We Are Still Here: Expanding Empathy Through Humanization and Cultural Appropriation

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Abstract

Although empathy has been deemed an innate mechanism and is essential to multicultural interactions, research indicates that many factors inhibit a person's willingness to empathize with someone, such as how cognitively taxing it can be. This empathy avoidance trend may be more pronounced when targets are outgroup members depicted as suffering due to social disparities (Benally, Ochai, Ciappetta & Soto, 2020; Cho et al., 2019). This can create hostile environments for minorities trying to navigate society, such as Native Americans, who have historically suffered immense social injustices during the formation of America and continue to be negatively impacted by systematic inequalities. The present study uses the Empathy Selection Task (Cameron et al., 2019) to examine whether White students empathize better with visibly distressed Native American individuals when primed with a video intended to increase familiarity with/humanization of Native Americans or a video displaying implicit instances of cultural appropriation of Native American symbols. In the following study we demonstrate that both humanization of Native Americans *and* depictions of cultural appropriation increased empathy approach with Native American suffering, suggesting that people empathize more with Native American suffering after being reminded either about their common humanity or how this humanity has been stripped away (moral outrage).

Introduction

Empathy has many different definitions across the various subfields of psychology (e.g., neuroscience, cognition, development). Bohart & Stipek (2001) highlight the importance of distinguishing these many definitions in understanding the role it plays in evaluating moral contexts. Across these definitions, there are multiple behaviors (in animals and humans) that have been identified as markers of being empathetic (e.g., social mimicry, feelings of discomfort when watching another person suffer). Many of the mechanisms (e.g., mirror neurons) behind these behaviors have been deemed innate to humans and highly social animals like monkeys and dolphins (Gallese, 2005). Prior research suggests that these innate mechanisms can be actively ignored or avoided altogether based on present contextual factors and the empathizer's motivation to empathize with a target (Gray, Schein & Cameron, 2017; Brethel-Hauwitz et al. 2018). Examples of such motivational factors include, but are not limited to, the degree or type of perceived harm to the target (Gray, Schein & Cameron, 2017), social relationships with the target such as whether they represent ingroup/outgroup members (Brethel-Hauwitz et al. 2018), and the extent to which morality is considered at all (Haidt, 2001).

Even so, understanding the factors behind an individual's unwillingness or reluctance to empathize is, arguably, more important. In the current paper, we focus on a socially derived definition of empathy by de Waal (2008) that emphasizes the cognitive processes which enable individuals to perceive and understand another's emotions and can motivate individuals to act on these perceptions. De Waal's definition was also used by Brethel-Hauwitz et al. (2018) and demonstrated to be correlated with participants choosing more altruistic options towards strangers (i.e., likelihood to donate a kidney). This definition of empathy allows us to understand the extent to which the decision to empathize (empathy approach) reflects altruistic tendencies across differing contexts. For example, choosing to empathize with a marginalized outgroup member in a context that may highlight one's privilege may be very difficult and therefore signal greater altruism than choosing to empathize with an ingroup member. Our study manipulates the context in which a person is asked to empathize to demonstrate how present societal portrayals of Native Americans may affect the way others approach or avoid engaging in empathy with members of this group.

Empathy and Native Americans

Solidarity among groups was once a key to survival when discerning danger and it continues to be an active defense mechanism against modern dangers like cyberbullying (Mann, 2018). In multicultural societies (i.e., varying in race, socioeconomic status, ability etc.) like America, outgroup empathy is essential in sustaining positive cooperation and survival. This is especially salient in times of global dangers such as the coronavirus, racism, and human trafficking pandemics we are currently facing. With recent atrocities, such as the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, the lack of cohesion in our multicultural society, and subsequent lack of empathy, was put on full display as George Floyd's cries of "I can't breathe" were displayed for the world to see in a nine-and-a-half-minute video. Floyd's murder was the beginning of many systematic changes in areas ranging from politics (e.g., the passage of non-discriminatory bills) to professional sports (change of the Washington Football team's mascot). These hostile environments can be encouraged on a commercial level through the acceptance of such mascot stereotypes and encouraged by people around the world to promote similar stereotypes. Racist mascots like that of the former Washington football team were particularly mentioned by the American Psychological Association to contribute to hostile environments for minorities living in America (American Psychological Association, 2005).

Despite being America's original Peoples, Native Americans remain some of the most marginalized ethnic groups in society given the high rates of social disparities between these communities and other segments of society (Adakai et al., 2017). Although Native Americans make up around 2% of the population, up to 40% of Americans indicated that they are not aware Native Americans still exist (Shear et al., 2015). Moreover, the United States Constitution continues to label Native Americans as "Merciless Indian Savages." Such labels are not only dehumanizing in nature, but they often combine with inaccurate depictions of Native Americans in the mainstream (Washington Football team's Mascott, the r*dskins) to portray a skewed picture of modern Native Americans. In a 2017 Ted Talk, Houska (2017) explains the connection between these instances of dehumanization and how they continue to make it a lot easier for the Government to "run over" Native Americans' personal and political rights. As one example of this, consider the Dakota Access pipeline, which was built across Native American homelands despite strong opposition by the Native American community. Davis (2002) explained that

Americans lack ability to understand how such issues (e.g., racist mascots) relate to the ongoing societal marginalization of Native Americans, makes it difficult to understand the Native American struggle for sovereignty and other struggles affecting quality of life for this group.

In concluding her talk, Houska's with her listeners to "Stand with us [Native Americans], *empathize*, learn, grow, and change the conversation." Indeed, empathy has been identified as an important part of demonstrating moral behavior such as altruism to strangers (Brethel-Hauwitz et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the literature also indicates that humans tend to show a robust preference for avoiding empathy (Cameron et al., 2019), especially when targets are portrayed as suffering on a mass scale (Cameron & Payne, 2011). Therefore, the goal of the following study is to examine how humanizing rhetoric and depictions, as well as potentially dehumanizing depictions, such as cultural appropriations, may lead to differences in people's willingness to empathize with America's original people. More specifically, the following study is a direct answer to Houska's call by examining the willingness of White individuals to engage in empathy when faced with Native American suffering after viewing different portrayals of Native Americans.

Empathy Avoidance

Cameron et al. (2019) determined that the process of empathizing requires cognitive work, which people robustly prefer to avoid. Within Cameron and colleague's Empathy Selection Task (EST) participants are presented with a picture of a visibly distraught individual and asked to either describe the individual objectively (i.e., characteristics such as age or gender) or to empathize with them in a short sentence describing their feelings. Cameron and colleagues identified *empathy avoidance* as the consistent tendency among their participants to choose to describe individual targets depicted as suffering over empathizing with them. Thus, people might set personal limits on how much they want to empathize based on how hard they want to work. Other studies also demonstrate people's limitations in empathizing based on the number of individuals depicted as suffering. For example, Cameron & Payne (2011) demonstrated that people are more likely to feel efficacious when empathizing with a single suffering individual than they are with a suffering group of individuals (i.e., mass causalities form natural disasters). Since Cameron and colleague's original study, other studies have used modified versions of the EST to understand the boundary conditions of empathy avoidance using various social contexts (e.g., assessing empathy avoidance with African American individuals depicted as suffering from racial inequality; Cho et al., 2019). Studies have also examined the empathic response to Native Americans portrayed as suffering (Benally, Ochai, Ciappetta & Soto, 2020), which directly informs our approach in the current study. For example, consistent themes in each of the studies have indicated that White American participants are generally less likely to empathize with photos of distressed Black and Native Americans. In addition, the presence of social disparities information with the suffering individuals (e.g., "The person in the photograph is suffering. Native Americans die from alcoholism at a rate of 189% higher than any other racial group in America.") also predicted empathy avoidance more so than when no additional disparity information was presented (i.e., "the person in the photograph is suffering").

Aside from invisibility, Native Americans also face both implicit and explicit prejudice and discrimination from those Americans they do interact with (Harjo, 1992). Despite being America's original inhabitants, Native Americans continue to be considered outgroups to many Americans, both systematically and socially (Houska, 2017). Consequently, Native Americans were the last racial group to gain citizenship in 1924, and consistently

demonstrate more suffering than other Americans in social areas such as suicide, alcoholism, and pre-mature deaths (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2007). What many people often fail to recognize is that many of the social disparities Native Americans face today may have their roots in the "legacy of chronic trauma and unresolved grief across generations" which scholars suggest was enacted upon them by the dominant European culture (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998). Researchers have also connected behaviors such as heavy alcohol consumption (Chartier & Caetano, 2010) to historical losses of land, people, and culture (Whitbeck et al., 2004). These historical injustices and misrepresentation narratives in America's society might make empathizing with Native Americans an uphill battle in most cases. This is in addition to explicit discriminatory patterns in social interactions such as outgroup exclusion, which can identify members of said outgroups as homogenous and inferior (Tajfel, 1982). All in all, the combinations of obstacles such as general empathy avoidance tendencies can create a large disconnect between the majority of Americans and Native Americans. In response, the following study will attempt to manipulate the contextual factors under which Native Americans are presented (humanization vs cultural appropriation) to determine if these differing contexts increase or decrease people's willingness to empathize.

Other findings from Benally, Ochai, Ciappetta & Soto, (2020) suggest that prior training in empathizing (e.g., perspective-taking) may help mitigate empathy avoidance. The researchers suggested that these "empathy experts" may have increased efficacy in identifying with and or communicating with outgroup members (i.e., students from diverse backgrounds), explaining their decreased empathy avoidance as opposed to most other studies using the EST. Therefore, interventions that increase people's understanding of humanizing aspects of an outgroup may also increase their efficacy and thus their willingness to empathize. Findings from the literature would concur that empathy toward individual outgroup members can facilitate a greater willingness to accept the humanity of all members of that outgroup (Gubler, Halperin, & Hirschberger, 2015).

The Present Study

In order to evaluate the factors that influence empathy approach or avoidance toward Native Americans, the present study made use of a modified version of the EST used in Benally, Ochai, Ciappetta, & Soto's (2020). This modified version is modeled after the social disparities' context featured in their study, which presents Native American suffering as a result of social disparities currently facing Native American populations. The dependent variable was our participant's willingness to engage in empathy as determined by the number of times they chose to feel with the targets as opposed to describing them objectively throughout their trials (empathy choice). We measured our dependent variable based on the mean empathy choice exhibited by participants across the EST trials (percentage of trials participants chose to empathize over describe) across both conditions. Responses above the one-way analysis for variance suggested participants were more on the empathy approach side versus empathy avoidance.

Given the wide-ranging level of experience that majority populations have with Native Americans, and the fact that familiarity can increase empathy (Elfenbein, Beaupre, Levesque, & Hess, 2007; Ickes, 1997), we decided to use participant's experience with Native Americans as a covariate when examining the effects of our contexts. We hypothesized that our participants would demonstrate more empathy with targets when primed with a video that aims to humanize Native Americans relative to a video depicting cultural appropriation of Native American symbols and images.

Methods
Participants

Participants were a total of 140 White undergraduate students at Penn State (74 in our humanizing condition; 66 in our Cultural Appropriation condition). Participants were predominantly female (81%), all over the age of 18 (mean age = 19), and mostly freshman (72%). They completed the study for course credit. The majority of our participants also indicated they did not have any experience interacting with Native Americans, consistent with Shear et al.'s 2015 finding that roughly 40% of Americans are not aware Native Americans still exist. Although this American reality was reflected in our study, it was hard to generalize how participant's pre-experience with Native Americans could have shifted the results with only two participants indicating they had a great deal of experience with Native Americans.

Materials and Measures

Demographics and Native American Exposure. We collected the following demographic information as part of the completed survey: age, gender, religiosity, political orientation, ethnicity, and year in school. Finally, given prior research indicating that experience with Native Americans can influence empathy motivation towards this group (Benally, Ochai, Ciappetta, & Soto, 2020) we asked about participants' prior experience in interacting with Native Americans. The questions included: How much experience have you had interacting with Native Americans/American Indians? How interested would you be in learning about Native Americans/American Indian culture and history? How competent would you feel in having a conversation with a Native American/American Indians in the future? How familiar were you with the facts and statistics about Native American/American Indian experiences presented with the pictures? These questions were asked on a scale of 1to 3 (i.e., 1= not at all and 3= a great deal). Notably, 96 of our 140 participants (68%) indicated they had little to no experience with Native Americans, while 42 (30 %) said they had some experience with Native Americans. Only two indicated they had a lot of experience interacting with Native American individuals. On average our participants indicated a moderate political preference with an average political orientation rating of 3.83 on a 7-point scale (1=very conservative and 7=very liberal).

Humanization Condition Stimuli. In order to present Native Americans in a humanizing manner we chose the YouTube video: "Proud to be (Mascots)" for our humanizing condition. This 2-minute video educates viewers on Native American culture, by highlighting the names of specific Native American Tribes (e.g., Navajo, Arapaho, Blackfoot), their modern occupational titles (e.g., soldier, doctor, lawyer), famous Native Americans (e.g., Billy Mills and Bill Rodgers), and everyday roles that they play (e.g., mother, brother, sister). These various names, titles, and role are narrated by a Native American narrator with a serious tone, while coupled with clear pictures and videos of examples of Native Americans. The video ends with a black screen and narrator stating "the one name that Native Americans do not call themselves…" followed by a picture of a Washington r*dskin's logo on a football helmet. We expected this video to increase familiarity with Native American targets and thereby possibly increase then tendency to empathize with Native Americans. The video will be shown to participants before they complete the modified EST were asked a comprehension check question (e.g., Please name one of the Native American tribes mentioned in the video).

Cultural Appropriation Condition Stimuli. To present a less humanizing depiction of Native American culture, we chose a promotional video of the Washington r*dskins (and their mascot) demonstrating cultural appropriation of Native American imagery and symbols. The video we used is a two-minute rendition of the former Washington r*dskin's 'fight song' called Hail to the r*dskins. Throughout the video, images of fans dressed as Native Americans are portrayed, as well as highlights from the football team. Other brief images shown demonstrate spectators and the Washington team's band with traditional headdresses that are typically only worn for Native American ceremonial uses. A review of the current literature suggests that such instances can indirectly inflict pain to Native Americans, even when the agent is not aware the pain is being felt (Gray, Young & Waytz, 2012). Although Gray, Young & Watson's (2012) paper implies that intention is an integral part of perceived harm (i.e., a possible motivational factor for empathizing), Tara Houska (2017) illustrated how the lack of awareness for Native American issues in Americans is harmful to the existence of modern Native Americans (i.e., loss of culture, lack of acknowledgment of community issues). Therefore, introducing this instance of cultural appropriation could help trigger an empathic response from participants as they witness inaccurate portrayals in the video in addition to the real faces and statistics of the targets in our study. To ensure participants viewed the entire video, we included a comprehension check question asking what team the video was promoting at the end of the video.

Empathy Selection Task Modified (EST). The present study's design was modeled after the original empathy selection task developed by Dr. Daryl Cameron and Colleagues in 2017. People's strong preference to avoid empathy was originally observed using the Empathy Selection Task (EST), where participants were asked to respond to a series of photographs with target individuals' faces. The task's intent was to assess the participant's dichotomous selection to regulate their emotional experience by asking them to choose to either write a sentence objectively describing the target (describe) or to write a sentence feeling what the target is feeling (feel). For the present study, the stimuli and trial structure of the EST was modified as follows. Our study included all of the same pictures, which always depicted Native American individuals in distress with a short vignette indicating, "the person in the photograph is suffering." We used the previous study's 'social disparities' condition, which included information on social disparities faced by Native American communities following the vignette. We used this condition because participants demonstrated the greatest relative empathy avoidance in this condition. Participants were asked to complete 20 trials of our Empathy selection task after viewing the video outlined by their condition.

Additional Measures. Our survey incorporated additional measures that were not used in the current study. Participants completed the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI) which comprised of personal distress (PD) and Empathic Concern Scale (subscale of the interpersonal Reactivity Index) which measures participants' feelings of warmth, compassion, concern for others (Davis, 1980) and the Identification with All Humanity Scale (IWAH).

Procedures

Our study used a between-studies online survey design. Approximately half of our participants watched the "proud to be" video (humanizing Native Americans) before completing the modified EST described above, and the other half watched the cultural appropriation video depicting the Washington redsk*ns and their mascot.

Participants first read and agreed to the consent form by indicating they were above the age of 18 and wished to participate in the study. Participants were then assigned to one of the two conditions to watch either the humanization video or the cultural appropriation video prior to beginning the EST task. Participants answered a brief comprehension check question on the video's contents and then completed the modified EST. Following the EST, participants filled out the demographic section, and additional questions not relevant to the purpose of the present study and therefore not discussed further (NASA task load index, empathic concern scale, identification with all-humanity scale).

Data Analytic Approach

Our primary dependent variable was the overall mean empathy choice exhibited by participants across the EST trials (percentage of trials participants chose to empathize over describe) across our two conditions (humanization and cultural appropriation). We used a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test the differences between conditions while controlling for exposure to Native American culture. We also tested whether the mean empathy choice score for each condition was significantly different from .50 using a one-sample t-test to see if there was evidence of empathy avoidance in each condition, regardless of the differences between conditions.

Results
Preliminary Results

The final sample size of 140 included only those participants who provided a correct response to our attention check question after the corresponding video for each condition was watched. Of the 140 participants included in the final analyses, 30.7% of them had previously completed a similar EST task, but findings did not differ by previous experience with the task, so all participants were retained in the final analysis. Overall, the results indicated that people tended to choose to empathize with the targets more than they chose to describe the targets objectively, with 72.9% in the cultural appropriation condition ($SE = 0.1$) and 54.9% in our humanizing condition ($SE = 0.03$). A one-sample t-test revealed that both the humanizing condition, $t(73) = 2.64$, $p = .01$, and the cultural appropriation condition, $t(65) = 4.58$, $p < .01$, was significantly different from .50 indicating a significant empathy *approach* across both conditions.

Primary Analyses

The results of a one-way ANOVA comparing our humanization and cultural appropriation video prime conditions, while also controlling for our participant's prior experience in interacting with Native Americans revealed a significant main of condition, $F(1, 135) = 3.86$, $p = .05$, indicating that the conditions were significantly different from each other. This hypothesis was in the opposite direction of our expected results such that the cultural appropriation condition yielded a significantly more empathy approach than the humanizing condition, although both conditions demonstrated empathy approach. Interestingly, both of our conditions were higher on empathy approach for the social disparity condition in the previous study (46%).

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to demonstrate how humanizing rhetoric such as a video describing the many names Native Americans identify with, as well as a cultural appropriation video, might impact people's willingness to engage in pro-social behavior (empathy) with outgroup members. We hypothesized the humanizing condition would generate a greater empathy approach and our cultural appropriation condition would lead to less empathy avoidance. Although we saw more empathy approach with the humanizing condition, we surprisingly saw an even greater empathic response with our cultural appropriation condition. Both conditions were significantly different from the 50% choice level expected if participants were choosing to either describe or feel randomly throughout the EST.

Humanizing Condition

Our humanization condition was marked by the "Proud to Be" video, which was part of the 2013 Change the Mascot Movement launched by the Oneida Nation to chance the NFL's Washington football team mascot. Results within this condition were statistically significant and demonstrated some empathy approach, although not more than our cultural appropriation condition as was expected. Upon further evaluation of our stimuli, our video may have overplayed the resilience, strength and other positive descriptions of Native Americans, which may not have been consistent with the statistics we presented. With the video's breadth of images, video clips, narrated titles and names, it is hard to determine what stood out most to participants or what they thought of Native Americans generally after watching. Still, evaluating participant's subjective responses overall might provide further insight into their thoughts about the study as a whole.

Another fact to consider when evaluating these results was that Washington football team did away with their r*dskin mascot in July 2020, a month after this study began. By the time the participants had completed our study, the name had been changed for approximately 5 months and participants may have been well aware of this movement. With the central theme of the video being changing the mascot, participants may have considered the message outdated or taken care of considering how long the name had been changed. Therefore, although the majority of our participants answered empathetically, their responses may have been more empathetic had the topic not been on the forefront of pop media. On the contrary, the lack of societal awareness on this issue could have had the opposite effect like the results of Benally, Ochai, Ciappetta & Soto, (2020). Additionally, since the change of the name, many individuals and organizations such as the Native American Guardians Alliance have spoken out in opposition of the name change and worked to preserve Native American heritage, including 'historical' mascots. Therefore, any participants who share this view might have response less empathetically.

Cultural Appropriation Condition

Much like the Humanizing condition, our Cultural Appropriation condition was marked by its unwarranted displays of the appropriation of Native American culture by the Washington football team and non-native individuals associated with the organization (i.e., wearing headdresses, utilizing ceremonial objects, the 'hail to the r*dskins theme song). Surprisingly, the participants within this condition responded more empathically than our humanizing condition as well as all of the conditions in Benally, Ochai, Ciappetta & Soto, (2020).

Unlike the humanizing "Proud to Be" video, the "hail to the r*dskins" does not openly demean the former Washington football team mascot. Consequently, the open endorsement of the former mascot may have triggered participants to take an altruistic (i.e., empathic) stance when answering the EST. Again, the historical change to the Washington mascot in July of 2020 may have played a role in this condition as well considering this study began in May 2020. Aside from the social aspects of the name change, organizations like the National Congress on American Indians, note that calling a Native American person a r*dskin in person could constitute charges at the school and federal level ranging from bullying to hate crimes (i.e., provided the name "r*dskin" is graffitied on a Native American's property). For similar reasons, the American Psychological Association deemed such mascots as aids in creating a hostile environment for minorities in 2005, six years before the video was made (American Psychological Association, 2005).

We estimate that such historical changes and societal focus on racial issues (e.g., Instagram's Black out Tuesday to stand with the Black Lives Matter movement June 2, 2020) might have been prevalent in the minds of participants who took our survey. Our White participants could have felt particularly obligated to answer empathically considering such changes and potential feelings of "White guilt" (Swim & Miller, 1999) in reaction to both the video prime and our stimuli. According to Swim & Miller, this "white guilt" could have triggered participants to react in the most protective or altruistic way (i.e., choosing to empathize). As mentioned, we did collect subjective information on how our participants felt about the study overall but did not include such information in our final analyses. Additionally, Penn State saw its first student organizations to support Native American students (i.e., the Indigenous Peoples Student Organization and the American Indian Society for Science and Engineering) in the Spring of 2020 (Baker, 2020). According to the Indigenous People Student Organization Advisor Tracy Peterson, the organization has not only helped bring acknowledgement to students here at the university, but the land the university was built on," which is something our participants could have been aware of. This awareness could have also triggered an ally response if any of the participants learned of Native American issues on the University level, as well as the National level.

Limitations and Future Directions

One of our most important limitations within this study was the limited and homogeneous nature of our participants, who were all White, Penn State students who were 81% female. With the majority of our participants being freshman students in psychology, our study reflected a small subset of not only White people, but Penn State students as well. To generate a more inclusive sample, we would have to go beyond psychology subject pools and expand to more than college-aged individuals, which we predict might decrease empathy approach. A more diverse sample with older individuals might also reflect the lack of awareness of social issues considering how the majority of social media users are ages 18-29 (Pew Research Center, 2019). Additionally, our sample may have had other demographic factors such as sex differences in empathy, where self-identifying females tend to demonstrate more empathy behaviors than self-identifying males as young as two years old (Hoffman & Levine, 1976). Also, college-aged students may have more plasticity in their willingness to empathize (Grühn et al., 2008). Consequently, future studies should aim to collect data from a larger audience with greater diversity in age, ethnicity and location.

Given the geographic location of this study (i.e., Pennsylvania, which contains no tribal lands), our participants presumably largely lacked in experience interacting with Native Americans. Therefore, future studies could seek White participants closer in proximity to Native American tribes (e.g., border towns near Native American reservations) to develop a fuller picture of outgroup empathy towards Native Americans. Therefore, future studies performed with White individuals at schools located on or nearer Native American reservations or populations could provide a sense of how proximity to Native American culture might influence motivation to empathize.

Another area that may have affected our results was our inability to equate the responses between conditions. Although our main EST and demographic questions were the same, we did not include any pilot tests to determine how our participants reacted to our video prime nor if they actually created the desired humanization or cultural appropriative effects. In fact, one of the original intents of selecting the cultural appropriation video was to present a video that we thought was once societally accepted (i.e., shown in commercials or at Washington football games) we assumed our participants might not immediately recognized as cultural appropriation (i.e., not seeing a problem with the video's elements nor connecting them to the EST's social disparities). Any failed recognition of this cultural appropriation according to Tara Houska is just as harmful to modern Native Americans and the problems they face. As mentioned before, adding pilot studies or questions referring specifically to participant's reactions to the video in future studies could help gage how the stimuli is received. Better understanding how the initial video prime is received could help generate how participants connect instances of cultural appropriation to the current struggles Native Americans face in society.

Lastly, our study did not have an accurate control condition to compare with the results of each individual condition. We did not have a no-video condition like the Benally, Ochai, Ciappetta & Soto, (2020) study, which allowed them to demonstrate relative empathy avoidance between their conditions. Any future study would benefit from such a control condition or by incorporating the original disparity statistics from the Benally, Ochai, Ciappetta & Soto, (2020) study. Additionally, any future studies of similar nature should ask participants about their awareness regarding the Washington team name change and their subjective thoughts about it.

Conclusion

Research on effective humanization strategies and empathy efficacy is becoming increasingly crucial in multicultural societies like the United States. Such studies demonstrate the importance of rhetoric in mainstream media, which is especially important to modern Native Americans who often suffer disproportionately compared to other Americans and continue to suffer in silence (i.e., 87% of American history books only indicate Native Americans as existing before the 1900s). The solutions to these modern problems are difficult to be fully addressed without acknowledgement of the historical wounds of Native Americans and empathy as they continue to heal. Studies like ours provide insight into potential obstacles that non-native members of society may have in empathizing with historical and present instances of Native American suffering. Without empathy, Native Americans will continue to see a decline in population and culture as tragedies like Covid-19 continue to devastate already disadvantaged communities.

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