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**Erasing and Dehumanizing Natives to Protect Positive National Identity: The Native
Mascot Example**

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Abstract

For individuals who view being American as central to their sense of self, the reality of Native oppression (e.g., genocide, police brutality) threatens their ability to maintain a positive national identity. We theorize that long-standing narratives in American culture erase and dehumanize Natives as a means of protecting positive national identity by providing psychological distance from and justification of Native oppression. We illustrate this protective process using the example of Native mascots. We first demonstrate that Native mascots erase and dehumanize Natives and then illustrate how the use of Native mascots protects national identity. We conclude by calling for individual and institutional-level changes to create a society free of harmful and toxic narratives and the practices that perpetuate these narratives.

Keywords: Native Americans, Erasure, Dehumanization, National Identity, Native mascots

Erasing and Dehumanizing Natives to Protect Positive National Identity: The Native Mascot Example

Native Americans--henceforth referred to as Natives--have battled oppression since the arrival of White settlers, who felt divinely entitled to the lands Natives cultivated and built communities on since time immemorial (Merk, 1995). To wrest the land from Natives and assert superiority, settlers engaged in oppressive and violent acts that ranged from genocide to the forcible removal of Natives from their homelands to assimilationist campaigns intended to erase Native communities, cultures, and values from the physical landscape and cultural imagination (Wolfe, 1999). Over time, the oppressive actions shifted but have not subsided. Contemporary oppression manifests in systemic injustices, such as disproportionately high rates of imprisonment (Sakala, 2014), police brutality (Lett et al., 2020), and violence (Rosay, 2016), and the underfunding of critical physical, mental health, and community services (Warne & Frizzell, 2014), schools (Executive Office of the President, 2014), and environmental protections (Gilbert, 2019), that undermine Natives' well-being and livelihood.

In many respects, Native oppression contradicts core American values of moral superiority, equality, and justice (Beasley, 2001; Lipset, 1996). We theorize that when people view being American as central to their sense of self, this contradiction poses a problem--a psychological threat (i.e., group image threat)--that must be resolved in order to preserve a positive national identity (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Deaux, 1996; Ellemers & Van den Bos, 2012; Leach et al., 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Two common strategies for resolving group image threat include psychologically distancing from (e.g., construing oppressive actions as happening at a distant time or place; Mentovich et al., 2016;

Peetz et al., 2010) and justification of (e.g., construing oppression as deserved or serving a higher moral purpose; Bar-Tal, 1990; Branscombe & Miron, 2004) moral transgressions.

We further posit that American culture is infused with long-standing narratives that leverage these two strategies to resolve the group image threat posed by Native oppression. The first narrative is that Natives are non-existent or irrelevant to contemporary society (i.e., erasing narrative). This narrative creates psychological distance between Americans who are non-Native, henceforth referred to as non-Natives, and the reality of Native oppression.¹ If Natives do not exist, past oppression does not deserve attention and contemporary oppression cannot occur. The second narrative is that Natives are subhuman or inferior to other groups (i.e., dehumanizing narrative), which often manifests as blaming Natives for their negative outcomes. This narrative justifies Native oppression by suggesting that if Natives were more “civilized” or “human,” oppressive actions would not be warranted or occur.

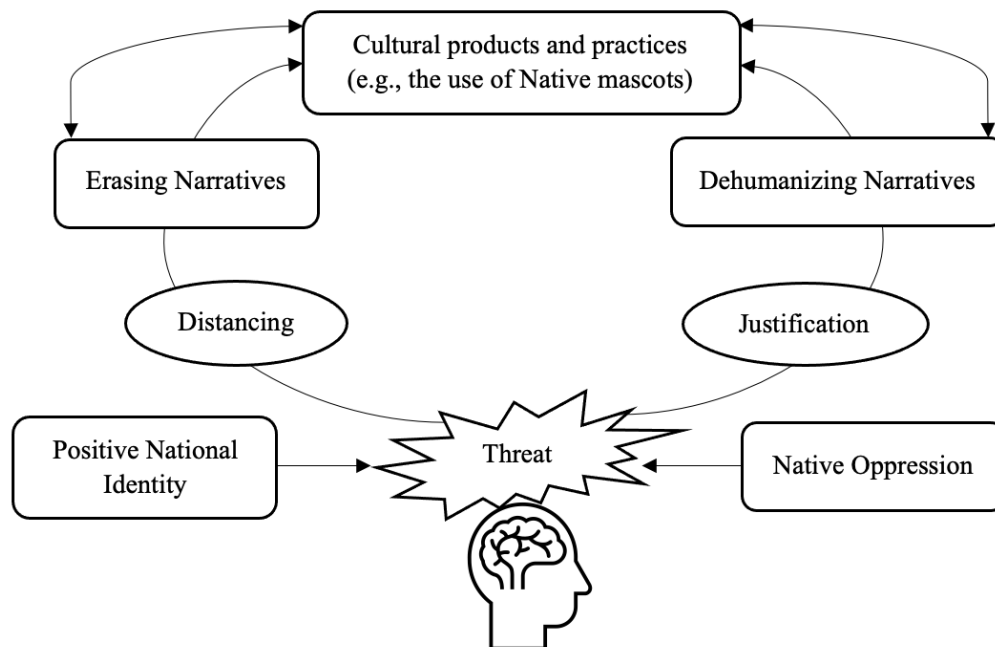
To illustrate how erasing and dehumanizing narratives enable psychological distance from and justification of Native oppression (see Figure 1 for conceptual model), we first describe two examples of narratives invoked to 1) proactively justify Natives’ forcible removal by the U.S. government and 2) contend with disproportionately high and under investigated rates of death among Native women and girls. We use these examples to illustrate the existence of erasing and dehumanizing narratives over time, particularly when Natives’ livelihood and wellbeing are undeniably at stake. We then provide a deep-dive into a contemporary example of how these narratives manifest in a harmful practice that many non-Natives view as innocuous: the use of Native mascots. We illustrate how Native mascots reflect and perpetuate erasing and

¹ We use non-Natives rather than Whites because prior research reveals that national identity, regardless of racial ethnic group membership, predicts attitudes regarding Native issues (e.g., eliminating Columbus Day, a holiday that erases the atrocities Indigenous Peoples experienced at the hands of Columbus; Eason et al., 2021).

dehumanizing narratives and argue that Native mascots (and their underlying narratives) protect non-Natives' positive national identity by enabling psychological distance from and justification of Native oppression. To conclude, we offer practical suggestions for creating a society free of harmful representations, like Native mascots, and their underlying narratives.

Figure 1

Conceptual model illustrating how erasing and dehumanizing narratives contend with the threat against positive national identity posed by the reality of Native oppression



Historical and Contemporary Manifestations of Erasing and Dehumanizing Narratives

One historical example in which non-Natives deployed erasing and dehumanizing narratives to their own benefit--and to the detriment of Natives--is the "Trail of Tears," which involved the forcible relocation of the Cherokee tribe to Oklahoma in 1838. To justify the forced cession of Cherokee land and removal of Cherokee Peoples, the U.S. government attempted to:

- 1) silence the Cherokee Peoples and obscure their resistance efforts (i.e., erasure; Languth, 2010); and
- 2) portray the Cherokee Peoples as uncivilized savages (i.e., dehumanization;

Jackson, 1833). To this end, a state paramilitary force attempted to silence Cherokee critiques of relocation and destroy evidence of their existence (Langguth, 2010) by openly harassing Cherokee journalists and burning down the *Cherokee Phoenix* printing press, one of the most widely distributed national newspapers of the time (Boudinot, 1996; Hill, 2015). Second, President Jackson dehumanized the Cherokee to support his displacement campaign, contending “those [southeastern] tribes cannot exist surrounded by our settlements. They have neither the intelligence, the industry, the moral habits, nor the desire of improvement which are essential to any favorable change in their condition...they must...long disappear” (Jackson, 1833). Erasing and dehumanizing narratives helped justify the U.S. government’s subsequent actions to take the coveted Cherokee land and force the Cherokee to march approximately 1,200 miles from North Carolina to Oklahoma. These narratives not only made the removal palatable and justifiable, but also catalyzed the deaths of more than 4,000 Cherokee people.

Erasing and dehumanizing narratives also exist contemporarily, for example, in the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG). A groundbreaking report by Lucchesi and Echo-Hawk (2018) revealed that murder is the third leading cause of death among Native women, with approximately two Native women and girls going missing or murdered every day. However, only 2% of MMIWG cases are reported in the national database, and most are not investigated or prosecuted by state or federal authorities. Building on the report, we contend that efforts to address the MMIWG crisis are hindered by 1) the erasure of this epidemic from public awareness; and 2) dehumanizing explanations of the violence. First, mainstream local, regional, and national media do not cover the vast majority of the MMIWG cases, erasing the crisis from public consciousness (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018). Second, in the rare instances when mainstream media discusses MMIWG cases, journalists often portray

missing and murdered Native women and girls as promiscuous and reference their drug and alcohol use or criminal history (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018). By blaming victims and questioning their moral character, media portrayals communicate that Native women and girls bear the responsibility for the violence and thus are not fully deserving of the same protections and basic human rights (i.e., dehumanization) as other Americans. Consequently, the public is either unaware of the MMIWG crisis or views the violence as deserved. These narratives undermine any sense of responsibility or urgency on the part of non-Natives to address the crisis and thus perpetuate ongoing Native oppression and death.

Taken together, both theory and real world examples demonstrate that erasing and dehumanizing narratives provide a psychologically protective means of engaging with Native oppression. In the remainder of this paper, we unpack the example of Native mascots, providing theoretical and empirical evidence to support our proposition that the erasing and dehumanizing narratives these mascots reflect and perpetuate serve to protect national identity.

Native Mascots Reflect and Perpetuate Erasing and Dehumanizing Narratives

Native mascots remain widely-used throughout the United States, despite ample scientific evidence regarding the harm they inflict on Natives (for review see Davis-Delano, et al., 2020). Exposure to Native mascots lowers Native youth's self-esteem, community worth, academic goals and positive affect (Fryberg et al., 2008; LaRocque et al., 2011), and increases dysphoria, hostility, and depression (LaRocque et al., 2011). Among non-Natives, the use of Native mascots increases implicit stereotyping of (e.g., implicit association of Natives with negative attributes such as primitiveness; Angle et al., 2017; Burkley et al., 2017; Freng & Willis-Esqueda, 2011; Kraus et al., 2019) and explicit discrimination against (e.g., verbal and physical abuse; Clark et al., 2011; Jacobs, 2014; Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Reholt, 2017; Steinfeldt et al., 2010)

Natives. This robust body of research unequivocally demonstrates that Native mascots undermine Native well-being and intergroup relations, and it affirms Native communities' and organizations' long standing opposition (see Change The Mascot, n.d. and Giago, 2019 for further discussion of Native activism).

While some schools (e.g., Stanford) and professional sports teams (e.g., Cleveland Indians) retired their Native mascots in acknowledgment of their documented harm and Native opposition to these mascots, others retired only after outside pressures. For example, in 2005, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) banned colleges with Native mascots from playing in championship games, citing 18 teams with “hostile and abusive” mascots. After much contestation, ten of these teams retired their mascots (Schwarb, 2016).² In 2020, only after Nike, FedEx and other sponsors threatened to divest, the Washington National Football League (NFL) team retired its mascot, formerly referred to by the racial slur R*nsk*ns (Walker & Dubin, 2020). Fans pushed back against these retirements, with many continuing to sell and wear vintage Native mascot paraphernalia.

Despite the longstanding opposition against and documented harm associated with Native mascots, we propose that Native mascots persist because they reflect and perpetuate erasing and dehumanizing narratives. To support this, we first describe the central features of erasing and dehumanizing narratives and then demonstrate how these features are evident in the continued use of Native mascots.

Native Mascots Erase Contemporary Native Peoples

Erasing Natives from the public consciousness is one of the primary forms of contemporary anti-Native racism (Deloria et al., 2018; Eason et al., 2018a; Robertson, 2015;

² Of the eight teams that did not retire their mascots, five received waivers due to local tribal support and three were given permission to use the same mascot name (e.g., warrior), but shift imagery to more generic warrior.

Rifkin, 2011). Erasure takes two forms: 1) erasing the existence of contemporary Natives and 2) erasing Natives who exist outside of a limited set of homogenous depictions. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau (2012) includes 5.2 million people who identify as Native, yet Natives are continually depicted as people of the past. Across all 50 states' K-12 history standards, 87% locate Natives in pre-1900 contexts (Shear et al., 2015). Similarly, less than 1% of television, film, book, or video game characters are Native, and most of these representations are historical (Leavitt et al., 2015; Mastro, 2017; Mastro & Stern, 2003).

Like education and the media, Native mascots depict Natives as 18th or 19th century figures dressed in buckskin clothing and headdresses, armed with tomahawks, bows, and arrows (Deloria, 1998). A random sampling of 100 schools, semi-professional and professional sports teams with Native mascots (MascotDB, n.d.a) illustrates the extent of the problem. All teams portrayed Natives historically, featuring headdresses or feathered headbands (88) and/or tomahawks or bows and arrows (27; see Appendix). Hollywood-derived chants and dances performed at half-time shows exacerbate these historical representations (Spindel, 2000).

Beyond relegating Natives to the past, Natives who exist beyond the available limited, homogenous depictions are also erased. Despite the diversity among the 574 federally recognized and hundreds of unrecognized tribes, Natives are stereotypically depicted with buckskin clothing, headdresses, and dwelling in tipis (Ganje, 2003), practices common among Plains tribes, but not among other Native communities (Pritzker, 2000). Non-prototypical tribes are largely rendered invisible and dismissed as "inauthentic." As a result, research suggests they may struggle to be seen or have their voices heard (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Sesko & Biernat, 2010; 2018).

By relying primarily on Plains representations, Native mascots similarly erase the relevance of Native communities across the country. Regardless of which tribes Native mascots purport to honor, these mascots share the same physical features (e.g., nose, skin tone, hair), expressive forms (e.g., dance, face painting), clothing (e.g., buckskins, feathers), and personality characteristics (e.g., brave, stoic) (King, 2006). Chief Illiniwek, the University of Illinois' former mascot, for instance, donned Plains Indian tribes' clothing, even though the Illini were Woodlands people. Like other homogenizing representations, Native mascots erase Native diversity.

Native Mascots Dehumanize Contemporary Native Peoples

A second strategy for contending with the reality of Native oppression includes the use of dehumanizing narratives. Dehumanization is the act of perceiving or treating people as subhuman (Haslam, 2006). Since first contact with European settlers, Natives have experienced both animalistic and mechanistic dehumanization (Haslam, 2006). Animalistic dehumanization involves the denial of uniquely human characteristics (e.g., morality, civility, and higher-level emotions like love; Leyens et al., 2001) and reduction to the status of animals or animal-like "savages" (Haslam, 2006). Nineteenth century rhetoric and policies, for example, compared the Apache Peoples to wolves (Welch, 2017). The *New York Times* reported: "The Apache is as near the lobo, or wolf of the country, as any human being can be to a beast (Dunbar, 1859)." This Apache-wolf association justified European settlers' "hunting" of Apache Peoples by employing the same gruesome measures used to kill actual wolves (e.g., community hunts, scalplings; Jacoby, 2008). Television and films continue to portray Natives as subhuman, even literally transforming Natives into animals (e.g., 2012-2018 *Twilight* series). Native men are commonly depicted as bloodthirsty savages wielding tomahawks and scalping knives against Whites (e.g.,

2015's *Bone Tomahawk*), and Native women are commonly depicted as promiscuous and amoral "squaws" (Bird, 1999; Larson, 2006; Raheja, 2011).

Native mascots similarly reduce Natives to animals or animal-like savages. Mascots are intended to inspire players to fearlessly defeat rivals. Accordingly, most mascots are dangerous, aggressive animals. The ten most common mascots for university and secondary school teams include seven animals (e.g., tigers), one historical figure (a knight), and two Native mascots-- *Warriors* and *Indians* (MascotDB, n.d.b). Given that the vast majority of mascots are animals, using Natives as mascots places Natives on the same level as animals. Further, Native mascots bolster the idea of Natives as fearsome savages by reinforcing associations of Natives with violence and aggression. For example, the Atlanta Braves baseball team's logo is a tomahawk, which was used as a tool and a weapon by tribes in the South and the Great Plains. However, when fans perform the "tomahawk chop" they mindlessly enact behavior that casts the majority of Natives and their actions as brutal, uncivilized, and fearsome subhuman savages (Pewewardy, 2000).

These associations are far from trivial. Empirical research demonstrates that Native mascots broadly activate implicit and explicit Native-savage associations (i.e., dehumanization). Exposure to Chief Wahoo versus non-Native mascots (i.e., Pittsburgh Pirates) made negative Native stereotypes (e.g., savage, primitive) more accessible to non-Native participants compared to positive Native stereotypes (e.g., noble, proud; Freng & Willis-Esqueda, 2011). In another study, non-Native participants primed with a Native (vs. kangaroo) mascot logo were more likely to implicitly and explicitly associate Natives (vs. White people) with 'warlike' savages (Angle et al., 2017). Moreover, non-Natives whose local team (i.e., Cleveland Indians) used a Native mascot demonstrated a stronger implicit Native-savage association compared to people whose

local team (i.e., Detroit Tigers) did not use a Native mascot (Angle et al., 2017). Lastly, when primed with Native versus White mascots or neutral images (e.g., carrots), non-Natives who held pre-existing prejudicial attitudes towards Natives showed greater activation of the Native-savage association and perceived ambiguous behavior by a Native target (vs. a White or Black target) as more aggressive (Burkley et al., 2017). These findings run contrary to mascot defenders' argument that Native mascots "honor" Natives and, instead, affirm that these mascots fuel dehumanizing perceptions of Natives as savages.

The second form of dehumanization, mechanistic dehumanization, occurs when targets are denied living characteristics (e.g., warmth, emotionality) and reduced to inanimate objects (i.e., objectification; Haslam, 2006). American culture commonly commercializes Natives and Native cultures by turning Natives into products that can be possessed, used, and thrown away (Doxtator, 1992). Companies use Natives as advertisements and logos (e.g., Land O'Lakes products) and turn Native cultures (e.g., clothing, rituals) into profitable products. For instance, one of Yandy's (a lingerie and costume store) best-selling costume lines (e.g., "Pocahottie") featuring feathers, headdresses and low-cut, short dresses. Despite Native communities' contention that these costumes eroticize Native women, the company's CEO refuses to eliminate them (Nittle, 2018). However, in response to internet outrage, Yandy promptly removed costumes inspired by *The Handmaid's Tale*, a fictional story of oppression of mostly White women (Elassar & Muaddi, 2018). This example suggests not only that Native women are perceived and treated as inferior, but that there are no observable social consequences of exploiting them.

Native mascots similarly objectify Natives by turning them into products from which schools, professional teams and fans can own and profit. Native mascot merchandise generates

considerable revenue for universities and professional sports teams and organizations. A report on the financial impact of sports mascots suggests that, compared to other human and animal mascots, Native mascots generate significantly more revenue (Tripathi, 2013). Just as settlers celebrated victorious massacres by placing Natives' decapitated heads on sticks (Baker, 2007), by purchasing Native mascot products, fans can continue to collect Native trophies and take a piece of purported Native culture home (Black, 2002; Spindel, 2000).

While research demonstrates that Native mascots activate Natives-savage associations, to date, research has not explored whether mascots increase Native objectification. Research on female objectification, however, provides insight. Like Native mascots, sexualized images of women are used to sell products (Stankiewicz & Rosselli, 2008). Research demonstrates that exposure to sexualized female imagery increases men's belief that women are sexual objects that they can use to meet their needs (e.g., Bègue et al., 2017; Gestos et al., 2018; Karsay et al., 2017; Wright & Tokunaga, 2016). Further research should examine whether Native mascots elicit a similar psychological process.

How Native Mascots Protect non-Natives' National Identity

Now that we established that Native mascots erase and dehumanize Natives, we turn to the argument that Native mascots (and their underlying narratives) protect non-Native national identity from the reality of Native oppression. Specifically, we argue that erasing narratives obscure the country's moral transgressions against Natives, thereby psychologically distancing non-Natives from Native oppression. Dehumanizing narratives work in tandem to cast Natives as unworthy of better treatment, thereby justifying Native oppression. In the remainder of this section, we review empirical research suggesting that erasing and dehumanizing narratives allow

non-Natives to maintain a positive national identity. We then discuss how Native mascots serve the same psychologically protective function.

An examination of Columbus Day illustrates how erasing narratives allow non-Natives to avoid engaging with Native oppression. Columbus Day celebrates the “discovery” of the Americas and glorifies Christopher Columbus as brave, civil, and adventurous. In reality, Columbus was one of the most brutal colonizers in American history, who killed and tortured the Taíno Peoples for economic gain (Zinn, 2003). Most Americans do not know of Columbus’ misdeeds and remain reluctant to embrace the truth (Cullen, 2017). Only 14% of American parents with children in public schools believed it is appropriate to teach children about Columbus’ brutality against Natives, but a vast majority (92%) believed it is *inappropriate* to deny the Holocaust (Public Agenda Foundation, 1994). We theorize that this paradox, in which American parents oppose teaching their children about Native genocide but approve of their children learning about Jewish genocide, stems from a desire to protect national identity (Eason et al., 2021). That is, the Holocaust does not cast the U.S. in a negative light and thus is not threatening to how Americans view their country. Columbus’ atrocities, however, threaten America’s positive image and thus Americans’ national identity, leading parents to want to avoid teaching this truth to their children. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that people high in national identification preferred maintaining Columbus Day and not adopting Indigenous Peoples Day, which acknowledges contemporary Natives’ lived experiences and the atrocities of colonization (Eason et al., 2021).

Similar to Columbus Day, analyses of Thanksgiving Day further illuminates the link between erasing narratives and national identification. While Thanksgiving celebrations emphasize friendship and cooperation between settlers and Natives, they erase the violence,

theft, aggression and displacement the Pilgrims enacted against the Wampanoag, and the fact that early “thanksgiving” celebrations were frequent events that marked violent massacres of Natives (Deloria, 2019; Donnelly, 2017; Kurtis et al., 2010). Non-Natives high in national identification embraced the erasing narrative of Thanksgiving over more accurate narratives that tell the disturbing origin of the holiday, and they rated the erasing narrative as more appropriate for foreigners to understand the “true” meaning of the holiday (Kurtis et al., 2010).

These holiday examples demonstrate that non-Natives high in national identification embrace erasing narratives and deem concealment of the country’s moral transgressions as necessary to promote a positive national image. This desire to avoid Native oppression is consistent with the motivated forgetting literature, which demonstrates that individuals are less likely to remember negative ingroup information (e.g., immoral, violent acts; Cooper & Stone, 2004; Peetz et al., 2010; Sahdra & Ross, 2007). In one study, non-Natives read a passage about historic transgressions against Illiniwek people and the ongoing consequences of these transgressions. Non-Natives remembered fewer words from the passage when the perpetrators were framed as ingroup members (i.e., *Americans*) rather than outgroup members (i.e., *Europeans*; Rotella & Richeson, 2013). This finding is consistent with our contention that non-Natives avoid engaging information about Native oppression that threatens their national identity.

When erasing Native oppression is not possible, dehumanizing narratives take hold, allowing non-Natives to justify the oppression (Savage, 2013). By relegating Natives to subhuman categories, dehumanization makes Natives unworthy of humane treatment and legitimizes violence (Bandura, 1990; Bar-Tal, 1990). In the context of colonization, settlers’ descendants dehumanize Natives to exempt themselves from the guilt associated with the

historical oppression of Indigenous groups (Savage, 2013). For example, upon learning that White settlers, as opposed to disease, were responsible for widespread Native deaths, White participants animalistically dehumanized Natives by denying them higher-level human emotions (e.g., love, hope; Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006). Similarly, after reading information suggesting that all (vs. only a few) non-Native Chileans were responsible for the death and suffering of Mapuche people (i.e., an Indigenous group in Chile), non-Native Chilean participants attributed fewer high-level human emotions to the Mapuche (Čehajić et al., 2009). These findings are consistent with the assertion that non-Natives dehumanize Natives to rationalize the oppression inflicted by their ingroup members, thereby maintaining a positive national image.

Given the link between erasing and dehumanizing narratives and positive group image, we theorize that Native mascots play a similar psychologically protective role for non-Natives. Indeed, preliminary evidence shows that non-Natives high in national identity reported greater opposition to the retirement of Native mascots (Eason et al., 2018b). Empirical research also suggests that the continued use of Native mascots bolsters positive identity for non-Natives. White individuals who viewed another White person wearing a Native mascot t-shirt experienced higher self-esteem, expressed greater liking of, and felt more similar to other White individuals compared to those who viewed the same person wearing a Fighting Irish or a no mascot control t-shirt (Fryberg, 2017). Another study demonstrates that, at a university with a Native mascot, students who expressed more explicit anti-Native prejudice reported a greater sense of school belonging and more positive attitudes towards their school's mascot, an effect that was particularly pronounced among White students (Kraus et al., 2019). While Kraus and colleagues did not measure national identity specifically, research demonstrates that non-Native individuals

high in national identification not only see negative stereotypes of Natives as acceptable but also personally endorse those stereotypes (Eason et al., 2021). Studies examining Whites' attitudes toward racial/ethnic minority groups in general also demonstrate that greater national identification is related to more negative beliefs and attitudes about racial/ethnic minorities (Theiss-Morse, 2009; Yogeeswaran et al., 2014). Based on these findings, it is reasonable to speculate that in Kraus and colleagues' work (2019), students, especially White students, who expressed more anti-Native prejudice were also higher in national identification. Although additional research that directly tests the psychological effects of Native mascots on non-Natives in relation to their national identity is needed, these studies collectively suggest that the continued use of Native mascots confers psychological benefits by enhancing non-Natives' self- and group-images.

Discussion

We presented Native mascots as a prominent example of a wide range of cultural practices that reflect and perpetuate two deeply-embedded cultural narratives that *erase* and *dehumanize* Natives. These cultural practices enable non-Natives to psychologically distance from and justify Native oppression. By providing a means of contending with U.S. moral transgressions, erasing and dehumanizing narratives allow non-Natives to maintain positive national identity, which in turn predisposes individuals to reifying the harmful products and practices these narratives engender. Given the ongoing mutually constitutive nature of the cultural narratives, practices, and individual beliefs (Markus & Kitayama, 2010), how can we move forward in ways that afford Natives the full rights and protections of other Americans?

Undoing Narratives that Erase and Dehumanize Natives

Banning Native mascots is one way to mitigate their harm, but this move alone is insufficient to end Native oppression. To target the root of Native oppression we must replace erasing and dehumanizing narratives with accurate, contemporary narratives written by Natives. Below, we offer recommendations for individuals and institutions to facilitate change.

First and foremost, ending Native oppression requires non-Native individuals to stop supporting cultural narratives that undermine Natives' wellbeing. Non-Natives must first acknowledge that most information about Natives conveyed in schools and popular culture reflects inaccurate, limiting, and stereotypic representations that erase and dehumanize Natives (Reese, 1996; Shear et al., 2015). Next, non-Natives must seek more accurate, expansive narratives that reflect who Native Peoples are and how they want to be seen (i.e., learn the truth about Natives' historical and contemporary experiences). Finally, instead of building a positive national identity by suppressing national transgressions, positive national identity must be fostered by acknowledging the past and highlighting the nation's continued commitment to build a more just and moral future in line with our ideals (for example see: Dresler-Hawke & Liu, 2006; Levy, 1999; Welch & Wittlinger, 2011). By following these recommendations, non-Natives may be better able to identify and replace erasing and dehumanizing narratives of Natives.

The onus for change, however, does not solely fall on individuals. Powerful institutions have long perpetuated and profited from these harmful cultural narratives and thus must be part of the solution. Much like the NCAA, professional sports organizations (e.g., the NFL, MLB, NHL) should move to systematically eliminate the use of Native mascots. In education and media, promoting accurate, contemporary representations is essential. Following the examples of Montana, Washington, Oregon and North Dakota, states can adopt legislation requiring schools

to teach tribally-developed history curricula (Janzer, 2019; KickingWoman, 2021). Similarly, major textbook distributors, such as McDougal Littell, Pearson, McGraw-Hill and Houghton Mifflin, can pledge to include this curriculum. In the arts, building on the work of initiatives such as Sundance Institute's Indigenous Program, American Indians in the Arts, and the Writers Guild of America West's Native American & Indigenous Writers Committee, greater efforts are needed to support the development and casting of Indigenous writers, directors, and actors (Sundance Institute, n.d.). These suggestions are a starting point for individuals and institutions to move away from erasing and dehumanizing narratives and to make space for Native voices.

As we consider the role of individuals and institutions, we must also examine the role psychological research has played and can play in addressing erasing and dehumanizing Natives.

Psychological research largely omits Natives (Fryberg & Eason, 2017), often justifying this exclusion as a result of "small sample size, large margins of error, and other issues related to the validity and statistical significance of data" (National Congress of American Indians, n.d.).

Psychologists have a responsibility to develop a science that is inclusive of Natives and committed to addressing contemporary Native issues. For example, further research is needed to understand the psychological mechanisms and motivations that underly Native erasure and dehumanization, whether these psychological processes are unique to North American Indigenous groups, and how these processes may (or may not) generalize to global Indigenous populations (i.e., due to common experiences arising from settler colonialism) and to other marginalized groups (i.e., due to shared experiences of prejudice and discrimination). When psychologists heed this call to action, they can both improve the visibility of Native Peoples and identify pathways for addressing Native oppression.

Conclusion

Native mascots will one day be a thing of the past, but if we do not reject the narratives that allowed these mascots to persist, Native oppression will simply continue in other forms. From the under-investigation of the MMIWG epidemic (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018) to the disproportionately high rates of police brutality (Lett et al., 2020), erasing and dehumanizing narratives fuel inequalities that are quite literally a matter of life and death for Natives. Uplifting the full humanity and contemporary significance of Natives requires seeing Natives the way they want to be seen and creating a culture in which Americans both face past moral transgressions and commit to an equitable future for all Americans.

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Appendix

Table.

Results from content analysis of 100 randomly selected schools, semi professional, and professional sports teams with Native mascots.

Team name	Feather Headband	Headdress	Tomahawk	Bow & Arrow
Southern California Apaches		1		
Watertown Arrows				1
Yerba Buena Aztec Warriors		1		
Port Huron Big Reds		1		
Bellaire Big Reds				1
Adrian Blackhawks		1		
Shawnee Braves	1			
Union County Bravettes				1
Agawam Brownies		1		
Catawba College Catawba Indians	1			
Toledo Cherokee		1		
Greenback Cherokees		1		
Morgan Township Cherokees		1		
Blytheville Chickasaws		1		
Kansas City Chiefs				1
Pelahatchie Chiefs		1		
Bellefontaine Chieftains		1		
Bibb County Choctaws		1		

Shiner Comanches		1		
Community Fighting Braves	1			1
Jackson Fighting Indians				1
Clearwater Fighting Indians		1		
Window Rock Fighting Scouts	1			1
Sachem East Flaming Arrows	1			1
Cooperstown Central Hawkeyes				
Rogers City Hurons	1			
Archbishop Ryan Indian Raiders	1		1	1
Grand Ridge Indians		1		
Oswego Indians		1		
Collinsville Kahoks		1		
Booker Kiowas				1
Carlisle Lady Chiefs	1			
Clarke Lady Indians				1
Lady WarriorsGoshen Lady Warriors	1			
Indiana Little Indians		1		
Lake View Maidens	1	1		
Berryhill Maidens		1		1
Tyler Junior College Apaches	1			
Tecumseh Arrows	1			1
Missouri Valley Big Reds	1			1
Westville Blackhawks		1		

Stockton Blackhawks		1		
Whetstone Braves		1		
Alta Loma Braves		1		
Northview Chiefs			1	1
Big Foot Chiefs		1		
Armuchee Indians		1		
Bismarck Indians			1	
Colbert County Indians		1		
Heard County Mighty Braves		1		
Madison Mohawks		1		
Morgantown Mohigans			1	
Escalante High School		1		
Petoskey Northmen		1		
Bonnyville Pontiacs		1		
Aliquippa Quips			1	
London High School		1		
Utica Redskins			1	
Slocomb Redtops				1
Pentucket Regional Sachems			1	
Syracuse University Saltine Warriors		1		1
Pittsfield Saukees			1	
South Stokes Sauras			1	
Quinton Savages			1	

Arlee Scarlet Warriors				1
Lake Forest Scouts				1
Creekside Seminoles	1			
Detroit Seminoles	1			
Monroe Central Seminoles	1			
Calvert Senecas	1		1	1
Watkins Glen Senecas				1
Antioch Sequoits				1
Solen Sioux		1		
Westhope/Newburg Sioux		1		
South Beloit Sobos	1			
Bellmont Squaws	1			
Dodge County Squaws		1		
Jourdanton Squaws	1			1
Palmer Terrors	1			
Pineridge Thorpes		1		
Johnstown Tomahawks	1		1	
Marysville Pilchuck Tomahawks			1	
Chowchilla Tribe		1		
Tulare Union Tribe		1		
Uintah Utes		1		
Woonsocket Villa Novans		1		
Braintree Wamps		1		

Anadarko Warriors		1		
Athens Warriors		1		
Walled Lake Western Warriors	1			
La Puente Warriors		1		
Piggott Mohawks	1			
Stanwood Mohawks	1			
Osceola Seminoles		1		
Hurricane Redskins	1			
Laveta Redskins		1		
Coshocton Redskins		1		
Broken Bow Savages		1		
Savannah Savages	1			
Candor Indians		1		
County Lines Indians		1		
Total	39	49	5	22

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