

The Ramapough Mountain Indians' Unsuccessful Bid for Federal Acknowledgement: Socio-Cultural Factors

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study used content analysis to examine socio-cultural factors associated with the Ramapough Mountain Indian's (RMI) unsuccessful bid for federal acknowledgment. It applied the McCoulough and Wilkens four-factor framework for explaining success in the Federal Acknowledgement Process (FAP): (1) meeting the social construction of the image of an Indian, (2) cohesiveness of the self-identity of the tribe's members, (3) perceived legitimacy of benefits or burdens directed toward the group, and (4) tribe's resources to assist acknowledgement effort. The study hypothesized that if the framework is applicable, then newspaper articles will reflect weakness or negativity with regard to the four factors. With a sample of 50 newspaper articles (21 newspaper outlets), thematic and quantitative analyses revealed that application of the framework offered socio-cultural insights about RMI's unsuccessful bid. The analyses coded for the presence and prevalence over time of each factor with inter-rater reliability 80-100%. Results indicated varied depictions of the RMI in the newspaper media during the FAP, with some articles centering indigenous experiences and leadership and other articles focusing on negative stereotypes of indigenous communities. The study illuminated the powerful role over time of economic and political opponents in shaping negative media narratives particularly in relation to Indian gaming. Given critiques of bias in the FAP, this study supports the argument for reforming the process with input from indigenous communities. Limitations of this study include the exploratory nature of the research, manualized data analysis of a complex data source, and the impact of researcher bias.

Introduction

Indigenous tribes have called the North American continent their sacred homeland for thousands of years. With the expansion of European colonialism into North America, many of these tribes had to fight for their land. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, the United States government waged battles with Native tribes, engaged in exploitative treaty-making, oversaw forced tribal migrations to barren lands, and reneged on past promises in order to expand the territorial boundaries of the United States.¹ Today, there are 574 Native American tribes currently acknowledged by the U.S. federal government.² However, it is estimated that more than 200 indigenous tribes are not federally acknowledged.³

¹ Norton, Mary Beth, David M. Katzman, David W. Blight, Howard P. Chudacoff, Thomas G. Paterson, William M. Tuttle Jr., and Paul D. Escott. *A People & A Nation A History of the United States*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008.

² "Indian Tribes and Resources for Native Americans." USA.gov, January 7, 2022. <https://www.usa.gov/tribes>.

³ O'Neill, Eilis. "Unrecognized Tribes Struggle without Federal Aid during Pandemic." NPR. NPR, April 17, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/04/17/988123599/unrecognized-tribes-struggle-without-federal-aide-during-pandemic>.

In 1978, the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs established a Federal Acknowledgement Process (FAP) as a system for Indian tribes to gain official acknowledgement.⁴ In order to be acknowledged, a tribe must meet seven criteria demonstrating political, historical, and genealogical continuity.⁵ Once acknowledged, a government-to-government relationship is created between the federal government and the tribe. The tribe also receives benefits from the federal government, such as health care, the ability to create reservations, political authority over its members, and, potentially, the ability to run an independent casino.⁶

The Ramapough Mountain Indians (RMI), residing in Mahwah and Ringwood, N.J. and Hillburn, N.Y.,⁷ are one group that has sought federal acknowledgement.⁸ With roughly 5,000 members,⁹ they claim to be descendants of the ancient Munsee Lenape tribe of the northeastern United States and received acknowledgment as an Indian tribe from the state of New Jersey in 1980. However, their bid for federal acknowledgement was denied in 1996.¹⁰ An appeal by the RMI of this decision was denied in 1998.¹¹

According to the federal government, the RMI, in their applications for acknowledgement, had failed to meet three of the seven mandatory criteria. Specifically, the RMI had failed to demonstrate that they: (1) are a distinct community that has existed from historical times until the present, (2) maintained political authority over their members from historical times until the present, and (3) consist of individuals who descended from a historical Indian tribe.¹² As someone who lives in a community close to the RMI, this paper began with my curiosity about the tribe, who seem either invisible to the residents of my town or are the subject of fearmongering and derogatory stories about their origins and behavior.¹³ Based on my learning of the RMI's failed bid for federal acknowledgement, I wanted to dig deeper into the decision and understand how the process of federal acknowledgement might be connected to the RMI's negative public perception and image. I wondered what socio-cultural factors might be at play in the decision. This inquiry is important because focusing on the RMI's efforts for federal acknowledgement might offer a window into how Native American groups are perceived and depicted in the US in the 21st century and the socio-cultural context influencing federal policy decision-making.

⁴ Roessel, Faith. "Federal Recognition - A Historical Twist of Fate." NARF.org, n.d. <https://www.narf.org/nill/documents/nlr/nlr14-3.pdf>.

⁵ Office of Federal Acknowledgement, *The Official Guidelines to the Federal Acknowledgement Regulations*, 25 CFR 83 § (1997).

⁶ Riley, Lorinda. "WHEN A TRIBAL ENTITY BECOMES A NATION: THE ROLE OF POLITICS IN THE SHIFTING FEDERAL RECOGNITION REGULATIONS." *American Indian Law Review* 39, no. 2 (2014): 451–505. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43857889>.

⁷ McGrath, Ben. "Strangers on the Mountain." *The New Yorker*, February 21, 2010. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/03/01/strangers-on-the-mountain>.

⁸ Office of Federal Acknowledgement, *Summary Under the Criteria and Evidence for Final Determination against Federal Acknowledgement of The Ramapough Mountain Indians Inc.* § (1996).

⁹ Kelley, Tina. "New Jersey Tribe Member Dies After Police Shooting at a Back-Roads Party." *New York Times*, April 11, 2006. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/11/nyregion/new-jersey-tribe-member-dies-after-police-shooting-at-a-backroads.html>.

¹⁰ Office of Federal Acknowledgement, *Summary Under Criteria and Evidence*.

¹¹ Office of Federal Acknowledgement, *Reconsidered Final Determination Declining to Acknowledge that Ramapough Mountain Indians, Inc. Exists as an Indian Tribe* § (1997).

¹² Office of Federal Acknowledgement, *Summary Under the Criteria and Evidence*.

¹³ McGrath, "Strangers on the Mountain."

Literature Review

In order to address this research topic and further refine my research question, it was necessary to conduct a literature review of both the implementation of the Federal Acknowledgement Process (FAP) and the origins and history of the RMI. This effort helped to reveal the connection between the FAP and socio-cultural factors and the shifting narrative about the history and origins of the RMI.

Federal Acknowledgement Process (FAP)

A review of the literature on the FAP indicated a pattern of criticism focused on the ways that the FAP criteria are unfair and reflect a lack of historical and cultural understanding of Indian tribes. Three main criticisms, mostly from scholars in political science, were identified.

First, the process is costly and time-consuming. Riley claims that the FAP requires petitioning tribes to invest significant amounts of time and money into the process. She claims that the system has been “politicized and modified... so much that petitioners must increase their research efforts, employ expensive experts, and use other costly strategies in order to be successful.”¹⁴ She emphasizes the long turnover time per application, which she estimates to be 30 years, as evidence of the cumbersome and ineffectual nature of the process. As a result, the FAP has become an arduous and sometimes fruitless endeavor for prospective tribes.¹⁵ Miller points out that after going through the process of “collecting data, paying experts, and waiting for bureaucratic determination, many hopeful petitioners have grown disgusted by the government regimen,” ultimately leading to a tense and antagonistic relationship between the Bureau of Indian Affairs and petitioning Indian tribes.¹⁶

The second criticism is that the process is political. Riley also criticizes the FAP as “bogged down in a political battle, especially over gaming concerns, by the general public,” causing it to be an ineffective tool for tribes to petition the government for acknowledgement.¹⁷ Federally recognized tribes have the ability to own and operate independent casinos on tribal lands as long as their state’s laws allow for any sort of gaming.¹⁸ As a result, because of Indian gaming rights, federal acknowledgement can have a significant impact on surrounding communities and other casinos, giving it an extra political dimension. This has led to stiff political opposition toward petitioning tribes.¹⁹ Cramer argues that the political opponents of Indian casinos often focus on the “possibility of increased rates of organized crime, neighborhood and property crime, and family crime, as well as economic hardship that gambling often places on the poor.”²⁰ Cramer methodically discredits each of these claims and further posits that casino gambling has had a positive impact on Indian tribes’ ability to be successful in their bid for acknowledgement. According to Cramer, Indian gaming rights have opened up market opportunities for the gaming industry to finance the recognition of Indian tribes in return for “lucrative tribal casino contracts.”²¹ The capital infusion provided by these contracts can be used to fund the tribe’s research necessary for recognition. Financing successful bids for federal acknowledgement has been

¹⁴ Riley, “WHEN TRIBAL ENTITY BECOMES NATION,” 469.

¹⁵ Riley, “WHEN TRIBAL ENTITY BECOMES NATION.”

¹⁶ Miller, Mark Edwin. *Forgotten Tribes: Unrecognized Indians and the Federal Acknowledgment Process*. Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2007, 47

¹⁷ Riley, “WHEN A TRIBAL ENTITY BECOMES NATION,” 452.

¹⁸ Darian-Smith, E.. "Indian gaming." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, May 22, 2016.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Indian-gaming>.

¹⁹ Riley, “WHEN TRIBAL ENTITY BECOMES NATION.”

²⁰ Cramer, Renée Ann. *Cash, Color, and Colonialism: The Politics of Tribal Acknowledgment*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008, 99.

²¹ Cramer, *Cash, Color, and Colonialism*, 95.

historically difficult because of the costly nature of the process and the poverty of the majority of Indian communities.²²

The third criticism is that the process is unfair. Miller claims that the process is not based on a tribe's merits but, rather, on a tribe's "ability to hire experts and secure political allies, or their ability to find scraps of paper or documents pointing to continuous historical existence - records that are often the result of good fortune or the accidents of history."²³ In essence, Indian tribes are "bogged down trying to confirm their tribal functioning every generation since European contact" with written documentation.²⁴ This is particularly problematic because Indian tribes "traditionally traced ancestry and culture through oral tradition" and therefore have difficulty finding the required documentation to meet the criteria.²⁵ Miller further emphasizes the arbitrary nature of the process, claiming that there "is no historical or rational reason why some indigenous groups have federal status and others do not."²⁶

In response to these criticisms, political scientists McCulloch and Wilkins developed a framework of four socio-cultural factors which they theorized could explain a tribe's success in gaining acknowledgement. Figure 1 below depicts a summary of the four factors. McCulloch and Wilkins applied this theoretical framework to the Catawba tribe of South Carolina and the Lumbee tribe of North Carolina. They hypothesize that if all four factors are strongly positive, then a tribe should be successful in its bid. The first factor of the framework is meeting the social construction of the image of an Indian. Tribes that have preserved their culture and look stereotypically Indian will meet this factor. The second factor is the cohesiveness of the self-identity of the tribe's members. Tribes that have a well-defined identity and internal cohesiveness will meet this factor. The third factor is the perceived legitimacy of the benefits or burdens directed toward the group. The wording of this factor is slightly confusing. The researchers proposed that tribes that are perceived as having been exploited because of their Indian identity may be seen as deserving federal benefits. Finally, the fourth factor of the framework is the tribe's resources to assist the effort. A tribe that is large in size, that has more access to capital, and more political connections will meet this factor.²⁷

1. Meet the social construction of the image of an Indian	1. Cohesiveness of the self-identity of the tribe's members
2. Perceived legitimacy of benefits or burdens directed toward the group	3. Tribe's resources to assist effort.

Figure 1. McCulloch & Wilkins 4-Factor Framework to Explain FAP Success

History and Origins of the Ramapough Mountain Indians

A review of the literature on the history and origins of the RMI reveals a complex and shifting narrative about their identity. Perhaps the most influential piece of literature on the RMI is *The Ramapo Mountain People* written by historian Steven David Cohen in 1974.²⁸ As Cohen claims in his book, at that time, the origins of the RMI were largely based on local legend, which was heavily influenced by a pamphlet on the group's origins published in 1936. The

²² Cramer, *Cash, Color, and Colonialism*.

²³ Miller, *Forgotten Tribes*, 17.

²⁴ Miller, *Forgotten Tribes*, 47.

²⁵ Miller, *Forgotten Tribes*, 57.

²⁶ Miller, *Forgotten Tribes*, 20.

²⁷ McCulloch, Anne Merline, and David E. Wilkins. "'Constructing' Nations within States: The Quest for Federal Recognition by the Catawba and Lumbee Tribes." *American Indian Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (1995): 361-88. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1185596>.

²⁸ Cohen, David Steven. *The Ramapough Mountain People*. Rutgers University Press, 1974.

pamphlet claimed that the “Jackson Whites,” a derogatory name for the group, descended from “Tuscarora Indians,” “Hessian mercenaries,” “prostitutes” and “escaped slaves.”²⁹ According to Cohen, this story was “Repeated in newspaper and magazine articles...thereby reinforcing the stereotype by giving it the aura of historical veracity.”³⁰ This local legend exacerbated negative perceptions of the group by outside communities. Collins claims that the stereotype of the RMI “connotes a racial anomaly spawned by inbreeding and intermarriage, born into ignorance and degeneracy, and condemned to poverty, feeble-mindedness and suspicion.”³¹ This contempt by outsiders toward the group caused them to “withdraw into clannish seclusion for protection of their way of life against ‘outsiders.’”³² Cohen agrees that the group is “suspicious of outsiders, particularly of reporters.”³³ To research his book, Cohen lived with the RMI for over a year and conducted the first real academic investigation of their origins using genealogical records. Upon scrutinizing the local legend regarding the RMI’s origins, Cohen found that the legend was baseless. Instead, Cohen concluded that the group descended from a small group of landed Dutch Black families who lived in New Jersey during the 17th and 18th centuries and who moved into the Ramapos during the 19th century. Cohen minimized any Indian origins, claiming that “it probably could not have involved more than one or two individuals or there would be more documentary evidence.”³⁴ Collins agrees with Cohen’s conclusions and emphasizes its importance by claiming that: “Changing the legends about the ‘Jackson Whites’ to the history of the racially mixed people of the Ramapos is a necessity.”³⁵ Cohen’s book was not well received by the RMI and provided a catalyst for the group to incorporate itself as the Ramapough Mountain Indians.³⁶

In contrast to Cohen’s work, later scholars have increasingly tended to affirm the RMI’s Indian identity. In light of the Ramapoughs’ denial of acknowledgement, Lenik analyzed the historical presence of Indians in the region through an archeological lens. In his study, Lenik examines historical and archeological data from his own archaeological excavations of the Ramapo Mountains, as well as that of other prominent archeologists throughout the 20th century. Such excavations revealed Native American artifacts (i.e., hunting gear, arrowheads), settlements, such as rock shelters, and remnants of European trade in the region, all of which demonstrated the presence of Native Americans in the N.J. highlands area.³⁷ Lenik also claims that: “The continuing presence of Indians in the northern Highlands region in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries is documented in several local history publications, letters, and newspaper accounts.”³⁸ Lenik draws upon all of the preceding findings to assert that “Native American people were a significant element among the primary progenitors of the Ramapo Mountain People.”³⁹

Stead, an anthropologist who grew up in close friendship with RMI members, contends that the RMI are Indian, stating that they are the “contemporary tribal descendants of the Munsee Lenape people.”⁴⁰ As evidence of their Indian origins, Stead cites the Ramapoughs’ rich oral traditions which are heavily linked to Native story-telling

²⁹ Cohen, *Ramapough Mountain People*, 3-7.

³⁰ Cohen, *Ramapough Mountain People*, 23.

³¹ Collins, Daniel. “The Racially-Mixed People of the Ramapos: Undoing the Jackson White Legends.” *American Anthropologist* 74, no. 5 (1972): 1276–85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/672981>, 1276.

³² Collins, “Racially-Mixed People,” 1281.

³³ Cohen, David Steven. “The Origin of the ‘Jackson Whites’: History and Legend among the Ramapo Mountain People.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 85, no. 337 (1972): 260–66. <https://doi.org/10.2307/539500>, 265.

³⁴ Cohen, *Ramapough Mountain People*, 42.

³⁵ Collins, “Racially-Mixed People,” 1284.

³⁶ Cohen, *Ramapough Mountain People*, 1974.

³⁷ Lenik, Edward J. *Indians in the Ramapos: Survival, Persistence and Presence*. New Jersey: North Jersey Highlands Historical Society, 1999.

³⁸ Lenik, *Indians in the Ramapos*, 47.

³⁹ Lenik, *Indians in the Ramapos*, 2.

⁴⁰ Stead, Chuck. “Ramapough/Ford The Impact and Survival of an Indigenous Community in the Shadow of Ford Motor Company’s Toxic Legacy.” Dissertation, Antioch University Repository and Archive, 2015, vi.

practices. He claims that “Stories are really the foundation of who the Ramapough Lenape are and it is from their stories that they claim their native identity.”⁴¹ The works of Stead and Lenik demonstrate a significant shift in academic discourse towards favoring the idea of the RMI as having Indian ancestry. However, Stead maintains that: “The Ramapoughs continue to face denial by a handful of white professionals whose footnote in history is a small gain when compared to the long troublesome legacy it has cost the people.”⁴² As a result, Stead emphasizes the importance of community voice in allowing the Ramapoughs to tell their own story.

Research Gap

The criticisms of the FAP, as well as the shifting and contradictory depictions of the RMI’s history, helped to reveal an important gap in the research. While Cohen and Stead have written papers that summarize the timeline of the RMI’s unsuccessful bid for federal acknowledgement, no study in the review of the literature addressed the myriad socio-cultural factors which might be associated with the RMI’s unsuccessful bid for acknowledgement.^{43,44}

Research Question

Based on the identified research gap, I posed the following research question: Can the McCulloch and Wilkins framework offer insight into the socio-cultural factors which might be connected to understanding why the RMI’s bid was unsuccessful? I hypothesized that if the framework is applicable, then newspaper articles will illuminate weakness or negativity with regard to the four factors specified in the framework.

Method

To address the research question, a content analysis was used to investigate how the RMI were portrayed in newspaper articles prior to the federal government’s rejection of their bid for acknowledgement. Newspaper articles offer accessible archival data which can reveal the public perception and messaging surrounding the RMI during the time period. As a result, they potentially offer a rich source of information on the socio-cultural factors which affected the RMI’s bid with respect to how they were viewed and how they were portraying themselves. A content analysis is suited to address my research question because it can be “used to determine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within qualitative data” and “quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships.”⁴⁵ For this study, I coded and analyzed newspaper articles to explore the presence of the four factors outlined in the McCulloch and Wilkins framework and what this meant for the tribe. Additionally, I quantified the prevalence of these factors and tested out the possibility of exploring the relationship between the factors.

Sample

The sample was 50 newspaper articles published between 1978 and 1998 from 21 different newspaper outlets. Twenty percent (20%) of my sample included national newspapers (e.g., New York Times, Los Angeles Times) and 80%

⁴¹ Stead, “Ramapough/Ford,” 42.

⁴² Stead, “Ramapough/Ford,” 59.

⁴³ Cohen, Steven David. “The Name Game: The Ramapough Mountain Indians,” n.d.

https://doi.org/https://www.academia.edu/1225640/The_Name_Game_The_Ramapough_Mountain_Indians.

⁴⁴ Stead, “Ramapough/Ford.”

⁴⁵ “Content Analysis.” Columbia Public Health, April 15, 2022.

<https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/research/population-health-methods/content-analysis>.

included regional newspapers (e.g., The Record, The Philadelphia). Figure 2 depicts a chart with the number of articles in the sample by year. The sample likely has a larger frequency of articles beginning in 1993 because, during that year, casino owner Donald Trump and congressional representatives started a campaign against Indian gaming which included the RMI. See Appendix 1 for a full list of the sources in the sample.

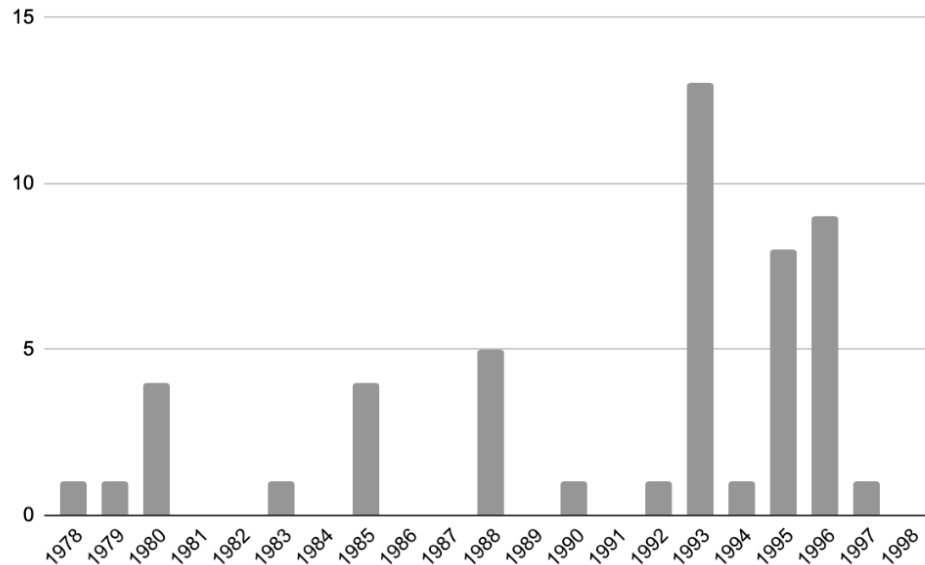


Figure 2. Number of Newspapers in Sample by Year

Procedure

Two online databases (ProQuest and Newspapers.com) were used to create the sample. The date range was based on when the RMI incorporated (1978) and the final Federal appeal decision (1998). The search criteria specified keywords: “Ramapough”, “Ramapo Mountain Indians” or “Ramapo Mountain People.” To be as inclusive as possible, these keywords were selected because newspapers refer to the group using two different spellings of ram-ah-poh and some sources refer to them as “Indians” while others refer to them as “People.” The group is also sometimes referred to with the single term “Ramapough.” With the goal of creating a sample of 50, a manageable size to code and analyze manually, the sample selection began with ProQuest generating 291 hits. The top 50 articles were reviewed and after removing duplicates, articles under 50 words, and articles that mention RMI in passing; the final sample from ProQuest was 17 articles. Next, a search of Newspapers.com generated 45,298 hits. The top 33 articles meeting date and keyword criteria were selected, using the same removal criteria. One reason that Newspapers.com had significantly more hits was that there appeared to be more duplicate articles across newspapers.

Data Matrix

A data matrix in Google Sheets was created with rows for each article and columns for each factor from McCulloch & Wilkins Framework. This matrix was used to organize coding processes and conduct basic qualitative and quantitative analyses.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Judd, Charles M., Eliot R. Smith, and Louise H. Kidder. *Research Methods in Social Relations*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1991.

Two-Step Analysis

First, a thematic analysis was conducted using the four-factor framework. In the thematic analysis, I read through each newspaper article and recorded any information related to any of the four factors. After this was completed, the information was reviewed and themes/trends were drawn from the data which comprises my results. Second, building on the findings from the thematic analysis, I developed yes/no indicators which would provide insight into the prevalence of the four factors and trends. The articles were coded for these indicators. To check the reliability of my coding and increase methodological rigor, an inter-rater reliability test was conducted using articles that were randomly selected. A second person coded 20% of my sample for each indicator and the percent similarity was calculated. The acceptable level of agreement is 75% or higher.⁴⁷ The results from my test yielded agreement ranging from 80 to 100% on each quantified indicator. When there was disagreement, the two raters reviewed the content and reached a consensus.

Findings

Thematic Analysis: What Insights Can Be Gained from Applying the McCulloch and Wilkins Framework?

The thematic analysis revealed that the factors were prevalent in the sample and somewhat interrelated. There was a nuanced portrayal of the RMI with differing perspectives and opinions. Tables 1 through 4 below summarize key insights relating to each of the factors and provide sample quotes from the perspective of different actors involved in the FAP and journalists reporting about it.

The thematic analysis for Factor 1 focused on image is summarized in Table 1 below. I found that while journalists often reported the RMI's own view of their ancestry, they also reported on the RMI's unclear and multi-racial origins, relying principally on local mythology and Cohen's work as support for this perspective. In the articles, the RMI's account of their Indian identity was often directly challenged by local residents, politicians and casino owners. These challenges to the RMI's Indian identity likely negatively affected the RMI's image as an Indian tribe. However, balancing out these negative portrayals, some journalists asserted that the RMI have an authentic Indian identity and culture. When quoted, spokespeople for the RMI also asserted their tribe's Indian roots.

Table 2 below summarizes insights for Factor 2 focused on cohesiveness. During the period covered by the sample (1978-1998), the RMI were in the process of reclaiming their Indian culture. After incorporating in 1978, the RMI established a tribal structure, began hosting powwows and started practicing traditional Indian cooking, dancing, singing, etc. The powwow, an event that celebrates a tribe's Indian culture, was the most public expression of their identity and in fact, one article proclaimed in its title: "Powwow: For Ramapough, A Chance to Debunk Myths."⁴⁸ In the thematic analysis, it seemed like these actions could have helped both to convey the RMI's Indian identity to the general public, as well as to strengthen the RMI's sense of self-identity.

⁴⁷ Glen, Stephanie. "Inter-Rater Reliability IRR: Definition, Calculation." Statistics How To, January 6, 2021. <https://www.statisticshowto.com/inter-rater-reliability/>.

⁴⁸ Coleman, Chrisena A. "POWWOW: For Ramapoughs, a Chance to Debunk Myths." *The Record*. September 20, 1992, 16.

Table 1. Thematic Analysis for Factor 1: Meets the Social Construction of the Image of an Indian

Factor	Insights	Supporting Quote
1. Meets the social construction of the image of an Indian	Local residents questioned RMI's Indian identity.	"There never has been such a tribe. This is a fiction invented about 15 years ago and used by questionable elements trying to obtain permission for a gambling casino." ⁴⁹ - Local Op-Ed (1996)
	There was a continued influence of Cohen's work and local mythology.	"Many locals still call them 'Jackson whites,' a derogatory term that refers to a belief that the tribe descended from English and West Indian prostitutes brought to New York by a man named Jackson in colonial times." ⁵⁰ - New York Times Article (1995)
	Politicians and casino owners also challenged their identity.	"It's not a history of an Indian tribe." ⁵¹ - Representative Robert Toricelli (1995)
	Some journalists asserted that the RMI has an Indian identity and culture.	"the people pledge loyalty to an elected tribal chief, count on a medicine man to cure a variety of ailments and gather for powwows each summer... why doesn't the Federal Government consider them Indians?" ⁵² - New York Times Article (1995)
	RMI spokespeople asserted Indian identity.	"members of our tribe, after the warm season, traveled from the Big Waters - the Hudson River - up to these mountains to hunt for food. When they found the conditions here excellent, many decided to stay." ⁵³ - Chief Ronald Van Dunk (1983)

Table 2. Thematic Analysis for Factor 2: Cohesiveness of the Self-identity of the Tribe's Members

Factor	Insight	Supporting Quote
2. Cohesiveness of the self-identity of the tribe's members	RMI spokespeople claim that the group had lost their Indian culture.	"We were Christianized and Europeanized, lost our culture and lost our ways." ⁵⁴ - Chief Van Dunk (1985)
	The group was in the process of rebuilding an Indian culture to reclaim their identity.	"Even the sweat lodge, a domed structure in the backyard of a tribe member where the chief and other tribe leaders prayed around a pit of fire-heated stones, is only a few years old." ⁵⁵ - New York Times Article (1995)
	There was a sense of pride in the community.	"The truth is there and we are proud of it. Torricelli has lost my vote and I call upon my friends, neighbors, former students, their parents and friends, all Ramapoughs living in Passaic County, and all fair-minded people to follow me." ⁵⁶ - Op-Ed by Community Member (1996)

⁴⁹ Smith Jr. Clifton, William H. "RAMAPOUGH `TRIBE' IS A FICTION." *The Record*, May 24, 1996.

⁵⁰ Nieves, Evelyn. "OUR TOWNS; Rebuffed and Ignored, a Tribe Waits to Be Confirmed as Indian." *New York Times*, December 1, 1995.

⁵¹ Hernandez, Raymond. "The Mountain People Dig In Over Recognition as Indians." *New York Times*, January 1, 1995.

⁵² Hernandez, "Mountain People Dig In."

⁵³ Van Dunk, Ronald. "LIKE A BIRD FLYING." *The Daily Times*. September 18, 1983, 100.

⁵⁴ Avery, Ron. "Area Indians Revive Tribal Heritage." *Philadelphia Daily News*, July 25, 1985, 8.

⁵⁵ Newman, Andy. "IN PERSON; Laying Claim to a Tribe's History." *New York Times*, November 26, 1995.

⁵⁶ Fields, Roberta Jean. "RAMAPOUGHS ARE INDIANS." *The Record*. July 22, 1996.

Table 3 below summarizes insights for Factor 3 focused on legitimacy. The deservingness of the RMI to receive federal benefits was primarily attacked by politicians, casino owners and others who claimed that the tribe was exploiting the system and applying for acknowledgement only to open a casino. At the same time, some of the articles took the view that the RMI were being targeted by the selfish casino industry. The RMI's lack of resources was also emphasized. This emphasis could theoretically bolster the view amongst the public that the RMI deserved to receive the benefits of federal acknowledgement. However, none of the articles explicitly connected the RMI's socio-economic status with having an Indian identity. As a result, the most powerful message from the articles for this factor was the challenges by political and financial opponents of the RMI to the tribe's legitimacy and deservingness.

Table 3. Thematic Analysis for Factor 3: Perceived Legitimacy of the Benefits or Burdens Directed Toward the Group

Factor	Perspective	Supporting Quote
3. Perceived legitimacy of the benefits or burdens directed toward the group	Casino Owners attacked the legitimacy of the RMI's tribal application. They claimed that the group is only applying in order to open a casino.	"What they're [RMI] doing is wrong, and it's disgraceful." ⁵⁷ - Atlantic City casino owner Donald Trump (1993)
	There was a bipartisan coalition in Congress opposed to the RMI's bid. They also claimed that the RMI is exploiting the system.	"[RMI's bid is a] failed venture to bring high-stakes gambling to Bergen County." ⁵⁸ - Rep. Marge Roukema (1996)
	Some journalists claimed that casino owners are attacking the RMI out of selfish interests.	"[Trump's opposition is a] preemptive strike against the possibility of New Jersey's Ramapough tribe competing with Trump's three Atlantic City resorts." ⁵⁹ - Daily News Article (1993)
	RMI is portrayed as a community in need (Socially isolated, in need of social services, economically depressed).	"The history of the Ramapough Indians is that we've been cut down to our knees by racial slurs... and kept socially and economically in the rear of everything and we still are." ⁶⁰ - Chief Van Dunk (1985)

Table 4 below summarizes insights for Factor 4 focused on resources. I found that throughout the sample, the RMI's lack of resources was emphasized. Additionally, there was a pattern of strong political opposition from various groups to the RMI's application. Lack of resources and political opposition would significantly hinder the RMI's ability to make a successful bid for acknowledgement.

⁵⁷ Romano, Jay. "3 Indian Tribes Stir Casino Fears." *New York Times*, August 1, 1993.

⁵⁸ Young, Elise. "RAMAPOUGH INDIANS APPEAL DENIAL OF STATUS AS A NATION." *The Record*. May 8, 1996.

⁵⁹ Sutton, Larry. "Donald says ough to Indian gambling." *Daily News*. May 4, 1993, 939.

⁶⁰ Garcia, Dan. "Bingo for Indians - not a sure bet." *The Record*. December 15, 1985, 35.

Table 4. Thematic Analysis for Factor 4: Tribe’s Resources to Assist Effort

Factor	Insights	Quote
4. Tribe’s resources to assist effort	RMI lacked financial resources and are a small tribe of 2,000-3,000 members.	“lawyers estimate that the process may cost as much as 100,000 - money that the tribe does not have.” ⁶¹ - Daily Record Article (1988)
	There was opposition by casino owners because of potential casino competition.	“it could be the death-knell of Atlantic city.” ⁶² - President of the Casino Association of New Jersey in Atlantic City (1993) “On Friday, Trump sued Interior Secretary and Indian Gaming Association Chairman Charles Keechi, charging the government gives Indian tribes preferential treatment in granting casino licenses.” ⁶³ - Daily News Article (1993)
	There was steep political opposition in Congress.	“If the Indians would forgo any attempt for a casino, I would support the tribal application.” ⁶⁴ - Representative Robert Torricelli (1993)
	There was opposition in local politics.	“Fearing casinos may be coming to the region, the Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders passed a resolution in 1993 opposing the Ramapoughs’ application. Paramus, Ramsey, Mahwah, Oakland, and Saddle River passed similar resolutions.” ⁶⁵ - The Record Article (1995)
	The RMI publicly blamed political opposition against a casino for their denial.	“[The decision was] an election year sop to the casino issue.” ⁶⁶ - RMI Lawyer (1996)

Quantitative Analysis: Prevalence of the Factors and Relationship Between Them

Quantitative analysis provides insight into the prevalence of each of the four factors in the newspaper articles. Six indicators were created. Each indicator was related to one of the factors from the McCulloch & Wilkins framework. Table 4 below names the six indicators and summarizes how I coded for each indicator and the general meaning behind each such indicator.

⁶¹ Schwartz, Elizabeth S. “Tribes to pursue 3 paths to recognition.” *Daily Record*. June 5, 1988, 13

⁶² Romano, “3 Indian Tribes.”

⁶³ Sutton, “Donald says ugh,” 939.

⁶⁴ McGann, Mike. “Casino issue splits lawmakers.” *The Herald News*. August 2, 1993, 4.

⁶⁵ Privitera, Deborah. “Key Step near in Indians' bid for recognition.” *The Record*. May 4, 1995, 25.

⁶⁶ Keller, Susan Jo. “New Jersey Daily Briefing: Ramapoughs Are Rejected.” *New York Times*, January 19, 1996.

Table 4. Coding Procedure for the Coding of Each Indicator

Framework Factor	Indicator	How it was coded	Meaning
1. Meets the social construction of the image of an Indian	a. Refers to group as “Indians,” “Native Americans,” a “tribe” or a “Nation”	Counted if the article refers to the tribe using any of the words listed in 1a.	General respect for the RMI’s identity
	b. Favors RMI perspective on their origins	Counted if the article gave a clear preference towards the RMI’s perspective on its origins. Specifically, that they are primarily the descendants of the Munsee Lenape.	Ideological support for the RMI’s identity
2. Cohesiveness of the self-identity of the tribe’s members	a. Includes community voice	Counted if the author directly quoted a tribal chief or tribal member.	Tribe’s ability to share its own narrative
	b. Includes story of tribal life or a ritual	Counted if the author included a story which suggests that the group has a distinctly Indian culture (e.g. a story of a powwow, a story of group members engaging in traditional Indian practices).	Active and publicized tribal culture
3. Perceived legitimacy of the benefits or burdens directed toward the group	a. Author or quotation portrays RMI as exploiting the system for a casino	Counted if either the author of the article or a quotation from the article directly claimed or insinuated that the tribe was applying for federal recognition in order to open a casino (e.g. an article titled “Indians Want Bingo, Request Tribal Status”). ⁶⁷	Presence of exploitation narrative
4. Tribe’s resources to assist effort	a. Mentions the words “casino,” “gambling” or “bingo”	Counted if the article mentioned any of the words listed in 4a.	Presence of the casino issue

Table 5 below provides the prevalence of each of the listed indicators (expressed as a percentage). The interrater reliability is also provided in the far-right column of the table. In general, I found that a majority of the articles referred to the RMI as Indians, using various nomenclature. Additionally, a majority of the articles included a quote from a chief or tribal member, meaning that in a high percentage of the articles the tribe could directly share its perspective. A smaller, but substantial, percentage of the articles favored the RMI’s view on their origins and/or included a story of tribal life or tribal ritual. The high percentages of Indicators 3a and 4a demonstrate the prevalence of the exploitation narrative and the casino issue and how linked these stories were to the RMI in newspaper media.

⁶⁷ UPI. “Indians Want Bingo, Request Tribal Status.” *Newsday*, December 16, 1985.

Table 5. Prevalence of 6 Indicators Related to the McCulloch and Wilkins Framework

Framework Factor	Indicator	Percentage	Inter- Rater Reliability
1. Meets the social construction of the image of an Indian	a. Refers to the group as “Indians,” “Native Americans,” a “tribe” or a “Nation”	60%	80%
	b. Favors RMI perspective on their origins	34%	100%
2. Cohesiveness of the self-identity of the tribe’s members	a. Includes community voice	58%	90%
	b. Includes a story of tribal life or a ritual	28%	100%
3. Perceived legitimacy of the benefits or burdens directed toward the group	a. Author or quotation portrays RMI as exploiting the system for a casino	44%	90%
4. Tribe’s resources to assist effort	a. Mentions the words “casino,” “gambling” or “bingo”	70%	100%

To dig a bit deeper, two additional questions were posed regarding the portrayal of the RMI as Indians and the emergence of the casino issue in the articles. Table 6 below shows that 84% of the articles included at least one of the image and cohesiveness indicators and that 12% of the sample provided robust portrayals with all four indicators present. This finding suggests that the RMI were portrayed as Indians in newspaper articles to a fairly significant degree.

Table 6. Further Analysis of Coding for Image and Cohesiveness Indicators

Question	Indicator	Results
1. How many of the articles portrayed the RMI as Indian?	a. Includes at least one of the image or cohesiveness indicators	84%
	b. Includes all four of the image and cohesiveness indicators	12%

Figure 3 below shows that references to the exploitation narrative and the casino issue dramatically increased over time. The Indian Regulatory Gaming Act was passed in 1988. This act enhanced Indian tribes’ ability to own and operate casinos on tribal lands and, as a result, significantly increased the relevance of Indian gaming. In my content analysis, I found that most of the articles which mentioned Indian gaming were published after the promulgation of the act. In light of this trend, I used 1988 as a watershed year in my data analysis. After and including 1988, 79% of articles raised the issue of casinos and 53% included concerns about the RMI’s intention to exploit the eligibility to own casinos as a tribe. The high prevalence of the indicators in articles published during and after 1988 further illustrates how the RMI became closely linked to the casino issue and how widespread messaging of the exploitation narrative became.

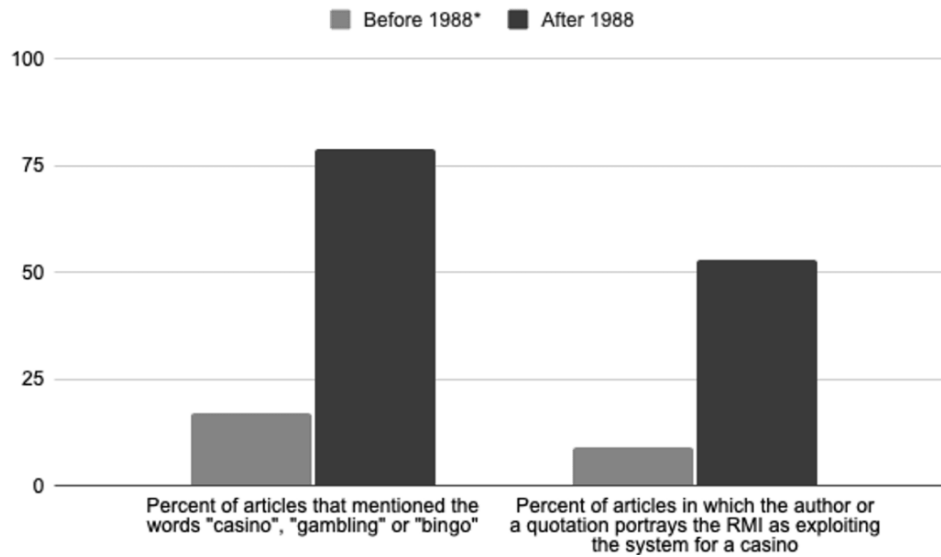


Figure 3. Prevalence of Exploitation and Casino Indicators Between Watershed Year

Limitations

This research study has limitations that are important to consider when interpreting the results and considering opportunities for future investigations. These include the exploratory nature of the research, manualized data analysis of a complex data source, and the impact of researcher bias. Firstly, this research was exploratory, investigating the applicability of an existing theoretical framework to a new tribal group (RMI) and a new data source (newspaper articles). This type of preliminary work is important for advancing theoretical understanding, generating questions, and focusing future research.⁶⁸ The present study did not aim to draw causal conclusions about the outcome of the federal bid. Rather it sought to deepen understanding about the social cultural factors associated with the bid and generate questions and approaches for future work. Second, content analysis of newspaper articles is a complex endeavor made more challenging by reliance on manual coding. This approach limited the sample size that it was feasible to analyze and limited opportunities for identifying patterns could have been made possible through software. Finally, my own researcher bias as someone who is not part of the RMI could have skewed or limited my research questions, approach, analysis and conclusions. In considering the socio-cultural factors connected to the RMI bid, it seems particularly important to take the step of directly asking people who lived through the experience and are most directly familiar with the bid. While I was able to visit the RMI community, including its community center and the Mahwah Museum, and speak with local writers and journalists as part of my background work, I was not able to interview RMI community members and directly conduct what Stake calls a “member check.”⁶⁹ If I had this opportunity, I would have asked for feedback on my questions, methods, and data interpretation. There may have been important gaps in my work such as events of which I am unaware that did not appear in newspaper articles. RMI members could also have helped in the effort to operationalize the factors, informing what image, cohesiveness, legitimacy, and resources mean to them. This is especially important considering how the RMI have been systematically denied a voice in communicating their own narrative.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Stebbens, Robert. *Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2001.

⁶⁹ Stake, Robert E. *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1995.

⁷⁰ Stead, “Ramapough/Ford.”

Discussion

The McCulloch and Wilkins framework helped to identify socio-cultural factors connected to the RMI's bid for federal acknowledgement. Analyzing newspaper articles suggests a mix of strengths and weaknesses in the socio-cultural context surrounding the RMI's bid. While journalists, for the most part, respected and named the RMI's identity as Indian, political opposition to the RMI's opening a casino arose as a particularly potent issue that came to be heavily connected to the RMI's story in newspaper media. Local residents, local politicians, casino owners and congressional representatives all emerged as potential stakeholders who opposed the RMI's bid because of the casino issue. These stakeholders drove negative portrayals of the RMI in the media. There was significant external political pressure that countered and negated the resources available to the RMI for their bid. This insight, which emerged out of the study's exploratory process, extends the original framework's use of the concept of resources. The McCulloch and Wilkins paper focused on the internal resources of a tribe, rather than external resources and political opposition which may be arrayed against a tribe.⁷¹

This study generated several directions for further research. The research could be expanded by looking at a larger sample and different types of media sources such as radio and television. Other methods, such as interviews or surveys could also be used to collect data and cross-check findings. Additionally, the effect of the federal government's rejection of the RMI bid on the RMI community could be researched by conducting interviews with RMI community members. And finally, to further develop the framework, it could be applied to different tribal cases. The further development of the McCulloch and Wilkins framework is important because it could potentially provide a useful strategic tool for Indian tribes to assess their positioning in the federal acknowledgment process and to guide planning.

Conclusion

As stated in my introduction, recent estimates suggest that over 200 tribes remain unacknowledged by the federal government.⁷² This lack of federal acknowledgement has significant consequences as these groups are being denied public visibility and respect as well as federal benefits. This study has illuminated the varied ways a group seeking federal acknowledgement is depicted in the media, lifting up both indigenous community voice and negative stereotypes. The study also revealed the powerful role of opponents with political and economic agendas in challenging efforts to gain acknowledgement and dominating the public story in the media. Given the critique of the FAP process, this study further supports the argument for reforming the process with input from stakeholders, including Indian tribes, to address biases and make it fairer.

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⁷¹ McCulloch and Wilkins, "'Constructing' Nations within States."

⁷² O'Neill, "Unrecognized Tribes Struggle."

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