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Truth on Trial
Indigenous News Media and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Residential School (IRS) system was a means of forcibly assimilating Indigenous peoples into the body politic of the dominant Euro-Canadian society. From the time of its incorporation in 1876 to the closure of the last school in 1996, the IRS system was home to grievous abuse and rampant neglect of students. Following residential school survivors' efforts to seek retribution and redress through class-action lawsuits, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established as a state-sanctioned mechanism of witnessing to the impacts and legacy of the IRS system. However, owing to an imprecise mandate, a non-transitional political context, and a non-retributive scope, available evidence suggests that public understandings of the TRC's terms of reference and function have been mixed, at best. In an effort to move beyond considerations of mainstream media representations of the formal process of reconciliation, the present study undertakes a quantitative content and framing analysis of Indigenous community newspapers – a remarkably underutilised source material – to better understand how the process of reconciliation was contextualised and problematised within the subaltern of Indigenous news media. Overall, the results of the present study align to a considerable degree with the hypothesised outcomes, and suggest that while reconciliation remained a newsworthy topic of deliberation in Indigenous news media, scepticism, criticism, and constructive refusal to a number of its key assumptions may have constrained broader import. Ethical and methodological issues are addressed, and directions for future research are identified.

INTRODUCTION

Few moments in Canadian history paint a more fulsome picture of the depravity to which Indigenous peoples have been subject than the Indian Residential School (IRS) system. An educational system 'in name only' (TRC, 2015: v), the IRS system was jointly operated by the Government of Canada and the Catholic, United, and Anglican Churches (AHF, 2008), and served the express purpose of forcibly assimilating Indigenous children into the dominant Euro-Canadian culture through an environment encouraging of ferocious neglect, systemic racism, and rampant abuse. Following the closure of the last residential school in 1996, former students – or, more appropriately, survivors – initiated a process of redress through public disclosures and class-action lawsuits. As time wore on, 'it became clear that traditional legal proceedings...were insufficient to adequately address the restitution sought by IRS Survivors' (Feldthusen, 2007: 10).

An alternative was settled upon in the form of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), mandating the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). Granted a broad mandate to produce 'an accurate and public historical record...of the IRS system and its impacts' (TRC, 2016: 4), the fundamentally contestable nature of the TRC's terms of reference – magnified by its quasi-legal standing, non-retributive scope, and the abnormal political context from which it emerged – led to marked differences in public understandings of its precise function (Flisfeder, 2010). Moreover, as a state-sanctioned, consensus-oriented mechanism of witnessing (Moon, 2006), the TRC was encircled by critics who called for a re-evaluation of the very notion of reconciliation, casting it as a morally cumbersome, ideologically rife, and quiescent notion of justice (e.g. Alfred, 2005; Coulthard, 2014; James, 2015; Simpson, 2016).

In light of the uniquely discursive function of the Canadian TRC, the present study undertakes to better examine the relative salience and framing of the formal process of reconciliation in Indigenous news media over the course of the TRC's official mandate. To this end, Indigenous news media is conceptualised as a site of active contestation and resistance to dominant reconciliation narratives (Spivak, 1988; Ginsburg, 1994; Corntassel et al., 2009; Chow-White & McMahon, 2011), welcoming of countervailing meaning, and imparted with a unique capacity to shape public understandings of a liminal moment in Canadian history.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualising truth and reconciliation

Truth and Reconciliation Commissions[1] are temporary institutional mechanisms 'often created by a national government, to investigate, document, and report upon human rights abuses within a country over a specified period of time' (Teitel, 2003: 11). In allowing victims of political violence to 'speak the unspeakable and inscribe the event for the first time' (Payne, 2008: 17), TRCs seek to produce an official narrative of collective memory, brought into being through testimonial encounter. In practice, however, neither the telling of truth nor the catalysis of reconciliation can be taken as natural emanations of the act of confession. Indeed, as a state-sanctioned, certified space of listening, the impulses of a TRC steer it toward concord over discord, as it seeks to define its own 'objects, subjects, concepts, and strategies, [and govern] the production of knowledge and statements of 'fact' and 'value'' (Moon, 2006: 10). Thus, while the notion of reconciliation is contingent up the Derridean notion of hospitality – that is, a 'welcoming of the Other, that engages in an art and a poetics that exceeds even as it depends upon the political' (Derrida, 1982/1988, quoted in Schaffer, 2008: 94) – consideration must always be given to the fact that the institutional space of listening itself is constitutive of and conditioned by distinct forms of knowledge and regimes of truth (Foucault, 1966).

Reconciliation in Canada

The emergence of a discourse of reconciliation in Canada – what Tavuchis (1991) terms 'the call' for reconciliation – is directly and singularly attributable to the protracted agonism of Indigenous peoples. In the wake of tensions exposed by the tumultuous 'Indian summer' of 1990 (*see:* Coulthard, 2014: 115), the Government of Canada responded by establishing the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), which was tasked with investigating the evolution (and devolution) of the state's relationship with Indigenous peoples. Arguably Canada's first 'reconciliatory forum' as such, (Henderson and Wakeham, 2013: 20), RCAP's final report contained sweeping recommendations for change – including restitution of Indigenous lands, creation of an Indigenous order of parliament, and public acknowledgement of the atrocities committed within the IRS system (AHF, 2008). Coinciding with the launch of RCAP, former Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Phil Fontaine came forth to

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[1] In practice, the terminology varies from one commission to the next; Chile's *Comision de Verdad y Reconciliacion*, established in 1990, was the first to use this name and most TRCs since have opted for a similar title.

disclose the abuse he had suffered as a child at Fort Alexander School (TRC, 2015: 130). Thousands of others soon followed.

Working within the parameters of standard tort law, survivors' initial attempts at finding justice were done through the courts (Henderson, 2015). In this arrangement, survivors stood 'alone... pitted against the powers and resources of the state' (Feldthusen, 2007: 67) – hardly the most appropriate means of seeking accountability, but 'in the face of persistent and widespread disavowal of systemic abuse and discrimination' (Henderson, 2015: 3), it was a start. While many lower courts refused compensation for issues of importance to Indigenous peoples – 'such as the loss of language and culture' (TRC, 2015: 130) – by 2005, more than 18,000 lawsuits had been launched against the Government of Canada, the churches, and individual perpetrators (Llewellyn, 2002). As the inertia behind such cases grew, the Government sought alternatives to quell the rising costs of litigation.

In May, 2006, an agreement was reached in the form of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) – the largest class-action suit in Canada's history (TRC, 2015). The IRSSA consisted of five components: first, it established the Common Experience Payment (CEP), 'through which former students would receive a payment of $10,000 for the first year that they attended a residential school, and an additional $3,000 for each additional year or partial year of attendance' (TRC, 2015: 138). Second, it established the Independent Assessment Process (IAP), tasked with overseeing and administering 'additional claims of students who were physically or sexually abused at the schools' (TRC, 2015: 138). Third, it mandated $125 million in financial support to the Aboriginal Health Foundation (AHF)[2], a non-profit organisation principally concerned with facilitating community-based, Indigenous-led mental-health initiatives for residential school survivors (AHF, 2014). Fourth, it mandated that financial and administrative support be ear-marked for commemoration of residential schools (TRC, 2015: 139). Lastly, it mandated the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC).

Idiosyncrasies of the Canadian TRC

Typical TRCs have been grounded in a political context of transitional justice – that is, 'a conception of justice associated with periods of political change, characterized by legal responses to confront the wrongdoings of repressive predecessor regimes' (Teitel, 2003: 1). But in Canada, neither regime change nor radical structural overhaul are imminent prospects

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[2] While the federal government initially agreed to extend the AHF's mandate, funding was ultimately cut and the AHF was dissolved on September 30, 2014.

(James, 2015b)[3]. This, in concert with a multitude of structural anomalies, have made both the function and ideology of the Canadian TRC markedly different from prior commissions.

First, the process of reconciliation in Canada is the first to have been directly initiated through civil litigation. As such, Niezen (2013) notes that 'it did not have the kind of national and international attention that feeds into a broad public will to overcome a legacy of state-sponsored harm' and thus 'to an unusual degree among truth commissions, it [faced] the challenge of persuasion' (p. 3, 4). Second, it is the only truth commission where 'the victimization of children is the single, central, unwavering focus' (Niezen, 2013: 5), a fact which led it to undertake a non-adversarial, 'victim-centred' approach.[4] Third, as a consequence of its focus on victimisation of children, the TRC was 'unusually active in its involvement with mental health intervention, and hence with promotion of the ideas and categories associated with mental illness and recovery' (p. 5), a fact reflected in the IRSSA's aforementioned mandating of funding to the AHF. Fourth, the TRC's ability to compel testimony was explicitly curtailed, while any aspect of a retributive component was removed altogether (see: Schedule N *Section* 2, sub-section (c), (f) in TRC, 2016: 2)[5]. As Niezen (2013) argues, this had the effect of making the TRC 'an information-gathering rather than a judicial body' (p. 4) – or put differently, less a matter of punishment than of certifying a specific account of history through voluntary, discursive means (McMahon and Chow-White, 2011). Finally, in stark contrast to most prior Commissions, the TRC's mandate contained an *a priori* clause which outlined that it could 'at its discretion, hold sessions *in camera*, or require that sessions be held *in camera*' (see: Schedule N, *Section 2*, sub-section (e) in TRC, 2016: 2) – that is, a clause to limit public and media exposure until such time as it felt appropriate.

Critiques of reconciliation

In light of the aforementioned anomalies inherent to the Canadian TRC, a number of prominent scholars have expressed fears that the TRC offered little more than *pro forma* political theatre within an 'official period of sanctioned transgression' (St. John, 2008: 10), offering a symbolic reward at the cost of substantive deprivation (Edelman, 1964).

[3] Among prior TRCs, Australia's is in a sense the most similar to the Canadian TRC. *See:* Gunstone, 2007 or James (2010).

[4] This approach was adopted as a direct result of concerns raised by the AFN (see: Fontaine, in AHF, 2014: xi). James (2012) has characterised this as a 'Carnivalesque' approach, insofar as it grants agency among victims.

[5] In an effort to both promote the TRC's mandate and work around the constraints posed by the completely voluntary nature of the delivery of testimony, the TRC hosted seven 'National Events'. Events were held in Winnipeg, MB (June 18, 2010); Inuvik, NT (July 1, 2011); Halifax, NS (October 26-29, 2011); Saskatoon, SK (June 21-24, 2012); Montreal, QC (April 24-27, 2013); Vancouver, BC (September 18-21, 2013); and Edmonton, AB (March 27-30, 2014).

Underpinning this unease was the TRC's reliance on a model of reconciliation informed by a liberal politics of recognition (e.g. Taylor, 2009) which, in non-transitional contexts such as Canada, 'provides a ready frame in terms of which reconciliation can be conceived' (Schaap, 2004: 523). Ignoring calls for more substantive elements of reconciliation – for example, the settlement of outstanding land claims – such a politics of recognition rests upon goodwill gestures of accommodation and inclusion, operationalised and carried out through the provision of state-sanctioned 'spaces of witnessing'[6].

Critics have long contended that politics of recognition may be used to supplant broader concerns for socioeconomic redistribution (e.g. Fraser and Honneth, 2004), and at the outset to the TRCs inauguration, Alfred (2005) argued that the refusal to offer a wider conception of justice '[was] itself a further injustice' (p. 152) – or as Turner (2006) characterised it, a rescinded claim to Indigenous land which threatened to enshrine colonial injustices. As Corntassel et al. (2009) would later argue, the TRCs terms of reference were such that 'the issue of land [was] treated as a separate issue from that of the residential school, ignoring the fact that the issues with which survivors from the residential school era contend are rooted in the forced removal of entire families and communities from their homelands' (p. 11). Rather than submit to such a superficial conception of justice, critics such as Coulthard (2007), in concert with Brudholm (2008), suggest that the entire moral project of reconciliation – steadfast in its promotion of forgiveness as preferable to the harbouring of 'bad' emotions – is more exculpatory than cathartic. Just as Fanon (1952) saw both justness and emancipatory potential in 'hatred, contempt, and resentment' directed toward colonial powers, critics in this vein force consideration of an entirely different path forward – that of righteous resentment, or 'a politicized expression of Indigenous anger and outrage directed at a structural and symbolic violence that still structures our lives, our relations with others, and our relationships with land' (Coulthard, 2014: 109).

Reconciliation and media

While the underlying ideologies of reconciliation make it both morally contentious and politically ambiguous, in those contexts where it is undertaken, 'A successful truth and reconciliation commission…must have the wisdom to build a bridge over the chasm that separates truth and reconciliation, but it must also take on the responsibility of sharing this wisdom widely' (Flisfeder, 2010: 3). In describing the uniquely discursive character of the

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[6] For Althusser (1971), the politics of recognition are merely a component to the Ideological State Apparatus, insofar as they seek concord over discord, securing social unity through deference to state authority.

Canadian TRC, Niezen (2013) takes a rather terminal tone, writing 'it will succeed if it convinces a sufficiently large number of citizens of the harm, done by the schools and the need to overcome it, and it will fail if too many remain un-persuaded of the reality of these harms' (p. 6). As such, in all TRC's – but to a unique degree in Canada – the media serve as 'key sources of information about and engagement with "reconciliation"' (Chow-White and McMahon, 2011: 345), both as the principal agents involved in shaping mediated representations of reconciliation (Bourdieu, 1991), and in terms of sharing 'meaning-generating perspectives free from coercion and distortion' (Habermas, 2003: 37).

Media approaches: agenda-setting and framing

Beyond conceiving of the role of media in processes of reconciliation at an abstract level, it is of course necessary to more adequately operationalise *how* media are so involved. From the perspective of agenda-setting theorists, public discourse is in large part determined by the inclusion, repetition, and reification of specific news elements, such that a degree of relevance and salience is conferred upon issues encountered more frequently (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Fowler, 1991). In the context of reconciliation, the media may thus encourage (or hinder) reconciliation through inclusion (or omission) of key narratives, which provide a template of understanding beyond the confines of the TRC's decidedly temporary spaces of embodied listening (Anderson, 1983). In contexts such as the South African TRC, the media's ability to elevate the process of reconciliation to the status of a bonafide public media event (Dayan and Katz, 1992) illustrates the productive capacity of agenda-setting power (see: Krabill, 2001). On the other hand, a focus on less overt means of heuristic influence is provided by a framing approach, which considers 'the deliberate *or* accidental transmission of norms and ideological formations' (McQuail, 2005: 308) embedded in news media. As processes of reconciliation are 'publicly defined and framed through media: newspapers, television newscasts, internet blogs and other forms of public communication' (Chow-White and McMahon, 2011: 345), curated schematic arrangements may subtly shape and constrain the nature of wrong-doing, the scope of complicity, and the assignment of agency (Henderson, 2015).

Competing discourses of reconciliation

Public expectations and understandings of truth and reconciliation – what happened, to whom, by whom, and how the impacts ought to be dealt with in the present tense – naturally vary from one national context to the next[7]. As such, reconciliation is a scalar construct (Crocker, 2000), and in practice it ranges from minimalist notions of contentious coexistence (e.g. Uganda, *see:* Quinn, 2003), to maximalist conceptions of harmonious national unity (e.g. Australia, *see:* Gunstone, 2007). In Canada, two dominant conceptions have emerged, and find their basis in what Chrisjohn and Young (1995) describe as the 'standard' and 'irregular' accounts of the IRS system.

The first such conception – deemed the 'reductive frame' (Nagy and Gillespie, 2015) – 'disposes neatly of all problems associated with Indian Residential Schooling' (p. 4) by locating wrong-doing to the (distant) past, and characterising the IRS system as the site of exceptional, perverse, and above all 'individual crimes of sexual and physical assault' (Henderson, 2015: 2). In describing the remedies to such past-tense-wrongs – that is, the path to reconciliation – such a conception promotes public acts of contrition, governmental benevolence, and well-meaning ailment of psychically-damaged individuals. As such, the reductive frame allows 'the neo-liberal taxpayer-citizen [to] empathize with the individual traumatized by violence, whilst dismissing broader claims about residential schooling' (Henderson, 2015: 2).

In contrast, the latter conception – deemed the 'expansive frame' (Nagy and Gillespie (2015) – positions the IRS system as 'one of many attempts at the genocide of Aboriginal Peoples' (Chrisjohn and Young, 1995: 5), in which 'the disruption of spiritually grounded relationships to land and kin that sustained communal, place-based existences' (Henderson, 2015: 9) was merely a precondition of colonial expansionism. As such, attempts to define the IRS system as a static and historical relic are seen to represent a 'rhetorical maneuver designed to obscure…the moral and financial accountability of Euro-Canadian society in a continuing record of Crimes Against Humanity' (Chrisjohn and Young, 1995: 5; *see also*: Simpson, in Adams, 2016, p.1), manifest in the ongoing material and cultural dispossession of Indigenous peoples. In contrast to the therapeutic discourses favoured by the former conception, the expansive frame thereby invokes a 'claim of a collective experience of cultural loss' (Henderson, 2015, p.2) and privileges more holistic or culturally-appropriate approaches to intergenerational, community-level healing (Waldram, 2004; Wilson, 2008). Finally, the

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[7] For an overview of some of the more general models of truth and reconciliation, see Hamber & van der Merwe (1998), Crocker (2000), or Torpey (2003).

expansive frame situates the locus of control over the process of reconciliation firmly with Indigenous peoples themselves, seeing reconciliation as simply 'the latest chapter in a centuries-long struggle for aboriginal rights and self-determination vis-à-vis the state' (Chow-White and McMahon, 2011 p. 348).

Locating Indigenous media

Mainstream media resonance is critical to shaping the contours of public understandings of reconciliation, particularly among non-Indigenous audiences for whom the process of reconciliation may be felt to be of little consequence (Gamson and Wolsfeld, 1993). Unfortunately, available evidence suggests that over the course of the TRC's mandate, mainstream media institutions have typically embraced a reductive frame of both the IRS system and the process of reconciliation, which has stressed 'inter-group comity and fence-mending, and that treats the Canadian settler society's contribution to these goals in terms of listening, learning, and goodwill' (James, 2015b: 2). Of course, this is not altogether surprising, as Canadian mainstream media institutions have historically approached issues of importance to Indigenous peoples with ambivalence and disinterest, at best. In the intermittent periods where such institutions have felt compelled to showcase their progressive nature through tokenised representations of Indigenous voice, reified stereotypes continue to abound, with Indigenous peoples variously portrayed as conflictual, deviant, irrational, lazy, uneducated, entitled, promiscuous, and above all, homogeneous (see: Singer, 1982; Valaskakis, 1994; Claxton-Oldfield and Keefe, 1999; Harding, 2006; Robertson and Anderson, 2011; Morrison et al., 2014). That Indigenous peoples continue to be so profoundly underserved by, and under-represented within Canadian mainstream media, should serve as a reminder that such institutions remain 'ill equipped to handle analysis of the political landscape or the complex history of Indigenous peoples' rights, title and land issues' (Minifie, 2014: 1).

Thankfully, the mediascape is by no means homologous or devoid of feasible dissensus, and as Foucault (1966) rightly asserted, 'where there is power, there is resistance' (p. 95). While Indigenous peoples continue to be both structurally and symbolically excluded from Canadian mainstream media, the rich subaltern of Indigenous news media can serve as a counter to the 'democratic deficit' inherent in mainstream discourses (Spivak, 1988; Hafsteinsson, 2008). Through creative integration of cultural praxis into media practices, Indigenous peoples have augmented available mediation opportunity structures (Cammaerts, 2012) and enjoined the ability to 'share their own information, stories, and perspectives with the world, expand their sphere of influence, [and] mobilize political support' (Wilson et al., 2015: 27).

Many Indigenous media practices involve a privileging of 'Aboriginal cultural knowledge…including use of indigenous languages, reference to the accounts of elders, exploration of traditional values, and documentation of the past and present experience of colonialism' (Bredin, 2012: 197). Still, just as 'the concepts of 'alternative media', 'community media', 'civil society media' and 'rhizomatic media'…have proven…to be highly elusive' (Bailey et al., 2008: 5), the heterogeneity of voice inherent to Indigenous news media makes subsuming it into a singular modal category both futile and ill-advised. Certainly, most Indigenous news media is at least in partial alignment with conventional interpretations of independent media, both because 'few public subsidies by government have been forthcoming' (Roth, 2014: 8) and because available funding has proven fickle and unreliable (Bredin, 2012). Further, Indigenous media conforms in many cases to models of alternative media, as it '[serves] the needs of a particular group or community that is poorly served by dominant commercial media' (Skinner, 2015: 200). Moreover, inasmuch as Indigenous media typically serves 'actually existing, geographically bounded communities'[8] (Atton, 2015: 8), it may be understood to be in concert with specific conceptions of community media (e.g. Bailey et al., 2008: 53). Perhaps more than anything, Indigenous news media practices share considerable overlap with Rodriguez' (2001) notion of citizens' media – that is, 'media practices where the living-out of those practices or media performances is at least as important as the media products' (quoted in Atton, 2015: 3) – insofar as the position of Indigenous news producers constitutes an essential component to their politics[9] (Haraway, 1988; Hall, 1997).

Conceptual framework and research questions

Irrespective of the national context in which they are grounded, processes of reconciliation involve the *re*-imagining of community (to paraphrase Anderson, 1983) through certification and integration of collective memory, consisting of 'both the remembered and the forgotten' (Andrews, 2003: 1). In Canada, the TRC's mandate, terms of reference, and structure was such that it was vested with a uniquely discursive character, and carried out its principal mandate – to acknowledge and 'promote awareness and public education of Canadians about the IRS system and its impacts' (TRC, 2015: 1) – in the shadow of an enduring national consciousness intent on annihilating (or, *un*-imagining) the very core of Indigenous being. Where state-sanctioned, formalised spaces of listening imply 'identification with the nation as a legitimate

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[8] Just as the term 'Indigenous' connotes located belonging, a belief in the coevality of place and selfhood underscores many traditional Indigenous epistemological outlooks, and thus a core structuring notion of most Indigenous media is its grounding in a community of *geography* (see: Wilson et al., 2015).

[9] Consider the manner in which *The Nation*, one of the five publications used in the present study, describes itself: 'Our readers are simply not reached by other publications, the Nation is *their* magazine' (*The Nation*, 2016: 1).

and assumed territorial domain' (Grenfell, 2008: 87), the present study conceptualises Indigenous media as an active space of subaltern voice which distributes agency 'among Indigenous peoples located *outside of* the official discourse realm' (Andrusieczko, 2012: 113) and through which the path to reconciliation may be variously delineated, disseminated, contested, or augmented.

As such, the present study finds concert with scholars such as Ginsburg (1994) and Battiste (2011), who have made explicit the link between Indigenous media and broader efforts to reclaim Indigenous voice and vision, and understands Indigenous news media to be a vital space of political contestation through which 'Indigenous methodologies and experiential knowledge [may serve] as a counter-narrative to the Canadian state's notion of reconciliation' (Corntassel et al., 2009: 6). To this end, the present study sets out to analyse the salience, prevalence, and framing of reconciliation discourses through content analysis of Indigenous news media over a six-year period, and poses two primary research questions:

1. To what extent has the tone toward and frequency of reporting on the formal process of reconciliation differed over time, and across Indigenous community newspapers?
2. How was the process of reconciliation framed and critiqued in Indigenous community newspapers, and to whom did authors assign the locus of control for guiding the process?

As Riffe et al. (1998) note that 'quantitative content analysis is most efficient when explicit hypotheses...are posed' (p. 37), four broad hypotheses were formulated in response to the above research questions:

H1: In light of the numerous structural, ontological, and administrative criticisms levelled at the TRC over the course of its mandate (*e.g.* Alfred, 2005; Flisfeder, 2010; Coulthard, 2014) it is predicted that a majority of articles will identify ongoing constraints to the formal process of reconciliation, and that on average, the tone of coverage will be more negative than positive.

H2: In line with agenda-setting scholars who posit that the relative salience of an issue is magnified by its repetition (e.g. Fowler, 1991), it is predicted that coverage toward the formal process of reconciliation will increase with time, with statistically significant peaks in coverage immediately prior to and following each of the TRC's 7 National Events; moreover, it is predicted that the depth of coverage (operationalised as word count) afforded to articles with a primary focus on reconciliation will be significantly greater than those without.

H3: In line with the view that reconciliation is a scalar and fundamentally contestable construct (e.g. Chrisjohn and Young, 1995; Crocker, 2000; Torpey, 2003; Nagy & Gillespie, 2015), it is predicted that articles in Indigenous community newspapers will tend toward adoption of an expansive frame, as indicated by their topical emphases, contextualisation, privileging of Indigenous voice, and framing of reconciliation as an ongoing process (McMahon & Chow-White, 2011).

H4: In line with the view that Indigenous media may serve as 'a site of contestation and resistance, offering alternative discourses' (Chow-White & McMahon, 2011, p.5) in supplement of broader efforts toward self-determination (Ginsburg, 1991, 1994; Coulthard, 2007; Alfred, 2005; Andrusieczko, 2012), it is predicted that Indigenous community newspapers will tend to frame Indigenous peoples as primarily agentic in guiding the process of reconciliation.

METHODS

Rationale for study

Despite the evident centrality of media to processes of reconciliation, scholarship from within the field of media and communications remains remarkably scant. Within the limited pool of prior research centred on the mediation of processes of reconciliation, a disproportionate share has focused on the indebtedness of the 1995 South African TRC to mainstream media institutions. In one of the earliest such studies, Bird and Garda (1997) analyse print media coverage over the course of the South African TRC's mandate, while subsequent studies by Skjerdal (2000), Krabill (2001), Gibson (2004), Verdoolaege (2005), and Cantero (2011) expand their scope to include broadcast media. Evans (2016) offers a dissenting opinion, arguing that the role of media in the South African TRC has been largely overstated. As for other national contexts, Augoustinos and Penny (2001) examine mediated reconciliation discourses prior to the initiation of Australia's TRC, Grenfell (2008) examines the role of media in constructing national narratives following East Timor's TRC, and LaPlante and Phenicie (2010) examine the role of media in facilitating transitional justice following Peru's TRC.

A total of four studies to date have examined mediated reconciliation discourses in the context of Canada: in the earliest such study, Angel (2012) elucidates the manner in which 'Indigenous peoples mobilize memory, construct ideas of nationhood, and negotiate reconciliation' (p. 35) through analysis of personal effects and archival materials. Henderson (2015) critically evaluates the emergence of a 'common-sense' discourse on residential

schools in the decade leading up to the IRSSA, while James (2015b) undertakes preliminary research to analyse dominant representations of reconciliation 'before, during, and over the course of the life of the TRC' (p. 2). In the most comprehensive study to date, Nagy and Gillespie (2015) examine a two-year period of Canadian mainstream newsprint coverage to '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' (p. 6). As such, there remains a distinct lack of research on mediated representations of reconciliation outside of mainstream media coverage, which has undertaken longitudinal analysis over the duration of the TRC's mandate, or which has analysed any facet of such representations since its mandate officially ended with the release of the TRC Final Report on 15 December, 2015.

Rationale for methodology

In the rare instances where Indigenous community newspapers have received any form of academic scrutiny, ethnographic methodologies (e.g. Hafsteinsson, 2013) and discourse analyses (e.g. Retzlaff, 2006) have predominated. In the present study, quantitative content analysis was adopted as the primary methodology, as it was felt to confer a number of benefits. First, the unobtrusive and nonreactive nature of content analysis precluded the need for human participants, and thereby minimised what could have otherwise been utterly paralysing ethical constraints in light of the study's engagement with a highly-sensitive, politically contentious issue with a high likelihood of invoking potentially traumatising memories (see: Becker and Geer, 1957). Second, the adoption of a more 'top-down' methodology such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was felt to be both infeasible and inappropriate, insofar as it would necessitate deep knowledge of Indigenous epistemological outlooks, idiosyncratic conceptions of intellectual copyright, and cultural protocols (see: Wilson, 2008; Picart, 2016). Third, the reductionist nature of content analysis was felt to be well-suited to the longitudinal design of the present study, which required systematic categorisation of the data in order to render it manageable (Riffe et al., 1998; Berger, 2000). Finally, the empirical nature of content analysis is such that it allows for the reproducibility of findings (Holsti, 1969; Rice and Ezzy, 1999), and in light of the paucity of prior literature, this was felt to be a significant affordance to future research.

Procedure

Materials

With one exception[10], the unit of analysis in the present study was limited to the textual content of digitised Indigenous community newspapers. This decision had several bases. First, while Avison (2000) has noted that the Indigenous public sphere remains largely restricted to radio and newsprint – a fact which Retzlaff (2006) and Hafsteinsson (2013) reify – Indigenous media producers have more recently made abundant use of digital technologies in order to make their content available to a much wider audience than has historically been possible though newsprint alone. Second, the relatively low production costs associated with newsprint is such that publications often encompass a wider range of views than other media, where financial constraints remain prohibitive (Bailey et al., 2008). Finally, and most importantly, the systematic study of Indigenous community newspapers in Canada remains almost entirely absent, and as such, the present study sought to address a sizeable gap in existing scholarship.

Sampling

As Riffe et al. (1998) have noted, at times, 'sampling requires creative solutions' (p. 101). Indigenous community newspapers are not indexed by LexisNexis, Canadian Newsstand ProQuest, Factiva, or any other comprehensive database, and as such, a multistage sampling regime was required to create the sample used in the present study. To develop a census of active Indigenous community newspapers, telephone and email consultations were held with the lead archival teams of the University of British Columbia's X̱wi7x̱wa Library and the University of Saskatchewan's Indigenous Studies library portal, which account for two of the largest collections of Indigenous media in Canada. These consultations produced a list of $n = 51$ Indigenous community newspapers, which was narrowed to $n = 28$ after culling all those with incomplete archives or which were not available in digitised form[11]. While convenience

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[10] Of the $n = 5$ publications in the sample, $n = 4$ were community newspapers, as their production and distribution within a specific Indigenous community was felt to comprise an important element of their politics. However, one publication (APTN) does not satisfy quite the same criteria, as it is more commercially-oriented and operates both as an online news publication and as a publicly-mandated broadcaster (Hafsteinsson, 2008). Nevertheless, as the largest Indigenous news media producer in Canada, APTN's inclusion was felt to be justified by the disproportionate share of agenda-setting power it holds within the Indigenous public sphere.

[11] It is readily acknowledged that by limiting the sample to only those Indigenous community newspapers available in digital form, the sample may have inadvertently been skewed towards larger or more financially successful newspapers (see: Downing and Husband, 2005: 66); nevertheless, in the present study, a limited timeframe and the feasibility of accessing physical materials prevented the development of a more varied sample.

samples of this sort are not ideal, Brewer (1963) argues that their use is justified in circumstances where the difficulty of accessing materials would otherwise constrain the study's feasibility.

As Bredin (2012) notes that 'the most participatory and culturally representative [Indigenous news media organizations] are those that have reduced their reliance on direct state support and have a mixed revenue base' (Bredin, 2012: 196; *see also*: Skinner, 2015: 205), the sample was further narrowed to n = 21 after discarding those which were not financially independent. Finally, stratified random sampling was used to create a geographically representative sample of n = 5 newspapers, as Krippendorff (2013) notes that stratified random sampling is well suited to media content that varies with time or geographic distribution. Thus, the newspapers included in the final sample were *APTN National News* (produced in Winnipeg, MB, serving a national audience), *The Nation News* (produced in Chisasibi, QC, primarily serving a Cree audience), *Ha-Shilth-Sa* (produced in Port Alberni, BC, primarily serving a Nuu-chah-nulth-aht audience), *Eagle Feather News* (produced in Saskatoon, SK, primarily serving a Cree, Dené, and Métis audience), and *Nunatsiaq* (produced in Iqaluit, NU, primarily serving an Innu and Inuit audience). A summary of each newspaper selected for use in the present study is available in Appendix A, while Appendix B provides a summary of additional newspapers suitable for future research.

Search parameters

Articles were obtained by manually searching the digital archives of each newspaper for headlines containing the terms 'reconciliation', 'truth commission', 'TRC', 'residential school', or any combination therein. An initial search yielded a combined n = 1,190 articles across the five periodicals, for an average of n = 238 articles per periodical. After culling redundant entries – which included discarding any articles not found in either the editorial or news sections of the newspapers – this sample was narrowed to n = 341. Of these, n = 103 were from APTN, n = 59 were from Nunatsiaq, n = 44 were from Ha-Shilth-Sa, n = 81 were from Eagle Feather News, and n = 54 were from The Nation. The period of analysis extended from 15 May, 2010 (one month prior to the TRC's first National Event) to 15 June, 2016 (six months after the release of the TRC Final Report). All articles included in the sample were written in English.

Development of coding frame and specifics of model

A multi-stage approach was taken in the development of the coding frame. First, the relevant literature on generalised models of truth and reconciliation was referenced in order to create a heuristic matrix through deductive analysis (e.g. Chrisjohn and Young, 1996; Hamber and van der Merwe, 1998; Crocker, 2000; Torpey, 2003; Corntassel et al., 2009; LaPlante and Phenicie, 2010; Nagy & Gillespie, 2015). Subsequent operationalisation of variables was supplemented by McMahon and Chow-White's (2011) *cold conflict model*[12], highly applicable to contexts of discursively-driven conflict, which 'works to uncover examples of value-based language, highlight the perspectives of various stakeholders to the conflicts examined, and explore the discursive field of power relations' through four principal frames (p. 351). Appendix C provides an overview of the heuristic matrix and McMahon and Chow-White's (2011) *cold conflict model*, while the complete codebook is available in Appendix D.

Coding and analysis

All coding was performed by two independently trained coders. While the use of software such as VBPro or NVIVO may have proven beneficial in reducing the amount of time spent coding, Neuendorf (2002) explains that 'the notion of the completely 'automatic' content analysis via computer is a chimera' (p. 40), and given the nuanced nature of several of the measures contained within the codebook, the associated risks of such software were felt to far outweigh the potential benefits.

As Krippendorff (2013) explains, in studies which adopt content analysis as their methodological framework, descriptive statistics are the most common level of analysis. As such, a majority of variables within the codebook were constructed as nominal-level categorical variables, with analysis mostly restricted to cross-tabulations of variables of interest and testing the goodness-of-fit using Pearson's chi-squared test. To reduce the risk of a Type I error (α) resulting from multiple comparisons, a Bonferroni correction was applied when analysing categorical data. Additionally, a number of variables were constructed as interval-level variables, which necessitated the use of independent samples t-testing to test the independence of the population means. All data entry and analysis was performed using SPSS v21.0.

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[12] McMahon and Chow-White's (2011) model is composed of four frames: *Cooperation and reconciliation in conflict transformation; Reporting invisible effects of structural racism; Complicates stereotypes*; and *Community leadership and self-determination*. A brief overview of each frame is available in Appendix C.

Inter-coder reliability was also computed in SPSS v21.0, using Hayes and Krippendorff's (2007) KALPHA macro. Krippendorff's alpha (Kα) was chosen as it is widely considered to be a more robust reliability index than alternative measures such as percent agreement, Scott's pi, Cohen's kappa, or Fleiss' kappa (Joyce, 2013).

RESULTS

Results

Overall, the results of the present study align to a considerable degree with the expected outcomes, though several unexpected and novel trends emerged. The preceding sections provide summary information on the major findings pertaining to each of the four hypotheses. Wherever noted, additional information is available in the Appendices.

Hypothesis 1

To analyse the first dimension to hypothesis one – namely, that a majority of articles would identify constraints to the process of reconciliation – case summaries were calculated across the entire sample of n = 341 articles. In line with the hypothesised outcomes, n = 236 (69.2%) articles were found to have identified constraints to the process of reconciliation, while just n = 105 (30.8%) did not. The difference in proportions was found to be statistically significant, χ^2 = 22.59, p < .001. To assess the second dimension of hypothesis one – namely, that the tone of coverage toward the formal process of reconciliation would, on average, be more negative than positive – the mean response value was calculated. The results once again aligned with the hypothesised outcomes, as coverage toward the formal process of reconciliation was, on average, found to be more negative than positive in tone: expressed on a five-point Likert-scale, the average tone across all cases was M = 2.86, SD = 1.229. Excluding cases where the tone was coded as neutral, a total of n = 162 (47.51%) articles contained either strong or moderate criticism, while n = 115 (33.72%) articles contained either strong or moderate support. The difference between these proportions was found to be statistically significant, χ^2 = 18.57, p = .001. Table 1 provides a summary of these findings.

Table 1. Overall tone of coverage.

Response	Frequency
Strong criticism (1)	41 (12.0%)
Moderate criticism (2)	121 (35.5%)
Neutral (3)	64 (18.8%)
Moderate support (4)	75 (22.0%)
Strong support (5)	40 (11.7%)

In an effort to uncover any significant longitudinal trends in tone, the sample was next dichotomised into two time periods, with T_1 representing the approximately three-year span from May 2010 to April 2013, and T_2 representing the approximately three-year span from May 2013 to July 2016. When the overall tone of coverage in T_1 was compared to that of T_2, no statistically significant difference was found to exist, $\chi^2 = 4.567$, $p = .334$, indicating that tone remained fairly consistent across both time periods. However, when each of the five publications was considered on its own, a slightly different set of results emerged, such that the tone of coverage from APTN was found to be significantly more negative in T_1 than T_2, wherein $n = 26$ (92.85%) of articles in T_1 contained either strong or moderate criticism, compared to just $n = 41$ (54.67%) of articles in T_2, $\chi^2 = 14.179$, $p = .007$.

As Table 2 illustrates, all publications with the exception of EFN contained a considerably higher proportion of articles which identified constraints to reconciliation than without, a difference found to be statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 34.552$, $p < .001$. A full summary of findings pertaining to hypothesis one is available in Appendix E.

Table 2. Number of articles identifying constraints to reconciliation.
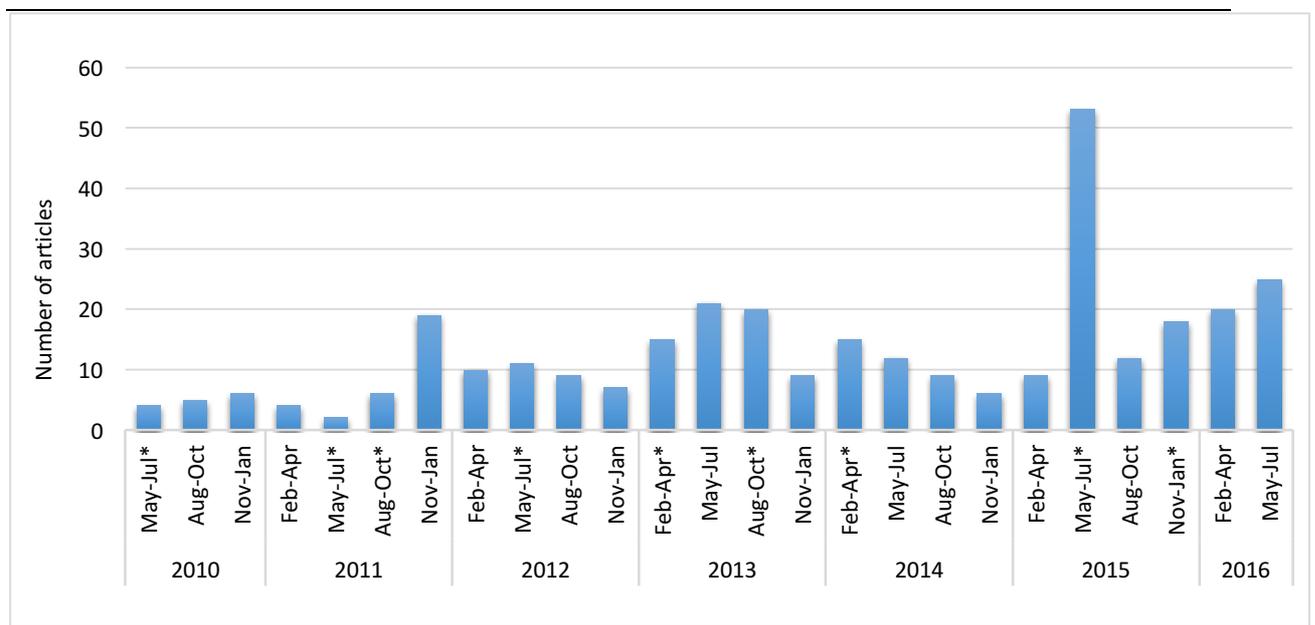
Publication	No	Yes
Nunatsiaq	13 (22.0%)	46 (78.0%)
The Nation	15 (27.8%)	39 (72.2%)
APTN	22 (21.4%)	81 (78.6%)
Ha-Shilth-Sa	9 (20.5%)	35 (79.5%)
EFN	46 (56.8%)	35 (43.2%)

Hypothesis 2

To test the first dimension of hypothesis two – namely, that the number of articles on the topic of reconciliation would increase with time – case summaries were calculated. Overall, the results lent strong support to this hypothesis: as Figure 1 illustrates, there was a clear negative skew in the direction of T_2, whereby a total of n = 98 articles (28.7%) were produced in T_1 compared to n = 243 articles (71.3%) produced in T_2. The difference in proportions was found to be statistically significant, χ^2 = 341.00, p < .001.

Fig.1. Longitudinal trends in overall media coverage.
Note: Time periods marked with an asterisk (*) indicate periods in which a TRC National Event was held.

Of particular note is the fact that May-July 2015 accounted for n = 59 (17.3%) articles, by far the most of any single time-period, while the number of articles produced across the entire first 15-months of the sample was just n = 21 (6.2%). The single lowest number of articles was produced between May-July 2011, when just n = 2 (0.6%) articles were produced.

Analysis next turned to assessing the number of articles produced in the periods immediately preceding and following each of the TRC's 7 National Events, compared to the number produced in all other periods. While the mean number of articles produced in the periods immediately preceding and following the TRC National Events was indeed found to be substantially higher than the mean number of articles produced in all other periods (M_1= 16.89, σ_1 = 17.11 vs. M_2 = 11.81, σ_2 = 6.75) this was not found to be a statistically significant

difference, $t = 1.063$, $p = .299$. A notable finding, however, is that there was a large degree of variation between the TRC National Events: the events in Saskatoon, Vancouver, and Edmonton corresponded with especially active periods of news coverage, while the event in Inuvik corresponded with the single lowest period of activity.

To assess the second dimension of hypothesis two – namely, that indigenous news media publications would dedicate more coverage to articles with a primary focus on reconciliation compared to articles on any other topics[13] – a random selection of $n = 30$ articles from within the same time period was drawn from each of the five publications. As Table 3 illustrates, the mean difference between these two samples was found to be statistically significant for all publications, such that articles on the topic of reconciliation were between 22.54% and 103.80% longer than articles focused on any other topics.

Table 3. Word count comparison (reconciliation vs. non-reconciliation articles).
Note: Where M_1 = Reconciliation focused articles, M_2 = non-reconciliation focused articles, and percent difference $(\Delta M / |M_1|) \times 100 = ((M_2 - M_1) / |M_1|) \times 100$.

Source	M_1	M_2	σ_1	σ_2	N_1	N_2	% Diff.	t	p
APTN	666.3	323.7	652.2	249.8	103	30	105.8	2.84	.005 -.001
Ha-Shilth-Sa	863.7	423.7	448.8	341.5	44	30	103.8	4.63	<.001
Nunatsiaq	685.2	471.5	266.2	552.0	30	30	45.3	1.99	.05 - .025
EFN	676.1	485.1	274.9	194.3	81	30	39.4	3.52	<.001
The Nation	890.4	726.6	197.5	235.0	54	30	22.5	3.49	<.001

Hypothesis 3

To assess hypothesis three – namely, that Indigenous news media would tend toward employing an expansive framing of reconciliation – a multi-stage approach was taken, with the overall results lending strong support to the expected outcomes.

First, case summaries were calculated to determine the most common topical emphases across all $n = 341$ articles. Table 4 presents a summary of the five most frequently encountered topical emphases[14].

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[13] Articles in this random sample included those drawn from the sports, news, business, and opinions/editorial sections.

[14] Note that the corresponding variables were designed to allow for multiple responses (i.e. responses were not mutually exclusive and thus, a single article could be coded to include multiple topical emphases).

Table 4. Overall topical emphases of articles.

Note: * indicates significance at the 99% confidence level.

Variable	Frequency	χ^2
Impacts of sexual or physical abuse	41.9%	17.958*
Administrative barriers (funding, staffing, etc.)	37.0%	4.186
Specifics of TRC Mandate or Final Report	33.7%	27.996*
TRC-inspired art, education, or sports initiative	32.8%	23.158*
Historical Indigenous political activism	32.6%	21.697*

Overall, the results indicate that the most frequent topical emphases corresponded to a mix of both expansive and reductive framings of truth and reconciliation, with the single most common topical emphasis being the impacts of sexual or physical abuse.

To better understand which topics held the most salience in each of the five publications, the sample was further dichotomised and case summaries were once again calculated. While a similar set of findings emerged, among variables where there was an especially large magnitude of difference between the papers, the largest degrees of difference were seen in reporting on the Qikiqtani Truth Commission ($\chi^2 = 49.241$, $p < .001$), on topics classified as Other ($\chi^2 = 31.985$, $p < .001$), on outlining specifics of the TRC's mandate ($\chi^2 = 27.996$, $p < .001$), on relations with the RCMP or municipal police ($\chi^2 = 24.825$, $p < .001$), and on TRC-inspired community events ($\chi^2 = 23.158$, $p < .001$). A summary of conditional proportions of topical emphases, dichotomised by publication, is available in Appendix E.

To assess the degree to which Indigenous news media coverage privileged Indigenous speakers over non-Indigenous speakers, case summaries were calculated to determine the frequency with which sources were cited. In strong support of the expected outcomes, $n = 269$ (78.9%) articles relied on Indigenous speakers as their primary source, while just $n = 72$ (21.1%) relied on non-Indigenous speakers, a difference which was found to be statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 78.10$, $p < .001$. More specifically, the results indicated that residential school survivors were the most commonly used source (32.6%), closely followed by INAC-elected Indigenous leadership figures (31.1%), and TRC Commissioners Murray Sinclair and Wilton Littlechild (22.3%). Among non-Indigenous sources, the most frequently cited were federal government officials (23.5%), non-Indigenous academics (15.8%), and lawyers or judges (14.1%). Also noteworthy was the degree of heterogeneity between and within each of the five publications: as Table 5 illustrates, the overwhelming majority of sources cited in each newspaper did not appear in any of the other publications. A summary of findings pertaining

to the use of Indigenous and non-Indigenous sources is available in Appendix F, while Tables 1 through 5 of Appendix F provide an overview of all sources used in each publication.

Table 5. Heterogeneity of sources.

Publication	Articles (n)	Sources used	Shared	Unique
Nunatsiaq	59	41	15 (36.59%)	26 (63.41%)
Ha-Shilth-Sa	44	55	18 (32.73%)	37 (67.27%)
The Nation	54	90	31 (34.45%)	59 (65.55%)
APTN	103	118	35 (29.67%)	83 (70.33%)
Eagle Feather News	81	102	25 (24.51%)	77 (75.49%)

To assess the manner in which indigenous news media contextualised the historical origins of, and impetus for, the process of reconciliation, case summaries were calculated. As table 6 illustrates, the overall results indicated consistent adoption of a frame which established grassroots political activism and landmark legal decisions as the most significant historical moments in the process of reconciliation.

Table 6. Contextualisation of reconciliation.

Note: * indicates significance at the 99% confidence level.

Variable	Frequency	χ^2
Grassroots political activism (e.g. INM, AFN)	190 (55.7%)	19.958*
Legal decisions (e.g. *Delgamuukw*, *Tsilhqot'in Nation*)	121 (35.5%)	9.542*
Settlement compensation packages (e.g. IRSA, IAP)	88 (25.8%)	7.966*
Other governmental initiative	72 (21.1%)	8.158*
Closure of specific residential school	71 (20.8%)	21.697*

An additional finding of note in this regard is the tremendous degree of variation among publications in terms of the frequency that the closure of a specific (regional) residential school was cited as having initiated the process of reconciliation: whereas Nunatsiaq cited the closure of a specific residential school in no articles whatsoever, Ha-Shilth-Sa did so in n = 23 (52.3%) articles. Also of note is that the 2008 apology offered by then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper was cited as having initiated the process of reconciliation in just n = 51 (15.0%) articles – and in those limited instances, it was typically mentioned only for the purposes of highlighting its insincerity or casting doubt on its underlying motives. A full summary of findings pertaining to contextualisation of the historical origins of, and impetus for, the process of reconciliation is available in Appendix G.

In terms of the manner in which indigenous news media framed the temporal scope of reconciliation – that is, whether reconciliation was portrayed as a discrete event or as an ongoing process of transformation (see: McMahon and Chow-White, 2011) – the results of the present study found that there was strong consensus across all publications: as table 7 illustrates, reconciliation was framed as an ongoing process in nearly 90 percent of all cases. A full summary of findings pertaining to the temporal scope of reconciliation is available in Appendix H.

Table 7. Temporal scope of reconciliation.

Note: * indicates significance at the 99% confidence level.

Variable	Frequency	χ²
Reconciliation as ongoing process of transformation	301 (88.3%)	27.709*
Reconciliation as discrete event bringing closure	18 (5.3%)	6.408*
Unclear or ambiguous	22 (6.5%)	3.211

Next, analysis turned to a consideration of the specified expected outcomes of reconciliation. As table 8 illustrates, the observed frequencies for this dimension of hypothesis three were more varied than expected, and ranged from expansive elements such as the betterment of Indigenous political self-representation, to more minimalist conceptions emphasising individual healing or catharsis. Among other notable trends, a comparatively low number of articles overall (n = 108, or 31.7%) explicitly identified structural or legislative reform as an expected outcome of reconciliation, while the most common outcomes of reconciliation identified in coverage by APTN followed a markedly different pattern than all other publications. A summary of findings pertaining to the expected outcomes of reconciliation is available in Appendix I.

Table 8. Overall frequencies: expected outcomes of reconciliation.

Note: * indicates significance at the 99% confidence level.

Variable	Frequency	χ²
Education of non-Indigenous Canadian publics	179 (52.5%)	13.998*
Intergenerational or community healing	178 (52.2%)	13.248*
Individual healing or catharsis	150 (44.0%)	8.966*
Betterment of Indigenous self-representation in politics	122 (35.8%)	7.152
Public recognition and memorials (including NCTRC)	116 (34.0%)	6.679

Finally, analysis turned to a consideration of the factors which were identified in indigenous news media as ongoing constraints to the process of reconciliation. As Table 9 illustrates, constraints were largely focused on the perceived shortcomings of the federal government in facilitating the formal process of reconciliation.

Table 9. Overall frequencies: constraints to reconciliation.

Note: * indicates significance at the 99% confidence level.

Variable	Frequency	χ^2
Obstruction or conflict of interest by federal government	84 (24.6%)	6.334*
Administrative barriers (funding, staffing, etc.)	76 (22.3%)	6.288*
Lack of Indigenous ontology (i.e. Western-legal basis)	58 (17.0%)	12.983*
Re-traumatisation of IRS survivors	40 (11.7%)	17.772*
Indifference from Canadian public + lack of structural emphasis	39 (11.4%)	6.655

Overall, specific instances of governmental intervention and obstruction were the most cited constraint, with a perceived funding shortfall, seen to constrain the TRC's ability to carry out its investigative mandate, the next most commonly identified constraint. However, when the sample was further individuated and each of the five publications was considered on its own, a slightly different set of results emerged. Particularly noteworthy in this respect was the finding that 30.5% of articles published in Nunatsiaq cited a lack of Indigenous ontological perspective (i.e. the TRC's basis in a Western-legal framework) as a constraint to reconciliation, a proportion significantly higher than in other publications, $\chi^2 = 19.680$, $p = .001$. A summary of findings pertaining to identified constraints is available in Appendix J.

Hypothesis 4

To analyse hypothesis four – namely, that Indigenous peoples would tend to be portrayed as primarily agentic in guiding the process of reconciliation – case summaries were calculated. Overall, the results deviated only slightly from the expected outcomes, insofar as the locus of control over the process of reconciliation was in fact most commonly ascribed to the federal or provincial government – however, as Table 10 illustrates, this was closely followed by assignments of agency to the Indigenous public, elected Indigenous leadership figures, and residential school survivors, who collectively comprised by far the largest proportion of actors identified as agentic.

This ascription of agency was accentuated further when noting the frequency with which informal, community-led reconciliation events and arts initiatives were framed as central to a 'bottom-up' approach to reconciliation. A full summary of findings pertaining to ascriptions

of agency is available in Appendix K, while Table 1 of Appendix K provide specifics on the aforementioned community-led reconciliation events and arts initiatives.

Table 10. Assignment of agency in process of reconciliation.

Note: * indicates significance at the 99% confidence level.

Variable	Frequency	χ²
Federal or provincial government	160 (46.9%)	8.623*
Indigenous public	142 (41.6%)	8.258*
Indigenous leadership (elected or hereditary)	130 (38.1%)	7.946*
Residential school survivors	85 (24.9%)	11.152*
Provincial or Supreme Court of Canada	85 (24.9%)	6.679
Non-Indigenous Canadian public	83 (24.3%)	13.800
University or other educational institution	60 (17.6%)	17.108*
TRC Commissioners or TRC-affiliates (e.g. TRNRC)	59 (17.3%)	7.960*
Indigenous media	50 (14.7%)	21.152*
Mainstream media	46 (13.5%)	5.004
Non-governmental organisation	41 (12.0%)	3.201
Church (Catholic, Anglican, United)	32 (9.4%)	6.930
Private sector	31 (9.1%)	11.186*
Other	23 (6.7%)	8.111

Lastly, inter-coder reliability (ICR) was calculated by training a second coder and re-coding *n* = 70 (20.5%) articles. This yielded an average of Kα = .88. As Krippendorff (2013) specifies that coefficients of .90 or higher are ideal, while coefficients of .80 are acceptable, the obtained value is thus well within the acceptable range. Individual Kα coefficients can be found within the codebook in Appendix C.

DISCUSSION

Overall, the results of the present study align to a considerable degree with the hypothesised outcomes, and illustrate that while the formal process of reconciliation remained a salient point of news coverage, the success of its mandate was seen to be hampered by numerous constraints.

Longitudinal trends

The results indicate that, on the whole, the formal process of reconciliation remained a salient topic of news coverage within Indigenous news media across the entire period of study. Beyond the steady upward trajectory of news coverage afforded to the process of reconciliation seen across the sample, the finding that articles related to reconciliation were on average of significantly longer length – between 22.54% and 103.80% longer than articles focused on any other topics – is encouraging. Overall, these findings suggest that despite the anomalies inherent to the TRC's mandate (e.g. the structure of *Schedule N*), which in many cases all but disallowed the process of reconciliation from disseminating its findings in real-time or of taking on the character of a media event (Dayan and Katz, 1992), the process of reconciliation remained a newsworthy and pertinent issue within Indigenous news media.

While the results indicate that there was no statistically significant difference in the number of articles produced in the time periods immediately preceding and following any of the TRC's 7 National Events, two time periods bear further elaboration. First, the period of May-July 2015 accounted for $n = 59$ (17.3% of the total sample) articles, by far the largest number produced in a single time-period. This provides some grounds for optimism, as this period coincides with the 15 June, 2015 release of the TRC Summary Final Report – for all intents and purposes its single greatest duty – which suggests that Indigenous news media felt this element of the formal process of reconciliation to have been delivered upon. More intriguing, however, is the precise focus of coverage from this period, which focused heavily on the Report's labelling of the IRS system as one of 'attempted cultural genocide'. Indeed, while $n = 68$ (19.9%) articles in the present study employed the term 'cultural genocide', the period of May-July 2015 accounted for $n = 55$ (80.9%) instances of its use. As Hereditary Chief Robert Joseph mused in one article, 'The words 'cultural genocide' has shaken a country that perceived itself as good and kind... The impacts of these truths will change the way First Nations people move forward and will achieve the results that they have worked towards for a very long time'[15]. Thus, while the spike in coverage from this period suggests that the release of the TRC Summary Final Report was seen to be a newsworthy event unto itself, the coverage it attracted was largely preoccupied with the symbolic affordances inherent to this profound rhetorical shift.

 Conversely, just $n = 21$ (6.2%) articles were produced in the entire first 15 months of study, with the single lowest period of activity falling between May-July 2011, during which just $n = 2$ (0.6%) articles were produced. This too is an intriguing finding, as it coincides with the TRC

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[15] Steel, D. (2015). Take advantage of this profound time in Canada, Joseph tells BC-AFN. *Ha-Shilth-Sa*.

National Event held in Inuvik on July 1, 2011. As such, it would appear the Inuvik National Event fell flat with its ambitions to engage the Canadian public and celebrate regional diversity (TRC, 2016). The most likely explanation for this is that the TRC's reliance on a generic, pan-Indigenous cultural model was not well-received by Inuit peoples. As Niezen (2013) describes in reference to the Inuvik National Event, 'a local organizer…was dismayed to be told by someone from the TRC headquarters in Ottawa that she should be responsible for providing a supply of sage for the 'smudging' to take place in the upcoming meeting. The challenge she faced was that sage is a plant that grows in arid regions, the closest being the dry interior of British Columbia, and none of the people of the western Arctic customarily make use of it' (p. 63). This sense of disconnect from the formal process of reconciliation was apparent throughout Nunatsiaq's coverage, inasmuch as it dedicated substantially less coverage to the TRC's Inuit sub-Commission than to the altogether separate, Inuit-led Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC)[16].

Frames of reconciliation

In line with the hypothesised outcomes, the results of the present study illustrate that Indigenous news media coverage predominantly expressed reconciliation as an expansive and ongoing process of self-determination informed by Indigenous cultural praxis; moreover, a considerable degree of heterogeneity in the scope of coverage across publications lends support to the assumption that perspectives informed by lived experience and locality find particular comport in Indigenous media's framing of the process of reconciliation.

Context

Remarking on the manner in which mainstream media coverage has typically contextualised the origins of the TRC, McMahon and Chow-White (2011) note that coverage tends to '[suppress] discussion of important legal cases such as *Delgamuukw* and cornerstone reports such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples' (p. 357). The results of the present study suggest that Indigenous news media adopt a dramatically different approach, and overwhelmingly historicise it as an extension of prolonged grassroots political activism (55.7%) and landmark legal decisions (35.5%) manifest in such cases such as *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, *Tsilhqot'in Nation v. British Columbia*, and *Lax Kw'alaams v. Canada*. Echoing a

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[16] The Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC) was established in 2007, ostensibly with a mandate to investigate the social impact of widespread, government-led killings of Inuit sled-dogs (*qimmiit*) between 1950 and 1975. Its final report, *Moving Toward Saimaqatigiingniq,* was released 20 October, 2010, and contained broad recommendations on social policy, language revitalisation, and community health.

line of argument encountered frequently, one article plainly rejected the notion that reconciliation was the result of benevolence on the part of the federal government, arguing that 'the body that really brought [reconciliation] into action was the Assembly of First Nations, under Phil Fontaine'[17]. Similarly, where more reductionist frames of reconciliation 'tend to relegate all committed injustices to the past' (Corntassel et al., 2009: 10), an overwhelming majority (88.3%) of articles framed reconciliation as an ongoing process of transformation (McMahon and Chow-White, 2011). To that end, many articles sought to establish a direct link between vestiges of the IRS system and present-day socioeconomic disadvantages, and referred to the over-representation of Indigenous children in foster care, disproportionate rates of incarceration, and disappearance and/or murder of over 1,200 Indigenous women as evidence of the need for sustained agonism. By rhetorically qualifying the IRS system as the distal cause of more proximate systemic violence, such coverage affirms a vision of reconciliation that is both historically nuanced and committed to addressing the reality of present-day structural oppression by 'making visible the invisible' (Hall, 1997; McMahon and Chow-White, 2011).

Outcomes

In describing the expected outcomes of the formal process of reconciliation, the bulk of articles expressed optimism toward the potentially transformative impacts of intergenerational and community-level healing (52.2%) or individual healing and catharsis (44.0%). That the former eclipsed the latter as the most-cited outcome is an encouraging finding, and is an indication of the privileging of conceptions of health and well-being informed by syncretic re-imagination of traditional Indigenous epistemologies, which espouse 'systems of knowledge in their context, or in relationship' (Wilson, 2008: 74). Considered in conjunction with the fact that an average of 68% of sources were unique to each newspaper, this finding also lends credence to the operationalisation of Indigenous media as foremost a hybrid of community and citizens' media, whereby the situated knowledge of Indigenous peoples finds expression through locally and culturally-appropriate modes (Rodriguez, 2001; Ginsburg, 1994; Atton, 2015). That articles did *not* more frequently cite substantive outcomes such as legislative or educational reform is attributable to the palpable sense of distrust in governmental mechanisms evident in many articles: In but one illustration of this, Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council vice-President Ken Watts explained, 'We aren't asking for everything under the sun. All we want is what's

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[17] Morrow, S. (2012). Conspiracy of silence on residential schools has been broken. *Ha-Shilth-Sa*.

rightfully ours and we want to work with all levels of governments, but that needs to be done with *iisaak* (mutual respect) and recognition of *hishukish tsawalk* (everything is one)'[18].

Agency

When assigning the locus of control over the process of reconciliation, Indigenous news media left little room for ambiguity; as Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami president Mary Simon argued in one article, 'The support has to be done by our own people...we have to believe in ourselves'[19]. Overall, the collective share of agency assigned to Indigenous peoples was by far the largest of any segment, and was distributed somewhat evenly between the Indigenous public (41.6%), Indigenous leadership figures (38.1%), and residential school survivors (24.9%). Still, this is contradicted by the fact that the single most frequently ascribed agentic actor was in fact the federal or provincial government (46.9%) – more telling, however, is the manner in which this agency was framed. In the overwhelming majority of such cases, the scope of governmental agency was conceived in remarkably limited terms, essentially restricted to facilitating and allocating funding for cultural or language revitalisation initiatives, or negating and repealing much-maligned laws such as the *Indian Act* or *First Nations Education Act* (Bill C-33)[20]. Conversely, the scope of agency assigned to Indigenous peoples was expansive and multi-faceted; as numerous articles pointed out, Indigenous-led reconciliation initiatives existed long before the TRC, with the Nuu-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council's 1996 self-published book '*Indian residential schools: the Nuu-chah-nulth Experience*'[21] and the Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC) providing just two of the more salient examples. Further, a minority of articles named Indigenous media outlets and Indigenous journalists as being particularly central to the process of reconciliation. This was especially true of APTN, whose coverage had a clear investigative leaning – perhaps best characterised as serving a 'watchdog' Monitorial role (Christians et al., 2009)[22].

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[18] NTC Staff. (2014). Canada must find a clear path forward. *Ha-Shilth-Sa*.

[19] Rogers, S. (2011). TRC meeting produces call for better Arctic mental health services. *Nunatsiaq*.

[20] See: Chartrand: (2015). The TRC: the Indian Act & democracy. *Eagle Feather News*: 1.

[21] Tseshaht First Nation. (2015). Alberni Indian residential school: a legacy of genocide. *Ha-Shilth-Sa*.

[22] In a salient illustration of this 'watchdog' role, APTN released a series of articles investigating allegations of financial exploitation of residential school survivors by predatory law firms. These articles, widely cited in each of the other publications, uncovered evidence of firms claiming expenses on thousands of IAP claimants whose applications were never even submitted, charging in excess of 60 percent interest on loans, and hiring 'enforcers' to extort money from residential school survivors. *See:* Martens (2014).

Tone toward and constraints to reconciliation

As expected, the overall results indicate that a majority of articles (n = 236, or 69.2%) identified constraints to reconciliation, and were on average more negative than positive in tone (M_1 = 2.86, SD_1 = 1.229). Thus, while the topic of reconciliation remained a salient and newsworthy topic, Indigenous news media producers clearly saw the need for scepticism and constructive criticism toward the formal process of reconciliation on a number of grounds.

Federal obstruction and administrative barriers

The most commonly identified constraints to reconciliation pertained to a combination of federal obstruction and administrative barriers, which accounted for 24.6% and 22.3%, respectively. Specifically, articles cited the federal government's resistance to adopting the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)[23], drastic funding cuts to the budget of Library and Archives Canada and non-renewal of funding to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation[24], and brazen refusal to turn over documents to the TRC[25] to illustrate that the TRC's very *raison d'etre* was under threat of compromise. As TRC lawyer Julian Falconer argued, 'what is at stake here is nothing short of the control of history...if Canada is successful in terms of its resistance to providing these documents, there is a real risk that...the truth telling function of the commission will be undermined'[26]. In light of Niezen's (2013) observation that the TRC's commencement in a non-transitional context produced 'a relative lack of awareness of the existence of the Commission itself' (p. 4), the degree to which these factors were seen to have limited TRC's central mandate paints a bleak picture of its likely import in the non-Indigenous Canadian public sphere.

Victim-centeredness

Numerous articles also identified the TRC's victim-centred approach as a major constraint to reconciliation. Residential school survivors were the most vocal in this regard, and were concerned that its monological nature could work against the perceived credibility of testimony, or compel only the most salacious and gut-wrenching stories which fit the dominant

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[23] APTN. (2010). Government attack on declaration reveals true colours: critic. *APTN*.

[24] Staniforth, J. (2013). Federal budget cuts to the Library & Archives of Canada stall Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *The Nation*.

[25] Barrera, J. (2012). Duncan sees no 'issue' turning over residential school documents, blames TRC head for controversy. *APTN*.

[26] APTN. (2012). TRC takes Ottawa to court in battle over 'control' of residential school history. APTN.

narrative of lives broken and futures stolen[27]. As TRC Commissioner Murray Sinclair conceded in one article, 'even now some people do not believe their stories'[28]. These concerns align with Moon's (2006) assertion that reconciliatory projects are at all times 'hostage to configurations of political power that condition the terms of peace agreements' (p. 3), a fact which Henderson (2015) highlights in describing the TRC's subtle 'regulation of speaker identity categories' and 'templates that remind speakers of the allowable limits of testimony and prime them to tell a particular kind of story' (p. 27).

Offsetting these concerns, a minority of articles (*n* = 22) unexpectedly contained frank and non-judgmental discussion of *positive* experiences at residential schools. Although most framed these as exceptional and isolated happenings[29], others contained unreserved gratefulness: as Inuit residential school survivor Jobie Weetaluktuk confessed, 'For me, [residential school] was more positive, but I didn't suffer the abuses that some of my peers did…In some ways, I really appreciated school'[30]. Coverage in this vein extended to identifying former teachers or clergy who were less abusive or altogether encouraging of students 'to draw on their cultural heritage'[31]. Thus, while the 'Carnivalesque' nature of the TRC (James, 2015) was seen to place the burden of the testimonial encounter on residential school survivors, these concerns were at least partially mitigated by the unique capacity of Indigenous news media to serve as a parallel space of listening less resistant to countervailing meaning.

Non-retribution and irreconcilability

Without question, the most terminal constraints emanated from the TRC's distinct lack of a retributive mandate – a structural characteristic that Mamdani (2002), Teitel (2003), Torpey (2003) and Schaap (2008) have long warned carries the risk of being perceived as exculpatory and unjust. In a scathing open letter to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Belgian human rights activist Lieve Halsberghe charged that the TRC's non-retributive model meant that 'People with trauma…are being denied justice by the Canadian government…this is immoral and a shame for your country'[32]. Others took this critique further, and called attention to the fact that compensation packages administered through the Independent Assessment Process (IAP)[33]

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[27] See: German, A. (2010). Truth and reconciling. *The Nation*.

[28] Bell, J. (2015). Chair hopes TRC wind-up inspires new beginning for Canada. *Nunatsiaq*.

[29] Head, T. (2015). What the survivors think. *Eagle Feather News*.

[30] Rogers, S. (2011). At TRC hearings, students recall the hard years. *Nunatsiaq*.

[31] Morrow, S. (2014). Artwork stirs memories for residential school survivors. *Ha-Shilth-Sa*.

[32] Halsberghe, L. (2016). Open letter to Justin Trudeau: bring the perpetrators to justice. *Nunatsiaq*.

[33] While the IRSSA originally allotted the IAP a budget of $960 million, the eventual pay-out was five times that, leading the Chief Adjudicator to comment that serious abuse was 'rampant, not isolated'. *See:* Curry (2011).

had been determined after federal investigators located and interviewed some 5,315 residential school staff accused of sexual and physical abuse – only to release them without charge after ascertaining (and quantifying) the severity of their crimes[34]. In effect, this was seen to amount to a provision of amnesty for individuals suspected of serious crimes.

In response, residential school survivors such as Monica Ittusardjuat asked 'How can I forgive the government? How can I forgive the church? It has no heart'[35]. Thus, in a sizeable minority of cases (n = 31) the feasibility of achieving reconciliation was rejected outright. In such cases, the formal process of reconciliation was seen to offer a shallow conception of justice book-ended by 'a political process that promoted but could not ultimately guarantee an ethics of listening' (Schaffer, 2008: 95). Thus, while Coulthard (2014) has noted that those who refuse reconciliation are 'typically cast as being saddled by the damaging psychological residue of this legacy' (p.109), the prominence of these perspectives may indicate a more thoroughgoing re-consideration of the efficacy of the political project of reconciliation. Treating these as moments of constructive refusal serves as a reminder that Indigenous visions of reconciliation represent 'an alternative to the Canadian state's vision for reconciliation' (Corntassel et al., 2009: 4).

CONCLUSION

The results of the present study illustrate that, far from settling old grievances, the mediation of reconciliation in Indigenous news media has unsettled visions at once discordant from and complementary to 'the Canadian state's notion of reconciliation' (Corntassel et al., 2009: 6). At the broadest level, the propensity of Indigenous news media to frame the process of reconciliation in expansive and temporally unbounded terms illustrates the critical role which Indigenous news media can play as a parallel space of witnessing. Indeed, as Atton (2015) writes of such media, 'transformation lies in the reflexive act of media production…perhaps not intended to convert or even inform a broader audience, they provide platforms for education and information, for solidarity and growth' (p. 8). Thus, while the long-term impacts of the TRC's Final Report remain to be seen, the mediation of Indigenous voice and vision is in many ways itself constitutive of reconciliation in action, and can do much to reprise the inadequacies of a cultural import at times seen to offer little more than post hoc empathy.

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[34] Nicholls, W. (2016). Unfinished business on residential schools. *The Nation*. See also Troian (2016).

[35] George, J. (2011). After decades, the chilling truth still hurts. *Nunatsiaq*.

Limitations and future research

In the present study, the unobtrusive and nonreactive nature of content analysis has allowed for empirical analysis of a politically and ethically contentious issue within Indigenous news media – a remarkably understudied domain. Nevertheless, the difficulty of operationalising abstract concepts is a distinct weakness of content analysis (Riffe et al., 1998); compounded by the deductive coding approach necessitated by the scarcity of prior studies, there is every possibility that biases on the part of the researcher may have influenced the results. Moreover, limitations are introduced by the uneven sample sizes of the five publications used. As a consequence, it is possible that certain trends in the data may simply reflect differing levels of sensitivity to equal magnitudes of change.

Most importantly, as a decidedly positivist and 'conventionally hierarchical [tool] of observation' a particular degree of caution is warranted by the application of content analysis to Indigenous news media, as a non-Indigenous researcher (Downing and Husband, 2005: 134). In an effort to mitigate this, and cognisant of 'the need for local cultural control over how, to whom, and under what conditions cultural knowledge may be revealed or displayed' (Wilson et al., 2015: 86), contact was made with the offices of each of the five publications in order to obtain free, prior, and informed consent for the use of all materials.

Future research would benefit from taking a political economic perspective, comparing the coverage of financially independent Indigenous news media to those in receipt of government subsidisation, or alternatively, examining newspapers who serve treatied territories versus those within non-treaty territories. Further, while the feasibility of accessing such materials prevented their incorporation in the present study, future research would benefit from an engagement with Indigenous radio and film content, as Skinner (2015) notes that 'radio in particular plays an important role in isolated communities' (p. 205). As methodological approaches such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) recognise 'that discourses are often multimodally realized, not only through text and orality, but also through…images' an interdisciplinary approach, with 'richer contextualization, and attention to the multimodality of discourse' (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001, p.16) would also benefit future research.

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