

## Food-Sharing Practices Online in the Facebook Group Cambridge Bay News

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Résumé de l'article

Cambridge Bay News est un groupe populaire sur Facebook utilisé par les résidents d'Iqaluktuuttiaq pour communiquer entre eux. De nombreux membres utilisent également le groupe pour partager de la nourriture traditionnelle avec d'autres. Notre article examine les pratiques des résidents en matière de partage de nourriture sur Cambridge Bay News et l'impact de ces pratiques sur les relations au sein de la communauté. En comparant ces pratiques avec l'histoire orale et les comptes rendus anthropologiques des pratiques de partage d'Inuinnait, nous examinons comment le partage des aliments modifie les relations au sein d'Iqaluktuuttiaq ainsi que les relations qu'entretiennent les gens avec le territoire en réponse aux pratiques coloniales en cours.

# Food-Sharing Practices Online in the Facebook Group Cambridge Bay News

Laura Dunn<sup>i</sup> and Pamela Gross<sup>ii</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Cambridge Bay News is a popular Facebook group that residents of Iqaluktuuttiaq use to communicate within the town. Many members also use the group to share country food with others. Our paper looks at residents' practices of sharing food on Cambridge Bay News and the impact these practices have on relationships within the community. Comparing these practices with oral history and anthropological accounts of Inuinnait sharing practices, we examine how food sharing is changing relationships within Iqaluktuuttiaq and between people and the land in response to ongoing colonial practices.

## RÉSUMÉ

**Les pratiques de partage de la nourriture en ligne sur le groupe Facebook Cambridge Bay news**

Cambridge Bay News est un groupe populaire sur Facebook utilisé par les résidents d'Iqaluktuuttiaq pour communiquer entre eux. De nombreux membres utilisent également le groupe pour partager de la nourriture traditionnelle avec d'autres. Notre article examine les pratiques des résidents en matière de partage de nourriture sur Cambridge Bay News et l'impact de ces pratiques sur les relations au sein de la communauté. En comparant ces pratiques avec l'histoire orale et les comptes rendus anthropologiques des pratiques de partage d'Inuinnait, nous examinons comment le partage des aliments modifie les relations au sein d'Iqaluktuuttiaq ainsi que les relations qu'entretiennent les gens avec le territoire en réponse aux pratiques coloniales en cours.

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Facebook is ubiquitous across Nunavut. There are several Inuit-run Facebook groups that have tens of thousands of members. These range from social photo-sharing groups such as Nunavut Hunting Stories of the Day, presented in this volume by Castleton, with 45,274 members, to political groups like Feeding My Family with 21,959 members. The pervasiveness of Facebook is especially obvious in the many groups created by residents of Nunavut's settlements that are dedicated to buying, selling, and trading. There is one buy, sell, and trade group for each of Nunavut's twenty-five settlements, and most of these groups have over one thousand members. In some settlements these groups are deeply intertwined with everyday life (Hot 2010). One popular Kitikmeot Facebook group is called Cambridge Bay News. It is used primarily by residents of Cambridge Bay (Iqaluktuuttiaq), Nunavut, to share information amongst the town's population of roughly 1,800 people. This article examines this Facebook group in light of the historic and ongoing colonial context of Cambridge Bay. More specifically, we will look at how residents use food sharing on Facebook to create and define new understandings of community in Cambridge Bay.

Along with the rising popularity of Facebook, Inuit and non-Inuit users express ambivalence about some of the ways it is used (Searls 2016). At times, local Facebook groups have raised new concerns for Inuit.<sup>1</sup> For example, in 2014, the Kitikmeot Inuit Association (KIA) expressed concern that Facebook groups dedicated to buying, selling, and trading were facilitating the selling of country food and threatening traditional sharing practices (CBC 2014). Selling meat, or country food,<sup>2</sup> online had become so widespread that the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board warned the KIA that Inuit should stop the practice. As KIA's executive director Paul Emingak explains, "they were concerned that, especially with caribou, that if caribou was sold to other communities for profit, then that would diminish the herds in other communities" (CBC 2015b). The concern was that Facebook groups have been making it easier to commercialize country food and that this phenomenon was eroding longstanding Inuit values such as sharing.<sup>3</sup> The power and popularity of Facebook groups have grown to such an extent that Inuit organizations now see them as having a major influence on Inuit culture and traditions (CBC 2014).

In Cambridge Bay, food sharing is shaped by the context of ongoing colonial practices in Canada and the ways in which Inuit have responded to and resisted these practices. Colonialism, in the context of this article, refers to a

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1. In 2016 an Iqaluit woman reached out to the Iqaluit Sell/Swap page to find an adoptive parent for her child. The adoption was successful, but the post was met with significant outrage (George 2016).

2. Country food is a term used to refer to meat from wild game such as fish, seal, caribou, muskox or whale.

3. Some Facebook sell/swap pages such as Iqaluit Auction Bid now refuses to advertise the sale of country food.

global process of dispossession and exploitation of Indigenous Peoples by settler states and European powers. Specifically, in Cambridge Bay the authors use the term *colonialism* to refer to the ideologies and power structures that developed the coercive settlement policies enacted by the Canadian government in the 1950s, as well as the abuse and cultural genocide enacted through the system of residential schools and family disruption caused by tuberculosis hospitals.

Today, colonialism endures in the form of inadequate implementation of the Nunavut Agreement and the ongoing conditions of inequality between Inuit and non-Inuit (Campbell, Feng, and Hanson 2011). One example of this inequality is food insecurity. A study found that in Nunavut 70 per cent of Inuit preschoolers do not have enough to eat (Egeland 2010: 12). In comparison, only 8.3 per cent of all households in Canada do not have enough to eat (Roshanfar and Hawkins 2015: 1). This disparity reflects the priorities of the Canadian government, which, throughout the process of the signing and implementation of the Nunavut Agreement, prioritized corporate access to Inuit lands and resources over providing the services necessary for the well-being of Inuit communities (Campbell, Feng, and Hanson 2011: 34).

The failure to fully implement the Nunavut Agreement, especially article 23 regarding the education and employment of Inuit, has meant that Inuit earn significantly less than non-Inuit in Nunavut (Berger 2006). Despite the settlement of a lawsuit regarding the inadequate implementation of article 23 in 2015, a 2017 report from Nunavut Tunngavik revealed that education levels for Inuit have not changed significantly since the launch of the lawsuit in 2006 (Nunavut Tunngavik 2017: 4). Article 23 of the Nunavut Agreement is crucial, since low wages are widely understood as the primary cause of food insecurity (Food Banks Canada 2015: 1). When members of Cambridge Bay News share food in the group, they are not only continuing a tradition of food sharing but also alleviating the food insecurity linked to the prioritization of resource extraction over the education and employment of Inuit.

This research draws on ethnographic observation of the Facebook groups Cambridge Bay News from August of 2014 to June 2015 conducted during the Dunn's master's thesis research. This research included Dunn's interviews with thirteen community members, including two administrators of the Cambridge Bay News Facebook group and one of the librarians who oversees the local internet access point. All interviews were conducted in face-to-face settings using a semi-structured methodology and open questions that allowed respondents to situate their Facebook use and food-sharing practices within their own experience and perspectives. The only non-Inuit interview referenced in this article is with the group's founder Hugh MacIsaac. Most of the participants were recruited through the first and second author's relationships with the participants. Friends and acquaintances were the most accessible participants and gave the most candid responses. We also recruited research participants through a posting on the Cambridge Bay News Facebook page. While striving for impartiality, we acknowledge this recruitment technique may have influenced observations since

most participants were either active users of the Cambridge Bay News Facebook group who would be less likely to critique its impact on the community than non-users, while friends and acquaintances of the researchers may have felt a need to share information they thought that the researchers wanted to hear.

In this article, we choose to envision community through a “post-place” definition (see Bradshaw 2008) that understands the term *community* less as a physical location or circumscribed population than a shared network of relationships, including social bonds, interdependence and goals. These relationships are constantly changing, but the settlement structures a large network of relationships that is made up of more closely linked sub-communities such as families, churches, and organizations (Dunn 2015b: 23). As a traditional practice central to Inuit identity that is currently taking on new forms online, food sharing is a useful lens for gaining insight into Inuit engagement with Facebook as a social media platform. The article situates online sharing practices within existing research on Inuit digital media and the broader tradition of Inuit food sharing.

## **Inuit digital media**

Inuit have been using digital media as a tool for communicating with local and global communities since the early days of the internet. In the planning stages of the Nunavut territory, Inuit leadership saw digital media as an important tool for creating solidarity among Nunavummiut (a name ascribed to both Inuit and non-Inuit residents of the territory). In 1995, the Nunavut Implementation Commission, a team of federally appointed Inuit leaders, emphasized the importance of the internet as a link that could connect remote settlements with each other and with Southern services (Nunavut Implementation Commission 1995: 54). The Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Association also emphasized the importance of the internet in the Arctic and advocated for community-by-community control over internet access points (Roth 1999: 93). When the federal government cut funding for free internet access at libraries and community centres across Canada, Nunavut was the only territory to take up the project and continue to offer funding for free community internet access points through the Northern Community Access Program (CBC 2012).<sup>4</sup> Digital media grew to be a part of daily life in Inuit communities across Nunavut, first via social networks like Bebo and later Facebook (Hot 2010).

One of the primary themes in research on Inuit digital media is the question of appropriation or assimilation. Broadly speaking, this question asks whether Inuit can appropriate digital media to preserve their culture or whether

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4. This program is especially important because of the high cost of a private internet connection, which in Cambridge Bay costs at least eighty dollars per month for a Quiniq account with a 25 GB/month cap, as of 2018.

the technology will cause Inuit to be assimilated into a dominant global culture. Within this debate, appropriation has been understood as the ability of Inuit to use the internet for their own cultural purposes, while assimilation has meant that Inuit culture would be fundamentally changed by the norms of online interaction and the conventions or properties of the medium itself. This question was first raised by Arctic anthropologists such as Louis McComber, cited in an 1998 article by Jean-François Savard. Despite widespread support for increased internet access by the Nunavut Implementation Committee, Savard expressed concern that the internet's language, content, and technological affordances would dominate Inuit culture (Savard 1998: 88).

The question of appropriation or assimilation with respect to the introduction of the internet in Inuit communities was framed by broader debates in digital media studies and science, technology, and society studies about the impacts of the internet on all aspects of society as it entered the mainstream in the 1990s, such as the work of Neil Postman and Raymond Barglow. Savard draws on theorists such as Dan Thu Nguyen and John Alexander (1996), who suggested that the internet could result in some loss of social meaning and cultural specificity for all internet users, let alone those belonging to minority language groups and cultures.

Despite Savard's warnings about overly optimistic views of technology, the first observational study of Inuit uses of digital media suggested that the impacts of digital media on Inuit might change but not threaten Inuit culture. In his cyber-ethnography *Inuit in Cyberspace*, Neil Christensen suggested that Inuit use the internet to assert their social and political identities and the boundaries of these identities. Christensen (2003) defines "Inuit web pages" as any webpage created or maintained by Inuit as well as those that contain Inuit cultural signifiers such as syllabics, maps of Arctic geographies, or inuksuit (*inusuuk* in the plural). Christensen shows that that the Inuit do not lose what he calls "Inuit-ness" when they connect online, and that Inuit should not be bound to the time / space of their ancestors (Ibid.: 43). Instead, he argues that these websites are being used in a way that emphasizes the local by asserting place-based identities and Inuit political power (Ibid.: 103).

Focusing specifically on the use of Inuktitut as a written language online, the question of cultural assimilation through digital media was taken up again by linguist Timothy Pasch in 2008 and anthropologist Aurélie Hot in 2010. They share the concern that unless changes are made to social networking tools in Nunavut, especially to facilitate Inuktitut writing systems, Inuit youth will continue to use English to integrate themselves into a global youth culture (Hot 2010: 61).<sup>5</sup> The recent Uqausivut report confirms the findings of Pasch and Hot, showing that over a ten-year span, the percentage of Inuit who report Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun as their first language has dropped (Government of Nunavut 2012: 11). However,

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5. Facebook recently announced that the platform will be available in Inuktitut in 2019.

the Uqausivut report suggests that residential schools played a large part in the decline of Inuit language and culture. While each technology comes with affordances that facilitate different languages and behaviours, it can be difficult to untangle whether media technologies are facilitating cultural change or simply reflecting broader social changes, such as the language loss caused by residential schools (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996: 406).

Much of the tension in the debate is rooted in differing methods for defining what is essential to Inuit culture. While Savard looks at Inuit culture as a set of distinctly Inuit ways of living that are radically different from the norms and conventions of online interaction, Christensen resists defining Inuit culture and accepts internet users' self-identification. The question of whether or not Inuit culture is threatened by the internet comes down to the much more difficult and politically laden question of defining what makes something essentially "Inuit."

In his master's thesis, Alexander Castleton (2014) revisits the question of appropriation versus assimilation using actor-network-theory. He explores Inuit youth practices on Facebook. Castleton argues that, although Inuit Facebook users must adopt the scripts of Facebook, the primary requirement of these scripts is to share images, video, text, or hypertext. This sharing impulse, though it originates in Western technology, works as a catalyst to develop content related to Inuit knowledge, identity, and culture (Castleton 2014: 106). Thus, while there may be a cultural difference between the platform and user, their goals become somewhat intertwined and aligned through content creation.

Since the arrival of internet in Nunavut, the debate about appropriation versus assimilation has shifted significantly from Savard's pessimism to the cautious optimism expressed by Pasch, Hot, and Castleton. For now, it might be best to lay this question to rest. Revisiting the question of assimilation versus appropriation in 2010, Savard urges that since the internet is clearly a part of everyday life, it is time to stop asking whether or not appropriation is possible. Instead, he wonders how Indigenous Peoples can appropriate virtual networks (Savard 2010: 101). This question is more relevant to modern life in Nunavut. While the question of assimilation versus appropriation does have productive aspects that could push developers to create new platforms and technologies that better reflect Inuit knowledge and values, it is a question best left unanswered. This is because in the past, the question of appropriation versus acculturation has put an individual, usually a non-Inuk researcher, in the position of deciding what is and is not "truly Inuit," erasing the diversity of Inuit identity and imposing paternalist limits on cultural change.

Instead, research is shifting to look at the everyday use of digital media by Inuit individuals and communities (Christensen 2003: 47; Dupré 2011; Hot 2010; Wachowich and Scobie 2010). In an examination of YouTube accounts by Inuit youth, Nancy Wachowich and Willow Scobie found that many youth use YouTube as an outlet for identities and perspectives that are outside the representational politics of Inuit identity and to tell stories that complicate Inuit nation building



(Wachowich and Scobie 2010: 100). Dupré's (2011: 89) research shows how this everyday quality of social media use means that ceremonies of birth and death, as well as traditional family relations and kinship patterns, are performed on Facebook and Bebo. Hot (2010: 58) shows that, at the time of her research, Bebo was so popular in Igloolik that for the 350 residents who were between the ages of ten and twenty, there were 255 Bebo profiles.

The everyday use of digital media translates into the political realm through social media campaigns. Recently, Scobie and Rodgers (2013: 97) examined how *Inuit Qaujimagajuqangit*, also called Inuit Knowledge, has challenged resource extraction industries in Baker Lake and Pond Inlet through campaigns and interventions in the community consultation processes.

Katarina Soukup's (2006) article deals with the ways in which digital media could materially revitalize Inuit culture. She examines the films and media platforms created by the acclaimed media collective Igloolik Isuma Productions, co-founded by award-winning filmmaker Zacharias Kunuk. Part of Kunuk's passion for the internet is based on its capacity to facilitate what Soukup calls a "contemporary nomadism." Contemporary nomadism combines "tradition with the modern, remaining out on the land, living a traditional life of hunting and gathering, all the while being in contact with the rest of the twenty-first century through the internet" (Soukup 2006: 224). For Kunuk, this would ideally allow him to return to the areas where his family lived pre-settlement and work at an outpost media lab, which would mean "being able to edit a movie, take email, and if you see a seal in the bay, you drop everything and go out after it" (Kunuk in Soukup 2006: 244). By living this way, it seems clear that digital media has the potential to decolonize the spatial organization of Inuit.

The benefit of looking at the role of digital media in everyday life is that it refocuses the research questions on the agency with which Inuit address problems of everyday life. These problems range from immediate political struggles such as challenging resource extraction industries as explored by Scobie and Rodgers (2013), to the longstanding barriers to hunting that were created when Inuit were moved into settlements, a problem that Kunuk overcomes through his outpost media lab. In our study of Cambridge Bay News, we speak to the emerging question: How do Inuit use social media in their daily lives and how are Inuit using local Facebook groups to create and transform their communities? Specifically, we focus on food sharing in local Facebook groups as a tactic for Inuit to address food insecurity and reconnect with the land.

## **Cambridge Bay News**

Cambridge Bay News is a public Facebook group consisting of 3,901 members<sup>6</sup> who post updates about local activities and events. Michelle Tologanak, one of the group's administrators, posted the following description in the "About"

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6. This number is as of August 27, 2018.



section of the group: “Cambridge Bay News is about sharing your news with others in the Community and elsewhere, events, jobs or just looking for something to purchase. You can find it all on this site” (Tologanak 2015). In addition to the events, jobs, and news that Tologanak mentions in the group’s description, members often post lost and found items, travel cancellations, school closures, and concerns about the community.

We had access to the Cambridge Bay News Facebook group between August 2014 to June 2015 because it is an open group. This means that all posts in the group can be viewed by any individual with a Facebook account. Research involving Facebook is still evolving and can raise serious ethical questions about privacy; as a result, we limited our observations to this group, which was already open to the public. This meant that we did not look at members’ profiles and ensured that group members who requested anonymity in their interviews would not be linked to their posts in the group or their Facebook profiles. To conduct this research, the first author received permission from both the Nunavut Research Institute and the McGill University Research Ethics Board, as this work was part of her master’s thesis.

In 2011, shortly after moving to Cambridge Bay, Hugh MacIsaac, a geologist for the Government of Nunavut, started Cambridge Bay News. He found that the existing community Facebook group called Cambridge Bay Sell/Swap was becoming cluttered with events and announcements, making it difficult for members to find the items they wanted. Hugh decided to create a separate Facebook group dedicated to community news and announcements that could redirect some of the content that was cluttering the Sell/Swap page. Hugh is not Inuit, and, as the group grew, he recruited Shannon Kemukton and later Michelle Tologanak, who are both Inuit, to be administrators (MacIsaac in Dunn 2015a).

Any Facebook user can request membership in the group, and any group member can approve the request. For the most part, group members only approve requests from Facebook users they know, and the group’s administrators are the only members with the ability to delete members from the group. Ultimately, the three administrators have the final say about who is and is not welcome in the group. They are also responsible for deleting posts that group members find inappropriate. When they are not busy with their young families and work, all three administrators—Hugh, Shannon, and Michelle—monitor activity on Cambridge Bay News. Hugh wanted the group to “control itself and to give [the other administrators] the freedom to do what they want” (MacIsaac *in* Dunn 2015a). This claim is born out in the fact that, while the administrators work alongside one another to moderate the group and deal with complaints, they have never discussed how the group should be moderated and they each use their own judgment.

Shannon Kemukton is the most active administrator on Cambridge Bay News. She explained her role in the group in an interview in April 2015. She makes her decisions about membership by examining a new member’s Facebook

profile. She checks that the account is real, not a spammer, and that the owner of the account currently lives in Nunavut. Requests to join the group from users outside Nunavut are treated with a little more caution.

We have many job opportunities within Nunavut and [Southerners] move to the community and I still don't accept them [into the group]. But let's say they work at RBC [bank] and they know a lady for example [a woman who has lived in the community for decades]. They would message me and say there is this lady who is trying to get on Cambridge Bay News and they're not accepting her.

And I would say, "Oh, I'm sorry I wasn't accepting them but, reason being—they're not within Nunavut and I don't know if they live in Cambridge Bay or not" and they say, "Okay, her name is this, this is how you spell it, she's got this kind of picture" and I'm like, "Okay, I'll keep an eye out for her and if I see her I'll accept her." (Kemukton in Dunn 2015a)

In this hypothetical vignette, Shannon explains that she accepts requests to join the group from non-Inuit if a longstanding community member can vouch that they live in Cambridge Bay. Membership in the Facebook group is fairly open, since group members generally approve any members with whom they are familiar, but for users outside of Nunavut and without strong connections to the community access is restricted. This means that in particular cases administrators have significant personal control over group membership; but, for the most part, the group is self-organized.

There are often posts offering to share food on Cambridge Bay News, and these posts are accessible to all group members. As a result, the process of determining who is and is not a member of Cambridge Bay News also determines who has access to any food that is shared in the group. The current membership of Cambridge Bay News has grown to be larger than the population of the municipality. It is not possible to get an exact number of group members who live in Cambridge Bay while maintaining the privacy of members, but Shannon estimates about half of Cambridge Bay is a member of the group. For the most part, group members who do not live in Cambridge Bay are from nearby settlements or previously lived in the community. Members access Cambridge Bay News through their cellphones and home computers. Residents without computers access Facebook through the Nunavut-Community Access Program (N-CAP) internet access site at the May Hakongak Library. Those without Facebook accounts can be contacted through the group by asking a group member who is a neighbour or family member to go and deliver a message face-to-face (Kemukton in Dunn 2015a).

Once someone becomes a member, he or she potentially gains access to any food that is shared on Cambridge Bay News. Thus, the current members and

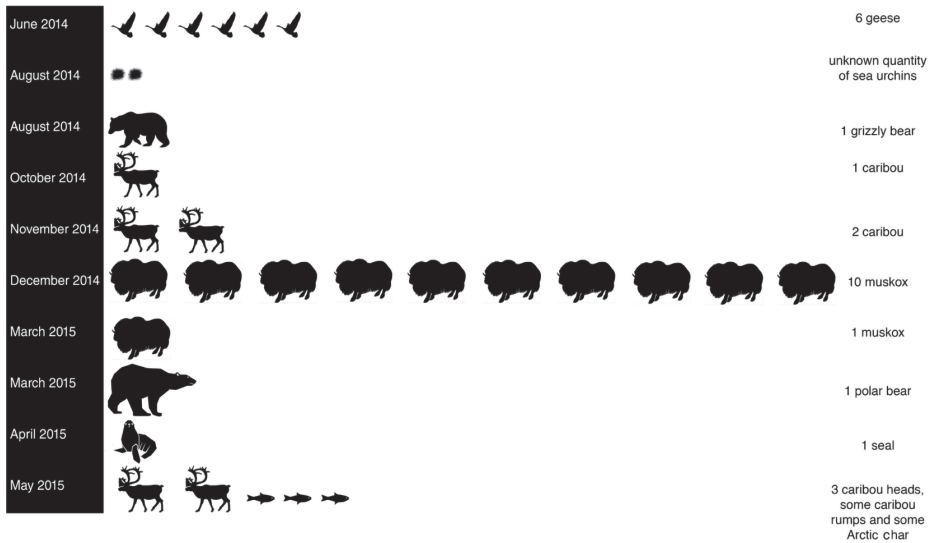
the administrators, who control who participates in the group, have a significant impact on who has access to this food. Altogether, these practices delineate who can participate in online sharing on Cambridge Bay News.

## Sharing country food online

Sharing information is the primary purpose of Cambridge Bay News; the group was started to share news, updates, and promote events. But it is also used to share and request material goods that can range from caribou meat to prom dresses. Here we focus on one particular form of sharing that takes place on Cambridge Bay News—the sharing of country food—and examine it in the context of traditional sharing practices.

Members of Cambridge Bay News typically share country food in the group through an offer of caribou, muskox, or seal meat. These posts detail the quantity and location of meat that can be picked up. On average, there is one post per month offering country food, with more sharing taking place during months when caribou or geese are in season and little or none when animals are scarce (Table 1). As Table 1 suggests, offers of country food in Cambridge Bay News range widely in the quantity and type of food available online. The most common foods shared are muskox, char, and caribou, while sea urchin is the most unusual.

**Table 1.** Quantity of country food shared on Cambridge Bay News, June 2014–2015



The member who posts country food in the group is not always the person who hunted the meat. Shirley<sup>7</sup> is an Inuk, a Cambridge Bay resident, and member of the Facebook group. She described her experience of sharing food in the group:

Yesterday I was walking home and the lady was cutting up seal last night and she said do you want some seal? I said, no I can't eat seal meat. And she goes—can you do me a favour and let people know that I have seal to give away. My dad won't eat all this. — At 6 o'clock I was like—oh yeah! Facebook—so I posted something for her. Free seal. (Shirley in Dunn 2015a)

In Shirley's description, country food sharing practices move fluidly between online and offline communication.

The members of Cambridge Bay News greet posts offering country food with enthusiasm. In June 2014, one member shared six geese with anyone who would come pick them up, to which other members commented, “the old way of sharing still exists” and “way to go ... You make your grandparents smile at you” (Sim 2014a, 2014b). In these quotes, residents explicitly link country food sharing on Cambridge Bay News with earlier forms of food sharing. People who share food in the group do so for any number of reasons, but the most common explanation is that they have more than they need. Shirley said that the woman who was cutting up the seal meat wanted to share because her father had more than he needed. In another post, one group member shared the largest quantity of food posted during the research period in a post that read, “giving away whole char, caribou heads (two cut up and one whole) and rumps. Outdoor freezer is broken. Don't want to waste food. No more room in the inside freezer. They are all outside on top freezer. Please share my post.” Emphasizing a desire to avoid wasting food eases the complex social dynamics and power relationships that surround charity.

For those who pick up country food shared on Cambridge Bay News, the group is an important source of fresh meat. Kelly's<sup>8</sup> family often goes to pick up country food when it is shared online. She sends one of her children to get it or walks over herself. Kelly is Inuk and appreciates online sharing because her family finds it difficult to get out on the land to go hunting. Kelly explained,

There are some people in town that don't have snowmobiles, they don't have four wheelers, they don't have boats, for instance my family, we don't have any of those. There are some people who would share even just a little bit of meat with my family and I love that part. So, when someone posts on Cambridge Bay News “we have some free tuktu or free fish, free

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7. At her request, “Shirley” is a pseudonym and all identifying details have been removed.

8. At her request, “Kelly” is a pseudonym and all identifying details have been removed.

muskox—come get some if you want.” So we would go grab some. We go every chance we get. I always wish to go out on the land. It’s awesome to be out on the land but I just can’t. (Kelly *in* Dunn 2015a)

It is important to note that Kelly emphasizes that the act of sharing, rather than the quantity of meat, is most important to her. Sharing is particularly significant in this case because it allows Kelly’s family to remain connected to hunting. Though Kelly’s family does not have the equipment required to travel and hunt, they remain connected to land-based activities and resources through shared country food.

### The “old way” of sharing

Most Inuit in Cambridge Bay are part of a group of Inuit from the Kitikmeot region who call themselves Inuinnait, meaning “the people” in Inuinaqtun, a dialect of Inuktitut. Inuinnait, also known as Copper Inuit, are made up of smaller regional groups and families who live in the regions spanning what is now western Nunavut and eastern Northwest Territories, including Cambridge Bay (Bennet, Rowley, and Evaloardjuk 2004: 409). Amongst Inuinnait, in the past and in contemporary times, food sharing has been an important practice that includes formal structures for sharing hunted food within a camp, amongst family and with hunting partners.

Anthropological accounts of Inuinnait ways of life refer to a variety of country food sharing practices. In the 1970s, David Damas documented Copper Inuit *piaqtigiit* (seal sharing partnerships) between hunters. A hunter would have a variety of partners with whom he would exchange different parts of the seal when it was caught. For example, a hunter would give a flipper to a particular hunting partner each time he caught a seal and this partner would give him a flipper in return. These partnerships were highly structured and extended through kin and non-kin relationships (Collings, Wenzel, and Condon 1998: 4). *Payaqtuq* was another form of country food sharing that involved bringing food to families not included in that hunter’s seal sharing partnerships. Sharing a meal with the whole camp was another form of food sharing.

Food-sharing practices expanded and contracted based on need and ensured that individuals did not go hungry. “If ten seals, for example, are caught in one day, and there are only six families in the camp, it is obviously unnecessary to send more than a tiny portion of the meat to each household. On the other hand, if only one seal is caught, the whole of the meat must be distributed, otherwise some of the people would go hungry” (Collings, Wenzel, and Condon 1998: 4).

Sharing food in “the old way” has a significance that goes beyond distributing resources. Through their examination of the role of the seal in Inuit culture, Peter et al. (2002) articulate some of the values and beliefs at work in harvesting and sharing country food. Looking at the interaction on a spiritual

level, when a hunter sees a seal, the seal is understood as having shared itself with the hunter by making itself available to be caught:

From the time that the seal gave itself, the hunter had an obligation. His obligation was to share the seal with the people of his camp. If he failed to honour this obligation, the seal would not give itself to the hunter again. Inuit believed that animals have spirits and could come back again and again. Sharing the seal ensured that there would always be more seals to be caught. (Peter et al. 2002: 168)

This means that sharing country food worked to strengthen the community on three different levels. Materially, sharing networks had the effect of distributing the risk of an unsuccessful hunt. On an interpersonal level, sharing networks produced strong relationships of support and interdependence (Peter et al. 2002). Spiritually, sharing country food fulfilled a circle of sharing that begins in the natural world.

A recent study of food sharing practices in Ulukhaktok (formerly called Holman), which is an Inuinait community on the opposite side of Victoria Island from Cambridge Bay, found that formal seal sharing partnerships that linked kin and non-kin in food-sharing networks had shifted (Collings 2011: 8). Inuinait hunters continued to share country food, but in many cases sharing was limited to the siblings or parents of the male head of the household (14). Collings links the decline of sharing networks to several different factors, including the collapse of the sealing industry in the 1980s due to pressures from anti-fur activists.

Pamela Stern (2005: 70), however, looks at the same retreat from broad sharing practices as a result of government housing policies and wage labour, which together reinforce the nuclear family as a sharing unit. Overall, these two studies of sharing practices in Ulukhaktok suggest that Inuinait sharing networks have become smaller and increasingly limited to the nuclear family. In some settlements community freezers fill this gap, but there is no longer a community freezer in Cambridge Bay.

## **Changing networks**

Sharing, based on location rather than family ties, is growing in Cambridge Bay. Another Facebook group, Helping Our Community of Cambridge Bay One and All, is dedicated exclusively to sharing country food, store-bought food, and other necessities amongst the residents of Cambridge Bay. Though we did not document the group's activity because it is a private group, it has been featured in two news articles that include discussion of the skills and goods shared in the group (Song 2015). In one case, Jesse Tologanak used the group to offer free baking lessons to community members, so she could pass on her skills and teach



families to save money (CBC 2015a). Tologanak says that Inuit come from a tradition of sharing and that “with Facebook we can bring it back.”

This kind of sharing goes beyond sharing country food. When I asked Shannon why the group is open to people across Nunavut, not just Cambridge Bay members, she echos Tologanak’s vision of the expansion of sharing practices through Facebook:

We like to share. Inuit like to share. I’ve been hearing these past couple years that Cambridge Bay is one of the most active places within Nunavut—even though it’s not as big as Iqaluit—Cambridge Bay is still one of the most active places right now. As these past few years passed by, I’ve been getting more and more requests from people within Nunavut because they could use the information within their community. Like the kind of activities or events or things happening within our community. They could do it within their community too. It’s just one way of sharing the information that we have ... It’s an information site—you can share ideas. (Kemukton in Dunn 2015a)

From Shannon’s perspective, sharing is part of Inuit identity, so it makes sense for other Inuit to have access to information about the types of events that take place in Cambridge Bay.

By sharing food and other goods on Cambridge Bay News, participants are also sharing ideas. Social belonging and interdependence are feelings and ideas that are not easily communicated in the abstract. When a member meets a request posted in the group or when a member shares a caribou with the whole community, they are communicating that there are support systems that operate outside inadequate government solutions and that Inuit are still taking care of each other.

The expansion of these networks is not without complications. Some members feel that goods shared on Cambridge Bay News would be better distributed to those who are known to be in need. Shirley explains that, though she has shared country food on Cambridge Bay News, it is not how she prefers to share:

I don’t really like to go on Cambridge Bay News or sell / swap for country food because I already know by heart and by word of mouth who really wants it and who has to have it to live on it. So when I have it, I give it to them, [especially] when I know they haven’t had it for a while. Something about going on Cambridge Bay News with native food. Everybody wants it. Whether you’re old or young everybody wants it. I would just give it to the ones who need it. (Shirley in Dunn 2015a)

For Shirley, the huge demand for country food on Cambridge Bay News makes it difficult for some to get the food they need. When members share meat through the group, it is on a first-come, first-served basis, which is different from distributing meat to those who are seen to need to need or deserve it.

Sharing country food through an open Facebook group is accessible to a large number of people, but it is not accessible to all Cambridge Bay residents. One key difference between sharing on Cambridge Bay News and older interfamily sharing practices is that individuals assess their own level of need. Rather than members of a food-sharing network recognizing that a community member is in need, on Cambridge Bay News, individuals assess their own level of need when they decide to go pick up country food. Another distinguishing feature of sharing on Cambridge Bay News is that residents of Cambridge Bay do not have equal access to the country food shared in the group. The food is distributed on a first-come, first-served basis so those who have free time, internet access, and can get across town easily have a significant advantage.

However, group members work to correct for these advantages and guide the ways in which Cambridge Bay News is used for sharing country food. Often when a member posts country food in the group, other members will ask if some meat has already been distributed to the Elders before it was posted in Cambridge Bay News. For example, when a member posted a large quantity of meat, one member suggested sharing the meat with some Elders and gave the names and addresses of two Elders who particularly enjoy the type of meat being shared. She added, “when [my partner] brought them ducks last year they got really happy.” In this way, members try to ensure that first-come, first-served sharing only happens after Elders and others who are seen to need country food have received their share.

Sharing country food through Cambridge Bay News changes how need is defined, but while it limits accessibility in some ways, it also opens up new connections within the community that might not otherwise exist. Since sharing country food on Cambridge Bay News does not require that the person sharing country food has an existing relationship with the recipient, anyone is welcome to respond to a request or take up an offer of food or equipment. For group members who are not embedded in social relationships that provide country food, information, and other goods, their participation on the Facebook group increases their access to the land and country food, while strengthening social ties.

This type of sharing, using large local Facebook groups, is still fairly infrequent. Members post country food in the group approximately once a month. It seems unlikely that this practice will replace sharing offline or sharing through family networks. Instead, the group could provide a valuable complement to the existing sharing networks. Older Inuinnait sharing traditions took many different shapes, from the networks of seal-sharing partnerships to sharing a meal with the whole camp, to distributing food to those in need. In

this light, we can understand country food sharing on Cambridge Bay News as one form of sharing that complements other systems that are based on need or family and household ties.

## **Conclusion**

Despite ongoing colonial policies of the Canadian government, Inuinnait sharing networks are expanding to include new forms. With the widespread popularity of Facebook groups, Cambridge Bay residents have found innovative ways to use this popular technology to reach members who have become isolated from other sharing networks. Expanding these networks is significant because of the role that sharing plays in Inuit culture as a way of providing food, strengthening the community through social bonds, and as a tangible sign of human connection with the land. In these ways, sharing country food online is a form of resistance to colonial structures that were designed to impose a wage economy and the nuclear family on Inuit.

The expansion of Inuinnait sharing networks is facilitated by the use of Facebook groups but the sharing practices that take place are strongly guided by the group's members. Community members have different views on what kind of sharing is and is not appropriate for Cambridge Bay News. While posts offering country food to the whole Facebook group are extremely well received in the group, members also check that food has already been shared with Elders before it is posted for members to come and pick up. The expansion of sharing networks through the Facebook group is constantly being negotiated amongst group members as they decide when and how country food should be shared. Cambridge Bay News is changing the way that community relationships are strengthened in Cambridge Bay, not just because of the technology itself, but because Inuit are engaging with the platform and actively negotiating what role it should play in their community.

While we argue that country food sharing on Cambridge Bay News represents increasing social reconnection and for some members a rare source of freshly hunted food, we do not see it as a potential solution to the food security crisis. Rather, this case study illustrates some of the ways that community sharing groups fill gaps in the services provided by the federal, territorial, and municipal governments. Policy responses to this evidence of key gaps would be best directed improving the income levels of Inuit and removing barriers to hunting and country food sharing.

With the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications' (CRTC) ruling that broadband internet is a basic service, we hope that some of the barriers to accessing online sharing networks, like owning a smart phone or a computer and the high cost of internet access will be reduced. This would increase the accessibility of groups like Cambridge Bay News, reduce demand on public internet access services at the local library, and open up avenues of connection within Cambridge Bay.

Sharing practices in Cambridge Bay have changed, as they did in other Inuinait communities, and this study suggests that they are continuing to change. However, this change is not without guidance from administrators and community members. Concerns about the growing use of social media amongst Inuit, such as KIA's concerns about the selling of country food through Facebook group, are valid, but this change takes place within the context of a group of engaged residents who actively negotiate what kinds of change are and are not welcome in the group. It is a testament to the many residents of Cambridge Bay who care deeply about the future of their culture and community.

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