rights for themselves that Indigenous peoples were not (Banton, 2009), ultimately positioning settlers as the rightful inhabitants of the settler nation-state of Canada (Razack, 2002; Vickers & Issac, 2012). Thus, race—as a concept derived by Europeans for their benefit over the Other—functions as a manifestation of settler colonialism, affecting how settlers understand oppression in Canada in the present.

Terminological Clarification

Many of the respondents did not demonstrate an understanding of how the idea of race is applied in a systematically oppressive way compared to prejudice and discrimination. An example of systemic racism is the way Canadian K-12 curricula are based on middle-class, male, EuroWestern understandings of knowledge, and if the perspectives of people of colour or Indigenous peoples are included, they are done as an “add on” (Calgary Anti-Racist Education, 2015). Battiste (1998) criticized this approach, what she called the “add and stir” method, because it fails to challenge the normalcy of colonialism within educational institutions. Moreover, these methods maintain settler colonial norms in curricula and educational institutions. Prejudice, meanwhile, is having an incorrect assumption about a group (i.e., the myth of the drunken Indian, which Vowel [2016] has debunked in detail). In contrast, discrimination is prejudice in action, like calling an Indigenous person a drunk Indian with the intent to offend and harm them. Though some respondents included prejudice and discrimination in their replies, most did so improperly: they were often used interchangeably when one is based on thought, and the other, process. Of the 75 respondents to this question, 90.97% (n = 68) were unable to explain how the historical construction of race—as a structure—impacts who can and cannot experience racism, and as a result, why racism cannot be experienced by white people. More specifically, white Canadians are incapable of experiencing racism because Canada is a white settler colonial nation-state created in the image of EuroWestern nations according to the norms and values of those nations with the intent of oppressing Indigenous peoples and people of colour. One respondent indicated that “racism is about treating a different ethnicity than yourself poorly because of their race. Therefore, for example, if a Latino [*sic*] or Filipino [*sic*] is prejudice [*sic*], discriminatory, or antagonistic towards a white person, that is racism.” The conflation of terminology in this response demonstrates that who experiences racism and in what ways is not understood. Racism, O’Brien and Szeman (2004) explained, is “the systematic practice of stereotyping and persecuting people based on their race,” where race is a socially-constructed category used to differentiate between groups of people based on assumed behavioural and physical characteristics (p. 319). Though both race and ethnicity are social constructs they are not interchangeable terms (O’Brien & Szeman, 2004) in the way the respondent indicates.

⁷ Other racialized peoples in what would become Canada would have experienced similar, incorrect essentialisms. Black slaves and freed slaves as well as the Chinese men who worked on the Canadian Pacific Railway, for example, were denigrated using the same type of rationale.

Moreover, as racialized Others, Latinx and Filipinx⁸ individuals do not have the systematic and historical power needed to oppress a white person. Prejudice, as Vickers and Issac (2012) outlined, requires a prejudgment of groups based on negative, unfounded stereotypes and generalizations; in turn, individuals are not able to treat stigmatized persons equitably. Relatedly, discrimination is an act or series of actions undertaken on someone due to prejudice (Vickers & Issac, 2012). Racialized persons are capable of being prejudiced towards, as well as to discriminate against, white people, but that is not racism: “only the dominant group has the social, historical, and institutional power to back their prejudice and infuse it throughout society” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 41).

In contrast, one of the respondents who believed white people cannot experience racism wrote that “racism is fundamentally about oppressive power structures, while people can hold prejudiced beliefs about white people this is not racism.” This respondent indicated the difference between racism and prejudice, but also indicated how oppression is connected. Another participant’s words echo those of the previous response: “Racism requires power. A white person can experience discrimination, but not racism.” Racism exists due to oppression, which “is a multidimensional imbalance of social, political, and institutional power that builds over time”; this allows it to become normalized through history, ideology, institutions, and culture (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Since race-based oppression has been built into the norms and institutions of Canadian society—existing always-already⁹—it often goes unnoticed by white settler Canadians. Settler colonialism, therefore, is the way in which oppression—vis-a-vis the historicization of race—has been and continues to be enacted in what is now called Canada.

Reverse Racism

Those who believe in reverse racism, or that white people can experience racism, do not have an awareness of how race has been structured as a concept over time. As one respondent indicated, “reverse racism is very evident when whites get blamed for doing things as being racist when actually whites have to be very careful what they say and do while minority groups seem to have more leeway in these areas.” Since this individual does not go into specific details about the ways in which white people apparently have to be cautious about their words and actions, while people of colour do not, it is hard to know if they are speaking from their experiences or in generalities; nonetheless, they are incorrect. Another respondent, though also somewhat vague, wrote that “there is starting to be what is called reverse racism or prejudice especially against white males.” This response is particularly interesting since the participant also included gender as part of their answer. As mentioned above, prejudice is not the same as racism, because anyone can be prejudiced, but only white people have the systemic power to be racist. Along the same lines is the fact that men,¹⁰ as persons abiding by the standards established through sex-based social norms, and thus the gender that maintains systemic power over all other genders, cannot face “reverse sexism.” This respondent, too, is mistaken in how they perceive both race- and gender-based oppression. Work by Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) confirmed this: reverse racism does not exist, because racialized persons do not maintain political, economic, or institutional power.

Though the majority of survey respondents (21.43% strongly agreeing and 42.86% agreeing) believed that white people could experience racism, it is important to contrast these faulty rationales with those who “get it.” As one participant noted, “reverse racism is not a thing. Racism is power + prejudice. White people may experience prejudice, but since they are the ones who hold power in our society, they don't actually experience racism.” This articulation is not only spot-on, but easy to apply in classroom settings and other locations of discussion. What then, is the root of the issue, and why do white people think they can face racism? One respondent articulated one possibility: “If a white person is claiming racism, it is usually because for once they are not getting their way.” More succinctly, and what has entered into popular consciousness

⁸ The use of Latinx is a way to move beyond and be more inclusive than the existing, male-centric Latino, and the gender binary encapsulated in Latin@ (Scharrón-del-Río & Aja, 2015); Filipinx operates on the same premise.

⁹ People are always-already subjects, because their identifying characteristics (gender, race) and roles within society are determined by ideologies prior to being born (Althusser, 2014). Simplified, *always-already* is something that has always been there though we may not know it is there.

¹⁰ This is to say, predominately cismen. For further reading on the intricacies of gender, please see the work of Devor (1994), and Devor and Dominic (2015).

as of late, “when you’re accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression” (Shirky, 2016).¹¹ This means that for white people—who have not faced systematic oppression due to their race—when racialized peoples start to gain equity in society, they feel as though their rights are being taken away from them. The result of this of this is resistance. Vickers and Issac (2012) outlined four tactics white people use in order to legitimize their belief that they are capable of being victimized by race in the same way as people of colour: a) ignoring and discrediting the speaker, b) denying the need for change, c) constructing hierarchies of oppression, and d) displacing the voices of those who face discrimination. These cognitive manoeuvres show not only that the concept of race continues to benefit white people, but also how strongly race and settler colonialism are interconnected manifestations of oppression. Seeing that the majority of respondents of the survey were white, well-educated teachers in Alberta, it is clear how deeply imbedded settler colonialism is within, not only systems of education, but the mythology of the nation as a whole. In essence, this allows for the continued erasure of Indigenous experiences in favour of those of white settlers.

Limitations

Limitations of this study focus on the generalizability of the survey sample. First, it is not known if the survey respondents are a phantom population—a group of outliers who are not representative of the population being studied (Kufs, 2010b)—and unfortunately there is no way to evaluate this. One thing that impacts the participants is response bias: individuals with strong opinions (for or against) are more likely to respond to a survey on a particular topic. Presumably, participants were more interested or encouraging of the research than they were discouraging of it. As such, the data collected and the resulting interpretations suppose that these respondents are more normal than a group of outliers. Second, a significant issue with volunteer of sampling is that “it is difficult to establish the extent to which those who volunteer to participate are typical of the group to which findings are to be generalized,” meaning any claims made about the sample must be done with caution (Jupp, 2006, para. 5). However, as Van Meter (1990) indicated, a way to eliminate response biases in surveys is to include in-depth interviews as part of the research design. Though not a part of this article, interviews are included in my dissertation’s research design, which will help eliminate some of the bias in my research. Third, as Brady (2006) indicated, opportunity sampling can be seen as a “less demanding” method of sampling, because it relies on the knowledge and experiences of the researcher, which makes it less thorough (para. 2). Moreover, it is often seen as “weak on external validity as it is impossible to generalize from the data it produces because it is not representative of the social world in general” (Brady, 2006, para. 6). Although these criticisms of opportunity sampling are valid, Van Meter (1990) believed some criticisms of ascending strategies can be resolved by applying descending strategies, such as using more randomization methods. It is also important to note that opportunity sampling was not the method I had envisioned when planning the study: as a result of not having access to the ATA member listserves, my ability to conduct a random sample was eliminated. For these three reasons, it is assumed that although these results are typical of the sample, they may not be representative of the ATA member population. Nonetheless, these results are provocative in that they should challenge settlers in Canada to do better, be better, and listen to Indigenous peoples more.

Conclusion

Though my research is very much a work-in-progress at this stage, the conclusions I have reached from this analysis are troubling. Not only is there the implication that for many settlers, there is no comprehension of the ongoing and systemic oppression rooted in settler colonialism that Indigenous peoples must endure in their day-to-day lives, often exacerbating existing medical conditions (Belcourt, 2017; Lee, 2016). Moreover, it is also worrying that educators may not have been given the skills and tools necessary during their Bachelor of Education programs to understand how inequities intersect and impact people as they move through the world. The ATA *Code of Conduct* clearly states that teachers must teach in a way “that respects the dignity and rights of all persons without prejudice” (Alberta Teachers’ Association, 2017b, para. 2), but my research suggests that Alberta teachers may not be able to do so. I believe that without teachers having knowledge of some hard truths about the history of Canada, and the realities of racism and oppression faced by Indigenous

¹¹ As O’Toole (2016) outlined, the exact origins of the phrase are somewhat unclear and the wording has changed over time, Shirky (2016) is credited with the phrase “When you’re accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression.”

peoples, the discrepancy between the high school completion rates by Indigenous and settler students will continue; the former group have a three-year completion rate of 50.2% and five-year completion rate of 56.7%, which is much lower than that of settler students (Alberta Education, 2016c).

As Ahmed (2012) identified, speaking out about racism is viewed as “making rather than exposing the problem: to talk about racism is to become the problem you pose” (p. 153). This analogy also works when talking about settler colonialism, as I have here, since settler colonialism as it was enacted by settler-colonizers of the past was based on racist understandings of Indigenous peoples and people of colour. In short, I have become the problem, because I see a problem that needs to be addressed rather than ignored. Thus, I will once again state that white people cannot face racism. White people cannot and do not face systematic oppression as a result of their race. Though white people can face oppression, it is not due to race, as one respondent explained: “We might experience other ‘isms’ but not racism, e.g. agism [*sic*].” Grasping this fact is also critically important in view of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s *Calls to Action* (2015). Currently, Alberta Education is making progress in meeting some aspects of recommendations 10, 62, and 63, which focus on education attainment of Indigenous students, updating curricula, and “educating for reconciliation” as well as other considerations. But if School Boards refuse to offer professional development for teachers on Indigenous topics or teachers refuse to seek out professional learning opportunities to aid in teaching Indigenous content in their classrooms, the *Calls to Action* will not be actualized in the spirit and intent they are meant to be. Along similar lines, if pre-service or in-service teachers are not given (or flat-out refuse) anti-oppression training, the likelihood is that they are not teaching in a way that honours the *Code of Conduct*. At this juncture in time, it is too soon to say what will or will not happen with Education Alberta’s plans towards reconciliation, teacher professional development, and curriculum redesign.

Adopting the words of Papaschase nêhiyaw curriculum studies scholar, Dwayne Donald (2012), who follows the advice of Hermeneutic scholar Geoffrey David Smith, I believe in order for there to be greater understanding from settlers about the ways in which Canada is a white settler colonial nation-state, and how that has resulted in centuries of oppression for Indigenous peoples, we “must work backward, beginning with a thoughtful accounting of the present state of affairs and revealing the very deep linkages to the past” (p. 40). In doing so, settlers will ideally begin to unlearn the normalized traditions and national mythologies of Canada, a place that is a white settler colonial nation-state, and an imagined community (Anderson, 2006). But the onus here is on settlers, because, recalling the words of Epp (2008, 2012), reconciliation is a settler problem. It is the work of settlers who lived centuries ago who established this white settler-colonial nation state, and it is the work of those people—be they our relations or not—that privileges the knowledges, histories, experiences, and lives of settlers over that of Indigenous peoples. In order for us, settlers, to be able to reconcile with Indigenous peoples—by this I personally believe there must be restitution—we must first reconcile with ourselves.

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