

**A STUDY EXPLORING INDIGENOUS WOMEN ATHLETES' EXPERIENCES
WITH PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT**

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Abstract

This research project sought to explore how Indigenous women athletes experience physical activity and sport through an Indigenous feminisms lens. Five of the ninety-four Calls to Action that have come out of the Final Report of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) are directly related to sport and physical activity. This means that sport and physical activity are positioned as important to processes of reconciliation in Canada. Indigenous participation and achievement in sport and physical activity have largely been ignored in Canadian history and excluded from historical narrative as a result of colonialism and cultural erasure (Hall, 2013). Indigenous women, in particular, lie at an intersection that results in distinctly different experiences due to the impacts of gendered colonialism on Indigenous communities. This research study employed methods guided by community-based participatory research, in partnership with the Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Circle (ISPARC), conducting virtual focus groups with Indigenous women athletes (17-19 years) who reside in rural or remote areas and are part of Team BC for the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG). This study explored the following research questions: What are the experiences of young Indigenous women engaged in high performance mainstream sport generally, and Indigenous sport more specifically? What do young Indigenous women want/need in terms of their current and future experiences in sport and physical activity? Using thematic analysis, the research study found that Indigenous girls and women's experiences are still impacted by colonial structures of racism, classism and sexism. However, these oppressive systems can be dismantled through decolonial practices of relationality, intergenerational support, and increasing Indigenous representation of Indigenous girls and women at all levels of physical activity and sport. This research study also found that physical activity can act as a site of resurgence and

holistic wellbeing. This study is significant as it helps fill a gap in the existing scholarly literature on Indigenous women's experiences in physical activity and sport. Moreover, this study also has possible applied significance as it has the potential to inform culturally-relevant sport and recreation programming for Indigenous girls and women.

Lay Summary

This study explored the physical activity and sport experiences of Indigenous women athletes ages 17-19 who reside in rural areas and were selected for Team BC for the North American Indigenous Games. This research study partnered with the Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council to better understand Indigenous women athletes' experiences through focus groups. Their stories shared that Indigenous girls and women experience distinct forms of oppression due to colonialism. However, their participation in physical activity and sport can also promote individual and community cultural strength and wellbeing. By promoting Indigenous values, increasing Indigenous representation, and creating more inclusive opportunities, recreation and sport providers can positively influence Indigenous girls and women's experiences in physical activity and sport.

Preface

This study was approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board - H21-00001.

The content of this thesis is the unpublished work of Alyssa Reyes.

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List of Abbreviations

BC	British Columbia
BCAAFC	BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres
FNHC	First Nations Health Council
ILTPD	Indigenous Long-Term Participant Development Pathway
ISPARC	Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity & Recreation Council
MNBC	Métis Nation BC
NAIG	North American Indigenous Games
OCAP	Ownership, Control, Access and Possession
TRC	Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this research project is to explore the physical activity and sport experiences of rural Indigenous women athletes in British Columbia (BC). Using an Indigenous feminisms lens, in partnership with the Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity & Recreation Council (ISPARC), this thesis sought to understand any potential influences and structures in place that effect physical activity and sport participation amongst rural Indigenous women between the ages of 17-19. The emerging themes of these athletes' experiences affirm the mission of ISPARC and call upon Canadian governments and sport and recreation providers at all levels to further the development of Indigenous physical activity and sport broadly, and Indigenous girls and women's sport specifically.

With the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (2015), organizations across the nation are attempting to work to implement strategies and plans to continue the journey of truth and reconciliation in addressing the historical and ongoing effects of settler colonialism. The mandate of the TRC is, on the one hand, to “reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and ongoing legacy of the church run residential schools,” while on the other hand, “guide and inspire a process of truth and healing toward reconciliation” (TRC, 2015, p. 23). Sport and physical activity have been identified as an important part of both the truth-telling and reconciliation process, with 5 of the 94 Calls to Action being directly related to sport. In 2019, the BC Government adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in an effort to move towards reconciliation (BC Government, 2020). Article 31 of UNDRIP calls for the Indigenous rights to “maintain control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledges and traditional cultural expressions...including sports and traditional games” (United Nations Development Programme,

2007, p. 11). These provincial, federal and international documents are aligned in their focus on Indigenous self-determination and petition for truth-telling as a pathway to reconciliation. Indigenous sport and physical activity have been identified as critical to processes of decolonization and Indigenous resurgence. However, realizing the possibilities of Indigenous-centred sport for reconciliation is not necessarily straightforward.

Leanne Simpson (2018) states, for reconciliation to be meaningful it must be adopted broadly to undo all the political, systemic and environmental harm on Indigenous peoples. The TRC and UNDRIP have sparked thought and action amongst recreation and sport providers as to how their work can positively influence truth and reconciliation. Recreation and sport organizations can potentially play a large part in providing health and wellness education, planning and programs for their respective communities, including Indigenous communities, which means that they can also contribute to decolonization. However, decolonization through sport and recreation is never guaranteed, as we must remember that sport has been part of the process of settler colonialism (Forsyth, 2013; Norman et al., 2019).

This community-based participatory research project explores Indigenous women's experiences in high performance sport in partnership with ISPARC. ISPARC is comprised of the First Nations Health Council (FNHC), BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC) and the Métis Nation BC (MNBC), and is dedicated to improving Indigenous health and wellbeing through the implementation of the Aboriginal Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity Strategy (ISPARC, n.d.). ISPARC promotes and supports Indigenous sport development and their athletes' experiences can help shape recommendations for mainstream sport and recreation institutions to better support Indigenous participants. In Canada, sport has been a vehicle for reproducing settler colonialism as well as Indigenous reclamation; however,

Indigenous sport participation and accomplishment has also been largely neglected from Western/mainstream historical narratives (Downey, 2018; Hall, 2013). The layering of the intersection of gender and the colonial impact on Indigenous gender identities, creates a compounded negative effect on the experiences of Indigenous women (Giles, 2013). These experiences are missing in academic literature, and this research looks to help fill the void.

To lay groundwork for this research, the following terms require definition: physical activity, sport, Indigenous sport stream and Mainstream sport participation. “Physical activity” is defined as any bodily movement that results in energy expenditure (Caspersen, Powell & Christenson, 1985). For this research, sport will relate to any physical activity that can be completed as a team or individually that has a component of competition. Sport participation can be divided into two different streams as defined by the Indigenous Long-Term Participant Development Pathway (ILTPD), a resource developed by Sport for Life with the assistance of ISPARC: The Indigenous Sport Stream and Mainstream Sport Stream (Sport for Life, 2019). The Indigenous Sport Stream consists of any Indigenous organized physical activity and sport from playground to Indigenous high-level sport (Sport for Life, 2019). Mainstream Sport consists of all physical activity and sport external to Indigenous communities and culture (Sport for Life, 2019). Elder Alex Nelson coins the term ‘double helix’ to describe the two streams that are at once separate, but overlapping and cross-fertilizing (as cited in Paraschak, Forsyth, and Heine, 2005). The two streams are interconnected and interdependent and an individual may move between streams throughout their lifetime (Sport for Life, 2019).

The ILTPD stresses that in order to develop Indigenous youth into successful athletes and long-term participants, mainstream and Indigenous sport organizations must work in tandem as a coordinated and connected system to allow for Indigenous participants to move between sport

systems (Sport for Life, 2019). Recreation and sport organizations are included in the ILTPD as collaborators through this work, as these organizations can play a large role in reconciliation and facilitating positive physical activity experiences for Indigenous peoples.

This exploratory research study examines the physical activity experiences of Indigenous women with a focus on Indigenous women athletes from rural BC between the ages of 17-19. For this research project, the participants were recruited from the 2020 U19 North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) Team BC. Victoria Paraschak describes NAIG as a “sporting competition [...] that Aboriginal youth from across North America have access to an international sport opportunity where pride in their Aboriginal identity is fostered – an outcome unattainable for many Aboriginal athletes in mainstream sport” (Paraschak, 2013, pg. 105). ISPARC plays a role in team selection and the organization of Indigenous sport stream Team BC for provincial competitions, including NAIG. Athletes are selected from across BC to compete in individual and team sports, bringing together a wide variety of Indigenous identities and experiences.

The Team BC athletes were selected as research participants as they are a group of women who have participated in physical activity and sport at a high level. These women have arguably had positive experiences in physical activity and sport to maintain long-term participation at a national level. Themes can be drawn from their experiences in order to formulate recommendations to recreation and sport providers to further Indigenous participation and progress towards reconciliation and Indigenous self-determination. In addition to the applied implications of this study, this research helps fill a gap in the existing research by exploring the experiences of Indigenous women athletes within a Canadian context, an area that is generally underexplored.

Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2012), contends that non-Indigenous researchers can support Indigenous peoples in academia by contributing to Indigenous literature through Indigenous-centred research methods and worldviews. Cooky (2017) emphasizes the need for public scholarly work within the realm of sport and exercise science. Together, these scholars validate this research as I contribute to a gap in Indigenous-centred academic literature in the realm of public scholarly work in sport and exercise science. The gap identified is explored with the following research questions: What are the experiences of young Indigenous women engaged in high performance mainstream sport generally, and Indigenous sport more specifically? What do young Indigenous women want/need in terms of their current and future experiences in sport and PA?

Theoretical Approach

I am exploring these research questions with an Indigenous feminisms theoretical lens. As a non-Indigenous researcher, to apply Indigenous theory in a good way, I must align my epistemology, methodology, and axiology in a way that centres Indigenous worldviews and commits to relational accountability (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Although Western critical theory is, in many ways, aligned with Indigenous theory and makes space for Indigenous theory in qualitative research, it is not sufficient on its own (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Thus, I am guided by the thoughts and ideas of Indigenous academics such as Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Margaret Kovach, Audra Simpson, Andrea Smith, Leroy Little Bear, Jo-Ann Archibald, Amy Parent, and Shawn Wilson to navigate my Indigenous theory.

The Indigenous values that inform my theory are relational accountability, respect, responsibility, relevance, and reciprocity, especially as I employ Indigenous conversational methods (Archibald & Parent, 2019; Kovach, 2019; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2008).

Wilson's (2008) identification of relational accountability to community holds as an overarching value that guides my theory and research process. I am respectful of the Indigenous communities I have been working with and their stories and experiences shared. I hold myself relationally responsible to the ISPARC community, their cultures, protocols, values, stories, and experiences. I hold reverent the culture, protocols, stories and experiences shared with me and work to ensure the project and its subsequent results and recommendations are relevant to the community. Embodying these Indigenous values in the research process has helped to ensure as a non-Indigenous researcher, I do not perpetuate the harm that Western research has imposed on Indigenous communities.

Years of colonialism and research have frequently failed to improve conditions of the Indigenous people who are researched (Simpson & Smith, 2014, Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2018). Western academic writing and the typical objective to define an end result completely contradict the Indigenous oral culture and value in process (Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2000). It is necessary to decolonize the research process by re-centering Indigenous worldviews and values to ensure anti-oppressive research practices (Kovach, 2009; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). It is with an Indigenous feminisms lens that this research acknowledges the pervasive impacts of gendered colonialism on Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous feminisms, specifically, highlights the inequities as a result of gendered colonialism (Simpson & Smith, 2014). Indigenous feminisms acknowledges the impact of colonialism on Indigenous women and the settler violence to their culture, bodies and land that are compounded due to multiple levels of oppression (Simpson & Smith, 2014). Indigenous feminisms, in particular, is not classified by one set of values and perspectives as a multitude of definitions of Indigenous feminism exist. For this research, Indigenous feminism will be defined

as valuing the recognition of everything and everyone equally (Million, 2013). This extends past the “white women’s movement” that calls for solely white women’s rights, disregarding women of colour and queer identities (Maracle, 1996). Indigenous feminisms theory considers the compounded colonial impacts that Indigenous women experience based on their layered identities and this lens is applied to this research’s epistemology, methodology, and axiology.

Researcher Positionality

As a settler engaging in Indigenous research with an aim to destabilize settler colonialism, it is critical to be reflexive in both recognizing one’s own positionality as well as the lands on which one lives. I acknowledge that I have the privilege to live, learn and work on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish and Musqueam peoples. As part of this privilege, I understand that I have a responsibility to work to disrupt the settler colonial normative. As someone who works in health promotion and recreation, I see the pivotal role recreation can play in decolonization. One definition of decolonization positions it as the “expansive collection of activist practices and ideas that works to destabilize the authority of [settler colonialism], mute the expression of its power, and open up possibilities for alternative ways of being in the world that emerge from Indigenous worldviews” (McKegney & Phillips, 2018, p. 98).

I am continuously grateful for my ability to hold space on this land and acknowledge that I benefit from colonial practices. I am non-Indigenous to Turtle Island, and a first-generation settler to Vancouver, Canada. I have a complex relationship with settler colonialism as someone who holds heritage from the Philippines. The Philippines, its people, and in extension my family, have been greatly impacted by colonialism and feel the effects to this day.

While I do not share the same worldview as Canadian Indigenous peoples, I recognize and have an empathetic understanding of the effects of colonialism, power and racism through my own generational experiences with colonialism as a Filipino. My coursework in Indigenous feminisms and Indigenous methodologies have provided me with a basic understanding of Indigenous worldviews. This background course work, my work experience at UBC in collaboration with the UBC Equity and Inclusion Office, and my community-based participatory research methodology will help to ensure I approach my research with an equity-lens and employ anti-oppressive research practices. This does not negate the fact that I likely have an unconscious bias as a new settler to Canada and it is important to acknowledge I am a heterosexual, cis-gendered, able bodied and economically stable graduate student and researcher. However, my understanding of an Indigenous worldview and gender identity will allow me to explore the physical activity experiences of Indigenous women and my experience as a recreation provider will allow me to translate these experiences to other recreation providers. These findings may be useful in empowering and informing recreation providers to work and collaborate with Indigenous women with the goal of actualizing self-determination over their physical activity and sport practices.

Schinke and Blodgett (2016) describe this acknowledgement and reflexivity as a researcher's critical self-awareness of values, bias, power and worldviews. This exploration of my researcher reflexivity will help me to unpack my own worldview, and the values and beliefs embedded in that worldview, which are critical components of anti-oppressive research (Potts & Brown, 2005). This anti-oppressive approach goes some way towards helping to ensure I do little to no harm both in the immediate and long-term time frames on my participants and the community. As Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) suggests in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, as a non-

Indigenous researcher to Canada, it is my role to amplify Indigenous voices and foster pathways for the further development of Indigenous research capacities in Western Academia if needed and promote and mentor other Indigenous academics.

Justification and Relevance

Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) also depicts an Indigenous research agenda as that of a circular figure with four directional tides representing decolonization, healing, transformation and mobilization processes. Healing encompasses physical, spiritual, psychological, social, collective and restoration approaches (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). While physical research lies within the healing process, Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) explains that these four processes influence, impact and incorporate each other. This indicates physical activity and physical activity research can play a role in decolonization.

Sport and physical activity have played a key role in settler colonialism, but they have been and continue to be, cultural forms that have been used to resist aspects of colonization and support positive identities and community formations. The edited book *Aboriginal Peoples and Sport in Canada* (Forsyth & Giles, 2013) includes a range of chapters that illuminate and explore this complex relationship through examining lived experiences, and I intend through this thesis to build on this and related work (see upcoming literature review). Residential schools used sport and recreation as a tool of assimilation while the Indian Act banned several physical cultural activities such as Sun Dances and Potlatch (Forsyth, 2013; Pettipas, 1994). However, participation in sport also served as a vehicle for positive self-expression and a place of relief for many residential school students and other Indigenous peoples (Forsyth, 2013; Norman, Hart & Petherick, 2019). Physical activity and sport have their own history within Indigenous contexts and are inherent in Indigenous culture (Forsyth, 2013; TRC, 2015).

Hall (2013) argues that Indigenous participation and achievement in sport and physical activity has largely been ignored in Canadian history and excluded from historical narrative as a result of colonialism and cultural erasure. Identified here is an important shortcoming in the literature focused on Indigenous sport and recreation, particularly the experiences of girls and women (Forsyth, 2007; Hall, 2013). As will be outlined in the literature, a particular gap exists when it comes to better understanding Indigenous young adult experiences, particularly those who identify as women. Tuhiwai-Smith (2012) further recognizes a general lack of Indigenous scholarly work, calling for more Indigenous research literature both by Indigenous authors and non-Indigenous authors when necessary. As a recreation provider, it is my public scholarly responsibility to support my local community through reconciliation and research in sport and exercise science. I plan to contribute to the processes of reconciliation within Canada by addressing the gap in the research on Indigenous women's physical activity and sport experiences.

The above sections have provided a broad overview to the proposed research, my theoretical approach to the research how I am positioned within the research, and why it is important. The next chapter looks to delve further into the existing academic literature on Indigenous experiences in physical activity and sport to identify the gap in discourse.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section will provide an overview of key research literature in relation to this research study. The review will begin with background on Indigenous literature in relation to health and health experiences. The section will continue on to overview research on Indigenous experiences with physical activity and sport. To close, the review will feature key pieces of literature focusing on Indigenous women's experiences with physical activity and sport.

Background Indigenous Literature

Western research on Indigenous peoples has a history of oppression, erasure and romanticism (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). As Audra Simpson (2014) expresses, it is common in the field of anthropology to grossly analyze and record Indigenous cultures, omitting colonization from their accounts. Western colonial narratives of amenable cooperation do an injustice to Indigenous peoples, reinforcing settler colonialism while alleviating the responsibilities of settler colonialists (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). "Settler colonialism" is a distinct form of colonization in which foreigners settled on Indigenous lands, acquired Indigenous land and resources typically through violent means, and imposed their own values and culture upon Indigenous peoples (Wolfe, 2006).

Particularly in the health field, which aims to solve the "Indigenous problem" where the research question inquires how to "fix" Indigenous peoples, the assumption is that the blame and problem resides in Indigenous peoples as opposed to the situational and environmental context (Darroch & Giles, 2016; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). This is exacerbated by the media in their depictions of Indigenous peoples where dangerous and false Indigenous deficit stereotypes are often portrayed and perpetuated (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). These impacts have a ripple effect onto current Indigenous experiences of wellbeing, health services and more specifically, physical

activity. These impacts include discrimination in physical activity spaces and health services, feelings of blame and shame amongst Indigenous peoples, and erasure of Indigenous ways of knowing and healing (Darroch & Giles, 2016; Smylie, Kaplan-Myrth, McShane, Métis Nation of Ontario-Ottawa Council, Pikwakanagan First Nation, & Tungasuvvingat Inuit Family Resource Centre, 2009). This provides background as to historical factors that may shape Indigenous health experiences.

Indigenous Health Experiences

Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall shares the idea of “two-eyed seeing” that incorporates the First Nations Medicine Wheel with the Health Promotion Ecological model tying together Indigenous concepts of health with Western frameworks (Lavallée & Lévesque, 2013). Lavallée and Lévesque describe one representation of the First Nations Medicine Wheel, as shared with them by V. Harper through personal communication, as comprised of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health (Lavallée & Lévesque, 2013). This holistic conceptualization of health may share some common ground with the broader ecological model of health.

The Western Health Promotion Ecological model consists of the microsystem (interpersonal), mesosystem (connections between) and macrosystem (institutional), acknowledging all environments an individual encounters (Lavallée & Lévesque, 2013). The ecological model parallels the medicine wheel teachings of the reciprocal influence between a person's various environments such as family, friends, community, social and institutional environments, and the physical environment (Lavallée & Lévesque, 2013). This holistic approach allows for a shift in thinking amongst Indigenous peoples that their environment, including societal factors and systemic barriers, influence their health as much if not more than their independent decisions thus shifting the onus of responsibility away from the individual or

patient and re-focusing on societal broader structures (Lavallée & Lévesque, 2013). As this research utilizes a critical theoretical approach, it is important to acknowledge the variety of relational, contextual and environmental factors that may affect an Indigenous person's experiences with health and physical activity.

A small body of literature currently exists examining the complex historical Indigenous relationships of oppression, cultural erasure, physical activity and recreation within Canada. In the following section, I will provide an overview of relevant literature outlining the shared health and physical activity experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada that will inform both the research questions and methodology.

Indigenous Physical Activity Literature

With this holistic approach, it is vital to acknowledge the historical factors that have shaped one's systems. The Indian Act, enacted in 1876, was a government document that impacted Indigenous peoples of Canada and restricted many of their rights and practices. The Indian Act was massively influential in how Indigenous peoples in Canada experience physical activity, from the banning of physical cultural practices, to revoking Indian women's status for marrying white men, to residential schools and their oppressive assimilation, including through Euro-Western sport and recreation (Forsyth, 2013; Pettipas, 1994). These critical events and their impacts are shared through inter-generational relations that extend beyond the individual to their family and community. While these impacts are intergenerational, the generational strength, survival, and passing down of culture can be seen as generational resilience. Leanne Simpson (2018) equates this transcendence of experience and cultural sharing through generations as a form of resurgence. When exploring how Indigenous peoples experience physical activity, it is

integral that we inquire how relational factors, such as how they may promote participation or cultural sharing, may play a role.

External factors extend beyond generational experience and include political and environmental contexts. It is integral to understand how Indigenous young adults' settings may have shaped their physical activity experiences throughout their youth. Indigenous youth experiences continue to be affected by the byproducts of colonialism such as racism and inequitable government resourcing, especially impacting youth living on reserve (Halas, McRae & Carpenter, 2013). Halas, McRae & Carpenter (2013) demonstrate the challenges of providing quality physical activity opportunities and physical education on reserve in the province of Manitoba. As on-reserve schools are federally funded, they often do not have the direct support and proper funding required to provide quality physical education. Teachers are transplanted from city centres with little understanding of Indigenous culture or the specific rural community. These transplants are often generalist teachers who, due to lack of resources, must instruct in physical education with little formal training. It can take time for teachers to learn the culture of the community and build relationships only to eventually burn out and make an early departure, losing all relational currency built through their time in the community.

The government funding structure affects Indigenous health and physical activity programming as well. Norman, Petherick, Garcia, Giesbrecht and Duhamel (2018) evaluate the effectiveness of *After the School Bell Rings*, an afterschool youth physical activity intervention designed to 'fix' the 'health problem' of physical inactivity in the after-school period in an off-Reserve, but mostly Cree, community in northern Manitoba. They outline a number of problems with the government health intervention and highlight alternative methods in working with Indigenous communities. The government utilizes a deficit approach and pre-determines a false

representation of the community. The government privileges Western evidence-based modes of knowing and health objectives that conflict with the Indigenous community's values. An example being the community's perception of itself as an already active community. The epidemiological evidence does not account for the community's health priorities of housing shortages, food insecurity, unemployment and high rates of cancer due to environmental contamination. The government also deems a formal ethics application unnecessary for the evaluation, further demonstrating their unrestrained power in facilitating research projects.

Norman et al. (2018) highlight these missteps by the government and proceed to move forward with community-based methods. The authors acknowledge their power and privilege in completing this research as mostly of Euro-Canadian descent and that even well-intentioned researchers sometimes fail to recognize Indigenous peoples' relationship with colonization. To help mitigate this, they use community-based participatory research through community events and community walkabouts. Two of the authors, Norman and Petherick, spend a great deal of time visiting the community, attending community events and developing relationships. Norman et al. (2018) identify that it can be problematic for external government organizations to try and govern recreation from a distance, providing solutions to an Indigenous "problem" that needs to be fixed, as the priorities of organizations outside the community can be privileged over the priorities indicated by the community itself.

These institutional effects also plague Indigenous physical activity experiences in city centres. Mason, McHugh, Strachan & Boule (2018) study the experiences of urban Indigenous youth with respect to physical activity programs in Canada. They conduct community-based participatory talking circles in four different city centres. From these group interviews they

derive four themes: socio-economic status, experiences of discrimination, positive perceptions and kinship.

Urban Indigenous youth shared that they experienced financial barriers to participation in sport and physical activity, both personally and systemically (Mason et al., 2018). Some participants shared that their lack of family disposable income made it difficult to participate in activities, particularly those such as hockey that require expensive equipment. Others indicated that their parents were busy working to provide for basic needs leading to a shortage of time to drive youth to practices or games. Other participants also shared the lack of quality coaching, equipment and facilities due to funding deficits (Mason et al., 2018).

Another barrier to physical activity included experiences of racism and discrimination (Mason et al., 2018). These experiences included discrimination by both peers and instructors. When discrimination was not overly prevalent, Indigenous urban youth experienced self-confidence and sense of belonging. Youth also expressed a sense of kinship and supportive community when sharing physical activity experiences with other Indigenous folks.

These qualitative findings led to several recommendations around creating inclusive, welcoming physical activity spaces for Indigenous youth. Mason et al. (2018) suggest a need for cultural competency training, Indigenising recreational spaces, and hosting all-Indigenous programs and spaces. They express the important role instructors, mentors, educators and coaches play in ensuring a positive space for Indigenous youth (Mason et al., 2018). Indigenous role models provide an opportunity for racializing spaces (a space that facilitates the re(creation) of racialized identities) and showcase to youth a diversity of positive paths and life choices (Paraschak, 2013).

These findings are echoed in McHugh, Deal, Blye, Dimler, Halpenny, Sivak & Holt's (2019) meta-study of twenty qualitative research articles examining sport and recreation experiences of Indigenous youth in Canada. McHugh et al.'s (2019) findings are synthesized into five themes: potential holistic benefits, multiple levels of barriers, necessary relationships within Indigenous communities, importance of Indigenous cultures, traditions, and connections to the land, and strategies for enhancing sport and recreation experiences. More pertinently, racism, financial barriers, lack of adequate facilities, equipment and spaces and a lack of culturally relevant activities are all identified as barriers to Indigenous youth participation in sport and recreation programming.

The studies included in McHugh et al.'s (2019) meta-study employed largely collaborative or participatory research methodology. This is congruent with Mason et al. (2018) and Norman et al.'s (2018) approach to their research projects. This community-based research seems to be best practice when exploring Indigenous community experiences, a notion that is supported by Indigenous academics such as Kovach (2009) and Tuhiwai-Smith (2012).

Another theme that was consistent across the studies is the notion that while negative experiences in sport and recreation exist, it is necessary to highlight Indigenous resilience and Indigenous peoples' positive experiences with physical activity and sport. Indigenous peoples do not always distinguish between sport and physical activity or Indigenous stream or mainstream participation (Paraschak and Thompson, 2014). Dubnewick, Hopper, Spence & McHugh (2018) suggest Indigenous participation in traditional Indigenous games enhance sport experiences of youth by promoting cultural pride, interacting with Elders, supporting connections to the land, developing personal characteristics and developing a foundation for movement. Indigenous youth are also drawn to traditional activities because they incorporate their cultural backgrounds

(Kerpan and Humber, 2015). These benefits are important to note when promoting physical activity and sport amongst Indigenous peoples. However, it is also important to identify and address the barriers to Indigenous sport and recreation participation. In the next section, I do just that by reviewing the existing literature as it pertains to the experiences of Indigenous Women in physical activity and sport in Canada.

Indigenous Women's Experiences in Physical Activity and Sport

Indigenous women exist at the intersection between race and gender that shapes their experiences distinctly from men. Indigenous women's experiences have been shaped by colonialism from the time the first European missionaries arrived in 1615. The sex-gender system is a colonial construct imparted on Indigenous peoples through aggressive colonial assimilation policies that have displaced Indigenous understandings, practices and teachings around gender and sexuality (Simpson, 2017; Wilson, 2018). The emphasis on a binarized heteropatriarchal sex-gender system that privileges straight men, resulted in the removal of women (as well as men expressing diverse genders and sexualities) from positions of power, replacement of traditional gender roles and colonial control through the management of women's bodies and sexual violence (Huhndorf & Suzack, 2010).

The disempowerment of Cherokee women can be observed as one example of the impact of colonialism on Indigenous women's experiences. Prior to colonization, Cherokee mothers were a political authority (Miles, 2009). Women's value in matrilineal descent and the household made them revered amongst the community (Miles, 2009). Beloved Women and War Women were titles reserved for esteemed Cherokee women in the community (Miles, 2009). Miles (2009) shares the influential power Beloved Women and Warrior Women maintained while negotiating anti-removal campaigns. As settler colonialism became evermore institutionalized,

settlers used their privilege to shift gender power to Indigenous men within their communities convincing these men to sign over Cherokee land for financial gain (Miles, 2009). In the early 1800s, Nancy Ward a Beloved Woman, used her influence to speak to the men of the Cherokee governing body to request they refrain from signing any further land treaties with the US government (Miles, 2009). Nancy was one of many Cherokee women that understood the potential impact of their displacement on their future generations (Miles, 2009). While initially their efforts proved successful, this only lasted a few years before the US government executed additional attempts at removal concluding with the Indian Removal Act and the Trail of Tears (Miles, 2009). This brief overview highlights one of many instances of the forced gender power shift amongst Indigenous communities instigated by settler colonialism, as well as highlighting the resistance to such colonial impositions.

The colonial influences on gender also create complexities within Indigenous physical activity spaces. The Dene games are a set of events that the Dene First Nations people host regionally (Giles, 2013). Traditionally, participation has been a privilege exclusive to men (Giles, 2013). Women's participation has been limited for a host of reasons including connotations of the menstruation cycle and division of labour within the household (Giles, 2013). This is seen amongst the Dene games but can also be found in Nishnaabeg culture where the menstrual cycle typically prevents women from participating in a sweat lodge (Simpson, 2017). Traditions around gender binary are sometimes problematic as often they are a cause or creation of settler influences (Hokowhitu, 2015). The Dene peoples are comfortable with accepting changes in tradition around improving the efficiency of equipment, however, are resistant to change around varying gender participation (Giles, 2013). This exemplifies an ongoing complexity of wanting to acknowledge Indigenous tradition and leaving room for positive

change without facilitating an erasure in culture. This preservation of post-colonial traditions come typically at the expense of Indigenous women.

Indigenous women value physical activity and sport from a holistic perspective, acknowledging the social connection, physical health and overall wellbeing benefits (Lavallée & Lévesque, 2013; Schinke, Peltier, and Yungblut, 2013). Participation in women's sport for development programs potentially enhance urban Indigenous women's lives by reducing negative stereotypes and offering opportunities for peer connection (Hayhurst, Giles, and Radforth, 2015). In contemporary settings, Indigenous women's participation continues to be plagued with barriers including sexism, lack of opportunity and lack of representation (Forsyth, Giles, and Lodge-Gagne, 2014; Hargreaves, 2000; Maxwell, Stronach, Adair & Pearce, 2017). While some urban Indigenous women attend physical activity interventions to resist discrimination, this relies on the individual to bear the burden of overcoming barriers (Hayhurst, Giles & Radforth, 2015). Ferguson, Epp, Wuttunee, Dunn, McHugh & Humbert (2019), suggest social support and community play an integral role in overcoming Indigenous women barriers and flourishing in physical activity and sport.

The literature clearly depicts that sport and physical activity can be a source of strength and empowerment, it also suggests Indigenous peoples' experiences within physical activity and sport can be plagued with discrimination and barriers. Indigenous women in particular, experience heightened and distinct discrimination due to the impacts of gendered colonialism that increases their marginalization. Unfortunately, contemporary literature discussing Indigenous women's experiences in physical activity and sport mostly relates to Australian and New Zealand contexts. The Canadian literature remains mostly limited to urban Indigenous women in relation to health experiences. The understandings of Indigenous women's experiences

in sport and physical activity, both positive and negative, provide an opportunity to understand how in sport and physical activity can further Indigenous self-determination and nationhood. Understandings could be used to promote an experience and environment that is inclusive and accessible. These experiences and potential understandings are what this research proposes to uncover and contribute to an academic gap that so desperately needs to be filled. In this next section I will cover the methods in which I propose to fill this gap.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

This section will provide an overview of the methods applied in this research project, specifically recruitment, community-based participatory research, focus groups, thematic analysis and the justification for the selection of each method. I worked with a key contact within ISPARC who guided the project throughout the research process. This was the Director of Sport at ISPARC, Chief Lara Mussell-Savage of Skwah (Sqwá) First Nation, who was generous with her time and thoughts throughout my thesis to provide mentorship and guidance as a representative of ISPARC. The balance between Western methods and Indigenous knowledges and values remained at the forefront of this project. I have done this in an attempt to create an alignment of epistemology, theory, and methods with Indigenous worldview (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). It is for this reason that I chose to utilize conversational method to hear story through focus groups. To further root the research in an Indigenous paradigm, I honour the 4 R's of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility throughout the story collection process (Kovach, 2019).

Recruitment

Using generic purposive sampling, participants were recruited through ISPARC and their existing mailing list of athletes. This is a commonly used strategy when sampling Indigenous peoples' physical activity experiences (McHugh et al., 2019). Generic purposive sampling is a method in which participant recruitment occurs with a set of defined criteria (Bryman, 2016). For this study, the criteria of people I sampled were team and individual athletes who self-identify as women, have qualified for the 2020 U19 Team BC and have or currently reside in rural BC. I originally intended to recruit 16-20 participants who met these criteria.

Three rounds of recruitment e-mails were sent out to the athletes including a personalized reach out from Chief Mussell-Savage to specific athletes. Participants from the first focus group and interview were asked to reach out to any potential teammates that would be eligible and interested to participate in an attempt to utilize snowball sampling. To my knowledge, this did not prove successful. Recruitment proved difficult during the pandemic. A few reasons for this may have been the discontinuation of many sports resulting in a less engaged audience with ISPARC, or the general decline in adolescent mental health and challenges in adolescents socially connecting due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Hu & Qian, 2021). After multiple recruitment e-mails and follow-ups from myself to those who expressed interest, my supervisor and I decided that six participants would be sufficient, especially given that I intended to conduct multiple focus groups with the six participants. This decision was shared with the broader supervisory team so they were aware of the circumstances shaping the research.

Once a participant expressed interest, a follow-up e-mail that included informed consent forms and an online scheduling form was provided. This e-mail also included instructions on how to access the Zoom call and guidance on providing a pseudonym. This pseudonym is used to provide anonymity to the athletes of this research. Participants were offered the opportunity to turn on their camera and share their real name with the other participants on the call. Upon conclusion of the story collection process, participants were compensated a \$50 honoraria.

I conducted two rounds of online story¹ collection. The first round included one focus group of five participants and one interview for a total of six participants. The second round,

¹ I have chosen to use the term ‘story’ as opposed to ‘data’ to highlight that I am aware of the tensions between Western and Indigenous modes of coming to know. Whereas Western methodological approaches assume that knowledge can be derived by breaking ‘data’ down into mini-units of meaning, the holistic approach to knowing is embodied in Indigenous storytelling. I do not assume to be able to resolve these tensions, but I am aware of them and will work to maintain the holistic integrity of the stories shared by the young women in this study.

which was intended to encourage co-analysis and -construction of knowledge, included one focus group with three participants and a second focus group with two participants. Due to time constraints, the sixth participant did not attend a second focus group but reviewed a summary of the results section provided by e-mail and offered the opportunity to provide suggestions and feedback. Collection occurred from May 19th to September 1st, 2021.

Community-Based Participatory Research

As I am employing an Indigenous feminisms theoretical lens, I chose to embark on community-based participatory research. Community-based participatory research is also endorsed by both Western and Indigenous academics as a method for outsiders working with Indigenous populations as they centre the experiences, voices and knowledge of Indigenous peoples themselves (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Kovach, 2009; Schinke & Blodgett, 2016; Wilson, 2008).

Best practices for community-based participatory research include providing ample time for research, placing community members first, and utilizing a community informed approach (Schinke & Blodgett, 2016). I planned to form a community project committee and be present amongst the ISPARC community in-person Community project committees can be helpful when conducting Indigenous research (Wilson, 2016). This acknowledges these community leaders as historians, critical thinkers and educators and respects the knowledge they bring to the research (Wilson, 2016). Committees are helpful in informing any existing community and cultural protocols that may exist (Kovach, 2009).

An integral part of community-based participatory research is engaging the community in a meaningful and collaborative way through developing relationships. I planned to give back to ISPARC through a number of ways. I will contribute the research results back to ISPARC to

ensure long-lasting service through my findings. Schinke and Blodgett (2016) suggest community-based participatory research is useful for context within a community, when the researcher is an outsider and can facilitate a better distribution of power. As I was an outsider this proved invaluable by addressing some of the failings of past Western research protocols (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). I value relational accountability, and ensured I was beholden to ISPARC's priorities, cultural knowledge, and needs (Wilson, 2008).

The COVID-19 pandemic made it challenging to pursue community-based participatory research. The pandemic increased stress and workload for many, including ISPARC. I had originally planned to form a community project committee and be present amongst the ISPARC community in-person through events and programs. However, in order to reduce the burden of this research project on my community and ensure their priorities remained forefront, I refrained from composing a community project committee. To alleviate any stress to the Indigenous community members, we used an existing community group to consult on the research questions, methods, and report. The ISPARC Board of Directors was consulted through Chief Mussell-Savage to approve the research project. To streamline the communications, I worked with Chief Mussell-Savage who provided context on the community, protocols, and funneled any needed decisions to the Board of Directors. We met over the phone and Zoom about four times through the course of this research on timelines that worked well for my connection at ISPARC, as well as exchanged over a dozen e-mails at every stage of the research process.

I worked with ISPARC on a timeline that allowed for their consultation and contribution throughout the research project and provided adequate time for meaningful review and feedback at each stage. I committed to prioritizing the needs of ISPARC and their community ahead of my research by moving on a timeline that was convenient for ISPARC. For example, in March 2020,

at the beginning of the pandemic, I held off reaching out to ISPARC to ensure I did not add to their workload and become an additional burden. I waited a few months prior to reaching out and ensured they knew they did not need to respond until they were ready. I was sure to not move forward at various stages of the research project without hearing from ISPARC with a definitive decision.

COVID-19 also induced the elimination of in-person programming and sport, making it impossible to connect with the community in-person and challenging to build genuine relationships. I tried my best to connect with the ISPARC community virtually by partaking in their online community by following their social media platforms and attending various virtual webinars open to the public. I attended four virtual webinars held by ISPARC in partnership with the UBC Learning Circle. I also joined their various mailing lists to receive constant updates. Despite the number of hours spent connected online, it was still difficult to develop genuine one-on-one connections with more members of the community. However, as COVID restrictions are easing, I have been able to further engage with ISPARC through regional engagement sessions and partnering to put on an Aboriginal Coaching Module workshop.

I look to remain relationally accountable to my participants, ISPARC, and Indigenous stream sport. One example is the collaboration with my supervisor Dr Moss Norman, where we brought together UBC Recreation, the School of Kinesiology, ISPARC, the Indigenous Physical Activity & Cultural Circle (IPACC), and UBC Learning Circle, to host a 'Decolonizing Physical Activity and Sport' panel where I worked with leaders in ISPARC and the other organizations to bring this topic to 500+ attendees worldwide. I look forward to remaining engaged through the regional coordinator and supporting ISPARC initiatives where possible. I aim to reciprocate the

support, time, and resources that were gifted to me back into Indigenous communities and sport.

This aspect will be detailed after a summary of my research methods.

Data (Story) Collection: Focus Groups

Conversational method honours the Indigenous values of orality and relationality (Kovach, 2019). This Indigenous method is a major justification for employing focus groups to collect participant's experiences and stories due to the orality and relational nature of focus groups. I also chose to employ focus groups due to the nature of their high engagement, transcendence of the individual-centric nature of interviews, ability to observe participant interactions and participant comfort. Focus groups also allow for group interaction and the observation of non-verbal, relational cues (Bryman, 2016). Many Indigenous peoples' lived experiences within a community are shared lived experiences and transcend the individual to include their family, friendships and community (Wilson, 2016). In this case, I expected that the participant's experiences would extend to their team, coaches and organizations. I also hoped that this potential group familiarity within teams and ISPARC, would encourage more dialogue and willingness to contribute more truthfully (Bryman, 2016). Focus groups also help mitigate power relationships between researcher and participants by allowing participants more agency in guiding the conversation, meaning my participants had collective power and could move the conversation in ways that are comfortable and meaningful for them (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). This was particularly helpful with my participant community as I am an outsider. Commonly in focus groups, researchers have less control over the conversation and focus during the interview (Bryman, 2016). This was a concession I was willing to make in favour of reducing power relations and allowing participants fuller control over the research product.

I chose to utilize focus groups as opposed to sharing circles for a few reasons. While sharing circles may generally be more culturally appropriate when exploring Indigenous experiences through research, this proved complicated with the ISPARC Indigenous community. Sharing circles come with cultural protocols that may differ across diverse Indigenous groups (Kovach, 2009). As ISPARC is composed of athletes from many Indigenous communities this is not possible. Sharing circles also need to be led by an Elder, knowledge keeper or cultural teacher (Kovach, 2009). I did however consult ISPARC when drafting my interview guide and they provided insight into how I would want to conduct my focus groups in a way that respected the community of athletes.

Chief Mussell-Savage suggested using a ‘Community Agreement,’ which is a set of respectful guidelines identified communally at the beginning of each focus group. After beginning with introductions, I asked the focus group participants what guidelines they would like to expect from each other and offered some suggestions such as being respectful of others experiences and allowing space for others to speak. Together we created a small list of community expectations to ensure inclusive and respectful engagement.

Another impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was my own ability to plan in-person focus groups. I ideally wanted to host a large in-person community feast to collect participant stories, which is encouraged when looking to engage Indigenous participants (Kovach, 2009). In light of COVID-19, it was necessary to shift all interviews to an online format. As COVID-19 can be spread through close contact and talking, the decision to utilize online focus groups prevented the spread of the virus and helped mitigate any potential harm to the participants (BCCDC, 2020). This decision also allowed the project to overcome geographic distance between research participants.

The focus groups were hosted online through Zoom Video Communications. Zoom has a range of advantages and functionalities that make it an optimal platform for focus groups. Zoom allows the option to securely record and store sessions without the use of third-party software, user-specific authentication, real-time encryption and the ability to backup recordings to local drives (Zoom Video Communications Inc., 2016). Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey, & Lawless (2019) share the experiences of female participants with Zoom interviews noting the agreeance between researchers and participants that Zoom was a useful method for qualitative interviews. Participants shared advantages such as building rapport, convenience of participation and overall user-friendliness (Archibald et al., 2019). With the target participant demographic being athletes who reside in rural spaces, there may be issues of internet connectivity and bandwidth. While internet connectivity was not a commonly reported issue, it was the most reported problem when using Zoom to conduct focus groups (Archibald et al., 2019). I planned to mitigate any issues by providing resources such as instructions, checklists, and pre-interview instructional time such as one-on-one appointments to walk participants through how to use Zoom in advance of the focus group (Archibald et al., 2019). Luckily, internet connectivity was not an issue and almost all participants were very comfortable with the platform.

Laara Fitznor recounts her experience with auditory recordings, stating that they allow for the participants true voice to come through, which is an incredibly important aspect of Indigenous storytelling (as cited in Kovach, 2009). I video recorded these focus groups so that I could hear and view the participants as they tell their stories. This method allows me to identify who is contributing at what time and note some non-verbal language and interpersonal interactions. One problem with the video recording, was that Zoom only video recorded who was speaking so that only one participant was featured at a time. This meant that I was not able to

review any non-verbal cues from other participants. Luckily, there were key moments where as a facilitator I did state out loud in the focus group and took note of any consensus gestures such as nodding, laughing and smiling.

In addition to focus groups, I took a few quick and short critically self-reflexive notes at the beginning and end of the focus groups and interviews. These digital notes consisted of non-verbal interactions, relational interactions, pre- and post- focus group interactions, and personal reflections. Critical reflexivity is considered an anti-oppressive approach as it provokes researcher self-reflection in regards to power and privilege (Kovach, 2009). This was critical in identifying how my identity as an outsider and researcher played into the story collection.

I aimed to conduct at least four focus groups with four to five participants per group; however, as mentioned earlier, recruitment proved challenging. These numbers were selected based on Smith & Sparkes (2016) and Bryman's (2016) recommendations for rich stories. To compensate for a smaller number of participants, we adjusted to having two rounds of focus groups with the same set of participants. Each focus group lasted between 1.5-2 hours. This allowed for deeper relationship building, increased comfort, and richer conversations. For the first round of focus group/interviews, I played the role of the moderator, guiding each discussion through a set of guiding interview questions found in Appendix A. The questions outlined in Appendix A considered not only physical activity experiences, but what might affect these experiences. Aligned with Lavallée & Lévesque (2013) and Tuhiwai-Smith (2012), the questions took into consideration the microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem. I asked questions about not only participant's individual experiences, but what structures and systems may have shaped them.

After an initial round of analysis that will be outlined in the next section, I held a second round of focus groups to facilitate knowledge co-construction and co-analysis with my participants. I opened the focus groups asking if there were any additional stories, experiences, or answers that they wanted to share that may have surfaced upon the conclusion of the first discussions. We then went through a set of nine themes that arose from the first round of story collection. With each theme I provided a general description of how I came upon that theme and asked the following questions: Does this theme/topic resonate with you? Why (or why not) does this theme resonate with you? Why (or why not) is it an important one? Are there any additional reflections or thoughts based on this?

Once we discussed each theme, I asked the participants to individually provide a set of top three themes that either resonated the most or felt the most impactful when considering the experiences of Indigenous women athletes and their participation in physical activity and sport. I then opened the discussion one last time for a final round of thoughts, reflections and feedback. We concluded with expressions of gratitude and an outline of next steps.

One of the participants was unable to attend a follow-up focus group to contribute to the co-analysis. We tried three times to schedule a virtual meeting where we could go through the themes that the other participants had a chance to review. Due to academic commitments and time restraints, we decided that I would send her a document with a summary of the themes that she could review and provide any additional thoughts or suggestions. This ensured we were able to work with her timeline and prioritize her needs over the research project while still being able to contribute.

The next section will provide an overview of how data analysis was conducted.

Data (Story) Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is valuable when analyzing people's experiences, identifying factors and processes that influence phenomena, recognizing patterns of people's practices and behavior, understanding social interactions and when using focus groups (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). Thematic analysis, however, is a Western tool that encourages the dissecting of data preventing a holistic analysis more aligned with an Indigenous worldview (Kovach, 2009). An Indigenous method would have been preferred, however, currently there is no singular Indigenous method of analysis (Kovach, 2009). To try and remain true to an Indigenous research paradigm, I did my best to uphold the Indigenous values of relational accountability and the 4 R's throughout the analysis (Kovach, 2009).

As researchers we have an inherent power over participants and stories that exists within our research project. Leaning into the Indigenous value of responsibility, it is my responsibility as a researcher to mitigate power imbalances and tell a story that is wholly truthful and representative of my participant's experiences. We have the ability to convolute stories, make our own biased assumptions and draw unfounded conclusions (Potts & Brown, 2005). My responsibility as an anti-oppressive researcher, is to practice reflexivity and acknowledge this power throughout the research project (Potts & Brown, 2005). It is integral that my research intentions continue to be framed from an Indigenous feminisms exploratory place of Indigenous sport experiences and informed and guided by those I am working with (i.e., ISPARC, the participants). It is my responsibility to ensure the analysis is congruent with participants' stories, while respecting and holding reverent their true voices. I committed to this by honouring their stories, as well as guaranteeing participant checking of their stories, experiences, and themes at multiple points in the collection and analysis process.

I transcribed every focus group and interview myself. I started with open coding, employing deductive analysis utilizing a priori framing, a method of coding where a theoretical lens is determined prior to analyzing (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). This ensured the maintenance of self-in-relation in the research as well as an Indigenous perspective due to my Indigenous feminisms lens (Kovach, 2009). I gave equal attention to each story when coding, and coded inclusively and comprehensively by reviewing every transcript fully twice over prior to making any decisions as to what sections might be more prevalent than others (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). I committed to Potts and Brown's (2005) recommendation to not anticipate what I expected to learn and what fits within my own biased assumptions.

As I moved into relational analysis, I looked for any relationships between the first level of codes and how they might further relate to my theoretical framing. Based on the minimal existing literature, I also took note of any congruent emerging themes. I looked to discover themes not just from explicit experiences, but rather external and underlying factors that might be shaping these experiences. I conducted my analysis with consideration of the microsystem, mesosystem and macrosystem that underlie and shape the participants' experiences of sport and physical activity. At this point I allowed for abductive analysis. I settled at my first level of themes, which was shared with the participants to ensure their voices come through in a way that honors and respects their experiences holistically.

I presented nine first level themes to the athletes: (1) intergenerational relationships and support, (2) benefits of sport, (3) active for life, (4) reciprocity, (5) contrasts between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous sport, (6) equitable opportunities, (7) representation, (8) NAIG as a celebration of Indigeneity and community, and (9) barriers/negative facilitators. I discussed these

during the second round of focus groups with the athletes and they found these accurately captured what they were sharing and wanted to share with others. We discussed further experiences amongst those themes, which themes resonated the most, and any aspects that might be missing. It was clear that relationships, Indigenous tournaments, and Indigenous women role models were important in these conversations. We also discussed the various barriers to sport and that those can control a person's experience especially if they cannot move past them. They felt confident in the way I presented these nine themes which assured me their genuine voices were coming through and confirmed the reliability and validity of the research.

I transcribed and reflected on what the participants shared with me in the follow-up focus group. I further reviewed the nine themes through abductive analysis to group them into three final over-arching themes that were defined and named as: (1) sport as a site of resurgence, (2) impacts of colonization on women's sport, and (3) intergenerational support and relational accountability. At this stage, I shared a summary of the sub-themes and themes with ISPARC as a form of member checking to ensure relatability and reliability.

To guarantee quality, I referred to Braun, Clarke & Weate's (2016) 15-point check-list for good thematic analysis as well as share my findings with the ISPARC community to ensure the findings resonate with participants. Quality in qualitative research refers to rigorous, deliberative and reflexive process to ensure a robust qualitative practice (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). While I referred to all 15-points, I gave particular focus to some points in relation to transcription, coding, analysis, and the written report (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). I planned for a detailed story transcription, ensured the themes told a compelling story that participants agreed with, maintained my epistemological position consistently throughout the analysis and

stayed very active in the analysis by completing the analysis wholly myself (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016).

Throughout the research process, I asked myself the following based on Potts and Brown's (2005) anti-oppressive approaches: Can participants see themselves in the work? Does the analysis fit with their beliefs and understandings? Was enough effort made to include multiple perspectives? Was enough time spent developing and maintaining relationships? Are participants left in a better place post-research? I feel the answers are largely 'yes,' further ensuring quality and anti-oppressive practices.

Following Burke (2016), to further assess the quality of my thematic analysis of the focus group interviews and critical ethnographic reflexivity, I also constantly asked myself the following questions: Is this research of substantive contribution and impact? Is it coherent and does it resonate with the reader? Is it credible? Is there transparency in the process? Again, I navigated the research process to ensure the answers were always 'yes.'

Once the research report is complete, I will share a final copy of the report along with a summary of the results and recommendations to ISPARC. A summary of results was shared with ISPARC to further assess the reliability and validity of my research. I connected with Chief Mussell-Savage to discuss her thoughts on the summary and whether the results resonated with her, which they did. She really emphasized that the themes in relation to Indigenous women role models and the benefits of Indigenous stream sport events such as NAIG should be highlighted. I also consulted with her to devise the best way to share the report including audience, format, and timeline. The following section details the subsequent steps once the report is approved by ISPARC.

Reciprocity & Relational Accountability

Reciprocity is the final Indigenous value, tied to relational accountability, that needs to be upheld for an Indigenous paradigm. It is important upon exit, that we give back the knowledge that has been gifted to us in a way that can transform the community moving forward. This echoes Kuokkanen's (2008) sentiments that as Western researchers we must reciprocate our participants' gifts of knowledge back to them to sustain and renew balance. It is important to give this research back to the community in a digestible, comprehensible way that allows them to move forward with our findings.

For this project, this will occur in two ways: first, through a virtual community event where I present the findings of the research project and potential recommendations to ISPARC, and second, a summary of the project and the findings of the research will be presented to recreation professionals located in BC. The content of the presentation will be provided to ISPARC and the research participants for review and approval prior to dissemination.

The presentation and summary brought together the stories and experiences in a way that centres, respects, and holds reverent the voices of our participants in a holistic manner. The presentation will begin with an overview of each participant's stories to honour the holistic value in Indigenous storytelling (Archibald & Parent, 2019). I will then weave the stories together through the presentation of the relational themes created through the analysis process. Through these themes I will provide researcher interpretations and recommendations while leaving opportunity for reader interpretation. In addition, this project was granted \$500 through the UBC School of Kinesiology. With these funds, we were able to compensate each focus group participant with \$50 for their time and knowledge as further reciprocity.

I am receiving a great deal from the gift of Indigenous knowledge and story. Upon completion of this research project, I will receive a Master of Arts degree. While I have

philanthropic intentions, I am benefiting from this research greatly. In my graduate journey I have had the great privilege of learning from incredible Indigenous faculty and teachers through course work and through readings. I have learned invaluable life values and lessons through these teachings that centre Indigenous worldviews and have allowed me to unpack my own understandings of the world. I am forever indebted and look to bring these teachings with me in life and continue to contribute to processes of decolonization.

Relational accountability and reciprocity should extend beyond the conclusion of a research project or graduate degree. I look to maintain the relationships I have built with the ISPARC community, always as a support in any way they may need. This may look like ongoing relational connection or individual or community assistance, such as assisting with any future recreation opportunities. Since building a relationship with ISPARC, we have partnered together to put on educational events to promote more inclusive, equitable, and decolonized physical activity and sport spaces. I have also gotten involved with ISPARC's Vancouver Coastal Region engagement sessions and initiatives.

It is also important to share the project with the larger Western recreation community to move towards reconciliation and promote an experience and environment that is inclusive and accessible for Indigenous communities. As a recreation provider, I commit to relational accountability and the processes of decolonization in my work and life, extending the hopefully positive impacts of this research to as many Indigenous peoples as possible.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics within research should be consciously deliberated prior to, during and after a research project. Most notably, Potts and Brown (2005) ask researchers to contemplate how power and privilege plays into their research ethics to ensure anti-oppressive researcher

practices. As I worked with an Indigenous population, there were inherent ethical considerations as well as additional ethics application sections to complete.

The 2018 *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2) outlines three core principles, respect for persons, concern for welfare and justice. I addressed each of these principles (Medical Research Council, 2018). I have power as a researcher and a settler. With this power it was my moral responsibility to ensure my participants were fully aware of what the study entails and that they understood their consent was given freely and throughout. It is a privilege to be welcomed into a community and it was necessary they understood their consent as ongoing with an ability to withdraw at any time. In regards to concern for participant welfare, I ensured the needs and benefits of this research outweighed the risks. Risks included bringing up traumatic experiences, individuals potentially expressing conflicting ideas in front of their community, and doing harm on the individual. It was my role to mitigate this and ensure I could connect them with necessary mental health and wellbeing resources if need be. I also ensured justice for all Indigenous community members by attempting to create a space where they all felt welcome and invited in participating in this research.

The ethics application indicates a variety of obligations to the community. I needed to be, and was, informed of and respectful of the Indigenous community's customs and practices. The research was mutually beneficial, in line with Indigenous theories as well as increased the overall research capacity within that community (see also Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). Lastly, the community was informed of the research results in a manner that is clear and comprehensible.

It is also imperative to note that ethics applications more generally come with their own intricacies in terms of Indigenous researchers and Indigenous research. While ethics applications are meant to protect all people including the marginalized and vulnerable, the process is

embedded within Western academia and colonial institutions. This implies that all research must go through colonial processes to be considered meaningful and significant. Western academia has been violent towards Indigenous populations and does not always account for Indigenous ways of knowing (Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012). The additional ethics application section on researching Indigenous participants provides researchers with the language to think critically about working Indigenous peoples. Further, once an application is approved, no one holds researchers accountable to their approved ethics application unless a complaint is raised to the ethics board.

To ensure that my research is ethically sound beyond the ethics board application, I deliberated a multitude of procedural, situational, cultural, relational and existing ethical considerations. Situationally and culturally, I am receiving a great deal from their gift of Indigenous knowledge. I will receive a Master of Arts degree and that in itself has ethical implications. While I have philanthropic and good intentions, I am benefiting from this research greatly. More importantly, cultural complexities exist when it comes to storytelling and sharing. I guaranteed constant checking throughout the research process of whether it was appropriate for me to share someone's experiences and stories. Indigenous stories have a history of appropriation and erasure, and it is important that I am able to either give credit where it is needed, or outline that a story cannot be shared through my voice. I will at no point own any of these stories or experiences. To this end, the study will be guided by OCAP.

OCAP is an acronym for Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (FNIGC, n.d.), which outlines a set of standards to ensure First Nations data is appropriately collected, protected, used, or shared. Ownership indicates that any knowledge, data and information is owned by the community collectively. Control reiterates informed consent and maintains the

power that a community or individual can revoke participation at any point of the research process. Access provides First Nations with the right to access the research information and data at any given time, as well as control who has granted access and how they may access that information. Possession reaffirms the control in which First Nations have ownership and stewardship of the physical control of their data to protect this right. In order to protect the identity of the participants of this research when consulting with the key informant at ISPARC, I limited the use of identifiers such as names, location, and sport participation, when sharing information. Adhering to these principles will ensure I close out my research project in a proper manner that ensures no harm, however, due to University research limitations, the primary investigator will store data in encrypted, password protected files for up to five years upon completion of the study.

It is inherent in community-based participatory research to develop and maintain relationships. In terms of relational ethics, I will invest in these relationships to demonstrate genuine care, understanding and desire to help. However, it is also important to delineate my role as a researcher. It is important that I am able to direct the participants to other resources if they are to come to me with concerns, questions or assistance out of my scope of practice.

As noted earlier, it is important upon exit that I give back the knowledge that has been gifted to me in a way that can transform the community moving forward. It was important to give this research back to the community in a digestible, comprehensible way that allows them to move forward with my findings. I also made it a priority to share with recreation providers the themes and suggestions in moving forward towards reconciliation and decolonization.

To summarize, guided by the 4 R's of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility, I embarked on community-based participatory research with ISPARC. I worked closely with a

leader within ISPARC who consulted on the project and acted as a liaison with ISPARC's Board of Directors. Together we recruited six athletes by e-mail to participate in two rounds of virtual focus groups. The research participants shared their experiences and took part in co-creating the knowledge and co-analyzing their stories. Using thematic analysis, I landed at nine sub-themes that were grouped together to form three broader overarching themes. The COVID-19 pandemic proved challenging to employ true community-based participatory research methods, however several efforts were made in an effort to compensate, such as engaging through virtual communities, extending the time spent with the research participants in focus groups, and multiple opportunities for member checking. I am committed to staying relationally accountable to ISPARC and reciprocating what has been shared with me by providing a summary presentation to ISPARC, staying engaged with my ISPARC region, and continuing to advance Indigenous women's physical activity and sport through my work. The following chapter will outline what was captured as a result of these methods.

Chapter 4: Results

The next three sections will delve into overarching themes that emerged from the conversations with the participants. The dialogue sought to answer two research questions, including: what are the experiences of young Indigenous women engaged in high performance mainstream sport generally, and Indigenous sport more specifically, and; what do young Indigenous women want/need in terms of their current and future experiences in sport and physical activity? Three resulting themes arose from the conversations with the Indigenous women athletes: (1) Sport as a Site of Resurgence; (2) Colonial Impacts on Indigenous Women's Sport, and; (3) Intergenerational Support and Relational Accountability.

The results and discussion are intertwined in this section as the themes of this research are interrelated with each other and the literature that has come before this research. This is congruent with the idea of conversational method as relational (Wilson, 2001). The conversations from this research are related to the conversations that have come before them. This means that the research is inspired by, and an extension of, existing literature with an aim to build upon the pre-existing literature and lay further foundation for future knowledge exploration. In this way, this research and its results do not sit independently, but interact with existing Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing. Thus, the results and discussion will be interwoven together in the next three sections.

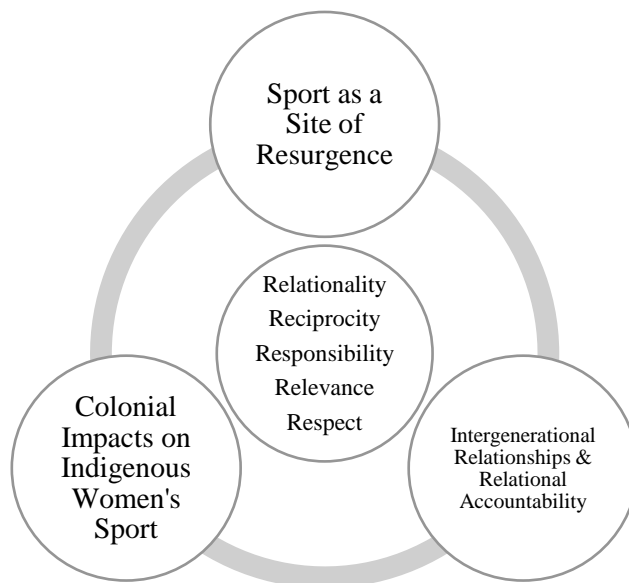


Figure 1. Research themes and Indigenous values

I have used Figure 1 to illustrate how each of the three over-arching themes emerging from this research are related to each other through the Indigenous values of relationality, reciprocity, responsibility, relevance and respect. These values are placed in the centre to illustrate that they are at the core of the themes, and thus related to each theme. A number of Indigenous scholars have identified these values as crucial to many Indigenous worldviews (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Kovach, 2019; Wilson, 2008).

With respect to the first theme, I suggest that Indigenous women's participation in holistic physical activity for themselves, their family, and their community can be considered an act of resurgence, which was a core theme to emerge from my research. Sport as a site of resurgence is a demonstration of the relational generational resilience of Indigenous communities and the respect between them, which can be demonstrated through sport generally and specific sporting events that celebrate Indigeneity, such as the North American Indigenous Games

(NAIG). As I argue below, relationality, reciprocity and its resulting support system are also what keep youth in sport (see also McHugh et al., 2019).

The second theme examines the colonial impacts on Indigenous women's sport and how these have resulted in an absence of opportunities for Indigenous girls and women. The participants felt that this has led to girls and women dropping out of sport, which they suggest can be mitigated through the resurgence of Indigenous peoples, their knowledge and their values in sport. The third theme examines intergenerational relationships and relational accountability. Here, the athletes demonstrate two Indigenous values, reciprocity and responsibility, in sharing their desires to give back as role models, mentors, and caretakers. The act of giving back embodies the value of reciprocity. They choose to give back based on a shared sense of responsibility to develop Indigenous women's physical activity and sport, a community and space that has given so much to them. This sustains the cyclical nature of these themes, continuing the generational support and respect, which in turn promotes Indigenous girls and women in sport, and facilitates sport as a site of resurgence.

Sport as Site of Resurgence

The broad theme 'sport as a site of resurgence' is broken down into three sub-themes, including sport as teacher, sport as opportunity, and Indigenous sport as a community experience. Each of these sub-themes are founded in a strengths-based perspective of sport and physical activity, as well as an understanding of sport as a potential site of resistance and Indigenous resurgence. The concepts of strength, empowerment, resistance and resurgence were dominant within the stories the young women shared. For this reason, I briefly overview these concepts for readers before turning to the participant's narratives.

Sport has been acknowledged by Indigenous women as a site of resistance, a place to defy negative health stereotypes placed on both their identities as women and as Indigenous (Hayhurst, Giles & Radforth, 2015). For urban Indigenous women in a Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre, they shared that their choice to attend and show up to a sport program was a form of resistance for them, that their attendance and participation demonstrated they defied negative health stereotypes placed on Indigenous women (Hayhurst, Giles & Radforth, 2015). Building on Hayhurst and colleagues (2015), the young women in my study positioned their physical activity and sport participation as a site of resistance, a place of personal and community empowerment, which can also be recognized as Indigenous resurgence.

To support this, I share two concepts that McGuire-Adams (2020) describes as *gwekisidoon gibimaaziwin* and decolonized physicality. The Anishinaabeg concept shared with McGuire-Adams by Mr. Clint Geyschick, *gwekisidoon gibimaaziwin*, entails making positive changes for a better life (McGuire-Adams, 2020). ‘Decolonized physicality,’ is defined as any holistic form of movement that fosters wellbeing for oneself, family and/or community (McGuire-Adams, 2020). Holistic movement is congruent with our broad definition of physical activity which considers any bodily movement, but takes this definition one step further in defining physical activity as for the betterment of one’s self or others (Caspersen, Powell & Christenson, 1985). McGuire-Adams (2020) argues that her participants’ practice of *gwekisidoon gibimaaziwin* through decolonized physicality/holistic movement, destabilizes settler influences as their empowered movement challenges colonial deficit stereotypes of Indigenous health. Thus, Indigenous women’s participation in holistic physical activity for themselves, their family, and their community can be considered an act of resurgence. These concepts are critical to the stories the participants in this research shared, as I examine below.

Physical Activity & Sport as a Teacher

The development of life skills and attitudes through sport participation were highlighted by participants as deeply valued benefits. This aligns with the existing research as well as with the concept of decolonized physicality, where sport is valued holistically, ranging in social, physical health, and general wellbeing benefits (see Lavallée & Lévesque, 2013; Schinke, Peltier, and Yungblut, 2013; McHugh, Deal, Blye, Dimler, Halpenny, Sivak & Holt, 2019). The present research found that the benefits of sport extended to individual development in the areas of professional and interpersonal skills. Participants outlined a number of benefits including but not limited to: learning life skills and attitudes, increased opportunities and enhanced wellbeing.

In terms of life skills, the participants identified discipline, time management, leadership, and teamwork as key skills learned through sport. Attitudes athletes developed through sport were drive, confidence and respect. Hockey Stick shared her observations of the noticeable differences in those who participate in sport versus those who did not:

I think also growing up doing sports it teaches you life skills, like hidden life skills, you know. Like some things that you wouldn't actually learn if you didn't do a sport and you could tell it through people who don't. Like if you're not five minutes early you're five minutes late kind of thing. If I didn't play sports, I would always be late, to everything. (Hockey Stick)

As Hockey Stick articulates, the development of these life skills and attitudes such as the value and practice of time management, were learned through sport participation. Similar to Hockey Stick, a few of the participants highlighted a noticeable difference in the work ethic and discipline of those who played sports and those who did not. It was shared that athletes were

notably more likely to be on time and complete tasks on time. Sport was viewed as a teacher with lessons that transcended the field of play, as also dictated by Buddy:

...for a long time, I was super shy and then after learning how to talk to people, learning how to introduce myself – cause how many times I would go to try outs and I wouldn't know anybody and I'd have to talk to them... And even now that's how I've made my friends. I remember how many times my friends have been like “you know so many people” mostly from sports but also just from talking to them and introducing myself. And sports definitely taught me respect. To respect others and to respect yourself. And I keep that, that's definitely something that applies to me with everything.

Buddy developed a number of interpersonal skills through sport such as networking, socializing, and respect. Indigenous sport in particular was expressed as an opportunity to learn from others. This is perhaps unsurprising given that Indigenous sport and games have a history of being used as a tool for community integration and cohesion, personal growth, passing on of historical knowledge, and development of social and survival skills (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006).

Sport was further identified by the research participants as a promoter of physical and mental health. Participants did experience poor mental health from stressors to perform, make the team, and burn out; however, these were largely outweighed by the abundance of benefits. Similar to McGuire-Adam's (2020), who interviewed Indigenous women runners and found that sport offered them a pathway to decolonization and empowerment, the research participants of this study also found personal empowerment in movement. Bree describes it as,

I honestly just like kind of see myself grow and get better. I find that very accomplishing. Like no matter what at the end of the day I know I can like get in the gym and still get better even if I've had a really crappy day.

As Bree outlines, sport was considered an outlet, a source of relief, and a place for self-mastery, and personal growth and development. This same self-mastery and discipline can be observed as a gain in individual power that can be used to resist the colonial state by defying notions of deficit Indigenous health stereotypes and by developing mental and physical strength, further iterating the idea of sport as a site of resistance (McGuire-Adams, 2020).

Physical activity and sport were also considered places of connection. It was for these reasons that many of the young women indicated intentions of continuing physical activity and sport beyond the conclusion of their elite athletic careers, a phase known as 'Active for Life' under the Indigenous Long-Term Participant Development Pathway (Sport for Life, 2019). Respondents emphasized both a continued need for movement as a mental outlet as well as their continued participation with family members as it was one way they connected with each other.

This is consistent with McHugh and colleagues (2019) findings around the holistic benefits that Indigenous participants gained from participating in sport. They categorize these holistic benefits as mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical. This research found that these benefits of sport expand beyond what McHugh and colleagues' (2019) categorize as mental benefits (such as communication and teamwork), to include a larger breadth of professional and interpersonal skills as well as a conduit to opportunities.

Sport as a Conduit to Opportunities

Sport was considered a pathway to opportunities such as jobs, school and travel. Participants shared they were able to demonstrate the skills, attitudes and experiences discussed

in the previous section, on job and post-secondary applications making them more successful candidates. Many continued their sport journey as it also paved a pathway to post-secondary education. Blake outlines this in the following quote:

And I also kind of like, continued with sport because my goal in the end was to get a scholarship to university because I knew I was paying for my university so I was trying everywhere I could to get part of my university paid for.

As Blake shares, sport lowered financial barriers to attending post-secondary education. Sport increased access to further education.

Another enjoyable opportunity of sport was the ability to travel for competitions. The tournament experience was a shared highlight by participants with the added benefit of being able to visit other Indigenous territories they would not have been able to otherwise. Buddy describes her experience travelling to Toronto to play lacrosse as amazing:

...I've only been playing [lacrosse] for maybe about five or six years I would say, and the more I learned about it – about how it was actually created from Indigenous peoples and being able to see the territory, 'cause we went to Toronto where the Iroquois, that's where lacrosse originated from, it was just amazing, it made me even more proud to play the sport as an Indigenous person.

Buddy touches on an incredible experience, being able to visit another Indigenous territory and taking part in a piece of their history and culture through movement. While the version of lacrosse played today is a Western appropriation and adaptation of the traditional game played by the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, it nonetheless has been taken up by diverse Indigenous peoples as an expression of Indigenous nationhood (Downey, 2018). The source of pride that Buddy derives from playing lacrosse is shared by many Indigenous peoples and playing the

game has been a powerful source of Indigenous survivance for generations, including amongst the Squamish on the West coast, as Alan Downey (2018) explains. This opportunity to travel, participate in culturally relevant activities and engage with Indigenous ways of knowing, enhances cultural and spiritual experiences, an act of cultural resurgence (Simpson, 2011). This demonstrates the potential sport has to teach Indigenous youth about their Indigenous heritage and foster pride in their Indigenous identity.

Participants expressed that NAIG also presented an opportunity to learn more about their own Indigenous heritage and culture.

With like the NAIG and stuff, you do learn a lot about the Indigenous culture.

Like when I went to my first NAIG tournament I knew nothing about my background or any of that kind of stuff, and when I went there it was really eye opening and I learned a lot about culture and things that we do. It was just like I had no idea. Obviously, you read about stuff in textbooks, but actually going and experiencing some of the things is pretty cool. (Maggie)

Maggie shares her experience in re-connecting with her Indigenous culture at NAIG. This experience was not unique to Maggie. Blake shares a similar story in reconnecting with her Indigenous heritage,

I did not have the knowledge of my heritage right from when I was born, so to like learn about it and develop into celebrating it and being proud of it and learning more about, it has definitely been a journey. You [Alyssa] definitely nailed it, it [NAIG] is a celebration and it makes me proud.

NAIG provided Blake the opportunity to not only learn about her Indigenous history, but to celebrate it and be proud. Canada's history is riddled with policies and practices to eliminate

traditional Indigenous cultural practices in an attempt to civilize and assimilate Indigenous peoples and solve the ‘Indian problem’. Through the colonial displacement of Indigenous communities, banning of their cultural practices, such as the Potlatch and Sundance ceremonies (see Pettipas, 1994), residential schools, and policies that resulted in traumas like the Sixties Scoop that took Indigenous youth out of their homes, generations of Indigenous folks have been separated from their Indigenous culture with only recent generations beginning to re-connect with their Indigenous culture and language (TRC, 2015). Indeed, sport and physical activity were often deployed in residential schools as part of the assimilation process, although Indigenous students more often than not took them up as a site of resistance (see Forsyth, 2013). With this long history of using sport as a site of survivance, it is perhaps not surprising that the participants suggested sporting spaces like NAIG serve as an opportunity to revitalize and reconnect with one’s Indigenous culture, an intended objective since the inception of the games (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). In the following section, I explore how NAIG can be seen as a site of community cultural resurgence.

Indigenous Sport as a Community Experience

Physical activity and sport exist as a duality where, on one hand, they have acted as colonial oppressive tools meant to enact violence on Indigenous bodies, while on the other, serving as a site of resistance, self-determination and resurgence (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). As briefly touched on earlier, the history of lacrosse in BC demonstrates this narrative. Lacrosse was appropriated by Euro-Canadian society and Westernized for their own participation; however, Indigenous peoples were still able to invest in the sport with their own culturally-specific meanings and forms of resistance (Downey, 2018). Notwithstanding the way in which lacrosse was appropriated and codified according to the Western sport model in the nineteenth century, it

remains a physical cultural practice that many Nations take pride in and, in this way, serves as a source of pan-Indigenous identity and mobilization (Downey, 2018).

The concept of decolonizing physicality suggests that the benefits of physical activity and sport extend beyond individual participants to their communities at large (McGuire-Adams, 2020). Leanne Simpson (2017) describes a similar resilience as the intergenerational transcendence of experience and cultural sharing. As lacrosse in BC acted as a tool of Indigenous cultural strengthening, the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) also acts as a site of Indigenous unification (Downey, 2018; Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). In a 2014 evaluation of NAIG, more than half the participants felt more connected with their Indigenous heritage as a result of the event (Praxis Research Strategy, 2014). This was also identified in the previous section where participants described reconnecting with their Indigenous culture through NAIG.

NAIG, and similar Indigenous tournaments, were highlighted by all the participants as impactful experiences due to the Indigenous representation, immense cultural pride, sense of family, and generational resilience present at the games. Buddy describes NAIG as,

the most Indigenous youth I've seen in my entire life... I look back at it now and I just feel empowered that I ever really got to go because it makes me want to get Indigenous youth [out there] even more because there could be even way more, like two stadiums of Indigenous athletes and I think that could be amazing.

Buddy highlights the sense of pride and empowerment she feels from being around so many Indigenous athletes. The powerful presence of Indigeneity inspires her to want to give back to her community with an aim to increase the number of athletes present at the Games in future years. She sees the potential in Indigenous communities and the impact of a strong Indigenous

presence. The ability to represent oneself, one's family and the province gives the youth a sense of giving back or reciprocity. When describing the importance of playing for ISPARC, The Fish touches on this pride and empowerment and how it showcases her family's generational resilience:

...I'm going to be representing my province and especially [my family]... like just growing up my great grandpa had it really tough, he was Aboriginal and back then it was really hard on them and stuff. So it was just nice to know that all of his hard work and the fact that he persevered and I could just represent my family for that, kind of thing.

In both Buddy and The Fish's sharing, representation and relationality play large roles in their experiences. For Buddy, the large contingency of Indigenous youth inspires her to promote more Indigenous participation in physical activity and sport. The Fish sees her own representation at NAIG as generational pride and respect. Her playing her sport is out of respect for her province, her community and her grandpa. For both Buddy and The Fish, they feel a relational accountability to promoting Indigenous representation in sport. They want to give back to the Indigenous youth athletes through volunteering as coaches and sport leaders to grow the number of Indigenous athletes. This increase in positive, aspirational, and cultural representation reinforces positive narratives reflective of Indigenous culture and resilience.

Participants also shared that NAIG facilitated connection between Indigenous athletes from across the country. The event allowed them to see Indigenous athletes represented at an elite level of play and meet athletes of different Indigenous identities and from diverse nations. In alignment with the literature, NAIG was seen as a celebration of culture, cultural appreciation

and cultural pride (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). Hockey Stick embodies this in her following statements:

It's also definitely something that not everyone can say. I can do this. I had the opportunity. I am Métis. I can represent my province. You know, it's like a big honour. It was such a surreal feeling putting on that BC Crest for the first time.

These same sentiments of pride in representing one's province and Indigeneity that are found in Hockey Stick's statement, were shared by many home communities who were proud to see their young athletes competing on an international stage, creating a benefit that extended beyond the event attendees.

NAIG was also a celebration of community relationships. The athletes described their experience as familial. Maggie shares these collegial feelings as:

Just like the way the boys' team and the girls' team connected, we would always go out. Like the girls' team would go make posters for the boys' team and then our next game the boys' made posters for us and they cheered us on. And when both teams, Team BC, boys and girls, got kicked out [eliminated due to loss] of the tournament we would go and cheer on a different team in the tournament.

There was just like, no bad blood anywhere. Just like everyone was just friendly and wanted to have a good time.

As Maggie shares, what is unique about NAIG is that everyone cheers for everyone. Everyone is supportive, receptive, and friendly despite coming from varying geographic locations, and despite gender, demonstrating the Indigenous values of relationality, reciprocity and respect. These acts of kinship are the antithesis of colonization, where colonialism aimed to divide nations, families, and genders. Indigenous stream sport works to re-connect and rebuild

Indigenous nations' relationships (Downey, 2018; Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). These differences in Western mainstream sport and Indigenous stream sport will be further discussed in a later section.

These experiences of cultural pride, representation and connection through generations can be considered a form of Indigenous resurgence (Simpson, 2011). This further expands on McGuire-Adam's (2020) notion of sport as a site of self-empowerment through decolonized physical activity. This research poses the idea that physical activity and sport can act as a site of Indigenous resurgence for individuals and communities at large.

Participants shared this sense of community and support were mostly found in Indigenous stream sport and not as heavily emphasized in mainstream sport. This can likely be attributed to the Indigenous ways of knowing found in Indigenous stream sport. However, Western influences are not only found in mainstream sport, their deep colonial structures also impact Indigenous women's physical activity and sport experiences across the double helix comprised of the mainstream and Indigenous sport streams. These differences will be explored in the next section.

Colonial Impacts on Indigenous Women's Sport

In this next section I will discuss the second theme of this research, colonial impacts on Indigenous women's sport. This research project takes an Indigenous feminisms lens in understanding the experiences of the Indigenous women athletes who participated in this research. An Indigenous feminisms lens recognizes the compounding impacts of colonialism, devaluing and displacing an Indigenous woman's identity based on both one's gender and race resulting in a distinctly different experience in comparison to an individual who may only solely identify as a woman or as Indigenous (Simpson & Smith, 2014). Indigenous feminisms recognizes the role gendered colonialism plays in impacting the experiences of Indigenous

women due to the displacement of Indigenous culture, knowledge, and values. The second theme that emerged in this research project focuses on the idea of colonialism and its heteropatriarchal values negatively effecting Indigenous women in the spaces of physical activity and sport. This section will elaborate through the discussion of three sub-themes: 1) barriers to participation; 2) inequitable women's opportunities, and; 3) contrasts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous sport.

Settler violence has inflicted damage on Indigenous women based on their Indigenous identities and aggressive colonial assimilation policies have displaced their Indigenous ways of knowing in relation to gender and sexuality (Simpson, 2017; Wilson, 2018). Settler violence and the imposition of heteropatriarchy have also played out in Indigenous women's physical activity and sport plaguing their participation with barriers including sexism, lack of sport opportunities, and an absence in representation (Forsyth, Giles, and Lodge-Gagne, 2014; Hargreaves, 2000; Kay & Jeanes, 2010; Maxwell, Stronach, Adair & Pearce, 2017). This presents in physical activity and sport spaces as fewer opportunities across the age spectrum, fewer options across the competition spectrum, fewer career opportunities in sport, and the upholding of the sex-gender system in organized sport. The lack of opportunities, compounded with barriers and a gap in representation and celebration of Indigenous girls and women's sport, results in lower representation in sporting spaces (Hall, 2013). The participants' experiences illustrated how heteropatriarchal impacts are experienced in the form of barriers to participation, inequitable opportunities, lack of representation, and differences between Western and Indigenous approaches to sport.

Barriers to Participation

A number of barriers exist when it comes to Indigenous women's participation in physical activity and sport. Consistent with the existing literature, the two main barriers to physical activity and sport expressed by the participants, were cost and lack of support system (see Mason et al., 2018; McHugh et al., 2019). A support system can be described as an individual's relational structure built with those available to help in various and necessary ways. A support system can be comprised of one or all of the following: family members, friends, community members or sport administrators such as coaches, volunteers, and others. Buddy expressed these barriers in terms of a lack of money and support system based on her experience and what she has observed in rural BC,

I'm not sure about everywhere, but around this territory, a lot of what I've seen is because of the money, the cost. Especially without receiving funding or the understanding that it can be too much, a lot of times, [sport costs] too much money. And also, the fact that some people, they don't have that support system, like I was saying that I have, they have maybe one person who is okay with them going or not going. But I think there needs to be a lot more of a support system for Indigenous athletes to feel like they can do this, they can play this sport, they can continue on throughout their whole life to pursue all these sports together. And rather than tearing each other down or rather than not supporting. And I think it's super important that we get in as much Indigenous kids as possible to continue to play sports.

Buddy shares that her support system is integral to her ability to play. Her mother plays a pivotal role in navigating and accessing various grants and financial assistance to lower the financial

barrier to participate. Ultimately, her support system (family) is how she is able to overcome barriers to participation. These barriers impact Indigenous athletes generally, but were also common themes brought up by the Indigenous women participants of this study.

Between equipment, fees and transportation, there were many costs identified when it came to sport participation. Whilst some participants were able to access grants, it was also shared that not everyone was aware of the available financial supports and that the application process could be quite burdensome. As Buddy shares, her mother is able to navigate the grant process allowing them the financial support to access the sports they desired, showcasing how financial barriers can sometimes be overcome by support systems. However, relying solely on a community of support can be problematic in that it has the tendency to perpetuate an ethic of neoliberalism, where responsibility is placed on the individual athlete and their community to navigate what can often be a complex and challenging structural system, such as the bursary or grant process. Communities of support, broader societal structures, and the ownership of responsibility to eliminate barriers to physical activity and sport will be further discussed a little later on.

Another barrier for athletes was the COVID-19 pandemic. From season cancellations, facility unavailability, and no competitive game play, the past year had proven challenging for these athletes and their teammates. For rural Indigenous communities, some of these issues existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as a lack of adequate facilities and equipment (Mason et al, 2018). Bree suggests COVID-19 exacerbated these challenges based on her experience with her team:

I'm pretty sure throughout the whole season we didn't have our whole team together once, and it was super on and off because our kind of college gym is

also a recreational centre. So it was like we were kind of going based off them because they were following the COVID rules and obviously it says team sports but they're not considered a team sport they're considered a whole gym facility so we were super on and off, practicing, not practicing, which was really crappy because I live a ferry [ride] away. So, it was like at some points I wasn't even there when they were practicing because we just didn't know and there was no point in spending more money than we had to for rent so it was just really on the fly. I would go back there and then it would be cancelled so then I would go back home and it was just like, crazy.

COVID-19 instigated a number of facility impacts due to capacity limits and social distancing requirements to prevent the spread of the virus. Many facilities underwent booking adjustments and limitations based on purpose of use, as shared by Bree. For Bree this meant inconsistent practice days and times and more inconvenient, spontaneous cancellations. This aggravated financial pressures as the money spent on commuting became a futile cost because of cancelled practices. So rather than continuing to pour money into practices that may not come to fruition, Bree temporarily ceased participation. Similar to Bree, Maggie's team's attendance suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID affected hockey, obviously a lot, with no games and just practices all year. And with that it caused two girls to leave our team throughout the season because they were just so done with just practicing so that was the biggest way it impacted our team.

As Maggie describes, the lack of games had adverse consequences for many of the high school aged girls, where some players dropped-out. For participants who had entire seasons cancelled or

missed out on NAIG due to event postponement, they shared experiencing a decline in their mental health as a result. The postponement of NAIG also has broader cultural and community impacts. Based on the positive influences highlighted in the previous chapter, the absence of NAIG is a missed opportunity for cultural sharing, pan-Indigenous identity formation, and resurgence.

The COVID-19 pandemic also reduced, and in some cases eliminated, access to physical activity and sport opportunities for all Canadian girls, with one in four girls likely not resuming their pre-pandemic sport participation (Canadian Women & Sport and E-Alliance, 2021). Unfortunately, issues of facility unavailability, sub-quality sporting opportunities, and costs, existed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Canadian Women & Sport, 2020). The top five barriers to sport for youth girls in Canada pre-pandemic were access to facilities and programs, quality of programs, alternatives to sport, cost to participate, and confidence (Canadian Women & Sport, 2020). The Covid Alert (2020) reports the impact of the pandemic on girls in sport and that these barriers have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The report admittedly recognizes that their data misses an intersectional approach, and is unable to identify additional barriers faced by those existing at the cross-section of inter-locking oppressions, including disability, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and others. The participants in this study echoed similar exacerbated barriers due to COVID-19 expressed in the report. As the research participants in this study identify as Indigenous women, this further supports the intersectional impacts Indigenous women experiences. The next section will further explore the existing barrier of accessing quality physical activity and sport programs for girls and women.

Inequitable Women's Opportunities

All participants shared a sport development pathway filled with multiple activities. They shared that the diverse range of participation and cross-training likely were positive influences in their sustained physical activity and sport participation. Unfortunately, while diversity in activity participation was deemed a positive factor in Indigenous women's physical activity and sport experiences, the availability of diverse physical activity and sport opportunities was often insufficient.

A large barrier, indicated by both the literature and the participants, that prevents girls and women's physical activity and sport participation is the general absence of opportunities dedicated to girls and women at all levels (Canadian Women & Sport, 2020). For those who do manage to access sport, their experiences are not always positive. Many of the participants in this study shared their frustrations with the dearth of opportunities or inadequate opportunities. The participants explained that the sporting opportunities of boys and men were prioritized over those of girls and women, which reflects the experiences of girls and women in both non-Indigenous and Indigenous sports (Kay & Jeanes, 2010). While participants shared there were growing opportunities for leisure activities for young girls, the ability to play at higher, competitive levels, were limited, particularly given their remote locations which often results in fewer opportunities.

For some of them, the gap in local competitive girls' team opportunities at a young age resulted in complete exclusion or participation on boys' teams where they experienced sexism and isolation. In the narrative below, The Fish shares her experiences getting into the mainstream sport of hockey:

So, this is actually kind of bad, but when my parents wanted to enroll me and my twin brother in hockey they [local sport administrators] said “no, we only have room for the boy.” And my parents were like “Excuse me?” and they were like “well we’re either doing both or none.” And they were like “okay well we only have room for the boy.” (The Fish)

For The Fish, the sport administrators essentially served as gatekeepers to the mainstream youth league, policing heteropatriarchal norms of sport as a male domain outright blocking her participation based on her gender. This heteropatriarchal valuation of gender roles is entrenched in a lot of physical activity and sport spaces in the way we offer modes of participation (Kay & Jeanes, 2010). Youth sport typically divides participation based on the sex-gender binary, often privileging boys and men (Kay & Jeanes, 2010). Athletes typically participate in strictly male designated organized sport or female designated organized sport. This is hugely problematic in the way it reinforces heteropatriarchal norms and a sex-gender binary, as this favours men as the dominant gender devaluing girls and women in physical activity and sport. The sex-gender binary serves to reproduce “colonial heteropatriarchal gender/sexuality” formations that are exclusionary for “Indigenous people who identify as GLBTQ or through nationally specific terms from Indigenous languages” (Driskill et al., 2011, p. 3). The term Two-Spirit is an Indigenous proposed term meant to capture those Indigenous folks who identify along the gender and sexuality spectrum, a term meant to resist gendered colonialism and its resulting heteronormativity (Driskill, Q., Finley, C., Gilley, B.J., & Morgensen, S.L., 2011). Although the term ‘Two-Spirit’ is a pan-Indigenous term that came into use after colonization, it is used to nonetheless characterize the diversity of gender/sexuality formations that cannot be reduced to the Euro-Western sex-gender system (Driskill et al., 2011). This gender binary division creates

challenges where there are no offerings for girls or women and athletes are denied their only option to participate based solely on their gender, as demonstrated in The Fish's experience.

Blake had a similar experience in mainstream sport of almost being denied participation, and when she was finally granted access to a boys' team due to her success on the girls' team, she experienced the following misogynist behaviour:

I ended up being let on to the male's side of hockey and I played on the boys' team with Maggie [another participant] some years up until I guess 5 years or 6 years and it was a fight every single year to play on those teams, and even within the team, the harassment I had. Boys telling me, like they would hide my gear so I couldn't make it on the ice or they would wait at the door and say "you're not getting on the ice," "we don't want you here," "why are you on our team?"

Blake endured discrimination in the form of verbal and physical abuse. Her cis-gender boy team mates would harass her in attempts to prevent her from playing. From verbal manipulation to physically hiding her gear, her teammates were relentless. Even worse, often coaches and managers did little to nothing to prevent the behavior or hold the boys accountable to their actions. For Blake, she did have a supportive girl teammate in Maggie, but for Buddy this was not the case.

Once I got to a certain age as a girl playing with boys it was like I was more isolated for a long time. Like have to change in different dressing rooms, have to be just like even like better than some of the guy players and I think for a long time, even people would like often assume I wasn't as capable because I was a

girl in sport but then when I would show it [my skills] would change their minds a little bit. But I think it's important to, cause when I did play boys hockey and boys lacrosse, often I found it was a different sense of community because it was like I was in it but I was also separated and treated differently because I was a girl. (Buddy)

Buddy shares her experiences playing on boys' teams as incredibly isolating and uncomfortable based on her gender identity. She felt physically and mentally distinct and separate from her teammates. For these women, their resilience and resistance kept them in sport. However, the participants reflected that not all young girls have the strength, desire or community support to keep them in their sport of choice. While resilience is a good quality to possess, it is often uncritically celebrated in dominant discourse as it relieves responsibility from the system that created the problem in the first place. This notion of self-resilience as a necessity wrongly puts the responsibility on the individual athletes, as noted by Hayhurst, Giles, and Radforth (2015). Rather than placing the burden on the individual women athletes, it is necessary that the colonial structures of heteropatriarchy that privilege cis-gendered men be disrupted.

It is important to highlight that these women's experiences exist at an intersection of race and gender. Indigenous girls and women have to negotiate multiple, interlocking sets of gender and racial power relations to play sport at a high level. These structures privilege the participation of boys and men in their own communities limiting opportunities for high level competitive sport for girls and women, especially in geographically remote locations where socioeconomic factors interplay. The research participants recognize the way gender power relations affect how their identities are reflected in mainstream sport, in career opportunities, and in media.

This inequitable access for women's sport has also resulted in fewer flourishing sport career opportunities. "I think once school is done, sports will be done. Being competitive anyway," Hockey Stick shares. Buddy delves into this topic and shares:

I think it's crazy how male athletes, even like professional, get paid way more than female professional athletes. And because they have jumped through the exact same hoops and pushed and worked hard to get to where they are and they're not seen as much in media, not seen the same money, and I think it's time that we start prioritizing because there's no real reason to have this gap when women athletes, like they work just as hard for the less amount of achievements back.

Buddy makes an excellent point in identifying the pay disparity between men and women professional athletes. Because of this pay disparity, fewer opportunities, and a lack of Indigenous representation, a professional career in sport is often not attractive or seemingly possible for Indigenous women. These similar practices can materialize at local levels as these professional practices normalize and privilege the sport practices of boys and men over girls and women.

This inequitable access has resulted in inequitable representation of women generally, and Indigenous women more specifically in physical activity and sport spaces. Indigenous women's experiences in particular are often excluded from the conversation (Forsyth, 2007; Hall, 2013). Therefore, the compounding identities of being Indigenous and a woman exacerbates the neglect of Indigenous women in physical activity and sport in media. This lack of representation serves to erase Indigenous girls and women athletes from mainstream representations, which thus reinforces negative colonial stereotypes of inactivity, poor health, and lack of success in sports. Representations of Indigenous peoples generally, and Indigenous

women specifically, as unhealthy, lazy and unsuccessful, perpetuate a broader settler colonial discourse that inferiorizes Indigenous peoples (Darroch & Giles, 2016; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012).

In the case of the present research, the lack of opportunities along with the various systemic social, cultural and economic barriers make it extremely difficult for Indigenous peoples to succeed in sport, particularly Indigenous girls and women. In the absence of these contextual factors, and an analysis of how these factors connect back to historical and ongoing processes of settler colonialism, it is assumed that Indigenous girls and women are either just not very good at sport or that they are uninterested in sport. These assumptions are another form of settler colonial erasure, erasures that serve to naturalize the broader discourse of Indigenous inferiority. As presented in the first results section, powerful and competent Indigenous women participating in sport at a high level disrupts this discourse.

The research participants are well aware of this structural power relationship and are battling it at every turn. From critiquing lack of media representations, gender discrimination, opportunities, and mainstream sport in general, participants are aware of the societal barriers they work against. In this way, their very existence in sport is an act of resistance.

Contrasts between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous sport

Participants were also asked about their participation in both the Indigenous sport stream and mainstream sport. An underlying theme that surfaced when discussing participation in mainstream sport and Indigenous sport was a difference in values and coaching styles.

I had such a more welcoming experience with the Aboriginal side of it [sport] – it was very like warming and we were all just there to have fun and we were just like a family and it didn't matter where you were from, or where you played before, or how good you were, it was just fun. And we did everything together.

And then when I went and played for [the non-Indigenous Team], it was still really fun and really good hockey and everything but it was just more like there wasn't necessarily that community aspect I found. (Blake)

Blake shared her experience with the Indigenous stream sport as welcoming, familial, and fun. This occurred while still being able to enjoy and play sport well. The notion that sport can be inclusive and fun while also being played at an elite level, is one to note as we explore the differences between mainstream and Indigenous stream sport in the following paragraphs.

Participants mentioned that mainstream sport was often more political than Indigenous stream sport. When prompted to define the term “political,” Bree and Maggie offered confluent observations. Together they discuss and share the social and political dynamics that exist within mainstream sport:

Bree: [Mainstream sport is] political in the sense that it's kinda like who you know, instead of like a lot of the time, it's not actually how good you are. It's actually just like it could be who your parents are, it could be like the person you've grown up being coached by. Like say that just like, on a whim you grew up under someone's wing or like you grew up in a certain school, I find a lot of schools go into [respective] clubs and it's all just kind of clumped into one. So there could be one player in that clump that's not that great, but since she's been there so long she'll get picked over you, so it's kinda like, it's not really how good you are, or what kind of person you are, it's who you know in a sense and in basketball, especially.

Maggie: Yeah definitely, not even just like playing Team BC, like regular Team BC stuff. Just like regular hockey try outs and everything, it's so political

especially like trying out for – like there’s always the A team or the B Team and it’s like if you don’t make the A team in your first year, it’s like the rest of your time in that association you’re never going to make the A Team. It’s like, it’s just never going to happen.

What Bree and Maggie are identifying are the systems of privilege and oppression that are at play in mainstream sporting structures. Bree shares how privileged bodies who supposedly ‘belong’ within specific social circles get carried through to higher levels of play where they may not belong based on their skill level. Maggie then highlights how privilege is maintained and perpetuated through the years, leaving those who are not part of this inner group to continue being at a disservice. In this case, if an athlete is not in the right social circle or goes to the right school, they are less likely to make a high-level mainstream sport team. And if you do not make the top tier team, you likely will never be given another chance. As the participants of this study come from remote contexts, this typically disconnects them from these inner circles of privilege that typically exist within urban city centres. These opportunities are not only geographically located in more urban locations, they also reflect high coaching fees, more travel and thus higher participation and registration costs, thus further marginalizing the young women from these opportunities.

Participants also shared that mainstream sport was rooted in Western values of individualism and prioritized winning over everything else. Meanwhile, they found Indigenous sport aligned with the Indigenous values of holism and interconnectedness, and was a vehicle for enjoyment. What is important to note is that despite these differentiating values, Blake found she still experienced “good hockey” while participating in Indigenous hockey. This “good hockey,” which is arguably the aim of Western/mainstream sport, Blake found in Indigenous stream sport

even though this sporting model emphasize a different set of values. This indicates that high level competition and success do not necessarily need to come at the expense of fun, positive social relations and team values.

Blake also suggests Indigenous stream sport has a different spirituality not found in mainstream sport:

The only way I can describe it honestly is that it was a different spirituality with the Indigenous side of things. It felt like it was more based around discovering yourself and your heritage and it was more of a spiritual journey.

As Blake identifies, Indigenous stream sport often includes elements of spiritualism. The values of spirituality, holism, interconnectedness found in the Indigenous sport stream are also reflected in The Holistic Model as given to the Aboriginal Sport Circle by Rick Brant (Sport for Life, 2019). The Holistic Model mirrors the medicine wheel with four sections that represent aspects of a participant's development in the sport pathway, including the physical, cultural, spiritual and mental. The physical development aspect relates to the typical physical health benefits associated with physical activity and sport participation. Cultural development is described as connection to Indigenous culture, knowledge, and protocols. Spiritual development touches on an individual's purpose and motivation. The mental aspect is the development of mental-intellectual skills such as strategy, tactics, and resilience. These developmental benefits align with McGuire-Adams' (2020) more holistic definition of decolonizing physicality expanding the criteria of what is considered movement beyond the typical assumptions of physical activity solely defined as sport and exercise with an aim of winning or getting fit.

This broader, holistic decolonizing view of development through movement was also found in the research participant's experiences. When asked about the fulsome spectrum of what

the participants considered physical activity and sport, Buddy shared reflections on her experience with her grandparents teaching her how to be a steward of the land through forest fire prevention, hunting, gathering, and hiking. She describes her own physical, cultural, spiritual and mental development through this land stewardship:

Being out on the land we would hike everywhere and I think it like really got me out as well, away from sport, it took me out on the land and taught me a lot about my own culture and that as Indigenous peoples we are here to take care of the land...especially when we're hunting and stuff what my Grandpa always taught us, is that your first thing that you get, like my first grouse, I had to give away to an Elder. Or your first buck you have to give it away to an Elder before you can hunt and keep it for yourself and I thought that was really important. Take care of our Elders... I think that's super important like to take care of others in your community. (Buddy)

The same value of community and interconnectedness found in Indigenous sport stream play was reflected in the value of community care when connecting to land that Buddy shares. This holistic form of movement benefits the wellbeing of oneself, the community, and the land, in line with McGuire-Adam's (2020) concept of decolonized physical activity.

When physical activity and sport focuses on winning at all costs, other aspects of the self-in-relation are neglected. This places emphasis on the outcome as opposed to the process. When relationships are foregrounded, such as relationships with other players, coaches, supporters, family, and oneself, it allows for something else to emerge. Indigenous stream sport creates a space for this something else to emerge, something that the participants identify as 'spirituality.'

This web of relational being is seen in land-based practices, but is not exclusive to this domain. As Buddy suggests, it can transfer into other spaces and practices, such as sport. This notion of giving back to the community strongly relates to our next section, delving into the Indigenous values of relationality and reciprocity.

Intergenerational Support and Relational Accountability

The final results section discusses the themes of intergenerational support and relational accountability and how they influence Indigenous women's physical activity and sport experiences. The overarching themes of intergenerational support and relational accountability strongly resonated with the participants of this project. Intergenerational support can be understood as various generations of people helping one another within a family or broader community. Supporters can be family, friends, athletes, and others. Cree Scholar, Shawn Wilson (2008), describes relational accountability as being "accountable to ourselves, the community, our environment or cosmos as a whole, and also to the idea or topics that we are researching" (p. 106). In relation to this research project, intergenerational support and relational accountability tie together to form respectful, responsible and reciprocal relationships between generations of athletes and their extended communities. There is a responsibility to generations that came before as well as the future generations and those not yet born.

Relational accountability towards parents, community members, and athletes who feel a sense of responsibility for the relationships around them, can give rise to intergenerational support for Indigenous girls and women who are athletes and participants. As described in a previous section, this intergenerational support in the form of navigating barriers, emotional support, coaching, amongst others, works to sustain Indigenous girls and women's physical activity and sport participation. These Indigenous girls and women then desire to reciprocate this

received intergenerational support further fostering relational accountability and a desire to support future generations. This circular process can be depicted in Figure 2.

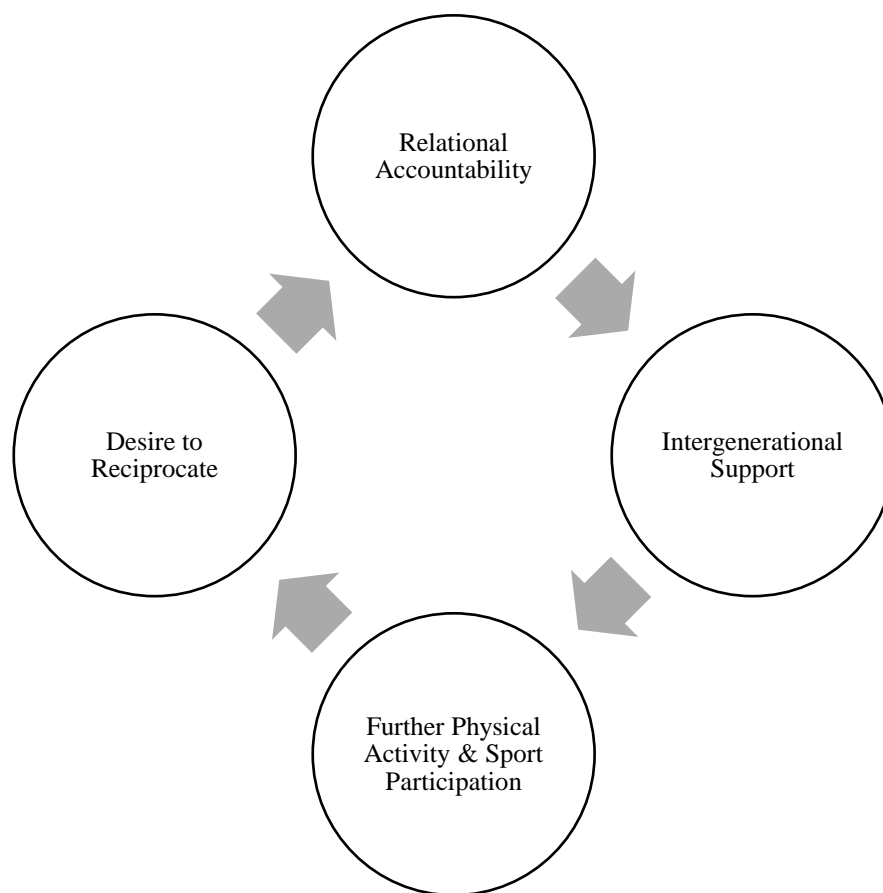


Figure 2. Relationship between intergenerational support and relational accountability

The first section will discuss the various relationships an athlete may have with others, its various forms, and how these relationships play a role in keeping Indigenous girls and women in physical activity and sport. The second section will delve into the importance of Indigenous mentors and role models and more specifically, Indigenous women role models. The final section will comment on the participants themselves as Indigenous women roles models, and how relational accountability continues to drive their own intergenerational support of Indigenous girls and women's physical activity and sport.

All My Relations: Family, Community & Culture as Supports

Relationality is an Indigenous concept that all living beings, both animate and inanimate, are connected and exist in relation to one another (Little Bear, 2000). This grounds a deep value in relationships (with others and with the land) and one's responsibility to, and respect for, other beings, driving the concept of intergenerational support. Relationships are important for many Indigenous communities and this emerged in the conversations with the research participants as well. Participants shared that their intergenerational relationships with families and friends were influential to their physical activity and sport experiences. The Fish shares how important family is to her and how influential they can be:

Family for sure because family is honestly one of the most important parts for sport in my opinion. Just having a good support system, cause after having a bad game, going home, that support system really changes your mind set kind of thing.

The Fish describes how family can be a mental and social support, especially after a tough loss. Family members and friends were also described as advocates, supporters, mentors and role models. These relationships help to build systems of support. For many, their support systems were a main factor in them getting into physical activity and sport.

Some participants got into sport because a family member suggested so or because another family member was already participating and they wanted to join in. For Buddy, it was her cousin:

...when I was 6 or 7 years old, I saw my cousin playing hockey. Growing up, I wanted to be, cause my cousin was like my brother, and I wanted to be so much

like him. So, I begged my Mom to let me play hockey, but first I did figure skating for a while and that's how I got so good at skating.

Buddy wanted to be like her close cousin and play hockey. This got her into figure skating which led to participation in hockey. For others, family members not only inspired them to get involved, but is also a key reason they will continue being active. Hockey Stick shared the following:

My mom's a big tennis player and usually when I come home we'll play tennis together. So, I really enjoy it and I'll probably continue doing that just for fun and also again for the social aspect.

Hockey Stick shared that her mother played a role in getting her into tennis, an outlet she will now use for fun and social connection. Bree also shared that her mother is a spin instructor so, as a result, Bree spins all the time. The participants suggested movement was a vehicle of connection to spend time with family and friends. This is also a demonstration of Indigenous women inspiring other Indigenous women, which we will touch on later in this section.

As shared in the previous sections, family members not only encouraged the participants to get involved in sport, but often actively advocated on their behalf, making sure they got opportunities to compete in sports that may not have been available to them otherwise. For The Fish, her parents were pivotal in fighting to ensure she found a spot on a hockey team when sport administrators originally told them no due to her gender as a girl. For Buddy, her mother was instrumental in securing funding so that money was not a barrier to participation. Family members play integral roles in systems of support, facilitating participation for Indigenous girls and women. Social support and community, play integral roles in overcoming barriers to

physical activity and sport, ultimately allowing Indigenous women to thrive in those spaces (Ferguson, Epp, Wuttunee, Dunn, McHugh & Humbert, 2019).

In a previous section I touch on how NAIG, and similar Indigenous tournaments, and the participants who attend foster a sense of unity and resurgence through the games that extend to their communities. In this section I suggest that the same sense of unification and strength is reciprocated in the opposite direction through support systems and communities onto Indigenous athletes and sport communities. These systems of support that work to combat barriers to participation challenge entrenched colonial pressures intended to divide kinship relations. The shared community and cultural experience of sport, as stated in an earlier section, is largely relational and can be seen as an act of cultural resurgence.

This relational support is also driven out of respect. Respect for oneself and for another. This is congruent with Wilson's (2008) description of relational accountability, that respect, reciprocity and responsibility are at the foundation of relational accountability. As described in an earlier section, Buddy suggests sport teaches "to respect others and to respect yourself". This also supports the notion of physical activity and sport's dual opposing roles where sport can act as both a source of empowerment and shame, as Indigenous girls and women often feel defined by a dominant deficit discourse that frames them as inactive and unhealthy. Physical activity and sport can foster respect but it can also be a source of shame. As Darroch and Giles (2016) discuss, Indigenous women often feel shame and blame when associated to their levels of physical activity. This can be traced back to a long history of settler colonialism perpetuating bodily shame as a central tactic in dividing Indigenous peoples from their own bodies and their nations (McKegney, 2013). Given this history, for the participants to speak of the pride and

empowerment experienced through sport, and to share this sense of pride with others, powerfully pushes back against settler colonialism.

Indigenous Mentors & Role Models

What is also being described in the previous section, is the importance of Indigenous role models. For some participants, it was their older siblings who inspired them to get involved with sport. For others, their parents were identified as their role models. This relates to the Indigenous value of relevance. It is important to have relevant role models. In the case of this research, it was important to the participants to have the presence of strong Indigenous role models. Participants shared it was important to them to see Indigenous athletes and have Indigenous coaches, role models, and mentors.

Indigenous coaches were identified as integral role models and mentors in an athlete's support system. Participants shared that coaches in general, played a large part in shaping physical activity and sport experiences. Indigenous coaches in particular, were seen as role models who valued athletes as they were and what they brought to the team. They were often younger Indigenous athletes who volunteered their time to coach.

While all Indigenous role models are important, it was clear that having Indigenous role models who identify as women is just as integral. Indigenous women role models were incredibly influential to the research participants. These Indigenous women came in the form of close family members, teammates, and athletes on the world stage. Hockey Stick beautifully captures this notion:

For me, my biggest role model is my sister. She is four years older than me and she is a very good hockey player. But it's not just I aspire to be her on the ice, I

aspire to be her outside in real life because she's done so much and she's accomplished so many great things.

For Hockey Stick, her sister, who is also an ice hockey player, continues to be an important role model on and off the ice. She is an Indigenous woman role model in Hockey Sticks' life.

As stated in the previous section, participants shared a strong desire to see more intersectional representation through women's representation and Indigenous representation in media. Brigitte Lacquette was brought up by several participants as an Indigenous athlete they looked up to, signifying the importance of Indigenous women seeing their identity on an international level. This speaks to the importance and necessity of relevant role models. Maggie also shares similar sentiments:

The biggest role models for me when I was younger playing hockey was definitely when I would be on the ice with older girls. I would be like ok this is my time to watch the older girls, figure out what they're doing because I want to play just like them.

Maggie shares that her biggest role models were the older girl athletes, and later highlights specifically some older Indigenous women athletes who she strived to learn from and mimic their skills and game play. These experiences demonstrate the importance of local role models and Indigenous representation in physical activity and sport. This echoes the literature in emphasizing the integral role that role models can play in creating culturally safe and relevant spaces, and showcasing a path forward in becoming active for life (Mason et al.'s, 2018; Paraschak, 2013). Hockey Stick found the idea of relevant role models to be a sub-theme that really resonated with her:

I think the role models is a huge thing because without a role model you don't have a purpose, if someone doesn't show you the way then you'll never figure it out on your own kind of, if that makes sense.

Hockey Stick speaks to a really integral aspect of role models. She recognizes that role models are not only representationally important by being visibly present in the media, but it is also important they are present in everyday lives of the participants as they are also key in paving a path for youth. They help demonstrate the possibility and a way forward in reaching a goal, and this is especially important for Indigenous girls and young women athletes who face interlocking systems of gender and racial oppression in sport.

Self as Role Models

Participants were then asked if they saw themselves as role models. Most of the participants said yes, but that they had not always thought of themselves as role models. They then went on to describe the moment they realized they had become a role model to younger Indigenous girls. The Fish shares the following experience,

I never saw myself [as a role model], I was just like 'oh I'm having fun with these little kids like teaching them the fundamentals' kind of thing. But they actually really looked up to us and then they started watching all of our games so that was pretty cool.

The Fish describes how she did not see herself as a role model and thought she was just having fun while teaching younger girl athletes how to play, but that she finally noticed how much the athletes looked up to her and her other teammates who were volunteering. This experience emphasizes how important Indigenous women specifically are to other Indigenous women and girl's experiences.

All participants shared that they volunteered in some coaching capacity for girl's sport and wanted to continue to do so, as a form of reciprocity in continuing the cyclical nature of intergenerational support from one generation of women athletes to another. This cyclical process generates these same relevant role models that were previously indicated as integral to their own experience. This reciprocity is in large part due to the relational responsibility and accountability they feel to advancing women's sport and giving back to a community that gave them so much. This act of reciprocity is a key component of cultural resurgence, developing more Indigenous athletes through the engagement of Indigenous girls and women with other generations of Indigenous girls and women. Buddy captures her desire to support women's sport in the following:

I hope to see myself as a coach and as involved as I can to push other Indigenous athletes to continue playing all the sports. I've seen so many other Indigenous athletes go and then quit but I think that there just needs to be some more support for that. And it would be amazing if we could have even more Indigenous athletes out here and even more funding for Indigenous athletes in sport.

Buddy hopes to become a coach to promote and support younger Indigenous athletes in pursuing physical activity and sport participation. She sees the potential in Indigenous sport to increase the number of Indigenous athletes. Blake sees a similar potential and feels a sense of responsibility because of her experience:

I know personally I think a bit of it is on me. I feel like since I've had the privilege to participate in NAIG and represent Aboriginal Team BC, I feel like I want to help out and give back because I know a lot of my friends and

community members look up to me so if I can help promote it or I dunno, help out at summer camps, or spread the word about it, I feel like that can be beneficial in the end.

Blake feels relationally accountable to her friends, community members, and the broader Indigenous sport community to support Indigenous sport through promotion and volunteering. This notion of giving back was not limited to physical activity and sport opportunities. Two participants aimed to work in health care, one of them specifically calling out the systemic racism in health care spaces. Bree explains:

I want to do for others what others did for me kind of, in a sense, like also, I grew up – I had rheumatic fever growing up and so I grew up really sick and so I find that's why I want to become a nurse, because I lived in a hospital and that's where all the nurses would come and help me. So it's like I want to be there for kids who, where the nurses were there for me, and I want to make sure that they're understood and I feel like I'm really good at understanding people. So I think that's kind of how I live my life and how come I would coach those kids teams when I was a senior even though I didn't have much time. I feel I was like, I just wanna be able to do something for others which can also not be super great cause I find I can drain myself really easily, but I feel like it's always pretty rewarding.

Bree nicely summarizes the general theme of this section. She indicates how the respect and support given to her influences and inspires her own desire to pay it forward in healthcare, physical activity, and sport. The experiences and stories shared by all participants were a true

embodiment of the Indigenous values that ground relational accountability, respect, reciprocity and responsibility.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this final chapter I will summarize the findings, provide a set of recommendations, indicate opportunities for further research, and offer some final thoughts. This research project sought to better understand the experiences of Indigenous young women (ages 17-19 years old) in physical activity and sport. The aim was to provide voice for Indigenous women in this space and to help fill an identified gap in the research literature. Whilst I recognize I am receiving a great distinction from this research project, my intention was always and remains to create safer and more inclusive spaces for Indigenous girls and women in physical activity and sport. As a recreation administrator, I see the role physical activity and sport can play in promoting holistic wellbeing and the role recreation and sport organizers can play in creating inclusive and culturally relevant spaces. This research helps build a platform for other researchers to explore further topics around Indigenous women's experiences in physical activity and sport, and for future Indigenous voices to find space in research on Indigenous physical activity and sport.

The stories the participants shared revealed that the physical activity and sport experiences of Indigenous young women in rural areas continue to be impacted by racism and sexism as a result of colonialism. However, the sport and physical activity experiences of the young women are also a site of strength, wellbeing, and resurgence for both the women themselves as well as their communities. Additionally, it was found that both Indigenous women mentors and role models are integral in supporting one another through generations and showcasing pathways forward for younger Indigenous girls.

The results build on the work of Tricia McGuire-Adams (2020), who sees sport and decolonized physical activity as a site of resurgence for Indigenous women. Using the concept of decolonized physicality, the results of this study start to reveal how Indigenous physical activity

and sport can be pathways towards holistic wellbeing and Indigenous community resurgence. Physical activity and sport help to empower Indigenous women and promote respect for oneself and for others. Participants shared that physical activity and sport is seen as a teacher, a conduit to opportunities, and a community builder.

The stories corroborated existing literature on the impacts of colonization on Indigenous women's physical activity and sport. A host of barriers still exist in accessing physical activity and sport, especially in rural spaces. For Indigenous women, sport and physical activity are experienced as a form of gendered colonialism. The participants shared that they continue to experience a lack of competitive sport opportunities, underrepresentation at all levels, and scarce career options in sport and physical activity. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated all of these challenges resulting in girls and young women dropping out of sport.

For those Indigenous girls and women who overcame existing barriers and engaged in physical activity and sport, their experiences that were not always positive. Due to the lack of opportunities for girls, they were forced to play on boys and men's teams where they experienced discrimination due to their gender. They also identified that there were distinct differences between their experiences in mainstream sport as compared to Indigenous stream sport. Their Indigenous stream sport experiences were described as more welcoming, familiar, holistic, and fun.

A number of these barriers, the participants suggested, can be mitigated by a strong intergenerational support system as communities can act as advocates, financial aids, and companions, to name a few. Although the intergenerational support system is an important dynamic, this unfortunately places the onus on Indigenous peoples and does not actually address

the colonial impacts and structures that are at the root of these issues. The value of intergenerational support that can be seen in Indigenous stream sport promotes a sense of relational accountability, where each member feels mutually beholden to one another. This sense of relational accountability is felt amongst the Indigenous girls and women who participate in physical activity and sport. The participants of this research expressed the importance of Indigenous women mentors and role models and the pivotal role they can play in growing Indigenous women's sport. Because they understand the importance of Indigenous women representation at all levels, they feel a sense of responsibility to give back to their own communities by acting as role models themselves.

The strengths of the research participants' experiences may prove insightful for recreation and sport providers moving forward in promoting Indigenous women's participation in physical activity and sport. Examining the positive aspects of Indigenous physical activity and sport participation adheres to a strengths-based approach and deeper understanding of constructive ways to promote physical activity and sport (Paraschak & Thompson, 2015). This strengths-based lens avoids examining Indigenous peoples from a colonial mindset that assumes Indigenous communities are at a deficit (Paraschak & Thompson, 2015; Tuhiwai-Smith, 2012).

This is congruent with Norman, Petherick, Garcia, Giesbrecht and Duhamel's (2018) suggestions that health and physical activity organizations should work with Indigenous communities when program planning to avoid deficit approaches and Western-centred approaches. As opposed to examining what is 'wrong' with an Indigenous community, interventions should capitalize on strengths of a community to further support their wellbeing (Norman et al, 2018).

Often the burden is unjustly placed on Indigenous individuals and their communities to navigate colonial heteropatriarchal and capitalist structures. It is necessary to shift the focus towards changing the macro- and meso- systems that continue to be rooted in settler colonial power structures, thus moving the onus of responsibility away from the individual athletes and their communities (Lavallée & Lévesque, 2013). Based on this research, a number of recommendations can be aimed at recreation and sport organizations locally and nationally, that have the collective power to make change from a systems perspective.

Mainstream (Western) recreation and sport organizations play a major role in how participants interact with physical activity and sport. By providing recommendations on the role recreation and sport organizations can play, this shifts the responsibility onto the systems and structures that influence Indigenous girls and women's physical activity and sport experiences. This is why this research project proposes three recommendations for recreation and sport organizations to assist in decolonizing physical activity and sport spaces for the benefit of Indigenous women. Based on the discussion and the participant's own input, three recommendations can be made to recreation and sport organizations to improve opportunities for Indigenous women's participation: (1) prioritize representations of Indigenous women in sport, (2) invest in Indigenous stream sport, and (3) promote Indigenous values in physical activity and sport spaces.

Prioritize Representations of Indigenous Women in Sport

The first recommendation is to prioritize Indigenous women's physical activity and sport at all levels of the participant development pathway. It is clear that there are not enough safe and inclusive opportunities for Indigenous women to participate in physical activity and sport. Prioritizing Indigenous girls and women's physical activity and sport means expanding quality

leisure and competitive opportunities and growing women's professional sport opportunities. By creating more opportunities, this will increase representation, showcase local role models, and demonstrate to young Indigenous girls what a competitive and active for life lifestyle can look like, and how such a lifestyle benefits both the women themselves, but also their communities. An expansion in these opportunities is necessary at all ages and levels of participation.

An opportunity lies in investing in women's professional sport generally, in order to open pathways for Indigenous girls and women. Women's professional sport opportunities require structural change. It is not enough to only increase the salaries of women athletes to make sport feasible career options. The further development of women's professional sport leagues through society's and organization's increased valuation and belief in women's sport, increase of positive media coverage, and mimetic pressures² will increase the likelihood that other organizations will shift their views on the value of women's sport (Shaw & Amis, 2001). Social, financial, and structural investments in women's sport will likely be generated through these social pressures resulting in an opportunity to increase athlete salaries thus becoming more attractive career options. Governing bodies of sport, sponsors, recreation providers and other organizations that make up the meso- and macro- systems, need to shift their valuation of girls and women's sport and invest in growing opportunities for physical activity and sport for girls and women. However, this shift in valuation and growth in women's sport needs to consider the gendered colonial impacts to ensure that those whose compounding identities lie at systemically oppressive intersections are included and accounted for. Specifically, space needs to be made for Indigenous women to thrive in professional sport.

² Managerial pressures caused by a desire to mimic similar sport organizations in an effort to remain on par (Shaw & Amis, 2001)

When Indigenous women are represented in professional sport, they become role models for future generations of Indigenous girl participants. This supports the continuation of the intergenerational cycle that has Indigenous girls looking up to and being supported by their Indigenous women mentors and role models, to later in life becoming future Indigenous women mentors and role models who support younger generations of Indigenous girl participants. Indigenous women's representation in physical activity and sport is incredibly important in battling negative stigma around health and exemplifying a positive pathway towards physical activity and sport.

Invest in Indigenous Stream Sport

The second recommendation is to support greater investments in Indigenous stream sport. This can be in the form of Indigenous majority events, leagues, and workshops like NAIG that bring together Indigenous communities, foster cultural pride, and showcase representation. This is in line with Call to Action #88 in the Final Report of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) that calls to 'ensure long-term Aboriginal athlete development and growth, and continued support for the North American Indigenous Games' (p. 10). It is also in line with Call to Action #90 of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) calling for the investment in community sports programs, elite athlete programs, and programs that address cultural relevancy and anti-racism for coaches, trainers, and sport officials. In addition to investing in Indigenous stream sport and recreation generally, it is critical that the sport and recreation of Indigenous girls and women's sport and recreation be invested in specifically. Oppressive colonial systems like the heteropatriarchy can play out within Indigenous communities too, often privileging boys sport (Forsyth, 2007). Therefore, it is

necessary to call out Indigenous girls and women's sport and recreation as an area that requires specific investments.

As described in the results, Indigenous sport stream events like NAIG have the power to connect generations of athletes and their communities to build systems of support. Indigenous sport stream workshops, events, and programs serve to inspire, empower, and develop future generations of Indigenous athletes. Support systems through family, community, and sport organizations subsequently help reduce barriers to participation. Working with communities to identify how these social and cultural supports can be built utilizing strengths-based approaches can be key in promoting participation.

Promote Indigenous Values in Mainstream Sport

The final recommendation of this research project is to promote Indigenous values in mainstream sport where Indigenous folks may also participate given the double helix model, the participation model that identifies the distinct, yet overlapping nature of the two sport streams (i.e., Indigenous stream and mainstream sport). The Indigenous sport stream and mainstream sport stream are depicted as two parallel strands that Indigenous participants may flow between (Sport for Life, 2019). Western colonial thought is prevalent through most mainstream physical activity and sport opportunities. It is insufficient to welcome and bring Indigenous people into sporting spaces if those spaces are still built for, and affirm, the values, traditions and structures of white folks to the exclusion of others, including Indigenous participants (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Recreation and sport organizers have an opportunity to decolonize their programs through embedding of Indigenous values into all levels of their organizations.

Recreation and sport organizers should communicate with their local Indigenous communities to introduce Indigenous values into sporting systems, a partnership that would also work to ensure that the values introduced are in a respectful and culturally appropriate manner. I share this as a precautionary note as efforts should be made to not pan-Indigenize Indigenous peoples and their values. Based on conversations with participants and existing literature, two values that commonly reflect Indigenous ways of knowing are relationality and physical activity and sport from a holistic perspective.

Focusing on the relational aspects of physical activity and sport helps build community. From the research participants' perspectives this looks like cheering on teams, making friends, and promoting the betterment of the team as opposed to the individual. It shifts the perspective away from winning and success as the sole purpose of participating in sport and physical activity. Relationality also encourages intergenerational support and relational accountability to foster participation for the future generations to come.

This shift towards relational values is in alignment with the holistic valuation of physical activity and sport. This means honoring the social, mental, physical, and cultural benefits of participation. The promotion of decolonized physical activity is also in line with Call to Action #89 to 'promote physical activity as a fundamental element of health and well-being' (TRC, 2015). Physical activity and sport participation from a holistic perspective can then help in the process of Indigenous resurgence.

Final Considerations

This research has been fruitful in contributing to the academic conversations of Indigenous women's physical activity and sport, however the project does have some limitations.

Given COVID-19, true community-based participatory research was not possible given the restrictions on in-person social gatherings. COVID-19 also likely affected the number of recruited participants due to virtual burnout, a decline in sport participation, thus lower community engagement and connection. And finally, given my positionality as a non-Indigenous researcher, my outsider status may have affected the quality of my research. As an outsider, it can be challenging to develop relationships and build trust with participants, especially in online environments, which served to further distance me from the participants. Aligned with the findings of this study, having an Indigenous woman researcher facilitate this study would have been an ideal scenario to showcase representation, provide mentorship and a role model for the participants of the study as someone in academia. With that, a number of steps were taken to ensure quality, reliability, validity, relevance and anti-oppressive approaches through relational accountability. These steps included relationship building and engagement with ISPARC, member checking at multiple stages of the research process, frequent check-ins with ISPARC, and constantly reflecting on my own positionality, potential biases, and power.

I have been so grateful to have shared this space with the Indigenous women athletes who participated in this research, the Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council, and my thesis committee. It is a privilege I did not take lightly throughout this process. I have developed a relationship with various members at ISPARC, and plan to commit to long-term engagement with the organization by supporting ISPARC through my work as a recreation provider.

As a researcher and recreation programmer, this research contributes to the creation of culturally safe and gender equitable spaces in physical activity and sport research, programs and facilities, something that I can implement in my own work. I plan to utilize these learning and

recommendations in my own practice and share them with my professional networks. I am also contributing this research back to ISPARC through a community presentation.

A number of contributions are made through this research project, academically and practically. This study gives voice to Indigenous women who reside in rural areas in the spaces of physical activity and sport research, an area that is lacking historically and contemporarily (Hall, 2013). The stories of the participants strengthen the idea that physical activity and sport can be a site of Indigenous community resurgence and unification. This research also supports the need to utilize an intersectional approach that accounts for Indigenous women's compounding identities of race, gender, and geographical location when promoting and programming physical activity and sport opportunities.

I hope that this research helps to build a platform in which further research in the area of Indigenous women's physical activity and sport experiences can be continued. The research project's findings speak to Indigenous conversations that have come before, affirming both the pre-existing literature and this research project, and can help inform conversations in the future (Wilson, 2008). Future areas of exploration include looking to understand the physical activity and sport experiences of rural Indigenous young girls, older adult Indigenous women, and those who identify along the gender spectrum beyond the binary. The gap in literature surrounding Indigenous girls and women's experiences in physical activity and sport is still present, although this research goes some way to addressing this gap, and the various nuances of their experiences remain largely unheard in the existing research.

Indigenous girls and women deserve the world's attention and service. Academia needs to continue giving voice to Indigenous girls and women, empower them, listen to them, and learn

from them. As colonial systems, academia, sport and recreation organizations need to prioritize Indigenous women, their experiences, and opportunities. We need to do more. Although I have named this chapter as a ‘conclusion,’ it is my hope that it is rather just the beginning, and that more research and community-engaged conversations and action will follow from this work.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Interview Guide

Introduction:

- Interviewer introduction
- Overview of interview format, technology preface and community agreement

Warm-Up Questions: (Structured, in order)

1. I want to start by giving each of you an opportunity to introduce yourself, your name, how you want to be identified in the research report, and where you are from.
2. What is your favourite way to get moving? Why is this your favorite form of movement?

RQ1: What are the experiences of young Indigenous women engaged in high performance mainstream sport generally, and Indigenous sport more specifically? (First question structured, and then allow for free flow)

- Can you tell me more about when did you start in sport and how did you get involved?
 - Prompts: Do you like some sports more than others? What do you like/not like about different sports?
- What is your favourite part about sport?
- What sport(s) are you currently involved with and where?
- What has shaped your experience with sport and physical activity overall? How do you think organizations, your community, and different spaces play a role?
- Who has influenced your experience with sport and physical activity?
 - Do you have any role models? If so, who? [Prompt: Parent, teacher, friend, coach...]

- It sounds as though others have influenced you—I wonder, do you see yourself as a role model? If so, who are you a role model to?
- I am really interested in learning more about your experiences in Indigenous sport and physical activity. Indigenous sport and physical activity can be defined as participation in Indigenous cultural activities OR participation in sport organized by an Indigenous organization such as your local friendship centre, community centre or band, OR participation with other Indigenous participants such as NAIG.
- One of the reasons I invited you to participate is because all of you are part of Team BC for NAIG. I was wondering if you could tell me a bit about your previous experiences with NAIG or other Indigenous stream sport competitions?
 - What does being a part of Team BC mean to you? If you have participated in NAIG before, what does NAIG mean to you?
 - What does NAIG mean to your broader community?

RQ2: What do young Indigenous women want/need in terms of their current and future experiences in sport and PA? (Free flow)

- Imagine yourself in five years, where do you think you will be and what do you think your involvement will be in physical activity and sport?
- Are there lots of opportunities for young women—or women your age group or slightly older—to be involved in sport and physical activity in your communities?
 - PROMPT: If not, why not? What barriers do young women face?
- Do you think opportunities for young women to participate in Indigenous stream sport and physical activity as they grow older is important? Why/Why not?

- Do these opportunities currently exist? What kind of physical activity and sport future do you hope will exist for younger Indigenous girls? What do you think needs to occur for this imagined future to become a reality?