

**“WHAT ABOUT US?” SHEDDING LIGHT ON THE RURAL SCHOOL ATHLETIC
EXPERIENCES OF FOUR GIRLS OF LITTLE SALMON CARMACKS FIRST
NATIONS IN THE YUKON TERRITORY**

by

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Abstract

This study explored the sport experiences of four Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations (LSCFN) girls from Carmacks, Yukon Territory. Along with their stories I also tell my own, as I was their coach and teacher during their time in organized sports. Throughout the study the girls described their sport experiences as being enmeshed in notions and issues surrounding their race (Native), gender (female), and location (rurality). These are unpacked and discussed throughout the study. Their stories suggested a need for further attention to pedagogy regarding Physical Education and coaching, as well as intersectionality and the impacts that this has on rural teacher preparation/hiring and retention policies.

Preface

This study was approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board of the University of British Columbia on November 13, 2012. The Certificate number is H12-01185.

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Dedication

For the students of Carmacks.

Personal Anecdote

Who we are cannot be disconnected from where we come from. Our experiences shape our identities. This is, in part, what makes us human. We have the ability to change, adapt, and reshape our worlds, and in return we have the potential to influence others. People's identities are dynamic and forever changing, and so it is with my own. There is the visible part of my identity: I am a young, middle-class, White woman. On the other hand there is the hidden part that may not be apparent at first glance: I am an educated teacher, athlete, and coach. The constructs of my identity all intersect one another and not only contribute to shaping my own experiences, but also affect how I may influence others. The complexity of human experience and identity presents itself in various settings. The focus of this study is on a specific experience that took place over the course of three years in the community of Carmacks, located in the Yukon Territory, Canada.

Prior to conducting this study, I tried to separate myself from the sporting experience of the four LSCFN girls because I wanted the study to be about their experiences, not my own. As I began designing the study, I realized that the four LSCFN girls' sporting experiences are directly linked to me as their teacher/coach. I brought sports into the school, and I coached and supported them through their sporting journey. In return, they supported me as over the three years we melded into one entity...a team. Part of this study involves looking at my own journey as a teacher, coach, and individual. Throughout this study I have personal anecdotes where I speak to my own journey. This includes my personal motivations for moving to the Yukon, my time living in Carmacks, and now my time as a graduate student doing research with the community of Carmacks. To shape my journey, I have

chosen to use Bandura's (2001) core features of human agency (intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness) as they address the complex nature of human experience. They do not occur in any particular order, instead the core features of human agency act as main constructs of human identity, and they contribute to one's agency over their experiences. I will briefly explain each of the core features of human agency and then we will begin the sporting journey of the four Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations girls.

If one has intentionality, then one's actions tend to serve a purpose. However, more than an intentional state is required. A proactive commitment to bringing actions about is necessary (Bandura, 2001). To have forethought, people construct outcome expectations from observed conditional relations between environmental events and anticipated outcomes. Self-reactiveness involves reasons or motives behind one's actions and moral reasoning. Self-reflectiveness is one's ability to evaluate one's beliefs and actions. This includes self-regulation, as reflecting on one's experiences plays a key role in shaping the courses lives take by influencing the type of activities and environments people choose to get into.

The first feature of human agency I wish to discuss is self-regulation. My decision to move to Carmacks in the Yukon Territory was largely influenced by my efficacy beliefs. I was at a point in my life where I needed to break out of my Vancouver bubble and learn something new about myself. My interest in the North stems from my father, who worked in the Northwest Territories as a geologist and often spoke of its beauty. I wanted an adventure, and so I applied to any job that caught my eye. I was offered a few positions, but took the job in Carmacks because I felt that my skills as a Physical Educator/coach would benefit the school. My intentions and beliefs behind my practice as a teacher/coach are largely influenced by my own values about coaching and teaching. These values have been shaped

by my experiences with school and sport and are part of my self-reactiveness (my reasoning and morals behind my actions) (Banadura, 2001).

I come from an active family. Sport was always a part of my life growing up in Vancouver, British Columbia. During high school I focused my attention on competitive volleyball and basketball, but I also engaged in other sports. Sport always made me feel strong, powerful, and confident on and off the court as it contributed to my confidence as a young woman in what I felt was a masculine world. This in turn gave me power to fight for what I believed in and to understand some of my experiences as a woman in society. Sport also taught me about teamwork, responsibility, and leadership. Being a part of something gave me a sense of belonging. All of these reasons contributed to my love for sport and motivated me to pursue coaching, and eventually teaching, as I felt that sport could influence youth in positive ways. Just as sport shaped me as a young woman, it shaped me as coach and a teacher. The aspects of sport that I identify with and value are what I focus on in my practice. This is what drove my coaching and teaching in Carmacks. As a result my values played a role in the sporting experience described in this study by four of the twelve LSCFN girl athletes.

I went to Carmacks with the starry-eyed notion that I was going to help the people in that community. I was going to make a difference! What I did not realize was that I was unprepared for the challenges of teaching in a rural community and I had limited knowledge about Native schooling concerns or the effects of colonization on Native people. I moved to the community completely oblivious to factors that would continue to shape and challenge my beliefs about myself, as well as about my teaching and coaching.

I remember my first day of teaching clearly. There I was standing at my classroom door dressed in my fancy teacher clothes, coffee in hand and a rather large nervous smile draped across my face. I heard the bus pull up and the students started filing into the school in a rather disorganized fashion. I started to say hello to my students and, as I recall, not one of them said hello back to me. As soon as the bell rang Acaycia bolted into the room and skidded to a halt in front of my desk. She just stared at me with uncertainty. I didn't know how to react, so I just smiled and decided to get down to business. I felt that the relationship between the student and the teacher is an important one that needs to develop on trust and therefore part of my intentionality was to try to foster a trusting environment by introducing myself and my expectations for my class in the hope that I came across as approachable. The students just stared back at me, and I could sense in their eyes that they had heard this before from some other White teacher. Suddenly I found myself asking, who am I to stand up in front of the class and teach what I think is important? From that first day, I started to struggle with what knowledge is of most worth to these students and what knowledge is being taught as legitimate knowledge in the community school (Pinar, 2006). I started practising self-reflectiveness.

In order to discover what it meant to teach and coach in Carmacks, I had to learn about what it meant to live and teach in that particular culture. Part of this was recognizing “my position in a place in relation to the circumstances of that place” (Chambers, 2008, p. 115). Through self-reflectiveness I realized that when I first moved to Carmacks, the locals made my position clear to me. I was told that I was that White teacher who did not care about the community or the children and who was only here for the money. It was apparent that the community was used to White people coming there in an attempt to “fix them” and then

leaving shortly after they had their fill. There was a lot of tension between “outsiders” and the community due to a history of mistrust. I was in a situation where I had to reinterpret my relationships to the context and the people that now surrounded me. I had to find a way to identify with the objects and people of this new world (Sumara, 2004). It was clear that I would need to find a way to teach skills that the students could relate to and identify with if I were to have any hope of creating that positive relationship with the school and the community. Once I discovered that the place I now lived in required me to change my teaching practice, I was able to proceed with forethought and get an idea of what I was going to do within the Carmacks community.

After my first day of teaching in Carmacks, I struggled with my role in that community as a non-Native professional. The girls identified trust as a major barrier within their school. They recall not trusting “outsiders” because “they always do what they think is best not what the community wants” (Interview 2, December 6, 2012). Through sport I was able to build a trusting relationship with the girls as well as the community. However, I knew that something was still missing for the girls even after their positive experiences with sport and it wasn’t until I began my master’s research that it became clear to me what that was: their voice.

When I arrived in Carmacks to teach high school I brought with me my own agenda. I had, and still have, a passion for Physical Education (PE) and coaching (specifically volleyball and basketball). Based on my own high school experience, I assumed that extra-curricular sports and PE existed in all schools. I received a shock when I arrived in Carmacks and found that there had been no extra-curricular sports at the school for the past seven or eight years. What I realized after talking with some community members was that many of

the adults in the community had fond memories of participating in extra-curricular sports in school, such as weight lifting and basketball. This further fuelled my desire to coach, as I felt it was an experience that many community members wanted for their children. This is where the story began.

Over the three years that I coached and taught in Carmacks I witnessed a tremendous transformation in the LSCFN girls, as well as in myself on a personal and professional level. I believe that the experience of playing sports for the school/community played an important role in disrupting the girls' perceptions of schooling and of their own identity. I was curious how the girls viewed their own sporting experiences.

Defining “Native”

Aboriginal, Indigenous, First Nations, Indian, and Native are all words associated with Native people in Canada. It can be confusing for people to know the “correct” term to use and so it was for me. At first I decided to use the word Aboriginal, as this was the term that I, as a non-Indigenous person, was taught to use in post-secondary education. I never questioned the use of the term until I began this study. I discovered that the term Aboriginal has become common practice in statistics and government circles, and it is perceived to be a politically correct term for non-Aboriginals to use when referring to discussions regarding Aboriginal peoples. It is important to trouble the term Aboriginal, as many Indigenous scholars would argue that it continues to “other” Aboriginal culture and identity by assuming that all Indigenous groups are similar and therefore have similar epistemological standpoints on topics such as education (Dion, 2009; Kanu, 2007; Smith, 2005; St. Denis, 2007). Susan Dion (2009) claims that just including the term Aboriginal in conversation is not enough, because it further “others” Aboriginal students without providing Canadians a greater

understanding of themselves as being in a relationship with Aboriginal people. Although the term Aboriginal aims to decolonize, it can actually continue the process of colonization because it fails to recognize the internal colonialism that structures the way society perceives Indigenous groups in Canada.

Further, it is important to note that race is a social construction designed to empower the privileged (dominant culture) and disempower other groups of people (Dion, 2009; Kovach, 2009). Terms used to describe Native people, such as Aboriginal or First Nation, have also been used to disempower them as these terms were created under the guise of the dominant culture.

Considering the issues surrounding its use in research, I will only use the term Aboriginal when discussing literature from a government or statistical standpoint, or if it is the word used by the author being referenced. However, the four Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations (LSCFN) youth make it a point to refer to themselves as Native. They do not identify with the term Aboriginal or First Nations and so whenever possible I will use the term Native. When I am discussing my research in regards to the general community of Carmacks, Yukon Territory, I will be referring to the participants as Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations or LSCFN, as this is what the community members identify as.

The Community of Carmacks, Yukon Territory

Carmacks is an Indigenous village of approximately 600 people located on the Yukon River about two hours northeast of Whitehorse in the Yukon Territory. The Aboriginal peoples that live here are the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations (LSCFN). They speak Northern Tutchone. They are a self-governing community, which means that they are allowed to “pass legislation and assume responsibility for provision of education programs”

(Yukon Department of Education, 2010, p. 15). Community activities usually revolve around the weather. In the summer, baseball tournaments are popular; in the winter, curling and ice hockey are popular activities. Throughout the year there are community dinners and momentous events such as potlatches that most often are held in the event or commemoration of a death. Many community members still participate in traditional forms of collecting food by fishing, hunting, and setting trap lines. The LSCFN office staff has a strong focus on ensuring that their children receive an adequate education and are actively involved in organizing activities in the school that they deem important to their culture. However, partly due to the residential school experiences of many of the LSCFN community members, parents and guardians have reservations about the schooling system in Carmacks. Consequently, the school and the community seem to be disconnected and almost exist as separate entities. This may cause tensions between the school and the LSCFN (Neegan, 2005) as Western epistemologies come into conflict with LSCFN ways of knowing within the community school.

Aboriginal peoples have historically resisted assimilation policies, and the LSCFN in Carmacks are no different (Neegan, 2005). LSCFN educators are striving to improve the educational experience of their students in ways that value them as LSCFN people. I would argue that education is at the heart of the struggle to regain control over their lives as LSCFN people and their community.

Chapter 1: Introduction–The Journey of Native Sport and Schooling

Cynthia Chambers (1999) once said that, “who we are cannot be separated from where is here.” Her statement speaks to the interconnectedness of one’s identity and experiences. In this sense, who Native people are cannot be separated from their communities/land, and I would propose that this connection cannot be separated from the effects of colonialism. However, the effects of colonialism are often masked during discussions regarding Native “issues.” This can be seen in how Native sport and schooling issues are often tied to issues of race, and the colonial history embedded in the “issues” is dismissed (Dion, 2009; Smith, 1993). Ignoring colonial history leads to the re-colonization of Native people and essentializes their identities. The settler is then relieved of their role in the colonization process and privilege is maintained (Bailey et al., 2009). Exploring how colonization has historically and currently affected Native peoples in terms of sport and schooling can demonstrate how Native people have used Euro-Canadian sport as a form of self-determination and further emphasize how they are never passive recipients of dominant culture. Understanding how sport and schooling have affected Native people also helps me as a White educator/coach to understand my role as a settler in the process of decolonization.

I will begin by exploring major themes in the literature regarding Native sport and schooling experiences through what Vicky Paraschak (1991) refers to as “contested terrain.” Paraschak (1991) explains that because Native peoples were and are never passive recipients of dominant culture the struggle with Eurocentric notions of sport and schooling takes place on contested terrain. On one hand you have a fight for control, and on the other hand a fight for self-determination. Colonization is always met with resistance from Native peoples and for this reason I have chosen to situate the historical and current literature about Native

sport and schooling in “contested terrain.” Following this discussion will be a brief explanation of the framework, significance, and purpose of the study.

1.1 (Re)colonization

There is a common perception that the colonization of Native peoples is a thing of the past, therefore the Canadian public often overlooks the present struggle against colonial forces (Dion, 2009; Kanu, 2007). I would argue that it is important to acknowledge that Native sport and schooling are held on contested terrain where there is a constant fight against control through self-determination. Recognizing the ongoing struggle for self-determination can enable settlers to start to decolonize themselves, and it is here that the process of social transformation can begin (Smith, 2005). Contested terrain can be further understood by exploring how it appeared historically and how it persists currently in relation to sport and schooling for Native peoples.

1.1.1 Historically

When Europeans arrived, they brought with them terrain that was soon contested. The strongest examples of the fight for control by Western culture can be observed through the use of residential schools as an assimilation tool (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). Native children were often taken from their homes and forced to attend residential school where they were banned from practising their culture, including speaking their language (Forsyth, 2007). Residential schools focused on ways to take the “savage” out (Native ways of knowing/being) and put the “civilized” in (Western ways of knowing/being). Sport in this context was used as a civilizing agent to control Native peoples (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006).

Over time Euro-Canadian sport as a form of control was transformed into a form of self-determination for Native people as they resisted colonizing practices.

From the 1900s to the mid-20th century Native peoples appropriated Euro-Canadian sports as they used them to keep their language and traditions alive in the face of assimilation (Hall, 2012). For example, the Arctic Winter Games were initially created by non-Native people and designed to be played in the north, however it largely reflected southern notions of sport and competition, as only Euro-Canadian sports, such as hockey, were represented (Paraschak, 1991). Over time, Native peoples of the Northwest Territories took control over the Arctic Winter Games and began to implement traditional Native sport practices, such as snowshoeing, into the Games. The Arctic Winter Games continues to be enmeshed in Western notions of sport, however Northern Native ownership has transformed it into a form of self-determination instead of control/assimilation from the South.

1.1.2 Currently

Historically sport and schooling were discussed together in terms of how Euro-Canadian sport initially was introduced to many Native groups. This interaction created contested terrain (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006; Paraschak, 1995). I propose that currently sport is rarely discussed as connected to schooling. Schooling and sport concerns for Native peoples in Canada are often discussed as separate entities. When they are discussed together it results in generalized information about sport and schooling. Often there is little mention of how sport and schooling continue to be held on contested terrain. Ignoring how school and sport continue to be used as a form of colonization, and how Native people resist these practices in an attempt to decolonize, further contributes to the assumption that colonization is a thing of the past. This leads to Canadian society believing that there is nothing wrong

with how the school and sport system is structured and there is little consideration given to exploring the effects of Euro-Canadian sport on Native participants.

The majority of Canadians would agree that success in school contributes to important life outcomes for all students (McIntosh et al., 2011). Trudeau and Shephard (2008) suggest that success in school is most often defined in terms of Western notions of academic achievement and school attendance. Since school experiences tend to revolve around these two indicators of success, it may be no surprise that the majority of studies that focus on athletics and schooling specifically look at the connection between participation in school athletics and school performance or attendance (Bailey et al., 2009; Davalos et al., 1999; Shernoff & Vandell, 2007). For example, Hanks and Eckland (2012) and Bailey (2009) found that athletics generates and reinforces educational goals because students are exposed to a network of social relations through bonding with other students. This further reinforces the students' connection to the school and improves academic performance. The danger behind general claims such as this one, however, is that there is an increased risk of assuming that all students have similar experiences when participating in school athletics, and it ignores the colonial history embedded in sport and schooling. Bailey (2009) suggests that generalizing students' experiences of participation in athletics often favours the experiences of one group over the other. In this case the privileged are favoured over Native peoples.

In order to challenge studies that generalize the experience of youth participating in physical activity in schools, I would argue that there is a need to specifically explore the subjective experiences of youth who may be marginalized by our Canadian society in order to understand how they are marginalized and how they resist further assimilation. And yet, there appears to be very little research that focuses on obtaining the subjective experiences of

students who participate in school athletics. Furthermore, it is necessary to explore how school and sport are connected currently and what this means in terms of self-determination practices for Native youth participating in sport within their schools.

1.2 Significance of the Study

A study that connects participation in school athletics and schooling experience for a specific Native community is important for several reasons. First, Native education and health have rarely been connected in the literature in meaningful ways. Native schooling concerns and Native health/physical activity issues are often discussed as separate entities in regards to Aboriginal well-being. It may be beneficial to explore how school athletics are connected to the schooling experience(s) of Native youth. Bringing these two research areas together may shed light on the uniqueness of individual experience as well as the complexity of the schooling experiences of Native youth.

Second, this study tries to be aware of the risk of generalizing experiences of Native youth in school by focusing on the specific athletic and schooling experiences of four LSCFN youth who live in Carmacks, Yukon Territory. The subjective experiences of the four LSCFN youth may challenge general statistical claims and shed light on the connection between athletics and schooling experiences of the youth in their specific community. This may provide information that is useful for the youth as well as the school, as the experiences of the LSCFN girls will try to account for the complexity of identity.

Third, it is often assumed that schools will have extra-curricular sports and adequate physical education programs (Mandigo, 2012). Often in rural or isolated communities, extra-curricular and educational opportunities are limited by the size of the community, weather conditions, and what kind of specializations the teachers at the school or in the community

have (Spaaij, 2009). Prior to my arrival, the Tantalus School in Carmacks had not had any substantial PE or extra-curricular sport program for at least seven years. When I arrived, I started an extra-curricular sport program and began to reshape the PE program for the school. Since the four LSCFN girls had minimal exposure to athletics in their past schooling experiences, it would be beneficial to explore how, or in what ways, participating in athletics affected them. The connection between school athletics and schooling experience(s) in general may be clearer, since the four LSCFN girls have distinct memories of not having adequate athletic opportunities in their community and then participating in them for three consecutive years.

Fourth, historically Euro-Canadian sport has been appropriated by Native people and used as a form of self-determination (Forsyth, 2006) and research in this area is lacking (Hall, 2012). However, Euro-Canadian sport remains on contested terrain, as struggle within a colonial framework persists for Native people. This study sheds light on how Native youth view participation in Euro-Canadian sports in terms of a form of self-determination. Furthermore, by using a decolonization framework for the study, I as a settler and researcher will be working to decolonize myself as a teacher, coach, and settler in society. Further insight into sporting experiences of Native youth can provide a deeper understanding of what it means to resist colonial culture as well as to use aspects of Western culture to empower Native youth and their communities. I would propose that it also provides insight into the role of the coach/teacher in the process of decolonization.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this emergent case study is to understand and explore how four LSCFN youth, living in Carmacks, Yukon Territory, experienced sports in their school. I am aware that there are many systemic influences, such as ethnicity, gender, and location that also play a role in the experiences of the four LSCFN youth. To avoid assumptions about how systemic influences affect the lives of the youth in the community it is important to first listen to the subjective experiences of the youth. This may then allow them to discuss from their own perspectives how different aspects of their identities and lives influenced their experience with athletics and schools.

Another purpose of this study is to explore how the youth view sport and schooling as being embedded in contested terrain and how they navigate through the terrain. I would argue that further understanding how youth view sport and self-determination can shed light on how Native people may use Euro-Canadian sport as a decolonizing agent within their communities to resist the control that persists from dominant colonial culture.

The main research question is as follows: How did participation in sports in the rural community of Carmacks, Yukon Territory, influenced four female Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation (LSCFN) students? Stemming from this central question, my sub questions are as follows:

- 1) How can physical education and sports play a role in the process of empowering LSCFN girls?
- 2) How can physical education and sports aid in the construction of the identities of LSCFN people within their own community?

The sub questions are questions that I had in the back of my mind throughout the study. The interview questions were shaped with the participants through an initial focus group meeting.

1.4 Framework of the Study

Who we are, as residents of Canada, is largely connected to the history of Canada (Chambers, 1999). In order to work on gaining a deeper understanding of how sport and schooling are connected, I would argue that it is vital to be aware of the history of sport and schooling to understand the connection between sport and schooling for Native peoples today. My observation is that literature which focuses on sport and schooling largely ignores the fact that they continue to be held on contested terrain. Indigenous scholars such as Susan Dion (2009), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1993) and Verna St. Denis (2007) would take issue with literature glossing over the fact that sport and schooling remain embedded within contested terrain, as it further ignores the continued colonization of Native people. Many Indigenous scholars focus on the importance of addressing power relations, as they are integral to understanding sport and schooling as social practices (Paraschak, 1997). Sport and schooling as social practices creates and confirms a particular subjective reality in keeping with the dominant cultural form. From here, resistance to subjective realities may arise, offering alternatives to dominant cultural forms (Paraschak, 1990). Considering this, it is important to bring together literature regarding sport and schooling under a decolonizing framework.

I will be using a decolonizing framework as I discuss the sport and schooling experiences of the four LSCFN girls to further examine what contested terrain looks like for them. This may shed light on how sport can also act as a decolonizing practice within the school system for LSCFN youth in Carmacks, and give further insight into how sport and schooling may be connected to each other through a process of control and self-

determination. By writing autobiographical narratives throughout, I am also working to decolonize myself as a settler as I also play a role in shaping the colonial nature of sport and schooling. I cannot be disconnected from the colonization experience. By working on decolonizing myself, I can also be apart of the process of decolonizing sport and schooling practices when working with Native students/communities in meaningful ways as defined by the communities.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Historically and currently, sport and schooling act as sites of resistance as they work to both empower and disempower Native peoples. Many empowering changes stem from disempowering circumstances, such as the implementation of residential schools (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). I would argue that it is important to explore and bring together literature regarding the history of sport in school and current health, physical activity, and schooling issues/initiatives for Native peoples, which may enhance our understanding of how sport and schooling as sites of resistance hold the ability to empower and disempower Native youth. This aids in our understanding of why policy and initiatives targeted towards enhancing the quality of life and schooling experiences for Native youth are often ineffective, and it sheds light on what may be helpful when looking to “improve” the quality of life and education for Native peoples in Canada.

I will begin with an overview of literature that discusses the history of sport and school policies in Canadian residential schools, as history continues to influence current policy and initiatives targeted at improving the quality of life and education of Native peoples. From there, I will enter into a discussion about how sport was used to disempower Native peoples. Ways that Native groups have resisted disempowering practices in relation to sport and schooling will then be explored. To further understand what guides the empowering and disempowering practices, it is important to explore what Vicky Paraschak (1991) refers to as the power-bloc. This can be defined as “relations structured by the privileged...relatively structured along racial lines” (Paraschak, 1991, p. 57). The power-bloc will then be connected to the cycle of empowerment and disempowerment that continues to

shape Native people's experiences with schools and sport. To demonstrate the effects of the power-bloc, a discussion about schooling and health concerns will shed further light on how the power-bloc is influencing current schooling and health practices that affect Natives across Canada. Finally, deficiencies in research will be discussed, and further areas of research will be identified in relation to sport and schooling for Native youth.

2.1 History of Sport and Schooling

Long before Europeans arrived, many Natives had evolved their own kind of education, in which the community was the classroom. Sports and games played an important role within the communities, as it brought people together in a positive manner and often were immersed in cultural beliefs and knowledge of the particular community. For example: the community of Carmacks has a history of sports and games that were both cooperative and competitive in nature. These included stick gambling and Dene games such as the head-pull. Teams were created based on what family you were a part of or your age. However, during residential school there were many restrictions put in place that forbade Native people from speaking their language, seeing their family, or wearing traditional regalia (Kirkness, 1999). These methods were often met with resistance, so Europeans sought ways to distract Natives from traditional pursuits. This is where Euro-Canadian sport was used (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006).

In the Canadian context, sport has been utilized by the government and used as a civilizing agent to assimilate Native peoples (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). Euro-Canadian sports and games provided a convenient standard with which to measure "savage" and "civilized" behaviours (Forsyth, 2007). Links to traditional physical practices were discouraged and replaced with what were deemed appropriate sport practices. As a result,

sport was immersed in Western ways of knowing and being. This can be seen in the use of Western definitions of gender. The boys and girls in residential schools participated in Euro-Canadian sport/physical education separately. As defined by Western culture, the boys were encouraged to play “manly” sports such as hockey or basketball while girls participated in calisthenic programs or more “feminine” activities such as skipping and dance (Forsyth, 2007). Gender discrimination has been used as a means of colonization in Canada and addressing it has been an important part of the decolonizing process (Lawrence & Anderson, 2005).

Before 1951, sports were mainly available to boys. Euro-Canadian sports and games reinforced dominant assumptions about appropriate male and female sporting behaviours. These were channelled into Western notions of gender appropriate activities (Parashcak, 1995) and acted as another form of assimilation. Gender beliefs in Indigenous communities were replaced with Western notions of masculinity and femininity (Forsyth, 2007; St. Denis, 2007).

This may also explain why Indigenous scholars such as Verna St. Denis (2007) have struggled with the Western colonial nature of feminism as a de-colonizing framework. Feminism is a Western response to Western patriarchy and does not embody Indigenous ways of knowing gender within Native communities. For example, within a Western framework one would think that Native females involvement in sport would historically have been discouraged. On the contrary it tended to be viewed as a positive thing, and “femininity” wasn’t seen as an issue to be dealt with (Paraschak, 1995). The lack of discussion around female Native sport participation is for the most part a colonial construction. This is reflected in male athletes emerging as symbolic leaders of the residential

school era, as female athletes were encouraged to take on more non-competitive roles that focused on social aspects of sport instead of competitive ones (Forsyth, 2007; Paraschak, 1995). Stories about Native females participating and succeeding in Euro-Canadian sport were non-existent, and further an analysis of their experiences within the Western sport context was and still is rare. This can be exemplified by looking at the story of the girls from Fort Shaw Indian School in Montana during the early 1900s, which was not brought to the public's attention until recently.

Full-Court Quest (Peavy & Smith, 2008) is a story that was silenced for many years until Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith came across a photograph of the Fort Shaw Indian School girls' basketball team. The photograph motivated them to record the story of the girls from Fort Shaw Indian School as a reminder of how powerful sport experiences can be for Native people, in particular girls. The girls on the basketball team were all from different Native backgrounds and they met at an off-reservation residential school in Montana. Here Euro-Canadian sport was being used as a civilizing agent in much the same way as in Canada (Peavy & Smith, 2008). Although sport in residential school was used to disempower Native people and assimilate them into civilized society, it also allowed for an opportunity to fight against oppression and refashion cultural values to celebrate athletic achievement on their own terms (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006; Paraschak, 1991). By playing beyond campus, the girls' visibility could be raised and could challenge long-held assumptions about Native women and sport. They used their school experience as a way to overcome racial and gender barriers by becoming basketball champions (Peavy & Smith, 2008).

Full-Court Quest is a prime example of contested terrain, as on one hand there is attempted control over the girls at the school and on the other there is self-determination

through the girls' sporting experience (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). This further reminds us that Native people are never passive recipients of dominant culture, as at times they have adopted and occasionally resisted dominant cultural forms and practices (Paraschak, 1991). Euro-Canadian "civilized" sport was one of many ways that marked the resistance of colonized peoples who searched for social values in times when their immediate cultural surroundings were changing (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006).

2.2 Contested Terrain

Stories such as *Full-Court Quest* demonstrate the potential that sport has to challenge dominant cultural values around gender, race, and even location (Forsyth, 2007; Peavy & Smith, 2008). Some scholars have explored the power of sport to disrupt dominant culture and to empower Native peoples. For example, Vicky Paraschak's (1990) study in the early 1990s looked at organized sport participation for Native females on the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario. Her study recognizes sport as a social practice, as it creates and confirms a particular subjective reality in keeping with the dominant cultural form. However, through resistance to the subjective reality, ideologies and meanings within sport may be contested, which offers alternatives to dominant cultural forms.

The women from the Six Nations Reserve in Ontario found that their roles in Euro-Canadian sport were limited to those of coach, member of sport organizations, or volunteer (Paraschak, 1990). The opportunity to be a female Native athlete within Aboriginal or Euro-Canadian sport settings was limited. It may seem that being Native, females would have more opportunity to be athletes within Aboriginal sport organizations, but this was not true. The success of Native women in sport continues to be rare. Although Euro-Canadian sport provided a way to adopt and at the same time resist dominant cultural forms, it also

reproduced elements from the dominant culture, such as Western gender norms. This is reflected in the lack of opportunity for females from the Six Nations Reserve to compete in sport (Paraschak, 1990).

The lack of discussion of female Native sport leads the public to believe that male Native sport is an accurate representation of sport in Indigenous contexts (Paraschak, 1995). This can be further explored by discussing how Native peoples continue to view sport as a way to demonstrate their distinctiveness from mainstream society through the creation of all-Native sport systems/organizations. The majority of the organizations are run by Native leaders, who more often than not are male (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). Non-Native sport groups often tried to sway Native groups to join their organizations as they had more funding and sporting opportunities. Even when sport acts as an empowering agent, desire for control persists within dominant culture.

The North American Indigenous Games (NAIG), created in the 1970s, signals the beginning of Native self-determination in matters of culture through mainstream sport (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). As Natives were immersed and socialized within the Euro-Canadian sporting culture, Native sport organizations began as a way to exist within the dominant Western culture, while at the same time maintaining and “taking back” Native culture. Over time, sport organizations immersed in traditional Aboriginal sporting pursuits were developed as a way to maintain their culture without defining success based on Euro-Canadian standards. To explore this further, we can look at the difference between two Aboriginal sporting events that were created in the Northwest Territories (NWT), Canada: the Arctic Winter Games and the Northern Games.

The Arctic Winter Games and the Northern Games developed in the NWT have been sites where race relations have been both contested and reproduced. Vicky Paraschak (1991) described contested terrain as existing within a “power-bloc” (this will be discussed more fully on page 17). Until recently it was comprised of non-Native Euro-Canadians who operate within a colonial framework.

The Arctic Winter Games were created within the “power-bloc” and as a result reflected sporting activities that were viewed as legitimate by Western culture in the South. Up to 1979, Native peoples remained outside of the culture of the “power-bloc.” It wasn’t until after 1979 that Native politicians entered the “power-bloc” and began to take control over what they considered to be legitimate activities for the North. At this time, some Northern events were added, such as snowshoeing, which encouraged more Native people to participate in the Arctic Winter Games as their culture began to challenge Euro-Canadian notions of sport in the North (Paraschak, 1997). The difference in how race relations exist in the NWT and the South can act as an example of how it is important to consider local contexts of sporting practices for Native peoples. This prompted the creation of the Northern Games in Inuvik, NWT.

The Northern Games opposed the Arctic Winter Games, focusing on traditional physical activities of the North, and straying from Euro-Canadian sport values such as meritocracy (Paraschak, 1991). Traditional physical activities included in the Northern Games were one- and two-foot kick, knuckle-hop, musk-ox push, stick gambling, and the head pull. However, the Northern Games struggled to gain credibility in the South because outsiders viewed it only as a cultural organization, not a sport organization. As a result, the Northern Games fight for funding opportunities and recognition.

The creation of the Arctic Winter Games and the Northern Games can be further explored by applying Bandura's (2001) core features of human agency. This can assist us in understanding how people become agents over their experiences rather than passive recipients. The core features of human agency are intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness. Native people have intentionality as their actions to create Native sport organizations tend to serve a purpose. To practice reciprocity, they have worked to gain control over the Arctic Winter Games and create the Northern Games in order to allow their culture to continue to flourish. Native people are also aware of the challenges that they face, specifically in terms of funding and recognition, as they design games or organizations that reflect their needs. This demonstrates forethought. Their ability to persist against all odds and continue to be motivated demonstrates self-reactiveness. Finally, Native people practice self-reflectiveness as they continue to place their efficacy beliefs at the heart of their actions. This shapes the courses their lives take by influencing the type of activities and environments in which people choose to participate.

The Arctic Winter Games and the Northern Games are examples of how the blending of Euro-Canadian and Native sport does not need to result in assimilation. However, in order for Native people to be deemed successful in the dominant sport context, sport typically has to be under the guise of the "power-bloc." In this sense, although resistance to dominant culture occurs, the reproduction of it also exists because Native sport organizations continue to straddle two worldviews (their community worldviews and Western worldviews).

2.3 Power-Bloc

It is not possible for Native people to argue for legitimacy within a framework that they did not construct, because the framework was designed to maintain the power and authority of its non-Native creators (Forsyth, 2007). This framework can also be referred to as the “power-bloc,” and it is here that policies/initiatives towards sports and education are largely shaped (Dion, 2009; Paraschak, 1991). Understanding how the power-bloc works in terms of power relations becomes integral to understanding sport as a social practice (Paraschak, 1997), and I would argue also gives insight into the role that sports have within the school system. The effects of the power-bloc on sport will first be explored, followed by a discussion of power relations and schooling. Sport and schooling are then discussed together to provide a deeper understanding of the historical and current implications that the “power-bloc” has had in regards to sport and schooling for Native peoples in Canada.

2.3.1 The power-bloc and sport

The decision to introduce Euro-Canadian sport as a civilizing agent for Native peoples in residential schools was made under the guise of the power-bloc (Paraschak, 1991). Aware of their actions or not, the dominant European culture used sport as an assimilation tactic to ensure that the power of their culture prevailed (Forsyth, 2007). As time progressed residential schools were closed, as the abuse and mistreatment of Native people became an area of concern for the public. However, the closure of residential schools did not mean the end to the power-bloc. Native people continue to walk in two worlds (a Western one and a Native one), as they try to argue for legitimacy. A prime example of the power-bloc today is in the sport relations between the North and the South of Canada. Native sport in the South of

Canada tends to reproduce and determine the dominant system of sport for the entire country (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006; Paraschak, 1991; Robidoux, 2004).

Sport after 1951 was often framed as battles between “Indian” and “Whites.” Sport often accentuated and exacerbated the perceived differences between people, with negative connotations attached to traditional Native practices (Forsyth, 2007). This “battle” falls under the guise of the power-bloc and currently exists within the Euro-Canadian sport context. For example, stereotypes about athletes in the Northwest Territories being wild and savage still exist today and are encouraged by the dominant discourse of the South (Robidoux, 2006; Van Ingen & Halas, 2006). The notion of Native people as “savage” still exists within the sport culture of the North even though the residential school era has ended, further proof that the process of colonization—whether via legislation or sheer force—continues to persist in Canada today.

However, resistance and strength have played a key role in combating colonial forces (Spaaij, 2009). The Northern Games acts as a resistance to Euro-Canadian sport culture, as it centres entirely on principles of sport in the North and does not include Euro-Canadian sport. The Northern Games remained outside of the power-bloc and act on their own accord, because Native peoples of the North fight to keep it based on Native epistemologies. The Arctic Winter Games is also a form of resistance. This has resulted in the Arctic Winter Games being a blend of Euro-Canadian sport and Northern sports, resulting in events such as snowshoeing.

As Native people resist functioning within the power-bloc, they are faced with new threats to their organizations. This means that they have to find funding through other sources, and gaining credibility can be challenging as Native sport organizations/games are

overshadowed by Euro-centric sport organizations. The pressure to assimilate remains, and is met with resistance. If Western egalitarian principles are embedded in sport and physical activity, it will fail to address the power relations and social inequalities of Canadian society. In turn, sport will continue to fail Native communities (Spaaij, 2009). Understanding power relations becomes integral to understanding sport as a social practice.

2.3.2 The power-bloc and schooling

Power relations in schooling are based on the same principles of the power-bloc. The dominant culture continues to define what is legitimate in terms of schooling, which leads to the further colonization of Native peoples (St. Denis, 2011; Smith, 1993; Van Ingen & Halas, 2006; Spaaij, 2009). The examination of power relations to gain insight into why school is failing Native students is a relatively new area of study. In the past, there has been a lack of researchers and schools addressing the power relations and social inequalities of the education system (Spaaij, 2009).

Currently, increased attention has been placed on schools as a “contact zone” where the social spaces of cultures meet/clash and create domination and subordination, resulting in concepts such as colonialism and slavery (Van Ingen & Halas, 2006). Within the “contact zone” the unique barriers that affect the schooling experience of Native students are overlooked. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005) describes these barriers as part of the neoliberal agenda that seeks to protect and strengthen Western forms of knowledge, which do not reflect the knowledge of many Native peoples. Settler colonialism has contributed to barriers for Native learners, as the cultures and environments that shape the home of many Native students are not valued as legitimized within the power-bloc. Settler colonialism results in the continued marginalization of Native students. To resist the effects of settler colonialism,

Indigenous scholars have encouraged a decolonizing framework be applied to education (Dion, 2009; St. Denis, 2011; Smith, 1999; Spaaij, 2009).

A decolonizing framework recognizes schools as being landscapes of power, racialized spaces that maintain Whiteness (Van Ingen & Halas, 2006; Smith, 1993). The dominant culture can be reflected in the lack of colonial history being taught. Academic performance continues to be a function of personal ability and motivation versus systemic opportunities. For example, the lack of effort put towards decolonizing education can be seen in the implementation of multiculturalism discourses in the school system. Multiculturalism discourses are focused on as a way to bring in epistemologies from marginalized populations. However, focusing on multiculturalism further impacts the reception of Native teachers and Native knowledge brought into schools, as their identities as Native people are essentialized and they are grouped with all marginalized groups (St. Denis, 2011; Smith, 1993). This contributes to a creation of a national Canadian identity that is built on false knowledge of the colonizers themselves (St. Denis, 2011). The negative implications of multiculturalism discourse are further demonstrated in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1993) study, in which the Maori women viewed multicultural practices as a "divide and rule" strategy of colonization, as minority groups were forced under the guise of multiculturalism. Strategies such as implementing a multicultural discourse function under the power-bloc and further aim to group all marginalized groups together, which results in Native knowledge and voices being further silenced.

Ignoring how power relations affect Native people's schooling experiences results in a lack of support for schools in Native communities because of how interests, tensions,

positions, and relationships intersect each other in education and schooling. This further contributes to a shared anger about school and schooling within Native communities.

2.3.3 Sport, schooling and the power-bloc

Discussions regarding Native people's health and education continue to be held on contested terrain as the dominant culture fights for control and Native people continue to practice self-determination (Kanu, 2007). What is often overlooked is how the power-bloc works to govern the discussions, and how this affects the public's views of the health and schooling of Native peoples (Dion, 2009; Paraschak, 1991). For example, the majority of the discussions regarding Native people's health and education involve quantitative data that continues to suggest that Aboriginals not only have lower life expectancy, poor diet, and high disease rates (McIntosh et al., 2011; Satchwell, 2004; Young & Katzmarzyk, 2007) but also continue to have low graduation rates (Mcintosh et al., 2011). Indigenous scholars such as Susan Dion (2009), whose aim is to apply a decolonizing framework to discussions around Indigenous health and education in Canada, would take issue with statistics, as it further essentializes the Aboriginal identity. Through this essentialization, the diverse needs of Native people are swept under the rug as the power-bloc aims to represent Native "issues" or "struggles" through Western ideologies. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) further supports this by suggesting that what is perceived as "valid" research in the Western world is often research that is informed by Western ideology. This results in measurable outcomes, such as statistics, which are the main determinant of/influence on policies that affect Native populations.

I propose that working under the guise of the power-bloc creates contested terrain (control and self-determination). Currently literature that discusses health/physical activity and schooling concerns for Native people is framed within the power-bloc, and therefore

discussions continue to be held on contested terrain. The literature on health and schooling for Native people is largely presented as “areas of concern” (Satchwell, 2004) and these are rarely brought together in meaningful ways by Native people, for Native people and their communities.

Health/physical activity concerns and schooling concerns are currently discussed separately in terms of how gender and location are contributing to the so-called “startling statistics” that are valued by Canadian society. Separating Native experiences into categories such as health or schooling is ignoring the complexity of how these categories are interrelated, and this contributes to the further essentialization of Native identity (St. Denis, 2011). This is why bringing together current health and schooling concerns is important. Two themes that have become apparent through engagement with the literature on health and schooling for Native peoples are gender and location. Health and schooling concerns will be presented in relation to the emergent themes of gender and location.

2.4 Current Health/Physical Activity and Schooling Concerns

As previously discussed, historically health/physical activity concerns and schooling were interrelated categories. Schooling was used as a way to colonize Native people (Forsyth, 2007). The consequences of colonization are immense and have resulted in a cognitive dissonance of Native people’s identities in Canada (Waters, 2004). Being disconnected from their homes and traditional activities has resulted in a more sedentary lifestyle, and has resulted in health issues that may have not otherwise occurred (Van Ingen & Halas, 2006). Instead of a focus on a decolonizing framework to address these health/physical activity concerns, there has been an intense focus on surveys and quantitative studies to explore health and physical activity in terms of boys’ and girls’ participation in

sport, the social and economic conditions of Native peoples in Canada, and the graduation rates of Aboriginal youth in Canada (Brown et al., 2011; Findlay & Kohen, 2007; McIntosh et al., 2011).

What has come out of these studies are so-called “facts” about Aboriginal health/physical activity in Canada. These “facts” include high rates of Type II diabetes, obesity, and drug/alcohol abuse (Young & Katzmarzyk, 2007). Generalizations about health/physical activity levels are problematic because it continues to be described in ways that encourages social division and is regressive. It goes against social equality and permits a form of participation that “others” Native culture. Verna St. Denis (2011) refers to this as a simple song/dance that represents all cultures. Claims are made under the power-bloc and are created to reflect the epistemological standpoint of the dominant Western culture. They often fail to address how colonial history has influenced the data presented to the public (Dion, 2009). Colonial history is often ignored because statistics are presented as “valid” knowledge in the Western world (Smith, 1999). Data continue to drive health and schooling initiatives for Native people and often frame their needs from a Western perspective. History seems to repeat itself: sport is being used again in the schooling system, but this time to address the health/physical activity concerns, as well as schooling concerns held by Western society about Native peoples.

The majority of the Canadian public holds the neoliberal belief that success in Western school contributes to important life outcomes for all students (McIntosh et al., 2011). Western culture often is what drives the “needs” of our society, and currently the low number of Native youth graduating, coupled with the high dropout rates, has caused much discussion of Native education in Canada. How to increase the success rate of Native peoples

within the education system has led to many strategies/initiatives targeted at promoting Native success. The connection between sport and positive perceptions of schooling remains strong (Findlay & Kohen, 2007; Satchwell, 2004; Spaaij, 2009). This has contributed to schools trying to address the health and physical activity of Native people through sports and Physical Education, as sports are said to create a greater sense of belonging, which helps keep youth in school (Satchwell, 2004).

The positive correlation between sport and schooling has not always been enough to create success for students within sport and schooling contexts. Kanu (2007) says this may partly be attributed to the fact that unique barriers that affect the schooling experience of Native students are overlooked due to the historical and continued marginalization of their cultures. Two barriers that have emerged through the discussions in the literature are gender and location. These two barriers will now be further discussed to gain insight into the complexity of identity and how it relates to success within the Western sport and education system. By discussing these barriers separately I am not saying that they exist as separate entities. This is how the literature on sport and schooling for Native peoples was presented.

2.4.1 Gender

Native girls continue to be at a higher risk for non-participation in sport, as boys continue to have higher sport involvement than girls do (Brown et al., 2011; Findlay & Kohen, 2007). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1993) has found in her studies in Maori communities in New Zealand that females often did not feel welcome at events and yet they were mostly in charge of running them. The boys were encouraged to participate actively in sport activities in their communities, whereas females were seen as responsible for multiple roles as grandma, mother, daughter, student, event organizer, and care-giver (Spaaij, 2009). The multiple roles

may explain why Native women participate less in sport, as they feel that their roles within their communities are already defined for them. The roles differ between Aboriginal communities and the community often determines the level of importance placed on girls participating in sport (Smith, 1993).

Girls taking on different roles such as athlete within their communities may be frowned upon, as the role of athlete is a construction of the dominant Euro-Canadian culture. This identification with Euro-Canadian gender norms continues to colonize them. Verna St. Denis (2007) suggests that many Aboriginal women reject the notion of feminism as they feel it is largely a Western construction and does not reflect the gender norms of their communities. At the same time, Native men have appropriated Western gender norms and implemented them within their community as a form of power and control against colonization (St. Denis, 2007). This has caused gender inequities to exist within the male dominant Western form of sexism and be applied in a Native context. Women within Native communities then resist fighting the inequities, as they do not identify with Western notions of feminism (St. Denis, 2007). This has not only affected Native women in terms of sport participation, but it has affected their schooling experiences as well because they continue to straddle two worldviews. The cognitive dissonance associated with straddling two worldviews can result in a struggle for identity and purpose in one's life (Waters, 2004). This may help explain statistics that continue to shape the schooling experiences of Native females.

It is suggested that being Native and female subjects a person to the highest forms of victimization in Canadian society (Satchwell, 2004). Many Aboriginal female students left school early due to poor teacher-student relationships, which may be part of the reason why

there is a focus on the underrepresentation of Native teachers in the school system (St. Denis, 2011; Smith, 1993; Van Ingen & Halas, 2006;). The absenteeism of Native females then impacted teachers' social/education practices, as non-Native teachers did not see the need for particular strategies because they feared that it may label their students as Native and themselves as racist. They often had low expectations for parental involvement, which may be a result of leftover colonial history being ignored (Smith, 1993; Van Ingen & Halas, 2006). This is further emphasized in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1993) study. She looked at how Maori students viewed school in New Zealand. Smith (1993) found that Maori girls were often presented as having serious behavioural problems, and Maori teachers were the ones who were supposed to "deal" with the deviant behaviour of the girls. Factors such as these may attribute to how Native females are stereotyped in schools, and how these stereotypes continue to perpetuate negative student-teacher relationships, which can lead to school dropout.

2.4.2 Location

The type of athletic opportunities that you have a chance of being exposed to is often determined by where you live. Through surveys, interviews and focus groups, it appears that there is less opportunity to play in sports in rural or isolated communities in Canada (Findlay, 2007; Naylor & Scott, 2009; Spaaij, 2009). Students in rural Native communities have been reported as feeling that options were limited by the size of the community, weather conditions, and perceptions of how they may be viewed by their peers (Naylor & Scott, 2009; Smith, 1993). One unique limitation that was discussed in a study in Northwest Victoria, Australia, was that Native participation in rural sport remains low and tends to be restricted to a small number of sports such as basketball or soccer (Spaaij, 2009). It may seem that

opportunities in sport are limited to what Western society has defined as sport. What it means to participate in sport, specifically in the context of the community, appears to be lost in the midst of the Western ideology of what it means to be physically active. For example, ActionSchools!BC attempted to implement their program into rural communities. They found that in order for urban programs to be successful, physical activity must reflect and involve the community itself (Naylor & Scott, 2009).

Native communities have reported that having a strong connection between sport and community creates cohesion, identity, and pride. Local residents place emphasis on the way sport is able to transcend class, ethnic, religious and other barriers by bringing different social groups together in a cooperative manner (Spaaij, 2009; Smith, 1993). Considering this, it would appear that Native community's value sport, yet they feel like they cannot identify with what is currently being offered and defined as sport opportunities in their communities. This may result in decreased levels of physical activity and a lack of connection between sport and community.

The lack of connection between sport and community mirrors the same connection between Native communities and schools. Not only have remote/rural communities been reported to have fewer resources than urban centres, some students have been said to have a fear of leaving the community due to a lack of confidence about their ability to function in urban centres (Satchwell, 2004). This has motivated schools to create a sense of belonging through extra-curricular activities, such as athletics. (Satchwell, 2004; Smith, 1993).

Negative perceptions of rural communities as having "slack" schools (Van Ingen & Halas, 2006) may result in Native students lacking pride in their school or community because it is perceived by others as illegitimate. In her research in a Maori community in

New Zealand, Smith (1993) found that Maori students dropped out earlier or got into trouble earlier and those who stayed in school struggled with exams. The intersection of class and race makes academic success particularly challenging for Native youth living in communities that are marginalized (Smith, 1993; Van Ingen & Halas, 2006). This further demonstrates how limited resources and negative perceptions of rural/remote schools contribute to the Native youth's resistance to schooling, as schooling does not appear to have a place in their community.

It is important to remember that there are rural schools that have had success in terms of increasing student engagement within the school, so that it cannot be assumed that all rural schools are subjected to loss. Alert Bay Elementary in British Columbia and Elijah Smith Secondary in Whitehorse in Yukon Territory are two examples of successful rural schools as defined by Western standards (Papworth, 2001). Roger Papworth (2001) interviewed the students and teachers within these schools and found that key factors of success identified by the participants were strong leadership, community/parental engagement, Aboriginal content, and professional development/teacher commitment. However, many schools continue to be enmeshed in Euro-Canadian values. The values of the community and recognition of the Native land are swept under the rug (Van Ingen & Halas, 2006).

2.5 Deficiencies in Research

The majority of attempts to increase physical activity and improve schooling for Native peoples are influenced by data derived from surveys, policies, or quantitative studies that focus on single or small groups of Native peoples and often exclude Northern communities (Young & Katzmarzyk, 2007). The surveys, policies, and quantitative studies have discussed benefits of physical activity and schooling in general, but I would propose

that little is known about Native peoples who have decreased access to facilities or programs in Canada. These studies have established two main themes: (1) that sport involvement increases positive perceptions of schooling for students (Brown et al., 2011; Findlay, 2007; Hernandez et al., 2008; McIntosh et al., 2011; Satchwell, 2004); and (2) that research has focused on gender and location as possible barriers to participation in sport, physical activity, and schooling for Native students. Qualitative researchers have taken the initiative to explore more in depth the reasons why Native students struggle in school by looking at gender and location as possible barriers to success. These studies give further insight into the barriers that are preventing Native youth from engaging in school in positive ways (Smith, 1993; Spaaij, 2009; Van Ingen & Halas, 2006). However, little is known about how Native youth, particularly girls, in rural communities in Canada experience these barriers to schooling and sport participation. Further, there is little research from the perspective of rural Canadian Native peoples documenting their experiences participating in sport.

Research that considers Indigenous methodologies or epistemologies is lacking in the studies of Native schooling and sport. Unique barriers of Native students are overlooked due to the historical and continued marginalization of their cultures (Kanu, 2007). This can cause what Meredith Minkler (2004) refers to as “Insider-Outsider tensions,” where researchers who are non-Native research Native communities/people without considering the wants/needs of the people they are researching. Different values can cause conflict and create tension. I would propose that an ethnographic meaning of physical activity/schooling for Native peoples should to be considered as one that is embedded in a complex web of meanings that tie people to their specific community. If research continues to be determined

by principles of the settler culture, it will continue to be situated within contested terrain and produce findings that are not always beneficial to Native communities.

Although statistics and surveys can be a good way to begin to notice patterns that need to be addressed in terms of the connection between Native education and athletics, they are not sufficient to fully understand the benefits that the intersections between school and athletics have for Native youth. I believe that my research can illuminate the athletic experiences of youth in rural communities from the perspective of the youth themselves in order to gain further insight into how sport and athletics contribute to perspectives of self and school/schooling.

Chapter 3: Design and Methodology

3.1 Personal Anecdote

Minkler (2004) would suggest that an “outsider” entering a Native community often evokes fear and distrust. The “outsider” not only brings with them their own biases and values, but they also embody a dominant culture that has historically and presently colonized Native peoples. Taking this into consideration, Ball and Janyst (2008) suggests that establishing trust is key when doing research with Aboriginal communities. Trust allows for communication and is essential in developing research that reflects what community members feel is important to the community. Personally, it took years of living in Carmacks in order to build relationships and trust with community members. These relationships allowed me to begin to “turn over my own colonial rock” (Regan, 2010, p. 230) and reassess my role as an educator in the community, thus marking the beginning of an infinite journey. A part of this journey is this study, which continues to challenge me to look at my own colonial history and reassess my role, if any, in Native education/communities. When designing the study and research question I once again found myself sandwiched between two worldviews. On one hand I had my Western worldview, which I was comfortable in, and on the other hand I had the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations worldview, which I was a visitor in. I felt that in order to do research that was beneficial to community members I had to go to the source. I knew that I had a strong rapport with the LSCFN girls I taught and coached for three years and so I decided to ask them what they thought would be important to study. One of the girls, who appears in this study, said blatantly, “ Well, what about us?” and it dawned on me that the girls wanted their voices to be heard. This altered my intentionality around the study.

In terms of methods, I knew that the voices of the participants were at the heart of the study and keeping them as authentic as possible was of great importance. I decided to focus on an emergent case study so that the themes discussed would be a reflection of the voices of the four LSCFN girls. Although the participants did not design the topic of the research, they determined what was important to discuss. We worked together to discuss topics that were important to the sport and schooling experience of the four LSCFN girls. Although some of the structure of the study still embodies my Western epistemologies, LSCFN epistemologies are reflected in the process of gathering the data and determining topics of discussion.

When I began this study I had limited understanding of Indigenous research methodologies and so my initial instinct was to methodologically approach this study from a Western perspective (since that was consistent with my area of comfort). Through self-reflectiveness and self-reactiveness, I progressed through my studies and became more aware of the implications of applying Western methodologies to research in Indigenous communities. One major implication is that Western colonial notions of what is valid research/knowledge overshadow Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Smith, 2005). The research then continues to be enmeshed in colonization rather than self-determination and development of the Indigenous communities being researched. Smith (2005) would argue for research that encourages the social transformation of colonial relations between the native and the settler and this is what I am attempting to move towards as a non-Native researcher. This is why the methods shifted throughout the duration of the study as I tried to work towards methods that would allow the participants to have greater control over what they shared (Kovach, 2009). Through this process I hoped that the study would focus on what was important to the participants and also give me a chance to work on decolonizing myself. As a

result, the methods of this study reflect my worldviews (Western) and the participants' worldviews (LSCFN) as the two ways of knowing try to meet each other in some chaotic yet meaningful fashion.

3.2 Design and Methodology

The design and methodology of the study are described in the following sections: 1) approach and rationale, 2) research questions, 3) site/location description, 4) data-gathering methods and analysis, and 5) validity/ethical considerations.

3.2.1 Approach and rationale

I propose that it is important to first discuss the philosophical assumptions of qualitative research to ensure that my study is the right fit. Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research based on the following parameters: how the researcher gathers data; how the participants are engaged in the research process; and the overall design of the study itself. In terms of data gathering, the researcher is the key instrument when gathering data and typically organizes the data into categories or themes. Sometimes data analysis is inductive, whereby researchers collaborate with the participants interactively, so that the participants have a chance to shape the themes that emerge from the process. The focus is on the holistic account of the participants' interpretations/meanings of events as the researcher tries to develop a complex picture of the problem or phenomenon being studied. Although qualitative research is viewed as interpretive in the sense that the researcher makes an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand, the participants are usually encouraged to participate in the study in some way or another. It is important to remember that

qualitative research typically has an emergent design. This indicates that the phases of the process could change or shift throughout all phases of the research, so nothing is concrete.

A case study approach is the best fit for this study because it aims to explore a phenomenon in depth through a variety of data collection procedures (Yin, 1994). My research explores the sport experiences of four Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations youth located in the community of Carmacks, Yukon Territory, and is therefore looking at a specific experience, group of people, and location. This study is an emergent design in the sense that I alter the questions and change direction based upon the actual data that I receive as well as the input from the participants. As the researcher I am the key instrument when gathering data in the sense that I transcribe, code, and organize the data into categories or themes. Through inductive data analysis and member checking, the participants have a chance to comment and shape the emergent themes throughout the entire study.

The case study strategy can be explored in more depth in order to adequately define it according to the type of research question, the control that the investigator has over the events, and a focus on either contemporary or historical phenomena. The type of research question often defines what constitutes and differentiates research strategies. More often than not, case study research focuses on how/why questions instead of what or who (Yin, 1994). The case study research strategy also puts the researcher in a position in which they have little or no control over the events or participants' responses. In this sense, a case study always focuses on contemporary, real-life context instead of a historical context. Case study research is especially useful if the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 1994).

As with any research strategy, there are always criticisms that the researcher must take into account. Some common critiques of case study research include a) a lack of rigour over process; b) biased views of the interviewer (although this occurs in every form of research); c) the duration of the study is too lengthy as the investigator struggles to limit the number of variables to be analyzed; and d) case studies are sometimes confused with ethnography or participant observation (Yin, 1994). I would argue that it is important to address these criticisms before initiating case study research, as this will improve the validity of the study. For example, the researcher can distinguish between an ethnographic study that aims to have a close-up, detailed observation of the natural world (Yin, 1994) and a case study that aims to gain a deeper understanding of individuals, organizations, and social or political phenomena in order to avoid the case study being confused with an ethnographic study. Such criticisms will be addressed in the validity section.

Too often research has been frowned upon by Native communities because it often only benefits the researcher and not the community or participants. To address this, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) mentions a few critical questions that should be asked of the researcher before progressing with the study. They are: a) whose research is it?; b) who owns it?; c) whose interests does it serve?; d) who will benefit from it?; and e) who has designed its questions? I believe that it is necessary for me to answer these questions to ensure that I understand my role as a non-Native researcher in a Native community and so that the research is not designed to benefit only myself. First and foremost, it is important to remember that the study is our study (belonging to both myself and the four LSCFN girls), not just mine. We all own it and therefore we all should benefit from it in some manner. This was an important reason why an emergent design was needed. Although I, the researcher,

would be the key instrument in gathering the data, it would allow for the questions and focus of the study to shift based on what the participants felt was important to discuss. Therefore the data that would emerge out of the study would reflect the authentic voices of the participants and not exclusively that of the researcher. In this sense, the researcher is not telling the participants how to answer. They are shaping the direction of the research based on their own subjective experiences, and the research aims to create results that may be beneficial to the participants, not just the researcher.

3.2.2 Research question

Taking into consideration Yin's (1994) definition of a case study approach, my central research question is more concerned with the how/why aspect versus the question of who or what. The central question is as follows: how did participation in athletics in the rural community of Carmacks, Yukon Territory influence four female Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation (LSCFN) students?

Although I structured the research question, the construction of it came from conversations with the four participants. Through casual conversation it became apparent that the four LSCFN girls' sport experience was extremely important to them, as the majority of our conversations revolved around it. It dawned on me that a further investigation into this phenomenon would shed light on the role of athletics in their community. After the question was created it was shared with the participants and they had an opportunity to comment on whether it would be worth discussing.

3.2.3 Location and population selection

I want to make it clear that by focusing on Carmacks I am not insinuating that all rural communities are the same. Each community is unique in the way that it is governed, and the cultural values held within communities differ. Although this study focuses on the community of Carmacks, I would suggest that the findings would still be of interest to many under-represented communities in the north, as many rural Native communities are strongly impacted by forces of colonization (Dion, 2009). This study is meant to shed light on the four LSCFN girls' experiences and at the same time allow others to gain further insight into the impact or role that Euro-Canadian sport may play in a Native context.

I chose to focus on Carmacks because I have established trust with the participants over the three years that I lived and worked in the community and I have strong emotional ties to the community. I hoped that these strong relationships would allow us to explore the athletic experiences at a deeper level and produce something meaningful together. I worked in Carmacks for three years as a high school teacher. Over the three years I made an effort to integrate community epistemologies into the school curriculum and atmosphere in order to build strong relationships with the students as well as with community members. For example, through the Physical Education curriculum I worked with community members to design outdoor education units which reflected activities and epistemologies valued by Carmacks. This resulted in ice fishing, hunting, and salmon fishing trips, which were run by community members as well as myself.

During my first few months working as a teacher in Carmacks, I tried to spend time talking with community members about education so that I could create activities that reflected the values of the community. Many community members talked fondly about their

participation in athletics, particularly basketball, in the past and were upset that there had not been athletics at the school for the past seven years. This motivated me to use my previous training in Euro-Canadian sports and background in coaching to start a volleyball and basketball team at the school. Since there were only 30 high school students at this time, the team was comprised of roughly 12 grade 6–12 girls who varied in age and ability. Coaching enabled me to build meaningful relationships with the girls over the three years I worked at the school. We fundraised to travel to Vancouver to play in an Aboriginal basketball tournament, we travelled around the Yukon Territory to play games against other rural and urban communities, and we even won the Territorial Basketball Championships in 2011. We were the first rural community to win the championship.

I invited the four girls to be my participants for a few reasons. First, I have the longest and most intense relationship with them since I not only coached them for three years but also taught them in all subjects. Second, each of the four girls is still in school and participates in sports in some capacity. Third, they come from diverse family backgrounds and their experiences of school/sport vary. My thought was that this group would provide a variety of perspectives as to the importance or influence of playing sports in a rural community. The girls were in grade 12 during the time of the study, and I believed it would be interesting to explore the possible influence that participating in sport teams played in shaping their future endeavours.

3.2.4 Data collection procedures and analysis

Ethnographic methods, in this case focus groups and individual interviews, were used to collect the data. The data collection methods in this study were designed to allow the themes to be determined and shaped by the participants and not solely the researcher. The

study began with a focus group in which all four of the participants had a general discussion about athletics in their community. I created a set of open-ended questions that were meant to guide the conversation. Major themes that emerged from the focus group played a key role in shaping the one-on-one interview questions. Two of the questions were as follows: 1) Can you tell me about your experience attending school in Carmacks? 2) Can you tell me about your experience with athletics in Carmacks? The interview questions were kept as open-ended as possible to allow the participants to share information they felt comfortable with and to keep in mind that they may not have felt comfortable sharing everything. Also, by keeping the questions general it allowed for multiple themes to emerge that could then be the focus of the one-on-one interviews.

After the focus group, I conducted a one-on-one interview with each participant. At this time the transcript from the focus group was shown and the participants got to review it to ensure that it was a proper representation of the conversation. We then discussed what they felt stood out for them and this formed the basis for the interview questions. The study concluded with a final focus group with all four participants to share findings and ensure that information was not missing or inaccurate. Member checking was used to ensure accuracy and proper representation. The transcripts from the final focus group were e-mailed to each participant so they could check them over for accuracy and add any further comments.

Focus groups and interviews have advantages and disadvantages. Advantages are that the information is coming from the perspective of the participants and the researcher has some control over the flow or line of questioning. They are also a useful way to engage participants in reflection, especially when the case study being researched is in the past (Creswell, 2009). The disadvantage is that the information is coming from the interviews

instead of being observed in the moment in the natural field setting, and there is a risk of researcher bias being present and the possibility that not all people are equally articulate and perceptive. In order to address the risk of researcher bias, I have situated myself in the study by including autobiographical narrative pieces that appear throughout and I have focused on member checking to ensure that the themes and information are properly represented.

During the focus groups and interviews the data recording procedures were in the following order and took place over the course of a month: 1) I conducted and audiotaped the focus group interview; 2) I transcribed the interview; 3) participants read over the transcript from the focus group; 4) I conducted and audiotaped the one-on-one interviews; 5) I transcribed the interviews; 6) participants read over the transcripts from the one-on-one interviews; 7) I conducted and audiotaped the final focus group interview; 8) I transcribed the focus group interview; and 9) I e-mailed the transcript from the final focus group to the participants. Throughout the focus groups and interviews I took handwritten notes, but in order to be fully engaged in the interview I relied on audio recordings.

Once all of the data was collected and checked, the following steps were taken to analyze and interpret the data (Creswell, 2009):

Step 1: Organization and preparation of the data for analysis by transcribing interviews,

typing up field notes, and arranging data.

Step 2: Review of the data to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on the overall meaning of the information.

Step 3: Analysis with a coding process to address what readers would expect to find, based on past literature, to address codes that are surprising, not anticipated, and unusual, and codes that address a larger theoretical perspective in the research.

Step 4: Use of the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as the categories/themes for analysis.

Step 5: Description of how the themes/categories are represented.

Step 6: Interpretation or meaning of the data.

Member checking continued throughout all six steps. The four LSCFN girls read over the findings and contributed to shaping how the data was presented. Following the data collection, the girls and I communicated via Skype every few weeks. At this time the emerging themes and interpretation or meaning of the data was shared with the participants. The girls were able to comment on what they felt needed to be changed or how they felt about the representation of the data. Their comments throughout the process included to fix how the stories were written as they remembered events slightly differently than myself, and to stop being so wordy. They emphasized that it was important to them that they and everyone in their community should be able to read and understand the study. I have taken their comments seriously and tried my best to integrate them into the study. The four LSCFN girls approved the final presentation of the study before it was submitted. After the study, the girls wish to present and share the study with the community along with me.

3.2.5 Validity and ethical considerations

Prior to starting any study there are a few ethical considerations that are typically addressed. As part of my study, I had to consider why the site, Carmacks, Yukon Territory, was chosen and ensure that the participants would also benefit from the research and that the research would not be invasive.

Throughout the study the results were reported throughout the interviews and focus groups and they were coded according to themes or categories. The themes or categories

were then reported back to the students through the focus groups and at the end of the one-on-one interviews in order to invite further feedback. Such member checking enabled the participants to have their voices reflected in the process of research, which in turn may have resulted in the study of topics and issues that were of importance to them.

In order to address possible issues of invasiveness, throughout the study the participants were protected by confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms in the write-up of the study and release of information. There was a concern that the interviews might be stressful for the participants. I attempted to mitigate stress by starting with a focus group so that the participants could get used to the questioning and dynamics of an interview. The fact that the four LSCFN girls had a strong and trusting relationship with me also helped ease stress, as trust was established already. Although there was trust established, it cannot be ignored that there was still a relationship of power between the participants and myself. Of note, I have maintained a relationship with the participants, specifically in the context of this research process, to assist them in continually reflecting on their collaboration in the study, and helping them consistently contribute to the presentation of the findings.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1 Personal Anecdote

When I entered Carmacks, I entered a “place” and therefore altered it just by being there (Casey, 2001). The girls described a shift in how they viewed the school/community and themselves as occurring in grade eight, when I arrived to teach. I am not suggesting that I am the reason for this change, but my presence in the school altered the reality of the “place” for the girls. At this time I brought sport into the school and that was described by one of the girls, referred to as Carol as “bringing something back that we didn’t have forever. Something was brought back that got kids involved and got them active and gave them opportunities and experience. Something that Carmacks wouldn’t be able to give a student if they tried” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). I knew that sport had the potential to influence student’s lives, but I had no way of knowing the journey that was about to unfold for the girls in Carmacks.

4.2 Introduction to Findings

The girls’ increasing sport involvement began to influence the way that they viewed their own identities, and the way they related to their school environment (place). As the girls discussed their sporting and schooling experiences, their stories reveal a journey of the self. The girls share stories about their journey that focus on four emergent themes: hope, opportunity, visibility, and agency. These themes will be the focus in the findings. The stories shed light on how sport impacted the four LSCFN girls and give insight into how sport participation can be more than shooting a ball into a net.

The results of the study will be discussed and analyzed through the stories of the girls' experiences with sport as this remains at the heart of the interview responses. First, it will be helpful to contextualize the four girls, the school, and the community to gain an understanding of the "place" that shapes the girls' lives. Second will be a story that best represents the true beginning of the girls' sporting journey. Third, the findings will be discussed through four major themes identified above, which emerged from the interview responses. Finally, in the last section I will consider implications of these findings and make suggestions for further areas of research.

4.3 Description of the Participants

For the sake of this study the girls have chosen pseudonyms that will be used throughout the study to ensure confidentiality. The names they chose are Jade, Kyra, Acaycia, and Carol. The next section provides a brief description of each girl based on how they described themselves in their interviews. To begin each description, the participants chose a quote that they felt best represented them.

4.3.1 Jade

"I learned skills and I learned how to talk to random people if I have to..." (Interview 4, November 27, 2012)

At the time of our interview, Jade was in grade 12 at a school in Carmacks, Yukon Territory. She hopes to continue her education at Yukon College after she graduates. She has always enjoyed school in Carmacks as it allowed her to "feel close to [her] roots" (Interview 4, November 27, 2012). Knowing and living her culture is important for Jade and she enjoys connecting to her culture by learning how to bead and sew. Sport presented an opportunity to

“learn something new” (Interview 4, November 27, 2012). She described her main motivations for joining sports as being with friends and to keep in shape. But as time progressed she “fell in love with learning the skills and playing with friends” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). Sport for Jade is about staying in shape, learning new skills, being with friends, and representing her community in a positive light.

4.3.2 Kyra

“I always liked sports it just helped me deal with the stress and get away from school and just play” (Interview 2, December 6, 2012)

Kyra was also in grade 12 at the time of the interviews, at a school in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory. She has aspirations to be either a hair stylist or a Physical Education teacher at the high school level because she says that, “little kids are too immature!” (Interview 5, December 19, 2012). She says that “school was always easy for me, but it was boring before sports” and elaborates by saying that “I wanted to learn how to do it and be good at sports. I always wanted to be into sports” (Interview 2, December 6, 2012). Kyra describes her competitive nature and the desire to improve herself as an athlete and a person as the things that drive her in her life. Sport has motivated her to be proud of representing her community. She has a passion for social justice issues specifically regarding topics concerning what she describes as “being Native” (Interview 5, December 19, 2012).

4.3.3 Acaycia

“It was so cool because it was the one time that me and Kyra were playing and there was this guy I know who is in my class and he hit it [the baseball] and I turned and caught it

behind my back all pro and they were all like did they just see that and I felt so proud!”

(Interview 2, December 6, 2012)

Acaycia always struggled with school. She talked about how she use to have tantrums a lot because the work was too hard but now “she loves school and feels more mature” (Interview 6, December 17, 2012). Sport was always a place where she says that she did not have tantrums because she was good at it. She describes sport has giving her a place to learn to lose, to be with friends and be proud of where she is from. Her favourite memories are travelling to Vancouver to play in an Aboriginal basketball tournament in 2010 and winning the Territorial championships in 2011. She has aspirations to be a Physical Education teacher after she graduates this year and she continues to play basketball in Whitehorse where she completed her grade 12.

4.3.4 Carol

“Sport changed things and gave me more stuff to do and it was fun and I looked forward to it and it was exciting and it added to school altogether” (Interview 3, November 26, 2012).

Carol described herself as the “type of person where I like to do something where the work is nicely done. Like after I clean I like to see how it is nice and clean and after my work I like to see how it is all nice...” (Interview 3, November 26, 2012). This shows in her approach to sport and school where she works hard to show people what she is capable of. She was always positive and did not care what other people thought of her. If she wanted to do something, she would do it! Carol is proud of where she comes from and enjoyed travelling with sport as it gave her a way to represent her community and “learn about other cultures.” At the time of the interviews she was in grade 12 in Carmacks, Yukon Territory, and she wanted to continue on to post-secondary education after graduation.

4.4 The School Environment Before Organized Sport

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1993) suggests that offering extra curricular activities, such as athletics, in schools often helps foster a sense of belonging which in turn increases school attendance and leadership in the school/community. Positive correlations between school and sport led me to question what would happen if extracurricular activities were limited or not offered at all? During one of the interviews, I asked all four girls what it was like growing up without sports in the school. Kyra sums it up best when she says, “I’ll tell ya! Opportunities like sport and academic classes to take at the school is what you need to get experience for your future career and Carmacks just doesn’t have that” (Interview 2, December 6, 2012). According to the girls, the school environment was routine before they had organized sport involvement, and opportunities to gain the experience needed to succeed after graduation were limited. After analysing the interviews the girls’ school environment before sports was shaped by three themes: trust, culture, and lack of opportunity.

4.4.1 Trust

The impact of residential school on many Native people’s lives and the colonial nature of the Western school system have resulted in mistrust between Native and non-Native peoples (Dion, 2009; Forsyth, 2007). The four LSCFN girls identify building trust with others in the school as an important part of their schooling experience. All four of the girls felt comfortable attending school because they were “surrounded by friends and some teachers that they liked” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). Their main motivation for going to school was to be with their friends and socialize. On one hand, knowing people in the

community contributed to a less intimidating and more comforting environment because trust was already established. On the other hand there was a huge concern about the “outsider.” Carol and Jade support this by saying that they “do not trust outsiders” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). A lack of trust between the “outsiders” that work at the school (the teachers and principal) and the students/community can create anxiety around attending school (St. Denis, 2011). Kyra elaborates on this point by explaining that many family members dislike the school because of the teachers and principals who work there. She states that, “the principals just don’t understand our community and they don’t try to do anything to make our school better. Principals try to change things for the bad and that is what makes our community angry” (Interview 5, December 19, 2012).

As mentioned in the methodology section, establishing trust is key when working with Native communities, as years of colonization have resulted in mistrust (Ball & Janyst, 2008). The girls emphasize that a large part of establishing trust with “outsiders” comes from the outsider taking time to be part of the community and listen to what the community and students want for the school. However, the girls report rarely seeing teachers and principals involved with the community outside of school (Interview 3, November 26, 2012). The wariness around “outsiders” is a concern for all four of the girls and plays an important role in shaping their experiences when travelling outside of their community or when attending school in Carmacks.

4.4.2 Culture

Going to school in their own community allowed the girls to feel close to their roots, as their culture is a part of the school environment (Interview 4, November 27, 2012). The major way that their culture is reflected in the school is through Native Language class. Jade

states, “you need to know your language to know your culture” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). When the girls were growing up their culture was reflected in the school in other ways as well. Jade remembers that, “Elders use to come and teach native tradition dance, but it stopped when the new school was built” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012) and now there is only Native Language class.

Van Ingen & Halas (2006) suggest that schools are landscapes of power; racialized spaces that maintain Whiteness. To navigate through the “Whiteness,” the girls emphasize that knowing their culture and seeing their community reflected in the school was something that shaped a positive schooling experience from a young age (Interview 6, December 19, 2012). However, this wasn’t always present.

4.4.3 Lack of opportunity

Where you live will play a role in shaping the kinds of opportunities you may have (Findlay, 2007; Naylor & Scott, 2009; Spaaij, 2009). For example: students in rural Native communities feel that their options are limited by factors such as the size of their community (Naylor & Scott, 2009). This seems to be true for the four LSCFN girls, as new opportunities, such as sports, rarely occurred within the community due to the small population (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). The lack of opportunity caused school to become routine or something to pass the time with (Interview 6, December 19, 2012). Opportunities to break out of routine were rare.

The girls all identify organized sport as something that they felt was missing from the school. They had Physical Education class, where they played the same games over and over and then the basic clubs offered at lunchtime. These included skipping, running, skiing and sometimes in the spring baseball (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). However there was no

opportunity, especially for girls, to participate in organized sports and travel outside of the community. As Acaycia states “although you may learn something new here and there...the school just sucked! It was bad!” (Interview 2, December 6, 2012).

In the past the schooling experience for the girls was not entirely positive, but in grade eight they were finally going to be presented with an opportunity that they may have been waiting for.

4.5 Something New

Girls Sports, specifically volleyball and basketball, were introduced to Tantalus School in Carmacks, Yukon Territory in September of 2008. The girls were excited to “try something new” and in just two weeks travelled into Whitehorse to play in the first game of the season. There was excitement and optimism on the bus, as the girls were excited to travel outside of their community on their own. Their excitement dwindled upon entering the school in Whitehorse. The girls noticed an immediate difference between themselves and the opposing team: the uniforms. Kyra recalls that, “it was embarrassing with the striped shirts because we didn’t have uniforms and we painted our faces and looked stupid jumping for the ball” (Interview 2, December 6, 2012). The differences between the Carmacks team and the Whitehorse team were clear prior to the start of the basketball game.

It was half time and the score was 60 for the Whitehorse team and 2 for Carmacks. The girls were distressed, and as their coach I felt it was my responsibility to stand up for my players. I walked over to the coach on the opposing team and said, “Hey. Look. You know you are going to win and that’s fine, but can you at least let my players bring the ball up the court and pass a little during the second half?” She looked at me up and down and simply stated, “If you can’t stand the heat, then go back to where you came from.” Shocked and

bewildered I turned abruptly and headed back to the girls' bench. The girls looked at me and asked, "What did she say?" I didn't have the heart to tell them what was said to me, so I simply asked them if they wanted to play the rest of the game or leave. The girls all agreed to play the game until the end because they didn't want to be perceived as quitters by the other team.

At this point the girls felt like Whitehorse already perceived them as losers and they could not stand the idea of confirming these stereotypes by quitting the game. The Carmacks girls felt that the Whitehorse players perceived their community as small, not talented, a waste of time and inexperienced (Interview 1, November 26, 2012; Interview 2, December 6, 2012; Interview 5, December 19, 2012). This is in line with other reports of urban centres viewing rural community schools as "slack" schools and having limited resources (Smith, 1993; Van Ingen & Halas, 2006). It is no wonder that Aboriginal students living in rural/remote communities fear leaving their community and are often said to lack confidence about their ability to "fit in" with urban centres (Satchwell, 2004). The fear of being misunderstood by those outside of their community was palpable, but they somehow persevered.

The final score was 102 to 4 for the Whitehorse team. The Carmacks girls were so upset that they stormed out of the gym and into the foyer of the school without shaking hands with the other team. I had to try to chase them down. I thought I had all of my players together but one was still missing. Suddenly the smell of rotten apples emerges from the school bathroom and Acaycia, one of the girls, runs out of bathroom and towards the bus. I followed the rest of the team onto the bus and upon my arrival was greeted by the girls all high-fiving Acaycia and saying things like, "That will show them to mess with us Natives!"

(Interview 2, December 6, 2012). I was shocked to find out that Acaycia put a stink bomb in the bathroom because someone on the opposing team called her a “dirty Native.” I began to realize at this point that coaching in Carmacks might be a lot harder than I initially expected it to be.

What came out of this game, other than a bunch of really enraged LSCFN girls, was my realization that sport for them was not about winning or mastering skills; it was about finding a way to maintain their dignity. In the process they were going to have to learn to navigate through all of the misconstrued perceptions that the wider community, such as Whitehorse, had of them. Central to these perceptions was blatant racism and bias against rural communities by urban centres. The complex relationship between race and location (or place) plays a key role in shaping one’s identity and unfortunately, according to Verna St. Denis (2011), it is often ignored. What it means to the girls to be from Carmacks is deeply rooted in what it means to be Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations and vice versa. This becomes apparent in the conversation held with Acaycia and Kyra in Interview 2, December 6, 2012:

Acaycia: I was really, really bad. I would throw a tantrum and be like fuck and that is when I got mad and threw the stink bomb in the bathroom.

Interviewer: Why did you throw a stink bomb in the bathroom?

Acaycia: I think it was because I didn’t like any of those girls. They would call us down and I got really mad at those girls and I just couldn’t control it anymore and I didn’t like their attitude!

Kyra: You can see it in their eyes...they would look at us with those stink eyes.

Acaycia: Yeah they are like “Oh they are Native and retarded.”

Kyra: Yeah I can see that happening because when I tell people that I use to live in Carmacks they are like “Aw...that sucks.”

Long-held beliefs about rural communities and Native peoples in Canada have had an impact on the girls’ identity construction. Acaycia and Kyra both recognized the discrimination demonstrated by the Whitehorse players as stemming from their race and place (location). It seems to be something that is internalized and accepted as truth by the girls. My coaching had to shift somehow to allow for difficult conversations to take place between us. I needed to foster agency (self-efficacy) within the girls as a team as well as within each of the individuals.

This story marks the beginning of the development of what Bandura (2001) refers to as a collective agency, which is explored in more detail later on in the discussion of the findings. It was in this moment that I realized we all had shared power, intention, knowledge, and skills that bonded us together in unique ways, but getting to a point where we could acknowledge this was going to be a challenge. Losing the Whitehorse game ran deeper than any win-lose game and no amount of practice time was going to heal that pain. I realized that coaching the LSCFN girls was not going to be about winning, or proving anything to anybody else. It had to be about a journey where we (as a team and individuals) worked together to challenge long-held assumptions. We had to develop our own collective agency as a team by reshaping our perceptions of power, intention, and the knowledge/skills that we thought we had. This began during the first practice after what the girls now refer to as the “stink bomb incident.” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012).

4.6 The Buy-In

At the time of the “stink bomb incident,” the girls had limited opportunities to travel outside of their community. As a result, all four girls had few encounters with dealing with blatant racism. This is reflected in their reaction to the loss that led to the “dirty Native” comment during the stink bomb incident in Whitehorse. They did not know how to react to the situation because they had limited experience with understanding and dealing with blatant racism outside of their community.

The two weeks following the stink bomb incident were dedicated to discussing what had occurred during the game in Whitehorse. My priority was acknowledging what the girls were feeling and addressing their concerns so that we could move forward as a united team. At this point, the self-efficacy of the girls was low and I was prepared for them to back out of the team altogether. What emerged from the two-week debrief session was a recognition of the anxiety that was present with the girls around how the boys in Carmacks and the outside communities perceived them in terms of their ability to play sports. Their fears acted as a major deterrent for participating in sport. Jade put it best when she stated that, “boys think they are better because we are girls and they are going to think we are weaker than them and that they are better than us just because we are girls. That is just how it is in the community” (Interview 4, November 27, 2012).

The girls held common beliefs that the boys were naturally stronger and that they were suppose to participate in sport. According to Carol “boys just get things handed to them. They get all of the sport opportunities in the community” (Interview 4, November 27, 2012). In a traditional sense, boys grow up having the opportunity to try new physical

activity in a positive, supportive manner and girls just continue to doubt their abilities as they lack the same opportunities to participate in sport (Nelson, 1994).

The girls' perceptions of themselves as LSCFN women participating in sport parallel their perceptions of their own rurality. Kyra held beliefs that, "Whitehorse probably asks us why we even come in if we can't keep up or do anything. They just want to dominate us because they can" (Interview 5, December 19, 2012). Mike Corbett (2000) suggests that every time students living in rural communities leave they are presented with both risk and opportunity: risk in the sense that they will not be recognized in a positive light but at the same time many opportunities such as learning about oneself or new places. At this point the LSCFN girls were focused on the risks of leaving their community to play sports instead of the opportunities. They were afraid that Whitehorse teams' perceptions of their community would be reaffirmed because they would continually lose. They didn't want to be a disappointment to their community or reaffirm to the boys that they were in fact "weaker" than them.

What emerged from the debrief sessions was the importance of the girls feeling confident in their own community above all else. The insecurities around being female and participating in sports became apparent as long-held beliefs about gender roles within their community were restricting the girls' ability to be anything outside of those norms. Native girls in rural communities are quite often expected to hold multiple roles such as grandma, mother, daughter, student, event organizer, or caregiver (Smith, 1993). The girls initially felt limited by these roles but as they started to play sports they developed a need to break out of the norms and take on new roles, such as athlete. Once they felt recognized in their own

community, they began to grapple with other constructs of their identities such as their rurality and race throughout the three years I coached and taught them.

Discussion of their fears and anxieties opened up the floor for us to begin to establish our collective agency. Over the two weeks of discussions we decided that regardless of our decision to participate in organized sports together we could expect a struggle. Ursula Kelly (2009) says that rural communities are fundamentally sites of loss where residents tend to struggle either proudly or desperately to “sustain” themselves by resisting loss. As a team, we decided after much discussion that we were going to struggle proudly. The struggle that unfolded over the next three years centred around four themes:

1. Hope
2. Opportunity
3. Visibility
4. Agency

Each theme became more apparent through the stories that the four girls told over the time they had participated in sports. Through these stories we can further understand the answer to the question that was on the tip of community members’ tongues: “What changes when a LSCFN female becomes an athlete?”

Chapter 5: Hope

Prior to their sporting experiences in grade eight the girls described a lack of hope about their lives within their community, specifically in regards to their identity as females. The interconnectedness of their race, gender, and location was not focused on during the early years of their sport experience. When the girls described their stories of hope, they focused on the importance of developing their emerging identities as powerful females within their community. They made little mention of their Native identity. The girls said they felt that because everyone in their community was Little Salmon, having their identities validated/recognized as Natives was not seen as a priority. Being recognized and appreciated as females in their own community was a more pressing issue for the girls. As Carol puts it, “the issue is them” as she points to the outside world “they make it [being Native] an issue” (Interview 3, November 26, 2012). St. Denis (2007) would say that this is an effect of Western patriarchy and colonization. It is the Western colonial nature of the dominant culture that makes being Native an “issue.” This became more apparent as the girls gained opportunity and visibility, which are discussed in subsequent sections. For now, being an LSCFN female is what the girls felt they needed to focus on as they began their journey in sport.

The girls represented the pivotal moments where hope was developed through two stories. Hope took the shape of combatting gender norms or assumptions about being female in their community. Along with the girls’ stories, I used literature on feminism and sport to take a deeper look at gender norms in Carmacks. The major authors included are Mariah Nelson (1994) and Indigenous scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1993), Janice Forsyth

(2006), and Verna St. Denis (2011). However, many Aboriginal scholars, such as Verna St. Denis (2007), do not identify with feminism due to its Western colonial nature and therefore I would like to explain my reasons for using feminism to examine the girls' sport experiences.

Verna St. Denis (2007) explains that feminism is not relevant because of differences between Aboriginal and Euro-Western cultures/ideologies in regards to gender relations. She also recognizes the concerns surrounding feminism in Indigenous contexts, and suggests a need for what she refers to as Indigenous feminism. She supports Indigenous feminism by reminding us that although some Aboriginal people do not identify with notions of Western feminism, colonization has affected different Aboriginal peoples to varying degrees. She states that, "exactly what 'equality' for women entails, the means by which it is to be achieved, even the exact nature of the obstacles it faces, are all disputed issues" (St. Denis, 2007, p. 36). Western patriarchy has been identified within the community. Native men have been said to internalize White male devaluation of women (St. Denis, 2007). The girls support this through statements about shared beliefs that men are stronger, wiser, and naturally better at sports and school (Interview 2, December 6, 2012). For the girls, gender and sexism are present in the Carmacks community. I would argue that by using Indigenous and non-Indigenous feminist scholars we can further understand how the girls view being female in their community.

To give some context to the girls' stories about hope, it is necessary to look at their engagement in sport as a social practice in the context of the community. Victoria Paraschak (1990) suggests that sport is a social practice and that it often creates a particular subjective reality that keeps reinforcing the dominant cultural form, in this case masculinity. In this

sense women and men learn to associate sport with masculinity because sport continues to be associated with masculine concepts such as winning, competitiveness, and masculine physical (upper body) strength.

The culture in Carmacks is no different. It tends to focus on male sport and in turn limits opportunities for females to participate in sport. For example, in Carmacks the boys had opportunities to participate in hockey, running, curling, and soccer, and the girls were limited to running. This shaped, defined, and limited how the girls felt about themselves as females in their community (Nelson, 1994). How females view themselves in Carmacks seems to be aligned with what Smith (1993) found in her studies in rural New Zealand. She found that in rural communities women did not feel welcome at events and yet they were mostly in charge of running them. The defined roles for females may contribute to the steady decline in sport participation among girls in rural communities (Hernandez et al., 2008). During sporting events in Carmacks, the girls were rarely allowed to participate. They were in charge of the logistics of the events, such as concession and scheduling, but the majority of the sporting events were for male participation. In this sense, sport was a way to measure masculinity and maintain power in the community, as gender roles were strictly reinforced and controlled by men. Asserting their masculinity with sport is one way of keeping them in those roles (Nelson, 1994). The girls in the community recognized these beliefs. Kyra stated that, “in Carmacks girls have two choices. They can go to school, graduate, and then drink, do drugs and have sex. Or they can drop out of school, drink, do drugs and have sex” (Group Interview 2, December 16, 2012). Acaycia elaborated further by stating that “girls in Carmacks stop going to school, get a job, get money, party, work, party, go to Whitehorse and party and get pregnant” (Group Interview 2, December 16, 2012).

It is important to understand that the community of Carmacks was not always shaped by these beliefs. I would argue that these views of women in the community are a result of many years of colonization and the girls have internalized these beliefs. Hope for a life that was different from those expectations seemed out of reach for these girls. They wanted more, but did not know how to obtain it. However, an opportunity to resist a dominant subjective reality may arise (Paraschak, 1990), and in this case sport for the girls acted as a way to challenge gender norms within their community. However, the girls' fight was often met with resistance from the dominant masculine structure of the community and therefore their fight continued to be framed in struggle.

It becomes evident that sport and physical culture have always been and continue to be held on contested terrain, as on one hand you have control (disempowerment) and on the other self-determination (empowerment). If we look at Euro-Canadian sport as being held on contested terrain then the cyclical nature of disempowering and empowering practices through sport in a Native context remains. Historically, this cycle has existed since Euro-Canadian sport was introduced into the residential school system. At first sport acted as a distraction from traditional physical practices and as a way to take the "savage" out and put the "civilized" in (Forsyth, 2007). During this time, sport was used to disempower Native people. The government used sport as a way to achieve assimilation through the public school system. Over time, sport began to mark the resistance of colonized peoples who searched for social value in times when their immediate cultural surroundings were changing (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). Due to resistance, organizations and sporting events began to emerge as ways to celebrate cultural identities through mainstream sport. The North

American Indigenous Games (NAIG), which began in the 1970s, is an example of Native self-determination in matters of culture.

Contested terrain can be seen to shape the experiences of the four LSCFN girls. At first the girls felt excluded from sporting activities, as females were not encouraged to take part in sport within their community. Sport was viewed as an empowering practice for men. The girls took the disempowering circumstance and morphed it into an empowering experience as they used sport to reconceptualize their female identities. But self-determination/empowerment for the girls continued to be met with resistance by community members as well as the world outside. Resistance or struggle is where hope begins to develop, and it is in these moments that the girls begin to resist the gender oppression they felt within their community. Paraschak (1991) would say that this could be further proof that Aboriginal people are never passive recipients of dominant culture, as they continue to resist dominant cultural forms and practices. Hope will be discussed through two stories. Both stories provide examples of how the girls felt the boys in the community viewed them, and how sport impacted or shifted their views of themselves as girls within their community.

5.1 The Powerful Sergeant

The first year of playing sports (volleyball and basketball) was focused on bringing the girls closer together to support each other on and off the court. All four of the participants report that typically girls in the community did not support each other. The girls said that they gossip and back-stab because there is nothing else to do. “Sport gave us something to do,” said Kyra, and “it brought us together more as a family” (Interview 5, December 19, 2012). After many losses and debrief sessions during the first season, for the first time in what seemed like forever the girls had hope for the following year. All four reported that they

were hopeful to win a game even though they had always lost. Collective agency had started to develop as the girls began to form an identity as a team. The team identity allowed them to start to support each other on and off of the court as they worked together towards the same goals, in this case reconceptualizing their role as females in their community. All four of the girls recognized this. They recalled that, “sport brought us closer together to support each other on and off of the court” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). I began to see hope outside of the sport environment for the first time since I started coaching and teaching.

During my first year in Carmacks I sometimes volunteered to help the Junior Rangers with their meetings or out-trips. The Junior Rangers “offers young people in remote and isolated communities across Canada a unique opportunity to participate in a variety of fun and rewarding activities in a formal setting” (Junior Rangers, 2013). Who would have guessed that it would be at one of these routine meetings where the dominant structure of the community would be challenged by one of the girls? It was here where hope first became visible for the team, the community, and myself.

It was a balmy -20 outside and inside the recreation centre in Carmacks the Junior Rangers were running a workshop on leadership for the youth members. I was asked to help with some of the workshop portions and so I also attended. I knew many of the youth from school and enjoyed seeing them in a different context. During the workshop a sergeant from Yellowknife strode into the room with his bulging arm muscles and sense of power oozing from every inch of his body. He was the epitome of intimidation. Standing at the front of the room he began to lecture the youth about the importance of being strong physically in order to be strong mentally. The boys clung to every word while the girls remained silent and stared at this imposing man. To demonstrate a specific point the sergeant said, “When you

do push-ups you can't do any of those girly push-ups ya know with the knees on the ground, you have to do manly push-ups! This goes for the girls too. No pain no gain!" From the back of the room, I was fuming. I was about to interject but somebody beat me to it. Kyra quietly puts up her hand and when called upon stands up and says, "Actually, they aren't referred to as girl push-ups, they are modified push-ups and sometimes even boys have to do them in order to move on to doing regular push-ups. It has nothing to do with being a girl but everything to do with strength development. Thank-you." The sergeant turned beet red and stumbled on his words, only to manage a "Yes, yes of course." Kyra turned back to give me the thumbs up. I smiled at her with tears in my eyes.

The debrief sessions, which occurred frequently after the stink bomb incident to the end of the first year together, focused on what was important to the girls at that time and this involved tackling assumptions the girls held about their role in their community. The assumptions about their ability and identities as females were challenged by the debrief sessions. It was here that I began to see how sport teaches females how to rely on each other, to help each other and, most importantly for these girls, to trust each other (Nelson, 1994). Leading up to the sergeant episode, sport began to teach the girls about what it meant to be on a team and simultaneously contributed to their confidence. As their cohesion as a team grew, so too did their confidence as individuals. It was at the moment when Kyra stood up to the sergeant that what we had been discussing in sport practices translated off the court. This was when their views about females in their community began to shift. Part of the significance of the sergeant episode was Kyra making herself visible as a powerful female to the boys/men in the community, challenging dominant beliefs around gender norms and, as

Carol acknowledged, “gaining control over your own actions.” Bandura’s (2001) vision of a collective agency was now beginning to become ours.

In that moment that Kyra stood up to the sergeant I took a look around at the other girls who were on the team. They all looked to Kyra and smiled or gave the thumbs up. Secret high-fives were placed under the table hidden away from view. Many of the boys rolled their eyes and the sergeant changed the subject rather abruptly. As the conversation continued, all appeared to be back to normal except that the girls were sitting taller and speaking more. But I seemed to be the only one that noticed this.

Bandura (2001) states that, “some of the most important determinants of life’s paths occur through the most trivial circumstances” (p. 11). This remains true in the case of the girls’ development of hope. Their collective agency allowed them to act with intention and they began to become agents of their experiences. Kyra took charge over a situation that she felt was marginalizing her (and her teammates) as girls and turned the disempowering statement from the sergeant into an empowering circumstance. They were no longer willing to simply be passive recipients of their experiences. For the remainder of the year the girls recall participating in physical education class with confidence. Acaycia proudly stated “I played all pro against the boys by making a sweet catch and all” (Interview 6, December 6, 2012). Carol began to play basketball with boys at the recreation centre in her spare time as she “knew how to play it” and felt confident joining in (Interview, 3, November 26, 2012). Sport in Carmacks was no longer defined by masculine sports such as hockey, which all four of the girls report not liking to participate in (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). By participating in an all female sports team for the first time in seven years the girls began to feel good about themselves as females and therefore began to reshape what defined sport in

their community. Hope continued to grow as the girls began to see what kind of opportunities sport participation could provide for them.

Keeping in mind that sport has a history of empowering and at the same time disempowering Native people (Forsyth, 2006; Paraschak, 1991), the girls' hope fluctuated. Their grasp on hope was always being challenged, and it was a constant struggle to hold onto it. Over the next year the girls developed game skills and began to win a few games here and there. However, their wins were always downplayed through comments from the boys such as "It is just because you are playing girl versions of sports that you won" (Interview 5, December 19, 2012). Yet again, women's successes were downplayed within the masculine sporting arena (Nelson, 1994). It was expected and accepted that they would continue to lose because they were girls. This leads to the second story where the girls managed to maintain their hope despite these similar disempowering circumstances.

5.2 Boys versus Girls

For the entire first year that I coached the girls, the boys always wanted to play a game against them. I never allowed it that first year because I knew that the girls had perceptions of the boys as being "naturally better at sports" or that it is "genetic that men are in shape." I did not want the girls to measure their own worth based on how they played against the boys. At the beginning of the second year, the boys finally had a coach and they were going to get the opportunity that they were apparently denied for so many years. The girls wanted to play against the boys as a fundraiser in their community.

The girls were ready. They had the fundamental skills, teamwork, and even a few plays up their sleeves. However as soon as jump ball occurred the same two or three boys just carried the ball up the court and did a lay-up over and over again. There was one boy

who was six feet tall and he just stood under the hoop and the boys threw the ball from half court into his hands and he would shoot it two, three maybe five times until he got it in. The girls couldn't reach it. The boys won because of the two or three players on the team who just did all of the work.

After the game, I was debriefing with the girls and I asked them how they felt about the game and Jade said, "We are girls and we play differently than boys...like we are weaker...boys have the muscle in their bicep and women get different muscles but ours aren't viewed as real muscle...it is just useless with them" (Interview 4, November 27, 2012). The girls all nodded their heads and Kyra said, "the worst part is that the community thinks we suck when we are the better basketball players! The boys just had like one person who could play. We are a team." (Interview 5, December 19, 2012)

This story initially seems to be an example of hopelessness, as the expectations that the girls would lose is reaffirmed and therefore one would think that their old role within their community would be perpetuated. Prior to playing sports I would have agreed that a story like this would reinforce the prevailing gender roles within the community, the majority of these beliefs coming from a masculine framework aimed at keeping women in their place (Nelson, 1994). But, one cannot forget the strong connection between physical strength and personal power (Nelson, 1994). After a solid year of debriefing sessions, team building activities, and skill training the girls finally had something that they lacked before: awareness. They had a greater understanding of why they experienced hopelessness and they were no longer willing to be passive recipients of their lives. Acceptance was no longer an option. If we are to frame their awareness through Bandura's (2001) social cognitive theory it is at this point that the girls became agents of their experiences. Through this agency comes a

feeling of shared power among the girls as a team. In this regard, when the girls stepped onto the court to challenge the boys they felt more powerful than ever before. The team was at a point where although they wanted to win it was no longer the main objective of playing sports. As Kyra said, “in the past playing sports was to make others proud and to prove that you had the skills and now we play for ourselves and for our team” (Interview 5, December 19, 2012).

There has been a history of the power that develops among Native girls when they participate in what are considered traditional masculine sports, such as basketball. One story in particular resonates with the LSCFN girls’ sport experience. This story is *Full Court Quest* (Peavy & Smith, 2008), which focuses on a team from an isolated Indian boarding school in Montana and follows their journey to win the basketball championships in 1904. They played in a time where off-reservation residential schools were present in the United States and, as in Canada residential schools, were using sport as a form of assimilation to “civilize” Native peoples (Forsyth, 2006). During this time of disempowerment, the girls in Montana took a risk and stepped onto the court to challenge long-held assumptions about Native women and sport (Peavy & Smith, 2008). They were known for their flawless teamwork and this quality is what allowed them to navigate their way through the sexist and racist comments received from outsiders. Their teamwork turned a disempowering circumstance into an empowering one that worked to overcome racial and gender barriers.

On a smaller scale, this is what the LSCFN girls were doing by reacting to the loss against the boys by focusing on their strengths instead of their weaknesses. Just like the girls in *Full Court Quest*, the LSCFN girls focused on their teamwork as a major strength. By supporting each other they were finally able to understand that the boys’ physical strength in

sport was what was being praised and the girls' teamwork (their muscle so to speak) was not as valued by the community. However, it was now valued by the girls and they were no longer willing to be denied the opportunity to build strength and hope because of the boys' attitude toward them. This is where it became apparent that as excitement built for the next season, hope was building as well.

Chapter 6: Opportunity

Hopeful and ready to face their opponents with a new attitude, the girls entered their second year of sports in Carmacks. There was only one problem: in order to face their opponents they would have to leave their community and confront outsiders who often view their community as being associated with negativity and loss.

Rural communities are often saturated with loss (Kelly, 2009), which is embedded in many aspects of rural life. One area is rural education where there is a high turnover rate of teachers and a lack of funding for community schools. Loss is often a deep and abiding entity, and the girls identify it as part of their sport experiences in Carmacks. For example, the fear of losing or being perceived by outsiders as losers contributed to the girls' fear of leaving their community. They felt that losing games reaffirmed the "loser" stereotype attached to Yukon communities such as theirs. Jade and Carol recall feeling like Whitehorse expected them to lose because they were from Carmacks. They felt like losers before they even stepped onto the court.

For the girls, learning to lose was an integral part of developing hope and having the confidence to leave their community. To learn how to confront defeat one has to reconceptualize loss (Kelly, 2009). Through this process, a fuller consciousness of how loss affects one's life may be developed. If the presence of loss is not acknowledged, then the illusion that loss does not affect you or people in your community persists, and loss continues to be articulated in unproductive ways. For example, when loss is unresolved, it can result in a displacement and social dysfunction that manifests itself in the form of crime, substance abuse, and addictions (Corbett, 2000; Kelly, 2009; Van Ingen & Halas, 2006).

Through sport, the girls were able to think critically about loss and develop a sense of belonging through a shared knowledge of what loss meant to them as a team. They began to focus on the experience of playing sports instead of fearing loss. Reconceptualizing loss motivated the girls to focus on improving their skills and, as Kyra says, “[proving] to them that we can do it, we can be a winner for once on our own terms” (Interview 5, December 19, 2012). An example of how the girls reconceptualized loss can be seen in how they viewed the loss against the boys, as discussed in Chapter 5: Hope. They focused on their teamwork and strengths instead of using loss to define their identity. Learning to lose aided in the development of hope and contributed to the girls’ increasing confidence. As a result, the girls were willing to take advantage of opportunities, despite the risk that was associated with going outside their community. They had the strength to work through challenges despite the loss that might be associated with them.

The girls recognized that living in a small community is challenging in many ways. One of the challenges as described by the girls was “budget cuts” and “lack of funding and attention from Whitehorse” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). Fewer funding opportunities were identified as a major barrier to their participation in sport, both within and outside of their community. As a result, the girls had to find alternative ways to raise funds for uniforms, sport equipment, and travel. I asked all four of the girls why they thought Whitehorse might have more opportunities. Here is how the conversation unfolded:

Carol: They are the capital of course!

Interviewer: So because they are the capital they get to do whatever they want?

Carol and Jade: Laughter.

Jade: Like because everyone thinks they are good enough to do it and with the communities they just brush us off because we are small.

Interviewer: So they just assume that you don't have people who have that kind of talent to be able to do it anyway?

Jade: Yeah pretty much because I don't think the school has money for like some sports and stuff and I think that is just bull and so in Whitehorse they have like money for any kind of sport and stuff and they have money for travelling for the students and then here we don't have that kind of access to stuff like that. (Interview 1, November 26, 2012)

Usually people in Whitehorse do not pay attention to the unpopular (rural) communities, but all four of the girls claim that they began to receive more funding and attention when Whitehorse became aware that Carmacks had sports teams. Living in a rural community had been an isolating experience for the girls.

Living in rural North America often limits opportunity due to isolation (Corbett, 2009; Paraschak, 1991). The dominant culture of the South continues to define education and shape opportunity in many isolated communities. For example, the urban centres in the South control the majority of the funding given to isolated communities. There is a lack of funding for rural Native schools when compared to urban centres in the South (Naylor & Scott, 2009; Satchwell, 2004; Van Ingen & Halas, 2006). Southern values unconsciously shape the school, the community, and the community members (Paraschak, 1997). When the opportunity to attend an Aboriginal basketball tournament in Vancouver, British Columbia, presented itself, the girls were faced with the sad reality that they did not have the funds to be able to go. The lack of funding and attention given to their community became apparent. Typically the girls would just brush the opportunity off, but this time they were prepared to do whatever it took not to miss out on what they describe as a "chance of a lifetime" (Interview 5, December 16, 2012).

After many bake sales, letters to organizations, haunted houses and 50/50 tickets the fundraising for a trip to Vancouver was successful. There was excitement at the Whitehorse

airport as the girls said their good-byes to their loved ones and stepped out of their comfort zone to anxiously await a new experience. For many of the girls, this was their first time on an airplane. A few hours later the girls were cheering as the plane began its descent to the Vancouver International Airport. Acaciya couldn't stop saying, "Oh my goodness the lights go on forever! They do!"

Within the first few hours of being in Vancouver, Carol couldn't get over how big the "big city" really was. She was in awe at the flowers, fountains, and buildings. The next day, we took the bus to our first game at the Aboriginal basketball tournament. The girls were nervous, but excited to play basketball outside of the Yukon. Prior to the game, winning or losing wasn't on their minds, as being in Vancouver was said to be enough. However, in the end the girls were shocked and disappointed that what they viewed as "little kids" because of their height beat them. By the end of the tournament they had not won a single game. Instead of letting the loss weigh them down, the girls felt like their loss was an indicator that they didn't practice enough and they needed to try harder. Despite losing every game, the girls were excited to just explore the city and get a chance to be away from mom and dad because that never happens. Carol said she was happy to be with people that she knew and therefore she didn't feel like she was away from home because she had people that she knew with her. After visiting the Aquarium and Granville Island, and of course doing a little shopping, the team returned to the Yukon as different people, both individually and collectively.

Prior to the Vancouver trip many of the girls were afraid to leave their family and home for the first time in their lives. What gave them strength was travelling together as a team. A sense of belonging can help students support each other as a team, as opposed to being left to defend for themselves (Nelson, 1994; Smith, 1993). The four LSCFN girls

acknowledged that they felt less risk when leaving Carmacks with their friends, family, or people they trust, such as a coach/teacher. Kyra claims that “I didn’t really care as long as we were all there together, and a lot of us, well most of us, like at least for me, I didn’t really care what other people thought” (Interview 5, December 19, 2012). The fear associated with leaving their community often prevents people from taking opportunities to do so (Peavy & Smith, 2007), but the girls refused to let fear control their lives. Fear comes from knowing that when one leaves their community one is presented with both risk and opportunity (Corbett, 2000). This remains true for the girls, as both risk and opportunity were a major part of their experience in Vancouver.

A risk identified by the girls was a fear of being misunderstood by outsiders. This fear became a reality. Carol remembers people in Vancouver asking her if they lived in igloos or ate seal. She found it exhausting to have to repeatedly explain her culture (Interview 3, November 26, 2012). The misrepresentation of the North and of the girls’ culture became apparent during the visit to the Northern House. It was here that the girls became aware of how the South views Northern culture.

When the girls visited Vancouver the Paralympics were on and the team had the “opportunity” to visit the Northern House where Northern Aboriginal culture was on display to the public. I thought the girls would appreciate seeing their culture represented in a big city, but their reactions were not what I expected. As the girls explored the Northern House, Acacyia approached me and said, “This is strange being in this Northern house. I don’t see what the big deal is.” She sighs and looks around the room “We don’t even do soap stone carvings! How stupid it is to put stuff my grandma can make in with soap stone carvings.” I

was about to respond when I overheard Jade ranting to another teammate “Why do they think we live in igloos? Don’t they know anything?”

A little while later I catch Jade and Carol snickering at some of the tourists gawking over beaded regalia. “Geeeeee” said Jade to Carol, “they think this is something special! I can make something better than that!” Just then an employee from the Northern House announced that there was going to be a demonstration of Dene games in the centre room. The girls turned and looked at each other with mischievous smiles and ran to the room. A group had gathered around a centre stage where a Northern House employee waited patiently. “I need some volunteers...” the employee stated. Acaycia and Kyra’s hands immediately shot into the air and they began jumping up and down shouting, “Us! Us! Us! Pick us!” The employee motioned for the girls to come up on stage and began his explanation about Dene games. But, before the employee could explain what to do, the girls were already fully engaged in the “head pull” activity as the audience watched with fascination. As they left the stage Acaycia looked at me and said with laughter, “Did you see us? Kyra and I just got up there and did it and the guy was like oh I guess you already know how to do it!” and Kyra piped in saying, “So awesome! He didn’t even see it coming!”

The risk of having one’s culture essentialized was realized during the trip to Vancouver. The experience in the Northern House brings to mind two things. Firstly, the shock experienced by the girls when they began to see how misrepresented their culture and identities were in the South. Secondly, I noticed how they resisted the racism towards their culture through an act of self-determination. Through disempowering circumstances, they empowered themselves through a performative act to reclaim what was rightfully theirs in the first place.

The initial shock the girls experienced at the Northern House was at first a disempowering experience. They were hit hard with the realization that the South did not recognize their Little Salmon Carmacks' First Nation culture. For the first time in their lives, they became aware that according to the South, the North had one Aboriginal identity, which includes eating seal, living in igloos, and wearing fur clothing. The girls are not the only ones to have their culture essentialized and appropriated by dominant culture. For example the 2010 Olympic/Paralympic games held in Vancouver used the Inuksuit as the official symbol of the games. There was outcry, as the symbol was said to dishonour the Native peoples from the Northwest Coast, whose land the Olympics took place on. As well, some argued that its appropriation turned Inuit culture into a commodity to be bought and sold (Hall, 2012). The essentialization of Native identities became a reality for the girls as they began to understand the ramifications of "outsiders" appropriating and not understanding their culture. Kyra states that after the trip to Vancouver she realized that for her "it is a constant struggle to feel good about being Native, whatever that means." (Interview 5, December 19, 2012). Acaycia agrees, stating that she "felt like we were on display" (Interview 6, December 17, 2012).

Acaycia's feelings of being "on display" are echoed by other Native groups, such as the Musqueam who acknowledge the risks that occur when their cultures are put on display in museums (Shephard, 2010). The further essentialization of culture continues because the meanings behind the items presented in the museums are lost. This was reflected in the Northern House experience, as the girls realized that the context for the relics/objects on display failed to exist. This limits Native achievement to "primitive" forms of creation, ignoring contemporary achievements in broader fields and disciplines. The girls became

aware of what Indigenous scholars have referred to as the “contact zone” (Shephard, 2010; Van Ingen & Halas, 2006).

The “contact zone” is defined by Van Ingen & Halas (2006) as a space where social spaces of cultures meet/clash and create domination and subordination that results in concepts such as colonialism and slavery. The Northern House acted as a “contact zone” where the Southern representation of the North clashed with the girls’ identity. By seizing the opportunity to demonstrate Dene games, they turned a disempowering circumstance into an empowering one. The girls took ownership over the “contact zone” and reshaped it by inserting themselves into that space, which creates resistance to the colonial perspective of their culture that aims to maintain power relations in Western society (Dion, 2009). This gave the girls an opportunity to learn about the colonial forces that have historically and currently affected their experiences within their own community. Through this, the girls recognized that their identity as Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations had been essentialized through colonial forces of the South, such as the school system (Brown et al., 2011; McIntosh et al., 2011; Satchwell, 2004). The risk of their culture being misunderstood by outsiders became an area of concern for the girls. This realization also presented an opportunity to further understand what forces affected their community, and the girls began to think of ways to resist, overcome, or reshape these forces.

The trip to Vancouver provided the girls with an opportunity to “be more mature and explore life on their own” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). However, it quickly became apparent that it would take more than one opportunity to gain visibility inside and outside of their community.

After a successful trip to Vancouver, I was excited to go to school and share the wonderful experience with the rest of the students and staff. Upon entering the staffroom, the first question that I was asked was “Did you win?” With a sigh I responded, “No, but...” It was too late; I already lost their interest. It seems that the girls were met with similar experiences. Later on in the day Acacyia told me, “I think the community expected us to win and when we came back it was like the boys were like ‘Oh we knew you were going to lose’ and it was like, well I guess we are back to normal life again in Carmacks!” I just shook my head and asked her “what is it going to take to change this?” Acacyia just shrugged her shoulders and goes, “Meah. It just is what it is. Just ignore them like we all do...”

The girls had developed hope and taken hold of opportunity by fundraising and travelling to Vancouver. Their awareness of how the South views them as Native people and their experience bonding as a team changed each of the girls in terms of how they saw themselves within their community (Interview 2, December 6, 2012). However, upon their return from Vancouver, it became apparent that the community was not ready to accept their new identities yet. The girls were faced with the reality that success was defined by winning. The fear of losing and disappointing their community returned (Interview 6, December 17, 2012). Loss was still felt by the community and the students within the school, and to them winning was the only way to overcome the feeling of loss (Kelly, 2009). Western patriarchy had shaped the community and therefore success was defined along Western lines, including winning. As long as the girls lost, the community continued to view them as losers despite their many successes. The girls had worked on reconceptualizing loss for themselves, but the community remained stuck in loss. The girls were now in a position where they were thankful for their community, but at the same time they wanted more. They wanted to be

recognized by their community for their success as a team. They were not about to give up just yet, and together they continued to work on gaining visibility as Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation females.

Chapter 7: Visibility

As the girls entered year three of their sport experience they began developing what Bandura (2001) referred to as “collective agency.” Reflecting on their experience, all four of the girls discussed how they were able to persist because they were surrounded by teammates who understood what it meant to be from Carmacks (Interview 2, December 6, 2012). Kyra states that she “loved playing sports for Carmacks because it is her hometown and [she] can be close to the people [she] plays with, unlike in Whitehorse” (Interview 5, December 19, 2012). Their shared knowledge, power, intentions, and skills allowed them to function as a team and support each other on and off the court. For example, the girls felt that the team helped them resist pressures from the community to drink and drop out of school (Interview 1, November 26, 2012).

Upon their return from the Vancouver trip, the girls had gained a deeper understanding of the forces that shaped their community and in turn their identities. Their sense of developing agency over their experiences motivated them to train harder and seek opportunities to travel outside of their community. However, despite the number of opportunities taken or how the girls had changed personally, the fact that they continued to lose overshadowed their personal and collective successes. The girls felt like they had to “prove” their worth to themselves and to their community. The idea of “proving” one’s worth continued to arise throughout the interviews. The importance of having their achievements validated by Carmacks as well as outsiders was stressed. The personal growth and team bonding that the girls went through wasn’t enough for them to gain visibility, recognition,

and respect from others. The girls and their community viewed winning as the only way to prove their success and validate their experience.

Why is winning framed as the definition of success? I would argue that to understand how the concept of winning affected the girls, we have to look at it in terms of how it affects different aspects of their identities. These aspects include being Native and female, and their rurality. Looking at how the construct of winning is embedded in values of Western patriarchy, and how it interacts with the girls' identities can help us make inferences regarding the importance of gaining visibility through winning.

7.1 Sport and Winning

Organized sport was initially created by and for White middle-class men (Dworkin & Messner, 2002). This acted as a “natural superiority” over women as well as race and class subordinated groups of men. To maintain its power, sport remains dominated by forms of masculinity which is entrenched in competitiveness, aggression and elements of traditional understandings of the sporting male (Wellard, 2002). This has contributed to men using sport as a way to maintain gender roles within their world, in the form of subordination and repression, through making decisions about what the female body is capable of (Nelson, 1994). By participating in sport, the girls in Carmacks disrupted traditional perceptions of female bodies and took control over what their bodies can or cannot do. However, the Western male constructs of sport, in this case winning, continued to determine whether they were successful as female athletes. Winning in this sense would create a bodily agency in the girls because their success represents a resistance to oppression as female in their community. It also creates a resistance to traditional colonial perspectives on rural Native communities being framed by loss, and it is here that I would like to take a moment to talk

about loss and frame why “being winners” was so vital to the girls as well as to the community.

Native peoples and loss are often connected to each other when outside forces, such as the media or government, discuss Native “issues.” (Brown et al., 2011; Findlay, 2007; McIntosh et al., 2011; Satchwell, 2004). This remains true with Native education and sports, as conversations often assume a loss or lack of something. For example, surveys and quantitative studies have focused on the low graduation rates of Native students (lack of education) or the high diabetes rates among Native peoples (loss of health) (Satchwell, 2004). The majority of the discussions surrounding education are in relation to there being a gap or a loss that needs to be addressed (Kelly, 2009). Rarely are the successes of Native peoples celebrated, and therefore it is not a surprise that a feeling of loss is so present within Native communities (Kelly, 2009). Although the girls succeeded in other areas of sport, their successes continued to be measured against Euro-Canadian sport standards. In this sense, true success meant winning, and in order to validate their experiences they had to win under the guise of the dominant culture, Whitehorse. This is further demonstrated by looking at how the games won against other rural communities were not sufficient for the team to be deemed successful by community members or outsiders.

Playing against other rural communities was a less intimidating experience, because the girls were going to other communities who had similar experiences and struggles with loss as they do. The girls felt they could relate better and the pressure to “prove” themselves diminished. However, gaining visibility within other rural communities was not what was important to the girls or to their own community. Kyra remembers feeling that when they played against other communities they would just expect to win because they assumed that

the other rural team sucked, were an easy win, and had low skill level. The girls took the perceptions that Whitehorse had of them and projected them onto other rural communities because it was their “chance to actually win for once” (Interview 5, December 19, 2012). Perceptions of rural communities being “slack,” “worthless,” and framed in loss were reinforced; the girls from Carmacks admitted to thinking of other rural communities in the same way (Kelly, 2009; Van Ingen & Halas, 2006). The dominant culture continued to downplay the girls’ success within their own community, and it was not until they won by Western standards that credibility was warranted.

7.2 The Win

The Vancouver trip motivated the girls to work harder the following year. They were more confident and had developed trust as a team, as well as with me (the coach). They were diligent about practices and always supported each other. Kyra says the main motivation for her was that she “wanted to get better and show that we could do it and be a winner for once and eventually” (Interview 5, December 19, 2012).

It was time for a pep talk. I had the girls all huddled up outside of the school in Whitehorse where we were going to begin the tournament. I asked the girls why we were here, and they responded with “To have fun and support each other!” We all high-fived and did our cheer and entered the gym unaware of what was about to unfold. At the end of the first game the buzzer sounded and I jumped off of the bench and said, “Girls! We won!” The girls just sat there on the bench and looked at each other. Finally Jade said, “We won?” and all the girls jumped up and we embraced each other. We couldn’t believe that we actually won a game. As the tournament progressed we continued to win game after game until we were in the final quarter of the championship game. The score was 28–20 to us and there

was 1 minute left on the timer. As the clock counted down one of the girls on the bench grabbed my hand and buried her face in my arm. Everyone on the bench held hands and began counting down the last 10 seconds of the game. When the buzzer went off we all jumped up and the girls' dog-piled on me in the middle of the court. The boys team were watching and they all ran onto the court and hugged and high-fived the girls. Acaycia was approaching the boys and "being like IN YOUR FACE!" and the boys responded with "Woah you guys won actually." As we were shaking hands with the other team a girl stopped Acaycia and said "Where did this girl come from? I remember you use to lose every game!" She just beamed. After many pictures and interviews with local papers we piled back onto the bus and the girls continued to talk about the win. Acaycia kept saying, "We went all out and we were like we can do it guys and had confidence" and Kyra responded to her with "We just balled them! So awesome!" For the first time in their sporting experience the girls were happy and excited on the bus ride back to Carmacks.

Through this experience, the girls were able to win and be framed as winners within the dominant sporting culture of Whitehorse and therefore gained credibility with people in Whitehorse as well as in their community, especially the boys. Winning the Basketball Territorial Championships disrupted perceptions of themselves as Aboriginal females from Carmacks as well as about their school. In the process they gained visibility/recognition outside of their community.

7.3 Disrupting Perceptions

All four of the girls recall the reactions from various people who were present on the day of the victory in Whitehorse. First, they emphasized the reaction of the boys as being the most monumental. The girls had finally achieved success as the boys defined it by achieving

the goal of winning. By going up to the boys and shouting “In your face!” the girls felt that they finally proved to the boys that they are powerful and strong. However, their strength is still being defined by Western constructs of male power, “winning,” and competition. At the same time as female sports fight to gain power in the sporting arena they become controlled by men, as principles of women’s sports reflect characteristics of men’s sports. These characteristics include the following producing winners, champions, and profits (Dworkin & Messner, 2002). The girls were only successful once they succeeded under the guise of the dominant culture.

Although the forces of the dominant culture continued to influence the girls, they also resisted the pressure to conform to stereotypes associated with being Native and living in a rural community. Jade and Carol say that by winning, “it shows that we don’t all do drugs and stuff and drink alcohol and that we can do things” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). Winning the territorial championships disrupted stereotypes connected to being from a Native community, such as having issues with alcohol and drugs. This disruption is confirmed by the fact that a girl from the opposing team approached Acaciya and expressed her disbelief that her team had lost against a rural community and by Carol’s observation that, “they didn’t expect us to win and people wondered if we cheated but we knew that we worked hard for it and earned it” (Interview 3, November 26, 2012). Even when the girls won within the parameters set out and defined by the dominant culture, they were questioned on their integrity. Their success was not attributed to their hard work, teamwork, skills, or tactics; it was downplayed by accusations of cheating and not earning it. The assumptions of people in Whitehorse perceiving the girls as losers was raised to the forefront and challenged when the girls won.

These assumptions were also present in how Whitehorse perceived their community school. Jade and Carol recall feeling that the Carmacks school was perceived in a negative light. Their feelings about their own schooling experiences were mostly negative or “routine” prior to organized sport participation. Jade says that, “winning the basketball championships made the school seem more positive to outsiders and gave attention to the kids and the school in the community” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). On one hand, winning the championships challenged notions of rural schooling as being slack (Van Ingen & Halas, 2006). This is true as well with people in the community. Kyra and Acaycia say that they always felt that their school was not as good as Whitehorse, but playing sports and winning for their community made them proud to be from there (Interview 2, December 6, 2012). This pride translated into the school and all four of the girls say that younger kids now look forward to playing sports when they enter high school. A positive sport culture within the school began to be established.

The disruption of perceptions towards their community as well as in their own identities as Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation youth was a pivotal moment for the girls. The two years building up to the championships were spent working with the girls to establish agency (both collectively and individually) as they worked on reconceptualizing negative associations within their community and themselves. This included the reconceptualization of loss, gender (being female), race (being native), and their rurality. Because they gained visibility through winning the Territorial championships, the process of reconceptualizing stereotypes about their community as well as constructs of their identities could begin to happen for those inside and outside of the community. Visibility in the dominant culture allowed the girls to begin to recognize the agency they have over their

experiences and opportunities and to understand how factors surrounding them, such as colonization, impact these experiences. This awareness or agency continues to shape the courses of their lives today and impacts how they interact with people inside and outside of their community.

Chapter 8: Agency

Throughout three years of participation in sports in Carmacks, the girls developed hope, seized opportunities, and gained visibility. So, what does this all amount to and how does it affect the girls in their lives today (two years after winning the championships)? It is here that a discussion around agency is necessary, as this was and is constantly developing and shaping their lives.

According to Bandura (2001), agency embodies and functions on the belief systems, self-regulatory capabilities, and distributed structures on which personal influence is exercised. This chapter will be divided into the core features of human agency described by Bandura (2001) to gain a deeper understanding of how agency affects the lives of the four LSCFN girls currently and how this may affect their decisions for their future. These features are intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness. Discussion is not limited to agency, as the complexity of the girls' identities will still be discussed in terms of how agency has affected their identity constructs as well.

8.1 Intentionality

The girls recalled that upon their return from Vancouver during the second year of sports in Carmacks, they felt more motivated to attend practices, to work hard at learning the skills, and to take hold of more opportunities. They realized that if they wanted to succeed, as defined by winning, they had to be committed to bringing about the changes. The motivation to win was achieved when their actions began to serve a purpose. In this moment collective agency among the team began to develop.

Currently, collective agency no longer exists, as the girls who were part of the team for three years have travelled in different directions. Carol and Jade remain in Carmacks to complete their grade 12 and Acaycia and Kyra moved to Whitehorse to complete grade 12 there. Although collective agency is not as strong because the team no longer exists in the same way, the girls still have a strong sense of individual agency. Their goals and aspirations for the future are based on their own experiences and what they feel they can accomplish. Acaycia and Kyra have aspirations to become Physical Education teachers and they express an interest in coaching. Jade and Carol both want to begin by attending Yukon College so that they are not too far from home and see what they are interested in. All four of the girls have intentionality. They have action plans set out to achieve their goals of moving on in the future. Their current action plan is to graduate from high school and begin to move into the post-secondary school system. But having intentionality is not enough (Bandura, 2001). It requires more than an intentional state to have agency over one's experiences, as having desire or hope is just the beginning.

8.2 Forethought

Leaving their community and dealing with outsiders and community members perceptions of them as Native females from Carmacks are just some of the barriers the girls struggled with during their sport experience. Their ability to challenge these barriers was based on them having hope or confidence in themselves as individuals as well as a collective. But the struggle continues despite them gaining some visibility. The disruption of common beliefs associated with them as Native females from Carmacks was only temporary in terms of how they were treated by outsiders, but internally the girls gained confidence in their ability to initiate change and navigate themselves through the barriers they may come up

against. Bandura (2001) would say that they developed forethought. Due to their experiences of working through barriers to win the Territorial Championships, they were able to understand how barriers may present themselves in their lives. Working through them in a sports context gave them the tools to be able to work through them again in a different context.

One example of forethought is when I asked the girls how they felt about leaving their community to go to school. They all said that they wanted to leave to go to school because Carmacks can offer them only so much at this point in their lives, but it is scary for them to think about it and to be forced out into the world with no support. However, they also report feeling less intimidated going into Whitehorse and travelling because they have learned how to cope with judgment and how to socialize outside of their community. A major barrier Jade, Acaycia and Carol identified was that if they left the Yukon to go university they would feel isolated and lonely being away from their community, because no one around them would be Native. However, they recognize this as an unfortunate reality, and all four of the girls say that they still want to pursue things such as education so that they can contribute to their community in more meaningful ways in the future. Keeping close ties and connections to their culture was important for all four of the girls. Michael Corbett (2000) would recognize this as a risk of leaving one's community. The girls recognize the risk and feel confident to take opportunity despite the potential risks because they feel they have the ability to cope with possible struggles.

An example of a coping strategy as defined by Acaycia and Kyra is the use of the word "Native." They both explain that the word Native is a way for them to connect to other Aboriginal people who are not from their community. It represents the shared experiences of

Aboriginal people in the Yukon Territory in regards to colonization. Kyra explains that using the word Native when outside of her community allows her to connect to other Native people, and they can support each other. She goes on to say that the word Native is only used by Native people and therefore it is an identity that White people cannot adopt (Interview 5, December 19, 2012). The term Native acts as a form of resistance to the dominant culture and allows the girls to maintain and strengthen their identities as Native people.

Coping strategies are important, but just having an action plan and a deeper understanding for how to overcome possible barriers (foresightful behaviour) are not enough. This plan has to be put into action by motivation.

8.3 Self-Reactiveness

To carry out an action plan with intention and foresightful behaviour you also need to be able to react with moral reasoning to situations that may “get in the way” of achieving your goals (Bandura, 2001). This is referred to as self-reactiveness, which includes monitoring one’s behaviour and the cognitive and environmental conditions. It is at this point that I would like to focus on Acaycia and Kyra because they have already left their community to pursue their grade 12 education. This was a first step towards gaining more independence and having more access to courses or resources that will assist them in achieving their professional goals of becoming Physical Education teachers. Although the girls were aware of the possible barriers that would arise when they left their community to go to Whitehorse, they were still learning how to navigate in a culture that was not theirs. According to many Indigenous scholars, they were learning how to “walk in two worlds” (Dion, 2009; Kanu, 2007; Smith, 1993). This is evident in the girls’ two very different stories about trying out for sport teams in Whitehorse.

8.3.1 Kyra

After playing sports in a comfortable environment for the past three years, Kyra decided to try out for the basketball team at her new high school in Whitehorse. She felt nervous and isolated going into tryouts as none of her Native friends wanted to play sports because “most of the students who play sports are preppies...they are White.” She went for tryouts and felt that “they were so good and it was so hard.” Kyra says she remembers “feeling like I was not going to make it and I heard them talking about this other girl there who was probably way better than I was but they were like talking about her in front of me saying that she probably wasn’t going to make the team and I was thinking that I am the worst one there so what were they saying behind my back” (Interview 5, December 19, 2012).

Although the White girls said that they recognized her from the championships, they didn’t say much else. Kyra remembers that “they weren’t mean or anything they just didn’t talk to me and I didn’t feel like putting in an effort to talk to them either. I felt like a big outcast there and in Carmacks it was more like a family.” (Interview 5, December 19, 2012) Needless to say she didn’t return to tryouts the next day.

Kyra decided that she didn’t want to deal with the experience of being the only Native girl on the team and so she changed her goals to focus more on academics, writing, and fashion. She still recognized the barriers that she was up against but decided to shift how she wanted to navigate in this new world. It was important for her to have support from her “Native gang.” Being the only Native at tryouts was too much for her to deal with at this time, and she feels more confident being with other Aboriginal students at the school. This could act as a form of collective agency, as being Native bonds them to each other because

they have shared power, intentions, knowledge, and skills. Through this collective agency Kyra feels more confident to address inequalities or power differentials that she comes face to face with. This can be further demonstrated by a story that Kyra tells of an experience with what she refers to as the “preppies.”

Last week this preppie White girl went up and kicked this Native girl’s locker, I guess she had a problem with her and she went up and kicked her locker and it pissed us all off. We all went to sit in this hallway and there were like 18 of us in there and the same girls walked by and said like “Way to take our spot,” and then this one girl was like “Let’s go get ‘em right now” and she stood up. She is usually really nice so it had to have pissed her off. Anyway, so we all stood up and then everyone stood up and there was a big gang of us going down the hallway and then the people ran away (Interview 5, December 19, 2012).

Kyra and her friends bond together and support each other as Natives in their school in Whitehorse. They have collective agency, which assists them in having the confidence to confront people such as the preppies who treat them like inferior beings. This resistance feels more powerful for Kyra as she is with people she can relate to and who can support each other. Collective agency among marginalized groups, such as Native people, can create a more powerful disruption to the dominant culture, as there is strength in numbers (Bandura, 2001). This may also be a reason why the girls were able to persist with sports despite the challenges associated with it. When Kyra tried out for the sport teams in Whitehorse, she did not have collective agency. She was in charge of her own experience, but she felt outnumbered because she was the only Native trying out for the team. She was overwhelmed by this challenge and she says that she wasn’t ready to enter that battle just yet. However, she continues to show resistance in other areas of her life as she works in coordination with others who have similar experiences.

8.3.2 Acaycia

Acaycia's passion for basketball drove her to stick with sports, so when she made the basketball team in Whitehorse she was determined to stay on the team despite being "the only Native person on the basketball team." However, within a month of playing on the team she began to feel isolated because she felt that "they were all better than me and they don't know who I am, my culture." She is unsure about whether she wants to remain on the team but she feels uncomfortable talking to the coach because "she is White and just doesn't get it." Acaycia described going to school in Whitehorse as "being stuck between two worlds." For example, she remembers, "this one time in class I was the only Native person there. This guy was talking and he was like did you know that we are all White people in here and I was like 'Oh god' and then they were like 'Wait no that girl over there is Native'...they were whispering." She wants to continue playing basketball but doesn't know if she "has a place there" (Interview 6, December 12, 2012).

Acaycia's experience with trying out for sport teams in Whitehorse is similar to Kyra's in the sense that they both felt alienated as the only Native person on the team. However, Acaycia decided to stay on the team despite this challenge because of her passion for basketball. Basketball gives her enough self-satisfaction and a sense of pride and self-worth to persist with it (Bandura, 2001), despite the challenges around being the only Native on the team. Kyra felt that there were not enough self-incentives to sustain her efforts to achieve her previous goal of playing basketball and so she shifted her goals accordingly. This brings us to the fourth part of human agency, self-reflectiveness.

8.4 Self-Reflectiveness

In the moment that Kyra decided to not join the sports team and Acaycia did, they entered a process of self-reflection. This is defined by the ability of people to evaluate their motivation, values, and the meaning of their life pursuits (Bandura, 2001). This is the same process that Jade and Carol discuss when they talk about their decision to go to Yukon College instead of post-secondary education outside of the Yukon Territory. They both say that they thought about what would be best for them and their families. They determined that by moving away it would be too hard on their families and they would feel disconnected from their own culture. By making the decision to stay in the Yukon they chose a path that is in alignment with their life pursuits, which at the moment means remaining close to their culture while learning skills that they can use in the future to benefit their community. All four of the girls have strong self-efficacy, which Bandura (2001) says is an important indicator as to whether people think pessimistically or optimistically when encountered with challenging circumstances. This enables them to reflect on themselves in terms of what is important to them and make adjustments to their goals now as agents of their own lives. These goals will be forever changing as their transformation is a continuous and never-ending process.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Although this is the end to the study, the meaning of the sporting experiences for the four LSCFN girls and for myself will continue to influence our lives. For the four LSCFN girls it has changed their self-efficacy and made them see the potential that they have to be agents over their own experiences. For myself, it has forever changed the intentionality behind my teaching/coaching beliefs and practices and it has shed light on who I am in my own life and what experiences I want to pursue. Our experiences are never static. Just because something is in the past does not mean that it does not continue to influence who we are in the present.

The conclusion will be separated into three sections. Firstly, a summary of my own personal journey and my hopes for the future will be provided. This is followed by a summary of the findings. Finally, implications or areas in need of further research will be presented.

9.1 Decolonization of My Own Consciousness

When I first moved to Carmacks it was a job, not a place (Chambers, 2006). My experiences and connections to community members transformed Carmacks into a place for me. It was no longer a job, but a home. The best indicator of this transformation was when Acacyia asked me if she could see my status card on our way to Vancouver. I laughed and told her that I did not have one. She then proceeded to ask me why not, and I responded smiling with, “because I am White of course.” She then laughed, gave me a hug, and said, “Sorry, I forgot.” I will never forget that moment, for it was in that moment that I realized my role as an outsider had been transformed into that of a community member. To

summarize my personal journey from outsider to community member to researcher I will revisit Bandura's (2001) core features of human agency (intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, self-reflectiveness). The core features of human agency represent my transformation as a teacher, coach and individual.

9.1.1 Intentionality

In order to have intentionality, one must have a proactive commitment to bringing about action (Bandura, 2001). I had intentionality when I decided to go up North and when I began to coach the girls' volleyball and basketball. In both of these moments I had a commitment to bring about change/action. However, the reasoning behind my commitment would change over the three years.

My decision to go north was fuelled by my desire for adventure along with my passion for teaching. I wanted to step outside of my comfort zone and experience something new. At this time I felt that I had certain skills or expertise that would be useful for the community. I had already assumed that the community was embedded in loss or lacked "valuable experiences." My intention was to bring my knowledge and skills in terms of Physical Education and coaching to make the community a "better place." On arriving to Carmacks, I focused on what the community did not have. I felt that there was a need for a sport program and so I started one. I had intentions to teach girls in the community about the power and joy of being part of an organized sport team. These intentions were fuelled by my own experiences with being an athlete and coaching in Vancouver.

Over the three years, my intentionality shifted as I began to realize that the community did not need me to bring opportunity to them, they needed someone to work with them to create opportunity that reflected the needs of the community, not the needs of the

outsider. My intentions shifted from bringing a sports program to the community to working with the girls to shape the sports program to reflect community values and needs. When my intentions as a coach and teacher had forethought they shifted, and so did the experiences of the girls.

9.1.2 Forethought

“People set goals for themselves, anticipate the likely consequences of prospective actions, and select and create courses of action likely to produce desired outcomes and avoid detrimental ones” (Bandura, 2001, p. 7). Over the three years that I lived in Carmacks, I became increasingly aware of how racism, sexism, and rurality all influenced people in the community. I saw it in the school in the lack of funding for programming, and in outsiders in how they treated the girls when we left the community to attend sporting events. Part of having forethought was understanding how racism, sexism, and rurality all affected the girls. This altered my coaching/teaching practices to make space for difficult conversations. In this sense, I altered the goals for our team from a Euro-centric goal (winning) to a goal that reflected what was important to the girls: to build self-efficacy and a sense of family (team). We began to anticipate difficult circumstances that might arise when we had to leave the community and we were able to develop coping strategies to minimize the effects of possible negative interactions. From this, we designed our own achievable goals. Through this process I was able to understand the difference between what I wanted as a teacher/coach and what was important to the students. I began to think about the community’s needs/wants instead of my own. As I progressed in my time in Carmacks I continue to plan ahead, reorder my priorities, and structure my life accordingly. I adapted to my new environment.

9.1.3 Self-reactiveness

“Agency involves not only the deliberative ability to make choices and action plans, but the ability to give shape to appropriate courses of action and to motivate and regulate their execution” (Bandura, 2001, p. 8). My goals changed as I became more involved in the community. As my goals changed, so did my motivation and moral reasoning behind the goals. I attribute this change to my slowly understanding what it meant to live in Carmacks and what was beneficial in terms of schooling and sports from the perspective of the community.

At the time that I was designing community based athletic and Physical Education experiences for the students, I became aware of the importance of listening and paying attention to the Elders in the community as well as other community members. I knew that I would have to be aware of the environment surrounding me, by watching and allowing myself to be watched, in order to pick up on clues that would tell me what it meant to live in Carmacks (Chambers, 2008). Outside of school-related activities, I decided to join a sewing circle for women held on a weekly basis to learn about some traditions practised in the community.

At first, the women were very distant from me, but slowly as they saw me working hard and dedicating a lot of energy into learning how to sew, they opened up to me. I remember one moment where I was trying to get my needle through the thick moose hide of my soon-to-be moccasins, one of the women came over and watched me for a few moments. She then snatched the hide away from me and pushed the needle through with no effort at all. I am sure I looked amazed, because she then lifted her thumb up to show me her callous and smiled. I knew I wanted one of those. As time passed by, I became close with a few of the

women and enjoyed listening to their stories about their lives, and I often found myself sharing mine as well. A few of them even made me dinner to celebrate the completion of my first pair of moccasins.

Along with the weekly meetings, I would often bring my sewing to school and ask the students and teachers to help me learn how to sew my duffle mittens, moccasins, or hair clips. They loved sharing their knowledge with me, and were excited to see that I was interested in their knowledge as well.

Over the three years I lived in Carmacks, I joined the Recreation Board, attended sewing circles on a regular basis, and participated in the majority of community dinners, funerals, and events such as the sweetheart curling bonspiel held every year. By participating in these events I was able to learn about what values are important to the community and more importantly to become accepted as a part of the community itself. This helped me be able to create the athletics programs alongside the community so it also reflected their goals, motives, and morals. Without my participation in events that the community valued, I would have continued to be ostracized and labelled as just another White teacher. My involvement in the community contributed to my self-reactiveness.

9.1.4 Self-reflectiveness

“Through reflective self-consciousness, people evaluate their motivation, values, and the meaning of their life pursuits” (Bandura, 2001, p. 9). Although I reflected on my time in Carmacks as I lived there, I believe that the strongest example of self-reflectiveness is this master’s thesis. I decided to attend graduate school because as I was teaching, coaching, and living in the community I felt like I was missing something. Although I worked hard to be involved in the community, to change how I was teaching and coaching, and to support the

girls on their own journey, I did not fully understand the struggles of the community. I always asked questions of my co-workers and to myself about the school and the community. Such questions included, “Why aren’t more parents involved in the school?” and “Why do so many students not graduate?” and “Why don’t students put more effort into their classes?” The only answer anyone gave me was, “You can’t control that, the community has to want to change. All you can do is teach.” I accepted this as truth on the surface, but somewhere in the pit of my stomach I knew there was so much more to understand. I was hoping that grad school would help me reflect on my time in Carmacks and aid in deepening my understanding of the struggles between the school and the community.

Due to this research project I have changed forever as an individual, teacher, and coach. The most significant change would have to be in the way that I think about rural education. I no longer believe that all I can do is teach. I think there are reasons why Carmacks struggled with the school and the teachers, specifically outsiders, and I now know that it is my responsibility to be aware of the context of schooling in Native communities. I have learned a lot, but I still have a lot to learn.

Reflecting on my time in Carmacks and re-locating myself in the sporting experience of the girls has influenced what types of activities and environments I want to pursue. The most important one is to make sure that this study gets shared with the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations community and school. I feel that over the three years that I lived in Carmacks, along with the two years of grad school, the community (especially the girls) have taught and given me so much. I feel a need to give back in a meaningful way. Part of this is sharing the study, the other part is visiting the community, staying in touch with people who live there, and moving back to the North to continue to live, work, and learn.

9.2 Summary of Findings

After two focus groups and four one-on-one interviews with the girls, their experiences with sport emerged. As I read over the transcripts and discussed emergent themes with the girls, I noticed that their answers focused on stories about sport, not facts or statements. To stay true to the girls' representation of their sporting experiences, I decided to use a narrative inquiry lens to analyze the stories. In the writing and discussion of the stories, four major themes emerged: (1) Hope, (2) Opportunity, (3) Visibility, and (4) Agency. What is interesting about these themes is that they represent the girls' sporting journey from beginning to end. Their stories around hope focus on the first year of playing sports, opportunity focused on the second year, visibility the third year, and finally agency represented where they are presently in their lives (grade 12).

Prior to exploration of the girls' stories through the four themes, the thesis described the school environment before sports. The school had not offered organized sport teams for the seven years preceding my move to the community. The girls describe their school environment before organized sport as shaped by three factors: trust, culture, and lack of opportunity. They describe the skepticism that they have about outsiders coming in to teach at their school and live in their community. They are not quick to trust outsiders, as most do not stay around for very long and they are usually not willing to learn about the culture they are living in. According to the girls, most teachers who come from the outside are there just for the money and they do not care about the community. The girls felt that most outsider teachers leave every weekend to go into Whitehorse just to "escape" the community.

The school was shaped by mistrust and tension between outsiders and community members. Part of the mistrust was because most outsiders did not take the time to learn about

the culture of Carmacks. The girls all described their culture as being an important part of being Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations. They appreciated having Native Language classes in the school and they enjoyed attending a school that gave them an opportunity to express their culture. The fact that outsiders are not part of the culture, nor open to it, adds to the mistrust.

High turnover rates of teachers and lack of funding contributed to what the girls described as a lack of opportunity at the school. They felt that they were stuck in a routine of simply attending school and going home. Every year it was the same thing over and over again. This aided in their feeling of hopelessness about attending school in Carmacks and this is where hope emerged.

9.2.1 Hope

During the first year of sport participation, the girls' stories focused on developing hope individually and as a team. At this time, the girls sought hope by reconceptualizing their identity as females within their community. Sport disrupted their perceptions of what it meant to be a female in their community by giving them confidence in their abilities. They recognized this as important because they felt that sport showed them that they could be powerful agents over their own experiences and that they did not have to fit into typical gender norms within their community. Before sports the girls expressed shared beliefs that men are stronger, wiser, and naturally better at sports and school than women (Interview 2, December 6, 2012). They all felt that Carmacks focused on male sport and limited opportunities for women to participate in sport. For example, in Carmacks the boys had opportunity to participate in hockey, running, curling, and soccer and the girls were limited to running. They felt that as females in their community they did not have a lot of options

outside of typical gender roles such as cooking, cleaning, and babysitting. Sport presented an opportunity to challenge gender norms (Paraschak, 1990) and reshape how the girls felt about themselves as females.

During the first year of participating in sport, the girls were exposed to what Paraschak (1991) refers to as contested terrain. Sport was seen as a masculine entity within the community. When the girls entered it, they challenged the masculine sporting context and reshaped what it meant to be female within their community. Paraschak (1991) would say that the girls used sport as a form of self-determination. But, self-determination is met with resistance or control from the dominant culture and it is here that contested terrain develops. When the girls' self-determination was met with resistance, they bonded together and supported each other as a collective. For example, during the sergeant story where Kyra stood up to a sergeant from Yellowknife, the team all supported her act of self-determination. The strength of the team was proven again through the story "Boys versus Girls" where despite losing a basketball game against the boys in the community, the girls focused on their own strengths and successes outside of the masculine context of winning (Nelson, 1994).

The girls' strength as a team helped them maintain and develop their hope despite disempowering circumstances, such as losing against the boys. The development of hope helped them view their experiences in a different light and understand the context of their struggles. Hope marked the beginning of a journey of self-discovery for the team as well as myself.

9.2.2 Opportunity

Although the girls were presented with opportunities to leave their community and attend sporting events, they did not feel motivated to embrace them during their first year. Kelly (2009) discussed the loss that is often embedded in many rural communities. Loss can take the form of what the girls recognize as “budget cuts,” “lack of funding from Whitehorse,” and “teachers leaving quickly” (Interview 1, November 26, 2012). Outsiders’ perceptions of rural communities being losers prevented the girls from wanting to play against other sport teams for the fear that they would lose and reinforce the loser stereotype. Learning to lose played a large role in further developing hope and having confidence to take hold of opportunities that once may have been intimidating. Sport allowed the girls to think critically about loss and develop a sense of belonging through a shared knowledge of what loss meant to them as a team. It was here, during the second year of sports, that they were able to seize the first big opportunity, attending an Aboriginal basketball tournament in Vancouver. Despite the lack of funding and support, the girls fundraised within their community and raised enough funds to be able to attend the basketball tournament.

Upon leaving their community, the girls expressed fear of entering into the unfamiliar. Corbett (2000) would say that the girls took a risk by leaving their community, but at the same time it made room for opportunity. A major risk identified by the girls was a fear of being misunderstood by outsiders. This fear became a reality when the girls visited the Northern House around the time of the Paralympics. Here, they saw the misrepresentation of Northern culture, which was represented as Inuit culture (seals, igloos, and fur coats). At the same time that their fears were affirmed, this experience opened up opportunity for the girls to become more aware of what Van Ingen and Halas (2006) refer to as the “contact

zone.” The girls were presented with an opportunity to understand what happens when two worldviews, in this case Native and Western, come together and struggle with one another. They began to think about how the Western ways of knowing/being affect their community and they began to think of ways to resist further assimilation by Western culture. This was demonstrated when Kyra and Acaycia took the opportunity to demonstrate Dene games at the Northern House. They got up on stage and began to demonstrate before the worker had a chance to explain anything. The girls took ownership over the “contact zone” and reshaped it.

Upon returning to their community, the girls recognized that although they had changed, their community had stayed the same. Their success as athletes remained dependent on whether or not they won. The girls still had to work on gaining visibility inside and outside of their community.

9.2.3 Visibility

Entering the third year of sports, the girls had gained an understanding of forces that shaped their community and in turn their own identities. Despite the successes that the girls had in terms of fundraising, developing as a team and growing as individuals, the fact that they continued to lose prevailed. The girls felt they had to prove their worth to themselves and to their community, and the only way to do so was through winning.

The construct of winning goes back to the creation of organized sport by and for White middle-class men (Dworkin & Messner, 2002). To maintain its power, sport remains dominated by forms of masculinity, which includes competitiveness, aggression, and winning (Wellard, 2002). On one hand, the girls being female athletes had to find a way to navigate through a male sporting environment and validate their presence there. On the other, the girls, being Native, had to find a way to shake the loser stereotype that they felt was

associated with their race and rurality. Kelly (2009) notes that the successes of Aboriginal peoples are rarely celebrated, which reinforces feelings of loss associated with being Aboriginal and living in a rural community.

It was important to the girls to gain visibility as Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation females living in Carmacks, and they knew the only way to do this was by playing the Western “game” and winning. The girls were able to do this by winning the Territorial Basketball Championships at the end of their third year of playing sports. By being the first rural community to ever win the basketball championships, they disrupted outsiders’ perceptions of loss associated with the girls being Native, female, and living in a rural community. At the same time they disrupted perceptions of being female by winning in front of the boys. Now that they had won by the rules of the dominant culture, the boys and outsiders were forced to recognize their successes.

This is not the end to the girls’ struggles, as they will still have to deal with loss, sexism, and racism throughout their lives, but by gaining hope, opportunity, and visibility they were able to become agents over their experiences. Their awareness of how their sporting experiences have shaped them and how they fit into the world has helped them to develop agency, both collectively and individually. Having agency over their experiences will help guide them throughout the rest of their lives as they become able to make decisions in the best interest of themselves and their community.

9.2.4 Agency

At the time that I interviewed the girls they were in grade 12. When they talked about their lives after playing sports for three years they discussed how they have gained control over their experiences. Bandura (2001) would say that they have become agents of their

experiences. Just as I have analyzed my own journey through Bandura's (2001) core features of human agency (intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness), I have analyzed the girls as well. Each of the girls demonstrated the core features based on their individual needs/wants and beliefs.

All four girls show intentionality, because they have action plans set out to achieve their goals of moving on in the future. They all intend to graduate from high school and start college or university. Jade and Carol want to begin by attending Yukon College so that they can be close to family and community. Kyra and Acaycia aspire to become Physical Education teachers and eventually want to return to their community to use what they have learned to benefit the community of Carmacks.

Throughout the three years of playing sports, the girls had to work on ways to overcome sexist and racist situations. At first it was quite a challenge as they had no coping skills and initially their reaction was to never leave their community. However, sport gave them a way to challenge these inequities. They developed hope and confidence as individuals and as a team. The girls had gained confidence in their ability to initiate change and navigate themselves through the barriers they could possibly come up against. They have developed forethought (Bandura, 2001).

The girls were able to understand the risks and opportunities that may arise as they choose to leave or not leave their communities. They described coping strategies that will help them push through the barriers and achieve their goals. One example of a coping strategy is how Acaycia and Kyra use the word "Native." They use it as a way to connect to other Aboriginal people who are not from their community. The girls use the word Native as a form of resistance to the dominant culture and as a way to maintain and strengthen their

identities as Native people. This is the main reason for my use of the word Native throughout this thesis.

The girls had coping strategies in place and the ability to predict what might come their way, and now they had the ability to react to obstacles. They have the ability to make decisions that would best benefit them. For example, both Acaycia and Kyra tried out for the basketball team in Whitehorse. Kyra felt like that was not a priority for her whereas Acaycia felt like it was, so Acaycia stuck it out, and Kyra went on to pursue other things that interested her. Acaycia joining basketball and Kyra not joining is an example of self-reflectiveness. The girls both weighed the pros and cons of the situation and made a decision based on their needs/values at that time. Self-reflectiveness is also seen in Jade and Carol's decision to go to school close to home at Yukon College because they both believed that it would be the best for themselves and their families. They wanted to feel connected to their own culture, and for them this meant being close to their community.

9.2.5 Looking back and moving forward

Reflecting back on the three years during which the girls played sports together it seems that collective agency motivated them to continue despite challenging circumstances, such as the stink bomb incident. Now in grade 12, the girls have each developed different ways of being agents over their experiences and have developed different goals. However, their ability to pursue their goals contributed to their self-efficacy, which partly developed during their sporting experience. For Acaycia and Jade, self-efficacy continues to be largely rooted in sports, whereas Carol and Kyra have used their agency in other avenues to achieve their goals. An important part of Kyra's self-efficacy is being part of what she refers to as

her “Native gang.” The collective agency of her group is what gives her strength to pursue her goals and fight back during challenging circumstances.

The girls’ journey is not over and although they have developed confidence and overcome barriers, the struggle still persists. Issues with the boys in the community as well as outsiders’ perceptions are something that the girls felt they will have deal with all of their lives. But, having awareness of how these things affect them and how they can navigate and challenge these assumptions is what gives them hope to continue to pursue their goals. They are no longer passive recipients of dominant culture. They have become agents over their own experiences.

9.3 Implications and Areas of Further Research

The following four key areas emerged from my study and have implications for teaching practice, policy, and further research:

- (1) Teaching physical education and coaching practices.
- (2) Teacher preparation.
- (3) Further research into Intersectionality of Aboriginal Identity.
- (4) Hiring and retention policies.

Each area will now be discussed by drawing on examples from this study that support the need for these considerations.

9.3.1 Teaching physical education and coaching practices

Both teaching and coaching are traditionally focused on skill development and outcomes such as winning, which are embedded with Western notions of sport (Wellard, 2002). This study speaks to the importance of changing one’s teaching/coaching practices to

fit the situation and it offers insight into the neglected (emotional) aspects of sporting experiences.

When I arrived in Carmacks, I brought with me my Western notions of coaching/teaching. I began coaching by focusing primarily on skill development and getting the girls to understand game constructions, such as rules. After the stink bomb incident, it became clear to me that these were concepts that I thought were important for the girls to learn. It wasn't what they thought they needed or wanted from sport. It was here that I changed my coaching practice and began to listen to the girls about what was important to them. The focus went from me as a coach to us as a team. As the girls felt that their needs were being addressed, they began to engage more in skill development and their understanding of game constructs improved. As the students were afforded more autonomy in class and sport practices, they began to develop trust with each other as well as with me. Having trust between teammates (including myself) was a key piece that allowed the girls to feel confident to try new skills and make mistakes while learning. Thus, skill development followed as trust was established.

As I entered a new place I was required to adjust my teaching and coaching practices to the needs/wants of the community in order to engage them in school and sports. Often in sports, the public sees only the result of participating, which is winning or losing (Wellard, 2002). Winning was important to the girls because it was viewed as the only way to prove their success and legitimize their sporting experience to those outside of the team (community members and outsiders). I would argue that this has to change if as coaches and teachers we want our students to be physically active outside of high school. More attention

is needed surrounding struggle, resistance, and self-determination through sport so that experiences are legitimized and valued by the ones who participate in it.

It is a reality that the majority of students who graduate high school will not be involved in competitive high conditioning sports (Mandigo, 2012), so why are we teaching Physical Education and coaching as if this were the case? I think it is necessary for Physical Education teachers/coaches to shift their teaching practices away from a focus on skill development and more towards developing agency (individually and collectively). This may result in students being agents over their experiences instead of their experiences controlling their destinies (Bandura, 2001). Through the stories of the four LSCFN girls, it became evident that sport was not about developing skills or winning, it was about self-discovery and developing confidence to become agents over their own lives. It turned their feeling of hopelessness into hope and gave them confidence in their abilities as individuals as well as a team/group. The positive sporting experience that resulted in agency for the girls is transferable to life outside of school, whereas sport-specific skills are only relevant in that sport context. The connection between school and life is important to consider when teaching Physical Education or coaching organized sport within a school setting.

9.3.2 Teacher preparation

Teacher preparation is referring to how teachers are educated to enter the teaching profession. I argue that the majority of teacher education programs take place in urban centres and therefore the teaching practices are geared towards teaching in that setting. It is rare to find teacher education programs that educate about teaching in a rural community. In this study, the girls talk about how outsiders come to their community to teach and how they do not trust them. Mistrust is shaped by high teacher turnover rates and outsiders who come

in to “change” the community in terms of what they believe is best for their school. All four of the girls mentioned how principals have come in and implemented rules that aren’t important to their school or community (Interview 1, November 26, 2012).

Based on this study, it becomes evident that there is a need for teachers planning to teach in a rural community to be more prepared so that their time in the community can be beneficial for them and for the community members. There are three important considerations in terms of preparing teachers to enter a rural community (specifically an Native community):

- (1) Questioning Curriculum. There needs to be awareness and understanding of the construction of knowledge within rural schools. In terms of the types of knowledge represented in the school system, it is important to be aware that the majority of the curriculum taught in rural schools in Canada is designed in urban centres (Smith, 2005). The knowledge that is being legitimized in the schools often is not the knowledge that is deemed important by the community. There is a disconnect between what is taught and what is important in the students’ lives. I would propose that teachers planning to enter rural communities should be aware of and question what knowledge is taught within the schools. Weariness around implementing strategies that are supposed to improve the education of Native people, such as culturally sensitive curriculum, should be acknowledged, especially when the strategy was not created or designed with the community in question. Teachers entering rural communities, particularly Native ones, need to be able to question the curriculum implemented in the school and work with the community to integrate community ways of knowing and being.

- (2) Place Sensitivity. It is important for teachers entering rural communities to understand the significance of “place.” When I entered Carmacks, I entered a “place” and as a result altered it just by being there. When one enters a place, the dynamics of that place shift (Casey, 2011). If teachers are not aware of the importance of place and what it means to live in the community they enter, they may view where they are from as superior. For example, often rural communities’ options in regards to sport and education are limited by size, weather, and lack of funding (Naylor & Scott, 2009; Smith, 1993). The girls would agree with this, as they recognized that their community was shaped by loss or lack of options/opportunity. They all say that the cultural practices of their community was what made them Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations. Knowing what it meant to live in Carmacks strengthened their identities. However, in relation to sport the girls described their lives in Carmacks as being full of lack or loss. They focused on what they did not have, which was funding, instead of on what they had, which was rich culture. Their culture was not valued by outsiders or the school, and therefore they felt it did not matter outside of their community. As an outsider coming into a rural community, it is important to commit oneself to the community by staying for as long as possible, being involved in the community and being open to new ways of knowing and being. One has to learn what it means to live in that place or community in order to understand what it means to work there.
- (3) Self-Assessment. A self- assessment of motivations for wanting to teach in a rural community is necessary. My last recommendation for teacher preparation requires educators to seriously consider their motivations for wanting to teach in a rural

community. This is something that I did not do prior to moving to the Yukon. It was not until I entered graduate school that I reflected on my motivations and experiences in Carmacks. It is important to avoid the “starry-eyed” notion of going somewhere to help people, as one is assuming that the community in question needs outside help. The teacher already believes that they have something that the community does not. The community is already framed in loss before the teacher enters (Kelly, 2009). By questioning your motives for wanting to teach in a rural community, you can increase your awareness of what you may bring to the community before you enter. If motivations are not clear, it often results in teachers leaving the community quickly or essentializing the people who live there (St. Denis, 2011). For these reasons, the girls felt they could not trust teachers who came into their community. Trust is more likely to develop when one’s motivations for teaching in that place are clear not only to oneself but to the community members as well.

9.3.3 Intersectionality

Indigenous scholars such as Susan Dion (2009) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005) emphasize that many studies do not address the intersectionality of Aboriginal identity. This is problematic because studies then continue to colonize and de-humanize Native people. I would argue that this statement supports the findings of my study. With every year the girls played sports, they became increasingly aware of various aspects of their identities. During the first year, when hope was focused on, the girls became aware of being female within their community. In the second year, the girls became aware of how outsiders viewed their Nateness. This became especially clear during their visit to the Northern House. During their third year, the girls began to notice how different aspects, such as their gender, race, and

where they are from (Carmacks), all intersect each other and shape their experiences in this world. This became clearer for them as they fought for visibility within the dominant sporting culture of Whitehorse. Presently the girls talk about the difficulty of having to “walk in two worldviews” (Western and LSCFN) and learn what it means to be a LSCFN female from Carmacks and at the same time be a Canadian (shaped by Western context).

During this ongoing process of walking in two worlds the girls find themselves in a world where the intersections of their identity and experiences are ignored along with the colonial history (St. Denis, 2011). I would argue that further research is needed that explores the intersectionality of Native identity from the perspective of the people themselves, in order to begin to understand the experiences of Native people living in two worlds. This may shed further light on schooling experiences of Native youth and help raise awareness of the ongoing colonization that affects Aboriginal people and their communities.

9.3.4 Hiring and retention policy considerations

The girls put emphasis on the importance of who comes to teach in their community. The values and talents that the teacher holds largely influence the schooling experience of the students (Dion, 2009). Considering this, it is important that hiring and retention policy surrounding teachers in rural communities needs to reflect this concern. Policy continues to be largely embedded with the power-bloc where the values of the dominant culture shape what is represented (Paraschak, 1991). The dominant culture in most cases continues to be urban centres situated in the South. In order for policy to benefit the people it is intended for, those people must be included in the process of creating the policy. In this case, policy geared towards hiring and retention of teachers in rural communities needs to include the communities themselves in policy creation. This is the only way to ensure that the policy

reflects the needs of the communities that it is intended to benefit. In the case of Native communities, it is important for the communities to have ownership over policies that affect them in order to avoid the further essentialization of their culture/needs by Western epistemologies (Paraschak, 1991).

9.4 Reflection

The emergent findings from this study allowed for insight into my research question and sub questions. To conclude, I will use my sub questions as a way to reflect on the study as an entirety. They are as follows:

- (1) How can physical education and sports play a role in the process of empowering LSCFN girls?
 - (2) How can physical education and sports aid in the construction of the identities of LSCFN people within their own community?
- (1) How can physical education and sports play a role in the process of empowering LSCFN girls?

The study revealed that the most empowering aspect of playing sports for the girls was being part of a team. Their identity as a team allowed collective agency to develop as they all had shared intention, knowledge and experiences (Bandura, 2001). At a time where personal agency was low, being a part of a team empowered them to pursue their goals and deal with challenges that may arise, as they could support each other in their endeavours. However, it is important to remember that being on a team does not directly result in collective agency. The stories of the girls coupled with my own self-reflection suggested that collective agency developed as the team struggled proudly through disempowering circumstances. This includes navigated through, and resisting misconstrued perceptions of

them as LSCFN people by those outside of their community. Sport offered the girls a unique opportunity to be a part of a team. This helped create a sense of belonging and self-efficacy which empowered the girls in various aspects of their lives on and off of the court.

(2) How can physical education and sports aid in the construction of the identities of LSCFN people within their own community?

Physical education and sports holds the power to influence many parts of the human identity. In this study, the girls explored how sport had influenced many aspects of their identities. This included being female, Native and living in a rural community in the North. Although the girls did not discuss intersectionality directly, they acknowledged that these aspects of their identities are connected and work together to create their realities. By representing their community through sports, the girls were able to reconceptualise various aspects of their own identities, such as being female, Native or living in a rural community. This has resulted in the girls becoming role models and advocates for other community members. All four of the girls want to give back to their community through avenues such as coaching and teaching.

Participating in sports has not only strengthened the girls' individual identities, but it has allowed them to challenge negative perceptions of youth and reconceptualise their own roles within their community. As a result, they are motivated to make change and take on leadership roles. Although their time playing school sports has come to an end, the effects of sport participation will continue to shape/influence their own lives, and the lives of other LSCFN community members as the girls' voices will no longer be undermined.

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Appendices

Appendix A Brief Overview of the Yukon Territory

Languages

There are eight language groups among Yukon First Nations. There are two major language families: Athabaskan and Inland Tlingit. Athabaskan is subdivided into seven dialects: Gwich'in, Hän, Tr'ondek Hwech'in, Upper Tanana, Northern and Southern Tutchone, Tagish, and Kaska (Council of Yukon First Nations, 2013). See Appendix B for map of Language groups.

The Gold Rush

In 1898 the Gold Rush occurred in the Klondike on the homelands of the Tr'ondek Hwech'in in what is known today as Dawson City. Forty thousand White prospectors arrived in the Yukon, all seeking riches. They made their way from the Southern Yukon through Tagish, Southern Tutchone, Northern Tutchone, and Tr'ondek Hwech'in territories. When the gold seekers left, the Yukon was left alone and was of no interest to anyone other than the First Nation groups until the building of the Alaska Highway (Council of Yukon First Nations, 2013).

The Alaska Highway

In 1942 Americans built the Alaska Highway connecting Alaska to the rest of the United States. The highway brought twelve thousand American soldiers into the villages and the town of Whitehorse. The soldiers brought with them diseases, which soon evolved into epidemics such as whooping cough and tuberculosis. The diseases wiped out an estimated 50 percent of the population from the time of initial contact to the time of the highway completion (Council of Yukon First Nations, 2013).

Mission Schools

The Catholic Church in Lower Post, British Columbia (BC), and the Chootla Anglican School in Carcross saw three generations of Yukon First Nations come through their doors. It was the law that Status Indians send their children to the Mission Schools. The law was enforced by the RCMP. Children from all over the territory were sent to Carcross where they remained for 10 years or so without seeing their families. The schools no longer exist (Council of Yukon First Nations, 2013).

Appendix B Yukon Languages and Communities

Figure 1. Yukon Languages and Communities



Source: Yukon Native Language Centre, 2013. Reproduced with permission.

Appendix C Demographics of the Yukon

Table 1. Demographics of the Yukon

Communities	Population September 2012	Language Group	First Nations Group	Agreements
Whitehorse (Capital)	27,678	Southern Tutchone	Kwanlin Dun First Nation	Signed self-government agreement in 2003
Watson Lake	1,509	Kaska	Liard First Nations	Signed self-government agreement in 1993
Teslin	453	Tlingit	Tlingit	Signed self-government agreement in 1993
Tagish	250	Tagish	Carcross/Tagish First Nation	Signed self-government agreement in 1993
Carcross	431	Tagish	Carcross/Tagish First Nation	Signed self-government agreement in 1993
Haines Junction	830	Southern Tutchone	Champagne/Aishihik First Nation	Signed self-government agreement in 1993 (one of the first)
Beaver Creek	116	Upper Tanana	White River First Nation	Has not signed their self- government agreement and remain under the Indian Act
Destruction Bay	49			
Burwash Landing	94	Southern Tutchone	Klaune First Nation	Self-governing since 1993
Carmacks	524	Northern Tutchone	Little Salmon Carmacks First Nations	Self-governing since 1993
Faro	386	English		Not a First Nations community
Ross River	370	Kaska	Ross River Dene Council	Under the Indian Act
Pelly Crossing	327	Northern Tutchone	Selkirk First Nations	Self-governing since 1993

Communities	Population September 2012	Language Group	First Nations Group	Agreements
Dawson City	1,989	Hän	Hän Hwëch'in- "People who live along the (Yukon) River"	Signed self-government agreement in 1998
Mayo	462	Northern Tutchone	Na-Cho Nyak Dun- "Big River People"	Self-governing since 1993
Old Crow	243	Gwich'in	Van Tat Gwich'in- "People who live among the lakes"	Self-governing since 1993
Other (Champagne, Elsa, Johnson's Crossing, Keno City, Stewart Crossing and Swift River)	72	Northern Tutchone & Southern Tutchone		Self-governing since 1993
Total:	36, 304			

Sources: Yukon Bureau of Statistics, © Government of Yukon 2013; Yukon Native Language Centre, 2013. Reproduced with permission.

Appendix D Group Interview Questions

- 1) Can you tell me about your experience attending school in Carmacks?
- 2) Can you tell me about your experience with athletics in Carmacks?
- 3) Can you tell me how you feel your participation in athletics affected or changed your life in school?

Appendix E One-on-One Interview Questions

- 1) Can you tell me about what kind of role the school played in your life as you were
- 2) Can you tell me about your experience with athletics before I arrived to teach in your community?
- 3) Can you tell me what school was like for you before you had athletics offered in your school?
- 4) Thinking back to your three years participating in athletics in Carmacks, what are some of your favourite memories?
- 5) How do you think you changed during the three years of participating in athletics?
- 6) How do athletics play a role in your life now, if any?
- 7) What were some of the challenges of participating in athletics in Carmacks?
- 8) Do you think that athletics impacted the school? If yes, how and if not, why not?