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**What Playing Indian Can Teach Us About Ourselves and
How to Lead in an Increasingly Diverse America**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Playing Indian” by dressing in costumes and pretending to perform Native American rituals has long been a part of American culture. However, this casual racism and cultural appropriation has many far-reaching, detrimental effects that are rarely acknowledged. Research shows that the practice of cultural appropriation damages the health and well-being of individuals and communities.

This paper examines several historical and contemporary examples of the persistence of the practice of playing Indian, including examples from the Boy Scouts, the Y, Camp Fire, and resident camps. Over time, there have been multiple efforts to control or eliminate playing Indian from programs, but organizations that have mandated an end to these practices have encountered strong backlash. There is an almost universal claim from those who play Indian that they do so in honor of Native people, their customs, and their cultures—even though Native Americans have given clear messages to the contrary.

Finally, the paper presents a proposed framework for building solutions within organizations where encouraging the practice of playing Indian has caused harm, even if harm was not the intent. The key to meaningful change moving forward lies in resisting the temptation to identify quick or prescriptive solutions. Instead, circumstances dictate the need for a shift within organizations from discussion of issues to dialogue with people, with the goal of becoming a true ally to Native individuals and communities. The goal is to produce transformational change that will create greater equity and inclusion for all...and herald an end to playing Indian.

JOIN THE DISCUSSION



Visit Exchange to join the discussion about the implications of playing Indian for individuals, communities, and the nation. As you read more about this topic, consider the following questions:

How does the practice of playing Indian affect the way we conceive of and build community? What would it take for this issue to be addressed at YMCAs where the practice continues? What do I need to do personally to prepare myself to lead in an increasingly diverse America?

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FORGETTING THE BEGINNING

“On the fifth day under the rising moon, in the month of giving thanks, the Mighty Croaking Frogs met in the tepee of our chief, Chipping Beaver and Creeping Squirrel. Creeping Squirrel opened the Pow-Wow with 12 beats of the tribal tom-tom. All of the Mighty Croaking Frogs then raised their hands and eyes to the Great Spirit and gave a tribal prayer. All big Braves [dads] and little Braves [children] then joined to form the unbroken circle and chanted the pledge, aims, and slogan, led by our Chief. ”

—Sample Tallykeeper’s Report of a Y Guides Meeting

When I was 11 years old my teacher gave me a choice: dress up as a pioneer or dress up as an Indian. This was the requirement for Pioneer Days, a kind of field day filled with fun and games meant to wrap up our studies in fifth-grade history class. My grandma made me a costume, and I put my hair in two braids; I was an Indian.

Today, affluent kids at residential camps hold powwows where participants imitate Indians by speaking in broken English; parents and children organize into tribes, go on campouts dressed in costumes, and say “how-how” in Y Guides programs; and troops of Boy Scouts incorporate sweat lodges and other Native rituals into their activities. We drive Jeep Cherokees, Winnebagos, and Indian Motorcycles. We cheer for teams named the Redskins, the Chiefs, the Indians, and the Braves. “Playing Indian is a persistent tradition in American culture, stretching from the very instant of national big bang into an ever-expanding present and future. It is, however, a tradition with limitations. Not surprisingly, these cling tightly to the contours of power” (Deloria, 1998, p.7).

Playing Indian by dressing in costumes and pretending to perform Native American rituals has long been a part of American culture. However, this casual racism and cultural appropriation has many far-reaching detrimental effects, not only for people of American Indian heritage, but also for individuals of all races, and communities as a whole. Research shows that children’s self-esteem and sense of

identity are damaged, legitimate expressions of culture are eroded, racism against other races increases, and damage to the health and well-being of individuals and communities occurs.

Many struggle with understanding the original inhabitants of our nation, beginning with what to call them. Some have preferences about the terms **Native American, American Indian, Native, Indian, Tribal People, First People, Indigenous People,** or **Pan-Indian**. Others feel we should just use Apaches, Cherokees, Navajos, or the names of any of the other 566 tribes recognized by our government or hundreds of tribes still unrecognized.¹ For the purpose of this paper, I will use many of the above terms interchangeably.

Most of us know very little about American Indian people historically and today. So what is the fascination with or allure of dressing up and assuming their culture and identity? In his 1998 book, **Playing Indian**, Philip Deloria (Dakota Sioux) explains that playing Indian has served as a key process for Americans to define their identity: “In the end, Grateful Dead Indians, (Boston) Tea Party Indians, and those who came between [e.g., New York Tammany Society, Improved Order of Red Men, Woodcraft Indians, Camp Fire Girls] drank from the same well of meanings: Indianness offered a deep, authentic, aboriginal Americanness. No matter if the form were proto-American or anti-American, Indianness grounded a number of

¹ According to the website of Indian Affairs, a bureau of the U.S. Department of the Interior, “the United States has a unique legal and political relationship with Indian tribes and Alaska Native entities as provided by the Constitution of the United States, treaties, court decisions and Federal statutes.” Federally recognized tribes meet the criteria set forth by the bureau. Indian tribes that do not have that recognition must prove they are tribes by going through a lengthy, costly, and bureaucratic application process.

significant searches for identity on this continent. To play Indian has been to connect with a real Self, both collective and individual, and there was no better way to find such reassurance” (p. 183).

In this search for an authentic self, it is ironic then that, “as they shed their old clothes in favor of feathers, canvas costumes, intricate ‘artifakery,’ and bandanna headbands, white Indians have sported quite literally with the contingency of language, identity, social structure, and understanding itself” (Deloria, 1998, p. 184). In other words, as those from the dominant culture have used playing Indian to search for their own identity, they have simultaneously, often unwittingly, eroded the identity of Native Americans. Since the dominant culture consisted of predominantly affluent white individuals, it was new and exciting to take on a more “primitive” existence and return to the essence of one’s self.

Playing Indian is an activity that has resonated with adults and children alike. “Play was powerful, for it not only made meanings, it made them *real*. The donning of Indian clothes moved ideas from brains to bodies, from the realm of abstraction to the physical world of concrete experience. There, identity was not so much imagined as it was performed, materialized through one’s body and through the witness and recognition of others. Such performances did not resolve contradictions, but they did make their dissonances seem somehow harmonious” (Deloria, 1998, p. 184). As children moved from childhood to adolescence and then adulthood, the ritual certainly became an outlet for them to make meaning of their lives. For adults, it offered a chance to invent or momentarily become another, perhaps improved, version of themselves. Arguably, those who still strongly advocate for their right to play Indian are those who have performed the ritual as a family, parents and children together, taking on new names and identities to break away from who they are and how they interact day to day. The absence of Native people in these so-called ceremonies and rituals left a void of understanding about who the indigenous people of this land really are and how playing Indian would impact them.

Few Americans have accurate knowledge about the tribes, their histories, or their contemporary experiences. Ironically, this is due in part to the fact that American Indians are now a minority in the country that, prior to the arrival of most of our ancestors, was once theirs.

This leaves most Americans with little chance to interact personally with someone Native. Therefore it falls to secondhand sources, such as books or the media, to disseminate information about Indians. These sources are often inaccurate and perpetuate stereotypes that limit understanding. Further, American Indian tribes, which number in the hundreds, tend to be grouped under the single ethnic heading of Native American or American Indian, blurring the distinct and real cultural differences between the tribes. (See the U.S. Census Bureau’s [The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010](#) census brief for demographic information about American Indians.) While they may all share the distinction of being tribes of America’s First People, each tribe has its own customs, languages, and traditions. One would not expect a German, a Swede, and an Armenian to share a common culture. Why then do Americans expect this of an Apache, a Pequot, and a Hoopa?

The lack of accurate knowledge about American Indians is central to the practice of playing Indian. Many non-Indians equate their experiences playing Indian with expertise in Indian culture, and use that false sense of intimacy to perpetuate stereotypes that Native people find harmful. As Kickapoo educator Walter C. Fleming (2006) points out, “Stereotyping is a poor substitute for getting to know individuals on a more intimate, meaningful level. By relying on stereotypes to describe Native Americans, whites come to believe that Indians are drunks, get free money from the government, and are made wealthy from casino revenue. Or they may believe that Indians are at one with nature, deeply religious, and wise in the ways of spirituality” (p. 213). Both views are generalizations that promote a fixed idea of what someone is like rather than promoting a true understanding, or at least a search for the truth.

Stereotyping is further perpetuated by the phenomenon of **genesis amnesia**—the forgetting of the conditions of and reasons for the origins of a cultural practice (Bourdieu, in Ogilvie, 2004). “Hegemonic power structures rely on us forgetting the beginning,” writes Cherokee member Adrienne K. (2013) on [nativeappropriations.com](#).

Everything becomes normalized—the power structures, the historical narrative taught in schools, policies towards Indigenous Peoples—and society accepts this as “the way it’s always been” and stops wondering why...Native peoples are

“poor” and “alcoholics” because they are “lazy” or “unmotivated,” not because of centuries of systematic policies that have worked to put us in this position. Hipster headdresses are a fashion trend because they’re “fun” or “playful,” not because centuries of colonialism have painted Native traditions and spirituality as inferior and stripped the objects of their sacred origins, leaving them up for grabs.

Without accurate information about the current status of American Indians, many falsely believe that we are speaking of people and cultures of the past. This effectively eliminates a place in the conversation for contemporary Native people, and allows people from other races to escape the hard truth about what Native people face today. One prominent tribal member, Notah Begay III (Navajo/San Felipe/Isleta Pueblo), is making headlines for his commitment to improving the health of American Indians through his charitable foundation. The Notah Begay III Foundation’s 2012 report, “Turning the Tide for Native American Children,” notes:

The disruption of historic Native American systems of governments, religions, customs, traditions, and economies has led to shocking and disheartening statistics that represent families, children, and individuals living in Third World conditions, while paradoxically inhabiting one of the world’s most expensive economies. Years of genocide, isolation, economic and social disempowerment, and the stripping of assets and wealth has caused overwhelming poverty, lack of basic infrastructure, insufficient education rates, poor mental health, and abysmal physical health. (p. 21)

Today, on Native American reservations, one out of every two children is obese, and 20 percent of homes lack adequate kitchen facilities, such as a range or cookstove or a refrigerator. One-fifth of reservation homes lack running water, more than half of the homes do not have phone service, and only 10 percent have Internet access (Notah Begay III Foundation, 2012). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013) verifies that environmental factors, such as the ones listed above, shape and influence health. Once self-sufficient and healthy, Native Americans now suffer from the greatest health problems in our country (Notah Begay III Foundation, 2012; Indian Health Service, 2009). In 2009, the Indian Health Service, an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, released the general mortality statistics for American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) and other racial groups. Overall, the leading cause of death for American Indians was heart disease—the same as for other races. However, comparing death rates for the AI/AN population (2002–2004) to data on all other races (2003) revealed that Native Americans died from a multitude of preventable diseases at a far greater rate than all other races. Indian rates of death from tuberculosis were 750 percent greater; alcoholism, 529 percent greater; motor vehicle crashes, 235 percent greater; diabetes mellitus, 193 percent greater; unintentional injuries, 153 percent greater; homicides, 103 percent greater; and suicides, 66 percent greater (Indian Health Service, 2009).

Without understanding the realities currently impacting American Indian families and tribes, it may be easy to believe that playing Indian is a way of honoring and preserving great cultures of the past, or that it causes no harm. However, when we are armed with the truth of the lasting effects of the trauma endured by members of these tribes and a better perspective of what life is like for American Indians in our communities today, we may find in ourselves a desire to honor them in a more authentic way.

THE ORIGINS OF PLAYING INDIAN

The origins of playing Indian are complex. There are too many historical and contemporary examples to give an overview of each. Instead, several prominent examples will help to explain the depth and breadth of the issue. With the historical examples as a backdrop, the paper will then delve more deeply into contemporary examples from youth development programs to promote an understanding of how these issues persist and are being carried forward by current and coming generations.

PART OF AMERICA'S CREATION STORY

A key event in the development of playing Indian, as Philip Deloria (1998) argues, is the Boston Tea Party. A common version of the story relates that in 1773 American colonists, unhappy with the British imposing an import tax on their tea, disguised themselves as Indians, boarded the Dartmouth docked in Boston, and dumped the ship's tea into the harbor in the dark of night. By the early 1800s, the Tammany Society and several "tribes" of the Improved Order of Red Men had emerged into the American post-Revolutionary War culture. These societies of white men were usually political in nature and shared some common elements of playing Indian—wearing Indian costumes, painting faces, carrying bows and arrows, telling stories, and conducting rituals and Indian pipe ceremonies. These fraternal societies had varying levels of formal organization and secrecy "and attracted millions of nineteenth century men to weekly meetings and initiation ceremonies" (Lawrence, 1924, quoted in Deloria, 1998, p. 47).

PLAYING INDIAN AS YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

By the 1900s, in response to the modernization and urbanization of the United States, several prominent leaders were attempting to create programs to teach character values to children. Playing Indian was established as a method of character and physical development for youth through the **natural** or **hobby Indians** movement. In 1903, Ernest Thomas Seton organized the Woodcraft Indians in Connecticut (Deloria, 1998). Seton invited boys to camp out and organized them into a make-believe tribe. He told them Indian tales and had them make their own Indian costumes. Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts, replicated elements of Seton's Indian curriculum. In each of these organizations, members would

dress up as Indians, meet in groups or troops often named after actual Indian tribes, and learn and practice activities that required strength and character. Young hobby Indians supported their Indian identities by choosing new names and earning badges they displayed to promote their accomplishments and proclaim their identity to others.

By 1910, Seton's Indian activities made up the core program at countless resident camps (Deloria, 1998). Also at that time, Luther and Charlotte Gulick, close friends of Seton, developed a youth training program for girls that followed the Indian-play framework. In creating the Camp Fire Girls, the Gulicks adapted Seton's Indian Lore program to reinforce middle class notions of gender. Camp Fire Girls learned about the domestic role of women and cultivated practical skills to make them successful in the home. Charlotte Gulick gave the first camp the Indian-sounding name of WoHeLo, representing the camp's emphasized values of **W**ork, **H**ealth, and **L**ove. Girls chose Indian names, did Indian crafts, made their own headbands and ceremonial dresses based on the perceived notion of the Indian maiden, and decorated the dresses with their personal symbols and insignia, which were akin to the badges being used by Boy Scouts. The organization grew and today serves boys as well as girls under the shortened name of Camp Fire.

It is interesting to note that the Gulicks, who were well-known as educational and social reformers, were early and influential supporters of both the Boy Scouts and the Y. This close personal link between the founders of the three organizations and the Indian-play framework may be an important area to explore further, as we will see later that all three organizations continue to struggle to eliminate elements of Indian play from their current practices and programs.

The Y Indian Guides and Y Indian Princesses programs (also known collectively as Y Guides) began much later, in 1926. Y Guides was initiated by Harold S. Keltner, the Director of the YMCA in St. Louis, and his friend Joe Friday, an Ojibway Indian. Some versions of the story acknowledge that Keltner was greatly influenced by Seton; more frequently, the creation of the program is credited directly to the inspiration Keltner took from Friday, who was said to be his guide on fishing and hunting trips (YMCA of the USA, 2012).

The Boy Scouts, the Y (specifically Y Guides), and Camp Fire, all acknowledge that they have incorporated Native American themes into aspects of their programs. These organizations, while distinctive today, were formed with very similar mission statements and activities that emphasized physical fitness, civic responsibility, spirituality, and (arguably) gender roles and responsibilities. It is well documented that each of these organizations still tolerates programs that include elements of playing Indian, although finding a direct reference to this anywhere in print is increasingly difficult. Still, traces remain: the Boy Scouts still have the Order of the Arrow; the Y Guides still host the Council of Nations; and Camp Fire continues to present the WoHeLo awards. All of these activities, and likely many more aspects of the three organizations' programs, still involve playing Indian, though their decentralized or federated nature makes it hard to be sure how much playing Indian still occurs, and where. A quick scan of the Internet, however, produces thousands of images of program participants—young boys and girls and their parents or leaders—wearing feathers, beads, and Native American costumes, or faux buckskin vests and tunics.

The Boy Scouts, the Y, and Camp Fire also helped spawn the residential camping movement in America, which heavily emphasizes Native American crafts, themes, and rituals in the camping experiences of millions of youth and families. An example of the integration of playing Indian into the American camping experience was discussed in "Notes on Camp," an episode of **This American Life** that aired on National Public Radio in August 1998. "Camp Lake of the Woods holds a fake Indian powwow during the summer. This kind of fake Native American-ness has been a part of camping in the United States since organized camping began a century ago. And ceremonies like this are just part of making the business run for any camp" (Glass & Snyder, 1998). Camps have high overhead costs, yet can be excellent revenue sources when full. Currently, camp fees for Lake of the Woods and Greenwoods Camps in Michigan are approximately \$5,100 per person for four weeks of camp. Most Y resident camps charge fees of approximately \$2,000 per person for four weeks of camp. These fees underscore that the camp experience is marketed to an upper middle class audience with plenty of disposable income, a group likely to be predominantly white.

WHAT'S THE HARM?

Why should we care that playing Indian persists? According to their websites, Boy Scouts of America, the Y, and Camp Fire collectively serve 11.9 million youth annually—a very wide reach. These organizations work hard to improve the lives of so many youth and families today, so what is the big deal if some of their program participants still want to dress up as Indians?

PROBLEMS WITH PLAYING INDIAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY: AN ILLUSTRATION

The fact is, playing Indian is hurtful to Native Americans and creates division in place of inclusion. There is a great deal of scientific evidence to that effect. But first, because few people have had enough contact with living American Indians to be able to put themselves in their place, I offer two stories that illustrate the effects of Indian play.

In the radio program “Notes on Camp,” host Ira Glass (1998) demonstrates the blitheness with which program participants play Indian at their annual powwow.

Girl 1 The reason it got taken away last year was because a lot of the counselors felt that it was politically incorrect, because the speeches that the Indians make are derogatory towards Native American culture, if you look at it that way.

Ira Glass I ask for examples. A few of the girls hold their palms up in the air and say, How. They launch into these fake, Pidgin English sentences where they drop lots of verbs and add um to the ends of the words.

Girl 1 We go to Lakeum of the Woodsum Campum.

Girl 2 I liveum in Vassar Eastum. I teachum camper naps how to walkum on waterum.

Girl 3 It's like inside jokes they like put into—like with adding stuff that like Indians or whatever.

Girl 1 It's so funny that it's not like even—no one even really thinks about it like that.

In contrast, Philip Deloria (2004) talks about the toll this constant exposure to cultural appropriation takes as he describes an interaction he has with his son, who is listening to “Shake Ya Tailfeather,” by P. Diddy, Nelly, and Murphy Lee, a song whose chorus samples the fake “War Chant” associated with sports teams including the Florida State Seminoles and the Atlanta Braves.

One day...I snap just a bit and there's an extra edge in my voice as I yell at him, “Turn that song off!”... He knows something is up, and he's a little worried: “I am so sorry, Dad. Do you have a headache?” “Yes,” I snarl. “It's a 500 year headache and it's called disrespect, injustice, and oppression.” He is confused...the song seems pretty harmless to him—as it does to a lot of people, I suppose. The war chant is just a little fragment of culture picked up and re-mixed. But, as I have suggested in this book, it is far from harmless. It sets and reinforces expectations. Those expectations occur in little fragments and in sweeping narratives throughout American and, indeed, global culture. War chants and Indian named automobiles make their way into our souls, and they lay the groundwork for day-to-day social interactions. They underpin the many ways non-Indian Americans blithely ignore the requests, opinions, and assertions of Native people. (“The tomahawk chop and the mascot are meant to honor you. We don't care if you don't feel honored.”) Such cultural expectations and social relations exist in dialogue with economic, political, and legal structures. The same unarticulated expectations that surround the war chant (not honor and courage, let's admit, but Indian violence transmuted to sports) help explain the seeming naturalness of Indian poverty and the active hostility to the very idea of Indian wealth or modernity. (p. 225)

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM TO AMERICAN INDIANS

A growing body of research reveals that Native American stereotyping and the prevalence of stereotyped Indian imagery is harmful to Native Americans (Baca, 2004; Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008; Levy, 2013; Michaelis, 1997; Pewewardy, 2001). Using the well-known mechanisms of social identity theory and stereotype threat—both of which have been studied extensively with constituents of other stereotyped groups—researchers have demonstrated that exposure to playing Indian in its various forms damages identity, self-image, learning and

achievement, and feelings of personal and community worth. Further, those who stereotype American Indians also are more likely to stereotype other cultures (Kim-Prieto, Goldstein, Okazaki, & Kirschner, 2010).

Several prominent Native American educators are concerned about the negative impact that Indian imagery and cultural appropriation have on the identities and self-esteem of children. Bernhard Michaelis (1997), founder of Native Child, an organization created to affirm the Navajo child's culture, language, and positive identity, reports that the more frequently American Indian children see a stereotype, the more it hinders their ability to take pride in their heritage and to have a healthy self-image. He writes about how American Indian preschoolers do not recognize themselves in the stereotyped Indian identity shown in popular culture. Through cartoons and popular media, the children learned early on that Indians wear feathers and live in tepees. **We** don't do these things, the preschoolers reasoned, so we must not be Indians.

Dr. Cornel Pewewardy (Comanche-Kiowa; 2001), who was named 2009 teacher of the year by the National Indian Education Association, argues that this distorted identity and lowered self-esteem are detrimental to academic achievement. Having spent his life as an educator, he trains teachers on how to counter the attacks on American Indian culture in their classrooms, and asks them to become allies in the effort to preserve the mental health of Native children. Research on Indian mascots furthers these claims, noting that one of the harms of sports teams' Native American imagery is "the day-to-day, easily accessible instruction it provides in how to inappropriately claim symbolic American Indian identity without thought to the individual and collective consequences of doing so. As a tool of social control, non-American Indians become adept at misappropriating without conscience or consideration while creating mass confusion as to who is Indian" (Staurowsky, 2007, p. 66).

The majority of Native American people, organizations, and tribes have called for an end to all forms of playing Indian, including mascot imagery. More than 81 percent of respondents to a poll in **Indian Country Today**, a national newspaper that covers American Indian issues, along with

500 Native American organizations, hundreds of tribes, and petitions with signatures in the tens of thousands have called for the retirement of Indian mascots and other forms of negative imagery ("American Indian Opinion Leaders: American Indian Mascots," 2001). Continuing to play Indian and support Indian mascots when those affected by it are asking for its end is a form of bullying.

Others are making a legal case that mascots in school settings constitute a racially hostile environment. Lawrence Baca, a member of the Pawnee Tribe and a past President of the National Native American Bar Association, demonstrates that the interpretation of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by the U.S. Department of Education's (DOE) Office for Civil Rights should prohibit schools from continuing to use Indian imagery because it creates a racially hostile environment. Baca (2004) cites cases of violence and harassment that have occurred toward American Indians in conjunction with these practices.

In 2013, Daniel Levy, Director for Law and Policy at the Michigan Department of Civil Rights, filed a lawsuit against the 35 public schools in Michigan that have Indian mascots. In the argument submitted to the DOE's Office for Civil Rights he writes, "A growing, un-rebutted body of evidence now establishes that the use of American Indian imagery reinforces stereotypes in a way that negatively impacts the potential for achievement by students with American Indian ancestry. The negative impact on this minority of students is **not** associated with malicious intent" (p. 5). In other words, the harm to the child happens regardless of whether the intent was to harm or not. The DOE recently dismissed this claim because the legal standard of showing intent to discriminate could not be met. The federal agency found that, while the state did indeed show that harm was caused, it could not show that any school district intended to discriminate against the American Indian students. The state argued that showing "intent is no longer relevant when harm has been proven" (Levy, 2013). This decision will likely lead to legislation to change relevant evidentiary standards to remove the requirement that there be a showing of intent, especially as tribes flex their political muscle and increasingly use the political process when the judicial process fails them.

Recently, a series of four studies examined the effects of American Indian mascots and other Indian stereotypes on the psychological well-being of American Indian teenagers (Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008). Even when students reported positive associations with figures like Chief Wahoo (the Cleveland Indians logo), Pocahontas, and others, exposure to the images lowered American Indian students' self-esteem and feelings of pride in their community and limited their ability to envision achievement-oriented possible selves.

HARM TO THE NATION

"The new leaders of America will have to understand race, if for no other reason than the future of our country is a multicultural one" (Blackwell, Kwoh, & Pastor, 2010, p. 29). By 2050, the U.S. Census Bureau expects the United States to become a majority-minority country—that is, to have a population with no single racial group as the majority. Further, as the United States becomes an increasingly multicultural nation, we are reminded of the need to revise our historical patterns around racism if we are to solve some of the issues of civic engagement that prevent our forward motion. "Working on improving human relations is essential for diminishing the stereotyping that reduces Asians to foreign 'others,' renders black and Latino teens special targets of police harassment, and transforms derogatory terms for Native Americans into accepted names for sports teams. Challenging these perspectives is a worthy battle, and it is one that will have real consequences, particularly to the extent the negative images in the media and elsewhere influence teachers' perceptions of students, employers' perceptions of workers, and Americans' perceptions of the common destiny" (Blackwell, Kwoh, & Pastor, 2010, p. 147).

HARM TO THE ORGANIZATION

One also can predict an impact on organizations that hang onto traditions of stereotyping and playing Indian. As the nation becomes less and less white, the number of people who have experienced racism (or whose friends or loved ones have been marked by this experience) will inevitably begin to outnumber those who are unable to relate to these experiences because of their own privilege. This includes being able to see the effects of subtle racism of the type described here. Already, research conducted

by the Boy Scouts indicates that African American and Hispanic/Latino youth do not think the organization is comfortable with their racial/ethnic groups (Boy Scouts of America, 2007). In the report, African American, Latino, and Asian parents and youth indicated that they see a Scout as a white or Anglo person who is not comfortable with people from diverse backgrounds.

People who do not feel welcome and accepted do not join or choose to participate. People who have themselves been discriminated against because of their race or culture do not support organizations that are perceived as perpetuating racism, even if that racism has taken place toward a group other than their own. Cathy Tisdale (2012), CEO of Camp Fire, speaks to this issue in an editorial in *The New York Times* "It Pays to Be Inclusive." She attributes the success of Camp Fire to its long history of inclusion, stating that all are welcome. She notes that, with a clear and comprehensive policy of inclusion, "Camp Fire is known by its members, supporters and others, as an organization that embraces the differences among us and reflects the real world we all inhabit." The Boy Scouts' research, if not its own policies, confirms this. It notes that "youth are growing up in communities where diversity is the norm and their circle of friends reflects a variety of cultures. They want and expect diversity to be a part of their activities and the organizations they join" (Boy Scouts of America, 2007). Thus for the Y, the Boy Scouts, and Camp Fire—all of which are organizations that strive to work with youth and families of all racial and ethnic backgrounds—there is clearly an internal conflict: They seek diversity even as they tolerate racial stereotyping in activities within their organizations. The result of this conflict is, inevitably, less participation from diverse communities and harm to the reputation of their organizations.

The Y drew upon this argument when, in 2003, it attempted to end the Y Guides program and supplant it with a new program—YMCA Adventure Guides®. The Adventure Guides rollout packet states, "the controversy regarding the program (YMCA Indian Guides) has tarnished the Y's reputation. If staff and volunteers fail to make the necessary modification, it will continue to tarnish the

Y's reputation, making the Y less credible both nationally and locally. YMCAs place great value on the name, logo and standing in the community. YMCA leaders have a responsibility to keep the Y's reputation strong and relevant in their communities, to manage risks or threats of legal action, and to discourage negative media coverage. YMCA of the USA and local Ys are perceived as leaders; therefore, it is imperative that staff and volunteers 'walk the talk'—that they behave consistently with their mission, goals and core values" (YMCA of the USA, 2003, p. 31).

This all sounds good. However, the fact remains that this document was created a decade ago, and yet the practice of playing Indian in the Y—and in other organizations—persists.

WHY PLAYING INDIAN PERSISTS

Playing Indian is a ritual that has gone on at least since the founding of the United States, and, in the case of the nonprofit organizations and camps mentioned, has been systematized in a way that has allowed it to be passed from generation to generation. At this point, the affluent, mostly white individuals who continue to play Indian feel a great deal of attachment to the tradition. Many participants argue that removing the Native American themes from the programs they participate in would disrupt tradition and cause them to quit the program.

PARTICIPANTS GET A CHANCE TO BUILD IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY

Individuals who play Indian commonly report feeling a magical connection with each other through their activities. A feeling of sacredness and specialness replaces the feelings of isolation and disconnectedness so common in modern society. Playing Indian is a blueprint, of sorts, for relief from social stressors and may offer some a much-desired break from the reality of their everyday lives. One participant tells a story: “We almost did not make the first campout... there was so much to do. I also work on Saturdays. I was convinced to go because it was the ‘Induction Ceremony.’ The Fox tribe put on the best camping weekend I have ever been on. Looking back it seemed that the campout went on forever, there was so much to do, see, and learn. The tribes did an outstanding job carving pumpkins. On Saturday night, the Induction Ceremony changed the way I look at children forever. The...ceremony was simply outstanding. I can remember everything like it was yesterday. The princess’s faces, they looked excited, amazed. I cannot find the other words to describe what I saw on their faces. It was a truly special feeling. I cast away my impatience on Sunday morning and have yet to get impatient with my little princess since. I learned so much, as to what it takes to be a father and a friend to my new daughter” (“Stories From Past and Present Members About Their Experiences in the Adventure Guides/Princesses Program,” n.d.).

It can be hard for outsiders to understand participants’ deep emotional connection to the ritual. From the outside, playing Indian can seem silly, but, according to anecdotes from program participants, it allows a person a safe space to take on a new identity, to let go of the parts of oneself

that may be burdensome, and to be a part of a community where rituals are created and shared in meaningful ways. “Eugene...who has been active in [a program at a YMCA in the western United States] for five years with his 9-year-old daughter...says they enjoy the campouts, monthly at-home get-togethers and the annual father-daughter sweetheart dance in February. Each new member goes through an induction campout weekend. [Eugene] says the ceremony may sound sort of hokey, but can be quite touching. ‘When you’re right there and it’s nighttime and it’s a forest and you have a campfire going and someone’s slowly beating a drum, and you’re hearing these dads promising that they will dedicate time to be with their daughters and to listen to their daughters, and daughters are then promising that they will try to be respectful of their fathers, it’s very moving’” (“Stories From Past and Present Members About Their Experiences in the Adventure Guides/Princesses Program,” n.d.).

One void this practice fills is connection to an American cultural identity. As time goes by, the processes of assimilation, mobility, and intermarriage tend to dilute immigrant Americans’ connection to cultural practices in their countries of origin (Alba, 1990). For European Americans specifically, “the cultural stuff of ethnicity tends to wither” (p. 309). Cultural activities, then, “may remain confined to a sphere of personal curiosity instead of feeding into the life of ongoing ethnic networks and institutions” (Alba, 1990, p. 77). Immersed in a culture that emphasizes one’s right to pursue individual paths to happiness and absent rituals common to one’s entire social network, playing Indian can take the symbolic place of the traditions and cultural heritage practiced by a person’s actual ancestors. These imaginary adopted identities are further solidified as participants fulfill important roles within each tribe. Leaders are born and shaped in service to their small communities, and participants grow in deep relationship with one another.

PROGRAMS THAT TRY TO CHANGE INCUR BACKLASH

Change is difficult and playing Indian is entrenched. Organizations that have mandated the end of the practice have been met with strong backlash. Resident camps have attempted to discontinue Native American-related

traditions. The Boy Scouts, the Y, and Camp Fire all have taken steps to distance themselves from the act of playing Indian, recognizing, on some level, that it is not a practice that will be tolerated. Boy Scouts of America still calls its honor society The Order of the Arrow, but does not mention the need to dress up as an Indian to participate. Boy Scouts can still earn an Indian Lore patch. The Y has officially converted Y Guides to Adventure Guides, which supposedly avoids the use of Native American culture. Camp Fire does not even allude to its origins of playing Indian anywhere on its website, emphasizing instead its long history of inclusion.

CAMPS TRIED TO ELIMINATE POWWOWS

As recounted earlier in the paper, at Lake of the Woods and Greenwoods Camps (Mich.), the powwow was eliminated for one summer; due to overwhelming outcry from participants and their parents, it was brought back the following year. "A camp director in Wisconsin told us... that financially, you cannot run a camp without lots of repeat customers. These traditions bring kids back year after year" (Glass & Snyder, 1998).

THE Y TRIED TO ELIMINATE Y GUIDES

Over time, the Y has made multiple efforts to control or eliminate playing Indian from programs. The national board's vote to rename and restructure Y Guides was made "out of appropriate sensitivity to Native American groups and to better reflect their commitment to diversity," and the new program curriculum for Adventure Guides was developed in consultation with staff, participants, and volunteers, to support the conversion (YMCA of the USA, 2003).

While it is clear that many YMCAs did, in fact, convert their programs to the new Adventure Guides model, many have refused to do so. One example is a YMCA in the eastern United States that continues to sponsor the Arapahoe Nation, a fictitious Indian nation made up of non-Native participants, that boasts of involving 13,000 people in playing Indian annually. In 2011, this YMCA published a 129-page handbook outlining how to play Indian. It includes sections that detail "Tribal Responsibilities," "How to be a Good Chief," "The Longbow Council," and the following ceremonial closing prayer, complete with diagrams of the associated hand motions:

And Now, (point down)

May the Great Spirit (circle upwards),

Make (cup a ball of clay with your hands three times)

The Sun Rise (arms folded, then raise one arm up)

In (point your right hand into your left palm)

Your (extend hand to all others)

Heart. (place right hand on heart)

How-How! (p. 8)

A video featured on the YMCA's website in April 2013 showed a former "tribal chief" discussing the history of the Arapahoe Nation. It was not the history of the actual Arapahoe, but the history of playing Indian.

Equally startling, given the Y's stated focus on diversity and inclusion, was how few Native people were included as the organization created Adventure Guides and developed the conversion process. Although the Y seems sure that the new program design has eliminated all elements of playing Indian, it would be interesting to find out what the Native community would say if given the opportunity to contribute as much to the process as Y program participants, donors, and staff did. Perhaps it was the lack of meaningful dialogue between the groups that led to the failure, on the part of some Ys, to understand why a transition was needed at all.

CAMP FIRE TRIED TO ELIMINATE RACIAL STEREOTYPES

Camp Fire now serves both boys and girls. Its policy on inclusion states, in part, "Designed and implemented to reduce sexual, racial, religious, and cultural stereotypes and to foster positive intercultural relationships, in Camp Fire, everyone is welcome" (Camp Fire, n.d.).

Still, many of the youth who received this year's WoHeLo awards, Camp Fire's highest award for excellence in leadership, were photographed wearing beaded necklaces and brown, fringed tunics adorned with patches and insignia. To the untrained eye, this may not seem blatantly Indian; however, historical photographs clearly prove that the origins of this tradition lie with playing Indian.

THOSE WHO PLAY INDIAN CLAIM TO BE HONORING NATIVE AMERICANS

There is an almost universal tendency for those who play Indian to claim that they are doing so in honor of Native people, their customs, and their cultures—even though Native Americans have given clear messages to the contrary. Adrienne K. ("Dear YMCA, I haz the sads," 2011) of nativeappropriations.com registered her reactions by writing a letter to her local YMCA:

I see the wearing of a fake feathered headdress as akin to dressing in blackface—it is the donning of a costume of a racial group that is not one’s own, based off of stereotyped caricatures that allow for the continuing subordination of Indian people. I know that [the people pictured on the YMCA’s website and in the YMCA branch] would probably say that they are “honoring” Native Americans or “paying respect” to Indians, but the reality is that most Native people find no honor or respect in taking sacred objects out of context with no regard to their significance or origins. I am further saddened, because in a minimal Internet search, I found an abundance of evidence that YMCA groups have not ceased in the use of the Indian theme at all.

In the letter, Adrienne K. also suggested that the director of the YMCA watch a 2007 video posted on YouTube featuring a ceremony of one YMCA’s Adventure Guides program: “Try to picture how it feels, as a Native person, to watch your culture being misrepresented, mocked, and distorted beyond recognition.” In another blog post she wrote, “This video is one of those things that is so blatantly racist, the stereotypes are so deep and egregious, that I don’t even know what to say. The part that gets me is that this was in 2007. This was not in the ‘70’s. This is after Indian Guides supposedly ‘reformed’ their ways” (“Hoya Hoya, Cultural Appropriation! Or Why Suburban White Folks Shouldn’t Play Indian,” 2011).

The Y’s purpose is to strengthen the foundations of community, yet the Y’s tolerance for playing Indian actively undermines the sense of community many of its members have built. Adrienne K. notes, “The scary part is these are my neighbors, my mom’s students, the folks I see at the grocery store and at the beach. I am a member of a community that supports **this**...That scares me” (“Hoya Hoya, Cultural Appropriation! Or Why Suburban White Folks Shouldn’t Play Indian,” 2011). Experiences like this reinforce feelings of marginalization and perpetuate the belief that organizations like the Y do not understand the experiences of people from diverse backgrounds. They also can be traumatic. Adrienne K. writes that while watching the video, “I almost started screaming in my office.” The video is among hundreds of recent videos readily available on the Internet showing Y members mocking American Indian ceremonies.

Though it may not be obvious to participants that Native Americans do not approve of programs that mock their culture, the Y is aware of that fact. As the document rolling out Adventure Guides states: “We invited two Native Americans to advise us on what we could do to make our program more respectful. Again the message was loud and clear: ‘You can’t as long as you continue to adopt a culture that you don’t own and can’t possibly understand the intricacies of’ ” (YMCA of the USA, 2003).

Nonetheless, owing to the complicated history of colonization that American Indians have faced, there are Native people who will speak in support of the practice of playing Indian. Barbara Taylor, the Senior Consultant of Program Development for the Y during the time of transition from Y Guides, noted: “Some still argue that not all Native Americans feel that way. However, my experience from those Native Americans that have called to pledge their support for the program is that their support waivers when I explain some of the practices that are taking place that have been deemed inappropriate” (YMCA of the USA, 2003).

GENESIS AMNESIA IN ORGANIZATIONS

Why does playing Indian persist despite organizations’ attempts to become more respectful with their costuming and rituals? Either organizational leaders feel their response to the issue of cultural appropriation has been effective or they have regressed to a more covert status of appropriation by ensuring that the outward-facing messages convey tolerance while quietly allowing the practice. Through participant postings on the Internet, it is clear that in all three organizations—the Boy Scouts, the Y, and Camp Fire—playing Indian in various forms is allowed to continue unchecked.

As previously discussed, it is likely that the individuals responsible for evaluating programs in these organizations and fostering change suffer from genesis amnesia. They may know little to nothing about Native cultures. In some cases where discontinuance has failed, organizations that support playing Indian also may not know how the practice came to be part of the program, which prevented them from addressing the full complexity of the situation. In other cases, the fear of alienating current program participants has taken precedence over the need to authentically honor Native people and their cultures. It is interesting to note that the Boy Scouts, the Y, and Camp

Fire have not publicly acknowledged why they made the changes they have, which perpetuates genesis amnesia. Additionally, within organizations there is often an added set of organizational complexities that can prevent change and create blind spots that interfere with success.

To ensure lasting and meaningful change, organizations need to create a more thorough process for investigating, planning, and tracking instances of playing Indian in a way that fully addresses the need for change at every level of the organization. We need leaders for this process who are both skilled at leading change and knowledgeable

about the dynamics of privilege, marginalization, and internalized oppression. The process should include measures to prevent cultural appropriation from moving from overt to covert. Finally, as hard as it may be to admit, one must acknowledge that some individuals in positions of power will, for a variety of reasons, want to uphold the status quo. There are those who wield great authority and, although they may not say it, do not want inclusion. Without a strong process overseen by willing leaders, success is likely to be limited, as it has been in the past. Yet success is possible, so let us now turn to solutions.

SOLUTIONS

Whether or not participants in programs that play Indian are aware of the ways the practice harms individuals, organizations, communities, and American society as a whole, it is clear that they are attached to the emotional payoffs that arise from appropriating Indian culture and perpetuating stereotypes, as programs and practices have persisted long past the time when they officially ended. Under these circumstances, how can the chapter of American history that began this practice truly come to a close?

The key to meaningful change moving forward lies in resisting the temptation to identify quick or prescriptive solutions. Instead, circumstances dictate the need for a shift within organizations from discussion of issues to dialogue with people, with the goal of becoming a true ally to Native individuals.

If we really want to honor Native people, then an appropriate response seems to be to intentionally welcome and include American Indians in an ongoing dialogue. To continue to try to convince Native Americans that we are honoring them when they are telling us we are not seems cruel, and is likely a result of behaviors learned through a framework of white privilege. Instead, we need a dialogue that will lead to a deeper understanding of the dire conditions that impact American Indians today. I am hopeful that this would lead to authentic partnerships that would improve the lives of the individuals and communities on both sides of the issue. With a deeper understanding and an authentic connection, organizations could work with Native Americans to help address the circumstances that have led to tribal communities having some of the worst health outcomes and inequity in our nation. This would be a more effective way of honoring Native people, especially if it resulted in additional financial resources or partnerships with organizations that have programmatic expertise in these areas.

DISCUSSION VERSUS DIALOGUE

Tervalon and Neal (2013) make a distinction between discussion and dialogue (see the appendix). When we **discuss**, we promote fixing, advocate a single perspective, present a position as right, persuade, prove our own vision, or decide to act first. Through **discussions**, the Y and other organizations have come up with solutions that they

believed would work. In contrast, the purpose of **dialogue** is to learn, hear, and understand different perspectives; allow for common ground; discover or create shared visions; and seek coherence between thought and action.

This shift, if intentional and authentic, will lead us in directions we cannot conceive of theoretically. It will require practice, trust, and commitment to stay the course so that the solutions that emerge are meaningful and lasting. Patience with an open-ended process will be a key to success on this potential pathway to meaningful change.

OBTAINING ACCURATE INFORMATION

Solutions also need to be based on the best and most complete information we can get about both playing Indian and about Native Americans. This can be a challenge; much of what has been published in the past is inaccurate or written from the viewpoint of the colonizer (a fact that has further marginalized and alienated American Indians). Therefore, I advocate for a process that “upholds each individual or community group as the experts and teachers on the content of their personal culture. Thus, creating time and space for sharing personal stories, worldviews, approaches to trust building, team building, and community dynamics should become part of the day-to-day strategy for inclusion...” (Neal, n.d.). Educators and subject-matter experts could be engaged to enhance understanding, but they cannot replace the essential role of individuals telling their own truth about who they are and how an issue impacts them.

BECOMING TRUE ALLIES TO AMERICAN INDIANS

Appropriately engaged, allies—members of dominant groups—could play a powerful role in the process of healing the Native American community. Allies can be influential agents of change to help marginalized groups in their struggle against oppression.

According to Kendall (2003), being an ally “is not about rescuing or grandstanding, making a show of our support so that we will look good or progressive or liberal...Those of us who have been granted privileges based purely on who we are born (as white, as male, and so forth) often feel that either we want to give our privileges back, which

we can't really do, or we want to use them to improve the experience of those who don't have our access to power and resources. One of the most effective ways to use our privilege is to become the ally of those on the other side of the privilege seesaw. This type of alliance requires a great deal of self-examination on our part as well as the willingness to go against the people who share our privileged status and with whom we are expected to group ourselves."

Due to the great trauma experienced by American Indians through the wars and genocide that ensued after coming into contact with white people, an organization's motives for becoming an ally are likely to be met with suspicion. Additionally, certain behaviors or positions taken by those from a dominant culture can inadvertently offend many Native people. The most prominent of these is the tendency for people from the dominant culture to try to authenticate their alliance by communicating that they are "part Native" or "have a distant Indian relative." The tactic usually has the opposite effect of demonstrating the person's outsider status. A better approach is to introduce oneself as in any other setting and take cues from the Native person as to what information, if any, he or she wants to share about his or her culture or heritage. It is important to keep in mind that many tribal people are reluctant to share personal information or cultural traditions with outsiders, since so much has been taken disrespectfully from them over the years. Francis Kendall provides a helpful framework that outlines the roles and responsibilities of effective allies in his 2003 article "How to Be an Ally If You Are a Person With Privilege."

Becoming an ally is not about getting answers to every question. When interacting with American Indians, it is best to wait for information to be shared rather than asking probing questions. Also, allies should be prepared to commit to a process of establishing trust that will likely take longer than expected. Allies should expect to make mistakes, experience or witness grief proportionate to the intense trauma that has faced and still faces Native people, and yet stay the course. If allies abandon the process when it becomes hard, they risk reinforcing the stereotype that they have ulterior motives.

In the context of playing Indian, allies need to, not only recognize cultural appropriation, but also refrain from participating in acts of appropriation and actively name

instances of it out loud and in writing. To get to the heart of the issue, allies need to develop a regular practice of asking broader and deeper questions, such as, How is racism happening here? We need allies to believe they have agency to change, not only their own perspectives and behaviors (i.e., personally mediated racism), but also the larger systems in their workplaces and in their communities (institutionalized racism) without overlooking the role that internalized racism plays as well (Jones, 2000).

An example of broadening and deepening the conversation might begin with these questions:

- If you feel ready to be an ally, to put an end to playing Indian within your organization, how could you work to accomplish that?
- In what ways have you played Indian? Have you
 - done the tomahawk chop at sports games?
 - watched movies that stereotype Indians?
 - bought fashions that have been designed through a process of cultural appropriation?
 - dressed up as an Indian for Halloween?
 - mocked Indians when you do karaoke as the Village People?

Would you be willing to

- support a ban on Indian mascots?
- look at health and economic disparities on Indian reservations and within urban Native communities and to ally yourself with solutions?
- examine the role that your privilege plays in preserving business as usual?

As Kendall (2003) appropriately notes, "allies understand that emotional safety is not a realistic expectation if we take our alliance seriously. For those with privilege, the goal is to 'become comfortable with the uncomfortable and uncomfortable with the too-comfortable,' and to act to alter the too-comfortable."

Even with the successful development of allies in the dominant group, it is not for the dominant group to determine when the oppressed group is no longer being oppressed. The effort to reform and eliminate playing Indian can only be considered successful when Native voices attest to its success. In demonstrating the need

for immediate change, this paper has quoted numerous American Indian people. Those who would be allies must continue to hear from the individuals and communities adversely impacted and define success by improvements in the social conditions of these communities.

As we prepare to move forward together in an increasingly modern and diverse America, Manuel Pastor (2013) reminds us of the following key components of leading change through the division in our midst:

- Keep pitching to the coming generations who are aspirational rather than angry.
- Consider equity and inclusion to be important principles for successfully bridging communities.

I have proposed a framework for building solutions within organizations where harm has occurred through the organization's practices and programs, even if harm was not the intent. The goal is transformational change that will produce greater equity and inclusion for all.

APPENDIX

RESOURCES FOR DIALOGUE

DIALOGUE OR DISCUSSION

Dialogue

- To learn
- To hear and understand different perspectives
- To offer, reflect, and inquire
- To explore collective thinking and meaning
- To allow for common ground
- To discover or create shared visions
- To seek coherence between thought and action

Discussion

- To fix
- To advocate a single perspective
- To present a position as right
- To sell, persuade, and enlist
- To succumb to one strong opinion
- To prove one's own vision
- To decide to act first

DIALOGUE

Tips for challenging oppression and bias during dialogue:

- Acknowledge that intent does not always equal impact.
- Assume best intentions, share feelings, be supportive, and encourage dialogue to continue.
- Challenge personal assumptions or be aware of your own stereotyping, prejudicial, and discriminatory behaviors.
- Be aware of your personal communication style or any bias you may have toward other communication styles and dynamics.
- Learn to manage and facilitate conflict.
- Learn how to give and receive feedback around what pushes your hot buttons.
- Be clear on your own assumptions about how to handle tension or express emotion.
- Avoid language and behaviors that are biased or exclusionary.
- Speak in "I" statements.
- Provide accurate information—stay current—when challenging biases or stereotypes.
- State when you are sharing a personal experience or perception versus a fact.
- Avoid making generalizations; acknowledge diversity.
- Show empathy and compassion.
- Model nondefensive behavior.
- Model cultural humility—for example, correct stereotypes you make out loud to show that we are always learning and that cultural humility is a lifelong process (don't compartmentalize this behavior to special events or interactions with certain groups of people).
- Avoid blaming, shaming, or victimizing the speaker.
- Establish standards of responsibility and behaviors for your one-on-one or group dialogue so that you can hold yourself and others accountable.
- Reflect on personal barriers you have to dialoguing on difficult topics, as well as hesitations to intervene when you hear biases, stereotypes, and so on.

- Listen with the intent to learn from others' experiences; suspend judgment.
- Don't be afraid of silence.
- Acknowledge your own humanity and the humanity of others.
- Be flexible and ask clarifying questions.

Tips for overcoming defensiveness during dialogue:

- Explore the speaker's feelings of being attacked. Acknowledging someone's feelings does not mean that you agree with them or accept blame for them.
- Work with the speaker on ways to constructively deal with his or her feelings and stay open to the dialogue.
- Develop strategies for helping the speaker gain control over his or her emotions, circumstances, or environment.
- Dialogue, don't accuse!
- Use "I" statements in conjunction with positive statements versus negative statements—for example, "I can sense that this is very emotional for you" versus "You are always so emotional."
- Provide feedback during the dialogue process to help clarify, learn, and gently challenge ideas.
- Agree within reason; find areas in which you can realistically agree with the speaker; search for commonalities.
- Focus on one issue; don't compare them to your own or other issues that surfaced another time.

DIALOGUE SELF-ASSESSMENT

- What are some ways you might acknowledge that intent does not always equal impact when having a dialogue?
- Why is it sometimes challenging to assume best intentions? How can you model this during a challenging dialogue?
- What are some of your personal stereotypes, prejudices, or biases that might inform how you dialogue with others?
- Who would you feel uncomfortable having a dialogue with and why?
- How would you describe your personal communication style? How might this differ from the style of those around you?
- What did you learn from your cultural group about how to manage conflict and handle your own and others' emotions?
- What did you learn from your cultural group about other cultural groups that may interfere with having an open dialogue?
- How might you provide feedback to someone who said something that you felt was offensive or biased without shutting down the dialogue?
- What are some of your personal hot buttons (e.g., gender-bias language) that might get pushed during a dialogue?
- What are some ways to avoid gender-, heterosexist-, and ethnic-bias language during dialogue?
- How might you establish standards of responsibility and behavior for your one-on-one or group dialogue so that you can hold yourself and others accountable?
- What are some of your personal hesitations to intervening when you hear biases, stereotypes, and so on?
- What do you find challenging about suspending judgment?
- What is one example of an open-ended, clarifying question?

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As the Vice President and Regional Executive Director for the Metropolitan Oakland Region of the YMCA of the East Bay (Calif.), Kathleen Gushoney is responsible for creating a holistic system of wellness for all Oakland residents and their families. She also leads the development of partnerships with community leaders and volunteers to extend YMCA services and programs to broader segments of the community through the management of the M. Robinson Baker branch in West Oakland, the Eastlake YMCA in East Oakland, and many offsite and school-based programs.



Previously, she served as the Executive Director of the Downtown Oakland YMCA. Kathleen has worked extensively throughout the Bay Area, including in the YMCA of San Francisco, where she was Associate Executive Director at Shih Yu-Lang Central YMCA for three years. Prior to that, Kathleen was Assistant Director at the Friendship House Association of American Indians, Inc., in San Francisco, a transitional-housing and substance-abuse-recovery program that provides treatment, prevention services, job readiness support, and an afterschool youth program.

Kathleen earned her bachelor's degree at the University of Dayton, Ohio, and her master's in pastoral ministry from Boston College. She completed the YMCA Executive Development Institute in May of 2008 and received her YMCA Certificate in Executive Fundraising in 2010 and her YMCA Branch Leadership Certification in 2011.