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Written Statement of

Stephanie A. Fryberg, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Psychology

University of Arizona

On behalf of the

American Psychological Association

Before the

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

on

Stolen Identities:

The Impact of Racist Stereotypes on Indigenous People

May 3, 2011

Chairman Akaka, Ranking Member Barrasso, and members of the Committee, please allow me to express appreciation for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the 154,000 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA) about the use of American Indian mascots. My name is Dr. Stephanie Fryberg. I am an enrolled member of the Tulalip Tribes in Washington State, and I bring warm greetings from my family and tribal community. I am an Associate Professor of Social and Cultural Psychology at the University of Arizona, and a researcher dedicated to alleviating education disparities for American Indian and low-income children. I have conducted many studies on the psychological effects of using American Indian mascots and I am the author of a number of published articles on the topic.

APA, as an organization, has a long-standing commitment to using psychological knowledge to improve people's lives and to benefit society. The membership includes researchers, practitioners, and educators whose work has played a pivotal role in facilitating the resolution of personal and societal challenges in diverse, multicultural contexts. In terms of the use of American Indian mascots, the carefully honed research methods and theories of our field provide a basis for examining and assessing the psychological consequences for American Indians, non-Natives, and race relations in American society.

In my statement, I will provide a brief overview of the empirical research on the psychological consequences of using American Indian mascots. In summary, the research finds that American Indian mascots have 1) negative psychological consequences for American Indians, 2) positive psychological consequences for European Americans, and 3) negative effects on race relations in the U.S.

Negative Psychological Consequences for American Indians

A growing number of studies reveal that American Indian mascots have a variety of negative psychological consequences for American Indians. Exposing American Indian high school and college students to American Indian mascots decreased self-esteem, feelings of community worth (i.e., the belief that one's community can improve itself), and achievement related aspirations (Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008; Fryberg & Watts, 2010), and increased levels of anxiety and depression (LaRocque, 2004). In fact, one study found that being exposed to an American Indian mascot lowered self-esteem significantly more than being exposed to a set of negative stereotypes (i.e., alcoholism, suicide, teen-pregnancy, high school dropout rates) (Fryberg et al., 2008). Also notable, another study showed that even when an American Indian mascot represented an American Indian university, the negative effects were the same as when the mascot represented a largely non-Native organization (e.g., University of Illinois or Cleveland Indians Major League Baseball team; Fryberg et al., 2008).

Beyond these psychological consequences, American Indian mascots also negatively influenced the campus climate for American Indian students. American Indian students at a large university with an American Indian mascot reported more threats to personal safety and experiences of discrimination, and higher levels of stress and tension than non-Native students (LaRocque, 2004). Thus, American Indian mascots in school contexts have the potential to cause harm, both short term (e.g., on self-esteem) and long term (e.g., negative campus climate) to American Indians.

Positive Psychological Consequences for European Americans

Stereotypes typically exacerbate inequality by producing negative effects for the stigmatized target group and positive effects for high status groups. This pattern holds for the use of American Indian mascots. In contrast to the negative psychological consequences for American Indians, research reveals that European Americans may benefit from the use of American Indian mascots (Fryberg & Oyserman, 2011). One study showed that European American students exposed to American Indian mascots in a news article or on a t-shirt reported a *boost* in self-esteem compared to European Americans in the no mascot control condition. Another study revealed that European Americans also reported liking and feeling more similar to a European American wearing an American Indian mascot t-shirts than to the same person wearing an Irish t-shirt or a plain t-shirt. These studies suggest that European Americans may benefit from both exposure (i.e., feel better about themselves) and using (i.e., are liked more) American Indian mascots, and that this benefit may partially explain the tenacity with which some Americans cling to American Indian mascots.

Taken together, the work summarized above highlights the discrepancy of psychological consequences associated with American Indian mascots. After exposure to an American Indian mascot, American Indians reported reduced feelings of self-esteem and community worth, fewer achievement related aspirations, and higher rates of anxiety and depression. In contrast, European Americans, when exposed to the same mascots, report a boost in feelings of self worth and are liked more, rather than being seen as culturally or racially insensitive for endorsing stereotypes of American Indians. Consistent with the stereotyping literature, American Indian mascots are one of the taken-for-granted features of everyday life that serve to foster racial and ethnic inequality in this country.

Negative Consequences for Race Relations

Mounting research reveals that American Indian mascots undermine race relations by activating negative stereotypes of American Indians and by increasing the likelihood that non-Native individuals will negatively evaluate and interact with American Indians (Nelson, 2009). For example, one study examined 1699 user comments from an online Internet forum that was created in response to a newspaper article about the University of North Dakota (UND) Fighting Sioux mascot (Steinfeldt et al., 2010). Reflecting antipathy toward American Indians, 32% of the comments attacked the credibility and legitimacy of American Indians who opposed the use of American Indian mascots, 21% responded disparagingly toward American Indians (e.g., just get over it), 21% noted that American Indians should be grateful that the mascot "honors" them and 7% directly vilified American Indians (e.g., savages, drunks). Moreover, revealing a lack of empathy for American Indians, 20% reported that American Indians are not the victims, but rather that the users of American Indian mascots are the true victims because *their* mascot was banned. In summary, UND mascot supporters not only expressed negative attitudes and stereotypes about American Indians, they believed that American Indians owed them something (i.e., they should be grateful) for using the mascot.

Beyond *explicit* (conscious) attitudes and stereotypes, American Indian mascots may also elicit *implicit* (i.e., unconscious) attitudes and stereotypes (Nosek et al., 2007). A recent study revealed

that exposure to American Indian mascots brought to mind negative and positive implicit stereotypes of contemporary American Indians (Stone, Focella, Fryberg, & Covarrubias, 2011). Notably, however, the study found that the ease with which negative stereotypes came to mind was significantly quicker than the ease with which positive stereotypes came to mind, which suggests that American Indian mascots more readily yield implicit negative stereotypes of contemporary American Indians. Moreover, while the negative stereotype effect was limited to the American Indian mascot condition, the positive stereotype effect was found in all three mascot conditions (i.e., American Indian mascot, Irish mascot and non-ethnic mascot). This result suggests that the sports mascots in general seem to bring forth positive stereotypes of contemporary American Indians, but only American Indian mascots elicit negative stereotypes of this group.

The issue, with respect to race relations, is not simply that the use of American Indian mascots activated negative stereotypes of American Indians, in important contexts such as education, but rather that these mascots influence how European Americans, particularly those who support the use of American Indian mascots, think and act toward American Indians and other racial-ethnic minority groups. One study, for example, found that European American students who agreed with the use of American Indian mascots were more likely to engage in racial prejudice and discrimination against American Indian students than European American students who disagreed with American Indian mascots (Gonzalez, 2005). In terms of other racial-ethnic minority groups, two studies revealed that European American participants who were exposed to American Indian mascots endorsed more anti-Asian American stereotypes relative to participants who had not been exposed to the mascots (Kim-Prieto, Goldstein, Okazaki, & Kirschner, 2010). This research demonstrated that once a person starts thinking in stereotypical terms about one racial-ethnic minority group, the same type of stereotypic thinking can spill over onto other stigmatized groups.

The research findings on the use of American Indian mascots are proving to be remarkably consistent across studies and in terms of how the studies align with past research on stereotyping and prejudice. The research empirically demonstrates, for the first time, that the negative stereotypes promoted by American Indian mascots reveal negative consequences for the targeted minority group and positive consequences for the mainstream majority group. Hence, the use of American Indian mascots not only promotes the development, endorsement, and activation of negative attitudes and behaviors toward contemporary American Indians, but they reinforce inequality and, in so doing, undermine race relations in this country.

As I conclude, I want to express my gratitude for the opportunity to discuss the relevant research with you today. I look forward to hearing your questions and welcome the chance to respond. Thank you.