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Reclaiming Voices: Red Intersectionality and Subaltern Counterpublics in Indigenous TikTok Trends 'Savage Daughter'

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ABSTRACT

Popular culture often misrepresents Native American people by portraying them through a colonial lens; thus, Indigenous people of the northern part of America are mostly perceived by the caricature of their own culture or ultimately effaced from the media. In particular, Native American women are experiencing double marginalization. The colonial lens that put their people is mostly built on a patriarchal system, which is not only detrimental to the Indigenous's existence but also almost effectively erases their women's identity. Social media platforms such as TikTok have enabled marginalized groups to express themselves and regain their identities. This research employs Natalie Clark's Red Intersectionality and Nancy Fraser's Subaltern Counterpublics to analyze selected TikTok videos from the trend "Savage Daughter" by Sarah Hester Ross' cover, which numerous Indigenous women creators use to show their pride and culture. This study suggests that Native American women are, in fact, not erased from the media representation, but also provides critical insight into how digital platforms empower marginalized groups to resist dominant ideologies.

Keywords: *intersectionality; native American; social media; TikTok; women empowerment*

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INTRODUCTION

Colonial narratives have long influenced how Indigenous peoples are portrayed in the media, which is characterized by ambivalence, stereotypes, and erasure. Both popular culture and historical narratives have wavered between depicting Indigenous peoples as aggressive and savage threats or as noble and in one with nature. Indigenous identities have frequently been reduced to one-dimensional tropes such as the "noble savage", "violent warrior", or the "vanishing Indian". But more importantly, these representations remove the existence and agency of Indigenous women while also obscuring the complexity of Indigenous lives.

Indigenous women, in particular, are doubly marginalized within these narratives. Rarely positioned as central figures in media, they are relegated to the background or depicted in ways that uphold gendered stereotypes and systemic invisibility. The intersection of gender and race to silence their voices is reflected in this erasure. In addition to maintaining historical errors, the underrepresentation of Indigenous women also contributes to the marginalization of Indigenous communities as a whole. Understanding the roles and depictions of Indigenous women in the media is essential to challenging these trends because it shows how colonial frameworks have formed their invisibility and how decolonial viewpoints might restore their due place in the narrative.

In the era of digital media, underrepresented populations can now express themselves and reclaim their identities on social media platforms such as TikTok. One notable instance is the way Indigenous TikTok producers use the song "Savage Daughter" (as recorded by Sarah Hester Ross) to honor resiliency, cultural pride, and ancestry. This trend serves not only as a form of creative self-expression but also as a collective act of resistance against dominant narratives that have historically marginalized Indigenous voices who live in the settler-colonial state, such as the U.S. and Canada, with a particular focus on Indigenous women. This study examines how Indigenous women creators use TikTok to create alternative public spaces in which cultural identities are reclaimed and remade, drawing on Natalie Clark's Red Intersectionality and Nancy Fraser's concept of Subaltern Counterpublics. This paper employs a qualitative research approach to

investigate the thematic and symbolic aspects of these films, revealing how this trend pushes the limits of public discourse in the digital era and challenges hegemonic representations.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative content analysis framework, specifically Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), to examine the visual, lyrical, and performative elements of the Savage Daughter TikTok trend. TikTok was used as the primary data source, and videos were collected from January 2020 to December 2024, during which the trend gained significant visibility.

Videos were retrieved using the hashtags #SavageDaughter, #IndigenousTikTok, #native, and #Indigenous. Only content uploaded by self-identified Indigenous women was retained. To ensure consistency and relevance, several inclusion criteria were applied: the video had to feature the "Savage Daughter" audio (mainly with Sarah Hester Ross's version), include the creator singing or lip-syncing to the song, and display culturally specific visual markers such as traditional attire, distinct hair styling, beadwork, regalia, or other identifiable expressions of Indigenous cultural pride. Videos were excluded if they were reposts, uploaded by non-Indigenous accounts, or lacked visible cultural elements connected to Indigenous identity.

A purposive sample of 12 videos was selected. This number was considered sufficient to achieve thematic saturation while remaining manageable for in-depth qualitative coding and interpretation. Each video was documented through manual extraction of visual descriptors, including clothing, gestures, facial expressions, captions, and symbolic imagery. Because the audio already contained clear lyrics, transcription of speech was not necessary; instead, emphasis was placed on how the lyrics were embodied visually and performatively.

Ethically, all creator usernames were anonymized, and only publicly available content was analyzed in accordance with TikTok's public-domain accessibility.

The analytical process was guided by conceptual categories derived from Red Intersectionality and Subaltern Counterpublic theory. Rather than applying rigid coding procedures, the videos were examined interpretively through these

theoretical lenses, identifying recurring patterns related to colonialism, survivance, gendered resistance, counter-narrative formation, and critiques of settler-colonial discourse. The analysis involved careful, repeated viewing of each video to trace how visual performance, embodiment, and symbolism articulated layered meanings. Where interpretive tensions arose, they were revisited and refined through reflective comparison to ensure conceptual consistency and theoretical alignment.

In her research article, *Red Intersectionality and Violence-informed Witnessing Praxis with Indigenous Girls*, Clark extends intersectionality by embedding it within Indigenous epistemologies, sovereignty, and anti-colonial frameworks. Unlike conventional intersectionality, which primarily focuses on overlapping systems of oppression like race, gender, and class, Red Intersectionality centers Indigenous experiences, recognizing the unique interplay between colonialism, land dispossession, and identity. It acknowledges that colonial violence targets not only individuals but also cultural, spiritual, and relational systems, emphasizing the inseparability of personal and communal experiences within Indigenous worldviews. Red Intersectionality seeks to challenge and resist colonial narratives by focusing on Indigenous agency, resilience, and survivance. It moves beyond merely identifying oppression to advocate for activism and transformation rooted in Indigenous sovereignty and intergenerational knowledge. This framework highlights the importance of addressing gendered colonialism, recognizing the sacred roles of Two-Spirit individuals, and situating Indigenous girls' and women’s experiences within the broader context of systemic oppression and their resistance to it. Ultimately, Red Intersectionality calls for centering Indigenous voices and traditions while fostering holistic approaches to understanding and addressing violence, trauma, and identity.

Fraser’s *Rethinking the Public Sphere* critiques Jürgen Habermas’s traditional, bourgeois interpretation of the public sphere, particularly its claims of equality and universal access. She argues that social inequalities like gender and class inevitably shape discourse, challenging the idea that disparities can

be "bracketed" for equal deliberation. Fraser also critiques the concept of a single, unified public sphere as undemocratic, instead advocating for multiple subaltern counterpublics where marginalized groups, such as women, laborers, and people of color, can create counter-narratives to challenge dominant norms. These spaces serve two critical functions: allowing marginalized voices to regroup and articulate their perspectives and providing platforms to contest mainstream ideologies. Fraser's theory will be applied to the "Savage Daughter" TikTok trend, analyzing how Indigenous women use digital spaces to form a counterpublic that amplifies their voices, resists settler-colonial narratives, and reclaims their cultural identity in a participatory and transformative way.

In addition, this study selectively draws on Rowe's essay "Post-Nationalism, Globalism, and the New American Studies" (1998), which critiques nation-centered frameworks in American cultural analysis. Rowe's approach encourages the examination of cultural expressions that move beyond rigid national narratives and instead highlight transnational flows of identity, media, and discourse. Within this study, this perspective helps contextualize how Indigenous TikTok creators articulate identity and resistance in ways that both engage with and exceed conventional narratives of the United States as a unified national framework. By circulating through a global digital platform, these performances demonstrate how Indigenous cultural expression can simultaneously critique American settler-colonial myths while reaching audiences beyond national boundaries.

DISCUSSION

How it came to be: the perception towards Indigenous people

Indigenous people in America, for most of history, have been the victims of ambivalent perception. As Lynch (1984) aptly puts it, they have become the object of both "despised and revered," (p. 61). Berry (1960) ascertained people's perspectives, which exhibited mixed reactions toward Indigenous peoples. They were "more brutish than the beasts they hunt," according to many in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and one author even dubbed them "animals, vulgarly called Indians" (Berry, 1960, p. 51). One notable story is that of Mary Rowlandson, as Berry

(1960) noted, who was held captive for three months in 1676. Six years later, she published a book recounting her experience, which received significant attention on both sides of the Atlantic and was reprinted approximately 30 times. While Mrs. Rowlandson was not physically mistreated, she endured the same harsh conditions of cold and hunger as her Native captors. Despite this, she reflected on her captivity as an experience of unimaginable terror, describing her captors as "atheistically, proud, wild, cruel, barbarous, brutish, and diabolical" (Berry, 1960, p. 52). Berry, however, offered alternative perspectives; many others viewed Indigenous people in much more favorable terms. Columbus, for example, described them as "very intelligent, loving people, without covetousness", who embodied kindness and spoke with exceptional gentleness. Many explorers and writers who followed Columbus praised Native Americans, portraying them as paragons of virtue, marked by fidelity, dignity, generosity, self-restraint, and "tender piety" (Berry, 1960, p. 52).

When talking about pop culture – or movies in particular – it is quite difficult to find a "good" representation of Indigenous people, one that is free from dehumanizing or derogatory stereotypes—and even though they exist, one still needs incredible effort to find one, akin to a needle in a haystack (in which the haystack is Hollywood). Historically speaking, Indigenous people have been the object of misrepresentation in the media. Either seen as "spiritual masters, nature-loving, spirit-talking, wise, stoic, traditional, brave, long-haired, warrior" or "alcoholics, lazy, red-skins, wild, rich, impoverished, druggie, thugs, gangsters, ungrateful, victims, angry, tax-free, brown (or "white"), violent," (Culture, Stereotypes, and Identity, 2019). There are many stereotypical myths that settler – or colonizer – depicts them with, most notably, as foretold, the noble savage, the violent warrior, and perhaps the most haunting, the vanishing Indian.

The noble savage, as a concept particularly in literature, refers to "an idealized concept of uncivilized man, who symbolizes the innate goodness of one who has not been exposed to the corrupting influences of civilization," (Britannica & T. Editors of Encyclopedia, 2024).

Succinctly put, in terms of Indigenous people, this denotes the colonizer's view of Indigenous people who were often romanticized as noble yet primitive, living in harmony with nature but lacking agency or complexity—this deceptively good-natured impression from the term "noble" when coined with "savage" strongly indicates the colonizer's paradoxical viewpoints. Lescarbot, a French lawyer, explorer, poet, and author from the 16th to the 17th centuries – and perhaps one of the first people who described the Indigenous as such – had a cordial relationship with the Mi'kmaq, a First Nations group in Canada, whom he generally regarded favorably. The phrase "Les Sauvages sont vraiment Nobles", which translates to "The Savages are truly Noble," first appears in English literature in his works (Rapp, 2024). Contrasting with the noble savage, the violent warrior points to many depictions that framed Indigenous peoples as antagonists, particularly in Westerns, casting them as violent threats to settlers. Indigenous warriors abound in movies like Buffalo Bill's Wild West Shows, a live performance from the nineteenth century that was recorded and performed throughout Europe and America. According to Nabb Research Center Online Exhibits, "Buffalo Bill portrayed Native Americans as inhumane 'savages' that terrorized colonists for little to no reason," such as making a scene where "a settler could be seen riding by, traveling with his families, and the Native Americans would pass by on their horses and attack them. While the Natives were attacking the settlers, they would scream and yell at one another towards the settlers. They would also be carrying torches and their bows and arrows as they searched/burned the settlers' belongings," (Native American Stereotypes in Early Films, n.d., par. 1). This conveyed the notion that Native Americans were ruthless, heartless, and accountable for the ongoing conflict between Native Americans and Americans.

In the aforementioned movies, Native Americans are shown as having little to no clothing on their body and sporting a lot of feathers and beads in their hair. The clothing they wore appeared to be torn and/or soiled. The idea that Native Americans were violent 'savages' who only reacted to violence was first established by Buffalo Bill's Wild West Shows and other earlier motion pictures, and it subsequently spread throughout the world (Native American

Stereotypes in Early Films, n.d.). The vanishing Indian, as the colonizer would exclaim, is a powerful cultural myth in both Canada and the United States that suggests Indigenous peoples would either assimilate and eventually disappear culturally or physically as a result of their vulnerability to Western diseases (Settler Colonial Myths, n.d.). In the movie The Last of the Mohicans, Mohican leader Chingachgook, his biological son Uncas, and his adoptive son Hawkeye embark on a perilous quest to escort a colonel's daughters during the American Revolution. Tragically, Uncas dies while traveling. Chingachgook, overcome with grief, declares himself the "last of the Mohicans," lamenting the disappearance of the Mohican bloodline after his death and expressing regret over the decline of his people. The Mohicans remain, despite their dwindling numbers (2020). Likewise in Cooper's book, as mentioned by Oberg (2018), the indigenous people in Mann's "Mohicans" are either noble or ignoble, each having a unique connection to their environment and to "nature", but they are "all tragic" and "doomed" (par. 2). They show up, they act, but they will all inevitably disappear. The deep-rooted ideas about the "Vanishing American" are reflected in both Cooper's book and Mann's movie (Oberg, 2018).

In many mainstream Hollywood films, early Western television series, and popular adventure novels and comic strips, Indigenous characters have often been portrayed through reductive stereotypes—either as violent antagonists who threaten settler expansion or as silent, submissive figures who exist merely to support non-Indigenous protagonists. These portrayals frequently deny Indigenous characters psychological depth, agency, or contemporary presence, instead confining them to narrow narrative roles shaped by colonial imagination. Only "in the last twenty years Indian actors have found roles that do not involve the nineteenth century, roles that do not require loincloths and full feather headdresses", according to King in *The Inconvenient Indian* (2012).

One distinctive similarity is the absence of Indigenous women's representation. Although there are female characters, they rarely become the focus that advances the story, often remaining in the background. This marginalization can be interpreted as a reflection of an intersectional problem, where Indigenous women face compounded erasure due to the

gendered invisibility that minimizes their distinct experiences and contributions, in addition to the overall underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the media. This layered invisibility appears to be not accidental; it stems from systems that fail to recognize the unique contributions and struggles of Indigenous women, leaving their stories untold. Their exclusion from popular narratives sustains a larger erasure of their voices, histories, and realities. To address this, it is essential to highlight Indigenous women's experiences and acknowledge the intersecting forces that shape their positions within their communities and in society as a whole.

When it rains, it pours: the multi-layered burden upon Native American women

Mainstream media representations often contribute to a dual form of erasure – shaped by colonial and patriarchal frameworks – by marginalizing Indigenous women and limiting the complexity of their portrayal. Such examples can be found in Disney's *Peter Pan* (1953) and *Pocahontas* (1995). Now, these "old" animated cartoons both present their own interpretation of Indigenous people – especially their Native American woman – in what can be considered a misleading and dehumanizing portrayal, creating misrepresentation. In his book titled Animating Differences, King et al. (2010) assert the prevalence of "race, gender, and sexuality" in these films (p. 15). An example, which King has kindly provided, in the scene following Peter Pan's rescue of Tiger Lily and his dismissal of Tinker Bell, Peter and the Darling children join the Lost Boys at a fire in the Indian Camp. Teepees and totem poles are part of the scene, which combines aspects of several Indigenous cultures into a generic portrayal of "Indianness". Together, they answer the question, "What Made the Red Man Red?" with a song and dance. The brightly red "braves" and "chiefs" examine the genesis of clichéd expressions like "how" and "ugh", punctuated with made-up "Indian-sounding" jargon like "Hana Mana Ganda" (King et al., 2010, p. 16). King further provides illustrations, drawing attention to a song that comically explains these phrases: "ugh" is a groom's emotion upon seeing his mother-in-law, and "how" is a fundamental Native American speech marker. A young man unintentionally flirts with an elderly woman who has lost most of her teeth, while Wendy receives a reprimand from an

elderly woman who says, "Squaw no dance … Squaw gettum firewood". The chorus links this transition to the mythological origin of Native peoples' red skin. The scenario concludes with Tiger Lily dancing on a drum and kissing Peter, which embarrasses him and makes his face crimson. Not only that Peter Pan's portrayal of Indigenous Americans indicates stereotypical; uncultured, illiterate savages—it also suggests this very foreign notion of "Indian princess" – as seen in the character Tiger Lily and very much prevalent in Pocahontas – which is something that is started from misconception; the term "princess" was often mistakenly applied to the daughters of tribal chiefs or other community leaders by early American colonists who mistakenly believed that Indigenous people shared the European system of royalty (National Museum of the American Indian, 2007; Riverwind, 2008).

Connecting the dots regarding the "Indian Princess" myth with King's exclamation of Disney's tendency to "sexualize indigeneity itself" – when talking about apparent blush from a Native maiden's kiss – has become easier, fortunately—or unfortunately, with Disney's portrayal of Pocahontas. Before discussing the movie, let us examine in greater depth how the U.S. perceived the "Indian princess". The teenage princess gave us a tangible figure to hang the iconography on Americans already had a "Pocahontas Perplex"—since her appearance as a symbol of the New World in 1575, the Indian woman has been with us in her dual roles as Queen and Princess (Green, 1975, p. 701). The "Indian princess", who held a bow and arrow, wore a feathered headdress, and was frequently portrayed as pursuing independence, represented North America in paintings and engravings, even to the point of being "presented as the daughter of Britannia, her attributes now pertained to the American colonies" (Fleming, 1965, p. 65).

Women of all statuses have historically been in control of the household and agricultural aspects of tribe life in many Native American civilizations. Historically, women have cleared fields, planted and harvested crops, hunted and fished, and provided a significant portion of the food for their communities; however, duties differ based on geographic location and culture—in many villages, they also sit on war councils, own their dwellings, and oversee

the distribution of food (Wishart, 2011). This indicates that Native American women are primarily assigned to domestic roles but are also revered as being close to nature. Images of "Indian princesses" in non-Native culture reflect and frequently exaggerate this closeness to nature. The Native woman became a symbol of fertility to the general public as a result of her representation of American land and agriculture, "the colonial/patriarchal mind that seeks to control the sexuality of women… also seeks to control nature", says Indigenous feminist and activist Andrea Smith (Gorecki, 2015). And by extension, Pocahontas, according to poet Hart Crane of the 20th century, is "a woman, ripe, waiting to be taken" by the white man (Gill, 1991, p. 1; Snyder, 2015). The best-known contemporary portrayal of an "Indian princess" is Pocahontas, the title character of the 1995 Disney film, in which she is currently a member of the Disney Princess series. Her overtly sexualized image has drawn criticism, particularly since the actual Pocahontas was "a child of ten years old" at the time of the Disney-fabricated events, according to Captain John Smith's firsthand accounts of Virginia published in London in 1608. Particularly with respect to her relationship with John Smith, the European figure she falls in love with, the fictional Pocahontas is portrayed as distinct from other members of her Powhatan tribe. Pocahontas is kind and compassionate, in contrast to her hostile and aggressive tribe. She embodies the "noble savage" by rejecting stereotypes associated with Indigenous peoples rather than adopting colonial characteristics, particularly her spirit of adventure, which enables her to reflect on her history and seize new opportunities (Savage, 2018, p. 9).

Indigenous people are "the only population to be portrayed far more often in historical context than as contemporary people" (Yarrow, 2007. According to King (2012), this restricts the roles that Indigenous actors can play, "The majority of Indian actors end up playing historical roles". As long as they appear Indian – that's the catch – you won't get historical Indian roles if you don't appear Indian. Additionally, Indigenous characters are frequently denied a prominent position in stories in which they appear, allowing non-Indigenous characters to take center stage. Although they may be shown with sympathy,

Indigenous people in this stereotype need a non-Indigenous hero to save them or help them accomplish their objectives. Furthermore, it is frequently depicted that the protagonist is 'improving' the Indigenous culture and its customs.

It has not improved in the modern era, or at least in the last two decades, until this point. Portrayals of Native American women remain scarce. In fact, according to Smith and The Annenberg Inclusion Initiative (2023), "99% or 1,581 of 1,600 films featured zero Native American female-identified speaking characters". In their research brief, where they "punctuate the importance of Lily Gladstone's role in Killers of the Flower Moon by examining the prevalence of Native American characters on screen in popular film" – from 2007 to 2022, they reviewed 1,600 movies – "Native Americans characters are nearly invisible in top films" (ibid).

> On Screen Portrayals. A total of 62,224 characters were coded for apparent race/ethnicity. Of these, <1% (n=133) were American Indian/Alaskan Native. This calculates to less than a quarter of one percent (0.21) of all speaking characters coded for race/ethnicity.

Given that roughly 1.3% of the U.S. identify as Native American, the portrayal in Hollywood is astonishingly below the real world statistic.

The prevalence of Native American characters has not changed over time. In 2022, there were 3 depictions and the number was not different from 2021 (5 characters) or 2007 (5 characters).

The year with the most depictions was 2017, with 20 Native characters shown across the 100 top movies. The Twilight franchise accounts for the most portrayals, with 39 or 29.3% of all Native characters appearing in this series over the 16- year time frame sampled.

65% (n=86) of Native American characters were completely inconsequential to the plot. Only 1 protagonist (lead or co lead) across 1,600 movies was Native American. The remaining 46 characters or 34.6% were supporting or secondary to the plot.

77.4% (n=103) of all Native Americans on screen were male and only 22.6% (n=30) were female. This is a tilted gender ratio of 3.43 Native American males to every 1 Native American female.

Of the characters that could be assessed for age, Native Americans were more likely to be 21-39 (n=47, 35.9%) or

> 40-64 (n=41, 31.3%) than 13-20 (19.8%, n=26). Even fewer were elderly or 65 years of age or older (11.4%, n=15) or portrayed as elementary school aged children (1.5%, n=2).
>
> A full 1,581 movies out of 1,600 erased Native girls and women completely. Significantly, in 2022, there was not one woman or girl coded on screen across the 100 top movies. 2021 and 2007 were equality problematic, with 98 and 99 movies (respectively) erasing Native girls and women. (Smith & The Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, 2023, p. 4, emphasis added)

The amount of effort for people to watch an actual Native woman – even for an inconsequential role – on screen is borderline abysmal. Smith stated that "audiences would have to watch thousands of movies to see even one Native woman on screen …" And the sad thing is, "this is not their fault," as Smith boldly claims that the failure lies "on the part of writers, directors, and casting directors to see Native women and men as key participants in society and thus in storytelling," (Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, 2023, par. 8).

The fact that Indigenous women have long served as community leaders, storytellers, and cultural preservers is overlooked by this absence. Especially in storytelling, women's position as storytellers is essential to the tribe's survival, as storytelling is a cornerstone of Native American culture, helping to preserve and convey their values and traditions (García, 2015). It is crucial to draw attention to how this multi-layered invisibility exacerbates a larger systemic problem: the failure to address the difficulties of Indigenous women, including cultural marginalization and gendered violence, when their narratives are not told. This needs to be addressed by giving Indigenous women a central place in narratives and ensuring that their voices shape how their histories and identities are presented in both established media and new channels such as social media.

Where there's a will, there's a way: red intersectionality and subaltern counter-public in the settler-colonial society

There is this important concept of resistance practice, which highlights how understanding societal "complacency" is crucial to addressing the lack of action against violence targeting Indigenous women and girls (Clark, 2016, p. 53). Moreover,

Clark added that, historically, Indigenous women and girls have actively resisted the narratives imposed on them by policies and media; therefore, "this resistance is an important place to begin to understand the way forward" (Clark, 2016, p. 53). Indigenous women have historically used storytelling and other creative writing to challenge complacency and resist colonial imagery. These types of writing have always been political acts (Armstrong, 1990; Brant, 1994, as cited in Clark, 2016). As seen in this excerpt below:

> I believe that Indigenous girls' stories, writing, and poetry are medicines, and are also acts of resistance against the colonial and academic presentation of Indigenous girls. I know that many of the young women with whom I work write poetry, songs, short stories, and plays, and yet these narratives that are not saturated in notions of their being at risk are not published, nor are they part of the discourse about Indigenous girls. In the words of Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Storytelling, oral histories, the perspectives of Elders and of women have become an integral part of all indigenous research. Each story is powerful. But the point about the stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place." (1999, p. 144, as cited in Clark, 2016, p. 54)

The purpose of this "resistance" is to preserve cultural heritage; one can reasonably assume that storytelling, songs, poetry, and other forms of art may contribute to this effort. Despite not being the only source of voice for cultural exposé, the role of women – particularly Native American women – is very much crucial to this endeavor. It is because Native American women serve as cultural preservers, especially through storytelling. For it is through their stories and traditions that they become the guardians of their culture, carrying forward the legacy of their people. One of the most pivotal instruments for carrying on their legacy is the internet. The advent of the internet has ushered in an era of globalization through digital means, with social media emerging as a prominent platform for fostering engagement and connection. Social media empowers individuals to become storytellers and cultural ambassadors, often reviving endangered traditions,

including crafts, music, and languages (Romero, 2024). By incorporating traditional and modern interpretations, Romero adds, it also promotes intergenerational relationships by enabling older audiences to learn from younger audiences. Influencers who highlight traditions and artifacts contribute significantly to advancing cultural awareness (Romero, 2024).

Social media is crucial to the visibility of marginalized voices in the age of digital media and globalization, particularly those of Native American women. The convergence of Nancy Fraser's Subaltern Counterpublics and Natalie Clark's Red Intersectionality is best illustrated by the "Savage Daughter" TikTok trend. By reclaiming their identities and amplifying their voices, Indigenous women fight settler-colonial erasure by establishing a digital counterpublic. According to Fraser's paradigm, these creators use TikTok to both create a space of collective empowerment and resistance and to express the multiple forms of oppression they experience, as highlighted by Red Intersectionality. Within this counterpublic, the song "Savage Daughter" becomes a cultural instrument that represents disobedience, sovereignty, and intergenerational survival. In a settler-colonial setting, this trend illustrates how Indigenous women negotiate and challenge systematic oppression by fusing intersectional awareness with performative acts of resistance.

Figure 1. User @terrell2spirit with Native American makeup and adornments

Figure 2. User @official_kiyasha brandished her long hair by braiding it in the video with her Native American woven scarf

TikTok enables its users to use hashtags such as #SavageDaughter and #IndigenousTikTok, which allows Indigenous women to form a digital counterpublic that amplifies voices often excluded from mainstream media. Within this counterpublic, the trend's performative elements—lip-syncing, traditional clothing, and self-styling—may serve as a challenge to settler-colonial erasure by centering Indigenous identity and resilience. As seen on some users such as @chrishawn.blackeagle, @terrell2spirit, and @walkinbeautypoetry, they proudly present their makeups and Indigenous adornments: woven fabric for clothes, feathery accessories, beaded necklaces, and earrings with colorful stones. Some other users, namely, @tiamiscihk, @tionashayla, @official_kiyasha, @snakeriverranch, and @thatwarriorprincess, these users utilized this platform to share their pride in their traditional hairstyles: long hair and braided, which is very intimate to their way of life.

> Native Americans' beliefs around long hair, as with many of their beliefs, are tied to the earth and nature. Long hair has symbolic significance tying them to mother earth whose hair is long grasses. It's believed that long hair in Native American culture is a physical manifestation of the growth of the spirit, and some say it allows for extrasensory perception and connection to all things. Some Native American tribes believe that the hair is connected to the nervous system, and it reaches out like tentacles to pull energy and information from the world around us (Hufford in A Look At Native American Beauty And Style, 2021).

Figure 3. User @tiamiscihk shares her intergenerational bonding hair braiding practice with her mother

Users @tiamiscihk, @indigenousbabez, and @filmbyvictoria even shared this practice as intergenerational, from mother to daughter. In addition to commemorating survival, these acts foster a sense of unity among Indigenous creators and viewers by exhibiting cultural pride and personal expression. Through their collective presence on social media, Indigenous creators

increasingly use these platforms as spaces for cultural resistance and identity reclamation. This visibility offers a critique of dominant narratives that have historically marginalized, simplified, or misrepresented Indigenous communities.

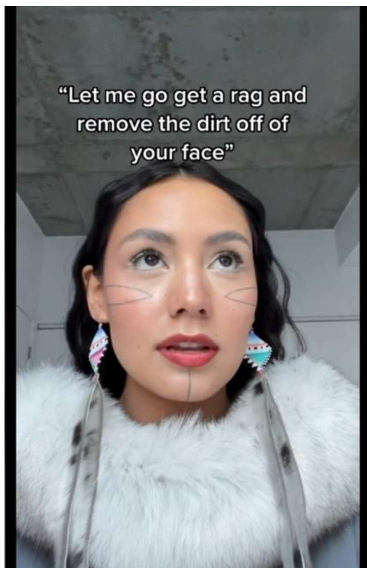

Figure 4. User @shinanova shares her experience getting microaggressions

The TikTok trend functions not only as a celebration of cultural identity but also as a form of reclamation shaped by overlapping pressures such as racism, sexism, and cultural erasure. In this context, Red Intersectionality helps illuminate how the Counterpublic space created through these videos engages with and responds to multiple, interconnected forms of oppression. As seen through user @shinanova's post captioned, "To the person who came up to me and said 'Let me go get a rag and remove the dirt off of your face'" referring to the face tattoos she has, before then, she lip-synced to the audio of the song with a serene smile. The video concludes with a compilation of Inuit and Native American individuals with traditional tribal face tattoos, presenting face tattoos as part of their cultural heritage. Although it may seem harmless, what she experienced was a clear example of unintentional microaggression. Within this Counterpublic space, Indigenous women present forms of dignity, resilience, and cultural pride that complicate colonial narratives that have often portrayed them primarily as victims. Through the lens of Red Intersectionality, these expressions can be understood in relation to the broader historical and structural conditions that shape Indigenous women's lived experiences.

The Silver Lining

The lyrics of "Savage Daughter",

> I am my mother's savage daughter / The one who runs barefoot / Cursing sharp stones / I am my mother's savage daughter / I will not cut my hair / I will not lower my voice (Ross, 2020)

which emphasize themes of defiance, connection to land, and self-definition, resonate with Indigenous women who navigate multiple, overlapping forms of marginalization. In this context, the song can be interpreted as a cultural artifact whose themes align with broader expressions of identity, resilience, and resistance. Red Intersectionality's tenets, which emphasize the value of Indigenous sovereignty, cultural resilience, and the generational ties between land and identity, are consistent with the song's repeated assertions of independence and pride in one's identity. Indigenous artists oppose colonial frameworks that aim to diminish or homogenize their experiences and reassert their individuality by embracing the song.

Furthermore, by offering a symbolic language for expressing alternative narratives, the song supports the objectives of Subaltern Counterpublics. By challenging prevailing discourses that erase or simplify Indigenous identities, its assertive tone and emotive visuals provide a common platform for Indigenous women to voice their pride and suffering. The song becomes a collective weapon of resistance and narrative when Indigenous TikTok creators sing it, bringing their lived experiences to its themes. By amplifying the voices of people who are frequently excluded from popular narratives, this dynamic use of "Savage Daughter" transforms the song into a collective proclamation of cultural survival and a personal anthem.

It is crucial to mention that this trend itself originated from a song cover of Wyndreth Berginsdottir's "Savage Daughter" done by Sarah Hester Ross, a white American singer, popularizing "Savage Daughter" without any explicit connection to Indigenous identity. Indigenous women on TikTok, however, have reinterpreted and embraced the themes of her song—resilience, connection to land, and disobedience against social expectations. Even though Ross is not Indigenous, the song's powerful lyrics give Indigenous artists a platform to take back their stories and fight against structural oppression. This reinterpretation illustrates how marginalized communities can adapt popular cultural materials to articulate their identities and lived challenges, transforming them into expressions of resistance and empowerment. In this case, Indigenous women engage with "Savage Daughter" in ways that

reflect layered social experiences and express cultural pride, resilience, and assertions of sovereignty.

This trend further challenges and reinterprets prevailing cultural narratives that have traditionally silenced or marginalized Indigenous voices in the context of the United States as a settler-colonial state. Indigenous artists use TikTok to challenge settler-colonial ideology's national mythologies of erasure and assimilation. The trend's performative components, such as dressing traditionally, exhibiting cultural customs, and fusing contemporary and traditional styles, serve as a direct challenge to settler narratives that limit Indigenous identity to the past. Rather, these artists highlight their resilience and contemporary presence, asserting that Indigenous traditions are alive, breathing, and dynamic rather than historical artifacts. This redefinition of cultural narratives highlights the agency of Indigenous women in shaping their own stories, using digital platforms to create a Counterpublic that challenges and subverts settler-colonial frameworks.

However, while TikTok enables new forms of visibility and Counterpublic formation, the platform also operates within structural limitations that shape both what content circulates and what researchers can analyze. TikTok's algorithmic recommendation system tends to privilege videos that quickly accumulate engagement, meaning that Indigenous content that spreads more slowly or circulates within smaller community networks may remain less visible. In addition, hashtag-based discovery – such as through #SavageDaughter or #IndigenousTikTok – relies on creators choosing to use those tags, which may inadvertently exclude videos from Indigenous users who do not adopt them. Platform moderation policies may also affect the circulation of culturally specific expressions; automated moderation systems can sometimes flag Indigenous symbols, body markings, or visual elements as "sensitive," potentially limiting the reach of such content. From a research perspective, restricted access to TikTok's data infrastructure necessitates manual video collection, which can introduce sampling limitations and compromise reproducibility.

Furthermore, because TikTok's user base tends to skew younger and more digitally

engaged, the trend may primarily reflect the experiences of younger Indigenous creators rather than representing the full diversity of Indigenous communities. These constraints suggest that while TikTok can function as a meaningful Counterpublic space, it does not fully overcome the broader structural inequalities that shape Indigenous representation in media. Future research could expand this work by using larger datasets, conducting cross-platform comparisons, or interviewing creators to capture a wider range of Indigenous digital experiences.

CONCLUSION

The use of Ross' "Savage Daughter" by Indigenous TikTok creators strongly challenges American myths, such as Manifest Destiny and the "vanishing Indian", used to defend settler colonialism by eliminating or marginalizing Indigenous peoples. These artists challenge myths that limit Indigenous identity to the past by expressing their presence and resilience through performative actions such as lip-syncing, wearing traditional attire, and highlighting their ties to the land. They demolish the myth of Manifest Destiny, which presented westward expansion as inevitable, and refute the "vanishing Indian" stereotype by reclaiming their cultural narratives on social media and presenting Indigenous cultures as dynamic and changing. By crafting their own stories and celebrating their resilience, they challenge the settler-colonial narratives that continue to dominate mainstream media and education. Moreover, the global reach and participatory nature of platforms amplify their voices, ensuring that their reclamation of identity resonates across borders and reshapes perceptions of Indigenous peoples in the US and globally. This study contributes to the understanding of how digital platforms empower marginalized groups to resist dominant ideologies and redefine cultural identities within a globalized, interconnected framework.

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