Negativity in Public’s Responses to News Articles on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women
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Abstract
This content analysis was conducted on negative comments posted after news articles about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. Results showed five general trends including: Generalizations about Indigenous peoples, victim blaming (blaming Indigenous peoples for this issue), dependence of Indigenous peoples on the government and other Canadians, accusations of reverse racism towards White Canadians, and the argument that all lives matter, not only those of Indigenous women. Findings highlight stereotypes about Indigenous peoples and demonstrate that Canadians have made little progress in their understanding of Indigenous issues and culture.

Methods
This sample consisted of four CTV News articles that were available on Facebook to read and comment on. On the CTV News Facebook page, a search was conducted using the phrase “Missing and Murdered Aboriginal/Indigenous Women” and the most recent articles with thirty or more comments in total were included in the analysis. The units of analysis for this study were the 500+ comments that appeared within the total comments on the selected news stories. Each section of comments on the news stories was first examined, individually, for negativity. These comments were considered negative because of their perceived derogatory, offensive nature by the researcher. Negative comments were then coded for repeating themes. Once general themes were established, the negative comments were then sorted into each.

Results
Five prevalent trends emerged: 1) stereotypes, 2) victim blaming, 3) dependence, 4) reverse racism, and 5) all lives matter. Results are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: General Themes of Negative Comments with Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes</td>
<td>James Davis Truth hurts doesn’t it? I am so tired of hearing “because I am native”… Because your native you get free education, no taxes, hurt your mouth… It’ll hit you what. Have the boys take all of those goodies and get a job! By the way… whatever happened to Idle no more? I guess everyone had to go home for their government cheque! You want us to take you seriously? Get a job, take a shower, get an education, make your home look something more than a tomb raid and stop wandering around drunk annoying people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim Blaming</td>
<td>Let’s see what happens when Black Lives Matter campaign.  The police have actually been better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependence</td>
<td>They think all Black is bad.  Some think all Indigenous is bad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse Racism</td>
<td>Native is the only one who is racist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Lives Matter</td>
<td>What people do not understand is that the Black Lives Matter campaign faced. These comments dealt with the idea that all genders, races, and religions matter and that Indigenous women should not be subject to specialized treatment or heightened attention.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion
In a study by Clerk, Kleiman, Spanierman, Isaac, & Poolokasigham (2014), non-Indigenous peoples were taken aback when actual Indigenous peoples did not fit their stereotypes. Wider Canadian society relies on stereotypes to explain why Indigenous peoples should be held accountable for their occupancy in the bottom rungs of society. Victim-blaming discussed the likelihood of Indigenous women still being alive and accounted for if they weren’t engaged in high-risk lifestyles of alcoholism, prostitution, or gangs. This degeneracy serves to justify victim-blaming discourse (Gotell, 2008).

Also common were statements about the dependency of Indigenous peoples on the government. Some even claimed Indigenous peoples would cease to exist without taxpayer money. Accusations of reverse racism were also prevalent especially in reference to affirmative action, statements that White privilege in Canada does not exist, and that blame is placed on White people. Lund (as cited in Lundi & Carr, 2010) argues that racism in Canada is made defensible through discourses such as the multiculturalism wherein Canadians can argue that there cannot be racism within a society that practices multiculturalism.

Lastly, the argument that “all lives matter” was also common. This is similar to the backlash that the Black Lives Matter campaign faced. These comments dealt with the idea that all genders, races, and religions matter and that Indigenous women should not be subject to specialized treatment or heightened attention. What people do not understand is that Indigenous women are not deeming themselves superior to other groups - they are simply advocating for equal attention and awareness. Amongst all the negative comments, however, one overarching commonality was apparent, and that was the deflection of blame onto Indigenous peoples. Given these trends, the Canadian public would greatly benefit from education about the experiences and realities of Indigenous peoples.

References

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