

Examining the Sociocultural Experiences of Cherokee Nation Citizens in Athletic Competition and Sport

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study sought to better understand an underrepresented ethnic culture and produced the following research question: what are the sociocultural experiences of Cherokee citizens surrounding athletic competition and sport? Following a qualitative design, 15 participants were interviewed about their personal experiences in athletic competition and sport while growing up in rural Oklahoma. Interviews were open-ended and followed a semi-structured script of questions with additional probes. The data revealed six axial codes (reputation, influences, culture, community, psychosocial development, and family). Qualitative analyses revealed that participants have lived in an environment that is conducive for athletic growth, cultural awareness, and social exploration. The individuals in this study experienced an unwavering passion for athletic competition and sport. Cherokee individuals start forming their social identity from an early age, around ages 6 to 10, through these athletic pursuits. They are raised in and continue to live in an environment that fosters opportunities that allow for social, cultural, and athletic growth. Family, schools, and community provide a stable foundation for pursuing athletic competition and sport. Examination of the lived experiences of Native Americans provides a fertile ground for future research efforts in sport and physical activity.

Keywords: Native Americans, physical activity, qualitative, culture.

INTRODUCTION

The Native American culture truly appreciates the sociocultural significance of being physically active through sport and play (1). Key tribal attributes such as self-discipline, self-worth, and self-reliance are thought to be developed through sport (2). Further, the Native American has had an extensive history and tradition of sport and play.

Well-known Native American professional athletes such as all-around athlete Jim Thorpe (Olympic Gold Medalist Decathlon and Pentathlon), Billy Mills (Olympic Gold Medalist 10,000 meter), and Sam Bradford (Heisman Trophy winner and NFL Quarterback) reflect positivity and cultural pride through sport and competition. Modern sport and games of North America, like field hockey, lacrosse, wrestling and cross-country running can be found in the historical chronicles of Native American culture (2).

However, the Native American has been an underrepresented minority in academic research (3). Research examining Native Americans in

sport has been somewhat better. Literature has shown that North American Indians, specifically Cherokees, have been playing a form of stickball for centuries, known as lacrosse today (4). Other forms of sport like wrestling, swimming, archery, and running were noticed by the early Euro-Americans (5) and were evident in traditional ceremonies or religious events (6).

The importance of these games for Native Americans was believed to enrich the physical, social, spiritual, and cultural conditions of the tribe (7). For example, stickball remains a part of tribal ceremonial rituals today in Cherokee culture (4). The Cherokees have had a tumultuous history and their involvement in sport and competition is unique.

The Cherokee Nation is one of the three federally recognized Cherokee tribes in the U.S. (the other two being the United Keetoowah in Oklahoma and the Eastern Band in North Carolina) and is headquartered in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. A chief, vice chief, and council members are elected and a written governmental constitution is in place. There are roughly

315,000 tribal members spread out all over the world. However, the highest concentrations of tribal members, 126,000, reside within the nation's fourteen counties in Eastern Oklahoma, roughly 7,000 square miles of jurisdictional boundaries. To be considered a citizen of Cherokee Nation, one must be a direct descendent of a family member from The Dawes Rolls (1898-1914). The Dawes Rolls were the final roll call of the western Cherokee; the citizen must provide documentation of at least one ancestor listed on the final rolls (8).

Cherokee people have had to endure many hardships over the years. The Treaty of New Echota in 1835 resulted in forced migration of most Cherokees. This "Trail of Tears" brought countless human loss (estimated at over 4000) but also highlighted the rugged survival nature of the tribe. After relocating to Oklahoma, education flourished through Cherokee National Male and Female Seminaries that helped to keep Cherokee heritage alive in addition to educating the young and helping to create for the Nation an accepted place within white society (9).

Games and competition have always been an important part of Cherokee culture. Stickball has been at the center of religious ritual, and much more, within the Cherokee identity. The Cherokee term for "stickball" (anetso) has been translated as "little brother to war," as game and ritual became intertwined.

In his book "*Anetso, the Cherokee Ball Game*," Zogry (10) suggests that the game signifies the Cherokee values of overcoming trials in order to foster community. Indeed, initially it was seen as a replacement or rehearsal for war. As an example, Cushman (11) reports that two tribes decided to play stickball over a land dispute instead of going to war.

Today, stickball has been replaced with contemporary sport in the lives of Cherokees. But its significance as "more than sport" still remains today. Collins (12) reported on the football team from Cherokee Central High School, a part of the Eastern Band of Cherokees. The author considers it a minor miracle that Cherokees still have a home in North Carolina after the Trail of Tears.

Although the game is football, their coach is reported as saying "when you're playing for CHS, you're not playing for a school. You're playing for a nation. It is much deeper than football. It's as much about pride in the culture." Being seen as different from the rest

of North Carolina, the coach also says that they are never just a school; they are always an Indian school.

Young Cherokee Nation athletes in Oklahoma also face sociocultural pressures while competing in sports. A high value is placed on competing at young ages, as evidenced by school-aged children (elementary and middle school) competing during the school day. Young Cherokees and their non-native peers are frequently taken from the learning environment of the classroom to compete in various sporting events during the school day throughout the academic year. The majority of the rural county schools have been practicing this method of sporting competition for decades. This issue could seem puzzling to outsiders looking in. For example, second graders are competing against other county elementary schools in softball tournaments during the middle of the school day. Certain sociocultural issues might also be in play here.

Principals, coaches, parents, and communities could be placing sociocultural pressures on these children to perform athletically. Because there is a lack of research on the Cherokee people and because sport has played a prominent role throughout the Cherokee past, the goal of this study was to investigate these experiences and to provide readers with a clearer understanding of these issues and to allow the reader to weave these present lived experiences with Cherokee culture of the past. A first step is to gather lived narratives from adult Cherokee citizens that have been in this system in Oklahoma. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain further insight into sociocultural experiences of an underrepresented population. More specifically, the purpose was to examine, using a phenomenological approach, the sociocultural experiences of Cherokee Nation citizens surrounding athletic competition and sport. Also, because most elementary schools within the county compete in interscholastic athletic competitions during the school day, the line between physical education and athletic competition is often blurred, calling into question the emphasis placed on athletics versus academics.

METHOD

Site and Sample Selection

A homogeneous sampling technique was utilized for the participant selection based on the

elite informant representative of this group (13). Face-to-face recruitment, word of mouth, texts, and phone calls were used to facilitate participant involvement. The goal was to recruit a homogenous group of participants that are sensitive to the sociocultural context of the study; therefore some social and contextual conversations took place prior to selection of participants. Participants were selected based on three criteria (a) Cherokee citizenship, (c) adult over the age of 21, and (c) experienced athletic competition and sport while growing up in the county where the study took place.

Participants

Prior to contacting participants, approval was received from the University of Arkansas IRB as well as the Cherokee Nation. The study consisted of 15 adult participants (8 male and 7 female) who are Cherokee tribal members and live in Oklahoma. The principal investigator was the only person conducting the interviews. Before each interview session, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, as well as the confidentiality of their answers, and informed that the interview was being audio-recorded. Each participant consented to the study by signing and initialing the consent forms, which, if desired, was emailed or given to the participant in person. After the interview, participants were given a twenty-dollar gift card.

Interviews

Interviews, which took place over a month-long period in the community, were conducted in a quiet location so that the recording device picked up both voices. Demographic questions were asked first followed by a semi-structured script of questions. Clarifying and follow-up probe questions allowed for more detail and richness.

The average interview session was 45 minutes. Confidentiality throughout the entirety of the study was stringently followed. Interviews were recorded via handheld audio recording device; audio files were immediately placed onto a password secure personal laptop computer.

The files were labeled by interview sequence instead of names to secure anonymity of the participants. The audio files were then transcribed via transcription panda, a secure online transcription service. To protect the participant confidentiality, no identifying information was recorded and pseudonyms were substituted for participants’ real names.

Analysis of the Data

The task of the researcher during the coding process was to synthesize the sizeable amounts of data. Therefore, after the interviews and transcription process, the data were analyzed beginning with the open coding phase. Transcriptions were read and reread multiple times looking for themes and concepts. The data was then coded by hand and line-by-line, highlighting common words, phrases, and concepts that appeared across all transcriptions (14). This initial ‘breaking down’ process produced the open codes from the data. These open codes were then grouped into categories and given names. The second phase yielded the axial codes or themes through an inductive connection of the open codes (15) (16).

Table 1. Axial Codes with Sample of Open Codes

Axial Codes	Sample Open Codes
Reputation	Known for something P.E. class being athletics Starting Early Rarely missed a game Its what we did Supposed to play
Influences	Peers Coaches Family Assumed you were going to play Just the way you were raised
Culture	We’re all Indian, let’s go do it Part of culture Prideful
Community	Church Attending games Filling up stands Poor area Everyone play sports
Psychosocial Development	Strength Self discipline No fighting Respect the game Compete
Family	Dad Older sibling Uncle Brother Pride in kids

RESULTS

Presentation of Axial Codes

The first level of the coding process generated the open codes. These were determined based on the frequency, specific actions or events, and contextual details within the data using exact words of the participants. Next, axial codes were established by systematically linking the

open codes (16). Table 1 is the presentation of the axial codes accompanied by samples of open codes associated with that axial code. The analyzed data uncovered six axial codes: Reputation, Influence, Culture, Community, Psychosocial Identity, and Family. The open codes data were gathered from the transcriptions; the axial codes were then discovered through analysis of the open codes.

To further aid in discovery of evidence, the data include quotations from the interviews associated with each axial codes, beginning with reputation.

Axial Code: Reputation

Reputation as an axial code revealed itself in the interview with Eli. He was speaking about the competitive sports in the county. “Nowadays it's really starting to get to be serious. Competition is really getting serious, and they take it to the extremes in this area.” He discusses some of the Cherokee reputation in sport and how it's specifically viewed from the Cherokees themselves.

Right now, I think it's very important to the Cherokees because in the past there's been several Cherokees excel at different levels of competition and it always makes people in this area proud to see somebody going on to do big things.

Later, Eli stated his view on how athletics and sports are handled in the county. “Around here, it's a way of life, athletics, sports, and competition. It's just a way of life. That's what people live for and you can see that all over.”

More participants explain how schools in the area have certain reputations. “I think that competition that we experienced at our school; because it is a play to win school, you know... it's always been that way” (Cole). “You had no choice in elementary school, and in rural Oklahoma you played sports” (Nora). “Tradition. They've always been competitive. You started in third and fourth and you just kind of built on that” (Abby).

Dirk speaks to the reputation of Cherokees and non-Cherokees and their position on athletic competition and sport within the county. “I think it's because the population's so small that everybody wants to be known for something, or at least their kids known for something.” I think it's pretty important to a lot of Cherokees that the kids play ball and do good at it. I think it's a pretty big thing with Cherokee people.”

In summary, the participants expressed, on many levels, being competitive and sport minded while growing up in the area. These experiences, from starting sports at a young age, to playing competitive tournaments all the way through school and even outside of school, even being viewed from outside communities, show that the penchant for taking sports seriously has become the county's reputation.

Axial Code: Influence

For the second axial code, participant's discussed their biggest influences for competing in sports while growing up in the community. Most of the participants spoke about an array of influences while growing up and playing competitive sports in the county. Peers or friends, coaches, and relatives seemed to keep coming up in the interviews most often. Additionally, influence from the area or culture contributed to participant's experiences in athletic competition and sport. Emma begins with this statement, “It was assumed I was going to do it. My mom assumed I was going to do it. My teachers, my coaches, and my friends — we all did it. So, I think it was probably just a combination of everybody and everything around us. Emma also discusses the socioeconomic climate of the area and how class might influence particular situations, “We're in a poor area and sometimes education takes the back burner to the need to make money, and it's that need for money in the present that is sometimes more important than the opportunity to go out there and get a better job later in life.”

Furthermore, participants stated who or what had influenced them to play and compete in sports. “I would say my biggest influence was my group of friends. Because everybody did it, so that's what I was going to do” (Cole). “I would say definitely the biggest influence was my coaches at [school]” (Abby).

It had to be my dad, because he was a coach. Not that he ever made us play, but just because he knew and he could help us and he encouraged us and he worked with us at home, or took us to a gym so we could. (Leah)

Participants also noted the influence of the environment at home and how it plays an important role in this context. “They push their children to play and to compete, and as adults some Cherokees still participate in tournaments and do things in sports.” (Lucy)

In summary, participants stated on many occasions that peers, family members, and

coaches had the most influence on them when it came to competing in sports. The data also revealed that the area (small town, rural area) home culture of the Cherokees played a vital role in influencing participant's experiences in athletic competition and sport.

Axial Code: Culture

In this context, the word *culture* is used to describe the Cherokee belief system, customs, a way of life in this particular area. Stan and Dirk state similar thoughts on the culture and their experiences growing up in the area. "We practiced every day. It's always been done that way. It's just the way you were raised" (Stan). "I think it was because of the people around me, you know cultural. I think, you know, everybody wanted to be the star athlete for something, so it was just something I think that everybody did" (Dirk).

I think that's part of the culture-is to compete with one another. They have a Cherokee stickball, they call it, and I know people that play, and they'll be bleeding, cut up, diving, and dirty. And nobody ever fights. They respect the game and the culture. You're not supposed to get mad and fight even if somebody, you know, roughs you up a little. That respect for the culture; you're not supposed to fight out there. But that competition, I think, is a big part of the culture. (Stan)

The Cherokee culture and the relationships with sport and games are brought up once again in these statements from Thomas and Parker:

We try to keep some of the culture. We want to promote the culture of the Cherokees and a lot of that stuff involves playing games like stickball. It must have been important a long time ago to the Cherokees for them to do that and I think our Cherokee people have embraced the fact that games and sports and being healthy is important. (Thomas)

There are schools that are just almost all Indian, and they're pushing it [sport and athletic competition]. And I know that they're telling them, hey, let's go! Let's go do it! We can do this! We're all Indian; let's go do it. (Parker)

Participants also discuss the Cherokee culture within specific events of the communities. "Always playing something. You go to [community name] and they're playing stickball. They're playing football. They're playing; you know, basketball, something" (Nora).

Finally, Parker and Stan opened up about the view some Cherokees have about sports and competition.

A lot of Cherokees are shy. They don't like attention. They don't like crowds. That's why I push so much for the kids when I talk to them to go prove it, because a lot of people when we go play far off out of state, they talk to us and ask us if we still live in teepees and all this kind of stuff, and we've got to tell them no. But what they see out of us is just people who don't talk, who don't want to be around crowds, who just want to be by themselves. I don't like that because we're not that way. A lot of us aren't. There is some still like that, but I don't like to be acknowledged as that when you go somewhere else. I want them to know that we're happy, we can do whatever they're doing. (Parker)

In summary, the way of life in this area is often expressed through play and sport. Starting their youth in athletic competition and sport at an early age, often five or six years old, has been part of the tradition for years and seems to be practiced by the next generation of parents. The data showed obvious tendencies that the Cherokee culture has played a major role in the experiences of these participants.

Axial Code: Community

The discussion about community comes up often throughout the transcriptions. Participants suggested that the community in which they live, work, and play have had a significant impact on how they grew up and how they are currently raising their families. Thomas stated his thoughts on community, "It was a thing that you did in a small community, you played whatever was available to you, and that's just how it was" (Thomas). He then speaks to the Cherokee family unit within the community setting:

I know our Cherokee people are really good about doing things in group settings, and they do things in church, they do things with family. They like to have get-togethers, and I think they do a better job of promoting the whole family through that. I think the Cherokees promote more family time than other people do in our community. (Thomas)

There are smaller communities, scattered throughout the county, which often have 'gathering places' for the residents. These could be churches, community centers established by Cherokee nation, or even private lands. Many of the gathering places have a basketball court

(a simple concrete pad), volleyball net in the middle of a flat, grassy area, and often have a crude softball field with no fence. People from the community meet up and play various sports competitions such as volleyball, horseshoes, basketball, and softball, stickball, and Cherokee marbles at these gathering places. The following are examples of these community gathering places and the practices within these communities.

Around here, these small communities and even up in the northern part of the Cherokee Nation I think it's a big thing. I don't want to say most, but a lot of Cherokees place high importance on it [sports]. They want their kids to be, you know, a real good baseball or basketball player. They'll borrow money to take their kid maybe to a camp and want them to do good. Once they get out of school here, they play more softball. As I mentioned earlier, there's a lot of horseshoe pitches as far as competing. (Stan)

"They love it. They really do. You go anywhere down around here, you'll see kids playing ball. Even adults will be out there with them. I think Cherokees like the competition and the sport" (Parker). "Our church plays volleyball, softball, and basketball. They play [Cherokee] marbles too" (Lucy).

The data also described how the communities and individuals in the county come out to support the games and the competition between the youth. "So, it can be quite the large crowds, honestly. I've been to a couple of them recently, kind of tournament type things at elementary schools, and it's impressive how many people are there" (Emma). The socioeconomic state of the community revealed itself in several different forms, especially in relation to education.

We live in a pretty poor area and sometimes the need to get out and get a job supersedes that opportunity to go out and get a higher education. When you go to school or college, you're not bringing in money, and sometimes that money is needed to help the family, or even the individual because they're not with their family anymore or that kind of thing. So, I think it's [education] important, but probably sometimes takes a backseat to other needs in this area. (Emma)

Kids that are coming from a poor socioeconomic region like this, education is their way out. To some kids, I know in their schools, athletics is their way out. And to me, education is our chance for our kids to better

themselves and make a better life for themselves. (Thomas)

"It's a socioeconomic cycle that's not going to be broke until you get them to understand they have to go to school" (Melanie).

I know there are a lot of kids that play a lot of sports in other communities. But around here it could be due to the level of income and poverty that we have around here. Organized sports are basically something for people to do and something for people to take their kids to. (Cole)

Several participants mention ORES (Organization of Rural Elementary Schools) in their interviews as an influential item within the county's dependent elementary schools.

The hot thing [in elementary schools] right now in [county name] since we have all the dependent school districts is this ORES, which is an Organization of Rural Elementary Schools that has put together a competition at the end of every sport. They sponsor their own state championships, and that is the driving force right now in competition and sports in the county. It's the idea that their kid has a chance in fifth and sixth, seventh and eighth grade to be a state champion. And that has really driven their sports forward, I think, into more competition, better competition, and more aware of practice time, aids to help their kids get better. It is very important to these people to have their kid be involved in this ORES competition. (Thomas)

In summary, communities offer support in many ways. They bring together families by organizing tournaments and other friendly competitions. The Cherokee community places a high importance on spectating at athletic competitions. The data also revealed that the communities within the county, in general, have been labeled as lower socioeconomic area, which could impact participants' experiences.

Axial Code: Psychosocial Development

Thomas and Emma give their thoughts on the psychosocial identity of the Cherokee people in conjunction with athletic competition and sports.

I think Cherokees are more in tune to athletic competition. They really like it more than the general public because it gives their child a chance to shine in spite of whatever their level of talent is and that they can use that talent in athletics and it gives them a chance to be somebody; a chance to rise above the stigma, if

there is a stigma, of being Cherokee. It allows them to rise above that and they can use athletic competition to better them and to get known and be known. It's a good self-esteem thing. I really believe that. They [Cherokee youth] have a sense of pride, of self-esteem, and I think it promotes so many positive characteristics in kids, I think that pride factor just goes way up and that want-to-work-hard factor goes up. There's just so many positive things that come from them competing in sports. (Thomas)

Participants continue the discussion on the social aspects of athletic competition and sports within the county. "For the kids, it's something to do. The competitive streak comes out." I think they have fun and they get to brag when they win, and the other kids get to brag when they win. I think it's a good thing" (Emma). "It gives them something to do. It keeps them out of trouble. And that's probably the only reason I stayed in school to get through [high school], was when I went to play ball" (Robert).

Levi talks about his experiences, "Trying new things. I always wanted to try new things, see what I liked. They didn't always stick, but whenever I kept playing, it was because I liked it. I think by middle school it [playing sports] becomes almost an identifying factor for people. I think it gives you a feeling of being together with everybody and being a part of things."

Additionally, participants shared their feelings about the youth of the county and the social impact of athletic competition and sports. "I think if they feel successful at a young age and see what it's like to be successful and taste it, then they'll want to strive to always be successful" (Lucy). "Third and fourth grade is competitive now. Where first and second grade is the laugh and fun stuff, but I also see that as getting a little more competitive, too" (Robert).

I think it's important because I think they need competitiveness. I think they need to be challenged. I think they need to learn that if they work at something, they can get better. Then you can use that in the classroom, you know. If you can practice this so many times out there on the ball field, you get better every day. If you practice your multiplication tables in the classroom, you'll get faster and better every day. A lot of the kids that enjoy playing sports are your Cherokee kids. (Leah)

In summary, athletic competition and being involved in sports as youth play an important role in the social development of these

individuals. Most participants stated how they enjoyed being competitive and gain valuable experiences from playing these sports and interacting with others. The participants also shared similar ideas on the present youth within the county and how they probably feel more pressure than when they, themselves, were growing up.

Axial Code: Family

The family unit is very important to the Cherokee people. The evidence shed light on the togetherness of the family unit, the importance of church, the relentless pursuit of competition, and the unwavering support and fellowship of friends and relatives.

Leaning on his experiences as a youth in the Cherokee family, Stan expresses how the elders may have felt about athletic competition and sport for the family.

Our elders, grandparents and their age group, they want our kids to go to church. The elders did, you know. They didn't stress the importance to go to a ball game. They wanted you to go to church first, and we'll play ball when we have time, you know. That's the way I grew up. That's my view of it. However, to certain families, it's real important. It'll be a hundred degrees and they'll go sit out and watch their family, kinfolk play softball. And they enjoy it. They'll cook big and take it with them and just eat during the day. It's real important to them.

"Extended family go out and watch. We went and watched a nephew, so, I mean everybody gets involved" (Emma). Leah stated, "I can drive by the little housing additions. They'll be outside playing volleyball, families will be. You'll hear the kids come to school talking about playing basketball with their friends, aunts, uncles, neighbors. The parents really want to be involved and they want to watch their children play their sports or events. I think some kids just learn they're going to be competitive from day one, especially if they have elder brothers and sisters. I just think that the Cherokees push a little more with the athletics than the education versus the other people. They (the family) want the sports, they want the kid to be great at whatever athletic competition they're involved in" (Leah). Levi echoed this in his statements, "I think families get together and play a lot of sports. They are very proud of their heritage. Cherokees seem to

value it a lot more. It's more of a family event for Cherokees” (Levi).

The steadfast support of at least one parent was mentioned throughout the interviews in multiple facets. “You see a lot of parents at ball games. I don't know if they work. I'm not sure. But I take off work to watch my children” (Lucy). “I think they're really proud to see their kid out there and do great” (Melanie). Thomas offers several thoughts on parent support. “It gives their child or their grandchild or great-grandchild an opportunity to be special, and every kid wants to be special. They have to try to find a way to swap something around at work some way to get around and go see that child. Most parents want their kids to be better than they were, whether it's in education or whether it's in sports or it's a job or whatever they do. As a parent, you want your kids to be better than you were.”

Eli stated this about the parents of the county, “Something else I've noticed is people will spend their every last penny traveling just going to watch their kids play sports. They schedule their life around their kids' sporting events.” “I think this generation of Cherokees kind of puts a big demand on their kid to play, to try to perform well” (Dirk).

In summary, the importance and impact family has on participant's experiences in athletic competition and sports while growing up in the area was very apparent. The support from family has a strong impact and participants reciprocate the support and pass this on to their children as well. Parents place high demands on the children but show tremendous amounts of support that seems to agree with the competitive nature of the youth.

DISCUSSION

This qualitative study sought to better understand an underrepresented ethnic culture and produced the following research question: *What are the sociocultural experiences of Cherokee citizens surrounding athletic competition and sport?* The data revealed that this population of Cherokee citizens feels great pride and honor while competing in athletics and sport. The Cherokees find meaning in athletic competition and sport and have passed these beliefs and value systems from one generation to the next. Cherokee families raise their children to be competitive from an early age. The extended families, schools, coaches, and communities foster this competitiveness. This ‘way of life’ has built a sense of tribal

kinship that leads to positive experiences. The individuals growing up in this environment see and do as those have done previously, not uncommon in most societies. Through athletic competition and sport, the Cherokee culture continues. The youth mesh the reputation of being athletic competitor and the Cherokee culture to form their social identity within their own world.

The Cherokee individuals in this study experienced an unwavering passion for athletic competition and sport. They were raised in and continue to live in an environment that fosters opportunities, that allow for social, cultural, and athletic growth. Family, schools, and community provide a stable foundation for pursuing athletic competition and sport. These Cherokee individuals start forming their social identity from an early age, around ages 6-10, through these athletic pursuits. The experiences in athletic competition are rooted in Cherokee culture and develop strong social identities of individuals throughout the different communities. The elementary schools throughout the various communities offer the Cherokee youth an opportunity to showcase their athletic skills. The reputations of the community, which is often upheld by the athletic prowess of the elementary schools, play an important role in the experiences of these participants. Furthermore, the community cultivates the reputation by hosting athletic events at gathering spots and supporting youth and adults alike. Many Cherokee people attend these athletic events. Sporting competitions such as horseshoes, volleyball, softball, and basketball are most common. Occasionally, traditional Cherokee events like stickball, marbles, or archery contests are hosted. The Cherokee families use these events as a gathering tool, using the time to spectate and for fellowship. As the youth grow up, they continue to attend these events either as a competitor or as a spectator. The participants experienced a number of athletic endeavors that had an obvious impact on their lives. These endeavors were heavily influenced by the importance placed on them by the Cherokee culture and communities. Throughout the experiences, the participants began to develop a firm sense of social identity for themselves. The passion for athletic competition and sports coupled with the richness of the Cherokee culture has produced a clear psychosocial identity that is formed at an early age for these participants.

This study suggests that future research into other Native American tribes could yield rich data. Future studies could also examine the psychosocial aspects of this study, particularly the relationships of parent/child and athlete/coach. This study's participants were adults; future qualitative researchers could interview Cherokee children to gain additional voices and a clearer understanding of the sociocultural issues facing ethnic minorities. Lastly, the participants from this study were partially chosen based on competing and playing sports as youth.

Future research could include Cherokees who were not athletes and didn't compete in sports while growing up in this culture. The Native American cultures are rich with history and tradition. The aim of this study was to uncover what sociocultural issues, if any, were related to Cherokee citizens surrounding athletic competition and sport and to provide a platform for minority (Cherokee) voices. Given the rich data accumulated in this study, it would be worthwhile to employ qualitative research practices to gain a better understanding of other less-examined peoples about how their life, culture, and past history affect participation in sport and physical activity.

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