

Psychology's Reckoning: Executive Summary of the Canadian Psychological Association's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Panel

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[Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls](#) (MMIWG report) details 231 Calls to Justice. At the 2021 Canadian Psychological Association's (CPA) National Convention, eight emerging leaders and eight established leaders each spoke for five minutes on some of the Calls to Justice and provided recommendations to CPA based on these Calls to Justice. The panel was planned by Ms. Anita Shaw, Dr. Stryker Calvez, Ms. Joanna Collaton, Dr. Nicole Jeffrey, Dr. Amanda Lints-Martindale, and Dr. Pam McAuslan. It was sponsored by four CPA sections: Section on Women and Psychology, Indigenous Peoples' Psychology, Section for Students in Psychology, and Rural and Northern Psychology.

Dr. Stryker Calvez started the panel with a Canada-wide land acknowledgment. Elder Beverly Keeshig-Soonias then opened the panel with a virtual smudge and shared words about honouring the sacredness of women. The 16 speakers—Dr. Sandra Byers, Dr. Karen Cohen, Dr. Tessa Colthoff, Dr. David Danto, Dr. Julie Goldenson, Dr. Judi Malone, Dr. Lorraine Radtke, Dr. Harvey Skinner, Iloradanon Efimoff, Christina Jeon, Karen Kumar, Aiden Mehak, Jennifer Sedgewick, Noor Sharif, Dana Strauss, and Erin White—then shared their recommendations.

In this executive summary, we share four overarching themes we identified in the panelists' talks. This is not the CPA's response to the MMIWG report. Conference attendees can view the panel talk on EventMobi until the end of December 2021.

Theme 1: Reckon with Past and Ongoing Impacts of Colonization on Indigenous People

Many panelists discussed the ongoing and past impacts of colonization on Indigenous people. The outcomes of colonization are many, including racism, genocide, and as Erin White discussed, violence towards MMIWG. Dr. Lorraine Radtke and Iloradanon Efimoff spoke of the outcomes of a colonized epistemology on subsequent research, teaching, and practice. As a stark illustration of ways colonization impacts Indigenous people within the discipline of psychology, Noor Sharif reminds us that less than 1% of psychologists in Canada are Indigenous – reasons are varied, but Noor points to psychology's past and current complicity in colonial harms to Indigenous people. Christine Jeon noted how psychology has failed to acknowledge the impact of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples and provided an apt example of how programs rooted in Indigenous legal traditions can better support Indigenous justice initiatives that reduce crime, recidivism, and victimization rates. Dr. Judi Malone reminds us that trauma from colonization isn't simply historical: "This is ongoing, current trauma." Overall, to address many of the Calls to Justice, psychology as a discipline needs to reckon with the past and ongoing

impacts of colonization on Indigenous Peoples.

Theme 2: Make Space for Indigenous Involvement

Many panelists discussed the importance of Euro-Canadian psychologists moving aside to create space for Indigenous participation in any steps taken to improve the discipline.

Whatever work is undertaken to address psychology's oppression of Indigenous people must be done in meaningful collaboration with Indigenous people. Our discipline often assumes that psychologists, as experts, know best. This has contributed to atrocities committed against Indigenous people and to superficial gestures framed as reconciliatory activities.

Erin White spoke of [*Their Voices Will Guide Us*](#), a program that exemplifies genuine collaboration with Indigenous communities in its development. This resource aims to "guide all educators in introducing the values of indigenous women's and girls' lives into the classroom" by promoting "critical thinking, reflection, [and] a dialogue around the lived realities of Indigenous women and girls, including members of the 2SLGBTQIAA+ community."

Dana Strauss highlighted the "deeply rooted mistrust of White Western scientists and clinicians within Indigenous communities" due to psychology's hostility towards Indigenous people, and that CPA must make efforts "to build meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities, founded in mutual respect and recognition." Dr. Julie Goldenson also emphasized the importance of building trust through a consistent presence in the community and noted that trust-building requires an "intimate understanding of Indigenous culture and ways of knowing."

Dana Strauss, Aiden Mehak, and Iloradanon Efimoff emphasized the continued exploitation of Indigenous people with the expectation of free emotional and academic labour. Adequate compensation is essential to equitable collaboration with Indigenous communities.

Theme 3: Improve Indigenous-Related Knowledge and Indigenous Education Access

Many panelists discussed the lack of access to Indigenous education within institutions and communities. Regarding formal education issues, Dr. Sandra Byers explained how "we must recognize [the need] to revise existing courses and learning outcomes ... at the undergraduate and graduate level" and highlighted how Indigenous content is not mandatory in all psychology departments across Canada. Dana Strauss suggested universities provide more professional certifications in Indigenous health and social services and revise current accreditation processes to align with equity, diversity, and inclusion initiatives. Panelists discussed mandating cultural competency and antiracism training for all course instructors. However, the limits of popular training strategies should be acknowledged (e.g., small effect sizes and degrading effects over time; Kalinoski et al., 2013; Bezrukova et al., 2016) and more effective strategies should be created and implemented.

Noor Sharif analyzed the existing structural barriers for Indigenous students to acquire post-secondary education. Notably, clinical psychology graduate programs must "move away from Eurocentric admissions requirements like GPA, GRE, publications, and conferences, accept other initiatives or volunteer work (...), create Indigenous-only admission streams that reserve

program spots, and provide significant financial support.”

However, teaching doesn't happen only in classrooms, as Karen Kumar described: “we create educational spaces wherever we decide to teach.” Karen Kumar discussed culturally safe community-based programs focused on protecting women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people from human trafficking. Community-based programs should be available to Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons, and the CPA can play a role in funding and mobilizing them.

Relatedly, Jennifer Sedgewick described how the CPA could use their position to educate others on the harms of hypersexualized and demeaning stereotypes of Indigenous women and girls. Such education could contribute to policy changes with meaningful outcomes.

Finally, Dr. Judi Malone and Dr. Tessa Colthoff demonstrated meaningful practices of allyship during the panel. Dr. Malone used her presentation time to share pre-recorded stories from Indigenous women and Dr. Colthoff emphasized supporting Indigenous ways of knowing like participating in storytelling and ceremonies. Overall, non-Indigenous psychologists must learn to be safe and effective allies to prioritize Indigenous worldviews in all educational work.

Theme 4: Improve Clinical Training to Facilitate Indigenous Community Healing

Multiple panelists spoke about how clinical psychologists are not trained to meet the needs of Indigenous communities despite the increased likelihood of Indigenous people experiencing Euro-Canadian defined “mental health problems” (e.g., substance use disorder, suicidality).

CPA-accredited clinical training is not currently required to incorporate any education on Indigenous worldviews or epistemologies. As noted by Dr. Lorraine Radtke, this “leaves no room to embrace the centrality of relationships with others and with the natural world. It does not lead to the kind of holistic understanding referred to in the final report.” Dr. Harvey Skinner emphasized the “need to ensure that all persons being trained and providing services for Indigenous people, including or especially psychologists, are aware about the history of colonization and [...] local language and culture, and local health and healing practices.” Dr. Tessa Colthoff reported that their community-based learning in a “five-day healing ceremony in Northern Ontario for family members of the missing and murdered women and girls [...] helped me to understand and connect with the issues on a level that was really purely factual to me before.” She also noted, “I don't think anything else would have prepared me better to offer this new story-based treatment to affected family members.” Dr. Colthoff described narrative exposure therapy as potentially more culturally appropriate due to its storytelling aspect. As in all endeavors connecting psychology with Indigenous communities, it is necessary to incorporate meaningful collaboration with Indigenous communities to train clinicians ethically and adequately.

Conclusion

This panel was undoubtedly a first for the CPA. The format of the panel, with 16 established and emerging leaders each speaking for five minutes, allowed the panelists to make several

recommendations to the CPA from diverse perspectives. Panelists discussed the need for psychology to reckon with colonization in order to make space for Indigenous involvement, provide meaningful educational opportunities, and improve clinical training.

All speakers expressed the need to challenge established Eurocentric practices and provided recommendations for the CPA to resolve issues in research, education, clinical training, and the community. Many also discussed the importance of community-based approaches in their work, creating space for Indigenous leadership, adopting a facilitative role in any efforts, and practicing genuine allyship.

Although this panel pertained to psychology, many panelists discussed how psychological research and practices influence other disciplines. Statements and actions carried out by the CPA and its members can serve as a model for other fields like medicine, law, and media to create and improve Indigenous-based initiatives.

Finally, Elder Beverly Keeshig-Soonias emphasized the stark reality of how “this is not about ideas and cool concepts, this is about people who are dead and dying because of these practices, values, and assumptions that are made about us. We’re talking about [Indigenous people] surviving.” Please review appendices A (recommendations from panel) and B (question and answer) to continue your learning journey.

References

- Bezrukova, K., Spell, C. S., Perry, J. L., & Jehn, K. A. (2016). A meta-analytical integration of over 40 years of research on diversity training evaluation. *Psychological Bulletin, 142*, 1227-1274. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/bul000006>
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Appendix A: Recommendations from the Panel

Most panelists discussed calls directly from the MMIWG report, though some discussed calls from the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#) (2015) or the [Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#) (Library and Archives Canada, 1996). All points discussed are pertinent today, including those originating in 1996. The staying power of points from 25 years ago speaks to the pace of change and the work we must do.

Community Engagement

1. Require accredited programs implement efforts to build meaningful relationships with local Indigenous communities as part of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion mandates
2. Community orientation programs (local leaders)
3. Receive feedback from community members in culturally appropriate ways
4. Psychologists should view selves as facilitators of healing wisdom in Indigenous communities
5. Be prepared to include family and community members in treatment
6. Better understand how to support community members in delivering traditional interventions (e.g., on-the-land interventions)

Education

1. Arrange summit or series of workshops to support decolonizing courses¹
2. Assist in developing relevant best practices document, toolkit, and website, and coordinate workshops to implement best practices
6. Research and promote evidence-based strategies similar to [Their Voices Will Guide Us](#) (Bearhead, n.d.) to help support Indigenous and non-Indigenous children's understanding of the effects of colonization
7. Use Indigenous-created curriculum and integrate Indigenous content in the curriculum
8. Provide resources to the public to support Indigenous and non-Indigenous adults who haven't been exposed to Indigenous history and the impacts of colonization
9. Fund, collaborate on, and mobilize community-based, Indigenous-led, trauma-informed, and culturally safe education programs that address racism, de-stigmatization, intersectionality, intergenerational trauma, and human trafficking on behalf of Indigenous Peoples' Psychology section of the CPA

Epistemology

1. Accept more qualitative work in their journals, leading a culture shift for others to follow
2. Reward researchers doing work with Indigenous Peoples
3. Encourage and publish community-grounded Participatory Action Research done *with* Indigenous women and girls
4. Reach out to Indigenous people involved in psychology nationally to understand how to

¹ We encourage readers to review Tuck and Yang (2012) before using the word "decolonize" given the risks of metaphorizing the word. Fiola and MacKinnon (2020) provide a good description of the differences between decolonization, indigenization, and reconciliation.

ground psychology in Indigenous worldviews

5. Listen to critical voices in the discipline
6. Recognize value and importance of Indigenous epistemologies, culture, and tradition in conceptualizing challenges and healing, including Indigenous knowledges, elders, and knowledge-keepers
7. Recognize importance of land connection and natural environment in Indigenous concepts of health, healing, treatment, cultural identity, and individual identity

Individual

1. Stay curious
2. Practice cultural humility
3. Slow down to listen and engage with Indigenous communities
4. Practice from a trauma-informed lens

Justice

1. Fund and make an official call to develop a classification scale with fairly compensated Indigenous consultants
2. Develop early intervention in crisis situations
3. Facilitate victim support services for people in remote settings
4. Improve accessibility to meaningful and culturally appropriate justice practices by working with Indigenous communities to develop restorative justice programs to support Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals, both as victims and offenders
5. Empower Indigenous communities through the revitalization of Indigenous law and Indigenous models of justice while also supporting culturally safe care for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA individuals based on the needs and unique traditions of individual communities
6. Adopt a Two-Eyed Seeing² framework when working with Indigenous communities so that trans-cultural collaborations are built around reciprocity and mutual respect

Recruitment

1. Build Indigenous capacity by compensating Indigenous people for this work and building infrastructure for Indigenous community connection
2. Require accredited programs hire a representative proportion of Indigenous faculty
3. Move away from Eurocentric admission requirements like GPA, GRE, publications, and conference presentations. Accept alternatives like other initiatives or volunteer work
4. Create Indigenous-only admission streams and reserve admissions spots for Indigenous people
5. Significant financial support and incentives for Indigenous applicants only
6. Advocate for equitable funding for traditional, community-based programs

² To see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together (Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall)

Services

1. Accountable social services (ensure cultural safety and inclusion)
2. One of the women's recommendations: be accessible, challenge judgment, treat trauma
3. Recognize that treatment, research, assessment, and programs are needed in Indigenous languages in part because language can connect Indigenous people to land, traditions, worldviews, and future wellbeing
4. Psychologists providing treatment should know how important culture is to healing and be skilled and supportive allies to those reclaiming their culture

Social Media

1. Issue a formal resolution regarding Call for Justice 6.1 including key findings from research demonstrating the harmful consequences of Indigenous stereotypes.

Training

1. Require accredited programs to enforce mandatory antiracism training for all faculty and students
2. Provide context-specific training
3. Training in collaboration with Indigenous communities
4. Facilitate the development of virtual practicum placement available to all clinical psychology graduate students that incorporates and validates traditional ways of knowing and healing to create cultural competency in working with Indigenous Peoples

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Appendix B: Panel Questions from the Audience and Panelist Responses

1. Question 1: As a white psychologist, how do I balance integrating Indigenous epistemology from community knowledge keepers without imposing mental and emotional labor?

- Answer: Do as much self-learning as you can by reading books, watching documentaries, or listening to podcasts done by or with Indigenous people. Provide knowledge keepers with honoraria and wellness resources (e.g., provide phone numbers to call, websites to visit, if they're feeling mentally or emotionally drained after sharing) to honor their time.
- Answer: Excellent suggestions above. I'd like to echo the importance of compensating people for their time and providing resources for wellness.
 - Indigenous allyship toolkit: [http://www.wellbeingwaterloo.ca/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Indigenous Allyship Toolkit inside pages 10 5x8 5 PRINT.pdf](http://www.wellbeingwaterloo.ca/blog/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Indigenous-Allyship-Toolkit-inside-pages-10-5x8-5-PRINT.pdf)
 - Guide to Allyship <https://guidetoallyship.com/> (This was developed framed around anti-Black racism; the specific struggles vary but statements regarding inaction as an "ally" very much apply)
- Answer: I echo both responses, and will extend the first by providing some podcasts people can reference for self-learning:
 - *Media Indigena*
 - *Medicine for the Resistance*
 - *All my Relations*
 - *Unreserved*
 - I'd also suggest reading the book *Elements of Indigenous Style: A Guide for Writing By and About Indigenous Peoples* by Gregory Younging. It includes case studies about the experiences of non-Indigenous people doing research with Indigenous peoples which includes how they have found ways to successfully approach community engagement. The book is quite short but is an excellent (I'd even say fundamental) resource.

2. Question 2: How do we address those peers in academic psychology who commit harm in hiding behind "we lack resources" in addressing the needed changes in Canadian Psychology Departments?

- Answer: Share free resources with them for things they can do on their own that can help – reading books, watching documentaries, or listening to podcasts done by or with Indigenous people. There are other free options too – signing and sending petitions to your university administration, creating ad hoc committees within the department to address what issues you can, etc. Maybe there are different ways to use existing resources – can professional development funds in the university be used for such initiatives? What about faculty initiative funds/grants?
- Answer: Is there a polite way to highlight that this is simply not true? It's a pretty weak excuse. First, can they operationalize what "resources" means to them? Academia/higher education is a lucrative industry and if departments truly prioritize harms against Indigenous and other racialized people in Canada, they can revise budgets to find funding for ventures related to this. As described in the comment above,

additional funding might be available at a university level, and there are free resources abound – without requiring much effort to dig up.

- Answer: Walk with them. Personally, I have volunteered countless hours to help academics meet Elders, follow protocol, and walk them through guest speaker support. It's a small start but often people are more confident in moving forward after support.
- Answer: Universities say resources are lacking until there is enough pressure, and then all of a sudden there are resources that seem to come out of nowhere. Putting pressure on universities and faculties at the right time and place, they will always find the resources. Simply saying there aren't any and throwing up their hands and walking away is simply a strategy to not do the work. I would be wary of someone that says that and does nothing to try to find resources. Petitions, emails/letters, committees, raising awareness for things to change, sharing free resources, continuing the conversation without losing momentum, etc., – when enough people are on board and speaking out, they will find the resources.

3. Question 3: How to address the continued pervasive white male influence in higher education and training, that is interfering with making the changes we know will produce good results for all – TRC and MMIWG.

- Answer: Encourage your department to hire diversely and support racialized students and students who identify as a gender other than man in your department. You might simply provide information to these students on other supports on campus or connect with them to provide infrastructure and support for a student group within the department or faculty if it doesn't already exist. Faculty and staff members can help by supporting their students to push against such influences and students can help by building a community to support one another. Student communities can also cross institutions as there are often few racialized students in psychology departments.
- Answer: Of course, this is a huge task that doesn't have any easy, one-size-fits-all solution. This question is likely best answered by each department doing an honest and thorough review of the current state of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in their department and identifying key areas where they are perpetuating white male supremacy. If your department doesn't have an EDI committee or some other organized group that is 1) diverse in and of itself, and 2) dedicated to exploring EDI issues within the department, it's likely ideal to start one. Many departments did not have an organized group addressing these issues prior to the death of George Floyd so many are still in their infancy and likely need support. The specific tasks that each school and department need to undertake will vary but encouraging communication and collaboration between different departments' EDI committees/representatives is ideal. Ultimately, we need to make psychology and our departments less hostile and more welcoming for marginalized groups and there are many ways to do so (some excellent suggestions described in the comment above). Framing it in this way, as opposed to reducing white male influence, is likely to encounter less backlash from the white man majority (although backlash is inevitable).
- Answer: The suggestions above are wonderful – I also think it's important to not only recruit diverse students and support them in creating community and pushing against

male white supremacy which still has an iron fist rule in our departments, it's imperative to recruit faculty and staff that are diverse and social justice-oriented as well. Things can only change through a top-down approach more so than a bottom-up approach – students have very little power in faculties and have a lot more to lose if they piss off the wrong people with pushing for necessary changes especially around the privilege and power of white folks who want to maintain that privilege in their respective areas. Students have shown to be the most vocal but are afraid of pushing too far in case they face repercussions, those in power need to be the ones to make these changes without the constant push from students to do so. It's therefore imperative that there are active efforts made to recruit diverse staff and faculty to positions of power. This will not happen overnight, there needs to be a concerted effort to do so. White people that are in support of changes to address white supremacy, systemic racism, and lack of safety for Indigenous people and all other racialized people need to be allies. Not just with nice words, but with action. It shouldn't be up to the marginalized and those most affected by this racism to push for changes, white people need to support these groups in doing so, white people need to put their privilege on the line if they are truly in support of making changes in our departments and schools. If white folks are afraid of pushing for necessary changes, imagine what Indigenous students, staff, or faculty feel like yet they are the ones doing it time and time again and they have the most to lose. If there are no or very few BIPOC in your faculty or student body, it is even more imperative for white allies to push for these changes and shouldn't only do so when a BIPOC person speaks up, if they are even present in a faculty or student body.