HELP OR HARM? [1]
symbolic violence, secondary trauma and the impact of press coverage on a community

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This paper describes the impact of extensive journalistic coverage on a small community in Quebec that experienced the murder of a teenage girl by a local man. Press coverage of the case was intense, as journalists converged on the small rural town to cover the story and the subsequent arrest of the suspect and his parents. In presenting the voices of both local residents and a journalist, this paper illuminates the secondary trauma and symbolic violence that can result from some forms of news coverage of a traumatic event. Five key themes regarding the impact of the media on community residents arose from the data: alienation from the community, anger at the media's public construction of the community, intrusion on community life, intrusion on the private processes of grief, and triggering renewed feelings of loss and grief. Implications for journalists are discussed, including being aware of the dynamics of symbolic violence and secondary trauma and incorporating positionality, empathy, and reflective practice into their reporting praxis.

KEYWORDS: communities, media coverage, reflective practice, secondary trauma, symbolic violence, trauma

Our Frame of Reference

One Journalist's Socialization Into The Profession: Linda's Story

What is the mission of a journalist? Ask a group of journalists and you'll get similar answers. Journalists describe their mission in a number of comparable ways. They see themselves as the eyes and ears of the public. They see themselves as a channel for vital information and as truth seekers. They see themselves as storytellers and witnesses for those too powerless to speak. Taken together, these perspectives form a picture of the journalist as a crusader for good. That picture justifies a journalist's rationale for wielding influence and authority in the course of performing his or her job.

When I took my first job out of journalism school, two reporters for *The Washington Post* were making history by unraveling a political scandal that would topple a president. Woodward and Bernstein exposed wrongdoing at the highest levels of government. They set the tone for waves of journalists to follow as emblematic crusaders for the greater good.

Most journalists don't view themselves as anything but beneficent. That self-image, however, can be challenged when a journalist is called upon to cover a traumatic event. As the eyes and ears of the community, journalists cover disasters, both natural and man-made. Almost every journalist will be sent out at some point in his or her career to cover a terrible event in which loss of life will occur. Most reporters have little or no formal training in how to deal with victims of accidents, disasters or violence. In the past, neither journalism schools nor

professional newsrooms have advised fledgling reporters how to comprehend trauma, understand its effect on victims, and deal with it wisely as a professional journalist.

The first traumatic event I covered occurred in 1978. A jumbo jet collided with a small plane over a residential area in San Diego. I was in my twenties. I'd never seen a dead body before. I was dispatched to cover the story not because of superior experience or skill, but because I was the only person in the newsroom at the early hour the planes crashed. Over the next twenty years, I would cover harrowing events under stringent deadlines: a bloody prison riot in New Mexico; a school shooting spree in Montreal, and the crash of a Swissair flight off the Nova Scotia coast in 1998.

To journalists covering a trauma, the mandate is clear: get the story and get it fast. But in doing so, journalists might wonder about the impact their incursions have on those who've been affected by the tragic circumstance. They might wonder whether the news coverage has damaged someone already in pain. They might ask themselves: Am I hurting victims in my zeal to get a story? Am I causing harm? By asking those questions, journalists begin to challenge the given rationale for wielding influence and authority on the job.

That process of challenging the rationale began only deep into my career, when I covered the massacre of 14 young women at the École Polytechnique in Montreal in 1989. My daughter was a toddler at the time. I got to know the family of one of the victims and began to reconsider the role of a journalist in the process. But it wasn't until I began teaching at Concordia University that my explorations took a more formal turn.

According to Coté and Simpson (2000), the way in which journalists carry out their mission to inform the public is questionable. Both former journalists, they believe journalists should adopt the physician's motto, "First, do no harm" as they proceed to cover tragic circumstances. This motto is not taught in journalism school. My own reflective exploration of how journalists cover violence, trauma and tragedy has led me, as an educator and scholar, to the importance of this dimension of journalism practice. In my collaboration with a team researching the effects of trauma on communities, I have come to see the impact press coverage can have on victims, other community members, and on the community itself.

A Shift Regarding Trauma Coverage

Only recently has the issue of trauma entered the discourse of journalism. In 1991 the journalism faculty at Michigan State University established a small program to assist journalism students in reporting on victims of violence with sensitivity, dignity and respect. This effort has evolved into the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (Dart Center, nd), a pioneer in illuminating the impact of reporting traumatic events and outlining best practices in covering violence (Kawamoto, 2005). And though this consideration has now entered the mainstream discussion within the journalism field (Coté and Simpson, 2000; McBride, 2003; Society Of Professional Journalists, 1996), it is by no means standard practice. Generally, the focus has been on how journalistic coverage impacts on the individual interviewed (Newman, 2008; Sykes, 2003; Sykes and Green, 2003), or on the journalist (Keats and Buchanan, 2009; Newman et al., 2003; Newman and Smith, 2008). There has been little attention to how this coverage may affect communities.

The Traumatic Event

On July 11, 2005, a girl from a small town on the Quebec-US border vanished on the way to see friends. Shanna Poissant, 16, was last seen getting into a red truck near her home in Hemmingford, Quebec. The following day, the Sûreté du Québec [SQ], the provincial police force, began to investigate her disappearance. The "runaway" hypothesis was quickly discarded, and police believed they were investigating a more sinister event. Shanna's photo was posted in the windows of village stores. The SQ's Montreal-based major-crimes division joined the investigation later that week. The search team consisted of some 20 officers, all-terrain vehicles, police dogs, and a helicopter combing rural wooded and farming areas.

The Media Coverage

Media coverage of Shanna Poissant's disappearance began shortly after her disappearance. Shanna resided in the U.S. before moving to Canada. Radio and television reporters from both sides of the border and print journalists from French and English outlets converged on the small rural community, population 2,000.

A few days after Shanna's disappearance, the driver of the red truck was identified in the media as Kurt Lauder. The Lauder residence on the outskirts of Hemmingford Village was searched. Lauder commented on a TVA (Téléviseurs Associés) newscast: "Je ne sais rien. Ils ont juste effectue une perquisition chez moi parce qu'ils la cherchent" ["I don't know anything. They just searched my house because they are looking for her"]. Ten days into the search, investigators focused their inquiry on a bicycle path several kilometers north after receiving information that Poissant's body might be found there. For every move by the police, there was a countermove by the media, massively flocking to the next search location. Police interrogated an undisclosed number of residents. So did the media, attempting for days to interview people on the main street through town. As anxious residents waited for police to shed light on the disappearance, others, including Shanna's stepfather, initiated their own search, contrary to the request of the SQ to refrain from such efforts, so as not to inadvertently tamper with potential evidence. On July 26th the SQ decided to halt the search. Shanna had been missing for two weeks.

On July 27th the headline in *Le Journal de Montreal* read "Ils l`ont trouvèe. Elle est morte!!!" ["They have found her. She is dead!!!"] The SQ charged Kurt Lauder, 23, with first-degree murder. His parents were charged with being accessories after the fact. A little more than a year later, on October 11, 2006, Kurt Lauder was convicted of 2nd degree murder. Eight months later, his mother was convicted on charges of being an accomplice after the fact. In the intervening time period, his father died of complications due to emphysema.

Modes Of Inquiry

Objectives: The Community Resilience Research Team's Story

Originally, our research team [the Concordia University Community Resilience Research Team] began to investigate the types of social supports that community residents and organizations require after a traumatic event. We began our research 15 months after Shanna Poissant was murdered. Interestingly, we did not start out by asking questions about the media's impact on the community; we sought to identify resources and assistance that would enhance the ability of residents to restore a livable balance in their community. But in interview after

interview, the issue of the media's impact became more persistent, and had a powerful influence on how the interviews were conducted. Many residents did not want to record their interviews for fear they would see their words splashed on the front page of a newspaper. These reactions led us to follow up on this developing theme. An emergent objective of this project was to explore the impact of media coverage on the quality of community life and on the residents' ability to grieve, heal and restore a livable balance after a trauma. Ultimately, we challenge the idea that journalists stand outside of the consequences of their approaches to covering trauma.

Methodology

We selected a qualitative methodology, since this method was conducive to understanding meaning attributed by participants to certain events, how context influenced actions, and the process by which events and actions took place. It also facilitates the identification of unanticipated phenomena, such as the strength of the local reaction to the media coverage, and can be used to generate preliminary theoretical propositions (Maxwell, 1996).

Research Design

We employed a cross-case comparative approach (Merriam, 1998), since it was flexible and adaptable in describing multiple realities; transferable to other participants in other contexts in order to build a foundation of description; and congruent with our ethics and values as researchers with regards to researching trauma (Connolly and Reilly, 2007; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Riddell, 1989).

The primary method of data collection for this project involved in-depth interviews, in order to explore participants' lived experience (Kvale, 1996). Interviews were interactive, minimizing hierarchical relationships in favor of collaboration (Oakley, 1981). We used an open-ended conversational format to build trust and rapport, and to facilitate a maximum exploration of the participants' experiences with the media. We elicited stories, since stories reflect cognitive and meaning-making processes (Vygotsky, 1987). When we had permission, we digitally recorded the interviews. For those who were fearful, we gained permission to take extensive notes. Additional sources of data were newspaper articles and media clips concerning Shanna Poissant's murder and the investigation.

Participants

We used a snowball sampling technique to generate an initial pool of participants (Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004). Once we had a clearer idea of the community, we used purposive sampling. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest this method when random sampling may not produce the kind of sample a project requires. In total, 17 participants were interviewed, including residents of the community, a town official, an investigating local police officer, a front-line worker in a community organization, and a journalist. Two researchers from the team conducted the interviews over an 18-month period.

Data Transformation and Analysis

We created a general framework for processing the data, and used it consistently across the cases (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). We provisionally categorized the interview text into similar inductively derived themes (Aronson, 1994; Ely et al., 1997). A theme captured something salient about the data with regards to the research objective (impact of media coverage), and represented some level of meaning within the data set at a semantic level (Braun and Clarke, 2006). For example, the theme *alienation from the community* was derived from statements that communicated some sense of disconnection from the community: avoiding the village, feeling isolated and alone, not being able to access services, etc. We formed propositional statements (a definition of the category) to characterize the key themes, and developed rules for categorizing the data (what was included and what was excluded) to keep each theme internally consistent. The "keyness" of a theme was determined by examining whether it captured something important in relation to the overall research focus. We then gave each one a title that attempted to capture the essence of the theme. We reviewed the data to check for consistency. We proceeded with this process until the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were fulfilled: exhaustion of data sources, saturation of themes, emergence of regularities, and overextension. We also subjected the data to various procedures to insure trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba, 1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Results

These results were emergent and inductive. Five key themes regarding the impact of the media on community residents arose from the data: *alienation from the community, anger at the media's public construction of the community, intrusion on community life, intrusion on the private processes of grief,* and *triggering renewed feelings of loss and grief.* Each theme will be discussed in turn, with supporting quotes from the participants.

Alienation from the Community

All of the residents interviewed expressed some feelings of estrangement and disconnection from the community as a result of the media coverage. For some, it was alienation from the physical community, feeling cut off from the stores and services in the village that were essential to their daily lives. Residents reported not being able to walk down the street in the centre of the village, or go to the post office or grocery store, without being cornered by reporters and their microphones. Mike [2], a long standing resident, described the media as "*swarming through the town*" all day and for most of the night. The media presence caused some residents to forego their weekly routines within the village and go to other communities instead, as evidenced by one resident.

> Rita: It was literally at one point, I remember driving through the village and there was a lot of media and thinking, "I'm not going to get my groceries now. I'm not going to deal with this. I'm just going to go home." And people saying, "I'm avoiding the village."

Others found themselves disconnected from family, neighbors, and friends that the community represented for them. Since the accused killer came from a long-established family in Hemmingford and Shanna was a local resident, news coverage uncovered and exacerbated splits

in the community. Angela, a woman who had lived in the village all of her life, observed that "*labeling*" became a conversational past time: those who talked to the media and those who didn't. This became a source of division within the community. As well, two camps were revealed and interviewed extensively: those who supported Shanna's family and those who supported the Lauders. It was a widespread belief among the research project participants that these alliances were private, and should be dealt with privately, not broadcast nationally and internationally. Some residents believed that by reporting on these divisions instead of focusing on the actual disappearance of Shanna, journalists were simply spreading village gossip as "news". Andy, a third-generation resident, noted, "*Gossip hurts, especially when it is packaged as news.*" In addition, what some residents found most disturbing was how the media's presence kept the inevitable small town gossip churned up. As Audrey, a community service provider said:

> The media crawling around town for a month brought out a kind of animosity in the community. "Can you imagine [what] so and so said on last night's news? They were standing right in the park and they said that the Lauder family can…" and they're saying this on the news, and others are saying, "Well you know, we shouldn't be talking to the press." So there is just a huge unrest. And so the gossip… those opinions that were shared around everywhere: church steps, café, came out in the room, into the media... And it separated the community.

Anger at the Media's Construction of the Community

Residents expressed feelings of anger concerning how the community was constructed and represented to the general public. Mike was quite vehement in his reaction to some of the media's "*trashing*" of the community. The following newspaper article in particular was pointed to again and again as painting an erroneous and hurtful picture of Hemmingford.

> **From La Presse 30/7/05**: Hemmingford est un village de contrastes. Ses deux rues principales sont bordées de maisons coquettes, noyées dans les rudbeckias et les hémérocalles. On y sent bien l'influence des loyalistes qui ont peuplé Hemmingford. Au centre du village, il y a le petit café où s'arrêtent les cyclistes qui pédalent à travers les champs de maïs. Il y a aussi l'épicerie où les résidants du "canton", plus riches et plus urbains que ceux du village, peuvent trouver quelques produits fins.
> Mais derrière cette image bucolique, il y a un autre.
> Hemmingford, moins joli, plus dur: c'est le village de Shanna. Hemmingford affiche le taux de chômage famélique de 2,8%. Mais ce plein emploi cache une rude réalité: celle des jobines mal payée à la scierie, au parc Safari ou à l'usine de cadenas.
>
> **[Translation]**
> Hemmingford is a village of contrasts. The two main streets are bordered by quaint houses, brimming with black-eyed susans and daylilies. One feels fully the influence of the Loyalists who populated Hemmingford. In the centre of the village, there is a small café where the cyclists who pedal through the fields of

corn stop. There is also a grocery store where the residents of the "township", richer and more sophisticated than the villagers, can find some fine products. But behind this bucolic image, there is another.

Hemmingford, less pretty, harder: that is the village of Shanna. Hemmingford declares a meager unemployment rate of 2.8%. But this full employment hides a rude reality: the badly paying "McJobs" at the sawmill, at Parc Safari or at the factory that makes locks.

Residents believed that this particular perspective was fuelled by a socio-political agenda, inserting tensions between French and English inhabitants, rather than by an objective approach to presenting the reality of the community. They resented the superficial, stereotypical portrayal of their complex community.

Rita: … it was La Presse, in terms of describing the community and everything; it got a lot of people very irate… This woman comes into your community and in one afternoon, she's done your community analysis. Which is basically, she says there's a bunch of rich Anglos [English-speaking], who live in the county and the township, and the poor Francophones [French-speaking] living in the village. And there's this little poor English strip. What right do you have? You spoke to three people, and now you make these pronouncements.

There had been some "talk" in the media that drugs played a role in the unfolding of the events that resulted in Shanna's murder. Other residents were angry at how this talk then ballooned into insinuations of a widespread youth drug culture in Hemmingford. A TV news report of a few teens hanging out behind the post office created the impression that every teen who hung out there was a "druggie."

Kate Lyn (who has grown up in Hemmingford): Oh god, depending on what station you listened to, Hemmingford looked like a big drug town… I can't remember what station it was now, but they were interviewing—because there are kids that hang out behind the post office. They were interviewing them, and they were asking the kids, "Well, why do they smoke pot?" But not all the kids that were back there smoke pot. It made it look like everybody that was back there was a druggie, which is not true. So, that is what Hemmingford is seen as now.

Residents expressed the belief that the media's appetite for interviews was so insatiable, everyone and anyone was fair game, regardless of their ability to give an informed opinion. Angela was particularly disturbed that the media *probed every chance they could.*" This added to the frustration of residents who felt that the media was creating a skewed view of the event, the individuals involved, and the community.

Arlene (a long-time resident): I would watch the news and I would say, "Who is that? I've never… that's a complete stranger giving his opinion." It was to the point where they would ask anyone and everyone, and it would irk the family to a certain degree. I remember [Shanna's] stepfather saying, "I don't even know this

person and he is giving his opinion about my daughter… he has never seen her in his life I am sure." So, it was kind of odd. Odd, in a creepy kind of way.

Intrusion on Community Life

Residents also reported meaningful disruptions to the usual flow of community life as a result of the media coverage. Vans from both French and English broadcast outlets were parked around the village; as well, the vehicles of American news teams clogged the streets for kilometers near the centre of town.

> K: Was there a big media presence?
> Arlene: Huge… once the search started, the media flooded the town. From the search [site about 5 kilometers away] straight to the town itself, there were vans and vans, and trucks with the huge antennas, and satellites, and you name it. Literally you couldn't walk down the street without somebody [from the media] saying, "So what do you think of…"

Whenever there was a tip that a clue or a body had been found, news vans would rush to the site, double-parking and blocking the rural two-lane road. Angela told us of a time when the media was camped in the driveway of a relative's house, because the police were intensively searching near-by. The reporters would "*hassle*" any family members or friends who came to the house.

> Alice (a journalist): I mean, the larger media, part of their job is to be intrusive, and to get what they need, sort of as fast as possible… the trucks were all over the place, and there was… this presence of media… they were just always there, and I am sure that it had a huge effect on the community… … you have all those people sticking microphones in their face, and trying to convince you that they need sound bytes…

Because the crime had taken place in a rural setting, helicopters from various TV new outlets circled the community at all hours of the day. This bombardment created an ever-present source of stress and pressure for the residents, as did the constant presence of news media in town.

> Audrey: You have to remember that this community lived under a microscope for over a month. I mean, you couldn't go outside your door, without meeting with the media…

The intense media coverage served to create an unsettling atmosphere for one resident.

> Kate Lyn: [Because of the media attention] a resident had been stopped on the roadway, and somebody on a motorcycle wanted to know if this is the town where the girl had been murdered. I found that quite disturbing when something like that happened. I wouldn't want to go around and be, like a tourist attraction...

Intrusion on the Private Processes of Grief

Rituals that are generally considered private were captured for public viewing and consumption. News reporters were camped outside of the church that was the site of Shanna's funeral. As her grieving friends and family filed out, the media was there to record and publicize their grieving.

> Kate Lyn: It was a very nice service, I went with my daughter, but I didn't know a lot of people that were there, and the media was there… They did a candlelight vigil which was really nice, and well done, except again, there was too much media there. It gave the kids time to grieve and be with each other, and to talk, but I didn't like the fact that all the media was there, it was too much.

A year later, the media arrived to cover a memorial service for Shanna that was organized through the youth centre. But many felt the media was using the memorial as an opportunity to gather reactions to something else: Kurt Lauder's guilty plea to a reduced charge of second-degree murder, which co-incidentally was announced the same day as the memorial.

> Alice: Certainly some of the media especially, I found from my experience, were much more intrusive than others… cameramen are specifically very in your face. They would weave their way through people along this… trying to get close-ups walking in the other direction; it was… almost, you know, scandalizing what was happening. And what was happening was an emotional event… because they more or less announced his sentencing.
> R: Yeah, around the same date.
> Alice: It came out. I think the night of the vigil. Anyway, there was an insane anger, so much anger, at the vigil. It took over the meaning of the vigil. Suddenly, it wasn't all about her anymore, it was about a reaction to… [Lauder] and I think that is why the media was there…

Triggering Renewed Feelings of Loss and Grief

The impact of news coverage on residents was not isolated to only the event and its aftermath. Many residents reported that news coverage up to two years after the murder activated intense feelings of grief.

> Rita: … every time there is sort of a court thing with Kurt, the media trucks are in the village.

New coverage would trigger fresh feelings of grief for those who were close to Shanna.

> Kate Lyn: I find there is too much put on TV too soon, and it gets people — I mean, my daughter hears stuff like that, and still today, when she hears his name mentioned on TV, she starts crying again.

It also served to renew feelings of anger, frustration, and fear for others in the community, especially the young people who seemed to have the hardest time coping with Shanna's murder.

> Ruby (a resident who had lived there for most of her life): I've noticed every time there's been something else on TV about the Lauders, they [adolescents in the town] get really cold and edgy. They get aggressive; they start fights at school… little things start to trigger. Parties that shouldn't be happening, the drinking… But, ever since Shanna died, I don't know it's like I said, kids are looking to pick fights; they have to get something out… It [the media coverage] brings them all back to the whole week, that everybody started looking for Shanna.

Discussion

The trends concerning the impact of intense media coverage on a community presented here are not entirely new. Jemphrey and Berrington (2000), analyzing the effects of news coverage on the communities of Hillsborough (following a deadly stadium-related disaster) and Dunblane (following a fatal school shooting at a primary school), demonstrated that the rights and expectations of the bereaved and survivors can be jeopardized, the reputation of a community can be sullied, and sensitivity towards individuals in pain can be sacrificed for business interests. Our inquiry suggests that intense ill-considered media coverage can actually do harm to individuals and communities. Hight and Smyth (2003) suggest that, since journalists face emotional and unusual challenges when covering violent or mass tragedies, they often construct a needed professional wall between themselves and the survivors who are dealing with extraordinary grief.

Our objective in presenting this research is to ask the question: Is there a better way to approach coverage of a trauma rather than to construct this wall? We propose that journalists challenge the framework with which they view traumatic events by considering the following concepts: Symbolic violence and secondary trauma. In addition, we believe that an explicit approach to reflective practice (Schön, 1983), incorporating empathy and positionality, would address many of the issues highlighted by these research results.

Symbolic Violence

Symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990) is a tacit unconscious mode of cultural or social domination that occurs within everyday social interaction. Symbolic violence takes place when holders of symbolic capital (resources available to an individual or a group on the basis of prestige, recognition, or conferred power) use their power against others, who hold less power, in order to shape or change their actions. In the context of media coverage of a traumatic event, an ordinary citizen is not able to socially pressure or compel a passer-by to comment on a news event the way a journalist can. However, residents of Hemmingford reported that many of them felt "forced" to comment on events that were quite painful. They felt emotionally battered by the constant media presence, especially at Shanna's funeral and the memorial service a year after her death.

Generally, people accept the media's use of this kind of social power as lawful, and come to experience this use of coercive authority as legitimate. But the wielding of this power comes at great cost. It is only when journalists are on the other side of the camera or microphone that

this coercion becomes clear and apparent. Mariane Pearl, a journalist herself and wife of reporter Danny Pearl, who was kidnapped and murdered while on assignment in Pakistan disclosed

> They are agitating for an audience with Danny's parents and sisters, too. In Los Angeles, television and radio vans are pulling up outside the Pearl house… "They ring the doorbell; we pretend we aren't home. We close the curtains and hide out. Reporters come up to the front door and shine lights through the windows. One bangs on the doors and holds up a piece of paper, saying, 'I am with CBS. Please open the door, I only want to give you this note…'" Good Morning America, the Today show, CBS Morning News. Diane Sawyer, Katie Couric, Connie Chung, Larry King, and the BBC. They all want me, the wife. I hear the names of the shows and can see the news assistants at their desks, hounded by their anchors to get me on air. I know the pressure to "feed the beast" I have felt it... I feel like telling them, "Yes, the world I am in right now is surreal, but in what world are you?" Then I think I'm being unfair. Or maybe I'm just on the wrong side of the camera (Pearl, 2003, p. 116).

Symbolic violence can result in a psychological sense of transgression and feelings of violation as described by the residents who participated in this study. When print and electronic journalists camped out on the doorsteps of community members pressuring them for interviews or intruded on the private processes of grief, there was a deep sense of harm and exploitation. This generated anger and a profound suspicion of the media. In fact, during the course of this inquiry, more than once the researchers were faced with having to "prove" to participants that their words would not be sensationalized in a newspaper.

Secondary Trauma

Secondary trauma (Figley, 1995; Gill, 2007) are those events, interactions, or public perceptions linked to a traumatizing event that inhibit timely community recovery, prolong stress and disruption, impair communality or damage social bonds. In the context of media coverage, secondary trauma is most often seen as the exposure to traumatic materials, such as photographs, videos of the victim's body, or pools of blood.

In the Hemmingford case, one television station repeatedly showed a 2:52 minute video clip that twice-included Shanna's body covered with a white sheet, being carried out of the underbrush on a stretcher. These graphic images triggered renewed feelings of loss and grief for those young people close to Shanna, as did the media rehashing of the grisly details of the murder every time the Lauder family appeared in court.

Implications emerging from the category labeled *Alienation from the community* suggest that secondary trauma was also created on another level. The community's ability to heal and recover was compromised by sensationalistic and intrusive media coverage. Factions were created or further polarized; inaccurate representations of segments of the community were presented as fact, deepening ruptures between residents and their neighbors and social supports. Inhabitants of Hemmingford reported feeling estranged from the very community that could comfort them. At a time when the community most needed to come together, the media contributed to further pulling it apart. It is difficult for people to recover from the effects of trauma when the community they have depended on fragments (Erikson, 1976). The cohesive

threads of the community's social fabric, which can positively bind them together to create a certain, safe, and wholesome environment were disrupted by gossip and innuendo packaged as news. Coping with trauma is facilitated by strong social bonds, which are enhanced by the experience of having faced the trauma together. This dimension of serving the public good needs to be a more explicit aspect of the journalist's mission.

Implications for Journalistic Practice When Covering Trauma in Communities

Positionality and Empathy

Cornies (2007) reported a survey that named the invasion of others' privacy as a primary ethical issue. Nearly 24% of the 98 Canadian journalists interviewed from every province named this and the pressures to exceed boundaries of decency and good taste in the course of their work as the most pressing dilemma of their craft. They cited most often the following dynamics that we saw evidenced in our research: intrusions into the lives of individuals and families during times of grief or stress; the use of long lenses and ambush interviews in pursuit of stories; the pressures exerted by newsroom assigners and producers to exploit personal information and to "torque" stories beyond what might be warranted by the facts for the sake of added impact or sensationalism; and the increasing use of unverified information, prompted by shrinking newsroom resources and the pressure to deliver an increasing number of stories.

In light of these dilemmas, it is interesting to examine the approach taken by the journalist interviewed in our study, who intuitively looked at the event with a different perspective. This journalist participant drew upon an ethical framework of care (Noddings, 1984), which argues that care is basic in human life and should be the foundation for ethical decision-making. Ethical caring is a state of being in relation, characterized by receptivity, relatedness and engagement. The journalist, consequently, employed positionality and empathy as she enacted her journalistic practice. Positionality refers to one's location in the social order with regards to others and the ability to reflect critically on the way one tackles tasks or relates to other social actors. Empathy is a more widely understood concept and calls for a sense of shared experience, including emotional and physical feelings, with someone or something other than oneself by remembering or imagining being in a similar situation. By shifting positionality and engaging in empathy, we argue that journalists can reclaim the personal when covering a traumatic event, yet still fulfill their journalistic mission. First, we present a comment from a resident to set the tone for the journalist's reflections.

> Arlene: … when you live within 10 miles of the victim's mother, who you can see what they were suffering, and you can see her pleading for her child's return on TV. It's not like she is 100 miles away and you don't know the woman… There were so many complexities to this case and so many twists and turns that what you see on TV for the 10-minute news report, makes it mundane and it wasn't mundane. I say to myself the world in general will never really know the suffering that went on in those fifteen days.

Arlene's comment expresses what Alice, a journalist for a newspaper, saw right away: the residents of Hemmingford were suffering. The paper she represented did not want to exacerbate the situation. Her comments reflect a reporter employing both positionality and empathy.

Alice: We were always very careful with the details even what we printed. You know, how her body was found; that kind of thing was also much more of a sensitive—certainly more sensitive than the newspapers from Montreal were… they didn't have that sort of bond [with the community].

Reporters and editors must be sensitive to the little details when covering a tragic event. No matter whether they are covering the story for a news outlet in the area or distant from it, journalists must seek to create an implicit bond with community members. Instead of operating with a "parachute" mentality – jumping into the situation and jumping out again – they must consider that in the course of "quick and dirty" reporting, they could prolong or compound the trauma for those impacted. A bond with the community also implies a sense of responsibility for the impact and implications of how they cover the news event.

Alice: I am really a bad journalist in that sense (laughs). In that I think I do involve myself a little too much in a lot of the stories… I would have preferred to just go and stand there and be a part of this memorial, and not have to try and drag people through any kind of memory, and to try and conjure up any kind of a sound byte to come out of any of the people who were standing there, because it was such an emotion-driven event…

Journalists must insure that they are not intruders in a situation where people are grieving. Asking – or not asking– for a comment at a memorial service doesn't make you a bad journalist or a good journalist. It's all in the approach. It is important to first be an observer, and then to respectfully ask permission before you photograph a source, take video footage, or pose a question. Only with consent can you build a relationship that is helpful to both parties, and the communities they live in, and that does no harm to the traumatized.

Alice: I have been told that comes out in the articles that I wound up writing, that there—it was very obvious that… I couldn't separate myself from it. There was no way I could just stand back and give my outlook on that kind of situation.
R: Is that framed as a strength or a criticism of your articles?
Alice: A strength, at that point, it was—because I did talk about—I didn't shy away from talking about the Lauder family, and that side. I framed it as a loss in a community of two young people…

Unable to separate herself from the story, Alice engaged in both positionality and empathy. In the final analysis, that made her a better journalist in her own eyes. She was able to see the larger picture and understand that underneath all the sordid details, the story was a very human story, that of a tremendous loss for the community. Though reclaiming the personal can complicate the journalist's traditional role as objective recorder of events, it can also create junctures of connection with readers (Usher, 2009).

Deeper Dimensions of Reflective Practice in Journalism

When journalists approach news coverage as bearing witness to traumatic events, they create opportunities to unify the community and facilitate its movement towards recovery. "Bearing witness moves individuals from the personal act of 'seeing' to the adoption of a public stance by which they become part of a collective working through trauma together" (Zelizer, 2002, p. 698). In order to delineate the potential of this role, reflective practice can assist journalists in exploring the consequences of their news coverage.

Schön (1983) has identified two dimensions of reflective practice: *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action*. *Reflection-in-action* is the reflection one engages in while doing something. The capacity to reflect on professional action allows the journalist to engage in a process of continuous learning. Niblock (2007) has suggested that this aspect of reflective practice is denoted by the journalistic maxim "thinking on our feet" which includes hunches about a story angle, choice of picture, and which sources will best interpret events. We suggest that this dimension of reflective practice also encompasses the strategies that have been outlined to sensitively and compassionately approach individuals who have experienced trauma.

Reflection-on-action is reflection on an action after having enacted it. This type of reflection links thought and action with reflection and allows a journalist to think about and critically analyze actions with the goal of improving practice. This aspect of reflective practice is denoted by the maxim "hindsight is 20/20" and includes goals about how to cover a story more effectively and compassionately next time. We suggest that employing the lenses of positionality and empathy is another way in which to engage in *reflection-on-action*. Sheridan Burns (2002) contended that journalists need to be cognizant of the wider social context in which they report and understand their place within it. This, in essence, is positionality.

Balancing the Tensions through Dialogue

Linda's Dialogue with Student Journalists

On September 11, 2001, I saw with absolute clarity how important it is for an educator to discuss coverage of trauma at length with students. Ironically, I was teaching a class on Deadline Reporting the day the planes hit the towers. I told my students that they were likely witnessing the biggest story of the decade unfold – maybe the biggest story of a still-nascent century. I told them that journalists in every newsroom across the world would be reporting on this story, on deadline. Journalists from every department in the newsroom, from arts to sports, would be drafted to write the story from myriad angles. I proposed that they, too, report on the story, but I asked them first how they felt about the proposition. Their reaction taught me a great deal. Several students cried. Some said they could not bring themselves to ask people questions on that day. Then one student raised his hand and asked if the class could cover the story in groups, instead of as individuals. It was a wise suggestion. We formed reporting teams. We then talked about the kinds of stories a team of reporters could do – stories that could be viewed as helpful not harmful. Most students agreed that venturing out to the airport, where passengers were stranded, might be a good option. Indeed, at the next class, the students who were most apprehensive about asking questions that day were most pleased with their efforts. They said they'd been able to provide information to the stranded passengers by bringing them news and facts to which they had no access. The students learned that they could actually help those who were impacted – at the very least, do no harm – and they could get their stories as well.

A Broader Dialogue: Conclusions of the Community Resilience Research Team

We believe it is imperative that journalists, editors, news executives, and journalism educators engage in dialogue in the newsroom and the classroom around the following issues and tensions.

The public's need to know versus the privacy of those who have been traumatized. A salient aspect of the discourse within journalism is its function to inform the public (Hujanen, 2009). However, what are the limits to what the public needs to know? Journalists and news editors must create discussion on the values and ethics guiding practice. "Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance… private people have a greater right to control information about themselves... Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy" (Society of Professional Journalists, 1996, ¶ 3).

Media mobbing, the flood of reporters, camera crews, satellite trucks and all the technology that characterizes the media-industrial complex (Wasserman, 2007), can inhibit recovery from trauma, and, as seen in Hemmingford, can contribute to symbolic violence and secondary trauma. Wasserman has noted that since a site where a tragedy has occurred is basically a vast trauma center, just about every potential news source is injured and susceptible to further injury. Media mobbing may also destroy the private space a community needs to gather itself quietly and tend to its wounds.

There is also a flip side. When media coverage is sensitive to the community, it can be helpful for the survivors. Seeing one's experience reported in the news can help one to reconnect with her or his life and with the community (Sykes, 2003). It can validate feelings of disempowerment and anger. In turn, it can help with the recovery process, both at an individual and community level.

Profit motive versus public welfare. In order to increase sales, meet deadlines in an environment that has dwindling resources, or scoop competitors, some journalists may sensationalize facts or cut corners on verifying for accuracy. This can lead to errors and negative coverage. Usher (2009) presented a compelling description of how the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* reporters assumed the role of advocates by challenging and correcting the negative media coverage of the city post-Katrina. Hemmingford, unfortunately, had no such advocate to contest bias and inaccuracy from "torqued" stories. Residents were left with a bitter taste that emerged time and again in this research project. Competition is part of the ethos of journalism as an interpretive community (Riegert and Olsson, 2007). But this is entwined with the (sometimes oppositional) discourse of journalism as public service (Hujanen, 2009). It is essential that newsrooms create climates that attempt to balance these two tensions in a socially responsible way, and engage in ongoing dialogue to continually clarify the news organization's style and integrity.

Doing the job of reporting versus being sensitive to those in pain. Part of "doing the job" has meant that journalists must maintain distance and objectivity. However, this aspect of the journalist's role has been cultivated in order to explicitly avoid media manipulation and broadcasting bias to the general public, and implicitly, perhaps, to psychologically protect journalists. Though detachment and objectivity have lately been problemitized (Deuze, 2005), there is an historical confusion between objectivity and sensitivity. One can present a fair story, exploring all sides of an issue yet maintain sensitivity to individuals and communities who are caught up in events.

It would have been logical for a journalist to assume that anyone in the small town of Hemmingford might have an association to Shanna, her family, or the Lauders. It also would have been logical to assume that residents would feel grief at the shattering of their image of Hemmingford as a safe and peaceful town. Coté and Simpson (2000) noted that it is not easy for journalists to recognize when trauma survivors need to be left alone, and when an interview, instead of being cathartic, deepens the injury by forcing victims to re-experience pain they're not ready to confront. Being sensitive to people's feelings of loss, sorrow and pain does not compromise responsible reporting. In fact, subjectivity and empathy do not contradict objectivity. These various value positions can be considered fundamental elements of a journalist's professional identity (Van Zoonen, 1998).

Conclusion

There's a growing awareness among journalism professionals that survivors of a traumatic event must be reported upon with sensitivity and respect. But reporters and editors have paid little attention to the impact that coverage of a traumatic event has on the wider circle of the community. Our research shows that consideration of community members, and the community as an entity, must be part of the equation when reporting on a trauma.

We do not question that journalists must continue to ask the "hard questions" and explore the difficult issues of our society. But through dialogue around these tensions, journalists may develop a more sensitive and socially responsible approach to covering a community trauma. They may expand their role, as Riegert and Olsson (2007) have posited, to include comforter and co-mourner in times of crisis, so they not only *do no harm*, but also facilitate healing.

Notes

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[2] The names of all participants are pseudonyms.

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