Where’s the Honor? Attitudes Toward the “Fighting Sioux” Nickname and Logo

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The purpose of this research was to explore support for Native American sports nicknames. A survey of students at the University of North Dakota, a school with substantial Native student enrollment, was conducted to determine support or opposition to the school’s “Fighting Sioux” nickname and logo. A majority of Native American and a minority of White students thought that the nickname conveyed disrespect and argued for change. Although the study was situated within Bonilla-Silva’s theory of “new racism,” the results indicated that a frame of color-blind racism provided an inadequate explanation of attitudes toward these nicknames.

Le but de cette étude était d’explorer l’attitude à l’égard des surnoms amérindiens en sport. Une enquête a été réalisée auprès des étudiants à l’université North Dakota, une institution avec un nombre substantiel d’étudiants amérindiens, pour déterminer le soutien ou l’opposition au logo et au surnom de « Fighting Sioux » propres à cette université. Une majorité d’étudiants amérindiens et une minorité d’étudiants blancs ont dit que le surnom évoquait un manque de respect et ont suggéré un changement. Quoique l’étude fût ancrée dans la théorie du « nouveau racisme » de Bonilla-Silva, les résultats indiquent que ce cadre théorique (selon lequel le racisme est présent sans égard à la couleur des gens) n’apporte pas une explication adéquate des attitudes à l’égard de tels surnoms.

The practice of American sports teams using racial nicknames and mascots is and has been controversial. By far, the most common racial nicknames are of Native Americans (Nuessel, 1994). This practice been criticized for fostering inaccurate stereotypes of a discriminated-against racial minority group. Indeed, there are many historical, political, economic, and sociological factors that can be used to explain the existence of Native American sport nicknames and why they have prevailed over time. There are strong views both in favor of retaining and eliminating this practice.

What do Native Americans themselves think about these images? Native American tribes and organizations that have condemned the practice as racist stereotyping have provoked heated reaction and controversy, particularly from sports fans. Many authors and commentators have argued that Native Americans...
have a wide variety of views about their likenesses being employed by sports teams (see Price, 2002 for a popular example of this). For example, University of North Dakota (UND) President Kupchella (2005b) cites a nearby newspaper’s survey as support for this popular thesis:

In a *Fargo Forum* poll, 95% of North Dakotans and 60+% of American Indians in North Dakota had no problem at all with the nickname/logo. Interestingly, in this poll, a majority of American Indians polled said it would make no difference in their support of UND if UND did or did not change the nickname, but most of the remainder said their support would actually decrease if UND changed it (p. 9, emphasis in the original).

Recent actions by the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) to prohibit the use of Native American nicknames and mascots in college sports because such names are “hostile or abusive” (NCAA, 2005) and overwhelming opposition to the practice from Native American organizations and most tribal leaders (AISTM, 2006) have led to further contention, because some schools have been granted exceptions due to local tribal support for names. Yet there have been few quantitative studies comparing the attitudes of individual Natives and Whites. In addition, no research has comprehensively shown the extent of opinion and feeling by the most directly affected constituency at a school that uses Native nicknames, Native Americans students themselves.

The purpose of this study was to explore the present-day attitudes of students towards a specific instance of this practice, specifically UND’s “Fighting Sioux” nickname and logo. I seek to explain the attitudes of Native, White, and non-Native minority UND students regarding the Fighting Sioux, and how these attitudes may differ across demographics and within UND. This school presents a unique test case; UND is close to many Native reservations in the Northern Great Plains and has a sizable Native student enrollment including actual Lakotan (or “Sioux”) peoples. Thus, these conditions represent an ideal situation in which to explore the opinions of a substantial Native student population regarding a Native American nickname at a predominantly White university.

**Literature Review**

The research on the subject of Native American mascots and nicknames has grown substantially in the last decade. This literature review will first focus on general critiques of the practice of using Native American nicknames and imagery, as well as analytical efforts to survey people’s opinions on the practice. Second, the local context of the University of North Dakota will be presented. Finally, the concepts of “new racism” and “color-blind racism” will be briefly introduced as a theoretical framework for situating the data.

**Research on Native American Nicknames**

Academic research has begun to cover a wide variety of issues related to the practice of American sports teams using Native American imagery. Evidence indicates that even well intentioned acts, however historically inaccurate that intent is
deployed, can have negative consequences for Native Americans. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2005) has determined that “the continued use of American Indian mascots, symbols, images, and personalities by school systems appear to have a negative impact on the self-esteem of American Indian children” (p. 1), an impact that may negatively affect life chances. Social–psychological research has demonstrated that Native logos harm Native youth in a variety of ways (Fryberg, 2003). When presented with such imagery, Native youth exhibited decreased self-esteem, lowered self-efficacy, and diminished perception of their potential achievement. Ironically, the use of same imagery increased the self-esteem of White youth.

LaRocque (2004) studied the reactions of a sample of UND students to images related to the school’s nickname and logo (“neutral” slides) and related controversial elements (“controversial” slides). The results indicated that White and Native American students had significantly different reactions to the images they were shown. Native students experienced higher levels of dysphoria, anxiety, and depression after viewing the “neutral” slide show, whereas White students experienced no distress viewing standard images of the Fighting Sioux. White students did, however, exhibit a major increase in hostility after watching the “controversial” slide show. LaRocque concluded that White students at UND were less likely than Native Americans to see racist imagery regarding the Fighting Sioux nickname as disrespectful.

Not only do Native people suffer from Native American nicknames and Whites benefit from them, but sports fans also tend to be strong supporters of keeping such team nicknames (Sigelman, 1998). King and Springwood (2000) argue that sports reinforce stereotypes about Native Americans as fans try to “play Indian” with the misperceived “fighting spirit” of Native peoples in the combat of sport. The visceral violence of some sports is linked to a particularly masculine expression of school pride, which in turn can provoke a combative relationship toward any critic of the Fighting Sioux nickname—particularly for fans of the most violent sports like football and hockey (Williams, 2006). Sigelman (1998) found that football fans were significantly less likely to want the Washington Redskins nickname changed than nonfans.

Whites, who are the most militant defenders of these nickname practices, view nonsupportive Native Americans as disorderly interruptions in the acceptable discourse of sports (Farnell, 2004). Consequently, Native criticisms of nicknames are positioned as “politically correct” or of having no appreciation for school spirit. Tovares (2002) notes how UND in recent years has been compelled to present its nickname to the greater world along with claims that UND presents its nickname and logo in a respectful manner and supports Native American programs. Although 21 Native American-related programs at UND have officially opposed the nickname, with none in support (BRIDGES, 2000), UND highlights Native Americans as university members, but simultaneously excludes and marginalizes their strong opposition to the Fighting Sioux nickname.

Scholars have suggested that the use of Native American imagery as mascots warps not only the view of Native Americans held by the dominant White culture but also harms the relationship between the two groups. The common representations of Native people by sports teams—performances and imagery—are merely tokens of a still-existing people who are not permitted to speak for themselves
and are consequentially fetishized (Slowikowski, 1993). Thus, the “mascotting” of Native Americans perpetuates White hegemony over Natives and forces false “unity” between Native Americans and Whites (Black 2002).

Research by media on the subject has not been immune from scholar criticism. For example, an often-cited *Sports Illustrated* (SI) survey (Price, 2002) that claimed Native Americans do not mind being used as mascots, logos, and nicknames has been widely criticized by scholars for various methodological and theoretical shortcomings (King et al., 2002). According to King and his co-authors, the *SI* poll is problematic because of (1) a pronounced bias that works to distract readers from the historical and contemporary context and implications of mascots; (2) methodological concerns including problematic sampling and identification issues that produce nonrepresentative and nongeneralizable findings, as well as ignoring much evidence contrary to its claims; (3) its conclusion that mascots are unproblematic merely because a majority of polled Native people say they are; and (4) the consequences for public debate and social justice are ignored.

Very little scholarly quantitative research has been done on attitudes toward these nicknames. Fenelon (1999) studied attitudes of people living in North East Ohio towards the Cleveland Indians and that team’s moniker, “Chief Wahoo.” He found that Native Americans were strongly against the use of Wahoo, that over half of the Whites surveyed found the use of Wahoo inoffensive and “either refuse [to acknowledge] or cannot see that Native Americans do” (p. 36), and that African Americans were found to be somewhere between these two positions. Sigelman (1998), who investigated beliefs held by Americans and Washington DC area residents about such nicknames, found a similar racial breakdown. He used attitudes towards the Washington Redskins football team nickname as an indicator of such support. The results, based on multivariate regression analyses, indicated that minorities (primarily African Americans), those who had a high level of education, and those who were not sports fans were more likely to support a name change. Neither age nor gender were significant predictors of change. Sigelman’s results suggest that regression analysis of a survey featuring more questions at a specific university where there is a measurable Native population, such as UND, could add greater context to understanding of this phenomenon. Currently, our knowledge of Native opinions regarding the use of Native imagery at schools is quite limited.

**Unique Aspects of the UND Setting**

*Native Americans at UND.* UND has a proportionately high Native American enrollment and, thus, is a unique venue for testing the claim that Native people as individuals differ in opinion from Native organizations. Native American students constitute the largest non-White racial group at UND and represented almost 3% of student enrollment during the 2005–2006 academic year (UND, 2005). Native Americans constitute nearly 5% of the population in the state of North Dakota, although Native Americans on the whole make up less than 1% of the US population (Census, 2005). The concentration of Native students at UND has led to a large number of Native American student organizations over time, greater tolerance for certain expressions of Native American cultures, and an increased probability for conflict.

Although it has a sizable Native presence, UND is also unique in that it is still a White-dominated school that uses a Native American nickname. How
can these apparent contradictions—larger than average Native population and a White population supporting a Native American nickname—be explained? One of the most common storylines about the nickname offered by White supporters is: “It’s intended as an honor because Native people were brave fighters.” Such a claim minimizes the racism inherent in a predominantly White university using a discriminated-against racial minority as its sports nickname. The statement also reinforces the misleading stereotypes that all Native Americans were brave and were fighters, thereby making all Native people targets of an externally imposed “honor.” Ironically, in the past, attributing the label fighting to Native Americans would have been perceived as highly negative, and would have helped to justify attacks by the US Army on Native Americans, as well as White settler incursions into Native territory.

**Incidents of Discrimination.** Although the majority of UND students and sports fans would claim not to be racist or harbor anti-Native feelings, occasional episodes of racist discrimination by Whites at UND against Native Americans in recent decades could be used to support the claim that the Fighting Sioux nickname fosters a hostile and abusive climate for Native Americans. Specific incidents at UND demonstrate that there may be an undercurrent of anti-Native sentiment that lays beneath the support for the Fighting Sioux nickname. But, first a brief history of the UND nickname is in order.

The 1930 change of the UND moniker from the “Flickertails” to the Fighting Sioux was advocated widely in the university’s student paper (Franks, 1982). Drawing on a discourse that consisted of White cultural views of Native Americans, the paper argued that (1) “Sioux are a good exterminating agent for the [North Dakota State] Bison,” (2) “They (Sioux) are warlike, of fine physique and bearing,” and (3) “The word Sioux is easily rhymed for yells and songs” (Annis, 1999). It is important to note that no Native Americans students attended UND in 1930 when the nickname was changed. By the 1970s, however, there were a sizable number of Native students. In 1972, Native students demanded that an ice sculpture in front of a UND fraternity house be taken down. The sculpture was of a topless Native American woman with the words “Lick ‘em Sioux” across her breasts. The fraternity refused to do so. A Native student destroyed the sculpture, resulting in a fight and that student’s arrest (Annis, 1999).

Subsequent events have periodically occurred at UND, usually in the context of public belittlement of Native Americans. During a homecoming parade in 1992, Native children were heckled on a float, and told by White students to go back to the reservation (Annis, 1999). Opposing sports fans have used racist, sexist, and other insulting chants directed at Native Americans. Numerous t-shirts have been created, sold, and worn by such fans that often sexually degrade Native Americans (LaRocque, 2004). In 1999, an outspoken Native American nickname-change activist was emailed a death threat for his opposition to the nickname (Brownstein, 2001). These events and others have followed patriarchal patterns, involving “father knows best” attitudes derived from an “old boy’s club” of decision makers, objectification akin to the physical objectification of women, and denigration of progressive and radical women critics (Williams, 2006).

**Opposition to the Use of Native American Nicknames.** In response to this history and similar histories throughout the US, various Native American nations
and organizations have passed resolutions condemning the practice of teams using Native American nicknames and imagery. Such resolutions often speak directly to the issue of racism. UND is a relatively unique university due to the strength of opposition to the nickname by regional reservation-based tribes and nations. For example, the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe stated that the use of the UND’s Fighting Sioux nickname and logo was “demeaning and derogatory to the Lakota Nation” (Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, 1997, p. 1). According to the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, the UND practice “places Native American Students in the position of being mascots, and subjects those students to . . . racially insensitive actions” (Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, 1997, p. 1). Finally, another regional tribal grouping, the Three Affiliated Tribes, argued that “these stereotypical symbols create an environment in which degrading acts become more acceptable and promote practices that trivialize and demean Native American culture, traditions and spirituality” (Three Affiliated Tribes, 2002, p. 1). Still, despite the vast majority of Native American organizations that oppose the practice and advocate change, critics have suggested that these organizations do not represent the general sentiment of the majority of individual Native Americans (alluded to in Price, 2002). Therefore, the opinions of Native Americans has become highly important, particularly the views of those Native students attending UND.

**Research on the Fighting Sioux Nickname.** A few studies have been conducted on attitudes toward the use of the UND Fighting Sioux nickname and logo. Driscoll and Schieve (1987) surveyed a small sample of Native American students at UND about their support for the nickname, finding ambiguity, disinterest, and a ratio of 2 to 1 support for the nickname. However, the survey was designed to see if students preferred the older “Blackhawk” logo or a newer “geometric”-style logo, so survey participants were primarily choosing between logos, or “both,” or “neither.” Native American students preferred a geometric-looking (and less culturally laden) logo to the traditional UND logo at a rate of 3 to 1. The study also solicited a number of qualitative responses that allowed respondents to elaborate on what they thought about the nickname and why they felt the way they did. These opinions range from “I am not offended. In fact, I enjoy it” to “It’s really derogatory to have a race of people as a logo,” with others making ambivalent statements such as “I personally feel that both sides of the issue have valid arguments” or critiquing particular aspects of the logos unrelated to race: “the colors are not right.”

The Social Science Research Institute (SSRI) of UND conducted a comprehensive survey of opinions in 2000, but analyzed its findings in only an elementary, univariate fashion. SSRI offered no conclusions but presented dozens of tables featuring the responses to the various questions. It is difficult to determine who within each sample tended to share which opinions. A brief, superficial appraisal of the SSRI report shows that most alumni, employees, students, and even minority students support the Fighting Sioux nickname and that most respondents do not want a nickname change. A central weakness in the SSRI presentation of results is that Native American students were not separated from other “minority” students in the report’s findings, thus making it impossible to ascertain the beliefs of Native students, a key issue in the political debate over Native nicknames. Thus, despite all the past research conducted in this area, a multidimensional view of how the most directly impacted constituency—Native American students—feels about this practice is lacking.
Although the conclusions from the SSRI study (2000) are flawed and limited, there are specific elements in the survey data that warrant closer study and, indeed, a second look. The SSRI asked questions that probe whether respondents feel the UND nickname is respectful and if the respondent thinks a change is warranted. Yet, support or opposition will likely vary based on certain demographic characteristics, such as gender, race, age, and years at UND. For example, women have been more supportive of change in regards to practices of discrimination, as have racial minorities generally, especially on race matters. Older people could be perceived as being more set in their ways and, thus, more racist, but also perhaps more wise and worldly in their attitudes and, consequently, more change oriented (see Sigelman, 1998). In addition, the duration of one’s time within an institution can have an effect on how one perceives the actions of that institution. The longer a student attends UND, the greater the possibility that the use of Fighting Sioux becomes commonplace and is perceived to be part of the setting. In the case of UND and the Fighting Sioux nickname, does a longer tenure cause one to be more critical or more conformist? Finally, since the Fighting Sioux nickname controversy would likely be a nonissue if not for collegiate sports, the influence of sports attendance and support should be central.

“New Racism” and “Color-Blind Racism”

How could the practice of using Native American nicknames be framed? Bonilla-Silva (2003a) has suggested a theory of contemporary racism called “new racism” and the accompanying ideology of “color-blind racism.” Color-blind racism is an ideological justification of racial inequality where traditional overt racism is not expressed. Thus, the majority of Whites who believe in color-blind racism actively avoid mentions of race, racism, and overt expressions of hostility. Bonilla-Silva (2003a) describes new racism in a “now you see it, now you don’t” fashion, where racism is active but hidden or disguised. The dynamics of color-blind racism help to maintain and reproduce the racial order without alluding to minority biological characteristics. Instead, minorities are perceived to be in a subordinate position due to cultural, not biological, deficiencies.

Color-blind racism works through four primary frames (Bonilla-Silva, 2003b). The first frame, abstract liberalism, allows Whites to claim that social policies (like affirmative action) should not be used to overcome inequality on the premise that such policies violate dominant cultural beliefs about meritocracy, individual choice, and equal opportunity. A second frame, naturalization, postulates that racial phenomena (like housing and school segregation) are “natural” occurrences—not the result of problematic policies or practices. A third frame, biologization of culture, suggests that the position of African Americans in society is the result of inferior culture. The final frame, minimization of racism, is to deny that discrimination plays a major role in society. African Americans who complain about racism are thus “hypersensitive” or are “playing the race card.”

Few theories articulate a way to understand racism against Native Americans, while many—such as color-blind racism—pertain to racism against African Americans. The majority of Bonilla-Silva’s (2003a, 2003b) examples pertain to African Americans, none to Native Americans. Bobo and Tuan (2006) applied a theory previously used for understanding African American and White relations,
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the “group position” model, to an instance involving Native Americans and Whites. The authors found that Whites claimed various rights, statuses, and resources in order to deprive Chippewa in Wisconsin of access to fishing, hunting, and gathering rights guaranteed in treaties, and that racial conflict resulted from Chippewa demands of the White-led Wisconsin government. The present article is a similar application of a theory originally developed about White racism against African Americans, using color-blind racism to analyze White support for using Native American nicknames.

Examples of new racism frames could be argued for, however flawed in their relevance to the theory, in research that focuses on White attitudes towards Native American imagery. Davis (1993) studied the discourse associated with the protests against Native American sports nicknames and found that change opponents (particularly White sports fans) often feel attacked because a “particular version of American masculine identity that is founded on Western mythology” (p. 9) is being challenged. Those who support the nicknames avoid words like racism when discussing what they perceive as an honoring practice while still employing repeated references to race. Merskin (2001) argues that most popular Native American images create a “consumer blind spot” within the dominant culture thereby inhibiting the ability of many Americans to identify such images as racist. Although there is a long history of racial stereotyping of Native Americans (Trimble, 1988; Merskin, 2001) and educational misrepresentation (Ashley & Jarratt-Ziems, 1999), some evidence points to the perception of Native Americans with the use of stereotypes that could arguably be considered more “positive” than “negative” (Hanson and Rouse, 1987). Yet, the fact that stereotypes are so easily used, even supposedly positive ones, demonstrates the continually racist nature of all stereotyping regarding race, whether “good” or “bad.” The so-called “good” stereotypes that are romantically applied to Native peoples, such as “fighting,” attempt to minimize the perception of racism. Miller (1999) claims that even though Native American protest against such nicknames has not significantly changed the attitudes of their targets, even small changes have been worthwhile political victories, such as the discontinuance of real-life mascots who dance at sporting events.

Data and Methods

The goal of the current study is to ascertain characteristics that help to explain views toward the UND nickname and support for a nickname change. Specifically, the paper explores how these attitudes vary by gender, race, age, and years at UND.

Data for this study come from a four-part survey conducted in 2000 by UND’s SSRI at the behest of the UND Presidential Nickname Commission. The Commission was charged with the goal of determining any possible directions for change at UND regarding its nickname. SSRI did a random sample of four constituent populations: alumni, employees, students, and minority students at UND. Some questions and demographics in the survey are not comparable across constituencies. The SSRI data included variables on geographic location and income, but only for the alumni component of the survey. Race was not asked of employees or alumni, while student rank is only relevant for students and minority students.
In this research, I use the student and minority student components. The student component included only undergraduates, while the minority student component included both undergraduate and graduate students (as well as Law and Medical students). To make the two groups as comparable as possible, I eliminated all non-undergraduate students from the minority student analysis.

**Dependent Variables**

SSRI asked numerous questions about the Fighting Sioux nickname, Native American students and programs, and hypothetical situations regarding a nickname change. Two questions have been constructed as scales: (1) Who thinks the nickname is honorable and respectful? and (2) Who wants a nickname change? The individual variables composing both constructs were measured on a Likert scale with a range from *strongly disagree* (0) to *strongly agree* (4). Both scales consisted of three questions. The first scale (Respectful: “Who thinks the nickname is honorable and respectful?”) had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.740. The second scale (Change: “Who wants a nickname change?”) has a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.856. The high alpha coefficients indicate that the two scales are suitable to serve as dependent variables in regression analysis.

**Independent Variables**

The analysis considers a variety of sociodemographic factors, such as gender (1 = female, 0 = male), age (in years), years at UND, and race. The measurement of race is more complex, and as such, requires greater explanation. Each respondent’s race was categorized in the SSRI survey as White, Black or African, Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American, Hispanic, or other. For the present research, some categories were combined to form three distinct groupings: White, Native American, and non-Native minorities (including all non-White and non-Native American students). The student survey component is predominantly White (96%) while the minority student survey component is split between Native American (53%) and non-Native minority (47%). Non-Native minorities were categorized separately from both Whites and Native Americans since the purpose of the paper is to test the difference between White and Native American opinions. Analyzing non-Native minorities separately allows for their opinions in respect to the other two races to be ascertained.

Finally, sports attendance was asked only in the general student sample and was measured as those who have attended more than five sport events (1 = yes, 0 = no). Dummy variables were constructed in a similar fashion for students who have attended at least one of the following sports: football, men or women’s basketball, hockey, and other sports. Basic descriptive and multivariate regression analyses were utilized.

To evaluate the nature of student opinions at UND toward the use of Native American nickname and logo, the following two hypotheses are tested:

H1: Native American students are less likely to view the Fighting Sioux nickname as respectful than White students.

H2: Native American students are more likely to favorably view a change of the Fighting Sioux nickname than White students.
Results

Descriptive Statistics

The preweighted sample was roughly half men (52%) and half women (48%). Sixty percent were White, 19% Native American, and 20% other racial minorities. The average age of students was 23 years old. At the time the respondents took the survey they had on average attended UND for about two-and-a-half years.

According to correlations of the weighted data, White students were significantly more likely to view the nickname as respectful, to not want change, and be younger. Native Americans students were significantly more likely to not view the nickname as respectful, to want change, be female, and be older. Those who thought the nickname was respectful were significantly likely to be younger students and to have been students at UND for a shorter amount of time, while those who wanted change were significantly likely to be older and to have been at UND for a longer amount of time. Bivariate correlations are shown in Table 1. There was no significant difference between men and women for those who thought the nickname was respectful. Men and women, however, differed significantly in their desire for a change in nickname: women were more inclined to want change than men.

Scheffé’s post-hoc constraint suggested that there were statistical differences between the means for both scales across race. Significant differences were found between White, Native American, and non-Native minority students for both opinions. Native American students thought the name was less respectful than both Whites and non-Native minorities, and were also more likely to want the nickname changed than the other two racial groupings. Whites considered the nickname to be more respectful than non-Native racial minorities did, and Whites were less in favor of change than non-Native minorities. Means and significance levels for both scales are shown in Table 2.

The variable years at UND was negatively correlated to respect and positively correlated to change for each racial group. The relationship was significant for both outcomes for Whites only (results not shown). The results of Native students showed a significant negative relationship between tenure and respect, but a nonsignificant relationship with change. The results for other racial groups were nonsignificant. Thus, at least at the bivariate level, tenure’s effect was more pivotal for Whites than for both Native Americans and non-Native minorities.

Table 1  Correlations Between Dependent and Independent Variables

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<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Who thinks it is respectful?</td>
<td>–0.695*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Who wants change?</td>
<td>–0.015</td>
<td>0.107**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(4) White</td>
<td>0.234*</td>
<td>–0.220*</td>
<td>–0.047</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Native American</td>
<td>–0.274*</td>
<td>0.247†</td>
<td>0.079*</td>
<td>–0.591†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(6) Non-Native minority</td>
<td>–0.070</td>
<td>0.073*</td>
<td>–0.005</td>
<td>–0.772†</td>
<td>–0.057</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(7) Age</td>
<td>–0.141†</td>
<td>0.188†</td>
<td>0.117†</td>
<td>–0.130†</td>
<td>0.138†</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(8) Years attended UND</td>
<td>–0.163†</td>
<td>0.115**</td>
<td>–0.023</td>
<td>0.034</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>–0.042</td>
<td>0.33†</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; †p < .001.
The members of each of the four Native American national groups, on average, did not think the nickname was respectful, and they wanted to see change. The mean scores of Native Americans did not differ significantly \((p < .05)\) by tribal affiliation.\(^2\) This suggests a clear consensus amongst the various tribal affiliations that the name is not respectful and should be changed. Since no significant differences were found amongst nations, all tribal affiliations were combined together as “Native” for the multivariate analysis.

**Multivariate**

The results in the ordinary least squares regression analysis predicting respect remained roughly the same as with the bivariate analysis (see Table 1). Race and time at UND significantly predicted those who thought UND’s nickname was respectful (Table 3). Native Americans and non-Native minorities (both compared to the reference category of Whites) were less likely to view the nickname as respectful. Also, the longer students attended UND, the less they viewed the nickname as respectful. For every year at UND, students decreased their views of the nickname being respectful by .107 on the 0 to 4 scale. Five years in college amounts to half a unit decrease in respect. Gender and age did not predict respect.\(^3\) Thus, with the exception of non-Native minorities and age, we can conclude that the regression results were similar to bivariate correlations even when demographics were held constant.

The second set of regression models (shown in Table 4) considers the question of who wants to change the UND nickname. Native Americans were significantly more likely to want a nickname change (compared to Whites, the reference category), as were students who have been at UND longer. Gender, non-Native minorities, and age were not significant.

The dependent variable from the previous regression analysis—“Is the nickname respectful?”—was added in the second model. Those who did not consider the name respectful were significantly likely to want change. Native Americans were still more likely to want change compared to White students. The effect of time at UND on change disappeared when controlling for respect. Thus, when considering the nickname’s respectfulness, the influence that time at UND had upon change was eliminated. Although tenure may matter in terms of

**Table 2 Means and Standard Deviations for Gender and Race**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Respectful N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Change N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>3.028</td>
<td>1.109</td>
<td>1.374*</td>
<td>1.323</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>3.060</td>
<td>0.993</td>
<td>1.100*</td>
<td>1.209</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>3.133**</td>
<td>0.957</td>
<td>1.128**</td>
<td>1.194</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>1.317**</td>
<td>1.401</td>
<td>2.923**</td>
<td>1.365</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Native minority</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>2.500**</td>
<td>1.398</td>
<td>2.118**</td>
<td>1.504</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Scores range from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Race variables unweighted: White from student sample; Native and other minority from minority student sample.

\(^*p < .01; \text{**}p < .001.\)
sociodemographic characteristics, controlling for respect trumps tenure’s effect. Gender becomes significant, as well, when considering respect. This full model explained 49% of the variance in change.

Only the general student sample was asked about attendance at UND sporting events, so the relationship between sport attendance and nickname support or change based on race could not be explored. The results based on the general student subsample (which was overwhelmingly White) showed that those who attended at least five sporting events were significantly less in favor of nickname change than those who had not attended a minimum of five events. Significant differences between fans and nonfans occurred only in football and men’s basketball, with those who had not attended games being more supportive of a change. The difference for thinking the nickname was respectful was not significant. See Table 5 for the differences between sporting event attendance on respect and change.

Table 3 Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Predicting Respectful Score (N = 675)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>b</th>
<th>SE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (female = 1)</td>
<td>0.025</td>
<td>0.077</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American (yes = 1)</td>
<td>−1.444**</td>
<td>0.197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Native minority (yes = 1)</td>
<td>−0.318*</td>
<td>0.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−0.009</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years attended UND</td>
<td>−0.107**</td>
<td>0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.586**</td>
<td>0.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. White is the reference category.*

* *p < .05; **p < .001.

Table 4 Summary of OLS Regression Analysis for Predicting Change Score (N = 656)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b</td>
<td>SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (female = 1)</td>
<td>0.143</td>
<td>0.093</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American (yes = 1)</td>
<td>1.611†</td>
<td>0.240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Native minority (yes = 1)</td>
<td>0.312</td>
<td>0.201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years attended UND</td>
<td>0.084*</td>
<td>0.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respectful?</td>
<td>−0.781†</td>
<td>0.035</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.440*</td>
<td>0.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.091</td>
<td>0.489</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. White is the reference category.*

* *p < .05; **p < .01 †p < .001.*
Null Hypotheses

**Respect Scale.** Respect scores of Native Americans decreased by more than 1 point (−1.444) on the 0 to 4 scale compared to those of Whites; this difference between Native American and White student views of respect was significant. This difference suggests that Native students were less likely than Whites to view the nickname as respectful. Thus, the null hypothesis that there would be no significant differences in respect across race was rejected. This finding was echoed in the descriptive results, which showed that a majority of Native Americans (including “Sioux” students) did not view the nickname as respectful.

**Change Scale.** The scores of Native Americans increased 1.611 points on the 0 to 4 scale for wanting change compared to Whites. Thus, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference between Native American and White student views about change was rejected. Not only was there a difference, but Native American students also showed far greater sympathy than Whites for changing the Fighting Sioux nickname. And, as seen in the descriptive results, Native Americans on the whole and “Sioux” students specifically wanted the nickname changed.

**Respect and Change.** The addition of the respect variable to the second research question (regarding support for a nickname change) helped to answer a question regarding causality. A major factor driving attitudes regarding nickname change may stem from one’s perception of that nickname. Thus, possibly, an individual first formulates an opinion of the nickname (as respectful or not), and then decides whether or not a change is warranted. The standardized coefficient for respect (not shown in the table) from the second model in Table 4 had the largest effect of all variables. This indicates that those who thought the nickname was respectful were more likely to not want to change the nickname, and consequently those who viewed the nickname as less respectful were more likely want to change that nickname. Yet, despite this covariance between respect and change, other factors

| Table 5  Mean for Sporting Event Attendance and Respectful and Change Scales |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Attended more than 5 sporting events |
| yes | 417 | 3.147 | 1.024* |
| no  | 105 | 3.012 | 1.390* |
| Sports attended? |
| football: yes | 439 | 3.151 | 1.023** |
| football: no  | 83  | 2.972 | 1.443** |
| men’s basketball: yes | 200 | 3.136 | 0.906** |
| men’s basketball: no | 322 | 3.114 | 1.219** |
| women’s basketball: yes | 146 | 3.155 | 0.972 |
| women’s basketball: no | 376 | 3.110 | 1.147 |
| hockey: yes  | 412 | 3.118 | 1.113 |
| hockey: no   | 110 | 3.144 | 1.036 |
| other sports: yes | 81  | 3.149 | 0.895 |
| other sports: no | 441 | 3.118 | 1.135 |

*p < .05; **p < .01; significance indicates differences between those who responded “yes” and “no.”
must be present in order to truly show causality. It is necessary to show temporal order: attitudes of respect must exist prior to attitudes regarding change. In addition, it is important for a theoretical model to include all nonspurious variables—in other words, all the important factors that could predict attitudes of change need to be included. Unfortunately, the SSRI data did not include measures of a student’s socioeconomic background, religious affiliation, political beliefs, past participation in social movements, experiences with other races, and other variables that could potentially predict change. Thus, even though there was a very strong relationship between respect and change, this research was not able to demonstrate causality.

**Discussion**

The results of the current study were similar to Fenelon (1999), who also discovered that support for Native Americans nicknames vary by race. Fenelon found that Whites support the Cleveland Indians’ logo and nickname more than African Americans, who support it more than Native Americans. In the present study Whites demonstrated the greatest support for the Fighting Sioux nickname, more than non-Native minorities who in turn support the nickname to a greater extent than do Native Americans. Consequently, the data strongly demonstrated that Native students at UND did not share the positive sentiments expressed by their White classmates. Thus, claims that Native Americans find the UND nickname honorable were not supported by these data.

Driscoll and Schieve’s (1987) survey of Native American students at UND in the 1980s showed support for the nickname while the results of the current study have demonstrated the opposite. There are a number of possible reasons for this, some of which are statistical. First, the current measures are more valid for reasons previously discussed. The present study used two highly reliable measures, each composed of three questions, that measured the notions of respect and change in a more thorough fashion. Bias in how the questions were asked is a possibility, because people will respond differently depending on how questions are asked. Second, weaknesses in the earlier sampling methodology could have resulted in a nonrepresentative sample of Native Americans compared with the more thorough and comprehensive sampling done for the more recent 2000 SSRI survey used in this study. The SSRI sampled more than half of the UND students who were officially registered as Native American, resulting in a more representative and accurate pool of respondents. Third, a shift in the sentiments of Native American students at UND from 1987 to 2000, or in the type of Native students who attend the school, could have occurred.

Sigelman’s (1998) finding that sports fans were less favorable to changing the Washington Redskins nickname is echoed in the descriptive findings of the SSRI data. UND students who attended less than five sporting events were significantly more likely to want the Fighting Sioux nickname changed than students who had attended more than five events. Football and men’s basketball fans in particular had significantly greater resistance to change than those who did not attend these sporting events. Clearly, sport attendance is associated with stronger demands to keep UND’s nickname. This seems sensible on the face of it: sports fans have a vested interest in retaining the team identities they support. Additionally, those
students less inclined to sports attendance are bound to be less committed to such imagery and less concerned with the possibility of seeing the nickname removed. Incidentally, men were significantly more likely than women to attend football and men’s basketball events. Since women were more inclined to change at a bivariate level (and when considering respect at the multivariate level), this gender difference could help explain why the attendees of these two sports are less inclined to change. Yet, none of these findings appear to bolster the color-blind racism framework, since there are no expressed claims that “race does not matter” here. In fact, race is always present at sporting events—on jerseys, signs, loudspeaker announcements, in concession stands, and audience cheers.

So, to what extent does the theory of color-blind racism offer a useful framework for analyzing White racism toward Native Americans? It is possible that certain elements of color-blind racism—perhaps the minimization of racism—may be useful in understanding White support of Native American nicknames and mascots, but this study was largely unable to determine this. First, abstract liberalism might be exhibited by the majority culture and its rights claims to use and profit from Native American images despite the poverty experienced by Native peoples. To request a change to this unequal representation would be an unfair demand placed on (White’s) free expression. Yet, Whites do not demand the end to a racial policy—such as affirmative action—in this case, but actually the continuation of a racial policy, the use of Native nicknames (and no other races). White claims for “equal opportunity” do not fit for this issue, since all races—Asian American, African American, and White—would be in demand as sports team images.

Second, perhaps “naturalization” is occurring when Native American imagery is used. If true, the practice might just be the predictable consequence of Native Americans desires to have their likenesses represented by sports teams—similar to how African Americans “like” living in segregated housing and attending segregated schools. As such, the practice would be normal and unproblematic. But, unlike the case of African American segregation (which is not “natural”), race is given as a reason for using Native people as nicknames (“Native peoples are brave, good fighters, etc.”). Since Whites do not suggest that the use of Native people as nicknames is a natural phenomena, this color-blind racism frame also does not fit.

Third, the biologization of culture suggests that Native Americans suffer a similar position at the bottom of the racial hierarchy as a consequence of an impoverished culture. Yet, the severe poverty that affects many Native Americans in the US is never associated with Native nicknames by the advocates of those nicknames. Thus, the reason that Native peoples are almost universally the only race represented by sports teams does not have anything to do with their “poor culture.” In fact, most Whites often cite a “superior culture” when justifying Native nicknames and discussing the reasons nicknames are respectful.

Fourth, the UND administration does attempt to minimize racism by pointing to all the progress made toward racial tolerance and the number of Native American programs at the university (again, despite the overwhelming opposition of those very programs to the nickname). White UND students largely reject changing the nickname on the basis of human rights claims or the requests of Native tribes. As such, this fourth frame—the minimization of racism—is the only part of color-blind racism that appears applicable in the case of UND and other Native nicknames.
Instead of avoiding race in justifying Native nicknames, it is apparent that the entire controversy at UND is based on the realities and language of race. Whites clearly supported a racial appraisal of the Fighting Sioux nickname, specifically supporting the notion that the nickname honors an ethnic group (the Lakotan people) and that it should not be changed. This stands in contrast to the demand for change by Lakotans and Native Americans generally. Color-blind racism tries to explain how Whites practice racism without using racial or racist language, and while Whites at UND may be “positively” stereotyping Native Americans, it cannot be said that Whites involved in this study practiced color-blind racism. The racism at UND involves a version of racism in which Whites endorse and articulate (what are perceived as) “positive” stereotypes of Native Americans and perceive their actions as nonracist and “respectful” toward Native peoples. White students have articulated support for a racist practice using openly racial language—directly addressing the Fighting Sioux nickname and the Lakotan people in student survey responses—while believing they are showing respect toward Native Americans in those practices. For these reasons, students were decidedly not “color-blind,” and thus, Bonilla-Silva’s (2003a) color-blind racism theory seems largely inapplicable in the case of UND’s Fighting Sioux.

The inapplicability of color-blind racism—a theory which uses racism against African Americans as its primary example—to explain attitudes toward Native Americans stems in part from the fact that Native and African Americans have had vastly different histories, colonial experiences, relationships with Whites, and inequalities. The notion of color-blind racism may offer a useful tool for the analysis of White racism against African Americans. Still, a comparable analytical theory for White racism against Native Americans, which has the nuance to consider the clear White support for racist practices on one hand and on the other hand the belief that respect is being offered by those same practices, is still lacking.

Although the current study did not indicate whether the Fighting Sioux nickname is specifically “hostile or abusive” as charged by the NCAA (2005), Native American students did not view the nickname as respectful. In light of these findings and psychological research that Native youth and students are harmed by these practices (Fryberg, 2003; LaRocque, 2004), the NCAA case against the use of Native American nicknames is strongly bolstered.

This research has demonstrated that White students at UND tend to adhere to a racial and racist view of a nickname that Native students themselves reject. The strong negative correlation between respect and change—the greater the perception of disrespect, the greater the support for change—is a finding that should not be ignored by nickname-change advocates. With an increased understanding that most Native American students see the nickname as disrespectful, support for a nickname change is likely to increase.

Another important purpose of this article is to inquire what the most affected group(s) think about practices like Native nicknames. One could not find a better example of this than UND with its sizable Native student population. Scholars need to continue research that goes beyond both the mainstream “conventional wisdom” on these issues, and they need to develop an empirical understanding of how different races evaluate such practices that can be rooted in some manner of theory. As such, this is a model that could be used in a variety of sociological inquiries into racialized sports nicknames and mascots.
Future research in this area should consider factors not measured in this paper. Variables mentioned previously, such as socioeconomic background, religious affiliation, political beliefs, past participation in social movements, and experiences with other races could all potentially influence attitudes towards Native American nicknames. Additionally, research performed at different time periods could reveal interesting results. For example, attitudes evaluated before, during, and after a school’s name change could reveal the process that people go through when confronted with a changing political reality regarding Native nicknames. Studies that contrast spatial attitudes could also help: attitudes at Native reservations; regions or states with low, medium, and high Native populations; urban, suburban, and rural areas; and nationwide. Finally, comparative work contrasting people’s support for various imagery and nicknames could be beneficial—how does support vary for names like “Indians,” “Warriors,” “Braves,” “Squaws,” “Redskins,” and “Redmen,” as well as for individual tribal names, mascots who do dances at games, graphic logos, or nicknames? To consider attitudes in these different ways would add depth to our growing, but still limited, understanding of this phenomenon and allow for the development of a suitable theoretical framework.

Notes

1. Respect scale
   1. UND’s use of the athletic teams’ nickname “Fighting Sioux” honors the Sioux people.
   2. The use of the athletic teams’ nickname “Fighting Sioux” perpetuates discrimination (reverse coded).
   3. UND’s athletic opponents use the athletic teams’ nickname “Fighting Sioux” respectfully.

2. Change scale
   1. UND should change its athletic teams’ nickname if it offends American Indians.
   2. UND should abide by Sioux tribal council requests and change the athletic teams’ nickname.
   3. The athletic teams’ nickname should be changed because it can be viewed as a human rights issue.

2. Those who identified as Native American were asked to give their tribal affiliation. These responses have been categorized into four separate groups that are regionally specific to the Northern Great Plains: (1) Lakotan (Sioux), (2) Chippewa/Ojibwa, (3) Three Affiliated Tribes, and (4) other tribes not located in the region. Specifically, mean scores based on tribal affiliation range from 1.000 for Lakotans to 1.516 for Chippewa (SD 1.379 to 1.529) on the respectful scale while those on the change scale range from 2.755 for Chippewa to 3.300 for Lakotans (SD 0.929 to 1.554). Even though there are visible differences between the respect and change scores for each tribal category—Lakotans being most cynical about the nickname—the differences are not significant.

3. Since it is conceivable that age and time at UND represented similar attributes in the regression models, tests for multicollinearity were run. In both models, the variance inflation factor was within reasonable levels, suggesting that the two variables represented different phenomena.

4. A structural equation model could be constructed to test this very assumption.
Acknowledgments

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Attitudes Toward the Fighting Sioux


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Williams


Three Affiliated Tribes. (2002). Opposition to the University of North Dakota’s use of the Fighting Sioux name and logo (Resolution number: 02-031-RP).


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