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## Cultural Appropriation: The Continued Phenomena Of American Indian High School Mascots

Joshua Bullock  
*University of New England*

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CULTURAL APPROPRIATION: THE CONTINUED PHENOMENA OF AMERICAN  
INDIAN HIGH SCHOOL MASCOTS

By

Joshua Bullock

BA (History, Oklahoma Baptist University) 2012  
MBA (St. Gregory's University) 2015

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

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INDIAN HIGH SCHOOL MASCOTS

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the phenomenon of how high school administrators view the identity of their school's American Indian mascot and how it creates school culture, views of American Indians, and cultural appropriation. Critical race theory offered a positional framework to contextualize the phenomena as experienced by each participant. Understanding the influence of an American Indian mascot has on administration is important because it adds insight into the controversial conversation about American Indian mascots and their use nationwide. This research study added to the body of knowledge regarding American Indian mascots by specifically engaging in the phenomenon from the perspective of leaders in positions of power within a public school.

This study examined two research questions: (1) What value do school administrators ascribe to their school's American Indian mascot? and (2) how do school administrators perceive and describe how an American Indian mascot influences their school culture and identity? Nine public school leaders participated. Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews and the data were transcribed and analyzed. Three themes were discovered from the data: (1) the mascot's symbol binds the community together by symbolizing pride, unity, strength, and togetherness, (2) the history and identity of the mascot transcended any benefit to changing it, and (3) the mascot is seen as a positive symbol. The researcher interpreted the themes using transcendental phenomenology, which led to the composite description of leaders within a public school that has an American Indian high school Mascot. The study provided two

recommendations for leaders, including exploration of the mascot's impact on American Indian students and meeting with Tribal leaders and Tribal community members. The researcher encouraged further study by recommending an examination of American Indians and people of color in leadership positions and their ascribed meaning in public schools with American Indian mascots and further study in different regions of the United States.

*Keywords: Cultural appropriation, critical race theory, identity, and representation*

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This dissertation was presented

By

Joshua B. Bullock

It was presented on

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and approved by:

Brianna Parsons, Ed.D., Lead Advisor  
University of New England

Darren Akerman, Ed.D., Secondary Advisor  
University of New England

Kelli Mosteller, Ph.D., Affiliated Committee Member

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family, to my wife and two wonderful boys who have supported me through this endeavor.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

According to the Native American Rights Fund (n.d.), the term *Native American* originated in the 1960s as a means to respect American Indian people. However, the term American Indian is more appropriate because it encompasses Native Hawaiians and American Samoans, too. The use of Native American Symbolism (NAS) in athletics began in the early 1900s (Callais, 2010). In 1915, the professional baseball team located in Cleveland, Ohio changed their name from the Cleveland Naps to the Cleveland Indians, a name that the team still uses (Callais, 2010). While the name of Naps honored a former player, management decided they needed a new name when the player was traded (Callais, 2010). As a result, the team changed their name to the Cleveland Indians to honor the first American Indian baseball player, Louis Sockalexis (Callais, 2010; Staurowsky, 1998). In 1946, the mascot for the Cleveland Indians became known as Chief Wahoo (Callais, 2010). However, the term had an undercurrent of racism because, while Sockalexis began playing professional baseball in 1897 and received accolades as the first American Indian baseball player, other American Indian players lacked the same respect (Callais, 2010; Staurowsky, 1998). American Indian players often suffered derogatory nicknames such as “Chief” and endured racial slurs from fans when they played baseball (Powers-Beck, 2001). Most fans called professional American Indian baseball players Chief a rather than their names (Powers-Beck, 2001). For Sockalexis, the media covered his negative traits more than the positive characteristics that spurred the team name change (Callais, 2010; Staurowsky, 1998). The media covered his alcoholism that would prematurely end his baseball career, which the media covered more prevalently than they did his outstanding play on the field (Callais, 2010).

While Sockalexis's story is an issue of American Indian identity, more broadly speaking it represents an identity crisis of other cultures projecting what it means to honor American Indians (Black, 2002; Freng & Willis- Esqueda, 2011; Pewewardy, 2004; Silva, 2007; Staurowsky, 1998; Weaver, 2001). Weaver (2001) attributed the use of the term Indian to people who were uneducated and unaware of the histories of American Indian people. In other words, for Weaver (2001) the term *Indian* was a grouping of all American Indian people, which led to a powerless invisibility and a complex history. For Weaver (2001), an example of a complex history marred by powerless invisibility was Sockalexis being referred to by fans as "Chief" (Powers-Beck, 2001), rather than his birth name. As Weaver (2001) noted, "identity is a combination of self-identification and the perceptions of others" (p. 243). American Indian mascots serve as an identity of American Indian people; therefore, the identity of American Indians and American Indian mascots affected both American Indians and non-American Indians (Black, 2002). In 1995, there were over 1,600 American Indian mascots across the United States at the professional, semiprofessional, and grade school level (Staurowsky, 1998). For more than thirty years, activists have fought to change American Indian mascot names or imagery and in 2001, more than 1,000 instances had been removed (Silva, 2007). However, in 2014, more than 2,129 mascots that referenced American Indians existed (Munguia, 2014). Therefore, the issue is still relevant.

In 2018, the Washington Redskins (Redskins will be referred to as R\*skins moving forward) sparked a controversial and relevant conversation regarding American Indian mascots (Cox, Clement, & Vargas, 2016). While Cox et al. (2016) determined that 9 out of 10 American Indians are not offended by the Washington R\*skins' name, the study only surveyed 504 self-identifying American Indian adults, a small sample of a large population. Self-identifying

American Indian adults meant that the newspaper did not seek to determine if those surveyed were in fact American Indian enrolled citizens. Further, this information was published as a newspaper article, not as research, which was important because it was not rigorously fact-checked or peer edited, rather it was published and used as such. Regardless, it remained largely cited and was still credited by defenders of the Washington Redskins mascots and namesake. Weaver (2001) argued that American Indian identity is complex, and American Indian mascots often embody the honor that society wished to place upon American Indian people (Black, 2002; Freng & Willis-Esqueda, 2011; Pewewardy, 2004; Staurowsky, 1998; Weaver, 2001). More importantly, referencing a newspaper article to provide justification of the honor and appropriateness of American Indian mascots points to a bigger issue that Silva (2007) argued as Native American Symbolism (NAS) retention supporters advocate for keeping NAS in place. Broadly speaking, Eurocentric cultures are those who see their own culture as better than other cultures and define others by their own norms. Such Eurocentric cultures have a long history of whitewashing people of color from history—in the forms of theater and movies (Johnson, 2018; Kompatsiaris, 2017). Specifically referring to American Indians, whitewashing, according to Dennison (2014), deepened inequality, employed techniques to assert and justify prosperity claims, and color-blindness. Other races also face whitewashing. African Americans faced situations such as *blackface* as it is seen as a “symbiotic colonial relationship between racial fetishization/fascination” (Howard, 2018, p. 100). Therefore, ethnic and racial stereotyping pervaded mass media historically, and through mass media people found how they were supposed to act and find identity (Childs, 2014).

Moreover, when a group is not represented in the media, they can become “deprived of messages or strategies for how to be a person” (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015,



p. 40). Leavitt et. al. (2015) argued that when the media portrays “limited, homogeneous prototypes of Native Americans, the media inhibits the development of characteristics or abilities beyond those supported by these Native American prototypes and inadvertently promotes maladaptive self-strategies (e.g., deindividuation and self-stereotyping) that undermine individual potential” (p. 47). Furthermore, when a group is represented through stereotypical depictions, people viewing stereotypes can develop stereotype awareness. Stereotype awareness occurs when people begin to be cognizant of stereotypes between ages 6 and 10. McKown and Weinstein (2003), and Nasir, McKinney de Royston, and Wischnia (2017) found that stereotypes of racial minorities were prevalent in urban schools, enforcing common assumptions about African American and Latino students. Furthermore, Silva (2007) argued that there are four types of justifications toward American Indian mascots, called public accounts. Silva (2007) argued that public accounts are justifications that people in society use to keep or preserve a contested practice. Silva (2007) listed four public accounts pertaining to NAS: denial of injury, assertion of benefit, claim of authority, and rejection of challenge. Because stereotypes, whitewashing, and blackface have historical roots (Childs, 2014; Johnson, 2018; Kompatsiaris, 2017; McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Nasir et al., 2017), the four public accounts are important for understanding how society identifies with American Indian mascots. Blackface misrepresents African Americans, while American Indian mascots similarly promote a limited and homogeneous view of American Indians (Leavitt et al., 2015).

Retention advocates (RAs) and Native American Symbolism (NAS) are the foundation for the four public accounts. RAs regarding NAS are advocates who want to preserve NAS because they feel obligated to maintain their view of historical claims (Silva, 2007). NAS describes American Indian imagery such as mascots, logos, and media depictions. A denial of

injury maintains that if there are no visible or tangible injuries to people or a group of people (including a demographic), then it is justified to keep the practice (Silva, 2007). However, the assertion of benefit argues that American Indian mascots are a benefit to both American Indians and community members (Silva, 2007). Retention advocates argued that the benefit of Native American Symbolism was found in the community's happiness and gratification they experience with the symbols (Silva, 2007). Public accounts two and three, assertion of benefit and claim of authority (Silva, 2007), align with Kalt and Singer's (2004) argument against two common myths held among non-American Indian people. Myth one is that American Indians were conquered and have no sovereignty, when in fact American Indian tribes are sovereign nations, which in some cases entered into treaties with the United States and at times have exercised both de facto and de jure rule over American Indians (Kalt & Singer, 2004). However, these treaties preserve tribal sovereignty—that is, self-rule (Kalt & Singer, 2004). Another myth that is commonly held is “there are no authentic Indians left” (Kalt & Singer, p. 23). In public account number three, Silva (2007) argues that RAs are better equipped to understand and know the practices of NAS use over any challengers.

Within public account number three, there are three subcategories: claim of expertise, claim of logic, and claim of noble intentions (Silva, 2007). Claim of expertise is defined as the act of claiming to have special knowledge of the group by perhaps claiming to be “one-quarter Indian” (p. 254). Furthermore, RAs who argued from this standpoint proclaim to know best (Silva, 2007). Claim of logic is the concept that people should see the benefits or positive aspects of the NAS itself and not focus on the negative aspects (Silva, 2007). Finally, the third subcategory within public account number three is claim of noble intentions (Silva, 2007). It is assumed that NAS are an honor, and as an honor are not worth changing any NAS because the

honor itself is worthy of justification (Silva, 2007). Under the third category, two interesting quotes from newspapers in Washington, D.C. and Fresno, California argued the noble intentions of keeping NAS (Silva, 2007). First, from California, the argument was a case-by-case elimination of NAS because not all schools' American Indian mascots could be offensive (Silva, 2007). From Washington, D.C. the argument for the Washington R\*skins was the term R\*skin should be changed to Native and the mascot should remain the same. According to Silva (2007) these two arguments advocated that NAS is an honor or that it is not worth the trouble of changing (p. 256). Fourth, the rejection of challenge argued that RAs have a right to self-expression and that NAS is an expression of self that should be defended as a first amendment right (Silva, 2007). Kalt and Singer (2004) opined that these public accounts demonstrated the myths that society provided a justification for Native American Symbolism. However, cultural difference and cultural identity often clash within society and produce racist actions such as blackface. Robertson (2015) argued that playing Indian, the concept of costumes, mascots, or other stereotypical behavior such as Columbus Day celebrations are no different from blackface. A discussion of blackface and its implications are discussed in chapter two.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study considered the impact American Indian mascots have on high school administrators. It is important to understand how, when a group is not represented in the media, they can become “deprived of messages or strategies for how to be a person” (Leavitt et al., 2015, p. 40). Both the quality and quantity of media representations for a group contribute to the idea that they may not belong or would not be successful in achievement-related fields (Leavitt et al., 2015). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) argued that helping people understand racism is a slow process and it could be difficult for one to understand that Mexicans can be business people

with business suits when visual representations show common images of Mexicans as cartoon characters wearing sombreros.

Perhaps the first well-known account of cultural identity and stereotyping was that of blackface in the 1700s as a means to represent black people in minstrel plays (Byrd, 2009). Even in modern culture, both digital and print can perpetuate racism through their portrayal of nonwhite people (Colburn & Melander, 2018; Jackson & Lyons, 1997). While this is an overarching issue with many specific problems, this study seeks to examine how American Indian mascots impact high school administrators. American Indian mascots are common within the K–12 education system, and Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, and Stone (2008) argued the impact of mascots promotes a negative view of community worth for American Indian students.

Removing the cultural differences and unique nuances of American Indian people produced a shallow, narrow, and putrid understanding of what it looks like to be American Indian. Colorblindness and invisibility (Fryberg & Stephens, 2010) were created by media representations of American Indian people groups. In other words, the continued use of the Cleveland Indian baseball team mascot as a guide perpetuates the stereotypes that all American Indian people have red skin, big noses, and black hair, among other stereotypical traits. Further, the perpetuation of such imagery does not allow the general public a closer understanding of the rich cultural traditions, religion, language, food, and much more that encompasses what it means to be American Indian.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of how high school administrators view the identity of their school's American Indian mascot and how it creates school culture, views of American Indians, and cultural appropriation. Pewewardy (2004) stated,

Non-Indian people may not be culturally aware that some American Indian symbols used by cheerleaders and cheering fans—war chants, peace pipes, eagle feathers, war bonnets, and dances—are highly revered or even sacred in many American Indian tribal communities. (p. 180)

In a society where American Indians are a minority, it is important to study and understand historical precedents of which non-American Indian people may not be culturally aware (Pewewardy, 2004). In other words, American Indian mascots were not created by American Indians to positively represent themselves and their lived experiences. Both the social and cultural existence of American Indians across the United States is largely invisible (Fryberg & Stephens, 2010). This invisibility can lead to a lack of opportunity in higher education for American Indian students (Jones Brayboy, Fann, Castagno & Solyom, 2012), a lack of success—including a lack of school belonging (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015), and in some cases, lack of congruent representations of self and role models (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Dvorakova, 2018; Fryberg et al., 2008; Leavitt et al., 2015). All of these issues provide a foundation to drive further research but, more significantly, they identify important pieces of a complicated and controversial puzzle.

### **Research Questions**

In an effort to understand how the identity of an American Indian mascot influences school culture, this research sought to answer the following questions:

- RQ<sub>1</sub>: What value do school administrators ascribe to their school's American Indian mascot?
- RQ<sub>2</sub>: How do school administrators perceive and describe how an American Indian mascot influences their school culture and identity?

## **Conceptual Framework**

Because racism is not aberrational and is commonplace in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016), it is important to study and understand situations that arise in life that are classified as racist. Racism is embedded within society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016), and it has taken many forms including blackface in theater (Byrd, 2009; Daigle, 2009; Howard, 2018; Moscovitz, 2009). Further, it has led to the creation of mascots like Chief Wahoo (Callais, 2010; Staurowsky, 1998), the Cleveland Indians baseball team mascot. However, American Indian mascots, blackface, whitewashing, and racism are simply symptoms of the larger issue of society projecting identity stereotypes. Several scholars have attempted to assess the impact that an American Indian mascot has on people (Freng & Willis-Esqueda, 2011; Fryberg et al., 2008). In 1915, the Cleveland baseball team changed their name to the Indians as a means to honor a player named Louis Sockalexis, and in 1946 they changed their mascot to Chief Wahoo (Callais, 2010; Staurowsky, 1998). Freng and Willis-Esqueda (2011) found that the mascot for the Cleveland Indians, Chief Wahoo, activated negative stereotypes toward American Indians, but the authors suggested further research could be conducted to assess the consequences of the negative stereotype activation. Fryberg et al. (2008) concluded American Indian mascot images produced a negative impact on American Indian students in high school and postsecondary schools. Therefore, a focus on how school administrators experience an American Indian mascot is necessary because the literature demonstrated societal responses to American Indian imagery.

## **Personal Discernment Statement**

As a researcher, I am very close to this topic. I worked for an American Indian tribe for over two years; learning, growing, and hearing the stories of tribal members and their struggles

with identity relative to media, representation, sovereignty, and cultural awareness has had a profound impact on my life. I also consider myself a critical race theorist in practice, and the profound impact of working for an American Indian tribe (as a non–American Indian) coupled with critical race theory drives my passion for this topic. Critical race theorists seek to understand how race and ethnicity impact society and the culture (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017). However, I consider this research more important than what I believe to be true about this topic. My connection to this topic has allowed me to learn many new ideas and concepts about the way society identifies with imagery such as mascots and the relationships they create.

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope**

This study has several assumptions and limitations. First, the researcher assumes that the role of a mascot across school campuses outweighs any actual cultural or spiritual meaning the mascot symbolizes. In other words, an American Indian mascot may have a headdress, for example, but the creator of that mascot may have created its likeness from a pan-Indian viewpoint—a viewpoint that groups all American Indian tribes and cultures together. Another assumption is the idea that American Indian mascots are often inherently racist because they portray an archaic perception of American Indian people (Fryberg et al., 2008). A limitation to this study is a small sample size of eight participants because it is conducted as a transcendental phenomenology. A small sample size allows the researcher to understand a phenomenon intimately but may not be replicated on a large scale. Another limitation is the lack of American Indian participants in the study. This study gathered information from eight participants who may or may not be American Indian and sought their understanding about the phenomenon of American Indian mascots. Moreover, these participants were high school administrators, and therefore the study’s scope focuses on a high school setting. A third limitation is that this study

only focuses on high school administrators and is limited by their understanding. Further research could be conducted to incorporate college or university administrators and their experience with American Indian mascots.

### **Significance**

The significance of the research was to contribute to existing literature on American Indian mascots and, more importantly, highlight the role of identity. Critical Race Theory is a “collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2018, p. 3). In terms of Critical Race Theory, society should allow people of color or minority groups to tell their stories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). The telling of stories prompts society to listen and understand the plight of a marginalized group. Through the Critical Race Theory lens, by allowing school administrators to tell their stories about the identity of American Indian mascots, this research provides insight and clarity into the issue. Moreover, Critical Race Theory focuses on people of color and marginalized groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016) and allows them to tell their stories. However, viewpoints from those who work with Native American Symbolism (NAS) will also lend insight as to how mascots and imagery are perceived and what impact they have on a population, in this case on K–12 school identity. Additionally, it is important to present this study because it not only contributes to the current conversation, but its approach focuses on how school faculty and administrators experience and interact with their school’s American Indian mascot. There is a gap in the literature that raises the need to assess how faculty and administration view the identity of their American Indian mascots.



## Definitions of Terms

*American Indian Mascot:* An American Indian mascot is a mascot that uses specific American Indian imagery, such as a headdress, feathers, skin color, or other cultural or stereotypical representations of American Indians. It is important to understand that people should not assume an American Indian mascot represents American Indians because they are often created by non-American Indian peoples based on their understanding of what American Indians should be/look like (Pewewardy, 2004).

*White Privilege:* Unearned inheritance of social and political advantages (McIntosh, 2004; Wise, 2011).

*Racism:* Aware, unaware, intentional, unintentional, blatant, and covert (Yamato, 2004) methods of race neutral and race exclusionary policies. Racism can also be institutional (Ezorsky, 2004)—that is, the lack of opportunity on many social and political levels, such as education or employment.

*Washington Redskins Name:* Name of the National Football League team name for the Washington, D.C. area professional football team.

*Colorblindness and Invisibility:* States of understanding that are created by a lack of appropriate representations of people groups. Without proper representations, the mainstream belief regarding a people forgoes a correct cultural understanding, which leads people to not see the importance of skin color, and not to see people groups as they are—with meaning, importance, and individuality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016; Fryberg et al., 2008).

*Critical Race Theory:* A theory on race, identity, and its interaction with the world. It has six tenets that generally guide and shape the theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

Freng and Willis-Esqueda (2011) found that American Indian imagery led to negative stereotypes (Fryberg et al., 2008), but there must be a more extensive and robust explanation of why and how identity and stereotypes impact high school administrators. Chapter two will address the historical ramifications of American Indian students' access to and success in higher education, the importance of stereotypes, the role of mascots at both the collegiate, professional, and high school levels, and offer an explanation of Critical Race Theory and white privilege. Identity and understanding of American Indian people and American Indian mascots are instrumental in understanding the global aspects of mascots. American Indian identity, cultural respect, and responsibility are essential for non-American Indian peoples to understand. Chapter two is a literature review that will address Critical Race Theory and identity issues by examining the existing conversation regarding American Indian mascots. Chapter three is an explanation and description of this study's methodology. Chapter four will explain the results and findings of the study and will address analysis methods. Chapter five will conclude the study by providing an interpretation of findings, implications, and recommendations.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding the importance and impact of identity and its influence on societal assumptions about racial and ethnic groups goes deeper than a surface image, such as a mascot, or racial slurs, or even unconscious bias. Unconscious bias occurs when the most common internalized forms of racism dwell in people (DiAngelo, 2018). Unconscious bias shapes the ideas and norms that humans have about various people groups and forms the ways humans interact with one another. Moreover, unconscious bias can strengthen colorblindness. Colorblindness is the idea that if people do not acknowledge race, then humanity becomes more equal and less racism follows (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; DiAngelo, 2018; Fryberg & Stephens, 2010). In the legal realm, some view that it is wrong for the law to take into consideration a person's race, even to correct historical traumas (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

An example of the United States' legal system not seeing color has occurred even as recently as 2018 (Platoff, 2018). Laws and policies designed to help certain races or people groups have been overturned or litigated against under the guise that the law itself is racist. For example, in Texas, a family adopted an American Indian child, but the adoption ended up in court because of a federal law called the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). ICWA was created to maintain American Indian tribes by mandating that an American Indian child be adopted by American Indian family members first (Platoff, 2018). However, the Texas case displayed an example of how the court system shaped or determined against one race or ethnicity over another, while attempting otherwise. In other words, Critical Race Theory would phrase the legal outcome in Texas as interest convergence—when a dominant group interest interferes in, prohibits, and or promotes minority group interest; more background will be presented later in

this chapter (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The Texas State Attorney General argued that the Indian Child Welfare Act placed the child's race over the child's best interest (Platoff, 2018). This legal precedence is relevant to this study because in order to understand why the topic of American Indian mascots is important, it is best to first understand how the legal and social systems are designed with race and racism embedded in them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). American Indian Tribal Nations are a racial group but also a distinct legal group with unique legal rights. Critical Race Theory was used as a theoretical framework to study and understand the influence of American Indian mascots in the secondary school setting.

### **Oppression of Culture**

Oppression of culture can be found in the United States in many forms—one of those being blackface. Robertson (2015) argued that playing Indian, using stereotypical representations of American Indian people is:

in no way different from wearing blackface or participating in minstrel shows—because it collapses distinct cultures into one stereotypical racialized group. Even worse, because playing Indian is deemed socially acceptable (e.g., normal, legitimate), any other racial or ethnic group may now participate—without recognizing the inherent racism in doing so. (p.114).

The United States has a history of actors using blackface primarily through minstrelsy or theater, and it rose to prominence in 1843 (Byrd, 2009). Blackface was seen as a “symbiotic colonial relationship between racial fetishization/fascination” (Howard, 2018 p.100), but blackface comedy began in the 1700s in England (Byrd, 2009). Blackface was popularized especially in the United States because actors could actually see black people (Byrd, 2009). Blackface as a construct was an identity created by a predominantly white society to stereotype African

Americans (Moscowitz, 2009). Yet, blackface as a means of assimilation of identity into white culture is a difficult argument because blackface was used by non-black actors (Daigle, 2009; Moscowitz, 2009). Presenting black people offered an opportunity to create a narrative of identity predicated on dominant society fantasies of black identity (Daigle, 2009, Howard, 2018; Moscowitz, 2009). Russell (2018) connected whitewashing to blackface because whitewashing is a symptom of a larger issue—that is to say, staining of characters in media.

Blackwashing/whitewashing, known as *staining*, or the process of adding color literally both white and black to a character in film or media (Russell, 2018). Staining as whitewashing was used to erase racism by taking color away (Russell, 2018). Blackwashing on the other hand has the opposite meaning; blackwashing provides color where color may not have been previously (Russell, 2018). Staining in media was commonly used to appeal to certain markets or locations for film (Russell, 2018). Russell (2018) argued that staining was part of race-switching, or the act of changing characters in film to resemble the ideas from the market in which the film will be viewed. Character portrayals in film do not always reflect accurate depictions and are often employed to place whiteness above other race or ethnicities (Russell, 2018). Appealing to mass audiences with race neutral histories and culture oppresses people of color. For Young (2004), it is oppression that immobilized or reduced a group from being able to represent and speak for itself.

American society does not define oppression the same way as Critical Race Theory or other social movements do (Young, 2004). In other words, the view of oppression in mainstream American society is outdated and would view the arguments of new social groups as false. Furthermore, regarding representation and identity, such as blackface or whitewashing, Young (2004) argued that five faces of oppression existed—exploitation, marginalization,

powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. The concept of exploitation is the transfer of inequalities among groups, such as races and genders in terms of social, workspace, and political manipulation of groups (Young, 2004). Marginalization was the exclusion of groups in professional, social, and political spaces (Young, 2004). Powerlessness was the lack of authority of a group and inability to change the dynamic to give power to that group (Young, 2004). Cultural imperialism is a universalization of what it means to be included in a society, with a focus on those who are dominated by the universalization and are marred by stereotypes and cultural invisibility (Young, 2004). Finally, violence referred to the acts both physically against people of a certain group within a society and also to the approval or mindset of a society to allow acts against a group (Young, 2004).

Young's (2004) five faces of oppression demonstrated an interesting framework for oppression and its history in the United States. Du Bois (2007) introduced double-consciousness, the idea of interpreting the view society places upon oneself over that of realizing how hard it is to strive to be true to itself. The double-self or double-consciousness is not uncommon for American Indians, as Roy (2014) suggested: "Native peoples negotiate two worlds, those of the Native view and of the non-Native view (p. 305). For Young (2004), the double-consciousness would fall under the cultural imperialism face of oppression. The remaining sections of chapter two provide a history of American Indians regarding identity and mascots, as well as mascots at both the professional and collegiate levels. Moreover, chapter two provides the existing literature arguments for and against American Indian mascots in relation to identity.

### **History of American Indian Education**

Historically, it was challenging for American Indian students to attend college or post-secondary options due to low funding, but this changed in the 1930s when more scholarships

were created to help American Indian students matriculate (Jones Brayboy et al., 2012). In 1932, scholarships for American Indian students were offered by only five schools, but under the New Deal policies and with help from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), more scholarships were created and provided. There was an increase from two thousand students to seven thousand students nationwide attending college by 1965 (Jones Brayboy et al., 2012). Although this was a vast improvement, by the 1960s this accounted for only one percent of the American Indian population who were enrolled in a postsecondary institution. Likewise, this improvement did little to foster American Indian identity or cultural growth because these students were expected to leave their culture and families behind as they attended mainstream, predominantly white institutions (Jones Brayboy et al., 2012).

By the 1960s, more progress was made to provide opportunities for American Indian students, but the common sentiment of “kill the Indian and save the man” (p. 8) was still strong, and even in the 1960s there was a push-and-pull movement between tribal communities and federal funding for American Indian students at mainstream institutions (Jones Brayboy et al., 2012, p. 8). Furthermore, this tension was caused by tribal leaders wanting to see federal dollars spent in tribal communities to keep their members within their community, rather than being spent to fund American Indian scholarships and programming without allowing American Indian students to retain their culture and traditions (Jones Brayboy et al., 2012).

Jones Brayboy et al. (2012) further argued that American Indian students “make up only one percent of the total enrollment in institutions of higher education” currently and they are the “least-studied group in higher education” (p. 9). It is also argued that “very little research has been conducted that specifically examines indigenous people in higher education, and even less has been conducted on success within institutions of higher education” (Jones Brayboy et al.,

p. 9, 2012). Being the least studied group in higher education opens the door for further research and studies in this area.

Postsecondary institutions contributed to the success and opportunities for American Indian students. Jones Brayboy et al. (2012) argued that university access has occurred as a result of opportunity, both historically and currently, but it came at the sacrifice of culture and traditions. There are several fundamental concerns with postsecondary institutions for students of color who were attending. Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) pointed to a link between survivor guilt and depression among African American students attending university. Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) argued that survivor guilt appears when students surpass the achievements of their parents. It is important for campus administrators to recognize the unique needs of every student, and respect cultural norms. Examining the literature on American Indian students, especially first-generation college students, could open a door into understanding what is required to better serve these students on campuses nationwide.

Many students of color are first generation college students, and Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias (2012) argued that, while universities set out to increase diversity on campuses, there was often an underlying current of university norms that affected students from diverse backgrounds. This is evident through the working-class context as most universities fostered a middle-class privilege culture and most first-generation students came from working-class backgrounds (Stephens et al., 2012). Therefore, these students often required additional tutoring, had trouble determining if they fit in, and needed mentoring (Stephens et al., 2012). Interestingly, Stephens et al. (2012), found first-generation students' motivations were more focused on interdependence (giving back to their community), rather than independence (thinking independently). Therefore, Stephens et al. (2012), argued:



Instead, reflecting the cultural norms that are foundational to American society, universities promote a particular set of independent norms for college students. These norms are based on a particular middle-class model for how to be a person and a successful college student. (p. 1195)

This suggestion provided a need for mainstream, predominately white universities to consider offering, creating, and developing educational modes of environmental and academic options for students of color.

Next, the creation of tribal colleges was an avenue to educate American Indian people. DeLong, Monette, and Ozaki (2016) provided a context for tribal colleges and stated that the first tribal college opened in 1968. Currently there are 37 tribal colleges, but only 32 are accredited, and the majority (30) are two-year institutions. Tribal colleges historically had embodied the struggles American Indians had endured throughout the years, by having to cope with little funding, overcoming opposition, and having students who were not college or career ready (DeLong, et al., 2016). Tribal colleges were created to fill a need and the environment they provided granted access and opportunity for their students (DeLong et al., 2016). As of 2010, there were 19,070 students enrolled in tribal colleges nationwide. Of that, 50% were female American Indian students and 29% male American Indian students, while 13% were non-Native Female and 8% were non-Native male. (DeLong, et al., 2016). Understanding the broad historical impact of tribal colleges was important because it set the foundation for the importance of studying or examining the role American Indian mascots played inside public high school settings.

### **Role Models**

A critical race theory framework for the idea of a role model was important because it positions a role model in tenet four. If tenet four—the idea that dominant society creates and promotes its own understandings of race and ethnicities (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016)—is accurate, then it is important to recognize how American Indian mascots promote a unified symbol of being American Indian. Role-models promote proper representations of oneself (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015) and can promote culturally congruent (Fryberg, Covarrubias, & Burack, 2013) modes of self—that is, the proper or American Indian perspective on being an American Indian. Further exploring the impact of role models in American Indian life is necessary for understanding American Indian mascots.

Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) explored the impact of self-relevant representations for American Indian students and how it related to school belonging. Self-relevant representations are the individual's comparison with a role-model whose similarities are perceived to represent the individual's background—gender and ethnicity, for example. (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Another example is when an American Indian student attends a predominately white college campus and could not find someone on campus to relate with both culturally and socially, as those around him/her did not look like they did or could not provide cultural support. In this case, the student would not have a self-relevant role model on campus. If this student found someone or a group on campus who could relate to him/her as a mentor or perhaps was from the same tribal nation, the role model would be able to provide cultural contexts from which this student could draw in his or her everyday life. This issue was important for understanding how environment and role models affect school belonging (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2014).

Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) found that American Indian students identified fewer role models—or a person that can be looked up to and emulated. A lack of role models directly impacts school belonging, because the more students could identify with role models, the more positive thoughts they would have, which would lead to confidence and a sense of school belonging (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Fryberg performed the study with American Indian middle school students to show how these students developed and how there was a lack of role models from whom to gain self-validating information, and realize that they could belong in this school context (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). This study was limited in its research because it focused only on school belonging (environment) and not academic performance. Also, the aspect of school belonging could not determine how long the positive connection between role models and environment lasted. According to Demirtaş, Yıldız, and Baytemir, (2017) belongingness is a fundamental human need. Demirtaş et al. (2017) found that belongingness was an important factor in adolescents and that basic psychological needs contribute to their self-esteem. Finally, 94% of American Indian students and 85% of European-American students identified family members as people they knew who went to college, and further research could be conducted to find out why other figures in students' lives (teachers and administrators) were not identified when asked who they knew who went to college (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015).

Moreover, when students had trust in their teachers, Fryberg, Covarrubias, and Burack, (2013), proposed that American Indian students would report a “culturally congruent representation of self” (interdependent self) and European American students would “endorse an independent self—they would also report higher academic performance” (Fryberg et al., p. 446, 2013). This is important because, as Fryberg et al. (2013) noted, “American Indian students may feel a greater sense of belonging and motivation when the education context matches their own

cultural understandings of self” (p. 447). Consequently, there should be a reconsideration of the student and teacher relationship, because most teachers are not aware of how important it is to incorporate strong, positive, and trusting relationships with their students in their teaching (Fryberg et al., 2013).

### **Self-Perception**

Representation in both a culturally respectful and a responsible way was important for understanding how mass media promotes colorblindness (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, p. 40, 2015). Colorblindness increases difficulty to address unconscious bias or issues that humans have toward another (DiAngelo, 2018). Additionally, it created a legal implication; as Delgado and Stefancic (2017) argued, when the Supreme Court does not see color (as an attempt to prevent color focused legal decisions) it goes against critical race theory and what critical race theory theorists would argue as needing aggressive anti-colorblind tactics. Critical race theory posited that racism is normal and commonplace (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017); thus, racism is embedded within society and promotes invisibility when a racial group does not fit into the dominant society’s view on what race is in America (p. 80).

With the need for self-relevant role models and trusting relationships with teachers (Covarrubias and Fryberg, 2014; Fryberg et al., 2013), another contributing factor to an American Indian’s self-perception was the role of mass media. When a group is not represented in the media, they can become “deprived of messages or strategies for how to be a person” (Leavitt, et al., p. 40, 2015). Both the quality and quantity of media representations for a group contribute to the idea that they may not belong or would not be successful in achievement-related fields (Leavitt et al., 2015). This concern is important because media representation, along with colorblindness, leads to a form of invisibility (Fryberg and Stephens, 2010). The media tends to

represent American Indian people in outdated historical or nonexistent ways and this portrayal has significant ramifications, because it communicates the idea that “American Indians do not exist in contemporary American society” (Fryberg & Stephens, 2010). Therefore, the historical context of American Indians in education and the mass media representations pointed to a grim landscape for American Indian students on campuses nationwide. In other words, additional research could be performed to understand how these issues impact students in certain ways, possibly through a case study.

Therefore, put in the context of representation and social identity theories, an American Indian student on a campus may have a difficult time understanding what it means to be a successful student, because the only mass media and stereotypical representations of successful American Indian people are often portrayed as that of sports mascots (as warriors), spiritual beings (Pocahontas), or as having negative traits (alcoholic abuse, high dropout rates, etc.). This causes real issues for indigenous students. (Fryberg et al., 2008). Furthermore, Fryberg et al. (2008), argued that the impact of mascots and the stereotypical representations of them causes both high school and university level American Indian students to have a negative view of community worth. Whether it is mascots or image representations of American Indian people, the problem is that these representations are not eliciting constructive identity associations for American Indian students. (Fryberg et al., 2008).

American Indian scholar Red Corn (2017) wrestled with his American Indian identity and having lighter skin. He reflected on his whiteness and how he benefited from both being white and being American Indian. However, he struggled with being American Indian as being tougher than being white because he realized the nature of how he became white, through marriages and the intricacies of blood quantum (Red Corn, 2017). Red Corn (2017) pointed out how the

perception of being white allowed him to fit into most social situations, but being a contemporary American Indian caused him internalized struggle. Balancing two identities is further captured by Roy (2014), who said “Native peoples negotiate two worlds, those of the Native view and of the non-Native view” (p. 305). These topics profoundly affect American Indian people across the nation and are very important to study and to understand why these issues plague many aspects of life.

### **American Indian Mascots**

With the foundation explained and the framework of critical race theory to guide the understanding of American Indian mascots’ role within society, it is now central to understand the problem with American Indian mascots. This issue goes beyond the mascot or icon itself and extends to broader issues like economics, professional, high school, and collegiate sports.

#### **The Problem with American Indian Mascots**

Referring to a group of people by name is important because it allows people to signify how they want to be addressed, for example, African American, LatinX, or American Indian. But the name people use outside of the group can “serve as a litmus test of the tenor of intergroup relationships” and can cause hostility (Sigelman, 1998, p. 318). Sigelman (1998) suggested that stereotypical mascot names offer blatant racism, and if there was a team name such “as the New York Negroes,” society would see it as “socially repugnant” (p. 318). However, society often did not view sports mascots such as Washington Redskins as equivalent racism. Furthermore, Sigelman (1998) concluded that it is nearly impossible for American Indian mascots to change because American Indian people “are a virtually invisible minority for most Americans” (p. 323). Essentially, other derogatory terms for other people groups are more easily recognizable to Americans, and they often do not recognize American Indian racist words or imagery

(Sigelman, 1998) despite activist groups and American Indian people advocating and speaking out against their use for more than three decades (Silva, 2007).

A common argument for the use of American Indian mascots or imagery is the intention of honor. Williams (2007) found that at the University of North Dakota (UND), white students were more likely to participate in colorblind racism and to view the mascots of UND as acceptable, whereas American Indian students and other non-white minority groups were less accepting of the UND mascot— Fighting Sioux (Williams, 2007). Additionally, Freng and Willis-Esqueda (2011) explored the use of the mascot for the Cleveland Indians on the basis that the mascot was honored, but they found that the mascot “activated a negative American Indian stereotype” (p. 586). These findings support Fryberg et al. (2008) who argued that “exposure to American Indian mascot images has a negative impact on American Indian high school and college students’ feelings of personal and community worth, and achievement-related possible selves” (p. 216). The use of these mascots appeared to have a direct correlation to furthering negative stereotypes of American Indian people. Later, this chapter will demonstrate the contentious relationship of using these mascots at the collegiate and professional levels respectively.

### **Collegiate Sports**

Mascots are a source of contention for American Indian people. In 2006, the NCAA announced that they would enact a policy to eliminate mascots, nicknames, and imagery at any championship game (Bollinger, 2016). However, several weeks after the announcement, the NCAA published an appeal policy under the logic that the NCAA wanted to honor the wishes of specific American Indian tribes—the idea being that if a tribe approved of the mascots then it would not be eliminated from championship games (Bollinger, 2016). Five schools have

received the exception, and out of the five, each had their own consultation with the tribal nation their mascots represented and have created scholarships and contractual agreements to revisit the use of mascots on a timeline and to promote culture (Bollinger, 2016).

Although this appears to be a reasonable attempt of common interest between tribes and schools, Bollinger (2016), raised a valid point against one Mississippi College's agreement with the Mississippi Choctaw Indians: what about "Choctaw Indian tribes outside of the state" (p. 86) who in a historical sense were forcibly removed from their ancestral homelands and relocated elsewhere. Choctaw Indian tribal members' voices should be as important to those in the local geographical area relative to Mississippi College. It is important to understand the background of the support that school mascots receive to the "number of mascot supporters, geographical scope of the supporters, race of the supporters, culture of the supporters, organization of the supporters, power supporters have in the community, ideology employed by the supporters, tactics utilized by the supporters, allies of the supporters, and business leaders' support for retention" (Davis-Delano, 2007, p. 348). Moreover, the idea that one tribe or even a group of people agree to the use of a mascot should not outweigh the ramifications of its use. In other words, there are many factors that contribute to the continued use of mascots, and those can often overpower an activist group's ability to work with a school's leadership to change the mascots. For example, Davis-Delano (2007) noted one case of a mascot's change because donors made a stand against providing future funding if the mascot was changed. This raised the question of whether or not the impact of changing/keeping American Indian Mascots outweighs the literature on the impact of mascots (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015, Fryberg et al., 2008, Pewewardy, 2004).

During the early 2000s, the University of Illinois was met with protest toward their athletic mascot—Chief Illiniwek (Farnell, 2004). The administration agreed to a dialogue to



allow people to express their desire to retain the mascot or eliminate it. In 2000, several letters contributed to the dialogue. One letter excerpt stands out:

American Indians can rightfully be angry with injustices their previous generations have suffered. Yet the Illini nation and any chiefs were not persecuted by white people then or now. Since there are no direct generations of Illini to speak out I claim my right to speak for them is stronger than non-Illinois American Indian nations! I am from this land that holds the dust of those people. It is more likely that those referred to as Illini suffered genocide from the very nations that now claim to speak for them. Where were their spokespersons when they became the University of Illinois symbol over 50 years ago? (Farnell, 2004, p. 41)

Farnell (2004) concluded that the position of these letters were generated from a mindset of settler colonialism, which allowed White people to feel legitimate on the land they occupy, also argued by Patel (2016). Farnell described settler colonialism in this way (2004):

It is predicated on the premise that real Indians must be dead. In declaring the Illinois Indians to be extinct and absolving Whites from any responsibility for this, imperialist nostalgia then clears the way to appropriate an Illini identity as part of a collective White heritage. (p. 48)

Pewewardy (2004) argued that mascots become racist because they mock the behavior of American Indian people—clothing, dancing, and chanting. This mockery grounds European Americans to “manufactured images” to a land and created shared history that furthers a “self-serving historical connection” (p. 181). American Indian people do exist and to continue to have them represented as mascots not only affects American Indian people but also non-American

Indian people because it allows racism to be tolerated and reinforces stereotypical images created by mainstream culture (Pewewardy, 2004).

### **Professional Sports**

American Indian mascots are not only used on the collegiate sport level, but also in professional sports. In 1967, the trademark to the mascot for the NFL team in Washington D.C. was created, and the team as it is known today began at that point. In 1992, there was legislation brought against the trademark (Hylton, 2010). Seven activists, led by Suzan Harjo, filed a complaint to have the Washington R\*skins name trademark removed because it was offensive to American Indians (Hylton, 2010). Suzan Harjo claimed that in 1967, the Washington R\*skins name was offensive and should have never been allowed under the Lanham Act—an act that prevented the use or registration of “immoral, deceptive, or scandalous matter; or matter which may disparage or falsely suggest a connection with persons, living or dead, institutions, beliefs, or national symbols, or bring them into contempt, or disrepute” (Hylton, p. 882, 2010). The case went on for two decades, and the NFL challenged the case and defended the mascot under the argument that “the trademark was not offensive, and that the interpretation of the Lanham Act proposed by Harjo and her fellow plaintiffs unconstitutionally violated the team’s rights under the First and Fifth Amendments to the United States Constitution” (Hylton, 2010, p. 883). The interpretation of the Lanham Act by Harjo leaned upon an example dating back to 1967 of American Indian people fighting the mascots issue in the court system.

Farnell (2004) presented an appropriate thought process to clarify the mainstream history and popular defense against the changing of mascots. Farnell (2004) argued that pop culture has been created by Native American Symbolism, despite other American minority populations having derogatory representations, such as blackface, removed. Farnell (2004) argued that this

circumstance indicates that, from the mainstream perspective, American Indians occupy a space in American society that is different from other minority groups because they are hidden from the corrective action of non-racializing methods.

Another topic with professional sports is the role of economics when changing a logo or mascot. Miller (1999) argued that owners will always maintain the status quo, especially if it is profitable to keep the mascot. For example, Miller (1999) argued that protesters have to convince three groups of people to agree to a change: owners, who have the power to change the mascot, but often reject the change because it would be less profitable; fans, who have bought into the on-field performance of the team and the off-field memorabilia that personifies the team—jerseys, attire, etc.; and the players (Miller, 1999). An example of a change would be the NBA team in the Washington D.C., whose owner agreed to change the name from the Bullets to the Wizards in the wake of public outcry over the name because it was seen as violent (Miller, 1999).

### **Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory is endorsed by a “collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2018, p. 3). Critical race theory has taken many forms since its inception, with more focused groups advocating and studying Latino, LGBT, American Indian, Muslim/Arab communities, and many more. Critical race theory began in the 1970s when lawyers, activists, and legal scholars began to recognize how the civil rights movement had made vast advancements previously but had stalled in the 1970s. Critical race theory was built upon two movements: critical legal studies and radical feminism. Moreover, critical race theory was

created to challenge existing power structures by bringing attention to legal inequities and uneven social issues (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

### **Six Tenets of Critical Race Theory**

Critical race theory is founded on six tenets; however, not all scholars or critical race theorists utilize or agree with all six tenets (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). First, critical race theory posited that racism is normal and is commonplace in society. Likewise, racism is a common experience for people of color. The first tenet argued that the normalcy of racism meant that it is hard to address and cure in society.

The second tenet is known as interest convergence or is often called material determinism. This tenet argued that interests of white elites (materially) and working-class whites (psychically) are furthered through racism and there is no incentive to eliminate racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). A main argument for interest convergence came from Bell (1980), who argued that the *Brown v. Board of Education* trial was approved by the Supreme Court because the interests of white and black people intersected, rather than being approved because it was a decision to help African American students. In other words, the decision could have resulted from elite white self-interest over a desire to help African American people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). More information will be provided on the importance of Bell's interest convergence argument.

Bell (1980) argued that *Brown vs. the Board of Education* ruling was not the victory the media proclaimed. In other words, Bell (1980) coined the term "interest convergence" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016), which was the understanding that the dominant society controls certain aspects of society—in Bell's (1980) case the educational equity within *Brown vs. the Board of Education*.

However, according to this logic, why would American Indian mascots change in a dominant society which claims these mascots are honoring American Indians? Freire (2004) argued false generosity is a result of an unjust social order spurned by the oppressors to correct oppression. Perhaps in the mascot context, the person who argued for mascot retention could be called the oppressor. Yet, correcting oppression must come from those who are oppressed and cannot be done by the oppressor because the oppressor cannot view the plight of the oppressed appropriately (Freire, 2004). In the mascot context, a mascot itself is not inherently oppressive in a traditional definition of oppression, (Young, 2004), rather it's the meaning ascribed to those who view the mascot. However, Freire (2004) argued true generosity (to fix oppression) only came from fighting the root cause itself. The arguments from detractors who claimed mascots do not honor American Indian people stem from this perspective (Fryberg et al., 2008; Hylton, 2010; Miller, 1999; Pewewardy, 2004; and Williams, 2007). Initially, Bell's (1980) interest convergence idea sparked controversy and outrage (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). This was because Bell (1980) argued against the notion that *Brown vs. the Board of Education* was a valiant and important legal accomplishment for the progress of African Americans on the premise that the government conceded the ruling as a means to bolster their international image (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). Yet, several years later, Dudziak (1988) performed historical archival research from declassified government documents into what Bell (1980) claimed and found them to be mostly accurate (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The United States was viewed as having a racism problem by the international community (Dudziak, 1988), and *Brown vs. the Board of Education* was an outlet to correct its image, as Bell (1980) argued. Therefore, Bell (1980) and interest convergence are important for this study because they can be applied to American Indian mascots.

Furthermore, this review addressed the impact of role models and self-perception on American Indian student success and how teachers contributed or could further contribute by providing culturally relevant curriculum. The historical perspective coupled with the background of American Indian mascots displayed the need for understanding how school leaders rationalize and internalize having an American Indian mascot while having American Indian students on their campuses. The gap that has arisen from the literature is: how do school leaders ascribe meaning to, rationalize, and internalize having American Indian mascots represent their high school?

A third tenet of critical race theory is the social construction (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This tenet argues that race is constructed, subjective, and does not correspond with biological reality. In other words, society determines and invents race and race's value within a society. Humans do share various traits or psychical commonalities, but one's race does not genetically determine their ability to learn, grow, develop, contribute, be successful, etc. A fourth tenet in critical race theory focuses on how "the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times, in response to needs such as the labor market" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 10). This tenet was important for this study because it addresses how a dominant society creates, uses, and retires images, feelings, and stereotypes of minority groups. At any given time, a group may be seen as exotic, another as uneducated, another as religious fanatics, or another as a hard working/contributing group. Unfortunately, critical race theory argues that the views of these groups are simply views and not inherent determining factors that enable or disable a group from being functioning members of society. However, along with the view of tenet four, society also retires those views as society chooses. In other words, a group that could be seen as hard

working during a certain time frame could be switched to a view of that group being uneducated or inadequate members of society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

A fifth tenet of critical race theory is known as intersectionality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Intersectionality is the idea that all races have their own origin and no universal identity. A common theme within intersectionality is anti-essentialism. For example, a white man could be a single father, American Indian, Jewish by religion, transgender, and Republican. These identities are unique to that person and cross many religious, social, gender, political, and racial backgrounds. Closely related to intersectionality is the sixth and final tenet of critical race theory: unique voices of color. Closely related because this tenet argues that people of color have their own experiences and they are uniquely situated to tell their stories. This tenet argues that people of color should share and tell their stories because it brings their voices forward and helps white people understand and listen to their voices (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

This study uses all six tenets of critical race theory and pays particularly close attention to tenet two, interest convergence, and tenet four, dominant societal racialization of people groups. These two tenets were important for American Indian mascots because they frame the creation and use of these mascots in ways that have been expressed by American Indian scholars and other academics (Covarrubias, & Fryberg, 2015; Fryberg et al., 2008; Fryberg & Stephens, 2010; Pewewardy, 2004). In other words, these tenets show how interest convergence and dominant societal racialization work in tandem in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

### **Conceptual Framework**

American Indian people face an overwhelming challenge in the classroom to identify with a “culturally congruent representation of self” (Fryberg et al., 2013, p. 446), to identify self-relevant representation of self (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015). Also, they struggled to overcome

stereotypes through mass media representations (Leavitt et al., 2015), to overcome the invisibility caused by colorblindness (Fryberg & Stephens, 2015) and to eliminate mascots. Working in a culturally responsible way with American Indian people is important for understanding the role American Indian mascots play within American society. For example, critical race theory argues that interest convergence (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2016) is a mechanism for creating opportunity to stifle progress when needed by dominant society and provide progress when it benefited dominate society. Certainly, these issues are not uncommon to find in Indian Country (a term commonly used to describe the realm in which American Indians operate in the United States) or with other students of color within student populations in both higher education and K–12. Moreover, there is a need to study how school leaders address or do not address having American Indian students on their campuses and having these controversial mascots that supposedly honor and pay homage to American Indian people.

The black and white binary is also derived from critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The black and white binary is a common framework by which people argued the varying degree or levels that affect people of color who are not black (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). As a result, this binary created a comparison of the plight of other minority groups to that of black people. Fryberg & Stephens (2010) argued that the media often represent American Indian people in an outdated manner, portraying them in a way that disables the option for American Indians to exist in a modern context. An example of prominent representations that American Indian students see most are mascots. Whether society represents American Indians as warriors, spiritual beings, or by highlighting negative traits, then the black and white binary is an accurate depiction of how society frames the struggles of another group that is not black; arguably this would lead to a form of invisibility (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016, Fryberg &



Stephens, 2010). This causes concerns for those surrounding the student and the student themselves (Fryberg et al., 2008). Parkman (2016) also asserted that minority student populations are most affected by the impostor phenomenon, in which individuals cannot accept or internalize their success or effectively self-assess their achievements (Parkman, 2016).

Moreover, Fryberg et al. (2008) argued that the impact of mascots and the stereotypical representations of them causes both high school and university level American Indian students to have a negative view of their community worth. Whether it is mascot or image representations of American Indian people, the problem is that these “representations do not cue associations that are relevant or useful for students’ identity construction” (p. 216). With the need for self-relevant role models and trusting relationships with teachers (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015; Fryberg et al., 2013) another contributing factor to an American Indian’s self-perception is the role of mass media. When groups are not represented in the media, they can become “deprived of messages or strategies for how to be a person” (Leavitt et al., 2015, p. 40). Both the quality and quantity of media representations for a group contribute to the idea that they may not belong or would not be successful in achievement-related fields (Leavitt et al., 2015). This issue is important because media representation, along with colorblindness, lead to a form of invisibility (Fryberg & Stephens, 2010).

### **Counternarratives**

Counternarratives serve a valuable purpose for both sides of an issue or argument and chapter four addresses counternarratives regarding one participant. During the research phase of this study, one of the nine participants provided a counternarrative from a unique African American viewpoint on the topic. This participant felt that changing the mascot should occur over any argument for retaining it. The participant based her assertion from a standpoint of

cultural appropriation. Regarding American Indian mascots, Chaney, Burke, and Burkley (2011) found that participants viewed American Indian mascots as equal to American Indian people. In other words, they proposed the first study that argued the meaning or representation of American Indians through mascots relative to actual American Indian people (Chaney et al., 2011). Chaney et al. (2011) found that non-American Indian people not only viewed American Indian mascot imagery as interchangeable with American Indian people but non-American Indian people's views of the mascots was negative and could be "emblematic of larger subjugating narratives regarding AI people" (Chaney et al., 2011, p. 57). Both Silva (2007) and Farnell (2004) provided arguments for retention advocates (RAs)—advocates for keeping American Indian mascots. RAs believe the mascot itself is not as bad as it appears to the advocates for changing mascots (Silva, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

There is a historical struggle between American Indian people and having their likeness, culture, and history portrayed respectfully versus those who see no harm or wrongdoing in media representations and mascots. Historically, American Indian students have seen progress by way of scholarships, access, and opportunity for postsecondary institutions; however this progress has only presented students with options at the sacrifice of their culture because they have to leave their culture behind to attend public higher education institutions (Jones Brayboy et al., 2012). In other words, an historical identity of American Indians is due to a lack of self-relevant role models (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2014, Fryberg et al., 2013), and the role of mass media and its representations of contemporary (or lack thereof) American Indian people (Leavitt et al., 2015; Fryberg & Stephens, 2010; Fryberg et al., 2008), and the use of American Indian mascots,

provides a question to be explored in chapter four: how do school administrators perceive and describe how an American Indian mascot influences their school culture and identity?

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

American Indian Symbolism (NAS) in athletics began more than 120 years ago (Callais, 2010), and one of the most prominent mascots/teams remains the Cleveland Indians. The Cleveland Indians changed their name from the Naps to the Indians in 1915 and changed their mascot in 1946 (Callais, 2010). In 2018, the Washington D.C. professional football organization's mascot was perhaps the most offensive NAS in the United States. The Washington Redskins name was challenged in 1967 as an offensive mascot and it was argued as such because of the name's creation through the interpretation of the Lanham Act (Hylton, 2010). The Lanham Act prevents disparaging or immoral trademark registrations (Hylton, 2010). Yet, since the creation of NAS in athletics, the complexity of American Indian identity and representation has remained remarkably similar. In other words, American Indian mascots often embody the image that society wishes to place upon American Indian people (Black, 2002; Freng & Willis-Esqueda, 2011; Pewewardy, 2004; Staurowsky, 1998; Weaver, 2001). Identity can be found in stereotypes, and stereotype awareness begins to form in children from ages six to ten (McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Nasir et al., 2017). Nasir et al. (2017) found that stereotypes and race are both prevalent in urban schools, enforcing common assumptions about African American and LatinX students. Furthermore, when a group is not represented in the media, the messages of what it means to be a person within a social group is absent (Leavitt et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of how school administrators view the identity of their school with regard to their American Indian mascot. Further, this study examined how administrators' understanding of the use of an American Indian mascot influences

school culture, students, faculty members and their views of American Indians, and cultural appropriation.

### **Significance of Study**

The significance of this research is to contribute to existing literature on American Indian mascots, but more importantly, highlight the role of identity. In terms of Critical Race Theory, society should allow people of color or minority groups to tell their stories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). This study drew upon the sixth tenet of critical race theory to examine the ascribed meaning and interaction with American Indian mascots by high school administrators and let them tell their story. To contribute to existing research, this study used critical race theory and contributes to the literature on mascots, American Indian identity in relation to mascots, and how high school administrators ascribe meaning to their school's American Indian mascot. The sixth tenet in critical race theory is significant because it encouraged people to tell their unique stories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). A phenomenological study captures unique stories derived from first-hand experiences because it supports discoveries surrounding a phenomenon.

### **Research Questions**

Critical Race Theory has six tenets that were created to study the impact of race within society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2016). Critical race theory is useful in many ways, but the sixth tenet, which advocates for people to tell their unique stories, was useful within a phenomenological study because the researcher learned first-hand about the experience of a participant. In an effort to understand how the identity of an American Indian mascot influences school culture, this research hoped to answer the following questions:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: What meaning do school administrators ascribe to their school's American Indian mascot?

RQ2: How do school administrators perceive and describe how an American Indian mascot influences their school culture and identity?

Creswell and Poth's (2018) framework of a guiding phenomenological question provided these two research questions that articulate a guiding phenomenon surrounding mascots—how do administrators identify with their American Indian mascot? Initially, this study sought to incorporate both American Indian students and school faculty/administrators' relationship with their school's American Indian mascot. However, Creswell and Poth (2018) argued that studies should have a central guiding question and likewise a transcendental phenomenological study should have research questions that describe the phenomenon. This study utilized a transcendental phenomenological approach and followed the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method created by Moustakas (1994).

### **Transcendental Phenomenology**

Transcendental phenomenology (TP) is the methodology for this study to explore and examine its research questions. Pragmatically, transcendental phenomenology was derived from Husserl's understanding of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). TP underscores discovery and the essence of experience to systematically study available knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). However, reflection on subjective observations sets TP apart from standard phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). More importantly, TP accesses the knowledge on hand, but combines a subjective reflection on the information before a researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) argued that TP as a methodology is science because philosophically speaking, humans can only know and understand what is before them. Viewing information from a subjective standpoint is seeing information or acts as they actually happened (Moustakas, 1994). Through the use of bracketing (also known as *epoche*), a researcher must remove preconceived assertions

or bias from interpretation of what is in front of them. Once preconceived assertions or biases are removed, researchers can then understand what is before them (Moustakas, 1994). But, as Moustakas (1994) argued, there is a convergence between realism and naturalism. Realism attempts to view the world in terms of how information or acts actually happened, whereas naturalism finds itself in the physical and material reality of the world. Yet, both realism and naturalism are connected through phenomenology because they take what is before them—material and physical and what lies between—to study the essence of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, this study utilized a transcendental phenomenological research methodology to study both the material and physical reality of American Indian mascots and the information that lay in between and beneath the physical evidence. For Moustakas (1994) the essence of the meaning ascribed to American Indian mascots as a phenomenon was located in both tangible and intangible realms. Mascots provided a physical presentation—the appearance of the mascot—and provided a nonphysical presentation: the meaning, feelings, and values assigned by someone to the mascot.

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was a public high school in a metropolitan area in Texas with a current American Indian mascot. The school has approximately 3,000 students and serves a broad student base. Furthermore, the American Indian school mascot has been in place since its inception in the 1980s. The school itself is in the middle of a large metropolitan area, which presents the school and its mascot as a unique opportunity to study. Additionally, it is one of the last remaining American Indian mascots in its vicinity.

### **Participants/Sample**

The participants were faculty and administration at a single high school site that has an American Indian mascot. The sample from the school site included nine participants and was within the guidelines set forth by Creswell and Poth (2018). The participants and stakeholders were identified as people who have encountered and experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study used snowball sampling, a method of in which the researcher identified several key participants that fit the criteria of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), then asked if the participants could identify additional participants, which led to information-rich possibilities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for this research was conducted through semistructured interviews, which are important to phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994), with specific required data from all interviewees, no predetermined order, flexible questions, and follow up open-ended questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Likewise, this research employed interview questions as a means to frame the experiences of the interviewees, as argued by (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interview questions are useful, especially in phenomenology, when the researcher cannot otherwise observe the behavior of the participants and/or needs a way to delve into the lived experiences and perceptions (Moustakas, 1994) of the study's participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These interviews were conducted in person in a face-to-face format. Face-to-face interviews provided the researcher the opportunity to employ the use of field notes. Field notes provide a unique opportunity to compile a roughly categorized note-taking mechanism to further examine the phenomenon from the perspective of the researcher (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).



This study utilized synchronous face-to-face interviews to interact and view the participants and their responses in real time. Two sets of interviews of face-to-face on ground interviews were conducted: first a semistructured interview and then a follow-up open-ended question interview. The interviews were 30 to 60 minutes in length and involved opened-ended questions (see appendix A). Questions were designed using guidelines suggested by Patton (2015) beginning with background/demographic, questions/information, and followed by feeling and knowledge questions. The goal of these questions was to discover the meaning participants ascribe to their American Indian mascot. These questions fit within the guidelines of Moustakas (1994) for transcendental phenomenology because they were open-ended and focused on the experience the participant has with the phenomenon. There were ten questions in total (see appendix A).

### **Data Validation**

Data validation is important because a qualitative researcher is not able to produce an objective interpretation or truth of the information before them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Moustakas (1994) labeled the pursuit of objectivity as the epoche or bracketing. Bracketing is the method of removing the opinion or bias a researcher may have about a topic. Data or information was generated from the participant but the data or information itself is not in itself valid until proven credible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data validation includes member checking. This study utilizes member checking to clarify if the researcher interpreted the meaning behind each participant's responses correctly.

### **Pilot Test**

The researcher performed a pilot test of the research questions before beginning data collection. Two pilot participants were selected from a high school in a metropolitan area in

Texas and provided feedback on research questions before data collection began. Pilot tests or interviews are a valuable tool for researchers to gauge and assess whether questions are clear, concise, and provide useful information (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The pilot test created an opportunity for respondents to recommend questions or suggest enhancements to existing questions.

### **Transferability**

Transferability encompasses internal and external validity to create an environment for the credibility of a research study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). There are many types of studies, both qualitative and quantitative alike, but it is through transferability that a researcher is able to gauge whether their study results match reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By determining if the findings are congruent with reality, researchers can ascertain if their study was conducted rigorously (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, reality and validity cannot be wholly captured or understood, as they are relative, yet in research, finding a strategy to align with reality is essential (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking was used for this study because member checking allows for participants to return to their statements and find out if the researcher has accurately depicted their responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Member Checking**

Member checking is a form of validation of information and data in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking is the method of returning information or collected data to participants of the study. Returning the information or collected data allows the participants to view the representations or interpretations of their responses by the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking was performed on this study after the second cycle of coding. The reason for using member checking after the second cycle of coding was because it

provided time for the researcher to complete the coding process and return the data back to the members. Also, members could only be checked after the analysis process was completed by the researcher and a list was compiled of comments on issues that needed to be checked with a participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This ensured that the meaning a participant explained was not misinterpreted by the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Analysis**

Data analysis for this study followed Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological research design. Transcendental phenomenological research design has four steps to follow. First, the researcher must develop a description of the phenomenon in their terms. Second, because this study uses semistructured interviews, the researcher performed the epoche or bracketing process with each transcript (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) and strive to bracket out their opinions and bias regarding the topic. The epoche process is a means of engagement with the material and is a concerted effort to eliminate as much bias within the study as possible (Moustakas, 1994). This creates an environment for the phenomenon to be studied as it is experienced among the participants and to view the phenomenon without researcher contamination. The third step in the process encourages researchers to consider and respect each statement discovered, record relevant statements, list nonrepetitive statements, relate or group the meanings of each statement to a theme, synthesize the meanings of the statements, and reflect and construct the meanings of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The final step is to construct descriptions of the experiences and create a composite description of the textural and structural descriptions within the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018, Moustakas, 1994). This final step is important, as it allows the researcher to appreciate and realize that each response from the

participants is unique and adds both value and clarity to the broader horizon of the topic (Moustakas, 1994).

Regarding bias, the researcher employed the bracketing/epoche tools laid out by Moustakas (1994). However, another tool that was utilized through this process was viewed from critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Critical race theory offered tenet six as a means for people of color to tell their unique stories (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Therefore, the sixth tenet for the research was a vessel for the participants of this study to tell their story and add their viewpoints to the horizon (Moustakas, 1994) of the topic, content that should be protected as their own unique story. Moreover, Patel (2016) argued that coloniality presented people with the mechanism to interact and created a worldview that “plays in how human beings decided to be in relation with each other, the land, and its resources” (p. 14). Using bracketing, along with an understanding for the sixth tenet of critical race theory, and a general understanding for how the colonized United States operated, the researcher approached this topic as cleanly and open-mindedly as possible.

### **Transcription**

Once the interviews were recorded and completed, the researcher used a transcription service to have the participant interviews transcribed. According to (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) transcription can be an intimate activity between the researcher and the data. However, having a transcription service transcribe the data for a researcher can cause errors and the transcriber may not be fully aware of certain terminology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, Rev.com was used, but as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested, the researcher listened to the recordings before the coding phase and read the transcription to correct any errors. The researcher encrypted the files and backups to prevent data breaches and kept any physical artifacts with personal

information in a separate safe. Digital artifacts were submitted through a secure and private submission service. Additionally, the participants signed confidentiality agreements before participating in the study.

## **Coding**

Coding is a word or phrase that develops from qualitative inquiry (Saldaña, 2016). Coding can come from interview transcripts, artifacts, observations and several other qualitative methods (Saldaña, 2016). However, the data for this study were coded from interview transcripts. Coding itself is indicative of the researcher and the lens through which he or she sees the topic (Saldaña, 2016). In other words, of the same transcript, multiple researchers could use different codes for the same section. For this study, the researcher used the epoche and bracketing processes to produce as objective a lens as possible. Yet, Saldaña (2016) argued that the lens, angle, and perspective a researcher uses for the study from the beginning should remain in the coding section. Therefore, when it comes to coding as an analytic process, it is important to understand it from a heuristic or discovery standpoint (Saldaña, 2016). The discovery of the codes allows researchers to analyze and understand where the study is taking them, but more importantly it leads to codifying and categorizing the transcripts (Saldaña, 2016).

**First Cycle Coding.** Because the interview transcripts were transcribed by Rev.com, the researcher received the transcription and pre-coded the data by hand. Pre-coding is a brief scan of the transcripts to gain a general understanding of what will happen in the first coding cycle and will allow the researcher to preliminarily scan the transcripts and identify common phrases and words. After the transcripts were pre-coded, the researcher used a first cycle coding technique called concept coding (Saldaña, 2016), a form of analytical coding for cultural or

broader ideas, such as a phenomenology (Saldaña, 2016). Concept coding consists of creating codes based on macro level meanings that arise from the transcripts (Saldaña, 2016).

**Second Cycle Coding.** Once the first cycle coding was completed, the researcher utilized a second cycle coding method known as pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding is a mechanism to take larger amounts of information and create smaller units of data for analysis (Saldaña, 2016). Pattern coding allowed the researcher to organize and create a broader coding structure from which to analyze the data (Saldaña, 2016).

**Field Notes.** Field notes are a tool to produce rigorous qualitative research and have been in use since the early 1900s (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Originally, scratch notes, or field notes, were used to collect private and personal thoughts from a researcher during research activities such as interviews (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). According to Phillippi and Lauderdale (2018), “Field notes situate qualitative studies within a larger societal and temporal context. In addition, they provide nontextual or auditory information about interviews and focus groups, useful in understanding participant meaning” (p. 381). Likewise, to prepare for field note collection a researcher should align their field note approach to the study’s theoretical framework (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

This study utilized Phillippi and Lauderdale’s (2018) field notes for interviews framework. During each interview, the researcher completed field notes and then after each interview the researcher reviewed the notes and added any relevant information. Phillippi and Lauderdale’s (2018) field notes for interviews framework consists of four components: setting, participants, interview, and critical reflection. The setting is where the interview took place, listing the specific information about the location, and the researcher recorded the information about the physical space they used to conduct the interview (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). For

participants, the researcher established a baseline for nonverbal cues by describing the appearance and demeanor of each participant. During the interviews, the researcher took notes on general observations of the participants and their responses. If a question or something within the line of questioning changed from a participant, the researcher noted it and determined why it changed (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Finally, for critical reflection, the researcher had a quiet moment to reflect on the interview, the impact the process had on the researcher, and to document any other useful information that arose (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018).

### **Participant Rights**

During and after this study, the participant's confidentiality was maintained as thoroughly as possible. The names of the participants and the study were known by the researcher. However, the researcher, any involved international review boards, and the faculty advising team know only the participant and site-based pseudonyms. Creswell and Poth (2018) argued to keep a master list of data separate from all data types, to back up and store securely all data, and to protect participants' information by changing or masking names. Participants could refuse to answer any questions at any time and could stop the interview without any fear of repercussion.

### **Potential Limitations**

Limitations are common and inherent to all forms of research. Qualitative research involves time-consuming analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), is subjective in nature, and is limited to small sample sizes. Potential limitations to this study were a bias against the constructs and principles that racism imposes upon American Indian mascots. The researcher worked for an American Indian tribe, listened to its tribal members and has been profoundly shaped by the impact that American Indian mascots have on American Indian people. Furthermore, the importance of white privilege impacted this research because the researcher is a white male. This

study employed a transcendental phenomenological methodology, and the use of the epoche and bracketing process (Creswell & Poth, 2018, Moustakas, 1994) provided an avenue to prevent this bias. The perceptions about conflicts of interest were important and could not be overstated. This study, its subject matter, participants, findings, and data were treated with the utmost respect. The sample size provided limitations because it worked with from eight to twelve participants, so it was difficult to generalize the findings.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

American Indian symbolism has existed for more than 120 years (Callais, 2010). Many studies have focused on American Indian mascot retention both on the amateur and professional athletic levels (Black, 2002; Freng & Willis-Esqueda, 2011; Pewewardy, 2004; Staurowsky, 1998; Weaver, 2001). However, the examination of American Indian mascots from the perspective of high school administrators fills a gap in the literature. By employing a transcendental phenomenological methodology (Moustakas, 1994) and a critical race theory framework (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) this study examined the ascribed value high school administrators placed upon their school's American Indian mascot. Furthermore, transcendental phenomenology underscores discovery and the essence of experience to systematically study available knowledge (Moustakas, 1994).

This chapter provides an overview into the methodology of the study, data collection, and information describing the participants. Three primary themes and two subthemes for each primary theme are discussed in the chapter.

#### **Brief Review of Methodology**

Ascribing value to an object, in this case an American Indian mascot, was the central framework for this study. Therefore, a transcendental phenomenology methodology created a framework the researcher used to answer this study's research questions. Transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) requires the application of a three-step process to analyze research data. First, the epoche, or bracketing, of the researcher's bias and agenda was used to complete this study (Moustakas, 1994). Second, a Moustakas-modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of transcendental phenomenological reduction was implemented (1994). To summarize

the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of transcendental phenomenological reduction method, the researcher participated in the study and developed a composite description from the research and the participants. Along with transcendental phenomenological reduction, the researcher used field notes before, during, and after interviews to gather his thoughts, and “situate qualitative studies within a larger societal and temporal context” (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018, p. 381). Field notes are used to “provide nontextual or auditory information about interviews and focus groups, useful in understanding participant meaning” (p. 381). Next, the researcher began the coding processes.

The researcher expected the interview to provide a large amount of information to work from for this study through the coding process. Therefore, the researcher selected to use concept coding and pattern coding (Saldaña, 2016). First however, was the pre-coding process, which allowed the researcher to find “codable moments” (p. 20) the researcher would fully code later. Pre-coding began and proceeded into concept coding, which created, as expected, many codes. Pattern coding began during the second cycle coding phase, which took the large sum of concept codes and grouped them into clear and distinct patterns (Saldaña, 2016). The third and final step for a transcendental phenomenology is Imaginative Variation, which is part of Moustakas’s (1994) modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. Imaginative Variation’s aim “is to grasp the structural essences of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35). By using imaginative variation, this study followed transcendental phenomenological reduction by arriving “at a textural-structural synthesis of meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience being investigated” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 36). To accomplish imaginative variation, the researcher combined steps one and two, included all data, field notes, and codes, and organized them into what Creswell and Poth (2018) labeled a composite description.

## **Research Questions and Data**

In an effort to understand how the identity of an American Indian mascot influences school culture, this research sought to answer the following questions:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: What value do school administrators ascribe to their school's American Indian mascot?

RQ<sub>2</sub>: How do school administrators perceive and describe how an American Indian mascot influences their school culture and identity?

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through in-person interviews with nine high school administrators whose school had an American Indian mascot, at a single research site in the southern United States. A semistructured interview protocol was used with each participant. Interviews were recorded individually and transcribed using a transcription service. The interviews ranged in length from 25 to 50 minutes.

### **Data Validation**

The researcher conducted two pilot interviews with a teacher in the same district as the research site and an American Indian educator not related to the research site. Both the teacher and the American Indian educator provided valuable insight into the research questions for this study. Neither met the criteria for participation and these pilot interviews were used to validate the questions prior to beginning the study.

Once the data were collected, the researcher began the member-checking process, which allowed the researcher to provide each participant with the copy of the transcript and asked to validate the accuracy. Additionally, each participant was provided with the final coded product after concept coding and pattern coding. Each participant was then asked to validate these

results. The data were cross examined among all nine participants through a process known as triangulation (Creswell, 2015; Merriam, 2009). Triangulation through collected field notes, coded transcripts, and the researcher's composite description allowed the researcher to view multiple data sources and discover if the themes were supported.

### **Data Saturation**

Data saturation is reached when no new data, themes, coding, and the replication of study occurs (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data saturation is not universal for all research types (Fusch & Ness, 2015), however, this study found no additional data upon reaching the final interview, no additional codes or themes, and the researcher believed that this study could be replicated. Study replication regarding data saturation occurs when the researcher discovers enough information that another researcher could easily recreate the study elsewhere and test the results (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Once data were collected the analysis process began. This study followed the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method and all data were considered collected upon reaching saturation. The researcher met saturation and found no new information regarding the ascribed value high school administrators applied to their American Indian mascot, and saturation was reached (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Description of the Population and Sample**

In total, nine high school administrators participated in the interview process for this study. The research site was given a pseudonym of Attleboro High School, to further protect the identity of the site and its participants. This study used snowball sampling to identify prospective participants. Snowball sampling was facilitated by a research site representative who identified participants who fit the study's criteria. The criteria for inclusion was limited to school administrators. Beyond being an administrator, a participant could be any age, gender, and race.

Table 1 details the demographics of the participants. Six participants identified as female and three participants as male. The average age was 53, with the highest age was 67 and the youngest participant was 40 years old. Each participant brought a unique and valuable perspective with a combined total of 124 years at the research site. Regarding the participants' length of employment at the research site, one participant was employed less than one year, and the highest length of employment was 37 years.

The nine participants represented high school administrators including assistant principals, counselors, and school safety personnel. Protection of the identity of each participant was important; therefore, each participant was instructed to select a pseudonym which they felt fit them best, while adding an additional layer of identity protection. The participants were encouraged to self-select pseudonyms that would hide their gender and identity. The participants for this study are identified as: Larry, Katy, Sandra, Hawk, Selma, Khaleesi, Poppy, Jay, and Shannon. Furthermore, participants were asked to identify themselves by age, gender, race, if they were American Indian and the length employed at the research site. Additionally, regarding race, participants were allowed to define their race in their own way. Following critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) participants self-reported their race based on their own view of race. For Hawk, he identified as an Anglo person, and likewise, Shannon identified as Black, over African American, as did Khaleesi. Further research could be conducted on how participants view their own racial identity in relation to understanding how they ascribe value to their school's American Indian mascot.

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Racial Identity</u>	<u>American</u> <u>Indian</u>	<u>Length Employed at</u> <u>Site</u>
Larry	50	M	White/Caucasian	No	Less than 1 year
Katy	40	F	White/Caucasian	No	1 year
Sandra	55	F	Caucasian	No	6 years
Hawk	53	M	Anglo	No	6 years
Selma	56	F	White	No	13 years
Khaleesi	55	F	African American	No	17 years
Poppy	60	F	Caucasian	Yes – 1/32	37 years
Jay	67	M	White/Caucasian	No	18 years
Shannon	49	F	Black	No	25 years

### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore the value high school administrators ascribed to their school's American Indian mascot. The value ascribed to the mascot was better understood through a series of interviews to determine participant's experiences with their school's American Indian mascot. A key aspect into understanding the value that each participant ascribed was found in the relative attachment each participant had to the school culture. After the interviews were conducted, each transcript was coded and grouped into common themes and

then further grouped into more specific commonalities. Three primary themes emerged through this process, which communicated each participant's ascribed value to their school's American Indian mascot. The three primary themes are: first, the mascot's symbol binds the community together by symbolizing pride, unity, strength, and togetherness; second, the history and identity of the mascot transcended any benefit to changing it; and third, the Mascot is seen as a positive symbol. See table two.

Table 2	
<i>List of Themes and Subthemes</i>	
<u>Primary Themes</u>	<u>Subthemes</u>
Mascot's symbol binds the community together by symbolizing pride, unity, strength, and togetherness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Participants' Description of American Indian Mascot</li> <li>b. Common physical mascot descriptions</li> </ul>
The history and identity of the mascot transcended any benefit to changing it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Historical American Indian Understanding</li> <li>b. Influenced Understanding of American Indians</li> </ul>
The Mascot is seen as a positive symbol.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Perceived Positivity of American Indian Mascot</li> <li>b. Cultural Appropriation Understanding</li> </ul>

### **Theme 1: Mascot's Symbol Binds the Community Together by Symbolizing Pride, Unity, Strength, and Togetherness**

Theme one emerged quickly as the strongest primary theme because each participant identified pride, strength, and togetherness as a thread that bound together the school community.

Each participant was asked feeling questions (Patton, 2015) regarding the school's American Indian mascot and their understanding and value ascribed to it. For example, each participant was asked to describe the mascot's features, its identity, and its role in the school community. Larry stated, "it's a true source of pride to be an Attleboro Chieftain, and I've seen that permeate itself throughout the entire student body." Katie's comments were similar, "it kind of brings in the pride. We're all about being Chieftains and I don't always think about being a Chieftain in terms of the Indian piece but that we are fighters, we're a tribe." Hawk argued that the mascot is "a fighter, someone who is loyal to the school, and has all the positive attributes of a Chieftain." Therefore, two subthemes emerged from the participant's responses: participants' description of American Indian mascots and why the participants reflect common mascot descriptions.

**Subtheme 1: Participants' description of American Indian mascots.** Every American Indian mascot is different in each community it represents, therefore there is no defined or accepted ascribed value to all American Indian mascots; however, this study found that each of the nine participants identified similar and common descriptions of their school's American Indian mascot. The most common descriptors were, "pride," "unity," "strength," and "togetherness" with the ideas of all four words reflecting a common thread that connected the school community and the general community surrounding the school. Larry reflected on a recent cheer banquet by quoting the cheer coach as saying "Once a Chieftain, always a Chieftain" and described his short tenure at the research site and noted that "just being here in a short period of time, it's [the American Indian mascot] a true source of pride to be an Attleboro High School Chieftain, and I've seen that kind of permeate itself throughout the entire student body." Katy described her understanding of the American Indian mascot as:



It's kind of that branding piece of what we're about that I think the mascot . . . Just typically speaking in schools in general it's almost like that's the center of it. It kind of brings in the pride. We're all about being Chieftains and I don't always think about being a Chieftain in terms of the Indian piece but that we are fighters, we're a tribe.

Hawk posited that the general community viewed the school as Chieftains and when positive accomplishments happened at the school the community would state "The Chieftains did that." So, it is certainly a social identification in pride for this part of town. Jay identified, "It's really a matter of strength. Belonging to a tribe or to a team. Yeah, that's it. That's mainly what comes to mind, is strength and belonging to a tribe or a team." For Poppy, the mascot represented the school tenets stating, "most of our tenets are . . . Chieftain strong is like our current one that we do." These common descriptions point to broad understandings of the role of the school's American Indian mascot. Furthermore, Larry identified the general community and the school community as intersecting, but still connected through the mascot as he stated:

And the community members that I come across, that have been here for a long time, or that are graduates who now have students at Attleboro High School, it really just kind of is the glue that holds this area together. Now I know demographics have changed. You know, the lines have been redrawn and redrawn over and over.

Symbolism became a common response because the mascot to them was a symbol of the school, rather than American Indian identification. Hawk identified the spirit of the competitor by positing "It's more of a spirit of a competitor . . . someone who's going to fight hard and defend its school." Sandra stated:

I don't think the mascot is that important in the community. It's part of the school, but I don't think when they think of Attleboro High School, the immediate concept is an

American Indian or a Native American. I don't think that is the immediate identification. It's more about what Attleboro High School represents. And when they hear Attleboro High School, and when we're in various competitions, I don't think that the American Indian comes out immediately.

Katy argued that the idea of the Chieftain is a fighter; however, it pointed to something great, like the school motto, she stated: "To be honest. I mean, the Chieftain I think of it in terms of being a fighter. Looking at our mascot on the wall that our words are truth, honor, and loyalty." Subtheme two began to emerge because each participant was identifying the symbolism of the American Indian mascot, in which there were still physical identifiers being described. Therefore, if the mascot is a symbol of the school culture and is not necessarily indicative of American Indian culture, the participants were asked to describe the mascot's traits and features.

**Subtheme 2: Common physical mascot descriptions.** The common physical mascot descriptions reflected these common words, "creative," "headdress," "feathers," and the color "red." For Larry, the traits and characteristics of the American Indian mascot reflected, "And it's the, of course you remember the headdress spells Chieftain, or Chieftains . . . will say that the facial features, if you want to get technical, the nose is pronounced." Furthermore, for Katy the mascot was more of a "Native American person," traditionally speaking, as she pointed to American Indian figures across the room. Katy felt that the figurines across the room reflected a traditional American Indian representation, rather than present-day American Indian people. The figurines wore headdresses and were dark in skin tone, and to her perhaps did not represent a current identifiable American Indian.

Sandra described the creativity of the mascot itself. She described how the feathers of the mascot spelled Chieftains and stated, "for me, when I see it, it's like, 'Oh, man, how creative is

that!” and she continued, “you don’t necessarily see what’s actual features of a person. You see the feathers. And that’s what I’m drawn to first is, look how they spelled Chieftains in those feathers.” The mascot’s artistic design overshadowed any resemblance of an American Indian person. Therefore, to Sandra, the mascot’s physical features are not indicative of its inherent American Indian symbolism.

Along with Sandra, Selma identified the creative aspect of the mascot and stated:

To me the face is made with [Attleboro High School abbreviated letters, AHS] and that forms the facial features. And then if I’m not mistaken the bands say Chieftains and then the feathers . . . the Chieftain head has more to do with the school itself than depicting a Native American.

Selma argued that the mascot itself literally in physical form is shaped by the school identifiers and not by American Indian identifiers. For example, the mascot itself is a creation of school letters, school name, and school identity that forms the outline of the mascot. To frame it another way, it is a creative type of word cloud that shapes the mascot into an American Indian Chieftain. Hawk, on the other hand, acknowledged that “when I think about it, I just think of more of a generic Chieftain, but I am aware that there is certainly an association with the Native American history.” But despite the association with American Indian history, the mascot highlights positive attributes of being a Chieftain, Hawk argued:

It’s a fighter, someone who is loyal to the school, and has the . . . All the positive attributes of a Chieftain. So, when you think tradition . . . When you think about the traditional Chieftain in any society, I think that is what we are striving for, and we hope to get to.

For Khaleesi, the mascot's colors and physical design point to what the school culture should strive to become:

It has our school colors in it, of course. Like I said, the figure itself has the Chieftains in the design, but when I see that, it represents to me who we should be: overcomers. You know, people that are up to the challenge, and if we fail, we try again. That's what I see when I think of [pause] because that's part of a [pause] in my mind, the Chief wears this headdress, so it's kind of a leader, that's what we're supposed to be, so it's a positive influence for me.

For Poppy, the physical features and traits rested on the headdress. She argued, "No, our Chieftain [pause] he's just [pause] a headdress." Similarly, Jay stated "So it's red in color. It's an American Indian Chieftain with a headdress, with the feathers and all." Finally, Shannon stated "It wears red, black, white." Subtheme two blends the symbolism of the first subtheme with the physical understanding argued by each participant.

## **Theme 2: The History and Identity of the Mascot Transcended any Benefit to Changing it**

Theme two arose from the transcripts from the final question. Would a participant keep or change the mascot if given the choice and why? All nine participants chose to answer this question with six stating to keep it, two undecided, but elected to keep it unless it offended American Indians or did not portray fidelity to American Indians and only one participant said it must be changed. Question ten asked participants if they would retain or change the school mascot. Therefore, theme two emerged because participants felt that the American Indian mascot and school history transcended any benefit to changing it.

For Larry, the mascot should be kept because of the positive impact laid out throughout the interview:

And the reason is, I do think you know, we've outlined a number of positive impacts that the mascot has on the Attleboro High School community, and at the same time, I don't see the negative impact on Native American people. Again, that's through my lens. . . . I'm a Caucasian, 50-year-old white guy, but I don't see the negative side, of especially ours. Attleboro High School Chieftains. I mean, I guess I could kind of see that the idea that the Redskins could be somewhat offensive.

Sandra felt that keeping the mascot was historically important to represent the high school and over time has been moving away from American Indian representation:

I would keep it. I think historically how they have adjusted it to represent more of Attleboro High School and the Chieftains, and less of moving away from a Native American or a concept or embodiment of a person, it's more about an idea of being strong, and having strength, and the Attleboro High School and the Chieftains. It's more about that than it is about any one particular group or any one particular person. It's showing the respect of what it is to be a Chieftain.

Hawk felt more strongly than Sandra or Larry because he felt the community would suffer most should the mascot change. Hawk argued:

I would absolutely keep it. The historical connotations that it's had for this community, a source of pride, the school's had a lot of success academically, athletically, and it's [pause] and that name has been associated with that. I'd hate to see that taken away, for any reason. I also think it would be a huge fight that would tear up the community, that would divide the community. I would not want to see that. Should that occur. . . . It would be a blood bath down here.

Poppy stated that she would keep the mascot because of the history it bears by arguing, “I would keep it because it’s part of our school now for almost 40 years. We all identify with it. We all see it in a positive manner. Our communities support it and identify with it.” Jay felt similar to Poppy by stating he would keep it, too. Jay argued that:

I think we should keep it. Yeah. Well basically I think it’s a matter of [pause] I think it’s important to feel like you’re a part of a group or you have some things in common. And I also think that it’s a positive thing to show determination and some sense of strength at various times.

The final participant who would keep it was Shannon, who argued the positive aspects of the mascot and its historical representation of the school meant that it should be kept. Shannon stated, “I wouldn’t change it. It’s been a representative of Attleboro High School. I understand it’s Indian, but it’s been around for so long . . . to me, it’s used in a positive way. It’s not in a negative way.”

Two participants, Katy and Selma, elected to keep it, but only if it was not offensive. Katy said that she wanted to keep the mascot, but only if the mascot was not offensive. Katy stated:

I mean, at this point, being new [pause] at this point I would say keep it. However, like I said at the beginning, I hadn’t really thought about it but the more I think about it just making sure that what we do is being [pause] that we are portraying another culture with honor and fidelity and not dishonoring [pause] if we had an American Indian student I would be curious to know what other members of that culture think about our school. In terms over here [pause] just getting that culture’s thoughts and buy-in.

Likewise, Selma felt it should be kept, but there could be a proper way to do it without being offensive. She stated:

I think if you can develop a mascot to where it creates pride and strength and it's not offensive, I think you should keep it because you have a tradition. But if there is no way that you can take that mascot and make someone feel proud, then I think you should change it.

**Counternarrative.** One counternarrative emerged through the interview process through the context of theme two. Only one participant, Khaleesi, outright stated the school's American Indian mascot should be changed. Khaleesi produced the only argument for changing it and she argued that her differing perspective by being African American helped her come to this conclusion. Khaleesi argued,

I would probably change it. Again, I particularly, because it's how I identify with myself because of how I came, but I definitely, with my understanding of cultural appropriation in the African American community, I would change it. I would change it. I wouldn't have that as our [pause] it would have to be something generic. And simply because we don't want to [pause] I wouldn't want anyone to be offended or hurt by something we did here at this school, particularly because we don't have a complete understanding of how we may offend somebody. And just taking something that's special to one community and making something that's [pause] because it's not really a special thing, as a mascot, it's just a representation, it doesn't really mean anything to us, so I wouldn't want to demean anybody in that way and belittle anybody by making it a mascot.

Khaleesi followed her argument with a reflection on how the interview process had changed her perspective on the school's American Indian mascot:

No, but it makes me, now, want to not wear any of my old stuff you know. Because I like it, I think whoever created the design was amazing, that they could actually make it, when you look at the figurehead that we have and how the face, the name is actually woven into the design, but now it makes me rethink a lot of things. But I hope that when I do wear it, that my behavior would be such that it wouldn't be a negative representation. Maybe I'll look at it that, since I'm like wearing a jacket, I don't know.

Khaleesi's answers certainly were set apart from the other participants. Chapter five will address this participant's answers through an analysis and recommendation for further research.

Moreover, two subthemes emerged from participants' answers regarding changing or keeping the mascot. First, how the participants learned about American Indians; in a broad and general sense. Second, how that understanding influenced their current experience with American Indians.

**Subtheme 1: Historical American Indian understanding.** Each participant expressed their own viewpoint on keeping or changing the mascot and the answers were mostly consistent. However, when asked about where their historical understanding of American Indians came from, meaning where did they learn about American Indians historically, their answers were similar, yet different in many ways. Larry, Katy, Khaleesi, Poppy, Selma, and Jay all expressed K–12 schooling as their main source of knowledge on American Indian history. Whereas Hawk, Katy, Khaleesi, Poppy, and Jay, additionally expressed an additional level of learning. This group of participants learned from K–12 education, but they also signified college, university, or general higher education as an additional source of knowledge for American Indian history.

Selma expressed the idea that literature could be an additional source of learning about American Indians and she felt that her biggest takeaway was learning about historical trauma



from literature. Larry and Selma each acknowledged that, like literature, film was a great source of historical knowledge for them, in addition to K–12 education.

Jay and Selma took their historical knowledge a step further than other participants by introducing a geographical component to his education of American Indians. Jay expressed:

Well, so obviously when I went to elementary school, there was some knowledge or something about that in the curriculum, when I was in elementary school. But then when I went to college, I learned a little bit more. My background originally was American history. And then when I lived in, I'll just tell you, when I lived in El Paso, because I was in close proximity to Apache Indians, up in the mountains in New Mexico, I did a lot of research on my own into that particular group of Indians. Well, the one thing I learned about them is that the tribe, the group, was everything. To be a member of the tribe was all important. That's one thing that I learned. The other thing that I learned from them is that they were very ethnocentric. They viewed themselves as above any other group of Indians, or any other group of people for that matter.

Similarly, Selma had a grandmother who was non-American Indian, but lived close to a Cherokee or Comanche reservation and would learn songs and parts of the Cherokee language.

Her grandmother would teach them to her:

I guess it began in school, in my history classes. Also family stories. The reason I say that is because my great-grandmother had a song that she would sing in the Cherokee language because there was a Cherokee reservation close [pause] I want to say Cherokee, now it could be Comanche, that was close to where she grew up and she learned some of the language of some of the songs, so that was some of my first.

Neither Shannon nor Sandra mentioned school, college, film, literature, or geography as her knowledge base on American Indians; rather, she expressed that it was her family that provided historical knowledge. It is worth pointing out that similarly, both Shannon and Khaleesi are African American, and both expressed family along with other means of historical knowledge of American Indians. However, where Shannon and Khaleesi differ is in how they viewed their family's role in educating them. Shannon voiced that her great-grandmother on her mother's side of the family was American Indian. Shannon articulated, "my great-grandmother on my Mom's side. She's Indian, so that's where I get it all, but I'm trying to remember. Just things about the educational part of when it comes to having the Indian side." Khaleesi on the other hand felt that stigma and stereotype prevented her from being permitted to learn from her family. Khaleesi expressed:

I wish I could say I learned more about it in my personal family life because my grandmother was, but I wasn't. And I don't know if there was a stigma to it because of the time that I grew up. So probably I know more about it now, and particularly, when it became an issue. So that was where more of the interest came, and then just trying to find out about my own family history, and I still haven't delved into it the way I should have. But pretty much just school, whatever was presented to me in school, and it wasn't always in the best light, historically. Growing up, historically, most of the time they were presented as weaker, and so I'm learning more as I get older.

Khaleesi continued with an interesting explanation of her connection of being "different" and not always agreeing with how things were taught to her. She stated:

I've always been a little different. What has been presented to me through schooling has always been different than what I've learned at home. Let me give kind of an analogy, I

guess. You grow up with stories, Goldilocks and the Three Bears. Goldilocks was the heroine in the story. For me, she wasn't, she was a burglar. . . . She was an intruder. She wasn't what I was taught she was, 'cause I was taught she was a little kid going in to a place and then she gets frightened by the three bears, but that was their home. Yeah, so same kind of thing with these. You know, you're taught one thing, you learn about the alcoholism, the drugs, all of that, but then you learn the other piece, the why that came to be. So it's a little bit different for me.

Sandra additionally mentioned only learning about American Indians historically from family. Sandra expressed the most in-depth thoughts about learning from family growing up. Sandra touched on land disputes, bloodlines, discrimination, stereotypes, and American Indian family members:

I would say, historically, just growing up, being that I had an aunt who was from Oklahoma, who is the mother of my cousins. And just growing up and learning about it from her. And at the same time, one of my cousins did marry an American Indian. And in turn, her children have married American Indians. And so, that whole bloodline there, that's probably been more of an influence. Being used as a mascot, even in all of our discussions, I don't remember really ever having a discussion about schools using it, or anybody saying anything about anybody using that symbol. It's been more of our discussion about disrespect toward American Indians has been more about land. And the stereotyping of imagery, or images, I guess I should say. Alcohol use, and some of the things, the statistics and research has been done on as far as American Indian people. And the choices that are made. And sometimes gets, people get stereotyped into this.

Sandra continued and noted that:

And at the same time, more about my cousin, who actually is over 50% American Indian herself, and the fact that she had blond hair, and the way that she was mistreated. Or, in a way, discriminated against at the hospital on the reservation. And when her children needed help, she was often the one that was last treated. Or her kids were, because [pause] and she always felt like it was because I'm sitting here fair skinned, blonde hair, but I'm, for some of them, I'm probably more American Indian than they are. But because I don't have that look [pause] That was something that she has mentioned as the kids were growing up. She would be very frustrated about that kind of thing. It was more through just relatives. But I don't ever remember a mascot conversation coming up. Or a misuse of mascots, in that way. It's just being treated with respect. And more about the people, and stereotyping, and a misunderstanding about who they are. And the land. Abuse in that way, per se.

Moving forward from learning historically about American Indians, the participants were asked to demonstrate how their learning has influenced their understanding of American Indians, which became a second subtheme.

**Subtheme 2: Influenced understanding of American Indians.** Each participant articulated their own understanding of how they were influenced by their learning of American Indians historically. Larry argued:

I mean, I think any time you experience something, whether it's seeing something on TV, or consuming some type of media, or visiting with somebody, face-to-face, one-on-one, you gain a greater depth and breadth of knowledge from that subject. So like I guess, just by acquiring more experiences, whether for me, unfortunately at this point, most of my information gained is through Twitter, it's a fast paced deal, and I don't get a chance to

watch too much TV, and while I'm at work, I don't get a chance to do a whole lot of anything other than work. And so, you know, just quick little sound-bites. And I'll be honest with you, I haven't really thought about this until your email, in a long time.

For Katy, she expressed a similar feeling about how her learning has influenced her. However, she felt aging has helped her learn and understand cultural diversity, hidden biases, and being sensitive. Katy expressed:

I think just in general learning about cultural diversity and trying to be a little more . . . trying to be open and more receptive to what the different needs of cultures are and making sure [pause] looking at my own [pause] what's the word? Like hidden biases. Checking what I say and do to being more sensitive to cultures outside of my own.

Sandra introduced empathy, how one part of her family is German, and how she compares both sides of her family when describing how her learning has influenced her understanding of American Indians. She stated:

Obviously, because there's a direct connection. There's more of an empathy. And a need to make sure that there's respect being given. It's not different than growing up with a mother who is German in World War II, full blooded German, and her brother having to change the spelling of their last name as he entered the American army, because of fear of being discriminated against. And so, it's that same [pause] having that empathetic view and trying to be alert to when people are disrespectful or aren't having a full understanding themselves. And maybe need to have a little bit more education about what they're saying, or the term that they just used, or something. Whether it be a Native American or an Indian, we tend to probably use Native American more so than the term Indian.

For Hawk, he took a more literal approach comparing his understanding of how his learning of American Indians historically has influenced him. Hawk used the term Chieftain (Attleboro school mascot) to answer the question:

Well, it's [pause] Made me look a little bit more in depth at what that means. But, and that it's, you kind of got to have a growth mindset, when you get into anything like that. And so you've [pause] So, my perception as a child what a Chieftain was, was probably different than what it is now as an adult. And certainly it's different, I would also say it's different now since I've been here at Attleboro High School, versus where I worked previously. I hadn't really given a lot of thought when I worked at [other district high school], and I worked at [other district high school] and so I'm, so, it's evolved over the years.

Selma articulated that she learned about American Indians historically from literature, therefore she expounded on that notion. As she explained how her learning from literature influenced her, she expressed emotions toward American Indians and their historical struggle. She said:

Mom always said that I was so soft-hearted and that kind of thing and so it's just, how as a people did they survive what they were going through, and trying to understand or try to figure out could I survive something like that? Because, of course, you never know until you have to do that. I guess, I don't know, I just have a very difficult time with how another human being could treat another human being in that way, and that could be anything. I mean anything. Kind of an example, I was reading a series of books, Mississippi Burning . . . *The Bone Tree* and I can't remember the other one. It went back and it dealt with the KKK and that kind of thing. I actually had to stop reading the series, I haven't even picked it up again because it was just so disturbing.

Poppy expressed it was a difficult question to answer, but described a recent political event and acknowledged a potential shift back to living off the land as American Indians had done and still do:

I guess just to always be sensitive to needs of others, the different ethnicities of all, but, again, how I guess, and some of this is kind of crazy, but you know how we were trying to put up a wall to keep the Mexicans out? At one point, we drove the Mexicans out of our land, the same way we drove the Native Americans off their tribes. So, you try to be aware that it's all, really, originally, this was all theirs, and that more people should go back to their lifestyle, living off the land.

Jay expressed that his learning (geographical and schooling) had influenced him through the term *ethnocentrism*:

Well, the one thing I learned about them is that the tribe, the group, was everything. To be a member of the tribe was all important. That's one thing that I learned. The other thing that I learned from them is that they were very ethnocentric. They viewed themselves as above any other group of Indians, or any other group of people for that matter.

Shannon articulated the shortest response. She expressed that when her youngest daughter went to college, she explored American Indian benefits to help her. Shannon stated, "My youngest daughter, trying to get her into college. We were actually trying to see what we could do from that part." Both subthemes are information rich into each participants' understanding of their school's American Indian mascot. However, from the primary theme two; whether or not to keep or to change the mascot, several participants mentioned, in their reasoning to keep or change the

mascot, a positive connotation to the symbol. The positivity of the mascot symbol led to the final emergent theme.

### **Theme 3: The Mascot Is Seen as a Positive Symbol**

Theme three arose from nine participant responses during their reasoning for keeping the mascot and throughout the general transcripts of each participant describing the mascot.

Positivity of the mascot is portrayed both through the mascot's representation of the school culture and in the community, but also in the history it created. Larry argued that it should be kept because of the positive impacts he expressed through the interview. For example, Larry believed the mascot is positive because it demonstrates the familial side of community:

Yeah, and it's a family. Absolutely the strength aspect of it. Commitment to excellence, a lot of pride. I mean, just [pause] I haven't seen any negative connotations derive from our mascot name since I've been here . . . and so I could see where that might be construed as possibly mocking in some form or fashion. I just haven't seen anything negative about this. But it's, I mean, it's clearly, I guess at first glance, an American Indian, with a headdress on, and feature-wise, the nose is a little bit larger maybe than you would normally see in a drawing, and mine is too. My actual nose. So I mean, it doesn't bother me one bit. But I guess looking at that, I can see how somebody might take offense to it maybe, I don't know.

For Larry a lack of perceived negative impacts from the mascot, if any, validated the idea of the mascot's positive aspects, hence subtheme number one for the third primary theme. Each participant perceived the positivity of the mascot in their own way, but in different aspects.

**Subtheme 1: Perceived positivity of American Indian mascot.** For Larry it was the positivity of the familial connection the mascot gave the community and the lack of perceived



negative impacts. For Poppy, she argued that “I would keep it because it’s part of our school now for almost 40 years. We all identify with it. We all see it in a positive manner.” Hawk felt that the mascot portrayed “all the positive attributes of a Chieftain. So, when you think tradition [pause] when you think about the traditional Chieftain in any society, I think that is what we are striving for, and we hope to get to.” Jay felt similar to Hawk in that Jay argued that the mascot reflected determination and therefore it is a positive attribute to aspire to. Jay posited:

Well, basically I think it’s a matter of [pause] I think it’s important to feel like you’re a part of a group or you have some things in common. And I also think that it’s a positive thing to show determination and some sense of strength at various times.

However, two participants augured a different perspective. Khaleesi had previously attended a university that changed their American Indian mascot, but she attended when it was still used.

Khaleesi felt a connection to the mascot and stated:

So I have that kind of bias built in because I have some good memories of the things that our mascot did, dressed as an Indian. Again, not necessarily demeaning, but I could see how, from the outside looking in, it may have been and definitely didn’t want to offend anyone. So I still have a special affinity, a kinsmanship, a positive view of that figurehead.

Shannon felt that the students reacted positively to the mascot and she validated that by seeing them enjoying it and reacting to it during school events. Shannon said “Just seeing how they react with it. Even when we have the parades in the hallways. How they’re reacting with it.” The researcher followed up with “So, they enjoy it. They react positively?” and said Shannon “Yeah.”

Selma and Katy, on the other hand, did not directly acknowledge outright benefits to the mascot. Katy suggested:

I mean, I think because of the history of the school I think it's very important because there is a lot of pride tied around our school and our community. We have a very tight-knit community here and a very supportive community. When they see that logo or people wear that logo it's always with a sense of pride.

Whereas Selma felt that it was difficult to suggest a positive benefit when asked who benefits most from the school's American Indian Mascot. However, Selma felt that the mascot played an important enough role to ensure it was revised recently to be kept, but ensure it was not offensive. She argued:

I will tell you, it's important enough that when we started having the discussion of a new mascot of somebody being dressed in something that it wasn't just willy-nilly decided. It was very thought out. The administration sat down because we don't want to make anyone feel uncomfortable. It wasn't just something . . . okay you can have one, here it is, whatever you decide. . . . It is important enough because we don't want to lose that name so it's going to be important enough to us to make sure we make good decisions that someone doesn't feel offended by the choices that we make or by our mascot.

The final subtheme for the third primary theme regards cultural appropriation and each participant's understanding of it.

**Subtheme 2: Cultural appropriation understanding.** Subtheme one demonstrated how the participants viewed the mascot in terms of its positive benefits among the school population and the general community. However, when asked about cultural appropriation and their understanding of it, their answers were diversified. Cultural appropriation was a central idea

behind this study because mascots typically involved certain cultural aspects, and an example in this study is the American Indian headdress used in the mascot. Most participants did not have an understanding of cultural appropriation. Those who did provided relatively accurate descriptions.

Larry considered himself a:

A fairly learned person . . . when you talk about cultural appropriation, are we talking about like how people understand, or how we receive different cultural aspects from various peoples, or what is cultural appropriation? [Researcher: Let's say in general.]

Larry: Right, and I'll be honest with you. . . . I'm not sure.

Katy followed up the question to clarify and ensure that her answer could be in a general sense.

Katy stated:

I think about in terms of bringing in, I guess my own personal thoughts are if we're borrowing from another culture to build our own it's just making sure that we're doing it with honor and fidelity and not being . . . what's the wording? Derogatory or demeaning or dishonoring a culture by borrowing from it.

Katy followed her description on cultural appropriation into her reasoning for keeping or changing the mascot. Katy identified a definition of cultural appropriation but took it further than other participants by articulating the words, derogatory or demeaning.

For Sandra, cultural appropriation was an inevitable outcome of the culture of the United States. Sandra expressed a connection between the culture the United States portrays to an inevitable cultural appropriation and argued:

I guess when I look at the United States, and this can be just my viewpoint here, we're seen as a melting pot of people, but at the same time, I think people need to still maintain their individual identities. And using various parts, whether it be the food, or . . . as long

as it's done in a respectful way. I don't really have a problem with that. But I think there still needs to be a maintaining of respect. Whether or not. . . . I, for example, have a particular statue in my yard, or whatever it happens to be, I don't really have a problem. But I do feel like that when it's done, it needs to be done correctly. And it needs to be a choice of [pause] there's things within cultures such as say, the Confederate flag, that would be inappropriate. And that doesn't need to be used. But at the same time, there are other things that can be harmless, in the choice of decoration or whatever, but still treated with respect. . . . We try not to segregate, but yet there are things that are from one culture to another that's very different. But whether or not you hope to identify with that culture by using another piece of it, or whatever it happens to be, as long as it's done respectfully, there's not a problem.

Hawk articulated his definition as:

But, my understanding is that if you, how I phrase it [pause] I kind of get it. The bottom line is that there are some things that are specific to a culture, that I may not understand or use correctly as someone who is not of that culture. And so that it's very . . . it's possible to be, I guess, borrowing from the . . . from somebody's culture inappropriately?

Khaleesi felt differently about cultural appropriation, as if it was closer to her than other participants. Khaleesi noted that:

As an African American, my view of cultural appropriation [referring to hairstyle] story is like the 'locks. For the longest time, and even now, it's inappropriate. People don't want it at their jobs, but people of other ethnicities are now doing it and it's okay. So that, to me, is cultural appropriation. It's not good for me, but it's good for everybody else to be entertainers and this, that, and the other. So I think sometimes we take away what is

the essence of one culture and we try to make them feel badly about that thing, while at the same time, making it work for the other, and actually, sometimes with some monetary something or other that comes with it. So that's my view of cultural appropriation . . . a double standard.

Jay provided the final participant definition of cultural appropriation. Jay posited, "well that's basically a group of people that will adopt from another culture, some of their symbols, some of their ideas, basically. That's what I understand of that." Finally, Selma, along with Poppy and Shannon, expressed that they felt they either did not know what it meant or could not provide a definition. This final subtheme provided much insight into how each participant viewed cultural appropriation and it framed their answers within the rest of the study.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout Chapter 4, the researcher presented the data collection and analysis methods used for this study. Each participant's response was crucial for this study, because it employed a transcendental phenomenology research framework. Transcendental phenomenology expects the experiences of every participant to be expressed through their own understanding of how each ascribe value to Attleboro High School's American Indian mascot. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and manually coded. The researcher used concept and pattern coding methods (Saldaña, 2016). Concept coding produced many codes throughout each transcript. Pattern coding examined and identified particular and specific patterns which arose from the transcripts. Further, through triangulation the codes were validated through the multiple transcripts.

Three primary themes emerged from the transcripts along with two subthemes under each primary theme. The three themes that emerged from the data are: first, the mascot's symbol binds the community together by symbolizing pride, unity, strength, and togetherness; second,

the history and identity of the mascot transcended any benefit to changing it; and third, the mascot is seen as a positive symbol. All three themes emerged through the coding and data analysis phase of the research. As each transcript was coded and analyzed, the researcher connected three themes and two subthemes for each main theme. The emergent themes were discovered through similarities, commonalities, and trends expressed throughout every response by each participant. This chapter listed each participant response regarding each theme and subtheme in its raw form without interpretation or implications. Therefore, chapter five will explore the interpretation of these findings through critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), the implications of findings, and recommendations for future studies.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

This phenomenological study aimed to examine how school administrators ascribed value to their school's American Indian mascot and how that mascot influenced their school culture and identity. To accomplish this, a critical race theory framework was used to examine school administrators' lived experience of an American Indian mascot, and how the administrators ascribed value and meaning to the mascot. Much literature has examined the role American Indian mascots have, focused on role models, media bias, colorblindness, and representation (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2014; Fryberg & Stephens, 2010; Fryberg et al., 2008; Leavitt et al., 2015). However, to fill a gap in the existing literature, this research focused on high school administrators and their view of their own school's American Indian mascot.

Critical race theory was used as a theoretical framework for this research study. Critical race theory is important for this research because it enabled the researcher to place the findings of the study in the context of how school administrators ascribed meaning and value to their mascot. In other words, critical race theory provides six tenets to frame the mascot in the context of society at large (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The mascot at Attleboro high school depicted the race of an American Indian person, from its cultural features, a headdress, and the color of the mascot's skin as red. Therefore, critical race theory theorized that first, racism is aberrational or commonplace in society. Because the mascot depicted a red, headdress-adorned American Indian, critical race theory pointed the researcher to realize the mascot is a common caricature depiction of American Indians in the United States. Second, interest convergence, in which dominant power structures meet or merge with people who are oppressed, effects change. Six out of nine participants felt that the mascot should be kept because it provided positive benefits from

their point of view. Six out of nine administrators hold the power to decide if the mascot could be changed, while two out of nine argued to keep the mascot if it was not offensive and one out of nine argued to outright change it, because the mascot could not be deemed appropriate, given the participant's personal experience with cultural appropriation. If six out of nine participants in power argued to keep the mascot due to positive benefits, then interest convergence has not occurred because the mascot would change only if the interests of those who want it changed converge with the participants in power who do not want it changed.

Social construction is the third tenet; in other words, race is created by society. Two out of nine participants identified the mascot as a form of cultural appropriation because it used a cultural item, a headdress. Seven out of nine participants could not or did not identify cultural appropriation during the interview process and therefore did not ascribe race to the mascot. The fourth tenet is the racialization of people groups at different times. Society determines the view of a people group at its convenience and uses race to meet societal needs. In the context of this research, as six of nine participants argued that the positive aspects of the mascot outweighed any benefit to change it, this meant that the school leadership viewed the mascot as a benefit to the school.

Intersectionality is the fifth tenet of critical race theory, which is the idea that all races have their own origin and no universal identity. The participants in this study were asked to describe their ascribed value and meaning to their school's American Indian mascot, and by doing that participants displayed the intersectionality in their lives. Participants were male and female, African American, Caucasian, held positions of power, were educators, had diverse cultural backgrounds, diverse family histories, and diverse educational backgrounds. In other words, intersectionality presented participants as a culmination of diverse and assorted histories



who told their experiences through their own unique lens. Finally, the unique voices of color are the sixth tenet of critical race theory, which is that people of color should share and tell their stories because it brings their voices forward to help the dominant society understand their plight (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In this study, two African American participants told their stories along with seven Caucasian participants. One African American participant provided a counternarrative that drove the study into an unforeseen narrative. Hence, this study was guided by two research questions:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: What value do school administrators ascribe to their school's American Indian mascot?

RQ<sub>2</sub>: How do school administrators perceive and describe how an American Indian mascot influences their school culture and identity?

This chapter examines the interpretations of the findings, the implications, and the recommendations for the site and for future research.

### **Interpretations of Findings**

Transcendental phenomenology was the methodology for this study. Transcendental phenomenology was derived from Husserl's understanding of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994), and underscores discovery and the essence of experience to systematically study available knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). In accordance with the research design, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with nine participants, and then the researcher coded and analyzed the interview transcripts. Three themes emerged through the analysis process: a mascot's symbol binds the community together by symbolizing pride, unity, strength, and togetherness; the history and identity of the mascot transcended any benefit to changing it; and the mascot was a positive

symbol. The following sections will address the study's two research questions, implications of the study, recommendations for further research, and the conclusions of the study.

**RQ<sub>1</sub>: What value do school administrators ascribe to their school's American Indian mascot?**

The literature pointed to two main ideas regarding research question one. First, Covarrubias and Fryberg (2014) found that American Indian students identified fewer role models—or a person that can be looked up to and emulated. Role models are important in the American Indian mascot conversation because most participants argued that the mascot did not reflect an American Indian or American Indian culture, thus removing the ability for the mascot to resemble American Indian culture in their perception. However, participants articulated that the mascot is a role model of sorts in that it directly portrayed positive aspects for stakeholders and the community. Larry reasoned that for the community the mascot was:

A true source of pride to be an Attleboro Chieftain, and I've seen that kind of permeate itself throughout the entire student body. We're talking about from the highly academic kids in the STEM program, to the athletes, to the fine arts department, all the way to the kids who really aren't involved in anything, there genuinely seems to be a sense of pride about being an Attleboro Chieftain.

Katy, in addition to Larry's comments, contended:

It's kind of that branding piece of what we're about that I think the mascot [pause] Just typically speaking in schools in general it's almost like that's the center of it. It kind of brings in the pride. We're all about being warriors and I don't always think about being a warrior in terms of the Indian piece but that we are fighters, we're a tribe. Togetherness.

For example, the mascot portrayed pride, strength, togetherness, a tribe mindset, and perseverance. Subtly stated, participants felt these traits were general American Indian traits. Sandra argued that the perseverance of American Indians was amazing, after going through so many tribulations.

The second notion was the concept of colorblindness, and six out of nine participants viewed the mascot without contemporary color—meaning having color not only as red. Riley and Carpenter (2016) noted that “non-Indians continue to adopt images and representations of Indians and Indian iconography with little regard for the experience of contemporary Native people” (p. 863). The mascot itself was “red” and most participants acknowledged its “redness” when asked about the mascot’s physical traits. However, colorblindness affects American Indians in many ways. Redcorn (2017) felt that internalized struggle with being American Indian but having lighter skin, and Roy (2014) argued that American Indians must navigate two different worlds, one for the dominant society and one for their American Indian culture. Riley and Carpenter (2016) posited:

These instances also reflect the glorification of Indian imagery, often by and for the benefit of non-Indians, but they simultaneously subordinate Indian people. As fashion icons use Indian feathers in photo shoots, Indian religious leaders cannot obtain eagle feathers for ceremonies. Rock stars seductively portray the ravished Indian maiden, while real Indian women experience extreme rates of domestic violence and sexual assault. Multinational companies secure patents on genetically modified “Indian wild rice,” while Indians cannot protect their own varieties from cross-contamination. And as the NFL defends the R-skins mascot, Indian teenagers suffer discrimination in schools that employ the same term for sports teams. (p. 863)

Likewise, Robertson (2015) posited, “Natives still routinely experience overt racism in the form of racial epithets like ‘redskin,’ ‘injun,’ and ‘squaw’ and horribly distorted depictions of Natives as mascots” (p. 114). Sandra identified that the mascot itself

definitely has the red color, which is actually . . . we still use the red heavily. But it’s kind of [pause] We tend more of the black and silver. And that tends to be more of prominent color. The red had kind of become more of the accent to it was red in color, but that red was signaled it does not represent an American Indian or American Indian culture.

Robertson (2015) stated, “‘legitimized racism’ is like a clear jar (society) that contains different forms of racism (social beliefs and interactions) that are, in fact, overt but become invisible within the other contents of the jar (social norms, institutions, and systems)” (p. 140). Jay acknowledged the color of the mascot and argued, “So it’s red in color. It’s an American Indian Chieftain with a headdress, with the feathers and all.” Larry acknowledged that he had heard about how American Indian mascots could be controversial, and he stated:

Watching Westerns as a child, and growing up, oftentimes in black and white, and then whatever I learned from grade school. From a mascot standpoint, I guess in the last 10, 15 years or so I guess, I’m a huge sports fan. So whether it was the Washington Redskins, which I grew up with on the East Coast, a Redskins fan. You know, the Atlanta Braves, or the Cleveland Indians, and their mascot I guess, has been controversial.

Larry acknowledge a key trait regarding colorblindness during his statement when he said, “oftentimes in black and white” referring to watching western style films as a child. The films were in black and white and he grew up with a historical understanding of how American Indians were, but it took up until the past 10 to 15 years to realize there might be a controversial aspect to an American Indian mascot. Chaney et al. (2011) found that:

[non–American Indian] people do not perceive a distinct difference between AI mascot imagery and actual AI people—they perceive them in a negative light and as essentially interchangeable. In essence, our data suggest that these AI images are not just mascots, but may be emblematic of larger subjugating narratives regarding AI people. (p. 57)

Chaney et al. (2011) findings displayed a fundamental realization in this research study that it is difficult for non-American Indian people to want to change an American Indian mascot because there is a discrepancy between the perception of an American Indian and an American Indian mascot.

**RQ2: How do school administrators perceive and describe how an American Indian mascot influences their school culture and identity?**

Each of the participants addressed the research question differently. Poppy, for example, argued that the mascot in the community was:

Huge in the community because we are a successful school and we meet the needs of so many kids and we are strong academically. We're strong in our fine arts program. We're strong on the athletic field. It's a huge sense of pride.

However, Sandra argued from the perspective that the mascot is not important in the community because it represents what the school stood for and not the American Indian aspect of it. Sandra stated:

I don't think the mascot is that important in the community. It's part of the school, but I don't think when they think of Attleboro Chieftains, the immediate concept is an American Indian or a Native American. I don't think that that is the immediate identification. It's more about what Attleboro High School represents.

Larry and Hawk argued similar viewpoints. First Larry argued that the mascot was important in the community because of its history, and he stated, “They’re [community members] just really proud of their Attleboro Chieftain connection and tie. So I guess it just kind of binds the community together.” Hawk argued history was the key to the role in the community, and posited, “it’s important. People identify with it” and he went on to state, “It’s [mascot] been here a while and it’s ingrained in the community and it’s always been the Chieftains.” Whereas Khaleesi argued the opposite from the on-field representation:

I don’t know that it’s really that important, except that there are times, particularly at football games or whatever, where we still do the little tomahawk thing, so I think when it comes to competitions and us expressing a particular thing, symbolically, to the other team, it’s still very important. Because we still use that that’s associated with the Native American culture . . . but, you know, we have cheers, but we still do the tomahawk chop. We still do that, so that piece is important in that way.

Participants appeared to argue that the mascot was important to the community, or if it was not important to the community, it was on the sports field. Furthermore, participants negated the American Indian aspect overtly or inadvertently, which was interesting because the mascot is physically an American Indian mascot representation. Participants understood it was American Indian, but it was only in physical representation and not in the school’s almost spiritual or figurative representation—school culture, achievement, and pride.

Yet, the literature pointed to honoring American Indians, but participants did not mention honor of American Indians in their responses. Rather, participants argued that the mascot was either important or not, but it almost certainly represented what the school stood for: achievement, pride, togetherness, and perseverance. The literature identified two concepts about

research question two. The first concept was the argument of having an American Indian mascot and that the use of a mascot honors their culture and traditions. For example, the first American Indian to play professional baseball, Louis Sockalexis, whose team at the time, the Cleveland Naps, changed their name to the Cleveland Indians to honor him as the first American Indian professional baseball player (Callais, 2010; Staurowsky, 1998). While Sockalexis' story is emblematic of mainstream beliefs about American Indian identity, more broadly speaking it represents an identity crisis of other cultures projecting what it means to honor American Indians (Black, 2002; Freng & Willis-Esqueda, 2011; Pewewardy, 2004; Silva, 2007; Staurowsky, 1998; Weaver, 2001). Weaver (2001) argued that American Indian identity is complex, and American Indian mascots often embody the image that society wishes to place upon American Indian people (Black, 2002; Freng & Willis-Esqueda, 2011; Pewewardy, 2004; Staurowsky, 1998; Weaver, 2001). Therefore, the influence of the mascot on school culture and identity is important because participants argued that the mascot influenced the school culture by bringing the community together as it promoted pride, togetherness, unity, toughness, and other positive traits of being a Chieftain. Yet the impact on school culture pointed to the second idea in the literature as Pewewardy (2004) argued that mascots become a racist practice because they mock the behavior of American Indian people through clothing, dancing, and chanting.

The research site, as mentioned by several participants, had introduced an "A" for athletic events. The "A" was the first letter of the school, Attleboro Chieftains, and it served as a new representation of the school on the athletic field to prevent inappropriate representations the former on-field American Indian costume posed. The site had considered the mascot situation previously and had taken steps to address what Pewewardy (2004) suggested. Sandra and Selma mentioned that the new "A," which replaced the on-field American Indian mascot, became a

replacement for the research site to use because it supplemented the existing mascot in a more modern form.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological research was to examine how school administrators ascribed value to their school's American Indian mascot and perceived and described how their American Indian mascot influences their school culture and identity. The implications of this research are for stakeholders and the community because six out of nine participants felt the mascot was a positive representation both for school culture and the local community. The implications for stakeholders will be discussed below. Stakeholders were a common theme throughout the interview process because participants argued the mascot played a role for students and community members, and the role the mascot played was a positive display of attributes that closely represented the school, both in and out of the classroom. Hawk argued:

The historical connotations that it's had for this community, a source of pride, the school's had a lot of success academically, athletically, and it's [pause] And that name has been associated with that. I'd hate to see that taken away for any reason. I also think it would be a huge fight that would tear up the community that would divide the community. I would not want to see that occur.

Likewise, Shannon argued, "when I think of the Chieftain, it's strength. It just makes me feel like strength is family oriented." Additionally, Larry pointed out that "it's a family. Absolutely the strength aspect of it. Commitment to excellence, a lot of pride. I mean, just . . . I haven't seen any negative connotations derive from our mascot name, since I've been here." Therefore, the implications for stakeholders and the community are clear as participants identified positive



family attributes ascribed to the mascot. The following two sections will address implications for stakeholders and the community.

### **Implications for Stakeholders**

While any other mascot may accomplish the same outcome, the mascot represents American Indians and therefore has further implications for American Indian people. As Robertson (2015) argued:

Sports teams with racist names and mascots are honoring Indians. Culturally appropriating sacred objects like tipis and headdresses is all in good fun. Legitimized racism is so common that it is accepted as the norm, as just part of the American landscape. (p.129)

The revelation of the mascot as a vital representation of the school and its culture implies that the school's American Indian mascot plays a significant role in school identity. Participants identified with the mascot as being a positive representation of the school, but at the expense of American Indian people. Other mascots like a tiger or lion may promote positivity, but participants argued the positivity of the mascot was found in its representation of American Indians. Larry and Katy mentioned the tribe, togetherness, and pride, as the positive benefits of the mascot. In other words, a positive representation gleaned from the mascot demonstrated how the school performed both in the classroom and on the field. Pride, strength, success, togetherness, and perseverance were argued by participants to be the key traits stakeholders identified with—all traits participants identified as being synonymous with American Indians. Through their discussions, participants felt that the mascot was predominantly positive toward stakeholders and was representative of the school culture over that of American Indian culture. Khaleesi's interview displayed a counternarrative directly opposed to other participants

regarding changing the mascot, and Katy and Selma said the mascot should be retained unless it does not bring honor and fidelity toward American Indian people groups.

Thus, the implications for stakeholders is that there is a divide between school administrators. While six out of nine participants shared they would like to retain the mascot because it is representative of the school culture over American Indian culture and because it is a positive representation of the school, three felt differently about retaining it. This implication meant that the school could examine further the role the American Indian mascot has on the stakeholders. Larry argued that after the interview he felt that he should become more educated on the topic and find out if there are American Indian students on campus and what their thoughts on the mascot were. After exploring and being more educated on the topic, as Larry suggested, participants could actively seek to hear the voices of American Indian students. Likewise, becoming more educated would mean that participants, who are in leadership positions at the school, could more effectively make appropriate changes to the mascot, if necessary.

Since participants were administrators and have the power to address retaining or keeping the mascot the implication could be focused on interest convergence. The literature on critical race theory argued an idea of interest convergence (Bell, 1980; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Interest convergence is the idea that change only comes when the interests of the ruling (in this case school leadership) meet or merge with those who are oppressed (in this case, any stakeholder who does not view the mascot as positive). Even if the mascot was positive and was beneficial to the school culture, Khaleesi's counter argument provided an implication that not all people, even in leadership, viewed the mascot in a positive manner and it would be difficult for change or an examination of the mascot to happen. Later in this chapter, recommendations for further mascot examination are made.

## **Implications for Community**

Participants identified that the community played a role in the school's American Indian mascot. The community defined by this research is the community surrounding the school. Hawk argued that it would be detrimental to the school and implied it would be combative if the mascot were changed. The community identified the school through the mascot, as indicated by participants, not simply through the mascot physically, but through the positive traits it displayed, i.e. pride, success, unity, togetherness, and perseverance. Throughout participant discussions, they expressed that the community viewed the mascot as the embodiment of the success the school has in the classroom and on the field. The implication for the community is that while the participants revealed their understanding of the mascot and its role within the community, there could be further investigation into how the community perceives and responds to the school's American Indian mascot that may imply otherwise. Later in this chapter, recommendations for further mascot examination are made.

## **Recommendations for Action**

This study aimed to examine how school administrators ascribed meaning to their school's American Indian mascot and how school administrators perceive and describe how an American Indian mascot influences their school culture and identity. Therefore, this researcher provides two recommendations for the research site and for the community outside the research site. Participants referenced both the research site and the community in their responses to the research questions. Moreover, recommendations will address stakeholders and the community through critical race theory focused recommendations. Diplomatic recommendations are derived from several responses about the detrimental impact changing or altering the mascot that some participants made. Hawk argued "It would be a blood bath down here" should the mascot be

changed. Also, Larry pointed out that political correctness is more common, and he stated, “But yeah, we’re so sensitive these days. I mean, you’ve got to be so careful with your words.”

Additionally, applying critical race theory to these recommendations offers a more inclusive environment to include American Indian people and people of color both from the research site and the community to examine the American Indian mascot.

### **Recommendation One: Explore Mascot’s Impact on American Indian Students**

The recommendations for the research site would be to begin a further and deeper exploration into the mascot to determine if it represents American Indians with honor and fidelity. The research site should seek out American Indian tribal nations, especially of those enrolled at school at the research site. As Katy and Selma suggested, the mascot should be kept only if it is not offensive, and Katy suggested the mascot should show honor and fidelity toward American Indians. A deeper exploration is not to suggest the research site should change the mascot immediately or ever, rather the research site should seek to incorporate a community full of diverse voices, which should include American Indian students or faculty on campus. Hawk implied changing the mascot would be detrimental to the community and the school because the mascot has a long history as a representation of the school and its success. Likewise, Poppy, Larry, Katy, Jay, Sandra, and Selma identified the mascot as portraying the school culture, success, pride, and qualities of a Chieftain, rather than an American Indian identity. Therefore, as the research site explores the mascot as representing American Indians and the school simultaneously, there should be a consideration of the question: should the American Indian mascot need to be retained?

Mascot retention was a key conversation with the participants. Khaleesi argued that the mascot should be changed, because her understanding of cultural appropriation is different from

other people. As an African American woman, Khaleesi believed that she had a unique and experienced viewpoint. She believed the mascot should be changed. A conversation regarding honor and fidelity to her would presumably prove that the mascot should be changed. Therefore, having a counter argument arise through interviews proved that the research site administration has differing opinions and assumptions of the mascot.

Ultimately, a majority of participants identified and ascribed value and meaning to the mascot as portraying pride, perseverance, positive qualities, and traits of being a Chieftain, and a symbol of school success to the community. Therefore, the American Indian representation of the mascot appears to be negligible. Yet the research site has its walls adorned with American Indian memorabilia and participants' offices have figurines and caricatures of American Indians. There is a definite American Indian representation across the research site, albeit Pan-American Indian. Exploration of the American Indian mascot and its honor and fidelity toward American Indians should help the research site leadership better understand if they are actually honoring American Indians.

### **Recommendation Two: Meet with Tribal Leaders and Tribal Community Members**

Building upon recommendation one, recommendation two would be to include the local tribal community and tribal leadership. The research site should seek out American Indian tribal nations from the community and from Indian Country at large. The above recommendations inside the research site should include American Indian students and faculty; outside the research site, the conversation should include American Indian people in the community. Likewise, other races and ethnicities should be considered both inside and outside of the research site. As Khaleesi argued, because she was African American, she felt she had a different viewpoint from most regarding cultural appropriation. Critical race theory argued that unique voices of color

should be considered and heard (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The research site should seek American Indian voices first and then, as Hawk posited since it would be detrimental to the community for the mascot to change, other community voices should be heard, especially people of color.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

As mentioned previously, the participant responses offered unique findings due to different factors, such as race—i.e., Khaleesi, who argued her understanding of cultural appropriation and being an African American woman allowed her to have a unique viewpoint on changing the mascot. Likewise, Katy and Selma argued that the mascot should be kept only if it represents American Indians with honor and fidelity. However, the majority of participants, Hawk, Sandra, Jay, Larry, Poppy, and Shannon argued the mascot should be kept because it reflects the school community positively. Consequently, the researcher believed three recommendations for further study could be made, because this research aimed to examine how school administrators ascribed meaning to their school's American Indian mascot and how school administrators perceive and describe how an American Indian mascot influences their school culture and identity. First, a study could be conducted examining how American Indian school administrators at public schools ascribe meaning to their school's American Indian mascot. Second, there could be an examination of how administrators of color at public schools ascribe meaning to their school's American Indian mascot. Third, further research could be conducted in different regions of the United States.

**Recommendation One: American Indian School Administrators at Public Schools Ascribe Meaning to Their School's American Indian Mascot**

Further study should be conducted on school administrators who are American Indian at a school with an American Indian mascot. It would be interesting to understand how American Indian administrators ascribe value and meaning to the mascot and, furthermore, how they view the role of the mascot in their school and local community. This study examined a random sample of administrators, none of whom were American Indian, but future studies could examine that specifically and determine where their findings fit in the larger conversation. It is important to note that a future study should identify whether or not they will incorporate American Indians who are members of federally recognized tribes or individuals who self-identify as American Indian. There is a distinction between the two and the recommendation would be to separate these two distinctions in future studies to further examine American Indian school administrators. In other words, a future study could aim to examine both members of federally recognized tribes and people who are not but identify as American Indian and determine the differences and similarities in participant responses.

**Recommendation Two: An Examination of How Administrators of Color at Public Schools Ascribe Meaning to Their School's American Indian Mascot**

Khaleesi's counternarrative led the researcher to make these recommendations for future studies. As an African American woman, Khaleesi argued that her upbringing and who she was as a person led her to a deeper understanding of cultural appropriation. In her words, Khaleesi argued:

As an African American, my view of cultural appropriation [referring to hairstyle] story is like the 'locks. For the longest time, and even now, it's inappropriate. People don't

want it [a hairstyle of dreadlocks] at their jobs, but people of other ethnicities are now doing it and it's okay. So that, to me, is cultural appropriation. It's not good for me, but it's good for everybody else to be entertainers and this, that, and the other. So I think sometimes we take away what is the essence of one culture and we try to make them feel badly about that thing, while at the same time, making it work for the other, and actually, sometimes with some monetary something or other that comes with it. So that's my view of cultural appropriation. . . . Oh, absolutely a double standard.

Khaleesi provided a strong counter argument against retaining the mascot and stated:

I would probably change it. Again, I particularly, because it's how I identify with myself because of how I came, but I definitely, with my understanding of cultural appropriation in the African American community, I would change it. I would change it.

Thus, a future research study could focus on how people of color perceive their school's American Indian mascot. It would be interesting to examine how other people of color are ascribing meaning to their mascot. Critical race theory argued that people of color should express their voices in many forms (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Using critical race theory to examine how school administrators both American Indian and people of color should provide interesting results because it allows for people of color to have a voice in the debate over the appropriateness of American Indian mascots.

### **Recommendation Three: Research in Different Regions of the United States**

The third and final recommendation is to examine how the research questions are answered by school administrators in other parts of the United States. This study examined school administrators in the Southern United States. Critical race theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and interest convergence (Bell, 1980) pointed the researcher to the concept that if people



in power—in this study’s case, school administrators—can change the mascot, then they should be studied across different geographical locations. Examining additional high school administrators who work in a school with an American Indian mascot could provide further detail into whether certain parts of the United States are favorable to changing the mascot. Additionally, these positions of power could demonstrate how interest convergence works in regional areas of the United States because further research could examine the level of change administrators feel comfortable with. Not every administrator would agree to changing their mascot and for different reasons. However, examining the phenomenon from the perspective of interest convergence could provide additional support in the mascot conversation by highlighting the thought process from future participants in different areas regarding mascot change. Nevertheless, several states have begun banning or limiting American Indian mascot use; therefore, it would be interesting to replicate this study across the United States and determine their findings.

### **Conclusion**

An American Indian mascot and its representation both for schools and American Indians is a complex topic. This research used a transcendental phenomenological methodology and a critical race theory framework. This research aimed to answer two research questions, how school administrators ascribed meaning to their school’s American Indian mascot and how they perceive an American Indian mascot as influential to their school culture. Six out of nine participants stated they would ultimately retain the mascot due to many positive aspects the mascot provided. Positive aspects were labeled by participants as togetherness, unity, pride, strength, and perseverance. Two out of nine argued to keep the mascot, but only if it promoted fidelity and honor to American Indian people. One counternarrative was stated by a participant

that ultimately led the researcher to three recommendations. Additionally, the counter narrative helped the researcher understand the implications of the research on stakeholders and the community because it portrayed how different people perceive the same topic. Ultimately, the research site should change the American Indian mascot and begin new traditions that meet the positive attributes participants argued that benefited the school. Since participants were divided on whether or not to change the mascot, the administrators should come together, meet with American Indian people, tribal nations, and the community to change the mascot and develop a new mascot that meets the traits argued by participants in this research.

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APPENDIX A  
SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL  
EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

**Section 1:** Patton (2015) Background/Demographic questions

1. Would you tell me about yourself?
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Position/Title
  - Race
  - Are you American Indian?
    - Which American Indian Tribe?
  - How long have you been employed at this school?
2. Would you tell me about your family?
  - Parents
  - Siblings
  - Predominant language spoken at home

**Section 2:** Patton (2015) Knowledge and Feeling questions.

Guiding Question: What meaning do school administrators ascribe to their school's American Indian mascot?

3. Describe the identity of your school's American Indian mascot.
4. What are the mascot's features?
5. What traits does the mascot have?
6. What is the mascot's role in the school community?
7. Where did you learn about American Indians both historically and currently?

Probe: how has your learning influenced your understanding and perception of American Indians?

8. Describe your feelings toward your rival school's mascot.

Probe: what is their mascot?

Probe: how does their mascot compare to your school's mascot (visually)?

9. How important is a school mascot in your community?

10. Given the choice, would you choose to keep your mascot or change it?

Probe: what is your reasoning for keeping/changing it?

APPENDIX B  
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND CONSENT  
FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

**Project Title:** American Indian mascots and their ascribed meaning given by high school administrators

**Principal Investigator:**  
Joshua Bullock

**Introduction:**

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during, or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

**Why is this research study being done?**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Joshua Bullock, a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership at the University of New England. My dissertation committee includes Brianna Parsons, Ed.D., Mary Patterson, Ed.D, and Kelli Mosteller, Ph.D. The purpose of this study is to examine the phenomenon of how school administrators view the identity of their school with regard to their American Indian mascot. Further, this study will examine how administrators understand an American Indian mascot influences school culture, students, faculty members and their views of American Indians, and cultural appropriation.

**Who will be in this study?**

Eight–12 high school administrators from a campus with an American Indian mascot.

**What will I be asked to do?**

- If selected for this study, you will be asked to participate in two audio-recorded interviews in order to discuss your experiences with your school’s American Indian mascot. Each interview will last approximately 30–60 minutes and will be held in a mutually agreed-upon location.
- Additionally, you will be asked to review the transcript of your interview, as well as my analysis of it, in order to ensure that your words and experiences have been captured accurately.

**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**

There are no risks associated with taking part in this study.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**

There are no benefits associated with taking part in this study.

**What will it cost me?**

There are no costs associated with taking part in this study.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

- You will be asked to choose a pseudonym that will be used in the study in place of your name.
- Your school or district affiliation and all other identifiable information will be removed.
- All research records will be kept in the locked home office of the principal investigator. As an added provision of privacy, the identity of participants will not be revealed at any time.
- All interview recordings from the study will be destroyed upon transcription and all identifying information will be removed from the transcript.
- Only the researcher's advisor and the IRB Committee at the University of New England have the right to review the study data.

**How will my data be kept confidential?**

- The interview(s) will be recorded and then transcribed using a transcription service (Rev.com). This transcription service keeps all files securely encrypted and requires all transcribers to sign confidentiality agreements.
- All notes, recordings, and transcriptions will be kept in a locked and secure location which is only accessible to me, my committee, and the Institutional Research Board. The list with your name and pseudonym will be kept in a different secure location, accessible only to me.
- All computer files will be kept on a password-protected computer, accessible only to me, my committee, and the Institutional Research Board.
- 

**What are my rights as a research participant?**

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with Joshua Bullock or your respective organization.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
  - If you choose to withdraw from the research, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.



**What other options do I have?**

- You may choose not to participate.

**Whom may I contact with questions?**

- The researcher conducting this study is Joshua Bullock.
  - For more information regarding this study, please contact me at [jbullock@une.edu](mailto:jbullock@une.edu)
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Brianna Parsons, Ed.D., Lead Advisor at [bparsons4@une.edu](mailto:bparsons4@une.edu) / (207) 221-4860.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu).

**Will I receive a copy of this consent form?**

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

**PARTICIPANT'S STATEMENT**

**I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.**

---

Participant's signature or  
Legally authorized representative

---

Date

---

Printed name

**RESEARCHER'S STATEMENT**

**The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.**

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Researcher's signature

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Date

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Printed name

