

Migration to Meaningful Engagement: A Self-Determination Conceptual Model for Motivators of Reconciliation Among First-Generation Immigrants

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Abstract: Canada is widely revered for its diversity and multiculturalism. While the concept of reconciliation is not new to this country, first-generation immigrants often struggle to conceptualize and navigate the process as they encounter these complex narratives of history for the first time after they arrive in their new homeland. Although there is an array of scholarly literature on reconciliation in Canada, within this spectrum, the realms of first-generation immigrants' engagement in reconciliation still needs to be explored further. To build an inclusive national dialogue around this process, it is vital to understand immigrants' views on reconciliation.

Drawing on self-determination theory, this paper proposes a conceptual model to comprehend first-generation immigrants' involvement in reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples of Canada. Informed by the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, we explore how satisfaction or frustration of these needs shapes immigrants' engagement in this process. While this conceptual framework lays the foundations for future research, it informs practitioners in settlement agencies to tailor programs that engage immigrants in reconciliation, advancing inclusion, and shared responsibility. It also offers insights for policymakers to develop culturally sensitive and psychologically supportive strategies that foster immigrants' meaningful participation in reconciliation in Canada.

Keywords: Reconciliation, first-generation immigrants, Indigenous Peoples of Canada, self-determination theory

Reconciliation is a multifaceted topic with an array of evolving definitions that range from forgiveness and repentance to co-existence of rival groups in a political system (Battiste, 2013; LeMay, 2025; Morgan, 2018; Robertson, 2025; Tutu, 2000; Watson, 2020). While some scholars have defined it as a coping strategy to resolve conflicts, reestablish damaged relationships, and restore harmony between two groups, others have contested such definitions for being overly restrictive to represent the true spirit of reconciliation, with their focus on the past and disregarding systemic harms and collective responsibility (Tutu, 2000; Wildcat et al., 2014). Amidst these conflicting views, scholars have suggested using an Indigenous lens for an authentic definition of reconciliation (Datta, 2020; Duhamel, et al., 2024). However, since the concept of reconciliation is deeply rooted in Christian-European traditions, there is no singular Indigenous lens or a single-word equivalent in Indigenous world-views. For instance, in Plains Cree—an Indigenous language spoken primarily in Western Canada—a broadly adopted term in reconciliation discourse is *wâhkôhtowin*, which refers to interconnectedness, relationship, or kinship. Another concept prevalent in Cree Treaty discourse is the concept of *nîtaskîwin*, which refers to getting along together on the land. With this conceptual diversity in establishing a universally accepted definition, researchers have argued in favour of maintaining this elusiveness as it broadens the scope for building meaningful relationships, recognizes its intricacy, and addresses the experiences and expectations of Indigenous Peoples on

reconciliation (Akhmetova, 2019; Bueno, 2024; Datta, 2019). Recognizing this complexity, we ground our views on reconciliation in the definition coined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, TRC (2015). According to TRC, reconciliation is an ongoing process that builds and maintains mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups by creating awareness of the past, acknowledging past wrongs, sharing the truth, healing, and building inclusive societies.

We begin this paper by outlining the sociopolitical context of reconciliation and frame first-generation immigrants within it. After presenting our stance on reconciliation and situating ourselves in this research, we draw on relevant literature and introduce self-determination theory as a framework. Next, we introduce our conceptual model for understanding the dynamics of first-generation immigrants' motivations for reconciliation. Finally, we outline future implications for research and conclude this paper.

Background

Rooted in the Judeo-Christian theology, the historical concept of reconciliation originated from the idea of restoring harmony between God and humanity through confession, repentance, and forgiveness (Tutu, 2000). However, researchers have cautioned applying this concept to a settler-colonial context such as that of Canada, as it prioritizes emotional healing over structural injustices, and leaves colonial power structures untouched (Wilson-Raybould, 2022). When reconciliation is grounded in Christian conceptions of forgiveness, it can lead to the “settler move to innocence” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 151), and position Indigenous Peoples as forgivers and settlers as repentant, while leaving colonial systems of power untouched.

For many first-generation immigrants (individuals born abroad who later settle in a new country, such as landed immigrants, refugees, and naturalized citizens), the concept of reconciliation, grounded in Judeo-Christian beliefs, represents a complicated terrain that they may encounter for the first time after arriving in their new homeland. Their limited understanding of Indigenous issues makes them vulnerable to stereotyping Indigenous Peoples (Nejad et al., 2021), and restricts their ability to conceptualize and navigate the process of engaging meaningfully with Indigenous communities (Aytac et al., 2022; Craft & Regan, 2020; Duhamel, et al., 2024). Though academic and vocational institutions across Canada serve as valuable information sources on reconciliation and Indigenous Peoples, those immigrants who do not access these institutions are left on their own to navigate this knowledge. Their struggles to settle in their new country (Rocke & King, 2020), their ideological perceptions (Datta, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2012), and the absence of discourse on practicing reconciliation (Akhmetova, 2019) can deter their engagement in this process, unless they have a strong passion to do so.

Research Gap and Purpose

With the release of TRC's Final Report in 2015, discourse around reconciliation and Indigenous issues started gaining momentum in Canada (Alfred et al., 2023; Battiste, 2013). Since then a significant number of scholars have analyzed reconciliation through a settler-Indigenous lens (Craft & Regan, 2020; Macdonald, 2020; McGuire & Denis, 2019); a few have studied first-generation immigrants' experiences in this process (Akhmetova, 2019; Datta, 2019; Lee et al., 2025; Polar, 2018), and very few have explored how fulfilling the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness influences immigrants' perceptions and engagement in this process. According to the 2021 Census, Indigenous Peoples and immigrants, including individuals with lived refugee experiences, are the two fastest-growing groups in Canada (Indigenous Services Canada,

2022; Statistics Canada, 2022), making them key participants in reconciliation. There is still a significant gap in understanding how first-generation immigrants perceive the invitation to reconciliation (Rafferty, 2020) and what factors shape their meaningful engagement in this legacy. To build an inclusive national dialogue around reconciliation, it is vital to understand these individuals' perspectives and factors that influence their engagement.

Through our research, we aim to address this knowledge gap and explore how immigrants perceive reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and what factors influence their participation in this process. Informed by self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002), according to which, satisfying the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness fosters intrinsic motivation, we investigate how these needs might shape immigrants' engagement in reconciliation.

Researchers' Stance on Reconciliation in Canada

Scholars have raised concerns over the idea of reconciliation between immigrants and Indigenous communities, arguing that historically, relationships did not exist between these groups (Wilson-Raybould, 2022), therefore, it is not justified to expect immigrants to engage in reconciliation. In response, we bolster our argument with four sources that reinforce first-generation immigrants' commitment to reconciliation (1) the Oath of Citizenship of Canada, (2) TRC's (2015) conviction that *We are all treaty people*, (3) Section 35 of the 1982 Constitution Act (Department of Justice, Government of Canada, 2025), and (4) Morgan's (2018) view of collective responsibility.

In 2021, the federal government revised the Oath of Citizenship in response to the TRC's Call to Action #94 (Government of Canada, 2023). The revised Oath acknowledges reconciliation as a shared responsibility for all Canadians and reinforces immigrants' onus to uphold Indigenous rights. Upon swearing the Oath, immigrants undertake the responsibility to uphold the laws of Canada, including treaty rights, and support reconciliation as part of their civic responsibility.

For those who argue that newcomers or individuals who choose to retain their permanent resident status, instead of securing Canadian citizenship, are exempt from reconciliation responsibilities, the TRC's final report addressed this as, "We are all Treaty people who share responsibility for taking action on reconciliation" (2015, p. 11). Based on this perspective, first-generation immigrants, by accessing public services, benefiting from public infrastructure, participating in the economy, and living on Indigenous lands, assume a moral responsibility to engage in reconciliation, even when it is not a legal binding.

Morgan (2018) identified two conditions fundamental to collective responsibility: (1) being accountable for something one has not done directly and (2) holding membership in a group that one cannot voluntarily detach from. The process of immigration is an offshoot of colonialism. Once immigrants arrive, they have the right to newcomers' group benefits. This implies that they carry the responsibility that comes with these rights, which is being accountable for something that they might not have done directly (depending on the backgrounds they come from), but that they are an extension of the group that caused the harm. Avoiding reconciliation would mean that the colonizers' generations, including immigrants, would inherit legacies and privileges that the colonizers instigated and endorsed.

Our stance on the moral and national responsibility toward reconciliation is that, on entering into reconciliation, first-generation immigrants have an opportunity to contribute to decolonization. Immigrant-Indigenous alliances can advance "decolonizing collaborations" (Polar, 2018, p. 27) and collective liberation from colonialism (Wilson-Raybould, 2022).

Researchers' Positionality

As the first author of this paper, I share my professional background that has deeply impacted my interest in reconciliation. I am a certified English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor. While teaching ESL to adult newcomers, I found myself struggling to convince these learners, who were eager to learn about contemporary Canada, to learn about Indigenous communities and the history of Canada. During our interactions, they would reiterate that, being newcomers, they had never been involved in what happened at the Indian Residential Schools, then queried why they should learn about Canadian history. These experiences and similar situations sparked my interest in exploring ways to motivate first-generation immigrants to educate themselves on Canada's past. Interacting with diverse communities has given me insights into the current dynamics of reconciliation in Canada, particularly how immigrants from marginalized communities and Indigenous Peoples navigate the effects of colonialism. Considering this research as an opportunity to work under the guidance of an Indigenous community leader, also the second author of this paper, I seek an answer to the question that has always triggered my thoughts: Why might immigrants engage in reconciliation with the Indigenous communities of Canada?

As the second author, I bring my long experience as a First Nations educational and community leader and my efforts to instigate dialogue in the promotion of reconciliation among Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples; efforts that I have sustained in my roles in teaching and research. My previous professional experience was characterized by initiatives that demonstrated enhanced Indigenous participation and outcomes in education and society, and a better understanding of Indigenous Peoples and issues among all students and the broader community. I also promote reconciliation through local and national participation in Canada's Indigenous Reconciliation Fund processes. The question of why immigrants might engage in reconciliation with Indigenous communities of Canada presents an opportunity to reflect on and learn from our agency in promoting reconciliation as an attribute of the Canadian experience and citizenship. Better understandings of ourselves in relation to our broader social goals help move reconciliation from an aspiration to a commitment and practice.

Literature Review

Internationally, reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples has taken diverse forms; yet it is grounded in truth, justice, and inclusivity. Several nations have embraced reconciliation (Bryan, 2010; Bueno, 2024; Larsson, 2016; Oduro & Nagy, 2014; Perera & Khodos, 2025; Rafferty, 2020; Vanthuyne, 2021); South Africa's struggles against racial apartheid have established it as an "international symbol of reconciliation" (Doxtader, 2009, p. 5). Similarly, New Zealand and Australia's reconciliation efforts offer a close analogy to Canada's approach.

The legal concept of reconciliation emerged in 1990 in Canada, with the Supreme Court's ruling on three cases (Baskatawang, 2023; LeMay, 2025). In the *R. v. Sparrow* case, the Court affirmed Indigenous fishing rights under Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 (*R. v. Sparrow*, 1990). In the same year, Elijah Harper's case drew national attention to Indigenous exclusion from constitutional discussions (Wood & Rossiter, 2022). Finally, the Oka Crisis, which resulted in a 78-day stand-off, flagged Indigenous land rights (Wilson-Raybould, 2022). These incidents raised the imperative of reconciling federal power and federal duty, and addressing the infringement of Indigenous rights (Baskatawang, 2023). Following these incidents, multiple reports on Indigenous rights and relationship building were released (Department of Justice, Government of Canada, 2025). The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* proposed 440 recommendations on Indigenous issues. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada issued 94 Calls to Action that revealed

the history and impact of residential schools. The National Inquiry's *Reclaiming Power and Place* issued 231 Calls for Justice on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, addressing violence toward Indigenous women and girls. There have been continuous efforts toward reconciliation, including the inception of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in 2008, Canada's endorsement of the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2010, and the passing of Bill C-15 in 2021 (Department of Justice, Government of Canada, 2025).

According to the 2021 Census, immigrants comprised nearly a quarter of Canada's 37 million population; they are projected to surpass half of the country's population by 2041 (Statistics Canada, 2022). Indigenous Peoples numbered 1.8 million in 2021 and are projected to exceed 3 million by 2041 (Statistics Canada, 2021). Hence, the future of reconciliation in Canada involves the country's two fastest-growing groups—Indigenous Peoples and immigrants. To build an inclusive national dialogue around reconciliation, it is vital to understand first-generation immigrants' perspectives and what influences their engagement in this process.

Between 2020 and 2022, over 40 percent of new permanent residents to Canada arrived from India, Nigeria, Afghanistan, and the Philippines—countries with colonial pasts (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2023). Immigrants often experience racism and systemic exclusion, similar to Indigenous Peoples, yet there is minimal interaction between the two groups (Nejad et al., 2021). Despite invitations for reconciliation from Indigenous communities and government initiatives, many immigrants struggle to engage in reconciliation while they adapt to their new country (Craft & Regan, 2020; De Costa & Clark, 2016; Nejad et al., 2021; Rocke & King, 2020). Their ideological perceptions (Datta, 2019; Tuck & Yang, 2012) and lack of discourse on practicing reconciliation (Akhmetova, 2019) deter their engagement, fostering misconceptions, stereotyping, and strained relationships (Gyepi-Garbrah et al., 2014; Macdonald, 2020), unless both groups have a strong passion to learn from one another. Under these circumstances, scholars have advocated for educating first-generation immigrants on the history of Canada (Akhmetova, 2019; Datta, 2020).

As with the concept of reconciliation, a range of complex factors influences individuals' engagement in this process. Rafferty (2020) noted that while some individuals in conflict-affected societies actively engage in reconciliation, how to motivate others to engage needs further exploration. Bryan (2010) accentuated the pivotal role of communities, with government taking a secondary role. They identified friendship, healing, understanding, humanity, empathy, remorse, economic interest, survival, and self-preservation as factors shaping engagement in reconciliation. Larsson (2016) proposed two rationales for reconciliation: Seeking truth and holding others accountable for past wrongs. People are more likely to forgive when they are motivated to learn and share the truth, but less likely to forgive when they choose to make others pay for their past actions. In a quantitative study, Webb (2012) applied regulatory mode theory (RMT) and concluded that people regulate their motivation through two approaches: (1) locomotion—quickly resolving issues and moving on, (2) assessment—cautiously evaluating how to handle reconciliation.

Being Treaty people, all Canadians share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships (Craft & Regan, 2020). This gives rise to diverse and sometimes conflicting views on reconciliation. For the Crown, reconciliation may be perceived as Indigenous Peoples' acceptance of parliamentary sovereignty; for Indigenous communities, it represents affirming their sovereignty and restoring the partnership they held before Confederation. This leads us to discuss Indigenous and non-Indigenous views on reconciliation and the convergence of these views.

Indigenous Perspectives on Reconciliation

There are diverse Indigenous perspectives on reconciliation. Some challenge the authenticity of reconciling with one's oppressor, particularly in the absence of a genuine relationship in the past (Wilson-Raybould, 2022). Others view it as an opportunity for non-Indigenous individuals to engage in a meaningful allyship with Indigenous Peoples, offering a practical guide on reconciliation (LeMay, 2025; Robertson, 2025). Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers from various First Nations communities have viewed reconciliation as an individual as well as a collective responsibility (Alfred et al., 2023; Battiste, 2013; Craft & Regan, 2020; Gebhard, 2017; Simpson, 2011). Reflecting on the TRC's (2015) concept of reconciliation as the process of establishing equitable relationships between Canada's Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, Justice Murray Sinclair emphasized practicing reconciliation in one's everyday life rather than just discussing it (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2016). Similarly, Wilson-Raybould (2022) accentuated the need for personal commitment to reconciliation and proposed "learn, understand, and act" (2022, p. 21), as practical strategies for true reconciliation. Framing education as key to reconciliation, Indigenous scholars propose reconciliation as a decolonization approach that advances justice, dialogue, and trust (Craft & Regan, 2020; Gebhard, 2017). Drawing on the role of colonialism in undermining reconciliation, they argued that by granting rights to citizens, colonial states shift the responsibility of the land from immigrants to the state, relieving immigrants of their obligations to Indigenous lands and allowing them to exploit Indigenous resources. Therefore, true reconciliation must move beyond the symbolism of restoring past harmony and focus on creating just and decolonized relationships based on recognizing Indigenous rights, laws, and self-determination.

Despite these pluralistic viewpoints, collective Indigenous perspectives ultimately converge to land restitution, full implementation of UNDRIP and treaties, and recognition of Indigenous laws and governance. Informed by their diverse cultural and social backgrounds, immigrants take different stances on reconciliation that we present next.

Non-Indigenous Perspectives on Reconciliation

Non-Indigenous scholars often view reconciliation as a collective responsibility (Morgan, 2018) that comes through dialogue and trust while working together to meet shared needs and celebrate shared successes (Abukar, 2020; Rafferty, 2020). As Datta (2020) noted, researchers' backgrounds impact their views on reconciliation. Studies reflect that first-generation immigrants view reconciliation as learning about the history of Canada, supporting community-driven reconciliation initiatives, and advocating for inclusive policies. Challenging the perception that limits reconciliation to conflict resolution, scholars have advocated for attitude shifts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups to foster community engagement (Perera & Khodos, 2025).

Rocke and King's (2020) study on immigrants' views of the TRC and their roles in reconciliation revealed diverse perspectives. Some newcomers in this study did not see a need for reconciliation, as they felt detached from past harms inflicted on Indigenous Peoples. Others felt that, being Canadian citizens, they carried a moral obligation to engage in reconciliation. Some considered themselves allies to Indigenous Peoples, and preferred collaborations based on their shared histories of colonization, rather than entering into reconciliation. These findings reflect that first-generation immigrants may prefer collaborative engagement with Indigenous Peoples over learning about reconciliation as their responsibility.

A national survey by the Environics Institute (2016) revealed that immigrants lacked sufficient knowledge about the Indian Residential School system, the TRC, and its recommendations. Still, they supported reconciliation in connection with socioeconomic equality.

Datta (2020) emphasized reconciliation as “capacity building” (p. 180) for everyone, and advocated for Indigenous people to define and lead this process by becoming the learning hub for reconciliation, along with books and institutions. Blackman (2020) emphasized that while first-generation immigrants are not responsible for the injustices committed against Indigenous Peoples, they are responsible for the present and the future. To prevent immigrants’ exclusion from reconciliation discourse, they asserted that immigrants should engage in reconciliation once they commit to being responsible neighbours, which includes understanding the experiences of all ethnic groups.

Convergence of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Perspectives on Reconciliation

Veracini’s (2010) triangular model suggests how settler states operate, positioning settlers, Indigenous Peoples, and immigrants within the same geographic space, but with unequal access to power and resources. European settlers occupy the top of the triangle, followed by Indigenous Peoples, and immigrants (often people of colour) at the bottom. Macdonald (2020) noted that settlers are autonomous in political decision-making while immigrants follow the settlers’ pre-established framework. This puts racialized immigrants at a disadvantage in a settler state, expecting them to make additional efforts to achieve their goals in every area of life.

Based on their race, beliefs, language, culture, gender, and abilities, immigrants have diverse experiences in Canada, which shape their perspectives on reconciliation. First-generation immigrants, particularly those from marginalized communities, may have spiritual and cultural differences with Indigenous Peoples, but they share similar experiences of racism, discrimination, and exclusion with Indigenous people (Craft & Regan, 2020; Polar, 2018; Shakespeare et al., 2023; Sutter & Esses, 2021; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Both groups struggle for their rights; one strives for treaty rights; the other one strives for recognition of their contributions to society. Individuals from both groups may find themselves relying on family and community connections for existence and advocate for preserving their cultures and languages. They may have strong connections to their native lands. With these commonalities, immigrants and Indigenous Peoples may work together to liberate themselves from the impacts of colonialisms. This can be partly achieved by creating a congenial learning environment between the two groups through settlement agencies.

Abukar (2020) suggested that first-generation immigrants’ feelings of relatedness with Indigenous people on sociopolitical levels may help bring the two groups together. The Circles for Reconciliation (2021) identified four themes that offer commonalities between immigrants and Indigenous communities in Canada in many cases: (1) Cultural traditions & rituals of childbirth, naming a child within the family, children spending quality time with grandparents, fasting, piercing, sewing, feasting, and celebrating seasons; (2) Colonization and systemic oppression, including missionary schools, colonization of names of places, loss of native languages, racial profiling and oppression, and having westernized names; (3) Family breakdown or disruption, including separation of children from parents due to war, immigration to the country, culture shock, language barriers, displacement from community, etc.; (4) Family & community practices such as extended family, respect for elders, challenges to preserving culture and language, and gender roles. Although first-generation immigrants come from different lands, they may connect with Indigenous Peoples on common grounds of culture, traditions, and political pasts.

Self-Determination Theory as a Framework

We ground our research in the psychological framework of self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 2014). SDT posits that while extrinsic and intrinsic motivations play a vital role in

shaping an individual's motivational stance, the three psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness drive motivation. These needs are interdependent, and their dynamic interaction leads to a purposeful, self-driven engagement and shapes an individual's motivational style. Autonomy stimulates individuals to freely engage in an activity. Competence reinforces effectiveness in their actions. Relatedness enriches the experiences of autonomy and competence within meaningful social connections.

While SDT has offered insights into understanding motivation across diverse fields, there are limitations to this theory. Critics have argued that it downplays realistic scenarios with conflicting factors such as absolute individual autonomy in a world with laws (Gantt et al., 2023; Guo & Chelliah, 2024). It overlooks the impact of power structures and social interactions on individual decision-making. Advocating for cultural and gender impacts on one's preferred construct, scholars have contested SDT's claim of the universality of human needs, and autonomy being the most preferred construct (Guo & Chelliah, 2024; Heine et al., 1999). With its roots deeply embedded in Western culture, applying the SDT model to other cultural settings can be challenging. Contending SDT's dichotomy of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, scholars have argued that intrinsic and extrinsic factors are not mutually exclusive. Depending on the activity, one can simultaneously experience intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

With due consideration of these critiques, we developed a conceptual model using the psychological framework of self-determination theory, as it offers a comprehensive model for conceptualizing first-generation immigrants' perceptions of reconciliation and a deep understanding of why these individuals engage in this process. SDT offers a unique lens to analyze whether first-generation immigrants' engagement in reconciliation is based on internalized values or external policies that shape the social environment to support or undermine their engagement in reconciliation.

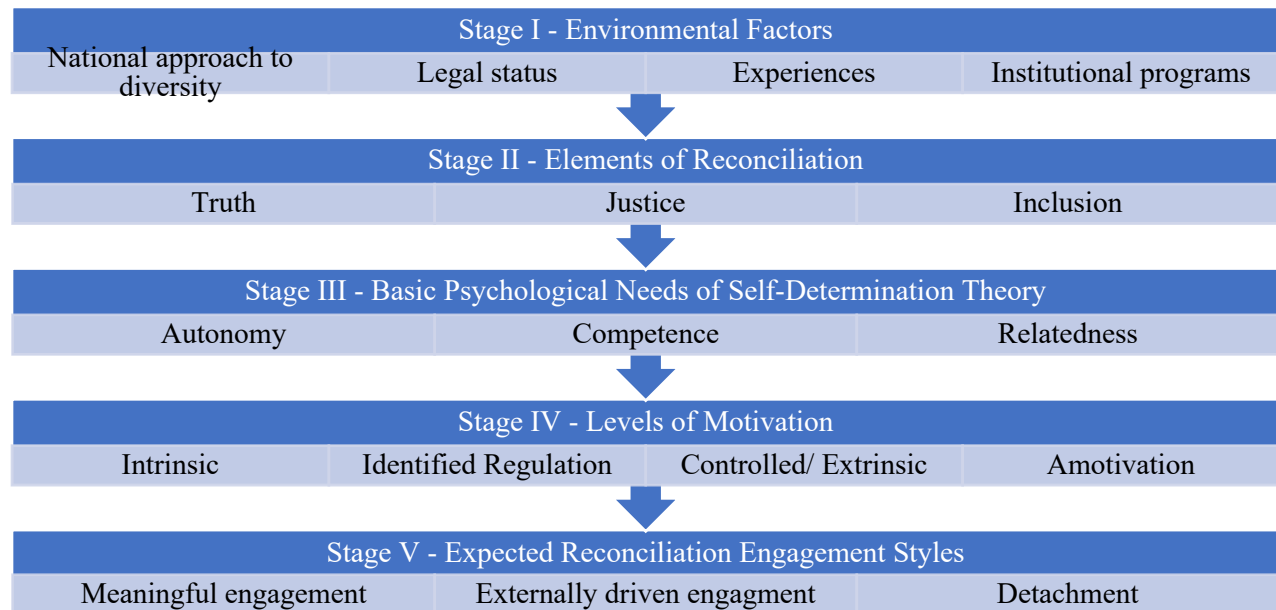
The Conceptual Model and Discussion

Figure 1 presents our conceptual model, Model for Motivators of Reconciliation Among First-Generation Immigrants. This model integrates the core concepts of reconciliation: truth, justice, and inclusion, with the constructs of self-determination theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and offers a comprehensive approach to understanding factors that inspire first-generation immigrants to engage in reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples of Canada. It shows five stages that first-generation immigrants may experience on their journey to reconciliation.

In Stage I of the model, Environmental Factors are contextual and structural elements, such as the national approach to diversity, an immigrant's legal status, their inclusion/exclusion experiences, and immigrant-focused institutional programs such as those offered by newcomer settlement agencies in Canada. Canada's stance of multiculturalism fosters openness to dialogue that encourages immigrants' participation in reconciliation. Their legal status may have a strong impact on their motivation for reconciliation. For instance, refugees may face trauma and reflect mistrust toward institutions, while landed immigrants may experience inclusion or exclusion, reflecting openness or resistance toward reconciliation. Finally, culturally sensitive institutional programs on reconciliation may enhance first-generation immigrants' perception of reconciliation, leading to meaningful engagement.

Figure 1

Model for Motivators of Reconciliation Among First-Generation Immigrants



Note: Figure created by authors.

In Stage II: Truth, Justice, and Inclusion—the core elements of reconciliation are conditions through which first-generation immigrants encounter reconciliation. While learning the truth, they recognize colonial legacies and Indigenous histories. When they encounter justice, they observe ongoing harms, understand systemic inequalities, and acknowledge Indigenous rights. Finally, through inclusion, they build respectful relationships that foster belonging.

In Stage III of our model, we interpret the elements of reconciliation through the lens of self-determination theory, which explains how they impact immigrants' motivation. When immigrants learn the truth about the history of Canada without any institutional pressures, they experience autonomous motivation to engage in reconciliation. At this stage, truth aligns with autonomy and enables immigrants to freely acknowledge reconciliation as a meaningful activity. Simultaneously, when first-generation immigrants from marginalized communities start realizing that their experiences of marginalization are similar to the colonial injustices toward Indigenous Peoples, they may develop empathy toward Indigenous Peoples and engage in efforts toward equity. This reinforces a sense of competence—contributing through their skills to reconciliation. Inclusion corresponds to relatedness and fosters connectivity. Thus, elements of reconciliation, influenced by satisfaction of basic psychological needs, set the grounds for immigrant engagement.

It is crucial for settlement agencies to comprehend varying levels of motivation among immigrants to engage in reconciliation in order to design programs that foster autonomous motivation. Stage IV: Levels of Motivation in Figure 1 explains why first-generation immigrants may engage in reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. At the intrinsic level, an immigrant pursues reconciliation as a meaningful activity that brings them a feeling of personal fulfillment. At the identified regulation level, they see reconciliation as aligning with their values. However, the presence of external forces such as immigration requirements, government policies, etc., may shift

their motivation to controlled motivation. An “amotivated” immigrant’s basic psychological needs are unmet, and they exhibit a passive response to engage in reconciliation.

In Stage V: Expected Reconciliation Engagement Styles, emotionally invested immigrants, with a commitment to reconciliation, show meaningful engagement to the process. Immigrants with an externally driven engagement may attend events on reconciliation due to external incentives. However, once these incentives are withdrawn, they are not motivated to engage in the process, as they may see it as meaningless. Those who are not motivated by external incentives, show detachment towards reconciliation.

Drawing on SDT’s approach to the types of motivation, when individuals internalize the value of an activity, it leads to autonomous motivation, whereas if external forces prompt their participation in the same activity, it leads to controlled motivation—a form of extrinsic motivation. Hence, identifying and understanding intrinsic or extrinsic motivation behind an individual’s engagement in an activity can bolster this engagement. Likewise, creating environments that support immigrants’ basic psychological needs can inspire first-generation immigrants to attain optimal outcomes. Informed by this notion, we argue that first-generation immigrants’ perceptions of reconciliation are not just shaped by information, but also by the way they view the complex sociopolitical narratives of history. Their voluntary participation in reconciliation may take place when they view it as something they choose to engage in, that aligns with their values, and connects with their experiences.

Viewing the reconciliation elements: truth, justice, and inclusion (Bueno, 2024; Tutu, 2000), through the SDT lens (Deci & Ryan, 2002), we suggest that first-generation immigrants’ pathways to reconciliation begin with environmental factors that influence their basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Satisfaction or frustration of these needs shapes their motivational patterns, and the outcome emerges in their style of reconciliation engagement.

Conceptual Development

In this section, grounded in relativist ontology and constructivist-interpretivist epistemology (Crotty, 1998), we present the theory-driven interpretive methodological approach that we applied to develop the conceptual model - Motivators of Reconciliation Among First-Generation Immigrants, which we presented earlier.

We used the SDT lens to conceptualize first-generation immigrants’ motivation for reconciliation through the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Next, we reviewed the literature and identified relevant resources that offered theoretical insights for developing the conceptual model. The literature review helped us determine that the majority of past studies focused on Indigenous-settler relationships, with determinants for first-generation immigrants’ motivation for reconciliation in need of further exploration. We also identified opportunities for research on the link between motivational psychology and reconciliation efforts.

Utilizing the SDT lens, we examined Canada’s approach to diversity, immigrants’ legal status in Canada, immigrants’ colonial legacies that shape their experiences of inclusion and exclusion within Canadian society, and reconciliation efforts advanced through institutional programs in Canada as environmental factors. Next, we integrated SDT’s basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2014) with the elements of reconciliation: truth, justice, and inclusion (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2016). We then conceptualized how satisfaction or frustration of the psychological needs of first-generation immigrants may shape their motivational orientations, such as meaningful engagement, externally-driven engagement, or detachment toward reconciliation. Finally, we mapped these dynamics among environmental factors,

SDT constructs, and reconciliation components, which lead to different styles of immigrant involvement in reconciliation in Canada.

Future Research Possibilities and Implications

The conceptual model presented in this paper sets the foundations for our future empirical research, where we will gather data through interviews and focus group discussions with first-generation immigrants, and analyze the data to refine or challenge our conceptual assumptions. It also offers a framework for settlement agencies and policymakers by identifying environmental factors that support immigrants' autonomy, competence, and relatedness. By aligning culturally sensitive programs with immigrants' basic psychological needs, settlement agencies in Canada can help to foster meaningful immigrant engagement in reconciliation. We anticipate that the findings of our empirical research will foster Indigenous-immigrant collaboration in dismantling colonial structures and creating a more inclusive and equitable society. Our scholarly contributions to reconciliation in the Prairie Provinces of Canada: Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, aim to support settlement agencies to develop programs for reconciliation engagement and offer policymakers insights into equitable strategies.

Conclusion

In this paper, we addressed gaps in comprehending how satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness shape immigrants' involvement in reconciliation. Our self-determination theory-based conceptual model links these needs to three engagement styles: meaningful engagement, externally driven engagement, and detachment. We examined the interaction of psychological needs with environmental factors, colonial legacies, and the elements of reconciliation: truth, justice, and inclusion, in shaping immigrants' motivation levels toward reconciliation.

To conclude, this paper has laid the groundwork for future research, where we will collect and analyze empirical data through qualitative interviews with first-generation immigrants and design initiatives that promote their participation in reconciliation. At the same time, it has contributed to the scholarly work in the field of reconciliation in Canada. This paper seeks to promote further dialogue and collaboration between first-generation immigrants and Indigenous Peoples by encouraging shared learning, mutual understanding, and collaborations toward dismantling colonial structures, with the aim of contributing to creating a more inclusive and equitable society rooted in respect, justice, and accountability.

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