



ILLUMINATIVE ANALYSIS

UNPACKING THE MASCOT DEBATE:

ILLUMINATIVE

NATIVE AMERICAN IDENTIFICATION PREDICTS OPPOSITION TO NATIVE MASCOTS

STUDY SUMMARY

IN DECEMBER 2019, RESEARCHERS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN AND UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY COMPLETED A LARGE SCALE, NATIONAL EMPIRICAL STUDY OF OVER 1,000 NATIVE AMERICANS ON THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARDS NATIVE AMERICAN MASCOTS AND THE WASHINGTON NFL TEAM NAME “REDSKINS” (R*DSK*NS). THE STUDY DEMONSTRATED HIGH LEVELS OF OPPOSITION TO NATIVE MASCOTS AND THE R*DSK*NS TEAM NAME. ADDITIONALLY, NATIVE PEOPLES WHO ARE MOST HIGHLY IDENTIFIED WITH BEING NATIVE AMERICAN ARE MORE OPPOSED TO THE WASHINGTON TEAM NAME AND NATIVE MASCOTS.

WHAT DEBATE?

OFFENSIVE VS. NOT OFFENSIVE

There are two key stakeholders in the mascot debate controversy on whether or not Native mascots are offensive, including: 1) Native people, tribes, and organizations that point to psychological research demonstrating Native mascots undermine the wellbeing of Native Americans, particularly youth; and 2) Sports teams, schools and organizations who use Native mascots who contend that Native mascots honor Native peoples and are not offensive. Several polls have been conducted over last 16 years on this issue. Polls reported in the Washington Post in 2016 and 2019 have been used to silence Native peoples’ opposition to the Washington team name and Native mascots. The “Unpacking the Mascot Debate” study takes this debate head-on with a fresh perspective.

WHY IS THIS STUDY RELEVANT?

This study is the first of its kind. Researchers specifically surveyed respondents in the context of their identification as Native Americans. To date, this is the largest scientific study of the relationship between Native American identity and attitudes toward Native mascots. The study also extends prior reports by examining variation in Native Americans’ attitudes along five demographic factors and three dimensions of Native American identification: legal and certificated status, behavioral engagement, and psychological identification.

University-Led, Funded, & Peer Reviewed. The study, funded by the University of California, Berkeley, was conducted by a team of social psychologists from Berkeley and the University of Michigan. It was peer reviewed by the *Social Psychological and Personality Science Journal*.

Highlights the Nuance & Importance of Native Identity. The study results highlight the importance of considering the unique and multifaceted aspects of identity, particularly when seeking to understand Native people’s attitudes and experiences.

Diverse Research Team. This study was conducted by a diverse team of researchers including two Native Americans, Dr. Stephanie Fryberg (Tulalip) and Julisa Lopez (Amah Mutsun Tribal Band), African American researcher Dr. Arianne Eason, Afro Caribbean researcher Dr. Nadia Jessop, and White American researcher Dr. Laura Brady. Together, they understand the cultural barriers and nuances of conducting research with underrepresented populations.



THE UNPACKED RESULTS

1,021

THERE WERE 1,021 NATIVE AMERICANS SURVEYED DURING THE STUDY IN WHICH 49% SAID THAT THE WASHINGTON R-WORD TEAM NAME ARE OFFENSIVE TO THEM.

Important Note: The number of respondents were 2x the number of respondents surveyed in previous polls published by the Washington Post.

NATIVE AMERICAN IDENTITY

NATIVE AMERICAN PEOPLES WHO ARE MOST HIGHLY IDENTIFIED WITH BEING NATIVE AMERICAN ARE THE PEOPLE WHO ARE MOST OPPOSED TO THE R*DSK*NS TEAM NAME AND THE USE OF NATIVE MASCOTS.

67%

SIXTY-SEVEN PERCENT OF NATIVE AMERICANS WHO ARE FREQUENTLY ENGAGED WITH NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURES (I.E., ATTEND POW WOWS, VOTE IN TRIBAL ELECTIONS, WORK IN NATIVE COMMUNITIES) OFFENDED BY THE R*DSK*NS TEAM NAME.

FIFTY-SEVEN PERCENT OF PEOPLE WHO FEEL HIGHLY CONNECTED TO BEING NATIVE AMERICAN (I.E., WHOSE UNDERSTANDING OF SELF IS CLOSELY

57%

TIED TO BEING NATIVE AMERICAN) ARE OFFENDED BY THE WASHINGTON NFL TEAM NAME.

NATIVE YOUTH AGES 18-24

65%

SIXTY-FIVE PERCENT OF NATIVE YOUTH (AGES 18-24) SURVEYED ARE HIGHLY OFFENDED BY THE R*DSK*NS TEAM NAME AND THE MAJORITY ARE OPPOSED TO THE TEAM NAME AND USE OF NATIVE MASCOTS.

NEARLY THREE-QUARTERS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS WERE BOTHERED WHEN THE WASHINGTON NFL TEAM'S RIVALS USE INSULTS ABOUT NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE.

74%