

Nora Lyne

**In Whose Honour? Understanding Native American Sports Mascots,
the Washington Redskins, and the Divisive Online Discourse About Them**

Nora Lyne, 37810
Pro gradu-avhandling i engelska språket och litteraturen
Handledare: Martin Gill
Fakulteten för humaniora, psykologi och teologi
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Author: Nora Lyne	
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Supervisor: Martin Gill	
Abstract: <p>The issue of Native American sports mascots, and the Washington Redskins in particular, has been a source of controversy for decades. The purpose of this study is to examine the mascot phenomenon and its possible consequences, and to form an understanding of how people argue for or against the continued use of Native mascots like the Washington Redskins.</p> <p>The study is qualitative in nature, and the primary material was obtained from the online platform Reddit by using the search terms “native american mascot” and “washington redskins name”. The results were categorized based on theme and argument, and a few common tendencies emerged.</p> <p>The material gathered from Reddit showed that defenders of the practice describe Native mascotry as an attempt to honour Native Americans, accuse mascot critics of being overly sensitive or too politically correct, and appeal to bigger, more important issues facing Native American communities. Mascot opponents, on the other hand, refer to the offensive nature of the word <i>redskin</i>, accuse the mascots of perpetuating Native stereotypes, and make comparisons to a variety of fictional, race-based team names in an attempt to point out the absurdity of the Washington team's name.</p> <p>The results suggest that the mascot issue is highly controversial, as well as emotional, and the discourse around the topic is littered with frustration, anger, and defensiveness. The topic is complex, since it deals with issues of cultural identity, racism, and appropriation, and is thus both difficult to solve and vital to understand.</p>	
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1. Introduction

The images that surround us in our daily lives - advertisements, logos, films, and so on - have the power to do more than just entertain us or sell us something; they have the power to teach us. Indoctrinate us, even. If we see an image often enough, it becomes the new normal - for instance, the emaciated bodies often found in fashion magazines would appear shocking if they weren't so frequently displayed, but the normalization that happens through repetition renders the bodies aspirational, rather than concerning. Likewise, if the movies we watch consistently feature protagonists that are mostly white, mostly male, and mostly able-bodied, these characteristics become the foundation for what is seen as the default human. Deviations from these characteristics are seen as deviations from what is *normal*, and are sometimes even accused of being part of a political agenda.

These representations are important precisely because they form a part of our understanding of the people around us - as well as ourselves. Because of this, marginalized demographics are especially vulnerable: oftentimes, cultural images portray them either poorly, or not at all. When authentic, diverse, respectful portrayals are rare, we are left with either one-dimensional, stereotype-laden representations, or with invisibility. And for demographics that have largely been rendered invisible, a single unflattering representation carries disproportionate significance.

This brings us to a particularly underrepresented demographic, namely Native Americans. According to 2013 data, Native Americans made up approximately 2% of the total U.S. population, but only *up to* 0,4% of all characters in popular television shows and films (Qureshi 2016). Native Americans are a small minority, and an even smaller one on screen. Due to this relative invisibility, one cultural portrayal has the potential to be disproportionately influential - and this brings us to Native American mascots in the sports industry.

According to the *National Congress of American Indians*, the number of Native American references in team names and mascots has diminished as a result of decades of activist efforts - around two thousand such references have been removed, although around *one thousand* still remain (*National Congress of American Indians*, n.d.). Native mascots, then, are ubiquitous, which means it is vital for us to understand how they are perceived, and how they may affect perceptions about Native Americans. After all, as mentioned, other forms of Native representation in the media are scarce.

In the context of this study, the word *mascot* is used as a sort of umbrella term that makes concrete an idea, and a set of rituals and images. This is because a Native American sports mascot is not just a logo, or a name, or a performer in a suit, but can instead be seen as a combination of those things, with the added element of related merchandise, and the idea of an identity (e.g. “I am a Redskin”). The criticisms directed at various Native sports mascots have focused on different things – one team might be criticized for its name while its logo is deemed acceptable, and vice versa. In the case of the Washington Redskins, the criticisms are generally directed at the name itself, rather than the logo.

The concept of Native sports mascots is, in and of itself, worthy of critical examination. Rendering an ethnic minority into a cartoonish, easily digestible form of entertainment is inherently strange, yet the practice is widespread and seldom questioned. Native mascotry as a whole is a complex practice with a long history, and it manifests itself in many different (more or less offensive) shades. This thesis does examine the problematic nature of Native mascotry in the general sense, but the main focus is on one particular team, namely the Washington Redskins. This is because of two reasons. Firstly, the Washington team is an NFL team with international name recognition - in other words, its media presence is larger than that of, for instance, a school team in a small town. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the team’s name is not merely a vague nod towards Native culture and identity, but a direct, dictionary-defined ethnic slur targeted at Native Americans.

Perhaps because of its ubiquitous nature, the practice of using Native imagery in sports mascots has been normalized. A research project called *Reclaiming Native Truth* examined the attitudes that Americans hold about various issues affecting Native American communities. The findings show that while many of these issues garnered support among the majority of non-Natives (e.g. increasing financial support for Native communities, or protecting Native communities’ natural resources), the mascot issue turned out to be particularly divisive - in fact, “among non-Natives, half the country believes that mascots honor Native Americans and a majority oppose a ban on sports teams’ using Native-themed mascots” (*Reclaiming Native Truth* 2018: 15). The mascot issue was *the only* issue that was not supported by a clear majority of non-Native survey participants (*Reclaiming Native Truth* 2018: 15). This divisiveness is what makes the issue a valuable research topic.

This thesis outlines the current discourse around the mascot issue, particularly when it comes to the Washington football team. Chapter 2 is dedicated to discussion about stereotypes (in general, and in relation to Native Americans specifically) as well as earlier research on the topic of Native American mascots. Arguments for and against the continued use of the name are outlined in chapter 3. Chapters 5 and 6 present and analyze the type of discourse that can be found on the online platform Reddit, on the topic of Native sports mascots and on the Washington Redskins.

2. Stereotypes

In order to fully understand the intricate problems surrounding the use of Native American mascot imagery, one must first understand one central concept: stereotypes. ‘Stereotype’ is often used interchangeably with ‘prejudice’ and ‘discrimination’ - and while these three terms do share several commonalities, and they do tend to overlap and correlate, they are distinct phenomena. **Prejudice** exists both on an individual, intrapsychic level and on a social, interpersonal level (Dovidio et al. 2013: 6). Prejudice can be “conceptualized as an attitude that, like other attitudes, has a cognitive component (e.g., beliefs about a target group), an affective component (e.g., dislike), and a conative component (e.g., a behavioral predisposition to behave negatively toward the target group)” (Dovidio et al. 2013: 5). Prejudice can also be seen as “a mechanism that maintains status and role differences between groups” (Dovidio et al. 2013: 6). Dictionaries define prejudice as “an unfair and unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially when formed without enough thought or knowledge” (Cambridge Dictionary), as a “[p]reconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience” (Oxford Living Dictionaries), and as “an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics” (Merriam-Webster). **Discrimination** is distinct from prejudice in that it exists to a larger extent in tangible, real-life interactions, rather than just in the mind - discrimination “implies more than simply distinguishing among social objects, but refers also to inappropriate and potentially unfair treatment of individuals due to group membership” (Dovidio et al. 2013: 8). Dictionary definitions of discrimination describe it as “treating a person or particular group of people differently, especially in a worse way from the way in which you treat other people, because of their skin colour, sex, sexuality etc.” (Cambridge Dictionary), as “[t]he unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex” (Oxford Living Dictionaries) and as “the act, practice, or an instance of discriminating categorically rather than individually” (Merriam-Webster). **Stereotypes**, then, can be described as “cognitive schemas used by social perceivers to process information about others” (Dovidio et al. 2013: 7). Furthermore, stereotypes do “not only reflect beliefs about the traits characterizing typical group members but also contain information about other qualities such as social roles, the degree to which members of the group share specific qualities (i.e., within-group homogeneity or variability), and influence emotional reactions to group members” (Dovidio et al. 2013: 7). As social perceivers, we tend to react more immediately to characteristics that are stereotype-consistent, and, conversely, we have a tendency to ignore or downplay stereotype-discrepant characteristics - perhaps due to the fact that it can be uncomfortable to have one’s hard-wired cognitive schemas disrupted. After all, stereotypes are

one way in which we, as social beings, attempt to make sense of the world around us, and when the world presents itself as more complex than what our schemas may allow, our reactions may range from confusion to frustration. In conclusion, stereotypes “represent a set of qualities perceived to reflect the essence of a group”, they “systematically affect how people perceive, process information about, and respond to, group members”, and they “are transmitted through socialization, the media, and language and discourse” (Dovidio et al. 2013: 8).

Stereotypes are not always explicit. If stereotypes operated primarily on an explicit level, it would mean that individuals who harbor any given stereotypical view would do so knowingly. This, however, is not necessarily how stereotypes function in reality - stereotypes, to a large extent, exist on an implicit, unconscious level. The possible disconnect between conscious and unconscious stereotyping (exemplified time and time again by, for instance, racist individuals passionately proclaiming “I am not a racist”) is a complex issue - people may hold certain stereotypical views (more or less consciously), but due to social pressure or a desire to strive for a less prejudiced worldview, they may choose to suppress those views (Dovidio et al. 2013: 10). As for real-world implications of implicit stereotypes, Dovidio states that “there is consensus that implicit manifestations of attitudes and stereotypes exist and reliably predict some behaviors, often independently from explicit attitudes and stereotypes” (Dovidio et al. 2013: 10). This further validates the notion that intent does not necessarily equal impact - an important concept to be aware of when it comes to the discourse around justifying native mascots as benign or even complimentary.

2.1. Positive and negative stereotypes

When discussing stereotypes, the underlying assumption tends to be that stereotypes are always negative in nature - perhaps understandably so. Positive stereotypes, however, do exist - but whether their consequences are positive or negative is a separate (and complex) matter. To illustrate, let’s examine two well-known stereotypes about women - one negative, one positive. A negative stereotype might be “women are inherently irrational and over-emotional”, and if one were to subscribe to this stereotype, one might conclude that women are unfit for leadership positions in the workplace. A seemingly positive stereotype, on the other hand, like “women are inherently nurturing and warm” may, ironically, have similar consequences: if one deems women nurturing and warm, one might think that women ought to prioritize a parenting role instead of a professional or academic one. In other words, regardless of intent, or perceived

positive or negative value, the consequences (from, for example, a potential employer's standpoint) are similar.

Czopp et al. (2015) explore the complex nature of positive stereotypes, which, despite the example above, do not always necessarily lead to negative real-life consequences. The study outlines some of the possible benefits of positive stereotypes. One such potential benefit is that “[e]ndorsing positive stereotypes of one’s group may be a way to establish valued and distinctive identities (Czopp et al. 2015: 453). Perhaps especially when it comes to marginalized and stereotyped groups of people, “emphasizing dimensions on which their group stereotypically excels may represent a compensatory coping strategy in response to the stigmatization associated with their group’s negative stereotypes or low social status” (Czopp et al. 2015: 453). In other words, positive stereotypes can be used in an attempt to counterbalance negative ones. Another potential benefit of positive stereotypes is that they can, in some cases, provide a temporary performance boost - for instance, a group of elderly participants in a study performed better than the control group on a set of memory tests after having been exposed to subtle stereotypes about advanced age correlating with wisdom (Czopp et al. 2015: 454).

In addition to the above examples, it is fairly easy to understand intuitively why positive stereotypes could be used in a positive manner - to allow systemically marginalized individuals to embrace their group identity, to boost self-confidence, and so on - but as Czopp et al. demonstrate, the cons far outweigh the pros. They point out that while positive stereotyping can indeed be beneficial in certain contexts, a “large (and growing) body of research clearly points to profound and pervasive negative consequences” (Czopp et al. 2015: 453). For instance, when exposing Asian American students to the concept of being “the model minority”, i.e. implying that they are (or should be) excelling in academia partly due to their ethnicity, 52% reacted negatively, while only 26% reacted positively. This could be due to the fact that, even if any given positive stereotype is intended as a compliment, “the targets of such stereotypes can feel depersonalized as if they are being acknowledged exclusively through their category membership” (Czopp et al. 2015: 454). Another study showed that “women who personally endorsed or were merely exposed to benevolently sexist statements reported greater self-objectification and body shame” (Czopp et al. 2015: 454), and yet another study showed that women exposed to benevolent sexism underperformed on a memory test - worse, in fact, than both the control group *and* the group of women who were exposed to hostile (i.e. non-

benevolent) sexism (Czopp et al. 2015: 455). Chapter 2.4. further illustrates the consequences of seemingly positive stereotype-based portrayals, specifically when it comes to Native Americans and Native mascots.

Czopp et al. provide explanations for three different factors that may determine whether or not a positive stereotype may have positive effects:

1. How is the positive stereotype stated?
2. Who is stating it?
3. In what cultural context is it presented?

So, for instance, if a positive stereotype is uttered overtly, without nuance, it will most likely be harmful and unwelcome - if it is implied in a more subtle manner, the consequences might be different. As for *who* is using the stereotype, Czopp et al. explain that “[w]hen stated by an outgroup member, positive stereotypes may feel more like prejudice than when the same statement comes from within the group” (Czopp et al. 2015: 455). As for cultural context, Czopp et al. explain that within cultures that value individualism over collectivism (e.g. the U.S.), being defined and judged based on group membership, no matter how “positively”, may be more insulting than it is in cultures that value collectivism (Czopp et al. 2015: 455).

2.2. Stereotyping Native Americans

Like any ethnic minority, Native Americans have been - and still are - subjected to pervasive stereotypes. Many of these stereotypes originate from the earliest contact between European settlers and Native peoples, whereas other stereotypes have developed in a more contemporary context. This section outlines the most common stereotypes of Native Americans. What will become evident is that non-Native Americans have a unique relationship to Nativeness and stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans - a relationship fraught with fascination, fear, nostalgia, guilt, admiration, fetishization, and mimicry.

One of the most universally recognizable Native archetypes is that of the **savage**. The savage Native portrayal is often either violent or noble - the former is defined by tribal warfare, violence against the white settler, brute force, bravery, and strength, while the latter is defined by timeless wisdom, and an innate understanding of nature - a pre-civilization, uncorrupted nature-child imagined by philosophers like Rousseau. These two portrayals are two sides of the same coin - they are polar opposites, and one is arguably more ‘flattering’ than the other, but they both rely on the understanding that Native people are primitive, simple, or uncivilized. The

archetype of the savage is in and of itself archaic - an ahistoric image of a Wild West -type warrior, completely removed from any notion of Native Americans existing in a contemporary context.

The two-sidedness of the savage stereotype brings us to a larger trend in Native stereotyping, namely the fact that many commonly held views of Native Americans contradict one another, yet coexist seemingly without issue. *Reclaiming Native Truth*, a project outlining the complex issues around Native media portrayals, reveals this dual stereotyping. In the minds of non-Natives, Native Americans suffer from extreme poverty, but are somehow also becoming obscenely wealthy thanks to casinos; they are connected to their spirituality, but are still abusing drugs and alcohol; they have incredible resilience, but still depend on the government for survival; and they respect and care for the environment, but their reservations are covered with filth (*Reclaiming Native Truth* 2018: 11).

As for the intersection between ethnicity and gender, two female-specific Native stereotypes are at the forefront. The **squaw** is a highly sexualized portrayal of Native American womanhood, which paints the Native woman as “a primitive, promiscuous, and frequently abused servant of men” (Kopacz & Lawton 2011: 244). Another popular portrayal of Native women is that of the **princess**, who is “a beautiful but desexualized chief’s daughter who often falls for the white hero” (Kopacz & Lawton 2011: 244) - Disney’s *Pocahontas* comes to mind. These two (opposite) portrayals are not only obviously oversimplified, limited, and insulting, but they appear to be a racialized version of the all too familiar Madonna-whore dichotomy, which is pervasive in Christian contexts. Furthermore, they define Native women not on their own terms, but instead in relation to men and men’s sexual conquests.

A common thread that binds together the various forms of Native stereotyping is that they are stuck in the past. In the American imagination, Native Americans are remnants of a nostalgic, sometimes completely fictionalized era - they are “fetishistically frozen in the past” (Ginsburg 2003: 302). The typical image of Native Americans is not a contemporary one - instead, they are portrayed as ahistorical and anachronistic, as a people “taxidermically frozen into timeless picturesques” (Rony 1994-1995: 22). Viewers enjoy seeing Native characters who are quiet and wear traditional garb - the “romanticized, exotic image of Native American braves and chiefs of the Wild West” appeals to modern viewers (Kopacz and Lawton 2011: 252).

A specific variant of the stuck-in-the-past Native portrayal is that of the spectral, ghostly Native American. Narratives about Native communities often rely on the idea of ‘a dying people’ - as Raheja (2010) puts it, “Native Americans are rendered harmless and unimportant through dominant discourses that treat Indigenous peoples as spectral entities, when they are treated at all” (p. 107).

In addition to the typical portrayals of Nativeness, which tend to place Native Americans firmly in the past, Kopacz and Lawton (2011) also describe some more contemporary Native stereotypes. These contemporary stereotypical portrayals can be placed into three categories: the “degenerate”, the “supercitizen”, and the “militant activist”. The first of these is a “deranged, substance-abusing reservation dweller” (p. 244); the second is “a wealthy Native casino owner and a recipient of cradle-to-grave benefits” (p. 244); the third is “an angry, aggressive vigilante seeking redress for centuries of repression” (p. 244).

Understanding this preoccupation with an imagined, ahistorical Native American may help us understand the popularity of the type of ‘Indian’ used in sports mascot imagery. The Native American mascot, after all, does not depict a contemporary image of Nativeness - which consists of a set of diverse cultures and identities - rather, it celebrates an amorphous, unspecified, and ahistorical caricature of what ‘Indianness’ should look like. Upon this imaginary Native American identity, a set of values are projected: strength, bravery, honor. The imagined Native American becomes a receptacle for non-Natives’ fantasies of ‘what used to be’, of a simpler time, of glorious battles between colonizer and colonized. These fantasies, of course, fail to consider the existence of Native people and Native cultures in a contemporary context - instead, they place Nativeness firmly in the past, where it is romantic, exotic, and, perhaps most importantly, non-threatening to the current social order.

Native mascotry may also be a specific variant of the American tradition of “playing Indian” (Deloria 1998) - a tradition built on romanticized ideas of history and Nativeness, which teeters uncomfortably on the edge between admiration and objectification. Often this roleplay manifests in the form of ‘cowboys and Indians’ - sometimes, for instance, in the form of children running around, wielding pistols, bows, and arrows, and sometimes in the form of football matches between the Dallas Cowboys and the Washington Redskins. A seemingly harmless form of roleplay, when considered in the light of the brutal, real-life violence inflicted

upon Native communities throughout American history, becomes disturbing upon closer inspection.

2.3. Media visibility: misrepresentation and underrepresentation

One of the several ways in which individuals construct their self-image, as well as form an understanding of not only their own communities, but others' as well, is through representations in the media. Seeing characters and portrayals that one can relate to - whether it's based on gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, or ethnicity - is a vital part of understanding one's own personhood, complexity, and potential. The ways in which any given group of people are represented in the media - whether it's news, film, music, or television - have the power to shape our understanding of the values and qualities of that group.

Media representation is powerful. For that reason, we ought to be highly aware of the editorial choices that lead to any given portrayal of people in the media, especially when it comes to marginalized groups of people. Harmful media representation can be divided into two crude categories, which frequently overlap: *misrepresentation* and *underrepresentation*.

Misrepresentation happens when a group of people is portrayed in a way that is skewed, stereotypical, counterfactual, malicious, or bigoted. The portrayal, in other words, is incorrect in some way - the intent to mislead may, or may not, be present. An example of a typical misrepresentation in media is the narrative that black men are inherently violent and prone to criminal activity, or that Muslim immigrants are a threat to national security. These tropes, while constantly repeated and confidently stated as objective reality, are of course counterfactual - but their ubiquitous nature have, at least to some extent, succeeded in shaping the collective perception of the groups of people they describe. Furthermore, these commonly accepted tropes, more or less directly, influence real-life behaviour and policies - consider, for instance, the disproportionate incarceration rates of black Americans, or the blatantly discriminatory immigration policies endorsed by the current US president.

Underrepresentation is what occurs when a group of people is virtually invisible in the mainstream media landscape. When historically marginalized groups - like transgender people, disabled people, or, indeed, Native Americans - aren't included in mainstream storytelling (and if they are, they are included as an afterthought, or as a token) it conveys an implicit, although strong, message: *your stories, your lives, are unimportant and uninteresting*. In short, it is a

case of insult by omission, and it hardly matters if the omission is done consciously and maliciously or merely by accident - the impact is the same. As is mentioned in the introduction, Native Americans are a small minority, and an even smaller one on screen.

In a US context (or, on a larger scale, Western context) there is an implicit understanding of a default human, especially when it comes to media and storytelling. More often than not, when creating new characters or choosing which stories are worth telling, the default tends to be male, rather than non-male, and white rather than non-white, and heterosexual rather than non-heterosexual, and so on. Consider the way films are characterized: a romantic comedy about a (usually white) man and a (usually white) woman is simply a 'romantic comedy' but the same film with black protagonists - and black background characters - is a 'black movie' or a 'black rom-com'. Or if the two protagonists were the same gender, we would classify the film as an 'LGBTQ rom-com', rather than simply a rom-com. In other words, whiteness is considered ethnicity-neutral, and heterosexuality is considered sexuality-neutral. In a similar way, a film with a predominantly male cast is simply a film about whichever topic it is dealing with - e.g. a war narrative - while a similar film with a predominantly female cast would most likely be branded as a 'girl power film' and, quite possibly, criticized as an unbearable political correctness stunt.

What is potentially damaging about being chronically underrepresented in mainstream media is that when one's identity finally *is* represented, that one representation carries a lot of weight. If, for instance, the vast majority of the (already scarce) portrayals of Muslims limit themselves to narratives about terrorism and religious fundamentalism (as they tend to do in an American context), we end up with an extremely limiting, counterfactual, and cartoonishly simplistic understanding of an entire group of people. If, instead, Muslims (and other marginalized demographics) were portrayed in vastly different types of roles, they would be afforded the dignity of being portrayed as full, complex, diverse human beings. In other words, the more invisible you are, the more vulnerable you are to misleading portrayals. In the case of Native Americans, respectful, diverse, and accurate portrayals are so few and far between that Native American mascot imagery may provide the primary source of 'information' about Native people for many non-Native media consumers.

2.4. Earlier research on effects of Native American mascots

Over the years, a number of studies have examined the real-world consequences of the continued use of Native American mascots. The ethical issues surrounding the concept can be, and have been, debated ad infinitum, so being able to refer to empirical research is valuable. The studies outlined in this chapter examine the subtle, yet powerful, psychological consequences of Native American mascots, on Natives and non-Natives alike.

In an attempt to understand how Native mascots may affect the minds of Native youth, Fryberg and colleagues (2008) conducted a series of four psychological studies. In Study 1, the researchers wanted to determine if Native Americans associate various American Indian (AI) mascot images with something positive, or something negative. Three common AI representations were used: Pocahontas, statistics about social problems in the AI community, and a sports mascot called Chief Wahoo. The study was conducted on Native American high school students living on an Arizona reservation. The students were exposed to one of the three representations - a small picture of Pocahontas or Chief Wahoo, or a small text box with the statistics. After seeing the representations, the students were asked to write down five words that came to mind, as spontaneously as possible. What Fryberg found was that the mascot image had more positive associations than the statistics about social problems, and that the mascot representation was about as positive as the Pocahontas image - in other words, "American Indian mascot representations are not always regarded as negative" (Fryberg 2008: 212). These results, however, only reflect what exists at the conscious level - what really interested the researchers was whether these seemingly positive attitudes also mean that the psychological consequences are positive. This is where the second study becomes relevant - they wanted to see whether the "positive" representations have a negative effect on the self-image of Native youth. In Study 2, the researchers used the same priming procedure as in Study 1 (i.e. pictures of Pocahontas or Chief Wahoo, or the statistics) on a different set of students. But instead of asking the participants to write down word associations, they were asked to fill in a questionnaire that would measure their self-esteem. The results showed that despite the fact that Study 1 indicated that the two mascot images were generally deemed positive, the effect on the participants' self-image was far from it. Compared to a control group, all three primes (Chief Wahoo, Pocahontas, and statistics about social problems) depressed the self-esteem of the participants, and the two mascot images did so to an even larger extent than the statistics did. These results seem to indicate that "in certain contexts, positive representations can have negative psychological consequences" (Fryberg 2008: 213) and that, most likely, these effects

happen at an unconscious level. Study 3, instead of measuring individual participants' self-esteem, aimed to measure their sense of community worth - through questions such as "[p]eople in my community can take action to make things better" (Fryberg 2008: 213). The procedure was the same as in Study 2 (exposure to AI representations) but the questionnaire measured the participants' feelings of community worth. The results of the third study reflect those found in Study 2: when compared to the control group, exposure to the AI representations depressed the participants' sense of community worth. Finally, Study 4 had a slightly different approach - instead of using the three earlier primes again, another set of primes was introduced: three AI sports mascots (Chief Wahoo, Chief Illiniwek, and the Haskell Indian) and one advertisement for the American Indian College Fund, which is an "achievement-relevant social representation" (Fryberg 2008: 214). In this study, the goal was to measure the participants' "achievement-related possible selves" (Fryberg 2008: 214) - essentially, whether or not they see themselves succeeding in their studies, finding a job, and so on. The results mirror the findings in studies 1 and 2: "American Indian college students primed with an American Indian mascot generated fewer achievement-related possible selves than the [students] who were primed with the American Indian College Fund advertisement or who were not primed at all (control)" (Fryberg 2008: 215). As a concluding remark regarding the combined results of the four studies, Fryberg suggests that "the negative effects of exposure to these images may, in part, be due to the relative absence of more contemporary positive images of American Indians in American society" (216) and that these mascots do "have harmful psychological consequences for the group that is caricaturized by the mascots" (216). Furthermore, these results clearly contradict the pro-mascot notion that "American Indian mascots are complimentary and honorific" (216). Perhaps most disturbingly, when referring to an earlier set of studies, Fryberg found that "after exposure to various American Indian representations, **European** Americans reported **higher** self-esteem compared to the control condition" (216, emphasis mine).

While Fryberg's study examined the effects of AI mascots on Native American people, a study by Chaney and colleagues (2011) sought to investigate the "implicit attitudes of non-AI people towards AI mascots and the extent to which they are related to attitudes towards AI people" (Chaney 2011: 42). One of the guiding assumptions of this study is that due to Native Americans' limited media visibility, AI mascots may provide the only gateway to Native culture and imagery for many non-AI people - in other words, to many non-AI people, AI mascots and AI people may be more or less interchangeable. Chaney's study makes use of the "Implicit

Association Test” (Chaney 2011: 45), or IAT, to measure participants’ attitudes and biases. Understanding these things on an implicit level is important because few people would willingly self-report explicit biases and racist thoughts - assuming they’re even aware of these biases in the first place. The IAT works “based on the assumption that responses to compatible judgment stimulus pairs (e.g., *snakes-dangerous*) will be more automatic, and hence faster, than for incompatible judgment pairs (e.g., *flowers-dangerous*)” (Chaney 2011: 45). In Chaney’s study, participants worked with four word categories: pleasant words (e.g. *beauty*), unpleasant words (e.g. *hatred*), Native American tribes (e.g. *Sioux*), and European nationalities (e.g. *Scottish*). Participants’ word association speeds were telling: the response times were shorter when pairing together European-pleasant and Native-unpleasant than European-unpleasant and Native-pleasant. The same tendency was present when, instead of listing Native tribes and European nationalities, the four word categories were pleasant words, unpleasant words, Native American mascots (e.g. *Chiefs*) and Caucasian mascots (e.g. *Vikings*). Even with mascots, participants were quicker to associate Native American mascots than Caucasian ones with unpleasant words. These results completely contradict the popular idea that AI mascots evoke positive emotions and representations of Native American people (Chaney 2011: 49). Taken together, these two variations of the IAT suggest that “implicit bias toward AI people was positively correlated with implicit bias toward AI mascots” (Chaney 2011: 49).

A study conducted by Hart (2011) aimed to understand if, and why, Native American mascot imagery is generally deemed socially acceptable, when, one would imagine, such objectification of any other ethnic group would be rightfully frowned upon. The hypothesis of Hart’s study was that participants “will not feel that the use of Native iconology for sports teams is racist, insulting or demeaning to Native American peoples” (Hart 2011: 20). The study was conducted in the form of a survey, and the participants were university students. The survey consisted of questions that would help determine whether or not participants would regard different ethnicity-based sports team names - real or otherwise - as racist. Washington Redskins, which represents Native Americans, was one of the team names in the survey, along with “Washington Niggers (to represent African Americans), Washington Chinks (to represent Asians), Washington Honkeys (to represent Caucasians) [and] Washington Wetbacks (to represent Hispanics)” (Hart 2011: 21). These imagined team names obviously rely on well-known racial slurs - they are not neutral signifiers of ethnicity - so the premise is that “redskin” ought to be widely understood as a slur as well, in order for the comparison to be fair. For every team name, participants were asked to determine whether or not they deem the names “racist,

insulting and demeaning” (Hart 2011: 21) with a simple “yes or no” answer. After each “yes or no” the participants were asked to explain, in their own words, why they answered the way they did. The quantitative portion of the study revealed differences in perceived offensiveness: Washington Niggers, Washington Wetbacks, and Washington Chinks scored higher on perceived racism (93,8%, 85,1% and 87%, respectively) than Washington Honkeys did (which scored 71%). Washington Redskins, however, only scored 54,3% on perceived racism - markedly lower than the other ethnic representations (Hart 2011: 22). The qualitative portion of the study, i.e. the “why or why not” portion, sheds some light on this discrepancy. For many participants, the fact that the Washington Redskins team has existed for such a long time has rendered the name less offensive to them - they’ve simply been desensitized. In fact, the team’s continued existence served as proof of its non-offensive nature for some participants, who reasoned that if Washington Redskins really was offensive, “something would have been done about it by now” (Hart 2011: 22). Others referred to Native friends and acquaintances (or to their own Native heritage) as justification - because these individuals haven’t expressed disapproval of the name, it must not be too problematic. Some said that Native people should feel honoured and privileged by the fact that they’re represented in the form of sports mascots. Hart summarizes the various qualitative responses as follows:

In general, there seemed to be two prevailing themes that came out of survey responses: one, that the use of Native iconology for sports team names is acceptable because it has been going on for a long time and secondly that study participants’ opinions were tempered by de-sensitization and lack of information. While reacting strongly to all other ethnic group iconology use, Native iconology use seemed to be acceptable and non-discriminatory; though there were a few participants that commented that once seen in the light of the survey they could understand how it would be inappropriate. Another pervasive theme was that if Native people objected to the use of their iconology for sports teams, something would have “been done about it by now.” This leads to a question of whether or not formative education is lending equal credence to all ethnic groups. (Hart 2011: 23)

The idea that nothing has “been done” about the derogatory Washington team name appears to be a fairly widespread belief. The following chapter will demonstrate that this idea is false; the team has faced criticism and activist efforts for decades.

3. The Washington Redskins

The Washington Redskins is an American football team founded by George Preston Marshall in 1932. During its first year, the team was called the Boston Braves, but due to the fact that the city already had a baseball team called the Boston Braves, Marshall changed his team's name to the Boston Redskins. After the team relocated to Washington, D.C, the name was changed to what it is to this day: the Washington Redskins. There is an understanding that Marshall chose the Redskins name partly to honour his team's head coach, William 'Lone Star' Dietz, who was thought to have Native ancestry - although his identity was later called into question (*National Congress of American Indians* 2013). In an article for the *Washington Post*, Richard Leiby (2013) further explains that some historians have come to believe that Dietz was actually of German heritage and that he was born to white parents in Wisconsin - *not*, as others claim, born to a Sioux woman and a German father. Dietz embraced Native culture and presented himself to the world as a Native American man, and, perhaps ironically, lamented the fact that Native traditions were disrespected and misappropriated - to Dietz, "[t]he Indian has been pictured too much as a thing of the white man's imagination" (Leiby 2013). The irony of the fact that Dietz himself appears to have embodied the very same type of romanticized misrepresentation does not seem to have occurred to him.

3.1 Honouring or hurtful?

Before going into the intricacies of the debate between those who would like to see the team's name changed, and those who want to keep it, it would be useful to look at the etymology and definitions of the word 'redskin'. Merriam-Webster defines 'redskin' as a "usually offensive" description of a Native American, and as early as 1898 the dictionary listed the word as "often contemptuous". Oxford Living Dictionaries also describes the word as "dated" and "offensive", and goes on to explain that "[t]he term originally had a neutral meaning and was used by North American Indians themselves, but it eventually acquired an unfavourable connotation". Cambridge Dictionary defines the word as "offensive" and "old-fashioned". Dictionary.com states that the word is "[d]isparaging and [o]ffensive", and further specifies that it is "a contemptuous term used to refer to a North American Indian", and points out that "within the context of white-Indian hostilities, use of the word redskin was associated with attitudes of contempt and condescension". What is interesting about the above definitions is that while they all recognise the word as offensive, none of them explicitly classify it as racist - which one might reasonably expect, given that the word is used to describe - in a "usually offensive" manner - a specific ethnic minority. One would imagine that if other historically marginalized

ethnic minorities were referred to with a specific word - especially if that word was widely considered offensive - we would classify that word as racist.

As for the word's etymology, one hotly debated issue is whether or not the word 'redskin' was, at one point in history, used to refer not to Native American people, but to their scalps, which were collected for bounty. The aforementioned dictionaries do not mention this particular interpretation of the word, but other entities have discussed it; for instance, the National Congress of American Indians (2013) states that "[t]he term originates from a time when Native people were actively hunted and killed for bounties, and their skins were used as proof of Indian kill", and that thus, "the word had been a term of commodification" (NCAI 2013). In an article written for *Esquire*, Baxter Holmes (2014) makes the case that 'redskin' does, indeed, refer to the scalped heads of Native Americans, and backs up this claim by referring to a document written in the mid-18th century, called the Phips Proclamation. In this document, the act of bringing in the scalp of a murdered Native American in exchange for money is encouraged with very little room for interpretation: "[b]ounty hunters were paid 50 pounds for living captive Penobscot males 12 years and older, 40 pounds for the scalps of dead Penobscot males age 12 and over, 25 pounds for the scalps of women, and 20 pounds for the scalps of children under the age of 12" (*Upstander Project* n.d.). Holmes also refers to an excerpt from a Minnesota newspaper, written in 1863, which states that the "reward for dead Indians has been increased to \$200 for every red-skin sent to Purgatory. This sum is more than the dead bodies of all the Indians east of the Red River are worth" (Holmes 2014). While these texts undoubtedly prove that Native men, women and children were systematically killed and scalped for money, the link between the word redskin and the act of scalping remains somewhat unclear (or, at the very least, difficult to prove beyond a doubt). The Phips Proclamation does not use the word redskin at any point, and the newspaper excerpt, which does use the word, may be understood as referring to Native American people themselves, rather than their scalps. In his op-ed, Holmes explains that his claim about the link between the word redskin and the scalped heads of Native Americans was called into question by some readers, many of whom cited a 2005 study by Ives Goddard. Goddard's study, which explores the various historical uses of the word redskin, concludes that Suzan Harjo's (whose legal battle against the Washington Redskins is outlined in chapter 3.3) claim about the redskin-scalp equivalency is "unfounded" (Goddard 2005: 1) and that "[t]he word redskin reflects a genuine Native American idiom that was used in several languages, where it grew out of an earlier established and more widespread use of 'red' and 'white' as racial labels" (Goddard 2005: 16) - in other words, the term was originally used by

Native Americans themselves, so the word's origins are benign. But there are some issues with Goddard's reasoning. For example, it ought to be pointed out that even if a term has benign, merely descriptive, and/or neutral origins, connotations change over time - racial epithets such as the N-word come to mind (although we might fairly argue that these words were never neutral or benign to begin with). Similarly, if we accept the idea that 'redskin' started as a neutral, merely descriptive term, it would be fairly short sighted not to consider the fact that especially during the 19th century and beyond, the word 'redskin' was used disparagingly, and that it is difficult to find examples of flattering or respectful usage of the word (Sanders 2014). In fact, usage of the word *redskin* became increasingly hostile and violent over time - one notable example is found in an editorial written by L. Frank Baum in 1890, where he expresses his views on Native Americans: "With [Sitting Bull's] fall the nobility of the Redskin is extinguished, and what few are left are a pack of whining curs who lick the hand that smites them. The Whites, by law of conquest, by justice of civilization, are masters of the American continent, and the best safety of the frontier settlements will be secured by the total annihilation of the few remaining Indians" (Kessler 2014).

What I would argue is that even if we cannot definitively prove that the word *redskin* was at some point synonymous with the severed scalp of a Native American, the usage of the word in the *context* of scalping and killing Native Americans (as in, for instance, the aforementioned 1863 newspaper excerpt) creates a strong enough association between the word and the actual racial violence for us to reasonably argue that the term is racist, or at the very least deeply offensive. Furthermore, Holmes makes the compelling argument that, despite a lack of definitive historical and/or linguistic proof of the *redskin*-scalp synonymy, "to many Native Americans, the term 'redskin' has long meant the act of [their] ancestor's scalps being collected for bounty" (Holmes 2014). In other words, lack of unequivocal proof for certain historical usage of a word does not erase the widespread understanding and interpretation of that word - and the subsequent experienced trauma.

The controversial nature of the Washington football team's name has prompted plenty of discussions and debates over the years. In the following section, the various arguments for and against keeping the Redskins name are outlined.

3.2 Arguments in favour of keeping the team name

In order to understand the viewpoint of those who disagree with changing the controversial team name, it is useful to consult a website called *Redskins Facts*. The website's *About Us* page explains that the site is "a growing online community of passionate Washington Redskins fans and others who support the team's use of its name and logo" (*Redskins Facts* 2015). The text goes on to clarify that the intent is not to "inflame or antagonize anyone", and then lists the names of "prominent supporters and sponsors". The website posits itself as a grassroots effort, but the Redskins franchise itself appears to be, at least to some extent, involved in the founding of the website. PR firm Burson-Marsteller, whose "clients have included the Blackwater USA security firm and Johnson and Johnson during the Tylenol poison scare in the 1980s" (Clarke 2014) was, according to the PR firm's spokesperson, "retained by the Washington Redskins and the player alumni association to provide technical and editorial support to distribute information to those who inquire about the team's history and name" (Clarke 2014). Considering the entities behind the *Redskins Facts* website - the football franchise itself, and a PR firm that has a history of defending controversy-ridden clients - we can gain a fairly good understanding of the perspective we can expect to see on the website. "Perspective" is the key word here because the website presents itself as a type of objective, neutral information source, whose aim is to simply present "historical evidence to fair-minded opinion leaders on both sides of the issue so ongoing discussions can be constructive" (*Redskins Facts* 2015).

The website features a section called *The Facts*. Before the text dives into the history of the team and its name and logo, the reader is told that *Redskins Facts* does not "believe in offending or discriminating against people of any ethnicity for any reason" - and almost in the very same breath goes on to state that the team name should stay because "[i]t epitomizes all the **noble** qualities [they] admire about Native Americans" (*Redskins Facts* 2015, emphasis mine). The text goes on to list those perceived "noble" Native American qualities: "honor", "loyalty", "unity", "respect", "courage", and, vaguely, "and more". The fact that the text references well known Native stereotypes (however 'positive' those stereotypes are) while arguing that the intent is not to offend or discriminate against Native Americans is, at the very least, ironic.

As the text goes on to discuss the history of the team name, the very first point that is brought up is the "authoritative linguistic survey" written by Ives Goddard - the same survey that was outlined in a previous section of this thesis. The text explains that Goddard's study "concluded that the word 'redskins' was created by Native Americans, and that it was first used as an

inclusive expression of solidarity by multi-tribal delegations who traveled to Washington, D.C. to negotiate national policy towards Native Americans”, and that the origin of the word is thus “entirely benign” - although, as I posited earlier, benign beginnings do not guarantee the absence of discriminatory and violent usage over time, because connotations are not immune to change.

The text goes on to explain that the redskins term should be deemed acceptable because “prominent Indian leaders of the 19th century [...] are documented as having referred to themselves as ‘Red Men’ or ‘Red-skins’”. The text also mentions that during the team’s first years, “four players and then-head coach William Henry ‘Lone Star’ Dietz identified themselves as Native Americans” (although the controversy around Dietz’s heritage is conveniently omitted). These arguments, while seemingly valid at a glance, do seem to fall apart if we were to draw parallels to a hypothetical situation where the team was called, for instance, *Washington N-words* instead of *Washington Redskins*, and featured a picture of a black person as its mascot. The first argument, which boils down to “members of the ethnic minority use(d) this word, too” hardly holds up to scrutiny when we think of racial slurs targeted at black Americans - black people may or may not choose to use these slurs as an expression of in-group solidarity, as a preemptive defense, or as neutral self-reference, but this does not render the slurs non-racist when used by, in this hypothetical situation, a corporation owned by a non-black individual. The same goes for the second argument, which boils down to “the team had a few members who belonged to the ethnic minority, so the name is acceptable”. Again, this argument hardly seems valid if we compare it to the hypothetical team - the fact that the hypothetical team had a few black players in the 1930s does not logically lead us to conclude that a racial slur like the N-word is an acceptable name for the team. Of course, perhaps this comparison is not entirely fair - after all, ‘redskin’ is not defined by most dictionaries as “racist” (it is deemed merely “offensive”). But interestingly enough, in general, dictionary definitions of the N-word also do not outright classify it as “racist”, either - instead, it is defined as “extremely offensive” (Cambridge Dictionary), a “contemptuous term” (Oxford Living Dictionaries), and “offensive” (Merriam-Webster). While dictionary definitions should not necessarily be taken as gospel, it is interesting to see how similarly the two slurs are defined. Whether or not it is necessary or productive to discuss the commonalities and differences between the concept of racism and the concept of offensiveness is its own matter altogether - what *is* relevant, for the sake of this discussion, is that both slurs are considered offensive. Should we then conclude that because one team name (the hypothetical one) would surely be

considered unacceptable in this day and age, the other team name (the currently existing one) should also be deemed unacceptable?

As a concluding remark, the text goes on to state “that the Redskins name is a self-reference in the context of the football team itself—and in no way should it be considered a slur targeted at a specific ethnic subgroup of Americans”. This claim raises some questions. The statement can be understood to mean that the word ‘redskins’ simply refers to the football team, and *only* the football team - completely devoid of any historical or racial context. In other words, ‘redskin’ has been reclaimed and rebranded - one might say stolen. If we, again, compare this line of thinking to the hypothetical *Washington N-words* team, it would seem, at the very least, questionable to claim that the word doesn’t refer to a “specific ethnic subgroup”, or that it is simply “a self-reference in the context of the football team itself”. With our hypothetical team name, this argument reveals itself as absurd - but the very same argument is made in defense of the *Washington Redskins*. Furthermore, claiming that the team name does not in any way refer to Native Americans stands in clear contradiction with the fact that, earlier on the same web page, the text clearly states that the name stands for all the qualities that one might “admire about Native Americans”. Does the name refer to Native Americans, or does it not?

The arguments outlined on the Redskins Facts website are mirrored in a letter sent by Bruce Allen, team President of the Washington Redskins, to US Senator Harry Reid in 2014. The letter starts out by stating that “the Washington Redskins are a positive, unifying force for our community in a city and region that is divided on so many levels” and that the “team name continues to carry a deep and purposeful meaning” (Bruce Allen 2014). Allen goes on to present the arguments, the first of which refers to the oft-cited Goddard study. He continues by stating that the “logo was designed and approved by Native American leaders”, and that “Native Americans continue to embrace and use the name and logo”. Furthermore, he points to an Associated Press survey that found that “83% of Americans [...] are in favor of keeping the Washington Redskins name”.

Perhaps the most vocal defender of the Washington team’s name is the team’s owner, Daniel Snyder. Snyder has been known for his unyielding, and sometimes inflammatory, approach to the name controversy - he famously declared that the team will “never change the name” and to further bring his point home, clarified “[i]t's that simple. NEVER — you can use caps” (Brady 2013). In a 2014 interview, Snyder provides justification for his standpoint: “It’s honor.

It's respect. It's pride. And I think that every player here sees it, feels it, every alumni feels it, and it's a wonderful thing, it's a historic thing. It's a very historic franchise, it's been a pleasure" (Bieler 2014). Snyder also encourages fans and critics to consider "the facts, the history, the truth, [and] the tradition" (Bieler 2014) when it comes to the team logo and name. To him, the Washington Redskins is "a historic football team that's very proud, that has a great legacy, that honors and respects people" (Bieler 2014). In the interview, Snyder explains how he has travelled across America to various Native American reservations and how he found that plenty of Native Americans love not only the Washington Redskins, but other sports teams with Native American imagery, too. As for how Snyder feels about the importance of the name debate in the first place, he says the following:

And what I did see that got me and touched me, and really moved me, and I think you know because you have now visited a lot of reservations as well, is the plight of Native Americans. The things that people don't talk about. You know, it's sort of fun to talk about the name of our football team, because it gets some attention for some of the people that write it, that need clicks, or what have you. But reality is, no one ever talks about what's going on on reservations, the fact that they have such high unemployment rates, health care issues, education issues, environmental issues, lack of water, lack of electricity. (Bieler 2014)

This reasoning - that due to tangible, life-altering problems such as unemployment and poor living conditions, we should not be paying attention to less tangible issues, such as offensive language use - is a derailing tactic, and an effective one at that. This argument boils down to a "there are more important things to worry about" narrative.

In another interview, Snyder repeatedly says that "the truth is on [his] side" (Scott Allen 2014) when it comes to the name controversy. He emphasizes 'the facts' several times - referring, for instance, to the story about the team name being a tribute to William 'Lone Star' Dietz (a story whose factuality has been called into question on multiple occasions) and to the fact that the logo was "designed by the head of Blackfeet Nation, the chair of Blackfeet Nation at the time, Walter 'Blackie' Wetzel" (Scott Allen 2014). At the end of the interview, Snyder makes clear that the team name will not be changed: "I think we've said so much at this point, we know where we are" and, as a concluding remark, "[w]e respect everyone's opinions, we really do. And hopefully they respect ours" (Scott Allen 2014).

Perhaps in an attempt to soften his famously combative tone, Snyder sent out a letter to season-ticket holders, outlining his perspective on the team name controversy. The letter begins with

an emotional, nostalgic description of Snyder going to his first Redskins game with his father. The letter goes on to present the familiar facts, for instance, how “four players and [the] Head Coach were Native Americans” (Snyder 2013) back when the team was first founded, and reminds the reader that the team name “is a symbol of everything we stand for: strength, courage, pride, and respect - the same values we know guide Native Americans and which are embedded throughout their rich history as the original Americans.” - again, citing well-known stereotypical attributes. Snyder emphasizes the importance of the team’s 81-year-old history, and mentions the word ‘tradition’ several times - failing to see the irony of invoking history and tradition in a debate about a historically marginalized ethnic group, whose history is filled with violent oppression and whose own traditions were, not too long ago, illegal.

3.3 Arguments in favour of changing the team name

The discourse around the name change might make it seem as if the opposition against Native imagery in sports is a new phenomenon - a trendy plea for political correctness for the sake of political correctness. That is, however, not the case. Ever since the 1960s, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), together with several other tribal organizations and activist groups, has called for an end to the use of Native American sports mascots. In 1968, the NCAI begins its campaign to tackle the issue of Native American media representation, and in 1972, the “NCAI and other organizations [met] with [Washington Redskins] team owner Edward Bennett Williams to ask for a name change - that was the last meeting any team owner ever had with Native people who oppose the team’s name” (*National Congress of American Indians* 2013). This is important to keep in mind especially considering that entities like RedskinsFacts.com provide video footage of individual Native Americans who do support the team name as proof that the team name does not need to change - the team has not shown much interest in considering (and displaying) the viewpoint of those Native American individuals and organizations that do *not* support the team name.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights has also voiced its support for the movement to end Native American mascot use. The commission explained its motivation as follows:

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights calls for an end to the use of Native American images and team names by non-Native schools. The Commission deeply respects the rights of all Americans to freedom of expression under the First Amendment and in no way would attempt to prescribe how people can express themselves. However, the Commission believes that the use of Native American images and nicknames in school is insensitive and should be avoided. In addition, some Native American and civil rights advocates maintain that these mascots may violate anti-discrimination laws. These

references, whether mascots and their performances, logos, or names, are disrespectful and offensive to American Indians and others who are offended by such stereotyping. They are particularly inappropriate and insensitive in light of the long history of forced assimilation that American Indian people have endured in this country.
(*U.S. Commission on Civil Rights* 2001)

While the aforementioned statement only explicitly refers to school mascots, the same arguments could easily be applied to the Washington Redskins, which is an NFL team.

The American Psychological Association (APA) is another organization that disagrees with the use of Native American mascots. The APA explains that “the continued use of American Indian mascots, symbols, images, and personalities undermines the educational experiences of members of all communities - especially those who have had little or no contact with Indigenous peoples”, and that the use of these Native representations creates an unhealthy learning environment for Native American students, and makes it harder for Native Americans to portray their own culture and traditions in a respectful manner (*The American Psychological Association*, n.d.).

In 1992, a group of Native Americans, led by Suzan Shown Harjo, started what was to become a long legal effort against the Washington team. They aimed to strip the team of its trademark registrations by taking their case to the Trademark Trial and Appeal Board (TTAB). Years later, in 1999, the TTAB ruled in favour of Harjo, on the basis that the team’s name is deemed disparaging to Native Americans - as a response, the Washington team appealed the TTAB ruling. In 2006, a new lawsuit against the team emerges: Amanda Blackhorse and four other Native American individuals also took their case to the TTAB, but their petition was put on hold while Harjo’s case was still being dealt with. In 2009, an appeals court ruled against Harjo, on the basis that Harjo and the others involved in the suit had waited too long after having turned 18 to claim that the team name is offensive - in other words, the case was rejected on the basis of *laches*, i.e. the notion that the plaintiffs had pursued their case in too delayed a manner. In 2014, The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office ruled in favour of Blackhorse, and canceled the Washington team’s trademark registrations, on the basis that they are offensive to Native Americans - the team responded by appealing the ruling. A year later, in 2015, a federal judge mirrored the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office’s ruling, and ordered the cancellation of the football team’s name registrations, which led to the team asking the U.S. Supreme Court to hear the case (*The Washington Post*, “Timeline: the furor over the Redskins’ name”). The Supreme

Court eventually concluded that the First Amendment's free speech clause trumps the disparagement clause, and that trademarks are private, not government speech, and as a result, the SCOTUS rendered the legal issue moot, and the Native American petitioners were unable to pursue further legal action (Shapira & Marimow 2017). One defining factor in this long-lasting legal battle was the precedent set by another case, which involved an Asian rock band called the *Slants*. In the rock band's case, the SCOTUS ruled that it would be a violation of the First Amendment to ban trademarks that can be deemed disparaging. This made it near impossible for the Native American petitioners to make their case - they had relied on the disparagement clause of the 1946 Lanham Act, which prohibits the registration of trademarks which are disparaging (Shapira & Marimow 2017). Geoffrey Nunberg, the linguist who testified against the Washington team during the legal battle, comments on the Lanham Act and its application, saying that "[y]ou have the right to pick a slur for your product name, the thinking goes, but you can't expect the government to protect your exclusive use of it by restricting the speech of others" (Nunberg 2014). Nunberg also provides a clear argument against the idea that using a name like *Redskins* is meant to be a compliment or an honorific:

When you pronounce a slur, you affiliate yourself with the attitudes and actions of all the people who have used it before you, whatever your personal feelings about the group it refers to. There's no exemption for good intentions, or even for ignorance. 'Nigger' stings even in the mouth of a child who doesn't know it's offensive. (Nunberg 2014)

The PR effort behind the pro-Redskins side of the argument will make it seem as if the slur can be reclaimed - by the team, and by non-natives - as something other than a purely racial term. Bob Raskopf, the team's trademark attorney, when asked whether or not he would be comfortable using the slur against an actual Native American, evaded the question by saying that "[t]hat's not what this case is about" and that it's about "what *our* word means" - in other words, the team has somehow 'reclaimed' the term and the term is thus post-racial. Nunberg is not impressed with this line of reasoning:

Of all the things that defenders of the name have said, there's nothing to touch the effrontery of Raskopf's assertion 'This is *our* word'—as if the team had the power to pluck the word out of history, both theirs and its own, and oblige everyone, Indians included, to honor their meaning of the word. (Nunberg 2014)

Nunberg also points to America's long tradition of 'playing Indian' as a possible explanation for why some people might feel so strongly about keeping the Native imagery of the team, and posits that wanting to indulge in this type of ethnic roleplaying might make sense since 'playing

Indian' "has [long] been the characteristic expression of the unbridled American id" (Nunberg 2014).

3.4 The controversial Washington Post poll

In the Washington Redskins name debate, one particular study keeps being brought up as evidence that the team name controversy is a non-issue. In 2016, The Washington Post published an article, authored by John Woodrow Cox, Scott Clement, and Theresa Vargas, which presents the findings of an opinion poll conducted by the newspaper. The poll, which surveyed 504 self-identified Native Americans from all U.S. states, found that "9 in 10 Native Americans aren't offended by [the] Redskins name" (Cox et al 2016). Furthermore, among the surveyed people, "more than 7 in 10 said they did not feel the word 'Redskin' was disrespectful to Indians" and 8 in 10 "said they would not be offended if a non-native called them by that name" (Cox et al. 2016).

Conducting a poll of this type, and publishing its results, does raise some ethical concerns, no matter how accurate its results or valid its methodology might be. The authors of the Washington Post article even point out that Redskins officials "are already using the poll as further justification to retain the moniker" (Cox et al. 2016). Indeed, the poll has attracted some criticism: Susan Harjo, for instance, does not "agree that this is a valid way of surveying public opinion in Indian Country" (Cox et al. 2016). Amanda Blackhorse has expressed criticism as well: "We should never poll human rights issues at all. [...] What we have here is a social issue where we have victims. We have actual real native people who have been damaged by native mascots, by stereotypes, by violence, towards native people" (Blackstone 2018). In an interview with NPR, Ray Halbritter, CEO of Oneida Nation Enterprises, points out the problematic nature of the poll: "the fact that we're poll testing a dictionary-defined racial slur against Native Americans shows how much we've ignored and continue to ignore [...] basic humanity" and "no other community's ever been asked to justify their existence or deny their degradation through poll testing" (Martin 2016). We also need to consider the flipside of the poll results - 1 in 10 Native Americans *do* take offense to the slur. With this in mind, is it reasonable to argue that the team ought to be allowed to keep their name?

The poll, understandably, has faced a fair bit of criticism. It does, however, complicate the discourse around the problematic team name - if we take the results at face value, are we in fact creating an issue out of a non-issue? Am I, as a non-native researcher, inserting myself into a

debate where I am unwelcome? Are the complaints of the “PC police” warranted? These are questions that we must keep in mind when researching this particular topic - after all, the personal is political, and vice versa, and the topic at hand is both deeply emotional and inseparable from a long history of racial violence. Taking any one side in this debate is thus bound to step on some toes.

4. Methods and materials

What has become clear so far is that the issue of Native American mascots in general, and the Washington Redskins in particular, is highly controversial. Despite compelling evidence from experts like Fryberg, the debate still rages on: is it, or is it not, acceptable to use ethnic caricatures and dictionary-defined racial slurs in sports imagery?

One way of understanding the general public's view of this difficult, emotionally charged issue is by observing anonymized online discourse about it. What I set out to do in this study is to delve into online comments and debates in relation to the topic at hand, and one excellent source for such discourse is the website Reddit.

4.1 Reddit

Reddit was founded in 2005 by Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian (*Wikipedia*, n.d.). The website markets itself as a “growing family of millions of diverse people sharing the things they care about most” and as the “home to thousands of communities, endless conversation, and authentic human connection” (*Reddit Inc. website*, n.d.). In January of 2019, Reddit was the fifth most visited website in the United States, and the 17th most visited in the world (*Alexa website*, n.d.), making it an unquestionably influential social platform - and provides an excellent primary source for public opinion, especially since the goal of the website is “endless conversation”.

Reddit posts are organized into user-created boards called ‘subreddits’, which cover different topics and themes from different angles. These boards have moderators, whose task is to enforce community guidelines and remove posts or comments that are inappropriate or too off-topic.

Reddit users, commonly referred to as ‘redditors’, are predominantly male (71%), predominantly young (18-29-year-olds make up 59% of the user base) and mostly liberal (47%, in comparison to the 13% who identify themselves as conservative and 39% who describe themselves as moderate) (Mitchell et al. 2016). Redditors are only identified by a username, which they may choose for themselves, which means that their true identities remain hidden, unless they were to choose to use their full name in their profile. In practice, then, redditors are anonymous commenters.

4.2 Material

I decided to use the search terms “native american mascot” and “washington redskins name” to find relevant Reddit posts. The search results were sorted by relevance, and the first 20 posts (per search term) that included one or more comment were included in the analysis - plenty of posts had zero comments, and as such were of no value in the analysis.

The fact that moderators - who, after all, are subjective observers and judges of acceptable discourse - have the freedom to censor inappropriate or irrelevant comments may, at first glance, prove to be a methodological problem for my study, but the fact that the comments that *do* remain have been deemed acceptable by a moderator is an interesting and valuable data point in and of itself.

After going through the material generated by the aforementioned search, and selecting only the comments that are clearly relevant to the topic (i.e. the controversy around either Native mascotry in general, or the Washington Redskins in particular), I was left with 98 separate Reddit comments. Some comments prompted replies, which turned into longer threads, but I chose to treat the comments as independent entities (except in the few cases where context is necessary). Comments, even when forming a part of a longer thread, tended not to be conversational - which is why I made the choice to treat them as separate entities. This also made it possible to place individual comments into their proper categories (according to theme or type of argument).

4.3 Method

This study is qualitative in nature. When reading and deciphering the 98 comments, some common tendencies and themes materialized. Plenty of comments make similar types of arguments, and rely on similar types of tropes. These similarities allowed me to place the comments into separate (although sometimes overlapping) categories, which are outlined in chapter 5. After categorization, each comment (or comment cluster, when the comments were particularly similar) is interpreted and analyzed with the following questions as a starting point:

- Does the comment express approval or disapproval of the continued use of Native mascots?
- How does the commenter attempt to justify their viewpoint?
- Is there a sense of anger, or blame - and who, or what, is it directed against?

- Does the comment express specific attitudes (positive or negative) about Native American individuals or communities?

My aim, in the analysis chapter, is simply to provide an overview of the type of comments one might expect to find about the topic of Native mascotry online, which is why I have attempted to keep my own subjective interpretations of the validity of each comment to a minimum, although I do insert myself into the analysis in some of the clear cases where a commenter's claim is, for instance, objectively counterfactual. The discussion chapter, on the other hand, is where I observe the comments with a more critical eye, and discuss why they might be considered interesting (and sometimes disturbing) in a larger, societal context. After all, while objectivity is of utmost importance, *neutrality* is not the standard to which one might want to aspire when it comes to issues of racial injustice.

5. Analysis

This chapter outlines the various themes and tendencies that the Reddit comments reveal. The sub-chapter headings describe the theme or the type of argument being made

5.1 It's an honour, or a compliment, or not offensive

1. *“The University of North Dakota changed their name from the Fighting Sioux. They currently dont have a mascot. Irish people dont go around complaining Notre Dame has a racist name in the fighting irish. I think teams named after Native Americans is honoring them and making them look like warriors, but they think otherwise. Stupid liberals.....”*

2. *“They could use names that honor like warriors or braves instead of derogatory and get a lot more creative with names because they do not have to be bigoted like naming them for a tribe in an honorable non racist way. They could always make up a type of mascot besides a stereotype of anybody in a negative way.”*

The two comments above invoke the oft-cited notion that Nativeness is synonymous with the warrior archetype. In fact, according to these comments, equating Native Americans with warriors should be understood as an attempt to “honor” them - after all, warriors are almost by definition strong and brave, and strength and bravery are positive qualities. Comment number 2 acknowledges that there are Native mascots that rely on stereotypes and bigotry, but argues that there are better solutions (other than eliminating Native mascotry altogether), like using specific tribe names - presumably in the way that Florida State Seminoles was named after the Seminole tribe, for example. Comment number 1 expresses frustration at those who criticize Native mascotry by providing an example of a team called the Fighting Irish, and how Irish people don't think the name is racist, so why should Native Americans complain about Native mascots? This line of thinking overlooks the fact that Irish people are not racialized in the same way that Native Americans are (in a contemporary, white-centric North American context), so describing the Fighting Irish as a “racist” team name would not be accurate in the first place - whether it is, for instance, offensive or insensitive would be a more valid discussion to have. Comment number 1 also, most probably inadvertently, highlights one of the biggest issues about Native mascots - namely, ownership and self-determination when it comes to cultural representations. The commenter posits that the intent of Native mascots is to honor Native

Americans, but “they”, presumably Native Americans, “think otherwise” - whose perspective does the commenter deem more valid? The comment appears to suggest that sports teams’ owners (who are presumably non-Native) have a better understanding of how to portray Native American culture than Native Americans do - a fairly patronizing view that seems to prioritize intent over impact.

3. *“I had no idea [Chief Illiniwek had] been removed. That actually makes me really sad, I saw their halftime show as a kid and I remember it being really powerful and respectful.”*

4. *“At my high school we were quite proud to be the Redskins. It wasn't derogatory to us, it was our identity and we would kick your ass for disrespecting it. We had 0% minorities in our school and had no reason to be prejudiced against anyone and weren't.”*

Comment number 3 exemplifies the strong nostalgia some (presumably non-Native) people feel when it comes to Native mascotry. The comment expresses a sense of profound loss - Chief Illiniwek, the former mascot of the University of Illinois, brought joy to the commenter in their childhood years. The mascot performance, which the commenter describes as “powerful and respectful”, did not elicit the same response in, for example, Charlene Teters (Spokane), who spoke of her experience in the 1997 documentary *In Whose Honor?*. She went to see a University of Illinois basketball game with her children, and as the Chief “leapt and twirled in what was billed at the time as an authentic dance, as fans in mock war paint yelled war chants from the stands” (*POV*, “In Whose Honor?”), she cringed with discomfort, as did her children. As for comment number 2, the same type of nostalgia is expressed, although the sense of ownership is more explicitly expressed: “it was *our* identity”. The commenter explains that the name Redskins was not “derogatory” to a group of students that consisted of “0% minorities” - the irony of this statement appears to be lost on the (presumably white) commenter. Indeed, it requires an astounding level of solipsism to argue that a racist term is acceptable because there are no racial minorities around to witness it.

5. *“Dumb. There's nothing wrong with having an Indian as a mascot.”*

6. *“It is a celebration of their culture that is cool and relatable.”*

7. *“Baseball team names are done in honor and respect. ‘The Redskins’ is no more offensive than ‘The Yankees’.*

No Northerner gets offended or cries like a baby when the term ‘Yankee’ is used for a team.

Likewise in polling more than 90% of Native Americans saw ‘Redskin’ as a compliment.”

8. *“I have NEVER understood this bullshit about being offended over a pro team's mascot or name.*

The team got that name because somebody decided that "Redskins" (not the potatoes) or "Indians" or "Braves" was a group worth HONORING and EMULATING. A high standard to aim at because of that group's skill, talent, accomplishment, strength, bravery, etc.

Why TF would anybody have a problem with that?!?!?”

Comments 7 and 8 argue that it is misguided and wrong to be offended by Native mascotry. Since team names and mascots “are done in honor and respect” (i.e. the intent is complimentary), they cannot be offensive. “Redskins”, as a group of people, were “worth honoring and emulating” because of their (imagined) inherent qualities, such as “strength” and “bravery”. Of course, one might argue that the problem is that “somebody” (presumably not a Native person or entity) decided to use Native American people as a stand-in for some imagined qualities. Native Americans had no say in this cultural representation - rather, the representation, which is a homogenized caricature, was dictated from the outside. Furthermore, comment 7 makes a comparison to another team (the Yankees) in order to make the point that Native Americans who are opposed to using a racial slur as a team name are just being overly sensitive crybabies - because if Northerners are not opposed to the word “Yankee”, Native Americans have no right to be opposed to the word “Redskin”. Comment number 5 does not provide justification for the claim that there is “nothing wrong with having an Indian as a mascot”, but simply states it as fact - which overlooks the fact that plenty of advocacy groups have argued the exact opposite for decades. Comment number 6 classifies Native mascotry as a “celebration” of Native culture. As for Native mascotry being a “cool and relatable” representation of Native culture(s), plenty of Native advocacy groups do not agree. In order for

a representation to be “relatable” it would have to be, at the very least, accurate - and given the fact that many Native mascots are cartoonish and homogenized (i.e. not taking into account the variation within and between Native cultures), that seems unlikely.

9. *“I'm native. I'm very connected to my heritage. When I was young, I asked my grandfather if he was mad about the "Tomahawk chop" controversy. He said he wasn't so I asked why.*

He said that people usually don't make mascots to be offensive. Much like the tomahawk chop, it's a form of imitation. I asked about my school team's mascot, the Indians, and he said the same thing. He said "We don't get mad if the tigers don't have a real tiger mascot. We don't get mad if the Spartans don't have traditional authentic Spartan gear." What he was getting at was that mascots are like caricatures. They're often over the top and kind of silly. This is just my thinking, but I have more important shit to worry about than if a team is called the braves, redskins, Indians, or whatever. If they want to be called that, then on some level they want to be associated with that aspect of being native. Just my 2c”

10. *“I'm a full blooded Navajo and I honestly don't mind the name. I feel like the people in Washington and fans of the team aren't using the name in a derogatory manner, but in a sense of pride, more akin to Notre Dame's "Fighting Irish." If anything, I would change the mascot for the Cleveland Indians, because the word "Indian" is something I and people in the native community hate. Christopher Columbus came here under the assumption that he was in India, referred to us as Indians, and somehow the name stuck. So we're pretty much named after his mistake, and we prefer the term Native American, not Indian.”*

11. *“I am native American. I dont mind it. Its an honor to be a pro team mascot.”*

12. *“35% here. Why the hell would you take offense to having your heritage proudly emblazoned on one of America's most recognizable and iconic sports? There isnt much more truly American than football and Indians. Why not take pride in that rather than offense?”*

13. *“15/16 here, grew up on and near a rez, related to tribal leadership and was an elected representative of Native student body in highschool for two years. I do not know any Native who is genuinely offended. Redskin stuff is cool. We wear it even if we don't watch football. No one cares.”*

14. *“Mingo/Pawnee (paternal & maternal respectively) here. I think it is actually pretty awesome. It isn't like it's the Washington Savages or anything. Redskins, Braves, Chiefs, etc.... All good by me.”*

Comments 9-14 are written by self-described Native people, some of whom do so either by referring to specific tribes (“Mingo/Pawnee”, “full blooded Navajo”), or by providing a blood quantum (“35% here”, “15/16 here”). Comment number 9 describes a discussion the commenter had with their grandfather, on the topic of Native mascots. The main points of the comment can be condensed to the following core arguments:

- Native mascotry is a form of imitation (and the implication is that imitation is, or should be seen as, flattery). This argument, while perfectly valid in some contexts, falls apart when we consider other formerly popular forms of ethnic imitation like, for example, blackface in minstrel shows. From a contemporary point of view it is difficult to argue that minstrel shows were in any way flattering the people they were imitating.
- People don't create mascots with the intent to be offensive (i.e. intent is more relevant than potential impact). One might argue that when it comes to something as insidious and violent as racism, good intent does not negate negative impact.
- The inaccurate/caricatured nature of Native mascots is acceptable because “the tigers don't have a real tiger mascot” and “the Spartans don't have traditional authentic gear” (whether or not we should be comparing Native Americans to either animals, given the fact that Native Americans are human, or to a Greek state that existed roughly two millennia ago, since Native Americans very much still exist today, is an entirely separate issue)
- There are more important things to worry about than Native mascots. This is an issue that I will cover in a more detailed manner in a later section.

Comment number 10 mirrors the notion of intent softening the potential impact: “fans of the team aren't using the name in a derogatory manner” but are instead using it “in a sense of pride”. The commenter in question finds team names with the word “Indian” in them more problematic than, in this case, “Redskins” - the commenter expresses frustration about being named after

Columbus' mistake. Preferring to be called "Native American" rather than "Indian" is understandable for obvious reasons, but it does not explain why the word "Redskin" specifically is acceptable (other than the fact that it is, presumably, not said "in a derogatory manner"). Furthermore, the comment makes a comparison to "The Fighting Irish" as a team name that is uttered "in a sense of pride" - the potential problems of this comparison have been mentioned in the analysis of comment number 1. Comment number 11 simply states that it is "an honor to be a pro team mascot" - the comment does not specify whether or not there are more or less offensive or honorable ways of using Native imagery in sports.

Comment number 12 expresses confusion about how one could possibly be opposed to Native mascots in sports - after all, "football and Indians" are quintessentially American. The comment refers to having one's heritage "emblazoned on one of America's most recognizable and iconic sports" as something one should be proud of - whether or not it is appropriate for non-Natives to be the ones making the choice to "emblazon" said heritage is not questioned. Comment number 13 characterizes the Redskins controversy as a non-issue - the person who wrote the comment does "not know any Native who is genuinely offended" and, more simply, claims that "no one cares" about the name. In fact, according to the commenter, "Redskins [merchandise] is cool" and lots of Native people "wear it even if [they] don't watch football". While this is, of course, a matter of opinion, one claim is simply not backed up by facts: plenty of Native people *do* care, as evidenced by the vast number of Native organizations that are opposed to Native mascotry in professional sports. As for comment number 14, a distinction is made between acceptable and unacceptable ways of using Native Americans and Native American imagery in sports mascots - a distinction which is not made in, for instance, comment number 11. According to comment 14, a name like "the Washington Savages" would not be appropriate, while "Redskins, Braves [and] Chiefs" are "fine". An explanation for this distinction is not given, although a possible explanation is that an adjective like "savage" is generally negatively loaded, while "brave" is considered more positive - although why "Redskins", the only racial slur in this particular sample of possible names, is considered appropriate is not made clear.

5.2 It's racist, offensive, or outdated

15. *"While the word "redskin" does not equal someone spitting in your face everyday the way it is used in the team name, it shows a callous attitude towards the things people who were called this had go through historically *(i.e. while they were being called "redskins", things like forced migration to hardly usable reservation land, the effects of which many native groups feel today through the highest rate of poverty experienced by any racial group in America right now). Frankly speaking, this seems much worse than being spit on. The people in charge of this may not be racist in a conventional sense, but it are at least apathetic of them to leave it that way."*

Comment number 15 posits that while the Washington team's name is not necessarily outright racist (like "someone spitting in your face everyday" would be), it shows, at the very least, a lack of consideration for historical context. The comment points out that the word "redskin" was used to describe Native Americans during a time when they were systematically and violently oppressed - a context which gives the word its negative connotation. Ignoring this context allows for its use in a contemporary setting. The difference, then, is between explicit and implicit racism - the former is malicious and violent, while the latter manifests itself in callousness and apathy, and perhaps even ignorance.

16. *"It's an ethnic slur. Not a tribe name. There is nobody who stands to benefit from licensing the name."*

17. *"I don't believe that "Redskins" is something worthy of being proud of. I think it's a slur and incredibly offensive. It's not a reminder of a beautiful part of my heritage, it's a reminder that Indians were systematically removed from America because of cultural and racial differences. If we were discussing a name like "Warriors" or "Chiefs", I wouldn't have any qualms, whatsoever. I'm perfectly happy with those mascots/logos."*

Comments 16 and 17 classify the Washington team's name as a slur. Comment number 16 may be implying that if the team was named after a specific tribe, there would not be as much of an issue - in other words, Native mascotry itself is not an issue, but the specific ethnic slur is. Comment number 17 is opposed to the claim that the Washington team's name celebrates Native culture, or that it is an expression of "pride" - according to the commenter, the name is

“a reminder that Indians were systematically removed from America because of cultural and racial differences” and that “Redskins” is not “something worthy of being proud of”. Historical context, again, gives the word its negative connotations. Comment number 17 also seems to say that Native mascotry in and of itself is not an issue, since the commenter is not opposed to the idea that a team would call itself the “Warriors” or the “Chiefs” - the racial slur is the issue, not Native mascots as a whole.

18. *“I don't think traditional alone is a good justification to keep things around. Even if it was in good taste when it was created. Things change, perceptions change, don't throw a fucking hissy fit about it, and deal with it like an adult.”*

Comment number 18 brings up an interesting point about tradition, and how it is used to justify questionable practices. I would argue that most people, even those opposed to changing the Washington team's name, would agree that if the Washington Redskins was founded today, the name would be in poor taste - why, then, is the name acceptable now merely because the team has existed for several decades? As the commenter points out, “perceptions change” - the casual mockery of Native Americans may have been deemed acceptable during the time the team was founded, but that is no longer the case.

19. *“How exactly do those names honor us? The problem with keeping Indian names isn't just the name itself. It's the stereotypes fans associate with the names which leads to them wearing offensive costumes and making fake war whoops, along with offensive gestures and news articles by the team's rivals.
Native team names do nothing positive for Indians and only perpetuate stereotypes.”*

20. [As a reply to the question “Why are you not allowed to dress up as an indian? I genuinely do not get the problem...”]

“Because often you are reducing many things about a culture into a silly costume and treat it disrespectfully. When you don a plumed headdress and dance around, it's only a costume and a silly dance. For a native tribes member, only the chiefs can wear that on special occasions and the dance has a special meaning too. Not to forget that for us, an indian is an indian, but for them, there are so many rich and diverse cultures. We just pick and choose from what we think is native tribes culture for shits and giggles and when your culture has been consistently mocked, it can hurt.”

Some earlier comments (e.g. comment number 17) have expressed the notion that Native mascots in sports are not inherently problematic, but instead that specific names, like “Redskins”, are offensive. Comment number 19, however, expresses concern about Native mascots as a whole - the issue with Native mascots and team names is “the stereotypes fans associate with the names”, and further, how these names validate fans’ choice to wear “offensive costumes” and make “fake war whoops”. In other words, Native team names and mascots enable a stereotype-based, adult version of ‘playing Indian’. Comment number 20, similarly, expresses concern about the whole concept of Native mascotry - the problem with Native mascots is that they reduce a culture (or indeed, a set of various cultures) “into a silly costume and treat it disrespectfully”.

21. *“Perhaps it's a sign to work with local native groups to come up with a name/mascot that depicts them in a way they want to be depicted rather than racist caricatures. You don't have to throw out the history of team names, just not be racist. It's not that hard.”*

22. *“There's a right way and a wrong way to use Native American mascots. Using names like Redskins or Redmen isn't the right way. But something like the Florida State Seminoles is fine, especially since I believe they get the blessing of the Seminole tribe.”*

Comments 21 and 22 argue that while Native mascots can be problematic, there are acceptable ways to use Native names and imagery in sports. Comment number 21 says that in order to avoid “racist caricatures” in sports mascotry, teams need to consult with Native communities and allow them to curate the way in which they are depicted. This, of course, still assumes that Native mascotry in sports should be allowed to exist, but merely in a less racist manner. Comment number 22 specifies that a name like “Redskins” is not an acceptable option, but that if a specific tribe consents to having its name used by a sports team, that is “fine”. Comments 21 and 22, then, both argue that inviting Native groups or tribes to participate in the naming process may mitigate the possible damage and offensiveness of a Native mascot. Having the right to self-determine the ways in which one is represented in media is obviously important, and these two comments offer self-determination as a possible solution to a complicated problem.

23. *"I can't remember if I was ever specifically called a redskin while growing up but I was definitely mocked in the exact same way these sports teams' fans like to celebrate and show support for their team."*

24. *"I didn't like being called a redskin after I realized my friend was using it as an insult. I thought it was funny at first (it just seemed so outdated), but it got old after being repeatedly called that when it became really obvious she was trying to bug me. I don't feel like getting up in arms over it, but it's real easy to change."*

Comments 23 and 24 recount experiences of people being mocked or insulted on the basis of their Native background. Comment number 23 explains that while the person in question does not recall ever being referred to with the word "redskin", they were instead "mocked in the exact same way [Redskins] fans like to celebrate and show support for their team". In other words, the songs, rituals, dances, imagery, and merchandise associated with Native sports mascots, which allegedly are meant to "honor" Native Americans and their traditions, may in fact feel like outright mockery for some Native individuals. Comment number 24, on the other hand, recounts an experience of being referred to with the "redskin" slur by a friend who, apparently, was trying to provoke a negative reaction - the offensiveness of the word, to this particular individual, did not become apparent until it became clear that the intent of the person uttering the word was malicious.

25. *"I'm far from a politically correct person, and the name is not personally offensive to me, since I am white. That said, the name is clearly offensive to some Native Americans, so the right thing to do would be to change it. I don't think the government or the NFL should force them to, but if Dan Snyder were a decent person, he would realize that the name is hurtful and look at alternatives."*

26. *"10% of native americans feeling offended is plenty to warrant a change."*

27. *"If a mascot is offensive to Native Americans, then take it at face value."*

28. *"The struggle of all native American people being used as dress up or the name of a sports team offends me."*

29. *“As a redskins fan I have pretty much given up even going into threads on r/redskins or r/nfl . I love the redskins but if the name is offending enough people to provoke 50 senators then maybe we should just change the damn name. I didn't become a redskins fan because I'm a fan of racial caricatures, and I can't imagine anybody else did either.”*

30. *“Who cares? It's an old, outdated, and blatantly offensive term. No one calls anything else by the color of a person's skin. Time to move on Washington fans.”*

31. *[In reference to European sports teams also using Native imagery] “It's only offensive when Americans are racist towards Indians? I don't care what continent you're from, if you do something mocking my culture, these hands transcend borders.”*

32. *[In reference to European sports teams also using Native imagery] “It is quite obvious this is offensive, and tiring and exasperating that this cancer has spread overseas. They say the Exeter team changed their name to Chiefs in 1999, Pizen adopted a logo and mascot and 2009 and Gent's mascot added in 2001. So these are recent developments and this is some new trend in Europe, not some remnant from the 1910s that has somehow been sitting around since then.”*

Comments 25-32 all classify Native mascots in general, or the Washington Redskins in particular, as “offensive”. Comments 25, 26, 27, and 29 argue that the fact that any number of Native Americans feel offended by Native mascotry, should be enough reason to make a change. Comment number 28 expresses frustration at the fact that Native American culture is made into a cheap mockery, and that Native peoples' struggles throughout America's history are “being used as dress up or the name of a sports team”. In other words, historical context (or, indeed, blatant lack thereof) is what makes the mascotry so upsetting. Comment number 30 simply classifies the Washington team's name as “an old, outdated and blatantly offensive term”. The comment also points out the absurdity of referring to “the color of a person's skin” in such a context, and that it is “time to move on”. Comments 31 and 32 discuss the fact that outside the U.S. context, some European sports teams use Native imagery in their mascots and logos, as well. Comment number 31 explains that being European (which would imply a geographical and historical distance from the atrocities committed against Native Americans on American soil) does not provide an excuse: Native mascotry is “offensive” and “mocking” regardless of “what continent you're from”. Comment number 32 laments the “cancer” that is

Native mascotry, as well as the fact that some European teams with Native-themed names are “recent developments” - not, as a team like the Washington Redskins might be trying to claim, validated by a long and noble history.

5.3 Appeal to worse problems

33. *“According to my family tree, I'm only 1/16 Native American, and I'm not a part of any tribe or recognized as indian by any official standards.*

That said, it doesn't bother me either way what the name of the team is. Compared to the suffering Native Americans have faced over the last 300 years, I really don't think the name of a football team should be any kind of an issue.

Further, I'd like to note that Native American Tribes have come forward and voiced that they find no offense in the team's name.

The whole name issue is an example of people not minding their own business and stirring up trouble simply because they can.”

34. *“You would think lefty SJWs would be more concerned about the 70% of native American children that don't graduate high school or the almost 50% that will experience alcohol abuse in their lifetime rather than team names.”*

→ Reply: *“It's possible to be concerned with two things at once you know?”*

→ Reply: *“Except we're not equally concerned. How much media coverage have you seen about this mascot thing vs. the rampant health, addiction, and poverty issues-- issues that are killing people--on the reservations in the last several years? This is an issue only because it's simple, controversial, emotional and provides easy material for the Mahers and Stewarts [two American left-leaning political commentators] of the world. If you're some kid growing up on the rez it's ultimately meaningless.”*

Comment number 33 correctly identifies that Native Americans have faced immense suffering throughout their colonial history. The commenter’s conclusion based on that fact, however, is that the controversial team name should not “be any kind of issue” - instead of, for instance, something along the lines of “let’s not add insult to injury by continuing to use Native American people as mascots”. Because worse things have happened, small problems should be ignored. This is a logical fallacy that we will henceforth refer to as “appeal to worse problems” - its correct name is “fallacy of relative privation” (*Logically Fallacious* website, n.d.). As will

become evident, all comments in this section of the analysis rely on this particular fallacy in one way or another. Comment number 33 further claims that “Native American Tribes have come forward and voiced that they find no offense in the team’s name” - an assertion that may be technically true (since there are sure to be a handful of tribes to have done so) but the fact of the matter is that a vast number of individuals, tribes, and organizations have voiced their opposition to the Redskins team name and mascot (*Wikipedia*, n.d.). Lastly, the comment dismisses concern about the practice as people choosing to stir up trouble for the sake of it, which, directly or otherwise, implies that opponents of Native mascotry (and the Washington Redskins in particular) are doing so insincerely. Comment number 34 attacks “lefty SJWs” (an acronym for “Social Justice Warrior”, which is a derogatory term meant to dismiss people’s concerns about various social and civil rights issues) for having misplaced priorities. Instead of focusing on “team names”, they ought to be worried about the high rates of alcoholism and the poor graduation rates in Native American communities. While substance abuse and graduation rates may be a genuine problem in various Native communities, referring to them in an attempt to steer the conversation away from racist mascots seems disingenuous at best. Acknowledging these particular issues in Native communities, in the way that the commenter does, also has an undertone of negative stereotyping. A reply to comment 34 correctly points out that it is possible to be worried about several things at once - meaning that we can work to combat both poor living conditions and racist mascots. This reply elicits another response, which claims that the mascot issue is given disproportionate media attention because it is “simple, controversial [and] emotional” and that unlike the severe poverty and health issues, the mascot issue isn’t actually “killing people”. While this certainly appears reasonable - after all, a mascot cannot kill you or drive you into poverty - one cannot help but consider, again, Fryberg’s psychological study and the disproportionate suicide rates among Native youth.

35. “I think they should do something to actually benefit Native Americans such as the N7 Fund. I understand that they intend to do more than just push for the removal of Native American mascots from sports teams but it doesn't actually help the issues that Native Americans have in their reservations.

The change is necessary but we must be wary of the "feel good" movement this may lead to. We may "fix" this apparent issue but failed to actually help the reservations which need support and help. Many reservations have crisis level problems with, drugs, gangs, suicides, abuse, and obesity. However, we focus on removing a mascot from a sports team assuming it will make it all better with a people we as a nation in the past forced

off their lands. We won't be able to restore their ancestral homelands but we can actually help them create a strong community and honor their culture properly.

Note: I'm very passionate about this, I grew up as a city-native but once I got into High School I started learning more about my heritage (I'm very mixed so I don't claim any lineage). I've spent time with the Grand Ronde and Yakama communities helping with organizing basketball competitions and other events."

36. *"Amazing. American Indians have disproportionately high rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, illiteracy, domestic violence, teen pregnancy, obesity, diabetes, poverty....almost every self destructive and life ruining problem imaginable, and we're arguing about fucking sports mascots. This country has no sense of priority."*

Comment number 35, much like comment number 34, argues that something should be done to "actually benefit" Native American communities - after all, removing a mascot does not "actually help the issues that Native Americans have in their reservations". This, of course, is not a counterfactual or irrational statement, but the argument falls apart when the comment warns against "feel good" movements that don't accomplish anything tangible, and claims that proponents of removing an offensive mascot assume "it will make it all better". It is not, however, the case that anti-mascot activists actually believe that removing harmful Native mascots is a magical solution to complex economic realities or intergenerational trauma. Removing offensive mascots is, at the very least, one small step in the process of allowing Native Americans to define themselves in the public eye. Comment number 36 goes on to list issues facing Native American communities - like "illiteracy, domestic violence [and] obesity" - and laments that the U.S. has "no sense of priority" because the mascot issue is given so much media attention in relation to these *real*, "self destructive and life ruining" problems. As long as these issues are not fixed, the thinking goes, we should not concern ourselves with something as frivolous as sports mascots. The question is: are we only allowed to discuss the mascot issue once poverty and health issues no longer exist in Native communities? How "perfect" must a community be before we are allowed to address the casual racism it is forced to deal with?

37. *"[Article being discussed in thread] brings up good points about real issues faced by native americans today (alcoholism, suicide, poverty). There are real issues that all Americans should be concerned about and PC idiots are more focused on the names of football teams."*

38. *“Yeah. That's the bleeding heart PC mob. Ready to have a fight over anything, not actually addressing problems but fixing the little things that in their mind are equal to wild fire”*

Comment number 37 relies on the same ‘appeal to worse problems’ logic that earlier comments do. This comment, however, adds the element of “PC idiots” being the culprit. Political correctness, apparently, is what stops us from considering “real issues faced by native americans (sic)” and instead makes us obsess over “names of football teams”. Of course, these comments don’t consider that casual racism (in the form of offensive sports mascots) could very well be considered real, tangible issues by the people and the communities that are reduced to stereotypical mascots. Comment number 38 continues to lament the “bleeding heart PC mob” for mindlessly picking fights “over anything” instead of “actually addressing problems”. The PC mob, according to this comment, is too busy “fixing the little things” to consider what actually matters. The same question that I posed in the analysis of comment number 35 applies here, as well: how “perfect” must a community be before it is acceptable to address the casual racism that is forced upon said community by the mainstream media?

39. *“TIL 90% of American Indians arent whiny assholes who focus their energy on stupid shit when they could work to save their dying heritage”*

40. *[in reference to studies pointing to the psychological damage caused by Native mascots] “Won't somebody think of the children? When an AA Gent mascot can ruin an American youth's self esteem I think you have more worrying matters on your hands.”*

Comments 39 and 40 have a particularly malicious tone, at least compared to the earlier comments in this section that, at the very least, attempt to cloak their disdain for the mascot controversy in worries about poverty and social issues on reservations. Comment number 39, which most likely is referring to the Washington Post poll that claims that 90% of Native Americans do not find the Redskins team name offensive, applauds the 90% of Native Americans for not being “whiny assholes” - which would lead us to conclude that those remaining 10% who do take offense to the casual use of a racial slur are simply being “whiny” (for the sake of my commentary of this comment, I will assume that the Washington Post’s

findings are valid and accurate). This feels like a truly backhanded compliment coming from a place of white supremacy - intentionally or not - and the message is clear: Natives who do not fight against anti-Native racism are *the good ones*. Natives who oppose anti-Native racism are a nuisance - they do not know their place. The comment goes on to suggest that Native Americans ought to focus on saving their “dying heritage” - which, of course, ignores the possibility that fighting inaccurate, anachronistic, and offensive cultural portrayals of Native cultures could be a perfectly valid way of saving Native Americans’ “dying heritage”. Furthermore, the idea of Native Americans as a dying people is yet another trope which has been used to justify neglect and abuse throughout history.

5.4 Only whites, non-Natives, liberals, SJWs, or the PC mob care about this

41. *“When the ‘Washington Professional Football Team’ thing started a few years ago I mostly wanted the Redskins to change their name so I could stop fucking hearing about it. The only people I heard going on about that were white people who wanted to impress you with how woke they were.”*

42. *“In the old days the cool kids met behind the dumpster to smoke cigarettes, now they exchange blog links and literature on social issues”*

Comments 41 and 42 classify the justified concern about racist mascots as trendy social activism - in other words, the “cool kids” who criticize the use of Native imagery in professional sports are merely taking part in a type of social justice Olympics. The implication is that the (mostly white) people who oppose the practice are doing so not because of any genuine moral concerns, but because they want to appear “woke” to the rest of the world. While it certainly is possible that there are people who express socially progressive opinions because they feel that it is ‘the popular thing to do’, it seems highly unlikely that that is the dominant reason for partaking in social activism - especially since socially progressive views are often met with intense backlash (some of the comments in this very thesis serve as evidence of that).

43. *“How does the modern leftist express their feeling of superiority over other people? Exploit demographics they perceive as lesser than them. Pat self on back for being morally righteous for “helping” people when in reality they are only trying to “represent” them to control those they see as vulnerable for personal political gain.*

Then, if someone disagrees, in an act of pure narcissism and desperation, claim to know what is better for them and call them a traitor to their (insert demographic here). After all, the leftist is their voice, not them!”

44. *“These manufactured controversies are so tedious. And they're usually mounted by virtue-signaling busybodies who behave paternalistically toward groups to which they don't belong.*

‘You're not offended? Well, I'll be offended FOR YOU.’

We need to stop paying attention to these condescending social justice warriors, who behave so paternalistically toward groups to whom they feel superior. The irony is that their very paternalism is a sign of the racism they claim to be saving us all from. ‘Well, the Native Americans are too stupid to be offended. So we'll be offended for them. We'll teach them.’

Yeah, Junior. They don't need you to ‘teach’ them. Stop being such a racist insofar as you assume that need YOU to lead them.”

45. *“As a Native American can we please stop patronizing us? We're not children. We don't need you liberal inner city whites to get offended on our behalf and go off on a moral crusade. We have a sense of humor, a sense of irony, a thick skin and we understand how the world works.*

P.S. Go Redskins”

46. *“Not me, but my friend's brother's wife's sister's customer's cousin knows a Native American on a reservation so I feel offended for them.*

Honestly, this is how a lot of the people sound when they say they are against the name”

47. *“This sounds like another case of SJWs getting offended on the behalf of other people. We have school mascots such as the Spartans but hardly do you see a Greek person getting angry over it or a SJW getting offended on the behalf of Greek people. Nonsense like banning Indigenous American mascot names will only further remove Indigenous Americans from US culture. We'll just have more teams named after the Spartans or another group of White European warriors which SJWs will later complain about.”*

48. *“Typical white liberal projecting.
If Indians aren’t offended, they’ll be offended for the Indians.”*

Comments 43-48 all criticize people for being offended on behalf of Native Americans. The comments make it seem as if Native Americans have no opinions on the matter which, ironically, ignores Native voices and activism - while the comments are accusing “modern leftists” for doing exactly that. Comment number 43 classifies “leftists” concerns about Native mascots as an expression of superiority over Native Americans. According to the comment, people are acting in a condescending and self-serving manner when they oppose racist practices (in this case, Native sports mascots) - they are “representing” a demographic against the wishes of that demographic. While I do not agree with the way the comment dismisses genuine concerns about racism, it does indirectly bring up the concept of *white saviourism*, which is a problem that needs to be addressed. It is not impossible that there is an element of white saviourism when it comes to the majority (in this case, white people) talking about, or even talking over, the concerns of the minority (in this case, Native Americans). If it truly was the case that all Native Americans are completely unconcerned about the mascot issue, and white Americans insert themselves into the discussion, claiming that Native Americans *should* care about the issue, then it would be fair to classify the majority group’s behaviour as patronizing white saviourism - but the fact is that there are Native American individuals and groups that *do* oppose Native mascotry.

Comment number 44 expresses similar frustrations, accusing “condescending social justice warriors” of paternalism, and goes on to say that this paternalism “is a sign of the racism they claim to be saving us all from” - fighting racism is the *real* racism. The comment accuses “social justice warriors” of being offended on behalf of Native Americans because they do not think Native Americans are intelligent or informed enough to be offended. This, again, ignores the decades of Native-led activism against the use of Native mascots - however, the legitimate criticism of possible white saviourism needs to be pointed out here, as well. Comment number 45 is written by a self-described Native American, and expresses some of the same concerns that comments 43 and 44 do. The comment expresses frustration over the “patronizing” behaviour of those (non-Natives, presumably) who are opposed to Native mascotry, and criticizes “liberal inner city whites” for going on a “moral crusade” on behalf of Native Americans who don’t take offense to the use of Native imagery in sports mascots. The commenter takes pride in Native Americans’ (implied by the use of “we”) “sense of humor”

and “thick skin”. “We understand how the world works” is an interesting statement - does it imply that some forms of racism are always going to be inevitable, and the reasonable thing to do is to accept it? Or does it imply that fighting to correct a particular form of racism (in this case Native sports mascots) is a sign of being naïvely disconnected from reality? We can only speculate, since the commenter does not elaborate on what is meant by the statement. The comment ends with “go Redskins”, which tells us that the commenter in question is a fan of the Washington football team. Comment number 46 makes a mockery of those who are opposed to Native mascotry on the basis of a far-fetched affiliation with Native American individuals. The comment does not consider the possibility that those who are opposed to Native sports mascots may do so based on independently formed moral concerns, research and/or logical reasoning, regardless of affiliation with Native communities and individuals. Comment number 47 goes on to criticize “SJWs” for being “offended on the behalf of other people”, mirroring the sentiments found in earlier comments. The comment makes a comparison to the Spartans mascot, and how ridiculous it would be if Greek people were offended by it, or, even worse, if “SJWs” were offended on behalf of Greeks - although the asymmetry of comparing Native American mascots to Spartan imagery in sports mascots has been addressed in the analysis of comment number 9. The comment goes on to claim that if, at some point in the future, sports teams stop using Native Americans as their mascots, it “will only further remove Indigenous Americans from US culture” - in other words, visibility in the form of (arguably racist) mascots is better than no visibility at all. In fact, once most teams are “named after the Spartans or another group of White European warriors”, then “SJWs” will surely be upset. Lastly, comment number 48 simply states that non-Natives being opposed to the use of Native imagery in sports mascots is a sign of “typical white liberal projecting”, where said white liberals are offended on behalf of “the Indians”. This, much like many other comments in this particular section, completely ignores decades of activism, led by Native Americans, which has been working tirelessly to eliminate “Indian” mascots. One might argue that this erasure is a sign of the exact same “condescending paternalism” that the “SJWs” are being accused of.

49. “[N]obody really gives a fuck accept the hyper sensitive and a few Indians.”

50. “SJWs ruin everything”

Comments 49 and 50 convey a certain type of “no fun allowed anymore” sentiment. Comment number 49 expresses frustration about the fact that the mascot issue would not be an issue in

the first place if it wasn't for those who are "hyper sensitive" - and, of course, the "few Indians" who care about the issue. Interestingly, the commenter does not express much concern about the idea that "a few Indians" might be opposed to Native mascotry - this minority is simply dismissed as unimportant. This brings to mind the flipside of the oft-cited Washington Post poll: if, indeed, 1 in 10 Native Americans are opposed to the Washington team's name, is that not in and of itself cause for concern? Comment number 50 goes on to say that "SJWs ruin everything", which is a particularly succinct way of saying "it used to be acceptable to partake in offensive traditions, but now people are pointing out that those traditions are offensive".

51. *"Personally, I think white liberals are the most upset out of anyone. And I find it disgusting that some commentators are taking a 'moral stance' not to say the name, but will happily point out how great dog-killer Michael Vick and wife-beater Ray Rice are when they score touchdowns. But this is what makes me angriest. Terry Bradshaw went on a Fox News show called The Independents and was asked why he is so passionate about the name changing. (paraphrasing)*

He replied, 'Because it's basically calling them the Washington N-Words!'

To which Kennedy (Yes the MTV VJ from the 90's, Kennedy) correctly pointed out, 'No it isn't. I know you think you are doing good with this stance, but if I were black, I would actually be offended by that, because it's devaluing such a horrific word. Not everything in life is the N-word.'"

52. *"I keep telling people this too, its mostly people that have nothing to do with Native American Culture that call it a disgrace [...]"*

53. *"It's funny, because the only people who take offenses to to the term 'redskin' are liberals suffering from 'white guilt'. You never hear a native actually complaining about the use of these teams name."*

54. *"I hope everyone realizes the people with an issue with the name are a bunch of politically correct white pussies"*

55. *"Many are proud of it. It's the white liberals screaming"*

56. [In reference to the idea that only white people care about / are offended by Native mascots] *“White people? You know we (Native Americans) are alive today and have our own voices right? I guess you think only white people find the Cleveland Indian's logo racist, or think that the name Redskins is racist?”*

Comments 51-55 all claim, in varying ways, that non-Native people (predominantly a combination of “white” and “liberal”) are the only ones raising concerns about the issue of Native mascotry - but as is pointed out in the analysis of earlier comments (e.g. comment number 48), this claim ignores, consciously or otherwise, the ongoing activism of Native communities and organisations. Comment number 51, after pointing out that “white liberals are the most upset out of anyone”, goes on to describe a television segment where two individuals debate the legitimacy of comparing The Washington Redskins to something like “the Washington N-Words” - a problem which will be covered in more detail in a later section. Comment number 52 laments that it is “mostly people that have nothing to do with Native American culture” who are opposed to the idea of Native mascotry. In addition to the already mentioned counterargument (i.e. many Native people *have* been and still *are* actively working to end the practice) this line of reasoning also does not allow for the possibility of non-Native allies, who may be committed to dismantling racism, even if they are not personally targeted by it.

Comment number 53 draws a connection between (presumably white) liberals opposing Native mascots and the concept of “white guilt”. While it is not completely unreasonable to interpret anti-racism work as a form of atonement for the centuries of oppression and violence that colonizers (i.e. white people) inflicted upon Native communities, it is not necessarily fair to dismiss legitimate anti-racism efforts as a self-centered expression of “white guilt”. The comment goes on to claim that “you never hear a native actually complaining” about Native mascots (and the Washington Redskins in particular) but this, as has been made clear, is simply incorrect. What’s more, “never hearing” Native voices on the matter may be due to the relative lack of Native visibility in mainstream media - although it may also be due to willful ignorance. Comment number 54 adds a layer of casual misogyny to its criticism of excessive political correctness by accusing “politically correct white pussies” of being the only ones who are opposed to the use of Native imagery in sports mascots. The misogynist epithet actually reveals an interesting underlying attitude about social justice movements - i.e. that they are the domain of weakness and oversensitivity, rather than e.g. genuine ethical concerns or research-based

activism. Comment number 55 goes on to claim that “many”, presumably Native Americans, “are proud” of the Washington team’s name, and that it’s “the white liberals” who are complaining. Referring to the pride that “many” Native Americans feel about the name (which may very well be true for individual people) plays into the narrative that people like Dan Snyder have worked hard to popularize. Lastly, comment number 56 provides a counternarrative to the idea that only white people are concerned about Native mascots - the comment points out that Native Americans “are alive today” and are perfectly capable of voicing their own concerns about the matter.

57. [In response to a news story of a basketball team at the University of Northern Colorado naming itself The Fighting Whites] “And nobody was offended” and “Wow. Imagine that. No enraged, offended backlash whatsoever.”

Comment number 57 makes a mockery of the idea that Native Americans may genuinely feel insulted by Native sports mascots. The comment refers to a team name that was created as a satirical response to the Native mascot controversy - in other words, the “Fighting Whites” mascot was not created as an attempt to “honour white culture” (in the way that Native mascots allegedly “honour” Native Americans). The comment also completely disregards, intentionally or otherwise, the asymmetry of comparing long-standing racism against Native Americans to the idea of “racism” against white people (who, after all, are the privileged majority group in an American context, and as such cannot be affected by systemic racism). The comment takes on a sarcastically congratulatory tone in praising people (specifically, white people, it is fair to assume) for not being “offended” or “enraged” about the Fighting Whites, and the implication is that those who *do* take offense to racialized mascots are wrong in doing so. This attitude towards people being upset about racism fails to take into account that being “enraged” or “offended” is not necessarily a voluntary, conscious choice, especially when it comes to the harsh realities of ethnicity-based discrimination. To make a comparison to physical violence, one does not ‘choose’ to feel pain if one is kicked or punched. Furthermore, the congratulatory tone is built upon the assumption that being able to remain stoic and unbothered in the face of injustice and racism is a positive trait - and that failing to do so is a sign of weakness.

58. [In reference to an article about Adidas offering to help eliminate Native mascots] “This is a great business move because they still profit from the sale of numerous Native American imagery in professional teams, but get the press for trying to be PC.”

Comment number 58 criticizes Adidas' offer to redesign Native mascots as a thinly veiled business strategy - "trying to be PC" is merely a way to attract attention and make a profit. While it is certainly possible that a large corporation like Adidas is prioritizing its branding and potential profits in offering to change Native mascots - rather than doing it for purely ethical reasons - it does beg the question: who *is* allowed to voice concerns about Native mascots? If the comments in this analysis are anything to go by, Native people opposed to Native mascots are "whiny", and non-Native people doing so are condescending, overly sensitive "lefty SJWs". The implication is also that entities that oppose racist practices (in this case, Native American mascots) are simply weaponizing social justice issues.

59. *"I see how it can be insensitive, but I feel like people shouldn't be so politically correct all the time. It really is making things harder."*

60. *"Can we stop pandering to PC bullshit now?"*

61. *"I understand that they think what they're doing will somehow be helpful, but it will just backfire. Nothing good ever comes out of making a PC statement."*

Comments 59-61 characterize political correctness as inherently negative, without elaborating on why that is the case. Comment number 59 acknowledges that reducing Native Americans to a mascot "can be insensitive", but still argues that it is wrong to be "so politically correct all the time". A generalization, i.e. 'political correctness is bad', is derived from a very specific controversy, i.e. 'people are opposed to Native American mascots'. As for what is meant by "making things harder" by opposing insensitive racial mascots, an explanation is not given. "Harder" for whom? Comment number 60 characterizes opposition to Native American sports mascots as "pandering" to a politically correct agenda. The comment does not acknowledge the possibility that a desire to end the use of insensitive Native mascots might be genuine - as opposed to a calculated effort to act in accordance with a "PC" agenda, for example. Comment number 61 warns about anti-mascot efforts backfiring, and "nothing good ever [coming] out of making a PC statement", but it is not made clear why either of these statements are true.

62. *"Honest question: Is the controversy over mascots real or manufactured?"*

63. *[In reference to the concept of changing the name of a team called The Savannah Savages] “Lol then theyll bitch about being erased from the public. What people have to understand is that these are proffesional victims they will never not be offended.”*

64. Banning all Native imagery/mascots in sports characterized as *“a PC carpet bombing”*

In speculating whether or not the controversy surrounding Native American mascots is real to begin with, comment number 62 erases, much like some earlier comments in this analysis, the undeniably real anti-mascot activism that Native Americans have led for decades. It is also not clarified what a completely “manufactured” controversy would entail - would it mean that the people and organizations (Native and non-Native alike) are taking part in a large-scale scam of some kind? The idea of a “manufactured” controversy evokes an image of a malicious, manipulative plot, rather than a sincere social movement. Comment number 63 argues that if Native mascots are removed, then people who advocated for their removal (in this case, Native Americans in particular) will instead complain about “being erased from the public”. The implication is that these “professional victims”, i.e. anti-mascot Native Americans, are simply complaining for the sake of complaining, and that regardless of outcome, “they will never not be offended”. The problem with this type of reasoning is that it classifies any sort of social activism by and for a marginalized group as performative victimhood, without any connection to real-life injustices - this effectively dismisses civil rights movements as people “bitching” about nothing (the gendered insult ought to be pointed out here, as well). In other words, silence and complicity is preferable, because fighting for change is simply a sign of wanting to be a martyr. Comment number 64 argues that banning *all* Native mascots is excessive political correctness, calling the idea a “PC carpet bombing”. This reasoning presumes that Native mascots are not inherently problematic, but instead relies on the idea that some Native mascots should be accepted, while some (presumably the most obviously offensive ones) can reasonably be criticized.

5.5 Would be unacceptable with [other offensive name]

65. *“For one day I think everyone should refer to Dan Snyder's football team as the Washington Dead Kike Babies. Perhaps it might stir some human sensitivities in this man - then again, he may be nothing more than a morally corrupt asshole.”*

66. *"I completely agree with Redskins. If you wouldn't call a team the Jews, or the Darkies, or whatever else, you can't call them the Redskins either. But I'm not so sure with teams like the Blackhawks, Chiefs, Braves, etc. I honestly don't see what there is to be offended about there."*

67. *"Imagine if there was something like the San Francisco Chinks, The Houston Wetbacks, the New York Jews or the Louisiana Niggers. One way to fix the issue is to give every team a racist name...or maybe that is just an absolutely terrible idea."*

68. *"Redskin is a racial slur and lots of Native Americans do find it offensive. Imagine if there were a team called the Negros or the Wetbacks. That would obviously be way over the line and incredibly offensive but for some reason Dan Snyder refuses to understand that."*

69. *"Lol I'm a fairly conservative guy in some aspects, including that I think people get offended too easily. However, I don't understand how people are against this. It's literally naming a team a racial slur. How would they feel if there was a team out there called the New York Kikes or the Atlanta Niggers?"*

70. *"Love the recognition, but think the name should change. Would we stand for a team called 'The Niggers'?"*

71. *"Imagine teams called the Cleveland Crackers, the Yarmouth Yids, the Nashville Niggers, the Raleigh Ragsheads and you get the idea."*

Comments 65-71 all provide comparisons to various hypothetical team names (which are based on either ethnicity, nationality, race, or religion) in an effort to highlight the problematic nature of the Washington team's name. Comment number 65 alludes to the fact that Daniel Snyder, the owner of the Washington team, is Jewish, and speculates whether or not Snyder would be opposed to a team name that flippantly refers to dead Jewish babies. The comparison is, for self-evident reasons, an uncomfortable and arguably offensive one, but considering the history of the word "redskin" being used to refer to the Native men, women, and, indeed, children,

being hunted for bounties (see chapter 3.1 for discussion on the etymology of the word “redskin”), it is not entirely far-fetched to make such a comparison - however tasteless and inappropriate it may be. The comment goes on to describe Snyder as “morally corrupt” and that he is thus unlikely to change his stance on the current team name. Comment number 66 argues that as long as it would be unacceptable to name a team “the Jews” or “the Darkies”, a name like “the Redskins” should not be deemed acceptable, either. The implication appears to be that team names referring to religious affiliation or skin colour are inappropriate. The comment does go on to make an exception for team names like “Blackhawks”, “Chiefs” and “Braves”, perhaps because they do not explicitly refer to skin colour, although they do fairly transparently refer to Native Americans. Comment number 67 makes a similar comparison to hypothetical ethnicity-related team names (such as “Chinks”, referring to Chinese or, more broadly, East Asian people, and “Wetbacks”, referring to Mexican immigrants) and jokingly suggests that if one team insists on keeping an offensive name (i.e. Washington Redskins) then all teams should have “a racist name”. Comment number 68 clearly classifies the word “redskin” as a racial slur, and refers to the fact that “lots of Native Americans” find the team name offensive. The comment asks readers to consider a situation where there is a sports team called “the Negros” or “the Wetbacks”, and how that “would obviously be way over the line and incredibly offensive”, and goes on to speculate why the Washington team’s owner “refuses to understand” why that is the case.

Comment number 69 also recognizes the word “redskin” as a racial slur, and, much like other comments in this section, rhetorically asks whether or not the general public would accept sports teams being called something like “the New York Kikes” or “the Atlanta Niggers”. The use of a racial slur in as casual a setting as sports mascotry is identified as unambiguously inappropriate by the commenter who, in their own words, is “a fairly conservative” person and admits to thinking that “people get offended too easily”. It is interesting to see a self-identified conservative describe their opposition to racial slurs as being somewhat at odds with their political affiliation - a self-aware, and quite stunning, admission. Comment number 70 appreciates “the recognition” (of Native Americans by teams such as the Washington Redskins, presumably) but does “think the name should change”. Much like in earlier comments, it is asked whether we would “stand for a team called ‘The Niggers’” - if one racial slur is obviously unacceptable, why is the other still up for debate? Lastly, comment number 71 provides another set of presumably unacceptable team names as a comparison point for the Washington team’s current name, namely “the Cleveland Crackers, the Yarmouth Yids, the Nashville Niggers,

[and] the Raleigh Ragsheads”. This sample of names is fairly similar to the ones given in earlier comments, with one notable exception, namely “Crackers” - a word that refers to white people. While the connotation of the word “cracker” is rarely positive (and could thus, if only technically, be described as a racial slur), the issue of asymmetry when it comes to racism and power structures must be considered. This asymmetry is briefly mentioned in the analysis of comment number 57. When it comes to a demographic that has been powerful and privileged for virtually all of a country’s history (as white people have, in the context of the U.S.), the consequences of a word like “cracker” are simply not comparable to the consequences of words that disparage less powerful, more marginalized groups, like the way “redskin” disparages Native Americans. In a completely ahistorical, context-free setting, all racial slurs would, ironically, be considered equal. It is, however, not necessarily the case that the commenter in question is attempting to equate the damage of a slur like the N-word with a word like “cracker”, but is simply providing a range of examples.

72. “Consider if they were named the Washington Black Faces or the Washington Chinks. Something that would never happen in this day and age, yet we still have a team named the Redskins and people aren't fazed.

People will say it's 'tradition' now or that it's an honor...it's not, it's an entire race of people being used as stereotyped mascots.”

73. “Yeah, I think the only reason ‘Washington Redskins’ seems okay to people is because people are used to it and it's been normalized. Any other racially charged name would seem ridiculous, but because Native names have been around forever they don't.”

Comments 72 and 73 both allude to the idea that the perceived acceptability of Native sports mascots may be due to a slow and steady normalization process. Comment number 72 argues that naming a sports team something like the “Black Faces” or the “Chinks” would surely “never happen in this day and age” - and that people who are not bothered by the Washington team’s name may feel that way because, at this point, it is “tradition”. This does bring up an interesting argument in favour of getting rid of the “Redskins” name: if the team was founded today, and given its name today, would we (and should we) deem it acceptable? Is the team’s current name acceptable only because it was given during ‘a different time’? Comment number 73 also points out normalization as an issue: the Washington team’s name is not deemed shocking or hurtful for the simple reason that “people are used to it”. The comment goes on to

say that “racially charged” names - like the numerous hypothetical examples provided by previous comments - would most likely be deemed “ridiculous”, but due to the fact that “Native names have been around forever”, we are unlikely to have a viscerally negative reaction to Native mascots in general (and a slur like “redskins” in particular).

74. *[In reference to a picture of made-up ethnic logos drawn in the style of Chief Wahoo]*
“None of those other ones would fly in today's world, however the indian one is fine because there are so few of us that most people probably do not even know we're alive today, doing our thing. We only make up around 2% of the population.”

75. *“I'm an eighth American Indian (Creek & Choctaw), and I honestly can't understand how people DON'T see why "Redskins" is offensive. I think society kind of forgets that there are still Indians here sometimes, because it is such a small population. I always just ask people to think about using any other derogatory term for other races as a team name. Naming a mascot after a race of people is a little weird, but using a slur as a name is certainly offensive and crossing a line.”*

76. *“If the team was named the Washington Blackskins, everyone would be able to see how it is racially offensive. Since no one actually knows any Native Americans, the story just gets ignored.”*

Comments 74-76 allude to the relative invisibility of Native Americans in mainstream U.S. culture as a possible explanation for why Native mascots are deemed acceptable by so many - an “out of sight, out of mind” type of dilemma. Comment number 74 says that people tend to think that an offensive Native mascot (in this case Chief Wahoo) “is fine because there are so few of us [Native Americans] that most people probably do not even know that we’re alive today”. This comment encapsulates the danger of being chronically underrepresented in public life - if most people (in a U.S. context) are not aware of Native people simply *existing* in contemporary America, then Native issues are bound to be largely ignored by the general public. This problem is discussed in the Reclaiming Native Truth report:

This lack of visibility and relevance in modern culture dehumanizes Native peoples and erodes support for Native issues. As an example, college students unaware or in denial of the prejudice, bias and discrimination faced by Native Americans are less supportive of Native issues. The good news is that when people are exposed to accurate facts about Native American history and contemporary life, they believe the information, feel

cheated that they didn't learn it in school, and quickly become more open to a new narrative. This effect is even more powerful when delivered by contemporary Native Americans. (Reclaiming Native Truth 2018: 8)

Comment number 75 expresses disbelief at the idea that people would argue that the Washington team's name *isn't* offensive, and speculates that a possible explanation for the lenient attitude towards using a racial slur in such a casual manner could be due to a lack of visibility: "society kind of forgets that there are still Indians here". The comment also describes the act of asking people who are unsure about the Washington team's mascot/name to consider if other racial slurs would be acceptable team names, as a way of bringing attention to the absurdity of the practice. The comment points out that the idea of using any ethnic group as a sports mascot is strange enough, but doing it in a way that uses an actual racial slur "is certainly offensive and crossing a line". Comment number 76 makes a comparison to a hypothetical team name to highlight the problematic nature of the Washington team's name - a team called "the Washington Blackskins" would surely be identified as "racially offensive". "Blackskin" is actually a very helpful comparison, since it is the closest possible equivalent to the word "redskin" (if we, for a moment, ignore the fact that "redskin" is a more established racial epithet than "blackskin" is). Because it uses a value-neutral adjective to describe skin colour (i.e. "black") and combines it with the word "skin", it could be perceived as a fairly value-neutral racial descriptor (as opposed to a slur like the N-word, for instance) - but it *still* feels intuitively problematic to imagine a team being called "the Blackskins". The comment goes on to say, like the two comments before it, that the relative invisibility of Native Americans in U.S. culture might be to blame: "no one actually knows any Native Americans", so the issue of offensive Native mascots is easy to overlook.

77. *"If the Indians have to go then the Cowboys and Hillbillies and other stereotypes have to go as well."*

78. *"I find Notre Dame's fighting Irish to be offensive as an irish-american myself. I guess since it's a private school and irish people are white that they get a pass."*

Comment number 77 compares a team name with the word "Indians" in it (and, presumably, any accompanying logo or mascot that may be deemed inappropriate) with team names like the "Cowboys" and "Hillbillies". The comment, to its credit, acknowledges that the "Indians" imagery relies on stereotypes - the question is, are the stereotypes associated with Native

mascots (in this case the “Indians”) directly comparable with the stereotypes that terms like “cowboy” or “hillbilly” evoke? “Indian”, after all, is a racial term, referring to a specific ethnic minority, while “cowboy” is a profession, rather than a racial category. “Hillbilly”, while its connotations are “often disparaging” (*Merriam-Webster*), simply refers to the referent’s rural background and/or low socio-economic status. So while all three words may be argued to rely on stereotypes - negative or otherwise - only one of them is explicitly referring to race. In other words, “Indians”, as a team name and mascot, has the potential to be racist, while “Cowboys” or “Hillbillies” do not. The comment, while acknowledging that team names like the “Indians” are based on stereotypes, may be argued to draw a false equivalence between the three names.

Comment number 78 identifies the commenter as an Irish-American, and expresses dislike for the Notre Dame Fighting Irish team name, describing it as “offensive” (a remark that contradicts an assertion made by whoever wrote comment number 1, saying that Irish people do not “go around complaining Notre Dame has a racist name”). We can not necessarily infer intent from online comments such as these, but it is entirely possible that the commenter (comment number 78) may be joking, or being hyperbolic for the sake of argumentation. If we assume that the comment is sincere, for the sake of this analysis, a few things need to be pointed out. Feeling hurt by a portrayal like the Fighting Irish is entirely valid, since such an emotion is subjective and personal - investigating whether or not anonymous commenters’ expressed emotions are genuine is both unproductive and impossible. What is of more interest is the comment’s second sentence, where it is argued (sincerely or sarcastically, we cannot know for certain) that since “Irish people are white”, the team gets “a pass” for its “offensive” portrayal of Irish people. The complex issue concerning the discrimination Irish people have faced in U.S. history and the problematic nature of calling that discrimination racist is briefly discussed in the analysis of comment number 1 - while anti-Irish sentiment certainly led to Irish immigrants being persecuted unfairly, the comparison with racial hatred towards Native Americans is not entirely symmetrical. The comment does, perhaps inadvertently, allude to this asymmetry by saying that unflattering portrayals may “get a pass” because they portray white people - after all, ‘racism against white people’ does not carry the same systemic, historical weight that racism against other racial minorities does, in a context (e.g. modern-day North America) that has centered, and still centers, whiteness. Lastly, the statement “Irish people are white”, further complicates the issue. Whites certainly form the majority of Irish people (*Wikipedia*, n.d.), and my own commentary on the issue of racism and Irishness in the U.S. does implicitly rely on that assumption, but in actual, demographic terms, ‘Irish’ does not equal ‘white’.

79. *“It does seem a little strange to me that no one ever brings that same argument up about the Celtics, Vikings, Fighting Irish, Spartans, or Trojans.”*

80. *“I have attended school with pilgrims, cavaliers, and knights as mascots - are those racist too? I honestly don't see any difference between an English knight or a Cherokee warrior as mascots - maybe they are caricatures, but they are also a celebration. I think it wise to get the blessing of whomever is being represented, and some people take their interpretations too far, but I don't see how it's inherently racist.”*

81. *“I'm not trying to trivialize the issue or deny your sensibilities to it, but are the Cleveland Cavaliers racist too? I mean, that is also technically an ethnic caricature. Or what about knights or pilgrims as mascots? I think in many peoples' eyes these are more a celebration of revered characters like warriors and such. Of course some people take it too far, or ignorantly misrepresent what they are about, but if we do away with Native American mascots then we have to do away with others as well. I cannot possibly fathom someone seeing English knights as racist, because we all know that knights and warriors and the like are revered and respected, and that's why they are chosen as mascots.”*

Comments 79-81 bring up arguments similar to that of comment number 77. The backlash against Native mascots and team names is questioned and dismissed because of the relative lack of controversy around other types of team names. Comment number 79 mentions names like the “Celtics, Vikings, Fighting Irish, Spartans, [and] Trojans” as examples of non-controversies, and appears to imply that because these names are more or less never discussed as possibly offensive or racist, Native mascots should not be a problem, either. “The Fighting Irish”, as a possibly offensive but arguably *not* racist team name, is discussed in the analysis of comments 1 and 78 (if we understand racism as, in addition to simply targeting an ethnic group, being intertwined with a larger system of unequal power structures and a history of disenfranchisement based on skin colour). “The Celtics” occupies much of the same grey area as “the Fighting Irish” does - “Celtic” is an ethnic and linguistic category, and may thus be argued to be inherently problematic (or at the very least uncomfortable) when used as a mascot or team name. That leaves us with “Vikings”, “Spartans” and “Trojans”. Vikings were pre-11th century Scandinavians, known as “seafaring warriors who raided and colonized wide areas of Europe” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.) - and while Scandinavians very much

exist today, their primary identification is not with Viking culture. Sparta, a capital in ancient Greece, and Troy, an ancient city in what is now Turkey, are also not common contemporary national or ethnic identities - contemporary citizens of Greece and Turkey most probably do not primarily identify as “Spartans” or “Trojans”. Native Americans, conversely, exist today, and the ahistorical images of Nativeness that Native mascots rely on place Native Americans in the past, while rendering actual, contemporary Native Americans more or less invisible. Comment number 80 describes the experience of having “attended school with pilgrims, cavaliers, and knights as mascots” and makes the case that there is not “any difference between an English knight or a Cherokee warrior” when it comes to mascots. Perhaps it is worth considering that the warrior-type Native mascots are not necessarily *meant* to represent contemporary Native Americans - after all, they are usually stylized according to Wild West era imagery, and thus, contemporary Native Americans should not feel that they are ‘targeted’ by these warrior images. This argument, however, quickly falls apart if we consider the rhetoric of the pro-mascot side of the public controversy. The Redskins Facts website, for instance, clearly states that it supports the Washington team’s name because it “epitomizes all the noble qualities we admire about Native Americans” (*Redskins Facts* 2015) - nothing clarifying that these “noble qualities” refer to any past civilizations or historic, long-gone warrior societies. As for whether “pilgrims, cavaliers, and knights” are “racist, too”, as the commenter asks, we need to examine what those words refer to. A knight is an honorary title, not an ethnicity or racial category. “Cavalier” signifies a set of “political and social attitudes” in 17th century England (*Wikipedia*, n.d.), i.e. not a specific ethnicity or race. Lastly, a pilgrim is a person “who travels to a shrine or holy place as a devotee” (*Merriam-Webster*) - the term is not dependent on race, or even a specific religion. The comment, in contrasting an English knight with a Cherokee warrior, says that both may be “caricatures”, but that “they are also a celebration” - but a celebration of whom, or what? According to the commenter, receiving “the blessing of whomever is being represented” is a good idea when creating a mascot based on a group of people (or a racial minority, in this case), but there is nothing “inherently racist” about Native mascots.

Comment number 81 also brings up “the Cleveland Cavaliers” as a comparison point, asking if the name is “racist, too” - just like comment number 80 did. The comment characterizes the Cleveland Cavaliers as “technically an ethnic caricature”, and goes on to provide “knights or pilgrims” as additional examples of potentially problematic mascots. The comment goes on to suggest that “in many people’s eyes” Native American mascots are “a celebration of revered

characters like warriors and such” - bringing us back to the problem of equating Nativeness with the warrior trope. The comment does admit that it is possible to take mascotry “too far”, or “misrepresent” Native culture, but concludes that “if we do away with Native American mascots then we have to do away with others as well” - it is not entirely clear if this is meant to refer to teams like the Cleveland Cavaliers, or perhaps to any and all mascots and team names that refer to human beings. The commenter goes on to say that they “cannot possibly fathom someone seeing English knights as racist” because “knights and warriors and the like are revered”. This does not take into account the vastly different ways in which these characters tend to be portrayed: it would be unusual to equate contemporary Englishness with the knight trope, whereas the line between the imagined Native warrior and actual contemporary Native Americans is blurred by the ubiquitous nature of Native mascots *and* the relative lack of alternative, contemporary Native narratives in mainstream media.

5.6 At least this way Native Americans get visibility

82. *“I suppose just having 'Indians' as the mascot is a bit different than say, 'Sioux Warriors' or something like that. Or just 'Warriors' with a (respectful) Native American character. I'm not really for or against Native American or any other ethnically-based mascots, but of course I'm against racism and other forms of ignorance. I think there's a reverent way to have ethnically-based mascots and that it's a bit of a shame to ban them across the board. I have great deal of respect for Native American culture having spent four years working for a non-profit living and working in First Nations communities in northern Canada so if anything, I'm worried about declines in awareness. I think (again, respectful) sports mascots are a great way to revere Native culture, as well as maintain some baseline of awareness. Perhaps teams that insist on retaining Native-based mascots should partner with local tribes to mutually benefit both groups in a variety of ways.”*

Comment number 82 offers “respectful” Native American mascots as a solution to the current mascot controversy. There are better (e.g. “Sioux Warriors”) and worse (e.g. “Indians”) ways to use Native American imagery in sports mascots, but “to ban them across the board” would be “a bit of a shame”. “Ethnically-based” mascots, we are told, are not necessarily inherently bad, but the commenter rejects “racism and other forms of ignorance”. The removal of Native

mascots might, according to the comment, lead to “declines in awareness” about Native communities, and having “respectful” Native mascots could be “a great way to revere Native culture”. Teams should “partner with local tribes” to come up with solutions that “mutually benefit both groups”. Accepting the notion of “respectful” versions of Native mascots relies on the premise that there *can* be respectful ways to create mascots based on Native people - certainly debatable, but not self-evidently true. The lack of awareness among the general American public about Native communities is certainly a problem, but whether it is a good idea to have sports mascots serve as a primary source of information about Native cultures is not obvious - surely there must be other paths towards increased awareness?

83. *“Redskins isn't the same as Savages or Godless Heathens or anything. When your race and culture are almost wiped out maybe you can start understanding how a nod to your very existence is appreciable - especially if it is in a strong and fierce context.”*

Comment number 83, much like comment 82, makes a comparison between more and less offensive Native mascots. “Redskins”, interestingly, is not characterized as a particularly bad representation, at least in comparison to names like “Savages or Godless Heathens”. The comment alludes to the relative invisibility of Native Americans in mainstream culture, and describes Native culture as having been “almost wiped out”. Due to this invisibility, “a nod to your very existence” is desirable, and given the “strong and fierce context” of sports - which is the realm of strength and physical prowess - this “nod” towards Nativeness is more positive than negative.

84. *“Yes, let's complete the eradication of the native american from our culture”*

85. *“Isn't this a double-edged sword? If you can't show indians anywhere but a casino then aren't they just going to be damn near forgotten? Already, you don't hear anything whatsoever about them as a minority group in this day and age.”*

→ Reply: *“I hear all kinds of shit about indians. How they seized the sky bridge at the grand canyon and now that the casinos are raking in cash they are pushing tribe members out on the basis they are not indian enough”*

Comment number 84 sarcastically remarks that getting rid of offensive Native mascots is the last step in “the eradication” of Native Americans. The comment does acknowledge that Native

Americans are chronically overlooked and rendered invisible in the larger media landscape, but whether sports mascots are an appropriate medium for sharing Native American culture(s) is not addressed. Many of the comments in this section appear to operate under a binary model of thinking: either we hold on to a problematic form of representation (i.e. Native mascots), or there will be no representation whatsoever. Alternative solutions (such as increased funding for Native-led media, for instance) are not really discussed. Comment number 85 makes a leap from the issue of Native American mascots to Native-owned casinos, seemingly unprompted. Mascots and casinos, apparently, are the main ways in which we can learn about Native communities. Again, it is not an incorrect understanding of American culture to identify that Native Americans are underrepresented in the media - but the possibilities for new, alternative representations and narratives are, again, not even discussed as an option. The comment prompted a response from somebody who summarizes their understanding “about indians” by referring to how “they seized the sky bridge” - a reference to a tourist attraction that is, at least partly, run by the Hualapai Tribe (*Grand Canyon West* website, n.d.) - and how “the casinos are raking in cash”. What these two points have in common is the implicit accusation of money-grabbing - a common theme in contemporary negative portrayals of Nativeness (see chapter 2.2).

86. *“Pretty soon there'll be nothing related to Native Americans at all in popular culture. Groups that have even allowed people to use tribe names or artwork will be silenced because white people think it's racist.”*

87. *“All Democrats are doing is finishing the job (in terms of annihilating native americans). They're hoping to turn their existence into complete obscurity by removing anything related to them in the name of racism.”*

88. *“I can't imagine [North Quincy High School] without its Yakoo!”*

Comment number 86 continues on the topic of complete erasure as a consequence of removing harmful Native mascots. If Native mascots are gone, the thinking goes, “there’ll be nothing related to Native Americans at all in popular culture”. The comment does acknowledge the very real problem of Native Americans being rendered relatively invisible in mainstream media - but does not address the issue of whether potentially offensive and racist portrayals should be allowed to exist simply because the alternative is *no* portrayals. The comment goes on to

speculate that even those who use Native imagery - e.g. tribe names - with the explicit permission of the tribe in question, “will be silenced because white people think it’s racist”. The idea that only white people care about the mascot controversy is a topic that is discussed in detail in an earlier section, so I will not elaborate on it here. As for situations where specific tribes consent to having their name and imagery used, as appears to be the case with e.g. the Florida State Seminoles (*Florida State University* website, n.d.), the issue of appropriation and ownership does become more nuanced than, say, the Washington team using its current name (“redskin”, in addition to being a racial slur, does not refer to a particular tribe that could have the power to grant or deny permission to use the word). Comment number 87 describes the mascot controversy as a partisan issue by blaming Democrats for “annihilating” Native Americans, and accuses the party of “finishing the job” of fading Native Americans “into complete obscurity” by fighting against Native mascots. In other words, it is implied that a campaign to get rid of a particular form of racism (i.e. offensive mascots) is a sinister, racially motivated plot. Comment number 88, while not directly a commentary on the topic of visibility of Native culture(s) in media, reveals something interesting about nostalgia being a potential factor in why some (non-Native) people might feel strongly about keeping Native mascots. A particular school, whose mascot was a Native American character called “Yakoo” would simply not be the same without it - there is a sense of loss, and of unwelcome change.

89. *“One thing that history shows is that the culture that is not shared is the culture that dies.”*

Comment number 89, if taken out of its current context, makes a valid point about the dangers of invisibility - about the risk of being forgotten and overlooked if the surrounding culture does not pay attention. The *Reclaiming Native Truth* project, for instance, reports that Native Americans’ relative lack of visibility (and thus lack of awareness among non-Natives) made non-Natives less likely to be supportive of various Native issues (p. 8). In that sense, the comment does correctly identify that a culture that people do not know or care about is likely to suffer. The context of the comment, however, is that the ‘sharing’ of culture means keeping Native mascots. The comment, perhaps inadvertently or subconsciously, equates Native mascots with Native culture - and as for a “shared” culture, who is doing the sharing? In the case of most Native mascots (and the Washington Redskins in particular), it is not Native Americans who are sharing Native culture with the general public - rather, this image of

“Nativeness” is shared by non-Native individuals and groups (e.g. Dan Snyder and the NFL). In other words, what constitutes “Native culture” is dictated largely by non-Natives.

90. *“But I like that its a reminder to what happened. I think the world needs a reminder of what happened and the more uncomfortable it makes them the better the reminder. And I think that if it invokes those feelings then good.*

What happened was offensive as fuck to say the very least. Throw it their face, right nexts to the Chiefs, right next to the Fighting Sioux out in the public. Let them be reminded of it every time. its not something that should ever be swept under the rug. Thats how shit like that happens again if there aren't reminders.

Maybe thats just my pride speaking but I still vehemently oppose a name change.”

91. *“I think it should stay the same. Some people might find it derogatory, but it shows a historical aspect of our country. If you erase something that is related to history, you are denying that events ever happened.”*

92. *“Wow. Over sensitive much? or a way to erase from history.”*

Comment number 90 sees the continued use of Native mascots as an educational opportunity. Keeping a name like the Washington Redskins serves as “a reminder of what happened”, presumably to Native Americans at the hands of colonizers. The Washington football team ought to make us “uncomfortable” and to remind us of past atrocities, because “if there aren’t reminders”, history is doomed to repeat itself. One might wonder whether Redskins fans wear face paint, buy Redskins merchandise, and go to stadiums to witness a football match because they appreciate the history lesson. By the same logic minstrel shows would serve as educational entertainment and a solemn reminder of the horrors of slavery, and getting rid of minstrel shows would be tantamount to denying history. Much like in earlier comments, no middle road or alternative solution is provided - for instance, instead of offensive mascots, schools should commit to teaching students about Native American history. Comments 91 and 92 make a similar argument: the Washington team’s name and mascot show “a historical aspect” of the U.S., and removing the possibly “derogatory” portrayal is tantamount to “denying that events ever happened” (“events”, presumably, referring to the violence committed against Native Americans). Again, the possibility of new, improved narratives and representations is not addressed - we are left with the binary choice of keeping offensive mascots, or wilfully denying

history. Comment number 92 also equates opposition to offensive Native mascots to being overly “sensitive” - a trope familiar from the “SJW” debate.

5.7 Freedom of speech

93. *“Pretty soon freedom of speech will be taken away so no one gets offended.”*

94. *“So why exactly is this posted here [on a Republican subreddit]? Last time I checked, football team names aren't exactly what republicanism is about”*

→ Reply: *“I think it's basically about letting a company do what it pleases in regards to its name. Which is a Republican ideal, corporate freedom.”*

Comments 93 and 94 see the Washington Redskins and/or Native mascot issue through the lens of free speech - changing the name (and thus limiting the use of a specific slur) is seen as an infringement on freedom. Comment 93 is thematically similar to the various comments shown in the section covering “SJWs”, in that the blame is put on the *offended* and, presumably, overly sensitive - not, as one might expect, on the *offender*. The comment warns the reader about freedom of speech (one of the core principles of democratic society) being “taken away so no one gets offended”. Furthermore, the comment reduces generations of systemic oppression and psychological damage caused by Native mascots, essentially, to ‘hurt feelings’ Comment number 94 asks why the Washington Redskins controversy is discussed in the context of a Republican subreddit (seeing as the name controversy is not, at least technically, a partisan issue). A reply to the comment explains that the connection between the name controversy and the values of the Republican Party is about “corporate freedom”, and about “letting a company do what it pleases”, at least name-wise.

5.8 Stereotype, oversimplification or mockery

95. *“Maybe we could round up all the offensive mascots and put them somewhere safe, somewhere they could call their own... let them manage their own affairs, keep living their traditional lifestyles in peace”*

Comment number 95 appears to be joking at the expense of Native Americans being forcefully relocated to reservations. Native Americans were put in a place “they could call their own” and

where they can “manage their own affairs” and live “their traditional lifestyles” - a rather charming description of what was a solution imposed by white settlers, against the wishes of the indigenous peoples (History.com editors 2019). The comment is most likely meant to be a joke, but it is not clear on whose expense the joke is made: is the sarcasm and mockery directed towards the settlers, for imposing the reservation system upon the Native population, or is it simply directed towards Native Americans themselves? Due to the lack of context, we cannot infer the joke’s intent, and can only speculate as to who is being mocked.

96. *“Yeah yeah, they will come together to find the final solution to eliminate inconvenient minority representations.”*

Comment 96 equates the removal of Native mascots (“inconvenient minority representations”) with the removal of Native people and their cultures (a line of thinking familiar from an earlier section). The term “final solution” is a nod towards the systematic extermination of Jewish people during WWII - in other words, a joke about genocide. Native Americans, of course, were also victims of genocide at the hands of white settlers.

97. *“I am ‘Native’ American, I don't mind at all. Apushmataha is my 5th great grandfather, and Pocahontas my 11th ggrandmother.”*

The complex phenomenon of non-Natives ‘playing Indian’, and hearing tall tales of distant Native ancestry (often a “Cherokee princess” somewhere in the family tree), serves as important context for comment 97. The intent and level of sincerity of a comment like this is impossible to determine due to lack of context - so an analysis must be done based on a few assumptions. If we assume that the commenter is joking, or being sarcastic (as is suggested by the fact that the word “Native” is in quotation marks) they might be mocking those who falsely claim Native ancestry in order to insert themselves into conversations about Nativeness. If, however, we assume that the commenter is being sincere, it is implied that their (highly unlikely) ancestral claim validates their dismissal of the mascot controversy.

98. *“The Redskins have given millions to Native American tribes, so yeah, I think they're okay with the name.”*

Comment 98 plays into the stereotype of Native Americans being greedy and easily corruptible by money (the negative attitudes towards “casino Indians” serve as an indication of this). The comment suggests that because the Washington team has “given millions to Native American tribes”, Native people who would otherwise have opposed the team’s name and logo might have a change of heart - or perhaps *should* have a change of heart. The idea that a powerful and wealthy entity (like the Washington team) can dangle money and resources in front of impoverished communities, making those communities feel indebted and thus, perhaps, less willing to be vocal about the ongoing objectification and appropriation of Nativeness (in the form of mascotry), is worth examining with a critical eye.

6. Discussion

There is a lot to be said about the comments analyzed in the previous chapter. The categorizations themselves (e.g. the “appeal to worse problems” narrative) provide a general sense of the most prominent themes found in the online discourse around the mascot controversy. The aim of this chapter is to consider these themes in a larger context, and to attempt to understand the underlying reasons for, and possible consequences of, the various viewpoints found in chapter 5.

One issue that featured prominently in the material was the comparison to other variants of prejudice, stereotyping and racism, and I, in the role of researcher, am forced to consider the validity of these comparisons. For instance, several comments brought up the Fighting Irish team name, speculating whether it might be considered inappropriate. As is explained briefly in chapter 5, the history of Irish immigrants facing discrimination, specifically in an American context, is certainly real, and undeniably ugly. The fact that Irish people have been treated as second-class citizens in the US is undeniable. Classifying this treatment as specifically *racist* is a separate, much more complicated matter - in a culture that centers whiteness, ‘racism against whites’ simply does not exist in the structural, systemic sense that racism against non-whites exists (this, of course, assumes that Irishness is equated with whiteness, which is another, separate complication). Michael Harriot, in an article for *The Root*, explains this issue around Irishness and whiteness as follows: “both ‘American’ and whiteness are sociopolitical constructs that have evolved over a long period of time, always seeking exclusion and supremacy, and it was not so long ago that Irish Americans were on the outside looking in” (Harriot 2018). But if we accept the premise “most of the Irish people who migrated to the US were white or white-passing”, then it becomes problematic to equate ‘racism’ against Irish immigrants with racism against, for instance, African Americans or Native Americans, who, after all, are placed firmly outside the confines of whiteness. This issue, for self-evident reasons, is incredibly uncomfortable, and it is difficult (if not impossible) to reach any satisfying conclusion that does not pit systems of racism against each other in an unproductive and hurtful way. I, for instance, have no desire to compare anti-black racism with anti-Native racism, and try to decide “which one is worse” - the only distinction I will posit is that anti-white sentiment, in a cultural context that centers whiteness as the default and as more desirable than non-whiteness, is not ‘racism’ in the same sense that negative attitudes towards non-whites is.

Another interesting feature, which is not discussed in the analysis of the comments in chapter 5, is the tone of the comments. Plenty of comments had a markedly hostile or angry tone - capital letters, curse words, insults, accusations, and multiple consecutive exclamation points were commonplace. The topic of discussion, evidently, is highly emotionally charged for many of the commenters. What is interesting about the anger is not the emotion itself, but the target. More often than not, the aggression is directed *not* towards the phenomenon of Native mascotry itself, but towards the people on ‘the other side’ of the debate. For many, the issue is not, for instance, that Native mascots do or do not exist - the *real* issue is that people (on ‘the other side’) are stupid, too sensitive, or too politically correct. ‘The other side’ is also infantilized (e.g. “[n]o Northerner gets offended or cries like a baby”) and feminized (e.g. “politically correct white pussies” and “hissy fit”). The stoic, ‘not offended by anything’ attitude is thus coded as masculine (and, implicitly, better than the alternative). Being offended, according to this line of thinking, belongs in the realm of the young and effeminate. The potentially offensive phenomenon is not the problem - the people who point out the offensiveness are the problem.

The anger (which featured more prominently, although not exclusively, among the pro-mascot side of the debate), I would argue, may be a sign of defensiveness - conscious or otherwise. The accusation against Native mascotry, after all, is that the practice is racist, and since overt racism is socially frowned upon, very few people would want to be accused of racism. Indeed, even outright white nationalists sometimes reject the notion that they are motivated by racism (citing, instead, things like heritage, crime rates, or culture), and racist monologues begin with the words “I am not a racist, but” so often that the phrase has become a universally known meme. Most people want to distance themselves from the ‘racist’ label, whether or not their attitudes are racist. This may help us understand the vigor with which some people defend the Washington Redskins and other Native mascots - a person might have been a fan of the team for a long time, perhaps since childhood, and when it is pointed out that the practice is hurtful and, indeed, racist, the fan feels personally attacked as a racist. Rejecting the accusations as political correctness gone too far, or as ridiculous left-wing dogma, creates a sense of validation: “I am not a racist, those people are just being too PC”. But if we prioritize the feelings of those who do not want to be accused of racism over the real-life consequences of racist practices, our priorities are seriously misplaced. This fragility has the potential to derail vitally important (and sometimes painful) discussions about race, power, and privilege.

A few comments described a sense of nostalgia when it comes to Native mascots - nostalgia is a powerful emotion, and as such may further help us understand the strong opposition to changing or banning the mascots. This, too, brings us to the aforementioned priorities - whose feelings and viewpoints do we prioritize when it comes to discourse around anti-Native traditions? Should we weigh non-Natives' nostalgia for mascots against Native Americans' dignity, as if they are equally relevant?

Indeed, with an issue like Native mascots, and the Washington Redskins, we need to ask: whose "Nativity" is this? Who has the right to define "Nativity"? The image of Native culture represented by the Washington team is, after all, a non-Native creation, imposed upon Native Americans, and branded as a "compliment" - the underlying message is "we're honouring you, so shut up". The fact that a multi-billion dollar brand has accumulated its wealth by selling a bastardized, imaginary version of Nativity is, at its very core, appropriation. Native culture (or, indeed, a crude simulacrum of it) has made non-Native people like Dan Snyder rich, which in and of itself ought to be considered outrageous - but considering the fact that actual Native Americans have been punished and criminalized in various ways for partaking in *their own* cultures makes the issue even more absurd. Ranging from forced assimilation, to the criminalization of Native religious ceremonies (*National Congress of American Indians* 2013: 11), the (white) majority has found a multitude of ways to suppress actual Native culture, while simultaneously appropriating it - in the form of headdresses at music festivals, "Indian" themed summer camps, or Native sports mascots. Instead of allowing Native Americans to represent themselves and their cultures - essentially, creating space for the message "this is who we are" - entities like the Washington Redskins are given the space to say "this is who *you* are".

At this point I feel it is necessary to point out the fact that, in my analysis and discussion, the underlying assumption tends to be that most, if not all, Native Americans are opposed to the Washington team's name and/or Native sports mascots. This, of course, is not necessarily the case, and it is not my intent to oversimplify the issue. A handful of comments in chapter 5, for instance, are written by self-described Native Americans who feel either indifferent to, or supportive of, the Washington team and/or other Native mascots. Furthermore, the Washington Post poll, which has been heavily criticized for its methodology, may very well be flawed, but its results should perhaps not be entirely dismissed. One could speculate about the underlying reasons - like the possibility that internalized racism might play a role - but I, as a non-Native researcher, have no desire to insert myself into the debate in a way that criticizes Native people

for having the ‘wrong’ viewpoint on a cultural phenomenon that is deeply personal and, admittedly, highly complex.

The ‘appeal to bigger problems’ line of thinking, which featured prominently in the analysis chapter, is an effective derailing tactic precisely because it appears reasonable. Who, after all, would argue that we should care about something as abstract as ‘cultural appropriation’ when there are families that are unable to put food on the table? The problem with this tactic is that it can be employed ad infinitum, until almost no issue is large enough to address. Consider this tactic in the context of, for instance, feminism. Why should (Western) feminists care about unfair representation in the video game industry, when there are women being emotionally abused by their partners? And those abused women, on the other hand, should be thankful that they aren’t *physically* abused, because that, surely, is worse. And even those who are physically abused by their partners are better off than the pre-pubescent girls who are married off to men decades older than them - *that*, surely, is much worse. For every injustice, a worse injustice can be found. In the context of Native mascots, I would argue that very few people actually think that an offensive mascot is a *more* important issue than, for instance, drug abuse or extreme poverty. What I *would* argue is that racial injustices exist on a continuum, ranging from seemingly harmless phenomena (jokes, appropriation, caricatures) all the way to outright violence - and the entire continuum deserves to be addressed, because the former normalizes and validates the latter.

The relationship between intent and impact is complex, especially in the context of a phenomenon like Native mascotry. Arguments defending the continued use of Native mascots (and the Washington Redskins in particular) sometimes refer to the *intended* purpose of these names and logos - i.e. honouring and celebrating Native American culture(s) - and this well-meaning intent ought to negate any harm that the practice might have caused. The idea that damaging words and traditions cannot be criticized because, essentially, ‘they did not mean to cause any harm’ does not consider the fact that, often, the damage is the same regardless of intent. For instance, urging another person to lose weight, with the intent of genuinely wanting to improve their health (and caring about another person’s health, surely, is the epitome of kind intent), may be wildly insulting to that person, and may even lead to poor self-esteem, disordered eating habits, and social isolation - all, coincidentally, things that are detrimental to one’s health. As for Native mascots, if we, for the sake of argument, agree that the intent may very well be positive, the intent does not change the fact that the impact on the psyche of Native

Americans (as suggested by e.g. Fryberg's 2008 study) is potentially detrimental. All of that being said, is it fair to claim that intent is of *no* importance? Is a hurtful comment made out of ignorance less horrifying than one made out of pure malice? These are difficult questions, and impossible to answer definitively within the scope of this discussion. Perhaps a more tangible problem to tackle is the human urge to defend oneself - as is discussed earlier in this chapter, nobody wants to be accused of something like racism, especially someone who believes their intentions are sincere. Jane Hill (2008) points out that "[i]n the folk theory of racism, to call a person a racist is a dire insult, since racists are uneducated, marginal, and backward individuals" (Hill 2008: 62-63). Because of this, accusations of racism are unlikely to be accepted by the person being accused. When defenders of the Washington team's name are told that the name is racist, or a racial slur, they (perhaps understandably) reject these labels – after all, they have been using (and defending) the word for ages, and as Hill puts it, the common understanding is that "[i]f the word is a slur, this entails that its users are racist" (Hill 2008: 62). Given this natural instinct to defend oneself, and the volatile nature of debating racism and racist intent, an important question remains: how do we get past our defensiveness so that we can move forward in a productive way?

7. Conclusion

The issue of reducing Native Americans to consumable mascot images is, as made evident by the emotional commentary on Reddit, a highly controversial one. Not only is the issue deeply personal to those who, one might imagine, are most directly affected by Native mascots like the Washington Redskins, but it appears to be of utmost importance to those on the ‘outside’ as well. Nostalgia, rejection of left-wing social politics, and defensiveness emerge as potential explanations for why the critical discourse around Native mascotry is so upsetting to some people on the pro-mascot side of the debate. The fight against offensive Native mascots has existed for decades, but the issue is still frequently framed as a new, far-fetched social justice effort with little relation to real-life problems. By dismissing the issue in this way, defenders of these mascots can rest easy, believing that their critics are simply being too sensitive, or on the ‘wrong’ side of politics. Those who oppose the continued use of Native Americans as sports mascots, on the other hand, find themselves increasingly frustrated: the mascot tradition seems so self-evidently hurtful, that we ought to have moved past it already - so why haven’t we?

In my role as researcher, I can not in good conscience pretend to be neutral about the topic. Not only does the evidence point us toward the conclusion that Native mascots do more harm than good (consider, for instance, the work of Fryberg, and the *Reclaiming Native Truth* project), but on an intuitive level, the tradition of objectifying an entire ethnicity in such a reductive, stereotypical, and ahistorical way strikes me as downright cruel. We rightly condemn practices like blackface, but hardly blink when non-Native people put on feathers and war paint, and wear merchandise emblazoned with a racial slur used against the very people they claim to be honouring. The Washington team’s brand could clearly be seen as overt racism in plain sight, and critiques of it are shut down with appeals to “tradition”, “bravery” and “strength”.

As for the future of Native mascots, and their disproportionately prominent role in representing Nativeness in the public landscape, only time will tell whether or not they will eventually be a thing of the past. Until then, more research needs to be done in order to understand the importance of diverse, accurate, and respectful cultural representations, the damage that can be done by hurtful, oversimplified ethnic portrayals, and the importance of being critical of widely accepted, but inherently problematic, traditions. Forums like Reddit provide a platform for discussions about these topics, but as long as there is a lack of both knowledge and empathy, these discussions can only get us so far. This study is limited, because it simply observes existing online discourse on the matter, and it is difficult to imagine how the issue could be

resolved in any tangible, productive manner. The scope of this study does not allow us to make any sweeping statements regarding the mascot issue and how it is perceived by different people, due to the relatively small sample size and the nature of anonymized online discourse – this study simply illustrates some common tendencies, which could be used as a starting point for understanding *why* people disagree on the mascot topic. This, in turn, may make it possible to reach some sort of consensus on this immensely divisive issue.

Swedish summary

1. Introduktion

De reklamer, bilder och symboler som omringar oss i vårt dagliga liv kan påverka våra uppfattningar om världen. Om ett visuellt meddelande upprepas tillräckligt ofta, blir meddelandet allt mer normaliserat. Med hjälp av dessa representationer lär vi oss saker om oss själva, om andra människor och om den omringande kulturen.

När det gäller relativt osynliga och marginaliserade folkgrupper, är det speciellt viktigt att vara medveten om hur de representeras i massmedier. Ju sämre synlighet en folkgrupp har, desto större roll har enskilda representationer. Denna avhandling fokuserar på ursprungssamerikaner och en populär (och problematisk) representation av deras kultur och identitet, nämligen maskotar inom idrottsvärlden. Speciell fokus kommer att ligga på fotbollslaget *Washington Redskins*. Syftet med denna avhandling är att diskutera maskotfenomenet, belysa hur kontroversiellt detta fenomen är, och förstå hur denna till synes ofarliga traditionen kan vara skadlig.

I denna text använder jag huvudsakligen ordet "ursprungssamerikan" (eng. "Native American"), men använder ibland ordet "indian", t.ex. då det handlar om maskotar och deras karikatyriska, anakronistiska skildring av ursprungssamerikansk identitet.

2. Stereotyper

Stereotyper kan vara både medvetna och omedvetna, implicita och explicita, samt både positiva och negativa. Syftet med detta kapitel är att beskriva de vanligaste stereotyperna om ursprungssamerikaner. Det som många stereotyper om och representationer av ursprungssamerikaner har gemensamt är att de är placerade i det förflutna. Moderna representationer av ursprungssamerikaner är, tyvärr, sällsynta i amerikanska massmedier, och fokusen ligger istället på en historisk bild av ett primitivt folk i stil av vilda västern. Det är vanligt att ursprungssamerikaner (som individer och på kollektiv nivå) beskrivs som modiga, starka, stolta krigare - en stereotyp vars laddning är å ena sidan någorlunda positiv, men å andra sidan översimplifierad, anakronistisk och våldsam. Ursprungssamerikaner skildras dessutom ofta som naturnära vilket, igen, är en till synes positiv stereotyp, men antydningen är att de är ociviliserade. Utöver dessa historiska stereotyper finns även en del moderna stereotyper. Projektet *Reclaiming Native Truth* beskriver en samling moderna stereotyper om

ursprungsamerikaner som är till synes motsägelsefulla, men existerar ändå sida vid sida. Ursprungsamerikaner beskrivs ofta som ytterst fattiga, men anses ändå ha blivit oproportionerligt rika tack vare casinoindustrin. De anses vara exceptionellt andliga, samtidigt som de ses som alkoholister och drogmissbrukare. De ses som starka, samtidigt som de anses vara totalt beroende av staten. Dessutom anses de inneha en speciell respekt för naturen, samtidigt som de kritiseras för att ha smutsat ner sina egna reservat (*Reclaiming Native Truth* 2018: 11).

Dessa stereotyper, speciellt de som skildrar ursprungsamerikaner i det förflutna, är relevanta med tanke på indianmaskotar. Dessa maskotar framställer nästan alltid en historisk, ofta karikatyrisk, bild av ursprungsamerikaner. Framställningen baserar sig ofta på stereotypen av den stolta krigaren. Maskotens "indian" är dessutom ofta ospecificerad och amorfisk - med andra ord, maskoten avbildar sällan en specifik person, stam eller nation. Maskotfenomenet och dess konsekvenser har forskats i tidigare. En psykologisk forskning utförd av Fryberg och kollegor (2008) påvisade att unga ursprungsamerikaner som utsattes för en indianmaskot upplevde försämrade självkänsla jämfört med kontrollgruppen - oberoende av ungdomarnas egna medvetna attityder gentemot maskoten. Dessutom nämner Fryberg en tendens bland amerikaner av europeiskt ursprung: deras självkänsla *förbättrades* efter att ha blivit utsatta för indianmaskotar (Fryberg 2008: 216).

3. The Washington Redskins

Det kontroversiella amerikanska fotbollslaget *Washington Redskins* grundades 1932 av George Preston Marshall. Lagets namn är av speciellt intresse med tanke på att ordet "redskin" är en etnisk förolämpning (eng. "racial slur"), dvs. kritiken mot laget handlar inte endast om problematiken kring indianmaskotar på en abstrakt nivå. Kritiken som riktats mot laget, t.ex. det att namnet är kränkande och att indianmaskotar överlag inte hör hemma i ett modernt samhälle, möts med påståendet att namnets och maskotens avsikt är att hedra och smickra ursprungsamerikaner och deras kultur(er). Även om ordboksdefinitioner av "redskin" beskriver ordet som förolämpande, insisterar bland annat Daniel Snyder, lagets ägare, att syftet är enbart positivt. Dispyten kring namnet, samt kring maskotfenomenet överlag, har pågått sen 1960-talet, där bl.a. *National Congress of American Indians* (NCAI) har varit en aktiv deltagare. Ändå framställs dispyten ofta som ett modernt fenomen och som ett symptom på överdriven politisk korrekthet.

På grund av att namnet är så kontroversiellt, utförde *the Washington Post* en opinionsundersökning bland ursprungsamerikaner. Undersökningen, som publicerades år 2016, påstår sig ha kommit fram till att 9 av 10 ursprungsamerikaner inte har ett problem med att fotbollslaget använder ordet “redskin” i sitt namn. Denna undersökning (vars metodologi har kritiserats) och dess resultat har använts av fotbollslaget som ett försök att rättfärdiga namnet. Resultaten kan dock ses från ett annat perspektiv: om 1 av 10 ursprungsamerikaner ogillar namnet, borde det inte beaktas?

4. Metod och material

Maskotfrågan (och speciellt *the Washington Redskins*) är alltså mycket omstridd. Syftet med denna undersökning är att förstå hur människor, på olika sidor av dispyten, argumenterar för eller emot fenomenet. Kontroversiella ämnen diskuteras ofta på nätet och maskotfrågan är inget undantag. Denna undersökning använde sig av diskussionsplattformen Reddit för att samla material och för att få en helhetsuppfattning om diskursen kring kontroversen.

Med hjälp av söktermerna “native american mascot” och “washington redskins name” samlades sammanlagt 98 relevanta Reddit-kommentarer. Dessa kommentarer placerades i kategorier på basis av argument eller tema (ett exempel på en typ av argument är “politisk korrekthet har gått för långt”). Analysen av detta material är kvalitativ, och utgick från följande frågor:

- Uttrycker kommentaren en positiv eller negativ attityd gentemot maskotfenomenet?
- Hur försöker kommentaren berättiga sin synpunkt?
- Uttrycker kommentaren ilska eller kritik, och i så fall mot vem/vad?
- Uttrycker kommentaren specifika attityder (positiva eller negativa) mot ursprungsamerikanska individer eller grupper?

I analyskapitlet diskuteras de mest centrala och uppenbara tendenserna och argumenten som Reddit-materialet avslöjat.

5. Analys

Många kommentarer argumenterar att indianmaskotar ska tolkas som “hedrande”, i och med att maskotar ofta avbildar ursprungsamerikaner som modiga krigare. Vissa kommentarer beskriver en känsla av nostalgi och t.o.m. personlig förlust när de diskuterar borttagna maskotar (många amerikanska skolor har valt att bli av med sina indianmaskotar). Indianmaskotar beskrivs som ett sätt att fira ursprungsamerikaners kultur på ett sätt som är “coolt” och “relaterbart”. En kommentar påstår, utan förklaring, att det helt enkelt inte finns något problem med att “ha en

indian som maskot”. En person uttrycker att hen inte kan förstå hur någon kan känna sig förolämpad, i och med att avsikten med indianmaskotar är att “hedra” och “söka efterlikna” ursprungssamerikaner, vars “talang”, “prestation”, “styrka” och “modighet” är beundransvärda egenskaper. Kommentarer skrivna av självutnämnda ursprungssamerikaner hävdar bl.a. att maskotar handlar om imitation och kan därmed tolkas som en komplimang, att Redskins-lagets beundrare inte använder ordet på ett nedsättande vis, samt att det finns väldigt få ursprungssamerikaner som verkligen känner sig kränkta av Redskins-namnet.

En hel del kommentarer beskriver Redskins-namnet och/eller maskotfenomenet som problematiskt. Enligt en kommentar avslöjar Redskins-namnet en hjärtlös och apatisk attityd gentemot ursprungssamerikaner och deras lidande alltigenom landets historia. En kommentar beskriver Redskins-namnet som en etnisk förolämpning, medan en annan kommentar påpekar att namnet känns som en påminnelse om hur ursprungssamerikaner har blivit förtryckta, istället för en påminnelse om en vacker del av ursprungssamerikaners kulturarv. En kommentar hävdar att tradition inte räcker som en ursäkt att behålla ett kränkande namn, medan en annan kommentar anser att problemet med indianmaskotar är att de upprätthåller stereotyper. En kommentar föreslår att idrottslag borde samarbeta med lokala stammar för att skapa icke-kränkande maskotar som framställer ursprungssamerikaner på ett mer positivt sätt. En självutnämnd ursprungssamerikan skriver att hen har blivit kallad “redskin” av en vän vars avsikt var att vara provokativ - en annan beskriver minnen av att ha blivit hånad på exakt samma sätt som indianmaskotar “firas” av idrottsfans. En kommentar hävdar att Redskins-namnet borde ändras om ursprungssamerikaner upplever att namnet är kränkande. En annan kommentar påpekar att det faktum att 10% av ursprungssamerikaner känner sig kränkta borde räcka som orsak att byta namnet.

En annan vanlig typ av argument är att det finns större problem att oroa sig över när det gäller ursprungssamerikaner och att maskotfrågan därför inte borde prioriteras. En kommentar hävdar att jämfört med 300 år av lidande borde namnet på ett fotbollslag inte vara ett problem. En annan kommentar anser att “SJWs” (eng. “social justice warriors”) borde fokusera på det att 70% av ursprungssamerikanska barn inte slutför sin utbildning, eller att nästan 50% av ursprungssamerikaner lider av alkoholism någon gång under sin livstid. En kommentar anser att “PK-idioter” (“PK” är en förkortning av “politiskt korrekt”) prioriterar fotbollslag och deras namn över “riktiga problem”, medan en annan kommentar berömmar de ursprungssamerikaner som inte är “gnälliga rövhål” vars prioriteringar är malplacerade. Flera kommentarer beklagar

sig över malplacerade prioriter - enligt dem borde fokuset ligga på det att ursprungssamerikaner lider av "alkoholism, drogmissbruk, analfabetism, partnervåld, tonårsgraviditeter, fetma, diabetes och fattigdom".

En hel del kommentarer anser att endast "SJWs", vita, liberaler och de som är överdrivet politiskt korrekta bryr sig om maskotproblemet. En kommentar påstår att de enda som bryr sig om Redskins-namnet är vita människor som vill imponera på andra och bevisa att de är progressiva. Att bekämpa maskotfenomenet beskrivs av en kommentar som ett sätt för vänsteranhängare att uttrycka sin överlägsna status, medan en annan kommentar anser att det är typiskt att vita liberaler känner sig kränkta på minoriteters vägnar. En kommentar påstår att endast de som är överkänsliga, samt "några indianer", bryr sig om dispyten. En annan kommentar anser att människor inte borde vara så politiskt korrekta hela tiden. En kommentar ställer en "ärlig fråga": är maskotkontroversen genuin eller fabricerad?

Många kommentarer jämför Redskins-namnet med andra lagnamn (både verkliga och påhittade) för att belysa problemet med namnet/maskoten. En kommentar påpekar att om man inte skulle döpa ett lag till "the Jews" eller "the Darkies" borde man inte använda Redskins-ordet heller. Andra förslag på oacceptabla namn var t.ex. "Chinks", "Negroes", "Wetbacks" och "Crackers". En kommentar hävdar att en möjlig förklaring till varför "Redskins" accepteras av så många är att namnet blivit normaliserat, i och med att namnet (och indianmaskotar överlag) har existerat så länge. En annan kommentar anser att dessa maskotar ses som acceptabla för att de flesta amerikaner inte verkar veta att ursprungssamerikaner fortfarande existerar. En del kommentarer undrar varför Redskins-namnet kritiserar, men lagen "Celtics", "Vikings", "Fighting Irish" eller "Spartans" inte kritiserar i samma mån.

En del kommentarer hävdar att ursprungssamerikaner, tack vare indianmaskotar, åtminstone får mer synlighet i samhället. En kommentar oroar sig över att ursprungssamerikaner skulle bli ännu mindre synliga om alla indianmaskotar skulle slopas och att en alternativ lösning skulle vara att skapa "respektfulla" maskotar genom samarbete med lokala stammar. En kommentar beskriver slopandet av skadliga indianmaskotar som ett sätt att slutgiltigt utrota ursprungssamerikaner från amerikansk kultur, medan en annan kommentar hävdar att ursprungssamerikaner kommer att glömmas bort fullkomligt om de endast framställs som casinoägare. En kommentar anser att Redskins-namnet är en bra påminnelse om ursprungssamerikaners historia och att radera namnet är att förneka historia, även om många anser att namnet är nedsättande. En annan kommentar

uttrycker oro över yttrandefriheten och påstår att yttrandefriheten kommer att tas bort så att ingen blir förolämpad.

Det fanns även några kommentarer som hånade ursprungsamerikaner. En kommentar föreslår skämtsamt att alla kränkande maskotar borde placeras på ett och samma ställe, där de får ta hand om sina egna angelägenheter och leva enligt sina egna traditioner. Denna kommentar skämtar alltså om det faktum att ursprungsamerikaner har tvingats att flytta till reservat. En person beskriver sig som ättling till Pocahontas och anser därför att indianmaskotar är acceptabla.

6. Avslutning

Diskussionen kring maskotfrågan visar att de som försvarar Washington-laget (och/eller indianmaskotar överlag) anser att maskotarna hedrar ursprungsamerikaner, tycker att de som motsätter sig indianmaskotar är överkänsliga eller för politiskt korrekta, samt vädjar till större, mer konkreta problem för ursprungsbefolkningen. De som motsätter sig Washington-laget (och/eller indianmaskotar överlag) anser att namnet är självklart kränkande, anklagar maskotarna för att de upprätthåller stereotyper och jämför Washington-lagets namn med andra påhittade, rasbaserade lagnamn för att demonstrera Washington-lagets namns absurditet. Kommentarererna på varsin sida av debatten visar att ämnet är kontroversiellt och känslomässigt. Aggression var en vanlig företeelse, som dock uttrycktes oftare av dem som försvarade Redskins-namnet och/eller indianmaskotar. Ilskan riktades ofta mot personerna på "andra sidan" av debatten och inte mot själva maskotfenomenet. Ett centralt tema är det att maskotar anses representera ursprungsamerikaners kultur, men denna form av "representation" är ju dikterad utifrån - ofta av vita människor. Vems syn på ursprungsamerikansk identitet är det som prioriteras egentligen?

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