

## Transitional Justice Review

---

Volume 1 | Issue 3

Article 2

---

January 2015

# Representing Reconciliation: A news frame analysis of print media coverage of Indian residential schools

Rosemary Nagy

*Nipissing University*, [rnagy@nipissingu.ca](mailto:rnagy@nipissingu.ca)

Emily Gillespie

*Nipissing University*, [emily\\_gillespie12@hotmail.com](mailto:emily_gillespie12@hotmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/tjreview>

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5206/tjr.2015.1.3.2>

---

### Recommended Citation

Nagy, Rosemary and Gillespie, Emily (2015) "Representing Reconciliation: A news frame analysis of print media coverage of Indian residential schools," *Transitional Justice Review*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 3 , Article 2.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5206/tjr.2015.1.3.2>

Available at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/tjreview/vol1/iss3/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Transitional Justice Review* by an authorized editor of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact [tadam@uwo.ca](mailto:tadam@uwo.ca), [wlsadmin@uwo.ca](mailto:wlsadmin@uwo.ca).

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40

**Representing Reconciliation:  
A news frame analysis of print media coverage of Indian  
residential schools<sup>1</sup>**

Rosemary Nagy, Nipissing University  
rnagy@nipissingu.ca

Emily Gillespie, Nipissing University  
emily\_gillespie12@hotmail.com

The Canadian Indian Residential School (IRS) system, operated jointly by the federal government and Catholic, Anglican, United, Presbyterian and Methodist churches, ran from the late 1880s until the last school's closure in 1996. Over this century-plus period, approximately 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis children were taken from their homes, often forcibly and sometimes for years at a time, in order to be assimilated, "civilized" and "Christianized." While some children may have had good experiences in the schools, the overall impact on Indigenous communities and families over seven generations has been highly damaging. The schools were chronically underfunded; many children were malnourished, susceptible to tuberculosis and other diseases, poorly clothed, and

---

<sup>1</sup> This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. We would like to thank Rob McMahon and John Nadeau for their advice prior to setting up the research project. We would also like to thank Rob McMahon, Wendy Peters and Matt James, as well as three anonymous reviewers, for their comments. All errors or omissions are our responsibility.

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2014, 3-40

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 4

endured chronic neglect.<sup>2</sup> Extensive forced labour was another component of the schools, often due to the lack of funds. Sexual, emotional and physical abuse were rampant. Children were punished for speaking their language, practicing their culture and seeing their opposite-sex siblings in segregated wards. The IRS legacy includes the loss of language and culture, the fracture of families and communities, cycles of violence, substance abuse, feelings of hopelessness, and suicide.<sup>3</sup>

In 2007, after twenty years of struggle in and out of the court system, survivors of the IRS system negotiated an out-of court settlement with the federal government and churches that ran the schools. Under tort law, only physical and sexual abuse were considered to be legally actionable and the Canadian government's strategy from the late 1980s to early 2000s was largely to construct the violence of residential schools as crimes committed by individual pedophiles and abusers.<sup>4</sup> This strategy denied the role of residential schools in the broader colonial project of assimilation. Consequently, the distinction between physical/sexual abuse and cultural/epistemological violence became the overriding binary that survivors fought against in their struggle for holistic recognition of IRS violence. Their success is evident in the \$5.1 billion Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA)<sup>5</sup> and the Prime Minister's subsequent apology, which together acknowledge systemic

---

<sup>2</sup> John Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System 1879 to 1986* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Agnes Grant, *No End of Grief: Indian Residential Schools in Canada* (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> See Rosemary Nagy, "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Genesis and Design," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> The IRSSA provides for a "Common Experience Payment," that goes to all former students in recognition of the everyday violence of the schools; an "Independent Assessment Process" for individual claims of sexual and physical abuse; funds for healing, commemoration, and the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).

## 5 A news frame analysis

cultural and intergenerational harms alongside physical and sexual abuse.

When Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered his historic apology in 2008, an Environics benchmark survey found that *only half* of Canadians had read or heard something about the schools.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, while respondents were aware of the loss of language and culture, they were most likely to recall the abuse and molestation of Aboriginal children as the main feature of the IRS system.<sup>7</sup> And, not unsurprisingly, respondents subsequently identified the provision of counseling as the best way to contribute to reconciliation.<sup>8</sup> We do not dispute that the healing of childhood abuse is crucially important. But, alone, individual counseling offers a limited response to the breadth of violence that occurred in and through the IRS system. It is a fairly narrow vision of reconciliation when compared to arguments made by survivors, activists and scholars that understand reconciliation to also involve decolonization and long-term structural change. Thus, while there are grounds for optimism insofar as two thirds of Canadians in 2008 were favourably inclined toward reconciliation, the survey also raises concern about the nature of people's expectations and their understandings of truth and reconciliation.<sup>9</sup>

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which was established as part of the settlement agreement, is mandated to “promote awareness and public education of Canadians about the IRS system and its impacts” and to “acknowledge Residential School experiences, impacts and consequences.”<sup>10</sup> But is

---

<sup>6</sup> Environics, *2008 National Benchmark Survey* (Ottawa 2008), ii.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, iii.

<sup>10</sup> Schedule N of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, Mandate for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Art. 1.

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 6

its message getting out there? And, moreover, what kinds of messages about truth and reconciliation are people receiving? To delve into these questions, we analyze print media coverage of residential schools and the TRC. The Environics benchmark survey found that people “were most likely to cite mass media when asked how they heard about Indian residential schools,” with numbers splitting evenly between newspaper and television.<sup>11</sup> According to the Newspaper Audience Databank, 78% of Canadian adults read a daily newspaper or read a newspaper online each week.<sup>12</sup> The media play an important role in any democratic society, disseminating information, educating citizens, shaping public opinion, and acting as a watchdog.<sup>13</sup> In the specific context of truth commissions seeking to deal with legacies of injustice and abuse, research from other countries shows the important role that the media might play in shaping collective memory and societal attitudes toward reconciliation.<sup>14</sup> News media coverage may exacerbate conflict and undermine attempts at peace-building. But it also has the potential to function as a tool of conflict resolution through public education,

---

<sup>11</sup> Environics, *2008 National Benchmark Survey*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Newspapers Canada, FAQ at <http://www.newspaperscanada.ca/about-newspapers/faq-about-newspapers> (accessed 26 September 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Lance Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 9 ed. (New York: Longman, 2012); Robert Hackett and Richard Gruneau, *The Missing News: Filters and Blind Spots in Canada's Press* (Ottawa/Aurora: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives/Garamond, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Lisa J. Laplante and Kelly Phenicie, "Media, Trials and Truth Commissions: Mediating Reconciliation in Peru's Transitional Justice Process," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 4, no. 2 (2009):207-29. See also Michael L. Best, William J. Long, John Etherton, and Thomas Smyth, "Rich digital media as a tool in post-conflict truth and reconciliation," *Media, War & Conflict* 4, no. 3 (2011):231-49; Annelies Verdoolaege, "Media representations of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and their commitment to reconciliation," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 17, no. 2 (2005):181-99.

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40

## 7 A news frame analysis

promoting a “culture of peace,” and deconstructing “naturalized” representations of conflicts and parties to conflict.<sup>15</sup>

Borrowing from media and cultural studies, we use the idea of “framing” to analyze representations of the schools, truth, and reconciliation. A news frame in journalism functions as the “central organizing idea” in a news story.<sup>16</sup> Framing theory alerts us to the ways in which writers and editors give some aspects of a newspaper story greater meaning over other components. This is done through conscious or unconscious decisions about who or what is included in a story and how they are depicted. Editorial decisions may be naturalized into invisibility under the guise of objective journalism; however, the framing literature in fact suggests that framing decisions both reflect and shape mainstream culture.

Through quantitative analysis of print media coverage of Indian residential schools from 2010-2012, we investigate representations of truth (i.e. what the schools were about), reconciliation (i.e. what should be done in response), and the relationship between the two. Our findings somewhat cloud assumptions within the transitional justice literature that truth leads to reconciliation. As Janine Clark notes, while a negative relationship between the two might seem relatively straightforward (without truth, there can be no reconciliation), it is less clear whether and how a positive relationship between the two might occur.<sup>17</sup> We code 146 articles to see how truth and reconciliation are framed in relation to one another. The articles collectively suggest that Canadian media

---

<sup>15</sup> Rob McMahon and Peter Chow-White, "News Media Encoding of Racial Reconciliation: Developing a Peace Journalism Model for the Analysis of 'Cold' Conflict," *Media, Culture and Society* 33, no. 9 (2011):989-1007.

<sup>16</sup> Zhongdang Pan and Gerald M. Kosicki, "Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse," *Political Communication* 10, no. 1 (1993):55-75, 58-59.

<sup>17</sup> Janine Natalya Clark, "Transitional Justice, Truth and Reconciliation: An Under-Explored Relationship," *International Criminal Law Review* 11, no. 2 (2011):241-61.

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 8

producers—and therefore to some extent Canadian audiences—may be willing to accept Indian residential schools as sites of genocide and colonization. As we detail further below, we understand this to be an expansive framing of the truth of residential schools. However, mainstream newspapers do not correspondingly link this to an expansive view of reconciliation as the restructuring of Canadian society.

The path from truth to reconciliation is instead framed in reductive terms of *truth-telling as therapy*, *witnessing* and *public education*. These three frames in the Canadian context echo transitional justice mantras. However, media representation of these truth-to-reconciliation activities or processes do not, on the whole, encompass reconciliation in the broad terms for which many Indigenous activists and scholars call. This is confirmed in our qualitative analysis of media coverage of the TRC's National Event held in Montreal, Quebec in April 2013. Panels organized by the local Kanien'kehaka people that characterized truth and reconciliation in terms of land, treaty, and gender equality simply were not considered newsworthy in the mainstream press. Instead, reporting was primarily framed around survivor testimony and stories of individual abuse, forgiveness, and healing.

### **Framing Indian Residential Schools**

News frames and media are culturally embedded and thus it stands to reason that mainstream media will largely reproduce or invoke dominant cultural patterns, values and norms. Mark Anderson and Carmen Robertson, in their comprehensive history of the representation of Aboriginals in Canadian newspapers, argue that the media "leads yet is led by what its paying public desires to read, yet in some sense already believes, or is likely to accept." They conclude that "colonial stereotypes have endured in the press, even flourished"

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40

## 9 A news frame analysis

over the last hundred and forty years.<sup>18</sup> Robert Harding similarly finds little change in representations of Aboriginal peoples since the 1860s, but more optimistically concludes that “the reportage is not monolithic.”<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Rob McMahon and Peter Chow-White, in their analysis of coverage of First Nations issues in the *Vancouver Sun* as a run-up to the TRC, determine that while there is “ongoing evidence” of racism in the media, “news discourse can simultaneously contain seeds of progressive reform.”<sup>20</sup>

Based on our review and synthesis of the literature on truth and reconciliation in the Canadian context, we propose a two-by-two matrix for conceptualizing how Indian residential schools might be framed in the print news media (see Table 1, below). We juxtapose “reductive” and “expansive” frames, each of which correspond to existent discourses or representations of truth and reconciliation.<sup>21</sup> While the construction of this matrix is deeply informed by scholarship, including our own,<sup>22</sup> that is critical of reductive approaches, the key point here is that conflicting discourses of truth and reconciliation are being mobilized in the public sphere. Indigenous leaders and settler-allies tend to view the truth

---

<sup>18</sup> Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen L. Robertson, *Seeing Red: A history of Natives in Canadian newspapers* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011), 15, 267.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Harding, "Historical Representations of aboriginal people in the Canadian news media," *Discourse & Society* 17, no. 2 (2006), 231.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Chow-White and Rob McMahon, "Examining the "Dark Past" and "Hopeful Future" in Representations of Race and Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission," in *Expanding Peace Journalism*, ed. I.S. Shaw, Robert Hackett, and Jake Lynch (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2011), 366-7.

<sup>21</sup> Our approach builds on Chrisjohn and Young's 1996 delineation of the "standard" and "alternate" accounts of Indian residential schools. Roland D. Chrisjohn and Sherri L. Young, *Circle Game: Shadows and Substance in the Indian Residential Schools Experience in Canada*, 2 ed. (Penticton, B.C.: Theytus Books, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> See Rosemary Nagy, "The Scope and Bounds of Transitional Justice and the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 7, no. 1 (2013):52-73.

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 10

commission process as an opportunity to challenge and improve contemporary public policy and social conditions by linking them to the schools, whereas the government appears to want to “draw a line through history, emphasizing that it takes responsibility for government abuses that are nevertheless firmly in the past.”<sup>23</sup> These conflicting views in the political arena appear to be reflected in the Environics survey which found that Aboriginal people were “much more likely [than the general population] to see a strong causal relationship between the Indian residential schools experience and the current challenges faced by Aboriginal communities.”<sup>24</sup>

As Anderson and Robertson remark, “[i]nsofar as the content of newspaper imagery derives from the larger culture in which its readers participate, one might reasonably expect a consonance between press content and pre-existing reader bias.”<sup>25</sup> They argue that news coverage emerges as a naturalized “national curriculum” that reinforces the status quo.<sup>26</sup> Yet, the use of socially dominant racist or colonialist frames is not an inevitable or inherent part of the news process. Media theorist Stuart Hall notes, the media “are also the one place where these ideas [about race] are articulated, worked on, transformed and elaborated.”<sup>27</sup> Journalists may actively seek to alert and mobilize the public,<sup>28</sup> and counter-hegemonic frames from

---

<sup>23</sup> Courtney Jung, "Canada and the Legacy of the Indian Residential Schools: Transitional Justice for Indigenous Peoples in a Non-Transitional Society," in *Identities in Transition: Challenges for Transitional Justice in Divided Societies*, ed. Paige Arthur, 217-50 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 231.

<sup>24</sup> Environics, *2008 National Benchmark Survey*, 22.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson and Robertson, *Seeing Red*, 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Stuart Hall, "Racist Ideologies in the Media," in *Media Studies: A Reader*, ed. Paul Marris and Sue Thornham (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 273.

<sup>28</sup> Matthew C. Nisbet, "Knowledge into Action: Framing the Debates over Climate Change and Poverty," in *Doing News Framing Analysis*, ed. Paul D'Angelo and Jim A. Kuypers, 41-83 (New York; London: Routledge, 2010).

## 11 A news frame analysis

an alternative cultural stock stand ready to be used.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the matrix serves as a heuristic model, and it is the basis for our deductive coding of articles in the quantitative analysis. We further probe it with qualitative analysis of coverage of the TRC's national event in Montreal.

| TABLE 1                                  | Expansive Frame                                                                                         | Reductive Frame                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Representations of truth</b>          | -Colonization and genocide<br>-Ongoing legacy and explicit links to contemporary structural violence    | -Emphasis on sexual and physical abuse of individuals<br>-Language of "mistakes" in the past    |
| <b>Representations of reconciliation</b> | -Decolonization<br>- Structural change<br>-Holistic healing (with an emphasis on Indigenous traditions) | -Closure on the past and moving on<br>-Individual healing (with an emphasis on Western therapy) |

Under the expansive framework, Indian residential schools are understood as central to the project of settler colonialism and a form of genocide. As such, the IRS system cannot be understood apart from things such as the dispossession of land, oppressive governance through the *Indian Act*, and the hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge and history.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Indian residential schools are

<sup>29</sup> Baldwin Van Gorp, "Strategies to Take Subjectivity Out of Framing Analysis," in *Doing News Framing Analysis*, ed. Paul D'Angelo and Jim A. Kuypers, 84-109 (New York; London: Routledge, 2010), 88.

<sup>30</sup> See Chrisjohn and Young, *Circle Game*; Gerald Taiaiake Alfred, "Restitution is the Real Pathway to Justice for Indigenous Peoples," in *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey*, ed. Gregory Younging, Jonathan Dewar, and Mike DeGagné, 179-87 (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2009); Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Brian Rice and Anna Snyder, "Reconciliation in the Context of a Settler Society: Healing the Legacy of Colonialism in Canada," in *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*, ed. Marlene Brant Castellano, Linda Archibald, and Mike DeGagné, 45-61 (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008).

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 12

not conceived as “historic” abuse but are concretely located in the present, linking the IRS legacy to contemporary issues such as underfunding for First Nations child welfare,<sup>31</sup> missing and murdered Aboriginal women,<sup>32</sup> disproportionate rates of incarceration, bureaucratic structures and fiscal arrangements,<sup>33</sup> treaty rights, and “deeply ingrained colonial attitudes and patterns of behaviour.”<sup>34</sup> Such an expansive “truth” of Indian residential schools corresponds to an expansive framing of reconciliation as decolonization, structural transformation, and healing in a holistic sense.<sup>35</sup> Holistic healing might include both traditional and Western approaches, but it must go beyond the individual to include the entire community and Canada itself. As Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew writes: “healing without changing the social and political conditions that first caused the injuries would be ineffectual.”<sup>36</sup>

In comparison, the reductive frame identifies IRS violence primarily as physical and sexual abuse. This, as we noted above, was the government’s strategy in the 1990s and early 2000s. Even with the acknowledgement of cultural loss and intergenerational harm, the language of “mistakes” continues to be used, suggesting that officials

---

<sup>31</sup> Cindy Blackstock, “Reconciliation means not saying sorry twice: Lessons from child welfare in Canada,” in *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*, ed. Marlene Brant Castellano, Linda Archibald, and Mike DeGagné, 163-78 (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Beverley Jacobs and Andrea J. Williams, “Legacy of Residential Schools: Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women,” in *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*, ed. Marlene Brant Castellano, Linda Archibald, and Mike DeGagné, 119-42 (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Scott Serson, “Reconciliation: For First Nations This Must Include Fiscal Fairness,” in *Response, Responsibility, and Renewal: Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Journey*, ed. Gregory Younging, Jonathon Dewar, and Mike DeGagné, 163-74 (Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2009); Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*.

<sup>34</sup> Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 37.

<sup>35</sup> See Nagy, “Scope and Bounds of TJ and the Canadian TRC.”

<sup>36</sup> Jo-Ann Episkenew, *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous literature, public policy and healing* (Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2009), 17.

## 13 A news frame analysis

would not have created the system had they adequately considered it.<sup>37</sup> For example, in 2011, former Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Duncan called residential schools “education policy gone wrong”<sup>38</sup> and Prime Minister Harper boasted at the G20 in 2009 that Canada “has no history of colonialism.”<sup>39</sup> The reductive framework ignores the colonial context in which the schools were created and never uses the language of genocide. Rather, as Chrisjohn and Young argue in their scathing critique, survivors are pathologized and “racism and oppression are explained away.”<sup>40</sup> Therapeutic discourses of healing serve to individualize violence and its remedy. With the notion that the “residential school syndrome” can be “cured,” the IRS system is located firmly in the past, and healing and reconciliation are seen as a process of closure and moving on.<sup>41</sup>

### Methodology

Framing is a standard practice in journalism, and it does not necessarily mean that journalists are “spinning” a story or deceiving their audiences. Rather, framing is a necessary means of reducing complex stories in ways that “play into existing cognitive

---

<sup>37</sup> Chrisjohn and Young, *Circle Game*, 30.

<sup>38</sup> Taryn Della, "Residential school survivors outraged over Duncan's residential school statement," *APTN news* 28 October 2011 at <http://aptn.ca/pages/news/2011/10/28/residential-school-survivors-outraged-over-duncans-statement/>.

<sup>39</sup> David Ljunggren, "Every G20 nation wants to be Canada, insists PM," *Reuters*, 25 September 2009 at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/09/26/columns-us-g20-canada-advantages-idUSTRE58P05Z20090926> (1 May 2014).

<sup>40</sup> Chrisjohn and Young, *Circle Game*, 94.

<sup>41</sup> Robyn Green, "Unsettling Cures: Exploring the Limits of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement," *Canadian Journal of Law and Society* 27, no. 1 (2012):129-48; Chrisjohn and Young, *Circle Game*.

structures.”<sup>42</sup> Robert Entman explains, “[t]o frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.”<sup>43</sup> Baldwin Van Gorp characterizes frames as “culturally shared notions with symbolic significance, such as stereotypes, values, archetypes, myths and narratives.”<sup>44</sup> Frames help to communicate why an issue matters, who or what might be responsible for problems associated with the issue, and what should be done about it.<sup>45</sup> Our analysis is confined to message construction, focusing on text and its broader social and cultural implications. Thus, we do not measure media effects such as how much attention people pay to the news on Indian residential schools, or whether they process it or agree with it. However, as noted above, we understand frames as both reflecting societal values and as having the potential to affect people’s attitudes and beliefs.

The quantitative part of our study examines 146 articles found in ProQuest’s Canadian Newsstand from the period June 1, 2010 to June 31, 2012.<sup>46</sup> We selected these dates so as to avoid news coverage of the TRC’s breakdown in 2008-2009 when all three commissioners resigned and there was a subsequent year of hiatus.

---

<sup>42</sup> Dietram A. Scheufele and David Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models," *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (2007), 12.

<sup>43</sup> Robert M. Entman, "Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, no. 4 (1993):51, 52.

<sup>44</sup> Van Gorp, "Strategies," 85.

<sup>45</sup> Nisbet, "Knowledge into Action."; Entman, "Framing."

<sup>46</sup> Canadian Newsstand covers mainstream media outlets in Victoria, Vancouver, Surrey and Port Moody, British Columbia.; Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta; Saskatoon and Regina, Saskatchewan; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Ottawa, Sudbury, Kingston, Toronto and Windsor, Ontario; Saint John, New Brunswick; and two national newspapers, the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*.

## 15 A news frame analysis

These dates capture the truth commission's fresh start at the first national event in Winnipeg in June 2010 through to the fourth national event in Saskatoon in June 2012.<sup>47</sup> The 146 articles were derived from an "all text" search of "Indian residential schools" and "residential schools" AND "truth and reconciliation." From an initial list of over 400 items, we culled all articles under 500 words and all articles with purely tangential references. Our dataset includes news articles, editorials, columns and opinions. We defend the use of news and non-news articles on the grounds that we should not sharply distinguish between "objective" and "subjective" writing and, moreover, that newspapers choose to run particular op-eds, editorials or news articles as part of the framing (and agenda-setting) process. We address any potential "skewing" of the data in our findings by analyzing differences between the article types.

We use the expansive and reductive frames outlined above to guide the deductive analysis of the selected articles. We also read inductively for other frames that might emerge. We each coded the entire sample independently, and discussed and resolved any disagreements, keeping track of the coding rules and setting definitions for emergent frames. The frames are not mutually exclusive and therefore we often coded multiple and sometimes contradictory frames in the articles. In searching for empirical indicators of a frame, we primarily focused on *how* the news story is told. Content should not be confused for a frame. For example, an article about someone applying for individual compensation will necessarily focus on sexual and physical abuse, but this is not automatically a frame. We read each article three times, searching for expansive, reductive and then emergent frames.

---

<sup>47</sup> There were seven national events in total; the last one was held Edmonton in March, 2014. In 2014, the TRC received a one-year extension and will submit its report in June 2015.

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 16

Framing devices are the “signifying elements” of a frame.<sup>48</sup> Framing devices include *syntactical and lexical choices*, particularly in the headline and lead paragraph.<sup>49</sup> For example, the uses of “genocide” or “policy gone wrong” are both lexical choices that signify very different understandings of Indian residential schools. *Episodic reporting* focuses on an individual or individual event in order to capture interest and stir emotion, and may therefore decontextualize, dramatize and individualize a social issue. In contrast, *thematic reporting* explicitly locates a social issue or problem within its systemic context.<sup>50</sup> We pay attention not only to what is said in a text, but also to *what is not said, whose voices are represented, and how*. In this respect, we look for *selective incorporation* of Indigenous voices, the “muffling” of details and the minimization of the relevance or significance of what they have to say through techniques of *deflection, decontextualization, misrepresentation* and *tokenization*.<sup>51</sup> Negative stereotypes, such as images of the drunken Indian, helpless victim, or angry warrior, also serve to frame a news item.<sup>52</sup>

For the purposes of coding, we identified framing devices such as individualization, decontextualization, negative stereotyping, tokenization, and episodic reporting to be likely empirical indicators of the reductive frame. In contrast, we anticipated empirical indicators of the expansive frame to align with framing techniques drawn from peace journalism, which advocates the use of media as a tool of conflict resolution. We largely follow McMahon and Chow-

---

<sup>48</sup> Pan and Kosicki, "Framing Analysis," 58-59; see also Nisbet, "Knowledge into Action."

<sup>49</sup> Pan and Kosicki, "Framing Analysis."; Van Gorp, "Strategies."

<sup>50</sup> See Nisbet, "Knowledge into Action."

<sup>51</sup> Harding, "Historical representations," 222-25.

<sup>52</sup> See Autumn Miller and Susan Ross, "They Are Not Us: Framing of American Indians by the Boston Globe," *Howard Journal of Communications* 15, no. 4 (2004):245-59; Anderson and Robertson, *Seeing Red*; Harding, "Historical representations."

## 17 A news frame analysis

White, who, drawing on critical race theory and peace journalism, generate a model that articulates four framing techniques in the context of a news series on the ‘dark past’ and ‘hopeful future’ of relations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples living in Canada.

The first peace journalism frame “*identifies instances of cooperation, reconciliation and hope* that simultaneously acknowledge past and present injustices.”<sup>53</sup> Whereas dominant media representations naturalize asymmetry or frame racism in the language of “common sense,” peace journalism acknowledges and deconstructs asymmetrical power relations. *Reporting on the “invisible” effects of structural racism* aligns quite obviously with the expansive frame that we propose whereby Indian residential schools are ensconced within colonization and other structures of violence. Moreover, reporting that *complicates stereotypes* and shows *community leadership and self-determination* signify the expansive frame.<sup>54</sup> Rather than representing passive, broken victims of sexual and physical abuse, we expect the expansive news frame to represent the resilience and agency of Indigenous peoples as they act for justice and self-determination. Moreover, rather than bleak dichotomizing of “us” and “them,” the settler-Indigenous distinction is represented not on a “zero-sum axis” but as one where all parties have agency in enacting change.<sup>55</sup> At its best, this sort of reporting would expansively frame Indian residential schools as a collective or settler problem and not as an “Indian problem.”<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> McMahon and Chow-White, "News Media Encoding of Racial Reconciliation," 999.; italics added.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 1002.

<sup>56</sup> See Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*.

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 18

### **Quantitative findings and analysis of mainstream media coverage**

Our sample consists of 29 items from national newspapers and 117 from local newspapers across the country. As per Chart 1 below, the *Winnipeg Free Press* accounts for a disproportionate share of the coverage, likely because Winnipeg is the location of the TRC headquarters and the first national event. More than half the coverage comes from Western Canada, perhaps due in part to the exclusion of Eastern Canadian media outlets in Proquest's Canadian Newsstand and perhaps in part due to the fact that the majority of the schools were located in the West.<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>57</sup> Our database does not include the Halifax *Chronicle Herald*, which extensively covered the Atlantic National Event.

19 A news frame analysis

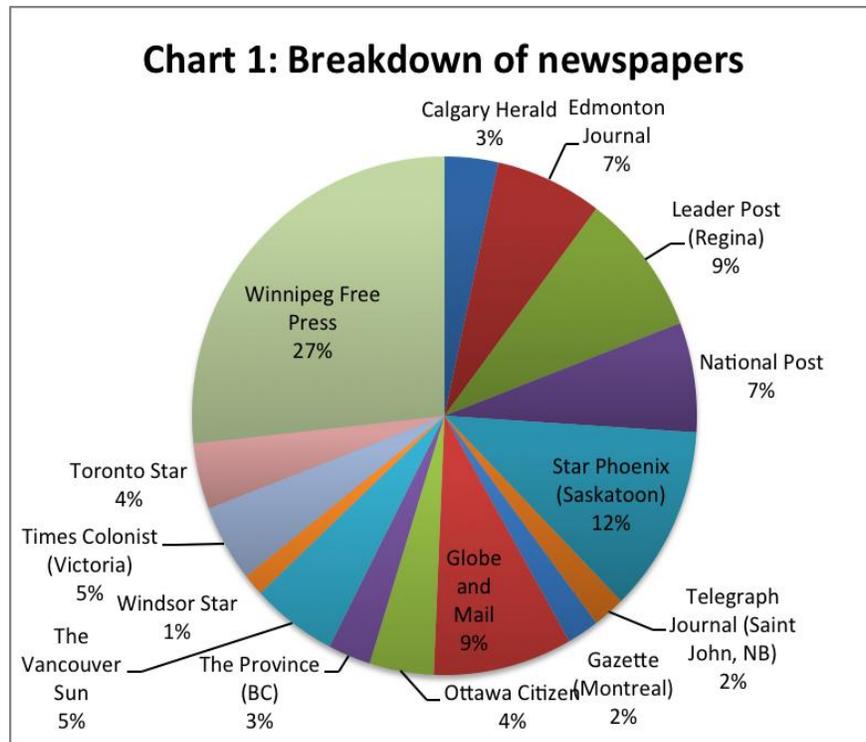
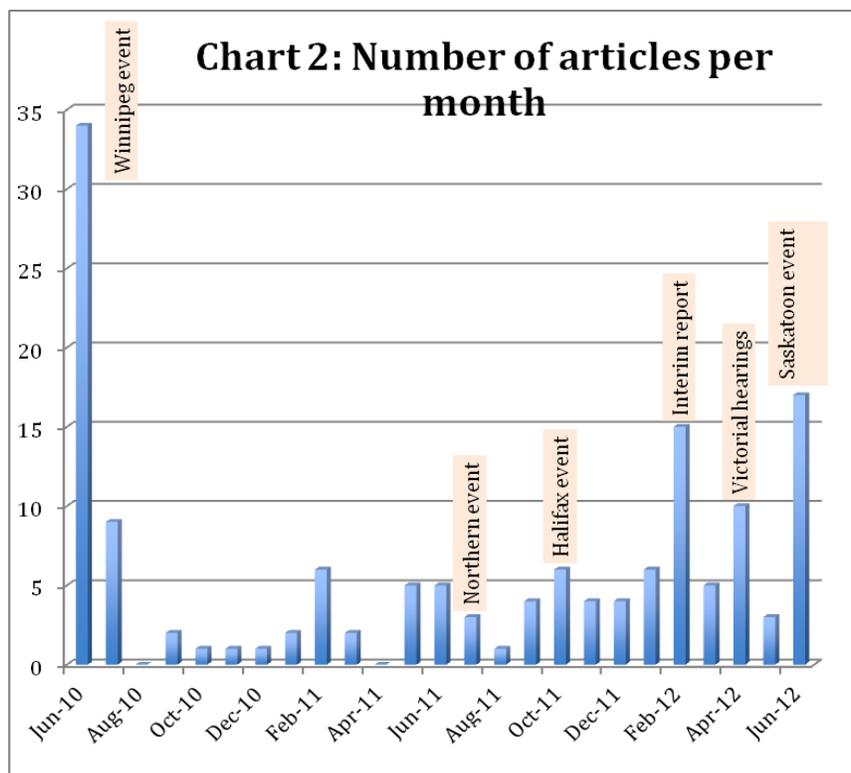


Chart 2, below, outlines the volume of newspaper articles per month between June 2010 and June 2012, the sample period. Coverage appears to spike around national events, although not all stories in the month of an event necessarily pertain to the event. Other major events and issues deemed newsworthy in relation to truth and reconciliation include the release of the TRC’s Interim report, local TRC hearings, memorials for or research into missing children, teaching IRS history in school curricula, the President of the University of Manitoba’s apology for Indian residential schools, and wrangling between the TRC and the government over access to archival documents. We note also a disappointing number of factual errors, most commonly the erroneous claim that the federal

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 20

government rather than an out-of-court settlement agreement established the TRC. This misleadingly positions the TRC as the result of government benevolence rather than a hard-fought gain resulting from over twenty years of struggle by IRS survivors.



Given the significance of representations of voice, we counted the sources quoted in all news articles. Survivors are the principal quoted source at 53% followed by TRC officials (12%), experts and others (11%), Indigenous Leaders (7%), ordinary

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40

## 21 A news frame analysis

Canadians (7%) and church (5%) and state officials (5%).<sup>58</sup> While the predominance of Indigenous and survivor voices can be seen positively insofar as they are articulating stories long denied or in some cases challenging stereotypes or modelling resilience and strength, reductive framing techniques of decontextualization and tokenization were very prevalent. In a seemingly mandatory formula, news articles frequently commence with at least one survivor's story. One article, "Residential Schools: Survivors Share the Pain," which was carried in three newspapers, provides a clear example of this focus on individual stories. It strings together snippets from the experiences of 19 nameless survivors, creating a single, decontextualized narrative focusing on the abuse experienced at IRS. The article ends with one survivor's declaration that after speaking with the commission, "I feel a lot lighter. Not light as a feather, but light enough to float," as if this is, or should be, the experience of all survivors after telling of their experience.<sup>59</sup> This sort of representation, combined with the lack of ordinary non-Indigenous Canadian voices, suggests that truth and reconciliation are largely an Indigenous issue.

### Overview of Expansive and Reductive Framing

Our overall finding from the deductive analysis is that while there are some nominal differences, the reductive and expansive framing of

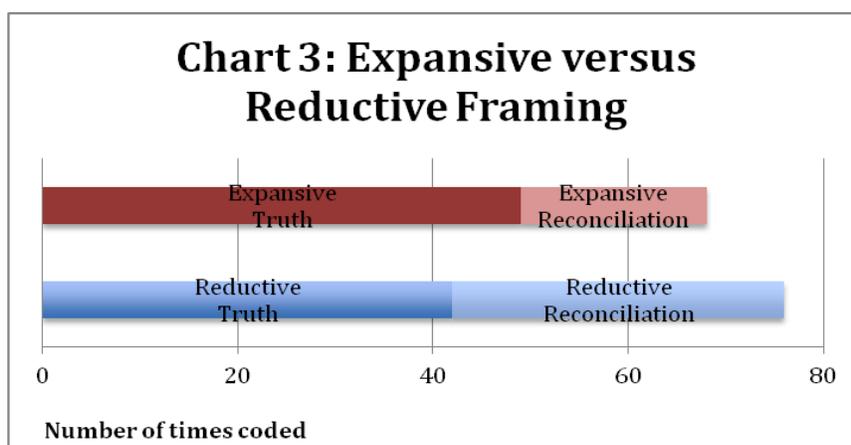
---

<sup>58</sup> Note that leaders of survivors organizations, like Chief Robert Joseph or Mike Cachagee, were coded as survivors. "Indigenous leader" refers to chiefs, national chiefs, or leaders of political organizations like the Metis National Council. State officials pertains to federal level only; municipal mayors, chiefs of police, and opposition critics were categorized in "other."

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Stobo Sniderman, "Residential Schools: Survivors Share the Pain," *The Montreal Gazette*, 07 May 2011, B1; Andrew Stobo Sniderman, "A Shameful Part of History; Truth and Reconciliation Commission Explores Cultural Devastation Caused by Residential Schools," *Star Phoenix*, 17 May 2011, B6; Andrew Stobo Sniderman, "Survivors Talk about Past to Heal the Present," *Leader Post*, 14 May 2011, G4.

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 22

truth and reconciliation is fairly evenly balanced (see Chart 3 below). Moreover, expansive frames of truth are slightly higher than reductive frames of truth. This provides some grounds for optimism. However, while many articles engage with frames about the “truth” of IRS, frames about reconciliation, especially expansive reconciliation, are less common.



Of the 146 articles, 75 percent were categorized as news, followed by 12 percent opinion, 10 percent columns, and three percent editorials. Overall, news items are significantly more reductive. Roughly 60 percent of news items are reductively framed, whereas roughly 60 percent of non-news items are expansively framed. Reductive framing in news articles is often accomplished through representations of survivors as broken individuals and passive victims who succumb to emotionality. The latent inference is that Indigenous people are more emotional—and therefore less rational – than non-Indigenous people.<sup>60</sup> In comparison to news article framing, framing in columns, editorials, and opinion pieces is

<sup>60</sup> Harding, "Historical representations," 223.

## 23 A news frame analysis

often less subtle, not surprisingly given their explicit use of rhetoric, judgement and argument. In one example, a columnist for the *Vancouver Sun* explicitly notes, “media coverage of the truth-and-reconciliation process misses the mark when it focuses only on the stories of students... [it] also requires Canadians to acknowledge the ongoing legacy of residential schools for entire indigenous communities regardless of who attended the schools.”<sup>61</sup> He then proposes a child-care program, increased parental benefits, and funding for community services because “it responds directly to the harm residential schools imposed by removing children from their families and communities.” Similarly, a *Star Phoenix* editorial explicitly links Indian residential schools to current under-funding of First Nations child welfare.<sup>62</sup>

A surprising finding across all document types is that while expansive truth is the most common form of truth, the articles most often engage with a framework of reductive rather than expansive reconciliation. Often articles contain more than one frame or no frames at all. Many articles present contradictory messages. For example, a June 2012 column in the *Star Phoenix* identifies the schools as “part of the colonial legacy” including to train “a cheap source of labour for the expanding western provinces.” Negative stereotypes are challenged through emphasis on First Nations’ resistance and the survival of culture. Yet, this expansive truth is met with reductive reconciliation. The author concludes that, “I realize that you can’t bury the past, but we need to move on.” This will apparently be enacted through a closure ceremony; little action is required on the part of non-Aboriginal Canadians. After all, “the

---

<sup>61</sup> Paul, Kewshaw, "New Deal for Families Promotes Truth and Reconciliation," *Vancouver Sun*, 17 Nov. 2011, A15.

<sup>62</sup> Editorial, "Feds Can't Duck Duty to Natives," *Star Phoenix*, 29 April 2012, A12.

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 24

legacy of the boarding schools remains an open wound in Indian country”—it is not framed as a wound in Canada.<sup>63</sup>

A news article picked up by six different newspapers exemplifies the problematic representation of survivors as traumatized individuals.<sup>64</sup> Survivors gather to provide “wrenching” descriptions of abuse. In sharing their “heartbreaking stories” as “voices crack” and tears flow, health support workers stand by “with a hand of comfort and tissues at the ready.” While the article evokes expansive truth with reference to criticisms of Harper’s “no history of colonialism” remark, the representation of reconciliation is decidedly narrow. TRC Commissioner Chief Littlechild is framed as a “cheerleader for forgiveness.” In testifying, survivors gain “relief, if not catharsis” because “the more you talk, the more you heal.” Moreover, “in transcendent moments of courage and grace, many survivors use their time in front of the TRC to express forgiveness to those who wronged them.” Whilst we might therefore conclude that reconciliation is positioned as something Aboriginals have to do on an individual level, by talking, healing and forgiving, two versions of the article veer toward acknowledging this limited representation. Chief Littlechild worries that survivors are “just talking among ourselves.”<sup>65</sup> Commissioner Marie Wilson states, “[t]he rest of Canada cannot think this is just about survivors telling their truth, having a measure of catharsis and that's it. It's about healing Canada's

---

<sup>63</sup> Doug Cuthland, "Time to Move on for Sake of Future Generations," *Star Phoenix*, 22 June 2012, A11.

<sup>64</sup> Andrew Stobo Sniderman, "A Shameful Chapter in our History," *Vancouver Sun*, 25 June 2011, B1; Sniderman, Residential Schools: Survivors Share the Pain," 07-May-11, B.1; Sniderman, "A Shameful Part of History" 17 May 2011, B6; Sniderman, "Survivors Talk about Past to Heal the Present," 14 May 2011; Sniderman, "A Shameful Chapter Aired," *Gazette*, 7 May 2011, B4; Sniderman, "Exposing Canada's Most Shameful History," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 22 Nov. 2011, A4. Three of these articles are run with the decontextualized snippets from 19 nameless survivors described earlier.

<sup>65</sup> Sniderman, "Exposing Canada's Most Shameful History," *Citizen*, 22 Nov. 2011.

## 25 A news frame analysis

amnesia and thinking about the problems that continue to plague First Nations people.”<sup>66</sup>

This sort of mismatching suggests that truth does not necessarily lead to reconciliation, or at least not to the same degree. Canadians may be willing to read about IRS as part of colonization and genocide or to challenge some long-held stereotypes, but it would be going too far for mainstream newspapers to link this to restructuring Canadian society. Nonetheless, we suggest that these seemingly contradictory discourses of truth and reconciliation are mutually enmeshed. As Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham state, the framing of claims of injury and redress is a discursive process that is “polyvalent and always unfinished,” constrained by (neo)liberal “disciplining pressures,” yet “sometimes unpredictable” in its effects.<sup>67</sup> For example, Henderson argues that insofar as the residential schools have become a synecdoche for pressing claims against the vaster colonial project, this occurs in part because “from the point of view of the state[,] financial reparations for residential schooling can be individualized and contained in a way that land claims cannot.”<sup>68</sup> Or, for example, as survivors necessarily turned to the language of *victims of historical trauma* in order to challenge their portrayal as *anomic Indian deviants*, their claims became enmeshed with a Westernized psychological paradigm that focuses on individual therapy rather than collective healing through restoration of land and

---

<sup>66</sup> Sniderman, "A Shameful Chapter Aired," *Gazette*, 7 May 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham, "Introduction," in *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, ed. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham, 1-27 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 15.

<sup>68</sup> Jennifer Henderson, "The Camp, the School, and the Child: Discursive Exchanges and (Neo)liberal Axioms in the Culture of Redress," in *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, ed. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham, 63-83 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 67.

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 26

culture.<sup>69</sup> Thus, we suggest that the mismatch between the framing of truth and the framing of reconciliation is not happenstance, but arises out of and contributes to these discursive processes. Following Henderson and Wakeham, the political culture behind news media framing not only shapes and reflects the politics of truth and reconciliation; it also shows the degree to which that culture itself “is at stake.”<sup>70</sup>

### **Framing truth-to-reconciliation activities or processes**

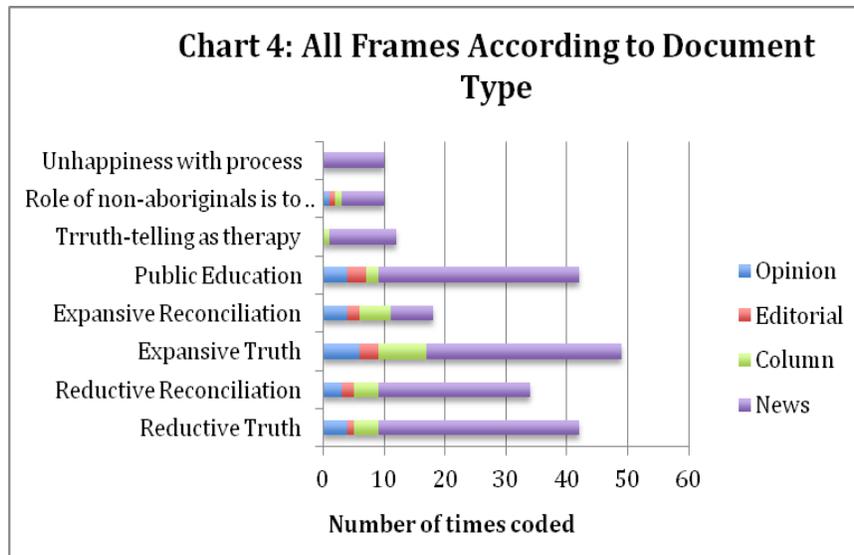
The road from truth to reconciliation requires some kind of bridging action: truth alone will not suffice. Through inductive analysis, we identified three additional frames that represent activities or processes that might serve this bridging function: *truth-telling as therapy*, *the role of non-aboriginals is to witness*, and *public education*. All three of these frames explicitly link truth to reconciliation. We also identified a fourth frame in the news coverage, *unhappiness with the process*, which frames truth, or, more specifically, the truth commission, as *not* leading to reconciliation. In Chart 4, below, we show the numbers corresponding to each frame, subdivided according to document type. As can be seen, public education comprises a very significant discourse, emerging in over forty of the articles. Because truth-telling as therapy and the role of non-aboriginals is to witness were often paired, these two together are also fairly prominent at 23 counts. Finally, unhappiness with the process, appeared a sufficient number of times that it merits some discussion.

---

<sup>69</sup> Dian Million, "Trauma, Power and the Therapeutic: Speaking Psychotherapeutic Narratives in an Era of Indigenous Human rights," in *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, ed. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham, 159-77 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> Henderson and Wakeham, "Introduction," 15.

27 A news frame analysis



**Table 2:**  
Counts of expansive and reductive frames alongside truth-to-reconciliation frames

|                                       | As a Standalone Frame | Reductive Truth | Reductive Reconciliation | Expansive Truth | Expansive Reconciliation |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Unhappiness with process              | 5                     | 2               | 1                        | 3               | 1                        |
| Truth-telling as therapy              | 2                     | 10              | 7                        | 6               | 0                        |
| Role of non-aboriginals is to witness | 1                     | 4               | 4                        | 3               | 1                        |
| Public Education                      | 9                     | 12              | 10                       | 17              | 4                        |

The four truth-to-reconciliation frames appeared both as standalone frames in news items or in any number of combinations with reductive and expansive framing of Indian residential schools, as noted in Table 2, below. We turn now to discussion and analysis of the four truth-to-reconciliation frames.

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 28

The frame of *unhappiness with the process* addresses the “herculean task”<sup>71</sup> of the TRC, which in July 2010 was “fraught with scandal, power struggles, firings, lost friendship and soul-destroying delays.”<sup>72</sup> As time progresses, the “troubled” truth commission faces “considerable challenges,”<sup>73</sup> including staff resignations,<sup>74</sup> funding constraints,<sup>75</sup> lack of access to historical records,<sup>76</sup> “bureaucratic delays in hiring staff,”<sup>77</sup> and allegations of misspending.<sup>78</sup> To some extent, the framework of unhappiness with the process is a distraction from the actual business of truth and reconciliation. The emphasis on all the challenges that the truth commission faces might also serve to place the burden of truth and reconciliation on the commission itself, rather than on Canadian society and government. Yet, this frame also gives voice to survivor groups themselves who are unhappy with the truth commission or the settlement agreement

---

<sup>71</sup> Bill Curry, "Research director resigns from truth commission," *The Globe and Mail*, 12 July 2010, A6.

<sup>72</sup> Linda Diebel, "No truth, no reconciliation: As the commission on Indian residential schools struggles with firings and delays, victims are dying," *The Toronto Star*, 24 July 2010, A1.

<sup>73</sup> Jason Fekete, "Residential schools panel struggles to complete job; Cash flow, access to records dog mission," *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 22, 2011, A4.

<sup>74</sup> Bill Curry, "Research director resigns from truth commission," *The Globe and Mail*, July 12, 2010, A6.

<sup>75</sup> Jason Fekete, "Residential-school commission struggles to complete mandate; Report cites funding constraints, bureaucratic delays," *The Edmonton Journal*, November 22, 2011, A9; Fekete, "Residential schools panel struggles to complete job; Cash flow, access to records dog mission," *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 22, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Fekete, "Commission struggles to complete mandate," *The Edmonton Journal*, Nov. 22, 2011.

<sup>77</sup> Fekete, "Residential schools panel struggles to complete job," *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 22, 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Bill Curry, "Hawaiian Junket Lands Truth Panel in Hot Water," *The Globe and Mail*, September 2, 2010, A4.

## 29 A news frame analysis

for excluding schools attended by Métis people.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, the shortfalls of the process are sometimes framed as “disgust” with the government for failing to enact real change.<sup>80</sup>

*Truth-telling as therapy* and *the role of non-aboriginals is to witness* were frequently paired together. With the notion that “the more you talk, the more you heal,” survivors are “relieved of [their] heavy burden”<sup>81</sup> and, according to one headline, are “finding solace in self-expression.”<sup>82</sup> This kind of framing invokes the myth of the “talking cure,” something which transitional justice scholars in various contexts have challenged. David Mendeloff, in his review of the empirical research, argues that “truth-telling has had neither the positive, nor the negative, psychological effects that are claimed.”<sup>83</sup> Other studies indicate that truth-telling for individual victims may be retraumatizing, deeply disappointing or even silencing.<sup>84</sup> While truth-telling may not function psychologically the way its proponents claim, the therapeutic discourse persists. Critics argue that the therapeutic discourse persists because it helps shore up elites’ political legitimacy,

---

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.; Clement Chartier, “Metis Still Waiting on their Apology,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 18, 2010, A17; Bill Redekop, “A fighter then, a fighter now,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 19, 2011, H5.

<sup>80</sup> Alexandra Paul, “Compensation Flawed, First Nations People Say,” *The Windsor Star*, February 3, 2012, D.3; Alexandra Paul, “Residential School Pact Needs Review: Coalition,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, February 3, 2012, A8; Heather Scoffield, “For Many, PM’s Apology for Residential School’s Rings Hollow,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 12, 2012, A4; Fekete, “Residential schools panel struggles to complete job,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, November 22, 2011.

<sup>81</sup> Jason Warick, “Priest Apologizes After Hearing Stories; Residential School Abuse Documented,” *Star Phoenix*, June 8, 2012, A3.

<sup>82</sup> Nick Martin, “Finding Solace in Self-expression,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 27, 2011, A8.

<sup>83</sup> David Mendeloff, “Trauma and Vengeance: Assessing the Psychological and Emotional Effects of Post-Conflict Justice,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2009), 609.

<sup>84</sup> Karen Brounéus, “Truth-Telling as Talking Cure? Insecurity and Retraumatization in the Rwandan Gacaca Courts,” *Security Dialogue* 39, no. 1 (2008):55-76.

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 30

distracts from socioeconomic needs, individualizes social problems, and lets individual healing, when it does occur, stand in for social change.<sup>85</sup>

In the Canadian context, Indigenous approaches to healing emphasize truth-telling as an essential first step in decolonization and in revitalizing land-based knowledge, culture and tradition.<sup>86</sup> In contrast, mainstream discourses of trauma and therapy have become entangled with notions of closure on the past, including through the government's actual closure of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which had supported 310 community-based healing projects, serving over 1,500 communities with 60,000 participants.<sup>87</sup> In this context of cuts to long-term healing support, framing truth-telling as therapy allows settlers "to do the least while appearing to do something."<sup>88</sup> The role of settlers in this paradigm is to witness testimony. This is framed as something that requires considerable effort on the part of witnesses: survivors' stories are "hard to hear, but they need to be told,"<sup>89</sup> and witnesses must be prepared to "listen to hard words."<sup>90</sup> The mechanisms through which witnessing works are fairly opaque, but settlers have to "really listen" because "reconciliation happens

---

<sup>85</sup> Simon Robins, "Challenging the Therapeutic Ethic: A Victim-Centred Evaluation of Transitional Justice Process in Timor-Leste," *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 6, no. 1 (2012):83-105; Claire Moon, "Healing Past Violence: Traumatic Assumptions and Therapeutic Interventions in War and Reconciliation," *Journal of Human Rights* 8, no. 1 (2009):71-91.

<sup>86</sup> Wanda D. McCaslin and Denise C. Breton, "Justice as Healing: Going Outside the Colonizers' Cage," in *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, ed. Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 511-29 (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008); Episkenew, *Taking Back Our Spirits*.

<sup>87</sup> Green, "Unsettling Cures."

<sup>88</sup> Chrisjohn and Young, *Circle Game*, 117.

<sup>89</sup> Editorial, "These Stories Must Be Told," *Times Colonist* [Victoria], February 29, 2012, A10.

<sup>90</sup> Lindor Reynolds, "Churches, Members Coping with Burden of Guilt," *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 18, 2010, A4.

## 31 A news frame analysis

with understanding.”<sup>91</sup> Witnessing will “allow us to rejoice in the power and resilience of the spirit”<sup>92</sup> and to “turn the page on a dark chapter.”<sup>93</sup> On this view, therapeutic closure becomes an exercise for settlers and Aboriginals alike, one that is grounded in survivors’ capacity to tell their stories and to confirm their recovery in a performative separation of past and future.<sup>94</sup>

To be sure, truth-telling and acknowledgement were key demands of survivors in their twenty-year struggle against silence and denial that led to the IRSSA. But as Michael Humphrey has noted, while social recognition of one’s truth may be “personally empowering and provide emotional awards... this does not necessarily add up to healing as an enduring outcome.”<sup>95</sup> His argument is particularly disquieting given the closure of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Witnessing in part serves to alleviate the anxieties of settlers who are themselves framed as victims of a failed public education system that fed them lies.<sup>96</sup> Humphrey describes testimony and witnessing as a “mode of communication through which the audience ‘borrows memories’ to create the illusion of a personal connection with events and thereby having a more intimate understanding of them.”<sup>97</sup> Witnessing, according to one quoted TRC participant, “has been an emotional, fabulous

---

<sup>91</sup> Doyle Fox, "Stories of Pain and Struggle," *Leader Post*, July 30, 2010, A17.

<sup>92</sup> Reynolds, "Churches, Members Coping," *Winnipeg Free Press*, Feb. 29, 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Judith Lavoie, "Dark Secrets of Residential Schools to Become Part of National Memory," *Times Colonist* [Victoria], December 14, 2011, A3.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Humphrey, "From Terror to Trauma: Commissioning Truth for National Reconciliation," *Social Identities* 6, no. 1 (2000), 24.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>96</sup> Maxine Matilpi, "It's Up to All of us to Bear Witness to History; Truth and Reconciliation Commission Coming to Victoria Later this Month," *Times Colonist*, April 8, 2012, D3.

<sup>97</sup> Humphrey, "From Terror to Trauma," 13.

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 32

experience.”<sup>98</sup> The risk here is that the experience amounts to “feeling good about feeling bad” and the “fabulous” spectacle of truth-telling ends up reproducing the colonial relationship between the helpless victim and the “humanitarian” witness.<sup>99</sup>

However, it is not always framed this way. One Indigenous opinion writer, first noting her disappointment at “how few nonindigenous people attended” the Victoria hearings, issues this plea:

The tellers need us present to listen, and they need us to listen deeply. They need us to be inspired into action, to ‘walk the talk,’ to not imagine ourselves absolved through ‘statements of reconciliation’ by survivors reported in the news, or by apologies offered by Prime Minister Stephen Harper.”<sup>100</sup>

This relates to TRC Chair Justice Murray Sinclair’s oft repeated quotation, “now that you know, what are you going to do about it?” Here we connect to the *public education* frame, which rests on the idea that the public is largely unfamiliar with IRS history and needs to be educated about it. Indeed, this is a key component of the TRC’s mandate. Coded alone or in any number of combinations with expansive and reductive frames, the *public education* mantras include:

---

<sup>98</sup> Jason Warick, "Survivors' Share their Stories; Schools Left Scars on Many," *Star Phoenix* [Saskatoon], June 7, 2012, A1.

<sup>99</sup> Roger I. Simon, "Towards a Hopeful Practice of Worrying: The Problematics of Listening and the Educative Responsibilities of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission," in *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, ed. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham, 129-42 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 131-2.

<sup>100</sup> Matilpi, "It's up to all of us," *Times Colonist* [Victoria], April 8, 2012.

## 33 A news frame analysis

“setting the history books straight,”<sup>101</sup> needing to know “so that no one can ever say this didn’t happen,”<sup>102</sup> “learn from this history and not repeat it,”<sup>103</sup> and “telling our stories so it will never happen again to any child.”<sup>104</sup> These, of course, are basic truisms in transitional justice, but there is no guarantee that knowing the truth—and, moreover, what kind of truth and whose truth?—will lead to any particular outcome.<sup>105</sup> Truth can be divisive and denied, and, as Roger Simon points out, there is a difference between *learning about* and *learning from* IRS history.<sup>106</sup>

In terms of expansive framing, as seen in Table 2, above, public education engaged with expansive truth far more than with expansive reconciliation. On the whole, the public education frame in print media representations is remarkably hollow. The suggestion is almost that truth *is* reconciliation. When Justice Sinclair walks into a classroom, he “help[s] nudge reconciliation forward.”<sup>107</sup> We are told that “the truth, eventually, will heal us all” and a complete record will allow survivors to “have some peace.”<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Karen Kleiss "A helping hand with healing; Boyle Street centre assists residential school victims seeking compensation," *Edmonton Journal*, January 24, 2011, A1.

<sup>102</sup> Jennifer Pritchette, "Day of Tears, Sadness and Anger; Reconciliation Ex-residential School Students Recall Abuse and Humiliation for Panel Members," *Telegraph-Journal* [Saint John], September 9, 2011, A1.

<sup>103</sup> Don Marks, "Finding Common Ground," *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 26, 2010, A17.

<sup>104</sup> Louise Brown, "Like Living in a Foreign Land; Aboriginal Survivors of Residential Schools to tell Their Stories," *Toronto Star*, September 28, 2011, GT.4.

<sup>105</sup> For example, see Clark, "Transitional Justice, Truth and Reconciliation."; David Mendeloff, "Truth-Seeking, Truth-Telling, and Postconflict Peacebuilding: Curb the Enthusiasm?," *International Studies Review* 6, no. 3 (2004):355-80.

<sup>106</sup> Simon, "The Problematics of Listening," 136.

<sup>107</sup> Brent Whittmeier, "Heartbreaking Stories, Daily; Truth Commission Judge Listens to Residential School Survivors," *The Edmonton Journal*, May 12, 2012, A1

<sup>108</sup> Mary Agnes Welch, Larry Kusch, and Matt Preprost, "Important Day in Our History," *Winnipeg Free Press*, June 17, 2010, A6.

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 34

Truth will allow “society to move forward together” because it “changes the attitude of people who had suffered abuse toward the larger society that abused them.”<sup>109</sup> Through some magical mechanism, “once the story is told, once the reconciliation has begun, they can be a more equal part of that society.”<sup>110</sup> The mechanism through which this might occur is apparent insofar as much of the public education messaging follows the call by the truth commission and others for the inclusion of IRS history in high school curricula. We note Roger Simon’s worry that curricular change “is likely to be more a matter of symbolic optics than social transformation. Unless the history of residential schools was taught as one component of the larger narrative of the colonization and attempted culture genocide of Aboriginal peoples, the force of this history would be greatly muted and too easily confined to a now surpassed era.”<sup>111</sup> While we cannot comment on actual high school curricula, including the new IRS curriculum announced in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, media representations of the content of education are sometimes reductively framed as “teach[ing] about the physical and sexual abuse and neglect suffered at the schools.”<sup>112</sup>

While a change in attitudes is obviously important, as Henderson has argued, this emphasis may serve to detract from material claims.<sup>113</sup> Corntassel and Holder refer to this as the “politics

---

<sup>109</sup> Heather Yundt and Teresa Smith, "Effects of Residential Schools Still Felt," *National Post*, February 25, 2012, A7.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Simon, "The Problematics of Listening," 135.

<sup>112</sup> Dirk Meissner, "Hearings Reopen Old Wounds for Residential School Survivor," *The Globe and Mail*, April 14, 2012, A11.

<sup>113</sup> Eva Mackey, "The Apologizers' Apology," in *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, ed. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham, 47-62 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

35 A news frame analysis

of distraction” behind truth commission mandates.<sup>114</sup> This seems to be the case even when explicit connections are drawn between attitudes and material conditions. For example, one op-ed writer argues that “lack of awareness must be rectified if the apology is going to lead to meaningful change.”<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, the author continues, “this lack of knowledge is dangerous because history and historical myths shape contemporary actions and attitudes.” Despite this explicit connection, however, the author inserts a sharp line between the past and present that denies contemporary structures of racism: “we cannot deny a time when systemic racism and discrimination *were* the norm.”<sup>116</sup>

Elsewhere, Commissioner Marie Sinclair is repeatedly quoted as saying that “we have all been the losers for lack of that knowledge and understanding... It has led us to a place of stereotypes and judgement and an inability to connect the dots between the realities of our country today and the 130-year history of contributing factors that led to it.”<sup>117</sup> Yet, the challenge to these stereotypes is then

---

<sup>114</sup> Jeff Cornthassel and Cindy Holder, "Who's Sorry Now? Government Apologies, Truth Commissions, and Indigenous Self-Determination in Australia, Canada, Guatemala, and Peru," *Human Rights Review* 9, no. 4 (2008):465-89.

<sup>115</sup> Charlotte Kingston, "Of Truth and Reconciliation," *Telegraph-Journal* [Saint John], June 11, 2011, A11; emphasis added.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Ethan Baron, "Teach All Kids About Residential Schools," *The Province* [Surrey], February 26, 2012, A11; Heather Yundt, "Teaching History High on Action List; Interim Report on Residential Schools Also Proposes Aboriginal Healing and Cultural-revival Programs," *The Montreal Gazette*, February 25, 2012, A8; Heather Yundt, "Residential School 'Healing' Promoted; Report Calls for Childhood Trauma Centres," *The Calgary Herald*, February 25, 2012, A17; Heather Yundt, "Commission Recommends Funding to Support Healing; Interim Report Calls for Health, Wellness Centres," *The Vancouver Sun*, February 25, 2012, B5; Heather Yundt, "Cultural revival urged; Commission seeks to repair damage by residential schools," *Star-Phoenix* [Saskatoon], February 25, 2012, A1; Heather Yundt and Teresa Smith, "Effects of Residential Schools Still Felt," *National Post*, February 25, 2012, A7.

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 36

framed in terms of abuse, as seen in this repeatedly quoted survivor's statement before the commission: "Nobody is making the connection. Bad Indians. Bad Inuit. Drunken Indians. That's all they think... But we would not be drunken Inuit or drunken Indians had we not been abused when we were children, had we not been exposed to assault and stuff like that."<sup>118</sup> While this is not untrue, the framing device exiles the broader colonial project to the periphery, and completely neglects the extent to which enduring stereotypes *precipitated* rather than resulted from residential schooling.

### The Quebec National Event

We had the opportunity to attend the Quebec National event on April 24-27, 2013 at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal. The discrepancies between the event itself and how it was reported offers further insight into how the TRC has been covered in mainstream Anglo-newspapers. There are 15 articles, almost all written by a single reporter from the *Montreal Gazette*.<sup>119</sup> Public education is the leading frame. Although the event itself generally engaged with an expansive view of truth and reconciliation, media framing tends to focus on the "archive of pain" collected from survivors' stories of abuse and the mandate to "get Canadians talking" about it.<sup>120</sup> Despite ample opportunity to do so, there was simply no reporting

---

<sup>118</sup> Heather Yundt and Teresa Smith, "Residential schools body calls for education funding; Hearings Truth and Reconciliation Commission releases its interim findings," *Telegraph-Journal* [Saint John], February 25, 2012, A4.

<sup>119</sup> There is one op-ed, two editorials and the *Edmonton Journal* and the *Leader Post* picked up one news item from *The Montreal Gazette*.

<sup>120</sup> Christopher Curtis, "Commission collects 'archive of pain' on shameful chapter in Canadian history," *The Vancouver Sun*, April 29, 2013, B3; Christopher Curtis, "Larger mandate is to get Canadians talking," *Gazette*, April 29, 2013, A3; Christopher Curtis, "Abused aboriginal children's archive of pain grows," *The Star-Phoenix* [Saskatoon], April 29, 2013, A7; Christopher Curtis, "Judge collects nightmares of the abused; Survivors of residential schools share burden with commission," *The Edmonton Journal*, April 29, 2013, A9.

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40

## 37 A news frame analysis

on reconciliation in terms of land, treaty, gender and the Two-Row Wampum,<sup>121</sup> which were addressed in a series of panels organized by the local Kanien'kehaka people over the course of the event. Palpable anger and mistrust on the part of some Indigenous participants during an incredibly intense town hall titled "Reconciliation: It Matters to Me" also received no coverage. Rather, forgiveness and healing, although "painful" and perhaps a "never-ending quest," are framed as a necessary path toward reconciliation.<sup>122</sup>

There are important counterbalances to the reductive framing. The *Montreal Gazette* and *Leader Post* editorials draw clear linkages with ongoing socioeconomic disparities, the "persistence of an assimilationist mindset in some quarters" and the Idle No More movement. Prominent honorary witnesses—former Auditor General Sheila Fraser, former Governor-General Michaëlle Jean, and former Prime Minister Paul Martin—garnered media attention, as did M.P. Roméo Saganash, who gave a private survivor statement and media scrum at the TRC. Coverage of these people frames reconciliation expansively with reference to "cultural genocide," the Kelowna Accord, First Nations education under-funding, lack of clean drinking water, and so forth. And Justice Sinclair's oft-quoted question is repeated: "Now that you know, what are you going to do about it?"

---

<sup>121</sup> The Two-Row Wampum beaded belt is the "symbolic record of the first agreement between Europeans and [Indigenous] peoples," and it "forms the basis for the covenant chain of all subsequent treaty relationships made by the Haudenosaunee and other [First] Nations" with settler governments on this Turtle Island/North America. Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign, "Two Row History," at <http://honorthetworow.org/learn-more/history/> (1 May 2014).

<sup>122</sup> Christopher Curtis, "Victims of residential schools gather; Dozens march through city before testimonials begin," *The Montreal Gazette*, April 25, 2013, A4.

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 38

In all this, however, settler ignorance is normalized—“how come we didn’t know?” asks former Prime Minister Paul Martin.<sup>123</sup> This is despite historic awareness on the part of church authorities of individual abusers and the 1922 report, “The Story of a National Crime,” written for federal authorities by Dr. P.A. Bryce.<sup>124</sup> The dialectic of truth-telling and witnessing noted above appears again. Survivors, in speaking their truth, release settlers from their ignorance: as the former Prime Minister expressed to survivors, “[y]ou are people of great courage and we owe you all an enormous amount.”<sup>125</sup> However, the benefits of truth-telling for survivors themselves are not guaranteed. One article acknowledges the “overwhelming” nature of truth-sharing and its re-traumatizing potential, particularly where there is no recognition or reparation.<sup>126</sup> Yet, after describing a day of testimony, the conclusion is, “[i]f there were a silver lining, it was that the pain shared at the TRC could lead to something better.”<sup>127</sup> How this truth telling will lead to something better for survivors and their communities is not made clear, while the inference is that for non-Aboriginals, simply witnessing and knowing may be enough.

With respect to non-Aboriginal Canadians, there are obvious contradictions between this passive framing of reconciliation and the expansive frame that clearly speaks to the need for action. This may be because Canadians simply do not know “what to do about it” on

---

<sup>123</sup> Christopher Curtis, “Paul Martin asks the question that's on everyone's mind,” *The Montreal Gazette*, April 27, 2013, A4.

<sup>124</sup> See Milloy, *A National Crime*.

<sup>125</sup> Curtis, “Paul Martin asks the question that's on everyone's mind,” *The Montreal Gazette*, April 27, 2013.

<sup>126</sup> Christopher Curtis, “The anguish of speaking out; The process is designed to heal, but discussing the past can be painful,” *The Montreal Gazette*, April 19, 2013, A4.

<sup>127</sup> Christopher Curtis, “Tears, pain and a chance to heal; Survivors of abuse at residential schools testify at hearing,” *The Montreal Gazette*, April 26, 2013, A6.

## 39 A news frame analysis

an individual level in the face of massive systemic problems, and news framing reflects that. Yet, the discrepancy between what was discussed at the Montreal event and what was covered in the print media suggests that something more is going on. In the large dataset, we came across little reporting on grass-roots efforts for truth and reconciliation, and none at all in the Montreal sample, except for two important, albeit vague, editorial nods to the Idle No More movement. The panels and discussions at the Montreal event spanned from survivor testimony of trauma to difficult dialogue about paths toward decolonization. However, the preference for “feel good” coverage that frames survivors’ stories within a “silver lining” suggests a desire for closure and moving on, rather than engaging the hard work of reconciliation.

### Conclusion

In 1995, Roland Chrisjohn and Sherri Young argued that the “standard account” of residential schools was one that pathologized survivors, ignored the systemic contexts of colonialism and racism, and used the language of “mistakes,” not “genocide.” Our findings indicate improvement over the last eighteen years regarding what passes as “truth.” But newspaper coverage still falls quite short of challenging Canadians to think about Indian residential schools in expansive terms that frame reconciliation as requiring decolonization and systemic change. Insofar as the news media function as a democratic vehicle for public education, learning *about* the schools has yet to translate into learning *from* Indigenous voices that locate reconciliation across a broad range of social issues that includes but is not limited to healing from childhood trauma. Given the higher levels of expansive framing in non-news articles, mainstream newspapers appear rather willing to publish op-eds that frame truth and reconciliation in broad terms. This may be one strategy for

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40

Rosemary Nagy and Emily Gillespie 40

social action. Advocating for peace journalism reporting is another. Seeking alternative, especially Indigenous, media is another obvious step, and we suggest that research into news framing of Indian residential schools in Indigenous and alternative, including online, media would be of benefit.

Concepts of truth, reconciliation, healing, witnessing and public education are the staples of transitional justice. The representation of these concepts in Canadian print media may very well reflect truisms within the so-called template of transitional justice—or, as Michael Ignatieff put it, “articles of faith”—that are increasingly falling under scrutiny.<sup>128</sup> In particular, the “structural critique” of transitional justice expresses concern over the field’s conceptual inability to address the structural underpinnings of mass human rights abuse.<sup>129</sup> Thus, we might question whether reconciliation in *any* context would be expansively framed, or whether the reductive framing we see here is specific to Canadian media engagement with Indigenous-settler issues.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, our research did not undertake an analysis of the TRC’s media strategy, which included hiring an experienced television producer to be Director of Events Planning and Artistic Programming. Nevertheless, it was our sense that the TRC’s messaging, particularly around the narrative of public education, contributed to how it has subsequently been framed in the print media. Systematic analysis of the TRC’s website, news releases, and hearings would provide important insights into the politics of truth and reconciliation within Canada and would also contribute to transitional justice scholarship on the impact of truth commissions. Finally, as the discourse of public education grows, and the TRC’s National Research Centre begins to be set up,

---

<sup>128</sup> Michael Ignatieff, "Articles of Faith," *Index on Censorship* 5 (1996):110-22.

<sup>129</sup> For an overview of this critique, see Nagy, "Scope and Bounds of TJ and the Canadian TRC."

<sup>130</sup> We are grateful to Matt James for this point.

41 A news frame analysis

important research and activist work remains to be done on how to actualize education beyond simply knowing about the existence and impact of Indian residential schools.

Transitional Justice Review, Vol.1, Iss.3, 2015, 3-40