Racial stereotyping of indigenous people in the Canadian media: A comparative analysis of two water pollution incidents

Philippe Burns | Eran Shor

McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Correspondence
Email: philippe.burns@mail.mcgill.ca

Abstract
This article examines the discourse surrounding issues affecting Indigenous peoples within the Canadian mainstream media. We compare the coverage of two cases of water poisonings—one in a primarily-white town and the other in an Indigenous community—in 282 newspaper articles from the Toronto Star, the Globe and Mail, the National Post, and Windspeaker. We show that the dominant coverage of these two very similar cases diverged significantly. The Indigenous workers in charge of the water supply were regarded as incompetent and incapable to fill their position while the entire community was described as drunk, lazy, helpless, and perpetually dependent on government aide. By contrast, white workers were seen as relatable and in command of their erroneous actions, while the residents of the town were described simply as the victims of an unfortunate tragedy. Such reporting fails to contextualize the events or point out the injustices of Canadian colonialism, thus contributing to the perpetuation of these injustices.

RÉSUMÉ
Cet article examine le discours sur les questions touchant les peuples autochtones dans les médias grand public canadiens. Nous comparons la couverture de
deux cas d’intoxication par l’eau - l’un dans une ville principalement blanche et l’autre dans une communauté autochtone - dans 282 articles de journaux du Toronto Star, du Globe and Mail, du National Post et de Windspeaker. Nous montrons que la couverture dominante de ces deux cas très similaires a divergé de manière significative. Les travailleurs autochtones chargés de l’approvisionnement en eau étaient considérés comme incompétents et incapables de remplir leur poste, tandis que toute la communauté était décrite comme ivre, paresseuse, impuissante et perpétuellement dépendante de l’aide du gouvernement. En revanche, les travailleurs blancs étaient perçus comme pouvant être racontés et maîtrisant leurs actions erronées, tandis que les habitants de la ville étaient simplement décrits comme les victimes d’une tragédie malheureuse. De tels reportages ne parviennent pas à contextualiser les événements ou à souligner les injustices du colonialisme canadien, contribuant ainsi à la perpétuation de ces injustices.

INTRODUCTION

Beginning on May 13th, 2000, Walkerton, a majority-white community in Southern Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2016), experienced the worst case of Escherichia Coli (E. Coli) poisoning in North America’s history (Gulli, 2005). Out of Walkerton’s fewer than 5,000 residents, seven people lost their lives and nearly 2,300 others fell ill. Five years later, in October 2005, in Kashechewan Ontario, a majority Cree community of 1,900 people was forced to evacuate more than half of its population due to E. Coli in the water source, causing skin lesions, scabies, and impetigo (Shimo, 2016a). This paper focuses on how the Canadian mainstream media reported on these two events and examines differences in coverage.

The two outbreaks diverge in several important ways. Walkerton, a wealthy Southern-Ontario town, saw seven individuals perish subsequent to the E. Coli contamination, whereas no one died in the remote community of Kashechewan. Kashechewan, on the other hand, experienced some noticeable socioeconomic problems, including higher rates of addiction and unemployment. Despite these differences, the two cases share many similarities. First, officials found E. Coli in both communities’ water sources, which could lead to serious health concerns, such as kidney damage and death (Gulli, 2005). The fact that there were no deaths in Kashechewan is largely due to the fact that the community had already been on a drinking water advisory for nearly two years at the time of the outbreak and most residents were already consuming their water primarily from bottled water (Shimo, 2016a). Second, the causes of the poisoning in both communities were similar as well. In Walkerton, the poisoning was caused by runoff from the manure on farms upstream (Brubaker, 2000). In Kashechewan, E. Coli got into the water stream because the treatment plant’s
in-take was downstream from the town’s sewage output (CBC, 2006). Third, a similar proportion of the population fell ill with various \textit{E. Coli}-related conditions (52 percent in Kashechewan, 46 percent in Walkerton). Both communities also had untrained water operators (\textit{Toronto Star}, 2000a; Shimo, 2016a), and both had broken chlorination machines (\textit{Toronto Star}, 2000b; Woods, 2005). An independent water expert who was flown into Kashechewan to investigate the incident stated that the situation was “identical to Walkerton, a malfunction in the chlorination system … and the back-up system didn’t work.” (Humphreys, 2005) These similarities allow for a useful comparison of the media coverage of these two communities and of white and Indigenous people more generally.

In order to fully understand the context for the two cases, it is important to note the circumstances in which Kashechewan was founded and continues to exist. In 1905, the Fort Albany First Nation signed Ontario’s Treaty No. 9, granting the Nation the area around where the Albany River meets James Bay (Long, 1990, p. 202). The group established itself on the southern side of the Albany River. In 1957, the government forcibly relocated the settlement to the northern shoreline of the river, despite the new location being flood prone. This fact is reflected in the name chosen for the town by the community—Keeschewan—which is Cree for “where the water flows fast.” A poor translation then dubbed the town Kashechewan. Not surprisingly, Kashechewan has consequently suffered from repeated inundations (Shimo, 2016b), causing multiple evacuations throughout the years, which led to dilapidated housing conditions (Shimo, 2016a). The community is further shadowed by a long history of residential schools, having only gained local control of its education system in 1987 (Long, 1990).

In this paper, we investigate how mainstream Canadian media distinguish between the two cases and examine how these distinctions echo racial stereotypes of Indigenous peoples in Canada. We show that the differential reporting aligns with perpetuated conceptions that divide Canada along racial and ethnic boundaries. We begin by reviewing past literature on Indigenous coverage in the Canadian media. We then present findings from the media analysis of these two cases and conclude with the potential implications of such differential media coverage for Indigenous communities in Canada.

\textbf{LITERATURE REVIEW}

\textbf{Background}

Indigenous communities in Canada experience more drinking water security challenges than non-Indigenous communities (Metcalf et al., 2014; Health Council of Canada, 2005). Canada holds seven percent of the world’s fresh water, yet it is inhabited by less than 0.5 percent of the world’s population (Environment Canada, 2012). Still, Indigenous peoples continue to have limited access to safe water for drinking or basic hygiene (Adelson, 2005; Eggertson, 2006, 2008; Patrick, 2011; Swain et al., 2006). The Canadian government uses drinking water advisories (DWA) to alert communities when the water quality has been compromised. Advisories occur two-and-a-half times more frequently in Indigenous communities than in non-Indigenous communities (Patrick, 2011). Between 1995 and 2007, half of all DWAs in Indigenous communities were lifted after 39 days. A quarter of the advisories, however, lasted longer than one year – deeming them long-term advisories (Health Canada, 2009). As of February 15th, 2020, 61 long-term drinking water advisories were in effect in Indigenous communities (Indigenous Service of Canada, 2020). These water challenges result in serious public health implications, with Indigenous
populations experiencing higher risk of waterborne illness compared to non-Indigenous populations in Canada as a result of their limited access to water (Adelson, 2005; Harbinson, 2012; Ford et al., 2010; Harper et al., 2011, 2015).

We also acknowledge that Canada is a settler colonial nation, a distinct form of colonialism. Settler colonialism is differentiated from other forms of colonialism by three main features. First, settlers “come to stay,” meaning they intend to permanently settle on and rule over indigenous lands. (Wolfe, 2006) Second, as Patrick Wolfe famously put it, settler colonialism is a “structure, not an event” (Wolfe, 2006). That is, “the moment of invasion sets in place a historically continuous structure ‘predicated on displacing Indigenous people from (or replacing them on) the land’” (Busbridge, 2018, p. 4). Third, settler colonialism seeks the “extinguishment of [Indigenous] political challenges to the state” (Macoun & Strakosch, 2013) by creating narratives and structures that support settler belonging and thus the elimination of Indigenous peoples. This logic of elimination is often omnipresent in settler colonial societies such as Canada. It is manifested in the “physical eradication of Indigenous bodies” (Busbridge, 2018, p. 4), as well as in strategic transformations such as segregation, religious and cultural reeducation, incarceration, and assimilation. By exposing Canada’s contemporary forms of colonialism, the entwinement of settler institutions, narratives, emotions, and settlers themselves are revealed (Macoun & Strakosch, 2013). The settler colonial context is therefore a useful framework for investigating the narratives of Canadian mainstream media.

Institutional racism and colonization are intertwined “and together deeply impact the health of Indigenous peoples in Canada.” (Allan & Smylie, 2015, p. 2) The effects of institutional racism are seen in domains such as access to healthcare, housing, education, food security, and employment (Allan & Smylie, 2015). Furthermore, institutional racism has a direct impact on the community of Kashechewan. Shaikh et al. (2017) argued that the consistent flooding in Kashechewan is not merely a natural hazard but is the result of distributional inequity, as no other community in Canada would tolerate such repeated devastation and disturbance due to flooding. According to Shaikh et al. (2017), when flooding threatens a white community the government quickly finds solutions, but such solutions are absent in many cases of flooding in Indigenous communities, demonstrating institutional racism.

**Previous research**

Former research on the media representation of Indigenous peoples has examined coverage patterns in countries such as New Zealand, Mexico, Israel, and Canada. Research on the representation of the Māori People in New Zealand found that Māori narratives were covered at low rates and the media relied primarily on white sources when writing about them (Rankine et al., 2014). Reporting was found to mainly focus on violence and the perceived threat Māori People pose to white New Zealanders (Abel, 2013). Studies focusing on the representation of missing Indigenous women in Mexico and Canada found that media coverage paints these women as disposable (García-Del Moral, 2014). Research on the media coverage of Palestinian athletes in Israel similarly found that their voices are often being silenced and policed (Shor, 2008; Shor & Yonay, 2011; Yonay & Shor, 2014).

In the Canadian context, research on Missing and Murdered Indigenous women found that Indigenous women received significantly less coverage than white missing women (Gilchrist, 2010) and were reported “as criminals, victims of sexual crimes, militant rebels, and as inassimilable others” (Jiwani, 2014, p. 1) Iconographic research has further found that Canadian media used
photographs to perpetuate images of Indigenous people as natural victims and as radical activists (Morton, 2014). Research on the television coverage of Indigenous people in Canada found that this coverage lacked context and that the voices of Indigenous people were missing (Clark, 2014).

Beyond these studies, over the last two decades, one may find four research reports on the media representation of Indigenous people that are frequently cited. The first is the report by the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples (1996), which conducted a qualitative analysis of the representation of Indigenous people in Canada. The Commission found that Indigenous peoples were covered in the media as environmentalists, warriors, or pitiful victims. Furthermore, the report established that coverage portrayed Indigenous people as foreign, unknowable, and as a threat to society. The authors of the report stated that media reports did not reflect Aboriginal realities very well and did not offer them many opportunities to tell their own stories. Thus, the media perpetuated a distorted image of the Indigenous communities to the non-Indigenous audience and contributed to weakened Indigenous communities.

Fifteen years later, sociologist Augie Fleras (2011) found that reporting patterns on issues affecting Indigenous people in the Canadian media refracted Indigenous realities through a “prism of mainstream whiteness” (p. 16). News media reports habitually omitted the historical context when writing about Indigenous issues and problems, thus creating a sense that these problems were caused by the communities themselves. This decontextualization, in turn, has helped to normalize non-Indigenous dominance. Indigenous peoples have been reported in ways that portrayed them on the one hand as vulnerable and requiring government assistance, and on the other hand as ruthless thugs who need to be controlled. Mainstream media have painted Indigenous people as confrontational, demonized their activism, and framed their protests as independent from one another, while ignoring the diversity of Aboriginal voices.

The work of Robert Harding (2006) has greatly contributed to the scholarship on the historical and contemporary representation of Indigenous peoples in the Canadian media. Using content analysis of mainstream media, Harding has found that the media portray Indigenous peoples as not ready to have control over their lives. Harding compared media representations of Indigenous peoples from the 1860s and from the 1990s, finding relatively few differences between the two periods, with Aboriginal people mostly portrayed as a threat, governed by emotions rather than reason (Harding, 2006).

In other research, Harding has shown that reporting on the Indigenous issues and individuals tended to focus on demonstrating the flawed, inefficient, and incompetent nature of the Aboriginal welfare system (Harding, 2009; 2010). Mainstream media coverage has been demonizing Indigenous welfare workers and questioning their competence, while ignoring the harmful historical impact of residential schools.

More recently, and closest to the design of the current study, Lam et al. (2017) analyzed newspaper coverage of water issues dating between 2000 and 2015. They found that there was limited coverage of Indigenous water challenges. Most newspaper articles focused on the government’s response to these challenges, highlighting inadequate government spending and action, while very few discussed how to protect water sources for Indigenous communities. In comparison, reporting on water issues in white communities did explore ways to protect the drinking water. Although the volume of coverage for Indigenous water issues had increased following the 2005 crisis in Kashechewan, coverage of Indigenous challenges continued to lack.

In conclusion, past research has found that the issues that Indigenous peoples face are substantially underrepresented when compared to coverage of white challenges, and that the scant coverage rarely includes Indigenous perspectives or contextualizes the issues they face. Indigenous people are commonly presented as outsiders who threaten the majority white population.
Three of these studies have also adopted a comparative design, contrasting the coverage of Indigenous and white issues (Harding, 2009; Gilchrist, 2010; Lam et al., 2017).

The current paper goes beyond the existing literature by utilizing a careful comparative analysis of two very similar cases of water security problems. By examining a large number of articles focusing on these two cases, we are able to account for the circumstances of the events that may influence reporting patterns, and ascertain that these are indeed comparable. Zooming in on these two cases allows for an exploration of not only how the water issues were covered, but also the way in which the media and the public think about Indigenous people and the deep-rooted and sometimes implicit stereotypes that come out through engaging with this issue.

**METHODS**

**Sampling**

We compared media coverage surrounding the water crises in an Indigenous community (Kashechewan) and a mostly-white community (Walkerton). Data was collected from three highly-popular Canadian settler Newspapers: *The Globe and Mail*, *National Post*, and the *Toronto Star*. The first two newspapers are nationally distributed, while the *Toronto Star* is a more local newspaper, though also available outside of the city. All three newspapers present an array of political stances, with the *Toronto Star* typically being considered a more liberally-inclined newspaper, *The Globe and Mail* considered politically centered, and the *National Post* considered a more conservative outlet. We also retrieved articles from *Windspeaker*, the only nationally distributed Indigenous newspaper.

In total, we analyzed 282 articles. Of these, 272 were taken from settler media and 10 from Indigenous media. Out of the 272 articles in settler media, 123 discussed the events in Kashechewan and 149 focused on Walkerton. All 10 articles from the Indigenous media discussed the water crisis in Kashechewan. We retrieved our sample using the ProQuest Canadian Newspaper online archival database. In order to track the narrative’s development, we examined articles written during the month of the crisis and up to five years following the incident (Walkerton: May 2000 to May 2005; Kashechewan: October 2005 to October 2010). We further limited the search to news, articles, and features in order to exclude opinion pieces that may skew our findings. We examined all of the 123 articles retrieved from our keyword search for the “Kashechewan Water Crisis” (50 articles from the *National Post*, 33 from the *Toronto Star*, and 41 from the *Globe and Mail*). Our search using the phrase “Walkerton Water Crisis” retrieved a significantly larger number of articles – 542. We randomly selected articles from this search to have a more equal number of articles from each news source. To do so we used a k-interval (k = 4), in order to reduce the sample to a more manageable size for an in-depth qualitative content analysis of 149 articles (22 from the *National Post*, 88 from the *Toronto Star*, and 39 from the *Globe and Mail*).

Our primary analytical strategy aimed to examine mainstream settler news sources in order to examine potential biases within settler media. In addition, in order to understand the discourse surrounding the topic in Indigenous media, we conducted an analysis of articles that mentioned the “Kashechewan water crisis” published in *Windspeaker* – the only nationally-distributed Indigenous newspaper in Canada. Using Proquest, we entered the same search term (“Kashechewan water crisis”) and retrieved all the articles published in *Windspeaker* within the same date range (October 2005 to October 2010). This search yielded only ten articles and we therefore analyzed all of them.
Analysis

We used a qualitative in-depth analysis to reach a thorough and critical understanding of the discourse in the four news sources described above. Our analysis was based on inductive open coding, wherein we allowed patterns to emerge organically from the data. Those patterns then informed the various themes and patterns that we discuss in this paper (see Warren & Karner, 2010). We followed an analytical strategy similar to that reported in former studies on the media representation of minorities in Canada (e.g. Shier & Shor, 2016) and in other contexts (Shor & Yonay, 2010, 2011). We used an excel spreadsheet to code basic information (such as newspaper, title, author, date of publication, and article length) in each of the articles in the final sample. We then identified key themes within each article and coded them into the excel spreadsheet, revising our list of themes sequentially as we progressed in the coding process. Indeed, at first we identified a large number of themes. These related primarily to the causes of the poisoning, the effect of the incidents on community members and victims, the impact of the poisoning on the community as a whole, the various regulations surrounding water issues, the government responses to the crises, the media coverage of the incidents, the role of individual water operators, the historical context of the two towns, and the economic impacts of the emergencies. In our analysis, we focus on a handful of these themes, for which we found the greatest disparities in coverage between the two incidents. These included the coverage of the individual water operators, the governmental responses to the incidents, discussions of the media coverage, and themes related to the historical contextualization of the two crises.

FINDINGS

Media coverage of the two water poisonings presented divergent reporting patterns. While in both cases the water operator lacked complete training, the two operators were described quite differently. In the Walkerton case, the operator was presented as responsible and reporters believed that he “should be made accountable” for his actions (Walkom, 2003). Conversely, the operator in Kashechewan was portrayed as infantile and incapable, suggesting that external (read “white”) “experts must take over regulation” (Leeder, 2005). The community of Walkerton was described as having been put in danger by “Ontario’s government [who] led to the... tragedy,” (Brubaker, 2000), whereas the response to the water crisis in the Cree community was presented as “unnecessary”, with one reporter even renaming the town “Kashechewaste” (Brubaker, 2005). Newspaper articles further discuss the problems of “unemployment, boredom, drug and alcohol abuse” within Kashechewan, sometimes even going as far as claiming that “the entire town reeks of poverty and neglect” (Strauss, 2005c). These reports did little to contextualize the structural issues that have led to the resident’s poor living conditions and instability, such as continued flooding, lack of proper government funding, and the recent history of residential schools. These differential media-coverage patterns perpetuate stereotypes of Indigenous people as juvenile, incapable, alcoholic, and apathetic. They also portray the community as living off of funding from the Canadian government, painting the community as parasitic. We found that negative framing was more common in The Globe and Mail and the National Post. The Toronto Star discussed the crisis in a mostly neutral and matter-of-fact tone; however negative content was not absent from their reports.
"Incompetent personnel who can’t follow instructions and solve problems": the coverage of water maintenance operators

In Kashechewan, the water treatment plant operator was a Cree man named Isaiah Wynne. When the chlorination system at the plant had broken down, Wynne resorted to “adding chlorine to [the] water manually” and maintained water chlorine levels around the average level of towns in the area (Strauss, 2005b). Once *E. Coli* was discovered in Kashechewan, an independent operator was called in and was able to fix the machine. Similarly, in Walkerton, a new chlorinator sat in a box for 7 to 18 months and was only installed after people had already started falling ill. The scales used to measure the chlorine to disinfect the water never worked and Stan Koebel, the treatment plant manager, ‘guesstimated’ the amount of chlorine they were using (Avery, 2000).

Despite these similar practices and responses to the crisis, media reporting on the actions of the two workers differed significantly. In a profile of a water operator in Hanover, Ontario, Charlie Gillis (2000) from the *National Post* summarized how Koebel had been portrayed: “It would be easy to sum up a man like Leroy Deitz in the simple terms media have been using to describe Stan Koebel over the past two weeks. Dedicated. Simple. Well-intentioned, if not well-educated.” Conversely, Wynne, the operator at Kashechewan, was not given any credit for his efforts to maintain chlorination levels. Instead, a report states that “when [the] system churned out dirty water thanks to the incompetence of band workers, consultants were flown in to fix it” (Kay, 2005). Another report on Kashechewan stated that once these external (white) consultants were brought in, “the *E. Coli* disappeared faster than you can say ‘competent operator’” (Brubaker, 2005). Thus, while both operators used precisely the same method for maintaining chlorination, Koebel’s actions were viewed as ‘well-intentioned’, though negligent, while Wynne was portrayed as completely incompetent and unqualified for the job, necessitating white experts to save the day. On the one hand, such a narrative removes personal blame from Wynne while holding Koebel fully accountable. On the other hand, as we discuss below, it also serves to infantilize not only Wynne but his entire community.

The two operators also had similar levels of training Wynne participated in a training program financed by Indian Affairs. The program was tailored to individual plants and did not constitute a certificate that would allow operators to work outside of their community (El Akkad, 2005). Koebel had taken similar training courses (*Toronto Star, 2000c*) and had “learned the tricks of the trade from his master” (Bourette, 2000a). His training had since been deemed “inadequate” (Coyle, 2001), and Koebel himself admitted to not having “appropriate skills or schooling” (Laghi, 2000) to take care of the water system. Still, all 11 articles that discussed the Indigenous Wynne, talked about him as incompetent. These coverage patterns were exemplified by columnist Margaret Wente of *The Globe and Mail*, who wrote about the Kashechewan case: "It’s easy to say that local water operators need better equipment and more training. Indeed they do. But not all the training in the world will help if they can’t follow instructions, and don’t know how to problem-solve" (2005a).

In contrast, reporting on the Walkerton case painted Koebel, the manager of the water operation plant, as a responsible employee, whose mistakes resulted from temporary poor judgment, rather than a general lack of competency. Indeed, of the 52 articles that discussed the water operator in Walkerton, we found that only 4 used language that portrayed Koebel as incompetent. These typically stated that “health officials have alleged [Koebel] knew of the contamination but failed to alert health authorities” (Barber, 2001), or that “Mr. Koebel is accused of keeping silent for days even though he knew that the town’s water was seriously contaminated” (Bourette, 2000b). In
other reports, the crisis was described as resulting from “a little bit of carelessness, and a lot of fear of being made to look foolish or alarmist – a lack of courage to speak out” (Globe & Mail, 2000).

To be sure, such reports do not paint Koebel in a positive light. They characterize him as lacking courage and failing to inform the community. One might even suggest that such reports are more damning in the case of Koebel, as he is portrayed as personally responsible for the incident, while Wynne is simply incapable of doing the job and therefore should not have been put in this situation in the first place. However, we should note what these differential portrayals say about Indigenous people as a group. In the case of Koebel, the incident is attributed to an individual failure of character or judgment and no one might infer from it that white Canadians as a group are incapable of fulfilling such positions of responsibility. In contrast, in the case of Wynne, the alleged lack of basic competency, skills, training, and ability to solve problems seem to originate from his background and upbringings and appear to be generalized to the entire community, which is thus unable to handle complex positions and take care of its own safety.

Indeed, the presentation of Indigenous water operators as incompetent was not limited to Wynne. Elizabeth Brubaker, a commentator for the National Post, argued that “most water treatment plant operators in First Nations communities do not possess the knowledge and skills required to operate their plants safely” (Brubaker, 2005). This statement is factually correct, as similar to Wynne, many Indigenous operators do not have sufficient certifications that would allow them to operate plants throughout Ontario. However, making sure that such certifications are acquired was not presented as a possible solution to the problem. Instead, the Toronto Star reporter recommends that “trained Ontario experts... take over regulation of native water treatment facilities to ensure drinking water safety on reserves” (Leeder, 2005). In the same vein, another article maintained that “low skills will make [Indigenous peoples] forever dependent on non-aboriginal funds” (Simpson, 2005), and yet another concluded that this is “no surprise: The labour force on reserves is among the most poorly skilled in the Western world” (Kay, 2005). In other words, the conclusion from the Kashechewan affair was that only white Canadians are really capable of carefully operating these plants and as long as Indigenous operators continue to occupy these positions, we should expect further calamities. This conclusion, once again, ignores the alternative solution of providing better training for Indigenous water operators, instead presenting these skills as out of reach and portraying the communities stereotypically as helpless, incompetent, and dependent on white Canada.

Reporting on the two operators also diverged in the degree to which humanizing and personal details were included in the report. Of the 52 articles that discussed the Walkerton water operator, 40 (nearly 80 percent) mentioned Stan Koebel by name. Conversely, none of the 11 articles that discussed the water operator in Kashechewan case mentioned Isaiah Wynne by name. Many of the reports on Koebel also gave personal details about him, which helped in humanizing him and his failings. He was described as a “solid fellow... who made a human mistake” (Walkom, 2003) or “a churchgoer, a father, and the kind of neighbor who cuts your grass when you are away. He drives a Ford pickup, and pictures of his wife and kids line his office” (Cheney, 2000). Cheney’s report continues with a quote from Koebel’s Reverend, Beth Conroy, who said: “‘Some people are blaming him. But not the ones who know him. He’s drinking the water right along with us. And so is his family.’”

In contrast, the single report that stated that Wynne was also liked by his neighbors, quickly clarified that this is simply because “a lot of people are related to [him]” (Wente, 2005b). The water crisis in Kashechewan was distanced from the mainstream audience of Canadian media, and Indigenous individuals and the community as a whole were described in dehumanizing and
racially stereotyping ways. All 11 of the articles that discussed Isaiah Wynne avoided using his name. In contrast, Stan Koebel was often reported with his name mentioned, alongside other personal details that served to humanize him.

“Bags of money dropped into the Kashechewan swamp”: covering the government response to the crises

Nearly 40 percent of the articles on the crisis in Kashechewan (49 of 123) discussed the government response to it and subsequent investments. While most reports used neutral language in discussing these investments, several viewed the money spent to help the community as an “unnecessary cost” and claimed that the Canadian government is “content to waste money on bogus solutions” (Brubaker, 2005). According to Wattie (2005), shortly after the arrival of the ‘independent expert,’ the water was reported as *E. Coli*-free. However, the government needlessly continued with evacuation plans and provided a military grade water filtration system. Others agreed that the government was “needlessly funding a huge evacuation and sending in the army to provide quality water that is already on tap” (Strauss, 2005c), with “bags of money being dropped by a plane into the Kashechewan swamp” (Brubaker, 2005).

Such media decries of “unnecessary public spending” were not present in the wake of the Walkerton crisis. Of the forty-three articles that discussed the government response (about one third of all reports), none challenged the transferring of additional funding to the town, despite the overall investments being similar in both cases. The Kashechewan evacuation had an estimated cost of $16 million (CBC, 2006), whereas the Ontario government spent $13.6 million to replace the water filtration system and $37 million in compensation to residents (Walkom, 2003). Reporters spoke of the latter investments as “a promise of better things to come” (Brooks, 2000), noting that the “town’s insurers should be commended for a generous interpretation of their policy” (Harries, 2000).

Media reports further encouraged the government to enforce stricter regulations in Walkerton, commending the Ontario government for getting tougher, “with new safety rules that force mandatory testing of water supplies” (*National Post*, 2000). Conversely, in Kashechewan, negative language presented the government response as going over-the-top. Wente (2005b), for example, used a list of pledged investments in Indigenous communities to illustrate money spent as mountainous:

Nobody can guess the final cost of the broken $30 part. The government spent $500,000 to fly people out; it’s costing another $10,000 or so a day to put them up. Paul Martin has pledged to move the whole community upstream, at a possible cost of $100-million. He has also promised $3-billion or $4-billion more to bring all 600 first nations water systems up to scratch, on top of the $2-billion we’ve already spent in the past decade. Meantime, back in Kashechewan, the Rangers have produced 300,000 liters of drinking water no one needs. (Wente, 2005b)

Some reporters further presented the investments in Kashechewan as opening the gates to a flood of investments in other Indigenous communities. When recapping the good and the bad of the federal government’s pre-election campaign, the (*National Post*, 2005) wrote: “Bad times: having ‘solved’ the Kashechewan crisis, Indian Affairs Minister Andy Scott is inundated with pleas from equally desperate aboriginal communities.” These ominous predictions stand in contrast to the positive descriptions of the outcome of funding in Walkerton, seen as an important and much needed promise for a better and safer life. Such differential coverage patterns communicate the idea that any investments in Indigenous communities may be seen as a waste, reinforcing the idea
that Indigenous water problems are just a force of nature and that spending monies on aiding communities is futile, as living conditions will never be able to ‘catch-up’ to the rest of Canada.

“A media cliché”: reflections on the media response to the events

The media response to Kashechewan was discussed in 7 of the 123 articles. Six of these articles criticized the amount of coverage the town was getting, as well as the reasons for this coverage. In particular, a report in a National Post article claimed that Kashechewan’s white community members were able to mobilize a response to their crisis through hatching “a media campaign to bring national attention… [and] try to embarrass the federal authorities into action” (Strauss, 2005c). Another article, this time in The Globe and Mail stated:

I’m astonished that anyone was astonished by the dirty water crisis in Kashechewan. It was a perfectly predictable business – and, as tragedies on reserves go, a relatively mild one… Headlines about miserable reserves in remote places are, by now, a media cliché. (Wente, 2005a)

Despite the presence of E. Coli in its water source, the Kashechewan community was deemed undeserving of this amount of attention, with journalists accusing local trickery as responsible for a disproportionate media response. Notably, none of the 11 articles that discussed media responses to the Walkerton case criticized the ample coverage given to the incident.

The media also focused on the actions of white members of the Kashechewan community, while ignoring the central role of Chief Leo Friday and other Indigenous members in dealing with the crisis. This role was evident in another report, suggesting that residents were so grateful for Friday’s role in securing an evacuation that “some of them [were] near tears, [as they] lined up to shake the chief’s hand” (Strauss, 2005a). This media focus on the actions of the minority of white members in the Kashechewan community during the crisis, while mostly ignoring the important actions of Indigenous leaders, again perpetuates the myth of the “white savior” who comes into marginalized helpless communities to save them from themselves.

“Fail to look after what they’ve been given”: neglecting the historical and structural context

Kashechewan is a remote community that was forcibly relocated onto a flood bank. This fact has caused several evacuations over the years (Shimo, 2016a). The community is still shadowed by the practice of residential schools, abolished only in 1987 (Long, 1990). Furthermore, the reservation is underfunded by the government, resulting in serious deficiencies in resources (Woods, 2005). However, this structural and historical context was not often mentioned in the media reporting on the community, with only two out of the nine articles that discussed the living conditions in Kashechewan mentioning this context. This lack of contextualization contributes to the common stereotype about a community that is inherently incompetent, lazy, and drunk.

Indeed, the media’s frequent focus on people with addiction and those who are unemployed paints a picture of the community as lazy and drunk. The following excerpt from the Globe and Mail on Mathias Wynne, a resident of Kashechewan who is unrelated to operator Isaiah Wynne, is one example:

When the federal government was announcing it would build a new settlement for the people of Kashechewan, Mathias Wynne was passed out drunk on a fetid mattress in his filthy room. It was only the next morning when he awoke with a splitting headache, feelings of nausea and trembling
hands that he heard the news... Three times he has been taken to clinics outside the Kashechewan reserve to treat his addiction, but, each time, boredom and hopelessness led him back to drink after he returned... [He’s] the father of two small children he has never seen. (Strauss, 2005b).

The article continues to describe the residents by focusing on their laziness. The reporter, Strauss, discusses the state of dilapidation of housing, but ignores the multiple floodings that led to this dilapidation, instead shifting the blame to the “indifference” of residents. The report focused on a recovering alcoholic who “sits in a football shirt flipping channels on the television” and stated that the population has “given up living off the land...and survive instead on junk food” (Strauss, 2005b). This coverage fails to contextualize the circumstances behind the dire state of the Kashechewan community, instead simply echoing long held stereotypes about Indigenous people as drunk, lazy, and irresponsible. Another article in a similar vein stated that the people of Kashechewan “live but do not work,” and that the community has “failed to look after what they’ve been given” (Ibbotson, 2006). This type of coverage creates the image that this community is inhabited by slothful residents, asserting that their lack of interest will inevitably perpetuate their poor living conditions and consequently their parasitic dependence on Canadian funding. The funding itself is then used to argue that Kashechewan must assimilate. Reporters note that the community is “running a deficit” (Strauss, 2005b) and that “all the money in the world won’t help if you don’t have a functioning society with a real economy (not a make-believe one fueled by government handouts) and an educated workforce” (Kay, 2005). Other reporters even stated that these “remote reserves that don’t meet modern capitalism must fail, because their occupants need and demand services that government can’t provide” (Ibbotson, 2006). The common theme for all these reports is that they fail to acknowledge the long history of oppression, abuse, and neglect that created these conditions. Instead, they reinforce the idea that Indigenous communities, when left to their own devices, are doomed to unemployment, poverty, and substance abuse unless they fully assimilate and adopt the culture of white Canada. Such narratives ignore the fact that even communities and individuals that make great efforts to assimilate and turn their back to their cultural heritage and traditions often fail in reaching economic and social equality (Weaver, 2012).

Two months after the evacuation, nearly all residents of Kashechewan had returned to their homes. According to Indian Affairs official Susan Bertrand, not a single resident did not want to return to Kashechewan after the evacuation (Curry, 2005). However, despite this marked resilience and the commitment of the residents, media reports continued to recommend the assimilation and the dissolution of the community, while ignoring Indigenous perspectives. For example, Jonathan Kay, a columnist for the National Post, wrote that the dissolution of the community is necessary, and that without assimilation into urban centers the town will disintegrate:

Since Indian leaders and their counterparts in Ottawa can conceive of only one solution to this problem – more money – the only question becomes how many millions taxpayers will fork over... The nation’s activists and politicians... argue that what we really need is more subsidies for this obsolete way of life. Meanwhile, the more obvious solution – encouraging natives to migrate to urban schools and job centers – is denounced as a form of cultural genocide... Kashechewan was a dysfunctional community bereft of any kind of functioning civil society or economy. Left to its own devices, such a community would mercifully disintegrate within months, and its inhabitants would be given a chance to build meaningful lives elsewhere. But with enough outside funding, Ottawa has shown us, even the most miserable community can grind on in perpetuity... We have already destroyed the aboriginals’ culture – through television, guns, the English language, packaged food, schools, hospitals, ATVs and Christianity. None of these genies can be put back in the bottle, even if natives wanted to – which, of course, they don’t. (Kay, 2005)
The author offhandedly dismisses the community’s willingness to stay together, instead painting the residents as grinding on into perpetuity. He easily brushes off the accusation about cultural genocide through the argument that, “left to its own devices” Kashechewan would disintegrate because of a lack of capitalist skills. While acknowledging the very harmful effects of colonialism to Aboriginals’ culture, he denounces reparations as a potential solution. Instead, he advocates the continuation of cultural genocide, as the community is seemingly helpless without the wonders of Christianity, the English language, packaged food, ATVs, and, of course, guns. Indeed, who in his right mind would want to give up on such wonderful things? These views ignore the desires of the community to stay together in Kashechewan and rehash the notion that only white Canada knows what is best for them. They also ignore the fact that even when aboriginal people do move to city centers they often remain socially and economically marginalized (Weaver, 2012).

In a later article entitled ‘Death by Preservation’, Kay (2007) further stated that “we are so determined to keep surviving native communities from going the way of the Taron that we encourage tens of thousands to remain huddled in ‘culturally authentic’ encampments such as Kashechewan.” Kay clearly believes that Indigenous people are no longer able to maintain any shred of cultural authenticity, whatever that means. His use of the term “encampments” evokes the imagery of the community as prisoners or forced detainees, again failing to consider the perspective of the community itself and the individuals who clearly do not welcome such disintegration and prefer to stay together in Kashechewan while fighting for the reparation of past and present injustices.

The National Post is not alone in this line of reporting. Columnist Margaret Wente of the Globe and Mail wrote in a similar fashion:

Makes me furious for kids like Roman Wesley, who, at 1, is among the youngest refugees from Kashechewan. Not a single thing that anyone has said or done or plans to do will help him. Once they clean up the water, he’ll go right back to the place without a future, where the only economic activities of significance are smuggling booze, distilling moonshine, and selling dope… Instead of restrictive laws, we use bribes. We bribe Roman’s parents to stay put. Miserable as their lives may be, at least they get a house and a welfare cheque. Once they strike out in search of better chances, they’re on their own… What strikes me most about the people of Kashechewan is their helplessness. Why couldn’t they just fix the intake pipe themselves? But it wasn’t their responsibility. It was the government’s job. And now it’s the government’s job to fix their lives. We’ve done an awful thing: We’ve trained them to be utterly powerless to help themselves. (Wente, 2005a)

Wente evokes the language of “refugees,” creating the false impression that the evacuation saved the members. To reiterate, there is no evidence that the community did not want to return to Kashechewan; quite the contrary. Once again, Indigenous perspectives are overlooked, and Wente is more than happy to speak for Roman Wesley, a one year old and his parents, reassuring that she knows what they truly need, even if they do not. This reporting presents the clearest depiction of the community as helpless victims, describing the people of Kashechewan as “utterly powerless,” unwilling to take responsibility. Again, the long history of oppression and neglect is omitted, making the community’s downfall appear inevitable, the result of inherent helplessness, lack of initiative, and cultural backwardness.

While the above narratives were dominant among reporters, it is important to note that there were also other media voices in the aftermath of the Kashechewan affair. Some reporters portrayed the community using positive language, critiquing “the Canadian Media [for regarding] the lives of one of Canada’s founding people as lacking in sufficient substance to matter to viewers” (Wagamese, 2005). Others reported on the Mayor of Sudbury, who was happy that her city received evacuees from Kashechewan and who felt “there has been a tremendous spirit of cooperation and
mutual respect between the communities... and by almost all accounts, our guests have been grateful for the enormous efforts of city staff, the Red Cross, our local aboriginal communities” *(Toronto Star, 2005)*. However, while important, these voices often blend into the background, leaving the main stage for strongly-worded condemning statements and proposed solutions such as the ones described above.

**“If you snooze, Indians lose, media folks”: how indigenous media covered the Kashechewan water crisis**

To further contextualize our analysis of mainstream settler colonial media, we examined how Indigenous Canadian media sources covered the Kashechewan water crisis. To do so, we looked at articles that mentioned the water crisis published in *Windspeaker*, the only nationally-distributed Indigenous newspaper in Canada. We found that these articles frequently discussed the history and context of the town, spoke of government funding as reconciliation for negligence and crimes, and were highly critical of the mainstream media’s role in reporting the crisis.

Discussions of the structural context of Kashechewan were common in *Windspeaker* reports of the water crisis. When discussing evacuations from Kashechewan in 2007 due to flooding, author Kate Harries primarily discussed how the ring dike that encircles Kashechewan had been insecure since it was built in 1997. She went on to say that “Like New Orleans, [Kashechewan] is a community that depends for its survival on the security of the protective wall that surrounds it. As in New Orleans, warnings have been ignored.” *(Harries, 2007)*. This neglect eventually resulted in flood damages to sixty homes. Reporting on the state of infrastructure is not limited to flooding protections, it extends to water intake as well. Such focus on the state of infrastructure and the context for dilapidated houses is rarely found in settler media reporting on Kashechewan.

In *Windspeaker*’s coverage of federal funding, authors rejected the argument that Indigenous people receive too much. Instead, they offered historical context to challenge this idea. In the following excerpt, written by Drew Hayden Taylor *(2007)* in the *Windspeaker*, government funding is given historical context:

WE DEMAND that something be done in general about the belief that Canada’s First Nations get everything for free. This is true only if you count the bad water in Kashechewan, illnesses from black mold in inadequate housing, linguistic genocide, diabetes, and rampant sexual abuse. Trust me, we’ve paid for all this in many ways. I’ve heard the term ‘give until it hurts,’ but this is ridiculous.”

Taylor rejects the idea that Indigenous people receive unnecessary government funding, providing the context of the crimes and negligence committed by the Canadian government along the years. Another article on the crisis in *Windspeaker* also addressed the government investment in Indigenous communities. Here, the author, Williams Morin, criticized the white Minister of Indian Affairs, Jim Prentice, who responded to a question about spending on Indigenous Canadians by saying: “Are we getting value for the dollars?” *(Morin, 2007)*. According to Morin *(2007)*:

As Aboriginals even today we are not seen as people. If we are not running at peak efficiency then get rid of it, is the order of the day. Aboriginal Canadians have unwillingly sacrificed so much for the Canada of today. Many Aboriginal communities and their members are still paying for it in real blood, sweat and tears. From residential schools to the Kashechewan water crisis, the neglect of Aboriginals continues. In today’s terms, how do you put a price on the loss of whole communities and the extinction of nations, a loss of many ancient languages, the systemic elimination of Aboriginal cultures.
Windspeaker authors discuss government investment through the lens of continued unwanted sacrifices made by Indigenous peoples in order to dismiss the argument that the funding is underserved. This perspective is often missing from settler colonial media, who are quick to dismiss Indigenous lifestyles as costly and argue for an approach of elimination through assimilation.

In response to suggestions for a relocation of the town to Timmins, Ontario, the Windspeaker reported that “a community consultation being undertaken by Dr. Emily Faries is expected to find that residents would prefer to stay on their traditional territories and move upriver to higher ground” (Harries, 2007). Again, it is rare to find the perspectives of community members in mainstream settler media reporting. In such reports, moving the town to Timmins is suggested with no consultation or input from the residents of Kashechewan. Chief Elijah K Moonias (2007) wrote an article in the Windspeaker in which he provided a counter argument to assimilation:

There is talk of moving northern, costly, isolated Native communities to urban centers in relation to water and sewage issues at Kashechewan… A few months ago there was a suggestion of moving protesting Mohawks out of the urbanized areas in Southern Ontario and moving them to Northern Ontario. So moving the urban centers is not an option apparently.

The Windspeaker was highly critical of the mainstream media’s coverage of the water crisis in Kashechewan, charging that settler news organizations recognize the problem but choose not to write about them, thus neglecting their duty to assist Indigenous peoples in their struggle. Thus, these mainstream media are complicit in the governmental neglect of Indigenous communities. One of the Windspeaker (2005) editorials demonstrates this cry for change:

Dear news directors and executive editors: Don’t you see that you are part of the problem? If you don’t dig into the workings of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and other departments that play a role on reserves, the officials will continue to do the bureaucratic equivalent of sitting on the couch eating bonbons while people get sick and die. As long as the mainstream press fiddles with other comparatively inconsequential matters, our taxpayer-fed bureaucrats will never have to take the career risk that comes with telling someone higher up the food chain that they need to spend money to address the fallout of generations of neglect on reserve. If you snooze, Indians lose, media folks.

Such narratives in Canada’s primary Indigenous newspaper offer an alternative to those described above in mainstream settler media and provide a stark contrast to these mainstream narratives. Whereas settler media authors often ignored context and argued the government “waste[s] its money on bogus solutions” (Brubaker, 2005). The Indigenous media highlighted the historical and continued oppression of Indigenous people and contextualized governmental investments in Indigenous communities by pointing to the “systemic elimination of Aboriginal cultures.” (Morin, 2007)

While mainstream media called for assimilation as a mercy treatment, citing the argument that “such a community would mercifully disintegrate within months” (Kay, 2005), Windspeaker writers argued “that residents would prefer to stay on their traditional territories and move upriver to higher ground” (Harries, 2007) Similarly, while mainstream reports ascribed dilapidated housing to the failure of residents “to look after what they’ve been given” (Ibbittson, 2006), the Windspeaker highlighted the insufficient infrastructure of the surrounding dikes leading to homes being damaged by floodwater (Harries, 2007). Finally, when discussing the media response to Kashechewan, we found that both mainstream settler media and Windspeaker agreed that the water crisis was “not news” (Windspeaker, 2005). However, while settler media dismissed the reporting as “a media cliché” (Wente, 2005a) designed to “try to embarrass the federal authorities into action” (Strauss, 2005c). Writers in the Windspeaker saw Canadian media as complicit in the continued
neglect of Indigenous communities. According to them, settler media failed to use its power in order to pressure bureaucrats and facilitate change.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

We conducted a qualitative analysis of 282 news articles, mainly from large Canadian settler newspapers, which covered two cases where *E. Coli* was found in the water source; one in the white town of Walkerton, and the other in the Indigenous community of Kashechewan. We found significant differences in the coverage of the two cases. The majority of the coverage of the Kashechewan water crisis in mainstream settler media reproduced stereotypes that Indigenous people are lazy, drunk, incompetent, and infantile. Articles that discussed Isaiah Wynne, the Indigenous water operator, described him as being incompetent. Reporting on the response by the government argued that any money given to Kashechewan is a waste, as it only serves to prolong the community’s dependence on Canadian funding. The media’s attention to the crisis was criticized as well, making the case that the living situation at Kashechewan is not newsworthy and that reports are overblown.

Articles that focused on individuals within the Kashechewan community painted vivid images of decrepit homes, inhabited by apathetic and inebriated residents, failing to contextualize these living conditions and to mention the history of oppression and neglect that have led to their creation. Some writers even called for the disintegration of the community, citing the towns’ need for funding, its helplessness, and its lack of a viable future. We found that 73 of the 123 articles (59 percent) avoided a negative tone, instead using a neutral tone to discuss the events in Kashechewan. Finally, only seven articles adopted a positive tone when discussing media and community response. These few positive articles and the use of a neutral tone, however, did little to provide a counter discourse, leaving readers with a vastly negative narrative that reproduces stereotypes.

In comparison, the mainstream settler media coverage of the mostly-white town of Walkerton and its water crisis provided a substantially-different narrative. Stan Koebel, the Walkerton water operator, was described as a devoted family man who simply made a mistake, which had nothing to do with his culture or upbringing. The government was criticized, but this time for underfunding water security rather than for pouring unnecessary funds to the community. Unlike what we saw in the coverage of the Kashechewan water crisis, the residents of Walkerton were not stereotyped and no article called for the disintegration of the community or its annihilation through assimilation.

The differential coverage patterns that we found reinforce stereotypes of Indigenous people as incompetent, fueling the sentiment that their communities are unable to survive without Canadian funding and aide from white Canada. This discourse facilitates suggestions for assimilation and cultural genocide as “solutions” to the “Indigenous problem.” Investments in the community are dismissed as wasteful because residents are thought of as inherently lazy, incompetent, and unable to help themselves. This, in turn, casts doubt on the effectiveness of funding for Indigenous communities, and thus renders funds more difficult to obtain. Lost in this line of argument is the fact that such proposed “solutions” of disintegrating Indigenous communities and assimilating Indigenous people into large urban centers have been highly problematic and questionable. Indeed, empirical evidence across Canada and in other countries shows that even Indigenous individuals who make great efforts to assimilate and turn their back on their cultural heritage
and traditions face substantial barriers, including racism, and often fail in reaching economic and social equality (Weaver, 2012).

We found that the only nationally distributed Indigenous newspaper, the Windspeaker, covered the Kashechewan water crisis in a very different way. The Windspeaker provided structural context on the state of housing and pointed to the failure of dikes surrounding the town that led to flood-water damages. The paper also discussed government funding in the context of the historical and continued neglect of Indigenous people and the crimes committed against these communities. Writers in the Windspeaker also refuted arguments for assimilation, pointing out residents’ desire to return to their homes. Finally, the Windspeaker critized mainstream settler media for failing to lead important change, calling on them to apply consistent pressure on the government to better address the conditions on reserves.

Our findings add to previous research on the media representation of Indigenous peoples in Canada and in other Western nations. This former work found that Indigenous peoples were reported as hapless victims who cannot help themselves, let alone govern themselves (RCAP, 1996). Also, in line with previous research, (Clark, 2014; Rankine et al., 2014; RCAP, 1996), we found that Canadian media tends to ignore Indigenous perspectives, making communication between communities difficult and portraying the communities as weaker than they actually are. Similar to previous research by Harding (2009), we also found that Indigenous efforts are discredited, through painting community members as apathetic, unskilled, and lazy. Canadian media reinforces the idea that any amount of money invested in Indigenous communities is a waste, and that the unskilled labour in reserves is simply destined to continue perpetuating a parasitic lifestyle. Finally, much like previous research (e.g. Fleras, 2011; Harding, 2010), we found that reporting patterns distance Indigenous community members from mainstream readers and fail to provide historical context for the conditions of Indigenous reserves.

The reporting patterns that we have observed in this paper have a tangible impact on the lives of the residents in Kashechewan and those of Canadian Indigenous people more broadly. The representation of the community as weak and the proposals for dissolving the town create a narrative according to which there is no amount of funding that can save the town. Consequently, accessing and receiving public funding becomes even more difficult. Indigenous peoples’ attempts to establish themselves as a strong community are therefore repeatedly undercut by the narrative that the town would fail without funding and that there is little to save. This narrative, in turn, serves to justify calls for the cultural annihilation of these communities.

Furthermore, psychological and sociological research has demonstrated the many negative effects of stereotypes, particularly ethno-racial stereotypes, on self-perceptions and on performance. For example, research on stereotype threat in African American students found that when reflecting on racial stereotypes students perform worse on intellectual tests (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Further research found that stereotype priming led to lower working memory capacity in marginalized groups (Schmader & Johns, 2003), as well as lower math performances among women (Spencer et al., 1999). Others have reported that exposure to news items and images may have a harmful effect on black youth’s academic performance, social appearance, and self-esteem, and is also associated with negative in-group attitudes among black viewers (Tuckchinsky et al., 2017; Ward, 2004). The stereotypes perpetuated in the reporting on Kashechewan may therefore increase the likelihood that Indigenous people would behave in ways that confirm the negative stereotypes of being lazy, drunk, and incompetent.

Our findings shed light on how most mainstream settler media fails to point out the injustices of Canadian colonialism, thus contributing to the institutionalization of these injustices. The dominant narratives in these media support assimilation and do not challenge sovereignty claims. In
contrast, the coverage in the one Indigenous newspaper, the *Windspeaker*, offers an alternative
and points out the failures of mainstream media.

What is next for reporting on issues facing Indigenous peoples? Future research can further
examine the impact of mainstream settler media on the lives of Indigenous peoples. A more rig-
orous examination of the ways Indigenous media cover stories could highlight alternative ways
for coverage in settler media. In 2015, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (TRC)
called on the federal government to provide more funding to the Canadian Broadcasting Corpora-
tion (CBC) to improve the coverage of Indigenous issues (2015). The TRC also called on journalism
programs to educate students on the history of Indigenous people, including the history of res-
idential schools and treaties. Clearly, substantial work remains to be done in these domains to
achieve more balanced and nuanced media coverage on Indigenous issues.

**REFERENCES**


