

Journal of Global Indigeneity

Reconceptualizing Indigenous Journalism Through Boundaries, Small Worlds, and Information Poverty

Jennifer Henrichsen
Washington State University
[ORCID](#)

Journal of Global Indigeneity

© Henrichsen
Vol.6, Issue 3, 2022
1-17
<https://www.journalofglobalindigeneity.com>

Abstract

Indigenous journalism is on the rise globally but remains understudied by communication and journalism scholars. In this paper, Chatman's (1996) information poverty theory is utilised to analyse Indigenous journalists' newsgathering practices and experiences in Canada because it has long been used to study marginalised groups but has not been applied to the study of Indigenous journalists or journalism. Twelve semi-structured interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous journalists reveal how maintaining information poverty can be a deliberate way to protect the boundaries of community information and limit engagement with outsiders that could perpetuate stereotypes and upset norms related to information disclosure. Indigenous communities are a type of 'small world' which prioritises containment of information from outsiders such as journalists, even if they are Indigenous, thereby emphasizing boundaries and role hybridity of journalists. Indigenous journalists, as navigators of these boundaries, which are themselves contested, shows a more fluid, porous and complex landscape of information poverty. The fact that Indigenous journalists are reluctant to report on their own communities for fear of fraying social solidarity by exposing their community to outside criticism or contributing inadvertently to lateral violence through their reporting, showed a willingness by journalists to be information poor in order to be community rich. This reluctance, alongside lack of access and limited authority, affect Indigenous journalists' public-service and watchdog roles.

Keywords

Boundary work; community; Indigenous journalists; journalistic authority; role hybridity; stigma

Corresponding author: Jennifer Henrichsen, Washington State University, PO Box 642520, Pullman WA 99164

Email: jennifer.henrichsen@wsu.edu

Introduction

Journalism is becoming increasingly blurry in terms of who practices it, who consumes it, and how it is shared and circulated, emblemizing that it is a “varied cultural practice embedded within a complicated social landscape” (Carlson, 2015, p. 2). Thus, studying subcultures of journalism, such as Indigenous journalism, is increasingly important to understand journalism in its myriad forms. It is also important to analyse Indigenous journalism because of its ability, through culturally sensitive reporting, to counteract common tropes and stereotypes in mainstream media about Indigenous peoples, which have shaped Indigenous and non-Indigenous social relations (Morgan & Castleden, 2014).

In recent years, Indigenous media have risen to prominence in the Canadian media landscape, as evidenced by the success of the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s Indigenous Media channel (CBC News Indigenous) and the University of British Columbia’s journalism school’s “Reporting in Indigenous Communities” curricula, which has been a model for other journalism schools in Canada (Christensen, 2011). Yet, despite this rise, Indigenous journalism remains understudied.

Indigenous journalism can be defined as “the production and dissemination of information about contemporary affairs of general public interest and importance, by indigenous peoples for the benefit of indigenous but also non-indigenous communities” (Hanusch, 2013, p. 83). This is a helpful definition, but it’s also important to note that scholars such as Todorova (2016) have criticised this definition as too narrow and have argued for multiple forms of Indigenous journalism(s) to “represent the multiple and diverse philosophies and practices embodied by Indigenous media workers in countries worldwide” (Todorova, 2016, p. 683). Some of the current research on journalistic cultures overlooks “the internal tensions, hybridity, and contractions within Indigenous Journalisms and how these are related to the hegemonic contextual frames within which they operate” (Todorova, 2016, p. 684). Scholars have shown how mass media and communication have contributed to the oppression of Indigenous peoples globally, including in Canada, through stereotypes, misrepresentation and marginalisation of Indigenous communities (Gilchrist, 2010; Harding, 2006).

Indigenous media are important because they often cover issues that are left unaddressed by mainstream media outlets, and they also provide counter-narratives to mainstream journalism’s use of tropes and stereotypes about Indigenous peoples (Morgan and Castleden, 2014). They provide empowerment by fostering an alternative public space that enables discussion of Indigenous issues on Indigenous people’s terms (Avison and Meadows, 2000). Indigenous media have the ability to revitalise Indigenous languages in Indigenous communities, provide culturally appropriate frameworks for

understanding Indigenous issues, and increase accountability among Indigenous leaders (Hanusch, 2013). Indigenous journalism can lead to increased trust in the media among Indigenous populations because such journalists know the resonant cultures, traditions and languages; have authority with the communities; and provide a watchdog role (Hanusch, 2013).

With these reasons in mind, this paper will examine how Indigenous journalists in Canada navigate their roles as journalists and as members of Indigenous communities. I use information poverty theory to analyse Indigenous journalists' newsgathering practices and experiences in Canada because it has long been used to study marginalised groups, but it has not been applied to the study of Indigenous journalists or journalism. Through 12 semi-structured interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous journalists, I examine what Indigenous journalists' newsgathering practices and experiences reveal about the construct of information poverty and how these insights can inform and improve existing theoretical frameworks of Indigenous journalism culture. The interviews reveal that lack of access, stigma and boundary work are important characteristics of Indigenous journalists' experiences, yet are missing from existing theoretical frameworks of Indigenous journalism because they borrow so actively from non-Indigenous frameworks. This paper argues that such characteristics, as well as the additional constructs of role hybridity, boundary work, journalistic authority and access are necessary for a more robust understanding of Indigenous journalism.

Journalism through the lens of information poverty and boundary work

The notion of information poverty was developed by Elfreda Chatman in her work in the 1990s, in which she investigated the information practices of a variety of subjects. In doing so, she discovered that social conditions of marginalisation shape information systems in localised ways, dynamics she described as 'information poverty' (Chatman, 1990, 1991, 1996, 1999). People who are information poor "perceive themselves to be devoid of any sources that might help them," lack information resources that align with their existing world view, have a sense of suspiciousness toward information from outsiders, and are willing to engage in deception and secrecy to maintain one's view and sense of control (Chatman, 1996, p. 197).

Information poverty can be caused by outsiders who withhold access to information. However, in addition, it is the reactive behavior by insiders who respond with self-protective behaviours that separates them from the information they need and keeps them information poor (Chatman, 1996). This insider claim to privileged access "serves to insulate and protect the worldview of insiders from contamination by outsiders" (p. 194). Yet, from the information poor's perspective, they are the insiders whom the outsiders cannot understand because they do not have the same experiences (Lingel & boyd, 2013).

Although, Chatman's conceptual framework of information poverty has been used by a wide variety of scholars in the information sciences, it has not been utilised before within journalism studies. The phrase 'information poverty' has been invoked casually and

literally at face value by some scholars (Berger, 2003) while others have argued that professional journalism has contributed to information poverty that, in turn, has limited political engagement (Clarke, 2014). But the term was not utilised with Chatman's conception in mind. This paper therefore extends the boundary conditions of information poverty by utilising it within the context of journalism studies to reconceptualise what we mean when we talk about Indigenous journalism.

A theoretical construct that shares some similarities with information poverty and that has long been found within journalism scholarship is the notion of boundaries. Boundaries are powerful social constructions that can be used to articulate authority and define legitimate practices in journalism (Carlson, 2015). Boundaries provide shared ways of understanding news work, and these mindsets inform how news is produced and consumed (Carlson, 2015). When threatened, journalists—like other practitioners—may more closely delineate and articulate boundaries to protect their autonomy (Gieryn, 1999). Such boundary work practices can occur with journalists using ethics to determine who is and who is not a journalist in order to better separate the insiders from the outsiders (Singer, 2015).

The concept of boundaries arises when examining information poverty within the context of journalism. In particular, the notion of boundaries is invoked when considering how information poverty can be caused by outsiders who withhold access to information and by insiders who may react to such behaviour with self-protective mechanisms that separate them from the information they need, resulting in information poverty. More broadly, this paper is about setting, complicating and re-establishing boundaries and how these boundaries affect information poverty in Indigenous communities.

Unearthing Indigenous journalists' lived experiences through semi-structured interviews

Using a purposive snowball sample, I conducted semi-structured interviews with journalists associated with five different Indigenous communities across Canada. Semi-structured interviews involve the researcher using an interview protocol to guide the interview; one in which the same topics are covered in each interview, but which is also flexible enough to allow for tailored follow-up questions that may emerge during the interview (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I interviewed eight Indigenous journalists (print and broadcast); two male and six female, and I interviewed four non-Indigenous journalists (print and broadcast); two male and two female. The publications represented include The Salish Sea Sentinel, Discourse Media, The Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, The Vancouver Sun and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Two interviewees (one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous) were former journalists and had transitioned to teaching journalism students. The Indigenous and non-Indigenous journalists were selected in part based on geographical location as I was onsite in British Columbia for my fieldwork and aimed to do as many interviews as possible in person. I sought a mix of both print and broadcast media and male and female participants to ensure diversity. The sample was informed by a

snowballing method, “in which sample elements are selected as they are identified by successive informants or interviewees” (Schutt, 2015, p. 172). This method is often used as a strategy for inductive, theory-building analyses (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). A snowball method was particularly helpful when asking for interviews with Indigenous journalists who tended to know of each other and each other’s work. Each interview drew from a tailored interview protocol, informed by the participant’s background and journalistic expertise. The interviews lasted on average of 35 minutes, were audio-recorded and transcribed in full. I used Charmaz’s (2006) constructivist grounded theory approach, which involves the researcher approaching data with an open mind and acknowledging rather than ignoring preconceptions. I also used Charmaz’s approach of open, select and theoretical coding on my data. I also examined 20 texts written by Indigenous and non-Indigenous journalists to gain insight into current media practices, and conceptions of information and media among Indigenous communities. These texts were chosen based on their relevance to the topic and the geographic area examined. To ensure that I captured my thinking throughout this research process, I maintained a research journal where I collected my observations, reflections and other dynamics as they related to my research. My aim was to utilise these methods so as to obtain a robust understanding of Indigenous journalists’ lived experiences in Canada.

The circumstances of Indigenous journalists

Despite an increase in Indigenous journalism in Canada, local journalism in Canada and elsewhere has been rapidly decreasing over the last several years in response to pressing financial and economic issues. Between 2008 and January 2017, at least 171 media organisations in 138 communities closed (Lindgren et al., 2017). Broadcasting stations were also affected, with one report warning that most of Canada’s small and medium-market TV stations would be gone by 2020 unless there was significant government intervention (The Canadian Press, 2016). The lack of local journalists is problematic because local news serves to provide information that is vital to communities, can help citizens keep their public officials accountable, and can also facilitate community leadership to solve shared problems (The Aspen Institute, 2009).

It is difficult to quantify how many tribal communities do not have access to local journalism but considering that Indigenous communities are under-represented and local journalism throughout Canada is falling, requiring government intervention (Canadian Heritage, 2022), it is likely that the situation is even more dire in locations that are remote, inaccessible and lack a history of media coverage or media creation. This makes Indigenous journalists emblematic of local news deserts in other contexts. Two main problems emerged as reflective of this situation, including the lack of access to tribal communities and Indigenous distrust of journalists.

Journalists’ lack of access to tribal communities

In other cases, journalists who are interested in covering Indigenous communities are often prevented from doing so because band meetings are usually private as the band prefers not to deal with “the whole world” (Woodrooffe, 2016, para 9). Such meetings tend to delve into internal matters of the First Nation, including “revenue, money coming from corporations and agreeing to project benefit packages” and are not open to journalists (Hamilton, 2016b). As a result, tribal leadership may ban media from reporting on proceedings or events that involve “cultural protocol” or “private community affairs” to “protect communities from journalistic harm” (Woodrooffe, 2016, para 11). Tribal communities can utilise Section 35 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which says it is “a First Nation’s right to determine who resides on their lands and who can come onto their lands” (Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982). Therefore, “treaty nations can refuse to allow journalists who are not band members access to Aboriginal lands,” although the legal case for doing remains untested (Hamilton, 2016a).

By limiting the access of Indigenous and non-Indigenous journalists to tribal proceedings, Indigenous community members emblemize certain characteristics of communities characterised by information poverty theory, including a sense of suspiciousness toward information from outsiders, and a willingness to maintain one’s view and sense of control by limiting engagement with outsiders to better insulate and protect the worldview of insiders or those within the Indigenous community. In doing so, Indigenous community members engage in setting boundaries around information, including who has access to it and how it circulates, which has important implications for their communities.

Indigenous communities’ distrust of journalists

Often when Indigenous community members have had contact with journalists, the experience has been negative in nature, both in terms of the story content and how the story reflects on the Indigenous community. Lack of access combined with a lack of knowledge of Indigenous cultures results in the increased possibility of stereotypical coverage, in part because events that are considered newsworthy are often conflict-oriented such as protests, which tend to reinforce certain tropes of Indigenous peoples as warriors or savages (Pierro, 2013). Some of this negative coverage may arise from journalists’ inability to find more diverse sources and their continued reliance on government sources, which can perpetuate stereotypes such as the “Aboriginal Warrior or the Violence Prone Protestor” (Pierro, 2013). Duncan McCue, a CBC reporter and an Anishinaabe and member of the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation in Ontario, says he tries to remind reporters about the role they have played in perpetuating stereotypes visually and through the types of stories they choose in order to avoid only depicting Indigenous peoples as victims or warriors (Wallberg, 2017).

Reticence on the part of Indigenous communities to engage with the media is rooted in historic and long-standing misrepresentations of Indigenous communities by the media. Such stereotypical coverage can have profound and long-lasting impacts on Indigenous communities. According to Dawson, a member of the Selkirk First Nation in central Yukon, “If you’ve been treated badly in the past, of course you’re going to be apprehensive [about speaking with the media]” (Gillmore, 2016). One Indigenous journalist said, “It’s important

for media to realize and understand that they are not owed anything by a community and access really isn't public space. It's reserve land that's been outlined by a treaty made with Canada" (Woodrooffe, 2016, para 23).

The willingness of tribal communities to allow Indigenous journalists to report on them has led some Indigenous community members to take up the mantle of journalism. Indigenous community member Noah Guno began his own independent news site addressing stories about Indigenous peoples and issues in northern British Columbia. Called The Aboriginal Press, the micro news site has 1,300 followers on its Facebook page. Guno created it after he realised Indigenous issues in his community were not being covered by the media (Hamilton, 2016a).

Another Indigenous community member, Ginger Gosnell-Meyers, launched her Facebook group to help hold her government leaders accountable to their people as there was no local press or other media presence in the area. She recounts how the government was holding "secret meetings for secret deals" but social media allowed her community to learn about these plans and to organise in protest. She argues, "Social media gives us the tools to rectify that and create space and discussion amongst ourselves, and to continue the Nisga'a tradition of fighting for our voices to be heard." (Hamilton, 2016a)

Social media platforms have not only been used to disseminate content and information. They have also been critical for potential sources to reach Indigenous journalists with story leads. According to one Indigenous journalist, an important document was shared with him on Facebook by friends of his who are Haida. The document turned out to be a "smoking gun" for an important investigative story that he pursued and published (Interview, (P6), June 6, 2017).

Other times, social media platforms have been used as a vehicle for the perpetuation of lateral violence among Indigenous community members. Lateral violence typically involves critiques and criticism of community members on social media platforms following a news story. Comments are quickly shared and individuals are tagged in a post, which can lead to a widespread, verbally violent experience for members of the Indigenous community. According to an Indigenous journalist, articles published on social media spark lateral violence by "lighting a match to the gas that's already there." He recounts how Facebook is "particularly brutal" for lateral violence in First Nation communities because there is no filter and there can be "a shitstorm of comments" that "can cause a lot of rifts" (Interview (P6), June 6, 2017).

The changing dimensions of role conflicts: personal, professional, internal and external

Indigenous journalists' experiences of newsgathering are influenced by boundary-work initiated by themselves, the mainstream media and Indigenous communities. These attempts to define their appropriate place in contextually specific situations can result in a prioritisation of one role over another in order to protect one's community.

One difficulty Indigenous journalists have is balancing the competing needs and obligations in their different roles as reporters and as members of certain tribes or Indigenous communities. One former Indigenous journalist says, “You’re subject to two worlds, your professional obligations and responsibilities and obligations to your community” (Interview, (P4), June 5, 2017). This push-pull tension can lead Indigenous journalists to de-prioritise their journalistic role in favor of their community member role. An Indigenous journalist recounts how there are things that should stay within his community and how, as a community member, he would choose to not cover a story as a journalist or help a journalist outside of his community pursue the story. He says there is “internal conflict and baggage that I personally don’t want to touch as a reporter. I’d rather resolve it internally as a community member” (Interview, (P6), June 6, 2017).

One Indigenous journalist says she simply “wouldn’t do a Gitksan story because it is my family” (Interview, (P2), June 2, 2017). Instead, she reports on Indigenous issues that are wider in scope or relate to other Indigenous communities that she is not a part of. She says she gives these stories the “same investigation, same rigor, same care” and is “looking for facts and truth telling like any other story (Interview, (P2), June 2, 2017). In another instance, a journalist recently left his reporter role to take on a leadership role as village councilor in the Gitlaxt’aamiks Village Government Council. Although he says he will still own the newspaper he created, he will not extend editorial judgment over the content now that he is part of the tribal leadership (Hamilton, 2016b).

Further complicating their roles as journalists is the fact that some Indigenous journalists have found that they lack authority when trying to report on other Indigenous communities. One Indigenous journalist recounts how leaders in the community gave him a hard time when he tried to report on an issue within their community related to corruption because his ancestral background was not similar to their own and his clan did not have authority to intervene in this community’s internal affairs. The journalist argued that being a journalist gave him authority to report on the Indigenous community’s affairs, but those within the community disagreed. He recounts how they told him, “[A]s a Wet’suwet’en person [you] have absolutely no right to question our authority with what we do on our territory, you worry about your own territory, we’ll worry about ours.” He acknowledges that they were right because “If I wasn’t a journalist, I have no right as a Wet’suwet’en person to question what they were doing.” (Interview, (P6), June 6, 2017)

The journalist acknowledges the clash between being a journalist whose job is to hold a leader accountable to his people, and his role as a “Wet’suwet’en person” where he “totally stepped over the line” (Interview, (P6), June 6, 2017). His experience is exemplary of the ways in which boundaries around multiple identities shape and complicate interactions around information, including hindering one’s professional role to help protect one’s community role.

The balancing act that Indigenous journalists must navigate between identifying as journalists and as members of Indigenous communities is complicated by their absorption and adherence to traditional media norms that are often taught in journalism schools and learned in the newsroom. Yet, responses by tribal community members suggest that Indigenous affiliation and community hierarchy outweighs respect for or adherence to settler norms, such as objective or watchdog journalism. Additionally, this affiliation with

and knowledge of community values and practices likely contributes to Indigenous journalism's ability to dispel stereotypes rife in mainstream media coverage of Indigenous communities.

In sum, the decision to prioritise one's personal role in his or her community over his or her reporter role may occur for several reasons. First, journalists may feel like the perception of them as objective reporters is compromised by their reporting in their own Indigenous community—a community often comprised of their family members. Second, the role the Indigenous journalist may have in the community might mean they are not seen as legitimate questioners of others who might be more senior or who wield more power within the tribal community's hierarchy. Third, when Indigenous journalists have reported on their communities in the past, there have been instances where such reporting led to lateral violence against that reporter's family members via social media—an experience they wish to avoid in the future. Indigenous journalists are thus consistently enmeshed in the experience of boundaries, including how they are set, complicated and re-established, and the resultant impacts this engagement has on information poverty.

Challenges to journalistic authority vis-a-vis hegemonic media norms

It is also challenging for Indigenous journalists to maintain a sense of authority when they report on Indigenous communities because their journalistic credibility may be questioned by mainstream reporters who adhere to hegemonic media norms. One journalist recounts how she used to dream of “reporting stories and issues that reflected the depth and importance of the Indian experience” but “editors informed me, however, that since I am Ojibwe, I lacked the necessary objectivity to cover Indian Country.” When she questioned the editor's decision to send white male reporters to cover city hall where many employees are white men, the editor dismissed the question and she was “branded a troublemaker and an advocate, incapable of doing serious journalism” (Pember, 2017).

This experience underscores the reification of objectivity by many in the journalism world. It also reveals how the objectivity norm is used by editors and journalists to suggest that distance is a net good for journalism and thus also for the populations the journalists report on. In doing so, it implicitly suggests that the dominant view, upheld by the status quo, is the one most worth keeping, despite the fact that journalism that adheres to these norms can reinforce stereotypes of the communities they cover while also leaving other issues unaddressed.

One non-Indigenous journalist and editor at an Indigenous news network describes how he pushed young Indigenous reporters to finish stories that might cause trouble in their personal lives because he argued that not following through with stories would reflect poorly on their credibility as journalists. He recounts:

I would just say to them, ‘We have to do this story. You found it, you’ve got to do it; it’s going to look bad if you don’t do it and it’s going to affect whether you’re perceived as a legitimate journalist or not based on how you conduct yourself.’ On a couple of occasions, they would do it very grudgingly and

then resign a week later or two weeks later. It's hard; it's harder than I think most people realize, but there's lots out there who survive it and go on to really great things. (Interview, (P11), June 8, 2017)

This sentiment, articulated by a non-Indigenous news editor, also reveals the utilisation of boundary work by journalists who use it to define who is and who is not a journalist. Boundary work is an important construct to consider when discussing the parameters and constructs that underpin journalistic culture. In times of media instability, journalists use ethics to determine who is and who is not a journalist and to distinguish between outsiders and insiders (Singer, 2015, p. 21). These norms are used as “identity markers of the professional news worker (“Who I am”)” and as “boundary markers between professionals and non-professionals” (Singer, 2015, p. 21). A consistent purpose in boundary-setting is the use of normative guidelines to articulate who is and who is not a journalist. Journalists position others as less ethical and therefore less crucial to providing information worthy of public consumption (Singer, 2015).

Indigenous journalists engage in boundary work through introspective comments about how they should act as a person of Indigenous background who has the role of journalist. One Indigenous journalist says that being a journalist who happens to be Indigenous often allows him access to Indigenous bodies and Indigenous leaders that might be blocked to a non-Indigenous journalist. When he gets that access, he says:

I have a responsibility as a journalist to ask tough questions often times about tough issues. I have to. I can't hold back, I can't protect, because what's a reader to expect, what's a reader going to think, what is my editor going to think? I better not ever or I won't be working in this business. (Interview, (P1), May 30, 2017)

Yet, he acknowledges that a balance is needed between western conceptions of media and engaging with Indigenous communities who have different traditions of communication, storytelling and accountability. Indeed, he argues that there is a balance between utilising some of the “best” concepts of western journalism while also “preventing cultural harm associated with previous colonial practices” (Adams, 2017, para 20).

These experiences are reflective of how Indigenous journalists engage in the resetting of boundaries as they negotiate hegemonic media norms and their roles as members of Indigenous communities.

Connecting lack of access, stigma and boundary work to information poverty

All of the above generates a hesitancy among Indigenous community members to engage with mainstream journalists and give them information. By not engaging or by limiting engagement, Indigenous communities also remain information poor because they are unwilling to obtain information from outsiders (the journalists) about their community. Yet, engaging with journalists on stories that are archetypal in nature, such as protest-related stories, is problematic for Indigenous communities because they could perpetuate

stereotypes of Indigenous peoples as violent or conflict-prone. In addition, communicating with journalists could be stigmatising for Indigenous community members because it risks upsetting norms related to limited information disclosure, especially if the information casts the community or its leadership in a negative light. This insider/outsider formulation contributes to information poverty by further limiting access to information. For instance, among tribal leaders who discuss secret matters in band council meetings everyone outside of the tribal council could be considered an outsider because they are not privy to those discussions. Information that is shared among Indigenous communities—and that is not related to secret proceedings of band council meetings—is considered insider information for those members, but is unlikely to be shared with journalists outside of the community because of their external status. This, in turn, keeps journalists' information poor even though they are not considered insiders because they don't have the knowledge or perspectives of the Indigenous community members. However, by keeping journalists' information poor, this in turn can keep the Indigenous community, comprised of insiders, information poor because understanding of the community through the dissemination of journalistic information (if done well) has not occurred, leaving stereotypes and tropes in place in the public imaginary.

As such, information poverty is felt by Indigenous community members who feel excluded from internal deliberations by their tribal leadership because they themselves are not in privileged positions of access in the community. For tribal leaders making the decisions, they experience information poverty by delineating who is an insider and who is an outsider, and maintaining these boundaries by keeping information secret. This suggests that internal affairs of an Indigenous community are perceived as sacred and the responsibility of that community and not for external evaluation or critique. This ties in to the notion of the small world phenomenon popularised by Chatman, and which refers to a world where its members “share similar opinions and concerns” and understand one another because of shared language and customs (Chatman, 1991). Values held by members determines what type of information is acceptable (Dankasa, 2017). Indigenous communities are a type of small world, which prioritises containment of information from outsiders such as journalists, even if they are Indigenous. This reinforces the finding by Lingel and boyd (2013) that maintaining information poverty can be a deliberate way to protect the boundaries of community information. Despite these attempts at containment, however, individuals are members of multiple small worlds and thus the borders between communities are often more porous in practice. In other words, individuals have multiple roles and have different levels of privilege or marginalisation associated with these roles, allowing for more movement between worlds than originally conceptualised by Chatman (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010). This finding aligns with the work scholars have conducted about overlapping public spheres among Indigenous communities, such as Avison & Meadows's (2000, p. 353) description of Aboriginal public spheres as “sites of discursive activity” and “processes of public opinion”. Yet, this paper differs by revealing how Indigenous communities may prioritise containment of information from outsiders, even if they are Indigenous, thereby emphasizing boundaries and role hybridity of journalists.

Information poverty is not merely a condition that is influenced by outsiders who withhold access to information and insiders who respond with “self-protective behaviors” to keep themselves information poor (Chatman, 1996, p. 197). Indeed, the role of journalists as navigators of these boundaries, which are themselves contested, shows a more fluid, porous and complex landscape of information poverty. The fact that Indigenous journalists were reluctant to report on their own communities for fear of fraying social

solidarity by exposing their community to outside criticism or contributing inadvertently to lateral violence through their reporting, showed a willingness by journalists to be information poor in order to be community rich. Yet, despite this unwillingness to report on and disseminate information, Indigenous journalists were still perceived by other non-Indigenous journalists as important intermediaries and facilitators of access between them and Indigenous communities. Although limited availability of information reinforced boundaries of insiders versus outsiders to help maintain social solidarity, it differed in scope, degree and application depending on an individual's role and proximity to the Indigenous community.

The news media have frequently perpetuated negative stereotypes and tropes of Indigenous peoples, contributing to the shaping of racist public conceptions of Indigenous peoples, which are sometimes institutionalised in policies or codified into law. It is therefore unsurprising that Indigenous communities choose to limit information about their communities and, more specifically, about tribal leadership meetings from outsiders such as non-Indigenous journalists, or in some circumstances, other Indigenous community members who might be working in the capacity of citizen journalists.

As Lingel and boyd (2013) note, it is important to understand whether the information itself carries a stigma, not just those who are characterised as seeking it in a particular way. Information related to tribal meetings has the potential to reinforce stigma because it could reveal misconduct by leaders, something which they want to avoid. However, it is more often the case that the information-seekers (the journalists) carry a stigma in the eyes of Indigenous community members.

As Chatman (1999) argues, local geographic and temporal realities are important when conceptualising information poverty. That has been shown to be the case when considering Indigenous journalists' lack of access to information, often on tribal land and related to band council meetings, which are temporal in nature. Yet, it is also important to note how individual experiences with information can vary and be localised (Jaeger & Burnett, 2010). This is evident in how an Indigenous community member who takes on the role of citizen journalist may have greater access to potentially privileged information in that community whereas an Indigenous or non-Indigenous journalist outside of that Indigenous community may have a different experience when trying to report on incidents that may have occurred in that community.

The themes of lack of access, journalist stigma and boundary work shed light on how information poverty can be conceptualised in an Indigenous community context. Tribal communities fear stigmatisation based on previous experiences with media and prevent access to tribal land and information via media bans. Journalists are still often viewed as outsiders, even if they are Indigenous. Indigenous journalists choose not to report on their own communities to avoid potentially hurting them and opening them up to criticism from outsiders. This unwillingness to engage in a reportorial role underscores boundary work by Indigenous journalists because they are unwilling to cross over a cultural line that could result in lateral violence for themselves, their families and their communities.

Although Hanusch (2013) suggests that more Indigenous journalism will increase trust in media because Indigenous journalists know the cultures, traditions and languages; have authority with communities; and provide a watchdog role, my study shows that this is not necessarily the case. Instead, Indigenous journalists balance multiple roles as

Indigenous, journalists and community members and often choose to protect their role in their community over exercising their monitorial and reportorial role. In addition, boundary work by Indigenous journalists, tribal communities and mainstream media journalists can result in limited authority of journalists to report on Indigenous issues thereby limiting their public-service role. Lastly, the lack of access that Indigenous and non-Indigenous journalists have to band council meetings where important decisions are made significantly limits the potential for Indigenous journalists to have a watchdog role, which, in theory, increases trust in media. As such, theoretical frameworks of Indigenous journalism culture would be strengthened with the additional constructs of boundary work, with an emphasis on role hybridity, journalistic authority and access. Future research could engage with these constructs in a variety of Indigenous journalism contexts to further expand theoretical frameworks of Indigenous journalism.

References

Adams, Paul. (2017). Where is the next generation of Indigenous journalists coming from? iPolitics. <https://ipolitics.ca/2017/06/22/where-is-the-next-generation-of-indigenous-journalists-coming-from/>

Avison, Shannon, & Meadows, Michael. (2000). Speaking and hearing: Aboriginal newspapers and the public sphere in Canada and Australia. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 25(3): 347-369.

Berger, Guy. (2003). The journalism of poverty and the poverty of Journalism. International Communications Forum. 5-9 April 2003, Cape Town, South Africa.

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. (1982). <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/how-rights-protected/guide-canadian-charter-rights-freedoms.html>

Canadian Heritage. (2022, April 5). Backgrounder – Government introduces legislation to ensure fair compensation for news media and the sustainability of local news. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/news/2022/04/backgrounder--government-introduces-legislation-to-ensure-fair-compensation-for-news-media-and-the-sustainability-of-local-news.html>

Carlson, Matt (2015). Introduction: The many boundaries of journalism. In M. Carlson, & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism: Professionalism, Practices and Participation* (pp. 1-18). Oxford: Routledge.

Charmaz, Kathy. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Chatman, Elfreda. (1990). Alienation theory: Application of a conceptual framework to a study of information among janitors. *RQ*, 29, 355-368.

Chatman, Elfreda. (1991). Life in a small world: Applicability of gratification theory to information-seeking behavior. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 42, 438-449.

Chatman, Elfreda. (1996). The impoverished life-world of outsiders. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 47(3), 193-206.

Chatman, Elfreda. (1999). A Theory of Life in the Round. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 50, 207-217.

Christensen, Jon. (2011). Reporting in Indigenous communities: A new guide for journalists. *The Bill Lane Center for the American West*. <https://west.stanford.edu/news/reporting-indigenous-communities-new-guide-journalists>

Clarke, Debra M. (2014). *Journalism and political exclusion: Social conditions of news production and reception*. Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Corbin, Juliet, & Strauss, Anselm. (2015). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dankasa, Jacob. (2017). Seeking information in circles: The application of Chatman's life in the round theory to the information small world of Catholic clergy in northern Nigeria. *Journal of Information Science*, 43(2), 246-259.

Gieryn, Thomas F. (1999). *Cultural boundaries of science*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Gilchrist, Kristen. (2010). Newsworthy victims? Exploring difference in Canadian local press coverage of missing/murdered Aboriginal and White women. *Feminist Media Studies*, 10(4), 373-390.

Gillmore, Meaghan. (2016). How journalism students are taught to tell Aboriginal stories. *J Source: The Canadian Journalism Project*. <http://j-source.ca/article/how-journalism-students-are-taught-to-tell-aboriginal-stories/>

Hamilton, Waweesh. (2016a, November 28). In First Nations, freedom of the press is unclear. <http://discoursemedia.org/toward-reconciliation/freedom-of-the-press-unclear>

Hamilton, Waweesh. (2016b, December 1). The new press on the block. <http://discoursemedia.org/toward-reconciliation/new-press-block>

Hanusch, Folker. (2013). Charting a theoretical framework for examining indigenous journalism culture. *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy*, (149), 82–91.

Harding, Robert. (2006). Historical representations of Aboriginal people in the Canadian news media. *Discourse and Society*, 17(2), 205-235.

Jaeger, Paul, & Gary Burnett. (2010). *Information worlds: Social context, technology, information behavior in the age of the internet*. New York: Routledge.

Lingel, Jessa, & danah boyd. (2013). "Keep it secret, keep it safe": Information poverty, information norms, and stigma. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 64(5), 981-991.

Lindgren, April, Corbett, Jon, & Hodson, Jaigris. (2017). Canada's local news 'poverty.' *Policy Options*. <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/january-2017/canadas-local-news-poverty/>

Miles, Matthew B., Huberman, A. Michael, & Saldana, Johnny. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Pember, Mary Annette. (2017). *Indian Country Today* hiatus is a blow to nuanced coverage of Indigenous peoples. *Columbia Journalism Review*. https://www.cjr.org/united_states_project/indian-country-today-hiatus.php

Pierro, Robin. (2013). Buried voices: Media coverage of Aboriginal issues in Ontario: Media monitoring report. *Journalists for Human Rights*. http://www.jhr.ca/en/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Buried_Voices.pdf

Morgan, Vanessa Sloan, & Heather Castleden. (2014). Framing Indigenous-settler relations within British Columbia's modern treaty context: A discourse analysis of the Maa-nulth treaty in mainstream media. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 5(3), 1-19.

Ravitch, Sharon M., & Carl, Nicole Mittenfelner (2016). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Schutt, Russell K. (2015). *Investigating the social world: The process and practice of research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Singer, Jane. (2015). Out of bounds: Professional norms as boundary markers. In M. Carlson & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism: Professionalism, practices and participation* (pp. 21-36). Oxford: Routledge.

The Aspen Institute. (2009). Informing communities: Sustaining democracy in the digital age. *The Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy*. https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/docs/pubs/Informing_Communities_Sustaining_Democracy_in_the_Digital_Age.pdf

The Canadian Press. (2016). CRTC hearings on local TV get dire warning that half of all stations could close by 2020. *CBC News*. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/business/crtc-local-tv-1.3418341>

Todorova, Miglena. (2016). Co-created learning: Decolonizing journalism education in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 41, 673-692.

Wallberg, Mike. (2017). Back to class: Reporting in Indigenous communities. <http://ivoh.org/back-to-class-reporting-in-indigenous-communities/>

Woodrooffe, Sophie. (2016). The freedom to limit freedom of the press. *Discourse Media*. <http://discoursemedia.org/toward-reconciliation/the-freedom-to-limit-freedom-of-the-press>

Appendix A. Interviewees

#	Identifier	Background	Org. Type	Role	Date
1	P0	Indigenous	Indigenous magazine	Editor	May 30, 2017
2	P1	Indigenous	Digital news media company	Reporter and photographer	May 30, 2017
3	P2	Indigenous	National public broadcaster	Reporter and Editor	June 2, 2017
4	P3	Indigenous	National public broadcaster	Reporter	June 2, 2017
5	P4	Indigenous	National public broadcaster; University	Former reporter; Professor	June 5, 2017
6	P5	Non-Indigenous	National public broadcaster; University	Producer; Professor	June 5, 2017
7	P6	Indigenous	Digital news media company	Reporter	June 6, 2017
8	P7	Indigenous	Digital news media company	Reporter	June 6, 2017
9	P8	Non-Indigenous	Digital news media company	Managing Editor	June 6, 2017
10	P9	Non-Indigenous	Regional newspaper	Reporter	June 6, 2017
11	P10	Indigenous	Indigenous national public broadcaster	Director of News and Current Affairs	June 8, 2017
12	P11	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous national public broadcaster	Executive Producer, Investigative News	June 8, 2017