# ATTITUDES OF DISPOSABILITY TOWARDS MMIWG ON THE HIGHWAY OF TEARS, A CPTED STUDY

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## Abstract

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has been a common topic in the media for the past few decades, and the Canadian government and Canadian people are beginning to recognize, realise and uncover the truths behind the continuing epidemic of Indigenous women identifying and LGBTQ2+ being victimised and murdered all over the country. As the cause is gaining attention, it is important to take the time to understand *why* thousands of Indigenous Women and Girls have gone missing or have been found murdered with little to no attention from police, society, or the media. This project connects the relationship between "disposability" and "MMIWG", and then implements the relation onto the case study of the Highway of Tears, using CPTED to provide a concrete direction of application for future use. The research is found by using a semi-systematic literature review and case study approach using online journal tools and examining the contents for similar relationships and findings. A clear equation can be formulated to understand how MMIWG has grown exponentially with little knowledge to the greater public. Society finds certain behaviours as "risky", and these behaviours come with predetermined consequences that are accepted as a punishment. Therefore, if Indigenous women partake in societally deemed "risky" behaviours, and if they face violence, it is deemed as an acceptable punishment, therefore when it is taken to the police there is less help provided due to the preconceived notions that the violence is the result of the "risky" behaviours, versus the Indigenous women being a target of violence. This project utilises a CPTED study on the Highway of Tears in order to create recommendations to make the space safer. The results found that there was a lack of defensible space, light and the environment inhibits communities to be key agents in their own safety, which speaks to the rates of MMIWG on the highway.


Keywords: MMIWG, Highway of Tears, Disposability, CPTED.

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Thank you all, ever so much.

Molly Clare

## Land Acknowledgement

Mount Royal University is located in the traditional territories of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) and the people of the Treaty 7 region in southern Alberta, which includes the Siksika, the Piikani, the Kainai, the Tsuut'ina and the Iyarhe Nakoda. We are situated on land where the Bow River meets the Elbow River. The traditional Blackfoot name of this place is "Mohkinstsis," which we now call the city of Calgary. The city of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation.

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## Situating Myself

I remember the first time I heard of the Highway of Tears. I was sitting in my second-year undergraduate Indigenous peoples and the Canadian Criminal Justice System class, with my now supervisor Dr. Harpreet Aulakh. The newfound knowledge of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls coupled with the Highway of Tears and lack of acknowledgement of the horrific disappearances and murders along the highway shook my being. My perspective of Canada has changed ever since. This found motive and passion guided me through my academic career, having written and completed multiple essays and projects on the topic of the Highway of Tears. Therefore, having conducted years of research and having spent days considering the tragedies, it is important to situate myself in this as a first-generation immigrant young white woman who is working towards being a good ally, and advocating for justice.

Aside from my academic career, I have been fortunate enough to work in different sectors of law enforcement and have touched but have not been deeply involved in situations involving Indigenous communities. These experiences have shaped my perspective and created an interest and passion for MMIWG and the Highway of Tears. This topic feels close to my heart because the women that are being stolen are my age, my mother's age, and my sister's age. Being a non-Indigenous woman, I feel responsible for advocating and raising awareness for those who are being ignored, forgotten and subsequently victim-blamed for their tragic murders.

It's important to recognize that being an ally is a process, and my intentions are to help the focus in academia to be shifted on MMIWG and for action to be taken to help prevent women and girls going missing.

The issues in this thesis can be difficult to read and may be traumatic if the reader is someone who has been personally affected by MMIWG or is negatively affected by the topics at hand. Regardless of the reason, if the reader feels as though they could benefit from talking to someone, there are some resources provided that can help below:

- The National MMIWG 24/7 Helpline 1-844-413-6649
- Talk4Healing (Ontario) 1-855-554-4325
- National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Support Phone Line 1-844-413-6649
- First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness 1-855-242-3310
- Mental Health Helpline (Alberta) 1-877-303-2642

## Introduction

In recent years, the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls has grown tremendously in Canada, and Indigenous issues have started to be given more attention by the government, media, and society. Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is a specific issue that has gained public attention, due to the increasing rates but also due to the lack of knowledge surrounding the topic. As Canadians are given more information about MMIWG2S+, and the increased rates of violence towards Indigenous females and female-identifying, there is a societal need for understanding of how stereotypes, environments and colonialism has influenced and enabled the tragedies to occur.

In this research thesis, there is discussion of the relationship between attitudes of disposability that are associated with Indigenous women and girls, and the connection these attitudes have with Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, then applying this relationship to the case of Highway of Tears, using Crime Prevention Through Environmental design to produce physical evidence.

Disposability is the term coined with the attitudes and stereotypes given to Indigenous women during colonialist times that has continued to have negative effects on Indigenous women and girls' lives to this day. Indigenous females are stereotyped as devious, trouble-finding, promiscuous and living “high-risk” lifestyles, and the effects these stereotypes have on the females are that they are seen as disposable in society. The term disposable is referencing feelings of replaceability and carelessness, where they were *destined* to find trouble or violence due to their stereotyped deviance. Therefore, when an Indigenous female faces violence, they are taken less seriously in multiple sectors of society, like their community, the police, the justice system and in medical fields. This enables violence, like homicides, to fall under the radar of the

police, but also of the public. The effects of this in Canada has become the phenomenon of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, where so many Indigenous females and female-identifying people have been victims of suspected violence, that have gone missing or have been found murdered.

In this thesis, there is an exploration of the effects of disposability and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls on the Highway of Tears, also known as Highway 16 between Prince George and Prince Rupert in Northern British Columbia, Canada. The Highway of Tears, the nickname given due to the high reports of Indigenous Women and Girls going missing, and some being found murdered, is a hot spot for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and has many environmental and societal factors that contribute to the high rates of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The thesis explores the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design of the highway, and how the environmental factors contribute to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Subsequently, the relationship between disposability, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, CPTED of the Highway and legislation is uncovered to show how multiple factors influence the rates of violence against Indigenous women along this area.

## Methodology

This thesis pertains to Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the relationship with the stereotype of being disposable in relation to the geographical area of the Highway of Tears. The research question is: How do attitudes of disposability affect MMIWG on the Highway of Tears? This topic is important to study because the rates of MMIWG are increasing and becoming more prominent in society, however there is still little awareness of the high rates of MMIWG on the Highway of Tears.

The purpose of this thesis is to connect the theory and attitudes of disposability to MMIWG, and then apply the relationship onto the Highway of Tears, which then uses CPTED to provide concrete directions to public officials and government in how to physically prevent MMIWG.

This thesis adds value to the understanding of the issue by analysing society's attitudes towards Indigenous women and girls, especially as deeming them as disposable goods. The relationship between the stereotype and the physical violence that Indigenous women face, or are at a higher risk of facing, becomes clearer and more apparent. Therefore, by applying the relationship to the case study of the Highway of Tears, one can use CPTED to understand the physical boundaries and obstacles that can influence the rates of MMIWG. Indigenous women make up 16% of all female homicides between 1980 and 2012, when only representing 4% of the population (National inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg. 54). Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or go missing than any other woman in Canada, and 16 times more likely to go missing than a Caucasian woman (National inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg. 54). These rates are worrying because they are the only *reported* rates, and even the reported rates are increasing over the years. Therefore, by analysing how

attitudes of disposability affects MMIWG on the Highway of Tears and using CPTED to understand the physicality of the problem, the research will be applicable for public officials and the public to bring awareness and change.

**Research Design**

The research design used in this thesis paper is a semi-systematic literature review and a case study design which aims to study phenomena or issues where not much is known (Labaree, 2019, Case Study Design). This research design will be useful in bringing an understanding to the complex issue of MMIWG on the Highway of Tears, especially when using the variable of "Attitudes of Disposability" into play.

Case study design applies various methodologies and a variety of sources to investigate a research problem, which is beneficial for this thesis as it covers a variety of academic sources, news sources and advocacy groups statements to obtain a fuller understanding of the problem (Labaree, 2019, Case Study Design).

There are limitations to this research design, as the Highway of Tears only has a small portion of studies conducted on it and is quite a specified area, therefore it would be difficult to generalise the findings to a wider population (Labaree, 2019, Case Study Design).

**Conceptualization and Operationalization**

The three main variables that I am attempting to address are "MMIWG", the "Attitudes of Disposability" and "the Highway of Tears". To begin, MMIWG, also known as MMIWG2S+ or MMIWG is a label for the Indigenous women, girls, two-spirited plus who are missing or have been found or presumed murdered. In this thesis it will be recognized that MMIWG2+ is the appropriate term that includes all women-identifying and more who are affected by gendered and race-based violence. However, this thesis paper uses MMIWG as the main descriptor, as the

research conducted mainly uses that term, and MMIWG is the official term used in the federal inquiry into MMIWG.

Secondly, the phrase “Attitudes of Disposability " works into the term disposability. Disposability is a term used for an item that is disposable, that can be thrown away and another can be retrieved with ease. The term disposable can also be understood as a product that was designated to be thrown away after use, typically one use (Khanna, 2009, pg. 184). It is also key to understand that to dispose, there must be a disposer and the disposer has a power over the item being disposed of (Khanna, 2009, pg. 184). Razack’s disposability framework for understanding violence provides a developed understanding of how Indigenous women’s bodies have been sexualized, and the sexualization has been linked to a history of colonialism that speaks to the levels of violence they face but also the degrading way their bodies are disposed (Johnson, 2020, pg. 29). The term disposable can also be applied to society’s actions and beliefs about Indigenous women, as they are treated as though they are disposable due to society's perspective of their “high-risk” lifestyles, and stereotyped promiscuousness and deviance. Therefore, when violence or tragedy occurs towards Indigenous women, it’s seen as a shoulder shrug because it was “bound to happen " due to their lifestyle *choices*. Society treats Indigenous women as disposable in many aspects when violence occurs, for example police putting little effort into their cases, or not recognizing the “missing” cases at all because *Indigenous women tend to run away*, therefore won’t be taken seriously when reported.

Thirdly, the phrase “Highway of Tears” which references Highway 16 travelling from Prince Rupert to Prince George in Northern British Columbia. The term “Highway of Tears” comes from the violence and tragedy that has occurred for the Indigenous groups along the highway, with 18 police-identified reports of murdered or missing women, with 10 being Indigenous

(Johnson, N.D, pg.29). On the other hand, Indigenous communities have reported over 40 of their community members have gone missing or have been murdered on the Highway of Tears (Johnson, 2020, pg.29).

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design is a design tool that draws on environmental and behavioural psychology to attempt to design out crime, with the designing of neighbourhoods and space to create more viewpoints and less dark areas where crime would be easier to commit (Cozens & Love, 2015, pg.396). In this thesis, Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design is abbreviated to CPTED, and then utilized to create physical examples and ideas of how policy makers can design out crime on the Highway of Tears.

**Data Collection Methods and Sources**

The method of study that is used in this thesis is online data collection. Online data collection is a method of data collection in which the researcher uses multiple online libraries and journals to type in keywords related to their topic to extract journals and articles related to the key word (Methods and Methodology, N.D, pg.1). The research design used to support the method of online data collection in this research is semi-systematic literature review. With respect to the Indigenous subjects and heavily emotional content that is researched, it is important to ensure to keep decolonising and Indigenous methodologies in mind. Although these methodologies are typically in respect to primary data collection, by applying a decolonising methodology it ensures to vocalize the Indigenous perspective by keeping Indigenous stories and experiences alive throughout the thesis paper (Liamputtong, 2019, Pg. 14). In the case of this topic, using Indigenous methodologies is important to ensure there is a decolonization perspective when explaining the prevalence of MMIWG, and the high rates of it on the Highway of Tears and the colonist perspective of disposability placed on Indigenous females.

Key words: MMIWG, Highway of Tears, National Inquiry, Mobility, Billboards, indigenous, girls, indigenous murder, women murder, high risk.

This paper utilises semi-systematic review within the method of online data collection by having systematic and organised instructions for data collection. The main online databases that is used is the Mount Royal University library databases,.

For the topic of MMIWG, disposability and the Highway of Tears, there are a variety of sources that can be found in relation, or using the keywords associated. The selection criteria was based on the initial reading of the article's abstracts, and then the first quick reading of the article for relevance. For example, when typing "disposability" into the search bar, there are many results that are displayed that do not pertain to this subject, mainly research articles pertaining to recycling and eco-efforts to help the earth. Therefore, by adding the term MMIWG into the search bar, the types of articles that then appear change and are more targeted to Indigenous violence and violence against women. Then, by analysing the titles and abstracts of each result for the term disposability can be focused upon and the research selection becomes more defined.

The next chapter focuses on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and can be a heavy topic to read. The upcoming chapter aims in providing the reader with a background to MMIWG, the colonialist structures and notions that allowed hundreds of Indigenous women and girls to experience violence, and then go ignored and the current day reality of MMIWG.

## Missing and Murdered Women and Girls

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls is a concept that has been seen in the media frequently in the past 10 years, and becoming more prevalent in Canadian society, academia, and the media now. MMIWG is a term used to describe the ongoing historical and present problem of Indigenous Women and Girls going missing, and, or subsequently being found murdered. Indigenous women and girls have been targeted by colonial violence and continue to be oppressed by it to this day (Luoma, 2021, pg.33). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the term MMIWG is used in this thesis as it is the most known and popular term used in Canada, and it's used within the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls - Final Report which were created by families of victims of MMIWG. However, it is important to note that MMIWG2+ includes *all* individuals, female identifying and others, who are targeted due to their sexuality and Indigenous race, and face violence or disappearances. When the term MMIWG is used in this paper, it is discussing all individuals who are female-identifying or targeted for their sexuality and Indigenous race and have been murdered or disappeared. It is important to understand that MMIWG or MMIWG2+ is multifaceted, and the gendered violence brought by colonialist views targets many individuals of Indigenous community in a variety of ways. However, using the term provided in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls - Final Report is helpful when falling back to documents like the Inquiry and Symposium, but also agencies who focus on MMIWG.

In 2010, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) confirmed that there were 582 known cases over the span of 20 years of missing or murdered Indigenous women and girls (National inquiry into MMIWG volume 1a, 2019, pg. 54). Maryanne Pearce identified 824 cases of MMIWG in 2013 when writing her thesis for her doctorate in law (National inquiry into

MMIWG volume 1a, 2019, pg. 54). Between the dates of 1980 and 2012, in an RCMP review, they identified 1181 cases of police-reported incidents of MMIWG (National inquiry into MMIWG volume 1a, 2019, pg. 54). Within this RCMP report, they stated that Indigenous women made up 16% of all female homicides between 1980 and 2012 when only representing 4% of the female population (National inquiry into MMIWG volume 1a, 2019, pg. 54). Nowadays, within relation to population growth, this number now looks like 24% of all homicide victims are Indigenous (National inquiry into MMIWG volume 1a, 2019, pg. 54). To extend this point further, research taken at the University of Manitoba has released that Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or go missing than any other woman in Canada, and 16 times more likely to go missing than a Caucasian woman (National inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg. 54). What this group of statistics is explaining is that Indigenous women and girls are being targeted and victimised at increasingly high rates compared to their population, and these rates are only increasing with time. The epidemic of Indigenous women being violently targeted is troublesome, especially when Indigenous women are seven times more likely to be targeted by serial killers, and more likely to be killed by acquaintances than non-Indigenous men (National inquiry into MMIWG volume 1a, 2019, pg. 55). In 2014, the RCMP issued a report stating that Indigenous women made up for 16% of all female homicides between 1980 and 2012, which is a gigantic overrepresentation when they constituted only 4% of the female population in Canada (Luoma, 2021, pg.34). With these statistics in mind, and federal and provincial agencies reporting on these specifics, there is a clear problem at hand in society that is targeting Indigenous women and girls specifically.

Indigenous people are often categorised under part of the “fourth world”, which is described as a community whose members tend to experience poor social outcomes whilst living

in a first world country (Parsloe & Campbell, 2021, pg.1). Indigenous women were previously stereotyped as dirty, lazy, immoral, by the white colonists and these stereotypes leaked into Canadian society and still linger in this age (Luoma, 2021, pg.33). These stereotypes disempower Indigenous women and girls to this day, continuing in a cycle that promotes gender-based violence, and racism towards Indigenous women and girls (Luoma, 2021, pg.33). Systemic violence against Indigenous women and girls is seen as normalised and institutionalised due to these stereotypes that have been accepted in society (Luoma, 2021, pg.34).

The Indigenous women are stereotyped as "squaw", which refers to a woman who is promiscuous, prone to deviance, incapable of controlling impulses (Morton, 2016, pg.304). The relationship between this stereotype and the *public acceptance* of violence against Indigenous women and girls is prevalent. Due to the "squaw" stereotype, society deems Indigenous women as prone to deviance and promiscuous, therefore when they ultimately get themselves into trouble they are considered as disposable and deserving of the outcome. The idea is that the Indigenous women are already marked as devious, therefore when violence occurs, they are almost deserving of it due to their "risky lifestyle", and when it occurs it was "bound to happen" therefore brushed off by police and society.

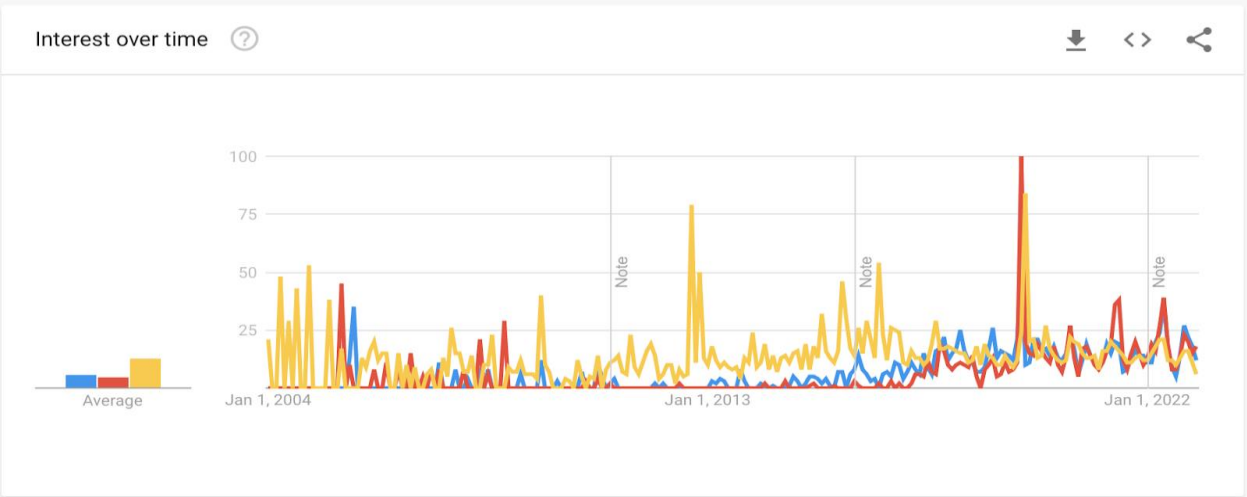
Although this concept has engrossed Canadian society in the past decade, it has been prevalent in Indigenous communities for centuries. The study Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Initiative - Final Report: *What was Shared* conducted in 2015 by the Alberta Justice and Solicitor General Victim Services. The study focused on MMIWG in Alberta and surveyed over 575 Indigenous communities to identify the needs of victims of crimes and trauma, and subsequently inform the Alberta Justice and Solicitor General Victim Services service delivery of what they can do better, but also use the data for broader policy work (Justice and Solicitor

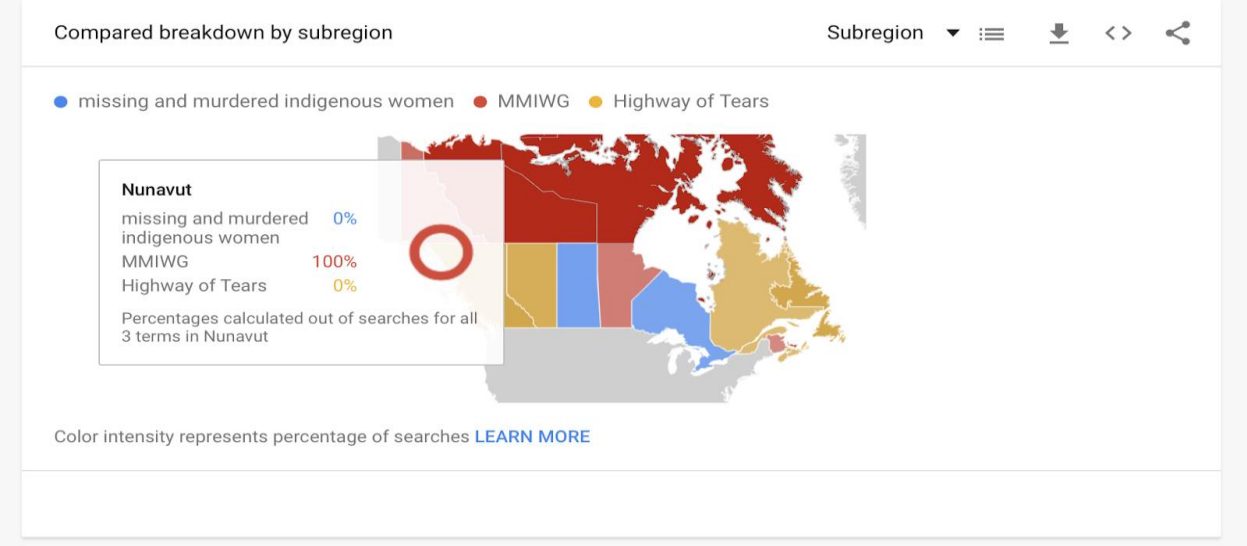
General, 2015, pg.4). The report found that 38% of respondents were personally aware of MMIWG in their community (Justice and Solicitor General, 2015, pg.33). 46% knew a murdered Indigenous woman, and of all the questions asked among participants the themes that stood out were intergenerational trauma, structural inequities, geographic isolation, and impact of vulnerabilities on community and individuals (Justice and Solicitor General, 2015, pg.33).

Colonial violence is the underlayer of MMIWG, where due to colonisation, colonialism has swept its way into Canada's systems in an attempt to rid of Indigenous culture and lifestyle. Colonial violence is multi-faceted, with there being layers of the assimilation of Indigenous peoples, but also within the social and economic marginalisation and can be seen today in our educational systems, government systems and in society (National inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg. 111). Indigenous people experience poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, unemployment, and barriers to education and more at much higher rates than non-Indigenous people (National inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg. 114). The social and economic marginalisation that many Indigenous people face due to colonialism can increase the rates of victimisation of violence (National inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg. 114). In an effort to survive, individuals do what they can in an effort to obtain basic needs like access to shelters, counselling, education, and other supports (National inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg. 114). As stated in the Reclaiming Power and Place, Volume 1a describes, the denial of accessible social and economic security is what leads to violence for Indigenous Women and Girls (National Inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg. 114).

When looking on Google Trends and searching the keywords and phrases: MMIWG, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Highway of Tears, the common theme among these examples are that they have increased in usage dramatically. This Google Trends tool is a

great source to see the popularity of the term, where and when over Canada. The Trends tool allows the reader to pick multiple key words and combine them to compare the search popularity.




Source: Google. (n.d). *Google Trends.* Retrieved February 7th, 2023, retrieved from: https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&geo=CA&q=missing%20and%20murdered%20indigenous%20women,MMIWG,Highway%20of%20Tears

By looking at the tables provided above, the first looks at how each key term has increased rapidly since 2004. There is an upsurge of yellow, which is the Highway of Tears, in 2004-2006 search terms, likely due to the symposium that was being submitted for the Highway of Tears. However, with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, and MMIWG, there has been growing interest, with the height in 2019 when the MMIWG report and Inquiry was released, and then it has retracted but continued to rise in popularity. The continued rise in popularity can likely be attributed to the "red dress day" and "orange shirt day" which has come into use in Canada after hundreds of mass graves of children who were forced into residential schools are being found all over the country. However, the point of using the Google Trends tool to understand how these terms have continued to gain popularity in google searches, but also in society. These concepts are dominating news stories, Canadian homes, and the education system. It is only in the past decade that the majority of the population has begun to acknowledge MMIWG, the Highway of Tears and the genocide of Indigenous women across Canada. Although the disposability of Indigenous women across Canada has been in play for hundreds of years, the acceptance and accountability of it is being understood to this day.

This chapter emphasises the importance of acknowledging the colonialist past that has let MMIWG occur, but also still provides space for MMIWG to continue in the present day. As a reader, understanding our role in MMIWG and how one can work towards being an ally is important. By recognizing and promoting days of awareness for MMIWG and holding the government accountable for their lack of actions in helping the Indigenous women and girls in need. The next chapter focuses on the theory of disposability and how it is tied to Indigenous women and girls historically and in the present day. By understanding the colonialist actions

with attitudes of disposability and how it is portrayed in the treatment of Indigenous women and girls, we can make positive changes to acknowledge and prevent future MMIWG.

## Disposability

Disposability is a multi-faceted term that is used in two separate ways (Khanna, 2009, pg. 184). The first use is references to "disposable camera", where something is used once, or a few times, and is then disregarded as either it's full or a new one can be easily acquired (Khanna, 2009, pg.184). The second usage is as "disposable income" or "disposable assets" where one has so much of something and it's so easily available that it can be used with ease (Khanna, 2009, pg. 184). In regards to naming a human as disposable, Khanna discusses Giorgio Agamben's theory of "naked life", which are individuals who are basically invisible, or born to die, garbage-populations or throwaway men (Khanna, 2009, pg.186).

Indigenous women are seen as disposable because of their "high risk" lifestyles, therefore when violence occurs it's seen as a consequence of their lifestyle, and is thought of as almost deserving (Johnson, 2020, pg. 27). High risk lifestyles are hard to define, but in society are seen as those who partake in activities like alcohol or drugs, transiency, partying, hitch-hiking, sex-work, and overall "promiscuous" behaviour. Although this definition is broad, and can be applied to all members of society, especially youths and young women, the "high risk" lifestyle can be brushed away for some, however for the Indigenous this label defines their actions in society (Johnson, 2020, pg. 27-28). The actions of a few can define a whole race of people, this concept is felt by many BIPOC groups, and is used as a hate-tactic by white supremacists (Johnson, 2020, pg. 27-28).

Indigenous women are seen as "willing victims" because of the high-risk lifestyles they are forced to take (Morton, 2016, pg.304). Society lays the blame onto the Indigenous women, acting as though the high-risk lifestyle is a choice, and they have the equal and adequate opportunities as a white woman to secure education and work opportunities. Therefore, with this

wronged perspective in mind, when violence occurs to Indigenous women instead of viewing them as a victim, society blames them for the violence as though it was deserved for their actions and lifestyle choices (Morton, 2016, pg.304). Due to racism and colonialism in Canadian society, Indigenous women are seen to be living a different lifestyle than the white and patriarchal norm, therefore when violence occurs, it is blamed on the lifestyle the individual lives rather than the offender who committed the violence (Morton, 2016, pg.304). The emphasis here is that different is wrong, which is an old but well used colonialist tool to justify the capturing and enslavement of marginalised populations, like the Indigenous. Therefore, the judgement from Canadian society onto the different cultural lifestyle that the Indigenous live is deemed devious, and wrong therefore consequences of violence is their battle to fight because they don't live the colonialist lifestyle. In relation to Indigenous women and girls, the equation seems to look like Risky Behaviour (like Hitchhiking) = Violence = Deserved = Lack of care/support from police and society (Johnson, 2020, pg. 28).

This equation fuelled by colonialist racist views, and then by the treatment of Indigenous women and girls from past to present. The risky behaviour could be in the form of hitchhiking, being out late at night, certain "promiscuous" work roles and substance use. These risky behaviours are seen as negative for Indigenous women and girls and females in general, yet in some instances they are promoted for white males. For the violence, this could be in the form of physical violence as a result of the "risky behaviour", or violence as in a negative outcome like overdosing from a tainted substance. Then, the connection is made between the risky behaviour and violence, and in the lens of Indigenous women and girls, there is an attitude of disposability attached as though they deserve the outcome because they participated in risky behaviour. Due to this attitude and blaming, the outcome leads to less policy support, less support from police and

less support from society and the violence aspect of the equation is given leeway to become worse.

Since colonisation, society has deemed Indigenous women and girls as invisible and in regards to the patriarchy and women's stance on the hierarchy, Indigenous women are found at the lower end of the hierarchy. The term "Naked Life" works as the background for the attitudes of disposability (Khanna, 2009, pg. 186). Those individuals who are seen as naked, in reference the Indigenous women and girls, are seen not as individuals, but as a population, therefore when one goes missing there is always another around the corner (Khanna, 2009, pg. 186). The notion of naked lives goes hand in hand with attitudes of disposability, because due to Indigenous females being seen as invisible, and having a lack of identity in society, they are seen as disposable, in reference to Khanna's first definition of disposable, they are deemed like a disposable camera (Khanna, 2009, pg.184). Like a disposable camera, society finds Indigenous women replaceable and disposable, they can be thrown away and a new one can be retrieved, as there is an abundance of them. In addition, with the "naked life" theory and attitudes of disposability, the "risky lifestyles" that Indigenous women are portrayed of living relates to the "born to die" aspect of naked life, where they are disposable, and their lives are not worth counting as their violent death/disappearance is there predetermined future.

The aspect of Indigenous women being seen as disposable is perfectly shown in the Cindy Gladue case, which involves a Cree woman who was violently murdered in Edmonton by a white male whilst working as a sex worker (Razack, 2019, pg. 285). Cindy had a contracted sexual encounter with the male, Bradley Barton, in a hotel room in Edmonton, who had purchased sexual encounters from her previously (Razack, 2019, pg. 286). Barton claims that he inserted his fists into Gladue's vagina, causing a tear during supposed "consensual rough sex",

however the Crown argues that the 11-centimetre tear was caused by the insertion of a knife (Razack, 2019, pg. 286).

What links this case to the attitudes of disposability, is that the courts had little respect for Cindy as an individual, a family member, a sister or a daughter, and decided to introduce her physical body parts in court as evidence. Cindy was encompassed and reduced to a mere body part, where there was outcry for the body parts being shown in court yet disregard for her Indigenous heritage and her work (Razack, 2019, pg. 286). Barton disregarded Cindy's humanity and reduced her to disposable matter during the night that he murdered her, seeing her Indigenous heritage and profession as disposable, playing off her "naked life", leaving her in the bathtub to bleed to death. However, the court disposed of her womanhood in just the same aspect by providing her vagina tissue where she had been bludgeoned into the courtroom for the jury to see.

The framework of disposability that Razack uses identifies how Indigenous women's bodies, dead or alive, and their value of humanity in the social order is made clear to be the lowest (Razack, 2019, pg. 291). We see this in many ways in relation to MMIWG, with the physical evidence and body parts of the victim being treated without respect to Indigenous culture or human dignity. We see this attitude of disposability to Indigenous women as individuals before violence occurs, and after the fact of the violence, proving that the attitudes of disposability are circular and never-ending. This is especially evident in police-work, with police not taking Indigenous women seriously, having little resources or effort in place to help find missing Indigenous women, and little effort in prosecuting and investigating those who committed violence against Indigenous women and girls. Razack explains this concept perfectly, by understanding that Indigenous people (specifically Indigenous females) are treated as

disposable in settler colonialism, who are understood to be waste and surplus, and are marked for death, cast out as excess and are populations that cannot be improved or contribute to modern society (Razack, 2019, pg. 299). Although harsh, these points are evident in the treatment of MMIWG, and the over 1200 cases of MMIWG throughout Canada that are known (Razack, 2019, pg. 285).

In the police perspective, due to the negative colonialist stereotypes of Indigenous women, the MMIWG cases remained unsolved or take less precedence than other cases due to attitudes of disposability that society has accepted, creating precedence that Indigenous women are acceptable targets for violent crime (Wilson, 2018, pg. 154).

As this thesis is written, Canadians are once again reminded of MMIWG and disposability. In 2022, a man named Jeremy Skibicki was charged with four first-degree murder charges after partial remains of one Indigenous woman was found in a garbage can, and he confessed to having murdered 3 more women and leaving their remains in garbage cans (Talaga, 2022, para.4). There is current uproar because the Winnipeg Police Service have deemed searching for the remains of the three women who are suspected to be in the city landfill is not 'feasible" (Talaga, 2022, para.2). To restate this, there are remains of three murdered Indigenous women of the names of Morgan Harris, Mercedes Myran and a third who has no known identity named Buffalo Woman, who were mothers, daughters, nieces and part of the human race are being laid to rest in a landfill in Winnipeg because Winnipeg Police Service don't believe it's worth their time to take the victims home (Tagala, 2022, para.2). Once again, the government is ignoring, and therefore accepting that Indigenous women are disposable, and are not worth the resources to remove their bodies and lay them to rest. What this entails is that there needs to be more action and accountability for the government to live up to their words, and promises

provided after the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and for the government to act. The question begs, if these women were white, would Winnipeg City police find is “feasible” to rescue their bodies and bring them home to their families?

This chapter focuses on the framework of disposability, the different uses for the term and focuses on how the term is used with respect to MMIWG and Indigenous women in general. Disposability framework is fuelled by colonialist views and is used to justify violence and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls. Disposability framework works in the shadows and is evident in lack of police work on cases, media articles, and the countless cases of MMIWG that are only being brought to light now. The next chapter dives into the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and how it has brought to light issues that were ignored in the past.

## National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

In 2019 the report Reclaiming power and place: The final report of the national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls was released to the public, which began in 2015 after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was elected (Hansen & Dim, 2019, pg. 1). In this thesis, this report shall be referred to as the inquiry. The inquiry came to be after multiple Indigenous women's organisations created calls for justice to discuss the rising problem of MMIWG in Canada (Hansen & Dim, 2019, pg. 1). Researchers engaged in a "truth-seeking" process which involved community hearings, finding knowledge from Indigenous Knowledge Keepers, and using testimony from over 2,000 participants over a span of 4 years to collect information and evidence, and then collaborate in creating the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls - Final Report (Parsloe & Campbell, 2021, pg.1). The inquiry's intent is to inform the public officials and policy planners about the high number of MMIWG, and the urgency of disparity in society that Indigenous women and girls face, including physical, economic, social, and environmental disparity (Hansen & Dim, 2019, pg. 2). The inquiry uses research conducted compiling 24 hearings across the country, 750 or so people's statements, eight institutional visits to correctional facilities, four guided dialogues, eight validation meetings and more (National inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg.4).

There are three parts to the inquiry, the first being the Volume 1a, the second being the Volume 1b and the third being the Supplementary Report. All in all, the inquiry is long with a combined total of 1127 pages. The National Inquiry is an important document as it legitimises the issue of MMIWG in society and provides research and framework for future studies and ways to help Indigenous women and girls. The inquiry has a multitude of information around the occurrence and continuance of MMIWG in Canada. Described in the report, MMIWG came to

be due to “engines of destruction” coming together through colonial legislation and action that attempted to assimilate the Indigenous population through residential schools and limits on human rights leading to conditions where violence, drug and alcohol abuse and suicide rates increase dramatically among Indigenous communities (Thorne, 2019, pg.1). Some of the results of the inquiry were validating that Indigenous women and girls face interpersonal violence, lack of personal security becoming normalised and a sense of abandonment encouraging coping behaviours like substance abuse and suicide stimulated by a lack of support from healthcare professionals and police (Parsloe & Campbell, 2021, pg.1). Whilst considering that the report is large, the findings are that there is significant, persistent, and deliberate patterns of systemic racial and gendered human rights and Indigenous rights violations and abuses, found historically and currently being maintained by the Canadian State designed to assimilate and displace Indigenous peoples (National inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg. 174). These violations all contribute to the countless cases of disappearances and murders of Indigenous women and girls. The report also finds that the treaties set in place that were signed over 150 years ago that were supposed to protect the Indigenous people have not been implemented in legal structure, therefore Canada has failed to keep up with their promise, and the result of this promise breaking is the deaths and disappearances of hundreds of Indigenous Women and Girls (National inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg. 174).

With the entirety of the report taken into consideration, the researchers for the inquiry came together and created “Calls for Justice” in which it uses evidence provided earlier in the inquiry to make recommendations to help end and redress the genocide of the Indigenous women and girls, these recommendations were defined as legal imperatives (National inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg. 168). The report describes the “Calls for Justice” as legal

imperatives because the recommendations are not optional, they come from legal documents like the *Charter,* Constitution and Human and Indigenous Rights laws (National inquiry into MMIWG, volume 1a, 2019, pg. 168). In total, there were 231 Calls for Justice, broken down into categories of who the Calls are targeted for:

| | |
|---|---|
| **Calls for Justice for All Governments** | ○ "Human and Indigenous Rights and Governmental Obligations",<br>○ "Culture",<br>○ "Health and Wellness",<br>○ "Human Security"<br>○ "Justice" |
| **Calls for Justice: Industries, Institutions, Services and Partnerships:** | ○ Media and Social Influencers<br>○ Health and Wellness Service Providers<br>○ Transportation service Providers and the Hospitality Industry<br>○ Police Services<br>○ Attorneys and Law Societies<br>○ Educators<br>○ Social Workers and Those Implicated in Child Welfare<br>○ Extractive and Development Industries |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Calls for All Canadians** | • 15.1-15.8 |
| **Distinction Based Calls** | ○ Inuit-Specific Calls<br>○ Metis-Specific<br>○ 2slgbtqqia-Specific |

(National Inquiry, 2019, pg.176-186).

Clearly as provided above, the headlines discuss recommendations for specific groups of people/bodies, and then recommendations provided by specific distinctions of the Indigenous community. The purpose of this is for the inquiry to be as direct as possible, therefore closing room for individuals or groups to detach themselves from the issue.

The inquiry has faced many different opinions in how it was conducted, why it was conducted and even the content it has released. John Hansen and Emeka Dim discuss the inquiry's choice to not include Indigenous men in the inquiry, although the Chief Commissioner of the inquiry stated there is need for the inclusion of Indigenous men (Hansen and Dim, 2019, pg. 1). Hansen and Dim (2019, pg. 1) discuss that there should be an inquiry that follows up including all Indigenous people, women, men, boys, girls. The perspective being that the separation of Indigenous females and males is a continuation of a colonialist strategy to divide Indigenous people, and with the focus only on Indigenous women, there is a potential restriction for communities to implement work to help due to infighting (Hansen and Dim, 2019, pg. 2). The reason for the need of an all-inclusive inquiry, states Dim and Hansen (2019, pg. 2), is that Indigenous males in Canada are at the highest risk of being victims of homicide .

Since the inquiry was released in 2019, the Government of Canada has received backlash for the minimal amount of work that was completed. Since then, the government has stated that they are;

- Focusing on prevention
- Ensuring Indigenous women's voices are heard
- Strengthening justice
- Improving safety and security
- Improving oversight and awareness
- Violence prevention and victim support
- Policing
- Family and community support

Whilst this thesis does not have the space to focus directly on this issue, from reading the "Actions taken by the Government of Canada since the launch of the inquiry", it is clear that the main actions of the government has been to budget money towards program lines that could help MMIWG (Government of Canada, 2019, para.8). However, when reading over this page it very clearly becomes that the Government of Canada is mainly flaunting their processes that were started *before* the inquiry was released and does not directly address what has been completed since (Government of Canada, 2019, para.8). The government has created documents providing their support to MMIWG, and provided information on a national action plan, and federal pathway that they are working on to address the systemic racism, sexism, ableism, and gender-based violence that affect the experience of Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people (Government of Canada, 2021, section 3). However, many don't feel as though the government has fulfilled their promises or done enough effective work that directly helps the Indigenous communities. In 2022, different agencies who advocate for MMIWG have criticized the government for the lack of accountability and work done towards the national action plan

(Deer, 2022, para.3). Contributors to the national action plan like the National Family and Survivors Circle have spoken out against the government due to the inaction and concerns regarding the promises that were made yet not performed (Deer, 2022, para.3). It's clear that there is still work to be done, and accountability must be held by the Government. In the case of MMIWG, inaction could mean the continued cycle of MMIWG, and a continuance of the colonialist violence against Indigenous women and girls.

This chapter focuses on the production of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the actions the government have taken since it came out. The National Inquiry brought to light a lot of the issues that Indigenous communities have been expressing for decades and asks the Canadian public to listen and hold the government accountable for the tragedies that have, and continue to, occur. The next chapter considers the infamous Highway of Tears, or Highway 16 in Northern British Columbia and its position and influence in the tragic cases of MMIWG that have occurred along it.

## Highway of Tears

The Highway of Tears, or Highway 16, is located in British Columbia, running from Prince Rupert to Prince George in Northern BC (Morton, 2016, pg.300). The highway is remote and underserved and has been known for high levels of hitchhiking due to its long length and lack of public transport (Morton, 2016, pg.300).

The Highway of Tears, also known as Highway 16 Travels 718 km from Prince Rupert to Prince George in Northern BC, which in driving time is around 8 hours long (Trippy, n.d.). The length of this highway is so vast that there are travel websites that recommend flying instead of driving one end to the other (Trippy, n.d.). The highway is known for its remoteness, with large areas of underdeveloped wilderness and sparsely populated communities (Morton, 2016, pg.302). For the communities along the highway, the highway is the lifeline between the two opposite cities at the end necessary for obtaining groceries, medicine, clothes, and work. Cell reception along the highway is inconsistent, and there are only few rest areas or shelters for those who need them (Morton, 2016, pg.302).

Due to the remoteness of the communities along the Highway of Tears, many Indigenous women face extra boundaries than Indigenous women in the city may face. There is poverty, unemployment, inadequate education opportunities which all contribute to social marginalisation and increased risk of violence (Morton, 2016, pg.304). Along the Highway of Tears, RCMP have identified 18 cases of murders and disappearances, with 10 being Indigenous, however the Indigenous communities along the highway record over 40 of their community members have gone missing or have been murdered (Johnson, 2020, pg.29). With these statistics in mind, it's important to understand the vast area of remote forest that Highway 16 is encompassed by. Therefore, when taking into consideration the physical length between Prince Rupert and Prince

George which are the major cities that have access to medical health, schools, the major shopping centres, more places for employment and other necessities one can consider the isolation that some of the Indigenous communities' face. Therefore, with long distances and unreliable weather conditions, transportation becomes a necessity. However, the necessity of transport like a car isn't always accessible for communities that face high rates of poverty. Therefore, to adapt many Indigenous communities may choose other contentious mobilities to access their needs.

Contentious mobilities are types of mobilities that are seen as "bad", or stigmatised in society (Morton, 2016, pg.301). Hitchhiking is a prime example of contentious mobility, as it is stigmatised and treated as undesirable, not used as a normalised mode of mobility in western culture. Hitchhiking has a lack of dependence that auto-mobility flaunts, one must hitchhike into a vehicle with another person to achieve their destination. Hitchhiking is seen as dangerous and a mode of last resort (Morton, 2016, pg.301). Although stigmatised as socially unacceptable, hitchhiking is common in Northern BC and especially along the Highway of Tears, and is especially associated with MMIWG, with links of the stereotype that Indigenous women are seen as risk takers, portraying undesirable behaviour and the relationship with hitchhiking as being an undesirable and risky behaviour. The relationship between these two concepts in society are then intertwined together with the idea of violence, with society linking risky behaviour and undesirable mobility with violence. The point largely ignored in this relationship is the fact that Indigenous women and girls tend to have a *lack of access* to other resources to use besides hitchhiking.

In 2006, there was a "Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendation Report" submitted by different Indigenous councils and services with recommendations to the federal government

to bring awareness to the issues along the Highway of Tears (Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendation Report, June 16, 2006, pg. 1). Even though this Symposium was submitted in 2006, there was speculation even then about the number of missing women along the highway, with the RCMP recognizing 18, and the Indigenous groups recognizing over 30-50 (Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendation Report, June 16, 2006, pg. 7). The reason for the speculation and gap in the numbers of MMIWG along Highway 16 is due to the inconsistency in the criteria of who is considered missing on the Highway of Tears by the RCMP, and by the Highway of Tears Carrier Sekani Family Services (Highway of Tears Program, n.d).

In the Symposium, during the Situation Analysis portion, the investigation began into why the Highway of Tears victims are mostly Indigenous, and also what the contributing factors place the women on the highway (Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendation Report, June 16, 2006, pg. 16). Poverty is the first factor, understanding that poverty affects young indigenous women immensely, and places them on the highway because there is no other mode of transport (Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendation Report, 2006, pg. 16).

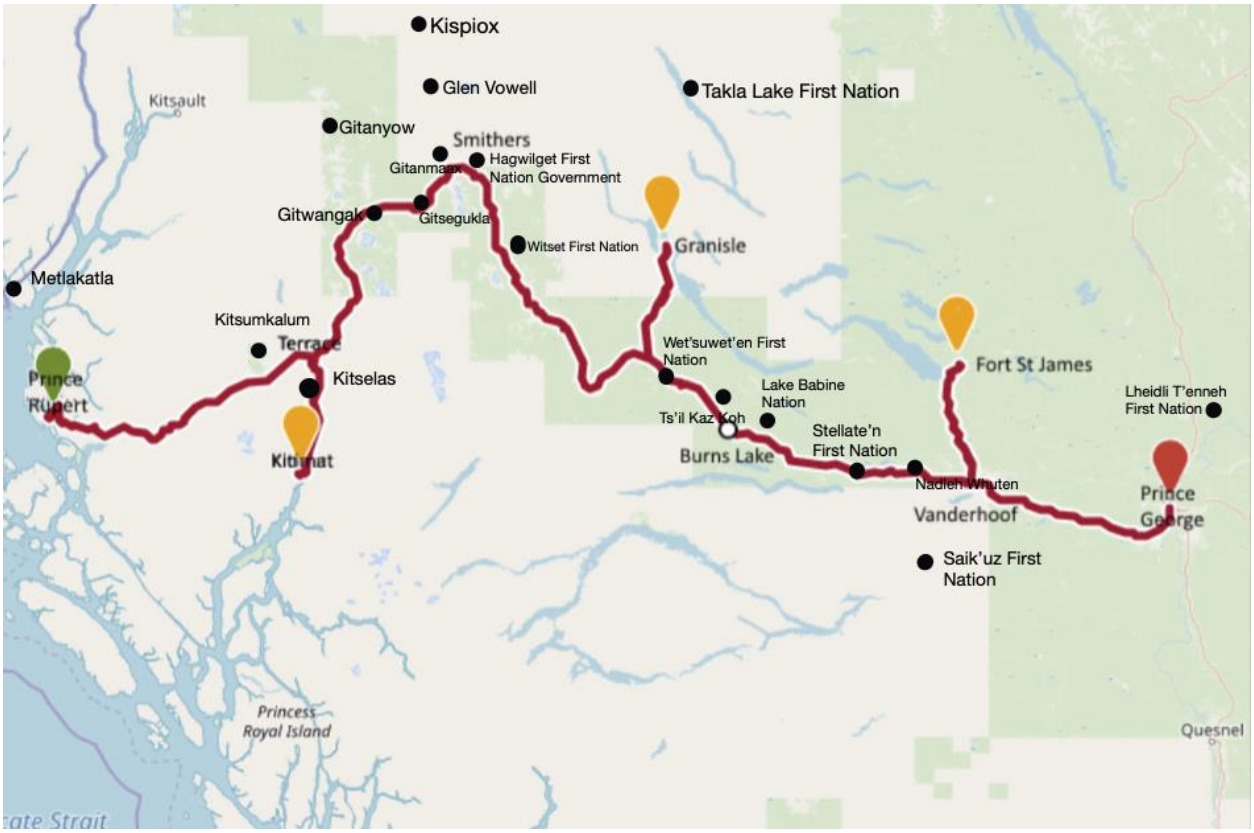
Along the Highway of Tears, many of the Indigenous communities are situated many miles from towns and the cities at either end of the highway (Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendation Report, June 16, 2006, pg. 17). Due to the isolation, small populations, and low-income average there are little to no businesses, recreations of other services available to help the community members (Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendation Report, June 16, 2006, pg. 17). Therefore, considering doctors' appointments, groceries, clothing, school and more there is a necessity for travel from these communities to the nearest area that has the facilities, and transportation is something lacking in the Indigenous communities by far (Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendation Report, June 16, 2006, pg. 17). Consider being

a youth in the isolated communities, and valuing sports or other social activities therefore travelling to the events by whatever means available and necessary to get there (Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendation Report, June 16, 2006, pg. 18).

There used to be a Greyhound bus service as the only transportation from Prince Rupert to Prince George, only stopping for passenger pick-ups in towns and cities along the highway (Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendation Report, June 16, 2006, pg. 18). This service was shut down in 2018 and replaced by a new bus service which runs from Prince George to Burns Lake, and another bus route from Prince George and Smithers, however not all the way to Prince Rupert, only covering 400km of the 715 km route (Stewart, 2017). Although these bus routes are a positive sign, once again there are problems with the pick-up areas being in cities or towns, and the bus routes running on alternate days (Stewart, 2017).

In 2018, the BC Bus North launched a bus service running from Prince George to Prince Rupert, however only operating twice per week each way (BC Bus, N.D). However, when attempting to book the bus ticket, from Prince George to Prince Rupert one way the fee is $63.81, and the trip is 11 hours and 25 minutes long which is significantly longer than driving and much more of a journey (BC Bus north, 2022). In good news, the smaller routes covering 400km of the highway are at a $5 cost, however residents still note that many are still hitchhiking due to the time delays in waiting for the bus (Stewart, 2017).

The British Columbia Assembly of First Nations has created a map tool for viewers to use to locate First Nations communities. I followed the Highway 16 from Prince George to Prince Rupert, and counted 19 First Nation communities that sat along, or within reasonable distance to Highway 16. These communities are found on this map provided below.




Source: Google Maps. (n.d..). Highway 16, British Columbia, Canada. Retrieved from https://www.google.com/maps/search/highway+16/@53.5867633,-115.0873818,10z/data=!3m1!4b1

Considering there are two cost-effective routes, one from Prince George to Smithers, the other Prince George to Burns Lake. The Prince George to Smithers route services 6 First Nations communities. The Prince George to Burns Lake services 6. However, this is a generous count as a majority of the counted communities do not live directly on the highway, and would need extra transport back to their home. What this means, is that the cost-effective bus route in place only serves 7/19, which is less than half, of the First Nations communities along the highway, twice a week. This leaves the remaining 12 First Nations without accessible and affordable public transport, struggling to reach necessities. Although this map is compact, the distance between the Indigenous communities and towns is far. Therefore, hitchhiking becomes a mode of

transportation, as it may be the only way to reach the required destination for food, supplies, clothing, education, or work.

Although there have been positive changes in the past twenty years, this highway is not safe or usable for the Indigenous communities, and still to this day creates a space where Indigenous women and girls are at risk. The next chapter focuses on the specific public billboards that are found along the highway which are intended to help prevent MMIWG, however are found to cause more harm than good.

## Billboards

Billboards are large signs found in public places with the intention to portray information. Billboards are especially prevalent in North America, being used to sell items, alert to public knowledge, and in the case of the Highway of Tears, for warning. There are two types of billboards found along highway 16, both with the intent to bring attention to caution of the travellers.

Although the billboards were advocated by some Indigenous groups and have benefits of raising awareness of MMIWG, they have received criticism around their purpose. The billboards were proposed after the 2006 Missing and Murdered Women's Symposium which had a recommendation asking for billboards, which is a positive sign that they were placed (Morton, 2016, pg.316). However, when reading the recommendation, Katherine Morton reports that it actually asks for a 1-800 number to be included on the billboards for "tips, leads and cellphone numbers in the location of any female hitchhiker they encounter" (Morton, 2016, pg.316). The recommendation also aims for the billboards to be used for "travelling public awareness", which means that the billboards should be speaking to the public, not the Indigenous population travelling through (Morton, 2016, pg.316). However, the billboards placed instead target the Indigenous women and girls, promoting awareness of the dangers of hitchhiking, instead of promoting and supporting MMIWG. The switch of the narrative, and lack of solution to the "problem" of hitchhiking is problematic, as it further indicates that the onus is on the Indigenous women and girls *not* to hitchhike, and victim-blames them for their action. This also deepens the notion that Indigenous women are at fault for their violence, and their "risky-behaviours" create paths to their own end, that are leading them to be disposable.

Source: Fremson, Ruth. (2016). *Dozens of Women Vanish on Canada's Highway of Tears, and Most Cases are Unsolved.* New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/25/world/americas/canada-indigenous-women-highway-16.html

This is the first billboard found along the Highway of Tears, clearly displayed is the text of "Girls Don't Hitchhike on the Highway of Tears", aimed at the Indigenous girls and women with effort to put an end to hitchhiking. There is also a note that a "killer on the loose" with pictures of victims of said killer or killers to warn the people/Indigenous girls and women that this issue is real and present. This billboard is interesting because it has two narratives, one is telling girls not to hitchhike on the highway, and another signifying there is a killer on the loose. As discussed previously, the narrative is not what was intended in the recommendations of the Symposium, the target audience for this billboard is at the Indigenous girls and women, not at the general public like requested. This billboard's key motive is to deter hitchhiking, and by deterring hitchhiking the onus is put on the hitchhikers to be aware of the risk. The shift in weight of blame is moved from the "killer" to the "victim" as the victim has become aware of the societal blame on the action of hitchhiking, and how the action of hitchhiking itself is a "risk" therefore by taking the "risk", you then reap the consequences.

This contractual relationship between risk and consequence in hitchhiking is parallel to the relationship between risk and violence seen in the disposability of Indigenous women and girls. The consequence of violence or murder seen as a result from hitchhiking, is treated in the same way that if you take drugs, when you overdose or have negative reactions in your personal life due to addiction it is your own fault because you chose to partake in substance abuse. However, in the comparison of overdosing, there is an understanding of addiction and mitigating

factors that encourage drug taking. That leeway doesn't exist for Indigenous women and girls, there is less of an understanding of the mitigating factors that may force, or encourage, one to hitchhike, rather the underlying voice of societally deemed disposability runs underneath. This lack of leeway for Indigenous peoples when it comes to tragedies like violence and substance abuse has a racist undertone. As seen in the media, victims of overdose who are white are portrayed as innocent, whereas Indigenous victims of overdose are ignored or stigmatised as addicts (Johnston, 2019, pg.1).

Source: Fournier, Suzanne. (2007). *Trying to put an end to the tears.* Ottawa Citizen. Press Reader. https://www.pressreader.com/canada/ottawa-citizen/20070222/281827164302235

This second billboard is the most problematic. First of all, the written words are similar to the first billboard when discussing "Hitchhiking, Is it worth the Risk", which directly speaks to how Hitchhiking is deemed a contentious mobility and an action with an automatic consequence. The question is almost passive aggressive, with the clear onus being placed on those who are hitchhiking, which are the Indigenous women and girls.

Although it is not clear in the picture, there is a young, Indigenous girl, on the side of the road with her thumb up in a hitchhiking position, facing a set of truck headlights on a quiet road. Behind the girl is imagery of two spirits of women trying to push and pull the young girl away, and there is imagery of crosses all the way down the highway signifying the others who have lost their lives in the same situation. Then, there is writing saying "Ain't worth the risk sister", which directly puts the blame onto the victim for hitchhiking and plays into this contractual relationship that those who hitchhike will face a consequence. This relates back to the relationship with Indigenous women being seen as devious, having a lack of impulse control and promiscuous, and

the stigma around hitchhiking being seen as undesirable. Therefore, these billboards are viewing the relationship between MMIWG and hitchhiking as valid, and by stopping hitchhiking there will be lower rates of MMIWG.

Although these billboards are problematic from the first glance, the real issue lays much deeper below the surface. To begin, the billboards put the onus on the women, assuming that they are *choosing* to live a "high risk" lifestyle and are *choosing* to hitchhike instead of using a mobility that society deems as safer. This speaks to the notion of Indigenous women being "willing victims" because they seek out deviance and then face violence, as society sees it as coincidental rather than a tragedy (Morton, 2016. Pg.311). However, there is a lack of thought to the high rates of poverty and inaccessibility to public mobility available to these women. Therefore, the billboards are insinuating that the women should simply not hitchhike because it's dangerous without giving a second thought to the fact that there may not be another option. For example, attempting to secure necessities, going to medical appointments, to access women's shelters and safety all take mobility, and when there is a lack of financial funds to secure private transportation then the option is to walk, or hitchhike. This is without considering the conditions of the road, the time of day and the temperatures.

The billboards are explaining that there is a relationship between hitchhiking and violence, when in fact the relationship is actually between racism, gendered-violence, socio-economic disparity, geographic isolation, and the lack of accessible mobility to obtain necessities forcing women to hitchhike who unfortunately may face violence. However, the risk of violence to obtain the necessities is worth it as going without food or medication for themselves or their children is a much higher risk.

Katherine Morton discusses that these billboards leave off any other option, neither billboard offers alternative forms of mobility, phone numbers for support or any suggestion how to stay safe when travelling (Morton, 2016, pg.311). Once again, reiterating that the onus is on the Indigenous women to not be devious or promiscuous and to obey the patriarchal societal view and stop deviating by using contentious mobility. This in turn, puts the blame onto the Indigenous women because they didn't follow the billboards warnings, therefore when they die it's their own fault because they knew the risks of hitchhiking.

These billboards bring to reality the perspective of disposability in real-time. For example, the billboards are a public use of media intended to inform the public about MMIWG, however instead aim at deterring the risk of Hitchhiking, when the real risk is the attitudes of disposability and lack of care for the Indigenous women and girls. The spinning of the narrative, instead of informing the public, they remind the Indigenous women and girls that it's their choice to hitchhike, and by doing so they are creating the risk of murder for themselves.

The billboards publicly represent the disposability cycle in play, that the Indigenous women hitchhike, are murdered, because they were murdered by hitchhiking, they should have known better, and then instead of the blame being put on the murderer, the blame is put on the action of hitchhiking. This is deflection and victim blaming at its finest. The next chapter uses CPTED to help understand the physical risks that are present along the highway that fosters space where MMIWG can occur and go unnoticed. The intention of using CPTED to highlight weak areas is to give policymakers ideas of how they can play a part in keeping Indigenous communities safe and preventing further cases of MMIWG.

## CPTED & Geographic Isolation

CPTED, or Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design is a theory and field commonly found within crime prevention, with the concept being to prevent crime through the design of environments (Gibson, Johnson, 2016. Pg.256). The concept of CPTED has evolved and branched out over time, with different theorists constructing new theories about prevention. The goal of CPTED is to design areas that lead to a reduction for crime, which will then lead to a reduction in fear and improvement of quality of life for the residents (Gibson, Johnson, 2016, pg. 257). CPTED is found in the planning of cities and buildings, with research being conducted to see how environments promote crime, and what city planners can do to prevent it through construction and maintenance (Gibson, Johnson, 2016, pg. 257). CPTED is a concept that is worth looking at in relation to the Highway of Tears, as the physical environment of the Highway of Tears is a key factor into how MMIWG is growing and prevalent in an underpopulated area.

The term *Defensible Space* commonly used in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is defined as "a residential environment whose physical characteristics – building layout and site plan – function to allow inhabitants themselves to become key agents in ensuring their security" (Cozens & Lowe, 2015, pg.394). There are 4 main characteristics to Defensible Space, being territoriality, surveillance, image and milieu, geographical juxtaposition. (Cozens & Lowe, 2015, pg.395). These four elements are necessary for a space to be defensible. Territoriality describes how the building or area should have clear ownership by both symbolic and real barriers (Cozens & Lowe, 2015, pg.395). Surveillance describes how the space must provide opportunities for surveillance for and by residents using the building, found in the design of the space (Cozens & Lowe, 2015, pg.395). Thirdly, Image and milieu discusses how the area

should be built to influence the perception of space, promoting clean, well-maintained, and well-ordered places (Cozens & Lowe, 2015, pg.395). Finally, geographical juxtaposition, and arguably the most relevant to the Highway of Tears, discusses how the surrounding space should influence the security of the adjacent areas and vice versa (Cozens & Lowe, 2015, pg.395). Together, these four elements work to promote a sense of ownership, community, and responsibility that residents will feel secure and help maintain a safe, productive, and well-maintained neighbourhood (Cozens & Lowe, 2015, pg.395).

With the use of defensible space, Newman discusses that areas will become livable and controlled not by police, but by the community of people who share a common terrain (Cozens & Lowe, 2015, pg.395). This idea of Defensible Space is what lacks along the Highway of tears and in many areas inhabited by Indigenous communities. Due to the large area, and lack of defensible space, there is a missing sense of security and safety provided by a lack of ownership, a lack of surveillance and especially a lack of geographical juxtaposition where there is no influence of security in the surrounding areas of the reservations. Given the Highway of Tears, and the spaced-out towns, villages and cities bordering onto the large, forested highway, there is so much space and hidden area that surveillance is somewhat impossible, and the area surrounding the reservations have no influence of security due to the multiple exit strategies and open areas.

Wekerle and Whitman defend that awareness of the environment, visibility by others and finding help could be supported by using lighting, promoting sightlines, land-use and informative signage could help reduce entrapment spots and movement predictors (Cozens & Lowe, 2015, pg.395). By adding physical security, like lighting along the Highway of Tears as well as sightlines in the road, these could prevent crime due to the surveillance opportunities by the

communities and the public passing along the highway. The point of a defensible space is to "design out crime", and due to the lack thereof, crime can occur unnoticed and is almost promoted in these areas due to the opportunity and accessibility. With this aspect in mind, it is clear to see the relationship to a lack of defensible space near the reservations and along the Highway of Tears in relation to the MMIWG, especially when women and girls are left with no option but to hitchhike to their destination, opportunities for crime appear apparent.

In the study "Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Initiative – Final Report: *What was shared"* conducted by the Government of Alberta, the government collected research and interviewed 575 Indigenous females from Alberta about their experiences and knowledge of MMIWG and provide information on their worries and experiences (Justice and Solicitor General, 2015, pg.40). Participants noted multiple themes related to geographic isolation as being a key factor into MMIWG (Justice and Solicitor General, 2015, pg.40). Participants noted inherent risk due to geographic isolation in First Nations communities (Justice and Solicitor General, 2015, pg.40). This could be for numerous reasons, considering a lack of resources close forcing extended travel for essentials like food, clothing, doctors' appointments, and work.

Risk increases as police response takes a longer time, currently this is trying to be fixed by the RCMP putting detachments or having on-reservation local police force. However, this is not the case for all communities, and costs a lot of money and manpower to run.

Bad weather limits access in and out of the communities, increasing feelings of isolation. These feelings of isolation are reported to be a key factor in "high risk behaviours", reasonably as people consider the need to "get out" and may choose walking late at night or hitchhiking as last-resort ideas.

Isolated communities have limited supports, therefore the need to exit the community grows continuously as residents are forced to go elsewhere for their needs. Lack of affordable and accessible transportation means community members take risks like hitchhiking or walking alone at night. Existing supports are strained, poverty, wage discrepancy leads to vulnerability for women. Poverty increases likelihood of high-risk behaviours due to strain, limits basic safety precautions like a working cell phone (Justice and Solicitor General, 2015, pg.40). Community members reported: lack of payphones, wanting a community neighbourhood watch, better lighting, more police, surveillance cameras, educational material (Justice and Solicitor General, 2015, pg.75). The participants were asked for ideas that could increase safety and decrease MMIWG in their communities, the results were:

Ideas for: safe rides, foot patrols, neighbourhood watch, peacemakers' program, self-defence, community welcome wagon (Justice and Solicitor General, 2015, pg.76).

Along the 718 km highway, there are only Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) stations. The stations being in Prince Rupert, Terrace, Smithers, Granisle, Burns Lake, Vanderhoof, Fort St James, New Hazelton, and Prince George (Google Maps, n.d.). New Hazelton, which is located below Glen Vowell services 9 communities, with 8 of them being mainly Indigenous (Google Maps, n.d). From New Hazelton detachment to Gitwangak, Google maps estimates with good weather it would be a 31-minute drive (Google Maps, n.d). This is the reality for many Indigenous communities, where the closest police station is over 30 minutes away, which may not serve the immediate need of a dire situation (Google Maps, n.d). Therefore, the Indigenous communities are valid in their fears of slow response times from police services, as even if there is no hold up and available officers, there may not be officer presence for over 30 minutes. Therefore, by using Defensible space along the Highway of Tears

to aid in prevention and protection of the communities, there would be another barrier of safety before the first responders could arrive.

Although the study used in this chapter was conducted in Alberta, and the Highway of Tears is in British Columbia, the study gives insight into the experience of MMIWG from a personal view, not just an academic view. By understanding individuals' experiences, worries and recommendations, academics, policy makers and government officials can use the ideas to help provide a safe space for their citizens. It is clear that Defensible Space would be useful and beneficial along the Highway of Tears to aid in the prevention of more cases of MMIWG and create a sense of support and safety for the Indigenous communities which are isolated. Although 911 response timings are hard to predict, even when considering the minimum 31 minutes of driving time, by creating a defensible space there is opportunity for citizens to request and receive help on a timelier basis, whilst also preventing crime down the road. Defensible space is essential for areas that have vulnerable communities as it acts as a primary protection and could save lives.

## Conclusions

The research provided in this thesis has demonstrated the relationship between MMIWG and disposability that has been forged by colonialism. It has affected Indigenous women and girls along the Highway of Tears who have been victimised for decades.

The relationship between attitudes of disposability towards Indigenous women and girls started over a hundred years ago, influenced by the influx of colonisation and patriarchy. The effects of this are ongoing and are seen to this day with the attitudes of disposability provided by law enforcement, the government and the media. The effects of disposability seep into the livelihoods of Indigenous women and girls, and systematically create space for them to face violence and victimization. The cyclical relationship between disposability and MMIWG leads to societal victim-blaming for Indigenous women living high-risk lifestyles thereby being ignored by law enforcement and thus, the violence perpetuates.

On a larger scale, this equation is shown with the billboards that are present in the case study of the Highway of Tears. Instead of creating a safe number or advocacy for the past MMIWG, and current Indigenous women and girls who live along the highway, they instead victim-blame the violence back onto the Indigenous women by pinpointing the hitchhiking as the problem, rather than the disposability fuelled by society and colonisation.

The application of CPTED reveals that the Highway of Tears is lacking many necessary physical elements that design out crime. By having more physical barriers, the violence against Indigenous women and girls may be deterred with crime being easier to spot by locals, and there being primary resources available to help people in need. There are lacking vantage points and basic safety structures like 911 phone boxes, stable internet, and phone services. Considering that Highway 16 is already unfavourable due to unpredictable weather, long distance and lack of

accessible public transportation, it lacks defensible space that could deter violence around its surroundings. A thorough CPTED analysis of the Highway of Tears reinforces the relationship between the Attitudes of Disposability imposed on the Indigenous women and girls by continued colonialism and the patriarchy, thereby continuously putting them in a marginalized position of victimization and violence.

Throughout the research I have conducted, I believe that there should be an updated federal document to the 2019 Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous women, and accountability for the calls for justice that have not been completed. Also, another look at the Symposium recommendations from 2006, and attention given to Highway 16 to create a safer space for the 17 Indigenous communities who live along it.

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