

# ***Cloaked Meaning and Moral Craftwork: Progress and Perpetual Problems in the News Coverage of Indigenous Peoples and Canada's Justice System***

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## **ABSTRACT**

**Background:** This research offers a critical analysis of the “moral craftwork” of the news media’s coverage of Canada’s Indigenous peoples and the justice system.

**Analysis:** This study’s thematic analysis of three case studies, spanning almost two decades, suggests a potential shift in how Canadian journalists report on racism and structural inequalities. Recent news coverage points toward a more transparent dialogue about racism.

**Conclusions and implications:** This study finds problematic journalistic practices linger, occluding a broader understanding of racism and colonialism. This research aims to expand the reflexivity of journalists by spotlighting this type of storytelling.

**Keywords:** Framing; Thematic analysis; Journalism; Reporting; Discourse; Hegemony; Power; CBC; Investigative journalism; Indigenous

## **RÉSUMÉ**

**Contexte :** Cette recherche offre une analyse critique de « l’artisanat moral » relatif à la couverture du système judiciaire et des peuples autochtones au Canada par les médias d’information.

**Analyse :** Cet article effectue l’analyse thématique de trois études de cas portant sur presque deux décennies de reportages. Il indique une transformation possible dans la manière dont les journalistes canadiens traitent du racisme et des inégalités structurelles. En effet, depuis peu, le reportage d’actualités semble appuyer un dialogue plus transparent sur le racisme.

**Conclusion et implications :** Cette étude remarque cependant que des pratiques journalistiques problématiques perdurent, empêchant une meilleure compréhension du racisme et du colonialisme. En soulignant ces lacunes, cette recherche aspire à encourager la réflexivité parmi les journalistes.

**Mots clés :** Encadrement; Analyse thématique; Journalisme; Reportage; Discours; Hégémonie; Pouvoir; Radio-Canada; Journalisme d’enquête; Autochtone

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## Introduction

From its origins as a Facebook group, Black Lives Matter (BLM, 2021) morphed into a rallying call in 2020 for millions of protestors, sparking a global phenomenon aimed at addressing institutionalized racism. The protestors' questions about systemic inequality and racism have rippled across the world, disrupting everything from the entertainment and fashion industries to academia and the news media. BLM also triggered an inflection point in journalism. Questions about race and reporting took centre stage as news organizations such as the *New York Times* and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) faced questions about their handling of the BLM protests and criticism about diversity in their newsrooms. In the wake of the 2020 BLM movement, CBC (2020a) executives conceded the public broadcaster was "not diverse enough." In the aftermath of Floyd's death, anti-racist forces pushed journalism to confront its implicit biases and lack of diversity (Darcy, 2020). Grassroots Indigenous social protest movements such as Idle No More have also sparked an evolving conversation about racism in Canada (Monkman & Morin, 2017). In addition, many Indigenous activists adopted alternative media strategies and self-mediation practices in recent decades to disseminate anti-colonial discourse (Brady & Kelly, 2017). Evidence of systemic prejudices about Canada's Indigenous peoples in Canada's news media is well documented (see, for example, Brady & Kelly, 2017; Clark, 2014a Fieras, 2011; Harding, 2010; Razack, 2000; Wilkes, Corrigan-Brown, & Ricard, 2010).

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) notably concluded that Canada's news media coverage of Indigenous peoples is often "inflammatory and racist in nature" (p. 294). Similarly, Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen L. Robertson (2011) detail how Canada's news media are filled with colonial assumptions about Indigenous peoples whereby "an imperial power attempts to impose its cultural world views upon the Other" (p. 5). Brad Clark similarly concluded that Indigenous peoples continue to be framed in Canadian news coverage in "Eurocentric discourse founded in Canadian colonialism" (p. 44). Peter A. Leavitt, Rebecca Covarrubias, Yvonne A. Perez, and Stephanie A. Fryberg (2015) highlight how the lack of news coverage of Indigenous peoples makes the group largely "invisible" (p. 42) in North American settler culture. Reflecting on his experience of covering Indigenous communities, Anishinaabe journalist Duncan McCue (2014) highlighted the so-called "4Ds: drumming, dancing, drunk or dead" (para. 1) that all too often dominate the news coverage of Indigenous peoples. Moreover, reporting about Indigenous peoples frequently highlights conflict—blockades, protests, resistance—that get framed (Entman, 1993) as *native restlessness*. Anderson and Robertson (2011) argue that the pronounced condescension in news coverage manufactures a stereotypical view of Indigenous peoples among the public. Moreover, there is an overemphasis on the pathologies of colonialism—poverty, addiction, poor education, etc.—in the news coverage of Indigenous communities

(Garcia-Del Moral, 2011; Johnson, 2011; Leavitt et al., 2015). Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) called on Canadian journalism schools to enhance their education around the colonial history of Indigenous peoples, treaties, and the toxic legacy of residential schools. The representation of Indigenous peoples working in Canadian newsrooms remains a problem (Brady & Kelly, 2017). Clark (2014b) concluded that news organizations continue to struggle with representing the diversity of Canada's First Nations, Metis, and Inuit populations because newsroom leaders, who are mostly white, tend to frame news from dominant settler perspectives.

Undoubtedly, dominant settler discourse remains a powerful shaping force in Canadian society. The imprint of colonialism is not a historical—dead and buried—artefact (Starblanket 2020). It remains a living and breathing discursive force (Green, 2020) constantly “legitimated by racist myths and policy” (Green, 2017, p. 184). Glen Sean Coulthard (2014), calling reconciliation a “pacifying discourse” (p. 58) that legitimizes new forms of oppression, contends that recent state-sponsored practices of inclusion continue to assert colonial power. While colonialism may have transformed from “unconcealed structures of domination” (p. 26) after 1969, it “remains structurally orientated around achieving the same power effect” (p. 38) that has always sought to bring Indigenous peoples under the sovereignty of Canada's legal and political regimes. As this study highlights, the imprint of colonialism remains a defining structure in Canada's justice system, often making the violence perpetrated against Indigenous peoples, and particularly Indigenous women, “invisible in the law” (Razack, 2000, p. 130). This discourse, in turn, gets echoed and amplified in the Canadian news media.

Anti-colonial discourse (Said, 1993) is not, of course, confined to the academy. Anti-racist and decolonizing discourses have also gained traction in mainstream political discourse (Lee, 2018). Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), for instance, shone a spotlight on Canada's troubled colonial legacy and ongoing system of repression. In 2008, seven years before the commission released its final report, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized to the abuse victims of government-sponsored residential schools (CBC, 2008). Yet, after asking for forgiveness, Harper's government did very little to deal with material issues such as Indigenous rights, title, and jurisdiction (Green, 2020). After the apology, Harper claimed there was “no history of colonialism” (Wherry, 2009, para 1) in Canada. Frequently, colonialism gets presented as something in the past—an “unfortunate legacy”—that do not continue have current implications (Coulthard, 2014, p. 121). More recently, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) chronicled the “deliberate race, identity and gender-based genocide” (p. 5) that victimizes Indigenous women and girls at an alarming rate. This anti-colonial discourse has gained prominence in recent years. Considerable empirical evidence suggests this type of discourse, along with ideology and social

institutions, influences the content produced by journalists (see, for example, Gans, 1979; Hallin, 1986; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

This study attempts to increase the reflexivity of Canadian journalists about their coverage of Indigenous<sup>1</sup> communities by putting the reportage of three notable cases involving Indigenous peoples and Canada's justice system under the microscope. The first case study examines the suspicious freezing death of Neil Stonechild,<sup>2</sup> a 17-year-old Saulteaux man, on the outskirts of Saskatoon in 1990. The second case study focuses on Colten Boushie, a 22-year-old man from the Red Pheasant Cree First Nation, who was shot by a white farmer in rural Saskatchewan in 2016. The final—and most recent—case study examines the violent arrest of Evan Penner, a member of the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, in Saskatoon in July of 2020. Using Theodore L. Glasser and James S. Ettema's (1994) work, whereby journalists position themselves as both detached observers and "custodians of conscience" (p. 338), this study illuminates a potential shift in how Canadian journalists report on racism and structural inequalities. Despite this change, problematic colonial discourses linger in journalistic practices. This article begins by sketching this research's theoretical and methodological foundations.

### Conceptual framework

Echoing Tom Bethell's (1977) thinking, Glasser and Ettema's (1994) work posits that journalists position themselves as both dispassionate and *objective* observers, operating "as a custodian of conscience" (p. 338). To this end, they state, journalists "make moral claims without appearing to make moral judgments" (p. 337), and, as a result, diminish the public discourse by neglecting to shine a light on the real issues and problems supposedly being exposed by their reporting. In short, the journalism scholar's framework contends that investigative reporting: a) objectifies morality by "transforming moral claims into empirical claims;" b) privatizes morality by often "secretly" devaluing or undercutting the "ostensible meaning of what is being reported;" and c) narrativizes morality by framing or "symbolically ... cast[ing]" people in their reporting as "innocent victims and guilty villains" (p. 338).

Canadian television journalist John Harvard noted that every day "journalists sit in judgment over somebody, from prime ministers to policemen, from handy-men to hookers ... Every day, we make moral judgments, from the picky to the profound" (as cited in Russell, 1994, p. 3). Citing the passion of the famous muckraker Ida Tarbell a century ago, Ettema and Glasser (1998) argue that "the essential energy of investigative journalism is still best characterized as 'righteous indignation'" (p. 61). Even now, investigative reporting has a profound connection to society's morality. Enterprise reporting, stresses Hugo de Burg (2000):

appeals to our existing standards of morality, standards they know that they can rely upon being held by people they know will be shocked

by their violation. In this sense they are “policing the boundaries” between order and deviance. (p. 22)

In his classic work about journalism practice, Herbert Gans (1979) argues that investigative journalism “typically judges the exposed against their own expressed values, and these can be determined empirically by the reporter” (p. 183). He stresses that these types of moral judgements make investigative journalism inherently conservative; essentially, reporting “reinforces and relegitimates dominant national and societal values by publicizing and helping to punish those who deviate from the values” (p. 293). As Stuart Hall (1982) argues, journalism is ultimately involved in the “production of consensus” (p. 65). In short, journalists police the status quo or hegemony of their time.

Journalism's language objectifies morality, “transforming moral claims into empirical claims” (Glasser & Ettema, 1994, p. 338). The wrongdoers—the corrupt police officers, for instance—are “found to have violated ‘objective’ standards” (Glasser & Ettema, 1989, p. 2), such as laws, codes, and ethics. In simple terms, journalists call out or judge *wrongdoers* based on the *wrongdoer's* own ethos, codes, ethics, or practices. Stories questioning a violent arrest, for example, evaluate police based on the standards they have set for themselves for arresting people. In line with normative practices of *objectivity*, journalists merely describe the world and are not, therefore, positioned as “a source of moral authority” (Glasser & Ettema, 1994, pp. 342–343). As a result, journalists do not need to explain or justify their reporting because no moral claims have been made (Glasser & Ettema, 1994). This commitment to impartiality or objectivity, however, “often reproduces dominant understandings and values” (Carruthers, 2000, p. 18).

The second dimension in Glasser and Ettema's (1994) framework of “moral craftwork” involves journalists privatizing morality to “secretly” obscure or sabotage “the apparent or ostensible meaning of what is being reported” (p. 338). In *Custodians of Conscience: Investigative Journalism and Public Virtue*, Ettema and Glasser (1998) contend:

Ironic narratives of villains and victims can summon moral outrage, but reliance on such narratives equips journalism with a moral vocabulary of little more than the most rudimentary conceptions of guilt and innocence. (p. 199)

Irony, they argue, allows journalists to “remain faithful to the facts and at the same time let it be known — albeit subtly — that the facts do not ‘speak for themselves’” (Glasser & Ettema, 1994, p. 340). This type of rhetoric exploits the polysemy of language to counteract the common sense interpretation of the words (Glasser & Ettema, 1994). To cast this doubt, journalists often signal their ironic intention by putting quotations around words or phrases (Glasser & Ettema, 1994). Reporters, for instance, often described U.S. military action in Afghanistan or Iraq

as a “so-called war on terror” denoting a degree of incredulity concerning official military policy. Journalists also often posit questions about behaviour without answering them. Stories include phrases such as “the behaviour has raised eyebrows” or “experts wonder why” or “the actions raise questions about the legality or ethics of the police officers.” Moreover, journalists insist it is their job to raise the questions—but not to decide if the questionable actions are illegal or immoral (Glasser & Ettema, 1989). Ultimately, this undercuts and obscures the obvious meaning of the enterprising reporting (Glasser & Ettema, 1994).

The final aspect of Glasser and Ettema’s (1994) “moral craftwork” in journalism focuses on narrative or storytelling. Hayden White (1984) regards the narrative as “an apparatus for the *production of meaning*, rather than a vehicle for transmission of information” (p. 19, emphasis in original). White (1978) stresses that narrative:

functions as a symbol, rather than a sign: which is to say that it does not give us either a *description* or an *icon* of the thing it represents, but *tells us* what images to look for in our culturally encoded experience in order to determine how we *should feel* about the thing represented. (p. 91, emphasis in original)

In a similar way, Schudson (1982) contends that news possesses “unquestioned and unnoticed conventions of narration” (p. 98) while muting any discussion about the narrative form and its efficacy for creating a robust public discourse. Moreover, journalists display a propensity to establish a clear victim in their storytelling, using language to compel the audience to feel pity. Victims are often juxtaposed against guilty villains. There are *white hats* (good guys) and *black hats* (bad guys) in journalistic storytelling, making it, arguably, episodic instead of thematic (Iyengar, 1991).

The journalism practices described by Glasser and Ettema (1989) help frame and structure news stories. James Carey (1989) argues that “Reality is not given,” it is “brought into existence, is produced, by communication” (p. 25). Stories, storytelling, breathe life into that existence. And narratives or frames “organize everyday reality” (Tuchman, 1978, p. 193) in a manner that helps to give “meaning to an unfolding strip of events” (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 143) while incorporating “*organizing principles*” (Hertog & McLeod, 2001, p. 11, emphasis in original; see also Reese, 2010) or symbols that help structure reality. Moreover, as Robert Entman (1993) describes:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. (p. 52)

The news media framing of Indigenous peoples in Canada has tended to reflect—and continues to reflect—the influence of colonial ideology (Clark, 2014a).

Ideology and stereotyping work hand in hand to depict Indigenous peoples as racialized others. Kevin M. Carragee and Wim Roefs (2004) contend that too much framing research in media and communication studies neglects the manifold expressions of political and social power. This study attempts to address this concern by offering an analysis of the power embedded in the framing of reporting about Canada's Indigenous peoples and the justice system. Understanding the power embedded in media practices remains an important preoccupation of communication scholarship.

We study the media because of the need to understand how powerful the media are in our everyday lives; in the structuring of experience; on the surface and in the depths. And we want to harness that power for good rather than ill. (Silverstone, 1999, p. 143)

Media have the power to privilege certain types of discourse and exclude others. It can prize certain ideas, classifying some as *true* and others as *false*. Discourse *rules in* and *rules out* what can be talked about, giving power to those whose ideas are included while wielding power/knowledge over the ideas that are not present (Foucault, 1979). This continuous (historical) coding of social practice reifies the social world (Foucault, 1989). John Street (2001) argues that the discursive power of the media perpetuates the distinctions or definitions of dominant groups—and, therefore, frames and narrows political choice. As Manuel Castells (2009) astutely observes:

[T]he most fundamental form of power lies in the ability to shape the human mind. The way we feel and think determines the way we act, both individually and collectively. Yes, coercion, and the capacity to exercise it, legitimate or not, is an essential source of power. But coercion alone cannot stabilize domination. (p. 3)

Having outlined the essential qualities of Glasser and Ettema's (1994) framework for imagining the "moral craftwork" of journalism and its discursive and framing implications, this article uses the news media coverage of Neil Stonechild, Colten Boushie, and Evan Penner to explore the following research question: Over time, how do Canadian journalists a) objectify morality, b) privatize morality, c) "narrativize" morality in their reportage of Indigenous peoples and Canada's justice system, and d) report on racism or structural inequalities?

### Methodology

Before describing this work's thematic analysis method and its rationale, it is important to offer some context about the three cases studies. Seventeen-year-old Neil Stonechild vanished on a frigid night in November 1990 in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The Saulteaux man's frozen body was discovered five days later (eight kilometres from where he was last seen) in an industrial area near the edge of the prairie city. The police investigation labelled the death accidental (Reber &

Renaud, 2005). CBC News' (2003) investigative reporting questioned the official cause of Stonechild's death, revealing information connecting two police officers to the young man's death. The public broadcaster "uncovered" internal police records linking two on-duty police officers to Stonechild on the night he vanished. Stonechild's death became linked to three other deaths in the early 2000s that were allegedly caused by police-dispensed "curbside justice." In these "starlight tours," as they are colloquially called, police drove Indigenous peoples to the edge of the city and abandoned them. Of note, a judicial inquiry in 2004 concluded that two Saskatoon police officers did, in fact, have Stonechild in custody on the night he vanished and attempted to cover it up (Wright, 2004). Moreover, the justice overseeing the commission of inquiry wrote about what he called a "chasm" (Wright, 2004, p. 208) separating Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous people. The commission spotlighted the structural inequalities between Indigenous peoples and settler culture in Saskatchewan. For the purposes of this study, the CBC News (2003) coverage of Stonechild is used as a benchmark to evaluate the public broadcaster's reporting of two more recent high-profile cases involving Indigenous men and Canada's justice system. It is important to note that the Stonechild case represents a significant point in Saskatchewan's history. The young man's death sparked considerable public interest and even protest. The public inquiry<sup>3</sup> that followed, while failing, according to some (Lugosi, 2011), to foreground systemic racism, did highlight the troubled relationship between police and Indigenous peoples. Stonechild's death continues as a touchstone, of sorts, for Saskatchewan's Indigenous community. Indigenous leaders continue to point to the public inquiry as an important inflection point in the relationship between their communities and the police (Modjeski, 2020a; Wolf, 2019).

On August 9, 2016, Colten Boushie, a 22-year-old Indigenous man from the Red Pheasant Cree Nation, was shot dead by a white farmer, Gerald Stanley, on a farm in rural Saskatchewan (CBC 2018). Boushie and four friends ended up on the farm after getting a flat tire on their way home from a day of swimming, drinking, and shooting. Boushie's death became a national flashpoint, sparking protests. Stanley stood trial for second-degree murder and was acquitted by an ostensibly all-white jury. The prime minister and the justice minister criticized the verdict, leading to jury-selection reform in Canada. The shooting also provoked a social media storm, prompting Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall to plead with people to stop posting racist comments online (Dinh, 2016).

The third case study analyzed in this research happened in the wake of the global BLM movement in 2020. Evan Penner, an Indigenous man from the Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation in northern Manitoba, was violently arrested on July 4, 2020. The arrest, captured on video by a bystander, shows Penner being punched, tasered, and pepper-sprayed by police officers (Modjeski, 2020a). Critics called the force unnecessary. The arrest also prompted a local BLM group and

Indigenous groups to call for the Saskatoon Police Service to be defunded (Modjeski, 2020a).

The three case studies—spanning almost two decades—were chosen purposefully to evaluate news media coverage over time.<sup>4</sup> The sample is purposive (Wallace, 2018), and consciously narrowed to Saskatchewan cases. The prairie province, along with neighbouring Manitoba, is home to the highest proportion of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Moreover, the province was once the Canadian “hotbed” for the Ku Klux Klan (Latimer, 2017). This fence around both CBC News and Saskatchewan also constrains the noise that may have bled into the data if other geographic areas and news organizations were included in this study’s corpus. Additionally, the historical importance of the public inquiry into Stonechild’s death offers a solid benchmark to compare subsequent CBC News reporting about Indigenous peoples and Canada’s justice system. Moreover, Stonechild’s legacy continues today, with “ripple effects” in the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the justice system (Stewart, 2019). The public inquiry examining Stonechild’s death made several recommendations aimed at reforming policing (Wright 2004). Talking to the news media about Evan Penner’s violent arrest in 2020, an official with the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations evoked the commission of inquiry that investigated Stonechild’s death:

We are still healing the relationship between the First Nations community and the Saskatoon police following the Stonechild Inquiry. Incidents like this one continue to put a heavy strain on that relationship. (Modjeski, 2020b para 10)

Again, the reporting about Boushie was chosen because it became a flashpoint for a national discussion about racism and led to major reforms of Canada’s jury system. The reporting about Penner was included because its proximity to the 2020 killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and the resulting worldwide BLM protests, allowed this study to consider the potential effect of BLM discourse on CBC News reporting in Saskatchewan.

All of the reporting about these Indigenous men is drawn deliberately from CBC News. The public broadcaster is the largest newsgathering organization in the province. Moreover, CBC News’ core journalistic standards and practices (CBC, 2020b)—with its commitment to accuracy, fairness, balance, impartiality and integrity—has not changed dramatically over the last 20 years. It is often held up as a paragon of journalistic standards and ethics. The public broadcaster also has a reputation for in-depth investigative journalism. The news service also boasts an Indigenous Unit dedicated to coverage of Canada’s First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples, suggesting the crown corporation has a sensitivity about Indigenous issues and solid expert practice of the news coverage of the community. To that end, this study’s thematic analysis compiled a body of journalism about all three case studies. The Stonechild analysis involved a radio documentary aired on CBC Radio One’s

flagship national current affairs show, *The Current* (CBC 2003) and a television documentary script for the CBC's preeminent television newscast, *The National*. Additionally, a feature-length radio news script for CBC Radio One's *World at Six* was also analyzed ( $n = 3$ ). For the Colten Boushie analysis, the seven-part CBC News podcast *Boushie* (CBC 2018) was thematically analyzed ( $n = 7$ ). All of CBC News' online stories ( $n = 8$ ) about Penner from July 2020 were examined in this study. While the format of the stories (radio, TV, and online) differ, the themes or nodes of interest for this study were found in all of CBC News media lines.

This study's thematic analysis (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2009; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Krippendorff, 2013) analyzed the coverage of the three Indigenous men's involvement with Canada's justice system. While thematic analysis is interpretive, its rigorous procedures—combined with this study's clear research question—identified patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), producing “a rich summary description of the range and depth of the data” (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012, p. 40). Keeping this work's conceptual framework and research questions in mind, this study's thematic analysis looked for four straightforward codes or nodes: narrativize morality, objectify morality; privatize morality, and reports on racism or structural inequalities.

In an effort to “deal with the inherent messiness of the text” (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012, p. 53), this study relied on NVivo software to code all the reportage for commonalities and themes. Akin to Glasser and Ettema's (1994) framework, this study's iterative coding process confirmed the presence of three modes (framing types) that journalists use in their coverage of Indigenous peoples and Canada's justice system. As well, reporting about structural racism was located in the reporting on both Boushie and Penner.

This analytical framework seeks to define meaning in texts. The method assumes that the words we use—and how we use those words—are not neutral. They construct our world and the knowledge we prize. How we talk about the world influences the society we create, the institutions we build, and how we order and prize knowledge. We study texts, argues Teun A. van Dijk (1993), to understand “*the role of discourse in the (re) production and challenge of dominance*” (p. 249, emphasis in original). Moreover, news is constructed by our social and political world (Fowler, 1991). Thematic analysis identifies how issues are constructed in news media. Media texts are prized because news organizations form part of a “field of symbolic control” that produce “discursive codes” that in turn create “ways of relating, thinking, and feeling specialize and distribute forms of consciousness, social relations, and dispositions” (Bernstein, 1990, pp. 134–135). This work's methods involved two steps. The initial research comprised a thorough reading of CBC News' radio and TV scripts and online news stories about the three case studies. This study's corpus was read with a mind to identifying key frames used in the public broadcaster's reportage (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995). This

study's goals are normative and transparent. This work aims to strip away the power embedded in journalism's language, increasing reflexive knowledge among journalists. Furthermore, this research's knowledge claims are, of course, qualified. As with all hermeneutic inquiry, its findings are not generalizable or predictive. This analysis, as is often the case with thematic analysis, illuminates an unclear part of social life with a lucid description of the discursive practice of investigative journalism. This research is transparent about its goals. Moreover, it is clear about its theoretical underpinnings. The analysis of data is logical and spelled out in the coming findings. It is open to critical engagement and debate. This qualitative research offers a rich description of the three case studies, with the aim of spurring increased reflexivity about reporting on structural inequality. For the purposes of clarity, the findings and discussion are blended in the following section.

### Findings and discussion

In keeping with Glasser and Ettema's (1994) conceptual understanding of the language of news, this work's thematic analysis reveals several examples in CBC's reporting that narrativizes, objectifies, and privatizes morality. Notably, in the Boushie and Penner coverage, the reporting highlights concerns about racism or structural inequalities. Overt references to racism and inequality are completely absent from the Stonechild coverage. Table 1 offers a breakdown of the node frequency found in this study's thematic analysis.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 1: Node frequency in the media coverage of the three case studies**

Nodes	Stonechild	Boushie	Penner
Narrativize morality	8	10	3
Objectify morality	6	11	3
Privatize morality	17	5	2
Reports on racism or structural inequalities	0	23	8

The following section offers a number of examples to better illustrate the practice. Again, the analysis and the findings are blended. It begins by examining the focus on narrative in all of the reporting.

#### Narrativizing morality

This study's thematic analysis found an emphasis on narrative in CBC's reporting in all three case studies. The CBC's (2003) investigative reporting about Neil Stonechild, for instance, paints a sympathetic portrait of the young Indigenous man. The CBC's (2003) radio documentary begins with so-called tension music to elicit emotion. The voices of Stonechild's friends float over the music. "Neil loved life," says one friend. Moments later, a female voice offers that Stonechild was "cool," and that "he was a good guy" who "everybody liked." The voices fade and the reporter's narrative begins with:

Lost in the headlines, ignored in all the allegations, eclipsed by the tragedy, Neil Stonechild has been forgotten. But his frozen ghost still haunts those who knew him and loved him. And if you really want to understand this tragedy, you need to get to know Neil: the friend, the brother, the son. (CBC, 2003)

The documentary paints a vivid picture of a typical normative teen: athletic, fond of music, and loyal to his friends (CBC, 2003). While this reporting hints cryptically at police corruption, it focuses extensively on crafting a compelling portrait of a sympathetic character. The documentary stresses with its script and interviews that Stonechild was not homeless, which was a common misconception. The narration says:

Neil wasn't living on the street. He still had a home, people who cared about him. And he was struggling to control his drinking problem. (CBC, 2003)

The documentary includes an interview with an anonymous worker at the group home where Stonechild was living at the time of his death. The worker also paints a sympathetic portrait of the young Indigenous man:

When people say Neil was a street kid, that's not so. Yes he was in some trouble, and yes he liked to drink, you know, those kinds of things, but he was certainly free to go home when he wanted. His mom loved him to death; his brothers and sisters were close with him. Neil's choice of lifestyle was more the fact that he was 17 years old, rather than the fact that he was on the street and abandoned, he certainly wasn't. (CBC, 2003)

The documentary also highlights the tragedy of his death at such a young age, noting that he had "his whole life ahead of him" (CBC, 2003).

There is a similar focus on narrative in the Colten Boushie reporting. Through interviews with the young Indigenous man's family, the podcast details how he grew up in Montana and then moved to the Red Pheasant Cree Nation in Saskatchewan to reconnect with his traditional home. Boushie's mother moved her family back to Saskatchewan to "reconnect with their roots" (CBC, 2018). The reporting includes information about how the young man was learning his community's culture and traditions. Boushie's uncle describes how he had become "a helper" in his community, serving as a "fire keeper" at "button ceremonies" (CBC, 2018). The reporter also notes that Boushie, nicknamed Coco by his family, was training to be a volunteer firefighter and that he worked odd jobs and as a short-order cook. The podcast also devotes considerable narrative to the events leading up to Boushie being killed. The podcast describes how Boushie and his four friends spent their day—swimming, drinking, and shooting at the Maymont River—before ending up on Gerald Stanley's farm with a flat tire. The podcast, however, provides few details about the farmer who killed Boushie, describing him in

ambiguous terms as a man “in his mid-fifties, [and] a long-time resident of the Glenside area” (CBC, 2018). The podcast details the reporter’s fruitless efforts to get tight-lipped family, friends, and neighbours to talk about Stanley. Stanley is presented as enigmatic and mysterious; he is only heard from directly when the CBC reporter recounts his testimony in his second-degree murder trial.

There is also considerable narrative focus in the reporting about Evan Penner’s arrest. Similar to the reporting about Stonechild and Boushie, it highlighted the Indigenous man’s backstory. Penner’s family was unsure of his whereabouts before his arrest. One CBC (2020c, para 4) story leads with his mother, Sherri Penner, telling reporters through tears that her son “did not deserve” the force used by police. Sherri tells reporters she could not finish watching the video showing her son’s arrest, adding:

As a mother, it’s very hard to see something like that happen to your child, and I wouldn’t want that to happen to anybody else’s child. (as cited in CBC News, 2020c, para 4)

Two CBC News (CBC 2020c; Modjeski 2020c) stories focus on the events leading up to the Cree man’s arrest. The stories quote the woman who called the police department’s non-emergency number to report Penner. The woman stresses that Penner was acting oddly but not suspiciously and he was non-violent. The woman describes the Cree man as “very skinny looking” (Modjeski, 2020c, para 7), and she recounts offering to give him a granola bar and glass of water. The woman describes asking Penner to leave her yard but says he laid down and tried to go to sleep. She tells the reporter that Penner did not seem to be “thinking clearly” (Modjeski, 2020c, para 9). The woman also describes Penner exposing his penis and asking her if it was “too big” (Modjeski, 2020c, para 8). There are, however, few details about the police officer who arrested Penner. While the video of the violent arrest shows one officer repeatedly punching Penner, the reporting provides the constable’s rank, name, and that he was placed on administrative leave after the incident.

The narrative in all of this reporting creates sympathy for the characters at the centre of the stories. Narrative is, after all, at the heart of news reporting (Uko, 2007). Yet, this narrative form—or what Aristotle described as a demonstrative discourse—confines or “narrow[s] the kinds of truths that can be told” (Ettema & Glasser 1988, p. 9). The Stonechild reporting, in particular, hints obliquely at police corruption but focus mostly on the individual. This episodic coverage ignores broader social or institutional (thematic) concerns. The episodic frame in the Stonechild reporting puts a human face on issues and events in the news, but it does not draw connections to larger structural and power dynamics at play in our social world (Iyengar, 1991, 2011). All three Indigenous men—Stonechild, Boushie, and Penner—are also cast as victims, with little agency. This victimization, arguably, evokes outrage and indignation in its audience. All of the reporting juxta-

poses the victims against the mysterious or unknown villain: the police or the enigmatic white farmer. In this storytelling, innocence is not possible without guilt (Glasser & Ettema, 1994). This reporting, though, arguably sidesteps broader accountability (Glasser & Ettema, 1989). The CBC News stories suggests guilt and innocence; yet:

they do not provide a forum for examination of those commonsensical concepts. These stories rely upon our understanding of, and emotional reaction to, such concepts to accomplish their moral task and they do not — indeed, cannot — critique their own premises. (Ettema & Glasser, 1988, p. 25)

Moreover, the language of news does not permit “the opportunity for judgement to be heard” (Glasser & Ettema, 1994, p. 343). As well, the supposed “compelling summons to participate in a moral universe” issued by the CBC’s reporting is only that: “a summons” (Ettema & Glasser, 1988, p. 24). It does not fully evaluate the morality of the forces at play within the story, nor does it provide citizens “a guide to moral action” (Ettema & Glasser, 1988, p. 25). Arguably, any call to a moral conversation by the CBC News’ journalistic narrative only amounts to an invitation to a discussion that is never fully realized (Glasser & Ettema, 1989).

### **Objectifying morality**

The CBC News reporting on all three cases relies heavily on empirical language and criteria. Notably, much of the reporting in the Stonechild and Penner cases judges the police “against their own expressed values” (Gans, 1979, p. 183). In the Penner case, a chunk of the reporting quotes an expert on policing detailing normative police “de-escalation techniques” (Anton 2020) and the range of behaviours that warrant the use of force in an arrest (Modjeski, 2020a). The reporting questions the need for force in Penner’s arrest, citing the woman who encountered the Indigenous man in her backyard before he was arrested. The woman repeatedly stressed that Penner was non-violent and non-threatening.<sup>6</sup> The woman emphasized that she had called the police’s non-emergency contact number to report Penner. One of CBC News’ online stories points out that the news services had spoken with “four people who had interactions with Penner before his arrest” who all said he “was non-threatening and not aggressive” (Modjeski, 2020c, para 25), raising questions, without being explicit, about whether police had lived up to their own arrest standards.

In the case of Stonechild, the CBC News reporting, especially the television documentary for *The National*, proves that starlight tours were common and that this was not, in fact, an “isolated case,” as the police force had insisted for years (CBC, 2003). This revelation suggests a pattern of behaviour. The claim of a pattern is, of course, not proof of police involvement in Stonechild’s death. Still, the CBC News (2003) discovery forced the police chief to retract the longstanding claim

and apologize. Furthermore, CBC News also highlighted a computer criminal record search of Stonechild's name, suggesting a link between the police and Stonechild on the night he disappeared. Another prominent feature of the reporting dwells on whether the marks on Stonechild's dead body were consistent with police handcuffs, again suggesting police had Stonechild in custody around the time of his death.

The Boushie reporting is also filled with moral claims that are transformed into empirical ones. Almost an entire podcast revolves around the forensic evidence presented in the second-degree murder trial (CBC 2018). The reporting focuses on the science of whether Stanley's gun could have misfired, as he testified during his trial. Another episode of the podcast explores whether the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Canada's national police force, conducted an adequate and thorough investigation. The CBC News reporter then wonders if Boushie's family received justice because of some of the mistakes made by the RCMP in their forensic investigation of the crime scene.

As detailed above, CBC's reporting about Penner, Boushie and Stonechild focuses on empirical criteria, narrowing the parameters surrounding meaning. The framing *ruled in* and *ruled out* what could be talked about, giving power or prominence to official (and technical) understandings. Borrowing from Lance Bennett's (1990) indexing theory and Entman's (1993; 2003) conception of framing, this type of reporting privileges experts and officials as the definers of *truth*. The CBC's reportage defined *wrongdoing* based on infractions of procedures or scientific plausibility. Journalists, as this work's thematic analysis shows, "share ideological *assumptions* about what constitutes evidence" (Durham, 2001, p. 124, emphasis added) with official and expert sources, determining, as a result, what is reportable. Gans (1979) stresses that this type of reportage makes journalism inherently conservative, whereby reporting "reinforces and relegitimates dominant national and societal values by publicizing and helping to punish those who deviate from the values" (p. 293). Ultimately, this rigid—official-dominated—news discourse constricts "what is known and knowable" (Fishman, 1982, p. 236).

### Privatizing morality

This work's thematic analysis found that much of the reporting by CBC News privatizes morality by using metaphors and reporting obliquely. The introduction to *The Current's* radio documentary, for instance, refers to the Indigenous men, including Stonechild, who died in the winter on the edge of Saskatoon as "frozen ghosts" who "still haunt the prairie city" (CBC, 2003). Similarly, a report on television begins with visuals of a masked man carrying a sign reading "Who is Policing the Police?" (CBC, 2003). The reporter's story goes on to highlight the bitter relationship between Saskatoon's Indigenous community and the police. The reporting also features a police expert, a former police officer who became the mayor of Saskatoon. The politician makes veiled allegations about unethical police work,

saying: “there were groups working within the police service that were successful in keeping information contained” (CBC, 2003).

As noted above, the reporting about Penner also privatizes morality when it stresses that the woman who encountered the Indigenous man before his arrest described him as non-threatening and she had called the police’s non-emergency number to report him. There is a duality of meaning here. The reporting raises the question of whether Penner’s arrest was warranted, given how his actions were described by eyewitnesses leading up to the police’s arrival. The moments before Penner’s arrest are unknowable because they were not captured on video. The union that represents the arresting police officer, in fact, argued that the video, which only shows the forcible arrest, lacks context. The Saskatoon Police Association demanded a fulsome independent investigation.

In the Boushie reporting, the irony or privatizing of morality is subtle, but it pervades the coverage. The podcast reporting often focuses on the all-white jury that found Stanley not guilty of second-degree murder. The reporting—again, technical in nature—details how random jury selection works and explains the machinations of pre-emptory challenges, whereby lawyers on both sides can veto potential jurors. Attributing it to Boushie’s family, CBC News reports that the defence challenged five visibly Indigenous potential jurors (CBC 2018). (This is, of course, another objective claim masquerading as a moral one.) After foregrounding the explosive racism that surrounded the trial, the reporting goes on to wonder if the composition of the jury could produce a fair trial. It persistently questions whether a jury wholly made up of privileged white people—unaware or uncaring, possibly, about structural racism—could fairly deliberate if Stanley acted illegally. The reporting fails to question, however, whether Stanley’s actions were racially motivated or how Indigenous peoples are often framed as threats to settler colonial security (Starblanket & Hunt, 2020). The narrative about Boushie was largely obliquely framed “as the story of a knight protecting his castle” (Starblanket & Hunt, 2018, para 14). The coverage casts Boushie as the intruder, pushing into a settler’s domain, but never gets flipped around, never introduces the idea of settlers trespassing on the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples. In stark contrast to Canada’s colonial reality, this framing positions Indigenous peoples as the threat. Gina Starblanket and Dallas Hunt (2018) point to the racist vitriol online in the wake of the jury’s verdict as clear evidence of how “the legal entrenchment of the ‘castle’ narrative functions to enhance settler entitlement to enact violence to protect their claims to land and property” (para 15).

In the Stonechild coverage, the evocative metaphorical use of a “ghosts” positions the teenager’s death as nefarious and his spirit as trapped in *middle world* of sorts, forever searching for justice or haunting those responsible for his death. The visual of the masked protestor also frames the story in dark tones without being explicit. These storytelling devices “vivify the boundaries of morality” (Glasser &

Ettema, 1994, p. 340) while seeming to be neutral or technical. The CBC's investigative journalism about Stonechild signals that there is much more to the story than is being reported. This type of "rhetorical masquerade" allows the journalist to evoke a "duality of opposed 'valid' and 'invalid' levels of meaning" while "pretending, more or less covertly not to be aware of the 'valid' level" (Glasser & Ettema, 1994, p. 340; see also Muecke, 1969, p. 20). Similarly, the Penner and Boushie reporting suggests "that the facts do not 'speak for themselves'" (Glasser & Ettema, 1994, p. 340). Arguably, framing stories in this language signals to the audience that there is more going on than what is being reported. The journalistic frames suggest a "secret truth" (Glasser & Ettema, 1994, p. 341) for a sympathetic audience. The CBC News reporting raises ethical and legal questions about Stonechild, Boushie, and Penner while not fully illuminating the totality of their actions or the underlying context of racism, structural inequalities, and the colonial history of police subordinating Indigenous peoples.

In line with Glasser and Ettema's (1994) thinking, the way the CBC News framed the Stonechild case—and its reliance on "empty rhetoric" (p. 338)—debased morality and failed to deal with the racism inherent in the Indigenous man's death. This absence is conspicuous. Silences, however, are strategic, and "an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (Foucault, 1990, p. 27). Unlike the reporting about Penner and Boushie, the Stonechild coverage does not reference structural inequalities. The word racism, in fact, does not appear once in the coverage. Fast forward more than a decade, and CBC News does deal much more directly with racism in the Boushie and Penner reporting. As for the Stonechild coverage, the totality of the reporting is, arguably, reductionist, conflating police behaviour with a technical violation. In turn, the "legacies of historic acts of racism are discounted as though they were simply historic artifacts replaced by newer understandings and 'renewed relationships'" (Green, 2006, p. 511). The CBC's framing of its Stonechild reporting glosses over the "structural racism ... denied by many non-Aboriginal members of Saskatchewan society, who prefer to see such events as isolated acts by individuals" (Green, 2006, p. 515).

It is, however, notable that 13 years after the Stonechild case, the CBC (2018) reporting on Boushie does deal directly—and substantively—with racism. The podcast, in fact, devotes an entire episode to how Boushie's death sparked a movement and triggered a backlash in settler culture. The reporting about Boushie highlights Saskatchewan's racist past and history as a significant base of the Ku Klux Klan in Canada. The reporting goes on to recount the protests demanding an end to institutional racism that swept the province in the aftermath of Boushie's death. Moreover, the podcast details the hateful and racist comments—some advocating violence against Indigenous peoples—that surfaced in the wake of Boushie's death and Stanley's second-degree murder charge. As noted above, the Boushie reporting also highlighted the structural racism embedded in Canada's jury-selection system.

The Penner reporting, which immediately followed the explosive global protest movement in response to George Floyd's death, also foregrounds systemic bias. Social justice advocates and Indigenous leaders are quoted in much of the coverage, linking Penner's violent arrest to structural inequalities and the legacy of "white supremacy and colonialism" (Modjeski, 2020a, para 43). A leader with the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations in another story (Modjeski 2020b, para 10) stresses that Penner's arrest had put a "heavy strain on that relationship" between Indigenous peoples and the police. Of particular note, all of the framing of institutionalized and structural racism is attributed to Indigenous leaders or advocates for radicalized and minority groups. So, while the reporting about Boushie and Penner deals with racism, the reporting continues to attribute claims of bias to advocates. The reporting about Boushie and Penner also makes moral claims that masquerade as empirical ones. As well, the coverage contains cloaked meanings and focuses on narrative.

This study's thematic analysis suggests that the discursive horizon (Laclau, 1990) or episteme—"the strategic apparatus which permits the separating out from among all the statements which are possible those that will be acceptable" (Foucault, 1980, p. 197)—for reporting about Indigenous peoples and Canada's justice system has shifted over the last two decades. Notably, the news reporting about Penner links concerns about his arrest directly to the BLM movement and calls to address structural inequities "built on white supremacy and colonialism" (Modjeski, 2020a, para 43). In fact, one CBC story highlights how the BLM movement further intensified questions about structural racism underlying the violent interaction between Penner and the police (Anton, 2020). While colonial discourse and practices—and their outsize power—persist, decolonizing discourses are increasingly present in the public sphere (Brady & Kelly, 2017).

Ongoing social movements such as the grassroots Indigenous social action group Idle No More and BLM have sparked greater public and journalistic awareness about structural racism in Canada. Furthermore, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) concluded that Canada's residential school system amounted to a cultural genocide. Similarly, a three-year National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) called the murders and disappearances a "Canadian genocide" (p. 5). Its final report produced 231 "calls for justice" aimed at ending the cycle of violence that claimed the lives of thousands of Indigenous women (Tasker, 2019). The inquiry—and the social movements noted above—challenge the hegemony of colonialism. Arguably, as this study's analysis suggests, journalists are echoing, in some ways, this anti-colonial discourse in their reporting. Considerable evidence from journalism research suggests ideology and social institutions have a profound effect on the content journalists produce (Gans, 1979; Hallin, 1986; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). While this research's three case studies suggests decolonizing discourses have grown over time in news reporting

about Indigenous peoples and Canada's justice system, problems persist. As this work highlights, settler colonial violence is not relegated to the past and should not be "subsumed" by prevailing myths and fictions that are bounded by "racist and evolutionary justifications, to multicultural rhetoric, to discourses on reconciliation that frame colonial violence as a past and temporary phenomenon" (Starblanket, 2020, p. 3). As Ibram X. Kendi (2019), the historian and activist, has argued eloquently, it is not enough to be "not racist," we must all strive to be actively "anti-racist." While it represents a big task, dismantling racism and "national mythologies ... is not an impossible one" (Lugosi, 2011, p. 313). Indeed, journalists need to recognize the continuing harm of colonialism to Indigenous peoples. In this vein, Joyce Green (2020) thoughtfully posits that "between truth and reconciliation there must be *recognition*" (p. 243, emphasis in original) of the lasting legacy of colonialism. Writing more broadly about "enacting reconciliation" in the "colonial project that is Canada" (p. 243), she offers some instructive advice that journalists would be wise to adopt when structuring their coverage of Indigenous peoples and issues, including: a) recognizing the harm of colonialism; b) thoughtfully engaging with the legacy of colonialism and its current manifestations in public policy; c) summoning empathy that acknowledges the "awful consequences borne by colonized people" (p. 243); d) approaching the subject with humility, prepared to learn new things, and challenge assumptions that structure our supposed meritocratic order; and e) remaining committed and determined to continue confronting uncomfortable truths. Adopting these practices would also likely increase the reflexivity of journalists about their role in shaping not only what we talk about, but also how we talk about Indigenous peoples and issues. A new generation of young journalists may be poised to adopt these practices.

Young journalists, some have argued, are increasingly more reflexive about their role in knowledge production, "prefer[ring] a more intimate, personal, even self-referential style to their journalism — something obviously connected to social media and Internet culture" (Adams, 2017, para. 15). Paul Adams (2017) continues, arguing:

It is easy for graybeards to mock this, to rear back in horror, to accuse the Snake People of being self-absorbed. But many younger people see a huge dollop of vanity—and perhaps even fakery—in the pose my generation of journalists adopted of being above it all, pretending to deliver the news without the merest inflection of political bias or social position. (para. 15)

Transparency is the new objectivity for younger journalists (Adams, 2017). Ultimately, changing the way journalists cover Indigenous peoples and Canada's justice system requires an increased reflexivity and a different way of thinking about the news media's role in knowledge production.

Part of this this increased honesty and transparency may come with hiring more Indigenous journalists (Brady & Kelly, 2014), and incorporating more Indigenous voices in news coverage. That will not, however, solve journalism's problems entirely. While the coverage of Boushie and Penner overtly dealt with racism, many moral claims were still framed as empirical ones and narrative remained omnipresent. As a practice, this work suggests journalists need to be more conscious about how they report on Indigenous peoples and Canada's justice system.

There are limits to this study, undoubtedly. This research offers a thematic analysis of three case studies, spanning two decades and involving one news organization. While the findings are not generalizable or predictive, they do offer a historical description and analysis of the type of news coverage of Indigenous peoples involved with Canada's justice system. Additionally, this study critically interrogates the power the news media have to shape meaning about Canada's Indigenous peoples. This, in turn, offers a starting point for increasing the reflexivity of journalists who report on Indigenous peoples. As well, this study offers a launching point for journalism educators to discuss the colonial history of Canada's Indigenous peoples and the ways it continues to structure discourse on Canadian journalism—as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) recommends. Moreover, this study offers a springboard for a future scholarship. Interviews with (or surveys of) journalists could help illuminate the impact of BLM and other decolonizing discourses such as Idle No more on reporting about Canada's Indigenous peoples. It also seems worthwhile to conduct research about the efficacy of CBC News' pledge in the wake of George Floyd's death to increase diversity and inclusion in its newsrooms and news coverage (Fenlon, 2020). A classic quantitative content analysis could offer some generalizable results about the impact of broader post-colonial and anti-racist discourses on Canada's news media.

## Conclusion

As the discussion makes clear, the CBC News' reporting on Stonechild's death conformed—unyieldingly—to a stringent discourse, preventing a broader and more meaningful understanding of his death. The framing resulted in: a) objectifying morality, b) privatizing morality by obscuring true meaning, and c) narrativizing morality with a cast of innocent and guilty characters. Glasser and Ettema's (1994) foundational work remains a robust framework for analyzing journalism. While the CBC's reporting did, arguably, “remind us of our shared vulnerability to suffering and injustice” (Ettema & Glasser, 1998, p. 200), its rigid adherence to an official journalistic discourse prevented a contextualized picture of our social world. By zealously seeking to be what Glasser and Ettema (1994) call “custodians of conscience,” CBC News ignored the underlying racism fuelling the wrongdoing. While the story did prompt some justice and some redress for Stonechild's family, in the end, the objectivity—so crucial to reporters—“derail[ed] discussion of the very

things journalism is supposed to be about: public right and wrong” (Peters & Cmiel, 1991, p. 198). Thus, in the end, the CBC’s investigative journalism failed to serve democracy or citizens by avoiding a much-needed discourse about racism. Yet, as this study makes clear, the coverage of Boushie and Penner does deal more directly with racism. Still, the language of news in this reporting continues to “sanitizes morality,” presenting moral claims as empirical ones. As well, an overemphasis on victimization and narrative persists. The reporting also focuses on a cast of heroes and villains, occluding deeper meanings and a broader public discourse about structural inequalities. Finally, the continued practice of privatizing morality also prevents a more straightforward understanding of racism and colonialism. Arguably, this type of reporting, in line with Glasser and Ettema (1994) eschews “values by denying values their status as values” (p. 343, emphasis in original). Ultimately, this type of reporting prevents a more deliberative public sphere, which is, after all, the function of the news media in a healthy democracy. As this study has argued, there is an alternative to this type of news coverage. Journalism needs to evolve. It needs to be more conscious of its moral craftwork. This, in combination with a heightened recognition about the historical and current manifestations of colonialism, can help produce more thoughtful, and empathetic news coverage of Indigenous peoples.

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### Notes

1. The three case studies examined in this research involve three First Nations men. Indigenous is commonly, of course, used as collective noun for Canada’s First Nations, Inuit, and Metis peoples.
2. As a national reporter with CBC News, the author of this article was part of a team of journalists who investigated the suspicious freezing death of the Sauteaux man.
3. Saskatchewan’s NDP government appointed Justice David Wright to lead a public inquiry into Stonechild’s suspicious death in 2003. Wright’s (2004) final report was highly critical of the Saskatoon Police Service, concluding that two police officers drove Stonechild to the outskirts of the city where he died of hypothermia. The final report has been criticized for framing the misconduct as administrative rather than racial (Green, 2006; Lugosi, 2011).
4. This research focuses on three case studies involving three First Nations men. Considerable news media coverage of missing and murdered Indigenous women is, however, notable for its gendered depiction of racial violence (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women and Girls, 2019).
5. These summary statistics should be interpreted with some caution. In some stories, a sentence was coded as a node because it stood alone. In other stories, several sentences were coded as a node because the totality of the sentences comprised a theme or node. As well, the evaluations of the three different cases rely on three different modes of journalism. For Stonechild, this research uses broadcast documentaries and news reports. For Boushie, a series of podcast episodes are put under the microscope. Finally, the Penner research relied on online news reports. Ultimately, the work evaluates

the frames and discourse present in the reporting. The aim is to assess how (over time) Canadian journalists a) objectify morality, b) privatize morality, and c) “narrativize” morality in their reportage of Indigenous peoples and Canada’s justice system.

6. This framing is also, arguably, akin to privatizing morality; it will be unpacked more thoroughly in the coming section.

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