

Bridget Keating  
First Nations University of Canada  
Regina, SK

**Pocahontas' Persistence:  
The Framing of an Indigenous Girl in News Media**

**Abstract**

In October of 2001, three white men from Tisdale, Saskatchewan, a rural farming community situated near several reserves in the province's northern grainbelt, sexually assaulted a 12 year old Indigenous girl from Yellow Quill First Nation. In the first national news story written about the assault, Krista Foss with the Globe and Mail describes her as a "Cree version of Jennifer Lopez" and invokes her mythological association with the Indian Princess, "Pocahontas" (2001, November 12). Thus, the girl becomes a manifestation of the historical and mythical "Indian Princess", which evolves as a contemporary description of her as a "Cree Jennifer Lopez". Subsequent coverage of the sexual assault trial defines the girl as a "sexual aggressor", who guides and facilitates the men's violent actions, and depicts a sexualised image of the girl within journalistic narrative, which, in essence, frames a textual body, an *ekphrastic* representation that produces a masturbatory fantasy.

Using this instance as a case study as well as an entry point into a larger discursive formation, I examine print media's coverage of the sexual assault trial involving 12-year-old girl. As part of this investigation, I argue that the gaze and textual imaging within journalistic narrative, and the mediated representation of the Indigenous female body is "embodied", "the active history of a whole past," as evidenced through *ekphrastic* imaging in journalistic text (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 56). As part of this research, I employ a media analysis to dissect images as represented through the canvas of the newspaper. The theoretical framework in my paper is based on visual semiotics and discourse analysis, which explore the significance of representation.