



Media and the Perpetuation of Western Bias: Deviations of Ideality

Media's Role in the Reinforcement of Negative Stereotypes of Indigenous
Identity and the Manifestations of Violence Toward Murdered Women

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Abstract

In this paper, I argue that Western media portrays Indigenous women by utilizing stereotypes that reify essentialist notions of culture and race. This is particularly evident when comparing media portrayals of cases involving murdered Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. Drawing on Indigenous feminism and postcolonial theories, this paper analyzes how these media portrayals perpetuate bias, and fail to educate the public about the legacy of colonialism, including systemic poverty and sociopolitical constraints on a marginalized group. By examining government involvement and the manifestation of structural racism in policy, law enforcement, and social biases, this paper will design the framework for a discussion of those murdered and missing Aboriginal women in Canada. I analyze two recent murder cases (2015) involving victims of domestic violence, that of Winnipeg's Selena Keeper, and Calgary's Lacey Jones-McKnight. Through the comparison of articles pertaining to the murders that are available in the Winnipeg Free Press, Calgary Herald and National Post, I offer insight into how the victims are described, their portrayed lifestyles, and contrast how they are depicted.

Introduction

Throughout Canada's history, the intervention of government policy has both affected the way in which Aboriginal people live in Canada, and also how they are perceived. These sociopolitical structures have been devastating to the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and are still largely responsible for the perpetuation of the contemporary 'Indian Problem'. Mainstream media supports the status quo, and writers are responsible, consciously or subconsciously, for reproducing the historically negative racist and sexist stereotypes that have been applied to Indigenous groups since contact. These portrayals, products of our collective Western biases mixed with historical policy, represent individuals as static and often less valued in Canadian society. Consumers of media should be critical of the representations of identities that have been compared to societal creations of ideality. Over time, society has manifested uneasily attained expectations of identity. These ideal constructions praise class and economic independence, privileges some genders over others, and categorizes race. Deviance from these narrow constructions are often subject to discrimination.

This paper will examine these Western biases in cases involving murdered Indigenous women in Canada. There are many stylistic choices found within print media that support perceived inferior roles of Indigenous women in our society that are not as evident in articles written about their non-Indigenous counterparts. It is necessary to outline a historical overview of policies that have specifically affected Aboriginal women that have been mandated by the Canadian government. These policies were put forth in

effort to align Indigenous women to the status of their European counterparts and to more largely promote the assimilation and elimination of the 'Other'. These marginalizing policies were destructive to First Nation communities and remain a contributing factor to the modern social perception of contemporary Aboriginal women. These social perceptions are reinforced by media by often portraying Indigenous women as a deviation from that of the 'ideal woman' (Meloy & Miller, 2009, p. 31), a further compounding factor that encapsulates Canada's idealistic constructions of gender. This is an unconscious effort to distance settler populations from what are perceived as inherent risks or lifestyles of Aboriginal groups. The negative depictions of Indigenous women in media may also be a potential trigger for murderers who desire to prey on victims who are perceived as less valuable in society. This paper will highlight three instances in which society, the legal system, and media have perpetuated the perceived unimportance of Indigenous women by examining murder of Helen Betty Osborne, the dehumanization of Cindy Gladue, and the invisibility of the victims involved in British Columbia's Pickton case. The materializations of structural racism and the negligence in its correction are systemic deficiencies within Canadian society. Paramount in this essay will be the direct comparison of two recently murdered women and their appearance in media. This will be accomplished by examining the cases of Selena Keeper and Lacey Jones-McKnight in the Winnipeg Free Press, Calgary Herald and National Post. Articles regarding Indigenous victims are most often written to contain stereotypical representations and more factual information about the crime while non-Indigenous women receive more personal description, linear narrative, and

humane attention. By discussing Winnipeg's '911 murder' case (2000), it becomes further apparent that stories about murdered Aboriginal women become catapults for other issues, such as the need for Canada to re-examine its protection policies and inadequacies found within society that could render all women vulnerable. There is further discussion about victim-blaming and the compliance of restraining orders that today appears to more often side with aggressors rather than honor women.

Political Segregation and Assimilation

The historical treatment of Canadian Indigenous populations has included various policies intended to abandon Canada's First People's 'savage way of life' (Salem-Wiseman, 1993, p.27). Duncan Campbell Scott, the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs administered the government policy to assimilate Aboriginal groups into colonial British social structures, religion, and laws. The belief that Aboriginal groups were child-like, and perceived imperialistically as 'White Man's Burden' (Mukasa, 2005, p. 57) was common during the beginning stages of colonization, and the policies that were created at the time reinforced that stereotype. These policies included provisions that led to the destruction of Aboriginal social and cultural structures, the creation of economic dependency and the appointment of agents to assure physical segregation of Aboriginal communities from the European colonies and to enforce external political control.

Indigenous identity was manipulated by the government by structural processes, and the segregation of Indigenous people likely aided

to increase the social fear of the 'Other'. Francis (1993) states, "The Indian is the invention of the European" (p.20); "there is no such thing as a real Indian" (p.21). By highlighting the believed negative behaviors of a group, and ignorant to the acknowledgement of colonial involvement, a disdain for the population has been perpetuated. Alcoholism, addiction, laziness and lack of education are often social conditions attributed to the character of Indigenous people (Assu, 2013). These stereotypes are commonly believed by broader Canadian society and are not only manifested in casual conversations and jokes, but also solidified through media representation and avenues of popular culture. In fact, within the prairie provinces, MacDonald (2015) notes that "one in three residents believe that the racial stereotypes of Indigenous people are true."

Aboriginal women, specifically, were once highly regarded members within their communities. Prior to the introduction of the patriarchal structure of Common Law, most Aboriginal groups across Canada were matrilineal (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2007). Indigenous cultures are traditionally socially equitable because each gender spiritually depends on the other for subsistence and survival, and is a component of the holistic interconnectedness and balance of their groups. At the time of confederation, British women were not considered members of the public sphere and property of their husbands. These foundational laws were transferred into the restrictive policies of the initial Indian Act of 1876.

Section 3 of the Indian Act outlines the provisions of the Gradual Enfranchisement Act, that states that the term, 'Indian', means "Any *male* person of Indian blood reputed to belong to a particular

band; any child of such person; and any woman who is or was lawfully married to such person,” If an Aboriginal *woman* chose to marry a non-Indigenous person, she, along with her children would no longer be considered legally Indian. This was not reciprocal to non-Aboriginal women who married Indigenous men. They, as the property of their husbands, along with their children, could enjoy full Indian status despite their lack of Aboriginal heritage. Although the Indian Act was amended in 1951, the status of these women and their children remained. It is no surprise that some of those who had children with non-Aboriginal men claimed that they were unsure of who the father of their child was to protect their legal Indian status. These paternalistic policies forced Aboriginal women in the mid twentieth century to admit to having children out of wedlock with unknown fathers. This act would have been inexcusable for all Canadian women of that era and Aboriginal women were often assigned the reputation of being immoral and promiscuous because of their decisions. This perception of being ‘loose’ has likely been part of the reason why Indigenous women are often associated with prostitution and are hyper-sexualized.

These policies remained in effect until the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was included in the 1982 Constitution Act, and Bill-C-31 (1985) returned status to those enfranchised Aboriginal women who lost their status through marriage and desired to reclaim. Approximately 85% of Aboriginal women lost their status through these assimilationist policies, which are evidence of sexual discrimination by the Canadian government. Over time, however, many women lost their connections to their communities, their language and culture. These

mostly urban groups are still targeted based on the physical characteristics of being Aboriginal, despite their cultural affiliations within broader Canadian society. These women struggle with the intergenerational trauma of their families, loss of identity, and are subject to the same historical stereotypes.

Identity Dichotomy

In many ways, Aboriginal women have had their identities created for them through Canadian policies and processes, and are often unjustly compared to Western constructions of female identity. Media is not willing or able to fully educate the public about the inherent lower status of all women in our society, let alone the treatment of Aboriginal women. Media also does not discuss policies and legacies of Canadian colonialism, the effects of poverty, or sociopolitical constraints on Indigenous people. Constructed expectations of gender mixed with deeply engrained racial bias can only result in negative perceptions. Indigenous women are further marginalized because they are just that - Indigenous and women - and are further subjected to an identity dichotomy. Aboriginal women can be more romantically described as those that have assimilated into non-Indigenous culture. These women are expected to maintain their spiritual ties to the environment. Here is where the image of the Indian Princess comes to mind, such as Buena Vista Home Entertainment’s depiction of Pocahontas (2000) on her quest to betray her community in favor of marrying European born John Smith. This romanticized identity is in direct contrast to the other, the malicious term that is most often perpetuated in cases involving murdered Indigenous women, the squaw. The prostitute. The addict. The

welfare recipient. The deviant. Deviance from the expected roles of women in our society is not well received, and yet, these descriptions still persist in many articles portraying Indigenous women. Emma LaRocque, Native Studies professor, University of Manitoba states that, “The portrayal of the squaw is one of the most degraded, most despised, and most dehumanized anywhere in the world. The squaw is lustful, immoral, unfeeling and dirty. Such grotesque dehumanization has rendered all Native women and girls vulnerable to gross physical, psychological, and sexual violence” (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, Ch. 13).

The fact that Amnesty International has discovered that “Aboriginal women aged 25 to 44 are four times more likely to suffer a violent death than other women in Canada” (National Roundtable on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2015) is not by chance, but rather evidence of systemic problems within Canadian society. These problems, that make Indigenous women more susceptible to violent crimes, have more to do with poverty, implicit bias and the perpetuation of these beliefs in popular culture and inaccurate portrayals within the educational system than with indigeneity. ‘Karen’, a Blackfoot woman, painfully recounted to me that both of her cousins, who were sisters, were murdered by different people on separate occasions. Their bodies found long after they went missing. When Indigenous women are portrayed as disposable outsiders from mainstream Canadian societies, as sexual deviants or prostitutes, and are subjected to poor investigations by police and emergency services, they become a target. Abusers who can socially and psychologically justify their acts, prey on deviants in society because there

is a more favorable chance of not being caught. To demonstrate how Indigenous cases have historically been dealt with by police, media, and society, the following high-profile cases have been selected to provide examples of racism, dehumanization and invisibility of Aboriginal women.

Evidence of Racism

In 1971, a nineteen-year-old Cree woman from Norway House named Helen Betty Osborne was kidnapped, viciously beaten, molested, and subsequently stabbed to death with a screwdriver. Her naked unidentifiable body was located along the perimeter of The Pas, Manitoba. Despite testimonies during the time of the investigation, and regardless of the hard evidence implicating four Caucasian perpetrators, it took sixteen years for charges to be laid. Only one man, Lee Colgan, would serve ten years for this crime. The crime occurred because the four young men loathed Indigenous people, and had expectations of how Aboriginal people should behave in society. According to Emma LaRoque, “Helen Betty Osborne was murdered because these youths grew up with twisted notions of “Indian girls” as “squaws” ... Osborne’s attempts to fight off these men’s sexual advances challenged their racist expectations that an “Indian squaw” should show subservience ... [causing] the whites ... to go into a rage and proceed to brutalize the victim” (1991, Ch. 13). The Government of Manitoba made a formal apology in 2000 regarding the length of time that it took for justice to be served, and this case is now used as a study of violent racism in Canada. The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission reviewed the proceedings of the event, and was concerned by the length of time that it took to solve Osborne’s

case. They concluded that the delay was due to racism, sexism and indifference. In addition, it was believed that “the people living in The Pas likely knew the young men who were responsible for the murders, yet because Osborne was an Aboriginal woman, the townspeople did not consider that the murder was of any importance” (Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, 1991, Ch. 2).

Evidence of Dehumanization

Aboriginal women are not only victims of racially charged violence, but can also be subject to dehumanization. Cindy Gladue’s preserved vaginal tissue was displayed during court proceedings in 2015, rendering it the first in Canada’s history (Renzetti, 2015). Alberta born Gladue, a mother of three, was found dead in an Edmonton hotel bathtub. She had an 11-centimetre wound to her vaginal wall that was likely caused by a sharp instrument. Bradley Barton was charged with her murder, but the jury not only acquitted his case but chose not to convict him for manslaughter. Barton had argued that the intoxicated sex-worker had consented to the sexual act, and that it was caused without the use of any sharp instrument. To date, her tissue had not yet been reunited with her body. To bring evidence into the courtroom of this sort is problematic, and disrespectful to the victim, her family, and to all those who knew her.

Evidence of Invisibility

Indigenous women are often also rendered invisible in media. In the case of the Pickton pig farm murders, at least one-third of William Pickton’s victims were Indigenous women. These women were mostly drug-addicted sex

workers from Vancouver’s Eastside, and were lured throughout the latter part of the 1990’s and early 2000’s to his farm in Port Coquitlam with promises of narcotics. At the farm, they were brutally murdered and mutilated. The exact number of victims is unknown, however, Pickton said that there were forty-nine and that he had intended there to be fifty, but that he “got sloppy and got caught” (CBC News, 2007). There were many red flags surrounding his conduct, including when one of the Indigenous prostitutes was able to escape. She had been stabbed a number of times and was found just outside the farm by a passing car. Despite Indigenous communities probing law enforcement to look into the large number of disappearances, they failed to investigate. According to Amnesty International (2004), police and city officials were denying that there were any patterns to the disappearances or that women were in any form of danger. Pickton was finally approached on his farm because of a firearms complaint. It was only then, when quantities of women’s belongings were found in his residence, that there was a larger investigation. This intensive search resulted in locating the human remains of at least thirty-three women. Pickton was ultimately charged with only six of the assumed forty-nine murders, because he was already facing a life sentence. It was decided that it was no use to continue convicting him for the following cases due to the cost of the proceedings. The failure to allow the families to seek finality in the loss of their daughters interrupts the healing process. The women whose remains were located at the Pickton farm have not been honored. Their individual names are difficult to attain, and their photographs are commonly displayed together like a tiled wall portraying ancient history. A unified, not individual or personalized identity.

Wally Oppal (2012), Inquiry Commissioner, gave conclusive evidence that the police department “as a system, failed because of the bias. These women were vulnerable; they were treated as throwaways — unstable, unreliable...the women were poor, they were addicted, vulnerable, Aboriginal. They did not receive equal treatment by police.” These women were not invisible to the families who raised them and the communities that knew them. Instead, there is a macabre infatuation with Willie Pickton, and it seems in this case, that people are more interested in the murderer than the murdered. This interest is then highlighted by mainstream media and the infatuation of understanding the mind of a serial killer takes precedence over the missing women.

Canada’s Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls

This paper has so far provided the argument that the combination of government policy, perceived social fears and media representations have manifested over time, and have been catalysts for the perpetuation of perceived biases of Aboriginal women. This foundation has made it only now possible to introduce the epidemic of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls in Canada. Despite media’s attempts of diplomacy and accuracy in cases involving murdered women, the contemporary devaluation of Aboriginal women in society is consistently evident. Articles rarely delve deeper into the core problems of marginalization and racism that has been previously discussed. In an article listing the numbers of Indigenous missing women, Shawna Ferris, University of Manitoba gender studies professor, affirms that much media reporting of Indigenous murders supports the idea that the women are involved in the sex trade or other

criminal behavior. She further states that with the use of mug shots rather than family photographs in newspapers and descriptive details about negative street life, these stories pose no threat to non-Indigenous women who are not engaged in these activities (Welch, 2014).

This sexual deviance has had a recurring role in the representations of Indigenous women, and has appeared throughout the context of this argument. Jacqueline Lynne and Melissa Farley (2008) state, “First Nations women were considered “exotic” sexual commodities and were assumed by colonizers to enjoy that status, not only because they were viewed as primitive but because they were female. Men’s assumption of the right to rape indigenous women is not a new idea.” The fact is that prostitution is not a defining factor in Indigenous murder. Of the 1,181 Indigenous women and girls who are assumed victims of unsolved murder or those missing by the RCMP, 80% are not in the sex trade. The perpetuation of this stereotype maintains the belief that Aboriginal women have loose morals, and thus continues to hyper-sexualize their group.

The actual number of victims is highly controversial. Canada’s Minister for the Status of Women, Patty Hajdu, has most recently discovered through the work of the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC), that the most current number may be as high as 4,200 (Tasker, 2016). It is difficult to find breakdowns of the number of all murdered and missing women as a comparative example. The Native Women’s Association of Canada has discovered that Aboriginal women and girls account for approximately 10% of all female homicides in Canada, however, only make up

for 3% of the entire Canadian population. To date, the Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police (SACP) is the only organization that publishes the statistics on missing women within their province. They have concluded and reported that 59% of the women currently missing in Saskatchewan are of Aboriginal descent (2015). It is clear that there is a disparity wherein Aboriginal women are more likely to be victimized than their non-Indigenous counterparts. It is important to interject, however, that there is sometimes confusion about the definition of who qualifies as Aboriginal. To demonstrate an example of Canadian society's definition of "being Native", I will highlight the depiction of Loretta Saunders, a student at Nova Scotia's Saint Mary's University and Nunatsiavut woman, who was found murdered in 2014. When reporters uncovered that she was an Inuit woman with blonde hair and blue eyes, and therefore did not look Aboriginal, they discounted the notion that any motivation behind the murder was related to her being an Indigenous person. She was also a successful university student, which defies the perceived stereotype that Aboriginal people are unintelligent and lack education (Assu, 2011). This is evidence of the simplistic crude dichotomy that has followed Aboriginal women over time. The social immortalization of both lifestyle and phenotypic traits as the binding agent of independent Aboriginal people to their group is problematic. These beliefs keep First Nations people from being seen as progressive and modern and denies their ancestry based on these generic codes. This is further evidence that Indigenous identities are defined by society and are ultimately perpetuated in the media in ways that mirrors these narrow definitions.

Western Expectations of Gender and the 'Ideal Woman'

Western society has created the guidelines for our expectations of gender. Women specifically are more valued if they assume a passive role in their relationships and desire to have traditional heteronormative goals which include domestic duties, and the virtues of marriage and child-bearing. White, able-bodied, heterosexual, economically privileged women are perceived as more worthy in society and are most represented in mainstream avenues of popular culture (Birke, 2000). These women then become role-models to women and girls who lack the understanding of the structures that have created these ideals. These standards are difficult to attain for most, specifically for those who are socially, politically and economically marginalized. To demonstrate how Western society frames the category of the "ideal women" in cases involving murdered and missing women, I will introduce an American example. Laci Peterson, from Modesto, California, was portrayed as beautiful, young, successful, a soon-to-be mother, sister, loving daughter, whose fairy-tale life was cut short by her cheating monstrous husband. She liked to cook, garden, and was loved by all that knew her (Wright, 2003). During the search for Laci and during her husband's trial, many women were found murdered or went missing but little was written about them. Laci Peterson, the "ideal woman" was the focus of media attention while other women's voices were silenced (Meloy & Miller, 2009, p. 45). This is so common in American media that it has been coined as the "Missing White Girl Syndrome" (Stillman, 2007, p. 492). According to Canadian Women's Foundation, a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner every six days (2015). What makes the Laci Peterson story more

important, valued, or significant than the story of others? There are limited representations of the same degree involving victims of marginalized groups. Society mourned because they could relate to her: she was someone recognizable, a friend, the girl-next-door, and a perfect example of the attributes that Western society values in women. Aboriginal women are unable to attain the equivalent status of 'ideal women' because of their race, unless they portray more favorable qualities of being 'white'. The Indian Princess identity is once again relevant, and demonstrates how these two identities of the princess and of the squaw play against one another to suit the objectives of mainstream society.

All women have the possibility of being subjected to domestic abuse, sexual assaults and victimization, yet media has a history of portraying Indigenous victims as separate from their non-Indigenous counterparts. There is emphasis on lifestyle differences that make the victimization of Indigenous women unrelatable to non-Aboriginal women. While scanning documents in the Winnipeg Free Press and Calgary Herald for the use of common words in cases involving Indigenous murders, there are commonalities of phrases that include that the Aboriginal victim was from a 'rough neighborhood,' with potential 'history of drug use,' where 'alcohol or drugs was a factor,' the women were potentially, 'engaged in risky behavior,' 'prostitution,' or products of 'foster-care' and 'abusive homes'. Media portrayals of murdered Indigenous women are very similar with common biases evident in article titles. Furthermore, media constructs certain identities that constitute a front-page story, while others are deemed less important and portrayed further back in media reporting. The depictions of non-

Indigenous victims in Canada emulates the American example of Laci Peterson, although less overtly.

Comparative Media Analysis

I have reviewed numerous articles in the *Calgary Herald* and *National Post* regarding the domestic murder of Lacey Jones-McKnight, a non-Indigenous woman, and of an Aboriginal victim, Selena Keeper, in the *National Post* and *Winnipeg Free Press*. Both women were twenty years of age and both were killed within the same general timeframe by their domestic partner.

Lacey Jones-McKnight, 20 had requested a restraining order on more than one occasion against her former boyfriend, but her requests were not approved. She was ultimately strangled by him in 2012. Kristopher "Tray" Wayne Guenther, 31 murdered Jones-McKnight in the basement of his home in Southeast Calgary, and then brought her body for his former girlfriend's workplace to prove that he did in fact, murder Lacey. He then proceeded to her family home in the Northwest, rang the doorbell, and told her mother that he had killed her daughter. He begged her to stab him. Lacey had had her mouth taped, and was bound by the wrists and ankles. The coroners had commented on evidence of brutality by the depth of the bruising and hand marks around her neck. Despite Guenther's legal team attempting to demonstrate that the murder was the result of a failed act of sexual asphyxiation and bondage, he was found guilty of first-degree murder.

Selena Keeper, 20 was rushed to the hospital in 2015 in critical condition following a violent public beating by her estranged boyfriend, Ray

William Everett, in Winnipeg's "rough north end" (Lambert, 2015). The witnesses were unable to intervene in the malicious attack as it was taking place and were forced to stand witness to the murder. Keeper, a young mother, had attempted to attain restraining orders against her assailant citing that he had been abusing her for more than two years and that she was afraid for her well-being. "I want to keep Ray away from me" was one of the answers that she gave on one of her protection orders (2015). The requests were denied. Police ultimately charged Everett, 20, with second-degree murder. He had been beating her over the course of their relationship, even during her pregnancy with their son.

These cases are difficult to digest, and it must be made clear that one victim is no more or less important than the other. Utilizing comparative analysis, there are marked differences apparent in print media involving the two women. The titles of the articles in McKnight's case most frequently contain her name. In fact, in reviewing the titles of 395 articles in the *Calgary Free Press*, only eleven did not. By contrast, Selena Keeper was mentioned in 72 articles in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, however her name is only noted in six of the titles. This is in direct relation to 493 articles that discuss Kristopher 'Tray' Guenther in the *Calgary Herald* and the two stories in the *Winnipeg Free Press* that mention additional information about Ray William Everett other than simply his name in their content. Keeper is mentioned in 41 articles in the *National Post* compared to McKnight's coverage, which is included in 122 articles (Table 1).

TABLE 1: VICTIM PRESENCE IN ARTICLES

	Print Articles	Name in Title	National Post
Keeper	72	6	41
Jones-Mcknight	395	384	122
Everett	54	2	0
Guenther	493	0	0

These numbers are affirmation that non-Indigenous crimes are more likely to receive more local and national attention than those involving the Aboriginal population, adding to the broader problem of invisibility of the latter group. Keeper is introduced in the titles of the stories as a variant of 'Slain North End Woman' (Slain North End Woman Lover, Feared Alleged Killer, Sister Says. 2015), 'Winnipeg woman,' or coldly as 'homicide victim' (McIntyre, 2015). She is not often afforded mention of her name. The details that are included in the articles are also evidence of a disparity between the representations of the victims and their aggressors. Lacey's estranged boyfriend is referred to as a "cruel, grotesque, repulsive monster" (Slade, 2015), just as Scott Peterson was in the murder case of Laci Peterson (Sahagun, 2004).

However, despite their loathed positions, both were afforded visible identities within media representations. The images in the articles regarding the murder of Jones-McKnight are mainly photographs of the happy couple, while others are of her alongside her friends and family demonstrating that she was a valuable member in a connected community. Her coverage is a linear narrative that discusses the events of the murder, the trial proceedings, and the ultimate sentencing of her murderer. She is lovingly described as a "kind, gentle, compassionate, loving soul" by

her mother (Slade, 2015). Keeper's partner and ultimate aggressor, has little mention other than to be depicted as "a gang member suffering from fetal alcohol syndrome, ADHD, addicted to alcohol, marijuana and cocaine...seized by Child and Family Services when he was five, and lived in ten different placements" (McIntyre, 2015). Everett has been described as suffering from being an abused child with pressures consistent with being a gang member, paired with addiction and mental illness. Are these considered an excuse for his actions? The photos that have been displayed of Keeper are mostly of her alone, and the fact based information that is presented in all articles are exact carbon copies of the others with little new information attached.

Lacey Jones-McKnight's case has been framed to be more relatable to mainstream consumers of media, and her depiction as a blossoming 'ideal woman' aligns with the Western *status quo*. I argue that this is because when white girls who are not engaged in deviant behavior are murdered it seems to defy the normative belief that only those engaged in risky lifestyles are susceptible. Murderers and aggressors are present in all demographics, yet those victims who are from marginalized communities seem to be held responsible as sole perpetrators of abuse. Aboriginal women are more widely linguistically portrayed as disposable, while those who are irreplaceable are remembered through personal recollections. Our collective Western bias has created the framework that decides which characteristics make a woman valuable and those which determine who is not.

Further Observations

Aboriginal people are not newsworthy, and are often emphasized in media as those demonstrating the negative stereotypes and behaviors that are believed to be inherent in their groups. These, in turn, aid in the continuation of racial biases and prejudices against Canada's First People. The constructions of identity found in media coverage of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women is intended to distance one group from another. These lead to the indifference that Canadians have in cases involving Aboriginal women. Warren Goulding, a journalist who covered a trial in Saskatchewan where three Indigenous women were murdered by serial Native woman killer, John Martin Crawford, stated, "I don't get the sense that the general public cares much about missing or murdered Aboriginal women. It's all part of this indifference to the lives of Aboriginal people. They don't seem to matter as much as white people" (Amnesty International, 2004).

The articles containing information regarding Selena Keeper follow with the conclusive need to re-examine Canada's, Manitoba's, and Winnipeg's policy on restraining orders and protective services rather than follow up to the case specifically. There is no mention of the systemic racial issues that have led to the dangers that Indigenous women face. Selena Keeper's name has merely been added to the list of other Indigenous women who are victims of domestic abuse in Canada.

Other articles involving murdered Aboriginal women often act as a catalyst to promote broader social problems that affect the non-Indigenous population. For example, there was a case from

2000 involving the “911 murders” in Winnipeg where two women, Doreen Leclair and Corrine McKeowen contacted emergency services five times over the course of an evening, afraid that Doreen’s ex-boyfriend would kill them. They were told by the 911 operator to “solve the problem themselves, and that they were partly to blame, and although the operator promised to send police, no car was dispatched” (Guttormson, 2002). Emergency services did not send assistance until it was too late. Doreen had a zero tolerance restraining order against the man who murdered these two women. As a result of this tragic episode, the *Winnipeg Free Press* media concentrated its article contents on the requirement for further sensitivity training within emergency services, and the need to understand the dangers of domestic abuse while recognizing a severe inadequacy in the current system. These women, as mothers, daughters, and friends were not spoken about in any personal detail in the news reports. Their deaths merely provided a situation to begin to explore what would be perceived as a “larger issue.”¹

Victim blaming is also common in cases of domestic abuse, with many observers questioning why the abused would go back to their abusers. McKeowen and Leclair were told that they were “partly to blame” (Guttormson, 2002), likely because William Dunlop was invited back into their home. The articles regarding Selena Keeper are certain to point out that although she had requested protective services, she and her partner had been out drinking together prior to the homicide. McKnight is reputed to have been avoiding her ex-boyfriend, however a number of articles suggest that she accused him of cheating on her, which led to the final altercation. As with many narratives of abuse, there are

inconsistencies in the story. In the coverage of the Pickton farm murders, for example, there is more focus on the deviant nature of the murdered victims and not on the conclusive fact that Robert Pickton should not have been murdering women in the first place.

Many Canadians also do not see any benefit in researching Indigenous murders because many of those who have been murdered are at the hands of other Indigenous people. This ignorance is further evidence of a distinct separation within Canadian society. Ironically, most white people are killed by other white people, but it is easier to relegate the problem of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls as no problem of non-Indigenous people.

Conclusion

Canada’s legal system continues to maintain that Indigenous women are not being marginalized, contrary to the plethora of evidence suggesting otherwise (O’Connor & O’Neal, 2010, 47). Rather than deny that there is a problem, new systems need to be put into place to work cohesively with Indigenous communities. Many of the support programs, policies, and protection services that have been designed to protect Aboriginal women have been created by non-Indigenous groups. These programs are arranged with limited funding, and locations that receive assistance are not always in easily accessible areas. In addition, the Aboriginal voices who are demanding alternate healing programs that will align the community with the wrongdoers and victims living within their populations can no longer be silenced.

The social and political involvement of the

government and society in the affairs of Canada's First People need to be minimized, and respect for epistemological beliefs must be honoured. It is obvious that Aboriginal women must be respected as equal members of society. However, Indigenous women's lives will remain at risk because of the failure of Canadian officials to be able to reduce the marginalization of these women in Canadian society. "Until Canada addresses the root causes of discrimination and social economic marginalization, there will continue to be a high number of Canadian Indigenous murder victims" (Amnesty International, 2004, p. 7). Despite probes by groups such as the United Nations to create measures to reduce the negative perceptions of Indigenous women, the social stigmas have not changed.

In this paper, it has been demonstrated that structural racism has been a major contributor to the marginalization of Indigenous women, and that the perpetuation of societal stereotypes and biases of contemporary Indigenous people have been destructive to their group. These practices have formed the framework for non-Indigenous people to understand Aboriginal groups in a Canadian context. By highlighting how media portrays women who are victims of murder, it is possible to conclude that Indigenous women are seen as less valuable or rendered invisible. These women are most often framed as deviants from that of the 'ideal woman', of which sadly, their biological traits will be a perpetual limitation. The case studies that have been discussed are not isolated rather, stand as a sample of other examples in recent Canadian history that depict the same portrayals of Indigenous women when victims of murder. These remnants are responsible for the continuation of the historical 'Indian problem', and the perpetuation of these

beliefs enact to further restrict Aboriginal people from social and political equality. Society must understand the broader scope and impact of our perceptions and recognize the impact of our own privilege and biases, and how the non-Indigenous status quo is depicted in mainstream Canadian media.

Endnotes

¹The 911 operator in this case continued their same employment with the city, without discipline.

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