No News Isn't Always Good News: Media Representation of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in Canada

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines media representation of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG). Indigenous women and girls receive disproportionately less media coverage than their non-Indigenous counterparts in the number of and details in news reports. This coverage is also overwhelmingly more negative in tone. Further, MMIWG are consistently framed as "high-risk" individuals who chose to engage in precarious behaviour, and as a result are to blame for the violence against them. However, there is a significant gap in the literature: what are the differences in media representation between Indigenous women? In this paper I ask: what are the differences in tone, coverage, and content of media representation between different media frames of MMIWG? Specifically, what are the differences between media representation of missing and murdered Indigenous women who are framed as engaging in "high-risk" lifestyles compared to Indigenous women who do not? Further, what does media representation of MMIWG, and the differences in media representation between Indigenous women, suggests about which Indigenous women are considered "newsworthy" and non-Indigenous Canadians' attitudes and opinions of MMIWG? Using an automated content analysis of newsprint reports from 2000-2010, the principal finding in this paper is that there are significant differences in media representation between murdered Indigenous women who engage in "high-risk" lifestyles compared to Indigenous women who do not. However, this paper also finds that missing and murdered Indigenous women are overwhelmingly not considered "newsworthy" victims, regardless of how they are framed.*

Keywords: *missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls; MMIWG; media representation; Canadian politics; political communication.*

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Introduction

The disproportionate number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG) in Canada is staggering. Over the past thirty years, there have been 164 missing and 1017 murdered Indigenous women and girls[1]. Indigenous women are "the most victimized group in Canadian society"[2]. Representing approximately ten percent of all female homicides in Canada, Indigenous women make up only four percent of the Canadian female population.[3] Indigenous women are also three times more likely to be killed by a stranger than non-Indigenous women[4]. Further, homicide cases involving Indigenous women are less likely to lead to charges (53 percent) compared to non-Indigenous women (84 percent)[5].

Despite the distressing and disproportionate number of MMIWG, most of Canada's non-Indigenous population have negative perceptions of MMIWG[6]. Most Canadians view MMIWG as "high-risk" individuals that choose to engage in precarious behaviour[7]. Further, most non-Indigenous Canadians have limited support for MMIWG[8], where support is defined as a strong desire for institutional change. Canada's non-Indigenous population is indifferent to the negligent police investigations into the deaths and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls[9]. Similarly, most Canadians do not advocate for governmental policies that address the alarming number of MMIWG[10]. Non-Indigenous Canadians' negative perceptions and lack of support for MMIWG is, in part, a result of media's framing,[11] as MMIWG are consistently both underrepresented and misrepresented in the media[12].

Research conducted before the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) recommendation for a National Inquiry into MMIWG has found that media framing of MMIWG is different from non-Indigenous women in its coverage, tone, and content. MMIWG receive disproportionately less media coverage than non-Indigenous women in number of and details in news media stories[13]. In addition, the media frames non-Indigenous women as valued family and community members, whereas Indigenous women are framed as sex-workers, victims, criminals, and "others"[14]. The media's misrepresentation and limited attention to MMIWG suggests that MMIWG are not newsworthy. While there is ample literature on different frames the media applies to MMIWG, there is a significant gap in the literature as to how the tone, context, and coverage of these

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[1] RCMP, "Missing and Murdered".
[2] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims".
[3] NWAC, "Fact Sheet".
[4] NWAC, "Fact Sheet".
[5] NWAC, "Fact Sheet".
[6] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims"; Gilchrist, "Multiple Disadvantages"; Jiwani, "Symbolic and Discursive Violence"; Jiwani and Young, "Missing and Murdered Women".
[7] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims"; Gilchrist, "Multiple Disadvantages"; Jiwani, "Symbolic and Discursive Violence".
[8] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims".
[9] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims".
[10] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims".
[11] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims"; Gilchrist, "Multiple Disadvantages"; Jiwani, "Symbolic and Discursive Violence"; Jiwani and Young, "Missing and Murdered Women".
[12] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims"; Gilchrist, "Multiple Disadvantages"; Jiwani, "Symbolic and Discursive Violence"; Jiwani and Young, "Missing and Murdered Women".
[13] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims".
[14] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims"; Gilchrist, "Multiple Disadvantages"; Jiwani, "Symbolic and Discursive Violence"; Jiwani and Young, "Missing and Murdered Women".

frames vary *between* one another. The media's framing of MMIWG is problematic because the majority of the information Canadians receive about Indigenous people and issues[15]. In contexts where Canadians have little knowledge, contact, or personal interactions with Indigenous communities, the media plays an integral role in shaping perceptions of Indigenous people[16].

In this paper, I ask: what are the differences in tone, coverage, and content of media representation *between* media frames of MMIWG? Specifically, what are the differences between media representation of missing and murdered Indigenous women who are framed as engaging in "high-risk" lifestyles compared to Indigenous women who do not? Further, what does media representation of MMIWG, and the differences in media representation between Indigenous women, suggests about which Indigenous women are considered "newsworthy" and non-Indigenous Canadians' attitudes and opinions of MMIWG?

Historical Representations of Indigenous Women: Queen, Princess, and Squaw

Indigenous women have been misrepresented since contact with European settlers; negative sexist and racist representations of Indigenous women and girls is a part of Canada's colonial history. It is necessary to understand historical representations of Indigenous women because these representations are present in today's news coverage of MMIWG. Early representations of Indigenous women in Canada are intimately tied to the process of colonization[17]. Although Indigenous women's connection to the land is used in both Western and Indigenous historical frameworks, the Euro-constructed image of Indigenous women mirrors Western attitudes towards land of "control, conquest, possession, and exploitation[18]". North American images of Indigenous women have been constructed within the context of colonization and have evolved as three different stereotypes: the Queen, the Indian Princess, and the squaw. All early representations of Indigenous women are overtly sexual, but have evolved with colonialist goals and perceptions of land[19].

When settlers first encountered Indigenous women in the sixteenth century, they produced images of Indigenous women that encapsulated the beauty of the "New World"[20]. Representations of Indigenous women as the Queen were "exotic, powerful, and dangerous[21]". The Queen was both militant and mothering. Indigenous women were presented as being "draped in leaves, feathers, and animal skins, as well as in heavy jewelry, she appeared aggressive, militant, and armed with spears and arrows"[22]. The Queen was seen as both something to be desired and feared.

As Europeans desired to conquest more land, the Queen trope was replaced with the Indian Princess[23]. Colonialist expansion of North American could only work if the Queen metaphor became more accessible and less powerful[24]. In response, Europeans began producing

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[15] Harding, "Historical Representations of Aboriginal People", 224; Harding, "The Media, Aboriginal People, and Common Sense"; Anderson and Robertson, *Seeing Red*.
[16] Harding, "Historical Representations of Aboriginal People", 224; Harding, "The Media, Aboriginal People, and Common Sense".
[17] Jiwani, "Symbolic and Discursive Violence", 3.
[18] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being,* 101.
[19] Jiwani, "Symbolic and Discursive Violence", 3.
[20] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being,* 101*;* Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex", 702.
[21] Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex", 703.
[22] Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex", 702.
[23] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being,* 101*;* Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex", 702.
[24] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being,* 101.

images of Indigenous women as the Indian Princess[25]. The mother-goddess representation of Indigenous women was replaced with a more girlish sexual figure[26]. The Indian Princess was easily assimilated into European ideals of womanhood and cooperated with settlers to colonize Indigenous land[27]. This imagery of Indigenous women symbolized virgin land that was open for consumption to settlers[28].

Once Indigenous people in North America began to resist colonization, the archetype of Indigenous womanhood changed once again[29]. The squaw stereotype was given to Indigenous women to legitimize land acquisition[30]. The term squaw literally means dirty, immoral, and unworthy[31]; it is the antithesis to the traditional Victorian woman[32]. Portraying Indigenous women as squaw has legitimized many forms of violence against Indigenous women[33]. For example, the squaw stereotype presents Indigenous women as unfit mothers[34]. Therefore, if Indigenous mothers are portrayed as unfit to raise their children within the confinement of the Victorian family model, the Canadian government can legitimize the forcible removal of Indigenous children by Child Welfare Services[35]. As "squaw", Indigenous women are seen to be unable to mother because of issues like domestic violence and poverty; all issues that are products of Canada's colonial history.

The narrative of Indigenous women as "easy squaw" is also used to describe Indigenous women's sexuality as "lewd and licentious"[36]. This manifestation of the squaw stereotype was, and still is, used to excuse the violence Indigenous women and girls experience by white-settler men [37]. The narrative of "easy" Indigenous women was created to cover up white men's extra-marital sexual activity [38]. Portraying Indigenous women as "squaw" allows Indigenous women to be blamed for the sexual deviance of white-settler men[39]. However, Janice Acoose argues that regardless of how Indigenous women are portrayed, whether as Indian Princesses or squaws, they are sexualized and deemed accessible to white European men for consumption[40].

The Media: A Connector, Shaper, and Mirror

In analyzing the differences in media representation between Indigenous women and understanding how the news media determines which Indigenous women are newsworthy, this paper situates itself in two bodies of literature: media construction and newsworthiness in the

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[25] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being;* Green, "The Pocahontas Perplex", 702.
[26] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being,* 101.
[27] Burnett, "Aboriginal and White Women"; Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims"; Dean "Moving Beyond Stock Narratives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women"; de Finney "Playing Indian and Other Settler Stories".
[28] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being,* 101.
[29] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being,* 103.
[30] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being,* 103.
[31] LaRocque, "Métis and Feminist".
[32] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being,* 103*;* Bourgeois "A Perpetual State of Violence"; Carter, *Capturing Women*; Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence; Razack, "Sexualized Violence and Colonialism".
[33] Bourgeois "A Perpetual State of Violence"; Pierce, "Christian Stereotypes and Violence"; Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence"; Razack, "Sexualized Violence and Colonialism".
[34] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being,* 103.
[35] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being,* 103.
[36] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being*, 104.
[37] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being*, 104 *;* Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence".
[38]Anderson, *A Recognition of Being*, 104.
[39] Anderson, *A Recognition of Being*, 104.
[40] Acoose, *Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws,* 45.

media. I first examine how the media creates news through agenda-setting, priming, and framing. I then outline how the media decides what stories are newsworthy, particularly in regards to which victims of violent crimes are newsworthy.

Erin Tolley posits that the media plays three roles as a connector, a shaper, and a mirror, and that these roles ultimately constitute what the media produces[41]. As a connector, the media is one of the primary sources that informs citizens about politics[42]. The media plays a key role in providing much of the raw data that citizens receive. However, it is paramount for this project to examine *who* is doing the connecting. Both women and Indigenous people are disproportionately underrepresented in media organization's board of directors and as journalists. Only one-third of editorial positions in Canada are held by women and more than seventy-five percent of English language national columnists are men[43]. Similarly, Postmedia, who own ten of the largest daily newspapers in Canada, has a board of directors comprised of eight men and two women, all of whom are white[44]. Other top Canadian media organization's board of directions have strikingly similar demographics[45]. The homogeneity of the media is worse for minorities. Minorities, including Indigenous people, only represent 3.4 percent of news staff[46]. The composition of the media does not necessarily on its own lead to inclusive coverage, but it does send a message about including diversity when connecting Canadians to the news media[47].

As a shaper, the media plays a critical role in determining *which* stories are covered and *how* they are covered[48]. "The media are not passive facilitators, but instead help shape how we see the world around us"[49]. Central to the media as a shaper is gatekeeping theory. In connecting us to political issues, the media acts a "gatekeeper" that funnel political issues into a limited number of stories[50]. These stories are often framed through a narrow and particular lens[51]. I use Erin Tolley's definition of gatekeeping as "dual individual-institutional". Both media corporations and journalists create news stories by selecting fragments of particular events[52].

One of the ways that the media acts as a shaper and gatekeeper is through agenda-setting. Agenda-setting theory suggests that there is a strong correlation between the amount of emphasis the media places on issues and the importance that citizens give those issues[53]. The media sets the agenda by determining what issues get covered and how much coverage they receive. Similarly, the media can act as a shaper through priming. Media priming, often thought of as an extension of agenda-setting, is ''changes in the standards that people use to make political evaluations''[54]. Media priming impacts a person's judgement; through agenda-setting, the news media suggests to people that they ought to use specific issues as a benchmark to judge other

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[41] Tolley, *Framed,* 13.
[42] Tolley, *Framed,* 13.
[43] Tolley, *Framed,* 14.
[44] Tolley, *Framed,* 14.
[45] Tolley, *Framed,* 14
[46] Tolley, *Framed,* 14
[47] Tolley, *Framed,* 15.
[48] Tolley, *Framed,* 15.
[49] Tolley, *Framed,* 14.
[50] Tolley, *Framed,* 15.
[51] Tolley, *Framed,* 15.
[52] Tolley, *Framed,* 15.
[53] Scheufele and Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming", 10; Price and Tewksbury, "News Values and Public Opinion".
[54] Iyenger and Kinder, *News That Matters*, 63.

issues[55]. In essence, "by making some issues more salient in people's mind (agenda setting), mass media can also shape the considerations that people take into account when making judgments about political candidates or issues (priming)"[56]. Thus, the media plays a critical role in determining *what* political information citizens receive and *how* it is received.

Media framing is another way that the media acts as a shaper. The issues and aspects of a story that are made salient through priming and agenda setting are what constitutes a news story frame[57]. Framing is based on the assumption that how the media presents an issue has significant influence on how it is understood by audiences[58]. Frames are cognitive tools in the human brain that communicate, construct, interpret, and evaluate information. Framing either emphasizes or deemphasizes particular aspects of information based on what is included or excluded in the frame[59]. Media framing is broadly understood as the selection of "some aspects of perceived reality to make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described"[60]. Media frames are both persuasive and analytical tools; they are heuristics that allow complex issues and ideas to be understood and can explicitly and implicitly shape attitudes and opinions based on what is included in the frame and how it is understood[61]. Successful frames must be a construction of some social reality because individuals can only asses a frame if they have some prior knowledge of the information in the frame[62]. Thus, media framing of political events evolves with the political environment so that individuals can understand, assess, and be influenced by the frame[63].

Finally, as a mirror, the media reflects political issues and events by acting as a metaphorical "mirror to society" [64]; the media is an informative bridge between the political sphere and citizens. However, as Taras has argued, the media is more of a "distorted mirror" because it acts as a reflection between journalists and their subjects[65]. As a distorted mirror, news stories are interpretive and constructed[66]. News items are not simply selected, as gatekeeping theory suggests, rather they are constructed[67]. This distortion is done both intentionally and unintentionally by journalists. Time-pressures and space limitations that journalists face affect which stories get told and how much detail they will receive[68]. These time constraints often result in simplified and partially told stories, leading journalists to employ stereotypes and tropes for added "colour" and context[69]. While the mirror that the media holds up is only partial and often distorted, it is nonetheless stories based on values that society has "created and

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[55] Scheufele and Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming", 11.
[56] Scheufele and Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming", 12.
[57] Tolley, *Framed,* 18.
[58] Scheufele and Tewksbury, "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming", 11.
[59] Iyengar "Framing Responsibility"; Iyengar, "Is Anyone Responsible".
[60] Entman," Framing".
[61] Hallahan, "Seven Models of Framing"; Iyengar and Kinder, *News That Matters;* Price and Tewksbury, "News Values and Public Opinion".
[62] Scheufele, "Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing"; Price and Tewksbury, "News Values and Public Opinion". .
[63] Scheufele, "Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing"; Price and Tewksbury, "News Values and Public Opinion".
[64] Tolley, *Framed,* 18.
[65] Taras, *Newsmakers*.
[66] Tolley, *Framed,* 19.
[67] Schudson, "The Sociology of News Production", 265.
[68] Tolley, *Framed,* 19.
[69] Tolley, *Framed,* 19.

condoned"[70]. This is why, as Erin Tolley argues, it is so important to study the media's portrayal of race, and specifically for this project, ideals about Indigenous womanhood, because "not only does it tell us something about the media but also something about ourselves"[71].

In acting as a connector, a shaper, and as a mirror, media is not neutral; power is at the core of what is considered newsworthy[72]. Newsworthiness is "what makes a story worth telling" [73]. News stories that are told are the ones that are deemed newsworthy by the media[74]. "Audiences are drawn in by the unexpected, the shocking, the titillating, and the novel. Conflict, drama, social impact, novelty, magnitude, proximity, timeliness, brevity and visual attractiveness are all considered when deciding what constitutes news"[75]. "Commonplace" events rarely appear in the news because they are not striking or deemed significant[76].

In determining which female victims of violence are newsworthy, the news media often presents victims of violence as a binary of either "good" or "bad"[77]. This results in a polarized representation of sexual violence as the "virgin-whore" or the "good-bad-girl" dichotomy[78]: victims of sexual violence are either to blame for their victimization or they are innocent[79]. However, not all women who experience violence are treated equally by the media[80]. Like society, the binary that the news media depicts falls along racial and class lines[81]. White, educated, and wealthy women are portrayed as "good" women who are worthy of saving and reporting on, whereas Indigenous women are portrayed as "bad" women who are unworthy of news coverage[82].

News Media Representations of MMIWG: Creating and Silencing the Violence

Consequently, in connecting us to politics, shaping our understanding of politics, and reflecting our political values back to us, news media representations of Indigenous women and girls, and the violence against them is linked to what is deemed worthy and unworthy of news coverage[83]. News media largely present and silence the violence against Indigenous women and girls through its content and framing. Non-Indigenous missing and murdered women are framed more compassionately than Indigenous missing and murdered women. Kristen Gilchrist's comparative case study of news media representation of missing and murdered Indigenous women and missing and murdered white women highlights the media's unequal representation of victims of sexual violence. All six women in the case study were under the age of 30, attended school or

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[70] Tolley, *Framed,* 20.
[71] Tolley, *Framed,* 20.
[72] García-Del Moral, "Representations as a Technology of Violence", 35.
[73] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 3; Gilchrist, "Invisible Victims"; Gilchrist, "Multiple Disadvantages".
[74] Tolley, *Framed,* 20.
[75] Tolley, *Framed,* 13.
[76] Tolley, *Framed,* 20.
[77] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 3; Gilchrist, "Multiple Disadvantages"; Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women*, 9; McLaughlin "Discourses of Prostitution/Discourses of Sexuality", 249.
[78] Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women*, 9; McLaughlin "Discourses of Prostitution/Discourses of Sexuality", 249.
[79] Meyers, *News Coverage of Violence Against Women*, 9; Jiwani, "Symbolic and Discursive Violence", 3.
[80] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 3; Jiwani and Young, "Missing and Murdered Women", 901.
[81] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 3; Gilchrist, "Multiple Disadvantages".
[82] Acoose, *Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws*, 43; Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 3; Gilchrist, "Multiple Disadvantages".
[83] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 2; Gilchrist, "Invisible Victims"; Jiwani, *Discourses of Denial*, 38.

were working, had close connections with friends and family, and had disappeared between 2003-2005[84]. None of the women in the case study were sex-workers or had run away from their families[85]. However, the media highlighted the non-Indigenous women's personalities, families, ambitions, and hobbies[86]. In contrast, the details of the Indigenous women's lives were scant in comparison[87]. Given that the articles about the Indigenous women were significantly shorter, the media did not convey who these women were and what they meant to their families and communities in the same way it did for the white women[88].

Most often, news media emphasize Indigenous women and girls' criminal behaviour. Indigenous women are framed primarily framed as sex-workers and criminals. A study of media representation of Indigenous sex-workers from 2006-2009 found that two dominant narratives emerge from news media coverage[89]. The first narrative that is perpetuated by the media is "vermin-victim"[90] .This narrative portrays Indigenous sex-workers as dirty and as a nuisance to Canadian society[91]. Sex-work is depicted as something that needs to eradicated[92].

The second narrative that emerges from news media representation of Indigenous sex-workers is that Indigenous women are to blame for the violence against them because they engage in "high-risk" lifestyles[93]. The media continually refers to sex-work as a "lifestyle", suggesting that sex-work is an individual choice, despite the fact that many women have no other employment opportunities available to them[94]. Media discourse around sex-work as individual choice suggests that Indigenous women who engage in sex-work and experience violence as a result are at fault: by choosing to engage in a "high-risk" lifestyle, Indigenous sex-workers must also accept the consequences of that lifestyle[95].

The repetitive representation of Indigenous women engaging in "high-risk" lifestyles normalizes the violence against them[96]. In emphasizing Indigenous women's criminal activity in news media, there is no attention to Canada's colonial history that constrains and shapes some Indigenous women and girls experiences and opportunities[97]. News media representation blames Indigenous women and girls for the violence against them and dismisses the unequal social conditions that contribute to some Indigenous women and girls engaging in sex work or living in poverty[98]. The media perpetuates a narrative that violence against Indigenous women is a result of individual choice, rather than social and structural inequalities[99]. Consequently, the violence against Indigenous women and girls is justified because of the media's framing signals to the

[84] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 11.
[85] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 11.
[86] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 11.
[87] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 11.
[88] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 11.
[89] Strega et al., "Never Innocent Victims", 12.
[90] Strega et al., "Never Innocent Victims", 12; Longstaffe, "Indigenous Women as Newspaper Representations", 239.
[91] Strega et al., "Never Innocent Victims", 12; Longstaffe, "Indigenous Women as Newspaper Representations", 239.
[92] Strega et al., "Never Innocent Victims", 13.
[93] Strega et al., "Never Innocent Victims", 16.
[94] Strega et al., "Never Innocent Victims", 16.
[95] Strega et al., "Never Innocent Victims", 16.
[96] Strega et al., "Never Innocent Victims" 21.
[97] García-Del Moral, "Representations as a Technology of Violence", 46; Strega et al., "Never Innocent Victims", 20.
[98] García-Del Moral, "Representations as a Technology of Violence", 46 ; Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims".
[99] García-Del Moral, "Representations as a Technology of Violence", 46.

Canadian public that violence against them is not important[100]. The silencing of violence against Indigenous women and girls is made worse in comparison to the media's compassionate framing of white women[101].

In addition to the negative framing and content of news media representations of Indigenous women and girls, they consistently receive disproportionately less media coverage than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Media coverage refers to the frequency of media representation, for example, the number of news articles and placement of newspaper stories.

In terms of frequency and placement of newspaper articles, there are more articles written about non-Indigenous women and these articles appear in a more prominent place in newspapers. On average, missing or murdered white women received three times more coverage than Indigenous women[102]. The comparative case study mentioned earlier found that articles about white women averaged 1.4 times more words than Indigenous women and that thirty-seven percent of articles about white women appeared on the front page of newspapers, compared to twenty-five percent of Indigenous women[103]. Articles about the Indigenous women often appeared beside advertisements and soft news, whereas articles about white women were often on the front page[104]. Further, other less significant articles were given more prominent space when placed near the stories of missing or murdered Indigenous women[105]. Poorly placed articles signal to readers that the stories in the articles lack urgency and social importance[106]. The placement of news articles about Indigenous women in the periphery of newspapers signal to readers that missing and murdered Indigenous women are not newsworthy.

Further, a study conducted in 2008 found that even Indigenous women who do not engage in "high-risk" lifestyles also receive limited news media coverage. In 2004 Daleen Kay Bosse, a twenty-five-year-old university student and mother went missing from Saskatoon. There was only a total of 51 articles in *The Starphoenix* and *The Leader-Post* over a four year time period about her disappearance and death[107]. During the critical two-week period when Daleen first went missing, her disappearance received no news coverage, despite the fact that her family notified the police within twenty-four hours of her disappearance[108]. Once her killer was identified, there was an increase in news coverage; however, the coverage focused on her killer, rather than on Daleen[109]. The limited media coverage of Daleen creates and maintains a silenced discourse around her disappearance and murder. Similarly, the number and timing of news articles suggests that Daleen's disappearance and death are not important[110].

A clear pattern emerges from surveying the literature on the historical representations of Indigenous women and current news media representation of MMIWG: Indigenous women are misrepresented and underrepresented in the media in both its coverage and content, and this representation portrays a message that Indigenous women are not newsworthy. The media representation of MMIWG also suggests that violence against Indigenous women is a

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[100] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims".
[101] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims".
[102] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 7.
[103] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 7.
[104] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 9.
[105] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 9.
[106] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims", 10.
[107] McKenzie, "She was not into Drugs and Partying", 148.
[108] McKenzie, "She was not into Drugs and Partying", 148.
[109] McKenzie, "She was not into Drugs and Partying",148.
[110] McKenzie, "She was not into Drugs and Partying", 148-149.

"commonplace" event. However, there are significant gaps in the current literature that need to be addressed to better understand media representation of MMIWG and what it suggests about Canada's non-Indigenous population's attitudes and opinions of MMIWG and ideals about Indigenous womanhood.

All of the existing quantitative studies on media representation of MMIWG in Canada are comparative that examine the differences in media coverage between Indigenous women and white women- there are no studies that examine the difference in media coverage *between* Indigenous women. This is an important gap in the literature because it limits our understanding of *who* the media considers newsworthy victims when reporting on MMIWG.

Secondly, the literature on news media representation of MMIWG is limited in breadth and depth. There is only one large quantitative study of media framing of Indigenous women and it has a limited scope. The study only examines Indigenous sex-workers specifically in Vancouver's Downtown East Side from 2006-2009[111]. Similarly, two qualitative discourse analyses of MMIWG only look at MMIWG in Vancouver's Downtown East Side, one in the 1960s[112] and the other in 2007[113]. The 2007 discourse analysis focused solely on Robert Picton's victims. Other qualitative studies of MMIWG have studied a maximum of three Indigenous women, and are again confined to a short and specific time-period and region[114].

The limited breadth and depth of the literature on news media representation of MMIWG is problematic because it significantly hinders our understanding of how media representation has changed over time; the current state of the literature is piecemeal at best. Exploring how the tone, content, and coverage differ between media frames will give insight into how the media determines *which* Indigenous women are newsworthy. If the media acts as a mirror, understanding which Indigenous women the media considers newsworthy will not only tell us something about the media, but about Canadian society. This paper attempts to address this gap by examining media representation of MMIWG over a large time-period and across all regions in Canada.

Data and Methods

The overarching methodological objective of this paper is to identify the differences in media representation of MMIWG. To do this, I aim to explore the differences in the tone, context, and coverage between Indigenous women, specifically comparing Indigenous women who are framed as engaging in a "high-risk" lifestyle to those who are not. Content refers to the information included in the news print reports. Tone refers to the overall sentiment of the article. "Negativity measures the use of terms or phrases that describe the topic in a more pessimistic, gloomy manner; conversely, positivity is a measure of the terms or phrases that describe the situation in a lighter, upbeat manner[115]". Media coverage refers to the number of articles, the number of words per article, and the placement of the articles. To achieve this objective, I performed an automated content analysis of newsprint reports from 2000-2010 of MMIWG. Then, using the data I extracted from the newsprint reports, I performed a t-test to determine if the differences in media coverage between Indigenous women was statistically significant.

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[111] Strega et al., "Never Innocent Victims".
[112] Longstaffe, "Indigenous Women as Newspaper Representations".
[113] García-Del Moral, "Representations as a Technology of Violence"
[114] McKenzie, "She was not into Drugs and Partying", Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims".
[115] Wallace, "Contextualizing the Crisis", 214.

My main hypotheses is that regardless of what media frames are applied to Indigenous women, they are not portrayed as newsworthy victims. I argue that the media presents violence against Indigenous women as normal, resulting in all Indigenous women not being considered newsworthy victims. I expect that there are no significant differences in the amount of media coverage between frames applied to Indigenous women. I posit that Indigenous women who are framed as "high-risk" and those who are not will have a similar number of articles, words per article, and front page articles. However, I predict that the tone of media coverage between frames will be significantly different. I expect that media coverage of Indigenous women who are framed as "high-risk" will be significantly more negative in tone. These hypotheses are based on the media newsworthiness literature. Given that previous studies have demonstrated that missing and murdered Indigenous women already receive less media coverage and more negative coverage than missing and murdered white women, I do not think how the media frames Indigenous women will significantly increase their newsworthiness; however, Indigenous women who are framed as "high-risk", and thus portrayed as blameworthy for the violence against them, will have more negative coverage.

I operationalized media representation of MMIWG, my dependent variable, as newsprint reports from 2000-2010. I chose to examine newsprint reports from the year 2000 onwards because 39 percent of the deaths and disappearances of Indigenous women occurred after 2000[116], producing a large and diverse sample. I did not include newsprint reports past 2010 because the political and social climate around MMIWG significantly changed after 2010. News frames are not static, they evolve with the political and social environment in which they are situated[117]. For a frame to be understood by its intended audience, it must be a construct of some social reality. I posit that the introduction of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into MMMIWG changed the political landscape in such a way that it created a public consciousness about MMIWG. Thus, I expect that media representation of MMIWG changed with the shift in the political landscape. In contrast, I expect that media coverage between 2000 and 2010 of MMIWG to be relatively consistent because there were no large shifts in the political environment or public opinion that would significantly change media representation.

I also chose text-based documents for this study as opposed to televised news or pictures because of the difficulty related to media image representation[118]. Operationalizing media representation of MMIWG as newsprint reports are generalizable and externally valid. Newsprint reports, although different than televised news or images, generally produce similar frames[119]. Therefore, I expect that measuring media representation as newsprint reports can apply to other forms of media, like images and television.

I operationalized my independent variable as "high-risk" Indigenous women and "not high-risk" Indigenous women. "High-risk" women were those who were known sex-workers, and/or lived on the streets, and/or engaged in criminal behaviour, and/or had substance abuse problems. All other women were categorized as "not high-risk". I took an inductive approach to determine if a woman was "high-risk" or "not high-risk". Using manual content analysis, I selected every fifth newspaper report of each individual woman and carefully read the content of the article. If the article framed the woman as engaging in any of the "high-risk" behaviours I

[116] NWAC, "Fact Sheet".
[117] Scheufele, "Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing"; Price and Tewksbury, "News Values and Public Opinion".
[118] Lawlor, "Framing Immigration".
[119] Lawlor, "Framing Immigration".

identified, I categorized her as "high-risk". If the newspaper reports did not frame an Indigenous woman as engaging in "high-risk" behaviour, I categorized her as "not high-risk".

To create my news sample, I collected newspaper articles using Factiva[120] for the 50 murdered Indigenous women and girls above the age of 18 from the CBC data set "Missing and Murdered" from 2000 to 2010[121]. This search yielded 843 newsprint reports. For internal consistency, I excluded missing Indigenous women from my sample because they tend to receive almost no media coverage. The 50 women from the CBC's data set is representative of all provinces and territories in Canada, as well as many different Indigenous communities.

Next, to determine the differences in media representation between MMIWG, I conducted an automated content analysis of news print reports from 2000-2010. I collected the newspaper articles from Factiva searching for the names of each women. I then performed an automated content analysis on the newsprint reports.

I chose ACA instead of manual content analysis for the bulk of my analysis because it is a more objective form of content analysis. ACA works with a software program deductively collecting specific elements in a body of text. A researcher can then reach a general conclusion about the data produced by the automated analysis. This type of analysis helps mitigate researcher bias[122]. In manual content analysis, researchers can code specific words that fit their methodological objectives[123]. However, a drawback of using an automated approach is that it is more reliable in larger bodies of text[124]. ACA could be problematic for this proposal because some newspaper articles consist of only twenty words. However, I expect this drawback to be minimal. I am only concerned with the aggregated general trends of framing in newspaper articles; I am not performing content analysis on individual words. Analyzing general trends in a large sample consisting of smaller individual samples can be highly reliable even if the coding of each item is noisy[125].

I then used the ACA program LEXICODER to identify media representation of MMIWG. I coded each individual news print report, but analyzed each newspaper article aggregately per woman and then per status. Using LEXICODER's word count function, I identified the number of words per article. I also used the LEXICODER sentiment dictionary (LSD) to determine the tone of the media framing. LSD is a dictionary within LEXICODER that has a list of words that have positive and negative valence. The LSD recorded the number of positive and negative sentiment bearing words for each newspaper. I also calculated the net-tone for each article using Young and Soroka's method to determine the overall tone[126]. The net-tone is the number of negative words subtracted from the number of positive words taken as a proportion of the total number of words spoken by each party leader. A net tone of less than -2 is negative and a net-tone of more than +2 is positive. Net-tones between -2 and +2 are neutral. The number of front-page articles and total number of articles were identified from the Factiva search.

Once I had collected the data from the newsprint reports, I used the statistical software program R to determine the differences in the amount of coverage and tone between Indigenous women. I performed a t-test, or a difference of means test, on the number of articles, the number

[120] https://www.dowjones.com/products/factiva/
[121] CBC "Missing & Murdered".
[122] Quinn et al., "The Automated Coding of Policy Agendas".
[123] Quinn et al., "The Automated Coding of Policy Agendas".
[124] Quinn et al., "The Automated Coding of Policy Agendas".
[125] Quinn et al., "The Automated Coding of Policy Agendas".
[126] Young and Soroka, "Affective News".

of words per article, the number of front page articles, and the overall tone per article. I used a t-test, instead of building a regression model, because "high-risk" status is my only independent variable. I used a 95% confidence level and an unequal variance when performing my statistical analysis.

Results

The principal finding from my analysis is that there *are* significant differences between the amount of coverage that Indigenous women who engage in "high-risk" lifestyles receive compared to those who do not; however, regardless of how the media frames Indigenous women, they are still not considered newsworthy. Figures 1-5 show the differences in the amount of media coverage.

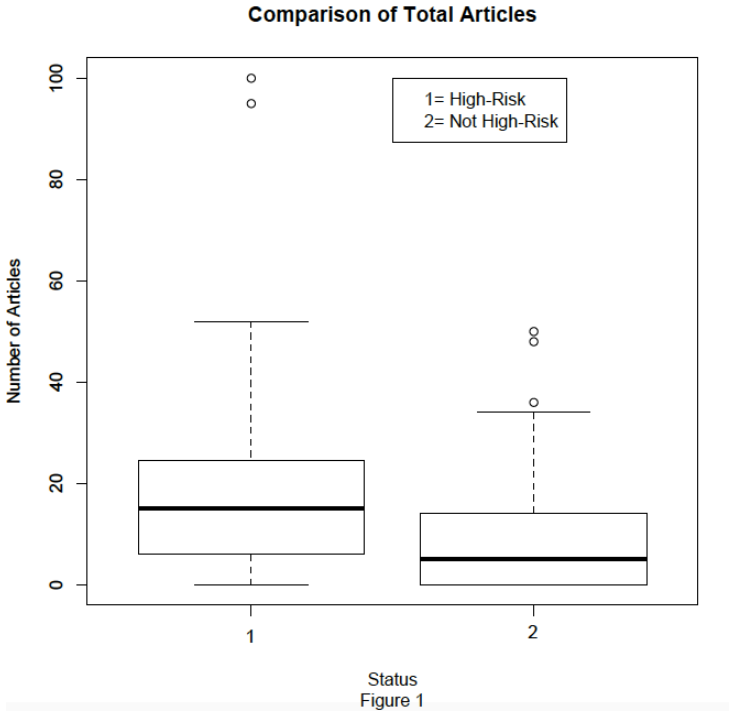

Figure 1

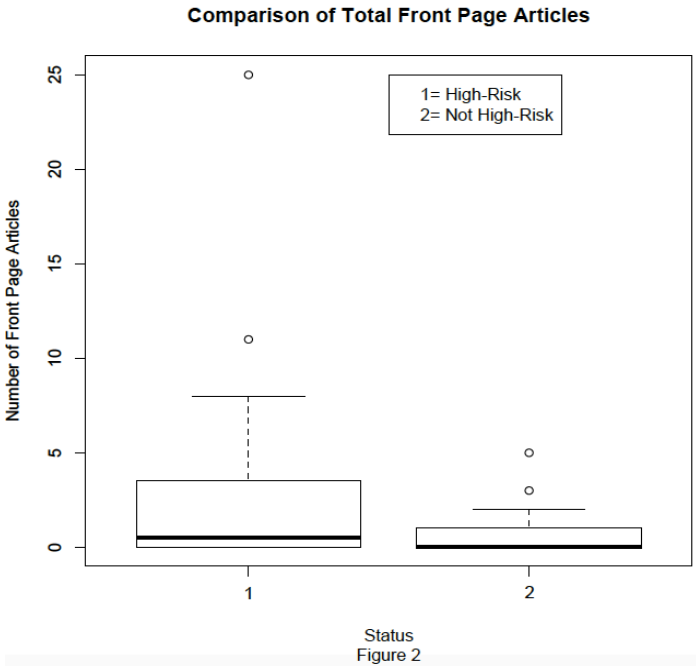

Figure 2

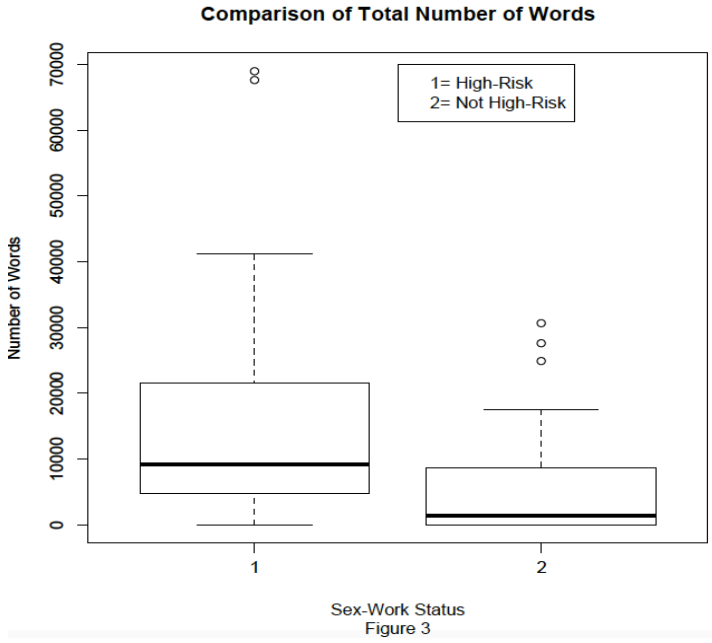

Figure 3

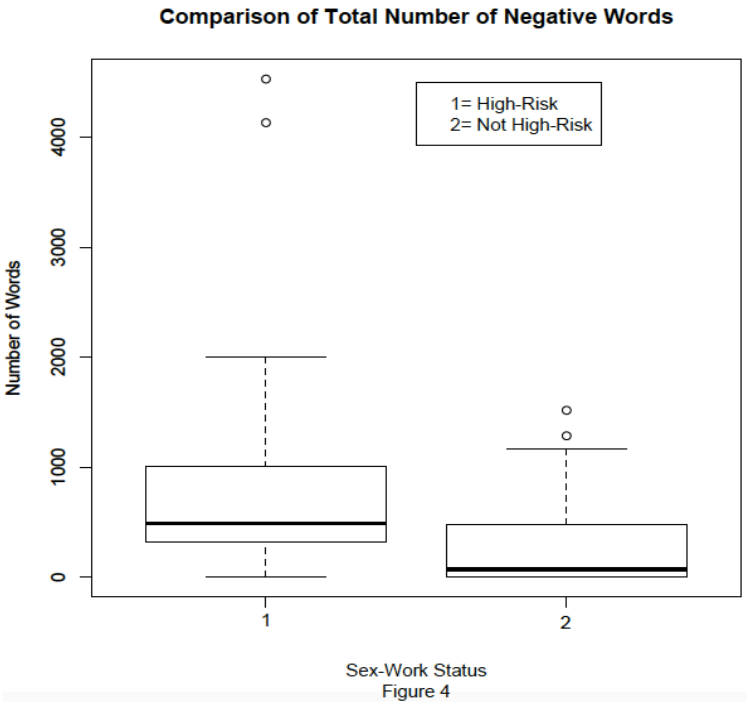

Figure 4

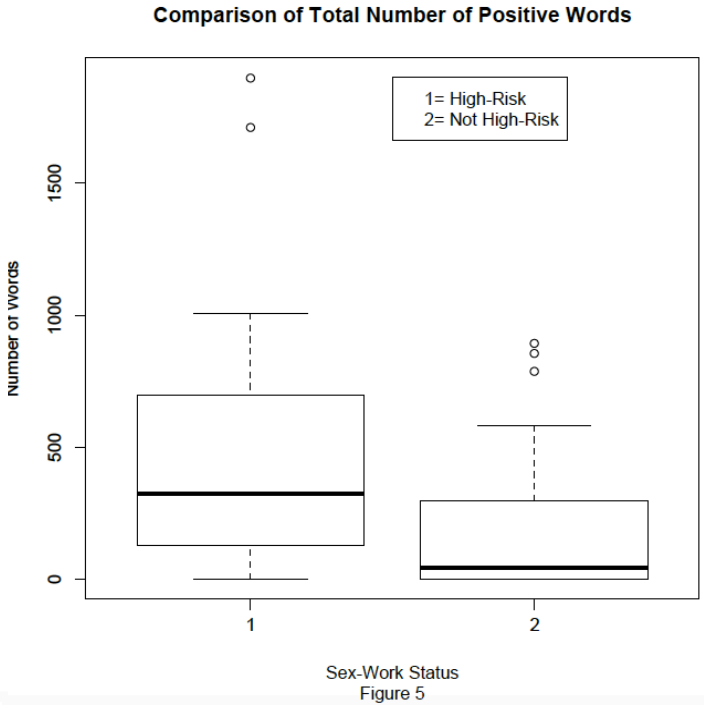

Figure 5

Overall, Indigenous women who were not framed as "high-risk" individuals received significantly *less* media coverage than those who were framed as "high-risk". There were more articles written about "high-risk" Indigenous women ($p < 0.05$) and there were more words in these articles ($p < 0.05$). However, there was no significant difference in the number of front page articles between Indigenous women who were framed as engaging in "high-risk" lifestyles and those who were not ($p > 0.05$).

In terms of the differences in the tone of the news print reports, Indigenous women who were not framed as "high-risk" received significantly less negative words on average ($p < 0.05$) whereas news reports about Indigenous women who were framed as "high-risk" received significantly more positive words on average ($p < 0.05$). However, the difference in net-tone between Indigenous women was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). This means that although "high-risk" Indigenous women received more positive and negative words, the overall coverage of the articles was not statistically more positive or negative compared to "not high-risk" women.

The limited number of front page articles for "high-risk" and "not high-risk" individuals suggests that missing and murdered Indigenous women are not newsworthy; these poorly placed articles send the message that MMIWG are not important. These results are consistent with previous studies that examine the difference in media coverage of missing and murdered white women compared to Indigenous women, which find that Indigenous women are not newsworthy victims.

The results of the tone of the media coverage also suggest that Indigenous women are not newsworthy. Again, given that Indigenous women already receive limited media coverage and that this coverage is overwhelmingly negative, these findings suggests that even when Indigenous women do receive coverage, the details in the stories are not positive. The media

does not frame "high-risk" and "not high-risk" Indigenous women with the same compassion that they do white women. Not only do Indigenous women receive less and more negative media coverage comparatively to white women, my analysis suggests that regardless of how the media frames Indigenous women, they are still not considered newsworthy.

Further, although "high-risk" Indigenous women received more media coverage than "not high-risk" Indigenous women, I argue that this is an overwhelmingly grim finding. The fact that "high-risk" women receive more coverage than "not high-risk" suggests that violence against Indigenous women is commonplace- Indigenous women are only newsworthy when the violence against them is "shocking". The content of the coverage of the "high-risk" Indigenous women was often sensationalized and dehumanizing. For example, "high-risk" Indigenous women whose death was linked to a serial killer received significantly more news reports and words in those reports than those who were not murdered by a serial killer ($p < 0.05$). The information in these articles largely focused on the killer, rather than the murdered Indigenous women.

Discussion

The results of this analysis shed light on a burgeoning, yet underdeveloped field in Canadian studies of political communication. Contrary to my initial hypothesis, my analysis demonstrates that there *are* significant differences in media coverage of Indigenous women who are framed as "high-risk" individuals compared to Indigenous women who are not. "High-risk" Indigenous women receive more coverage in the number of articles and in the number of words per article than "not high-risk" individuals. However, my analysis shows that there are no significant differences in the number of front page articles and the tone of media coverage between Indigenous women. These findings support my argument that Indigenous women are not considered newsworthy. The results of my analysis suggest that Indigenous women only receive coverage when the violence against them deemed is shocking and that this coverage tends to focus on perpetrators, rather than victims of violence.

The stark number of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada is well documented- the causes of this epidemic are not. It is imperative to examine media representation of MMIWG because the media informs and shapes Canadians about them. In finding that Indigenous women are not considered newsworthy by the media, regardless of how they are framed, not only tells us something about who the media considers newsworthy, but about ourselves. In mirroring the political sphere, my analysis suggests that the media reflects an image of Canadians who are still largely unaware and/or are apathetic about the distressing number of missing and murdered Indigenous women on Turtle Island. If the media is a mirror that connects, shapes, and mirrors Canadian society, then Indigenous women truly are "the most victimized group"[127].

Although this paper has made important findings about media representation of MMIWG, it only focuses on media *coverage*. Future studies on media representation of MMIWG should analyze the difference in media *framing* between Indigenous women to further our understanding of which victims of violence the media considers newsworthy and what this suggests about Canadian public opinion of the crisis in the age of "reconciliation".

[127] Gilchrist, "Newsworthy Victims".

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