COMPLETING THE CIRCLE: NATIVE AMERICAN ATHLETES GIVING BACK TO THEIR COMMUNITY

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COMPLETING THE CIRCLE:
NATIVE AMERICAN ATHLETES GIVING BACK TO THEIR COMMUNITY

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Natalie Michelle Welch
May 2019
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my elders and ancestors. Without their resilience I would not have the many great opportunities I have had. Also, this is dedicated to my late best friend, Jonathan Douglas Davis. Your greatness made me better.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the following people for their help through my doctoral program and the dissertation process:

My best friend, Spencer Shelton. This doctorate pursuit led me to you and that’s worth way more than anything I could ever ask for. Thank you for keeping me sane and being a much-needed diversion when I’m in workaholic mode. Your kind heart and patience makes me a better person.

I have to express the utmost gratitude to my mom, she is my biggest supporter and without her love and support I would never had made it this far. Thank you for always being in my corner. To my Grandpa Ham, the greatest man I have ever known. You have the biggest heart and I am so proud to be your granddaughter. To my Granny Lucille, I love all the ways that I am like you. You have always been my biggest cheerleader and I credit you with my love for reading. To my Granny Carol, thank you for always being there for me and willing to cook or teach me how to make your best recipes. To my favorite cousins, Shelby and Mike Parker, Kristina Cloer, and Gerena Parker. To Spencer’s amazing family, Diane, Mike, Steve, Lindsey, Karen, Allen and Matt. Thank you for welcoming me into your family. And of course, all of my Bradley and Blankenship families. There are too many of you to list but please know your love and support does not go unappreciated.

To the entire Cherokee community. So many of you have supported my journey. Thanks for amusing my family as they brag about me. Special thanks to Tim Swayney, Michael Slee, Micah Swimmer, Gerri Grady, Keyonna Hornbuckle, Dorcay Arch, LeChay Arch, Kayla Arch, Tiff Panther, Shannon Bark, Sheena Bark, Shawnee Bark, Emra Arkansas, Robin Swayney, Osh Stephens, Rooster Crowe, Karina Bottchenbaugh, Frances Stamper, Miranda Long, Eddie Swimmer, Darius Lambert, Stacy and Julian Ledford, Neko Smith, Austin Smith, and Hawk Walkingstick. Thank you for all the support and friendship.

To my dissertation committee, Dr. Robin Hardin, Dr. Steven Waller, Dr. Adam Love, Dr. Erin Whiteside, Dr. Nicholas Geidner, and Dr. Alisse Ali-Joseph. Rob, if it weren’t for you I wouldn’t be where I am today. I thank you for your continued guidance. Dr. Waller, you have always made me feel like an amazing person and scholar. Dr. Love, thank you for helping me become a more critical thinker. Dr. Whiteside, you have been an inspiration and awesome mentor. Alisse, I’ll never forget discovering your dissertation and how it made me feel like my dreams were possible. I’m so happy to have found a Native research sister. Thank you all for making me a better scholar.

To my awesome doctoral cohort – Zach Smith, John Magliocca, Lauren Beasley, Alexander Deeb, Sam Winemiller, Sam Bernstein, and Robin Cooley. You all inspire me and I love the work you are doing. Go Vols!
To my UCF family, Dr. Richard Lapchick, Dr. William Sutton, and Dr. Keith Harrison for showing me how impactful a professor could be. To my former bosses, Patty Brebner, Bill Davenport, Sally DeSipio, Reme DeBisshop, and Danny Sheniak for teaching me so much more than advertising and media. To Sam McCracken, Brent Cahwee, Wilson & Brenda Pipestem, and Stacy Leeds being kickass Native leaders for me to look up to.

To my dearest friends - Rachel Gardell, Catherine Liu, Michelle Krening, Alvina Begay, Christina Russell, Cristi Ecks, Jessie Gardner, Kristin Hurst, Michael Connelly, Austin Moss, Chris Kaiser, David Benoit, LaVera Morris, Devan Dignan, Ivanna Liberato, JT Louviere, Lisa Feldhusen, Phoebe Owens, Mandy Alperin, Gina Folston, Jessica Siegele, Allison Smith, Yoav Dubinsky, Sara Mitchell, Shanna Browning, Elizabeth Brock, Nolan Morrell, Jesse Christenson, Alex Palowski, Tim Morris and Isaac Fowler. Y’all know how much you rock.

To Vickie Chien coming in the clutch to help edit.

Finally, to my athletes, Caitlyn, Damen, and Notah, you inspire me every day.
ABSTRACT

Giving back is a crucial part of Native American culture (Kidwell, 1990), and can be a motivator for youth to leave their Native communities to obtain an education (Reyes, 2016). There is logical connection between giving back and Native American athletics as sport can be a catalyst for social capital, but it has only briefly been studied in this context among the Native American community (Ali-Christie, 2013). The dominant narratives of Native Americans are as peoples of the past or individuals facing insurmountable odds and destined to be another statistic of ill-health and loss.

The purpose of this dissertation is to better understand giving back amongst Native American athletes and to produce a counter-narrative to the deficit perspective by highlighting the voices of three successful Native American athletes using documentary film as a research medium. TribalCrit framed this research because of its emphasis on the importance of the Native American experience and storytelling. Public and visual sociology are also important to this work because of the need to showcase these findings in a way that is more accessible to the larger public and provide representation for Native people.

Several storylines were developed based on the comprehensive data collection alongside three Native American athletes. The storylines were: (a) Sports are Family, (b) Sport is a Vehicle, (c) Giving Back is Greater Than Sport, (d) Giving Back is Gratitude, and (e) Role Model Role. On the surface, sport appeared to be everything to these athletes but ultimately what mattered the most to them was giving back to their community. These findings can help us better understand the dynamics of the Native community beyond the grim statistics linking Natives to alcohol abuse, drug problems, diabetes and other health issues. This work can also provide the
community with personal stories of success and ensure the continuation of the circle of giving back.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Caitlyn Ramirez realized her dream of playing professional basketball in the fall of 2017. After a tumultuous, but ultimately successful high school and college career, she made a professional team in La Seu d’ Urgell, Spain, far away from the home she knew in the United States. Caitlyn grew up in a small community in Shawnee, Oklahoma where sports were a way of life. She grew up spending her weekends at powwows and softball tournaments where there were always games to be played. Caitlyn struggled through tough family losses but was always able to count on sports to help her cope. Once she started seeing success on the basketball court, she realized the sport was something she could use to better herself. She struggled with schoolwork but knew she had to better herself academically. Growing up, Caitlyn’s grandmother emphasized their Native American ancestry, and she always longed to learn more about her heritage. This passion for her culture only intensified once Caitlyn realized the power and influence she had as a role model and successful athlete.

Once overseas, Caitlyn participated in camps for local children, and even though she was thousands of miles away, she was compelled to do something for Native youth back home. Her grandmother always taught her to be giving and open to helping others in any way she could. She knew the struggle for opportunities that Native American youth faced and wanted to use her influence in any way she could. She made a post on Facebook, asking friends and family what she could do. There was a simple suggestion that she write letters to young girls who needed someone to look up to in their life. Caitlyn began to collect names and addresses and went to work on her stationery. She crafted handwritten notes and autographed pictures of herself as a professional basketball player. Initially, she thought she might send a dozen and ultimately, she
ended up mailing out more than 100 letters. Facebook was abuzz with photos of joyous young girls receiving their care packages (Figure 1, Appendix). Despite the simplicity, Caitlyn’s letter project created a deep connection with Native youth. Parents and friends claimed it was life-changing for their children to see someone who looked like they did, who came from a community like their own, finding success in elite sports (B. Cawhee, personal communication, April 25, 2018).

Caitlyn’s story is just one of many examples of Native American athletes giving back (Ali-Christie, 2013; Schnell, 2011; Schwartz, 2017). This phenomenon deserves deeper exploration because Native American athletes giving back includes meaningful personal, cultural and community ties. Giving back, just as participating in sports, has bigger cultural implications for Native American athletes. In this study, I aim to investigate what giving back and community means to these athletes. Just as photos of Caitlyn’s project provide deeper perspective, I will use documentary film to articulate my findings and illustrate the context of Native American athletes giving back.

**Purpose & Rationale**

Much of Western research stipulates beginning a research project with a statement of the problem and a research question. Furthermore, many scholars approach research in Native communities from a deficit perspective (Ali-Christie, 2013; Bartolome, 1994; Faber, 2016; Paraschak & Thompson, 2014). The deficit perspective identifies problems or barriers and then, “explores potential solutions for overcoming such problems, primarily by drawing on the skills of ‘experts’” (Paraschak, 2013, p. 230). Research done from a deficit perspective reinforces what is not working without considering or encouraging what is working well (Paraschak, 2013).
While evaluating problems can be crucial to solving them, at a certain point focusing on the negatives can be paralyzing and lead to the victimization of Native peoples. By focusing solely on problem solving, Native people are presented as helpless figures that need to be rescued. A focus on victimization can cause others to misunderstand Native Americans as inherently troubled and in need of outside intervention (Maton, Schellenbach, Leadbeater, & Solarz, 2003; Weick, Rapp, Sullivan, & Kisthardt, 1989). For instance, when non-Native journalists report on Native American issues, they don’t consult with Native American people directly. They instead propose a solution to problems they see from the outside, implying that Native American people are not worthy or capable of meaningful consultation. This approach can cause communities, especially underrepresented ones, to be misunderstood and perceived as unable to survive without outside help. Additionally, Native Americans may buy into negative stereotypes and accept the victim role, leading to a sense of hopelessness (Brown, Dickerson, D’Amico, 2016).

Rather than approach the Native community from the often-used deficit model, I seek to disrupt the ways Native communities have been colonized by the social scientific research process. Some scholars have attempted to emphasize the strengths of communities that are often seen for their deficits and suggest that a focus on community assets can be empowering (Cramer, Gonzalez, & Pellegrini-Lafont, 2014; Gonzalez et al., 1995; Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Yosso, 2005). The strengths-based model used by scholars such as Victoria Paraschak and Kristi Thompson (2014) with the Aboriginal people in Canada is a perspective I look to for guidance in this work. Instead of denying that problems exist, the strengths perspective reframes situations in a way that focuses on what is going well and, “the strengths already demonstrated by the individuals involved and the available resources they can draw upon to enhance their situation”
(Paraschak & Thompson, 2014, p. 1047). Similar to Reyes (2016) in her study of Native students, I focus on giving back as an asset among Native communities.

Scholars have touched on the concept of giving back among Native Americans, mostly in the educational context where Native students who pursue higher education aim to give back to their Native communities upon earning their degrees (Guillory, 2008; Keene, 2014; Reyes 2016). Ali-Christie (2013) found that Native American athletes used sport to secure and persevere in higher education and ultimately give back to their Native communities. This perseverance is not to be taken lightly as “institutions fail to recognize the disconnect between the institutional values and [Indian] student/family values; hence the real reasons for high attrition rates among disadvantaged students are never addressed” (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002, p. 8).

Giving back is mentioned among Native scholarship, and a smaller group of scholars have attempted to describe what giving back actually means to Native communities. Gulliory (2008) argued that giving back is more complex and not always a positive experience. For example, Native students who grow up on a reservation and return home after college can be met with distrust for leaving the community in the first place (Brayboy, 2005b; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Lee, 2009). More recently, Keene (2014) challenged the traditionally held belief that giving back among Native students is solely a commitment to returning to a reservation environment. This distinction is significant as not all Native Americans grow up on a reservation or even a community with a Native presence. The extent of the scholarly exploration into the meaning of giving back has been limited to this look at Native Americans and education, without any inquiry into the meanings of giving back to Native athletes.
Athletics can provide Native Americans with a level of influence in their communities, providing a platform to represent their tribes and communities in a way that transcends their sport (Ali-Christie, 2013; King, 2005). Native Americans often struggle to find positive representation, and athletics has historically been a way for Native American people to reclaim their pride and power (Ali-Christie, 2013; Anderson, 2006; King, 2005; Oxendine, 1988). Many Native athletes describe giving back as entailing more than typical altruism or community service, but as something ingrained in their nature that is exemplified by their Native culture and tradition and dedicated training as athletes (S. McCracken, personal communication, August 11, 2018). By serving as a public figure and acknowledging their tribal heritage, Native athletes can perform giving back by challenging deficit perspectives and changing the narrative around Native Americans and success. This dissertation explores the phenomenon of giving back by Native American athletes with hopes to learning more about why Native American athletes value staying connected to their community. Furthering the understanding of what giving back means to Native athletes, as well as their communities, can assist in encouraging and empowering future generations to continue the reciprocal cycle of giving back and further strengthen Native communities.

Many Native communities have integrated traditional knowledge and storytelling as a way to preserve their culture. Unfortunately, oral storytelling has left many stories untold in an increasingly visual world. This dissertation combines traditional storytelling with modern filmmaking to produce a story that is representative of and collaborative with the Native community. Qualitative methodology informs this work with an integration of in-depth interviewing and recorded ethnographic observations. Inspired by TribalCrit, a documentary film
can also provide a counter narrative and challenge the long-held beliefs and stereotypes of Native American athletes (e.g., Native Americans athletes can’t make it off the Rez and are susceptible to drugs and alcohol). Films have been made showing the benefits of sport to oppressed communities, but they often remain generic and over-simplified. They can portray sport as a cure-all for complex socioeconomic and historical trauma. For example, Belman’s *More Than a Game*, a documentary feature on LeBron James, fails to go beyond the sport of basketball to address real sociological issues surround the James’ rise to fame. Film critic, Avi Offer (2009) proclaimed that the film, “ultimately falls short in terms of offering insightful and provocative revelations” (para 1). The film I produce hopes to push further, to see how sport really facilitates advancement for Native athletes and what happens when they step away from the playing field.

Native American athletes are often placed in a unique position within their communities. Academics and athletics bring certain presumptions, as well as widely-held beliefs about their role in colonization and assimilation. Education is often seen as a vehicle to prosperity, but for many Native American communities, education was a tool used to strip them of their culture. Native American children were sent to boarding schools in the late 19th century under the mantra, “Kill the Indian, save the man” (Bloom, 2000, p. xiii). Organized sport was used in this context to replace Native American culture with respectful competition. However, in many cases, Native Americans utilized sport to “beat the whites at their own game” and essentially indigenized games and made them their own (Gems, 2005, p. 12). Native athletes giving back can demonstrate how an underrepresented population uses a globalized activity such as sport to benefit themselves as well as their community. It can provide best practices to continue the cycle of giving back and community enrichment. The model of Native athletes giving back may be
able to provide ways to complement, or correct, Western ideas of philanthropy that often rely on the privileged giving to the underprivileged.

Ultimately, the purpose of this dissertation is to explore documentary film as a research medium to better understand giving back amongst Native American athletes and to produce a counter-narrative to the deficit perspective by highlighting the voices of Native American athletes. I hope to provide a strengths-based representation of Native American athletes and combat detrimental narratives persistent in American culture. For the purposes of this study, giving back will refer to all actions and activities participated in by Native American athletes that contribute to their community. For Native American athletes, giving back is an active participation in community enrichment without asking for anything in return.

**A Note About Terminology**

Language is a powerful tool and it is important for me to address the use of terminology when working with Native American communities. Throughout scholarly literature as well as popular media there are a variety of terms used to describe Native peoples. Similar to Reyes (2016), when I use the term Native or Indigenous I am referring to “peoples across the globe who identify as first peoples in their traditional homelands” (p. 21). I am cautious when using these overarching terms because I do not intend to imply that all Native nations are same. There are over five hundred and sixty federally recognized tribes in the United States alone. However, I feel the similarity in experiences and interests does provide a source of strength for the greater Native American community. As Pidgeon (2018) stated, overarching terms like Indigenous are “term of unity, not assimilation” (p. 3).
For the purposes of this dissertation, I use the terms Native American, American Indian, Native and Indigenous interchangeably and often as used in the referenced work. Again, I recognize that these terms can mean very different things to different people and there are Native scholars who disagree with using the terms Native American or American Indian. For many, the ideal would be to refer to Native peoples by their specific tribal affiliation (Ali-Christie, 2013; Pidgeon, 2018). As Underwood (2017) stated in his dissertation, “the range of nomenclature makes it difficult and complicated to know which word is preferred, which word is accepted, and which is not” (p. 1). For me, “Native American” is most appropriate, but I do not discount any readers who may disagree.

In titling this dissertation I was also mindful of using the word “community” rather than “communities”. I feel that many Native American athletes aim to give back to the Native community as a whole rather than individual nations. For example, a Native athlete is just as interested in helping a member of another tribal nation as they are their own. Similarly, they are not solely focused on their own tribe’s priorities but the greater Native community.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Growing up on the Cherokee Indian Reservation on the Qualla Boundary of Cherokee, North Carolina was a unique experience, but it took me many years away to realize how unique it really was. To give a sense of how small and tight-knit the community is, I went through school with about 50 other kids in my class from kindergarten to senior year. Sports were, and still are, a huge part of life on “the Rez”. Friday night lights for football and basketball tournaments were huge community gatherings. I played countless hours of softball and basketball with my neighborhood friends. It’s weird to even write “neighborhood,” because that’s not how we thought of each other, we were all just families that lived around each other in our communities. Families lived in clusters in the seven different traditional communities, such as Wolfetown Birdtown, and Big Cove, for as long as anyone could remember. Youth played rec sports for their community and community pride was, and still is, a big thing. I know I will represent Wolfetown forever.

Sport was (and still is) so powerful for us because as a small community and tiny 1A school in North Carolina we weren’t just playing for the school, we were playing for the community and the entire Cherokee nation. There were many evenings I spent on my grandpa’s porch listening to his stories about the old games they had played. Our women’s basketball team won the state title in 1998, and I’ll never forget feeling so proud riding past the sign welcoming you to Cherokee, home of the 1998 North Carolina State Champion Lady Braves Basketball team, that still stands to this day. Last year we won our first state football championship, the first ever for any Bureau of Indian Affairs school, or what we call “Tribal”, school. Sports was, and still is, a powerful catalyst in our community.
I had always known I would go to college. It was simply understood as my next step after high school. My mom and entire extended family had always supported and encouraged me. When I was a junior in high school I was accepted to Dartmouth’s Native American fly-in program, an event that gathered Native American college juniors from across the United States on Dartmouth’s campus for a weekend to experience what college looked like for Native Americans at Dartmouth. I’ll never forget the overwhelming feeling of seeing so many Native American students from all over the country that did not look like me or any of my Cherokee classmates. Every skin tone and hair color, size and shape. This was when I realized that Native America was a lot bigger than I imagined.

Dartmouth was a great eye-opening experience, but when I stepped on to the University of Tennessee’s campus in Knoxville I had an intense feeling of belonging. Tennessee felt right, even if I was not sure exactly what I would study or pursue as a career. Just two hours away, Tennessee wasn’t necessarily my “safe” choice, that was Western Carolina University, only 20 minutes away from home, but it still felt like a world away from the Reservation. I had also decided I would apply to an Ivy League and after visiting Dartmouth in the cold northeast, picked one with warmer weather, Stanford. To my surprise, I was accepted, but it never even crossed my mind that I could go across the country, away from my family and the community I had always known, at age 17. Going to Knoxville would be a big enough jump for me.

Going away to college automatically separated me from what I had always known. I was only two hours away, but it felt like a lightyear. My eyes slowly began to open to what the “real world” looked like. I would return home feeling so different and find myself struggling to leave when I had to come back to campus. Many of my classmates never left Cherokee. Several went
to Western Carolina University, a local community college, or went to the workforce. Some did nothing and some (too many) became susceptible to drugs. When I returned home from school after a couple of months, things began to seem so different. I had old friends who did not talk to me anymore. I started to hear people say things like I had changed. The one thing I heard that hurt the most though was, “you think you’re better than us”. I did not know how to argue with that. Yes, I was trying to better myself, but I wasn’t trying to downplay anyone else or my home. The longer I was away the more disconnected and guilty I felt.

Thankfully, I did get closer with my family during this time, and I discovered I wanted to study sport management and use the power of sport to help Native communities. I graduated in May 2009 and set my sights even higher - graduate school even further away from home. After graduate school and amid a successful professional career in advertising, I felt the pull to reconnect with my Native community. Nearly 10 years later I have returned to academia with the desire to share the positive stories of Native American athletes through my work and provide a counter-narrative to the topics that often dominate mainstream discourse, such as controversies surrounding Native American mascots. It took me a while to realize that I was so motivated by this charge to give back to my community all along. I felt selfish for so long that my path lead me away from my home, but now I can see that it has allowed me to grow in a way to (hopefully) have a bigger impact.

When Guillory (2008) studied Native American college graduates and giving back, his key finding was that the concept of giving back is “much more complex, difficult, and even painful, in the lives of Native American degree recipients” (p. 168). Looking back on my own journey, this insight hits very close to home. While much of my community was supportive,
there were also those who looked down on me for leaving. Some made me feel selfish for pursuing my dreams. I was able to find solace through sport and the sense of community sport provided. I formed relationships with other Native athletes and worked with Nike’s Native American initiative, Nike N7, to further promote sport and physical activity in Native American communities. I began to see first-hand how Native American athletes leveraged their fame to promote sport in their communities.

In her dissertation on Native students giving back, Reyes (2016) noted that while several studies have declared giving back as a motivating factor for Native American college students, few have really described giving back in detail. While scholars like Gulliory have specifically defined giving back, giving back has not been explored in the realm of sport. With this work, I hope to get a deeper understanding of what giving back means to Native American athletes. This understanding will shed light on the significance and influence of community and how that can be harnessed for the greater good. I will look at how my participants’ status as athletes affects their impact and if or when community is prioritized over the self. I think this work is crucial to further dimensionalizing the surface-level understanding that most have of Native Americans. Beyond a deeper understanding, I also hope to inspire Native and non-Natives alike to foster a sense of community that further promotes the continuation of the circle of giving back.

While this study will speak of Native Americans in a general way, it is important to stress that Native American tribes are all distinct and evolving entities with unique characteristics and histories. I urge readers to not group Native Americans homogenously, but also understand that I will imply there are shared “core values, beliefs, and behaviors” (HeavyRunner & Morris, 1997, p. 1) among tribal entities in my discussion of Native American athletes.
What is “Giving Back”?

“Giving back” is a simple phrase for what can be a complex action. It is not merely charity or community service, while those can be forms of giving back. Giving back can take on numerous meanings for different people and can be motivated by different factors and settings. In Western contexts giving back can take on a variety of forms, including philanthropy, humanitarianism, civic engagement and community service (Reyes, 2016). Tithing, or contributing a portion of one’s income to their church dates to Old Testament times. It can be found documented in Judaism (see Gen. 14: 18-20; Mal. 3:10) and later Christianity (see Matthew 23:23; Luke 11:42). Giving back precedes any written history, as something inherit to Indigenous and religious cultures, such as the Hindi (Sugirtharajah, 2001). While contributing money can be a form of giving back, it can also be much more. Giving back often extends beyond a one-time donation or half-day volunteer experience. Next, I will briefly cover the common forms of giving back in mainstream Western culture.

Philanthropy

Philanthropy has been defined as the use of private funds for public benefit and social change (Harrow & Jung, 2011). The National Philanthropic Trust (2018) starts their history of modern philanthropy in the 1500s and modern research has found that there can be multiple motivations for philanthropy. Philanthropy is often associated with entrepreneurs and it has been suggested that they use philanthropy to further express their innovation and creativity (Shaw, Gordon, Harvey & Maclean, 2011). Philanthropists may also be moved by altruism and a desire to use their fortune to give back (Duncan, 2004). Other research suggests that entrepreneurs choose philanthropy as a way to boost their reputation, legitimize themselves, and make
connections with politicians, celebrities and other prominent organizations and people (Harvey, Maclean, Gordon, & Shaw, 2011).

**Humanitarianism**

Humanitarianism is the organized efforts to alleviate suffering and save lives (Fassin, 2013). Similar to philanthropy, humanitarianism regularly involves financial capital. Humanitarianism often implies a distance between the suffering and the giver (Chouliaraki, 2010). In what Reyes (2016) called a “colonial gaze” (p. 46), humanitarians can be relieved from colonial guilt by connecting from a distance (Chouliaraki, 2010). Humanitarianism can also offer short-term support while ignoring the systematic injustices that created the dependence of the impoverished on charity in the first place (Chouliaraki, 2012).

**Civic Engagement & Community Service**

Civic engagement has been broadly defined as the “attitudes, behaviors, knowledge, and competencies related to an interest in improving the local community and the wider society” (Lenzi, Vieno, Sharkey, Mayworm, Scacchi, Pastore, & Santinello, 2014, p. 251). Research suggests that a person’s level of civic engagement comes from reciprocal relationships with others as well as the contexts of one’s upbringing (Lenzi et al., 2014). Civic engagement can simultaneously nurture an individuals’ psychological, social, and cognitive well-being and contribute to more effective functioning of the community (Lenzi et al, 2014).

Community service is a popular aspect of civic engagement. Community service involves individual voluntary efforts that can range from tutoring to working for food banks (Boyte, 1991). Boyte (1991) suggested that community service can help young people feel like relevant and contributing members of their community. Both civic engagement and community service
emphasize involvement within the local community (Boyte, 1991, Lenzi et al., 2014). Due to this emphasis on community, Reyes (2016) suggests that civic engagement and community service may have more in common with Native American conceptions of giving back.

We often hear people say, “I want to give back,” but what they want to give, who they want to give to, and why they really want to give is not as obvious. For the purposes of this work, “giving back” will be used to describe the actions of an individual to contribute to the betterment of their community, through time, collaboration, or any other resources they have available. This work will explore the significance of giving back to Native American athletes and the influence of community. I hope to go beyond a simple definition to understand the motivations of athletes to give back and help the community understand the best ways in which to encourage the continued cycle of giving back.

**Native Americans & Giving Back**

Historically, ideas and attitudes about wealth among Native communities were much different from capitalist-based European values (Kidwell, 1990). Native American values traditionally include sharing, cooperation, being, group and extended family, harmony with nature and deep respect for elders (DuBray, 1985; Herring, 1990; Pedigo, 1983; Sanders, 1987; Trimble, 1981). Conversely, mainstream values emphasize saving, domination, doing, individualism, mastery over nature, and reverence of youth (DuBray, 1985; Sanders, 1987). The value system of Native nations was based on a reciprocal exchange. Exchanging ensured that resources were spread among the members of the group and this type of equal distribution was the norm. For example, the possessions of a deceased person were not inherited, but communally owned and spread across the community (Kidwell, 1990). To this day, even after all the loss
Native communities have been through, there are still traditions in Native American culture focused on giving (Kidwell, 1990). The practice of generosity and sharing is a core value of Native American tribes (Cleary & Peacock, 1998). Native American giving, or what is often viewed as exchanging, can involve monetary gifts, gifts of time, services, ideas, and other items (First Nations Development Institute, 2000). As Badwound and Tierney (1996) described, “members of Indian communities demonstrate generosity through informal and formal means of giving or sharing” (p. 443).

Clara Sue Kidwell (1990), in her work in a volume on diversity in fundraising, explained, “as the individual was necessary to the tribe, so the tribal ground was necessary to the survival of the individual” (p. 87). The phrase, “I honor you by giving – you honor me by receiving,” is encapsulating of the belief and understanding of Native peoples (First Nations Development Institute, 2000). The act of giving was not viewed as altruism but as a necessity to ensure distribution of resources within the group (Kidwell, 1990). Many Native Communities viewed exchanges as important to relationship development wherein givers are respected as much as receivers are honored (First Nations Development Institute, 2000).

Dagmar Thorpe (1989), a Sac and Fox traditionalist, contrasted the Native circle of giving to the Euro-American idea of a grant year. Instead of giving as a part of the Euro-American grant cycle, to Native Americans giving is a way of life (Thorpe, 1989). These ideas have not diminished over time, as Coyhis and Simonelli (2008) claim, “the principle of ‘In order to keep it, you have to give it away,’ is alive and well in Indian country” (p. 1938). In other words, giving back is something natural, it’s just “what we do” (Brayboy, Castagno, Solyom, 2014, p. 584).
Smith, Cech, Metz, Huntoon, and Moyer (2014) conducted a study on Native American student experiences in STEM majors and found that Native American students placed value in having goals that could serve the community and desired to give back to their communities. STEM is perceived as only serving individualistic goals, such as money and prestige (Cheryan, Siy, Vichayapai, Drury, & Kim, 2011; Diekman, Brown, Johnston, & Clark, 2010; Diekman, Clark, Johnston, Brown, & Steinberg, 2011; Morgan, Isaac, & Sansone, 2001; Rahm & Charbonneau, 1997), and the authors predicted this would cause an internal conflict for Native students. They predicted that if students feel like they are “giving back” it may help prevent them from “giving up” (Smith et al., 2014, p. 425).

In Guillory and Wolverton’s (2008) investigation of persistence factors, or reasons for sticking with college, family was the most frequently mentioned factor by Native American students. For these Native American students, especially those from Indian reservations, it is common for the nuclear and extended family to be close and even live in a single home (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008). The second most frequently cited factor for student’s persistence was related to giving back to their tribal community. These students viewed their education as “an instrument to combat deleterious conditions back home” (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, p. 75).

Reyes (2016) similarly found that in the educational sense giving back often means moving back and finding work on reservations after graduation from college. Reyes (2016) declared giving back within Native contexts as purposeful and relationship-driven. For Native Americans,

to give back is to contribute to something greater than the self; it involves using the gifts that one has been given in his/her own life to contribute to the life of one’s family, one’s
community, and one’s nation. In this light, I see giving back as a positive attribute and positive potential outcome of college attendance and completion. (Reyes, 2016, p. 16)

While giving back is not unique to Native Americans, how Native Americans perceive giving back is unique (Guillory, 2008). As Guillory (2008) did in his dissertation on Native American college graduates, I will work under the assumptions that the concept of giving back is taught and held by the majority of Native American people regardless of geographical region. Giving back is also not gender exclusive or confined to a specific field of study (Guillory, 2008; Smith et al., 2014). Most significant is the inherent nature of giving back to Native communities overall, it is not extraneous but essential.

“Giving Back” as Protection & Reinforcement

Giving back has often been noted as a motivating factor for Native Americans, but the reasoning as to why that is has not been explored in depth. One important factor to consider in giving back for Native Americans is its ability serve as a form of self and community preservation. That preservation includes languages, customs, and traditions that have withstood persistent attempts of eradication at the hands of colonization. It is often forgotten that Native Americans were not allowed to openly celebrate their cultural traditions as recently as fifty years ago. After the civil rights movement of the 1960s, Native Americans started openly practicing their tribal spiritualties with the hope they could be integrated into their recovery processes (Deloria Jr., 1988, 2003, 2006). An important aspect to achieving a healthy and balanced lifestyle after taking a wrong path includes a “return to culture” (Coyhis & Simonelli, 2008, p. 1928).
Henson, Sabo, Trujillo and Teufel-Shone (2016) conducted a review of protective factors among American Indians and Alaska Native adolescents to identify which were associated with positive health outcomes. Protective factors are attributes that are capable of directly affecting health (Hawkins, Cummins, & Marlatt, 2004; Jessor, Turnbin, & Costa, 1998) and can be found at the individual, family, and community level (CDC, 2018). For example, Allen, Mohatt, Rasmus, Hazel, Thomas, and Lindley (2006) found that activities and opportunities for youth to contribute to the community were a protective factor against alcohol use and abuse. Thus, giving back can protect current and future generations.

Hand-in-hand with giving back are cultural values and traditions that can also foster resilience (Guillory, 2008; LaFromboise, Hoyt, Oliver, & Whitbeck 2006; Strand & Peacock, 2002) and contribute to positive health outcomes (Allen et al., 2006; Pu, Chewing, St. Clair, Kokotailo, Lacourt, & Wilson, 2013). On the community level, Mmari, Blum and Teufel-Shone (2010) found that involvement in tribal language and ceremonies were protective against delinquent behaviors. Due to their findings, Henson et al. (2016) stressed the importance to support and invest cultural preservation and revitalization efforts to ensure Native youth, “have access to uniquely tailored protective factors only their cultures can provide” (p. 21).

Giving back can also be a way to enhance one’s inner strength and this strength is often tied to spirituality. Native spirituality is a way of living and looking at the world rather than a strict religious doctrine. Participants on the Great Basin Indian reservation said they “strived throughout their lives to follow the ‘right path,’ a process made easier through the support of others, a belief in God or the Creator, and self caring” (Strand & Peacock, 2002, p. 2).
Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990) declared generosity to be one of the four bases of self-esteem. They described how giving to others and giving back to the community were fundamental core values in many Native cultures, where adults stressed generosity and unselfishness to young people. Generosity, along with belonging, mastery, and independence, builds self-esteem and fosters resilience in young people (Brendtro et al., 1990). Resiliency is a significant trait amongst Native American people and Guillory (2008) found that all of twelve of the participants in his study of Native college graduates shared a story of resiliency.

Carol Locust (1988, cited in Cleary & Peacock, 1998) described how giving and sharing among the Native American community was crucial to survival:

This survival technique is still present in Indian communities, and it dictates behaviors that are frequently misunderstood by non-Indians. For example, the group’s survival depends on everyone working together and sharing. All members work together and contribute to the group, supporting each other in times of stress, for they know that they will find the same network of support for themselves should they require. Children are expected to contribute to their group, as soon as they are mature enough to do so. (p. 327-328)

Reyes (2016) also stressed the importance of ensuring community survival through giving back. However, while important, keeping communities in tact is harder than one might think.

**Barriers to “Giving Back”**

As previously mentioned, giving back for Native Americans can be very complex and even painful (Guillory, 2008). However, the majority of work has been done in the educational space and this work aims to add another dimension to what giving back and community can
mean through the highly regarded area of sport. By studying this in the context of sport we will get a better understanding of what motivates athletes to give back and how communities can foster a giving environment. First, we will look at some of the barriers that have been found to prevent giving back. Scholars (Brayboy, 2005b; Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003; Lee, 2009) have found that Native American students who return home after college are met with distrust for being away. Reyes (2016) found that some Native American students, when returning to their home communities, were met with questions of their merits and ability to succeed. A student participant in Guillory’s (2008) study mentioned, “it is not uncommon for a Native graduate to have their academic accomplishments minimized by other Indian people when they transition back to the community” (p. 128). Guillory (2008) goes on to point out that Native graduates, in dealing with criticism from one’s own family or community, “may have to learn how to live in a world of contradictions” (p. 175). Overall, Guillory (2008) found that strained relationships in the community were the primary struggle of giving back.

There is also concern because of the limited examples for Native students to follow. As Keene (2014) states:

We press rhetoric and ideals of nation building, sovereignty, and self-determination, and see education as the means to accomplish that goal – yet we have not set up the structures to show students the multitude of forms that can take, or provide the support to bring the students back home and reintegrate them into the community.

Another consideration for this study is the disjointed nature of Native communities for Native American athletes. Growing numbers of Native Americans are living in urban and suburban areas away from Reservations and Native American communities. I will be sensitive to
this in my work with Native American athletes, understanding that they may not all have a “traditional” reservation experience.

Much of the work that has been done on giving back in Native American communities has been linked to education. Sport is often associated with education and seen as a pathway to obtaining higher education for many traditionally disadvantaged communities. Native Americans are one such group that also utilizes sport for educational advancement (Ali-Christie, 2013). Guillory (2008) found that giving back for recent graduates was defined by the community. This work will explore the unique position that Native American athletes occupy and how they make meaning of giving back. Next, I will speak more to the definition and meaning of community, the concept of sense of community (SOC) and how these apply to Native Americans and sport.

What is Community?

As previously mentioned, involvement in one’s community can be a protective factor for Native Americans (Henson et al., 2016). Community, like culture, is a broad term that is often used without much thought into its meaning. It has been defined as, “a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings” (MacQueen, McLellan, Metzger, Kegeles, Strauss, Scotti,…Trotter, 2001, p. 1936). Gusfield (1975) described two different uses of the term community, one being the territorial and geographical nation of community, such as your hometown. The other being relational, or “quality of character of human relationship, without reference to location” (p. xvi).

While Gusfield (1975) noted that the two types of community were not mutually exclusive, Durkheim (1964) found that modern society forms community around interests and
skills rather than location. The digital age has also garnered entirely new forms of community. However, larger trends in the United States still hint at diminishing community and social connectedness (Putnam, 2000).

No matter the technical definition or type of community, there is a process of improving the quality of community life that is deemed by terms like “community development,” “community building,” and “community organization.” (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990, p. 56). This practice of improving community involves an individuals’ participation to produce collective and individual goods (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990). Community development should not be reduced to simply residential environments. As scholars such as Lawson (2005) and Warner, Kerwin and Walker (2013) have argued, sport and sports organizations can also be a part of community development. Wilkinson (2017) found this to be true among students in a Native American community and I look to see if this can be further proven by looking specifically at Native athletes and giving back. Community development shares values with giving back and may be a product of “sense of community”, which we will discuss next.

**Sense of Community**

In the mid 1970s the idea of “sense of community” (SOC) baffled many psychologists because of its highly emotional nature and incompatibility with “hard” science (Sarason, 1974). It may have been an elusive concept, however, “you know it when you have it and when you don’t” (Sarason, 1974, p. 157). In 1976, psychologist David McMillan attempted to operationalize a definition of “sense of community” that Sarason coined in 1974. McMillan (1976) landed on the following definition: “sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging and being important to each other, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be
met by their commitment to be together” (p. 11). Some of the elements of SOC are the perception of similarity, acknowledgment and willingness to maintain interdependence, and the feeling that one is part of a larger reliable and stable structure (Sarason, 1974).

A decade later in 1986, Chavis and colleagues attempted to create a Sense of Community Index (SCI) that could be applied and related across populations. They created specific profile items that were related to McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) four elements of SOC: (a) membership, (b) influence, (c) integration and fulfillment of needs, and (d) shared emotional connection (Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, & Wandersman 1986). They found the theoretical framework based on McMillan and Chavis’ (1986) theory of SOC could be used as a starting point for investigation and intervention (Chavis et al., 1986). Chavis et al. (1986) did caution against generalizing all perceptions of sense of community, stating, “the different aspects of a sense of community may vary among individuals, depending on various cultural and situational factors” (Chavis et al., 1986, p. 35). SOC should also not be thought of as a static feeling. Several external forces such as commerce, the media, transports, economics, and employment factors can affect SOC (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). As Gusfield (1975) suggested, and Chavis et al. (1986) also noted, SOC may come from experiences that are not tied to a physical location.

**Benefits.** SOC has been found to provide a wide range of benefits for the individual and for the community in which they belong. For the individual, there can be enhanced mental and physical well-being (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Deflem, 1989). In the organizational setting a sense of community can assist in retention (Kellett & Warner, 2011; McCole, Jacobs, Lindley, & McAvoy, 2012; Warner, Shapiro, Dixon, Ridinger, & Harrison, 2011), satisfaction (Kellett & Warner, 2011; Warner et al., 2011), and
stress reduction (Klein & D’Aunno, 1986). Regardless of individual or specific setting, fostering a sense of community can ultimately enhance quality of life, “which carries extensive implications for the domains of sport and recreation management” (Warner, Kerwin, & Walker, 2013, p. 350).

**Sense of Community & Sport**

It has been suggested that sport is one of the few contexts in which a collective experience is promoted (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 1997; Warner, 2012). However, sport, like any community activity, does not automatically guarantee the development of SOC, the features that contribute to building community must be identified and explored (Chalip, 2006, Warner & Dixon, 2011). Warner and colleagues have attempted to fill a void in research conducted on SOC and sport. Warner and Dixon’s Sport and Sense of Community Theory was born out of this work. The theory identified the following as fundamental factors needed for sense of community to be fostered among athletes: Administrative Consideration, Common Interest, Competition, Equity in Administrative Decisions, Leadership Opportunities, Social Spaces, and Voluntary Action (Warner, 2016).

Sense of community is distinct from group cohesion because it is not typically task or goal-oriented and it does not have an output or goal requirement (Carron, Brawley, & Widmeyer, 1998). Researchers exploring the link between sport and social capital have claimed that sport contributes to “sense of community belonging and provides communities with a real sense of presence” (Zakus, Skinner, & Edwards, 2009, p. 991). Within higher education, intercollegiate athletics has been found to be one of the best methods to create a sense of community among students and others who may differ from one another (Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphew, 2001).
Student-athletes’ participation in volunteering provided personal benefits as well as benefits to the community (Jarvie & Paule-Koba, 2012). A group of athletes studied by Jarvie and Paule-Koba (2012) agreed that their experiences were better as a result of engaging in community service as a team. Participation in community service by student athletes also fulfills the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA) mission to enhance the sense of community in higher education (Jarvie & Paule-Koba, 2012).

Sports has been described as having the power to bring people of diverse backgrounds together into a common community (Wolf-Wendel, Toma, & Morphew, 2001). Competition can serve as a creator of SOC in sport when participants share challenges and struggle to excel with others (Warner & Dixon, 2011). Of course, the impact of sports can go beyond the field to affect fans and the influence of sport icons has extended, “well beyond simple admiration to include impact on beliefs, values, self-appraisals, and behaviors” (Melnick & Jackson, 2002). Additionally, Bloom, Grant and Watt (2005) suggested that relationships and networks through sport can generate a willingness to work together outside of sport.

Additional examples of SOC and sport include the “unexplainable” sense of community among bleacher fans at Wrigley Field (Swyers, 2005, p. 1087), increased SOC for older adult or masters’ sport participants through shared sport interest, camaraderie in continued activity, relevant life purpose, and giving back (Lyons & Dionigi, 2007), and SOC creation in camp settings and wilderness adventure programs (Lyons, 2003; Sharpe, 2005). In utilizing SOC in sport Warner & Dixon (2011) heed the following advice:

If the dynamics of how and when a SOC is or is not experienced in a sport setting becomes more clearly understood, sport managers can use this knowledge to better build
and leverage community in ways that enhance the image of the region, university, or city, and even more importantly, improve the quality of life for its community members, including sport participants. (p. 260)

A tangential concept to SOC in sport worth mentioning is that of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and individual social responsibility (ISR). Agyemang and Singer (2013) discussed how in sport teams, leagues, and other communities are evaluated on a macro level, rather than a micro level, therefore the corporation is often under more scrutiny than the individual employee or athlete. Agyemang and Singer (2013) suggested a shift to covering more individuals’ contributions to place more emphasis on the individual’s actions and not solely on organizations as a whole.

**Native Americans & SOC**

Several Native American cultural values are based on community and maintaining a sense of community is a prominent characteristic for many Native Americans (Guillory, 2008). Scholars have noted how Native cultures often endorse a connectedness of people (Fryberg & Markus, 2007; Hill, 2006). It is not uncommon for Native cultures to emphasize the collective well-being over individual success (Mohatt, Ting Fok, Burket, Henry, & Allen, 2011). This is often in stark contrast to the dominance of individualism in American culture (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Frank & Meyer, 2002). Additionally, Tribal communities are often considered one large family (McKinley, Bayne & Ninnicht, 1970).

Native Americans’ emphasis on giving back is very closely tied to the community. Giving back serves the community. For many Native American students, it is usually necessary for them to believe that academic success will not detract from their connection to their tribal
community before moving forward with their education or career (Okagaki, Helling, & Bingham, 2009). Participants in a study on Indian families and their perception of career choice identified the ability to contribute to family and community members is a benchmark of success (Juntunen, Barraclough, & Broneck, 2001). For some students, remaining “connected to their past communities, family, church, or tribe is essential to their persistence” (Tinto, 2006, p. 4).

Additionally, Guillory and Wolverton (2008) described the necessity of “establishing and maintaining a sense of ‘family,’” at home and at college, to strengthen Native students’ academic persistence and reduce feelings of resentment that family members may feel toward students because they spend time away from home (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008, p. 61).

Unlike education, which is often linked directly to colonization, sport can be thought of more favorably in Native communities as an activity that can uphold Native values while allowing Native athletes to obtain a celebrity-like status. Sports bring the Native community together in a way that academics struggles to accomplish. Sports with a more traditional history, such as running and stickball are even more highly regarded in Native communities (Welch, Siegele, & Hardin, 2017). Certain modern sports have been “indigenized,” for example basketball in the Native community has its own style known as Rezball. Michelle Tom, a former Arizona State basketball player, described, “it gives recognition we’re still here as Native Americans and proud. Basketball is a love for us. Everyone grew up with it. You can see a rim anywhere on the reservation. It's always brought us together as a community” (Metcalfe, 2018, para 13).
Native Americans, Community & Sport

Native Americans have participated in leisure and games long before recorded history. This is logical seeing as how leisure was one of the earliest dreams of human beings, “to be free to pursue what we want, to spend our time meaningfully in pleasurable ways, to live in a state of grace” (Godbey, 2003, p. 1). Of course, the concept of leisure is more complex and varies depending on the people, place, and time (Russell, 2009). Leisure is perhaps most commonly viewed through the humanities: literature, art, and music (Russell, 2009). These arts convey what it is like to be human and artists portray their own experiences (Russell, 2009). Ancient societies such as those in Africa and Greece implemented body adornment, music and gymnastics as their regimen of leisure (Russell, 2009). In Rome, public games, called ludi, were annual events on the Roman calendar (Ibrahim, 1991). The Mayans were believed to go as far as to sacrifice children, who were considered most pure, in not only religious ceremony but also related to sport (Russell, 2009; Stevenson, 2005). Losers of traditional games such as pok-a-tok were sacrificed to the gods as a part of religious ceremony (Russell, 2009).

Contemporary leisure scholars have made connection between leisure and spirituality (Heintzman, 2015). James Murphy (1972) proclaimed that, “Leisure may be viewed as that part of life which comes closest to freeing us…It enables [people] to pursue self-expression, enlightenment, and [their] inner soul” (p. 22-23). Doohan (1990) proposed that “spirituality requires a leisured approach to life” (p. 64). While historical and contemporary translations of leisure can vary, there are three basic characteristics: free time, non-work, and a state of mind, or a special attitude or feeling (Russell, 2009). Ultimately, leisure is dependent on context. The
Cherokee, like many ancient cultures, have preserved pieces of their traditional leisure and games however, there is much we do not know about how far back these activities go.

It was not until Native American boarding schools were established in the late 19th century that modern organized sport was first introduced to many Native communities (Bloom, 2000). Sport was included in the programming of the schools as a part of the larger effort to erase Native American culture and history from memory (Bloom, 2000). The federal government established these boarding schools, “as a part of a crusade by a coalition of reformers who aimed to assimilate Native Americans into dominant Anglo-Protestant society through education” (Bloom, 2000, p. 1). While it may not have been a physical war on Native Americans, this battle was against Native American identity and culture to achieve “mass cultural conversion” (Bloom, 2000, p. 1). Sports were also introduced to provide the boarding schools with positive public relations, “providing ‘proof’ that Native American children could be assimilated and taught to compete with grace and sportsmanship” (Bloom, 2000, p. 109).

There were boarding schools set up both on and off reservations. Despite the strict confines of the schools, Native youth were able to find a space within sport to develop a community of their own (Bloom, 2000). One of the most prominent was Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. My great-grandfather Nick attended Carlisle Indian school from 1909 to 1915 and played baseball with the iconic and eventual Olympic champion, Jim Thorpe. He went on to play in the minor leagues in Philadelphia before moving back to Cherokee to start his family. I know many elders in Cherokee who attended a local boarding school as well and they have spoken of the hardship of being separated from family during these times. For many boarding school students, sport was a way to create a new community while away from their traditional
community. Native students could also use sport as form of resistance against colonial culture (Anderson, 2006).

To this day, the popularity of basketball and other modern sports in Native American communities may invoke the idea of assimilation, however many tribes have manipulated the game to make it culturally relevant (Sewell, 2013). As Gerald Gems (2005) described, “sport often empowered Native American athletes, enabling them to reverse the dominant-subordinate roles by beating whites at their own game” (p. 12). By infusing newly introduced institutions with traditional Native customs, games become ceremony. Anderson (2006) found that while sports in the Navajo community have become ingrained, their colonial meanings of individualism and dominance have not.

Modern Native Americans athletes can also use sport as a way to break through the deficits often attributed to their heritage and current living conditions (Paraschak, 2013, 2014). Sport is respected and valued in Native American communities in way that other vocations are not, providing an influential platform for Native American athletes. While it may start as a technical sport it has the potential to transform into an expression of cultural identity. My work on Cherokee stickball found that while the players integrated special traditions and ceremonies off the field on of their main motivations was to participate in the game for greater good of the *sga-du-gi*, the community (Welch, Siegele, Hardin, 2017).

In their study of Native American youth in the Midwest, Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, LaFromboise (2001) found participation in a sports team and participation in clubs to be contributing factors for academic success. In his dissertation on Native American high school student athletes with community leaders, Wilkinson (2017) found that community leaders
viewed athletics as a catalyst to improve overall educational engagement as well as a way to prepare for traditional and cultural activities. In noting the benefits of sport to the Native community, we still acknowledge that sport is “not a panacea” (Berg, Warner, Das, 2015, p. 29), but does provide the Native American community a tool for overcoming challenges.

**Applying SOC To This Work**

The concept of sense of community is fitting for this study of Native American athletes. Using the current definition of sense of community we can further explore what exactly community means to Native Americans specifically in the context of sport. Sport has the potential to add a layer of community to a group of people that already highly value connectedness. There is an interesting dynamic where sport is used to advocate for community and the community advocates for sport. It is a goal of this study to further understand that reciprocal relationship.

Native American athletes showcase their resilience in their pursuit of sporting success. They do not go on this journey alone. It appears that giving back to their community is inherent for many of these athletes, just as it is for Native American students (Brayboy, 2004; Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Reyes, 2016). A deeper understanding of what community means to these athletes can help us better support and nurture the future generations.

Indigenous researchers often note that they conduct their research to assist their communities, not only to achieve personal purposefulness (Kovach, 2006). While this can be linked to giving back to the community, it can also be “an inward knowing that as Indigenous researchers at this point in the game, what we do has to count, there is a personal need to assist”
(Kovach, 2006, p. 192). As a Native American woman and sport manager, I hope through this work with Native American athletes, I can maximize the value of my assists.

I view giving back as a part of the continuous circle in Native American culture, similar to the description of the circle of strength from Black Elk, the notorious Oglala Lakota medicine man,

You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation, and so long as the hoop was unbroken, the people flourished. The flowering tree was the living center of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it. The east gave peace and light, the south gave warmth, the west gave rain, and the north with its cold and mighty wind gave strength and endurance. This knowledge came to us from the outer world with our religion. Everything the power of the world does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same, and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves. (Brown, 1988, p. 35)
Traditional Native American Sport

Native Americans, as the first people of North America, were also its first athletes (King, 2005). They created and participated in a variety of games, from running to canoeing, across the different regions of the United States. Running, like many sports and games, was prominent in the daily life of many Native American communities with ties to religion, society and other cultural aspects. Footraces were perhaps the most universal and popular of all Native sports and games (Oxendine, 1988). Running had purpose beyond winning a race, it was a tool for survival. In addition to its importance to warfare, running assisted in hunting, gathering, trading, and delivering messages (Oxendine, 1988). Extraordinary running performances were captured by oral tradition and written accounts from the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

In April 1912, Philip Zeyouma from the Hopi Reservation won his first organized marathon attempt, the ultra-competitive Los Angeles Time Modified Marathon, which would secure his spot as a candidate for the 1912 Olympic Games (Gilbert, 2017). As Gilbert (2017) described, “Zeyouma’s identity as a Hopi runner challenged white American perceptions of modernity and placed him in a context that had national and international dimensions” (p. 78). For the Hopi, the accomplishment represented the beauty and complexity of their culture. Zeyouma’s victory also challenged Hopi runners to contemplate the forces that pressured them and other indigenous people to become modern. This is just one of the many examples of the multiple layers to sport in Native communities. As Philip J. Deloria (2004) proclaimed, “Sports served as a meeting place of transformation and persistence; for distinct, even mutually exclusive, Indian and white interpretations; and for shared understandings” (p. 131).
Lacrosse is perhaps the most widely known contemporary sport that is linked to Native American heritage. Archeologists trace the ball game to the southeast United States and along both sides of the Canadian border along the upper Midwest. However, nearly every tribe had some version of a stick and ball game attributed with their own unique regional and cultural characteristics (Venum, 1994). The game was both practical and ceremonial. It could settle disputes as well as bring the community together for a social gathering. The ceremonial aspect went beyond the game with several pre-game and post-game rituals (Venum, 1994). To this day, tribes like the Eastern Cherokee in North Carolina still play traditional stickball as means to exercise their cultural values (Welch, Siegele, & Hardin, 2017).

Two prominent works on Natives in Sport, Culin’s (1907) Games of North American Indians and Oxendine’s (1988) Sports and Games in Traditional Indian Life, conveyed the importance of traditional sports to Native American cultures without overgeneralizing Native American groups. Culin (1907) argued that every game devolved from or originated in a ritual practice. Oxendine (1988) outlined the most important factors characterizing traditional American Indian sport:

(a) the strong connection between sport and other social, spiritual, and economic aspects of daily life; (b) preparation of mind, body, and spirit of both participants and community; (c) rigid adherence to standardized rules and technical precision was unimportant; (d) strong allegiance to high standards of sportsmanship and fair play; (e) prominence of both males and females in sport activity; (f) a special perspective on team and membership and on interaction and leadership styles; (g) the widespread and vital
component gambling played, and (h) the importance of art as an expression of identity and aesthetics (p. 3-4).

To understand Native Americans in sport we must acknowledge these cultural foundations and the context in which Native Americans played. Unfortunately, there is little evidence of the earliest Native American athletes. It was not until the nineteenth century that Native Americans as athletes began to be documented by visiting Europeans. A prominent example of such documentation was author and artist George Catlin’s observation of Tullock-chish-ko (He Who Drinks the Juice of the Stone), whom he described as “the most distinguished ball-player in the Choctaw nation” (1841, 2;142). With these and many more early accounts, “it is impossible to consider athletics in North America without addressing the impact of Native American athletes” (Churchill, Hill, & Barlow, 1979, p. 24). For the purposes of this project we will begin our history of Native American athletes with the boarding school era of the late 1800s.

Native American Athletics & Boarding Schools

A prominent period for Native American athletes was what many refer to as the boarding school era in the late 19th century. As Native Americans resisted colonization, white U.S. government officials believed that they could integrate Native Americans into their newly developing society through education (Brown, 1993). In 1884, along with the allotment of reservation land, the U.S. government approved the removal of Indian children from their homes on the reservation to attend boarding schools (Piatote, 2013). Early government leaders believed a European style education would “civilize” and “Christianize” Native Americans and reduce their fight against expansion by settlers (Brown, 1993). At the same time, sport was being modernized and it complemented the ideas of assimilation and silencing of Native Americans.
Conversely, sport motivated students to continue education even though they were critical of boarding schools (Coleman, 1993).

One of the biggest commanders of Native American boarding schools was Army Captain Richard Pratt. Pratt infamously expressed his desire to “kill the Indian, save the man” (and applied his militaristic views to the school system (Bloom, 2000, p. xiii). Included in Pratt’s educational theory was his belief that children should be taken away from their families, tribes, and entire known environments. During the early years of boarding schools, Native Americans were subjected to a strict and universal course of study, military drills, malnourishment and disease, and physical beatings and psychological humiliation for speaking their native languages or talking about home (Bloom, 2000).

It was in this setting that Eastman asked Pratt why he had not implemented football at his school. Pratt responded, “Why if I did that, half the press of the country would attack me for developing the original war instincts and savagery of the Indian! The public would be afraid to come to our games.” Eastman replied, “Major, that is exactly why I want you to do it. We will prove that the Indian is a gentleman and a sportsman” (as quoted in King, 2005, p. xi). Pratt would soon embrace sports at Carlisle, going as far to say,

If it was in my power to bring every Indian into the game of football, to contend as my boys have contended with the different young men of the colleges, I would do it, and feel that I was doing them an act of the greatest Christian kindness, and elevating them from the hell of their home life and reservation degradation into paradise. (King, 2005, p. xi)

Throughout America, strategies based on Pratt’s concept were applied to civilize the “savage” Native American (Bloom, 2000, p. xiii). As Churchill, Hill, and Barlow (1979)
described, sports were an expedient means of processing Native American physicality into a “socially acceptable” package without disrupting the Indian myth. Superintendents used sports and Native athletes to advertise and exploit their process of assimilation. Bloom (2000) described how, “Unlike physical education or recreation, these athletic programs were created to provide schools with a valuable source of public relations, providing proof that Native American children could be assimilated” (p. xvii).

Perhaps the most famous Native American athlete in history is Jim Thorpe. Thorpe set himself apart at Carlisle Indian School where he excelled as a multisport athlete despite numerous attempts to run away to his home from the school. He would go on to win the pentathlon and decathlon at the 1912 Olympics. He played professional football and baseball before serving as the founding president of the National Football League (NFL). Rubinfeld (2006) described the ways in which Thorpe’s heritage contributed to his legend: (1) as a source of pride for American Indians in the success of ‘one of their own’; (2) a source of vindication for white Americans in the success of their country’s ability to accept, embrace, and assimilate an ‘other’ into ‘one of their own’; and, (3) symbolically, as a source of information about what was changing and not, in twentieth-century racial representations and relationships (p. 168).

While sports may have used to enforce assimilation, they have also facilitated resistance to assimilation, the preservation of cultural traditions, and the reformulation of cultural identities and adaptations (Bloom, 2000). Native students took pride in making American sports their own. As boarding school teams were sent to play other schools Native athletes used, “both their mind and bodies to reverse the dominant-subordinate roles, and beat the whites at their own game” (Gems, 2005, p. 12). The Carlisle Indians innovated to overcome their undermanned team and
found new ways to win (Jenkins, 2010). The Carlisle team also embraced humor and trickery and after receiving a bad call or racist remark. Natives would ironically say, “What’s the use of crying about a few inches when the white man has taken the whole country?” (as quoted in Jenkins, 2010).

Carlisle was so successful in football that it became attributed to the schools’ closing, with federal officials concluding that it was no longer “civilizing” Native Americans properly and the prominence of athletics had shifted attention away from the primary purpose of the school (Ali-Christie, 2013, p. 64). Bloom (2000) concluded that boarding school athletic programs “created a context for the celebration of intertribal cooperation and identity, sometimes on a scale rarely ever seen before” (p. 37). Sports facilitated opportunities and cultural exchange for American Indian students during a time that aimed to instill western education to accelerate American Indian cultural extinction (Adams, 1995).

**Post-Boarding School Era**

Increasingly after 1930, Native American athletes began to fade from American public culture. This was in part because of congressional efforts and defunding of schools as well as the chaos of World War II. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 called for Native Americans to “help themselves” without relying on the government by closing most federal boarding schools and encouraging public school attendance. Kachur (2017) proposed another reason for the abrupt end of boarding school athletics, the government and White society did not want Native Americans to have anything to be proud of.

Oxendine (1988) pointed to six features that contributed to the diminishing presence of indigenous athletes after 1930:
1. The closing of the Carlisle school.
2. The scarcity of other Indian institutions of higher education.
3. The poor quality of reservation and local schools.
4. A resistance on the part of many Indians to be assimilated into non-Indian society and non-Indian sports.
5. Passage of laws that prevented Indians from entering all-white colleges.
6. A multitude of social conditions both on and off the reservation. (p. xxi)

Deloria (2004) argued that shifts within federal policy and associated public perception of American Indians should be added to this list. He points to the importance of World War II and the end of efforts between the federal government and recognized tribes to work towards equal rights. Deloria (2004) also points to the civil rights movement and the creation of the black-white binary in race relations as overshadowing the “Indian problem” and its significance for most Americans (p. 131). Deloria (1996) explained why it became harder for Native Americans to stand out in sports:

When considering Indian athletes, it is easy to slide into the heroic mode focusing on Jim Thorpe and perhaps a few other outstanding individuals—Chief Bender, Hopi Olympic medalist Louis Tewanima, or William Lone Star Dietz, who head-coached football teams at Purdue and Louisiana Tech as well as the NFL Boston Redskins. But more obscure gridirons and dugouts all across America were also peppered with Indian athletes. (p. 330)

As Deloria noted, this sprinkling throughout sport was the result of sport becoming more of an individual effort. As Oxendine (1988) explained, “The Indian’s entrance into college sport
after the early 1930s was an individual, lonely effort – without the accompaniment of other Indian athletes and often without even the presence of other Indians at the institution” (p. 272). While collegiate sport became a more challenging goal, Haskell was able to produce successful athletes on the high school level. For example, boxer Chester Ellis won the National Championship in the Golden Gloves competition in 1939. Billy Mills led the 1956 Haskell cross-country team to a state high school championship before setting a freshman record at the University of Kansas and going onto to win 1964 Olympic gold medal in the 10,000 meters.

The narrative of Native athletes shifted in the second half of the 20th century when the first article was published about the American Indian athlete “dropout phenomenon” in 1979. Author Gabriel suggested that it was common for the young Native athlete to have great promise, only to drop out of school (Oxendine, 1988). Oxendine (1988) suggests that the dropout phenomenon was not only observed by outsiders but also by Native youth themselves, debilitating their drive. When Oxendine visited the Haskell campus in 1984 he spoke with several athletes who believed their career would end after their two years at Haskell (Haskell was then a two-year preparatory institution). None of the athletes believed they would go on to attend a four-year college. Native Americans who were not from Reservations believed their Reservation-raised peers were “afraid they’re not good enough” and they “shy away from competition” (Oxendine, 1988, p. 266).

A 2001 article in the New York Times by Selena Roberts continued the focus on the barriers Native Americans face in their pursuit of athletic success. Roberts (2001) cited the following obstacles to success for Native American athletes: prejudice and misunderstanding, lack of opportunity, coaches who are unwilling to recruit athletes from reservations, the isolation
of reservation communities, athletes’ attachment to family and community, the suppression of individualism, jealousy and conflict within indigenous communities, and inability to adjust to white institutions and expectations. Roberts (2001) suggested that Native American athletes, apart from Jim Thorpe, Billy Mills, and Notah Begay, “have not made the leap to the highest level of American sport” (p. 1). King (2005) criticized Roberts for obscuring rather than clarifying the extent of Native American athletes’ success in sports. King believed that Roberts suggested “only athletes who become famous or nationally known matter, neglecting in the process the numerous local contexts in which Native Americans play sports and what that participation means to the athletes and their communities” (p. xxv).

Bloom (2000) further explains the common media portrayals of Native Americans in sports,

Problems on contemporary reservations are framed not as the outcome of historical events or political interests and power but as cultural deficiencies of Native Americans…Native American cultures are portrayed as mired in a history of declension and death…and inept at dealing with modern institutions and social realities.” (p. 126)

While Roberts covered an important issue, her coverage simultaneously made “Native Americans visible and invisible, discernible through familiar clichés yet effaced by commonsense categories and dominant definitions” (King, 2005, p. xxv).

**Current State of Native American Sport**

A groundbreaking research report from the project Reclaiming Native Truth (2018), a team of Native researchers and thought leaders, found stunning results on just how distorted and inaccurate the public perception of Native Americans is. Crystal Echohawk, a leader of
Reclaiming Native Truth, explained that, “invisibility and erasure is the modern form of racism against Native people” (Nagle, 2018, para 7). Participants in the study only knew references to Native Americans that were stereotypical and negative. “They drink too much and get in fights” and “Alcohol abuse. Drug abuse. Child abuse. Gambling addictions” were common associations made with Native peoples (Reclaiming Native Truth, 2018, p. 57). The sports realm recreates the issue of invisibility and perpetration of stereotypes through the use of Native American mascots.

The public, and sports fans in particular, are more likely to think of Native Americans as mascots than actual athletes (King, 2005). Former collegiate athlete and Native American studies scholar Alisse Ali-Christie (2013) argued that, “until we overcome the ‘mascot’ barriers, American Indian athletes will not fully receive the notoriety and recognition they deserve (p. 105). While it may not be explicitly acknowledged, Native athletes overcoming the mascot stereotype and receiving significant recognition, may create a bridge between the athlete’s home community and the wider sport community.

At the collegiate level the percentage of Native American athletes has remained steady, at a discouraging three to fourth tenths of a percentage point (NCAA, 2017). This amounts to not even 2,000 out of the nearly half million athletes across all three collegiate divisions in the United States. At the next level, in the “big five” professional sports (football, basketball, baseball, hockey, and soccer), it’s likely that you can count the number of Native American athletes on two hands.

While the numbers are bleak, there are still bright spots for Native American athletics with organizations and individuals like Brent Cawhee, the creator of NDNSports.com, a website with all the latest news on Native American athletes of all levels and tribal affiliations. On the
corporate level, Sam McCracken has grown Nike N7 from a small, direct-to-reservation, shoe program for diabetes patients, to a mainstream seasonal product collection with Native athlete ambassadors across the United States and Canada. Nike N7 uses proceeds from their collection to grant funding to Native American sport organizations through the N7 Fund. Organizations like Native American Basketball Invitation and the Oklahoma Native All-State Games bring together and celebrate Native athletes while providing them with opportunity to be scouted.

Native American athletes have expanded their experiences to more non-traditional sports. Female UFC champion Nicco Montana is making a name for herself as a mixed martial artist from the Navajo Nation. Ashton Locklear became the first Native American gymnast to make an Olympic team in 2016. After a car crash, Noah Hotchkiss was left paralyzed below the waist and took up mono-skiing and wheelchair basketball. In 2015 Hotchkiss became the first Native American national champion in downhill ski racing. He signed with the prestigious University of Illinois wheelchair basketball team in 2017. As the Native American ambassador for Disabled Sports USA Hotchkiss aims to develop Tribal Adaptive Organizations and promote inclusivity in Native America. Additionally, Natives continue making a name for themselves in traditional sports such as rodeo and boxing.

Attention around Native American athletes has increased in the past decade but the popular media continues to create fetishized stories of Native Athletes overcoming the odds. For example, in the spring of 2018, Abe Street of the New York Times magazine published the article “What the Arlee Warriors Were Playing For”. This article continued the idea of “suffering porn”, where all the horrible aspects of Native American life are highlighted before using basketball as a pseudo-savior. As King (2005) explained, “even when Native American athletes
become the subject of public discussion, they too often get lost in Euro-American preoccupations and values” (p. xxiv). More work needs to be done by the media to dig deeper into the variety of societal forces affecting Native people and refrain from further marginalizing Native Americans.

Aside from a few exceptions (Ali-Christie, 2013), in recent scholarship there is a lack of coverage of present day Native American athletes. The focus remains on the more historical figures like Jim Thorpe (Rubinfeld, 2006). Native American athlete and scholar Ali-Christie (2013) noted in her dissertation on American Indian collegiate athletes that she wanted to avoid the contradictions and preconceptions that often surround Native American people. Her project involved the investigation of 10 American Indian athletes becoming collegiate athletes while juggling the multiple variables in their lives. All the athletes entered in to college because of a love of sport and finished with an education and desire to give back to their communities (Ali-Christie, 2013). The athletes showed resiliency through challenges academically and athletically and provided insight into how their identities as students, athletes, and Native Americans can benefit their own communities. Ali-Christie (2013) found that while the athlete role was prevalent it never surpassed their Native identity (Ali-Christie, 2013). They forged new relationships, continued their education after their athletic career concluded, and provided a source of strength to their own communities. Ali-Christie’s sharing of these exceptional athlete’s stories has helped reverse the invisibility of the modern Native American athlete.

There can be a very reciprocal relationship between sports and Native American traditions and culture. As a participant in Wilkinson’s (2017) dissertation study described,

Athletic participation prepares students for traditional/cultural activities and reinforces what is being taught in our tribal societies; hard work, team work, commitment, sacrifices
(mental and physical), responsibility. This builds community engagement, student sense of belonging and personal achievement. (p. 119)

Ali-Christie (2013) also found that sports are, “seen as symbols of cultural revitalization as well as avenues for obtaining scholarships to pay for college” (p. 24). There appears to be a lot of good to come from sport for the Native community. Native athletes will continue to use sport for physical fitness, mental health and educational attainment, but more accurate portrayals of these pursuits will only open the door to even more participation for Native Americans as well as a more enlightened perception of what it really means to be Native American.

**Native Athletes & Identity**

Success in sport has the potential to elevate Native Americans, as well as all other athletes, to a well-known status in popular culture. This status is relevant to the multiple identities a Native American athlete has. This section will discuss several relevant aspects of identity and how they interact and impact Native American athletes. For example, how a Native athlete embraces their cultural identity can affect their social identity. It is beyond the scope of this project to try to explain the complexities Native American identity, however a basic understanding of the role of social, ethnic, cultural, American Indian and athletic identity will aid in our understanding of the dynamic nature of these athletes.

**The Role of Identity**

At its most basic, identity is knowing who we are, knowing who others are, and the intersection between these varying perceptions (Jenkins, 2014). Identity is not just personal - who we think we are is closely related to who we think others are (Jenkins, 2014). Identity is also not just a one-time declaration, it is an ongoing process and one is not constrained to one identity.
at a time (Deaux, 2001). Jenkins (2014) argued that identification matters because it, “is the basic cognitive mechanism that humans use to sort out themselves and their fellows, individually and collectively” (p. 14).

**Social identity.** Tajfel (1981) defined social identity as, “part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 255). Social identity can be developed through employment, family roles, religion, and other ideologies (Kleiber & Kirshnit, 1991). Through the process of defining oneself as a member of a favorable in-group versus an out-group, positive social identity can be achieved (Deaux, 1993).

Additionally, Deaux (2001) described social identification as the process by which we define ourselves in terms and categories that we share with other people. While personal identity often is concerned with an individuals’ unique characteristics, social identities deal with commonalities between individuals (Deaux, 2001). In relating social identity theory to identity theory, Stets & Burke (2000) addressed how one’s comparison and classification into the in-group would enhance their self-esteem, a positive for the self and personal identity. In the context of athletics, social networks can narrow to coaches, trainers, and teammates causing social identity to be highly shaped by sport.

**Ethnic identity.** Within social identity there is the aspect of ethnic identity (Cross & Cross, 2008). Phinney (1990) did a comprehensive study of ethnic identity research in which she discussed the different ways ethnic identity has been defined and conceptualized. Ethnic identity was described as (a) self-identification; (b) feelings of belonging and commitment to an ethnic group; (c) a sense of shared values and attitudes with an ethnic group; and (d) cultural aspects of
ethnic groups such as language, behavior, values and knowledge of ethnic history (Phinney, 1990). In their study of Native American adolescents, Moran, Fleming, Somervell, and Manson (1999) found that it was possible for Native American youth to identify with both Native American and mainstream culture. It is important to note that when it comes to the Native American population and exploring ethnic identity, the diversity within the Native American population can raise questions because of which specific tribe or group a person may be referring to when she or he identifies as Native American (Moran et al., 1999).

**Cultural identity.** Cultural identity is often used as a synonym for social, ethnic, or national identity because of shared distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features as well as similar value systems, traditions, and beliefs (Kirch, 2008). Sussman (2000) differentiated cultural identity from social identity in that one’s awareness of their membership in a particular social group is not essential for cultural identity. Furthermore, individuals rarely recognize how they are influenced by their own cultural identity. The analogy of a fish in water can illustrate one’s perception of their cultural identity. Culture, like water to a fish, surrounds the individual and is often not acknowledged until removed (Sussman, 2000). Cultural identity is not explicitly recognized and even if you have defined your own cultural identity that does not mean that the perception others have of your identity necessarily aligns (Sussman, 2000). To maintain their cultural identity while finding a place in the Western world, American Indian athletes have often had to connect two or more cultures and adopt values such as, “resiliency, never-giving-up, and working together for a common goal” (Ali-Christie, 2013, p. 31).

**American Indian identity.** Due to the variety of Native American tribes, traditions, and cultures I am cautious to not overly generalize Native American identity. However, an important
factor to this study is the unity among different tribes and Native groups, sometimes referred to as Pan-Indianism (Hertzberg, 1971), and this should be considered with identity of Native American athletes. Lyons (2010) suggests that we should not question who is or who is not Native American but rather, “What kinds of Indian identities are in production during a given historical moment and what is at stake in their making?” (p. 60). Despite any ambiguity, identity serves many purposes for a Native individual or community through a connection to language, landscape, indigenous knowledge, and history (Ali-Christie, 2013).

Kinship is a critical piece of identity formation for Native American people (Ali-Christie, 2013). Kinship is a social system where relatives are classified and “each pair of relationships is specified in terms of culturally defined patterns of rights and obligations, proper behaviors, and attitudes or emotions” (DeMallie, 1998, p. 322). Kin terms can divide societies into principal groups, which can be further divided into clans, then turned into lineages (DeMallie, 1998). For example, as a Cherokee person you are born into the clan of mother as a part of the matrilineal system and you and your identity are linked permanently to that clan. The concepts of place and language are other important factors to consider in Native American identity. Colonization often forced the removal of Native Americans from their homeland. While there is still an association for Native people and their land, there should also be consideration the impact of displacement and the details of language (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

It has been necessary for Native American identity to remain fluid in order to adapt to contemporary education, society, and policy. For generations, the Native American’s place in American society has been debated, without the consideration of their actual well-being or the survival of their cultures (Holm, 2005). There are still many questions surrounding identity
formation for Native Americans. This identity cannot simply be labeled as blood degree, culture, language, politics, or social connections. Athletics, once a tool of assimilation, allowed Native people to maintain their identity without those in power noticing. Since the boarding school era, and probably before, sport has helped foster Native American identity and pride (Bloom, 2000).

**Athletic identity.** Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder (1993) defined athletic identity as, “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (p. 237). More specifically sport plays a key role in identity formation based on four steps: sport allowed for the participants to gain a unique knowledge only shared by participants, formation of friendships or associations with those that participate in the particular sport, expectations of their chosen sport participants, and finally, recognition and acceptance by others in the subculture of that sport as a member and fellow athlete (Donnelly & Young, 1999). Webb, Nasco, Riley, and Headrick (1998) developed a multidimensional perspective that contained two components of athletic identity—public and private. Public athletic identity is the extent to which an individual is known and recognized by others as an athlete. Private athletic identity is the extent to which an individual’s identity as an athlete has been internalized as part of his/her self-concept (Webb et al., 1998 p. 68).

The athlete role involves an individuals’ focus on athletic development and competition. The more athletes play into this role, and increase their levels of athletic identity, has been found to be related to superior athletic performance, confident psychological consequences during training, and enhanced body image (Horton & Mack, 2000). High athletic identity can also have negative effects, such as increased social isolation (Horton & Mack, 2000), negative psychological responses, severe identity depression, difficulty disengaging from sport (Brewer, Raalte, & Linder, 1993), sacrificed alternative identities and neglected other sources of self-
fulfillment (Webb et al., 1998). In Native communities, the athlete role can not only mean taking on a persona as a jock, but also be a representation of your family, tribe, and the Native community. As is often said on my home reservation, “You don’t play for your school, you play for your Nation”.

Adler and Adler (1991) found that student-athletes who have pursued and played a collegiate sport are engulfed or immersed by their role as an athlete. They described this pattern of experienced transformation as “role-engulfment” (Adler & Adler, 1991, p. 27). Lally & Kerr (2015) found that college student-athletes entered college focused on their athletic career and it was only in their final years of school that they began to consider their academics more prominently and prepared for a future without sports. Social identity theory (Brown, 2000) suggests that college athletes should identify with the socially desirable student-athlete status to garner a sense of belonging and self-worth, especially in large, impersonal institutions.

In her study of American Indian student-athletes, Ali-Christie (2013) found the one consistent conclusion among the research on college student athlete identity suggests that universities have a unique opportunity to foster self-perception as a “student-athlete” (p. 147). Ali-Christie (2013) noted the need for further research that considers other variables, such as the level of the level of competition, sport played, financial support, and how family background and cultural ties to a community enhance or discourage non-sport career options and identity. Similarly, an important factor in considering athletic identity is the social dimension in which athletes are judged by media, coaches, teammates, and professional setting. In other words, athletic identity is not simply how athletic you believe you are but the validation you receive as an athlete from others (Stephan & Brewer, 2007).
Limited research has been done that investigates the relationship between athletic identity development and racial identity development (Harrison, Harrison & Moore, 2002). In what work has been done, Harrison, Sailes, & Roitch (2011) found African American football student-athletes had a higher athletic identity scores than Caucasian American football student-athletes. This dissertation aims to add insight into the relationship between Native American athlete’s development of racial and athletic identity.

**Intersectionality**

I recognize that I have outlined different aspects of identity individually however I do not want to suggest that identity is static and compartmentalized. Different aspects of identity constantly intersect and fluctuate. We must consider what Kimberlé Crenshaw identified as intersectionality, or the ways in which a person inhabits two or more different minority classifications (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Crenshaw (1991), a critical legal theorist, coined intersectionality while speaking to the challenges of African American women as a result of intersecting oppressed identities. Different identities contribute to the experiences of Native American athletes and we should not separate the various dimensions (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality can guide us in examining how identities intersect at the micro-level within individuals and relate those interactions to macro-level social phenomenon (Corlett & Mavin, 2014). Intersectionality is a key concept of Critical Race Theory (CRT), as Crenshaw and other legal scholars aimed to uncover the deep patterns of racial exclusion. I will later discuss CRT in more detail as a crucial piece of my theoretical framework.
The Athlete Role in Native Communities

While identity for Native Americans is complicated and highly variable across individuals, tribes, and nations, athletic identity is often privileged because of the importance of sport in Native communities, both historically and as a modern means of success. Elite athletes, especially in the 21st century, attract celebrity-level attention and Native athletes have the power to explain their cultural heritage amplified by the platform of sport. Native American athletes can also provide alternative ideas of what Native America looks like. In times of a consistent Native American mascot controversy and a prevailing portrayal of the caricatured “noble and ignoble savage” (King, 2004, p. 4) this can be an asset to all Native Americans. By simply occupying a visible space in the sports community, Native athletes challenge stereotypes and inspire their community, providing a foundation of giving back.

We have seen the intersection of Native identity and athletic identity play out for several professional athletes. For example, NFL quarterback Sam Bradford became a highly-touted ambassador for the Cherokee Nation. Eric Bailey, a reporter for Tulsa World explained that Native Americans in Oklahoma were proud of Bradford and he was often asked about his heritage – “One problem, he had no idea what his heritage was. Being Cherokee wasn’t emphasized when he was growing up” (2009, para 18). Bradford admitted that he needed to learn more about his heritage and dedicated time to learning more about the culture. In contrast, PGA Tour golfer Rickie Fowler has shied away from discussing his Navajo heritage, but is still held up as representative of the Navajo nation. There could be multiple Native American athletes who are Native but for a variety of reasons choose not to identify as Native. While not discounting
others’ accomplishments, this work will be focused on those athletes who fully embrace their Native identity.

Brent Cawhee, founder of NDNSports.com, a website that aggregates all the news surrounding Native American athletes, spoke of the importance of only promoting athletes who embrace their Native heritage to be respectful to the athletes as well as tribal members. Cawhee explained the struggles of Native athletes who did not grow up “traditionally” and are thrust into the spotlight. These athletes may not have had the opportunity to be connected to their Native culture and do not want to offend tribal members who did. As he explained, “some people aren’t comfortable with it (being promoted), but they are still proud” (B. Cawhee, personal communication, July 26, 2018).

Embracing or downplaying a Native American heritage is a major influence on Native American athletes’ social identity. This choice is also tied to giving back and community. This work will specifically look at the impact of embracing cultural identity and how that interplays with the athletic identity of Native American athletes.

**Sport & Social Capital**

Since the 1980s, the concept of social capital has been theorized and operationalized in a variety of ways (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Despite the array of scholarship, at its core, social capital is the resources available to people through their social interactions (Lin, 2001; Putnam, 2000). Increased social capital comes from a larger and more diverse network of contacts than a smaller, less diverse network. In recent years, there has been particular interest and concern in the diminishing nature of networks, civic engagement, and community building during a period of increasing individualism (Widdop, Cutts, & Jarvie,
During this time of increasing technology, there have been conflicting views of the impact of Internet use and social capital (Best & Dautrich, 2003; Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll, & Rosson, 2005; Nie, 2001). Ultimately, when new media use is correlated to information acquisition and community building there can be a positive production of social capital (Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009).

In the world of sports, scholars such as Jarvie (2003), Delaney and Keaney (2005), Coalter (2010), and Nichols, Tacon, and Muir (2013) have explored the relationships between sports participation and social capital. It has been theorized that participation in sport can lead to personal success and civic engagement because it (a) creates physical capital that can be used to acquire social and cultural capital; (b) inspires educational achievement; (c) facilitates the formation of social networks; and, (d) fosters aspirations that transcend sport (Coakley, 2002, 2011; Coalter, 2007a). While sport can be consumed or played alone, “inevitably they interact, communicate, and consume physical forms of sport with family, friends, and acquaintances” (Widdop et al., 2016, p. 602). On an individual level sport may provide a basis in which one can form a friendship base, develop goals and foster well-being. On the local and community level sport can provide a base for the building of a local network and bring different sections of communities together (Widdop et al. 2016). Research has shown that participating in sport as a youth can have a significant effect on academic achievement, future income, and occupational attainment (Otto & Alwin, 1977; Phillips & Schafer, 1971). Otto and Alwin (1977) found that “participation in athletics has a significant effect on occupational attainment statistically controlling (for) socioeconomic origins, mental ability, academic performance and participation in athletics” (p. 110).
The attainment of social capital can be further categorized as bridging or bonding (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital involves the social ties that form across a normal divide, such as race or class. These ties can be what are commonly known as acquaintances and these connections can facilitate “getting ahead” (Putnam, 2000). However, the ability of sporting clubs to bridge connections between indigenous and immigrant groups has been questioned, as some groups have chosen to remain segregated (Krouwel, Boonstra, Duyvendak & Veldboer, 2006). Regardless, the nature, size, location, membership and community of sporting environments are important factors to consider when considering the potential of bridging connections (Coalter, 2007b).

Bonding links people together with others who are similar in some key dimension. These ties are normally stronger than bridging connections and based familiarity and closeness (Putnam, 2000). Coalter (2007b) pointed out that this could be linked to the historic role of sports clubs, “like-minded people (often from similar age ranges, educational backgrounds, sex, social class, race and religion) coming together to produce and consume a common interest – a particular sport” (p. 547). It has been debated how beneficial bonding can be. Forrest and Kearns (1999) argued that interaction outside of our neighborhoods is important and suggested that “cohesion may not be inherently positive – it can be inward-looking and suspicious of outsiders”.

Both bridging and bonding and its connection to Native communities are important considerations to be made for Native American athletes. Bonding may strengthen Native American communities but it may also limit inclusive forms of bridging for young people (Kelly, 2011). As Ali-Christie (2013) advised,
Where a student-athlete becomes so “bonded” to his or her community (home), when time comes to “bridge” into another community (higher education), the pipeline may seem non-existent and the path too difficult for the student. It is central to create community connection for students and it is equally imperative to build space for educational opportunities outside of home community. (p. 120)

Coalter (2007b) acknowledged the one-dimensional nature of policy-led debates focused on “the supposed inadequacies of ‘socially excluded communities’” (p. 543). This public discussion largely ignored Putnam’s (2000) analysis of the reasons for the decline of social capital. Change was often focused on community-specific deficit models to strengthen aspects of community with social interventions that included sport (Coalter, 2007b). Putnam (2000) pointed to number of sports-related factors that exemplified the decline in of social connectedness and community involvement. Still others have argued for sport and social capital and its development of community life, as former United Nations (UN) Secretary General of Europe proclaimed that “The hidden face of sport is also the tens of thousands of enthusiasts who find in their football, rowing, athletics and rock climbing clubs a place for meeting and exchange but above all the training ground for community life” (Jarvie & Thornton, 2012, p. 255)

For this study with Native American athletes, the definition of social capital by Putnam may be most relevant because of its emphasis on the community. Putnam (2000) views social capital as important because of its ability to improve the efficiency of communities by “facilitating coordinated actions and enable communities to be more effective in pursuit of their interests” (Coalter, 2007b, p. 546). However, I must acknowledge the importance of social capital as conceptualized by Bourdieu (1986) because of his emphasis on the implications of
power and inequalities in cultivating social capital. Putnam (2000) has been critiqued for creating a meaning of social capital that “risks becoming synonymous with each and all things that are positive in social life” (Portes, 1998, p. 3). Conversely, Bourdieu defined social capital as “the sum of the resources…that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 119). In this view, social capital is an unequally distributed resource that is pursued by social actors for individual and mutual benefit (Spaaij, 2012). As discussed, social capital has been predominantly viewed as a public benefit, but its relevance to the individual is important to our discussion of Native American athletes. Next, I will examine the impact of social capital and the prominence and platform it can provide Native American athletes.

**Prominence & Platform**

Richard Lapchick, well-known for his mantra, “There is something about sport” explains how sport can overcome many preconceived notions and eliminate barriers for those who decide to engage (Wexelman, 2014, para 13). Sport transcends and social capital developed through sport can lead to stronger cohesion outside of the sport context (Tonts, 2005). Sport can also provide a level of celebrity that gives athletes a platform on which to speak to communities around the country. Sport offers athletes a primary point of relation to others, Native or non-Native (Harris, 1998; Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008). With social media and websites like NDNSports.com, this is exponentially effective in creating a world in which Native athletes can be followed by fans across tribal lines around the country.
The inherent building of community in Native culture is complemented by a sports world that emphasizes athlete philanthropy. As one sports executive requested that players,

In addition to their work on the field, must also do their part in integrating the team into the community it represents. Whether it is through community appearances for a sponsor or other community activities, the goal is to have fans in the market associate them and the team for which they play to positive community activities. (Hamilton, 2004, p. 82)

The marrying of sport and philanthropy has experienced tremendous growth over the past twenty years. While athletes may be suspected of motivations that are less than altruistic (Peloza & Hassay, 2006), this trend has exemplified the ability of athletes to leverage their popularity to connect beyond their respective playing field. Shuart (2007) argued that the United States society has an, “obsession with fleeting moments of fame, and our centuries-long tendency to place elite athletes upon a social pedestal for athletic acts deemed as ‘heroic’” (p.127). This pedestal, when used properly, has the potential to inspire others to give back and participate in community enhancing activities.

The Sports Philanthropy Project (SPP) was developed to support league, team, and athlete charity in conjunction with the Robert Woods Johnson Foundation (RWJF). RWJF and SPP (2011) believed that professional athletes’ popularity and credibility could be leveraged to bolster health and health care programs in their communities. Over the course of thirteen years they created successful initiatives such as the Major League Baseball National Spit Tobacco Education Program (SPP, 2011) and formed a partnership with the Jacksonville Jaguars Foundation to discourage tobacco and other substance use among young people through media-based and in-stadium messages, community programs and public policies. SPP (2011) also
awarded grants totaling over $7.8 million and received a $3.5 million grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. The SPP is just one example of athlete’s utilizing their social capital to influence public opinion and incite positive actions.

Sport is embedded in our cultural fabric, and sport and philanthropy are a good match because of the role that sport has played in aspiring and inspiring others (Babiak, Mills, Tainsky, & Juravich, 2012). Native athletes can become celebrities not just from their local institutions but because of the aggregated support of Native Americans across the country. As historically oppressed and underrepresented, Native American athletes can use their social capital to speak for themselves and change deficit-based narratives by displaying their strengths (Paraschak, 2013).

**Native American Sport & Giving Back: Conceptual Model**

Figure 2 (Appendix) is a conceptual model of the role of sport in Native American communities. Building from Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern’s (1990) Circle of Courage, this model integrates sport to portray the benefits and outcomes of athletic participation. The Circle of Courage includes belonging, independence, mastery, and generosity; all elements that can be enriched through sport. Sport can serve many functions but for the purposes of this work it is giving back that we will focus on. This model showcases three of the most common forms of giving back: educating teammates and coaches about Native culture, holding camps and speaking to Native communities, and creating foundations to give back. Note the emphasis in most giving back activities for Native Americans is focused on giving back time rather than money. Of course, one form of giving back is not necessarily better than another but it can tell us
a lot about the values of Native American athletes. The entire process of Native American sport involves reciprocity of values and capital.
CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As I reentered the world of academia and began formally conducting research, theory was an abstract hurdle for my mind to jump. It felt foreign, excessively scientific, and in conflict with everything I knew. In a lot of ways theory simply seemed to be a necessary box to check off before proceeding with any research project. I was skeptical of its real benefits and applicability to the work I set out to do with Native American athletes and Native American communities. I was relieved to see that I was not alone in my skepticism of theory. Western research often seeks to classify and categorize, something that Native American and Indigenous people traditionally resist (Kovach, 2018). As Kovach (2018) explains, “As indigenous peoples, both our epistemology and our history of colonization resist definitional segregation” (p. 223). Even so, certain theories can strengthen our work and challenge the oppression faced by Native people and other marginalized groups. Anzaldúa (1990) argues that, “if we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can also be loosened and empowered by theories” (p. xxvi).

Upon choosing to use theory for empowerment, I realized it was something I have been using all along. It is inherent in my worldview and how I approach my research. In choosing particular theories to frame this research I looked for a delicate balance between what I already knew and assumed and what could provide additional insights and understanding throughout the research process. Given the purpose of this study, I draw insights from Critical Race Theory (CRT), Tribal critical race theory (or “TribalCrit”), as well as public and visual sociology. Critical race theory (CRT), and in particular, Tribal critical race theory (or “TribalCrit”), and the specific concepts of storytelling and counter-storytelling are perspectives that complement this work. Terms I have heard before, like sovereignty and colonization have taken on much deeper
meaning to me through these theories. In what follows I will explain and explore these theories
and concepts that I find most fitting to the work I intend to do.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore documentary film as a research medium to
better understand giving back amongst Native American athletes and to produce a counter-
narrative to the deficit perspective by highlighting the voices of Native American athletes. I hope
that by better understanding what giving back means to Native American athletes, our
communities can encourage and empower future generations to continue the reciprocal cycle and
further strengthen our people. The goal of this theoretical framework is to provide rationale and
justification for this work in a way that is academically robust and still inherently indigenous. As
I intend to use the somewhat novel approach of documentary film as a methodology and a way to
present my research, this framework will also help explain and justify the assumptions I make in
choosing this route (Crotty, 1998).

**What is Critical Race Theory?**

The origins of Critical Race Theory (CRT) can be traced to law and the CRT terminology
first appeared in numerous journals and texts over 30 years ago (Crenshaw, 2011; Donnor &
Ladson-Billings, 2018). It ascended in the 1970s after lawyers, activists, and legal scholars
realized, “the heady advances of the civil rights era of the 1960s had stalled and, in many
respects, were being rolled back” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 4). No longer seeing the same
results from old techniques, writers realized the need for new approaches to understand the
racism of the time (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

CRT originally examined and critiqued the role of the law in building and maintaining
unequal social and political relationships based on race (West, 1995). Derrick Bell and Alan
Freeman were two of the most prominent scholars to bring CRT to the forefront (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Bell was influenced by his experiences as an African-American man and as a civil rights attorney and legal theorist. Freeman was a white scholar who shared Bell’s distress over the slow pace of racial reform in the United States. Of course, there are other major figures, such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, who introduced the concept of intersectionality, the place of difficulty for women of color or LGBTQ individuals of color and others who occupy two or more minority classifications (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Perhaps the earliest and most prominent figure relevant to CRT is W. E. B. Du Bois (1903), who declared “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line” (p. 1). Du Bois was the first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University and links CRT to education, with a critical stance in the role of African Americans in the education system. Du Bois is also credited with founding U.S. sociology and a consistent focus on the perspectives, experiences, and resistance movements of the colonized (Weiner, 2018).

CRT draws inspiration from numerous theoretical traditions including critical legal studies (CLS) and radical feminist movements (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). From these movements, CRT scholars have drawn from a diverse group of theorists and activists from Michel Foucault to Martin Luther King Jr. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). In relation with CLS, CRT shares a rejection of “the prevailing orthodoxy that scholarship should be or could be ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’” (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995, p. xiii). CRT can be related to several different critical theories and tenets. Radical feminism has been linked to CRT through its focus on exposing and transforming oppressive structures. With radical feminism, CRT shares a call for critical examination of the “relationship between power and the
construction of social roles, as well as…habits that make up…types of domination” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 5).

CRT was not developed on a whim, but the need to move discussions of race and racism from simple experiences to the ideological realm (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Tate, 1997). In other words, racism was understood as an act of aggression, but discussions rarely confronted how race and racism are deeply embedded within American society (Omi & Winant, 1994). Essential to CRT is the desire to change social institutions, such as the educational system, and the policies and practices that may be oppressive (Bernal, 2002). Consequently, in the work to uncover the hidden subtext of race in society, CRT has attracted attention from a diverse mix of academic disciplines (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, &Thomas, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). CRT can be used as a methodological tool as well as a, “greater ontological and epistemological understanding of how race and racism affect the education and lives of the racially disenfranchised” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 7-8).

The Key Tenets of Critical Race Theory

CRT has traveled across the world, developing multiple qualities and offshoots, but Delgado and Stefancic (2017) outline six basic tenets that I will address specifically for this work. The first, and perhaps most prominent, is the idea that racism is normal and ordinary in society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Under this tenet, there are “business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvi) and cannot be solved by equal opportunity legislation. When racism is not acknowledged, it makes it even more difficult to address or remedy (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).
The second tenet is called interest convergence and was developed by Derrick Bell (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). Interest convergence means that advancement for people of color only occurs when it also promotes White self-interest (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). For example, Bell proposed that the supposed civil right triumph, *Brown v. Board of Education*, was founded more from, “the self-interest of elite whites than the desire to help blacks” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9). Gillborn (2009) used the development of affirmative action policies, which were purportedly enacted to benefit minorities and others facing discrimination, as an example of interest convergence. On the surface, affirmative action was intended to serve as a policy that privileges Black interests, but the primary beneficiaries, as far as hiring policies go, have been White women (Gillborn, 2009).

Higher education scholars Angelina Castagno and Stacey Lee (2007) applied the principle of interest convergence to their investigation of the use of Native American mascots at a Midwestern university. They argued that most diversity initiatives at higher education institutions both advance and limit racial equity and social justice (Castagno & Lee, 2007). In their study, they found that the university took partial action regarding Native American mascots by implementing a policy that discouraged, but not prohibited, Native American mascots. The university also refused to schedule events with teams who used Native American mascots, “unless the team is a traditional rival or a conference member” (Castagno & Lee, 2007, p. 6). Ultimately, they took no action that would hurt the interests of the university (Castagno & Lee, 2007). Castagno & Lee (2007) felt that the institution implementing progressive policies around race while at the same time instituting policies that protect the status quo exemplified interest convergence.
The third tenet is perhaps one of the most familiar in the social sciences, the idea that race is a social construct, not a biological or genetic reality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Rather than a biological or genetic reality, race and races are products of social thought and relations (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). While there are certain physical traits that people share, they are small and have nothing to do with personality, intelligence, and moral behavior. This type of racial classification is particularly complicated in the United States with Native American communities, where federal enrollment status has overtaken the importance of the culture and connections that come from being a Native American (Pack, 2012). For instance, I doubt when Native people discuss my heritage they will be concerned about my enrollment number and blood degree, but they will want to know who my family is and evaluate my contribution to our community. The portrayal of Native Americans by the media is also problematic and exemplifies the social construct of race. The media creates a homogenous group that is “frozen in time” and add to the invisibility of hundreds of tribal cultures (Leavitt, Covarrubias, Perez, & Fryberg, 2015, p. 43). In selecting participants for this work, it was important for me to select self-identified Native American athletes, but not require them to prove their “Native-ness” by blood degree or other institutionalized process. The complications around what it means to be a Native American was discussed with my participants and it is something I will thoughtfully considered throughout the research process.

The fourth tenet is what Delgado and Stefancic (2017) call differential racialization, “the idea that each race has its own origins and ever-evolving history” (p. 10). More so, differential racialization recognizes how racial categories and their meanings are constructed, manipulated, and positioned throughout history to serve the needs of white America. An example Delgado and
Stefancic (2017) use is the labor market and how the dominant society racializes different minority groups at different times. Another example is how one group of color may be portrayed as happy and naïve at a single point in time, but “as the needs of the white nation shift, so too these portrayals” (Harris, 2016, p. 807). The same group may later be depicted, through media, as dangerous and savage, all while upholding white supremacist structures (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This tenet is meaningful to the Native American community because Native Americans are often grouped homogenously rather than recognized for their unique tribal affiliations. While Native Americans are often less distinguishable by physical appearance, they still experience differential racialization. Native Americans may be romanticized as historical figures of the past and as sports teams mascots, then later as radical, unconventional anti-government protesters (King, Staurowsky, Baca, Davis, & Pewewardy, 2002).

The fifth tenet of CRT entails a commitment to social justice and a response to oppression of race, gender, or class (Matsuda, 1991). In this vein, a research agenda aims for the elimination of racism, sexism, and poverty and seeks to empower minority groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This work will be inspired by the opportunity to create change in the perceptions of Native American athletes and their communities. I will be extremely mindful of the differences in the unique tribal affiliations and upbringings of my participating Native American athletes because, as Ikemoto (1997) states, “Whether [people of color] can counter racism may depend, finally, on our ability to claim identities outside the master narrative” (p. 312-313). I will look to share these differences and create an alternative to the master narrative through this work.

The final tenet that I will cover is that of storytelling and counter-storytelling. CRT theorists believe that people of color inherently have the ability to speak to race and racism in
ways that can challenge the status quo (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). It should be noted that the
goal of CRT is not to, “twist or distort reality. Rather, CRT is meant to bring an alternative
perspective to racialized subjects so that voices on the social margins are amplified” (Lindlof &
Taylor, 2019, p. 100). I have chosen some of the most prominent tenets of CRT to cover,
however this list is not, nor aims to be, exhaustive. Due to its significance to this work, I will
elaborate more on storytelling and counter-storytelling.

**Storytelling**

The importance of storytelling and counter-storytelling cannot be understated in my
approach to this work. As Delgado (1989) stated, “oppressed groups have known instinctively
that stories are an essential tool to their own survival and liberation” (p. 2436). Native
storytelling was always a way to connect the past, present, and future, and to give new
generations a sense of where they belonged in the history of their people and in the history of the
world (Native Hope, 2018). The craft of storytelling has been integral to the preservation of
Native American culture and history. Storytelling was done orally long before written records
were imagined or utilized (Highwater, 1976). Delgado (1989) explained how it makes sense for
racialized communities to gravitate to storytelling, “for stories create their own bonds, represent
cohesion, shared understandings, and meanings. The cohesiveness that stories bring is part of the
strength of the outgroup” (p. 2412). Storytelling can also provide multiple benefits for members
of racialized groups. There is a psychological benefit likened to therapy in telling stories
(Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 1998). In hearing stories, we realize we are not alone and form
connections as a group. Additionally, stories help oppressed groups by educating the oppressor,
who usually does not recognize their actions as oppression (Lawrence, 1987). Delgado (1989)
argued that dominant groups justify their power and construct reality in a way to maintain their privilege. Hearing stories from people of color causes oppressors to rethink their rationalized racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Stories have the power to shed light and explain what it is like to live a certain life (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Legal storytellers draw on a history that goes all the way back to slave narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT scholars find stories important because they, “add contextual contours to the seeming ‘objectivity’ of positivist perspectives” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 11). Storytelling can be limited however by certain structures in law for requiring rigid categories and ways of speaking (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). The Indian law case of the Mashpee Tribe v. Town of Mashpee exemplified this conflict (Torres & Milun, 2000). As the Mashpee fought for their recognition as a tribe, a group of white jurors found that the Mashpee Tribe had ceased to be a tribe at relevant points in history for the case Mashpee v. New Seabury Corp (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001). The same jury found that they had constituted a tribe at other times in history, particularly when they ceded their lands to non-Indians (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001). Mashpee elders who attempted to recount their story through oral tradition were discredited when a non-Indian “expert” provided credible historical data (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001, p. 216). Torres & Milun (2000) further explained:

In the case of the Mashpee, the systems of meaning are irreconcilable: The politics of historical domination reduced the Mashpee to having to petition their “guardian” to allow them to exist, and the history of that domination has determined in large measure the ways the Mashpee must structure their petitions. The conflict between these systems of
meaning – that of the Mashpee and that of the state – is really the question of how we can “know” which history is most “true.” (p. 52-53)

As previously mentioned, storytelling holds a distinct and important role in Native American communities. Most Native American groups have their own version of how they came to be, as Anter (2018) declared, “tell any Indian a story of how something was created and they will tell you a story back about how Indians invented that very same thing” (p. 2). There are a variety of story types in addition to creation stories, including the sharing of specific moments in a Nation’s history, certain battles as well as myths and legends. As Coffey & Tsosie (2001) described these stories are:

The wealth of our people; they are what give life and continuity to our existence; they are what link us with our collective past, and our collective future…Native peoples’ stories contain the philosophical core of tribal cultures, including the values and norms that structure our moral universe (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001, p. 203).

Stories allow Native Americans to preserve cultural sovereignty. Unlike political sovereignty and the external concern with the federal government, cultural sovereignty is inherently internal and “the effort of Native peoples to exercise their own norms and values in structuring their collective futures” (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001, p. 196). An approach informed by emphasis on storytelling, rather than more rigid forms of data collection and analysis, will allow me to connect with Native American athletes in a way they are inherently familiar and comfortable with. Exploring and sharing how Native American athletes understand giving back to their community through stories will allow us to further support Native American values for the future.
Counter-storytelling

CRT scholars also believe that stories have the power to disrupt and dislodge (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Counter-stories can challenge malicious narratives and beliefs (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). However, as Solórzano and Yosso (2002) point out, counter-stories do not necessarily need to be created as a response to the majority stories. As Ikemoto (1997) states, “By responding only to the standard story, we let it dominate the discourse” (p. 136). Counter-stories can just as easily be those yet to be told. Solórzano and Yosso (2002) outline the four functions of counter-stories as follows:

(a) They can build community among those at the margins of society by putting a human and familiar face to educational theory and practice, (b) they can challenge the perceived wisdom of those at society’s center by providing a context to understand and transform established belief systems, (c) they can open new windows into the reality of those at the margins of society by showing possibilities beyond the ones they live and demonstrating that they are not alone in their position, and (d) they can teach others that by combining elements from both the story and the current reality, one can construct another world that is richer than either the story or the reality alone. (p. 36).

Counterstories can be necessary for Native American individuals who have often been marginalized and categorized as mascots or things of the past. Native American athletes in particular need to provide a narrative to combat long held beliefs that they are not worthy of recruitment or opportunity in sport (Ali-Christie, 2013; Whitney, 2002). This work will explore these beliefs with the athletes and be open to the potential of this not necessarily being the case. Ultimately, I hope that the stories I collect disrupt the dominant ways of knowing that have
privileged the colonial ideas of community and giving back, especially for Native American athletes. These stories will be collected in a way that prioritizes the athlete’s experience and I will encourage them to share their meanings of giving back and community in a way that is most significant to them.

Storytelling and counter-storytelling are not without criticism. Some scholars believe it to be ineffective and illegitimate (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). For example, Daniel Farber and Suzanna Sherry (1997) accused CRT scholars of hiding behind their personal stories and using narratives to advance their point of view. A counter argument to this can be found in the ideas of standpoint theory, which argues that some points of view can be more valuable than others when it comes to understanding systemic oppression. This acknowledges the “collective historical subjectivity and agency and our ‘embodied’ accounts of the truth” (Haraway, 1988, p. 578). Hartsock (1983) insists that “the concept of a standpoint rests on the fact that there are some perspectives on society from which, however well-intentioned one may be, the real relations of humans with each other and with the natural world are not visible” (p. 117). Privileging the voices of Native American athletes is crucial due to the nature of systemic oppression against Native peoples and the overwhelming representation of Natives as mascots, instead of real people, in sport. I am not hiding behind their personal stories but attempting to counteract long held colonial narratives with underutilized perspectives.

Critics of CRT also accused storytelling of lacking respect for the traditional ideas of truth and merit (Farber & Sherry, 1997). Despite the criticism, I know that storytelling is inherent in my being, something I have grown up with and lived my entire life. It is my truth and my tradition. Moreover, it aligns with my ontological and epistemological beliefs about how I can
best generate knowledge and thoroughly portray Native American athletes giving back. It is not about hiding and more about creating a relatable narrative. Storytelling with history and myth has preserved my culture. It feels completely natural and fitting to utilize storytelling to communicate the experience of Native American athletes giving back. To most effectively tell this story, I have chosen the method of documentary film. Due to this somewhat unorthodox approach, I will also include elements from theories of visual sociology and public sociology further strengthen this framework. These will be covered after we look at an important offshoot of CRT that I will apply to this work, TribalCrit.

**Tribal Critical Race Theory**

While CRT provides a solid foundation for this work, Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) more specifically addresses the issues facing Native American communities. After spending much of his academic career searching for a theory that complemented his perspective as an American Indian analyzing the problems faced by American Indians in the educational system, Brayboy (2005a) constructed Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) to more extensively address the issues of Indigenous people in the United States. This theory emphasizes the liminality of American Indians in regards to their relationship to the United States federal government (Brayboy, 2005a). There are more than 550 federally recognized tribal nations within the U.S., and their epistemologies and ontologies will differ based on time, space, place, nation, and individual levels. However, Brayboy (2005a) believes the commonalities suffice for the foundation of TribalCrit. TribalCrit, similar to CRT, also places high value on narrative and stories as important sources of data (Brayboy, 2005a).
The heart of TribalCrit rests in the recognition that colonization is endemic to society (Brayboy, 2005a, 2013). Brayboy (2005a) described colonization as the domination of European American thought, knowledge, and power structures in our society. Indigenous knowledge has historically been dismissed because of its difference to the status quo of what is “known” (Battiste, 2002). In the late nineteenth century, Native American boarding schools were established by the Federal Government under Lieutenant Henry Pratt’s “civilization” program (Child, 2000, p. 5). Native American youth were sent to boarding schools with the goal of civilizing them by means of stripping away every aspect of their culture. Pratt said this was done to, “kill the Indian and save the man”. Below are the additional tenets of TribalCrit with brief descriptions:

1. “Colonization is endemic to society” (Brayboy, 2005a, p. 429). In lieu of racism, Brayboy (2005a) prioritizes colonization as the widespread issue within our country. He elaborates on colonization as the removal of everyday experiences of Native Americans from the awareness of the prevailing members of U.S. society. Instead, the prevailing image of Native Americans is of extinct people of the past. Brayboy (2005a) asserts that colonization has been so complete that many Native Americans themselves cannot discern “who and what we are supposed to be, how we are supposed to behave, and what we are supposed to be within the larger population” (p. 431). All other tenets stem from this principal idea.

2. “U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, White supremacy, and a desire for material gain” (Brayboy, 2005a, p. 429). Colonialism aligns with a hegemonic nature of society. When settlers arrived the policies they developed allowed
them to rationalize and legitimatize their decisions to steal lands from Native American people (Williams, 1987, 1989). Furthermore, White supremacy is viewed as “natural and legitimate and it is precisely through this naturalization that White supremacy derives its hegemonic power” (p. 432). There is also a distinction to be made between colonialism and settler colonialism. Settler colonialism utilizes an invasive settler society to replace Indigenous people with a distinctive identity and sovereignty (Veracini, 2010).

Indigenous feminist theorists explain that the end goal settler colonialism is to make Indigenous people disappear (Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013). Western science and social scientific framing is often looked at as catalyst for settler colonial dispossession of Indigenous lands and bodies (Norman, Hart & Petherick, 2018). Throughout this work the use of colonialism or settler colonialism is taken from the referenced author, otherwise I will refer to settler colonialism as it is most appropriate for this work.

3. “Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and racialized natures of our identities” (Brayboy, 2005a, p. 429). With this tenet Brayboy (2005a) argues that Native American people are both legal/political and racialized beings, but we are often treated as racial minorities alone with their rights and interests forgotten or ignored. Again, it is stressed that Native Americans are marginalized in everyday society.

4. “Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification” (Brayboy, 2005a, p. 429). This tenet emphasizes the rights and interests of Native American nations and tribes (Brayboy,
As sovereign nations, Native Americans have the right to decide what their priorities are and the autonomy to act upon their goals.

5. “The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens” (Brayboy, 2005a, p. 429). Here Brayboy (2005a) challenges us to rethink our preconceived notions about the concepts of culture, knowledge and power. He relates culture to an anchor, always tied to a group of people and often a physical place but “just as the anchor shifts and sways with changing tides and the ebbs and flows of the ocean, culture shifts and flows with changes in contexts, situations, people, and purposes” (Brayboy, 2005a, p. 434). Knowledge in Native contexts can also be very different, even opposed to, to Western ideologies. However, Brayboy (2005a) believes that instead of conflicting knowledges, Western and Indigenous ways of knowing can work in conjunction. Brayboy (2005a) declares that power is an expression of sovereignty and explains that “culture is the base for knowledge that ultimately leads to power” (p. 436). I hope this work can provide a challenge to what many believe about culture, knowledge and power and how athletics can influence those notions.

6. “Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples are intimately linked around the problematic goal of assimilation” (Brayboy, 2005a, p. 429). The sixth key to TribalCrit is the recognition and rejection of assimilation in the education system. Again, Brayboy (2005a) stresses the multiplicity of what education can be for Native Americans.

7. “Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the
differences and adaptability among individuals and groups” (Brayboy, 2005a, p. 429).
Recognizing the importance of tribal traditions allows us to examine experiences in different ways and apply different theoretical frames through which to view these experiences (Brayboy, 2005a). Tribal philosophies lay that foundation for self-education and self-determination (Brayboy, 2005a). This tenet is particularly relevant to the goals of this dissertation. Native ways of giving back are much more complex than people realize and that Native athletes occupy a unique space in their respective worlds.

8. “Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being” (Brayboy, 2005a, p. 430). Brayboy (2005a) maintains that stories and other forms of Indigenous knowledge are legitimate forms of data and research. While the academy prioritizes scientifically based research, oral storytelling should not be devalued. This way of thinking of storytelling also aligns with the ontological assumptions of symbolic interactionism, where “Human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another’s actions” (Blumer, 1962, p. 190).

9. “Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change” (Brayboy, 2005a, p. 430). In the final tenet Brayboy calls for researchers to apply TribalCrit as praxis, or utilize theory to make an active change. He argues for research to only be conducted when it can improve the Native community in some way. Instead of the abstract, we must aim for the practical that can further our self-determination and sovereignty.
Altogether, the tenets of TribalCrit provide a thorough framework for Native people to affirm their value and overcome the inconsistencies in structural systems and institutions. Brayboy (2005a) asserts that Native people are inherently gifted with the knowledge and power to continue and expand upon their sovereignty. While TribalCrit is attributed to Brayboy’s 2005a piece, he notes that the framework for the theory has long been experienced and written about by other Indigenous peoples (Brayboy, 2013). He references Seneca intellectual Arthur C. Parker as perhaps the earliest published influence (Brayboy, 2013). In 1916 Parker, “presented a list of grievances or charges against the U.S. as a result of the spiritual, physical, and intellectual dislocation experienced by Indigenous peoples at the hands of forcibly imposed Western colonial notions of jurisprudence and religious civilizing missions” (Brayboy, 2013, p. 89). As Brayboy (2013) describes, “Parker explains the physical and cognitive dissonance that arises from forcefully imposed political, legal, and social liminality and exclusionary practices levied against Indigenous societies in their own home(land)s” (p. 90).

Certainly, notions of TribalCrit have been used prior to Brayboy’s coining of the theory. For example, *Red Pedagogy* (2004) by Sandy Grande aimed to define “the common ground between American Indian intellectuals and other critical scholars engaged in anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggles” (p. 6). Grande’s work provided a much-needed interjection of indigenous discourse into critical pedagogy and critical race theory (Calderón, 2006). Grande provides a thorough history of American Indian education in the United States and the ways in which democracy has been imposed upon American Indians in the United States. Grande also examines the ways in which colonialism impacts American Indian identity and gender issues. Just as critical scholars have neglected to interrogate the unique relationship between America
Indians and the United States, Grande asserts that American Indian scholars have failed to engage with critical scholarship in favor of the “production of historical monographs, ethnographic studies, tribally centered curriculums, and site-based research” (p. 1).

Since its inception, educators have utilized TribalCrit to make sense of Indigenous education. Writer (2008), in advocating for multicultural education for social justice, argued that CRT and TribalCrit had the possibility of “unmasking, exposing, and confronting continued colonization within educational contexts and societal structures” (p. 2). Castagno and Lee extended their work in CRT to explore different structures through the framework of TribalCrit. Castagno (2012) found that despite good intentions in the development and execution of specific training programs for Indigenous teachers, these programs were still housed under larger systems that upheld imperialism, White supremacy, and assimilation. Abercrombie-Donahue (2011) utilized a TribalCrit ethnographic study to explore educators’ perceptions of Indian Education for All (IEFA), an educational reform designed to preserve the heritages of the Montana Tribal Nations. Many obstacles were found by educators in implementing the IEFA curriculum, including: the lasting legacies of colonialism, Native American subjectivity, misrepresentations of Indigenous identities, lack of understanding about Indigenous epistemologies pedagogies and life ways, systemic racism, poor communication, broken relationships, mistrust and lack of rapport, whiteness and white privilege, and a lack of support or professional development opportunities with Indigenous specialists from particular tribal communities in Montana.

Another phenomenological study by Sandstrom (2017) analyzed the lived experiences of five Native American undergraduate students to determine what forms of support should be taken by the Bureau of Indian Education Study Group (BIESG) to encourage Native American
students. Sandstrom (2017) makes many links between TribalCrit and Native American education, including the way in which the BIESG seeks to improve Native American education while maintaining control over the environment and budget. Ultimately, he found that the detractions and supports for persistence in higher education fall within the tenets of TribalCrit, including “the influence of both the expectations forced on Native American families by the colonization of Native American tribal culture and the imperialistic roots of U.S. culture and policy towards Native Americans” (Sandstrom, 2017, p. 120). Waterman & Sands (2016) utilized TribalCrit to help explain the behavior of students who transfer from a four-year institution to a two-year institution, or the “reverse transfer”. The reverse transfer was found to be a choice made by individuals to achieve their own academic success (Deil-Amen & Goldrick-Rab, 2009) within the context of their culture and community (Brayboy, 2005a).

While education has been evaluated using TribalCrit there has not been much of an extension to sport and Native American athletes. With TribalCrit as a lens, this dissertation can further explore how sport does or does not uphold a colonial system of assimilation for Native American athletes. However, rather than focus on injustices alone, I look to understand how injustices may affect the process for Native American athletes to achieve success and acknowledge how that might influence their giving back.

In what is perhaps the most similar study in terms of ideological framework and the goals of this work, Reyes (2016) examined the essence of giving back by Native college graduates with a theoretical framework that included TribalCrit. Reyes (2016) noted how giving back is often listed as a motivating factor for Native college students but there is no research that
describes what giving back really is or means to individuals or the community. Through her phenomenological and indigenous research, she found that giving back,

- informs worldview; takes place at the intersection of passion, expertise, and opportunity;
- is experienced simultaneously as a privilege, a responsibility, a gift, and a burden;
- involves building and nurturing relationships; is mediated through considerations of place; and ensures community survivance. (Reyes, 2016, p. 10)

Instead of focusing on the many ways Native college graduates have been burdened through systemic racism, colonialism, or occupation, Reyes (2016) focused on how giving back could be an extension of the benefits of an individual degree to the greater community. As Brayboy (2013) suggested, research and practice should focus on the detriment of colonization toward self-determination, and Reyes (2016) provides a solid example of what that can look like.

While the tenets of CRT are certainly applicable to this work, TribalCrit provides an even better way to mobilize and execute within the Native community because of its specificity to the Native American community. TribalCrit complements the purpose of this study, which aims to explore the meaning of giving back to Native American athletes while providing a counter story with documentary film. I have yet to find a study with Native American athletes that applies TribalCrit and this work aims fill that void. The extension of TribalCrit from education to sport is logical and will provide meaningful insights. I hope that by doing this work I will provide a starting point for others and motivate Native communities to encourage and empower Native youth, further reinforcing the power of our Native communities.
Critical Race Theory in Sport

Since its inception, CRT has been applied to various disciplines, including economics, anthropology, sociology, and education (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Solórzano D. G., & Yosso T. J., 2001, 2002). While race has certainly been covered in sport for decades, Kevin Hylton (2009, 2018) entered fresh and important territory when he purposefully applied critical race theory to world of sport. Sport, like law, is assumed to provide a ‘level playing field’ (Hylton, 2009, p. 24). When acknowledged in sport, racism is often trivialized and chalked up to being part of the game (Long, Hylton, Dart, and Welch, 2000). In the past decade issues of race in sport have come to the forefront, sparking new social movements. The unique and central place in global discourse sport holds can reveal more about racial inequalities in society than other arenas (Hartmann, 2000). As Gillborn (2009) describes,

“the racial structuring and commodification of sport provide a vitally important context where racism works to protect particular interests while maintaining the racial status quo” (p. vii).

The media plays an important role in the perpetration of stereotypes in race and sport (Hylton, 2009). One example being the common trope of “naturally gifted” black sprinter contrasted with the technically skilled white sprinter (Hylton, 2009, p. 84). CRT explains these contrasting depictions as the inherent power relations built by a “white”-dominated society (Hylton, 2009). This is also exemplified in stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans as mascots, savages, and/or drunks (Ali-Christie, 2013, Staurowsky, 2006). Hartmann (2000) explains how a sports field has the potential to resist or reinforce inequalities, thus becoming a valuable assessment of cultural cohesion and togetherness for most societies. Still, a common
criticism of sport organizations is that of their anti-racism endorsements not extending beyond a symbolic statement to actual practical changes (Hylton, 2018).

On the interpersonal level, Anderson & McCormack (2010) applied CRT and intersectionality to explore the complex identities of athletes who are Black and gay and “how these identities are affected by and simultaneously affect sporting culture” (p. 951). They stressed the importance of more investigations that incorporate intersectionality in our understanding of sport. I strive to be mindful of my Native athletes’ multiple identities and how they intersect. Recently, Desai and Abeita (2017) performed a case study of a Diné woman who protested the use of a university seal that represented settler colonialism and genocide. Using CRT and TribalCrit as a theoretical framework the authors draw on Joy’s lived experiences to discuss how the legal/political and racialized identity of Native Americans impacts individuals. Interestingly in this case, the second author, a Native American PhD student, Abeita had previously protested against the use of Native American mascots. Desai and Abeita (2017) stressed the importance of higher education institutions becoming more aware of the microaggressions that operate at the institutional level and challenge them to take action against microaggressions to stop the marginalization of Native American students. This study, while not directly sport related, was tangentially relevant and provided an example of thorough exploration of the lived experience while also highlighting the authors’ role and personal experience. Additionally, sport is coupled with many higher education institutions and work with Native American athletes will need to be considerate of the possible negative experiences faced with higher education representation.
In the realm of college athletics CRT has been used to evaluate policies and practices of the NCAA (Cooper, Nwadike, Macaulay, 2017), analyze the underrepresentation of Black head coaches in football (Agyemang & DeLorme, 2010), explore experiences of Black male student-athletes (Bimper, 2017; Harper, 2009; Singer, 2016), and identify factors that affect the persistence of Black Women in athletic training programs (Siple, Hopson, Sobehart, & Turocy, 2018). As most of the work with CRT in sport focuses on the black-white binary, I hope to add another layer to the analysis with my work with Native American populations.

Showing the potentially dynamic nature of CRT, Glover (2007) created a fictional narrative of African-American participants experiences in youth baseball to expose embedded elements of racism often ignored due to “color-blind” policies (p. 195). The narrative created focused on the experiences with Little League Baseball that prompted several adults to create “a league of their own” (p. 195). Glover (2007) found policies and practices related to player selection, travel and transportation to games, isolation of minority players, spectator behavior, and coaching/role modeling privileged white children while disadvantaging children of color. Like Glover (2009), I hope to “promote narratives of people of color as sources of critique of the hegemonic social order that devalues them” (p. 206).

In 2009, Henhawk applied CRT to examine the tensions and experiences of race and racism of Aboriginal people of Canada when participating in sport, particularly focusing on his personal experience and the experiences of his family. Henhawk (2009) also points out how sport is a great context for applying CRT because of the belief that sport is the ultimate meritocracy and argues that the focus on merit, skill and social leveling distracts from discussions of race and racism. Henhawk (2009) presented his conflict with colonialization
versus freedom and how that was inherent in his sporting experience. He shows, “the often-contradictory issues of race, culture and power that have bullied their way into my consciousness through different episodes and experiences in my life” (p. 87). He also points out the stress he feels that his experience will be interpreted as a representation of all aboriginal people, this is something that I am very mindful of in my role of researcher.

Henhawk (2009) references Fox (2006) and her call for leisure studies to make more meaningful connections to indigenous scholarship. Fox (2006) calls for the decolonization of scholarship and challenges Indigenous scholars to rethink how they approach the study of leisure. She recommends a focus on the following:

(1) leisure studies need more descriptive studies and advancement beyond the large categorizations of modern Eurocentric definitions of leisure; (2) the need for the concept of leisure to be problematized and open to theorizing and critique; (3) the need to recognize the Indigenous critique of inherent hegemony within western intellectual traditions with Indigenous epistemologies and praxis; and (4) the need for postcolonial analysis and decolonization of leisure research to shape desirable futures through understanding harms of the past. (Fox, 2006, p. 405-406)

Sport is often seen as a way out for marginalized populations and as these scholars attest, we must challenge the preconceived notions around sports and equality.

In his dissertation, Wilkinson (2017) explored whether there was a connection between athletic participation and educational engagement and if so, if this connection could bridge the gap between Native American reservation-based high school and Native American communities. Within TribalCrit, Wilkinson (2017) identified three forms of knowledge to determine whether
the connection between athletic participation and educational engagement exists. The first form is cultural knowledge, the understanding of what it means to be a member of a tribal nation. The second form is knowledge of survival and includes an understanding of how and in what ways change can be accomplished. Additionally, knowledge of survival includes the ability and willingness to change, adapt, and adjust to move forward as an individual and community (Wilkinson, 2017). Third is knowledge acquired from educational institutions, academic knowledge.

Wilkinson (2017) found that potential connections could be made between students’ athletic participation and traditional/religious participation. Educational leaders and tribal leaders viewed athletics as a catalyst to the improvement of overall educational engagement of Native American high school students (Wilkinson, 2017). To his surprise, Wilkinson (2017) also found that athletic participation seemingly “prepares students for traditional/cultural activities and reinforces what is being taught in ceremonies: hard work, team work, commitment, and sacrifice (mental and physical)” (p. 119). While he used a more rigid method (Delphi) with what he deemed “expert” participants, his work still provides a strong example of what this research can aim for, an attempt to make meaningful connections between sport and Native American communities.

It is exciting and invigorating to utilize CRT and TribalCrit to conduct research within the world of Native American athletes. It privileges the experiences of this unique population and can provide deeper insight into the world of sport, giving back, and Native American communities. I believe this understanding will best be communicated in the form of
Documentary, rather than through a written document. In what follows I will discuss how documentary fits into my theoretical framework.

**Documentary in Theory**

While documentary film can relate to TribalCrit and the concept of storytelling, applying ideas from public sociology and visual sociology will further strengthen my reasoning for utilizing documentary-as-research in this project.

**Public Sociology of Sport**

In the fall of 2016 I attended my first academic conference, the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport (NASSS) conference. I was only in my third month of my PhD program and quite honestly still adjusting to being back in the world of academia. Cheryl Cooky’s keynote, “We Cannot Stand Idly By”: A Necessary Call for a Public Sociology of Sport, still stands out in my mind. I must admit while Cooky’s call for the conference attendees to “do” public sociology was inspiring, it also left me a little dumbfounded. In my mind, using our research for social change was the whole point of being a member of “the academy”. I now realize my naivety, as all too often academics struggle to make it out of their “ivory tower”.

Cooky spoke passionately about how the sociology of sport was her calling and how it could and should be a site for social change. I thought of my mentor Richard Lapchick, who has been a champion for social justice and included graduate students such as myself in his research for the popular “Racial and Gender Report Cards”. Throughout my time in his graduate program, Lapchick empowered us all and embedded the idea of using sport to create positive change in the world. While sport for development and peace is often at odds with critical analysis of sport, I believe the latter can aid in the former and I could see many of my personal ideologies echoed in
Cooky’s talk. She spoke of how now was as good of a time as ever to do this work because of acceptance and growing popularity of social media and mainstream media serving as outlets for athletes, sports consumers. Due to this shift in media, I would also argue that research is also more acceptable in formats such as documentary.

To highlight the possibilities of public sociology, Cooky references Michael Burawoy’s (2005) classifications of the different types of sociology: professional sociology, policy sociology, critical sociology, and public sociology. In 2004, Burawoy made what would become a well-known call for the public sociology and outlined the four types of sociology in his American Sociological Association presidential address. He described public sociology as bringing sociology into conversation with publics, “understood as people who are themselves involved in conversation” (p. 7). He classifies policy sociology as sociology to meet a goal defined by a client (Burawoy, 2005). Professional sociology provides legitimacy and expertise for public and policy sociology through, “true and tested methods, accumulated bodies of knowledge, orienting questions, and conceptual frameworks” (p. 10). Finally, examining the foundations and assumptions of the research programs of professional sociology is critical sociology. He explained, “Critical sociology is the conscience of professional sociology just as public sociology is the conscience of policy sociology” (p. 10)

Public sociology represents the interests of humanity (Burawoy, 2005). Burawoy (2005) further differentiates between “traditional” and “organic” public sociology as “two polar but complementary types” (p. 7). “Traditional” public sociologists write in opinion pages and may bring their academic research into the public realm (Burawoy, 2005). “Organic” public sociology involves working closely with active publics such as labor movements or human rights
organizations (Burawoy, 2005). Organic public sociology creates a dialogue between the public sociologist and the public and includes a process of mutual education (Burawoy, 2005). Burawoy (2005) described the goal of organic public sociology to “make visible the invisible” (p. 8). I identify with this goal of organic public sociology in my work with Native American athletes, to show people real Native Americans and not mascots. Whereas a purely written dissertation may be limited in its reach, utilizing documentary to explicitly show Native American athletes helps give them a presence and voice beyond text. In this sense, documentary is a form of traditional public sociology. Burawoy (2005) noted the importance of complementing sociologies and this project may best be described as blend of traditional and organic public sociology.

Many are drawn to sociology because of the possibility of improving society. Burawoy (2005) argued that the founding of sociology was motivated by a moral commitment to civil society. In his own presidential address to the American Sociological Association in 2000, Joe Feagin spoke of how sociology was born out of a “collective desire on the part of early scholars to not only understand how society works, but to also devise empirically-grounded solutions to some of its most pressing social problems” (Cabaniss & Hunt, 2018). Although Burawoy (2005) classified different types of sociology we reference today, he pointed out that the origins of sociology were inherently public. Cabaniss and Hunt (2018) stressed using sociology to address, “complex challenges we all face in an increasingly interconnected and persistently unequal world” (Cabaniss & Hunt, 2018, p. 1).

In the spirit of public sociology there has been substantial work done in the interests of women, minorities, and other underserved populations. *The Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sports* shares research and advocates for the betterment of girls on and off the
playing field. Emmett Gill’s “Athletes’ Human Rights Project” is dedicated to social justice for student-athletes in the U.S. at time when many question the corporatization of the NCAA. In Canada, Victoria Paraschak (2013) has led the way in combating deficit-focused narratives of Aboriginal athletes. For decades, scholars such as Richard C. King (2002, 2004, 2006), Laurel Davis (1993, 2002), and Ellen Staurowsky (1999, 2004, 2006, 2007) have consistently articulated the problems with Native American mascots. All of this work upholds the beliefs of public sociology, delayed as it may be in reaching the public, as well as tenets of CRT and TribalCrit that push for action and reform for the minority population.

In perhaps one of the most iconic pieces in the sociology of sport, “Racial segregation in American sport,” Loy and McEIlvoguе (1970) conducted the systematic measurements which showed that black players were being “stacked” in non-central positions in baseball and football (Donnelly, 2015, p. 421). This work showed that players from central positions were more likely to become managers and coaches, subsequently denying black players post-playing career opportunities. Loy and McElvogue’s (1970) work spurred several studies across the world in a variety of sports, including women’s underrepresentation in coaching and leadership positions. Their research led to the “report cards” and systematic monitoring of the racial makeup of individuals in leadership of sports organizations (Donnelly, 2015). What was intended to be a piece of professional sociology slowly transformed into public sociology as the knowledge leaked from the academy to the “‘publics’ who were able to change their own lives and the lives of others by having that knowledge” (Donnelly, 2015, p. 422). Policy changes such as the National Football League’s (NFL’s) adoption of the “Rooney Rule” exemplified the ability of sport research to “make a difference” in terms of racial equity in sport (Donnelly, 2015, p. 421).
While discussing several examples of public sociology Cooky (2017) references Samantha King’s book, *Pink Ribbons, Inc.*, that was made into a documentary and used by a social justice-based organization. While unintentionally creating documentary films can be influential, I believe intentionally doing documentary-as-research is a way to achieve a more impactful public sociology of sport. In his notorious essay, *The Camera and the Man*, legendary ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch, who many consider one of the pioneers of documentary film, describes film as providing the researcher with “the extraordinary possibility of direct communication with the group he studies” (1973, p. 43). The call for the public sociology of sport, and this direct communication, aligns with my aims with documentary-as-research. As Rouch (1973) proclaimed about filmmaking, “Finally, then, the observer has left the ivory tower; his camera, tape recorder, and projector have driven him, by a strange road of initiation, to the heart of knowledge itself” (p. 44).

**Visual Sociology**

Visual sociology is based on the idea that a visually represented world is different than a world represented by words and numbers (Harper, 2012). Distinguished sociologist and advocate for visual sociology, Douglas Harper (1998) explained that the rise of photography in sociology research did not occur until the 1960s and that much of the early work was inspired by documentary photographers rather than sociologists. Many proponents of visual sociology believed that the visual approach could invigorate a field that had been “increasingly abstract and distant from the world it seeks to understand” (Harper, 2012, p. 4). Like public sociology, visual sociology sheds light on often overlooked corners of society.
Twine (2016) described visual sociology as a “two-headed beast; separating the empirical from the symbolic” (p. 969). While possibly tricky to tame, Harper (1998) argued that sociologists recording the visual aspects of reality seemed “revolutionary in sociology” (p. 24). In Chaplin’s (2004) analysis of her own visual diary, she claimed it led her to stop taking what you see for granted, a goal of social science. Twine (2016), a feminist ethnographer and critical race theorist, argued that visual literacy was essential to racial literacy. In her work analyzing racism and anti-racism, Twine (2016) claimed that her ethnographic writing could not adequately “capture the nuances of social exclusion, racial discrimination and intersecting forms of inequality because words are not adequate in a world where humans organize ‘data’ visually” (p. 972). The complexity of Native American communities could also benefit from this more transparent visual treatment.

There are a variety of terms that have been used to describe the practice of documentary in research. Banks (2007) pointed out the ambiguity around visual research and whether it belongs to anthropology or sociology. Anthropology, rather than sociology, has often been the chosen category for most visual research because of the extensive use of images for illustration without a real call for change. Additionally, Becker (1995) explored the problem with trying to group a photograph into a category of either visual sociology, documentary photography, or photojournalism. He argues that there is no catchall term and that significance comes from, “the response their work generates in viewers, whatever name that work goes by” (p. 13). He ultimately claims the different examples of categorization, “provide a warning against methodological purism, an illustration of the contextual nature of all efforts to understand social life” (Becker, 1995, p. 13).
While there is much ambiguity in terminology, visual sociology perhaps better describes what I hope to attain theoretically with this work because of my quest for change. In my methodology chapter I will further cover the history of documentary and the fluidity around its categorized discipline, along with my ontological and epistemological assumptions in utilizing this method.

**Visual sociology in sport.** It has been suggested that sociology has overlooked the exact ways individuals perform sport (Hargreaves, 1982; Kerry & Armour, 2000). Hockey and Collinson (2006) argue that very little is known about how sport is actually done. Through their combination of autoethnographic, ethnomethodological and visual sociological approaches they examined a specific way of seeing in the performance of distance-running. In addition to their narrative, Hockey and Collison (2006) included photographs to provide, “a more effective way of communicating to the reader how distance runners see their training terrain” (p. 73). Following their narrative, Hockey and Collison (2006) provide a contextualized explanation of their ways of seeing and the typifications that underlie their everyday language. Ultimately, there is a need for more analysis of these routine practices, such as sport, that make up social life.

**Public & Visual Sociology in Documentary**

Travis Bell’s dissertation project serves as great example of the pairing of public and visual sociology in documentary format. In 2017, Bell created a film examining the Civil Rights Movement in Tampa, Florida. Bell’s narrative explored, “Central Avenue’s rise to prominence through segregation, its physical and symbolic demise as a racialized site of communal space, and how it is remembered through collective and public memory in the location it once occupied” (2017, p. iv). Bell claimed a visual product and story “can work as a transformative
mode that bridges private knowledge to challenge the public to think differently” (Bell, 2016, p. 135). Ultimately, Bell (2017) felt his film provided a space for him to strive as a researcher to help move himself and his community forward, a lofty but worthy goal and one that I also attempt in this work. Similar to the tenets of CRT and TribalCrit, documentary will help actualize my goal of changing the pre-conceived beliefs about Native American athletes and giving back.

Conversely, in the popular media, ESPN’s 30 for 30 documentary series has provided a plethora of examples of how sport and issues suitable for a CRT lens have become sensational successes. In *O.J.: Made in America*, Ezra Edelman deconstructs the story of O.J. Simpson and the summer of 1994, integrating all of the racism, sexism, and classism of the time. NPR reviewer Linda Holmes described the film as containing a, “contextualizing wisdom that gives it the feel of sociological exploratory surgery: painful and awful, but fascinating and ultimately in service of a much clearer picture” (2016, para 2). Documentary film is a natural development from visual sociology with the potential for serving the public while also challenging endemic racial narratives. In this work I utilize the visual to be the literal solution for the underrepresentation of Native American athletes.

**Moving Forward**

“When one lives in a society where people can no longer rely on the institutions to tell them the truth, the truth must come from culture and art” – John Trudell, 1986, Native American Activist

While there is a perceived disconnect between Western research and indigenous knowledge, applications of theoretical frameworks like CRT, TribalCrit, public and visual
sociology can bridge the gap and help create research that is meaningful and empowering to Native American communities. Public sociology has touched on Native American issues such as fighting Native American mascots and this work will extend to directly impact Native communities. There have been several intersections of Native Americans and education with a critical framework (Barnhardt, 2002, Brayboy & Castagno, 2008, Medin & Bang, 2014). This extension to critical analysis of Native Americans in sport is logical and necessary. Rather than point a camera and shoot, CRT and TribalCrit will lead me to co-construct the stories of Native American athletes with their collaboration. I hope to create a story that educates and inspires but my priority will be adequately serving my participants and my community. Again, as Brayboy (2005a) explains, “Tribal-Crit research and practice - or better still, praxis - move us away from colonization and assimilation and towards a more real self-determination and tribal sovereignty” (p. 97). Brayboy (2005a) challenges us to rethink our preconceived notions about the concepts of culture, knowledge and power and this is a goal of my dissertation and the documentary film.

While Du Bois (1903) stated color would be the dilemma facing the United States in the 20th century, Hylton (2018) and several other critical race scholars argue that this problem has spread to the twenty-first century. While I do not aim to solve this problem, I aspire to create a counter-story to the misconceived narratives of Native Americans. This project will allow me to engage with the community and have an impact beyond the written narrative. Using storytelling as informed by CRT and TribalCrit fits nicely with the narrative nature of the Native American oral traditions. It also allows me to involve my participants and the Native community in a piece of work that is representative of our often-overlooked strengths. It will allow me to work with my participants in a format that they know and understand. By telling these athletes’ stories I am
giving them a voice they would not get otherwise and because we will feature them on film it will serve as a broader and more dynamic picture of their experiences.

I imagine my theoretical framework as a piece of my dissertation like a wood splint in traditional Cherokee woven basket. The splints of CRT, TribalCrit, storytelling/counter-storytelling, visual and public sociology make up this framework. Scholars, like Brayboy, Castagno, Crenshaw, Du Bois, exemplify the weaving of this basket with their utilization and analysis of theories. Figure 3 (Appendix) illustrates this weaving of theoretical splints. The splints alone do not amount to much but woven together, with applicable literature, methodology, and a forthcoming documentary, I can construct a beautiful and strong basket. Altogether the tenets of CRT, TribalCrit, public and visual sociology are not shy in their command to “do something”, make change through our work. Something my ancestors would be proud of and something that can inspire future generations to utilize the power of sport to give back to their communities.
CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

‘Research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012, p. 1)

I have a powerful feeling of understanding when reading the words of Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai-Smith and thinking back to my upbringing on the Cherokee Reservation. Trust is of paramount concern to me as a Native American woman and qualitative researcher. I find it ironic (and amusing) that I am pursing work in a field with a methodology that stemmed from the “concern to understand the exotic, often dark-skinned ‘other’” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 44). Some of the earliest examples of qualitative research were the narrative accounts of Native Americans under early Spanish colonial rule in Latin American in the 16th century (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Early on, there were many ethnographic accounts of ‘others’ by outsiders, including James Mooney’s extensive fieldwork with my own tribe of the Eastern Band of Cherokee (Mooney, 1890).

Qualitative research has evolved substantially since its inception. Ethnography has shifted from the perspective of the conqueror, to minority populations taking control over the study of their own people (Vidich & Lyman, 1994). With the development of indigenous methods and indigenous scholars, “it is no longer possible for the human disciplines to research the native, the indigenous other, in a spirit of value-free inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 15). Now, rather than just observe history, the qualitative researcher plays an active part in it.
Comparing Qualitative & Quantitative Research

Historically, the social sciences and natural sciences have disagreed over appropriate ways to conduct meaningful research (Christians & Carey, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Social science has been critiqued as the “soft” discipline while natural sciences have been applauded for being more rigorous, objective, and generalizable (Christians & Carey, 1989; Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). Traditional quantitative research is grounded in measuring and quantifying values, performing experiments and establishing laws to guide future researchers (Christians & Carey, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Quantitative researchers operate under the assumption that reality is objective and there is one truth and one reality to be exposed (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019).

Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, are interested in understanding individuals’ feelings, emotions, behaviors and experiences (Christians & Carey, 1989; Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007). Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, “attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 21). Ontologically, qualitative researchers believe there is not one single reality but multiple realities that are shaped by social interactions and individual experiences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). For qualitative researchers, there is not one objective truth to be uncovered and realities are not static states. Reality is ever evolving through our experiences with others (Phillips, 1988). Instead of aiming to understand one’s reality, we are more interested in how
people justify their reality and determine their truth. How researchers know what they know, or their epistemology, is another underlying influence in the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative researchers believe that meaning is co-created and “seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10).

Stake (2010) described three main differences between quantitative and qualitative research. The first being that the purpose for qualitative research is about understanding rather explaining (Stake, 2010). The goal of quantitative researchers is to use statistical data to explain how x causes y. Conversely, qualitative researchers aim to understand the relationship between x and y, and use “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 17). In qualitative researcher, “meanings rather than frequencies assume paramount significance” (Maanen, Manning, & Miller, 1986, p. 5). Kaplan and Maxwell (1994) argued that understanding a phenomenon and its particular context is largely lost when data are quantified. Unlike quantitative research that uses set experiments to test a hypothesis, qualitative research produces findings from real-world settings where the “phenomenon of interest unfold naturally” (Patton, 2001, p. 39). Ultimately, understanding allows us as researchers to have a fuller picture of a given phenomenon.

Secondly, the role of the qualitative researcher is personal rather than the more detached role of the quantitative researcher (Stake, 2010). Patton (2001) supports this involvement of the researcher by maintaining that the real world is subject to change and the researcher should be
present to record these changes. Lastly, there is a distinction between knowledge discovered by quantitative methods and knowledge constructed with qualitative methods (Stake, 2010).

Similarly, Christians and Carey (1989) outlined four main criteria and unique features of qualitative research that differentiate it from quantitative methods. The idea of naturalistic observation involves getting inside the lived experience without disrupting the natural social process (Christians & Carey, 1989). Contextualization is the second criteria and refers to the building of perspective that the research must build for the audience. Maximized comparisons are the third criteria and entails selecting comparison groups as a way to demonstrate distinct interpretations. The fourth criteria, sensitized concepts, refers to formulating categories that have meaning to individuals but are also appropriate to explain the greater domain of social experience (Christians & Carey, 1989).

There are two misconceptions that have traditionally been tied to qualitative research. The first misconception is that qualitative studies are opposed to statistics or anything quantitative (Christians & Carey, 1989). While not necessarily aligned with the norms of statistics, qualitative research does not discount the power of counting (Christians & Carey, 1989). The second misconception is the belief that qualitative research is synonymous with historical research. Qualitative researchers are mindful of the past but also interested in explaining contemporary phenomena (Christians & Carey, 1989). In their latest volume on qualitative research, Denzin & Lincoln (2018) point out that the changing nature of qualitative research, including the blending between qualitative and quantitative, where statistics are being utilized and alternative discourses explored.
Ontology & Epistemology

Before moving on I would like to revisit the theoretical assumptions that underlie the qualitative methodology. Denzin & Lincoln (2018) outlined the interconnected process of qualitative research and explained that the researcher, “approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology), which are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways” (p. 54). Ontology is what we believe to be the nature of reality, while epistemology is the relationship between the researcher and the known (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). I like the explanation of ontology as what we know and epistemology as how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998).

Unlike most quantitative work, a key aspect of qualitative research is the belief in multiple realities. Quantitative research seeks to define cause and effect relationships of reality (Ahmed, 2008). Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, accept that reality is not a singular truth but individually constructed and there is value in understanding how people come to accept their realities (Ahmed, 2008). Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, “attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 21). Qualitative researchers are not removed from the data they collect but often active participants in the entire research process. This leads to the idea of the researcher as an instrument, a research tool important to the entire research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Unlike quantitative researchers who aim for separation between themselves and their subjects, qualitative researchers recognize the impact they can have as an advocate and activist by simply engaging with their participants and the subject matter. Quantitative researchers aim to be objective and impartial observer, while qualitative researchers embrace
their subjectivity and recognize the bias their perspective might bring. Based on the ontology and epistemology of qualitative methodology, it is impossible for the researcher to be an objective and impartial observer. However, we must be mindful of our power as an instrument and the effect we may have on a project.

Within an ontological viewpoint is the epistemological belief (Crotty, 1998). Epistemology is concern with the relationship between the researcher and knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Crotty (1998) described epistemology as a way of understanding and explaining “how we know what we know” (p. 8). Qualitative researchers seek to uncover the “why” behind ideas or phenomenon. Often these beliefs and feelings are not explicitly stated, assumed, or taken for granted when presenting research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Even if not explicitly spelled out, understanding your own ontological and epistemological beliefs are necessary before fully designing your research methods (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). While this will not guarantee good results, it will help ensure you end up appropriately answer the questions that guided the development of the project (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019)

**Research Paradigms**

We can trace a lot of qualitative history through paradigms, or the fundamental models or frames that we use when we design and conduct qualitative research (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Paradigms are thought to be more abstract and as Lindlof & Taylor (2019) describe, they exist, “above and behind particular theories and methodologies” (p. 7). Paradigms are also thought to be normative, in that they guide the researcher with basic assumptions on how to conduct research based on the central tenets of the paradigm (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). While not exhaustive, Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) have outlined the core tenets of five major
paradigms: positivism, postpositivism, critical theory, constructionism, poststructuralism, and participatory-postmodern. Early on, qualitative researchers longed to legitimatize their work and thought they would need to adopt positivism as a framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Positivists believe that there is one reality and that we can discover an objective truth through scientific measures (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). This process often involves experiments, surveys, and examining cause and effect (Crotty, 1998).

The postpositivist paradigm was born out of the critiques of positivism. Postpositivist, “are people who value a scientific approach to explaining social phenomena, but who also accept many of the criticisms of the different positivisms, and have developed positions that transcend them” (Corman, 2005, p. 21). Postpositivists do not necessarily believe there is an absolute truth to be discovered but find value in falsifying examples and reduction of bias (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Constructivism or interpretivism goes a step further and is grounded in the idea that multiple realities exist and that we construct knowledge through our lived experiences and interactions with others (Lincoln, Lyndham, & Guba, 2011). While a seemingly perfect fit for qualitative methods, many in the 1980s questioned the standards and level of rigor of interpretivists’ work. However, during the 1990s the development of more sophisticated rationale garnered respect for the work of qualitative researchers (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019).

The critical paradigm generally encourages, “ethically and politically sensitive study of the relationships between power, knowledge, and discourse that are produced in situations of historical and cultural struggle” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019, p. 14). Critical researchers believe the work they do and the knowledge they produce can create change, eliminate oppression, and empower (Merriam, 1991). Finally, the participatory or postmodern paradigm pushes researchers
to work with their participants and/or subject to co-create reality (Lincoln, Lyndham, & Guba, 2011). In this paradigm, different styles and methods can be utilized to produce different types of data and that data can be represented in alternative forms including film (Eisner, 1997; Lincoln, Lyndham, & Guba, 2011).

**What’s Quality in Qualitative?**

No matter the research design or paradigm, we must be mindful of what we can do to ensure the quality of our work (Mishler, 1990). What qualifies as quality in qualitative research is more nuanced than quantitative measures. Traditionally, the standards for assessing quality in research were through quantitative principles of reliability and validity (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Reliability being the consistency of our results and validity being our confidence in our methods to accurately document what we claim to be documenting. For qualitative researchers, reliability is less of a concern because of the overarching belief in multiple realities and multiple truths (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Validity is more accepted in qualitative methods but because of the specificity of qualitative studies it may also be irrelevant and replaced with dependability, where the effect of different environments is considered (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007).

There are also a variety of opinions on what standards should be used for measuring quality in qualitative research. Values are ever-changing and situated within local contexts and current conversations and criteria have been developed for specific paradigms, theories, and methods (Tracy, 2010). Jackson, Drummond & Camara (2007) argue that good research design should test, “trustworthiness via credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” (p. 26). To do this one can use member-checking, stepwise replication, and audit trails with the goal of ensuring the participants’ input is not manipulated by the researcher’s own belief system.
(Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007). We can use member-checking to validate findings. To do this we take transcripts, notes, themes and other work back to participants to determine whether they feel it is an accurate representation (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007). To establish credibility, we can utilize peer briefing and external auditors to assess the resonance of the findings to others not connected with the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Jackson, Drummond & Camara argue that this is how we can achieve objectivity, ethical diligence, and rigor (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007).

In her aim to provide an educational research tool, garner respect and unify qualitative researchers, Tracy (2010) developed eight criteria by which qualitative researchers could assess quality. The first and perhaps most important step in this criterion is ensuring you have a worthy topic, or a topic that is relevant, timely, significant, interesting or evocative (Tracy, 2010). Then study must be thorough and complex, utilize a variety of theoretical constructs, data sources, samples, and contexts to achieve rich rigor (Tracy, 2010). The data collection process and analysis procedures must also be detailed to attain rich rigor (Tracy, 2010). The third criterion is sincerity, which is characterized by “self-reflexivity about subjective values, biases, and inclinations of the researcher(s)” and “transparency about the methods and challenges” (Tracy, 2010, p. 840). Tracy (2010) links sincerity to the ideas of authenticity and genuineness without implying there is one single truth.

In reference to the trustworthiness and plausibility of research findings, the fourth standard is credibility. Credibility can be achieved through thick description, crystallization and triangulation, multivocality, and member reflections (Tracy, 2010). It is the responsibility of the researcher to account for the complex specificity and circumstantiality of their data by using
thick description (Geertz, 1973). The fifth criterion is concerned with influencing, affecting, or moving the audience. This can be done with the aesthetic, naturalistic generalizations and transferable findings (Tracy, 2010). The sixth criterion is significant contribution and asks the question of whether the knowledge you are generating is useful (Tracy, 2010). The seventh criterion is concerned with the ethical standards and considers procedural ethics, situational and culturally specific ethics, relational ethics, and existing ethics (Tracy, 2010). Last, but certainly not least, is the goal of achieving meaningful coherence with our work. This means that the study achieves what it set out to achieve, uses methods and procedures that fit the goals, and interconnects literature, research questions, findings and interpretations with each other (Tracy, 2010). While there’s no consensus on what exactly makes superior qualitative research, standards like Tracy’s help provide a framework which the researcher can learn, grow and contribute to the greater body of knowledge.

**Why Qualitative?**

Despite the criticism qualitative research has historically faced, it is the best fit for this work. There are several reasons why using a qualitative approach is appropriate in reaching the goals of this dissertation. With qualitative methods, there is an emphasis on exploring and describing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and I intend to explore and share the perspectives of Native American athletes regarding giving back and their connection to their community. I reject the notion of positivism in that I do not look to provide a single, defining truth about Native American athletes. I do aim to understand an aspect of their lives and their communities that carries great significance. Qualitative research also values storytelling, a cultural tradition and known way of sharing knowledge in Native American communities.
(Bruchac, 2003; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012). Storytelling from marginalized groups amplifies the voices of the participants and allow those from outside the community to hear their story (Riessman, 2008).

This study does not aim to identify all Native American athletes that give back to their community or numerically measure the impact on their community. While numbers and statistics from quantitative research have helped uncover the disparities Native Americans face, they do little to paint a nuanced picture of what it is like to be a Native American athlete. I do not aim to completely understand these athletes because their realities are ever-evolving and emerging, however, by using documentary film with qualitative research I hope to create a crystallized story that promotes a deeper understanding. Crystallization utilizes multiple sources, researchers, and lenses to expose a more complex, in-depth, understanding of our subjects (Ellingson, 2008; Tracy, 2010). Again, the goal is not to provide a “more valid singular truth, but to open up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue” (Tracy, 2010, p. 844). I also do not aspire to predict or find out what causes Native American athletes to give back (Van Manen, 1990). I believe it is more important and valuable to understand how giving back becomes meaningful in their lives.

Historically, research has been done on indigenous people, not with them. It is not just my desire to involve my participants in this work, it is crucial. Supported by a qualitative approach, their input and participation will help me uncover the meanings they create and share. I aim, “to make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3) in a way that eliminates stereotypes and assumptions previously held. Including the elimination of taken for granted ideas about what it means to Native American athletes to give back to their community.
Neapolitan philosopher Giabattista Vico believed that qualitative research provides, “the explanation of how people create what is distinctively human—civilizations and cultures” (Christians & Carey, 1989, p. 355). Native American culture has long been exploited, but I would argue not thoroughly explained or understood on an individual basis. I do not aim to be generalizable, but to provide insights into a specific phenomenon in the Native American community. It is my goal to, “examine the actual social process wherein significant symbolic forms are created, apprehended, and used” (Carey, 1989, p. 30). Qualitative researchers are not interested necessarily in the labels created but the complex meaning behind the labels (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Finally, I very much hope for this work to be empowering and qualitative research, when done through a critical lens, may produce such findings and help create positive change (Hays & Singh, 2012; Willis, 2007).

Methods

For this dissertation, I chose a research method to effectively and adequately fulfil the purpose of this study. Appropriate methods ensure the researcher is exploring what she means to understand. Due to the nature of my population and my desire to understand how they make meaning, a qualitative approach was necessary. Instead of a more traditional method, I believe blending qualitative traditions of ethnography and narrative inquiry to produce a documentary film will be the best way to share the stories and information found in this study.

There is support, especially more recently, of alternative forms of qualitative methods for gathering and sharing data, such as poetry and film (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lindlof & Taylor, 2019; Roulston, 2010). Due to my heritage of storytelling, experience in documentary film production, and pursuit of impactful research, producing a short documentary film will be the
best way to share my findings, inspire discussion, and provoke social change. Native American athletes are a part of a highly-marginalized population in the United States, arguably the most underrepresented and misunderstood. Native and Indigenous peoples have been subjects of research for hundreds of years and often cast into stereotypical roles as mascots and movie villains (King, 2005). Using a documentary film not only provides a voice to these people but an actual image that can be illustrative and perhaps more easily comprehended. In the latest edition of their handbook on qualitative methods, Denzin & Lincoln explain, “we no longer just write culture. We perform culture” (2018, p. 15). A documentary film will help me capture that performance and share it in a way that has a greater reach and impact. In the following sections I will go into greater detail about documentary-as-research and how it can be used to accomplish rigorous academic research.

**Documentary-as-Research**

Documentary-as-research does not have one simple, clean line of categorization. Even the term documentary causes debate about exactly what documentary is, with most people classifying it by what it is not – a cinematic movie (Aufderheide, 2007). If you bring up documentary research in an academic setting many will think you are referring to the study of documents. Traditionally, documentary research is a way of studying a particular phenomenon through the analysis of documents (Scott, 1990). As film and documentary scholar Bill Nichols (2001) describes, “documentaries are not documents in the strict sense of the word, but they are based on the document-like quality of elements within them” (p. 38). There have been decades-long debates within cultural anthropology as to what constitutes ethnographic film versus documentary film. There is even debate within the field of film and media studies over how to
define documentary, what aesthetics documentaries should use, and the level of cognition – or truth claiming the documentary makes (Corner, 2008).

Considering documentary film as research requires a broad review of how documentary has intersected with anthropology, including cultural and visual anthropology, and ethnographic film. In what follows I will give an overarching view of some of the more influential aspects from this fragmented line of research. Through this will we can see how documentary film, when done in a certain manner, can achieve rigorous research.

**Research & Film**

With the evolution of qualitative research and advancing technological innovations researchers have implanted new techniques for presenting research beyond written text. For over a century visual media such as photo and video have been used by anthropologists (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Sociologists have observed public behavior, recorded spoken narratives, and performed ethnographic studies of social interaction (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). While not technically “traditional”, these formats build on the history of tables, charts, diagrams, and photography being used to enhance scholarly publication (Elliott, 2017; Grbich, 2013). These methods often broaden the visibility and accessibility of scholarly research to new audiences (Clark, 2008). There is no consensus on where documentary belongs within academic disciplines. It has been used ethnographically in anthropology, linked to the visual and cultural anthropologies as well as utilized in other disciplines for data collection and distribution. Next I will review a brief history of documentary film that includes ethnographic film and visual anthropology and then I will look at documentaries in relation to sport and Native American communities.
A brief history of documentary film. The origins of documentary film can be traced back to the late 19th century as a tool of traditional “hard” scientists – including French astronomer Pierre Jules Cesar Jansen, who wanted to record Venus passing across the sun in 1874 (Barnouw, 1993). Eadweard Muybridge was obsessed with using cameras to record and study animal motions, beginning with a horse’s gait. Muybridge, as described in Erik Barnouw’s seminal documentary history, “had foreshadowed a crucial aspect of the documentary film: its ability to open our eyes to worlds available to us, but for one reason or another, not perceived” (1993, p. 3). Conversely, Banks (2007) describes the first anthropological film as a four-minute sequence shot by marine biologist Alfred C. Haddon in the Torres Strait Island. This film sequence captured a dance associated with a previously abandoned initiation cult and was filmed only three years after the first movable picture was developed (Banks, 2007). In addition to simply documenting, films at these times were produced for pedagogic means, especially in anthropology (Banks, 2007; Ruby, 2006). A lot of films were also made by or in association with ethnographic museums (Banks, 2007).

In the early 20th century, during the first high point for documentary film, countries who led in film production were those with colonial empires. Documentaries included, “coverage of ‘natives’ generally showed them to be charming, quaint, sometimes mysterious; generally loyal, grateful for the protection and guidance of Europeans” (Barnouw, 1993, p. 23). Natives were encouraged to perform their rituals and ceremonies for the camera. Most films on natives were crafted to reassure confidence in the colonial system to the Europeans. One that pushed those feelings of comfort was the 1903 film Native Women Coaling a Ship and Scrambling for Money
in the West Indies, the piece “presented a picture of degradation such as seldom reached the screen” (Barnouw, 1993, p. 23).

The next major turn in documentary film occurred when Robert Flaherty released *Nanook of the North* in 1922 (Banks, 2007). Flaherty had followed in his father’s footsteps to become a prospector, helping entrepreneurs locate precious resources in uncharted domain. At the suggestion of his boss he included a camera for filming in his trips (Barnouw, 1993). During two expeditions in 1914 and 1915 he shot hours of footage that captured the lives of Eskimos and “the full collaboration of Eskimos had already become the key to his method” (Barnouw, 1993, p. 36). Unlike previous projects, he decided to focus on a main character, Nanook, a celebrated hunter of the Itivimuit tribe of Eskimos (Barnouw, 1993). Although not necessarily done for scholarly reasons, Flaherty helped launch the movement to capture rapidly vanishing cultures, dubbed “salvage ethnography” (de Brigard, 1974). This was also the first time a documentary of this type was driven by “narrative, suspense, tension and resolution - qualities of the cinema or of theatre, not of anthropology or science.” (Banks, 2007, p. 10). It must also be noted while Flaherty is highly regarded in documentary film, he was also critiqued for his manipulation of the Eskimos to recreate traditions that were no longer used. Like many other filmmakers, Flaherty represents, but does not reflect reality (Nichols, 1991).

John Grierson, a Scotsman, aimed to use film to dramatize everyday problems in society so citizens could better understand their world. While having a lifelong relationship with Flaherty, and proclaiming him as the father of documentary, he lamented his passion for the remote and primitive. Grierson aimed to “bring the citizen’s eye in from the ends of the earth to the story, his own story, of what was happening under his nose” (Barnouw, 1993, p. 85). The
impact of the Griersonian tradition lived long past the 1930s and 1940s and presented a somewhat contradictory view that he described as the “creative treatment of actuality” (Grierson, 1946, p. 13).

Barnouw explains that by the middle of the 20th century, following World War II, there was a boom in what he calls “film reporting” by anthropologists, a lot of them influenced by their own participation in the war. One of the most influential would be Jean Rouch, a Frenchman who served the military in the French colony of Niger. He became so fascinated by life in Africa that he began chronicling it in several films (Barnouw, 1993). Rouch would go on to produce over one hundred completed films and nearly as many written publications (Henley, 2009). Rouch would be studied, written about and proclaimed as the best ethnographic filmmaker by many (Banks, 2007). He wrote of being inspired by film heroes, including Robert Flaherty, and devoted attention to developing relationships with his subjects and seeking their participation and feedback. Rouch described this as “shared anthropology” wherein:

The observer is finally coming down from his ivory tower; his camera, tape recorded, and his project have led him – by the way of a strange initiation path – to the very heart of knowledge and, for the first time, his work is not being judged by a thesis committee but by the very people he came to observe (1973, p. 96)

During the boom in filmmaking, because of practical difficulties and lack of convincing intellectual justification, there was a big increase in amateurs making films rather than trained anthropologists (Banks, 2007). In the 1930’s Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson’s work in Bali was an exception to this trend (Banks, 2007). Mead approached the work with an intellectual basis grounded in gestalt psychology and the idea that “elements of ‘culture’ were
organized into a whole that could be compared to a ‘personality’, and that through studies of child socialization in particular one could see the transmission and acquisition of this cultural personality” (Banks, 2007, p. 11). She had previously done this work through traditional ethnography method of participant-observation. This work is now referenced in nearly any account of the history of visual anthropology or visual sociology (Banks, 2007). Mead (1973) wrote about the struggle of acceptance of visual methods, “I venture to say that more words have been used, spoken and written, disputing the value of, refusing funds for, and rejecting these projects than ever went into the efforts themselves” (p. 4).

In the 1960s anthropologists continued to use photography in their work, but mainly for illustrative purposes in lectures and publications, “continuing the practice of presenting images of those under study to those who would never visit them” (Banks, 2007, p. 12). With the sixties came technological advances that led to major progress with the use of film in research. Rouch was innovative with his combined use of synchronous-sound filming with hand-held camera shooting (Guindi, 2014). David MacDougall (1998) was a pioneer of “observational cinema,” a term for the cluster of styles, including direct and verité, developed along with the invention of portable synchronous sound in the early 1960s. He says that the major shifts that occurred during this time were, “expressions of an attempt to resituate the author in relation to the audience” (1998, p. 86). He further describes, “the aim was to create documentary cinema embodying the perspectives of actual observers” (1998, p. 86).

During this time collaboration between researchers and filmmakers also began to occur, although not without tension between scientific documentation and creative cinema disciplines (Banks, 2007). However, there are several examples of this work bringing out the strengths of
both traditions, including Richard Hawkin’s *Imbalu: Ritual of Gisa Manhood*. The film used a compelling narrative along with narration by one of the participants and captivating camerawork to express detailed analytical insight (Banks, 2007).

In the 1970s, MacDougall, who operated the camera on *Imbalu* went on, along with several others, to show the power of film to explore areas of social investigation that anthropology and sociology had previously ignored (Banks, 2007). Banks (2007) explains the power of these types of films:

> No amount of data on the frequency of women's fertility ceremonies in Maasai society (Kenya), or the ages of the participants, or the number of head of cattle owned by Maasi men, can get to the core of Maasai gender relations in the way that Melissa Llewelyn-Davies's film *The Woman's Olamal* does. (p. 13).

By the beginning of the 21st century with the advent of digital technology, there were more visual productions by all categories of social science. The ability for marginalized groups to access video technologies themselves has challenged the status of ethnographic film as an initiative that “we” do to “them” (Banks, 2007). The popularity of documentary film has led to several issue-based topics and has highlighted the need for documentary as evidence (Nichols, 2008). For example, in the documentary, *An Injury to One* about the history of Butte, Montana as a mining town and the murder of the Industrial Workers of the World organizer Frank Little, showcases the importance of multimedia for a more complete perspective. The director, Travis Wilkerson, shares the story of a large flock of geese landing on a toxic lake in an open pit mine. After 342 geese die, one of the oil mine representatives assured the community members that the water was actually safe and the geese died ‘because of something they ate’ (Nichols, 2008). As
Nichols describes, “the facts do not, as Wilkerson’s sardonic tone suggests, speak for themselves; they must be seen and heard, and thence interpreted, an act that fissures into multiple directions depending on the purposes of the interpreter” (Nichols, 2008, p. 30). Other documentary films of the 21st century, such as Morgan Spurlock’s *Supersize Me* (2004), Michael Moore’s *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), followed by *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) changed public perceptions of what a documentary film could be (Banks, 2007).

**Documentary & Sport**

Documentaries that focus on the world of sports encompass an entire genre. Classics include George Butler’s *Pumping Iron*, Leon Gast’s *When We Were Kings*, Steve James’s *Hoop Dreams* and more recently Ezra Edelman’s *O.J.: Made in America*. McDonald (2007) argued that sports documentaries have been largely ignored by documentary studies. He believed this was because most sports documentaries do not fit with Bill Nichols’ (1991) “discourse of sobriety”. Nichols argued that documentary film should contribute to society with topics such as science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, and warfare. While not necessarily heralded by film studies, popular media has increasingly supported sports documentary content such as those produced by HBO and ESPN’s, 30 for 30, a film series on a variety of events in sport history (Vogan, 2005).

In the realm of academia, Australian Jenny McMahon, produced a docudrama of her six-month journey to re-immersse herself into the elite swimming culture. She aimed to identify whether the body practices she felt 16 years before were still present as a 40-year-old (McMahon, 2017). McMahon provided a first-hand athlete perspective of elite swimming culture and aimed to see if the problematic ways of approaching the swimmer body for competitive
McMahon invites the audience to draw their own after watching her 25-minute film (McMahon, 2017). McMahon cites Phoenix and Rich (2016) and their call for sport and exercise researchers to consider expanding their approaches to collecting and presenting qualitative research. Phoenix and Rich (2016) cite several reasons why this is beneficial, perhaps the most worthwhile for McMahon’s being the ability for participants to share more meaningfully about their experiences with their body.

Both the Journal of Sport and Social Issues (2017) and the Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health (2010) journal have had special issues that showcase documentary film. The special issue of the Journal of Sport and Social Issues included articles analyzing ESPN’s basketball documentary series as well as commentary on documentaries about boxer Mike Tyson and the Tour de France cycling competition. The special edition of the Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise, and Health journal compiled qualitative research projects that used a variety of visual methods in order to ‘see the way’ of physical culture (Phoenix, 2010, p. 94). Phoenix (2010) discussed the different uses for visual data, including working with participants to produce their own visual data. In sport this this can mean that participants use their bodies ‘show’ rather than just ‘tell’ about their experiences (Riessman, 2008). These journal editions exemplify the growing popularity of sports documentaries in theory and practice. Sports documentaries seem to be most successful when they capture the power of sport to transcend the playing field. Through my work with Native American athletes I hope to showcase this power of sport to connect with community on a deeper level.
Documentary & Native Americans

As previously mentioned, Native American and Indigenous peoples have been early and often subjects of ethnographic film and visual methods research. As early as 1901 anthropologist Baldwin Spencer filmed Aboriginal dance in Australia (Banks, 2007). Banks (2007) categorized Sol Worth and Adair’s ‘Through Navajo eyes’ project of the late 1960s as one of the landmarks in visual research. The researchers put cameras in the hands of the Navajo people, who had little to no experience with film, to see if they would make films that reflected the way they viewed the world (Banks, 2007). While ethnographic film has been regarded by many as a tool of colonialism, there is potential for film to be a source of strength and cultural renewal (de Brigard, 1974; Barnouw, 1993).

Native Americans have taken advantage of visual tools such as documentary filmmaking to rewrite their own narratives. In 1992, Steven Leuthold focused his dissertation on Native American documentary, more specifically those made by Native Americans themselves. Leuthold (1992) believed that Native American aesthetic practices were another form of expressing collective identity. Leuthold (1992) found that the Native American community preferred the term visionary when describing nature and land, in opposition to heavily romanticized views of Native Americans by outsiders. Overall Leuthold (1992) discovered, No single set of formal characteristics defines Native media, but there is an Indian sensibility; it includes a concern for craftsmanship seen in other forms of native expression, a desire to integrate human and natural activity, a personal rather than abstract approach to issues, a heightened awareness of the impact of the past upon the
present, and a readiness to adopt new technologies that aid in the economic and cultural self-determination of native people. (p. 290)

This work is very personal to me as a Native American woman. Creating a documentary film is about much more than aesthetics or even a certain story. It is about using the emotion of documentary film to make an audience feel deeply in a way they would not get from simply reading. This is the best way to convey the importance of my topic and inspire change and progress to be made for our future generations.

**Rigor in Documentary-as-Research**

While on the topic of craftsmanship and before concluding this section I want to address the concept of rigor. The preceding examples were chosen not only for their high regard, but also because they exemplify rigorous research. Rigor is not something that can be simply declared, it must be earned (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Rather than aim for precision like our quantitative neighbors, qualitative researchers should aspire to reach a “rich complexity of abundance” (Tracy, 2010, p. 841). To achieve this the tool or instrument to collect data must be as complex as our subjects and phenomena because, “it takes a complicated sensing device to register a complicated set of events” (Weick, 2007, p. 16). However, it is not simply our instruments, but the entire process from inception through data collection that must be carefully considered and executed to attain rigor (Morse, 2018; Tracy, 2010).

While having several theories and large amounts of data prepares the researcher for success, those alone does not guarantee rigor (Tracy, 2010). Rigor is less about producing a single research project and more about a thorough way of conducting research for current and future endeavors (Tracy, 2010). The amount of time, energy, research and careful consideration
that goes into documentary film, when done appropriately, allows filmmakers to reach this level of rigor. I am dedicated and committed to the work it takes to produce this film as a rigorous research project.

Throughout the evolution of documentary film, issues that apply to qualitative research such as participant involvement and assumptions about truth and reality, are present. In the next section I will discuss how I will utilize these two styles of research to achieve the goals of my dissertation with a special consideration of the notion of truth.

**Utilization of Qualitative Approach & Documentary-as-Research**

Perhaps the most relevant work to the aims of this project is Michael Wayne’s (2008) article that explores the relationship between critical, creative and research aspects of documentary. Wayne (2008) provides examples of how documentaries use statistics and other quantitative characteristics but ultimately declares, “the contribution of documentary film itself towards knowledge production, tends to be overwhelmingly qualitative” (p. 83). He elaborates with the following example:

The statistic-heavy introduction in *Supersize Me* concludes with the narrator now appearing before the camera for the first time as if to say that while all those statistics have given some sense of the scale of the problem, it will only really become meaningful by grounding it in a particular case study. (p. 83)

Wayne (2008) describes the conflicting nature of documentary because of its hybrid nature, “straddling both conflicting paradigms within the traditional social sciences on the one hand and the aesthetic dimensions of art and entertainment on the other” (p. 82). For example, Wayne (2008) describes the documentary film *Super Size Me* and how it opens with a statistics-
heavy introduction before the narrator presents himself as if to say his personal involvement provides a more meaningful case study. Positivist attitudes may be common in documentary but there is much to be said about the Griersonian tradition that stressed documentary as a “creative treatment” of actuality. Throughout literature there is this persistent tension between science and art of documentary. There is also resistance to documentary as research because of the danger in interpretation. As David MacDougall (1998) describes,

A significant contrast between the written and the visual in anthropology may therefore lie not in their very great ontological differences, not even in their very different ways of constructing meaning, but in their control of meaning. (p. 68)

Knowing the skepticism around documentary allows me to prepare and plan for how I can best convey my meanings to others and minimize conflicting interpretations.

A wide range of scholars across disciplines have advocated for visual methodologies (Azzarito, 2010; Friend & Caruthers, 2016; Penn-Edwards, 2004; Phoenix & Rich, 2016; Rose, 2007; Twine, 2016). For collection purposes, the use of video in research, “enables spontaneous and transitory information to be captured” (Penn-Edwards, 2004, p. 267). Although it’s often assumed, there is an effect upon people when being filmed that must be acknowledged. Azzarito (2010) believes that youth utilizing visual representation to make meaning of their identity can help researchers understand how to address issues of gender, race, and social class in physical activity. Twine (2016) argues that if we are to expect racial literacy we must also cultivate visual literacy. Friend and Caruthers (2016) assert that the utilization of documentary film as research, “creates opportunities to share stories from schools that illuminate diverse perspectives of voice,
which can be used to transform school communities” (p. 33). The potential for change and action is one of the most exciting elements in my pursuit of documentary film.

A potential problem described by ethnographic filmmaker Margaret Mead (1973) was that of the relationships between the filmmaker and the subject being filmed. She states,

Although no film has ever been made without some cooperation from the people whose dance or ceremony was being filmed, it has been possible, in the part for the filmmaker to impose on the film his view of the culture and people that are subject of this film. (p. 7)

Mead (1973) suggests including participants in all stages of the filming, including planning, filming, and editing (p. 8). Like Mead and similar to qualitative methods, several leaders in the use of visual methods and film emphasize the importance of including participants. Jean Rouch invited participants in his film, *Chronicle of Summer*, to see the footage in a screening room and to discuss it, and the discussion was filmed, and became part of the film, as did a discussion between Rouch and Morin on their deductions from the film experience (Barnouw, 1993). As Rouch demonstrated, documentaries can be used to bridge the gap between communities that may otherwise not have the opportunity to interact (Spence & Navarro, 2011). The involvement of my participants is of the upmost importance. According to Friend and Militello (2015), “Video as a research instrument has the potential to transform research from something we do to subjects to something we do with participants—co-generation of knowledge through inclusion of authentic voices that can be shared with a wide audience” (p. 91). I strive for this authenticity throughout my work with Native American athletes.
Notion of Truth

The notion of truth and reality in documentary film is very complex and worthy of exploring for the purposes of this project and the discussion of qualitative research. As stated earlier, most qualitative research is grounded in the believe of multiple realities and truths. Contrastingly, people tend to associate documentaries with a single truth (Spence & Navarro, 2011). There is an entire style of documentary film that is referred to as “film-truth” (also known as cinema verité). Early on, the use of documentary and ethnographic film was linked very closely to positivism and the belief of one singular truth to be discovered and shared (Banks, 2007). It is easy to see how positivism has impacted the practice of documentary filmmaking, especially in regards to the quest for objectivity. Spence & Navarro (2011) argue that the issue is, “not so much ‘Is it true or untrue?’ but rather, ‘How is actuality treated in order to sanction the documentary’s claims to be telling the truth?’” (p. 2). The negotiation between the filmmaker and reality will likely answer this question.

Film scholar’s Stella Bruzzi (2000) and Bill Nichols (2001) also present somewhat conflicting views on this notion of truth in documentary. Nichols (2001) describes documentary as “tangible representation to aspects of the world we already inhabit and share” (p. 1). Bruzzi (2000) sees documentary more as a performative act, arguing that filmmakers don’t have the intent of representing absolute truth and the audience doesn’t expect it. Bruzzi criticizes Nichols’ documentary modes of representation for being reducing and too rigid. She goes on to say, “it seems necessary to remind writers on documentary that reality does exist and that it can be represented without such a representation either invalidating or having to be synonymous with the reality that preceded it” (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 3). And further, “a documentary is a negotiation
between reality on the one hand and image, interpretation and bias on the other” (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 4).

Bruzzi (2000) suggests simply accepting that a documentary can never be the real world and that the interaction between the camera and the subject are what make a documentary what it is. While an image can be extremely objective, it’s interpretation can be entirely subjective (Grady, 2004). Furthermore, documentary filmmaking demands engagement and the ‘creative treatment’ involves a subjective engagement with the film captured and edited (Grierson, 1946; Wayne, 2008). There is an underlying sense of compensation in the qualitative field, one that tries to conform qualitative work to quantitative traditions. By focusing on all the humanizing aspects of qualitative inquiry, I respectfully decline any requests to make this work convey to quantitative standards. Documentaries do not, and should not, pursue absolute truth and this documentary film will feature different, varying stories of a truth as established by Native American athletes. I recognize that truth and reality is ever-evolving and this documentary film explores how Native athletes understand their reality.

**The Dance of Interacting Parts**

Throughout my life, the importance of storytelling has been paramount. It is grounded in my culture and my upbringing on the Cherokee Indian Reservation. I was raised by stories. Stories were the way my history and culture was passed down to me, not through physical family heirlooms. As a researcher, storytelling is essential to sharing results. Without effective communication even the best data can be worthless. When I discovered documentary film, I was enthralled with the idea of showcasing real stories in a way that spoke to so many people. I will never forget when I first watched the 2011 documentary, “Off the Rez,” the story of Umatilla
basketball all-star Shoni Schimmel and her struggle to balance the college recruitment process with her ties to traditional Native American upbringing. Finally, there was a way to portray this struggle so many Native American athletes, including myself, face. At the same time, I was beginning work at an advertising agency in a small entertainment department that was managing the boom of branded content. Much of the work we did was focused on documentary storytelling, using powerful stories and brand ambassadors to communicate with the masses. I thought back to my upbringing and how I would listen to my great-grandmother tell stories of our ancestors and her experiences at boarding school. It clicked for me that the power of storytelling for individuals and communities. With my access to the newest technology, I witnessed repeatedly how powerful telling a story through video could be. With this dissertation, my practical experience, along with the rigor of qualitative research and film, is used to create a comprehensive story about the importance of giving back and community for Native American athletes. Utilizing qualitative methodology along with documentary best accomplishes my goals of expanding the understanding of Native American athletes’ connection to their community while also providing the athletes and their community a platform to speak (and show) for themselves.

Scholars and practitioners may be suspicious of the coupling of two very different ideologies, but as Margaret Mead’s teammate in filmmaking Gregory Bateson (1979) once described “the dance of interacting parts” is a necessity to creating meaningful knowledge. I acknowledge the challenges qualitative researchers and documentary filmmakers have faced to prove their legitimacy. By rigorously approaching and executing in all steps from development to delivery, I can overcome these challenges to share my findings in a meaningful way. Mead
(1973) stressed, “These are disappearing types of behavior, we need to preserve them in forms that not only will permit the descendants to repossess their cultural heritage…but that will also give our understanding of human history and human potentialities a reliable, reproducible, reanalyzable corpus” (p. 8-9). Preservation and acknowledgement is exactly what I aim to achieve with documentary-as-research.

Production Process

In a groundbreaking June 2018 study by Reclaiming Native Truth, an overarching finding was that when narratives about Native Americans do exist, they are primarily deficit based and guided by misperceptions, assumptions and stereotypes (Campisteguy, Heilbronner, & Nakamura-Rybak, 2018). A primary motivator in creating a documentary film, rather than a traditional written document, is for the purpose of representation and combating detrimental narratives. This aligns with the purpose of this project and the influences of TribalCrit and public and visual sociology. By creating a documentary, I will be giving my participants a literal voice and image on screen that would be missing in a written document. It is my goal to give Native athletes a platform in which they can express their stories and explain how they make sense of their realities. In what follows I will explain how I plan to utilize documentary-as-research in conjunction with a qualitative framework to create a documentary that achieves the goal of better understanding the meaning of giving back and community to Native American athletes.

Participants & Preparation

With a qualitative methodological approach, the researcher looks at participants in a holistic context and tries to understand them from their own viewpoint and authoritative context for knowledge (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Many documentary filmmakers also strive to craft this
knowledge through their films. I have specifically chosen three main characters who I believe, will best exemplify the phenomenon of giving back in Native communities for the purposes of sharing their knowledge. While qualitative researchers may simply be looking for participants who check certain boxes and who are willing to participate, as a filmmaker I looked for participants who have experience being filmed and had the potential to convey their stories on film.

Over the past decade, I have closely followed Native American athletes for personal and professional reasons. Nearly every Native American athlete I have known has been involved with giving back to their community in some way, but there are several that have stood out for their commitment to “completing the circle”. The selection of Native American athletes is inherently smaller because of the minority aspect of the Native American population. However, the popularity of sport in Native communities does create a wider range of Native American athletes across the country than one might expect.

In the conceptualizing phase of this project I reached out to several Native American athletes I knew to talk briefly about their lives and sporting experiences. Several of these athletes brought up giving back without being asked and demonstrated their commitment to giving back through their actions. Of the three main athletes I focused on for the film, two are relatively younger and in the earlier stages of their career and one who is a veteran of the Native sport landscape. While these athletes will be the focus of the film we will also hear from others in the community who have been impacted by giving back.

Main character vignettes. Caitlyn Ramirez didn’t grow up on a reservation but she was raised in a home where her Seminole and Creek heritage was emphasized, valued, and embraced.
She grew up going to powwows and participating in sports. She found success in basketball and started to focus on the sport exclusively as she got into high school. She struggled with her schoolwork, often maintaining just the minimum GPA to play. Losing her grandmother at 15 only added to her challenges. Basketball became an outlet for her grief. Her senior year in high school she lost her father at 17 and suffered a torn ACL, causing all her offers to play Division I basketball to be rescinded. She attended a junior college, improved her grades and transferred to the University of Troy. Caitlyn helped lead the Trojans to two-straight conference titles.

Upon graduation, she was offered the opportunity to play overseas professionally. While it would be hard to leave the states, she could not pass up the opportunity to play basketball as her career. She realized that playing basketball at a high level gave her a platform to speak to Native youth and inspire them to not only play sports, but also get their education. Even though she was on the other side of the world she wanted to do all she could to help these young people with limited opportunities. She began the letter project, in which should would send handwritten notes and autographed photos to young girls. What she envisioned being a small project grew into over a hundred letters sent. Despite the distance, Caitlyn was able to reach out directly to the fans that needed to hear her words the most.

Damen Bell-Holter also reached the professional leagues after a life of playing basketball. Growing up in Hydaburg, Alaska, a small community of less than 400 people, he played basketball every day. Damen left Alaska to attend prep school in New Hampshire and improve his grades before attending college. After a successful career in Division I college basketball at Oral Roberts University, Damen played briefly in the NBA and then signed a contract to play professionally overseas. Since college he has been hosting camps to teach the
youth the game of basketball and push them to reach their full potential. After several years playing overseas he decided that his true purpose was serving his community and in April of 2018 signed on with SeaAlaska to serve as their new Director of Community and Youth Programming.

A veteran Native American athlete who has proven his commitment to giving back is Notah Begay III. Notah was born and raised in Albuquerque, New Mexico and overcame poverty to become a championship golfer at Stanford University. He was a part of Stanford’s 1994 Division I Men’s Golf Championship team. He would go on to become the first ever full-blood Native American on the PGA Tour. When his professional career started to slow down and he suffered a back injury he realized the need in the Native community for more health and wellness opportunities. Notah established the Notah Begay III (NB3) Foundation in 2005. The foundation would be dedicated to reducing Native American childhood obesity and type 2 diabetes. The foundation would host its first golf challenge in 2008, a major fundraiser. Over the past five years, NB3 has expanded their programming from golf clinics to cross country and soccer programming. NB3 has been awarded several grants from national institutes, including the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. While Notah continues to grow his team and foundation he also provides commentary analysis on the Golf Channel.

Caitlyn, Damen and Notah are at very different points of their careers. Caitlyn is still pursuing her dream to play in the WNBA and Damen is starting his life post-basketball, while Notah is learning how to best grow his foundation for maximum impact. Sports were a way of life for them growing up and their desire to give back is much more than simple athlete altruism. The connection to community has helped them get to where they are and they fully intend help
others realize their dreams. Instead of selfishly striving for personal success, Caitlyn, Damen and Notah are committed to sharing their journeys in hopes of helping another Native American kid realize they are not limited by anything, especially not their Native heritage.

These three athletes have a variety of upbringings and experiences in sport but have a common tie – their commitment to giving back to their community. Looking at their varying stories and places in their careers will help us understand the different phases of giving back. Beautiful films like I am *Yup’ik* and *Off the Rez* have highlighted the love of sport in Native communities. This documentary film takes it a step further to show how athletes reciprocate the support they receive and further strengthen community bonds. This will unveil a new understanding of the culture, values and traditions of Native American communities.

**Interview Structure**

Conducting interviews for this study was crucial for understanding Native American athletes’ unique perspectives, memories, descriptions of events and to foster trust (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). As Kvale and Brinkman (2009) explained, “the interview serves as the social technique for the public construction of the self” (p. 12). Working with a minority population performing a special activity lends itself to a naturalistic research tool such as in-depth interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I utilized responsive interviewing, where I built a relationship between myself and my conversational partners, rather than trying to build barriers between myself as the researcher and the researched (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Developing a rapport with my participants, before and after interviews, was a priority. Veteran qualitative interviewers Rubin & Rubin (2012) point out the importance of qualitative interviewing when
dealing with experiences that are less concrete. While giving back can be a physical activity, it is often a more fluid and a less evident experience.

The interview guide was constructed in a way that allowed for flexibility between the interviewer and interviewee. This was done to maximize narratives, discussions of interactions and comparison/contrast (Taylor, Haley, Wells, & Pardun, 1994). My question list was compiled in a way that allowed for the athletes to feel comfortable speaking to their experiences. They were not asked to recount specific events but encouraged to tell stories that came to mind. Questions were grouped around thematic areas of sport, family, heritage, and community. Instead of explicitly asking the participants about their motivations for giving back I used other questions that were more indirectly related to giving back and community and follow up to get at the idea of giving back. By asking about highlights, turning points, and having participants compare and contrast different scenarios, I created rich data that built valuable thick description (Geertz, 1973).

**Narrative Structure**

Narrative can be used in a variety of contexts, from research to film and can take on different meanings across mediums. Simply put, narrative film tells a story. Narrative film is often thought of as fictional, however narrative can be integrated into documentary forms, such as Ava DuVernay’s exploration of the history of racial inequality in the United States in her film *13th*. Narrative has also been used in qualitative research as a less traditional way to collect and/or share findings in story form. For example, narrative interviewing “stimulates storytelling and encourages interviewees to describe an event(s) as they saw it, in their own language, using their own terms of reference, and emphasizing actions or participants which they regard as being
significant” (Bates, 2004, p. 16). As Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba (2011) explained, “Post modern representations search out and experiment with narratives that expand the range of understanding, voice, and storied variations in human experience” (p. 125).

Narrative has also been described as a way in which “one person’s voice—the writer’s—speaks for others” (Richardson, 1990, p. 130), however that is not the goal of this work. I do not aim to speak for others, but to empower Native athletes’ voices to share their own stories. Glover (2007) argues that narratives used in a CRT context, “should be evaluated for their ability to challenge a general mindset” (p. 201). Additionally, narrative in the form of storytelling is held up as an important tradition in Native cultures (Cheshire, 2011).

The narrative for this project does not follow a traditional linear timeline, but like qualitative research it is organized into common storylines that weave together the stories of the athletes. I present these storylines not as traditional research themes but as a set of moments that pull in the viewers, piques their curiosity, and ultimately educates them through documentary film. Documentary film allowed me to be more transparent in the presentation of what participants were saying, a concern in both research and documentary filmmaking. While I still edited and chose certain quotes, I preserved their tone of voice and other elements of conversational speech.

I not only show these athletes speaking in on-camera interviews but also “in action”. This action includes their everyday routines as well as their involvement in special events such as sports camps they hold. This creates a more rigorous piece of research because we see the variety of ways that these athletes create their reality. A qualitative focus allowed me to develop deeper
meaning than one might through a more conventional documentary-style focused on reporting
facts.

**Additional Materials**

The documentary film did relied on additional materials to help contextualize the
athletes’ stories. For example, footage from the athletes’ participation in sporting events helped
illustrate their role as an athlete. I also included perspectives from community members and
those who worked with or benefited from the work of these athletes. These perspectives provided
an idea of the athletes’ impact and further shaped the story of their giving back.

An important element to the giving back of Native American athletes in Indian Country is
the spreading of their stories via social media. Social media has allowed tribes and Native
communities in previously secluded pockets across the country to connect and strengthen their
sense of Native American pride. Facebook, Twitter and Instagram provide platforms for these
athletes to directly connect with the world and particularly Native youth whom they look to
inspire. Not only the posts of their accomplishments, but the inside look of what their lives look
like on a day-to-day basis helps eliminate barriers between them and the youth. I integrated these
public facing elements to provide a multidimensional look at what these athletes do on a daily
basis to connect with their community.

I also recognize that music is an emotional editorial device that can enhance or detract
from the documentary film. I chose music that is representative of the vibes and feelings
throughout the film and attempted to not over-enhance or distract from the story.
Cinematographic Style

Rather than strictly commit to one style of filmmaking, I used a mix of verité, or natural film, and more produced pieces with these athletes. While these produced pieces might be stylized, such as a researcher does with interview protocol, I never created a scene that is unnatural to my participants. They were not asked to do any activities that they would not do otherwise. For example, we may film a scenario at a basketball gym that is stylistically flattering even if it is not a complete duplication of an exercise the athlete would do. I would also describe the style as illustrative, clearly portraying participants in a way that is easier to interpret. Creating a balance between cinema verité and more produced elements made for a film that is engaging and effective.

Positionality

I find it crucial to mention my positionality and the inherent biases that come from my perspective. As a Native American woman with experience in sports, I believe I have social identities and experiences related to those of my participants. I was open with my participants about my background, position, and the goals of this project before interviewing and filming. It was important to me to keep my biases in mind throughout the entire research process. There were multiple conversations with the athletes beforehand and I kept copious notes as one way to monitor my biases. I continued journaling throughout the entire process and reflected back on these notes to check myself.

I grew up on the Cherokee Indian Reservation and believe my tribal membership granted me easier access to Native American athletes. I also worked closely with the Native community, specifically Native American athletes, in my professional experience. I believe this allowed me
to build rapport and trust with the participants and maintain an insider perspective culturally. This insider perspective may allow for a “deeper contextual insight into the community” (Innes, 2009, p. 447). Additionally, the position of being an insider in Native American communities improves the strength of the research process (Swisher, 1998). Swisher (1986, 1998) has written extensively about the need for minority researchers to be conducting and writing about the groups to which they belong.

It is important for Native communities to have more Indigenous researchers and it is important for me to utilize my Indigenous standpoint epistemology. I hope to provide a cultural framework and Indigenous lens that Western society has overlooked or misunderstood. However, I acknowledge that my identity as a Native American may have limited my results, particularly in taking for granted shared knowledge between myself and my athletes.
CHAPTER V: MAKING THE FILM

The Process

An in-depth overview of the different steps in the production of the documentary film is presented in this chapter, which includes what is more traditionally known as the data collection process. I am reflexive in my discussion of the management of issues such as subjectivity, voice, and influence. In essence, it is a “story of the making” (Tordzro, 2018, p. 84). It is important that I outline how the data I collected transformed into a documentary film because this process is very significant to understanding the overall project. Traditional aspects of qualitative research were utilized, such as interviewing and transcribing, but the documentary production adds another layer to data analysis. There was an on-going circular process of reviewing data. As a filmmaker, I also had to consider the tone of speech, optics and visual attractiveness of data and how effective it would be in telling the story. Additional production enhancements such as b-roll and music had to be thoughtfully chosen to align with the overall message. Together, all elements contributed to the goal of creating a piece of content that is representative of the data, participants, and overall purpose of this research project. Using this type of project provides an opportunity to challenge the traditional Western research system (Bell, 2017), and “to value the visual as a transformative research methodology and production” (MacDougall, 1998, p. 7).

Theoretical Influence

Theory influenced the production of the documentary film but it is not explicitly addressed as content in the documentary film. The theoretical framework provided a roadmap to guide the production, development, and editing decisions of the documentary film. While I did not address theory in the content of the documentary film, the theoretical influences of TribalCrit
as well as public and visual sociology shaped how the film was crafted. Below I will explain more theoretical connections made in the production of the documentary.

**Co-Production**

Early on, and with the advising of my committee, I decided this would not simply be a documentary film where I shot all of the footage and edited in a vacuum. It was important to me to make the athletes part of the production process. As Burawoy (2005) suggested in describing organic public sociology, it was my goal to create a dialogue between myself and athletes and bring that message to the public. They would not only advise on how they wanted to be filmed but they also contributed media that they felt best represented themselves. Visual sociology suggests this would provide further context to a marginalized community. This was especially important for Damen and Caitlyn as they used social media to facilitate certain aspects of their giving back. In addition to being a presence on social media for fans to follow, they make thoughtful posts directed at those who may be following them for inspiration and to have someone to admire. This illustrated their commitment to giving back and as Notah referenced, this giving back was not simply, “as easy as flipping a switch on.” Giving back is a constant way of life for these athletes, and it was my task to work with them on how to best demonstrate that in a snapshot of documentary film. Due to the nature of documentaries, omitting people, places and moments is inevitable and “a level of trust must develop between storyteller and community based on prior technical training and a desire to properly contextualize the story that is mutually negotiated with the participants” (Bell, 2017, p. 27).

The relationships with my participants were of the utmost importance. I do not like referring to them as “subjects”, because they are really friends with whom I think of as equals,
not specimen for me to research. I was not developing new relationships but transforming existing relationships into more intimate, productive ones. Early on, I spoke to them about this project and its goals to gauge their interest in participating. All three of my athletes eagerly accepted my request to include their stories in this project. Again, showing their commitment to giving back. TribalCrit’s emphasis on the importance of tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification aligns with how I managed the relationships I had with my athletes and our co-production of this documentary film (Brayboy, 2005a).

**Community-based Approach**

I also wanted to ensure the overall Native community was properly involved in the research. An interesting case to note is that of Bird and Ottanelli (2017). During their community-based research remembering the Asaba massacre in Nigeria they explained, “we had to negotiate the complexities of being ‘outsiders’ who nevertheless want and need to work closely with the community” (Bird & Ottanelli, 2017, p. 159). As white Westerners, Bird and Ottanelli (2017) noted the importance to recognize potential problems in re-telling African history. They believed active and consistent engagement with the community aided in moving beyond the outsider status. I never quite felt that I was a pure outsider in the communities to which I travelled to conduct research because I am a Native American woman, but I also did not feel like a true insider. I was a guest of the athletes in the different locations and strived to be a respectful and thoughtful visitor.

A second point of consideration that Bird and Ottanelli (2017) made in their community-based research was clarifying that their work was guided by scholarship, “not by any prescribed community agenda” (p. 160). As Bell (2017) described, “this is not to say that research cannot be
subjectively produced, but it is to say that grounding this approach in relevant theory and methodological rigor rather than simply supporting a cause is necessary” (p. 51). While it may be impossible to segment scholarship and a personal or community agenda, it is important to recognize potential conflicts. In particular, Native scholars can be seen as strictly serving a Native agenda (Pack, 2000). Subjective stories can be shared by community members and “corroborated through quality research that ultimately can serve as an accurate intervention guided by collaborative efforts both by and for community members and researchers” (Bell, 2017, p. 51). Ultimately, there is a fine line that one must walk when working in Native communities, and a mindfulness needed when navigating between insider and outsider.

**Storytelling**

Storytelling can mean a variety of things to different people, with varying degrees of legitimacy assigned to a story. As Brayboy (2005a) described with TribalCrit, I do not think of story as separate from theory, but stories as making up theory. I aimed for this documentary film to tell the story of the scholarly research I conducted on Native American athletes giving back. I had to constantly balance between scholarly researcher and filmmaker while being a part of the Native community in a personal, subjective way. I felt the pressure to get it “right” for the community and make it scholarly enough for acceptance by my committee members.

Many may problematize my categorization of “data.” The positivist idea of data still prevails in much of research and this can also happen to documentary film with the notion of documentaries representing truth. Even beyond the positivists stance, there is expectations of data to be measurable. However, as Tordzro (2017) explains, storytelling,
draws on the value of subjective views and the unquantifiable values of the arts and humanities, of form and style, aesthetics, and value measures belonging within arts, education, practice and hermeneutics. In that sense, data in artistic research poses a serious problem. It is difficult for example to measure and quantify emotions in numeric measurements. (p. 31)

Multiple forms of data can contribute to the research process. Kiyimba, Lestern, & O’Reilly (2019) support this idea of media sources being considered as primary data and naturally occurring.

My personal memories of stories and storytelling, my personal experiences with sport and athletes, and my professional interactions and creations of documentary and athletics all influenced the creation of this documentary film but ultimately, this story was led by the words and actions of the chosen athletes. The access they provided me led to the creation of data and film that would tell their story. As encouraged by TribalCrit, I kept in mind how I could use their stories to create social change (Brayboy, 2005a).

**Timeline**

The conceptualization and discussion of this project began in early 2017. That spring I attended the College Sport and Research Institute (CRSI) annual conference and one of the first sessions was a panel about documentary film as research. Listening to the filmmakers and scholars explain their processes was when it all clicked for me. I had a longing for production work from my previous career and this presented a way to integrate that valuable experience into my research. Additionally, as a Native American, a group that is often marginalized and underrepresented, film could be a more ideal way for me to share my research. I began by
bringing up the idea of a documentary film to my advisor and with his encouragement and the support of the department, I began the journey of turning the idea into reality. Like much of my research, it really started with relationships.

I have been fortunate enough to develop meaningful relationships with dozens of Native athletes, and they served as the inspiration for this project. I then faced the task of selecting which athletes I would include in this project. The athlete that had priority in my mind was Damen Bell-Holter. Damen was perhaps the most publicly active in his giving back and as an Alaskan Native, he provided an even more unique and marginalized story. I also considered the aesthetic attractiveness of Alaska as a location to shoot when including Damen. I began communicating the intentions of my project to Damen in early 2018 and we worked to determine a time that would be best for me to travel to Alaska and shadow him in his giving back activities.

We ultimately decided on a week in early September 2018 when Damen would be participating in several events over a three-day span. Damen and I worked through an agenda and shot list once I arrived in Alaska and we met in person for the first time. I initiated this process, but he led a majority of the time. He had laid out his schedule and itinerary for the next several days and we discussed at what times would be best to film and other times that would not be appropriate. For example, he explained to me that I was not allowed to film at a residence home for at-risk youth. It was important for Damen to lead in how he wanted his story to be told and he was extremely involved in each step of the process. We had a very hectic couple of days filled with multiple activities and I still found myself filming him as he drove me to the airport. We had been filming together for three consecutive days, but I still felt there was more I could have captured.
Another athlete who inspired me and was at the top of my list from the beginning of this project was Caitlyn Ramirez. Caitlyn is a professional basketball player who grew up in Oklahoma. However, she did not grow up on an Indian Reservation and had many people question her Native heritage because of her Hispanic last name. I actually became aware of Caitlyn when my advisor noticed her playing for the women’s basketball team at Troy University against the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. We began a friendship in late 2016, and I proposed to her the idea of participating in the documentary in the summer of 2017. We tried coordinating a time to get together early in 2018 before she went back overseas in August to begin her second season as a professional basketball player. Unfortunately, we were unable to coordinate a time to get together before she left so we decided she could film herself overseas. This was not ideal, but it was still satisfactory because Caitlyn was leading the way in how her story would be told. She took my interview guide and then filmed herself thoughtfully going through my guide, question-by-question. The quality of this footage is not as good as the footage I filmed myself, but it was raw and representative of the place in life Caitlyn was at. At this point, Caitlyn’s footage being thoughtful and sincere was much more important than having high-quality, vibrant footage.

I thought I might limit this project to two athletes when I first began selecting participants. However, I felt there was something missing and thought using another older athlete with a different story could add depth to the project. Both Caitlyn and Damen are basketball players of similar age and getting an athlete of another sport and age would provide additional, and maybe different, insight. Notah Begay III is known as a golfer and even though he has not been active on the PGA Tour in several years, he still has a large presence due to his role as an
analyst on the Golf Channel and because of his nonprofit organization, the Notah Begay III Foundation. He mentioned in his interview how he hasn’t played on the PGA Tour in several years but people constantly ask him how the Tour is going. There was no doubt that his persona as a golfer had persisted in Indian Country despite not being an active player. I had previously worked with Notah and his foundation, and I was confident that he would provide a meaningful contribution to this project. I had never explicitly heard Notah discuss his desire to give back, and I felt this could be a chance to discover (and show) another side of him.

I worked with Notah to find a time to travel to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where he is based to do an interview and film an event with the foundation. Notah has a very busy schedule, so I knew my time with him would be tight and set out to make the most of every minute we had together. We settled upon a weekend in November when the foundation would be celebrating giving back $4 million in the past four years and the foundation’s cross country team would be competing. It was important to me to see the foundation in action and capture it for the story. Notah’s giving back has a much larger scale and I aimed to see the connection between him as an individual and the larger foundation.

I completed my filming in November and began transcribing interviews and other footage as soon as I could upon each session with each athlete. I was reasonably comfortable with all the data by December and began the more in-depth analysis and review of the transcripts.

Additional Material

I also wanted to include any coaches, family, or friends that were willing to speak on camera. This was driven by the documentary tradition of entertainment and having a variety of voices and faces that could provide additional insight. The input of the people surrounding my
main subjects provided a deeper understanding of how they interpret giving back. In some instances, it was an opportunity for comparison. For example, hearing from Notah’s brother Clint, about what giving back means to him as well as his opinions of Notah’s giving back could be compared to Notah’s to see if there were any fundamental differences. This would help illustrate the overall meaning of giving back to the Native American community.

I knew I would want to utilize additional material to provide more perspective in addition to the footage I shot. Specifically, I knew how active my participants were on social media, and that is important part of their giving back. The athletes would tell me how they used their social media presence to inspire, educate, and simply communicate their activities. The athletes’ social media was monitored daily and marked for possible inclusion in the documentary film. Unlike traditional qualitative interview projects which may focus on the participants’ words alone, I sought to use additional material to serve as a visual reference in the documentary film.

The use of traditional archival footage that documentaries often use such as news footage and home video also helped contextualize the story of Native American athletes and giving back. I prioritized their words but the additional material could amplify their voices. I first asked each participant if there was any specific material they wanted to be included. Again, I wanted them to lead the way in telling their stories. The athletes all led me to certain highlights, clips and other short videos that could be found on YouTube. Dozens of videos were reviewed, chosen, and catalogued for each athlete to be utilized as b-roll material. I viewed archival footage as the best way to show the athletic story of my participants as it was a quickly recognizable point of access.
Journaling

An important element of the research process was self-reflective journaling and reflection, (Merriam, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (2000) described this activity as “the process of reflecting critically on the self as research, the ‘human as instrument’” (p. 183). There can be several meaningful reasons for this type of journaling. It can serve as personal development/learning and self-assessment and self-management (Liuoliene & Metiuniene, 2009). More important to this project was the journal serving as a “mind jogger and jumping off point” (Kremenitzer, 2005, p. 5). There were several moments during the data collection that I noted for both writing and production of the film. Journaling was also a way for me express my emotions and document learnings of what worked and what didn’t work. I recounted my stress over battery life, memory storage, and other technical challenges.

Dewey (1933) describes this type of reflexive activity as “an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity” (p. 12). For me, journaling was an act of clarifying what I was experiencing in the moment and a resource that I could return to for insights, big and small. Journaling also helped me stay aware of my position in the work I was doing, as a Native American woman and friend to these athletes. As Sandstrom (2017) described, “self-reflective journaling enabled me to develop knowledge about myself even as I am developing knowledge of my participants, and served as a way to weave myself throughout the study while maintaining an awareness of my dual position” (p. 64). I kept my journal close throughout the entire process and examples can be found in the appendix.
Putting it Together

I began the analysis stage in a somewhat traditional qualitative way by transcribing my footage and reading the transcripts. I first read to familiarize myself with the material, not aiming to make any notes or conclusions. The next read was more intentional, and I looked for similarities and differences between my participants. Finally, on the third read I began coding, writing down notes and highlighting passages that stood out. This coding process was similar to the constant comparative method (Glaser & Straus, 1967). In the constant comparative method, “words, sentences, paragraph, codes, concepts, categories and literature are constantly compared with each other throughout the research” (Sparkes & Smith, 2014, p. 120). Through the constant comparison of data, categories that needed further refinement and development were identified and developed (Strauss 1987). Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe the art of comparison as creative processes with an interplay between data and researcher. The constant comparison provided a structure to the data analysis and made the entire process more digestible. This purposeful comparison makes the valuable task of interpreting social phenomena a much easier proposition (Boeije, 2002, p. 409).

Through the analysis several storylines became distinctive that could tie together the three athletes. The documentary film was outlined with five storylines based on the recorded interviews and social media posts. Several storylines were excluded because I felt they were not as prominent or impactful. For example, I felt the storyline describing the encouragement athletes received brought nothing new or surprising to the overall experience of Native athletes giving back. Similarly, the storyline where the athletes spoke specifically about their cultural heritage did not provide the depth that the other storylines did. While the cultural heritage was of
utmost importance to this project, I felt the athletes exemplified this more effectively when not specifically addressing it. I have seen many projects that utilize the “tell me about your heritage,” trope and fail to provide any meaningful nuance. Ultimately, I felt the storylines I chose were a better representation of the athletes’ identity than a more explicit, straightforward storyline about their identity. Footage was also reviewed to determine the viability of its usage in the film. The coding process helped synthesize the material for the audience of the documentary. In all, there were 144 pages of transcription, 17 hours of footage, and 33 pages of journaling reviewed.

I kept my five storylines in mind when I began to construct the documentary film and organized the files to highlight them. Video and audio clips of segments that may be used in the final documentary film were created. I compare this to the qualitative process of taking scissors to quotes on a paper transcript. I began to ruminate on how I wanted the documentary film to look after compiling this video and audio footage. I knew having the athletes speaking on camera alone would not suffice. I also debated whether to include narration, ultimately deciding to narrate at critical points where I felt I was best equipped with moving the story along. Bell (2017) addressed this notion of voice and space and as he explained, “the notion of voice is important to understand as to whose voice is being heard and how these voices are constructed. Specific to whose voice is being heard, it is consistently a combination of participant and filmmaker” (p. 52). In addition to the narration, I acknowledge that my voice was represented throughout in the way I constructed the documentary film.
Crafting a documentary as a form of academic research findings raises several questions, such as: “Who is the audience? What is the hopeful outcome? How can that outcome assist with perceptive and social change?” (Bell, 2017, p. 8). This project is much more complex than a simple checkpoint in obtaining the doctorate degree. It is a means to make meaningful research that could be used to change perceptions of Native American athletes and help better understand the importance of giving back to the Native American community.

My Native American identity complicates this research but so does the use of documentary film. We are not far away from the time when filming Indigenous people was “not considered very different from filming lions or other rare species” (Lansing, 1989, p. 13). However, as Lansing declared,

the old positivist idea of the anthropologist as a silent recording presence, a data gatherer, is probably gone for good, replaced with a more equivocal picture of a scholar who becomes engaged with the people he or she is studying in a complex web of exchanges and interactions” (p. 13)

Additionally, as a Native American, I understand the expectation that as a filmmaker I am automatically expressing my cultural identity (Pack, 2000). Ultimately, in this pursuit to present scholarly research on Native American athletes giving back, I hope to change the stereotypes and the status quo surrounding Native American culture, research, and filmmaking.

**Ongoing Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to explore the phenomenon of giving back among Native athletes and provide a counter-story through a documentary film representation. Just as one has
multiple intersecting identities, this research is guided by multiple theoretical perspectives. Critical race theory, specifically TribalCrit, and visual and public sociology are the splints that craft the basket that is equipped to carry the experiences of these Native athletes. This research aimed to use these theories to make sense of an important aspect of social life in the Native American community (Wolcott, 2001). This sensemaking guided the creation to the documentary film. I hope to inspire change with this work, not present a conclusive argument because “social change evolves and does not have to provide closure. Instead, film opens a new space for understanding social change and to challenge normative thinking” (Bell, 2017, p. 30).

Tordzro (2017) described how this concept creates new images, expands into new spaces and,

Dimensions of the physical and the imaginative scopes of mental where we begin to perceive different ideas, shapes around and of the objects and subjects of our research and their reflections in new contexts, and from new perspectives. Story holds the space for meaning making in the mess of everydayness.” (p. 63).

This is also relatable to qualitative research. Every day is a new day to make meaning of and a chance to create a new story.

As a scholar in sport management I feel this work has significant implications for our field because of the importance of issues of diversity and inclusion across our industry. These are no longer buzzwords but measurable goals implemented across all levels of sport. There are more and more segments of people and niche groups in sport with which we need to gain a basic understanding of for growth and success. The more we can learn from underrepresented groups the better we can serve them, while diversifying our own knowledge base, and enhance the
greater community as a whole. Corporate social responsibility and initiatives around philanthropy are important for sport managers to understand and even this specific example can provide key learnings. This work can also offer learning from the Native athlete model of giving back and as a successful way to socialize into giving. This project exemplifies what we strive for when we discuss the positive power of sport.

**Audience**

This project was conducted with the Native community in the forefront. The entire Native American and Indigenous community are stakeholders in this research. The documentary film will be an asset for them to utilize and promote their presence as well as better understand their own connection to sport. This work can assist the younger Native generations to understand their connections to their community and sport on a deeper level. While I assume the role of a catalyst, promoting social change as TribalCrit would encourage, the hope is that this documentary film will be seen by non-Natives and spark their interest and promote a deeper understanding of the Native community and giving back. This project aims to be influential in the Native community by assisting the understanding of their giving back and connection to sport while also providing insight to the non-Native community.

**The Findings**

The documentary film serves the purpose of presenting the data. A summary of the findings are presented below.

**The Storylines**

The data were organized into five storylines, similar to a qualitative researcher organizing textual data into themes. The storylines were developed after a thorough review of the film,
transcripts, and supplementary material of athletes giving back. Coding and creating categories for each athlete’s data ensued. The data and categories for all three athletes were brought together and were eventually narrowed to the final five storylines. One useful exercise in this process was extracting verbatim quotes from the athlete transcripts and organizing them under each of the categories. This allowed for comparison and contrast between the different athletes’ quotes. I was surprised in how similar the three athletes’ words were. The storylines were not only thorough but also intriguing and informative. The storylines were: (a) Sports are Family, (b) Sport is a Vehicle, (c) Giving Back is Greater Than Sport, (d) Giving Back is Gratitude, and (e) Role Model Role.

The *Sports are Family* storyline developed from discussing how the athletes got involved in sport. Damen, Caitlyn, and Notah all referenced their family when explaining how they were introduced to sports. Notah said his father was the most instrumental in exposing him (and his brothers) to sports. He described how his father always found value in sports and encouraged them to explore different sports, even ones he was not familiar with. Caitlyn said her involvement in sports came from “everybody” in her family playing sports. She described the great bonding that came with constant tournaments, from basketball to volleyball, and even horseshoes. Damen spoke of sport as something that was prominent in his community because that was “all there was to do.” He described basketball as something that was easy, accessible and a popular activity for a group of friends. For Damen, playing basketball in the community was (and still is) an extension of his family.

The *Sport is Vehicle* storyline came from the athletes discussing how they have used sport to make and reach goals in their lives. Sports also provided the athletes with a platform
from which they could influence others, especially children for whom they may serve as role models. Damen stressed this repeatedly throughout all of his speaking – with me and with the youth – that basketball was just a vehicle for him. Not to minimize the power of the sport but to emphasize the importance of development beyond sports. Notah spoke of when he became the top junior golfer in the state of New Mexico and how golf would be “something that might be able to provide me with some opportunity outside of my community, outside of my state. And possibly pay for my education.” Damen spoke of when he finished his freshman year in college as a turning point, he said “I realized I had a platform and I realized there’s a lot of kids just like me who need someone to have their back.” He elaborated on this shift,

At the end of the day, all the basketball stuff…that doesn't mean anything to me anymore. I'm not going to be talking about my basketball accomplishments for the next 20 years. I'm good on those. Those don't define me. I'm a father. I'm a brother. I'm a son. A mentor. A Coach. Those are what I pride myself on. So, understand that sport was just a vehicle for me.

As evidenced in the previous quote, the Giving Back is Greater than Sport storyline evolved from the Sport is Vehicle storyline. With the realization of the power of sport, sports’ high utility, and their platform, athletes described how giving back made them more than athletes and inspired their giving back. Giving back transcended sport for these athletes. Caitlyn spoke repeatedly of wanting to help Native youth not feel alone. She felt the rough times in her life, like her parents’ divorce and her ACL injury, were just a few of the experiences she could share to relate to others, especially the younger generation. While sport had made her somewhat of a celebrity, she wanted the youth to see she was just like them. Notah spoke of the prominent
Native belief in providing opportunity for future generations. He described his organization as providing leadership that taught, “the importance of a job well done.” Notah would also describe how golf provided him access to so many opportunities he would not have had otherwise. The experience provided by sport set him up to lead a successful non-profit to serve the Native youth. Damen also explained how giving back being greater than sport was possible because of the high-esteem attached to athletes. Being an athlete allowed Damen and the other athletes to influence others and have an effect beyond any playing field.

The Giving Back is Gratitude storyline came from drilling down into what specifically giving back means to these athletes. All of the athletes had an immense sense of appreciation. Damen described,

Giving back means to me, giving without any expectations and doing things because it's the right thing to do and understanding. For me specifically, giving back means understanding my platform and understanding the privilege and responsibility that I have to work with my people in understanding what an honor it is to work with my people. And whenever I think of giving back I think of every person that instilled something in my life.

Again, as evidenced by Damen’s quote, the community is such an integral part of the Native athletes giving back. Caitlyn, Damen, and Notah spoke of how they wouldn’t have reached their success without their Native community’s support. Notah summed it up simply by saying, “giving back to your community is just an expression of gratitude”

Finally, the Role Model Role storyline was prominent in Damen, Caitlyn, and Notah’s experiences as athletes and leaders in the community. Damen explained how the small nature of
our communities contributes to the spotlight being cast on you if you’re a top athlete. He described,

When you come from a small communities, there's not a ton of examples and we're still living out the effects of all the generational trauma where our cultures were pushed out of our communities and that is our foundation so you know when we're able to find somebody who is doing good or somebody who is making us all proud - when one of us makes it, we all make it.

This belief that one person being successful could be influential and effect the entire community was echoed by Notah and Caitlyn. Notah described how his focus on keeping his foundation representative of the community was crucial,

I think that, when people look at the NB3 foundation, they’re always impressed with sort of the impact that we're making and all of the great policies that we've come up with, through our research and data evaluation but I think what gives us our unique advantage within the space that we work is the fact that 90% of our staff is Native American. And a large percentage them live in the communities we serve. And so, we're a reflection of who we work with.

There is not a lot of representation of Native success for our youth, as Caitlyn described, “I knew what it was like not having a Native American role model. So I wanted to be able to, be something for somebody.” Notah made an insightful point when discussing his shifting mindset from athlete to role model, spurred by the birth of his kids,

When I became a parent, and a guardian to my children it put things in a different light. I realized that my time in golf was done, I realized that it was time for me to make the
sacrifices and shift from a very selfish mentality that one has to have as a professional athlete where time and activities and priorities completely revolve around the athlete. And I had to shift from that mindset to where how can I be, of better service, of better support to my kids as they sort of embark on their journey.

Ultimately, all three athlete relished their position as a role model and expressed their desire to create meaningful relationships for those who look up to them.

**Juxtapositions & Intersections**

The concept of truth provides an interesting point of discussion for this project. There are long-held beliefs about truth in research as well as documentary film. Bruzzi (2000) proclaimed documentary as “a perpetual negotiation between the real event and its representation” (p. 14). There is extra sensitivity in negotiating truth when working with Native populations. Ultimately, this project represents each individual athletes’ truth and how they made sense of giving back. There is no one singular truth. By presenting these athlete’s stories through documentary film, the research is not authoritative but accessible. The goal was not to present one uniform representation of Native American athletes but provide several viewpoints in which one can understand and make sense of their everyday lives (Agar, 1996). The way these athletes gave back varied but they all had the spirit of service. Each athlete simply serving as a public representation of Native athletic success was their most basic form giving back.

When considering the juxtapositions Native athletes faced, Notah made a great point in how top athletes have to be selfish, not allowing for much time to give to others. The most successful athletes have to dedicate themselves to their sport and their training to reach success. For many active athletes, giving back can be restricted by their commitment to their sport. Notah
in particular described how stepping back from professional golf put him in a space where he could take his focus from his training to helping his community. While stepping away from sport was not necessary for these athletes to give back, retirement did allow for a more focused dedication. However, the success they attained as athletes was what provided them a more powerful platform to maximize their giving back. This is a significant way giving back among athletes is different from giving back by educators and other Native people.

It is also important to note that Damen and Notah both discussed ways in which growing up in the Native community could possibly hold young people back. Damen described his small community of creating a nest that isn’t necessarily realistic for finding success away from home. For example, athletes may be held up on a pedestal and told that they are the best. As Damen explained,

They are never told hey you're not good, you're not that good, you need to get a lot better in order to compete on the bigger levels and their told they're so good, good, good for so dang long, once they do have these opportunities and they're sat on the bench or their finally told they're not as good as they think they are, “oh, I'm gonna quit.”

Notah echoed this sentiment when speaking of how growing up on a Reservation can sometimes be challenging and while it teaches a young person to survive it can may affect their ability to trust and connect. He described his own experience with divorced parents and moving to nearly 20 different homes throughout his youth. He described, “that's a lot of what we see on our reservation communities and it hinders the development of the next generations.” Reservations have historically been viewed as hard to break away from by outsiders like college coaches
recruiting Native athletes. There is not a simple on/off reservation dynamic when discussing success, and this is an area where more research and conversation is necessary.

The idea of community holding young people back and the belief that one person being successful could affect an entire community are phenomenon also found in other minority groups (Carter-Francique, Hart, & Cheeks, 2015; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986;). Just as I hesitate to group all Native American nations together, I think we must be careful before grouping all minority populations together. While certain outcomes may be consistent across groups it does not mean that every minority group approaches every situation the same way. There is something to be said for tribal sovereignty and resilience as unique aspects of Native American communities. This is where I believe the journey, and not the end destination or result, becomes an important consideration, and one that is often overlooked in traditional research.

More generally, many athletes feel that passion for sport is born out of its familial nature. For Native Americans their family and their kinship are exponentially influential because of the small size and isolation that is common among Native communities. The prominence of giving back with sport is unique to Native American athletes. For these athletes, giving back was not a new concept, it was something they had been very familiar with their entire lives. For example, Damen spoke of learning to fish for his family and not taking more than needed to ensure there is plenty for the future. Giving back is treated as something inherent, “just what we do,” and when given the platform, athletes give back in hopes to inspire success and influence generations to come. This generational emphasis may showcase another unique attribute of Native American athletes and the role of family socialization with Native communities can provide greater insight.
Hearing the athletes speak on the responsibility and pressure they feel brought about familiar feelings for me. I have forever felt shame for not returning to my home community permanently to serve my people. In creating research about the Native community, I certainly worry being viewed as exploiting my heritage and my people. Similarly, but perhaps not as malicious, is what a fear of what Pack (2000) calls the “risks of mainstreaming” (p. 279). He states that,

all indigenous film and video-makers confront what Ginsburg calls a ‘Faustian dilemma’: on the one hand, they use new technologies for cultural self-assertion and, on the other, they spread a technology that might ultimately only foster their own disintegration. (p. 280)

Additionally, Doreen Bird, an expert on mental health issues in tribal communities, stated,

As a Native American academic, I have to deal with balancing our tribal community’s world and respecting that, as well as academia and science. And also just trying to see how to respectfully engage the two into the work that we do. (Hughes, 2018, para 26)

Ultimately, I was impressed by how these athletes maintained their authenticity throughout this project. I was not sure how they would react when put in front of a camera but I felt all of the athletes stayed true to their selves whether I was recording or not. They had an impressive amount of self-awareness and did not romanticize their position as athletes. Rather than try to inspire the younger generation to be professional athletes they encouraged them to use sport as a way to develop meaningful transferrable skills. Notah, Damen, and Caitlyn provided a meaningful representation of what it means to be an athlete in the Native community as well as the importance of giving back to the Native community.
Theoretical Implications

One of Brayboy’s (2005a) tenets of TribalCrit argues that Tribal ways of knowledge and living are crucial to understanding the realities of Native peoples while also exemplifying the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups. The phenomenon of Native athletes giving back embodies this tenet. The Native American way of life, including traditions and visions for the future, are crucial to understanding the giving back of Native American athletes. Native Americans, and Native American athletes, are not one homogenous group but unique individuals who exemplify their own Native identity (Brayboy, 2005a). Due to the adversity and challenges faced in sport they also demonstrate the adaptability and perseverance of Native people (Brayboy, 2005a).

Brayboy (2005a) challenges people to rethink their preconceived notions about the concepts of culture, knowledge and power, and Native athletes are pushing towards personal and team goals while showing the public a representation of their Native community. As Native athletes become public figures with acclaim for their athletic accomplishments they also become role models and advocates for the Native community. Native athletes’ mere presence in the public sphere is a form of giving back to their Native community. It is not necessary to identify as Native American to give back to the Native community, but there is a deeper, familial connection to the community when athletes identify as Native. Repeatedly, the athletes in this project mentioned how impactful the community has been in their athletic careers. Their cultural connections instilled a sense of responsibility.

This sense of responsibility appeared to be not as burdensome as one might imagine. Native Americans carry the weight of overwhelming negative framing and are often portrayed as
constantly having to overcome deficits. However, there is more to be said for the tight-knit, giving nature of the communities of the Native athletes. While they may think of their pursuit as coming from behind, Native athletes often have a strong support system behind them. These athletes thrived with a come from behind mentality while leaning on their support groups. Damen and Caitlyn both spoke of how they did not want to be a statistic and they were driven to not succumb to the many challenges that Native Americans face. All the athletes spoke of the teachers, coaches, friends and family that help them escape this narrative.

Looking at giving back among Native athletes through the perspectives of TribalCrit and public sociology, while also considering the visual sociology, helped to create a story of inspiration. These athletes are not just successful; they inspire others to be successful. This challenges the public to think differently about Native American athletes, to show that they are not only here, but they are thriving and continuing a circle of giving back. For these athletes sport is fundamental to being a good citizen. While some may critique this structural functionalist standpoint, wherein sport is seen as all good and right, I would argue that this resiliency is needed among a marginalized group. Native athletes overwhelmingly rely on the good of sport to create an advantage. We may not need to uncritically accept everything they say, but there is something to be said for the strengths perspective with this unique population.

In this journey, I have been fortunate to have discovered several Native and Indigenous scholars who have emphasized the importance of our Native viewpoints and bringing our perspectives to research. This often means disrupting the long-held notions about what makes meaningful research. By not approaching this work from a deficit perspective we can better understand what is working and promote the stories that will encourage and strengthen the
Native community. The counter-narrative provides those who do not understand or even recognize Native Americans a new idea of what a Native American can be and what giving back and success means to them. Native athletes can provide stories that change perceptions of what it means to be Native. Native American athletes help diversify and solidify the power in our communities by adding to the work in educational surroundings.

**Documentary Production & Decolonization**

Getting behind the camera as a Native woman is an act of decolonizing research. Brayboy (2005a) birthed the simple, yet powerful TribalCrit based on the idea that colonialism is perverse in society. We are faced with the challenge of decolonizing the systems of oppression against Native people and often the first step is understanding just how we have been affected. Sport in Native communities provides a unique space for this decolonization to take place. Sport provides Native people an activity in which to express their cultural identity while also disproving the perceived inferiority we have to the majority.

Media when taken into our own hands, allows us to tell our own stories. As Pack (2000) argued, “The emergence of indigenous media is inextricably bound of the process of decolonization and globalization.” (p. 273). There is a stigma that comes with being a minority in media. There is an assumption by anthropologists (and others) that “when minorities take pictures, they will automatically express their cultural identity” (Pack, 2000, p. 274). Pack (2000) also argues that Native filmmakers are not immune to the stereotypical “noble savage” trope, and have incorporated the larger society’s views of them into their own self-image. This is exemplified in Ruby’s (1991) belief that we are audiences “long before we ever contemplate making our own images” (p. 60).
Hopi videographer Victor Masayesva, Jr. argues:

A Native filmmaker has the accountability built into him. Accountability as an individual, as a clan, as a tribal, as a family member. The white man doesn't have that. That's the single big distinction. (Leuthold, 1998, p.1)

Responsibility as a Native athlete aligns with my responsibility as a Native researcher and filmmaker. Ultimately, we want to serve our community and provide reciprocal support to those that come after us. Indigenous people around the world establish their own media “to preserve and restore an indigenous language, to improve the self-image of the minority, and to change the negative impressions of the minority that are held by members of the majority culture” (Browne, 1996, p. 59). We do this because we have been guided by our families, elders, and other kin that have taken meaningful interest and investment in our success. It is inherit and often unspoken. In decolonizing ethnographic film, Lansing (1989) recommends the principles of reciprocity and exchange, “Rather than speaking for our subjects, we must begin to speak with them” (p. 16). In this way, this film is a way for me to give back to my community. It must be noted however that I cannot speak for my entire Native community. Given the diversity within cultural domains and across groups, even the most experienced and knowledgeable of natives cannot know everything about his or her society (Aguilar, 1981, p. 21).

**Transformation & Perpetuation**

The role of the visual and story “can work as a transformative mode that bridges private knowledge to challenge the public to think differently” (Bell, 2016, p. 135). While I have experienced Native athletes giving back my entire life, it is not a narrative that many are familiar with. So much of what the public knows about Native Americans in sport is what has been
presented by Native American mascots. These caricatures have overwhelmed the zeitgeist, while Native athletes from across North America are having a wide variety of experiences. Despite the differences, the sense of community and inherent motivation to give back links Native athletes together. As I have woven together this project, Native athletes weave together complex stories of motivation, dedication, and giving.

Keene (2014) describes giving back as a motivation for Native students to complete their degree and explains how giving back becomes an act of transformational resistance to oppressive, white, patriarchal systems (Brayboy, 2005a). This can also be true of sport for Native American athletes. In reading about Indigenous education, I was struck by the following description of perpetuation, “When perpetuation is discussed within an Indigenous context, it often refers to the transmission of Indigenous knowledge to future generations and how they act on and regenerate it” (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019, p. 1). Those same authors describe Indigenous youth as in a “precarious position” (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019, p. 1). While there is generational trauma and other damage from settler colonialism, our future is good hands with Native athletes who are finding success in competition and using their platform to inspire the next generation. It is my goal to be a part of a “deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture,” (Wallace, 1956, p. 265) with giving back and the sharing of our stories.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to this project to be addressed. While the sample size of three is relatively small, this is a purely qualitative project and generalizability was not a goal of this work. This is also important to note, especially among minority populations, because small
amounts of quality data can still be considered progress in understanding experiences. By using a film representation I can offer a visual window into the experiences of these athletes. To clarify, just because I am highlighting these three particular voices, does not mean we should uncritically accept all the things they say. These athletes are not the best or only examples of giving back, but they serve as great success stories that exemplify the giving nature of Native athletes. This film is a snapshot that can inspire others to give back and think deeper about what giving back means to the Native community.

My desire to claim space in the public discourse for Native American athletes has also influenced how this project was completed. When I began doing research as Native scholar I felt that my Native perspective was of the utmost importance. As Brayboy (2005a) noted, “The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens” (p. 429). However, I understand now that while it’s important for Native Americans to have space in research conducted on their communities, sometimes an outside perspective can help with further clarifying and contrasting the Native American experience. It can be somewhat exclusionary for me to lead research alone as a Native, as I do not know what I know that the audience does not. I am guilty of taking for granted certain concepts or conversations that may be significant to others outside of the Native community. If I were to have a crew or other outside researcher along for the data collection I may have asked additional questions that could provide further insights.

Epilogue

As Kovach (2010) described, “While certain Western research paradigms frown upon the relational because of its potential to bias research, Indigenous methodologies embrace relational
assumptions as central to their core epistemologies” (p. 42). The relationships developed in this project will impact me and my career long after publication or any sport season. I hope this project presents an alternate way of doing scholarship, and is accepted as a different form of doing research. There have been many hurdles but thanks to a supportive committee I was able to complete this project as intended. I think Native scholars can be challenged by trying to fit a square peg into a round hole when it comes to matching our ideologies to Western research but allies can help alleviate this feeling. I understand the importance of compromise and aimed to keep a balance between my perspective and what was best for the greater research.

Visual sociology stresses the importance of not taking for granted what we see and this encouraged, and continues to encourage me to probe and ask questions with the hopes of promoting the continuation of service. Unlike the deficit approach, questions don’t have to be demeaning, suspicious or accusing, they can be encouraging and supportive. Everyone wants to know what’s unique to native communities, instead of asking questions of difference, I look to share stories. This work has shown me how rewarding service to the Native community is and can be. The impact these athletes have had on me is indescribable and I hope to continue to tell their stories.

As this project concludes in the spring of 2019, Notah Begay III is continuing to grow his foundation while also succeeding as a commentator on NBC’s Golf Channel. His life exemplifies giving back through service and representation. Early in 2019 Caitlyn returned to the United States after suffering an injury and being released from her professional team in Israel. She is working to return to playing professionally while also coaching and helping young Native athletes. Caitlyn has also returned to Troy University as a guest commentator for the women’s
basketball team on ESPN+. She has called multiple games and serves as an impactful representation of Native women in sports media. Damen continues his work with SeaAlaska, continuously visiting with Native communities across Alaska and the United States. He is also attending a variety of workshops and learning more about generational trauma and how to be a better Native man, friend, and father. He is also planning to start his own non-profit for the Native community. As these athletes continue to mature and grow I look forward to seeing their influence, one generation at a time.


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Figure 1. Facebook photos from recipients of Caitlyn’s letters
Figure 2. Native American Sport & Giving Back: Conceptual Model
Figure 3. My woven theoretical framework
Interview Guide

Sports
How did you get involved in sports?

When did you realize that you might be able to play sports at an “elite” level? What was that like?

Do you felt like you’ve become a role model? If so, why?

If it’s important for you to be a role model, why?

Why do you think it’s important for Native people to have role models?

What’s the most rewarding part of being an athlete?

Family
Can you describe your family?

How would you compare your family to the families of your friends and peers?

Did you have mentors or role models helping you? Which of those relationships were important to you? Why?

How do you stay connected to your family when you’re away? Is that important?

Heritage & Identity
How did you learn about your Native American heritage?

What do you think about when you hear the word culture?

What does it mean to you to be a member of your tribe?

How would you say your sense of self effects your world view?

How do you feel sport has shaped your personal identity?

How has your identity as an athlete and community member impacted your success/journey as an athlete?

Community
How would you describe where you grew up?
How would you define community? How would you compare it to family?

What sort of communities are you a part of? How important are those communities to you?

In your experience growing up, where did you feel a sense of community?

What was important to you about your community where you grew up?

What has your involvement with your community been like since you’ve left to play sports?

What prompted you to start giving back?

What is the message that you’re bringing when you return to your community?

What is the goal of your giving back?

What has that experience been like?

What are the rewards and challenges of giving back?

Do you feel a sense of responsibility to give back? If so, can you provide any examples of why?

When you return to your community are you returning as an athlete?

Do you think you would you still be returning if you weren’t an athlete?
Informed Consent Statement

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT
Native American Athletes Giving Back

INTRODUCTION
You are invited to participate in this research study which has the primary purpose of sharing the many ways Native American athletes give back to their community. The project aims to showcase how Native American athletes give back using documentary film.

PARTICIPANTS’ INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY
You will be participating in an approximately 30-60-minute interview and will be asked a series of questions focused on your experiences as an athlete and how you contribute to your team/school/community. Interviews will be video recorded for accuracy, transcriptions purposes and possible inclusion in the final documentary film. The researcher may also ask you to participate in a short (15-30 minute) filming session where you can show how you give back to your community (i.e. Educating teammates and coaches, working with youth). For the final film, you will be asked to approve any footage that you are included in.

Your research information may be used for future research studies (and/or other purposes such as education) or shared with other researchers for use in future research studies without obtaining additional informed consent from you. If this happens, all of your identifiable information will be removed before any future use or distribution to other researchers.

RISKS
You may feel uncomfortable being asked some questions. You can always skip any questions you are not comfortable answering and end your participation at any time.

BENEFITS
There are no direct benefits to the participant stemming from participating in this research project. However, by participating in this research study you will be providing greater insight into how Native American athletes give back to their communities. Information gathered from this study can be utilized to educate others on how Native American athletes help their communities.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Your image and voice will be recorded and possibly used in the documentary film. A copy of your footage to be used in the documentary film will be sent to you for your approval. If at any point you would like your name, information, or footage to not be included in this study you can contact the primary researcher and ask that your information/footage be removed from the study. You can select an option below stating that you do not want your film footage included in the documentary, but still allow your information to be used for the research.

CONTACT INFORMATION
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Natalie Welch, PhD student at the University of Tennessee, at (865) 974-1281 and nwelch1@vols.utk.edu. You may also contact Robin Hardin, faculty advisor on this project, (865) 974-1281 and robb@vols.utk.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-7697 or utkirb@utk.edu.

PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONSENT (please select one)
I have read the above information. I agree to participate in this study and:

____ I agree to allow my and/or my child’s footage to be used in the documentary film

____ I agree to allow video recording of myself and/or my child, but ask that my and/or my child’s footage NOT be used for the documentary film

Participant’s signature ___________________________________________ Date ____________

Parent’s signature (if under 18) ___________________________________________ Date ____________

Investigator’s signature ___________________________________________ Date ____________

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-18-04199-XP
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 02/22/2018
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 02/21/2019
Journal Example

Sitka
Mt. Edgecumbe gym - boys and girls basketball
Sitka School - assembly, gym class, communications class
Rehab center?
Flight to Kake
Interview
Kake school
Language with kids
Work with basketball players
Interview

JOURNAL
Day 1
Meeting / flying / introductions - nervous to meet him, we’ve talked a lot online but never met in person, connected on N7, went to his old high school, really dedicated himself to the kids, building relationships, coach advocated for him, played with kids extensively before speaking to them, asked them questions, pushed them to talk after - went to yoga, dinner with friend
Day 2
Morning trip to Sitka HS, see all the kids from elementary walking up, auditorium fills, Damen speaks, seems a little nervous but kills it
Meets with PE classes afterwards, changes into sweats to play ball
Lunch with media class for student interview
break
afternoon visit with rehab facility kids - they were so blown away by Damen, even I was able to connect with them, he pushed them to get out of their situations, we weren’t able to film here, the facilitators everywhere were so thankful and nice, some had obvious relationship with Damen
Kids wanted Damen to play ball with them but we had to leave to catch flight - they asked for autographs and Damen gave one his hat
Left for airport, flight to Kake
had community member pick us up at airport - she was super cute and sweet, like an auntie
Got to lodge, must have only had 10 rooms total, sweet old lady gave me keys to wrong room.
Amazing view.
Needed to walk to grocery store for food, not restaurants
Sat outside and watched sunset with Damen, talked about everything, frustrations, very real, talked about relationships, needing Native partner
Damen goes hunting early in the AM, I go run and soak in the colder weather and quiet community
We go down to the tribal offices and meet with a man, he talked about being police and the suicide epidemic there, as well as the alcohol abuse. Makes me really sad. He and Damen talk through issues and things they are doing to help. This is where the suicide walk come ups.
Mans brother comes in for a call, both bring salmon jerky to share. So welcoming.
We head off to the elementary school, taking the lodge managers trucks, we start with the 1st
graders, they are adorable and enamored with my camera, damen does language with them, I
didn’t realize this was something he did, he leads them through a whole lesson with such high
energy, it’s impressive.
Then we go to an older language class, they are shy, Damen asks them to introduce themselves
in Tlingit and include their clan. They are so shy. It’s a nice small group and they really connect.
Next we have to go back to kindergarten and Damen does his Haida language lesson. The kids
are so good. The teacher is strict. The kids love Damen. It’s time for school to get out. We try to
find our truck but it’s gone.
Damen wants to go to the gym, he finds two boys working on their basketball skills, he starts
putting them through drills, I’m getting nervous because we still needed to do his interview but
he’s dedicated to helping these kids as much as he can, he wants these kids to have an
opportunity to get out like he did, even caused some controversy with local coaches because he
encouraged them to move out to bigger things.
We have to walk back to the hotel to film interview, Damen says he’s used to walking
everywhere in the villages, it’s the rez way…
We get back to film interview and they’re calling me from airport wanting me to get there to
check my bags and get ready to fly. I’m sad to leave Damen. He has really impressed me with
his work.

TRANSCRIBING NOTES
I don’t pride myself on basketball that’s not my identity, I have a son. I pride myself on being a
father - speaking to girls at Mt. Edgecumbe HS

Interview
We NEED role models, we need examples of success

"If I didn’t know who I was or where I come from, or learn all the skills that I learned, I wouldn’t
have been able to go out there and be successful. You know, I wouldn't have understood who I
was. I wouldn't have had that confidence to continue my journey consistently."

I have an responsibility and obligation to give back to my community

You know the culture’s based around your community

giving more than you take, that's what my mom always taught me, was you always give more
than you take in life.

I was able to watch their blueprints of failure for the most part

I'd be still able to give back but with my platform and using basketball as a vehicle to guide me
in these communities and using that, that's just the vehicle to get me in the door and once I'm in
the door I'm able to deliver my full message because I know basketball and being an athlete you have a lot of influence, and moreso in the Native community, when you're a successful athlete you have a lot of influence and you have a lot of responsibility so you know, giving back is, you know, was built of me being an athlete and a basketball player but it's a lot bigger than that. I just use my athletics and my athletic platform as a vehicle to get me in the door and that's just the very, very small piece of the pie, was being an athlete and being a basketball player when moreso my story and message is based around adversity and overcoming challenges and believing in yourself and setting goals and following your dreams so, ultimately the athletic part and the basketball side is just to get me in the door but the bigger portion of the story is everything I had said, everything I went through to get to that point of having my platform as an athlete, that's what the story's about.

From Speech
In order for me to do what nobody else has done, I had to do what nobody else was doing
And giving back, that's what I loved, right off the bat.
So as time went on, like I said, my freshman year, I saw the opportunity I had, I saw the opportunity that not a lot of people had ahead of me. So I started to build, I started to build friendships. I started to build relationships and most importantly I started to give back to my community. Cause at the end of the day, all the basketball stuff, like you said, the basketball stuff I've accomplished I've had a successful basketball career, that doesn't mean anything to me anymore [13:14:48:29] I'm not going to be talking about my basketball accomplishments for the next 20 years. I'm good on those. Those don't define me. I'm a father. I'm a brother. I'm a son. A mentor. Coach. Those are what I pride myself on. So understand that sport was just a vehicle for me.

make sure you're giving back, make sure you're giving more than you're taking

My notes
throughout I had to check my preconceived beliefs and stereotypes
VITA

Natalie Welch is originally from the Cherokee Indian Reservation in Cherokee, NC. She is a proud tribal member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. Her Native heritage has inspired much of her work, including her research agenda. She is particularly interested in studying the modern representations of Native American athletes. She is also interested in Native Americans in media, business, recreation and athletic administration. Natalie earned her Bachelor’s of Science in Sport Management with a business minor at the University of Tennessee in 2009. After undergraduate she joined the prestigious DeVos Sport Business program at the University of Central Florida where she earned her Master’s in Business Administration (MBA) and her Master’s in Sport Business Management. The DeVos program sparked her passion for community service and she has since participated in the non-profit, Girls on the Run, in number of capacities on a yearly basis. Upon completion of her masters she worked event management at ESPN Wide World of Sports. In 2011, she moved to Oregon to work with Nike’s Native American initiative, Nike N7. After a year managing marketing initiatives with N7 she moved to the agency side and worked in multiple capacities at the advertising agency, Wieden + Kennedy. While at W+K she worked in social media, production, and communication and media planning. Natalie desired a return to working with the Native American community and decided to go for her doctorate degree back at the University of Tennessee. Natalie has taught Professional Development and Sport Marketing courses for the undergraduate students in Sport Management while working on her doctorate degree. Natalie currently has 3 publications, 8 research projects under revision or in progress, and over 15 international, national, and regional presentation. In addition to her dissertation documentary, she is also producing a film on the traditional game of Cherokee stickball. Upon graduation in May, Natalie will receive a doctorate in Philosophy in Kinesiology and Sport Studies.