

## 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 understandings of Indigenous issues and culture.

## Introduction

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada is a contentious topic that has garnered media attention. Harding (2006) examined how Indigenous peoples were portrayed by the Canadian news media over time. Results indicated that since colonial times, the portrayal of Indigenous peoples in the news is consistently negative (Harding, 2006). Such portrayal serves to preserve the interests of the dominant, non-Indigenous Canadian community while depicting Indigenous peoples as hazardous to this community (Harding, 2006).

In a content analyses of the press coverage of both missing/murdered Indigenous women and missing/murdered White women, Gilchrist (2010) revealed that articles about missing/murdered Indigenous women warranted three and a half times less coverage, shorter articles, a detached tone, scarce detail, and were less likely to appear on the front page when compared to those of missing/murdered White women. This is attributable to broader systemic inequalities in Canadian society that instill racism, sexism, classism and reflect colonialism (Gilchrist, 2010).

Although there is research on media portrayal of missing and murdered Indigenous women, little has been done to examine the public's response to this portrayal. The purpose of this study is to examine themes in public commentary in reaction to news accounts of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

## 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.



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## 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

Theme	Examples
Generalizations/Stereotypes	Uneducated, dirty, lazy, dirty, annoying, wanderers, losers, spoon fed, incapable of taking care of themselves, treatment of each other, don't have to work, victim card, homeless, fix your families, intermarriage/miscegenation and rape, destructive, unable to live without taxpayers, unwelcoming, violent, want everyone to think they are discriminated against when they are not, uncooperative with police, corrupt Chiefs, this is how they live, part of their culture, low income, backsliding, public intoxication, teenage living in a recipe for murder and battery, ugly environment, treat women like dogs, alcoholism is a family disease, "I have seen the way they act in downtown Winnipeg", rude, beggars, teen pregnancy, a lot of what goes on is entrenched in their culture
Victim blaming	High risk lifestyle, drug and alcohol addictions, prostitution, stop blaming white people, your problems, killed by own people, gangs, domestic abuse, misuse of hard funding, doing it to themselves, this generation can't help what happened years ago, high rates of Aboriginal incarceration, the answer lies with you, check bingo halls and casinos, take responsibility, self awareness, start an inquest, where the trail of bread crumbs leads to, take a look at the man of this culture, should be an inquiry on why natives are killing other natives, asking for it, look in the mirror, they do not want to be found, not reported missing, did not use their real names, risky behaviour
Dependence	All of the things the white man gave or said you, no taxes, free education, hunting rights, get a job, welfare, government hand-outs, health care coverage, we are enabling them, free land and housing, ask the government for more money, need to police their own nation, government doesn't owe natives, need to fix themselves, jink and choose government help, do their own inquiry, show more money at natives, there go my tax dollars, taxpayers pay for them to live
Reverse Racism	Aboriginals victim, no such thing as white privilege in Canada, racist to say it's the fault of white people, white man which hurt, no big bad whites getting them
All Lives Matter	Investigate all missing people - all genders and races, murder victims of all religions, all women regardless of race, others aren't as important as First Nations people, should be for all people, men matter too, why an inquiry into just one race and gender, never hear of the missing and murdered white women, most women killed in Canada are not Aboriginal, First Nations segregate into racial categories, why should they get all the attention, we are all human, stop using the race card

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, hunt year round...  
I'll tell you what. Have the feds take away all 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 like something more than a bomb crater and stop wandering around drunk annoying people.  
Like · Reply · 2 · February 27, 2015 at 9:53am

## Discussion

In a study by Clark, Kleiman, Spanierman, Isaac, & Poolokasingham (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 Lund & 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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