

Analysis of Cable News Network (CNN) Articles Related to Human Trafficking in Native  
communities

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### Bio

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### Abstract

This research paper will be discussing and analyzing how the Cable News Network (CNN) portrays the human trafficking of Native American people. It will include photos of the article depicted and an analysis of the images. It will discuss the impact of human trafficking in Native communities and the media's role in educating and addressing human trafficking. It will incorporate literature on colonization and its effects on violence against Native women and children. It will give recommendations for future authors to respond appropriately to human trafficking in Native communities. And finally, the human trafficking movement in Native communities that have built campaigns through grassroots efforts to retell the stories of resiliency and the strength of Native peoples to reduce human trafficking.

### Introduction

There is no word for human trafficking in Native American communities. "Stolen" is the term associated with the human trafficking of Native people across the United States. There has been a considerable amount of media and attention on human trafficking in Native American communities in recent years. Yet, human trafficking in Native communities has also been a threat and device of colonization. Native women, men, and children had a place within the

structure of their communities before colonization. Now, violence against Native women, men, and children have gained traction for the media and told the stories of the violence in Native communities. But how are these news articles depicting Native people? This papers' primary purpose is to analyze the Cable News Networks (CNN) portrayal and telling of human trafficking in Native communities. The importance of examining these articles is critical because it can either reinforce the stereotypes and violence of Native people or focus on the resiliency and strength of Native people.

What is human trafficking? How does it present and show in Native communities more specifically? Human trafficking is defined as the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation." (NIJ, 2019). Across the world, human trafficking is a significant public health concern that is a violation of human rights and modern-day slavery. While human trafficking is an international issue, it is also a domestic issue. It is even more than just sex trafficking but includes labor trafficking, debt bondage, and child sex trafficking (Francisco). In 2018, the Polaris Project identified 10,949 human trafficking cases, 23,078 human trafficking survivors, and 5,859 potential human traffickers just within the United States (Polaris). They are often a combination of sex trafficking and labor trafficking or domestic servitude, agricultural work, hotel services, prostitution, health, and eldercare or strip club dancing (Francisco).

Within Native American communities, human trafficking presents in a variety of ways. One way of trafficking is man camps along oil fields and border towns that have a historical

background of racism toward Native people, communities, and reservations (Earth). These man camps are composed of both Native and non-Native men who travel to oil fields for work and border tribal communities. Since man camps began increasing, the number of rapes reported increased with more men becoming violent toward Native women and girls across different reservations (Earth). With the increase of gender-based violence, it's particular to note that these man camps are in areas where the poverty levels of the community are low and the men in the camps are buying commercial sex (Deer & Nagle, 2017; Earth). Another way of trafficking is vulnerable individuals who are coming from reservations to bigger cities are at risk for exploitation by boyfriends, family, and friends (NCAI, 2016).

While human trafficking affects individuals, they also affect whole communities. There are specific vulnerabilities that make individuals, communities, and even nations susceptible to human trafficking. Those vulnerabilities are on the structural and proximate factors. For structural factors, it's the economic deprivation and market, globalization, attitudes towards gender, the demand for prostitutes, and situations of conflict (Cameron & Newman, 2008). Proximate factors include lax national and international regimes, weak law enforcement, corruption, organized criminal activity, and inadequate education campaigns (Cameron & Newman, 2008). More specifically, Native communities have considerable vulnerabilities and risk factors. Some of the weaknesses include historical trauma and cultural loss, significant poverty and economic isolation/dependence, high rates of Adverse Childhood Experiences in the population, high rates of homeless and runaway youth, high rates of exposure to violence, and high rates of personal or family/caregiver addiction to substances, and low levels of police or law enforcement presence (NCAI, 2016). These vulnerabilities allow traffickers to target and use

tactics to control vulnerable persons that include sexual, emotional, or mental abuse and enable addictions or being physically violent or threatening (NCAI, 2016).

The significance of historical trauma and cultural loss has a role in the human trafficking of Native persons. The patterns of history show up in today's society and how the public and media see Native people. The history of the colonization of the United States has left out the stories of rape, murder, and mass genocide of Native peoples. The history of colonization has left a mark on Native communities with systemic policies still reinforcing the goal of assimilation and murder of Native people. It cannot fall into binary thinking of past and present. Still, dualism is essential to recognize that human trafficking is modern-day slavery and how past policies have continued to systemically perpetrate violence against Native people (O'Connell Davidson, 2015). The devaluing of Native women and girls as a result of colonization. Non-natives were raping, murdering and owning Native women and girls because of the racial hatred (Deer, 2010). Native men began betraying the value of Native women and children by exchanging them to the French, Spanish, and British (Deer, 2010). To understand human trafficking in Native communities, it's essential to acknowledge that the colonization of the United States was violent and that enslavement of Native people was common (Deer, 2010). The violence toward Native women, men, and children was more than just physical but incorporated significant historical and cultural loss that continues to be part of the vulnerabilities of the epidemic of human trafficking in Native communities.

### Literature Review

The media has continued to inform the public on what's important and what's newsworthy (Wallinger, 2010). The agenda-setting theory states that the way the press conveys or covers a topic or object affects the way the public thinks about the subject and object and thus affects the

"salience of that object on the public agenda," (Wallinger, 2010). It reinforces that the media informs the public on what is essential and what is newsworthy. It also continues to provide content that is informative on social justice issues but limited in its content toward a topic, subject, or object (Wallinger, 2010). Media usage can give visuals to stories. For example, public health campaigns have represented the disease in various campaigns, including tobacco use, vaping use, and sexually transmitted infections. The visual representation of drives and media produce meanings and human belonging (Hua, 2011). These visual representations can define race and create an image of human trafficking and how the public see's human trafficking (Hua, 2011). The photos can racialize the categories of sexuality and gender that can determine the physical and biological markers of sexualized racialization (Hua, 2011). It has continued the narrative that Native women are Pocahontas or that Asian women are exotic.

The roles of gender and sexuality have created conversations around anti-trafficking rhetoric that captivate the stereotypical images of femininity and masculinity (Andrijasevic, 2007). It frames the victims and the perpetrators (Andrijasevic, 2007). The displays, images, and media have displayed ways the public visualizes human trafficking and who are trafficked. This includes the understanding of human trafficking and to warn women of the dangers of migration and prostitution (Andrijasevic, 2007). But the images of women, men, and children have captured bodies of stereotypical representations of femininity and objectification of survivors (Andrijasevic, 2007). Most importantly, it covey's narrative that survivors of human trafficking cannot go back to that state of "comfort" and that they cannot escape human trafficking (Andrijasevic, 2007).

The role of the media has a massive influence on the perceptions of individuals, communities, and identities. Media can tell the stories and put images of various rhetoric for the

public to know. It's an essential source of information that can be both accurate and inaccurate. The influence is significant because it's how articles, newspapers, and campaigns tell stories, and it's essential to educate and inform. Currently, media topics of human trafficking have focused on the arrestment of perpetrators and trial updates. The media has also focused on anti-trafficking campaigns including new taskforces created and governmental changes to immigration policies. To date, there has been little mention of the role the media has played in the portrayal of human trafficking in Native communities in the United States, including its effectiveness of educating, informing, and calling to action change. To continue the role of this paper, it's to examine how the media has portrayed human trafficking of Native people and what language and photos they are using that are anti-trafficking campaigns, prevention, and education of the human trafficking of Native people.

### Methods

Cable News Network (CNN) has published several articles related to the human trafficking of Native Americans. The reports years ranged from 2016 to 2019. Two of the authors wrote about Canada's indigenous communities impacted by human trafficking. Three of the authors of the article wrote about the involvement of human trafficking in the United States Native communities. All five of the articles have directly addressed the experiences of the human trafficking of survivors and the significant gaps in human trafficking prevention and treatment.

But most importantly, the articles addressed the resiliency of the survivors and what communities are currently doing to address human trafficking on a national scale. The reason why I chose the Cable News Network (CNN) is being they had the most articles related to the human trafficking of Native people with the inclusion of Canada's human trafficking of Indigenous people. Another reason why I choose CNN is because it has a wide range of viewers

and subscribers who read and watch the news across different platforms of social media. It has provided the most information about the human trafficking of Native people with various viewpoints and themes across the articles.

### Analysis

The analysis of CNN's articles related to the human trafficking of Native people and how portrayal throughout the articles were the themes that contributed to the reasons why perpetrators targeted Native people. CNN had spoken to survivors, directors, and community members who have been directly and indirectly been impacted by the number of stolen Native women. The common themes throughout the articles were; lack of police involvement, taboo of the subject of human trafficking, lack of access to economic means including jobs, healthcare, and education, lack of the political participation including policies surrounding missing and murdered women, violence against Native women and children, and finally the lack of mainstream media involvement in bringing the topic to the public eye.

The word choices of the authors also follow the analysis of what the public is imagining on understanding Native and Indigenous communities across North America. Within the United States, there are 573 federally and state-recognized tribes. When the audience hears Native Americans, there are different ideas or stereotypes of Native American people and communities. Often when people hear or read about Native Americans, it's stereotypical images like teepee's, war bonnets, headdresses, reservation, Pocahontas, and drunk homeless people. There is also the narrative that Native Americans are wealthy and receive money from the government for being Native American, and all Native youth receive free college or education. These stereotypes, biases, and stigmas have plagued Native and Indigenous people. There are discussions of the past words and phrases to describe Natives like "Indian" and "American Indian" that Native people

across the United States have challenged. Many have changed the past words to decolonize the name to reclaim heritage, tradition, and culture too, "Native," "Indigenous," "First Nations," or even going by their specific tribe.

All the titles of the articles used have used appropriate terms of what is “culturally sensitive.” The authors used Indigenous or Native terminology that shows that they have an understanding of the history of the words "Indians" or "American Indians." It’s unclear if human trafficking is the topic except for in two of the articles. The articles, "Canada's stole daughters: Sex traffickers target indigenous Canadians," and, "The Canadian indigenous community-fighting sex trafficking," captured the public's attention on sex trafficking and described trafficking of indigenous women and girls as stolen daughters (Cohen, 2016; Newton, 2017). The articles, “Why do so many Native American women go missing? Congress aiming to find out,” “Native Americans are more likely to be reported missing than others. New Laws seek to address that,” and, “At least 24 Native Americans – most of them women went missing in Montana last year. Two senators are trying to do something about it,” described the missing Native women in the United States, but there is no use of the word trafficking until you read the actual articles (Diaz, 2019; McLean, 2019; McLean & Weisfeldt, 2019). The differences in the headlines creates and depicts a story. The articles based on the United States Native women have no title or caption that indicated that the missing Native women were experiencing trafficking, yet the Canadian articles titled the articles with words like sex trafficking and stolen daughters created a narrative that they are more than just "missing."

The narratives of the survivors were described in detail by the articles, "Canada's stole daughters: Sex traffickers target indigenous Canadians," and, "The Canadian indigenous community-fighting sex trafficking," that told the story of how the Indigenous women were

experiencing trafficking (Cohen, 2016; Newton, 2017). The survivors talked about the methods traffickers used and the resiliency in their current treatment for services (Cohen, 2016). The articles went into indigenous healing methods and treatment center information (Cohen, 2016). The indigenous healing for the survivors followed the traditional healing methods, including sage and other herbs to cleanse and purify the body and soul (Cohen, 2016). The articles, “Why do so many Native American women go missing? Congress aiming to find out,” “Native Americans are more likely to be reported missing than others. New Laws seek to address that,” and, “At least 24 Native Americans – most of them women went missing in Montana last year. Two senators are trying to do something about it,” had different depictions of human trafficking and survivor narratives. The families were describing the lack of police and tribal involvement when their loved ones went missing. The authors explained that the Native women were missing and murdered with one story based on sex trafficking survivors in one article (Diaz, 2019; McLean, 2019; McLean & Weisfeldt, 2019). The authors continue to depict the stories about trafficked Native people as missing or simply vanishing.

The images in the articles were of missing Native women and family members trying to plead to legislators, police, and the community on the human trafficking of Native people. The image in the article by Andrea Diaz focused on a family member who is sitting and speaking to the Senate about her missing sister (Diaz, 2019). The image does not reinforce the image of the stereotypical thought of the actual article title, “At least 24 Native Americans – most of them women – went missing in Montana last year. Two senators are trying to do something about it,” that would have depicted missing women but instead showed the act of the family trying to get help to find their daughter and sister (Diaz, 2019). The picture depicts the resiliency of the family to find the missing Native women in Montana. The images in the article by Paula Newton

depicted the resiliency of the survivors and their stories (Newton, 2017). The author included photos that showed the elders, providers, tribal leaders, and police engaged in human trafficking prevention and treatment (Newton, 2017). The image of the police officer captured his routine (Newton, 2017). He was seated in the vehicle, beginning to look at the corner of a street and waiting (Newton, 2017). It indicated that he was waiting for a sex worker and/or prostitute to show up so he can engage with them and if they need help (Newton, 2017). While the pictures used for the articles depicted were non-stereotypical, the videos of within the articles reinforced the narrative that police, legislators, and leaders have a bias on human trafficking, especially of Native and Indigenous people.

Within the articles, the authors used words, images, and videos that there continue to be biased surrounding Native and Indigenous rights, responsibilities, and sovereignty. The authors continued to be culturally sensitive to words, images, and videos used that did not significantly stereotype Native communities in general. Yet, they used different words to describe victims and survivors. The differences in terms and biases were dependent on the country the author wrote about, trafficking in the United States, or trafficking in Canada. The articles involving Canadian Indigenous people used strong words to indicate that this is a problem, and our communities have named it. They used words like stolen, sex trafficking, colonization, racism, and abuse that has significantly put Indigenous people at risk of being trafficked. While the articles involving Native people in the United States labeled "missing" and the authors focused on the stories of the murdered and missing victims as "prostitutes," "disappearing," "drug use," and "sold sex for drugs," were all descriptions of the victims. This indicates that the bias and the intention of the authors were not the same and influenced the way the portrayed Native people across North American but, more importantly, within the United States.

### Conclusion

Human trafficking has continued to be a violate subject that the public has deemed inhumane for the survivors. Yet, the public has created an ideal victim and survivor of human trafficking. The media has had a role in depicting the ideal human trafficking survivor that includes having them identify and testify against their perpetrators (Hua, 2011). With there being an ideal victim and survivor of human trafficking, Native people across North America do not fit into that description of victim and survivor. The articles analyzed continued to depict Native people in the United States as only "missing" and not fully realizing the communities' risk of trafficking of Native women, men, and children. This includes how the United States has responded to the human trafficking of Native people with the label of only "missing" and instead has forced families to try to get the media's attention for their missing or murdered loved one.

Even when non-Native survivors want to convict their traffickers, the US attorney's office cannot always prove or convict them perpetrators (Nichols & Heil, 2014). Called the leaky pipe that even if survivors want to convict and arrest their perpetrators, the attorneys do not have enough evidence or the lack of evidence gathered during the investigation by law enforcement cannot guarantee a strong enough for a case for justice (Nichols & Heil, 2014). Most importantly, the jurisdiction issues of testifying and arresting in tribal communities are scant with limited resources for law enforcement to respond in timely and effective manner. It's even harder for police to investigate a missing or murdered Native person due to jurisdiction problems between the tribal, local, state, and federal agencies. Even if they had the resources, tribal police are not adequately or properly trained on the identification of human trafficking victims and survivors. There needs to be continues trainings and education for first responders, tribal officials and community members to properly and combat human trafficking.

All of the articles told the stories of the survivors of human trafficking. Yet, the authors depicted victims of the missing and murdered in the United States by using terms that would make the victims as the less ideal victim. They described the victims past using words like “prostitutes,” “disappearing,” “drug abuser,” and “sold sex for drugs,” to indicate that law enforcement did all they could. Thus, producing the image that Native people are the stereotypical image of being addicted and homeless. While CNN has written more articles about the human trafficking of Native people in both Canada and the United States, the variation in the article writing is apparent with a clear distinction of who is the victim and who is not. For future reference authors who are engaging with Native and Indigenous survivors, communities, and tribal leaders should follow the WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Interviewing Trafficked Women:

- Do not harm
- Know your subject and assess the risks
- Prepared referral information: do not offer advice or make promises
- Adequately select and prepare interpreters and co-workers
- Ensure anonymity and confidentiality
- Get informed consent
- Listen to and respect each woman’s assessment of her situation and risks to safety
- Do not re-traumatize a woman
- Be prepared for emergency intervention
- Put information collected to good use

(Zimmerman & Watts, 2003)

It continues to build upon the literature that the media decides who the victim is and who is not. But more importantly it depicts how the public responds and see victims including Native people who are trafficked. While the articles highlighted the variation of the resiliency of Native and Indigenous people, it's showing that tribal communities are acting towards change for future generations to stop the human trafficking of Native and Indigenous people.

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