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Symbolic Annihilation and Stereotyping of Native American Women in News:

A Content Analysis of Health, Safety, and Economic Status Related News

by

Shreyoshi Ghosh

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SYMBOLIC ANNIHILATION AND STEREOTYPING OF NATIVE AMERICAN
WOMEN IN NEWS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF HEALTH, SAFETY, AND
ECONOMIC STATUS RELATED NEWS

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University of Nebraska, 2022

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Abstract

This is an exploratory study on the safety, economic, and health challenges of Native American women who constitute about 1.5% of the American population. With the symbolic annihilation and stereotyping of Native American people and women of color, there was a need to study the portrayal of Native American women in news. The findings indicated there was a growth in news coverage during 2018-19 and safety, including missing and murdered, emerged as a key topic. But symbolic annihilation in health and economic status including pay gap news was significant. Health news mostly covered maternal health and deaths but excluded most other critical health issues. Low interrelation was observed among the safety, economic, and health topics with the issues discussed in isolation. The findings indicated the absence of stereotyping as the news coverage followed community and social justice as a dominant frame. The Associated Press had the most relevant news coverage with safety as the thrust area followed by The New York Times focusing on health and economic status and CNN on safety. Data for Los Angeles Times was not statistically significant and Fox had no data relevant to the research topics. The low volume of relevant news coverage was a limitation of the study.

Keywords: “Native American Women”, “American Indian and Alaskan Native Women”, “Indigenous Women of America”, “Symbolic Annihilation”, “Native American Health”, “News Framing”, “Minority News”, “Gender Communication”, “Health News”, “Race, Gender, and Media”

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Contents

Introduction	1
Research Focus and Purpose Statement	3
Important Terms	4
Literature Review	5
Reporting on Health	6
Reporting on Safety	8
Reporting on Economic Status	10
Theoretical Framework	11
Research Questions	15
Methods	16
Results	20
Discussion	31
Key Findings	32
Theoretical Implications	41
Future Research	42
Conclusion	44
Recommendations	44
References	46
Appendix A	59
Table 1	63
Figure 1	68

Introduction

“We have an opportunity to change our narrative—to weave ourselves a story moving forward in the fabric of America,” — Representative Deb Haaland, 2019 State of Indian Nations Address before the National Congress of American Indians (Monet, 2019).

This statement by Rep. Haaland highlights the long-standing crisis of news coverage of Native American (also referred to as American Indian and Alaskan Natives or AIAN or indigenous in several studies) communities (Monet, 2019). As they lack direct contact with policymakers, news coverage becomes crucial to building “public perceptions of Native American–United States relations and policy” that “influence the course of United States policy toward native nations.” (Jarding, 2004). The volume, breadth, and prominence of news media coverage increase policy-specific knowledge above and beyond common demographic factors (Barabas, et al., 2009), thus shaping public perceptions and framing ongoing public debates about policy responses, including conflicting priorities relevant to the timing or stringency of implemented policies (Mach, et al., 2021).

However, western mainstream news outlets are powerful ideological and hegemonic institutions that are reported to offer the Native Americans restricted choices to express their viewpoints and values (Killion, 2004). A content analysis of the top twenty traditional and non-traditional news websites, as ranked by Alexa Media Research, indicates Native Americans are under-represented in comparison to their proportion in the U.S. population (Josey, 2015) which is 2.9% (US Census Bureau, 2020). The study referred to previous investigations that reported the near-absence of

Native Americans in the media landscape. The absence persists despite the multitude of issues of Native American communities related to health, education, safety, poverty, and accessibility (OMH 2020; NCRC 2019).

With women constituting 50.4% of the Native American population (US Census Bureau, 2019), they could be assumed to have an equal share of the burden of this invisibility. But intersectional identities of race, gender and class are mutually constructed and interdependent, mediated by power structures and privileges (Haarlammer, et al., 2017). Women have faced the challenge of symbolic annihilation in news (Tuchman, et al., 1978) with women only a third of the share of voice in the US media at present (Macharia 2020; Women's Media Center 2020). Additionally, studies have indicated underrepresentation or stereotypical portrayal of poverty in the news coverage (Cline, 2011; Ordway 2018; Edelman, 2001). Native American women are the poorest (Barkdull, 2009; DeNavas-Walt, 2015; Chang, 2010), so the three factors of race, gender, and class are aptly applicable to them and marginalize in news coverage.

This study is focused on the representation of Native American women which connects it to the concept of symbolic annihilation of women in news (Tuchman, et al., 1978).

In addition to under-representation, past studies indicate that the intersection of gender, race, and class has negatively impacted news coverage of women (Meyers, 2004; Goldstein, 2009; Luther, et al., 2005). In the case of coverage of violence against women, Meyers (2004) observes that “the convergence of gender, race, and class oppressions minimized the seriousness of the violence” while dwelling on victim-shaming and

provoking the assault. Non-white women who were welfare recipients were also stereotyped on television news in the 1990s as ‘lazy African-American breeders’ (Luther, et al., 2005). This indicates the issue of framing the news based on race. The study will thus look into the framing of news stories related to Native American women. With the complexities of race, gender, and class, framing of the content can help understand the information in the stories (Miller, et al., 2004) and how journalists represent the Native American women in their stories.

Research Focus and Purpose Statement

This study investigates the representation of Native American women for five years (2017-2021) on the digital platforms of five mainstream news outlets in the United States of America (USA), to determine significant trends in the news coverage on safety, health, and economic status of Native American women. In this study, relevant news articles will be quantitatively coded for content analysis. A small selection of articles will be discussed to understand the framing of the narratives, portrayal, and sourcing. This study will contribute to an understanding of how the socio-economic issues of Native American women including safety, health, and economic status are reported by the mainstream US media and the scope for improvement.

This study is important because of the power of news media to influence public perceptions, public debates about policy responses, and policy development for Native American communities, especially women (Jarding, 2004; Barabas, et al., 2009; Mach, et al., 2021). It will further identify the existing gap in news coverage of Native American women.

Important Terms

Native American — The United States Department of Justice refers to the American Indians or Alaska Natives as Native Americans (About Native Americans, 2014). “As a general principle, an Indian is a person who is of some degree Indian blood and is recognized as an Indian by a Tribe and/or the United States.”

Reservation — The term has been used to denote a federal Indian reservation that is an area of land reserved for a tribe or tribes under treaty or other agreement with the United States, executive order, or federal statute or administrative action as permanent tribal homelands, and where the federal government holds title to the land in trust on behalf of the tribe (U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs, 2017).

Indian Health Services — IHS is an agency of the US Department of Health and Human Services. It is tasked with fulfilling the United States' unique obligation to provide healthcare to Native Americans (Hart, 2010).

Intimate partner violence — The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “Intimate partner violence (IPV) is abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic relationship. “Intimate partner” refers to both current and former spouses and dating partners (National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention, 2021). IPV includes physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression.

Literature Review

A 2018 study titled 'Reclaiming Native Truth' revealed the perceptions of the American public toward Native Americans (First Nations Development Institute, 2018). The report stated, "Contemporary Native Americans are, for the most part, invisible in the United States" (First Nations Development Institute, 2018, p. 8). But this invisibility is further replaced by stereotypes and misperceptions (p.11) or antagonistic attitudes toward Native American issues and the underestimation of discrimination (p.18). The study notes the need for increased news coverage based on the likelihood that most Americans "form most of their perceptions from the news media, entertainment media, and popular culture" (p. 29). News media constituted the largest reach (42%) among online influencers who are aligned with Native issues (p. 30).

This misrepresentation and stereotyping in news coverage have existed in the coverage of Native American women for centuries. They were depicted as tribal princesses or "civilized" women who are good mothers like white women or "downtrodden squaws" who are silly or foolish and identified by the hardships of their lives (Coward, 2014). With time, the portrayal changed to craft workers, but their association with exoticism, sexual aggression, and portrayal as outsiders continued, and they were depicted as alluring or repulsive but subjugated by the Euro-American culture (Coward, 2014). The actualities of the roles that the Native American women played in their society were missing from ethnography, history, and popular culture that were primarily recorded by White people (Bird, 1999). By the mid-1990s, Native American women had become largely invisible in mainstream popular culture with the rare

exception of their being appropriated in the white American culture (Bird, 1999). The invisibility is readily evident from the lack of news coverage of missing and murdered native women (Truong, 2020).

Yet the challenges of Native American women remain comparatively distinct. With median wages and wealth below the national average (The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, 2016; Chang, 2010), Native American women are among one of the poorest demographics. They further face accessibility issues regarding health, pharmacies, and birth control (NCRC 2019). Based on the accessibility issues the news coverage will be reviewed under three heads — health, safety, and employment.

Reporting on Health

News media is an effective platform for the dissemination of health information, thus creating public awareness, behavioral changes, and policy debates (Gearhart, et al., 2018). The study mentions Native Americans being an at-risk population with severe health disparities and lower life expectancies in comparison to other American populations. Gearhart, et al. (2018) also refer to the news consumption habits of the Native Americans for health information as quite similar to those of other populations.

Native American Women's Health

Past studies indicate Native American women are subject to higher risk compared to others for cardio-metabolic diseases (Ross, et al., 2021), diabetes (CDC, 2014), and diabetes-induced renal failure (CDC, 2017). Endemic type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) is one of the leading causes of mortality among Native American women (Dorothy, et al. 2020). Native American women as a group have a higher rate of cervical cancer than

non-Hispanic white women most likely due to late detection of the disease (Gurr, 2015, p.13). Even the incidence of breast cancer, which is lower among Native American women than in all other races/ethnicities combined, gets critical with a second-lowest survival rate (Gurr, 2015, p. 13). Hence despite the low rate of contraction of the disease, women with Native American ancestry get disproportionately affected (Pellatt, et al., 2013) with 30–70% higher risks of mortality from breast cancer (Maskarinec, et al., 2011). Melanoma and detection of skin cancer at an advanced stage is another reason for the high mortality rate from cancer (Gearhart, et al., 2018).

In addition, historical trauma and struggle induced by socioeconomic and political factors lead to chronic and infectious diseases and social pathologies (Gearhart, et al., 2017). This can be specifically observed in the case of bicultural Native American women, mostly those who are obese, with symptoms of depression and emotional distress 2x times which further led to binge-eating behavior (Clark, et al., 2012). Reproductive health also remains a challenge due to sexual assaults, unplanned pregnancies, low access to pharmacies, and birth control (NCRC 2019), teenage childbirth for over 40% of Native American women (NIDA, 2014), and lack of abortion facilities at IHS units (Arnold, 2014). This accessibility issue becomes more crucial with the ongoing debate on abortion laws, the Supreme Court hearing of the case challenging *Roe v. Wade* (Liptak, 2021) as nearly 300,000 Native American women will be subjected to the ban (McNeir, 2019).

Furthermore, less than half of Native American women have health insurance coverage (OMH 2020). Insufficient health insurance coverage only adds to the higher rate

of chronic conditions and deaths in Native American communities (Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021).

Health Reporting Paradigm

While the health issues of Native American women remain diverse, there is an imbalance between critical health issues and actual health topics covered in Native American news media (Gearhart, et al., 2017). The reporting was found to be dependent on what the journalists personally feel is newsworthy or what they understand with certainty while avoiding controversial issues. While the media outlets were found to be reporting health news 1-3 times a month, over 90% of the Native American journalists do not consider health news as a priority or indicated, and more than 80% do not adopt health news reporting to influence health policy (Gearhart, et al., 2017). A large section of journalists, however, acknowledges the importance of conveying culturally relevant health practices, advocating a healthy lifestyle, and reporting important health issues (Gearhart, et al., 2017). Furthermore, the US government has mandatorily included news media in all health communication (Gearhart, et al., 2018). Based upon the preceding discussion the following research question is posed:

RQ1. What are dominant health news topics reported on Native American women in mainstream US media?

Reporting on Women's Safety

One of the most grappling issues is the missing and murdered Native American women and girls with a homicide rate 10x times higher than other races (Urban Indian

Health Institute, 2018). While the New York Times (2019) reported that in recent years the issue has made headlines in the national news and is viewed as an epidemic, a Wyoming-based study showed local and regional news organizations covered only 18% of the murder cases of Native Americans and other indigenous people from 2000 to 2019 in comparison to 51% of cases covered for white victims (Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center, et al., 2020).

The existing news coverage of violence against women is often limited to reservation-based violence even though more than 70% of the Native Americans reside in urban areas (Pruitt, 2021). The study attributes it to the lack of data collection and media reporting for Native Americans in urban areas. Language analysis of the media reports further indicated victim-blaming and stereotyping of Native Americans with their lifestyle and social structure in tribal lands as the cause of violence against women (Pruitt, 2021).

This is further reinforced in another study that indicates gender, race/ethnicity, and cultural typifications determine the portrayal of homicide victims in the news (Gruenewald, et al., 2013). The study reports the newsworthiness of the homicide victimization of people of color such as Hispanics and women being ignored and neglected. This indicates a need to study the news coverage on safety issues, missingness, and violence against women and girls across urban and tribal environments. Based upon the preceding discussion the following research question is posed:

RQ2. What are dominant safety-related news topics reported on Native American women in mainstream US media?

Reporting on Economic and Employment Status

Native Americans are reported as the poorest (28.7%) racial/ethnic group in the USA with the residents on the reservations being among the poorest (Barkdull, C., 2009; DeNavas-Walt, C., 2015) with the average earnings of the community being \$49,906 (OMH, 2020). Single-race Native American women have the lowest levels of schooling with reduced earnings in case of marriage and migration (Huyser, 2009). While Native American women have a median wealth of \$5,700 against an overall average of \$65,000 (Chang, 2010), those from the Sioux and Apache tribes are among the poorest (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2015).

Recent studies show Native American women are paid 40% less than white men and 24% less than white women in the USA with the pay gap increasing with the level of education (LEAN IN, 2021). The average economic loss faced by a Native American woman in her career in comparison to a white man could add up to a million dollars (National Women's Law Center, 2021). Furthermore, Native Americans experience the highest rate of unemployment (6.6%) in the US among all racial groups as well as the lowest participation (59.6%) in the labor force (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

The factor of economic class comes into play with journalists leaving out the poor and the disconnect between newsrooms and the working class (Cline, 2011; Ordway 2018) or lack of portrayal of patterns and questioning policy in poverty coverage (Edelman, 2001). A Nieman Lab report says reporting on poverty is not valued by the news outlet nor the readers despite the value addition (McDonnell, 2001). The portrayals of the poor and their racial characteristics are crucial for public opinion as they can

impact public policy and the ability to address the root causes of poverty (Clawson, 2000; Rose, et al., 2013). The frames of news coverage have changed from portraying the social cost of poverty to the narratives of the poor as “cheaters and chiselers and of welfare programs doing more harm than good” in the 21st century (Rose, et al., 2013).

This indicates a need to study the news coverage on poverty-stricken Native American women, unemployment, and the pay gap that adds to their poverty. Based upon the preceding discussion the following research question is posed:

RQ3. What are dominant news topics related to reporting on the economic status of Native American women in mainstream US media?

Theoretical Framework

Framing

Framing focuses on message construction — “in terms of meaning, internal structure, and physical presentation” and how these affect public perception of the message (Miller, et al., 2004). Frames will help understand the complexities of race, gender, and class (Miller, et al., 2004) and how journalists represent the Native American women in their stories.

In journalism, frames are limited by organizational structure and business considerations (Miller, et al., 2004). This includes publishing deadlines, story format, journalistic routines, and editorial policy. Further journalistic work is limited by sources, interpretation of the information received and their perspective to develop the story. (Miller, et al., 2004) The content frame output though may seem biased but could be an

unintended product of these factors. Some of these frames become routine and hence frequently used or prominently visible, thus leading to stereotypes (Miller, et al., 2004).

In the literature review, such framing and stereotyping can be observed in the sections on safety, economic status, and employment news coverage. This includes cultural typifications that determine the portrayal of homicide victims in the news (Gruenewald, et al., 2013), victim-blaming, and stereotyping of Native Americans with their lifestyle and social structure in tribal lands as the cause of violence against women (Pruitt, 2021), and portrayals of the poor as “cheaters and chiselers and of welfare programs doing more harm than good” in the 21st century (Rose, et al., 2013). Hence the news coverage needs to be studied with the consideration of content frames used in the news, serving as a mechanism of cultural definition and control” (Miller, et al., 2004). For complex health information, thematic frames may be considered with a focus on social responsibility and public policy (Gearhart, et al., 2018). For example, the news coverage of Native American women regarding higher death risk from skin cancer or limited accessibility to reproductive healthcare can be analyzed to investigate how public policy development can be impacted.

However, since the study pertained to a racial minority women group, sufficient news coverage must exist to conduct the framing analysis. Gearhart et al. (2018) note that there is an apparent lack of health news on indigenous people that can be used for framing analysis. Based upon the preceding discussion the following research question is posed:

RQ4. How are Native American women portrayed (responsible or victims) in the mainstream American news as observed in RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

Symbolic Annihilation of Women in News

Women, in general, have been lagging in the news coverage (Ferris, 2005). This is leading to a symbolic annihilation based on the front-page references to women (Hernandez, 1995). As the absence of women in the media output is identified as a striking feature, symbolic annihilation is further induced through gender neutrality in stories that have women as sources (Hernandez, 1995). For example in the case of globalization news, “it says something about gender, but it does not say enough about women” (Harp, et al., 2013). Even in the age of digital media, which resolves the space issue of traditional media, online websites of the highest circulated news magazines in the USA allocated only 3-5% of their articles to female news subjects (Jung Yun, 2007). Women hold only a third of the share of voice in the US media (Macharia 2020; Women’s Media Center 2020). But due to a lack of research on women and media and appropriate understanding and framing of questions, issues of women and journalism remain unfronted (Colbert, 2003).

Another aspect of symbolic annihilation is robbing women of their empowered roles. On the one hand, women’s empowerment is limited to their role as wives and mothers (Harp, et al., 2013); on the other, the growing trend of featuring women in media was due to an increased focus on entertainment, fashion, and lifestyle coverage instead of politics and business (Stanley, 2012). Furthermore, research shows public perceptions

based on news coverage are not focused on gender stereotypes and discrimination in news (Lobo, et al. 2010). This conditions people to ignore the existing gender asymmetry and relegate it as an issue in the past or occasional occurrences.

Few studies in the past have investigated the issue of symbolic annihilation of Native Americans in mass media. The identities of Native Americans underwent symbolic annihilation as they were portrayed as a homogeneous group in entertainment media, thus eliminating their cultural identities (Merskin, 1998). Further the under-representation of Native Americans (Josey, 2015) and their silencing in news media (Killion, 2004) “suggests that to attract audiences, the media reflect social values that have a common denominator” (Merskin, 1998). The combination of the limited academic literature available on the symbolic annihilation of Native Americans along with those on the symbolic annihilation of women, as originally used by Tuchman et al. (1978), is an indicator of the symbolic annihilation of Native American women.

In journalism, representation and stereotypes can be explored given the time constraints that add to the limitation of journalists to report the depth and complexities of “social conditions, identities, issues, and language that appear in the news” (Gutsche, 2022). Yet Gutsche (2017) states that reporters don't just cover news, but they make news while the cultural institution of news represents particular and dominant cultural positions. Any misrepresentation or stereotyping arising out of such practice constitutes symbolic annihilation as it ignores, excludes, marginalizes, and trivializes that group (Merskin, 1998).

In the case of Native American women, the impact of stereotypical representation “on the social, legal, cultural, and economic aspects of public policy has received negligible attention from researchers, scholars, and policymakers” (Merskin, 2010). However, it affects the accessibility and quality of health care, political access, legal equity, and power available to Native Americans and other minority women in comparison to dominant groups (Merskin, 2010). Based upon the preceding discussion the following research question is posed:

RQ5. How are Native American women portrayed (sources, subjects, silent) in the mainstream American news as observed in RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

Research Questions

Previous research sets the foundation for the research questions about topics that are covered in news, and how they are covered in a representative sample of mainstream US media. Since little prior research exists in examining the framing and sourcing of news for the Health, Safety, and Economic Status of Native American women, topics are designed as research questions.

The first three research questions examine what are the dominant news topics related to the Health, Safety, and Economic Status of Native American women.

RQ1: What are dominant health news topics reported on Native American women in mainstream US media?

RQ2: What are dominant safety-related news topics reported on Native American women in mainstream US media?

RQ3: What are dominant news topics related to reporting on the economic status of Native American women in mainstream US media?

The fourth research question examines how the news outlets frame the issues of Health, Safety, and Economic Status of Native American women and who is attributed with the responsibility for the challenges. We explore whether the responsibility of the issues is attributed to the women or their community or existing policy or the news is reported without attributing any responsibility or the focus is on corrective actions.

RQ4: How are news stories on Native American women framed (responsible or victims) in the mainstream American news as observed in RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

The fifth research question examines how Native American women are mentioned in the news, whether they are the primary subjects in the stories or directly quoted, or whether they are mentioned along with other groups in stories pertaining to common issues.

RQ5: How are the Native American women mentioned (sources, subjects, silent) in the mainstream American news as observed in RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3?

Methods

Sample

To draw articles from news outlets with a national reach an initial search was conducted on Nexis Uni and Newspapers.com databases to check availability. The news outlets were selected based on the coverage area, circulation/reach, preferred medium of

communication, and political orientation of the target audience of the news outlets to create a stratified sample.

The geography of the news outlets was limited to the United States of America. The selected news outlets included The New York Times (NYT), Los Angeles Times (LAT), CNN, The Associated Press (AP), and Fox News Network (Fox). Articles were retrieved using a keyword search including “Native American women”, "American Indian and Native Alaskan women", and "indigenous women of America" published between January 1, 2017 – December 31, 2021.

The 5-year timeframe was selected based on increased attention to Native Americans in the news media since 2018 (Jensen & Rocheleau, 2020) including a significant increase in news consumption by the Native American audience (Nielsen, 2020) and an increase in indigenous affairs beat by 2020 (Truong, 2020). The decision is further corroborated by the output data that shows a sudden increase in 2018-2019 and a steady trend thereafter for keyword search results as well as relevant topics in the selected news outlets (Figure 1). The timeframe was extended at both ends, 2018 and 2020 by one year, hence the timeframe of 2017-2021.

The keyword search produced a total of 543 articles and 119 (21.9%) were deemed relevant. The share of relevant articles for NYT is 13.11%, for CNN –10.87%, AP – 46.31%, LAT –29.41%, and for Fox it is 0% articles. Of the 119 total relevant articles coded for the study, 29.41% were from NYT (n = 35), 8.4% from CNN (n = 10), 57.98% from AP (n = 69), 4.2% from LAT (n = 5), and 0% from Fox (n = 0).

Coding

Potential coding variables were arrived at by referring to the literature review for this study for health, safety, and economic status. A few reference articles and training sessions led to the identification of multiple variables for framing and symbolic annihilation. The coding sheet was further revised while conducting intercoder reliability.

Appendix A refers to the final coding instrument used in this study and definitions and examples for the variables. Health topic has 15 categories: Diabetes, Cancer, Cardiac and related Diseases, Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility, Pregnancy, Mental Health, Substance Use, Obesity, Life Expectancy, Health Insurance Coverage, Death, General Health, and Pandemic. Safety topic has 6 categories: Missing, Murdered, Sexual Assault, Other Assault, Mention of Reservation/Tribal Land, and Mention of Urban Area. The topic of Economic Status is determined by 5 categories: Pay Gap, Unemployment, Poverty, Poverty Policy, and Earning and Entrepreneurship.

The framing of a story was determined by assessing the story in its entirety and selecting the frame that best represents the theme of the story. Frames were coded into the attribution of responsibility on the victim that was based on the emphasis on Victim Characteristics, attribution of responsibility on the community based on the emphasis on Community Characteristics, and emphasis on Community & Social Justice Issue that involved the need for policy framework, Positive Reporting about government/community affirmative action, and Objective Reporting primarily mentioning/referencing statistics or reporting an event.

The issue of Symbolic Annihilation was added as a code to note whether the subject i.e. Native American women are cited in the story. This was categorized into Native American women quoted as the primary Source and Subject, Native American women as the Subject, or if the issue was discussed from the racial perspective or a gender perspective and refers to Native American women but not focused on them which was denoted as Silent.

Refer to Appendix A and Table 1 for definitions and examples. The entire text of each story was examined for identifying the topics based on mentions of the keywords, and frames based on the attribution of responsibility or focus of the story. Multiple topics were coded per story if present. The categories within each frame were coded as mutually exclusive. Along with the primary coder, a secondary coder was involved to conduct an intercoder reliability test. Both received training.

Intercoder reliability was calculated by double-coding a random subsample ($n = 61$ or 50%) of the data. Three rounds of testing were conducted with the first test results ranging from 0.33 to 1.00 followed by discussions to revision and conducting of two more rounds with the final intercoder reliability score of 1.00 at the end of the third round. No variables were removed as each one of them highlighted the critical issues related to the Native American women, and this study was exploratory with no similar study conducted in the past examining the news coverage on all of these issues along with their framing and focus on mainstream media.

After intercoder reliability testing, the primary coder examined each story for the listed topics, mentions of keywords, and frames. The coding was done as “0” for “not

present” and “1” for “present”. Multiple topics and a single frame along with symbolic annihilation were identified for each story. Most articles contained multiple topics and each topic within a story was considered as a single mention despite the same being referred to more than once in the article. This was done to prevent the inflation of the number of mentions of each topic.

Results

In the process of data collection, we validated the increase in news coverage on Native Americans from 2017-2021 with a steep spike from 2018-19. This is true for both overall coverage of Native Americans and topics relevant to this study (Figure 1). The change is statistically significant for relevant news coverage ($t(4) = 72.2, p < 0.001$), and for overall news coverage ($t(4) = 269.9, p < 0.001$).

The dominant category of news within the scope of the study is Safety ($n = 259$) followed by Health ($n = 52$) and Economic Status ($n = 19$). A paired t-test showed the topic of Safety-related news was more often mentioned and statistically significant than the topics of Health ($t(4) = 9.394, p < 0.001$), and Economic Status ($t(4) = 9.829, p < 0.001$). Though Health had higher coverage than Economic Status the difference was not statistically significant. Also Health was negatively correlated with Safety ($r = -0.486, p < 0.001$) and Safety was negatively correlated with Economic Status ($r = -0.639, p < 0.001$) indicating low interrelation in the news coverage on each of the topics. No correlation was observed between Health and Economic Status.

Dominant Health Topic

RQ1 examines the dominant health news topics reported on Native American women in mainstream US media represented by the five selected news outlets. Death (H13) including Maternal Mortality, and Suicide (n =12) constituted 23.08% of the health news coverage. Pregnancy (H05) that included Unplanned, Forced, Complications (n = 11) constituted 21.15% of the health news coverage. Together Death and Pregnancy have the highest frequency of occurrence in the overall Health news reporting (n = 52) constituting 44.23% of the Health news reporting. The other topics with at least a 5% share of the health news coverage are H04 – Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility (n = 6) with 11.54% share, H09 – Substance Use (n = 5), and H15 — Pandemic (n = 5) both with 9.62% share, and H12 – Health Insurance (n =3) with 5.77% share. Together these six topics constitute over 80% share of the Health news reporting.

A series of paired t-tests indicated Death and Pregnancy are the most salient topics. While Death was mentioned significantly more often than Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility ($t(118) = 2.153, p = 0.033$), it is not mentioned more significantly than Pregnancy ($t(118) = 0.576, p = 0.566$). There is no clarity on the second most salient topic. Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility is mentioned more often than Substance Use ($t(118) = 0.3, p = 0.764$), Pandemic ($t(118) = 0.3, p = 0.764$) and Health Insurance Coverage ($t(118) = 1.346, p = 0.181$) but the difference is not statistically significant.

While Death is one of the most salient topics in the Health news coverage (n = 12), the coverage was primarily focused on Maternal Mortality (n = 10) with an 83.33%

share in the Death-related news coverage. The associated topics were Pregnancy (n = 10), Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility (n = 5), Substance Use (n = 2), Health Insurance (n = 2), Abortion and Life Threat (n = 1), Diabetes (n = 1) and Cardiac-Metabolic Diseases (n = 1). Pregnancy showed a significant positive correlation with Death ($r = 0.867, p < 0.001$) and all associated causes of Death and Health topics such as Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility ($r = 0.722, p < 0.001$), Health Insurance ($r = 0.319, p < 0.001$), Abortion and Life Threat ($r = 0.722, p < 0.001$), Diabetes ($r = 0.184, p < 0.045$), Cardiac-Metabolic Diseases ($r = 0.288, p = 0.001$); however no significant correlation was found between Pregnancy and Substance Use.

Dominant News Outlet(s) for Health News

When examined for significance each news outlet Health emerged as a significant news topic, positively correlated with NYT ($r = 0.282, p = 0.002$) and negatively correlated with AP ($r = -0.187, p = 0.042$). CNN and LAT showed no significant correlation and no correlation could be determined for Fox due to the lack of data. The Health topics significant for NYT are H13 – Death ($r = 0.274, p = 0.003$) and H05 – Pregnancy ($r = 0.240, p = 0.009$).

Dominant Safety Topic

RQ2 examines the dominant Safety news topics. S01 — Missing cases (n = 64) constituting 24.71% share and S02 — Murder (n = 66) constituting 24.48% share have the highest frequency of occurrence in the overall safety news reporting (n = 259). Together they constitute 50.19% of overall Safety news reporting. S03 – Sexual Assault (n = 36) constituted 13.9% news share, S04 – Other Assault (n = 42) constitutes 16.22%

news share, and S05 – Mention of Reservation (n = 46) constituted 17.76% news share. S06 – Mention of Urban Area (n = 5) had the least mention (1.93%).

A series of paired t-tests indicated Missing and Murder cases are the most salient topics. Missing topics were mentioned significantly more often than Sexual Assault (t (118) = 3.558, $p < 0.001$), Other Assault (t (118) = 2.929, $p = 0.004$), Mention of Reservation (t (118) = 2.725, $p = 0.007$) and Mention of Urban Area (t (118) = 10.113, $p < 0.001$). Murder topics were mentioned significantly more often than Sexual Assault (t (118) = 3.843, $p < 0.001$), Other Assault (t (118) = 3.278, $p = 0.001$), Mention of Reservation (t (118) = 2.916, $p = 0.004$) and Mention of Urban Area (t (118) = 11.14, $p < 0.001$). The Murder topic was mentioned marginally more than the Missing topic but the difference is not statistically significant. Further, topics were mentioned significantly more in the context of Reservation than Urban areas (t (118) = 7.12, $p < 0.001$).

Dominant News Outlet(s) for Safety-related News

Safety is a significant news topic, negatively correlated with NYT ($r = -0.443$, $p < 0.001$) and positively correlated with AP ($r = 0.392$, $p < 0.001$). The Safety topics positively correlated to AP are S01 – Missing ($r = 0.372$, $p < 0.001$) and S02 – Murdered ($r = 0.368$, $p < 0.001$) and to CNN is S05 – Mention of Reservation ($r = 0.195$, $p = 0.034$). The Safety topics negatively correlated to NYT are Missing ($r = -0.474$, $p < 0.001$), Murdered ($r = -0.498$, $p < 0.001$) and Mention of Reservation ($r = -0.209$, $p = 0.022$). LAT showed no significant correlation and no correlation could be determined for Fox due to lack of data.

Dominant Topic on Economic Status

RQ3 examines the dominant Economic Status news topics. ES01 — Pay Gap (n = 10) has the highest frequency of occurrence in the category of Economic Status (n = 19). It constitutes 52.63% of overall Economic Status news reporting. The second frequently occurring topic is ES02 – Unemployment (n = 4) with a share of 21.05%, followed by ES03 – Poverty (n = 2) with 10.53% share, ES04 – Poverty Policy (n = 1) with 5.26% share and ES05 – Earning and Entrepreneurship (n = 3) with 15.79% share of the category.

A series of paired t-tests indicated Pay Gap being mentioned significantly more often than Poverty ($t(118) = 2.353, p = 0.02$), Poverty Policy ($t(118) = 2.79, p = 0.006$) and Earning and Entrepreneurship ($t(118) = 2.142, p = 0.034$). However, the difference between Pay Gap and Unemployment is not statistically significant. Additionally Unemployment though mentioned more often than Poverty, Poverty Policy, and Earning and Entrepreneurship, the difference is not statistically significant. Hence there is no clarity on the most salient topic in the category of Economic Status.

Dominant News Outlet(s) for Economic Status related News

The topic of Economic Status is correlated with NYT ($r = 0.369, p < 0.001$) and AP ($r = -0.334, p < 0.001$). While NYT showed a positive correlation with the topics of ES01 – Pay Gap ($r = 0.270, p = 0.003$) and ES02 – Unemployment ($r = 0.187, p = 0.042$), AP showed a negative correlation with Pay Gap ($r = -0.294, p < 0.001$) and Unemployment ($r = -0.219, p = 0.017$). LAT showed a positive correlation with

Unemployment ($r = 0.193$, $p = 0.035$). CNN showed no correlation and Fox had no data available.

Dominant Frames

RQ4 examines the media frame through the portrayal of Native American women in news coverage by the selected news outlets, including Victim Characteristics (FRM01), Community Characteristics (FRM02), Community and Social Justice Issues (FRM03), Positive Reporting /Affirmative Action (FRM04), Objective Reporting (FRM05). The Community and Social Justice Issues frame ($n = 75$) were used in 63% of the articles. The Positive Reporting /Affirmative Action frame ($n = 24$) was used in 20.2% of the articles. The Objective Reporting frame ($n = 17$) was used in 14.3% of the articles. The frames Victim Characteristics ($n = 2$) with 1.7% share and Community Characteristics ($n = 1$) with 0.8% share were the least used frames. A series of chi-square tests indicated the Community and Social Justice Issues frame appeared more often than the other frames of Affirmative Action ($X^2 = 51.2$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$), and Objective Reporting ($X^2 = 33.8$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). The Affirmative Action frame appeared more often than the frame of Objective Reporting ($X^2 = 5.01$, $df = 1$, $p = .025$). The other frames did not indicate any statistically significant chi-square values.

The Community and Social Justice Issues frame was also more often mentioned for the topics of Health (57.1%), Safety (60.9%), and Economic Status (70.6%). The topic of Death shows significant negative correlation with Community & Social Justice frame ($r = -0.186$, $p = 0.043$) and a significant positive correlation with the Affirmative Action frame ($r = 0.209$, $p = 0.023$) and Victim Characteristics ($r = 0.275$, $p = 0.002$).

This indicates stories including the health-related death angles are addressing affirmative actions taken. Victim Characteristics though indicated as a significant frame for the topics of Health ($r = 0.282$, $p = 0.02$) and Economic Status ($r = 0.320$, $p < 0.001$) is not conclusive as the count of articles for the frame is 2. The Murder topic has a significant positive correlation with the Objective Reporting frame ($r = 0.221$, $p = 0.016$) and a negative correlation with the Community & Social Justice Issue frame ($r = -0.196$, $p = 0.033$).

Dominant Frames in Each News Outlet

Community & Social Justice Issue frame was significantly used by NYT ($n = 29$). The frame was used in 82.86% of the article in the NYT and has a positive correlation ($r = 0.203$, $p = 0.027$). This frame was also most used by AP ($n = 34$) with a 49.28% share of its articles, and CNN ($n = 7$) with an 80% share of its articles. However, a negative correlation between AP and the Community & Social Justice Issue frame can be observed ($r = -0.335$, $p < 0.001$) and no correlation with CNN. For AP the frame of Affirmative Action/Positive Reporting showed a 29.99% share with a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.258$, $p = 0.005$) and the frame of Objective Reporting showed a 21.74% share with a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.250$, $p = 0.006$). NYT did not use this frame and showed a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.264$, $p = 0.004$). LAT did not indicate any correlation with any of the frames. No data was available for Fox. The frames of Victim Characteristics and Community Characteristics were not significantly correlated to any of the news outlets. Framing of stories was also observed in terms of correlation

between Health and Safety topics such as Pregnancy and Sexual Assault; however, no significant correlation was found.

Status of Symbolic Annihilation

RQ5 examines the issue of Symbolic Annihilation of Native American women in news coverage. The articles were examined for the share of voice of Native American women as Sources (SA01) quoted in the articles, focus on their issues as primary Subject (SA02) in the articles, or Silent (SA03) when they were mentioned as part of racial or gender groups in the articles without any specific focus on their issues or inclusion as sources. The Silent category, where Native American women neither quoted as Source nor focused as primary Subject, was considered to be Symbolic Annihilation. While in 37.8% of the articles Native American women were the primary Subject ($n = 45$), 36.1% of the articles were Silent on the Sources or Subjects being Native American women and were referred to along with other racial or gender groups ($n = 43$). Native American women were quoted as Sources only in 26.1% of the articles ($n = 31$).

The Silent Symbolic Annihilation was observed for the topics of Health (81%), and Economic Status (88.2%). Health news had only 14.3% articles with Native American women as Sources and 4.8% as Subjects. Economic Status related news had only 11.38% articles with Native American women as Sources and no other articles as Subjects. For the Safety topic, 48.9% of the articles had Native American women as primary Subjects, 31.5% as Sources and 19.6% were Silent. The differences were found significant with Health news having a significant positive correlation with Silent Symbolic Annihilation ($r = 0.432$, $p < 0.001$) and negative correlation with Subjects ($r =$

–0.316, $p < 0.001$). Within Health two of the salient topics indicate Symbolic Annihilation. Death has a positive correlation with Silent Symbolic Annihilation ($r = 0.445$, $p < 0.001$) and negative correlation with Sources ($r = -0.199$, $p = 0.030$) and Subjects ($r = -0.261$, $p = 0.004$), Pregnancy has a positive correlation with Silent Symbolic Annihilation ($r = 0.424$, $p < 0.001$) and negative correlation with Sources ($r = -0.189$, $p = 0.039$) and Subjects ($r = -0.249$, $p = 0.006$). A positive correlation also exists between Silent Symbolic Annihilation and Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility ($r = 0.306$, $p < 0.001$), and Pandemic ($r = 0.191$, $p = 0.037$).

The Safety topic had a significant positive correlation with Sources ($r = 0.230$, $p = 0.012$), Subjects ($r = 0.422$, $p < 0.001$) and negative correlation with the Silent Symbolic Annihilation ($r = -0.637$, $p < 0.001$). The topic of Economic Status had a significant negative correlation with Subjects ($r = -0.318$, $p < 0.001$) and a positive correlation with the Silent Symbolic Annihilation ($r = 0.443$, $p < 0.001$). This can be further corroborated by comparing symbolic annihilation against individual topics with the highest reporting frequencies. Missing news is positive correlated to Sources ($r = 0.358$, $p < 0.001$) and Subjects ($r = 0.306$, $p < 0.001$), Murdered news is positive correlated to Sources ($r = 0.302$, $p < 0.001$) and Subjects ($r = 0.420$, $p < 0.001$), and a negative correlation with Silent Symbolic Annihilation: Missing ($r = -0.636$, $p < 0.001$) and Murdered ($r = -0.699$, $p < 0.001$). In case of Pay Gap there is a positive correlation with Silent Symbolic Annihilation ($r = 0.340$, $p < 0.001$), but negative correlation with Subjects ($r = -0.236$, $p = 0.010$).

Thus it can be concluded in articles related to the categories of Health including Death, Pregnancy Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility and Pandemic, and Economic Status including Pay Gap, there is a high rate of symbolic annihilation of Native American women where their issues are reported typically as part of larger other racial and gender issues. In the case of Safety articles, the focus on Native American women is higher hence symbolic annihilation is low.

Symbolic Annihilation in Specific News Outlets

NYT was found to have a significant negative correlation with primary Subjects ($r = -0.323, p < 0.001$) and a positive correlation with Silent Symbolic Annihilation ($r = 0.436, p < 0.001$). AP indicated a significant positive correlation with the primary Subjects ($r = 0.396, p < 0.001$) and significant negative Silent Symbolic Annihilation ($r = -0.387, p < 0.001$). CNN indicated significant positive correlation with the Sources ($r = 0.312, p < 0.001$) and negative primary Subjects ($r = -0.240, p = 0.008$). LAT does not indicate any significant correlation with any of the symbolic annihilation frames. The non-availability of data for Fox indicated lack of reporting on the health, safety and economic issues of Native American women thus leading to their Symbolic Annihilation in news. Further, NYT is referring to Native American women only as part of racial/gender articles thus symbolically annihilating them as Sources and Primary Subjects. AP focuses more on Native American women as primary Subjects while CNN refers to more interviews of Native American women as Sources.

Symbolic Annihilation of the three issues was also evident with a 22.2% share in the overall pool of stories on Native American women done by the five news outlets

during the study period of 2017-2021 ($n = 536$). Fox had a 2.05% share of all stories done on Native American women during the period ($n = 11$) and there was no story relevant to the topics. LAT had 3.17% share of the stories on Native American women ($n = 17$) but only 0.93% of the stories in the pool were relevant ($n = 5$). CNN had 17.16% share of the overall stories ($n = 92$) but only 1.87% stories were relevant ($n = 10$). Furthermore, out of the 10 stories by CNN, two videos featuring Native American women as Sources were included in three different news telecasts. Thus though all 10 stories had Native American women as Sources, only six were unique. NYT had a 49.81% share in the total number of stories ($n = 267$) which is the highest among all the news outlets. But the share of relevant stories in the total pool is only 6.53% ($n = 35$). Out of 6.53% share as observed earlier, there is a negative correlation between Native American women as Subjects and a significant positive correlation with the silence of the women as part of other larger sample groups. AP had the second largest share ($n = 149$) in the total number of articles 27.8% while the share in the total pool for relevant stories was 12.87%. Thus AP contributed more than half of the relevant stories. A series of paired t-tests were conducted and the results indicated AP reporting most on the issues relevant to this study – Health, Safety and Economic Status in comparison to NYT ($t(118) = 3.49, p < 0.001$), CNN ($t(118) = 8.33, p < 0.001$), LAT ($t(118) = 10.13, p < 0.001$) and Fox ($t(118) = 12.76, p < 0.001$). Hence AP can be said to have the highest relevant coverage. This is followed by NYT which is reporting significantly more often than CNN ($t(118) = 3.95, p < 0.001$), LAT ($t(118) = 5.25, p < 0.001$) and Fox ($t(118) = 7.01, p < 0.001$). Fox is in

the last position with CNN ($t(118) = 3.29, p < 0.001$) and LAT ($t(118) = 2.27, p < 0.001$) sharing the third position with significantly more reporting.

Discussion

The results indicate the news coverage of Native American women increased significantly in 2018-19 and stabilized in 2020-21. This appears to correlate with a significant increase in attention to Native Americans in the news media since 2018 (Jensen & Rocheleau, 2020), increased news consumption by the Native American audience (Nielsen, 2020), and an increase in indigenous affairs beats (Truong, 2020). Indigenous and non-profit news outlets are also driving news coverage (Oyan, 2022) which might be increasing the news coverage in mainstream media. The surge in social media could be another reason such as TikTok that made indigenous storytelling stronger (Perez, 2021). The spike could also be for Native American women coming to the forefront of American politics (Warren, 2018; Watkins, 2018). The 2020 election could have been another reason for the spike as the news media viewed Native American voters to be causing a swing in elections (Myong, 2019). This study was designed to explore the relevance of the news coverage pertaining to Health, Safety, and Economic Status of the Native American women, that have been identified as crucial challenges. The study indicated a limited news coverage on the Health, Safety, and Economic Status related issues of Native American women during the period being studied with less than a quarter of the news coverage on Native American focused on the three issues. The coverage of the three topics was dominated by AP followed by NYT.

Key Findings

Safety among the three has emerged as the dominant topic. However, this dominance of Safety is only correlational to the other two topics of research and does not establish any substantial increase in the coverage during the period of study addressing the invisibility issue. The topics of Missing and Murdered have been significantly reported by AP and CNN since 2018.

Findings also indicated the stories were more focused on safety-related issues in the reservations. This corroborated with the finding from an earlier study that observed that existing news coverage of violence against women is often limited to reservation-based violence even though more than 70% of the Native Americans reside in urban areas (Pruitt, 2021). This was typically significant for the coverage by CNN that included videos from the reservations. However, two of the videos were repeated for six news stories. For example, a video story on two dozen missing Native American women and girls was aired three times during February 2020 in different news stories.

The findings also showed the topics of Missing and Murder were highlighted in the inclusion of more direct statements from the families of the victims, community leaders, and national leaders. The Safety category had the lowest Symbolic Annihilation with a higher frequency of Native American women Sources and Subjects. In several cases, the articles referred to individual missing or murder stories and connected with the families of the victims or the local community leaders, and even Native American national leaders. Both AP and CNN used first-person accounts as Sources or maintained the focus of their coverage on the Native American women making them the primary

Subjects. Also several stories focused on eminent Native American women addressing the issues of missing and murdered indigenous women and judicial issues to address violence against women in the tribal lands.

However in some articles that mentioned Sexual Assault the term women was not mentioned in the top paragraphs. For example, an article was published by AP in 2019, on a visit by the former U.S. Attorney General William Barr to Alaska as a result of renewed focus on violence against Native American and Alaska Native women by the US Congress and advocates. The author focused on sexual assault in the first paragraph but references of Native American women were made only in the 9th and 14th paragraphs almost eliminating the women as the primary subject. The story did not have any quotes from the women. In other cases, the safety-related news coverage pertained to overall safety or violence against women or was mentioned as part of other stories on the Native American race. Due to such issues, in about 20% of the news coverage Symbolic Annihilation persists.

However, some stories that have a diverse focus reduced the Symbolic Annihilation by citing issues affecting Native American women and quoting them as Sources. For example in a story published in 2019 by NYT on the expansion of gun control policy to domestic violence, a Native American leader was quoted stating how the provisions in the policy will help prosecute non-Native criminals for committing domestic crimes and dating violence in the tribal lands. Despite the limited scope, the article communicates the issue of violence against Native American women in their

voices. Probably due to inclusion of Sources and focus on Subjects in reporting of Safety-related news, the Symbolic Annihilation was observed to be the lowest.

Another finding was the inclusion of Health topics in some of the safety-related stories such as those on Missing and Sexual Assault. Few stories diversified with the inclusion of Medicaid thus bringing in the challenges of Health Insurance, Mental Health, and accessibility to facilities.

The most salient health news coverages were Death and Pregnancy. Further, five out of six cases of Death-related news were in the context of Maternal Mortality. The topic of Death and its associated causes such as Cardio-Metabolic diseases, Abortion and Life Threat, and Health Insurance (except Substance Use) have a significant positive correlation with Pregnancy and Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility. Individually Pregnancy and Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility were among the top three frequently occurring Health news topics. This indicates reporting of Death-related news is focused on Pregnancy-related Deaths. In the literature review, Pregnancy-related Health challenges among Native American women were attributed to sexual assaults, unplanned pregnancies, accessibility to pharmacies, birth control, abortion facilities, and teenage childbirth (NCRC, 2019; NIDA, 2014; Arnold, 2014).

The news coverage on Pregnancy included information such as racial disparities in Pregnancy-related Deaths, a bill to address racial bias in maternal care, prenatal initiatives, investments in maternal health, and even the issue of banning abortion in GOP-led states. These could be instrumental for public awareness and policy debates. Though not significantly related to the topic of Pregnancy, an article mentioned Trauma

as a challenge for Pregnancy. This was crucial as Native American women suffer from historical trauma.

While the Death news coverage was significantly related to Pregnancy including Unplanned, Forced, Complications (Table 2), Cardio-Metabolic Diseases, Mental Health, Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility, and Health Insurance, the coverage does not include other attributes such as Sexual Assault and Teenage Childbirth. Teenage Childbirth continues to be a Health challenge for over 40% of Native American women but no news coverage was available. Pregnancy or Pregnancy-related Death or overall Death topic did not show any correlation with Sexual Assault. This indicates the topic of Sexual Assault was reported from the perspective of Safety but the issue or its impact was not reported from the perspective of Health such as Unplanned Pregnancy, Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility, or Mental Health.

Cardio-Metabolic diseases which have high mortality among Native American women were primarily mentioned in the context of Pregnancy-related Death. Diabetes and Cancer including Breast Cancer and Melanoma that disproportionately affect Native American women had low frequency in news coverage. Other Health issues such as Mental Health and Obesity also had low frequencies.

The findings also to be reported that the Health stories were merely referring to Native American women as over 80% of the stories are not focused on them. NYT, the only news outlet with a significant positive correlation with Health also has a significant positive correlation with Symbolic Annihilation of Native American women in their coverage. The articles that mentioned them as Sources or primary Subjects were focused

on Safety or other issues related to the Native Americans and mentioned one of the Health topics. For example, the article “My Culture Is Not Super Bowl Entertainment” published in 2020 by NYT quoted Native American women as Sources who mentioned Life Expectancy. But the story was focused on stereotyping Native Americans, and their view on the misuse of their culture. In another example the article “In Indian Country, a Crisis of Missing Women. And a New One When They’re Found” published in 2019 by NYT quoted Native American women as Sources who mentioned Mental Health in the context of women returning after being Missing.

Pregnancy and Pregnancy-related Death news coverage had similar symbolic annihilation with Native American women not being mentioned in any of the articles as Subjects or Sources. Because of the symbolic annihilation, other Health issues that are specific to the Native American women may be lacking coverage as the Pregnancy and Pregnancy-related Death news coverage is not about the Native American women but women in general. While the US government has mandatorily included news media in all health communication (Gearhart, et al., 2018), the reporting policy on Native American women may not be a priority or non-aligned with Health policies (Gearhart, et al., 2017). This issue can be observed in an article published by AP in 2021 that focuses on pregnancy difficulties faced by Black women following a statement by the US Vice President. The article refers once to the similarly high rate of pregnancy-related death of Native American women. No similar article prioritized the Pregnancy issues where the Native American women were Sources and Subjects. It may be considered a symbolic

annihilation of the Native American women in the context of barriers to Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility and Unplanned Pregnancies.

News outlets may be covering only the issues that are aligned with other racial groups or government policies such as Pregnancy and Pregnancy-related Death, Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility, Pandemic and Vaccination, Substance Use, Health Insurance, etc. For example, stories related to Pregnancy and Mental Health referred to Medicaid insurance.

The topic of Economic Status did not show any dominant news topic though Pay Gap had more news coverage. This area received the lowest news coverage though Pay Gap and Unemployment is a significant area for NYT and Unemployment for LAT. The Pay Gap news was driven by two Senators focusing on gender disparities in pay in 2019 and a research study on racial and gender disparities in pay. Apart from Pay Gap, the other prominent topics are Unemployment, Entrepreneurship, and Poverty. The findings show the Symbolic Annihilation being significant in stories related to Economic Status with only 15 out of 17 stories excluding Native American women as Sources or primary Subjects and merely referring to them in the stories.

In 2021 NYT did a story on shrinking of Pay Gap in 25 years by 8 cents. In the story, Black was mentioned four times, Hispanic three times. Native was mentioned once. Black and Hispanic women were mentioned in the contexts of racial discrimination and gender discrimination separately, loss of income, and personal context. Native American women were referred once along with other racial and gender groups while mentioning the loss of income in a lifetime. The article ignored poverty and pay gap issues of Native

American women despite them being among the poorest racial/ethnic group in the USA (Barkdull, C., 2009; DeNavas-Walt, C., 2015). This indicates the Symbolic Annihilation of the Pay Gap and Poverty issues of Native American women. Further, it might indicate a disconnect between the newsroom and the Native American women as observed in the Literature Review with journalists leaving out the poor and the disconnect between newsrooms and the working class (Cline, 2011; Ordway 2018).

However, two out of 17 stories mentioned Native American women as Sources and both were on the topic of Entrepreneurship. For example, in an article published in 2021 by NYT on a philanthropic award to help advance gender equity, Native American women business leaders are quoted mentioning how such funding would ease entrepreneurship and impact the lives of Native American women and the tribal communities. It could be possible that more focus on Native American women business owners and business leaders will be able to curb the issue of Symbolic Annihilation of the Economic Status and even shed more light on other economic issues such as Poverty and the Pay Gap.

It is to be noted here that Symbolic Annihilation was probably the highest for Fox which did not have any search results for the topics and the period they were being studied. However, due to the availability of no data, the correlation could not be calculated statistically. But the non-availability of data not only shows Symbolic Annihilation by Fox but also a lack of focus towards the issues of Health, Safety, and Economic Status of Native American women.

The study indicated that the Community and Social Justice Issue is the most significant frame. Most of the articles regardless of the topic used this frame to evoke the necessity for further action. This finding addresses the issue of Stereotyping that arises in case of frames such as Victim Characteristics or Community Characteristics would have been dominant (Appendix A). The Victim Characteristics though though indicated as a significant frame for the topics of Health and Economic Status, the number of articles using the frame was extremely low. Hence the result for the frame was not conclusive. A few stories that used the frame connected health-related deaths with substance use, family history, and safety-related issues with barriers caused by the tribal laws.

The Community and Social Justice Issue frame was predominantly used by all news outlets but NYT used the frame significantly. This indicates the focus of articles in NYT had been accessibility issues, critical analysis of the existing policy framework, and a call for social change and policy reform. For example, in 2020, NYT published an article on how to think about pregnancy risks. The article primarily mentioned health insurance, accessibility to healthcare, substance use, complications in pregnancy, and a higher death ratio that could affect pregnancy which could have been the Objective Reporting frame. But it also evoked mental health issues arising from racism and socio-economic inequalities that could impact prenatal health, the significance of public policy to reduce or eliminate the situations, and the lack of data on diseases that impact maternal and prenatal health indicating the need for more focus in this area. The article was thus coded under the frame Community & Social Justice frame.

The low number of stories on CNN and LAT could be the reason why the frame did not indicate any significant correlation to these news outlets. The Community and Social Justice Issue frame by AP however was comparatively lower. It could be because of the nature of the news outlet as a newswire or because other outlets rarely used the Objective Reporting and Affirmative Action/Positive Reporting frames used by AP. Almost half of the articles on AP were focused on reporting an event/incident, and sharing data and had limited call for action or critical analysis. Due to this reporting style of AP, the dominant frame for the Murder topic which was mostly reported by AP turned out to be Objective Reporting.

The Community and Social Justice Issue frame was also used in more than 70% of the articles related to stories on Economic Status, followed by the topics of Safety and Health. Though the data is statistically significant, possibly due to the low number of articles.

The second most prevalent frame was Affirmative Action/Positive Reporting. This frame was used in the study to highlight stories focused on corrective/affirmative actions and how such actions can address Community and Social Justice issues. This frame was mostly used by AP for all topics. While stories in this frame also mentioned a call for action, the focus of the stories was to primarily disseminate information about affirmative action. For example, an article published by AP in 2019 on Oregon taking action to solve crimes committed against Native American women mentioned laxity in police investigations, victims' families seeking justice for a missing /murder case, and even issues with tribal jurisdictions. This story has the frames of Community and Social

Justice Issues as well as Community Character. But its primary focus is on the action taken by the state of Oregon and how it will address the crime issues. Hence it was categorized under the frame of Affirmative Action/Positive Reporting.

On the other hand, a news telecast by CNN aired in 2020 reported missing and murdered cases of Native American women. Though the news reported an affirmative action by the government, the report primarily focused on gaps in search action, disruptions, miscommunication, and mistrust among the community. The interviewees though held positive opinions about affirmative action, also speculated on the extent of affirmative action. The story was coded under the Community & Social Justice frame due to the mixed message of both affirmative actions by the government, lack of an action at the local authorities level, and call for action by the community.

Theoretical Implications

The study indicates that the framing of stories and symbolic annihilation is dependent on the policies of the news outlets, choice of topics as well as the political actors. The framing analysis followed the observations by Miller & Ross (2004) to understand the meaning, structure, and presentation and the impact on public perception. While news outlets such as NYT, CNN, and LAT were consistent with the Community and Social Justice Issue frame, AP used other frames of Objective Reporting and Affirmative Action/Positive Reporting in addition to the Community and Social Justice Issue frame, possibly because of being a newswire. This study also looked into the frames within the three broad categories of Health, Safety and Economic Status, however, due to

low data, the results were not significantly conclusive. This indicates the need for a larger sample size. The issue of Stereotyping was not observed in framing of the articles due to the dominance of the Community and Social Justice Issue frame.

Symbolic Annihilation was however dominant both topic wise and news outlet wise. The Health and Economic Status news coverage confirmed the silencing of Native Americans in news media as observed by Killion (2004) with the stories being primarily on women's issues and not on Native American women. This also indicated a lack of focus on the Native American due to a lack of audience and their inclusion in women's health stories to serve a common denominator (Merskin, 1998) in this case possibly to address the need for racial diversity. As the study was limited to Health, Safety and Economic Status related news stereotyping portrayal could not be determined. This was further limited as due to Symbolic Annihilation the stories lacked enough depth to create portrayals.

Future Research

The limited sample size of this study calls for further research. This exploratory study was conducted to understand how news outlets report the Health, Safety, and Economic Status of Native American women. The attempt to understand the news coverage from the perspective of liberal and conservative media, print news outlets and news wire remains inconclusive due to the low volume of data and non-availability in cases such as Fox. Intercoder reliability was at acceptable levels probably due to the first three research questions being about the identification of the dominant topics and the fifth research question categorizing Symbolic Annihilation based on citing Native American

women as Sources, Subjects or only referring to them in the stories (Silent). The only issue was with the framing.

Five news outlets were selected for this study based on their nature of operations, geographical locations, and focus. Fox was selected to understand the conservative news coverage paradigm while NYT, LAT, and CNN were selected to understand the liberal paradigm. AP was selected to understand the newswire paradigm. However, no news outlet was categorized in those manners during coding. For this study, these news outlets were appropriate however they should not be considered as a representative sample of all news coverage on Native American women. Since no news coverage data was available for Fox and limited data was available for LAT, the results might not be completely reflective of the period for content related to those news outlets in the concerned geography or news coverage policy.

Future studies are needed to look at wider geographic locations, such as states with higher Native American populations, more conservative news outlets as well as digital news outlets to which news readership/viewership is shifting. As an exploratory study, the selected news outlets for which data was available, offer a general direction on the news coverage of the Health, Safety, and Economic Status of Native American women. The period was also restricted to 5 years due to the spike in news coverage in 2018 and to avoid any skew in the output data. Future studies may look into long-term trends and address the spikes in data if any. For the news outlets except for AP, this study included only online content that was also published in print or aired on television. For

AP content indexed on Nexis Uni as news releases were considered. Future studies may extend the scope to news website content without duplications.

There is also a need to conduct interracial studies in each of these areas to study the extent of Symbolic Annihilation for each race on these topics and how the reportage could be made more effective.

Conclusion

The study shows Native American women are yet to become visible in society. There is limited coverage on Safety-related issues but in most cases, especially in Health and Economic Status related news coverage, Native American women are mentioned as racial placeholders to add diversity to the stories. At the same time news outlets are also calling for social justice on their issues. The study further showed the symbolic annihilation of the critical issues of health, safety, and economic status that constitute less than a quarter of the overall news coverage on Native American women. The study noted the difference in reporting certain topics such as health vs. safety, and pay gap vs. entrepreneurship, the latter in both cases focusing on individuals rather than statistics. The findings and implications of this study offer journalists insights into the sourcing paradigm and subject selection, framing of stories, and the consideration to include more impactful racial equity in future articles as they report on social justice.

Recommendations

The safety topic indicated the lowest symbolic annihilation due to the focus on Native American women as sources and subjects. The framing was further focused on individual stories rather than statistics. In two entrepreneurship-related stories, a similar

focus was observed. The current health news is primarily focused on maternal mortality and pregnancy. This needs to be diversified to other health issues of Native American women. In stories related to women's health issues and not specific to races, Native American women could be quoted as sources to highlight issues specific to them and their community. Alternatively, eminent women leaders and health experts from the Native American communities could be quoted in the health stories as is being done in the safety-related stories. The issues of health, safety, pay gap, and poverty can also be connected in the coverage explaining the correlation between sexual assault, mental health, health insurance, pregnancies, reproductive healthcare accessibility, and the impact of other health conditions on pregnancies, and life expectancy. With news outlets already focusing on the community and social justice frame, there is substantial scope for improved story-telling on all three topics.

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APPENDIX**Appendix A****Native American Women News Coverage Coding Scheme**

NOTE: If an article is unrelated to the topic just throw it out, do not code.

On the coding sheet code “0” for no and “1” for yes for each variable.

(DATE) Date (yyyy-mm-dd): _____

Coder

_____ (CD01)

_____ (CD02) (For Reliability Checking Only)

Source

_____ (SRNYT) The New York Times

_____ (SRLAT) Los Angeles Times

_____ (SRAP) The Associated Press

_____ (SRCNN) CNN

_____ (SRFN) Fox News Network

(TITLE) Title/Headline (full title): _____

Health News Topic Specific issue cited (can select more than one)

- _____ (H01) Diabetes
- _____ (H02) Cancer (Cervical, Breast, Skin, Melanoma, Other)
- _____ (H03) Cardiac and related Diseases
- _____ (H04) Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility
- _____ (H05) Pregnancy (Unplanned, Forced, Complications)
- _____ (H06) Teenage Childbirth
- _____ (H07) Abortion and Life Threat
- _____ (H08) Mental Health
- _____ (H09) Substance Use
- _____ (H10) Obesity
- _____ (H11) Life Expectancy
- _____ (H12) Health Insurance Coverage
- _____ (H13) Death (including Maternal Mortality, Suicide) – use with the cause of death
- _____ (H14) General Health (includes Vaccination other than COVID-19)
- _____ (H15) Pandemic (includes Vaccination for COVID-19)

Safety News Topic Specific issue cited (can select more than one)

- _____ (S01) Missing
- _____ (S02) Murder
- _____ (S03) Sexual Assault
- _____ (S04) Other Assault

_____ (S05) Mention of Reservation

_____ (S06) Mention of Urban Area

Economic Status News Topic Specific issue cited (can select more than one)

_____ (ES01) Pay Gap

_____ (ES02) Unemployment (include promotions or lack of it)

_____ (ES03) Poverty (only reporting poverty status)

_____ (ES04) Poverty Policy (policy discussion or reporting on policy)

_____ (ES05) Earning and Entrepreneurship

Media Frame What is the primary theme of the article? (SELECT ONLY ONE)

_____ (FRM01) Victim Characteristics: relationship status, mental health issues, age, drugs, alcohol, sexual orientation, eating habits, lack of education, migrant, housewife, welfare impact (Blaming Victim)

_____ (FRM02) Community Characteristics: tribal laws, broken homes, single parents, family history, unsafe locality, lack of jobs, poverty in reservations, local culture (Blaming Community)

_____ (FRM03) Community & Social Justice Issue: accessibility issues to jobs, safety, and healthcare, a call for social change in the light of higher rates of death and violence against women, pay gap, a call for policy reform (Blaming policy framework)

_____ (FRM04) Positive reporting about government/community affirmative action

_____ (FRM05) Objective Reporting: primarily mentioning/referencing statistics or reporting an event

Symbolic Annihilation How the subject is cited in the story? (SELECT ONLY ONE)

_____ (SA01) Cited as Source and Subject: Native American women are quoted as the primary source and subject.

_____ (SA02) Cited as Subject: Native American women are not quoted as the primary source but their issues are the primary focus of the story.

_____ (SA03) Cited Silently: Issue discussed from the racial perspective or from a gender perspective and refers to Native American women but not specifically related to them.

TABLES

Table 1

Definitions of variables and intercoder reliability scores

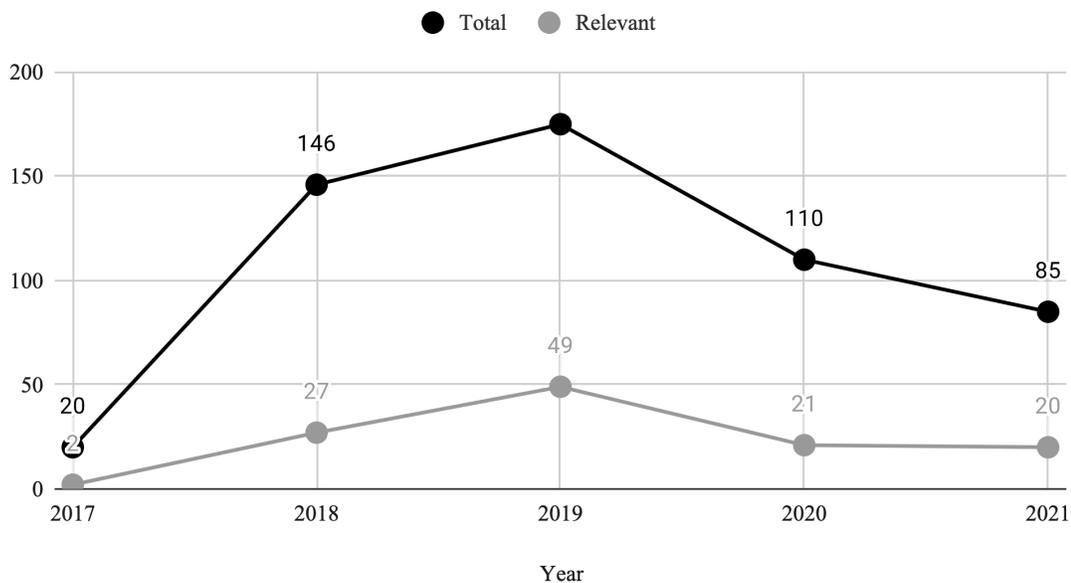
Topic	Examples	Krippendorf's alpha
Health News		
Diabetes	Cardio-Metabolic diseases, Diabetes	1.00
Cancer	Cancer including Cervical, Breast, Skin, Melanoma, Other	1.00
Cardiac and related Diseases	Cardiac issues, Heart issues, Arterial issues, Cardio-Metabolic disease	1.00
Reproductive Healthcare Accessibility	Accessibility issue to Indian Health Service, Pharmacy, Birth Control, Reproductive Healthcare, Abortion	1.00
Pregnancy	Unplanned, Forced, Complications	1.00
Teenage Childbirth	Pregnancy for teenagers	1.00
Abortion and Life Threat	Abortion Ban Policy or Law, Life Threats due to Abortion or Inaccessibility to Abortion,	1.00

Mental Health	Depression, Anxiety, Stress	1.00
Substance Use	Drug Use, Alcoholism, Smoking	1.00
Obesity	Include Eating Disorders	1.00
Life Expectancy	Whenever average life span is mentioned	1.00
Health Insurance Coverage	Include Medicaid or any other Health Insurance; include insurance offered by employer, government or third party	1.00
Death	All mentions of death including Maternal Mortality, Suicide – to be used with the cause of death	1.00
General Health	Any other health-related issue not mentioned above; includes Vaccination other than COVID-19	1.00
Pandemic	Covid-19, pandemic includes Vaccination for COVID-19; to be used for health-related mentions only and not in the context of economy or safety or other causes	1.00
Safety News		

Missing	Mention of Missing, kidnapped	1.00
Murder	Mention of Murder, Homicide, killed, dead	1.00
Sexual Assault	Mention of Sexual Assault, Sexual Abuse, Rape, Sexual Violence	1.00
Other Assault	Domestic Violence, Violence in the reservation, Assault, Violence	1.00
Mention of Reservation	Mention of Reservation or Tribal land, used in the context of jurisdiction of tribal law	1.00
Mention of Urban Area	Mention of a specific urban area where the incident happened	1.00
Economic Status News		
Pay Gap	Pay Gap, Discrimination in Pay, Compensation, Annual Earnings	1.00
Unemployment	Unemployment, including promotions or lack of it, Job loss	1.00
Poverty	only reporting poverty status	1.00
Poverty Policy	policy discussion or reporting on policy	1.00

Entrepreneurship	Startups, Business, Business Leadership, Earnings from Business, Wealth	1.00
Media Frame		
Victim Characteristics	Relationship status, mental health issues, age, drugs, alcohol, sexual orientation, eating habits, lack of education, migrant, housewife, welfare impact (Blaming Victim)	1.00
Community Characteristics	Tribal laws, broken homes, single parents, family history, unsafe locality, lack of jobs, poverty in reservations, local culture (Blaming Community)	1.00
Community & Social Justice Issue	Accessibility issues to jobs, safety, and healthcare, a call for social change in the light of higher rates of death and violence against women, pay gap, a call for policy reform (Blaming policy framework)	1.00

Affirmative Action	Positive reporting about government/community policy, affirmative action, Sources appreciating policy/action	1.00
Objective Reporting	Primarily mentioning/referencing statistics or reporting an event/incident; no inclusion of analysis or journalist's opinion	1.00
Symbolic Annihilation		
Source	Native American women are quoted as the primary source and subject.	1.00
Subject	Native American women are not quoted as the primary source but their issues are the primary focus of the story	1.00
Silent	Issue is discussed from the racial perspective or from a gender perspective and refers to Native American women but is not specifically related to them	1.00

FIGURES**Figure 1**

Volume Change in News Coverage (2017-2021) on Native American Women

Relevant includes only Health, Safety, and Economic Status as per Appendix A