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PRETENDIANS, SETTLER COLLECTORS, AND #NATIVETWITTER:

INDIGENOUS RHETORICAL SOVEREIGNTY

by

Carly Schaelling

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

American Studies

Approved:

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2020

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## ABSTRACT

Pretendians, Settler Collectors, and #NativeTwitter: Indigenous Rhetorical Sovereignty

by

Carly Schaelling, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2020

Major Professor: Debra Monson, Ph.D  
Department: English

This thesis paper uses thematic analysis to find and report themes in the minority online community space of #NativeTwitter. Drawing from Lisa King's theory of rhetorical sovereignty, this paper outlines how Indigenous people use Twitter to assert and take back control of their voices and images, as well as build community and connect with each other. This paper outlines three major themes within #NativeTwitter, as analyzed from a group of tweets pulled from the community from October 28-31st in 2018. The themes are: Calling out and Calling in, Community Building and Fostering Connection, and Cultural Preservation. Examples for each of these themes are analyzed in detail. The timeframe of these tweets was chosen to show how this community functions in a time of stress, Halloween, when Indigenous images are used and exploited in the form of offensive costumes.

(46 pages)

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Carly Schaelling

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## Introduction

Indigenous people face a multitude of problems not experienced or understood by the non-Native people living on the same land, and one prominent example of this is the commodification of Indigenous images. King (2015), author of *Survivance, Sovereignty, and Story: Teaching Native American Rhetorics*, provides a non-exhaustive list of ways Native images are co-opted by settlers, as they can be seen on: butter cartons, makes and models of cars, cigarette cartons, carpet trucks, romance novels, brands of clothing, cities, rivers, landmarks, Thanksgiving decorations, greeting card imagery, popular clothing chains, hanging in museums, and more (p. 17). A consistent struggle evident between Indigenous people and settlers is the popularity of Native American-style Halloween costumes. Debate about this issue is extensive, and social media provides a space for Indigenous people and settlers to engage. While costumes are just one example of the commodification of Indigenous images, they often paint Indigenous people in a light disparate to their true experience, reinforce stereotypes, and compel Indigenous people to—often repeatedly—engage in conversation with settlers about the problematic nature and repercussions of this commodification. Indigenous people, like other minority groups, created online spaces to gather as a community. #NativeTwitter is one example of an online Indigenous space users inhabit for multiple reasons.

This paper seeks to understand how online space, specifically #NativeTwitter, functions during the high stress time of Halloween, when white people are enjoying a holiday and often unaware of the controversy. While the #NativeTwitter community is obviously not representative of the Indigenous people as a whole, observing the themes of this online space provides insight into how Indigenous people use social media in a

way that is distinct from settlers’, and how this use helps Indigenous people reclaim rhetorical sovereignty and build community. By observing how these issues are present through the lens of #NativeTwitter during Halloween, this paper also seeks to understand how Indigenous Twitter users use social media to discuss, protest, and relate about broad issues in their community.

In September of 2018, a costume company called Yandy.com released a “Brave Red Maiden” costume which received significant backlash online, because the costume was a sexualized version of the handmaid uniform from the television show “The Handmaid’s Tale,” based off of Margaret Atwood’s eponymous novel. Yandy.com removed the offensive costume within 24 hours, and issued an apology for their objectification of an oppressed fictional character (Elasser and Muaddi). Indigenous people used Twitter, the same space from which the original backlash originated, to point out how the same company includes pages of “Sexy Indian” costumes available for purchase on their website. Yandy.com refused to remove the costumes (Nittle, 2018). Both the Handmaid costume takedown and the refusal to remove “Sexy Indian” costumes received wide media coverage, and each instance displays how social media impacts social change. The Twitter protest against the handmaid costume happened at the same time as the controversial Brett Kavanaugh hearings before his appointment to the Supreme Court, so Twitter was already rampant with women sharing stories and solidarity with each other about sexual violence.

This instance shows how Indigenous people use Twitter in a way distinct from the dominant culture of white people, a phenomena this paper seeks to illuminate. This example also displays the stress and difficulty of Halloween for Indigenous people in

North America. While the offensive costumes were not removed from Yandy, #NativeTwitter's protest spurred online discussion among settlers about the nature of offensive costumes, and prompted settlers to share and retweet #NativeTwitter posts about the issue.<sup>1</sup>

While the Indigenous protest was not immediately successful against Yandy, other online protests by Indigenous people have created positive change for the community. Cedar High School in Iron County Utah changed its mascot from "The Redmen" in April 2019, after years of contentious back and forth between the school board and the local Paiute tribe. Online petitions, videos shared of speeches by Paiute youth, and other online and community based efforts led the school board to vote to change the mascot (Harkins, 2019).

Because Halloween is a largely innocuous holiday for most white people in the United States, and rife with offensive representations and pain for many Indigenous people, this time was used as a lens to show how the #NativeTwitter community operates distinctly, using the tools available to them to survive and thrive. As a white person who is concerned with the way Indigenous people are treated both online and offline, what compelled me to write this paper emerged from a desire to show other white people how this online minority community functions in a way totally different than how we, members of the dominant culture, understand and use social media. The audience for this piece is not necessarily Indigenous people, who do not need a white person such as myself to show them how their community functions, but rather other white people who were previously unaware of the issue and the intricacies of minority online communities.

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<sup>1</sup> While the Indigenous protest against Yandy's offensive costumes was not originally successful, as on April 2020, all Sexy Indian costumes have been removed from the site. The company issued no press regarding this change.

Indigenous people have taken to Twitter to struggle, educate, and organize in a space not designed for these purposes. Observing Indigenous people's ability to use Twitter to gain rhetorical sovereignty illuminates one way this community uses the resources available to them to survive and thrive.

In order to observe this topic in the #NativeTwitter space, a data set of tweets hashtagged #NativeTwitter from October 28 to October 31 in 2018 will be used. Using a thematic analysis of these tweets, this paper shows a few facets of the difference in the experiences white people and Indigenous people face on social media, and how Indigenous people use social media as a means to obtain rhetorical sovereignty. The purpose of this research is to observe and report prominent themes in this minority online community space, specifically Indigenous users of #NativeTwitter. This research aims to display how Indigenous people use social media to navigate challenges and connect as a community.

### **Literature Review**

Understanding the definition of social media is important to this analysis. Humphrees (2016) defines it as "a set of practices for communicating, usually collaboratively, and usually so that it is visible to more than one person" (p. 7). Humphrees explains that social media "goes beyond private, dyadic communication...and it usually happens in a public or semipublic forum" (p. 7). While social media is not dependent on digital communication, exemplified in letters to the editor, citizen journalism, radio call-ins, and so on, sites such as Facebook and Twitter expanded the breadth and depth of social media, changing its infrastructure significantly.

Social media exists in between the two somewhat disparate communicative approaches in the fields mass communication and interpersonal communication. Many traits of interpersonal communication take place on social media, such as the use of relational norms (Mark & Jefferey 2003). However, these online interpersonal interactions do not happen in a semi-private or private space, and can become mass media, because of the visibility and shareability of platforms, so the structure is also geared toward mass communication (Humphrees, 2015). Understanding how social media differs from both interpersonal and mass communication helps shed light on the complexities that members of an online community face, in this case users of #NativeTwitter, because their tweets can be shared and distributed outside of the community. The ability to share and communicate with each other about Indigenous issues online also displays a reclamation of rhetorical sovereignty, as #NativeTwitter users call out offensive images and educate members outside of the community about Indigenous issues.

Rhetorical sovereignty is something many Indigenous people currently lack, and the use of #NativeTwitter shows Indigenous people grappling with this issue. King (2015) explains rhetorical sovereignty Indigenous peoples asserting control over their images, the way images are consumed by the dominant culture, and how images are disseminated. (p. 17). This idea of rhetorical sovereignty is especially important when applied to Indigenous people on social media, because tweets and hashtags are one way of reclaiming this rhetorical sovereignty. King argues that the reason these images become a problem is that they are not only taken out of context, but that many people viewing them do not know that they are taken out of context, or do not consider what

these images are doing rhetorically. The lack of rhetorical sovereignty experienced by Indigenous people is apparent, especially during Halloween on #NativeTwitter because of offensive costumes.

Understanding how minority online communities differ from white people's use of the Internet also underpins this analysis. Media scholar Nakurama (2002 and 2013) claims that "people of color were functionally absent from the internet precisely at that time when its discourse was forming into distinct barriers" (p. xii). Because the social interface of the internet took place largely before minorities were introduced, minorities must function in a system not made for them when forming an online presence. This claim is based on Pew research data that shows how the structure and culture of the internet was largely in place before it was used more broadly and more diversely (Pew Research, 2014). This complicates the issue of rhetorical sovereignty for Native people, because according to this claim, the way they use Twitter and hashtags is somewhat predetermined by an infrastructure created by white people.

Understanding issues regarding Indigenous images, commodification, and race and gender in social media is critical to this analysis. In research about Disney's *Pocahontas*, which is a common costume white people dawn on Halloween, Ono and Beuscher (1999) argue that the Disney princess became a cipher, which enabled Disney to franchise products effectively, ultimately harming the image of Native American women. This cipher theory involves the creation of a singular object, in this case the film *Pocahontas*, and the marketing of this commodity to children versus adults. Success in this campaign relies on "generic forms and figures that can be easily reproduced and identified" (p. 23). Ono and Buescher argue that Disney used utopic appeals to sell

*Pocahontas* products, including appropriations of Native American culture, history, and feminism. They argue that this cipher and the accompanying products and discourses surrounding the princess contributed to the material oppression of women, especially Native American women. Ono and Buescher's critique focuses more on how commodification of Native American images fits into capitalism. This critique is evident in the generic "Indian" costumes displayed during Halloween.

de Finney (2015) argues Indigenous girlhood and representations of Indigenous girls by both the Indigenous girls themselves and the broader culture of settlers impacts them in negative ways, by reifying their construction as disposable and ungrievable. de Finney argues that the current narratives about Indigenous girls solidify their position as cultural commodities and objects of colonial imagery. de Finney focuses on three of these harmful narratives: spectral narratives, epistemologies of ignorance, and playing Indian. de Finney asserts that these narratives are "embedded in a globalized capitalist order that enables Western girls' consumption of sexualized, deracialized Indigenous girlhood" (p. 170). Epistemologies of ignorance fuel practices that solidify the erasure of Indigenous girlhood, and there are numerous examples of the dominant culture playing Indian: pop singers Lana del Ray, Gwen Stefani, Madonna, and Kesha wearing headdresses and regalia to perform; high profile brands like Victoria Secret dressing their models in regalia; and Urban Outfitters and H&M marketing Navajo products in their stores. de Finney asserts that instances like these, of settlers playing Indian, sustains the hypervisibility of Indigenous girls' racialized bodies and their invisibility as diverse and complex subjects. de Finney's argument is important because of its focus on girlhood, and explains how playing Indian impacts Indigenous girls who grow up exposed to these

practices. Recognition and acknowledgement are approaches often posited as necessary to improve Indigenous and settler relations, and in the case of de Finney's argument, recognizing the media presents Indigenous girls as ungrievable is a first step. However, some scholars argue that recognition by settlers for complicity in Indigenous issues is not enough.

Coulthard (2014) challenges the notion of recognition, or, the idea that the wrongs against Indigenous peoples can be reconciled with acknowledgement. Over the years, scholars and activists have emphasized recognition as the way to negotiate and decolonize between the nation-state and Indigenous nations in Canada and the United States. Debates are shaped with this idea of recognition at the heart, such as the right to land and development, Indigenous cultural distinctiveness, and the right to self-government. Coulthard challenges this idea, positing that Indigenous nations need more than just recognition, but the ability to decolonize on their own terms. Because #NativeTwitter users participate in calling out and calling in settlers on their own terms, which will be discussed in depth in this paper, #NativeTwitter exemplifies a space where Indigenous people are engaging in reconciliatory discussions on their own terms. #NativeTwitter, in some ways, also rejects recognition as a solution, as members use the space to do more than call out and call in, but also as a place to foster community and preserve culture. #NativeTwitter members also often discuss settlers and settler colonialism from a variety of perspectives.

Taking a queer studies approach to settler colonialism, Smith (2010) explores the heteronormativity of settler colonialism, focusing on how pre-colonial structures can be recreated under the guise of decolonization if these projects are not interrogated from



multiple perspectives. Smith's critique of the use of decolonization to do something quite different than decolonize aligns with Tuck and Yang's (2012) analysis of the issue. Smith uses the commodification of Native American studies within the academic industrial complex as an example. Smith is also interested in how Native peoples operate within structures of colonialism, and explores why settlers love to play Indian. Smith questions why settlers would play Indian if they knew Native peoples were alive and well and "perfectly capable of being Indian themselves?" (p. 53). Smith posits that the act of playing Indian displays a dominant cultural understanding that Indigenous people are not alive and thriving, thus rendering a postmodern interpretation of them as monolithic being of the past acceptable for play. This interpretation highlights the complexity of dressing up as Indians for Halloween, scenes in music videos of cowboys and Indians, and consuming Indian commodities sold by large retailers. Playing Indian contributes to the erasure of Native peoples, while also promoting the death of the individual Indigenous person. Smith's analysis complicates the idea and popularity of sexualized Indian costumes and sheds light on broader issues of cultural appropriation as not just an offensive practice, but one that promotes objectification of Native peoples<sup>2</sup>.

Articles regarding collective action and activism online, including in places like #BlackTwitter provide context for social media analysis . Observing other scholars' approach to analyzing Twitter aids this analysis of #NativeTwitter. Understanding how social media holds space for minority groups to center around collective identity, as well

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<sup>2</sup> Other prominent works are Wolfe's (2006) *Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native* about cultural genocide, Joyce Green (2007) on aboriginal feminisms, Deer's *The Beginning and End of Rape* (2015) about the sexualization of Indigenous women, Watson (2018) on #MMIW, and Gilchrist (2010) on how white missing women and #MMIW cases are handled and reported differently.

as to raise awareness and protest, are topics analyzed by many scholars. For example, Carney (2016) writes about the trends #AllLivesMatter and #BlackLivesMatter on Twitter following the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner in 2014. Through a qualitative textual analysis of tweets from youth of color, Carney shows how “debates on Twitter reveal various strategies that youth of color employed to shape the national discourse” (p. 180). This analysis is important and thorough in its understanding and showing how youth of color use social media to combat dominant ideologies. By teasing out the strategies that youth of color employ in what appears to be a largely social constructivist view of technology, Carney found that these youths used a platform where they are not the majority to create widespread awareness about a topic that mainstream media was portraying in a totally different light than they were experiencing (p. 183). Carney’s work shows the importance of pushing back against technological determinism, especially when analyzing race, which would accept that these youth of color were using Twitter as it was presented to them, instead of using the platform to meet their unmet needs.

Evans and Clark (2016) found that women candidates tweet more than their male counterparts in general leading up to the election, and also have more “attack-style” tweets geared towards male politicians. Results showed that women tweet about “women’s issues,” discuss policy issues at a much higher rate, and engage in more negative interactions than their male counterparts (p. 326). This analysis, which drew from a data set of tweets by female candidates leading up to elections, displays the way women, because of their gender and positions as candidates, communicate differently on social media. This article also shows how gender and position play crucial roles in online

presence and communication. In the #NativeTwitter space, issues of commodification, rhetorical sovereignty, race and gender in social media, and social construction are all at play.

## **Methodology**

This paper consists of a qualitative analysis of tweets hashtagged #NativeTwitter from October 28 to October 31 in 2018. These tweets display the conversation among #NativeTwitter users during Halloween, when issues and discussion about costumes and the commodification of Indigenous culture are heightened. The tweets were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach.

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used in psychology that identifies and reports themes in data, and is used as a qualitative research method in several fields (Braun & Clarke 2015). Thematic analysis organizes and describes data in detail, and allows the researcher to identify, analyze, and report themes found in data. Thematic analysis is not tied to any theoretical or epistemological framework, and can therefore be used with rhetorical sovereignty. Thematic analysis differs from other qualitative research methods that also look for themes, because it is not primarily concerned with identifying themes across an entire data set, but rather themes within each data item. In this case, themes within a group of tweets from Twitter with a specific hashtag, and those tweets themselves are analyzed, rather than Twitter data as a whole (p. 206). There are a number of phases involved when using thematic analysis.

The first phase of thematic analysis is familiarization with data. The tweets in this study were gathered using Twitter's advanced search function, which pulled all tweets hashtagged #NativeTwitter from October 28-31 of 2018. Twitter does not allow tweets

to be downloaded or stored, so it was necessary to transcribe the content of the tweets into a table for further analysis. The tweets were with different fields for the Twitter user's handle, name, text from their bio, all hashtags from the tweet, and amount of likes, retweets, and shares. Because the transcription required typing the text of each tweet into separate fields on a spreadsheet, as well as reading through each tweet multiple times to ensure accuracy, familiarization with the data set was hard to avoid during the first phase, which is important for thematic analysis.

Next comes generating initial codes. This phase involves finding interesting and prominent features within the data set and coding them, as well as collating data relevant to each code. This phase involved reading through each tweet and writing a one to three word idea of the tweet's meaning. After creating initial descriptions for each tweet, the tweets were able to be grouped and searched for themes.

The next three steps involve searching for themes, reviewing the themes, naming and defining the themes, and finally producing a report.

After analyzing each tweet and initially categorizing it, then repeating and reviewing further, a total of three prominent themes emerged, each with its own subcategories. (See Table 1).

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Tweet amount</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Calling Out and Calling In	24	36%
Community Building and Fostering Connection	19	29%
Cultural Preservation	22	33%

These themes are: Calling Out and Calling In, Community Building and Fostering Connection, and Cultural Preservation. Calling Out and Calling In involves tweets that

both publicly accuse settlers of oppressive behavior, as well as educate and invite settlers to learn more about why their behavior is oppressive. Community Building and Fostering Connection includes tweets that express gratitude for the community, share Indigenous knowledge and success, invite participants, and seek face to face connection. The Cultural Preservation theme includes tweets that promote or share Indigenous work, express solidarity for international Indigenous issues, ask for recommendations, and tweets that preserve Indigenous language. Calling Out and Calling In has no subcategories, as each tweet directly deals with Indigenous issues regarding images and Halloween. However, the two other themes contain subcategories as illustrated in Table 2, Appendix B.

### **Calling Out and Calling In**

The most prominent theme from this data set is Calling Out and Calling In. This dichotomy is a relatively new concept in activism, initially developed as a response to the often oppressive behavior of allies performing self-righteous public shaming or humiliation of people. Mahan (2017) of the If When Now organization outlines the differences between calling out and in as follows:

Calling someone “out” is typically a public performance in which a person self-righteously demonstrates their superior knowledge, shaming an individual for their oppressive behavior. Calling-in is a proposed alternative to call-out culture that entails having a private, personal conversation with an individual who has used oppressive language or behavior in order to address the behavior without making a spectacle out of it” (IfWhenNow.org).

Importantly, calling out is viewed as less effective and negative when allies are participating in calling out people for oppressive behavior. The situation is different when the person calling out is a member of the group being oppressed by the individual. In the case of this paper, an Indigenous person is not engaging in oppressive behavior when calling out an offensive costume. Interestingly, however, many of the interactions on #NativeTwitter fall in between calling out and calling in. Mahan states that “calling-in recognizes that people are multi-faceted... and calling-in can be a powerful tool to address those mistakes and create space for real change and positive impact” (IfWhenNow.org). The tweets that fall under the Calling Out and Calling In theme on #NativeTwitter are doing a bit of both, that is, calling out an oppressor in a semi-public forum, and also engaging with oppressors to create space for positive change, learning, and impact, whether or not there is response or change.

A few tweets demonstrate this idea. Brandon D. Scott’s tweet, whose bio indicates he is the Director of Communication for Cherokee Nation Businesses and former Executive Editor of the Cherokee Phoenix, is shown in Figure 1, Appendix A. The text of the tweet reads:

“C’mon now, put away the ”made in China” headdress, the polyester buckskins, the plastic beads, the corny fake war paint. Those things are only representative of a culture of ignorance, and a culture of insensitivity.

#ifyouwanttowearfeathersdresslikeachicken #nativetwitter”

This is a stand alone tweet, not in response to anything specific, but rather a PSA of sorts as Halloween approaches. The language of the tweets employs humor, (especially the hashtag that reads, “if you want to wear feathers dress like a chicken,”) but also educates. Scott explains why dressing in costumes is inappropriate, linking the cultural

appropriation to a culture of ignorance and insensitivity. This preemptively calls out the people considering wearing offensive costumes, but also provides context for why this action is inappropriate.

A second tweet displaying a similar mix between calling out and calling in is shown in Figure 2, Appendix A, where @Force10Rulez addresses someone defending wearing offensive costumes. The tweet in question by @makeitrayn reads:

“I don’t know this girl personally, but I seriously do not see all the outrage. Halloween is specifically for dressing up, being whatever you want to be. No, I don’t know her intentions. But I HIGHLY doubt she did this to offend anyone. Get your panties out of your ass.”

@Force10Rulez’s reply:

“Says a #settler who has no right to speak for us Natives and what is or isn’t offensive to us. #NativeTwitter #NotYourCostume #NotYourMascot”

@Force10Rulez’s response operates on multiple levels of calling out. @Force10Rulz calls out both the settler she is responding too, and by default, the behavior that started the interaction, which is an offensive costume. By saying “a #settler...has no right to speak for us,” @Force10Rulez calls out @makeeitrayn for speaking for a group she does not represent. @Force10Rulz’s tweet also educates the settler that they are not in a position to declare what is or is not offensive to a group from which they do not belong, but also uses the community #NativeTwitter to back up her claim with community support. This interaction is particularly layered, because a settler is calling out Indigenous people and allies for calling out the offensive behavior of costumes. Thus, @Force10Rulz’s tweets is both calling out and calling in, showing the settler that there is

a community full of people that are the one with authority, and decrying the original behavior of dressing up.

Being Indigenous entails a different experience than any other minority in the United States. Because Indigenous people were living on the land long before any settlers arrived, they are not descended from immigrants or people displaced from their countries and brought to the land. Because they have treaties (though almost every single one has been broken) with the U.S. government, they should be able to operate as sovereign nations within the country, though they are hardly recognized and treated as such. Being Indigenous in the United States (and Canada) is an especially fraught situation for a person to inhabit, because of this complicated relationship. Tuck and Yang (2012) argue that decolonization “...offers a different perspective to human and civil rights based approaches to justice, an unsettling one, rather than a complementary one. Decolonization is not an “and”. It is an elsewhere.” This unsettling ideal and relationship is evident in tweets that are calling out and calling in. These tweets refuse to adhere to a binary, reflecting Indigenous people’s position because of settler colonialism. Calling out and calling in shows Indigenous people’s ability to inhabit the difficult space they have been pushed into by colonialism, while also using words and the internet to further sovereignty and change.

Tweets in this category also call out other issues prominent in the community. One of these is the phenomenon of “pretendians.” Pretendian is a term and hashtag created by Indigenous people to spotlight people who are “playing Indian.” This practice is common and harmful to Indigenous people for a multitude of reasons, one being it attempts to decrease the validity of actual Native peoples authority on Indigenous issues,



like what is offensive to their culture. Springwood (2004) observes the inflation of Native American identity claims from people arguing in favor of Indian mascots, and how this strategically claimed Indianness works to “obscure, if not dissolve, Native voices” (p. 65). This is a unique problem for Indigenous people, because it fuels the stereotype that there are no “real Indians” around, and that everyone is “a little bit Indian,” thus rendering all opinions on things like mascots and commodified images as equal. This issue is especially prevalent with current controversial figure Kayla Jones, a figure referenced in many of the tweets from this data set.

Kayla Jones is a Canadian-American model and singer who garnered significant criticism for claiming indigeneity. She claims Apache heritage, and in December of 2017, she joined President Trump’s National Diversity Council as Native American Ambassador ([ndctrump.com](http://ndctrump.com)). However, genealogist David Cornsilk, cited by Cherokee Nation Secretary of State Chuck Hoskin Jr. (2018) states that she is not a member of any federally recognized tribe, and numerous Native journalists found and reported that the Apache do not claim her (Hughes). Jones’ prominent Twitter presence presents problems for Indigenous people, especially during high stress times like Halloween, because she tweets and retweets ideas that directly contradict Indigenous voices and ideas about commodification. She also discusses these issues on her web show, “Mic Drop with Kaya Jones” ([crtv.com](http://crtv.com)). The following tweets address her specifically. @untamednative addresses her specifically with this tweet:

“Here’s our “Native American” Ambassador retweeting the rhetoric used to justify costumes that dehumanize Native people and desecrate our culture. You

prove daily how clueless you are about the people whose identity you fraudulently claim. #NativeTwitter #MicDropWithKayaJones”

This tweet directly calls out the oppressor Jones for her behavior, who promotes the idea that wearing Indigenous costumes is not offensive. @untamednative is doing multiple kinds of calling out and calling in. She is calling out Jones directly for her behavior of both claiming indigeneity and condoning offensive costumes. By calling Jones a fraud and positing that her behavior is dehumanizing to Indigenous people, @untamednative shows the harm of people speaking for a community from which they do not belong. @untamednative also implicitly calls out the use of rhetoric that Jones uses, and how this rhetoric is harmful to Native people. @untamednative is inviting those who listen to Jones’s work (by hashtagging #MicDropWithKaylaJones, Jones conservative web show,) to look at #NativeTwitter, a community actually representative of Native peoples. Using the hashtag #NativeTwitter both calls for community support on an issue, but also invites those who read and listen to Jones to take a look at a different community. This is an act of claiming rhetorical sovereignty, because it attempts to invalidate Jones’ harmful narrative, and bring the control to Indigenous people. These tweets absolutely put Kayla Jones out there as a fraud, and back up this accusation with facts and analysis. These rhetorical moves display the ability of #NativeTwitter users to both hold settlers accountable for their actions while also educating settlers as to why this is wrong, and bolstering the resolve of the community.

Another issue raised in the Calling Out and Calling In theme in this data set is that of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, or #MMIW, a movement aimed at raising awareness for the thousands of Indigenous women and girls who go missing and are

murdered every year. The following tweet in Figure 3, Appendix A displays an image of two women Indigenous women appropriately wearing regalia at a powwow in Edmonton, Canada. Twitter user @FancyFarica, whose bio includes the hashtag #IamDakota, uses this image to display when wearing regalia is appropriate. She connects the issue of offensive costumes to #MMIW. She uses the image of her and another Indigenous woman wearing real regalia, not offensive costumes, to contrast the notion that Indigenous people no longer exist. (See Figure 3, Appendix A). The text of the tweet reads:

“Doesn’t matter who you are, what race or ethnicity, this is a NO. #indigenous #women are being targeted and killed @ alarming rates & this only perpetuates the sexualized, long ago or dead “Indian”. We are humans and we are still here. Please stop. #MMIW #NativeTwitter #IAmNotACostume”

This tweet specifically delineates the gendered impact of offensive costumes, by hashtagging #indigenous, and #women, and also addresses the common stereotype of the vanishing Indian. This tweet educates readers, with the language “we are humans and we are still here. Please stop.” @FancyFarica also points out that even people who are not white are not justified in dressing in this way, by saying “Doesn’t matter who u are, what race or ethnicity, this is a NO.” (Meaning, wearing Native costumes if you are not Indigenous). This tweet is packed with both calling out and calling in devices.

@FancyFarica calls out people for participating in this offensive behavior, but also calls in the same people by educating and illuminating why the behavior is harmful, and including an image of where the behavior of wearing Indigenous regalia is appropriate, by Indigenous people at cultural gatherings. The phrase “we are still here” fights against

the stereotype that Indigenous people vanished. The hashtag #IAmNotACostume groups this tweet with others specifically dealing with offensive Halloween costumes. By tweeting with #NativeTwitter, this community member brings the issue into a semi-public forum, both for community support and to show users a place where they can read authentic Indigenous exchanges. This tweet asserts control over how and when wearing regalia is appropriate, thus enacting rhetorical sovereignty.

Another tweet directly connects offensive costumes to #MMIW. @TasteThisSass tweeted:

“You clearly don’t understand perception-bc perpetuating the PERCEPTION we’re COSTUMES is FETISHIZING which DORECTLY contributes to the sexual violence against our women dumbass. #nativetwitter #settlercollector”

This tweet directly engages with a now deleted tweet, engaging in a specific argument. @TasteThisSass, like @FancyFarica, connects offensive and sexualized costumes with “sexual violence against our women.” According to a Department of Justice study (2018), Indigenous women in the United States experience sexual violence at three times the rate of any other minority (doj.gov). This Twitter educates the oppressor of the real repercussions of offensive costumes. This tweet connects the perpetuation of costumes as directly related to fetishization, an issue Indigenous people face today. The hashtag #settlercollector is also a popular hashtag in the #NativeTwitter space, as it indicates a rounding up of oppressors. This hashtag is an act of rhetorical sovereignty, in that it clearly labels settlers who are violating and misusing Indigenous

images. Using this hashtag shows how #NativeTwitter members assert control rhetorically over their images.

Tweets in the Calling Out and Calling In major theme display how #NativeTwitter users engage with each other and with oppressors to educate, inform, argue, and rally with each other for support during and around Halloween. Tweets in this theme make up 36% of the data set, at 24 tweets out of 65. This data also implies that during other times besides Halloween, #NativeTwitter is a place that Indigenous users contribute to while engaging with oppressors. Because most members' bios indicate they are Indigenous people, their engaging with settlers contains attributes of both calling out and calling in.

### **Community Building and Fostering Connection**

The next prominent theme in this data set includes tweets that build the community and foster connections. These examples include tweets that express gratitude for the community, invite community members to participate in events, share Indigenous knowledge and success, seek face to face communication, and ask for Indigenous recommendations.

The tenets of the virtual community are displayed in this theme. Rheingold (1993) was one of the first to study virtual communities, and says “virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” (p. 126). #NativeTwitter operates in this way, with users continually contributing to the space in a variety of ways. Collins (2011) asserts that a sense of common identification emerges over time from repeated communication with

others in a group. Communities are distinct from just groups of people, because they include a shared consciousness, as well as shared rituals and traditions (Gusfield, 1975), a trait also evident in #NativeTwitter. For example, @n8v\_babe tweets her gratitude for the community:

“Idk where I’d be without #nativetwitter”

This short tweet displays the importance of the online community for this user. While only one line, @n8v\_babe shows her community that they mean a lot, and that the community itself is so important that this user finds direction and comfort there. This expression, in an online space, shows how powerful virtual communities can be, especially for a marginalized group.

Another element of community building and fostering connection is knowledge sharing. In #NativeTwitter, some posts share Indigenous knowledge:

“I’m preserving some tomatoes, apples, and lemons by drying. #Delicious #native #nativelanguage #TsalagiLanguage #NativeTwitter #homesteading”

This tweet by @teditsodani presents information for the edification of the rest of the group: that the user is participating in a practice rooted in their culture, preserving fruit by drying. This tweet strengthens the community by simply illustrating to other users what Indigenous activity this user is participating in. This tweet also give other #NativeTwitter users a chance to interact with this cultural activity by liking, retweeting, and commenting.

During October, #NativeTwitter can become an intense page. Another way users strengthen the community, especially during the high stress time around Halloween, is by employing inside humor with each other. This allows the community to enjoy a little fun while also participating in calling out and calling in oppressive behaviors. For example, @iambeebeeiam acknowledges this intense time and tweets:

“#NativeTwitter I’m cracking up so y’all gotta laugh with me. You know that joke, “I’m so Native, my grandmother was a wolf?” Can we do a thread where we just come up with ridiculous shit like that? We need a little fun.”

@iambeebeeiam acknowledges the stress in the community with the last line of their tweet: “We need a little fun.” This tweet received a high number of comments, at fourteen, which shows how ready community members were to partake in the inside humor and continue the thread. This tweet also calls of the creativity of #NativeTwitter users, by asking them to come up with their own one liners about being Native. This tweet and thread strengthens the community through shared experience (most users are familiar with the original phrase referenced: “I’m so Native, my grandmother was a wolf), and it also fosters connection among users by inviting them to participate in fun and uniquely Native creative activity. Users like @iambeebeeiam function in an important capacity in the community, by bringing members together. The replies show how important humor is to this community:

@moolissabarneyy tweets

“I’m so native, when no one’s looking I turn into a weeping willow”

@NativeOrchid tweets:

“I’m so native, my bread fries itself”

@okakashofa tweets:

“I’m so Native, the Blue Corn Moon cries to ME.”

Each of these tweets, along with others, solicited retweets and laughing emoji replies from the original poster and other members of the community. These tweets show how members of the community rely on each other in distinct ways, including making each other laugh by inverting stereotypes. These tweets also show members of #NativeTwitter enacting rhetorical sovereignty, by using Twitter to laugh with and strengthen each other.

Another way #NativeTwitter users strengthen the community and foster connections through asking for recommendations. This action shows the importance of users to support each other, as well as the importance they place on sharing and learning Indigenous knowledge. For example, @Lindsey1253 tweets:

“#NativeTwitter I’ve been looking for Native American parenting resources/books and am coming up empty. Any recommendations?”

@Lindsey1253 shows how important it is for her to use Indigenous knowledge when it comes to learning about parenting, and she also shows how she uses #NativeTwitter as a resource to ask for recommendations like this. Using #NativeTwitter as a hashtag for this question shows a level of trust and confidence that community members will share resources with her. Questions like this strengthen the community and foster connection by inviting other members to share their knowledge and recommendations with each other. Asking this question in this virtual community shows how members use the Internet as a means to find and share things with each other outside the realm of the dominant culture’s narrative.

Another tweet asks:



“#NativeTwitter, I am looking for a graphic designer to create a logo for my student organization! Any recommendations?”

This tweet shows a community member requesting help for a specific project they need completed, and by asking the community, is providing a creative opportunity and work for other members. This tweet received 24 replies, providing names and handles of creative professionals within the community. This tweet helps build the community network of business and creative professionals available for members to support.

Seeking face to face connection strengthens the online space of #NativeTwitter by bringing users together outside of the internet. While the number of tweets doing this are few, the request to meet up with members of #NativeTwitter shows the importance of the community in fostering different kinds of connection among users. For example, @beedubs767 asked the community to show up and support them at a wrestling match with the tweet in Figure 4, Appendix A. The text of the tweet reads:

“#Nativetwitterfam [Canadian flag emoji] I will be competing at Vancouver, Canada this weekend for wrestling(: would love to connect and have people support our #MenloWrestling team [blue heart emoji]”

This tweet fosters community connection by directly asking community members if they would like to connect by meeting up in person. This tweet also asks for community support specifically with @beedubs767's wrestling team. This tweet received two replies and ten retweets, illustrating how ready members were to share a request to connect in person, as well as show their support for their sport. The theme Community Building and Fostering Connection shows how Indigenous people use Twitter to connect and

strengthen each other. Indigenous people also use #NativeTwitter as a means of cultural preservation.

### **Cultural Preservation**

The final theme identified in this data set is cultural preservation. This theme includes tweets that preserve language, express international Indigenous solidarity, and promote and share Indigenous work. A study by Molyneux et al. (2012) investigated the link between the use of social networking sites and community resilience among Sioux Lookout region users in rural Canada. Survey results found that more than half of participants posted stories and photographs, looked at art, listened to music, and read about their culture online. Indigenous users gained social capital through using social networking sites to connect to their community. Members also used social networking sites to protect Indigenous identities and connect with each other, as the Sioux Lookout region is among one of the most rural First Nations regions in Ontario. #NativeTwitter displays a similar preservation of culture among users. Preserving language through tweets is one example of strengthening community resilience among members, as well as protecting Indigenous identities. For example, @OhLiveForToday asks #NativeTwitter community members to share how they say “hello” in their language:

“#NativeTwitter I’m working on a project to show diversity in Native American communities/tribes. How do you say hello in your language? Hailto! -Choctaw”

This tweet displays the preservation of culture in multiple ways. @OhLiveForToday shares she is working on a project to show diversity in language among members of her

community, and turned to #NativeTwitter for input. She then asks for members to share “Hello,” in their language, and the thread continued with 23 replies and 9 retweets.

@CanaItch also participates in preserving language by sharing a word of the day in their Indigenous language, as seen in this Figure 5, Appendix A. The text reads:

“Iñupiatun word of the day: aᅇallaᅇukti - bully, thug

The president of the United States uses his power like an abusive aᅇallaᅇukti. It’s not a good look.

Ahng-all-luck-hlook-tea

#wordofthedaychallenge #nativetwitter”

This tweet preserves culture by sharing a word a day in @CanaItch’s Indigenous language. The hashtag #wordofthedaychallenge implicitly invites other users to participate in the same challenge. The example @CanaItch provides comments politically about the president of the United States being a bully, while also educating the audience about how to say this word in her language. This act of sharing Indigenous language shows how members of #NativeTwitter use the space for culture preservation. This challenge also shows how during high stress times like Halloween, the community still operates in other ways besides Calling Out and Calling In. Tweets that preserve language display members of the community enacting rhetorical sovereignty, as these tweets educate and restore Indigenous knowledge among community members through tweets.

Tweets that promote or share Indigenous work also contribute to cultural preservation. For example, @MarkSpringer shares Indigenous music a tweet:

“Athabaskan fiddlers on Native American Calling @180099native. You can listen on kyuk.org Start your morning right! #NativeTwitter”

This tweet announces to the community where they can listen to Athabaskan fiddlers. Sharing creative work of Indigenous people is an important method of cultural preservation.

Tweets calling for solidarity with International indigenous issues also contribute to cultural preservation, but on a global scale. On October 28 2018, one of the four days from which this data set was measured, elections in Brazil decided Jair Bolsonaro as president. Bolsonaro has a history of ill relations with the Indigenous people of Brazil, and one of his campaign promises was to open the rainforest to more ranching (Londoño and Casado, 2018). @yipmann82 tweets shows support for the Indigenous people of Brazil by tweeting about ranching in Figure 6, Appendix A. The text reads:

“The Ranchers have been getting away with murder for decades! #Bolsonaro has only just begun. Women, minorities, #Indigenous, poor people and the #rainforest will be persecuted. Can they resist? #Brazil #BolsonaroNaRecord #Fascism #Nazi #NativeTwitter #Genocide @PersonalEscrito”

This tweet and image display a call for solidarity with the Indigenous people of Brazil. While #NativeTwitter is not specified as a space for solely North American Indigenous people, this region makes up the majority of contributors at least in this data set, as evidenced by self-identification in user’s bios. However, during this time in October, #NativeTwitter users shared images of the Brazilian rainforest as seen in @yipman82’s tweet to show support and solidarity with other Indigenous people and their specific struggles. Tweets that preserve culture display how important virtual online

communities are for Indigenous people, and also how Indigenous people use online spaces to meet their needs as a community. During Halloween, many tweets in #NativeTwitter engage with settlers and those claiming Indigeneity to call out and call in oppressive behavior. Indigenous people also use #NativeTwitter to build their community and foster connection, as well as preserve their culture. These themes display how Indigenous people use virtual space to thrive and support each other. These last two examples, language preservation and International solidarity, are not directly tied to Halloween. These examples show how the community functions in multiple ways during high stress times. The issues members of the community discuss are diverse, as evidenced by these themes.

## **Conclusion**

Indigenous people face a multitude of problems in North America. One prominent issue they face as nations of people is the commodification of their images through appropriation. Halloween, while seen by most as an innocuous holiday in the United States, often brings an onslaught of offensive images and behaviors because of Native American costumes. While Indigenous people certainly face ignorance from settlers online, they created virtual communities of their own as important spaces to connect with each other as well as engage settlers regarding issues they face as a culture. Twitter is a place where Indigenous people asserted control over their images and struggled for recognition and to educate others. The creation and use of #NativeTwitter as a virtual community displays Indigenous people's ability to find ways to connect, survive, and thrive as they face challenges because of their position. Analyzing the tweets found in

#NativeTwitter at the end of October in 2018 displayed three major themes in this online community.

These themes show how Indigenous people use Twitter in a way that is distinct from the dominant culture. Indigenous people are able to use this space to call out and call in settlers, build the community and foster connection, as well as preserve their culture. Tweets displaying these themes show how this community is able to help each other through the challenges they face as minorities in North America. The importance of rhetorical sovereignty regarding Indigenous people shows through each of these themes. By calling out and calling in settlers, members of the community make settlers accountable and educated about why their behavior is offensive and oppressive. Building the community through humor and sharing recommendations through tweets allows members of the community an outlet to learn and laugh with each other. Cultural preservation, through preserving language and expressing solidarity, plays an important role in enacting rhetorical sovereignty. Because members of #NativeTwitter use the online space to connect in this way, they assert control over their images, their languages, and their cultures.

This study only looks at themes for one stressful part of the year, Halloween. Further research for this community would include a thematic analysis of tweets in #NativeTwitter during a time apart from Halloween or Thanksgiving, when offensive content toward Indigenous people is rampant on the internet. A data analysis of tweets from a few days in the summer may illuminate if the themes in this draft are skewed in representation because of Halloween.

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Appendix A

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

 **Yip82** @yipmann82 · Oct 29, 2018  
Replying to @GeorgeMonbiot

**The Ranchers have been getting away with murder for decades! #Bolsonaro has only just begun. Women, minorities, #Indigenous, poor people and the #rainforest will be persecuted. Can they resist? #Brazil #BolsonaroNaRecord #Fascism #Nazi #NativeTwitter #Genocide @PersonalEscrito**



  4  4 

## Appendix B

Table 2: Subcategories within prominent themes

Community Building and Fostering Connection (n=19)		
<b>Subcategories</b>	<b>Tweet amount</b>	<b>Percentage within theme</b>
Express gratitude for community	7	37%
Invite participants	5	26%
Share Indigenous knowledge and success	5	26%
Seek face to face connection	2	11%
Cultural Preservation (n=22)		
<b>Subcategories</b>		
Promote or share Indigenous work	9	40%
Express solidarity for international Indigenous issues	3	14%
Ask for recommendations	4	18%
Preserve Indigenous language	6	28%