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Alumni Perceptions of a University's Decision to Remove Native American Imagery From Its Athletic Program: A Case Study

Jessica M. Toglia[1] and Othello Harris[1]

Abstract

One of the more contentious issues North American athletic organizations face is how to deal with Native American imagery that is associated with their sports teams. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has, in recent years, banned member organizations from using and displaying Native American nicknames and mascots at postseason events, with a few exceptions. This has led to protests, especially by alumni, at some schools. This case study examines how alumni at one university perceive and experience the removal of a Native American team nickname from the University's athletic program. Fourteen semistructured qualitative interviews were conducted with alumni from Miami University representing one of three cohorts: those who graduated by 1993 (before the removal of the nickname was discussed or implemented), those who graduated between 1993 and 2000 (during the time the nickname was removed), and those who graduated after 2000 (after the change was implemented). Borrowing from the narrative inquiry approach, thematic analysis was utilized. Two major themes that arose irrespective of cohort are presented and discussed.

Keywords

Native American imagery, NCAA, athletic team nicknames, mascots, alumni

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Many North American sports fans and spectators seem to tolerate the use of Native American imagery including logos, team nicknames, symbols, and mascots. Some scholars suggest that this is because Native Americans occupy a different space than other marginalized groups (see, for example, Farnell, 2004; Strong, 2004; Williams, 2006). Despite fairly widespread acceptance, since the 1970s debate has been ongoing about the appropriateness of the unremitting use of these logos, team nicknames, symbols, and mascots at various sporting levels. The debate is centered upon whether names such as *Indians, Warriors, Braves*, and *Redskins* and accompanying images are a positive way to honor Native Americans or if they represent harmful, negative stereotypes (Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008). For example, in 1995, the Cleveland Indians presented a press release extolling the historical significance of the franchise name. They asserted they are honoring Louis Sockalexis, who they claim was the first Native American to play professional baseball. The name "Indians," they say, is a way to continually remember his contribution to the franchise—to honor his legacy (a claim that has been challenged as historically inaccurate by Staurowsky, 1998). Contrarily, Ward Churchill (1994) argues the use of Native American imagery "causes real pain and real suffering to real people. . . . it threatens our very survival . . . it is a crime against humanity" (p. 82). Other professional sports franchises like the Washington Redskins and Atlanta Braves have contended with protests regarding their names and mascots. Yet, resentment of Native American imagery is not confined to professional teams; collegiate sports programs are also encountering resistance.

One of the most controversial issues the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has had to deal with, in recent years, is the use of nicknames and logos by its member institutions. Defenders argue that these images honor Native Americans' vigorous energy and aggressiveness, traits that, when associated with sport, are thought to be a good thing. Thus, for them these images celebrate Native Americans as brave warriors (Davis, 1993). Moreover, these supporters claim the mascots represent the fun associated with sport. Many people, they would argue, have become too sensitive to the presence of Native American images and representations. Supporters claim there is too much "political correctness"—too much concern about the feelings of non-White groups who claim marginalized status (King, 2002). Some adherents of this position may see political correctness as a loss of their privilege—their ability to engage in diversionary practices (e.g., sports viewership) without worrying about what people are called or how they are imagined. Furthermore, supporters claim that there are some Native Americans who are not offended by this imagery—who do not object to the use of their likeness for athletic teams. A *Sports Illustrated* poll (Price, 2002) suggesting the same has been used as evidence of acceptance of, or indifference to, this imagery by Native Americans. Moreover, proponents of the use of Native American imagery often state that while teams may have Native American logos and team names, these same teams also support, often financially, Native Americans. For example, the Kansas City Chiefs organization stated that the sales of a team poster with players wearing Native American attire were sent to the American Indian Center as a donation (Davis, 1993). In short, those who are in favor of the continued use of Native American names and mascots claim they celebrate and provide support for

Native Americans through the use of this imagery. In addition, they cite support from Native Americans as one of a number of reasons why this imagery is inoffensive in its intent and result. Not surprisingly, detractors' views of the continued use of Native American imagery are in direct opposition.

Opponents state that sport-related Native American images are racist and they are detrimental stereotypes based on incorrect information. For example, "warriors" suggests that Native Americans are aggressive and violent and this image ignores the fact that many Native American practices have been linked to non-violence and cooperation. Challengers say those who display Native American imagery are guilty of misappropriation of sacred symbols such as the eagle feather. For example, according to Davis (1993), the eagle feather is a ceremonial item that represents the highest honor a Native American can receive for doing a great deed; it is congruent with receiving the United States' Congressional Medal of Honor. Therefore, sports fans who dress in Native costumes using chicken feathers essentially mock this precious spiritual article with profane—disrespectful and demeaning—behavior. Those who display symbols such as war paint, feathers, and tomahawks (which they claim honor the brave Native Americans of the past), fail to acknowledge that these symbols are sacred and should not be used haphazardly for an athletic contest. Moreover, opponents fail to see the honor in these displays of Native American imagery countering that Native Americans are a vibrant living group. It is problematic, they say, to memorialize a group of people who still exist (Davis, 1993).

As evident by the outlined arguments above, there are differing positions regarding the use of Native American images. Not surprisingly, NCAA programs have been at the center of this debate.

The NCAA and Native American Imagery

As the debate regarding Native American imagery in college athletics was growing, the NCAA formulated a policy regarding these images and their use at member educational institutions. In August of 2005, the NCAA announced that any school with Native American imagery—which includes both mascots and team nicknames—would be banned from displaying them at sanctioned postseason events and would be ineligible to host NCAA championships beginning February 2006 (Perlman, 2005). However, if a school was able to secure tribal support, it could retain the nickname. Of the 19 schools that were affected, 5 were granted appeals pending permission from local tribes to continue use of their name and or mascot and of this 5, the most vocal schools in opposition to this policy were Florida State (FSU Seminoles), University of North Dakota (UND Fighting Sioux), and University of Illinois (UI Fighting Illini). FSU secured tribal permission and, as of this writing, continues to use imagery associated with the Seminole tribe while the UI has retired their mascot. Perhaps the most contentious response has come from UND. Following the UND's failure to acquire support from local tribes to retain its nickname and logo, the North Dakota Legislature took a different approach. In March 2011, it passed a law requiring the university to retain both the nickname and logo. Later that year, in November, the North Dakota

Legislature repealed the requirement that UND teams use the Fighting Sioux nickname. This was met by resistance from supporters of the nickname who sought to retain the mandate for the Fighting Sioux via a June 2012 statewide referendum (Wetzel, 2012). (The referendum failed, thus UND teams are not required to use the nickname, Fighting Sioux.)

Undoubtedly, some of the concern about relinquishing the UND's nickname and mascot regards the tradition, "honor," and meaning of these things to the University, and especially to the UND's alumni. This was demonstrated by a letter from the Executive Vice President and CEO of the UND Alumni Association to the Editor of the Wahpeton, ND & Breckenridge, MN Daily News. While stating support for dropping the Fighting Sioux nickname, the letter began, "For me, the name has always been a source of pride, tradition, honor and excellence, and will always be a part of who I am and those close to me" (O'Keefe, 2012, n.p.). We expect this will be a common refrain for universities faced with either dropping their Native American nicknames or NCAA sanctions.

Names, Logos, and Mascots: A Distinction

Native American symbols are ubiquitous in American sports, especially among college or university and secondary school teams. Bresnahan and Flowers (2008) report that in 2006 a total of 2,963 elementary, middle, and high schools still retained Native American sport mascots and that 58 colleges still used Native American images for their sport (this includes non-NCAA member schools). These symbols are also present among the four United States men's professional sports leagues with a total of five teams utilizing some form of Native American imagery. This includes *team names* such as the Atlanta Braves and Cleveland Indians in Major League Baseball (MLB), the Kansas City Chiefs and the Washington Redskins in the National Football League (NFL), and the Chicago Blackhawks of the National Hockey League (NHL). In addition, all of these elite teams have Native American logotypes or *logos* that refer to a symbol, representation, or abbreviation for, in this case, a sports team. These logos include Chief Wahoo of the Cleveland Indians—the grinning, red-faced, buck-toothed character with a feather in his hat; Atlanta Brave's tomahawk; Kansas City's arrowhead; Washington Redskins' red-faced, feathered, disembodied character; and the Blackhawks' feathered, war-painted face.

In contrast to a logo, a *mascot* is a person dressed up as a character for the team. For instance, the Cleveland Indians have Slider "a fuzzy, fuchsia-colored mascot" ("Slider, Tribe Mascot," 2009, n.p.); the Kansas City Chiefs have a wolf that makes appearances at games; and the Chicago Blackhawks have a bird named "Tommy Hawk." These mascots wear the Native American logos of the teams on their costumes and uniforms, but they do not have people who actually dress up as a Native American. The Atlanta Braves and Washington Redskins currently do not have mascots, although Atlanta used to have a mascot called Chief Noc-a-Homa (Rosenstein, 2001). It should be noted that many writers fail to distinguish between names, logos, and mascots in their work, sometimes using the terms synonymously. For example, in discussing the significance of Cleveland Indian's Chief Wahoo, King (2004) states,

> This is not an Indian either. It is Chief Wahoo. This is the pseudo-Indian mascot selected by "The Tribe"—or as they are more properly and commonly known, the Cleveland Indians baseball team—to represent itself and purportedly to honor former player, Louis Sockalexis . . . This is the anti-Indian symbol emblazoned on caps, jerseys and jackets worn by fans, found in the media coverage about the team and populating the publicity materials produced by Major League Baseball, Inc. and its corporate partners. Although not an Indian, Chief Wahoo adorns Indian bodies and makes regular appearances in Indian country. (p. 4)

In the above statement, King makes reference to Chief Wahoo first as a mascot and later as a symbol. For our purposes, Chief Wahoo is a logo or a representation of the Cleveland Indians (a symbol). However, as he is not an animate object, he is not a mascot. The distinctions among names, mascots, logos, and symbols are important ones because although public discussions are popularly referred to as debates surrounding Native American mascots, the meanings that logos, team nicknames, and symbols have are much deeper than simply employing a mascot (see, for example, Davis-Delano, 2007, who discussed nicknames, logos, and mascots as interrelated phenomena). Throughout the current project, team names, logos (or symbols), and mascots are thought of as a "bundle" and are referred to as *Native American imagery*. This is a more encompassing definition because the debate appears to include not only performances by physical mascots but also the meaning that names, symbols/logos, and objects can have. This imagery has been on display by colleges and universities for nearly a century. It is to this history, the result of a confluence of historical changes in American society and in collegiate sport, that we now turn.

Origins of Native American Imagery in Sport

The use of mascots by schools and colleges coincided with the expansion of athletics beginning in the early 1920s. Before the 1920s, college athletics were less established than today and there was less regulation of teams and players. For example, a student could play for several college teams over the course of a career with no limit on the number of years of athletic eligibility. To illustrate, William Lewis played football as an undergraduate for Amherst. He later went to Harvard for law school and joined the Harvard football team (Rust, 1985). Known as "tramp athletes" (Smith, 1988, p. 139), they faced fewer restrictions regarding years of athletic eligibility and "transfers" to and from schools than today's collegiate athletes.

Prior to the 20th century, there is little evidence of Native American mascots and team nicknames (Davis, 1993). This would change with the expansion of intercollegiate athletics. At schools where college athletics were expanding, the popular collegiate athletic team nicknames were first based on school colors. For example, Dartmouth College's nickname was the "Big Green" and Miami University's nickname was "The Big Reds" ("The 'Big Green' Nickname," 2010; Connolly, 2000). As athletics gained a permanent place at schools and universities, they also gained legitimacy. It was during this period—the early 20th century —that schools like Dartmouth University (Indians), Stanford University (Indians), the UI (Fighting Illini), and Miami

University (Redskins) began to use Native American mascots. In fact, many schools and colleges that adopted Native American names/mascots did so during this period even though they may have had prior nicknames (Connolly, 2000). These mascots were invented from stereotypes such as those shown in the very popular Wild West shows and movies that depicted Native Americans as savages but also as, athletic, trustworthy, and noble (Connolly, 2000). Stereotypes continued with the advent of television. For example, The Lone Ranger, a top-rated television show during the late 1940s and the 1950s, had a sidekick, Tonto who exhibited the kinds of traits that many Americans would admire in an assimilated Native American—he was bold and fearless—and exhibited the qualities of a "good Indians" (Spindel, 2002, p. 35).

King (2006) explains, during the time period of the invention and adoption of Native American athletic team nicknames in the early 20th century, there was a concomitant *crisis in White masculinity* due to the closing of the frontier. The land that was considered "The United States" had been almost fully explored by European "settlers." This movement of European settlers as far west as possible had deprived men of what had been an important means for displaying masculinity. Moreover, the rise of urbanization and industrialization contributed to the crisis (King, 2008). According to Messner (1988), during this time period while industrial capitalism was expanding, traditional forms of male domination were being undermined. For example, urbanization was accompanied by the loss of farms which diminished the practice of passing down private property, an important feature in men's domination of a central occupation—farming. Thus, fewer men controlled their own labor. This created fears of the "feminization of society" (p. 200) due to more women entering the workforce, especially public schools, and men having to rely on different breadwinner roles—roles that were less tied to property ownership. Thus, men during this time period were seeking alternative ways to validate their masculinity and reclaim authority over women. Organized sport was a major outlet that provided men ways to demonstrate superiority over women and combat perceived notions about feminization. That is, athletics were not viewed as being compatible with femininity; moreover, women rarely used athletics as a site for the struggle for equal opportunity. (For many women, this would come much later.)

At the same time of this crisis in masculinity, intercollegiate athletics were expanding. During this expansion, as most intercollegiate teams selected new names, there seemed to be a reliance on "masculine" characteristics such as toughness and physicality. For many athletic programs, this was best illustrated by traits such as bravery, stamina, and some warrior-like qualities —traits that had come to be associated with Native Americans, at least the "good Indians" (Spindel, 2002, p. 35). These stereotypes helped to consistently present male sports, especially sports like football, as uber-masculine, and these sports may have helped to replace the frontier as an outlet for men to demonstrate and validate masculinity. Although, the crisis of White masculinity did not directly produce Native American team nicknames and symbols, and these names were perhaps not chosen consciously to respond to the crisis, the environment was conducive to their adoption. The increased use of Native American imagery in college athletics occurred simultaneously with this crisis of masculinity.

While the historical period that spawned these images has long passed, these images have been sustained in nearly all levels of sport. Davis (1993) argues Native American images are sustained because supporters of this imagery feel arguments against them challenge a "common version of European-American masculine identity" (p. 16). That is, within Western mythology pride and nationalism are present. For those supporters, the removal of these images would be un-American. That is to say, since the closing of the "real" frontier—the end of the westward expansion that provided a means for the development of masculinity—sport has served as a surrogate frontier, allowing participants to continue the battle for supremacy. Native American mascots have played a role in the masculine identity through sport for many Americans.

King (2008) notes that over the years these mascots "have become institutionalized icons, encrusted with memories, tradition, boosterism, administrative investment, financial rewards, and collective identity" (p. 421). That is, Native American imagery (mascots and symbols) has come to mean more than rallying a team to victory. With the proliferation of Native American team nicknames and symbols throughout the 20th century and changes to college athletic programs, these images have become abundant and controversial. In a few cases, they have led to public demonstrations, primarily by opponents of the continued use of Native American imagery by sports teams.

The Protests

While protests of Native American imagery in sports at all levels have accelerated in recent years, the issue has been controversial for many years. Some have argued that racial sensitivity was heightened in the 1970s following the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s; this included the critique of the use of Native American imagery in sport especially at the national level (Davis, 1993). Until then, Native American imagery had been largely ignored. However, in 1970, the first official complaint on record against the use of Native American logos associated with a professional sports team was filed against the Cleveland Indians' use of the logo of Chief Wahoo. These early protests received little attention, perhaps owing to the small audience it actually reached. However, activism regarding Native American mascots continued to grow, and by the 1990s—due perhaps to methods of protest such as organized campaigns against their use and new ways to disseminate information such as the internet—these protests began to receive national media attention (Davis, 1993). According to Miller (1999), the first large-scale demonstration by opponents of Native American imagery against a professional sports team took place in 1991, in Minneapolis, at the MLB World Series between the Minnesota Twins and the Atlanta Braves. A few months later, at the 1992 Super Bowl between the Washington Redskins and the Buffalo Bills, also in Minnesota, there was another large-scale protest. These protests illustrate a shift from grassroots to larger, more organized protests during the 1990s. There were also protests on college campuses. The UI protest regarding Chief Illiniwek was, perhaps, the most prominent example (see, for example, King & Springwood, 2001). At Miami University, while there was no mass protest, the university made the decision

during the mid-1990s to retire the nickname, Redskins. This study, of Miami University, provides an examination of alumni responses to the change in a university's nickname more than a decade after the change was made. Years before the NCAA's decision to ban Native American imagery at postseason events, Miami University made the decision to discontinue its associate with the nickname "Redskins." While it is difficult to tell if Miami University's decision had an impact on the NCAA or its member schools, Miami University's case may be instructive for the few NCAA schools that have recently dropped Native Americans mascots and/or nicknames. Miami's case study may also be informative for those schools debating whether to drop Native American imagery. We begin with a discussion about Miami University, the Redskins, and the RedHawks.

Miami University Case Study

For the first 20 years of intercollegiate athletic competition (1888-1908), Miami University had no nickname. Their colors were red and white and had nothing to do with Native American heritage; rather, the colors were adopted by the campus literary societies that were founded in 1825. Nicknames for the athletic teams began surfacing in the early 1900s. These included "The Big Reds" and "The Red and Whites," both references to the teams' colors; they were also known as "The M Men" and "Old Miami." In 1928, publicity director Ralph J. McGinnis coined the term Redskins for the athletic program and the Varsity M Club became Tribe Miami (McDonald & Milne, 1999). The first official reference to the athletic teams using Redskins appeared in the 1931 university yearbook. In the 1950s and 1960s, students dressed like Native Americans began to appear at athletic competitions with the marching band. The official mascot in the 1960s was Hiawabop, who was a student dressed up with a painted face. Also during the 1960s, Chief Forest Olds visited the Miami campus and this led to the formal relationship between the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma and Miami University (McDonald & Milne, 1999).

The first public indication that the nickname should change came in 1972 when the Student Senate unanimously passed a bill to stop the use of the term Redskin. That summer, in 1972, a committee was appointed to examine the relationship between the Miami Tribe and the university's use of the nickname Redskins. The task force voted to retain the name. However, the committee's report recommended the elimination of caricatures such as Hiawabop and suggested that the university use only authentic Native American symbols (Connolly, 2000). In response to the task force decision, the Miami Tribe passed and released a resolution[1] in support of the nickname (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, 1972).

After the initial effort by the task force to closer inspect the term Redskins as it was used by the university, the relationship between Miami University and the Miami Tribe grew stronger throughout the 1970s. Scholarships for "qualified" members of the Tribe were created and a formal liaison position was formed despite there being few Native Americans on campus (Connolly, 2000). In 1988, the Miami Tribe reaffirmed its 1972 resolution at their business meeting (McDonald & Milne, 1999). However, the debate about the nickname began to resurface in the student newspaper

in 1992. A special issue was run in the student newspaper, the *Miami Student* in November 1992 ("The Redskin Issue"), and the Diversity Affairs Council and the College Republicans squared off in an official debate ("D.A.C.," 1992). In early 1993, there was an editorial in the *Miami Student* stating that new incoming President Paul Risser needed to address many issues; one of them was the mascot controversy ("Risser Must," 1993). Amidst the debate, President Risser announced a process to study the use of the term Redskin by the university. In November of 1993, there was a public forum held where people could present their points of view (Risser, 1993). The following month, after much deliberation, President Risser laid out his recommendation to the Board of Trustees that academic institutions should not promote a particular ideology or deny individuals the right to hold unpopular decisions. He stated that each person should decide whether to use the term Redskins. The Miami Tribe strongly supported Risser's public discussion and his recommendations and did not object to any changes (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, 1993). The Board of Trustees voted in December 1993 to accept President Risser's compromise ("Miami Tribe or Miami Redskins?" 1993).

President Risser and the Board of Trustees likely considered this issue resolved, but it was not. Debate continued over the next few years. In July1996, the Miami Tribe suddenly withdrew its support for the Redskins nickname and released an official resolution[2] stating, in part, that they can no longer support the use of the nickname Redskins and suggesting to the Board that the university discontinue its use (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, 1996). The Board of Trustees, in response to this resolution, voted in September 1996 to eliminate the use of the term Redskins. Subsequently, in February 1997, a group sued Miami University to stop the name change. This group included 13 citizens, 9 of whom were alumni. The lawsuit charged that the action of the Board of Trustees caused mental anguish and loss of enjoyment of life to the plaintiffs ("Alumni Sue," 1997). While some alumni were clearly resistant to the change in the nickname, others, including those who were students during the change, seemed to have held less animosity toward university officials.

After a lengthy process of reviewing new nicknames, "RedHawks" was recommended to the Board and in April 1997 the Board voted unanimously for the new nickname that was to go into effect June 30, 1997 (McDonald & Milne, 1999; "Trustees Approve," 1997). While a vocal group was opposed to the change of name, there appeared to be a range of opinions regarding the team nickname. This study examines the perceptions of alumni as they pertain to the removal of the name Redskins from Miami University's athletic teams. Using the qualitative interview method, the question "*How do Miami University alumni perceive and experience the removal of a Native American team nickname from the University's athletic program?*" was investigated within three different cohorts (these cohorts are discussed under study participants).

Research Approach

This research project borrows from the narrative inquiry approach. According to Schram (2006), this approach focuses on the stories people tell about an event or sense

of events that are chronologically connected. The narrative inquiry approach is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a small group of individuals as it allows for the researcher to analyze both meanings and motives and how they connect to the way people structure their experiences. These narratives provide a context for interpreting the meaning of an event. In this case, the event was the change in the athletic team nickname that occurred on the Miami University campus. In terms of understanding the meaning that people attach to the name change, some participants told their story of how they perceived the removal both when it happened (in 1996) and years later (in 2010).

Research Lens

The lens that guided this project is based on Schram's (2006) conceptualization of the interpretive/critical continuum. At one end of the continuum is the critical lens which holds, as a basic tenet, that the researcher undertakes research because she/he thinks that changes are needed. This requires the researcher to move beyond describing the situation to offering a critique as well, which serves as an impetus for change. At the other end of the continuum is the interpretive lens. This perspective acknowledges the social construction of reality and its complexity. Focusing on a particular place and time, the interpretivist researcher aims to make sense of the participant's perceptions of the way things are. This requires the researcher to keep in mind that reality is constructed by the people who live it and tell about it. For this research project, the lens leaned more toward the interpretive end of the continuum. That is, interview questions concerned with *what* and *how* were geared toward making sense of the situations where multiple voices were narrating (Schram, 2006).

Recruitment and Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used in the current study to recruit people who could discuss and answer questions about the phenomenon of interest. We initially relied on the data branch of the Miami University Alumni Association office for participants. The Association gathered a list of email addresses that were randomly chosen and sent the invitation letter electronically to 150 alumni (50 in each of three cohorts) on two different occasions asking for participation. This produced insufficient numbers—the return rate was zero. There is still question about whether or not the data branch actually sent out the invitation. In the meantime, our first participant heard about the project through an academic gathering and volunteered to be interviewed. That participant then referred us to two other participants. Thus, we utilized snowball sampling—we identified potential participants through personal relationships. Once we exhausted referrals from participants, we employed another technique—opportunistic sampling which according to Shank (2006) involves "tracking down leads," from non-participants. For example, a colleague of the primary researcher was able to provide two names. Both were contacted and agreed to participate in the study. Using these techniques—snowball and opportunistic sampling—we identified 14 participants.

Participation remained voluntary throughout the entire process. There were two criteria to be eligible to participate in the study: first, individuals had to be alumni of the university. Second, they had to answer "yes" to the question "do you believe you can talk to me about the use and/or change in the Native American athletic team nickname at Miami University?" For this project, semistructured qualitative interviews were conducted. Shank (2006) notes that semistructured interviews allow for some latitude concerning the ways questions are asked and what follow-up questions are used; however, all participants are asked the same basic questions to maintain some degree of comparability across interviews. There were three slightly different interview guides for different cohorts to reflect the eras they were students.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist. Afterward, the data were coded by the researchers, and where possible, meaning units were grouped into themes. Meaning units and themes were then examined both within and across the three cohorts for similarities and differences. "Researcher triangulation" (Johnson, 1997) was conducted during the development of meaning units and themes. A description of the study participants is presented next.

Study Participants

Fourteen semistructured qualitative interviews were conducted with alumni from Miami University representing one of three cohorts: those who graduated by 1993 (before the removal of the nickname was discussed or implemented), those who graduated between 1993 and 2000 (during the time the nickname was removed), and those who graduated after 2000 (after the change was implemented). Study participants were alumni of Miami University who graduated between the years of 1979 and 2007. Of the 14 participants, 10 were male and 4 were female. Four were on campus prior to 1993, 4 were students between 1993 and 2000, and 6 were on campus after 2000. Two participants identified themselves as having Native American ancestry, while 1 participant identified as African American and the remaining 11 participants identified themselves as White. Names have been replaced by numbers to ensure confidentiality. Presented in the next section are the results of thematic analyses of the interviews.

Results

As is the case with narrative qualitative research, there are as many stories as there are people telling them. What is important, however, is that these are the particular stories that people chose to tell and retell in a given time and space. We investigate two major themes that arose irrespective of cohort: *It's P.C.* and *Erasing Tradition*. Although the themes are presented in distinct sections, they are interrelated. The overlap of meanings provides further evidence that people do not live their lives in discrete ways. *It's P.C.* suggests that it was a politically motivated move to change the nickname in the

first place, and the change serves to sever an important connection to the university for some alumni (*Erasing Tradition*). We begin with a prominent concern among alumni: political correctness.

Theme 1: It's P.C.

The term "politically correct" or P.C. was evident throughout the interviews. Many participants perceived and experienced the removal of the team nickname Redskins as being an act of political correctness—that is, it was changed only because RedHawks was "safe" or "neutral" and they asserted that the change occurred because language had to be more sensitive. Whether it was framed as part of the time period, attributed to university administrators and faculty attempting to be P.C., or discussed in a way that explained that other people saw the change in this light, this theme emerged quite strongly. It permeated many participants' interviews. Outside forces or "political pressures" were given as reasons why the change occurred and the Miami Tribe's one-time endorsement of Redskins was one way some of them justified the reluctance to embrace new language.

When asked "What do you think about Miami University using the term Redskins?" Interviewee 6 conveyed his dislike of the nickname (RedHawks) that replaced it—and the politics he perceived were involved—when he stated,

> I absolutely think it's distasteful [the RedHawks]. I think when the university had the permission of the Miami tribe to continue using the Redskin moniker I think they caved into political pressure so I was very disappointed to hear that. (I#6)

Responding to the same question, Interviewee 7 had the followings to say:

I#7: Never thought twice about it at the time.
Interviewer: Okay. So have your thoughts changed about this now?
I#7: Well, it certainly has become an issue. Since probably since right around when I was graduating and beyond is when the Native Americans started voicing their protest about our Native American names used for teams and you know I really—I hadn't—I would say my thoughts have changed since then only because now I've thought about it. But you know prior I just hadn't really given it much thought. And I think I've gone through sort of an evolution of how I've thought about it. When it first started coming out I was very much thinking, yes, absolutely, change the name, it is disrespectful. If the tribe that you're naming yourself after is not happy with the naming, then you should drop it. And I still sort of think that but I also think that a very vocal minority has sort of corrupted the English language and is in other ways, not so much team names, but in other ways. And the whole political correctness movement has actually perverted the English language and we can say and what we can't say to an extent that it is difficult to—you know it is difficult to even speak about different things because you don't know what's going to be offensive and what's not. So that's kind of

where I sit on it. It's—why would honoring an Indian tribe be offensive, A; the word Redskin, you know I can kind of see that that's more derogatory than if it was the Miami, Miami tribe or something like that might not be so offensive. So I get that that might cross the line but I also think that when we were named the Miami Redskins I think it was probably came from a place of honoring and not of insulting.

This perception demonstrates that the larger national scene of the visible protests to Native American imagery in the 1990s was an important context for how these alumni made sense of the discussion of and debates surrounding possibly changing the University's sport teams' nickname. That is, some alumni in this study expressed that opposition to removing the Redskins nickname was due, at least in part, to frustration with a "phase" of *political correctness*. Participant 4 also conveyed this sentiment when he stated,

I#4: I think the other thing is I think at the time I'm trying to think back to, it has been 13 [years] that—and I think people got to a point they were fed up with political correctness. And then there was a sense that this was more political correctness that was taking place. And so that might have weighed into it too, a frustration level of a perceived political correctness is what was driving some of that. So it could have been that this was just the final straw on so many things that were—I mean there were times in the 90s that as a man I was advised, don't hold a door open for a woman anymore because that's not good. And then there was another generation that then it went sort of full circle, like wait a minute we still like that chivalry, and so there is a great deal of confusion by a lot of people like what am I supposed to do or say?

For Interviewee 12, the justification came from the idea that it was during a politically correct time period because for all the years prior to that, people did not seem to think it was offensive.

I#12: And so—well I'm guessing that it was you know kind of the start of how everything being in a PC world and you know wanting to follow political correctness and being afraid to offend or alienate anyone. And I think, my opinion is, I mean the university just sort of jumped on that band wagon.

Interviewer: Okay. You mentioned earlier in one of your responses about jumping on the band wagon or the PC thing. Can you talk about that a little bit more?

I#12: Yeah, that's just my opinion. Yeah, I just think it seems to me around that time you know being politically correct about things was really, you know, as much a buzz word, as much as just you know starting to be a way of life. People were sensitive to other people, other cultures, you know, and so I think we probably tended to and still do to this day sometimes maybe take, you know, go a little overboard on it. You know it wasn't an issue for you know let's see two hundred years, you know, almost. And now it became an issue. And I would have thought that if that use of that name would have been offensive in any way

that it surely would have been an issue a hundred years prior to that knowing how long the university was in existence, not knowing of course that they had the name Redskins all that time, that I don't know. I don't remember that in my old history of Miami (inaudible) during freshman year.

I#12: So yeah,[that's] just—my recollection is it seemed like that time is when you know being PC was you know kind of more of a—I don't know what's the right word. But you know it had a heightened sensitivity I guess—

Interviewer: *Uh-huh.*

I#12: To be politically correct about things.

The idea that it was a political decision or a consequence of political pressure seemed to mean that a small group of people wanted to change the name; it did not imply large vocal opposition. Moreover, some participants identified specific groups that were primarily involved in the push for change. These included faculty, activists, the administration, and the NCAA.

> Okay and that was under a new President, . . . and his response was that he wanted to get this issue behind him, that he had a lot of pressure from the academic community, you know the professors and staff. (I#4)

Interviewee 7 discusses how it was not an issue until activists became vocal:

Interviewer: So if I'm hearing you correctly, when you were here on the campus it wasn't an issue for you?

I#7: It wasn't an issue. I think it became an issue right when I was leaving, you know, no one even thought about it until some Native American activists brought it up, and that's when everybody said, Oh, yeah okay I get it now. It wasn't something that had been brewing and brewing and brewing that we knew about anyway.

Interviewer: So you said that there may have been some Native American activists around the time period that you were here or is that nationally?

I#7: Not that I know, I'm just thinking you know I'm assuming that it was a Native American activist organization of some sort that initially brought the petition to Miami University to change their name. I may be wrong. I mean it might have been some you know liberal college professors.

Participant 14 discussed how it might have been political action groups who decided that the old nickname was offensive:

Interviewer: So you don't remember anything in particular about—like because obviously you came in, this name is changing, were you curious about why it was changing or was that talked about?

I#14: Yeah, I do remember wondering why it was talked about and knowing that it was out of respect thing, it wasn't PC, it wasn't politically correct to—I think

people thought it was a derogatory term against the American Indians and the Miami Indians. So that was the main push, you know, of these groups of individuals that wanted to deal with it more politically correct.

Interviewer: Who are those people do you remember?

I#14: I don't remember. I don't know, I don't know if it was alumni that decided it was offensive or if it was other political action groups that maybe had no affiliation.

For Interviewee 11, the change was mainly characterized as a politically correct move that was driven by the administration. He discussed this extensively and explained it in the following way:

I**#11:** It seemed more—the Redskin, I guess I mean the RedHawk name I guess is a little more generic. The Redskin, while it may not become completely politically correct, tied to the word using the Miami name, the tribe.

Interviewer: So, how do you, just kind of your own words and your experiences, how would you explain some people being attached to the Redskin name while others seemingly are not so attached to it?

I#11: The ones that wanted the change were not so much attached to the school or the history behind it, but what the implications of using it as a derogatory name might have been. They didn't want—they were trying to be politically correct, trying to think of a name [that] they thought would not cause any problems, would be you know, you know, PC.

Interviewer: Okay. Just trying to make sure I'm clarifying what you're saying. Was it mostly administration led or where do you think the push was kind of coming from? You've talked about people who wanted to be PC.

I#11: The change?

Interviewer: *Yeah.*

I#11: I think it's more—I think it was more administration. Yeah.

Interviewee 12 also spoke about an outside group as the instigator for the change:

> Yeah, I'm not sure if it was a group of, you know, ancestors of you know original Miami Indians or if it was, you know, some other, you know, group that decided that they would take on this cause. That I don't know. (I#12)

Other participants told the story differently, stating it was the NCAA who made the university change. Interviewee 9 said,

> So when we changed from Miami Redskins to Miami RedHawks, I don't think the real reason they were changing it was to have a more PC name, keep it clean and clean image school. I think 90 percent of it was direct pressure from the NCAA saying they had to change their name or they were going to have sanctions if you will on that. (I#9)

Interviewee 10 stated,

> My understanding is you know it was change due to the derogatory nature of the name. You know subsequently, you know, the NCAA came out with its regulations regarding the mascots and the use of Native American nicknames for the schools, but I don't believe—although pending regulation may have been the incitement of change, I don't think the actual immediate loss of championship venues and that type of thing had actually come into play when they had made the change. I may be wrong on that, but that's my recollection of it. (I#10)

Thus, while some felt outside groups (or "agitators") were responsible for the change, others seemed to suggest the change occurred because of "internal politics." As an example, concern about the Miami Tribe's changing position on the nickname was mentioned. A number of participants were aware of, and made reference to, the 1972 resolution that the Miami Tribe released initially in support of the name. Participant 6 discussed the idea that there was endorsement from the Miami Tribe to use the name earlier in his quotations and bluntly states,

> The university had the endorsement of the Miami tribe. (I#6)

In a follow-up question, when asked if there have been any consequences, either positive or negative, of this change, Interviewee 6 stated,

> I don't think I'm in a position to respond to that because I simply don't know. I know how I feel about it. I'm disappointed that the university did that. And I talked to people that are like me that are as disappointed, but I'm sure that there are those that are pleased because they felt it was (inaudible). I certainly don't agree especially when you have the endorsement of the—Miami Indians . . . I'm just disappointed again that they chose to cave into the political pressure that forced them to change the name when they had the option not to. (I#6)

Participant 4 echoed this position:

> And as I recall there was a coalition of university professors who were putting a lot of heat on the trustees as well that it was high time, this was offensive kind of term to use to the Miami tribe which is in Oklahoma I believe. But I think that was somewhat controversial because I kind of recall also that some representatives of the Miami tribe had indicated that they were comfortable with the way things were handled within Miami University with respect to using the Miami tribe name which you know is how Miami University got its name is Miami tribe. (I#4)

However, not all participants agreed that the Miami Tribe had endorsed the nickname and therefore it should not have been changed. Participant 2 was unsure if the Miami Tribe endorsed the name and also could not understand why they would, if they did.

> You know, like we had this thing when the controversy was going on there was this you know the response that the Miami tribe had sort of blessed the use of the word. And you know, that may—I don't know the details, that may be true. Maybe they did say go ahead and use it. But, I can only speak from the average people that I have met for members of various Native American communities and you know those people I have met are very, you know, they are offended by it so I can't speak for the tribal hierarchy. But I can tell you that I have known a lot of average Native American folks and they don't like the terminology. (I#2)

Within cohort two, Participant 12, when asked about his memories to the reactions of the change, responded,

> I think generally most people I know were somewhat disappointed to see the name change. I mean it wasn't the end of the world, but I don't think—never quite understood. I mean I understood why they changed it, and I know that people understood why they changed it, the university explained it, but was also my understanding that that group of Miami Indians didn't really even—I don't know that it really offended them that I understood. And you know if you look throughout it isn't like we don't have other sports teams with the name Redskins even still to this day. (I#12)

Participant 11 describes how he thought the Miami Tribe did not have a problem with the nickname Redskins:

> They also didn't want to upset the Miami tribe. But it was odd because up until that point the Miami tribe had no problems with the Redskin name. I don't know that the tribe itself actually—I don't know what was going on with them actually. But it was basically the people that were supporting the change were more in terms of political correctness and didn't want to offend anybody, didn't want to offend the tribe, didn't want to impersonate as a biased or bigoted university by using the name so they wanted to change it. (I#11)

Alluding to the 1972 resolution, Participant 14 recalls,

> I do remember one quote that people kept saying was I guess it was in a contract somewhere and I haven't seen it personally that we were allowed to use the Redskin name, this is from the Miami tribe, allowed us to use the Redskin name for as long as the wind shall blow. And so everyone was, that was for keeping the name was obviously saying well I guess the wind's not blowing, we're not allowed to use it anymore. I do remember that type of discussion. (I#14)

Similarly, Participant 1 also references the 1972 resolution:

> [They] had quotes from that, from one of the leaders of the Miami tribe that said something along the lines of as long as the wind shall blow, the Miami tribe will be proud as the Miami University Redskins. And so there was a lot of people that believe, honestly believed that they were doing some kind of honor or, I don't know, I guess honor to the tribe, the Miami tribe through that nickname. And it did kind of come through for me at

> least that idea that when we change over to RedHawks people would forget that Miami was the name of a Native American tribe. (I#1)

Participant 9 says that the when the name changed, it was only rumor that the Miami Tribe wanted it to change:

> I#9: There was some talk around that they had received communications from the Miami tribe that they wanted the name changed as well, so that was all rumor. I never saw—I always thought if they had something they would have publicized that or shown it around, but you never saw it. So there is rumor that that happened, but I don't know. It just seemed—it was just kind of a weird situation.
> Interviewer: So if there was communication from the tribe, you were not aware of it?
> I#9: I mean they never published it. I never saw it.

When asked if she had heard or learned anything about the history of the team name at Miami, Participant 8 recalls and explains her conversations with the Chief of the Miami Tribe while she was in school, and the concept of their initial endorsement:

> And now it has just been so long I don't remember all of it. But I . . . do remember talking to the Miami chief at some point about the mascot and the history issue. And you know he just—well basically he said you know we've—we gave approval for them to use it and we gave them approval to use some of the regalia and since we've done that we feel that it is an okay symbol and acceptable and that's what I was told at the time. You know I talked to him about my experiences with that word and what it felt like it was so derogatory and how I just did not feel like it was an appropriate symbol to be using. (I#8)

The first theme, *It's P.C.*, involved the perceptions and attitudes that the change was made because it was politically correct to do so. That is, the change was not made because it is *really* racist rather, instead, because of a small group of people such as liberal professors or Native American activists who were offended by the name. Some of the interviewees talked about the name change as being politically motivated because after all, the Tribe endorsed the nickname Redskins. Thus, for most of the participants the change was described as being driven by outside pressures.

Theme 2: Erasing Tradition

The second theme that emerged was *Erasing Tradition*. This was discussed as both a challenge to and a loss of history and identity. While some participants viewed removing the Redskins nickname as a loss of identity, others did not. Perhaps this feeling of loss and subsequent longing has as much to do with the longing study participants had for their own pasts—their college years and what they now imagine them to be. Some claimed that they held their college years dear and the Redskins nickname represented that heritage and tradition for them. In addition, some felt the loss was about "a

tradition" (something the school always had and was not necessarily tied to athletics) and/or a loss for the athletic program (i.e., loss of a winning record). The theme *Erasing Tradition* is both related to and distinct from the previous theme.

When Participant 2 was asked how he would explain some people being much attached to the Redskins athletic team nickname, the following was his response:

> And so I don't think it is hard to understand why they became attached to it. I mean this is their college experience, this is—this embodies—the sports team embodied what they experienced as a college student. And those are incredibly potent memories. I mean they are memories and experiences that are remembered that last your entire lifetime. This is their home, this is where they probably met their spouse. And these are all part of you know the great experience here at Miami. So I don't, I don't think it is hard to understand why Redskins [became] such an important name because that was their experience that was their team, that was their you know, that's who they stood in the stands and rooted for, you know. And in a way I think that they sort of feel, they feel put off. They feel in effect some ways offended because how dare somebody challenge what I held so dear? So I don't have any problem understanding it, you know. I just think that there's another side to this that a lot of people don't actually see. And that's the important part. (I#2)

Along the same lines of identity and history, others focused on tradition. For Participant 6, this was especially evident. Early in the interview, when asked what meanings the athletic team nickname Redskins held for him he responded:

> It represents a tradition of many years and a special connection to the university. (I#6)

After alluding to the idea of tradition throughout the conversation, he was asked to elaborate.

> Well I think, I mean it is not a hard leap to make that so much of Miami University is rooted in tradition. The school was established in 1809 and it is something like the 7th oldest university in America. So there's a lot of tradition at Miami University. It seeps into everything that I can remember about it . . . Again so I think of the infringement and changing the name as an assault upon the tradition of Miami University when they chose the name. So, again I think it's important that we all have tradition. Tradition doesn't mean it is not progressive. It just means it anchors you in a different (inaudible) and that's what tradition means to me at Miami University. (I#6)

Another idea expressed was the removal of the nickname as a loss of history.

> Interviewer: Okay. Do you think there's been any consequences either positive or negative of the change?
>
> I#14: Yeah, I think the only thing that I can maybe see as a negative is you don't really—you don't probably have people inquire as much about the Miami history as far as the Miami Indian history. It is not in their—not that it was in their face but I mean if you saw a Miami Indian doing a special dance at halftime at

> an event, you might be a little more curious about the history of it. But if you have just totally erased any association with the Miami tribe out in Oklahoma and we're just a school called Miami, because we don't want to offend anyone, I feel like they've kind of been lost.

While Participant 1 felt it was necessary to remove the nickname, he had concerns about the potential loss of history.

> So, I like the aspect that it reminded us of a group of people that need to be remembered, but I didn't like the way that the name was removed from all historical consequence . . . people felt that it honored the Native Americans. I don't think it does, but that being said I was around that so much as a 18, 19, 20 year old that looking back on it even now I can see what people mean and the benefits of the nickname, which were slim, were the fact that it reminded us that there were Native Americans living there and maintain that kind of tradition. Obviously the name Redskins needs to go, but I think maybe try to incorporate some other aspect might have been nice. (I#1)

In contrast to Participant 1, Participant 8 (who identified herself as Native American and White) shares a more personal connection to the nickname.

> I think that it is a very positive change just because I have such issue with that word and I think that there's so much historical trauma that's associated with the use of that word and I just don't think that having that used as a mascot is appropriate for anyone in any situation. And so just to help native peoples get over seeing that word and having that such a present thing in athletics and sport teams to me is a very good thing that it got removed. From the historical perspective, you know, in terms of messing with the alumni, I mean I just don't—honestly I could care less about what the alumni in certain respects because they are not the ones that have connection to that word in the way that my people have been historically traumatized by that name. So I really could care less about their feelings, that's how I feel. (I#8)

The second theme, *Erasing Tradition*, dealt with the idea that the change was a challenge to traditions that the school had always had and those traditions were seen as relating to identities and histories, including something that was a long-standing tradition—as long as 200 years old. Thus, this nickname change was viewed as a challenge to their identity and, as a consequence, a loss of history. For some participants, that history was viewed much differently; for one who identified herself as Native American, this history and nickname were particularly appalling.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences and perceptions of Miami University alumni concerning the removal of the Native American athletic team nickname from the intercollegiate athletic program. University alumni seem to have a stake in the removal of Native American team nicknames at various schools and

colleges that sponsor athletic programs, yet this population is not usually studied regarding this issue. This project investigates their reactions. Semistructured qualitative interviews yielded two primary themes—*It's P.C.* and *Erasing Tradition*. A discussion and interpretation of the themes follows.

It's P.C.

One of the dominant narratives about why the university changed the nickname was that it was no longer politically correct to have such a team name. This was evidenced in the first theme, *It's P.C.* Eleven out of the 14 participants mentioned or discussed this in some capacity. In fact, political correctness permeated how study participants made sense of the change though there were multiple meanings associated with the term *politically correct*. However, it is a term that was not used positively by many of the participants.

The term *political correctness* has come to mean many different things to different people. Although the term was used prior to the 1990s (starting in the 1960s with the Black Power movement then pertaining to feminism and sexuality in the 1970s and 1980s), it seems to have become popular and widely used after it appeared in the media when discussing multicultural education, college/university campuses, and professors. In that context, it reflects an adoption by the conservative Right to discredit the Left in the culture wars (Perry, 1992). This provides a context for the way in which many of the participants used the term and thus in this project, it appears most often as a way to describe a perceived national climate in which language had to be "sensitized" or changed to be more "appropriate." By this, it appears that some participants were invoking political correctness to mean an unnecessary, heightened sensitivity by groups to language and practices that were, to these participants, once innocuous but are now offensive. For some of the participants, this resulted in confusion and exhaustion—waiting for people to make up their mind about how they should be addressed. Examples of this in the larger national context include those who were previously comfortable calling people "Negroes" or "Blacks" found groups preferring, if not demanding, to be called "African Americans" just as "Indians" gave way to "Native Americans" and "girls" gave way to "women" (for adults). Language can be used as a tool to privilege some and disadvantage other as these examples demonstrate. (See, for example, Bonilla-Silva, 2010, for an extended discussion about how Whites' use of language reinforces their privilege in a racially stratified society). Some of the participants told stories about how activists—especially those who were neither students nor alumni—were responsible for creating a climate that challenged the university's use of Redskins for an athletic team nickname. These "activists" were viewed as people out of touch with the situation or outsiders who did not understand as illustrated by one participant stating, "I think the name was driven more by administration and external pressures than inside." Moreover, perceptions varied about the groups to which activists belonged. For some, radical faculty members (those "liberal do-gooder professors") who were offended by what they viewed as discriminatory practices led the charge in ridding the institution of such practices. Others blamed Native American

activists who were viewed as outsiders, meddling in university issues, who brought a petition to the school administrators. Still for another participant, the NCAA was viewed as the instigator and was the reason why the university had to change. Few participants, especially those who were against the change considered the nickname a form of racism and, therefore, necessary to be removed. Rather, they seemed to adopt postures of ambivalence or tolerance, a common practice, according to Bonilla-Silva (2010) for Whites in communicative situations surrounding race. As nearly all of the respondents who discussed activists' responsibility for the name change were White, their posture may be a reflection of their position in the racial structure which, for Bonilla-Silva, is a social structure that awards systemic privileges and benefits to Whites over non-Whites. Thus, the realities and stories some participants constructed could be related to their dominant position. Or, perhaps it was hard for participants to discuss racial matters without implicating themselves in racist practices.

In addition, activism regarding Native American imagery has been documented since the 1960s, but none of the participants discussed activism surrounding Native American imagery that occurred earlier than the 1990s. Rather, many of the participants discussed the issue of activism as a sign of the spread of political correctness, which they trace to the 1990s. That is, some argued that there was little or no concern about the team nickname until the time period when political correctness rose in popularity. Due to the fact that the change that occurred on the Miami University campus happened during this time period, it makes sense that this is how some of the interviewees might discuss it since according to Davis (1993), the earlier protests did not gain widespread support.

Some participants expressed distaste for the activism. This activism has been demonstrated by various groups such as the University Student Senate and the Faculty Senate, and national organizations such as the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI). This view of activism seemed to trivialize the efforts to remove Native American imagery from sports teams. Furthermore, the participants' dismissal of "activists," whom they believed were not associated with the university, was displayed by their concern that the university was too quick to give in to the unreasonable demands of those whom they considered uninformed. This was especially true if these activists were perceived as not understanding university traditions or how the name might be critical to students' identity. Some felt the nickname *was* a cherished part of their college identity and they seemed to have a stake in retaining Redskins and were certainly not involved with removing it.

For some participants, Redskins may not be considered offensive and some even questioned the veracity of the claim that the Miami Tribe actually changed their mind about the nickname. This was demonstrated by narratives surrounding endorsement from the Miami Tribe. Some of the participants suggested that if permission was given by the Native American tribe, whom the team nickname or mascot represents, it cannot be offensive. Moreover, many participants were aware that the tribe had given its endorsement to the university declaring that the Miami Tribe was happy to allow the team nickname for "as long as the wind shall blow," yet they seemed unaware of the tribe's 1996 decision to rescind that resolution. This led to remarks such as, "well I

guess the wind's not blowing." Since most participants did not discuss how the tribe had revoked support in 1996, they could attribute the change to outsiders. But perhaps the tribe's position was unessential; the university, some participants felt, was entitled to keep the nickname, despite the agitation of activists and the apparent change of heart of the tribe. They may have thought it was unacceptable for the tribe to reverse its earlier resolution that the university could have the nickname Redskins for "as long as the wind shall blow."

Although some participants appeared ambivalent about the name change or to the new nickname, they still held on to the above-stated beliefs. Some even seemed to become more entrenched. A changing national climate surrounding the acceptability of certain language and practices did not change their attitudes. Even some participants who preferred the new nickname, "RedHawks," located the change in what many viewed to be the climate of that time period. Moreover, they viewed their "uncorrupted" version of the language as harmless and not directed at members of marginalized groups. That is to say, to them Redskins was neither intended to offend nor was it linked in any direct way to Native Americans (at least not present-day Native Americans). Also, even though the athletic team nickname changed, views did not necessarily change accordingly. The removal of the term Redskins did not necessarily make some participants think about the potential consequences of this nickname, such as the reproduction of detrimental stereotypes; they continued to use it and defend it (even if not in university sanctioned arenas). This suggests that simply changing an athletic team nickname does not necessarily coincide with a change in practices if structural changes are not made in addition to the name change.

Many of the participants in this study made use of the politically correct narrative as well as the tactic of tribe endorsement—arguing that the Miami Tribe was in favor of using the team nickname. This represents a common argument used to defend the use of Native American imagery and it is consistent with Davis's (1993) and King's (2002) findings that the critiquing of such imagery by opponents of the use of Native American mascots, and so forth, is often considered a form of political correctness by supporters who seek to retain this imagery. It is worth noting that the themes that emerged from the data were interrelated. That is, when participants were talking about the name being changed because it was politically correct, they sometimes also described the need to maintain the university's history and tradition. It is to this topic that we now turn.

Erasing Tradition

For the participants who were in opposition to the name change, a common narrative was that removing the name erased a strong university tradition. They were disappointed that the administration ignored their tradition in favor of something new that was fashionable for the time period (i.e., jumping on the politically correct bandwagon at the expense of a time-honored practice). Illustrative of this was when participants stated that Redskins was linked to the heritage of the university. By this they seemed to suggest that it was an integral part of the school's history.

Yet, few seemed to realize, or at least not many bothered to discuss, the fact that the nickname was coined in 1928, and it was not used officially until 1931, during a period when many other schools adopted Native American team nicknames and logos (Connolly, 2000). Much like Chief Wahoo was an invention of the Cleveland Indians baseball organization, the Redskins, which represented a unique trademark, was an invention of the school's publicity director in the late 1920s. One participant reasoned that the name did not create controversy for the entire 200 years the school was in existence, so why, all of a sudden, was it offensive? If it is actually offensive, he further reasoned, someone would have pointed this out 100 years ago. He seemed to be unaware of the protests that occurred well before the official name change in 1997 or that it was a contested issue prior to the change. For him, the association between the university and the nickname was harmonious until the 1990s when language became sensitized.

Arguably, since the university athletic teams did not have an official nickname for the first 40 years of competition (besides unofficial names that were used to describe athletes), the sole purpose for choosing the name Redskins was not likely to honor the Native American tribe that the school was named for, as some participants have stated. Rather, this is a narrative—Native American team nicknames are honorable—that has gained popularity. The naming at Miami University seemed to have more to do with branding and trade marking. This was captured by the publicity director's acknowledgment from shortly after Redskins was adopted, that the athletic team nickname was chosen to set apart Miami University from the other team nicknames in the region such as the Bobcats and Bearcats (Connolly, 2000). Although he also mentioned that the school was named after the Miami Tribe and it would be a suitable moniker, the nickname gave the university marketing appeal. This was done at a time when mass production and mass commodification created the need for identifying marks including the marketing of products in advertising and also in sport (Staurowsky, 1998). Many participants did not see why others would take offense at historical depictions such as Redskins, and most seemed unaware that these depictions were devised at a particular time for particular reasons. Some participants told stories that the original nickname choice of Redskins was integral to the university's tradition and bestows honor on both the university and the Miami Tribe; however, it was likely a conscious decision to brand the intercollegiate athletic program.

In addition, even the university's website does not contradict the assertion that the Redskins nickname was not adopted primarily to honor the Miami Tribe. Listed under the "Miami Traditions" section of the Miami Football Digital Information Guide (2010), there is an article titled "Miami Nickname History." In the article, it states that the nickname Redskins was announced as a successor to Big Red because that name had caused confusion with the Denison University athletic teams; nowhere does it state that the nickname was chosen to honor the Miami Tribe. Those who were opposed to the university's decision to drop Redskins thought doing so severed an important connection—history. One participant suggested the history about the subjugation and removal of Native Americans from local environments, as well as national forcible removals such as the Trail of Tears, will no longer be passed on to those connected

with the university. This was thought to be a negative consequence of the name change. Some participants explained that students might now care less about the connection to, and heritage of, the Miami Tribe. However, it seems questionable that history can be learned from these nicknames and images because the history that spectators have access to is the constructed one which is narrow, limited, and re-imagined. It depicts Native Americans as a monolithic culture preoccupied with aggression. This appears to be at odds with the students' belief that being able to view the team nickname and associated images might increase one's interest and perhaps cause viewers to seek out additional information about the Native American tribe for which the school is named. Still, within the theme *Erasing Tradition* some participants reproduced the narrative that these images are honorable and are a way to preserve the history of a forgotten people.

However, not all of the participants thought the nickname should have been retained as a way to preserve the connection between the University and the Tribe. The two participants who self-identified as having Native American ancestry had a different view point of the historical role of the nickname. One felt very strongly that she did not care if other alumni were offended, "because they are not the ones that have [a] connection to that word in the way that my people have been historically traumatized by that name." She argued that she is part of the group being stereotypically depicted and that those who seek to maintain the nickname, without understanding its harmful consequences, are fighting to continue archaic practices that demean and debase Native Americans. Similar sentiments were offered by a second participant when he emphatically stated that he thinks the term Redskins is awful given its history and use. The quaint image that other participants conjured up such as brave athletes who are an important part of the university's athletic tradition was not how these participants viewed the team nickname; for them it was a painful and derogatory word that signaled oppression, not tradition, at least not a tradition that they want to see repeatedly displayed and unchallenged by the university's sports fans. Curiously, some participants associated the nickname with enthusiasm about the athletic programs, suggesting that when a team is successful, it does not matter what the nickname is (although they were probably referring to men's teams and in particular football). Thus, their concern with tradition seemed to be with the university's winning tradition; some participants were concerned that the name change may have had a negative effect on athletics. Some went as far as to suggest that the team's nickname changed the university athletes' motivation for playing. Although no one explained why an athlete might perform better under different nicknames or how athletic performance and team names are connected, it was clear that for some participants, the Redskins team nickname was attached to a winning tradition while the RedHawks was not. On the athletic battlefield where sport is sometimes viewed as ritual warfare, an athletic team nickname that is presumed to aid in motivation is often favored. Some participants seemed to be upset with the new choice and this was revealed in the ways in which they discussed the name RedHawks. The change was viewed as the University giving up on a nickname that invoked a fighting image for a nickname that was not formidable. This demonstrates the stereotypes inherent in Native American athletic team nicknames—these

nicknames represent the ways many European Americans have come to view Native Americans, that of the brave warrior. Narratives suggesting that the Redskins nickname was a more suitable name for the athletes are consistent with Davis' (1993) findings where particular associations with Native Americans such as brave warriors were prevalent in the mythology of the American West (p. 16). These associations remain prevalent today.

An important observation was that alumni who lived their college experience with the new nickname, RedHawks, appear to be less opposed to the change than those who lived their college experience with the old nickname, Redskins. Perhaps participants from earlier cohorts encountered a less inclusive climate that did little to sensitize them to the effects of demeaning stereotypes on groups such as Native Americans, at least relative to the more recent graduates of the university in this study—the third cohort. This may help to explain why only a few participants in the first two cohorts discussed how they thought that the university's Native American imagery was offensive which contrasts with the third cohort where a majority did. In 1993 when the public discussions about the athletic team nickname were taking place, total minority enrollment (which includes African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans) was at 5.5% of the student population and of that, 0.2% were Native American. In 1997, when the change officially occurred, total minority enrollment had increased to 7.3% of the student population, and Native American enrollment had increased to 0.3% (Office of Institutional Research, 2013-2014). Miami university officials seemed to make a conscious decision to step up the university's efforts to increase diversity around the same time that the nickname was retired. Perhaps a contributing factor to a larger discussion of diversity was the Black Action Movement (BAM) that occurred in the spring of 1997. In March of that year, approximately 150 students concerned about race relations rallied outside of the administrative building on campus. This eventually led to a series of meetings with university officials and a subsequent comprehensive plan to increase minority recruitment, retention, and inclusiveness (McNutt & Wetzel, 1998). The increase in the numbers of non-White students may have led to a challenge to the administration, by minority students, to be more inclusive in various university practices. Thus when participants in the third cohort were in school, Miami was more diverse than in previous years. Miami University has made it clear that there are continuing efforts to diversify the institution as demonstrated by the extensive diversity statement currently on the Office of the President website (Office of the President, 2011). Although some participants may have been unaware of efforts to increase minority enrollment, perhaps inclusiveness and diversity were being discussed more in their classrooms and in university social settings during the third cohort's stay on campus, as one participant suggested. In addition, the last cohort was the most diverse group with two participants who self-identified as having Native American ancestry and one who self-identified as African American. This group had more non-Whites (3/6) and more women (3/6) than the other two cohorts combined. This may also be a contributing factor to this cohort's sensitivity to demeaning depictions of Native Americans. White participants in this study are not a homogenous group with regard to their responses. However, these

three minority participants offered a unique perspective that was shared by only one participant in another cohort; he identified as White. Thus, it is difficult to pinpoint just what created these four individuals' perspective. It may have to do with the time period during which the third cohort was on campus, it may have to do with racial identification, and/or as demonstrated by the White participant in cohort one, it may be due to a critical consciousness. Thus we observed that some participants did not look as favorably on the old nickname as others did. One mediating factor, for many of the participants, seemed to be the time period during which these alumni were on campus.

Implications

This study has many implications both for the literature and future research. It may contribute to our understanding of alumni's reaction to an athletic team nickname change as well as our knowledge about the use and endorsement of Native American imagery by former students of a university.

One implication is that many of the participants had difficulty separating the logo/symbol from the athletic team nickname. This is not surprising since the language regarding Native American imagery tends to use mascots, logos, and nicknames interchangeably and sometimes without recognition of the complexity of intersectionality. Thus, future studies in this area should recognize that depictions and words are not independent of each other and intersect to create the complex bundle named Native American imagery.

Since the NCAA policy has been implemented to disallow Native American imagery at sanctioned events by participating schools, it has encountered "endorsement by the tribe" narratives by those who object to efforts to rid their school of these symbols. This seems to speak to issues of authenticity—who gets to decide what is, or is not, offensive. The NCAA policy states that if permission is given by the tribe to continue the use of Native American imagery, a school can continue to display images and nicknames at sanctioned events. This has been the case recently at events for the FSU Seminoles. For schools like UND, whose nickname is the Fighting Sioux, the debate continues due to their inability to secure permission from both Sioux tribes (Fitzsimmons, 2011).

As this study suggests, even if Native Americans withdraw their support for the use of the nickname/logo, alumni will likely be reluctant to accept this decision—they are unlikely to support the university's change of nickname. Rather, they may rely on other narratives to resist name changes such as the university is being oversensitive and caving in to a climate of political correctness. That is, there may not be an acceptable reason for the university to change what some see as an important tradition. Without outside intervention, universities and colleges would have continued what some alumni see as a harmonious relationship—one that honors those whose imagery they make use of. This study also suggests that once the change is made, most alumni will likely, eventually, accept the changed name. While these participants provided many reasons why the university should not have made the name change, most of them seemed satisfied to be associated with the new nickname.

A final implication is that by studying the use of Native American imagery, opportunities may arise for critical analysis of its continued existence. By not allowing this topic to settle into the background, its importance can remain "top of mind" for advocates and activists. According to Staurowsky (1999), "the educational importance of examining Native American mascots stems from the fact that such topics allow for a re-visitation of the power of words, symbols, and images" (p. 388). Thus, a challenge to dominant narratives can occur if critical researchers continue to study this topic. Creating and circulating counterhegemonic narratives will not allow the topic to forgo a critical look.

As other universities carefully weigh the consequences of removing Native American nicknames, logos, and/or mascots from their athletic teams, this study may be instructive. Nearly two decades earlier, Miami University engaged in the kinds of debates that other universities are currently contending with. Miami University grappled with contentious issues such as how a Native American nickname is essential to the university's identity and how it is a source of pride and tradition. Severing the association between a university and its Native American imagery is not inconsequential; some Miami University alumni were, and perhaps still are, resentful toward the university. However, this study suggests that more recent university graduates may be less tied to Native American imagery than alumni who graduate during earlier decades. This may, especially, be true if the campus climate is more inclusive and welcoming to diverse groups and perspectives. Removing Native American imagery may need to be a part of a larger discussion and set of practices around the university's academic and social environment. It may require a comprehensive plan—something far more than simply dropping a nickname, mascot, or logo.

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Notes

1. In 1972, the Miami Tribe passed and released a resolution in support of the nickname stating as follows: "Whereas, it is our counsel that the name Redskins is a revered and honored name in the eyes and hearts of the people of Miami University, and that it signifies to them as to us the qualities of courage, self-discipline, respect, kindness, honesty, and love exemplified by generations of young athletes, therefore know all peoples that we of Miami blood are proud to have the name Miami Redskin carried with honor by the athletic representation of Miami University on the playing fields of Mid America and in the arena of the world in International Olympic competition. We, the Miami Redskins of Indian blood, and our namesake, the Miami University Redskins, have a mutual and cherished heritage. May it be blessed by Moneto as long as the winds shall blow" (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, 1972, n.p.).
2. In July 1996, the Miami Tribe suddenly withdrew its support for the Redskins nickname and released an official resolution stating as follows: "Whereas, the bonds of friendship and shared heritage between Miami University and the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma have grown stronger over the last twenty-five years; Whereas, we realize that society changes, and that what was intended to be a tribute to both Miami University, and to the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, is no longer perceived as positive by some members of the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, Miami University and society at large; Therefore, be it resolved that the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma can no longer support the use of the nickname Redskins and suggests that the Board of Trustees of Miami University discontinue the use of Redskins or other Indian related names…Be it further resolved, that the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma does not associate the athletic team nickname of Redskins with Miami's logo, exemplified by the artist's portrait of an Indian Chief. The Miami Tribe therefore urges Miami University to continue use of the respectful and dignified portrayal of the Indian Chief as its logo and as a reminder to all of the shared heritage of Miami University and the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma" (Miami Tribe of Oklahoma, 1996, n.p.).

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