Denying Racism in Canada's Residential School System

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Abstract

Denials of racism are one of the most salient features of racist discourses. This paper examines the online comments on six news articles posted on Facebook. The articles, from three major Canadian daily newspapers, announce the findings of graves at former residential schools. This article sorts the different denials of racism in these comments using the typology of denial proposed by Van Dijk (1992) and used by Wodak (2015). It also identifies other 'denial-adjacent' strategies that appear in the comments, including delegitimizations, temporal distancing, individualization and displacement, excessive doubt, distractions, and outright dismissals.

Introduction

On May 27, 2021, Tk̓emlúps te Secwépemc (the Kamloops Indian Band) announced that the remains of 215 children had been found in a mass grave on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School (Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, Office of the Chief, 2021). On June 24, 2021, Cowessess First Nation announced preliminary findings of 751 unmarked graves at a cemetery near the former Marieval Indian Residential School (Eneas, 2021). Since the findings at Kamloops IRS and Marieval IRS, a number of other investigations have begun on the grounds of former residential schools while existing investigations have been expanded.

Critical discourse analysis has found that denials of racism are one of the most salient features of racist discourse with denials being pre-emptively employed to defend against even unspoken but possible inferences of racism (Van Dijk, 1992). Anti-racist educators in Canada have found that "the denial of racism is an integral and central part of the Canadian identity" (Razack 1998, 11). Discussions of the graves at former residential schools could be expected to contain such denials. This article examines the comments sections following Facebook posts by three major Canadian daily newspapers for such denials.

Literature Review

Canada's residential school system operated for over 100 years and had, as a goal, the cultural genocide of Indigenous people's (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2015). The TRC was mandated by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement to determine the truth about the residential schools in order to provide a foundation for reconciliation. The TRC recognizes that the claims it makes in its reports are "sometimes difficult to accept as something that could have happened in a country such as Canada, which has long prided itself on being a bastion of democracy, peace, and kindness throughout the world" (pp. v-vi). Canada, like most nations, engages in the ideological work of imagining itself as a nation that is legitimate and just. Critical discourse analysis provides an approach to the analysis of the ideological work being done through discourse (Fairclough, 2003; Jäger, 2001; van Dijk, 2001; Wodak, 2001). This literature review discusses some of the relevant findings of the TRC report. It then looks at the literature on racism in Canada and the ideological work done by denials of racism, with a particular emphasis on their relevance to teacher education.

TRC Report and Residential Schools

The TRC describes the residential school system as "an education system in name only for much of its existence" (p. v) in which children were neglected, made to work, and often abused physically and sexually. The purpose of these schools was linguistic and cultural genocide through assimilation of Indigenous children into the dominant, white culture "where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men" (John A. MacDonald, cited in TRC, 2015, p. 3). The TRC report contextualizes the residential school system within the Canadian government's more general policy of cultural genocide towards Indigenous peoples (TRC, 2015, p. 4). The legacy of residential schools "is reflected in the significant educational, income, health, and social disparities between Aboriginal people and other Canadians" (p. 135). Taking children away from their parents and placing them in abusive, racist institutions, "often harmed the subsequent ability of the students to be caring parents" (p. 138). Indigenous children are over-represented in child welfare and foster care systems and further over-represented in child deaths while in foster care (p. 141). Educational outcomes and income gaps also attest to the continuing legacy of the residential schools (p. 146). The report issues 94 Calls to Action, including calling for training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism for those working in hospitals, the civil service, law schools, businesses, and educational institutions. An understanding of the forms of denial and other defensive strategies that appear in public discussions of racism can inform such training.

Nationalism, Denial, and Racism in Canada

The discursive legitimation of nations involves multiple layers of forgetting and remembrance. Renan (1882/1990) points to the need to forget the "deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations" (p. 11) reassuring his French nationalist compatriots that "getting its history wrong is crucial for the creation of a nation" (p. 11). Bhabha (1990) writes that "the origins of national traditions turn out to be as much acts of affiliation and establishment as they are moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion, and cultural contestation" (p. 5). The legitimacy of these imagined national communities (Anderson, 2006) depends on forgetting the repressive and exclusionary exercises of power.

These imagined communities, however, must also be remembered and reproduced or they risk being redefined. They are reproduced, on a daily basis, through banal nationalism, which involves the everyday and unremarkable performances of nation-ness, such as the flying of flags and the playing of anthems (Billig, 1995). The "daily plebiscite" through which a nation is affirmed (Renan, 1882/1990) takes place through the largely unconscious and automatic or routine performances that indicate consent to one's position vis-à-vis nation and nationality.

Once its history has been gotten wrong, it must continue to be misremembered. This is as true of Canada as it is of any other settler society. When the nation's deeds of violence and displacement are recalled, they are routinely denied. Henry and Tator (2006) write:

> Canada suffers from historical amnesia. Its citizens and institutions function in a state of collective denial. Canadians have obliterated from their collective memory the racist laws, policies, and practices that have shaped their major social, cultural, political, and economic institutions for three hundred years. (p. 1).

A not incidental consequence of this historical amnesia and collective denial, is that "many, if not the majority, of Canadians are not only ignorant of Aboriginal culture, they are also ignorant of their own

ignorance" (Warry, 2009, p. 16). Denials of stories that disrupt the legimation of the imagined community maintain this ignorance.

Racism is often, but not always, denied in everyday speech, political statements, media representations, and in academic texts; when it cannot be denied, racism is treated as an individual characteristic, not a property of the nation. Henry and Tator (2002) argue that there is a widespread assumption "that because Canada is a society that upholds the values and ideals of a liberal democracy, it cannot possibly be racist, nor can its major institutions be racist, and certainly not the media" (p. 82). Racism can, however, be seen as the aberrant "beliefs and behaviours of isolated and dysfunctional extremists" (p. 82). Dei (2005) finds, even in progressive and educational spaces, a denial of racism as an issue of power and a framing of racism as individual, interpersonal, and a product of ignorance: "Racism is perceived as a personal and an interactional problem, and to this end, anti-racist work can be about raising consciousness" (p. 96). Racism, when defined as an individual problem, demands less of both the nation and those who are included within it.

Denials of Racism in Education

This denial of racism poses challenges for teacher education and citizenship education. When challenging the layers of denial and selective remembrance that serve to legitimate the imagined community, educators face resistance from racialized white students. Montgomery (2013) writes that "getting racialized whites (and, as well, able-bodied, middle-class, and heterosexual men) to simply acknowledge their privilege and power continues to be a huge challenge in many teacher education classrooms" (p. 3). Solomon et al (2005) note that teacher candidates employ discourses of denial when confronted with evidence of their white privilege. For this reason, critical approaches to anti-racist education employed in teacher education programs aim "to disrupt the various and plentiful denials of racism (which coincide with the denial and silencing of racialized non-whites)" (Montgomery, 2013, p. 3). To disrupt these denials, Montgomery proposes teacher candidates can be involved in constructing 'typologies of denial.' He prepares students for this work by having them respond to Peggy McIntosh's (2005) frequently used article on 'the invisible knapsack' and, the following week, has them read Solomon et al's (2005) article on discourses of denial among teacher candidates responding to the same article.

Gulliver and Thurrell (2017) find that denials of racism exist in English language textbooks intended for adult newcomers to Canada in preparation for the Canadian citizenship exam and Gulliver (2018) finds similar denials in citizenship study guides. In both cases, some of the denials are denials of Canada's history of colonization and its impact on Indigenous peoples.

One of the consequences of this frequent denial of racism in education is that Indigenous students may not recognize themselves in the curriculum. Neeganagwedgin (2011) in a study of Indigenous women's educational experiences finds that the misremembering of Canadian history in educational texts alienates Indigenous students whose realities are being covered up. She writes "the denial of Canada as a 'settler' state is important, as it reinforces how Indigenous people and their cultures have been undermined and supplanted in the curriculum with lies or by distortions through both omission and commission" (p. 10). Neeganagwedgin describes how the women she interviewed learned more about Indigenous culture outside of school than from a curriculum that is irrelevant, forgetful, and in denial.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an approach to the study of how power relations are maintained through discourse, that is, through language as a social practice. CDA research conducted by Van Dijk (2002, 2006) identifies denials of racism as one of the linguistic means through which dominant groups in racist societies maintain power asymmetries.

Methods and Selected Texts

Van Dijk (2002, 2006) analyzes the 'ideological' processes through which a group imagines and positively represents itself and, at the same time, imagines others as outside of the group and as having negative qualities. One strategy of positive self-presentation is the denial of racism. Van Dijk (1992) notes that, "One of the crucial properties of contemporary racism is its denial" (p. 87) and goes on to observe that "even the most blatantly racist discourse in our data routinely features denials or at least mitigations of racism" (p. 89). Van Dijk (1992) provides a typology of denials, which are useful in analyzing the types of denial that accompany racist discourses:

1. act-denial ('I did not do/say that at all');
2. control-denial ('I did not do/say that on purpose', 'It was an accident');
3. intention-denial ('I did not mean that', 'You got me wrong');
4. goal-denial ('I did not do/say that, in order to .. .'). (p. 92)

He then notes that "besides denial proper, there are also a number of cognitive and social strategies that are more or less closely related to denials" (p. 94). The additional 'cognitive and social strategies' that occur in interactive comments sections replying to newspaper articles in an online forum may be quite different than those Van Dijk was observing largely in print newspaper articles.

This paper analyzes denials in the comments posted by Facebook users responding to articles by three major daily Canadian newspapers announcing the finding of a mass grave at Kamloops (Globe & Mail, 2021, May 28; National Post, 2021, May 27; Quan, 2021) and those announcing the finding of unmarked graves at Marieval (Kennedy & Boyd, 2021; Nardi, 2021; Pruden, Kirkup, Hager, & Tait, 2021). It identifies within these comments denials of racism and other ideologically defensive strategies. Denials of racism are sorted into the categories of denial identified by Van Dijk (1992). For defensive strategies that do not fit into the types of denial identified by Van Dijk, partly because of the nature of online interactive forums, categories for an expanded typology are proposed.

Canada's three highest-circulation English language daily newspapers are the Globe and Mail, the Toronto Star, and the National Post. According to Winter (2011) the Globe and Mail is "liberal" and "slightly right-of-centre" and caters to a university educated readership (p. 96). The Toronto Star adopts "a more social-liberal editorial stance than the Globe" (p. 96) but, like the Globe, is "best described as socially majoritarian, urban, and Central Canadian, as well as politically centre and left of centre" (p. 96). The National Post, Canada's second highest circulation 'national' newspaper, caters to a more conservative readership than the Globe and Mail or the Toronto Star (p. 96). The comments, however, were on public Facebook posts and the commenters may not have been regular readers of the newspaper. In some cases, the same Facebook users commented on posts from more than one of the three newspapers.

As the comments were made on public forums, the individuals producing the comments have no reasonable expectation of privacy. Confirmation was sought and received from the author's university's Research Ethics Board that research drawing on Facebook comments under posts accessible to any of Facebook's nearly 3 billion users does not require ethics review as the comments are considered to be in the public domain. Article 2.2 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Research Ethics states ethics review is unnecessary when the information is in the public domain and the individuals quoted have no reasonable expectation of privacy (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2018, p. 15). Nonetheless, names have been removed and replaced with an alphanumeric designation for each commenter, e.g. PK1, GK 2, TM3, etc. The first letter indicates the newspaper (P for National Post, T for Toronto Star, and G for Globe and Mail); the second letter

indicates whether the article being responded to referenced the mass grave found at Marieval (M) or the unmarked graves at Kamloops (K). The number was assigned to each commenter when their comments were placed in the data set.

No further identifying information or demographic characteristics of commenters is included. As Gebhard (2017) explains in the context of teachers' discourses about residential schools, critical discourse analyses often provide minimal information about those reproducing discourses because the focus of the analysis is the discourse itself not the speaker of the discourse. Those who reproduce discourses are not the originators of those discourses; discourses exceed the individual. Racism and its denial are everyday phenomena and the racism observed in these comments is racism of the quite ubiquitous sort in discussions of aspects of Canadian history that delegitimize the imagined community.

Findings

While this article is not in anyway quantitative, it should be said that the majority of comments did not contain evident denials or face-keeping strategies. Many commenters called for investigations, reflection, and acknowledgement of the harms done by residential schools: "Canada must confront this tragedy with openness and candour" (SK1); "Canada's dirty secret needs to be shared in all history books!!!!!!" (SK4). Others made brief emotional declarations of grief or sorrow: "So heartbreaking (SK12); "Sad" (GM26); "Horrific history" (GM27). Many even referred to racism, genocide, or white supremacy explicitly: "These were death camps to exterminate Indigenous people" (SM8); "Shouldn't this be called a concentration camp with genocidal intent?" (SM9). Others made openly racist statements: "This means 215 less criminals Canada has to deal with !!!" (SK11).

This study finds that discussions of the graves at former residential schools did, as expected, contain denials of racism identifying the following types of denial and denial-adjacent strategies, building on van Dijk's (1992) typology (Table 1).

Table 1
Denials and Denial-Adjacent Strategies

	Type	*Explication*
Denials	*Act-Denial*	'this did not happen' or 'this thing that happened wasn't racist'
	Control-Denial	'it could not be helped' or 'the racist event wasn't our fault.'
	Intention-Denial	'this was not meant in a racist way'
	Goal-Denial	'the racist outcome was a side-effect and not the goal.'
Denial-Adjacent Strategies	*Delegitimizing*	attacking the messenger, possibly accusing them of racism or ulterior motives
	Distancing	emphasizing the temporal or spatial distance between the racist event and the present
	Displacement and Individualization	placing the responsibility on a different group or on individuals instead of a group
	Excessive Doubt	expressing doubt about the evidence and declaring a need to take a stance of neutrality until further

	evidence is gathered while establishing a very high level of proof
Dismissals	refusal to engage other than to dismiss, for example putting a laughter reaction as a response to a serious statement

Examples of each of these types of denial were found in the comments section on these articles.

Denials

Many of the denials of racism in the comments fit the typology proposed by van Dijk and used by Wodak (2015) and other critical discourse analysts.

Act-Denial. One type of denial identified by Van Dijk are 'Act-Denials' which deny that an event took place. These are denials that say 'this did not happen' or 'this thing that happened wasn't racist'. A comment made by PK 16 that "there was no genocide" is an example of 'act-denial.' One form of act-denial in the data involved quibbling over definitions. These comments do not say "there was no genocide" so much as 'there wasn't technically speaking a genocide': "They were treated horribly, many if not all were forced to change their names to be more Canadian. It's still not technically classified as genocide" (SK6); "215 deaths OVER 73 YEARS DOES NOT MAKE A GENOCIDE" (PK4).

Definitions and redefinitions may be used as a form of act-denial. When one commenter refers to the residential schools as 'genocide' another replies: "genocide [ˈjenəˌsīd] NOUN the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic group or nation" (SK2). While not explicitly a denial, a reasonable inference would be that SK2 feels this definition rebuts a statement made by a previous commenter that "it is genocide" (SK8). Definitions may also deny the systemic nature of racism, redefining racism as individual beliefs. When accused of excusing the nation's racism, SK7 replies: "Racism is when you discriminate against someone based on the color of their skin." By defining racism as individual discriminatory actions based on colour prejudice, SK7 argues that the nation cannot be racist.

Control-Denial. Control-denials acknowledge that something occurred but deny that the in-group had control over the event. Control-denials say 'It could not be helped' or 'the racist event wasn't our fault.' References to high child mortality rates and diseases appeared in many comments, usually followed by claims that the same diseases also affected non-native children and that death from these diseases was inevitable: "Based on the time period the number of children and the state of disease and health care the number of deaths and burials is not unusual" (PK12); "These schools were running for over a hundred years during a time when childhood death of ALL races was common" (GM39). The implication is that these children, who had been forcibly removed from their communities and placed in over-crowded and under-funded institutions, could not have been saved from disease and their deaths could not have been prevented.

Intention-Denial. Intention-denials, as identified by van Dijk, may explicitly acknowledge that 'something happened,' but deny that the intentions were racist. These denials say 'There was no racist intent' and 'This was not meant to be racist.' Racism is explained as a misunderstanding of people who had no racist intent. Some commenters made explicit reference to 'good intentions': "The initial intentions were good though what happened in ripping families apart and the horrendous things the children ended up being subjected to were so wrong…" (PK7). Intention-denials concede certain realities while denying the racism that informed those realities.

Racist intentions are also denied through comparisons to historic examples of non-Indigenous people suffering horrible conditions and brutality in other contexts: "These schools existed in Ireland, too! The Irish moved on, so should they" (GM20); "in Ireland dead children were tossed down a well at one unwed mothers home" (PK 26); " [British Home Children] in some cases had it worse..they were alone with their abusers..slept in barns...rarely had an education... And had no home to return to..." (GM7). Such claims imply that if similarly abusive institutions could be found elsewhere, particularly within the in-group, then the intentions towards Indigenous children could not have been intentionally racist.

Goal-Denial. Van Dijk differentiates 'goal-denial' from 'intention-denial.' While intention-denials claim 'this was not meant in a racist way,' goal-denials claim 'the racism was a side-effect and not the goal.' Both intention-denial and goal-denial acknowledge that horrendous abuse happened. Intention-denials proclaim good intentions on behalf of those perpetrating the abuse, while goal-denials place racist outcomes as a side-effect of the action.

It can be difficult to distinguish between intention-denials and goal-denials in much of the critical discourse analysis that draws on van Dijk (1992). Statements like the following could be interpreted as either: "It was a failure but not a genocide […] That they tried to make native people conform to white society was done however poorly not out of malice but through practical considerations of the day and circumstances" (PK16). Such claims do not deny that residential schools had as an intention "to make native people conform" but deny that genocide was the goal. Residential schools were formed for "practical considerations" and limited by "circumstances" with the resulting deaths being "a failure but not a genocide."

Denial-Adjacent Strategies

Van Dijk notes that people use face-keeping strategies besides denial, such as mitigating language or euphemisms and "a number of cognitive and social strategies that are more or less closely related to denials" (p. 94). The following are denial-adjacent strategies in the online comments regarding these articles: *delegitimizations* of those who did or might imply racism, *displacement* of the blame onto individuals or groups other than the in-group, expressing excessive *doubt*, and, otherwise, *distracting* from or *dismissing* any possible inference of racism.

Delegitimizations. Delegitimizing comments attack the out-group or those arguing for them. Delegitimizing statements were made about Indigenous peoples, the media, and powerful unidentified others. Comments on the articles contained criticisms of Indigenous peoples, accusing them of having been irresponsible in maintaining these graves, particularly in regards to the unmarked graves beside the Marieval IRS: "You would think with the (+) $10 billion Canada gives the Indigenous people every year they would have invested to retun these kids along time ago or at the very least maintained these grave sites" (SM10); "Why with the billions of tax dollars sent every year to the Indigenous communities, did they not mark and keep these gravesite in respectable condition??" (GM37); "This 'unmarked graves' issue is a First Nation's scam to get us to give them more money for nothing. They abandoned these graves they're calling unmarked when they ran the School system" (PM14). Delegitimizing statements often accused Indigenous people's of ideological or financial motives: "It's all about "compensation" (PM7); "Enjoy mining your victim hood. I hope it gets you what you want" (PK16). These delegitimizing statements may contain other forms of denial, such as act-denials declaring the issue 'a scam'.

The 'media' was also delegitimized. "It looks to me like the media is just stirring up hysteria and hate again and enabling thugs to run amok tearing down statues, burning churches and making white people feel guilty about something they had no part in" (PM17).

Many delegitimizing comments, however were more ambiguous in terms of who exactly is being delegitimized: "Oh please? What were the causes of death? This is one big dog and pony show. Oh....? Let's racialize everything?" (PM22). Comments referred to "thugs" (PM17), "mob knee jerk reactions" (GM1), and "one big dog and pony show" (PM22) without being more specific about who the mob were or who was putting on the show.

Similarly ambiguous comments suggest that some untrustworthy group is manipulating events, pointing to the 'convenient timing' of the discovery of these unmarked graves being suspiciously close to Canada Day (July 1st): "Ooohhh....an existing cemetary. Then decommissioned...Now with far more sets of skeletons than previously listed. How convenient" (GM5); "All of this coming out just as Canada day is fast approaching, very convenient timing. The culture war rages on" (PM2); "The timing is convenient..." (PM24); "Good thing this is happening a little deflection was needed" (GM18). The finding of these graves is said to be 'convenient' but it is left unclear for whom it is convenient or how it is convenient. Such ambiguity protects the commenter from being accused of racism while allowing them to defend the in-group.

Distancing. One strategy used to defend the in-group from inferences of racism is to place the event in the distant past. This kind of temporal distancing appeared in comments: "Remember it was in 1898 ...." (TM2); "First of all if it was a crime who are you going to prosecute if it took place more than 100 years ago?..." (PM17); "what if it was done a hundred years ago , how many would still be alive today ?" (GM28); "Calm down! We all know ,about the abusers, they are dead !! This all happened 50 + years ago" (GM41). Such statements may not deny that abuse took place, but fail to recognize the ongoing legacy of the residential schools, deflecting blame away from the in-group in the present by placing it on individuals in the past.

Displacement or Individualizations. One way in which the in-group can be insulated from accusations of racism is by defining racism as the property of individuals or a sub-group within society (Wodak, 2006). Such responses may acknowledge that genocide took place, but shield the in-group as a whole from accountability for it: "I hope they're able to find causes of death and charge the individuals responsible for this" (GK6); "Individuals make choices and can be held accountable. An overarching boogie man can't" (GK6). While individuals may have committed crimes within the residential schools, the residential schools themselves were part of a national policy designed to perpetrate cultural genocide upon Indigenous peoples.

Other individuals, namely politicians, were singled out as being primarily responsible. Despite the fact that the residential school system continued for over a century with support of both Conservative and Liberal parties, commenters focused attention on individual leaders or specific political parties: "All under the watch of PET also known as Pierre Idiot Turdeau" (PM25); "jail harper forever" (GM29).

The Queen was mentioned a number of times, usually in conjunction with conspiracy theories in which she was said to have been personally involved in kidnapping children from Kamloops IRS: "10 children were stolen from this school too… by High power people" (GK1); "Didn't Queen Elizabeth take 10 kids from Kamloops Residential school in BC to that picnic where they all DISAPPEARED?" (GK3); "The queen was found guilty for the disappearance of 12 of these children that went on a picnic with her and Philip when she visited in the 1960s. Why isn't that talked about?" (GK11).

A strategy closely related to individualization is to elect a segment of the society to blame, thereby insulating society as a whole. This was sometimes a political party: "More LPC death camps" (PM21). LPC stands for Liberal Party of Canada. While both Catholic and Protestant churches were involved in the running of residential schools (TRC, 2015), many commenters assigned blame to the Catholic church or to Catholics more generally: "If and people are pregadise it's the catholic churches not the people in Canada" (GM21); "This isn't the Gov,....this is Catholics!" (PK1). This form of

displacement tells us not to blame the nation, but to blame individuals or groups within the nation instead. Sometimes this is said most explicitly: "Don't blame Canada!!! BLAME THE QUEEN AND THE POPE!!!! And the RCMP for covering it up all these years!" (PM24).

Excessive Doubt. A degree of skepticism is necessary for a deliberative democracy. Expressing doubt and suspicion in ways that cannot be responded to or demanding a level of evidence that cannot be reasonably met, however, are not. Within days of the graves being located, commenters expected forensic reports, access to the data gathered through ground penetrating radar, and genetic testing to confirm Indigenous ancestry: "I think I'll wait for the Forensic Report" (PM15); "Would be nice to see the GPR data and images. Have any been published?" (PM20); "If this is a community grave site. Are they testing the bodies for ancestral connections or is every unaccounted for body assumed to be Indigenous?" (GM16); "is this fact or fiction" (GM36). "Pictures and location please, I am tired of just believing it!" (GM22).

Speculation, preceded by "could be" or "were probably," accompanied demands for people to wait before speculating. Calls to not "assume anything before we have all the facts" accompanied assumptions about what "probably" happened: "These graves may not all be children. Could be pioneers, Mounties during the rebellion, adult aboriginals" (PM4); "we have no information to determine what caused these deaths. It could be a horrible illness or pandemic type illness" (PM7); "Graves? Or images of shafts/ pits located by radar? No bodies found as yet. If it is graves it could be anybody. I notice how we like to play judge, jury, executioner without all the facts... Confirmation bias?" (PM8). Statements of doubt are often accompanied by delegitimizations. Those who might imply racism on the part of the national in-group are said to be "play[ing] judge, jury, executioner" (PM8) having "confirmation bias," "engaging in virtue signalling" (PM9); "jump[ing] on the hate bandwagon" (GM15).

Distractions. 'Distractions' are comments which attempt to reframe the issue in ways only tangentially related to the topic, such as comments that focused only on government overreach, but shifted the topic to covid-19 vaccinations: "look what they have done to these sweet souls and you trust them with the jab please please wake up" (GM31). Other 'distractions' attempted to reframe the in-group as victims of a racialized threat from others: "It is coming again. We survived Christianity. But we won't survive Islam" (PK23). What these examples of 'distractions' have in common is that they attempt to shift the topic away from possible inferences of racism by the in-group to largely irrelevant subjects, sometimes while also drawing upon other denial-adjacent strategies.

Dismissals. 'Dismissals' are non-substantive comments that do little other than dismiss information negative to the in-group while not adding enough explicit information to categorize the response as another type of denial or denial-adjacent strategy. For example, using a laughter emoticon as a reaction to a tragedy (PM7) suggests the article cannot be taken seriously, but says little else. A similarly dismissive strategy was to quote words from the article without expanding on any implied critique. In response to the National Post's story titled "*Like a crime scene': 751 unmarked graves reported found at former Saskatchewan residential school*" (Nardi, 2021) one commenter responded: "'Reportedly found'... yah right... these Graves were never lost!!" (PM24). Another comment seems to mock the idea that the news might be traumatizing for living victims simply quoting the words "renewed trauma" (GM28) but adding no further comments. These responses seem to dismiss the news but say little more.

Conclusion

Comments about residential schools that appear in social media contain examples of the types of denial identified by van Dijk (1992) as well as the other denial-adjacent strategies identified in this article. These denial-adjacent strategies include *delegitimization* of those making claims of racism,

distancing of Canada and Canadians from the racist events in time and place, *displacement* of responsibility for racist events onto individuals or select groups within Canada, expression of excessive *doubt*, outright *distractions*, and offhand *dismissals*.

Historical amnesia and collective denial continue to preserve a misremembered Canada, interrupting attempts to discuss the history of residential schooling. Prevalent public discourse denies that residential schools were part of a racist policy of cultural genocide supported by politicians from different political parties, by churches, and by the general public. This discourse of denial concedes that individual Canadians or sub-groups of Canadians might be responsible, but shields Canada from blame. Racism remains individual, interpersonal, and a product of ignorance.

The TRC report calls for training in anti-racism for those working in educational institutions. Teachers and teacher educators engaging in anti-racist education on Canada's residential schools will be working with students whose perspectives are, to some degree, informed by the collective denial prevalent in public discussions of the topic. Constructing typologies of denial in class, as suggested by Montgomery (2013), or attempting to apply existing typologies of denials, such as van Dijk's (1992) or the typology constructed in this article, could help to disrupt this discourse of denial. Talking about denial and denial-adjacent strategies could deepen students' awareness of how denial works to perpetuate a misremembered history. Further research with teacher candidates could test the typology of denial constructed here or explore the efficacy of education about denials in promoting and deepening reflection on residential schools.

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