URBAN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES WITH PLAY

by

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Abstract

There are few universally agreed upon definitions of play. Furthermore, the way play is defined, understood, acted out, and valued, varies across cultures, yet the conceptualization of play within the context of Indigenous cultures has yet to be explored. This research sought to understand how urban Indigenous families conceptualized and experienced play. This included an exploration into what activities were included in play, and what factors influenced play for Indigenous families. This research used Métis methodologies: wahkootowin (kinship) and kiyokewin (visiting). These two concepts are interrelated in that they both speak to upholding and maintaining strong relationships through acts of relational accountability. These concepts also provided a theoretical perspective for understanding the connections between play, family, and wellbeing. Kiyokewin was practiced during five semi-structured interviews amongst a total of 12 people (7 adults and 5 children). The meetings provoked dialogue, which was further facilitated through the creation of art pieces and engaging in play. A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted to reveal five themes: (1) Play activities vary widely, (2) Play engages wahkootowin, (3) Play is conceptualized as an experience, (4) Play engagement is affected by many factors, and (5) Play can be part of kiyokewin. Participants named a wide variety of activities they engaged in with family, individually, or through organized programs. In describing their experiences, they spoke to their personal conceptualizations of play, describing how it was experienced and the feelings it evoked. They also discussed the importance of family and community in play, and how play provides the opportunity to bring people together. Participants identified many factors that influenced play engagement including interests, people involved, health status, colonization, and logistics. This work also demonstrated that play is one way to strengthen wahkootowin, and contribute to wellbeing. This study offered unique insights
into the perspectives of urban Indigenous peoples regarding play within their families. It was benefitted by using Métis approaches to research that allowed for story sharing and engaged family members of all ages. The results offer numerous opportunities for further study, as well as recommendations for play programmers.
Lay Summary

This study sought to understand how urban Indigenous families conceptualized and experienced play. Through practices of kiyokewin (Métis visiting), conversations were held with Indigenous families to hear their stories around play, including what activities they engaged in, who was involved, and what factors influenced their play. Results show that families engaged in a wide variety of play activities with their families and communities, citing these relationships as an important part of their play experiences. Participants also described play as a concept and experience that evoked certain emotions (joy, relaxation). Some factors that influenced play engagement included personal interests, the people involved, health status, colonization, and logistics. This study demonstrates that family and community play an important role in play for Indigenous families (also referred to as wahkootowin), and engaging in play is one way to strengthen wahkootowin. Recommendations for further study and for play programmers were also highlighted.
Preface

This research was conducted by myself, Shannon Field, with guidance from my supervisory committee, including Dr. Shannon Bredin (Primary Supervisor), Dr. Margaret Kovach, and Dr. Moss Norman. I am also grateful to have received support from the staff at the Red Fox Healthy Living Society. With support from the aforementioned people, the project design was generated. Recruitment of participants was facilitated by me, Dr. Shannon Bredin, and staff at the Red Fox Healthy Living Society. I was responsible for data collection and data analysis, with assistance from staff and youth leaders at the Red Fox Healthy Living Society. I am the primary author of this thesis, with feedback offered by my supervisory committee. This research was approved by the University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board, Certificate Number: H22-01236.
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<th>Description</th>
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<td>ABR</td>
<td>Art-based research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNPHW</td>
<td>First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MFMI</td>
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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge my supervisor, Dr. Shannon Bredin, for her guidance and support throughout this journey. She has been a wonderful ally and has provided me with valuable insights on my research and own ways of thinking and doing this work. I would also like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Margaret Kovach and Dr. Moss Norman, who have also shared indispensable knowledge and insights into research. I hold my hands up to each of you.

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**Dedication**

I have two dedications to make. The first is to all Indigenous families who have had play taken away from them, and who have used play to survive; and to all those families now who are watching their little ones play, learning to play, and embracing play. I hope your spirit lives free, curious, and playful.

My second dedication goes to all Indigenous graduate students making their way through academia. Part of my efforts to give back to community are to give back to the community of Indigenous graduate students. Many Indigenous scholars discuss the importance of reciprocity. In his work on Insurgent research, Gaudry (2011) says that research outputs should be directed at Indigenous peoples, including the written work. During this process I looked at many other Indigenous students’ theses. I learned from each of their unique works. So, it is my turn to give back to this community. With that, I am writing this paper to Indigenous graduate students.

This work is woven with personal stories throughout, each one linking to my reflections of this work, the processes, the theories, and outcomes. These experiences have shaped my understanding and ways of being in the world. Reflecting on where I am from, where my ancestors are from and who my kin are, were crucial pieces to building this work.

I hope that other Indigenous graduate students discover this paper and find it helpful in writing their own graduate papers just as I did reading the work of others. I hope my stories resonate and reverberate. I hope they inspire and validate the challenges that come your way as a graduate student. Graduate school is tough; it can feel isolating, and it has tested me in so many ways. I came across many knots that I had to untangle. But I am thankful for the opportunity to take the time to explore a topic I am interested in, Indigenous ways of research, and myself. I learned a lot about myself in this process, and I hope you do too.
Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will introduce readers to the researcher, research topic, the goals of the project, and provide an overview of the document.

1.1 Situating the researcher and research

Taanshi, Shannon Field d-ishinihkaashon (Hello, my name is Shannon Field). I write to you from the unceded homelands of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations, where I live, work, and learn. I am the daughter of Denise (nee Henrikson) and John Field. My dad was raised in Burnaby, British Columbia, and he was brought into a family is of Irish and English descent. On my mother’s side I am Métis and Swedish (amongst other ancestries). Her family originates from the Red River Settlement (Winnipeg, Manitoba) after which my great grandparents settled in Manigotagan and the neighboring town of Bissett, which is located a couple of hours north. Our Métis family names are Boulette, Irvine, Folster, and Pruden.

I grew up in a suburban pocket of Richmond, situated on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded homelands of the hən̓q̓əmi̋m̓ speaking Musqueam people. In my childhood, I was seen as the responsible, mature type of kid. I was respectful, quiet, polite, and studious. At home, I liked to do arts and crafts, play imaginative games with my toys, and cook with my mom—and sometimes I liked to clean. I remember standing in my kitchen, I was probably a pre-teen, cleaning something in detail as I often still do. My mom stood there looking at me, hands on her hips, “don’t you worry about that. That’s not something kids need to worry about. Your job is to go play and enjoy your childhood. Not everyone gets to do that you know.” I’d roll my eyes and say, “yes, mom. I’m almost done”. In fact, a very similar situation happened recently when I offered to do a deep clean of her bathroom for Mother’s Day, but I digress.
Later, I’d spend the day on my bicycle, cruising the neighborhood with my friends, grabbing Slurpee® drinks from 7-Eleven® before heading to the park to play on the playground, climb trees, roll down the hills, or play a game of basketball. On hot summer days we’d run through the sprinklers on people’s front lawns, and ride past the blackberry bushes to see if they were ready for picking. I remember feeling a sense of freedom and independence, joy, and moments of exhilaration and calm.

My mom continued to repeat similar sentiments about focusing on playing and enjoying my life into my adolescence, reminding me to take my time and enjoy my youth. Into adulthood, I have continued to believe that life should be fun, and that we can find playfulness in everything we do. As my interests grew into health and fitness, I wondered why more fun approaches to physical activity were not promoted. So many people dreaded the idea of having to exercise despite all of its health benefits.

While I was interning at a government health office, I was asked to create a fitness program for employees. A coworker told me that they asked interns to do this every year and it hadn’t been very successful. Instead, I came up with an alternative, offering a movement program that incorporated three concentrations—one focused on education of the body, one on play, and one on calisthenics (bodyweight exercises). The calisthenics sessions were notably the least popular, and the play sessions were the most popular. I had to get creative for the play sessions as there are not many resources for adult games that are physically active besides sports. So, I made up games that could be played in a board room using items like bean bags, hula hoops, balls, cups, and cones. People that attended the play sessions laughed and sweated harder than anyone in the calisthenics sessions, so not only were they reaping the health benefits but
they were having fun and acquiring the motivation to keep coming back. It was a reminder that play should not end with youth and can be a powerful tool for wellbeing.

Little did I know that in a few years I would begin a Master of Science degree focusing on play. I did not think I would ever attend graduate school. Not for any particular reason, I just did not think it was for me. I am one of few people in my family to go to post-secondary. But here I am, diving into the study of play, being able to engage with this topic through Indigenous research methodologies, and exploring how play has contributed to the person I am.

I often thought about how Indigenous peoples have used play and playfulness as a survival mechanism to get through the grueling times or to lighten our spirits after darkness. When I think of Indigenous play and playfulness, I think of my mom sharing jokes, teasing, and aunties’ big belly laughs. I think about the congregations of families, with everyone from the tiny tots to the eldest of elders, whether it is at family reunions, or Pow wows, or hand game tournaments. I think of how play brings us together.

After conducting a literature review, I found there was little being shared about Indigenous perspective of “play”. So, I decided to give space to Indigenous families to share their knowledge of play and maintain that space in academic literature with the hope that others who study recreation will find it, learn from it, and work towards creating culturally appropriate play programs that honour Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

I also knew that because I was doing research with Indigenous peoples, I wanted to do it in an Indigenous way. The problem was, I had a hard time committing to “Indigenous Research Methodologies”. I had to disentangle myself from who I thought I was, to the person I really was in conducting this work. I am an urban Indigenous person, who grew up away from their Métis homelands and have mixed-European heritage. I grew up with limited access to cultural
activities, and I had only met a small handful of other Indigenous peoples in my childhood. I felt disconnected and unsure about what it meant to be Métis.

One of the challenges I came across in reading about Indigenous research methodologies, was that many Indigenous scholars were referencing the need to go to their home territory to complete their research. Margaret Kovach writes about returning to Saskatchewan a number of times throughout her doctoral research (2021). In her graduate work, Anna Louisa Flaminio (2013; also referred to as Anna Corrigal Flaminio in other literature) uses wahkotowin as her methodology, returning to her home territory citing that “This river land is where my relatives, the Métis, lived, worked, enjoyed family, and eventually fought for their lands. It is a place of beauty that envelops my spirit and helps me reconnect to the spirit of wahkotowin” (p. 63). Janice Cindy Gaudet (2019) was also called home on the recommendation of Métis Elder Maria Campbell who told her: “Theory comes from the way you lived. It is inside of you. Go home, visit your relatives, visit the land” (p. 50). These scholars all speak to how our stories are imbued in the land, that the land speaks to us and holds our histories. Reading their stories, I felt like the only way to do Indigenous research was to be on my home territory.

While it wasn’t within my means at the time to go to Manitoba and visit with family to discuss our ways of being, I reflected on the times I had visited. Even if we hadn’t spoken much in the many years past, upon visiting each one of my relatives welcomed me into their home, fed me, made sure I had a warm place to sleep, and when it was time to leave, they made sure that I did not leave empty handed. When I look at my mother, I can see these ways within her. She has always been kind to all of our neighbors, always bringing them food, blankets, or other gifts. Many of the neighborhood kids enjoyed coming to my house afterschool for snacks and to play.
My mom ensured every child knew that they had a safe place to come and food to eat if they needed it. It was her way of taking care of the community.

Still that doubting voice in my head said that memories were not enough. Remaining in urban Vancouver, away from Métis territories, made me feel like I couldn’t do true Métis research—like I’d be missing some sort of truth to it all.

What I have come to learn over the years while meeting more Indigenous Elders, participating in Indigenous cultural activities, and learning about Indigenous research methodologies, is that growing up I was instilled with the many values and principles that have allowed Métis families and communities to survive and thrive for generations. The things I thought that made me different were not just personality traits, but the differences between Western and Indigenous ways of being and thinking, including the principles within the concepts of wahkootowin (kinship) and kiyokewin (visiting), which take hold as the methodologies of this work, and will be discussed further in Chapter 3: Theoretical Approach.

When I reflected upon Indigenous research methodologies and their resistance to the colonial structures that continue to influence our identity, community, and familial ties (Datta, 2018; Gaudry, 2011), I thought about our complexity as Indigenous peoples in academia. I remembered that these systems were not designed for us, and that one of the intentions of colonization is to make Indigenous peoples feel “not enough”. I had to remind myself not to let the voice of colonizer win, and that I was enough. Auntie/Elder Doris Fox furthered that saying to me, “don’t you ever forget, you are more than enough” (personal communication, January 5, 2023). Regardless of feeling disconnected and living approximately 2000 kilometers away from my mom’s home, I am still a Métis woman, whose inherent right is to do Métis research.
1.2 Métis history and language

As a Métis woman, using Métis methodologies, I would like to present a short history on Métis people and where our language and culture come from. The Métis people arose in the 1700’s, after European men migrated to what is now known as Canada, to work in the fur trade and started families with First Nations women (Métis Nation of Ontario, n.d.). First Nations were an integral part of the fur trade, as were their social and political customs (Ens, 1996). Thus, understanding these customs was essential to the participation of European men, and it was First Nations women who introduced them to their cultures (Ens, 1996). These well-established relationships gave rise to many marriages, and consequently trade alliances, jobs, shared resources, and social status (Ens, 1996).

The Métis are not merely the children between a European and First Nation couple (Ens, 1996; Ouellet & Hanson, n.d.). It was only after generations of certain families working together through specific political and economic conditions, that they developed unique identifiable communities with distinct cultural ways (Ens, 1996; Métis Nation of Ontario, n.d.). Many of these communities resided along the shores of the Great Lakes, Red River Valley and Saskatchewan River Valley, and were separate from adjacent First Nation villages allowing them to develop their own unique customs (Ens, 1996). In the latter half of the eighteenth century, political and economic forces began to push many Métis and mixed-blood families to the Red River Settlement (Ens, 1996). This is where my family members can be traced to, and is often referred to as the homeland of Métis people, and now known as the city of Winnipeg (Ens, 1996; Manitoba Métis Federation, n.d.; Métis Nation of Ontario, n.d.). Many of the mixed-blood families who moved to the Red River Settlement were of Cree descent, but upon integrating into the community, took up a Métis identity (Ens, 1996).
These Cree influences can be seen in both Métis culture and language. Michif is the language of the Métis and typically contains French nouns and Cree verbs (Gabriel Dumont Institute, n.d.-a). Though, depending on the region, there are various dialects of Michif including Michif-Cree, Northwestern Saskatchewan Michif, Michif-French, Cree, Saulteaux and Bunji (Gabriel Dumont Institute, n.d.-a). In the book: *Stories of Métis women: Tales my kookum told me* (Oster & Lizee, 2021), all eight women who shared stories of language mentioned Michif and/or Cree as the spoken language in their family. Norman Fleury, a Michif language specialist, notes that many people referring to Cree (spoken by Métis people), are actually referring to Michif (Gabriel Dumont Institute, n.d.-a). Due to the overlap in language, speakers of either may recognize the words *wahkootowin* and *kiyokewin* (or various spellings). Brenda Macdougall, a Metis historian, articulates that term *wahkootowin* continues to be used in northwestern Saskatchewan by both Michif and Cree speakers (Macdougall, 2010).

Macdougall (2010) further notes that there are variations in spelling of *wahkootowin*, including *wahkotowin*, *wakottuwin*, *wahko’towin*. There are also various verbiages of the word, for example *wakotuhisoo* (he forms a relationship) or *wakottuwok* (they are related) (Macdougall, 2010). As Michif is an oral-based language, there is no standard orthography (Gabriel Dumont Institute, n.d.-b; Macdougall, 2010). Over time, orthographies will shift through revisions or change completely with the development of new ones (First Peoples’ Cultural Council, 2020). Different orthographies are chosen based on the choices of communities, knowledge of linguists, and practicality (for example, including few or no symbols so that it can be easily typed on a computer) (First Peoples’ Cultural Council, 2020; Macdougall, 2010). Therefore, in addition to regional and cultural differences, there are variations in spelling and pronunciations of the words *wahkootowin* and *kiyokewin*. Brenda Macdougall (2017) uses
the spelling: *wahkootowin*; while Maria Campbell (2007), Leah Dorion (2010), and Anna Louisa Flaminio (2013) spell it *wahkotowin*. In Janice Gaudet’s thesis work (2019) she uses the phonetic spelling keeoukaywin, while her co-authored paper (Corrigal Flaminio et al., 2020) uses kiyokewin. Further examples of spelling and word variations can be seen below in Table 1.

For consistency throughout this paper, I have chosen to use the spelling *wahkootowin* based on the early work of Brenda Macdougall (2010), and *kiyokewin*, based on Corrigal Flaminio et al.’s (2020) work, unless specifically referencing one author’s views. The concepts of wahkootowin and kiyokewin that take on the theoretical framing and methodology of this research are based in Métis experiences and knowledges shared by Métis Elders and scholars, as well as my own inferences based on my family’s ways of thinking and being. Therefore, while reminiscent of Cree concepts, they are intended to depict Métis ways of thinking and doing and it is outside the scope of the work to speak to the nuances between Métis and Cree concepts of wahkootowin or any other cultural concepts of kinship.
| Table 1 Variations of kinship and visiting from Michif and Cree dictionaries. |
|----------------|----------------|
| **Michif Talking Dictionary** (dictionary.michif.org), a digital adaptation of *The Michif Dictionary:* *Turtle Mountain Chippewa Cree* (Prairies to Woodlands, n.d.) | visit | keewkayhk |
| | family | wawhkounouhk |
| | kinship | wawhkoumiwayt |
| **Michif To Go** [https://www.metismuseum.ca/michif-app/](https://www.metismuseum.ca/michif-app/) (Gabriel Dumont Institute, n.d.-b) | relative | ni wahkoomow |
| | kinship | waahkoomiwayhk |
| | visit | kiiwookew |
| **Online Cree Dictionary** ([www.creedictionary.com](http://www.creedictionary.com)) (Miyo Wahkohtowin Education Authority & Intellimedia Inc., n.d.) | kinship | wahkohtowin |
| | the act of visiting | kîhokewin |
| **itwêwina Plains Cree Dictionary** [https://itwewina.altlab.app/](https://itwewina.altlab.app/) (Amoh et al., 2023) | relationship; or the act of being related. | Wâhkôhtowin |
| | she/he visits | kiyokêw |

### 1.3 Defining play

In determining my research topic of “play”, my supervisor asked me, “what kind of play will you study?” I was unsure as to how to answer that question. When I think of play, I think of a vast variety of activities and moments. I think about the moments of freedom and joy as I rode my bike around the neighborhood looking for new spots to explore and familiar ones to settle in. In reflection, I think about how play allows us to just “be”. While we do not always choose what we get to play or with who (e.g., school or organized programs), we do choose how we engage. We choose how fully immersed we become in the game, whether to be friendly or competitive.
This somewhat vague understanding of play drove me to look for a simple definition of play in the literature.

The majority of literature is based on Western and European perspectives, including those from Canada, the United States, Australia, and Europe. As a result of the equivocal nature of play, there are few agreed upon definitions, and some argue that it is the player who truly defines it as such (James, 2021; Rigby & Rodger, 2006). Despite this, there are a number of commonly accepted characteristics of play found in the literature; these include: autonomous and active participation of the player, being intrinsically motivated, and that play is process-oriented rather than outcome-oriented (Haywood et al., 1989; Rubin et al., 1983 as cited by Rigby & Rodger, 2006). Haywood et al. (1989) also suggest that play has rules and boundaries. Even in imaginative play, children determine when play begins and ends, and what space is part of their game, such as certain pieces of furniture but not others (Haywood et al., 1989). In addition to the act of play, there is also the approach or disposition to play (and other scenarios in life) referred to as playfulness. Bundy (1993) states: “Without playfulness, all activities become work” (p. 217). Play and playfulness are distinguishable, and I would argue that a person could be playful while working, but playing while working might be more frowned upon (particularly in Western culture).

In continuation of our discussion on terminology, we move to leisure. Some suggest that what play is to childhood is what leisure is to adulthood (Rigby & Rodger, 2006). Haywood et al. (1989) propose that “leisure is intimately connected with the characteristics, experience and purposes of play” (p. 2). Like play, the conceptualization of leisure has different perspectives. Leisure can be seen as residual time that exists when not working, as specific activities like sports and watching television, or as the freedom to participate in any activity based on intrinsic
motivation (Haywood et al., 1989). Sport can fall both within the concepts of play and leisure but can also fit within its own stand-alone concept (Haywood et al., 1989). For example, someone could play the sport of soccer recreationally or professionally. In one case, they are playing for fun, and in the other for work, yet the activity itself remains the same. The categorization of these concepts and associated activities can be difficult as they quickly transcend the boundaries of their descriptions (Piaget, 1951).

Play also has a number of functional aspects to it. Infants typically engage in what is known as sensorimotor play, which is where they develop mastery over their own movements and interact with their environment learning about cause and effect (Piaget, 1951; Tanta & Knox, 2014). By the first year of age, symbolic and imaginative play develops (Piaget, 1951; Tanta & Knox, 2014). This type of play involves using objects to symbolize other objects in life, though sometimes ‘real’ objects are used, and imitations are of life-like scenarios (Fasoli et al., 2010). Alison Wunungmurra, a Yolngu woman (from the Dhalwangu clan) from north-east Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia (in Fasoli et al., 2010) recounts Australian Indigenous children re-enacting a movie they had watched that was wholly casted by Indigenous actors and provided perspectives into traditional ways of life. The children played by the river, and like in the movie, began fishing and gathering mussels, and using baskets woven from leaves. Here imaginative play also introduced real experiences, including the practice of cultural activities (Fasoli et al., 2010). Other forms of play include mind or subjective play (e.g., daydreaming), solitary play (e.g., drawing, puzzling), contests (e.g., games and sports), risky play (e.g., skateboarding, climbing a tree), digital play (e.g., video games), and active play (e.g., tag, basketball) (Sutton-Smith, 1997; Tanta & Knox, 2014).
Active play is also referred to as physical activity play, locomotor play, or exercise play (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). Active play is characterized by playfulnes and moderate to vigorous physical activity (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). In a systematic review of the literature examining the concept of active play, Truelove, Vanderloo, and Tucker (2017) found common themes mirrored in other play definitions. For example, active play included being unstructured, freely chosen, and fun; but active play definitions further included increased energy expenditure, rough and tumble play, and gross motor movements (Truelove et al., 2017). As a physical activity, active play has an important role in the wholistic wellbeing of both children and adults, effectively improving physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social wellbeing (McGuire-Adams & Giles, 2018; Warburton et al., 2006), while preventing several chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and depression (Kim & Welk, 2015; Warburton et al., 2006).

Less active forms of play, like sitting and playing with toys, doing art, or reading, also provide a positive benefit for mental wellbeing and offer therapeutic effects (Alexander, Frohlich, & Fusco, 2019; Schousboe & Winther-Lindqvist, 2013). For example, children can reduce stress and tension through play, including low-intensity activities such as reading, playing games, and drawing (Alexander, Frohlich, & Fusco, 2019). Play may also assist with cognitive performance through arousal, breaks from other cognitive tasks, and improving self-esteem and wellbeing (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998).

While my original intention as a Kinesiology student was to focus on active play, once recognizing that there was little literature on Indigenous perspectives of play, I opted to leave the construct of play wide open, and provide participants with the opportunity to determine how they defined play for themselves. However, in addition to this, it was important to remember that the
large majority of the research I was reading was centered around Western constructs of play, and I did not want participants’ conceptualizations to be pressed into Western conceptualizations.

The previously discussed definitions of play are widely accepted, but it is important to recognize that the way play is defined, understood, acted out, and valued varies across cultures (Fasoli et al., 2010; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Therefore, this is an important consideration in this research given that the participants may have their own varying understandings of play; and are situated in an urban region and may lack access to culturally relevant play programming and activities. Indigenous peoples may experience Western-based programs/activities differently than non-Indigenous peoples as they may not align with cultural values or norms (Ferguson & Philipenko, 2016).

Furthermore, colonization and Western perspectives have significantly impacted play experiences for Indigenous peoples across Canada. Physical activity, sport, and leisure time has been highly controlled through colonial policies and initiatives like the Indian Act and Indian Residential School system (Forsyth, 2012; Gerlach et al., 2014). Despite changes in these policies and the resistance of Indigenous peoples, settler state policies continue to define and influence how Indigenous peoples engage in play. Policies, research, and programs are imbued with Eurocentric ideologies and social practices, oppose Indigenous knowledges, and can be viewed as another way to marginalize Indigenous peoples (Fox, 2007; Gerlach et al., 2014). Therefore, it was important that participants in this project understood that there was no judgement in the way they conceptualized and/or experienced play. The intention of this project was to understand how urban Indigenous peoples conceptualized play and to better understand their experiences of play.
1.4 Research Questions

Accordingly, this research strives to explore what play means to Indigenous peoples living in urban environments, and how they experience play. The research questions include:

1. What does play mean to urban Indigenous families?
2. What activities are considered as play?
3. Who do they engage in play with (e.g., on their own, with their family, or with organized programs)?
4. What factors influence play?

1.5 Project goals and anticipated outcomes

The goal of this research was to create space for Indigenous knowledge in the field of physical activity, recreation, and play; as well as to make recommendations for the design of play programs that honour the desires of Indigenous peoples, and value Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Further to exploring the conceptualization of play by Indigenous families, the experiences of play were important to examine, given that factors such as the purpose and approach to play; activities designated as play; intra-family culture and community culture; and opportunities, accessibility, and exposure to play may or may not align with what is found in Western literature (Fasoli et al., 2010; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Literature on Indigenous peoples’ perspectives and experiences of physical activities, leisure, early-childhood programs, and wellbeing suggest that family and cultural connections may be important facilitators in play experiences; and will be further discussed in Chapter 2 (Ferguson & Philipenko, 2016; First Nations Health Authority, n.d.; Fox, 2007; Gerlach et al., 2014; Lavallée, 2007). The purpose of exploring these factors was to support an understanding of how Indigenous peoples conceptualize and experience play.
1.6 Importance of the project

In 1989, the Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (United Nations, 1990). This was in recognition that families are fundamental within society, and that all of their members, particularly children, should be afforded with the essential protections to allow them to grow, be well, loved, and understood (United Nations, 1990). Article 31 recognizes the rights of children to rest, leisure, and play (United Nations, 1990). Furthermore, Gerlach and colleagues (2014) applied a critical lens to play, and suggest that play should be reframed as an occupational determinant of health, with particular consideration to the realities of Indigenous peoples and the impacts of historical, political, and socioeconomic conditions post-colonial contact.

While this project speaks to the important benefits of play for Indigenous children, it goes beyond that to speak to the benefits of play for the whole of Indigenous families, and explores their distinct experiences with play. This is currently an area that is almost non-existent in the literature. This work also creates space for Indigenous knowledges and experiences within academic literature. To facilitate meaningful and inclusive play and recreation policies and programs in Canada, it is necessary to have play literature that is grounded in the voices of Indigenous peoples. Giving the space for Indigenous peoples to define play, also supports the United Nations recognition that Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination, including determination and engagement in their social and cultural development (United Nations, 2007).

1.7 Overview of the research

This research was an exploration into what play means to Indigenous peoples, and how they experience play. This research was carried out using the Métis methodologies of
wahkootowin (family relations or kinship) and kiyokewin (visiting) (Campbell, 2007; Corrigal Flaminio et al., 2020; Dorion, 2010; Gaudet, 2019; Macdougall, 2017). These two concepts are interrelated in that they both speak to upholding and maintaining strong relationships through acts of relational accountability (Campbell, 2007; Corrigal Flaminio et al., 2020; Dorion, 2010; Macdougall, 2017). These concepts also provided a theoretical perspective for understanding the connections between play, family, and wellbeing.

Kiyokewin was practiced by holding semi-structured interviews that provoked dialogue, working with our hands on an art piece, and engaging in play. A total of five interviews were conducted with Indigenous families, with a total of seven adults and five children. Participants in this project were asked about the activities they like to do as a family, individually, or through organized programs, and what factors influence their play experiences (e.g., why do you choose to participate in certain activities?). Depending on what participants shared during the first half of the interview they were asked varying questions about their experiences of play, if adults ever felt held back from playing, and whether they hoped to engage in play more often. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, with summaries of the transcriptions being produced.

Indigenous youth leaders were then invited to participate in a data analysis workshop (learning about and assisting in a thematic analysis). The findings revealed five themes: (1) Play activities vary widely, (2) Play engages wahkootowin, (3) Play is conceptualized as an experience, (4) Play engagement is affected by many factors, and (5) Play can be part of kiyokewin. Overall, families engaged in a wide variety of play activities, and most people discussed play with their families and friends, with limited activities on their own. Participants spoke to the concept and experience of play, rather than providing any narrow definitions. In
determining their play activities, they spoke to the purpose of their activity and how it made them feel. Participants also named many factors that influenced play engagement including interests, people involved, health status, colonization, and logistics. The results demonstrate that Indigenous families participate in a wide variety of activities and that family and community play an important role in play. While play may have been impacted by colonization, engaging in play is one way to strengthen wahkootowin, and contribute to our wellbeing.

1.8 Overview of the document

This first chapter has provided the context to this work, including situating the researcher and research, defining play, and stating the project goals. In the following chapter, a review of the literature will be provided, proceeded by a detailed chapter on the theoretical approaches using wahkootowin and kiyokewin. In Chapter 4, literature around the methods of interviewing, using arts, and incorporating play in research will be presented. This will be followed by Chapter 5, which presents the research methods as used in this study. The results will be presented in Chapter 6, and Chapter 7 will provide a discussion of those findings. Finally, Chapter 8 will conclude this work by presenting the strengths and limitations of the work, areas for future research, and knowledge translation strategies of the research.
Chapter 2: Narrative Literature Review

A review of the literature shows limited research regarding Indigenous peoples’ perspectives of play. This included searching for terms like games, dance, sport, leisure, physical activity, and early childhood programs. Due to the limited amount of literature, this review will include Euro- and Western literature. This literature will be viewed with careful consideration, taking note that Euro and Western views may not align with how other cultures define, understand, value, or experience play (Fasoli et al., 2010; Sutton-Smith, 1997).

2.1 Euro- and Western theories of play

Classical theories of play, developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, attempted to explain the purpose of play (Mellou, 1994). These theories included the Surplus Energy theory and the Recreational/Relaxation theory, which respectively proposed that play provided an outlet to burn off extra energy or replenish energy lost from work (Mellou, 1994). Practice or Pre-exercise theory (Karl Groos 1896, 1901 as cited by Mellou, 1994) suggested that play served as practice for adulthood; for example, children imitating adults is an important element in play.

Modern theories of play arose after 1920 and focused on determining the role of play in child development (Mellou, 1994). Generally, human development consists of four interconnected domains: the cognitive, affective (socioemotional), motor, and physical domains (Payne & Isaacs, 2017). Motor behaviours, including those skills used in play activities, are impacted by development of the cognitive, affective, and physical domains; just as the development of the motor domain impacts performance in each of the other domains. For example, having well developed muscles (physical) can help improve how fast you run (motor),
which in turn makes you feel good about yourself (affective), and because you feel good, provides you a clear mind to make better decisions, such as anticipating game plays (cognitive).

Modern theories of play mainly focus on the cognitive and affective domains. Some examples include Freud’s Psychoanalytic theory in which play advances emotional development (Freud, 1961; Mellou, 1994). He proposed that play has a cathartic effect which allows children to process and/or transfer negative emotions; for example, the re-enactment of a spanking on a doll transfers the negative feelings to the doll (Freud, 1961). Other psychoanalysts expanded the theory to talk about wider personality development and expression of aspirations, anxiety, and ego processes (Mellou, 1994). Cognitive theories deal with intellectual development and postulate that play provides scenarios in which children practice newly acquired skills, or develop abstract thought, creativity, and flexibility (Mellou, 1994).

A great deal of research has been produced documenting play’s impact on development and wellbeing, including the aspects of physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing (Alexander et al., 2019; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; Schousboe & Winther-Lindqvist, 2013). As mentioned previously, active play can contribute to the prevention of several chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and depression (Warburton et al., 2006), as well as improve mental, spiritual, and social health (Lavallée, 2007; McGuire-Adams & Giles, 2018). Play has been shown to provide a positive benefit for mental wellbeing, as well as therapeutic effects (Alexander et al., 2019; Schousboe & Winther-Lindqvist, 2013). For example, it is reported that children can reduce stress and tension through play including participation in low-intensity activities such as reading, playing games, and drawing (Alexander et al., 2019). Play may also assist with cognitive performance through increasing arousal, serving as a break from other cognitive tasks, and improving self-esteem and wellbeing (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998).
Play also benefits social and cultural wellbeing (Dender & Stagnitti, 2015; Fasoli et al., 2010; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; Schousboe & Winther-Lindqvist, 2013). Play activities can provoke spontaneous ideas and enact uncensored realities (Schousboe & Winther-Lindqvist, 2013) and provide scenarios or interactions in which consequences are diminished (Bundy, 1993). These breaks in reality mean that players may attempt activities or roles they would not try otherwise in their life, resulting in the opportunity for personal and social development (Bundy, 1993; Schousboe & Winther-Lindqvist, 2013). Children often refer to play opportunities as moments they enjoy with their friends (Berinstein & Magalhaes, 2009; Ergler et al., 2020).

Cultural teachings can also be shared and practiced through play (Dender & Stagnitti, 2015; Fasoli et al., 2010). Through play, children imitate adult-like activities including traditional activities like hunting and gathering food, and singing and dancing (Dender & Stagnitti, 2015; Fasoli et al., 2010). Schousboe and Winther-Lindqvist (2013) argue that more play research should undertake a cultural-historical theory in recognition of human development on all levels from individual to societal, and the cultures and histories that influence the societies they develop within. Schousboe and Winther-Lindqvist (2013) look at play from each of these interdependent levels (individual, group, and immediate societal and historical levels). Cultural-historical theory appreciates that “that there are many ways to play and many ways of thinking about play” (Schousboe & Winther-Lindqvist, 2013, p. 4).

2.2 Indigenous perspectives on development and wellbeing

The numerous benefits that play offers to wellbeing can be contextualized within the philosophical approach to wholistic wellbeing, which includes our personal wellbeing, the wellbeing of our community and nation, the systems around us, and an understanding of being in
relation and our interconnectedness (First Nations Health Authority, n.d.; Gaudet, 2019; Lavallée & Lévesque, 2012; Macdougall, 2010).

A wholistic approach to our personal wellbeing includes multiple domains, and is often depicted through the teachings of the medicine wheel. The medicine wheel is not used by all Indigenous peoples, and many First Nations and Métis communities carry their own unique teachings of it (Lavallée & Lévesque, 2012). Generally, the medicine wheel represents the interconnection of mental, spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing and emphasizes balance among these (First Nations Health Authority, n.d.; Lavallée & Lévesque, 2012). The previously mentioned domains of human development (cognitive, affective, physical, and motor) can be recognized within the medicine wheel with the exception of spirituality. While interconnection is recognized, discussions around the dimensions of development lack the emphasis on balance, which is found in medicine wheel teachings. The absence of these important aspects of wellbeing in Western perspectives on development and wellbeing furthers the need for more inclusion of Indigenous perspectives.

Expanding beyond our personal wellbeing there are also teachings in many Indigenous communities about how the wellbeing of our family, communities, and Nation(s) influences our personal wellbeing (Gaudet, 2019; Macdougall, 2010). This is the understanding of wahkootowin. Wahkootowin is a Cree-based word also used in Michif, the language of the Métis people, that can be translated to relatives and relations extending to the whole of creation, past, present, and future, physical, and spiritual (Campbell, 2007; Dorion, 2010; Macdougall, 2010, 2017; Wildcat, 2018). Wahkootowin is based on the belief that we are all related and interconnected, bringing a sense of responsibility and care for one another (Campbell, 2007; Dorion, 2010; Macdougall, 2017; Wildcat, 2018). More details of wahkootowin can be found in
Chapter 3, *Section 3.3 Unravelling theory*. While social development is discussed in Western developmental play theories, the discussion is not comparable in depth or emphasis in the way that it is honoured by Indigenous peoples.

The inclusion of widespread relations is well illustrated in Figure 1, which presents the First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness (FNPHW) model (First Nations Health Authority, n.d.). In this circular model, the center represents the human being, nested amongst numerous other circles portraying teachings, values, bodies, and environments that support and uphold wellness. The second circle holds the concept of the medicine wheel and its four realms. The third represents the values of respect, wisdom, responsibility, and relationships, but it is noted that any other values could be included. The fourth circle talks about where we come from including our family, community, nations, and the land. In its fifth circle, environmental, social, cultural, and economic influences are included. In the FNPHW model, the outermost circle is drawings of people representing strong communities. This circle includes children “because they are the heart of our communities and they connect us to who we are and to our health” (FNHA, n.d.). Some Indigenous peoples believe that we have much to learn from children (Field et al., 2022), and that these children represent both our futures and our pasts (Makokis, 2008); and are therefore, a depiction of our wellbeing at multiple points in time simultaneously.

Within the context of play, we should be considering factors not just within a child’s or adult’s personal realm, but consider the whole web of our relations and its influences. Wahkootowin captures our relations of past, present, and future (Campbell, 2007; Dorion, 2010; Macdougall, 2010, 2017; Wildcat, 2018), and therefore we could consider how the legacy of colonization has impacted our wahkootowin of the past and continues to impact in the future. Colonization has impacted our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, as well as all
of our relations—family, community, land, and Nations. And because it has impacted those
relations, it has impacted the way we engage and the way we play with one another (Gerlach et
al., 2014).

![Figure 1 The First Nations Perspective on Health and Wellness (FNPHW) model.](from First Nations Health Authority, n.d.)

### 2.3 Colonization in the form of physical activity

Indigenous peoples have always participated in sports, recreation, play, and physical
activity. Family members of all ages engaged in active roles, including Elders (Thompson et al.,
2000). Traditionally, the most popular activities included hand games and ball and stick games
which are still practiced today (Filice, 2016). These activities were part of everyday culture, and
promoted skill development, fitness, personal growth, community cohesion, and transmitted and upheld traditional teachings (Filice, 2016; Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006).

Musqueam Nation Auntie/Elder Doris Fox (personal communication, March 4, 2022) shared that ‘runners’ from her community would run for days to send and retrieve important messages with neighbouring communities as far as the interior region of British Columbia. They could run faster than those travelling by canoe, effectively saving their communities from invasions. Sometimes runners also had a role in healing and ceremony, offering prayers and reaching healers in other communities for help (D. Fox, personal communication, March 4, 2022; Rasmussen, 2003, as cited in McGuire-Adams & Giles, 2018). Today Indigenous people still find a connection to running.

McGuire-Adams and Giles (2018) interviewed Anishinaabeg women who described running as healing, ceremonial, and connecting them to the land. The authors describe the importance of land and how it carries ancestral stories and teachings, and participants compared the long preparation process of readying for a marathon to ceremonial sun dance preparation. As such, “the act of running on the land, thus, re-presents Anishinaabeg on the land, which also fosters personal decolonization through physical activity, and creates a community of support” (McGuire-Adams & Giles, 2018, p. 212). Unfortunately, the colonization of these lands and the Indigenous peoples who come from them has greatly affected every aspect of life, including participation in physical activity and play.

The Canadian government imposed several policies and initiatives in effort to control and eradicate Indigenous peoples and their cultures. From the late 1880’s to the early 1950’s, the Indian Act prohibited Indigenous peoples from engaging in cultural and ceremonial practices, including many physical activities like dancing and games (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). Indian
residential schools were imposed by the Canadian Government in the 1880’s, with the last school closing in 1996, in an effort to control and assimilate Indigenous peoples, committing widespread abuse, destitute living conditions, and genocide (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, n.d.). Children were forcefully removed from their homes, taken away from their homelands, and forced into these institutions.

In 1910, calisthenic exercise was regimented at the schools, with the intentions of reducing the spread of pulmonary disease among the children and youth (Forsyth, 2012). While promoted as a health initiative, it was a form of power over the young people “through meticulous control of specific parts of the body—a type of micro-management” (Forsyth, 2012, p. 22). There was widespread belief that the combination of formal schooling and religious instruction would result in disciplined citizens that upheld Eurocentric beliefs (Forsyth, 2012). This included instilling Western gender roles, whereby boys were taught to be vigorous and competitive, and often did labour work outdoors, while girls engaged in less physically demanding activities, often not participating in sports at all, and completed domestic tasks inside (Forsyth, 2012; Gerlach et al., 2014).

In the 1970’s, the federal government of Canada began to support sport participation to encourage competition and under the notion that teamwork developed leadership skills, cooperation, and commitment (Alexander et al., 2019; Forsyth, 2012; Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). Children across Canada were encouraged to engage in sport over leisure activities and other counter-culture activities (Alexander et al., 2019). The Canadian government was using sport as a way to instill Western values, obedience, and to further maintain their goal of assimilation (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006).
The prescription and encouragement of physical activity in an effort to control and assimilate Indigenous children and youth, included the denial of meaningful play experiences. This was done by separating friends and families, and dictating if, when, and how they played (Gerlach et al., 2014). The result of such control is intergenerational trauma that continues to impact health and wellness, familial relationships, and play experiences (Gerlach et al., 2014; Reading & Wien, 2009).

While policies have shifted, such as the end of Indian residential schools, settler state policies continue to define and influence how Indigenous peoples engage in play. Sports and leisure activities, including play, are imbued with Eurocentric ideologies and social practices, and their promotion, while seemingly harmless to the rest of society, are yet another way to marginalize Indigenous peoples (Fox, 2007; Gerlach et al., 2014).

Gerlach, Browne, and Suto (2014) have discussed how early childhood education programs are centred in Eurocentric idealistic and neoliberal views. Evaluation in early childhood education programs examine parent-child relationships through play interventions, perpetuating racialized discourses and patriarchal surveillance (Gerlach et al., 2014). Evaluating early childhood education programs through this lens also leaves a blind eye to the injustices that colonization has created, wherein Indigenous parents may be blamed and shamed as disinterested or neglectful of their children for disengaging in play (Gerlach et al., 2014).

An important contemporary issue in early childhood programming is that play time is sometimes decreased or removed in order to make space for formal education to promote brain development (Frohlich et al., 2013). Further, programs for early childhood development largely place focus on school readiness and productivity. This focus on productivity “is a more insidious
and pervasive form of colonization as Indigenous children are primarily viewed as human capital for the economic health of the state” (Gerlach et al., 2014, p. 251).

Play is also being recognized by health institutions as a way to promote healthy activities and reduce morbidity (Frohlich et al., 2013). Some researchers argue instrumentalizing play to focus on the positive outcomes on physical health, risks reshaping children’s play experiences (Alexander et al., 2019). As discussed previously, play is typically defined as a process, not an outcome (Haywood et al., 1989; Rubin et al., 1983 as cited by Rigby & Rodger, 2006), and some researchers further emphasize the need for free and spontaneous play (Alexander et al., 2019; Frohlich et al., 2013; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; Schousboe & Winther-Lindqvist, 2013). For example, children commented that being on sports teams was fun and rewarding however, still recognized it as an obligation, feeling forced to do it on days when they did not want to (Alexander et al., 2019). This sense of obligation to participate in structured and deliberate activities can easily fracture the quality of fun.

Deliberate play can offer benefits. Deliberate play (such as some physical education classes or organized community programs), can offer some improvements to gross motor and fine motor skills and benefits to inhibitory cognition (Pesce et al., 2016). Pesce and colleagues (2016) found that motor skill improvements as the result of a deliberate play intervention in physical education classes were enhanced by spontaneous outdoor play. While their intervention emphasized fun, it does not mean every child always had fun. Regardless, Pesce et al.’s (2016) study suggests that there are benefits to experiencing both deliberate and spontaneous play.

2.4 Indigenous peoples’ perspectives on physical activity

Today, Indigenous peoples have two worlds to walk in—the Western colonized world and their traditional world. While Indigenous peoples often find themselves walking within the
dominant Western world, the environments and experiences often misalign with their knowledges, values, and ways of being. One Indigenous student interviewed by Ferguson and Philipenko (2016) mentioned that the physical activity opportunities available at their university campus did not resonate with them and that the lack of traditional and cultural engagement in physical activity instilled a sense of disconnect from their authentic self.

Moreover, other Indigenous students recommended integrating Indigenous-specific physical activity programming, for example pow wow dancing (Ferguson & Philipenko, 2016). The students also suggested having more Indigenous visibility and voice in physical activity settings which would involve Indigenous staff and memberships on committees (Ferguson & Philipenko, 2016). Lai et al. (2019) partnered with a First Nation community in British Columbia and implemented a community-led and family-oriented walking and healthy lifestyle counselling program. The program proved to benefit cardiometabolic health and physical activity behaviours among participants, demonstrating the necessity for culturally relevant health and fitness programming (Lai et al., 2019).

Outdoor programming may be another way to include culturally relevant aspects (Bredin et al., 2021). The outdoors provides a variety of play opportunities, including sensory play, exploratory play, risky play, and social play as well as the opportunity to connect with the land (Bredin et al., 2021). The connection to land further contributes to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, in addition to a sense of belonging to family and community (Bredin et al., 2021).

Social connection is another important factor in finding meaningful physical activity for Indigenous peoples. As previously mentioned wahkootowin, or relatives (family, community, Nation, land) are important contributors to wellbeing. Numerous studies exploring physical
activity within Indigenous communities reference the importance of family and community connections. Thompson et al. (2000) considered how Indigenous peoples in Australia viewed eating and physical activity habits in an effort to create effective public health interventions targeting behavioural factors. Their participants spoke about the importance of social connections and responsibilities, and that physical activity is done in support of their family and community. Moreover, physical activity participation that was completed for the benefit of the individual, was seen as shameful and a breach of their social responsibilities (Thompson et al., 2000). For example, team and individual sports were acceptable, but working out at the gym for individual wellness as opposed to training for your sport was seen as a social disconnect (Thompson et al., 2000).

Janice Forsyth (2012) interviewed a residential school survivor, and while those who attended had varying experiences, this Survivor recounts making lifelong friends through his sporting experiences at the school and developing teamwork skills. Fred Sasakamoose, a former National Hockey League player, also recounts his time at residential school saying he found relief in sports, and that hockey was the only thing that made going back to the school each fall bearable (Sasakamoose, 2021). Indigenous students in Ferguson and Philipenko’s (2016) study expressed that a lack of community on campus resulted in low levels of physical activity among Indigenous students. Other students commented on keeping active social groups, and how it supported them in remaining active (Ferguson & Philipenko, 2016). McGuire-Adams and Giles (2018) interviewed Anishinaabeg women runners; one runner said her running group felt like family, and another runner discussed how it provided motivation and created a community of support.
The women participating in McGuire-Adams and Giles’ study (2018) also shared that they wanted to become healthy role models for their children and families, and successively their friends and families began running or working out after seeing them commit to running. The participants in Ferguson and Philipenko’s study (2016) also found their parents to be active role models and supported their own physical activity engagement through exposure to different sports and by sharing positive stories of their sport experiences.

These literature references to family and social connection demonstrate just one of the important socio-cultural factors that should be considered when looking at physical activity within Indigenous communities. Different ethnic and racial groups, due to various factors such as cultural values, norms, racism and discrimination, and socioeconomic discrimination, have been found to impact participation in leisure activities (Berinstein & Magalhaes, 2009; Gerlach et al., 2014; Rigby & Rodger, 2006; Walker, 2013). Therefore, it is important to consider these factors in addition to particular community knowledges and experiences, when examining physical activity and play knowledge and experiences.

While reviewing the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples’ Participation in Sport survey, Findlay and Kohen (2007) identified that the use of the term ‘sport’ may have missed many physical activities which Indigenous peoples participate in, such as hunting and snowshoeing. McHugh et al. (2013) found that some Indigenous youth located in Edmonton, Alberta found it difficult to define sports when explaining what sports meant to them, further emphasizing the need to define physical activity related terms from an Indigenous perspective.

Moreover, there remains a dearth of literature on Indigenous leisure and play (Fox, 2007; Gerlach et al., 2014). Gerlach, Browne, and Suto (2014) suggest that play should be reframed as an occupational determinant of children’s health as it would draw attention to how it is
influenced by historical, political, and socio-economic structures within society. Play research has mostly been centered around adult, Eurocentric, middle-class perspectives (Gerlach et al., 2014). Fox (2007) articulates that an attempt to conceptualize “Aboriginal leisure” is problematic in that leisure is a Euro-North American concept that may not resonate with Indigenous peoples.

Even in the very way that researchers explore Indigenous identity and its connection to leisure can misconstrue and oversimplify the elements of Indigenous being (Fox, 2007). Many researchers miss the interconnectedness and greater meanings of activities, such as overlooking spiritual and relational aspects (Fox, 2007). In earlier discussions about play in this document, you will notice that most research references play as a function of physical, mental, and social wellbeing and development (Alexander et al., 2019; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998), without mentioning spiritual wellbeing. Therefore, this project seeks to decolonize concepts of play and articulate how some urban Indigenous peoples conceptualize play. Applying the theoretical lens of wahkootowin attempts to explore play with the recognition of interconnectedness and relationality.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a review of Euro- and Western theories of play. These theories discussed a focus on function of play as a contributor to childhood development. This discussion was furthered by a narrative review of Indigenous perspectives on development and wholistic wellbeing. A wholistic approach to wellbeing considers a person’s entire web of relations, including family, community, Nation, and land, as well as the systems that make up and influence our society, such as social, cultural, and economic. In consideration of the multitude of these influences, this chapter goes on to discuss the numerous detrimental impacts of colonization and how it has weaponized and degraded play for Indigenous peoples. Despite this,
Indigenous peoples continue to find solace in sport, physical activities, and play, and recognize these activities as a path to wholistic wellbeing (physical, mental, spiritual, familial, community).
Chapter 3: Theoretical Approach: Wahkootowin and Kiyokewin

Methodology is the strategy, and process or design inspiring the choice of particular methods (Crotty, 1998). This requires reflection of the epistemology and theoretical perspectives which inform and relate to the chosen methodology. This chapter will describe Indigenous methodologies through the perceptions of being an urban Métis woman, and how this has influenced the gathering of knowledge for this work. I will take you through my journey of finding Métis theories and methodologies, landing on wahkootowin and kiyokewin. I attempt to explain those living concepts and discuss how they apply to this research.

3.1 Chapter preface

In thinking about my research choices, I struggled to justify them beyond thinking this is what my mom and granny would do and what “just feels right”. In my original proposal, I included a number of theories and approaches to try to explain my methods and how I would analyze the data. The response I got from my committee was that there were too many pieces, and that it needed to be simplified. I agreed. It was a mishmash of things, none of which quite fit together. So, I started over.

In Crotty’s well referenced book The Foundations of Social Research (1998), Crotty reminds us that we should be stating the assumptions we bring to research. In doing what felt right, what assumptions was I bringing? I wrote out a list of things I believed about play, about play amongst Indigenous families, and why I thought my methods were meaningful. I then unpacked those thoughts and considered where they came from: how did my childhood influence these ideas? Are there Indigenous teachings and values within those assumptions? How are those ideas shaped by colonialism and Western thought?
I cycled through many different thoughts, moments of enlightenment, tears of self-doubt and confusion, and tears of joy and connection. I was struggling to put concepts to paper in ways that made sense—in ways that dissected them into theory, methodology, and methods. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, Section 1.1 Situating the researcher and research, I was also doubting my ability to do “Indigenous research” because I was not on my own homelands. But as Creator would have it, I was reminded that theory is bound in our web of relations and as such, is everywhere we are.

In the midst of writing this chapter over, I attended a community event, that for the previous 13 years, had been organized by Elder Kat Norris, member of Lyackson First Nation. She would rally together community members across Vancouver to cook Bannock and other foods to be handed out in the Downtown Eastside (where many of our kin, marginalized, and impoverished peoples reside) each New Year’s Eve. To her, building community and supporting our kin was incredibly important. She recognized that the impacts of colonization have left many Indigenous peoples displaced and/or disconnected from their homelands, including her own community which has been in land disputes for years. Sadly in 2022, Kat passed away, but her family ensured that her legacy would live on.

On December 31, 2022, I spent 6 hours pulling apart little pieces of dough to be fried, slicing up baked and fried Bannock to make sandwiches, and packing everything up in little bags to be handed out later that evening. Despite working for many hours straight, and the grief that Kat’s close family members were feeling, the kitchen was filled with dancing, singing, learning, encouragement, teasing, play, and laughter. Many of us did not know each other, but there was
so much love in that room. The aunties\(^1\) would say to me, “oh, you know we only tease you because we love you”. I felt a sense of belonging; it felt like being surrounded by my own family; I felt loved.

I walked away from this event reflecting on how our knowledges and theories live within our kin, and that everything within and far beyond the homelands are in that web of relations. My Métis kin are spread across the province of Manitoba, but the people in that East Vancouver kitchen were also my kin. They are all wahkootowin, my family. We visited, shared stories, learned new things, and supported one another. And we were practicing kiyokewin, visiting. The experience solidified that I could do Indigenous research, right where I was.

In the following sections, I will take you through Métis epistemology and the concepts of wahkootowin and kiyokewin and how they can be applied in research.

### 3.2 Epistemology

In *Research as Ceremony*, Shawn Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree Nation) (2008) takes us through a visioning exercise to help us imagine Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. He has us imaging numerous tiny lights, connecting them together with threads, creating a web, and eventually those lights take on physical form (whether it be our body or other beings in the world around us) representing the many relationships we have formed over our lifetimes. He says that, “Every individual thing that you see around you is really just a huge knot—a point where thousands and millions of relationships come together” (p. 76). He goes on to say that these knots can also represent ideas and entire systems of thinking – otherwise known as our

\[^1\]“Aunties” are not always blood-relatives, but are Indigenous women who play an important role in guidance and teaching of younger generations (Flaminio et al., 2020).
epistemology. In my reflections after the New Year’s Eve Bannock giveaway, I thought about how every person in that kitchen was a “knot” that I was becoming familiar with, and thus I was slowly working to unravel the Indigenous theories and knowledges bound within our relations.

Understanding the epistemology we align with is foundational to the way in which we do research. Epistemology is a term used to describe what determines how we come to know, what we know, and what knowledge we perceive to be valued (Crotty, 1998). Epistemologies are influenced by social relations, including culture, teachings, and experiences and therefore it is important to recognize that people from different cultures will naturally angle from different paradigms (Crotty, 1998; Kovach, 2021). The understanding of how we come to know, prompts our theoretical perspective, our methodology, and our methods (Crotty, 1998; Kovach, 2021). In asking myself how my mom or granny would go about hearing others’ knowledges, what I was really thinking about was Métis epistemologies and methodologies.

Like Wilson (2008) shared through his knot analogy, the Métis people also believe that our knowledge systems are bound within our relations—whether those are relations to other humans, the land, or any other being (Gaudet, 2019). Métis communities pass on traditional knowledge through social relationships and acts of social accountability (Hodgson-Smith & Kermoal, 2016; Oster & Lizee, 2021). Knowledges and histories are shared through stories passed down from Elders and family members (Corrigal Flaminio et al., 2020; Dorion, 2010; Hodgson-Smith & Kermoal, 2016; Oster & Lizee, 2021). Learning also occurs in our day-to-day activities like cooking and gathering food (Hodgson-Smith & Kermoal, 2016).

Kinship is a significant part of our knowledge systems. It recognizes the multiple, interconnected, contextual, and evolving sources of knowledge (Kovach, 2021; Little Bear, 2000). These systems of knowledge require a wholistic approach in order to grasp all of being
that is in constant flux (Kovach, 2021; Little Bear, 2000). To maintain our knowledge systems, we must also maintain our kinship ties—*wahkootowin*, which also encompasses the laws and principles that guide how our families’ function (Dorion, 2010). Wahkootowin is our relations and the shared responsibility for each other (our ethical roles), and the belief that our kin extend to everything in creation; and recognizes that these responsibilities are lifelong obligations (Corrigal Flaminio et al., 2020).

### 3.3 Unravelling theory

Like Wilson (2008), Kovach (2021) also uses a knot analogy stating: “Articulating theory can feel like unravelling a tightly tangled knot” (p. 181). As a beader, I know all too well the experience of untangling knots. Overall, beading is a humbling experience that takes time and patience, yet certain styles and thread types lead to knots more frequently which can be frustrating. The Métis are known as the flower beadwork people (Manitoba Métis Federation, 2023) and my granny and mom were also beadiers. I use beading as a way to ground myself, connect with my culture, and practice creativity, determination, and humility. Despite my practical experience with knots, determining Métis theory in the context of my research was one of the toughest knots I have ever tried to unravel. I had many winding and evolving theories and bounced back and forth between “I get it!” and “ugh, I don’t get it”.

I had begun to read about how Métis scholars had used the concepts of *kiyokewin* and *wahkootowin* in their research (Corrigal Flaminio et al., 2020; Dorion, 2010; Gaudet, 2019; Gaudet et al., 2020; Macdougall, 2010). Kiyokewin is the concept of Métis visiting practices (Corrigal Flaminio et al., 2020; Dorion, 2010; Gaudet, 2019) and wahkootowin is our kinship, relationships, or relations (Campbell, 2007; Dorion, 2010; Macdougall, 2010, 2017; Wildcat, 2018). These concepts made sense to me within the realm of my research, but I found it difficult
to label them as theories and/or methodologies, or even to talk about these two concepts separately. Kovach (2021) validated my struggles in reminding me that terms like theory, epistemology, and methodology are Western concepts that seek to separate and categorize concepts which often go against the foundation of Indigenous thought in which everything is interconnected and whole. Through my learnings, I determined that both wahkootowin and kiyokewin and its associated principles (including decolonization) were the methodology, fueling the theories and methods behind my work.

3.3.1 Wahkootowin

Wahkootowin is a Cree-based word also used in Michif, the language of the Métis people, which can be translated to relatives, relationships, and relations extending to the whole of creation, past, present, and future, physical, and spiritual (Campbell, 2007; Dorion, 2010; Macdougall, 2010, 2017; Wildcat, 2018). Mathew Wildcat (2018) describes wahkotowin in the context of Métis and Cree teachings as “the act of being related—to your human and other than human relatives” (p. 14). Due to the lack of standardized orthographies, there are variations in spelling of wahkootowin, including wahkotowin, wakottuwin, wahko’towin (see Table 1; Macdougall, 2017; Wildcat 2018). There are also various verbiages of the word, for example wakotuhisoo (he forms a relationship) or wakottuwok (they are related) (Macdougall, 2010).

The concept of family, or wahkootowin, is fundamental within a Métis worldview, and encompasses ideas, values, principles, laws, taboos, virtues, and ways of being—it is much more than our physical relations (Macdougall, 2010). It guides and influences people’s attitudes, thoughts, behaviours, and day to day activities (Flaminio, 2013; Macdougall, 2010). It actively leads us through ways of knowing, feeling, and being (Gaudet, 2019).
Wahkootowin is based on the belief that we are all related and interconnected, bringing a sense of responsibility to one another (Campbell, 2007; Dorion, 2010; Macdougall, 2017; Wildcat, 2018). With its foundations, wahkootowin represents the notion that family is “the binding fabric of society…” and “… provides structure to society; infuses institutions with meaning; establishes [sic] protocols and frameworks for interaction and behaviour; is the foundation for pursuing any economic, political, social, or cultural activity” (Macdougall, 2010, p. 7). Wahkootowin influences how we foster and strengthen our relationships, and influences whole community interactions (Macdougall, 2010). Furthermore, “[i]t guides the way we conduct ourselves, treat one another, and learn from one another and from the land itself” (Gaudet, 2019, p. 53). We are responsible to our kin, and our contributions and withholdings can have a profound impact to ourselves and our web of relations.

In my research I use wahkootowin to guide the axiology and analysis of my work, while also advancing decolonial ways in the academy through the use of Indigenous theory and ways of being. Before further discussing how wahkootowin speaks to my work, I provide several examples of wahkootowin in research by Métis scholars.

### 3.3.1.1 Examples of wahkootowin in research by Métis scholars

There are numerous examples of wahkootowin in research. Brenda Macdougall, a Metis\(^2\) historian (2010) examined the effects of wahkootowin on economic, religious, and socio-cultural histories on Metis family groups in Northwestern Saskatchewan. Through a review of hundreds

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\(^{2}\) Some Métis/Metis people choose not to include acute accent over the letter e. Based on individual author’s works I’ve written it Métis or Metis
of records, she considers how families nurtured their community and identity through family obligation and responsibility (Macdougall, 2010).

Anna Flaminio, a Métis Cree scholar (2013) considers wahkotowin (a variation in spelling) as a relational approach to analyze Cree history for the purposes of determining the applicability of *Gladue*—which works to reduce over-incarceration of all offenders in Canada, particularly Indigenous offenders by looking at individual’s unique background and systemic factors. She offers guidance on how social history can be applied through a lens of wahkotowin in addition to offering a framework of analysis to the Gladue inquiry, which is based on wahkotowin (Flaminio, 2013).

In her dissertation, Metis scholar and artist Leah Marie Dorion (2010), explores child rearing practices with Cree and Metis families. Her research drew on decolonizing theories, including wahkotowin and its principles, recognizing that colonial policies were focused on breaking down Indigenous families (wahkotowin) and have had lasting impacts on child-rearing practices today (Dorion, 2010).

And finally, Janice Gaudet, a Métis scholar (2019) completed her doctoral research on the use of Indigenous methodologies in land-based initiatives for Indigenous youth. She focused on the methodology of keeoukaywin (kiyokewin) or “visiting work”, recognizing wahkohtowin as an underlying principle that sets the tone for how we come together. It was Gaudet’s work that helped me to understand how the concept wahkootowin was central in my work, and in my efforts to practice kiyokewin.

### 3.3.1.2 Wahkootowin as axiology

The concept of wahkootowin is a guiding force in the axiology of this work. Understanding wahkootowin means understanding our connectedness and recognizes that our
behaviours matter and that we must show care for one another (Gaudet, 2019; Macdougall, 2010). Wahkootowin is our relational responsibilities (Campbell, 2007; Corrigal Flaminio et al., 2020; Dorion, 2010; Macdougall, 2010, 2017; Wildcat, 2018). It is comparable to relational accountability, which numerous other Indigenous scholars have discussed its role in research (Gaudet, 2019; Hodgson-Smith & Kermoal, 2016; Hunt, 2018; Kovach, 2021; Little Bear, 2000; Wilson, 2008). Shawn Wilson (2008) found that several Indigenous scholars he spoke with “stated that this relational way of being was at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous” (p. 80).

Relational accountability in research urges us to consider our responsibilities as researchers and ensure that our methods contribute to respectful relationships between ourselves, the topic we are studying, and the participants within the study (Wilson, 2008). Part of this responsibility is reciprocity, which also seeks to maintain the wellbeing and healthy balance of our relations (Gaudet, 2019; Little Bear, 2000; Wilson, 2008).

Wahkootowin is not just our responsibility to others but requires a recognition and responsibility to ourselves. Without self-recognition there are no relationships to be had. Relationality requires the recognition of both the relations to other and to ourselves (Gaudet, 2019). Janice Gaudet (2019) says that, “Self-recognition that is anchored in relationality brings us back to our bodies, allowing us to derive meaning and develop self-reliance in our lives” (p. 56). This act of self-recognition also becomes part of the research process. It requires us to be reflective, dig deep, and regain all the pieces of ourselves and understand who we are, where we have been, where we will go, and who is in our web of relations shaping our thoughts, ideas, knowledges, and experiences. Stan Wilson (2001) from Opaskwayak Cree Nation, speaks to the concept of “self as relationship” (p. 91). He articulates that as Indigenous peoples, our identity is
grounded in our relationships to the land and with our kin of the past, present, and future. Relationships are described as the things we are, not as something we are in (Wilson, 2001, 2008).

This recognition that we are our relations, solidifies the understanding that we are connected and that our behaviours matter. Our methods should serve and benefit the community in some way (Gaudry, 2011; Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Wahkootowin serves axiological guidance, ensuring that I treat my participants and their knowledges with respect, and our interactions create a stronger relationship between us so that we have a shared understanding. Wilson (2008) says that in our analyses, we must hold to relational accountability by remaining “true to the voices of all the participants and reflect an understanding of the topic that is shared by researcher and participants alike” (p. 101). When I meet with participants, I understand that they are gifting me with their knowledges, and I must offer something in return. Wahkootowin also holds reciprocity as an underlying principle. I practice reciprocity with my participants through story exchange and offerings like food, gifts, and honorariums; and to the greater community by sharing knowledges held within this research.

3.3.1.3 Wahkootowin theorizing in play

While I believe that wahkootowin plays a central role in the axiology of this work, it also has theoretical underpinnings in play. Wahkohtowin and Indigenous theorizing more broadly, include an emphasis on relationality and interconnectedness, and our responsibility to uphold each other’s wellbeing. I believe that so much of this is exuded in play time – who we play with, how we play, where we play. Our play has been influenced by the generations before us, the games they played and passed onto us, the individual likes and dislikes within our own nature and those that play with us, the land we live on (both ancestrally and currently), and the
experiences it has afforded us. However, Dorion (2010), found that the severance of wahkotowin in Cree and Métis families, through colonial policies has had lasting impacts on child-rearing practices today. The impacts of the severance of wahkotowin extends to play. Western and Eurocentric thought deem play and playfulness as immature and something that is left behind in childhood (Gerlach et al., 2014).

Regardless, I believe that our play interactions across the generations re-establishes and strengthens wahkootowin. When we come together, are playful together, and laugh together, I think we are strengthening wahkootowin. Maria Campbell (as cited in Flaminio, 2013) says that we learn wahkotowin over a lifetime, through everyday activities, stories, and songs. I believe that wahkootowin is learned and practiced through play too; that play is an active contributor to our wellbeing and playing together is an act of relational accountability.

Playfulness and humour is not only of critical importance for Indigenous peoples culturally, but also for healing and love (Garrett et al., 2017). Dorion (2010) says that “[t]he teachings of Wahkotowin identify ways to use loving and nurturing language between family members” (p. 55). I think of the little ones learning, of cousins teasing, and aunties’ big belly laughs; I picture the gatherings of families, with everyone from the tiny tots to the eldest of elders at Pow wows and hand game tournaments. I think about the group of us gathering in that East Vancouver kitchen on New Year’s Eve, and how we were strengthening wahkootowin. My theory is that playing with one another results in love, healing, and is a decolonial action, strengthening wahkootowin. The theoretical application of wahkootowin will be further discussed in 5.2 Meaning making (Analysis strategy).
3.3.1.4 Wahkootowin as a decolonial act and theorizing

While in previous sections I have discussed how wahkootowin influences the axiological approach and theorizing in play; I believe that it strongly supports decolonial acts and theorizing. The concept of relational accountability includes upholding the wellbeing of our relations, and this includes decolonizing spaces for them. Datta (2018) describes decolonization as a “continuous process of anti-colonial struggle that honors Indigenous approaches to knowing the world, recognizing Indigenous land, Indigenous peoples, and Indigenous sovereignty—including sovereignty over the decolonization process” (p. 2) and goes on to say, “that decolonization is an on-going process of becoming, unlearning, and relearning regarding who we are as a researcher and educator, and taking responsibilities for participants” (p. 2).

Métis scholar, Adam Gaudry (2011) discusses how extractive research is deficits-based and often looks to validate Indigenous knowledges within Western academia—allowing Indigenous knowledges to be debated by Western thinkers. The consequences of doing so silence, marginalize, and lose control of Indigenous knowledges (Gaudry, 2011). As an alternative, Gaudry (2011) offers us what he refers to as Insurgent Research, which challenges colonialism and centres Indigenous ways of being, thinking, and doing. Insurgent research validates Indigenous worldviews and is accountable to Indigenous peoples in that the research is created for their use, and they are the ones who judge the validity and effectiveness of the research (Gaudry, 2011). Insurgent research is decolonial at its heart.

The purpose of this work seeks to honor Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and to amplify self-determining conceptualizations of “play” in an effort to encourage those that work with Indigenous peoples to make space for Indigenous play. Decolonizing and Insurgent research creates the space for self-determination and empowerment of Indigenous peoples (Datta, 2018;
This research will also be mindful of colonization’s impact on Indigenous peoples’ experiences of play across generations, the play experiences available to us, and how we seek to play today. Marie Battiste (as cited in Datta, 2018) says, “decolonization is ‘recovery from colonial impact, restoration of Indigenous people’s identities, Indigenous people’s languages, Indigenous people’s experiences’” (p. 12). Wahkotowin as a decolonial act and theorizing within this research disrupts the centering of colonial knowledge and perspectives of play, shifting towards Indigenous worldviews, knowledges, experiences, and values related to play.

3.4 Kiyokewin

In thinking about how I wanted to approach my research I thought of ways my mom, my granny, and our other relatives would create space and welcome people in their home. I thought about the importance of visiting, and how it acts to uphold our relationships and share knowledge with one another. Without knowing the word at the time, what I was envisioning was kiyokewin [kee-ou-kay-win] or (kinship) visiting (Flaminio et al., 2020; Gaudet, 2019; Gaudet et al., 2020). Kiyokewin reflects a Cree and Métis methodology that is also “a Métis way of life” (Gaudet, 2019). Gaudet (2019) says:

Keeoukaywin points to special times and spaces in which connections are strengthened, stories are heard, remembering occurs, and we are reminded of who we are and of our responsibility for the well-being of the whole. It offers an Indigenous view of community-based, participatory research methodology, and stands on its own as a viable methodology… Keeoukaywin is a way of celebrating life, creating alternative knowledge, learning, and sharing, a living expression of wahkotowin that resists colonial dominance (p. 55).
Kiyokewin is our social responsibility, where wahkotowin is built in (Corrigal Flaminio et al., 2020). The visiting way requires ongoing work towards relational accountability, prompting us to create respectful and safe spaces for our visitors, and allows them to feel at home, to feel a sense of belonging (Gaudet, 2019).

Kiyokewin typically takes place in the home, and Métis women were most often engaged in visiting practices and were essential in the continuation of culture and values, knowledge translation and mobilization, and maintaining strong relationships (Dorion, 2010; Gaudet, 2019). The creation of a home environment in which visiting occurred, was centered around love and care, sustaining a space of respect and reciprocity (Gaudet, 2019). Sharing food is key aspect of kiyokewin (Corrigal Flaminio et al., 2020). In Dorion’s doctoral work (2010), one of her participants recalls visitors always being fed, and given food to take away with them—I have shared that my family follows this same practice.

3.4.1 Kiyokewin in my research

The descriptions of kiyokewin above had been the references I was looking for. Kiyokewin is centered around wahkootowin, which was the goal of my project. As a methodology and as visiting work, it offered the space to bring family together, build and strengthen our connections, share stories of play, and act in play.

My goal was to create a welcoming environment, one where people felt comfortable, where they wanted to engage and share stories, and be playful. Play was used to strengthen our connections, and facilitate our conversations around play. Art also became a tool to facilitate conversations and the sharing of stories about play. The incorporation of play and arts into the methods, is captured by the approach of learning-by-doing in Métis methodology, which has us “engaging our hearts, bodies, voice, and minds, visiting with and learning from each other, and
sharing our stories (Gaudet et al., 2020, p. 19). I also considered that visiting often occurs through day-to-day activities (Corrigal Flaminio et al., 2020; Hodgson-Smith & Kermoal, 2016), and given some consider play to be a child’s occupation (Gerlach et al., 2014), kiyokewin can also be practiced through play.

Naturally, I would ensure that my guests were taken care of. I carefully prepared for the visit with participants, making sure I had everything that might be needed. I provided participants with ample information about the project, and when they indicated their interest in participating, I asked for their preferences on meeting times, dates, and snacks. Regardless of their food preferences, I always brought numerous options for participants to snack on. In effort to sustain a space of respect and reciprocity, I offered guests something to take home with them (art supplies), and an honorarium for their time.

3.5 Chapter summary

This chapter offered insight as to how I landed on wahkootowin and kiyokewin as the methodology for this work. It reviewed what a Métis epistemology looks like, centering the importance of kinship in passing down knowledge. This leads into the discussion around wahkootowin, our relations, and how wahkootowin has been used as a methodology in research, and how it shows up as a theory and axiology in this work. Kiyokewin, visiting work, is also introduced and discussed within the context of our responsibilities to our wahkootowin, and how kiyokewin stands as a space to share knowledge, securing itself as the other methodological stand point of this work. Detailed application of wahkootowin and kiyokewin in this research can be found in Chapter 5: Research Methods.
Chapter 4: Literature on Interviewing, Arts-Based Methods, and Play in Research

In advance of the chapter dedicated to research methods, this chapter will review the literature associated with using interviewing, arts-based methods, and play in research. This review gives way to the rationale for using these methods, as well as key takeaways from other researchers. Again, in reviewing this literature, it is important to note that the majority of the research is based in Western thought and perspectives and caution should be taken when relating to Indigenous ways of thinking and being. Regardless, I found the literature to provide useful information for guiding the meetings with families and their children in the project.

4.1 Literature review on interviewing

In wanting to keep the essence of kiyokewin alive, this research utilized semi-structured interviews with multiple family members. The semi-structured nature allows for more dialogue between participants and the researcher, and allows openness and flexibility to discuss artwork and share stories about play experiences that is more reminiscent of visiting. In consideration of children’s involvement in this study, dynamic dialogue may also assist in coming to an understanding of children’s contributions. As there is still limited literature on kiyokewin in research, I looked to the literature on family interviewing.

4.1.1 Multiple family member interviews

As may be obvious by their name, Multiple Family Member Interviews (MFMI) refers to interviews conducted with multiple members of a family, resulting in data that contains the perspective of more than one family member (Kankkunen et al., 2002; Reczek, 2014; Van Parys et al., 2017). They can be conducted with two (dyads) or more family members present, or
conducted separately, or a mixed of both approaches (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010; Van Parys et al., 2017).

Reczek (2014) suggests that qualitative family research can offer deep insights into the complex and intertwining lives of families, particularly if researchers are interested in relationships, family culture, or a particular event experienced by the family. This richness of data is gained through the dialogue between family members, for example “one individual jogs the other’s memory, injects opinion or thoughts into another’s narrative, or prompts another to tell a particular detail of a story” (Reczek, 2014, p. 328). Some studies also suggest it can be helpful to surround the child with familiar relationships to make them feel more comfortable and to provoke conversation (Mayall, 2008).

In their determination to provide a much-needed roadmap to assist researchers undertaking MFMI, Reczek (2014) begins by suggesting that researchers should consider whether their epistemology aligns with this methodology. Reczek (2014) provides examples from (post)positivist, social constructionist, and critical epistemological frameworks, which are notably different than Indigenous research paradigms. Shawn Wilson (2008) notes that as long as the methods fit the ontology, epistemology and axiology of the Indigenous paradigm, they can be borrowed from other suitable research paradigms.

As mentioned previously, Métis epistemology expresses that our knowledge is held in our relations (Gaudet, 2019; Hodgson-Smith & Kermoal, 2016). Gaudet et al. (2020) discuss the importance of extended family and their role in supporting the family with knowledge translation and tangible supports. I thought it was important to bring families together and hear from multiple generations on this topic. Additionally, I considered that colonization has been working to separate wahkootowin, our families, and I did not want to further perpetuate this. Therefore,
MFMI provided the opportunity for Indigenous families to co-create knowledge while aligning with kiyokewin. Kiyokewin is about coming together, sharing stories, and listening to those around the table. In reading about MFMI, the following information was summarized to guide the interviewing process:

- Children are proposed questions first to avoid being influenced by what their parents say (Kankkunen et al., 2002).
- Reczek (2014) expressed that open-ended questions directed at the family as a whole, can allow the family to provide a joint response, providing responses that are cohesive and consensual.
- The same questions that were posed to adults, can also be posed to children, just in simpler terms (Kankkunen et al., 2002).
- Kankkunen et al. (2002) suggested that the child’s role in the study could be enhanced with the use of play and drawing during data collection.

4.1.2 **Interviewing children**

A number of considerations for interviewing children were revealed across the literature. In Mayall’s (2008) experience, children recognize adults as the people in power, regardless of the efforts made by the adult to diminish this dynamic. Morison et al. (2000) advise that children’s willingness to participate in an interview (whatever the purpose) will be influenced by their discernment of personal benefit and risk. Children are more likely to respond openly and honestly when they feel respected, accepted, and safe, rather than if they sense any discontentment (Morison et al., 2000). Further, the people present at the interview, including the
researcher and the parents, also influence how a child responds (Morison et al., 2000). Children can also distinguish between adults and the context in which they hold power (Mayall, 2008).

Morison, Moir, and Kwansa (2000) provide a number of tips for interviewing children. These include:

- Actively listening and showing interest in what they are saying.
- Being responsive to non-verbal cues to help establish rapport and prevent distress.
- Using aids in communication, like pictures.
- Taking your time, and not pressuring a child to respond.
- Using humour with discretion to avoid misunderstandings (for example, teasing).
- Using supportive responses (e.g., praise for explaining something well) and avoiding critical responses.
- Keeping questions short and knowing that preschool aged children have difficulty with open-ended questions.

4.2 Literature review on arts-based methods

In this project, arts-based methods were used as a facilitation tool, rather than a primary source of data. Arts-based methods are becoming an increasingly popular and accepted method in research. Numerous terms are used within this methodology, which has caused some confusion, but art-based research (ABR) can be used as an umbrella term to capture all artistic approaches to research (Leavy, 2017).

Arts-based methods were specifically used as a tool to facilitate data collection from the abstract question: “what does play mean to you?” Some researchers suggest that art can provide participants with a voice, particularly when the concepts being explored are difficult to verbalize (Coemans & Hannes, 2017). Gravestock (2010) suggests that through drawings, we see the
world through the participant’s eyes. Many researchers use ABR as a complementary approach to qualitative approaches and believe that ABR can facilitate richer discussion with participants (Alerby, 2015; Coemans & Hannes, 2017). Alerby (2015) also proposes that combining oral and/or written comments with images can improve the credibility and rigor of the research. Oral commentary that accompanies the process and final description of the art creations, will be the primary source of data.

This study implemented visual arts, offering participants the opportunity to draw and/or create a collage. Coemans and Hannes (2017) conducted a scoping review of ABR with vulnerable populations, confirming that arts-based methods are becoming more common, particularly visual arts methods. Photography is the most popular method, followed by drawing and collage making (Coemans & Hannes, 2017). Hammond et al. (2018) completed a scoping review of international ABR with Indigenous peoples. They too found that the majority of studies used photography; less common was drawing and collage making. Hammond et al. (2018) also found health was a dominating topic studied by those using ABR, followed by systemic discrimination; however, ABR has not been frequently used in physical activity research to date (Phoenix, 2010).

Humans have always shared their stories through art and crafting, and therefore art pieces can embody our knowledge (Fitzpatrick & Reilly, 2019). Gaudet et al. (2020) also described using a layered approach with kiyokewin, where they incorporated dialogue, reciprocal learning, and arts-based methods. Dorion (2010) explains that engaging the hands in an activity “helps the storytelling occur in a very memorable manner” (p. 92). Hammond et al. (2018) suggest that ABR offers flexibility and makes space for other ways of knowing such as cultural knowledge in the research process and outcomes. Expression through art also removes the constraints of
written language (Fitzpatrick & Reilly, 2019), particularly when that language is not of your own. In her discussion of using tribal epistemologies, Kovach (2021) reminds us that language provides insights into our worldviews. Different languages have different expressions, and some relate to concepts that do not exist in other languages. However, many Indigenous peoples do not know their languages, or are still re-learning their languages. Art may then be one way to express the concepts that Indigenous peoples relate to, which are difficult to discuss in English or do not translate into English.

Furthermore, some researchers suggest that ABR has the ability to reduce power imbalances between the researcher and the participants (Coemans & Hannes, 2017). Arts-based research can also be decolonizing as arts were not traditionally seen as data in Western research. Gaudet et al. (2020) suggest that using layered approaches (which includes learning-by-doing like arts-based methods) avoids misrepresenting knowledge and disconnects us from our hearts and one another.

The creation of art provides a tactile experience and can offer the creator and viewers an emotional experience (Yuen, 2016). Yuen (2016) worked with Indigenous women to create collages depicting the meaning of leisure in their experiences of healing. Yuen (2016) found that the use of collage was particularly useful because the concept of leisure in Indigenous cultures is not typically thought of as its own entity, but rather as “a way of being intricately woven in the tapestry of life” (p. 339). The collages represented multiple experiences, emotions, and multiple metaphors and understandings (Yuen, 2016). Yuen (2016) found herself experiencing numerous emotions and memories while reviewing the participants’ artwork, and in applying Indigenous methodologies, recognized that her experiences and reflections were an important part of the analysis process.
Brubacher et al. (2021) used sewing as a method for arts-based inquiry. Inuit women gathered to sew (an activity deeply connected to Inuit culture) and talk about their pregnancy and birthing experiences. Sewing “was flexible and tactile, invited voicing and storytelling among participants and reflected relationality and kinship” (Brubacher et al., 2021, p. 2607). The experience of sewing was grounding, allowing women to easily share their stories (Brubacher et al., 2021). My hope was to use art-making in my study to provoke storytelling and bonding amongst family members.

There is a particular focus on the process of ABR, over the outcomes when working with Indigenous communities (Hammond et al., 2018). The process of ABR has been found to be generally well received by Indigenous participants (Hammond et al., 2018). Through storytelling and art, Russell and Leeuw (2012) were able to better understand Indigenous women’s experiences with sexual health and cancer screening. After holding an arts-based workshop, participants were significantly more aware of these services and felt empowered and more comfortable in accessing them (Russell & de Leeuw, 2012). Young et al. (2013) worked with youth from the Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve in Ontario to develop a health and wellbeing measure using photovoice, a community-based participatory research method in which participants use photography to share their stories. The youth had a positive experience taking pictures around their community that represented wellness and discussed how they related to aspects of the medicine wheel. In another study that used photovoice in partnership with Huu-ay-aht First Nation, Indigenous participants commented that the use of taking pictures was a good way to express thoughts and feelings (Castleden et al., 2008).
4.2.1 Arts-based methods with children

Arts-based methods can be particularly helpful in doing research with children. Art-making and playing are often used in therapeutic environments as they are activities in which children are well-versed in and are often used to express themselves (Caldairou-Bessette et al., 2020). Sometimes art pieces can convey subtler information requiring a higher degree of interpretation. For example, Caldairou-Bessette, Nadeau, and Mitchell (2020) examined art drawn by a young boy undergoing therapy and noted gendered-relationships in the pictures. They then made inferences about his relationships with male-figures. They also noted that the child expressed more details on the second interview, pointing to the importance of building relationships.

The nature of the relationship also influences what children are comfortable sharing during the interview. Therefore, researchers should exercise caution with their interpretations and should consider the participant’s individual identity and context in relation to supportive evidence. Caldairou-Bessette, Nadeau, and Mitchell (2020) note that researchers should practice reflexivity and consider our position as adults and researchers and how this may influence children. They argue that adults have the responsibility to defend children’s rights to express their voice and to advocate for it as worthy knowledge.

4.2.2 Drawing and collage

The creation of art should have a directed theme or respond to a particular question (Scotti & Chilton, 2017). In this project participants were given the option of expressing their response to “what does play mean to you?” through drawing and/or collage. After the pictures were finished, we asked probing questions to facilitate dialogue about the creations (Scotti & Chilton, 2017).
While the creation of art can be skillful and require practiced technique, there is no right or wrong experience (Gravestock, 2010). Drawing and collage were chosen because they can be made by those with varying skill levels and are an accessible method of data generation (Scotti & Chilton, 2017). Drawing is flexible, allowing the creator to convey infinite representations (Gravestock, 2010). Collages are typically made through piecing together ready-made images (e.g., magazine pictures) which can ease the pressure for those who are hesitant about their drawing skills (Scotti & Chilton, 2017). Scotti and Chilton (2017) recommend that careful consideration is given to what images are offered for use in collage. Some factors include the range of content, the identity of people in photos, the scenes, the diversity of colours and textures, and how these might represent the given research topic. It is also recommended that appropriate space is provided to make collages, including good light, comfortable seating, space to spread the images, and somewhere to dispose of scraps (Scotti & Chilton, 2017).

4.3 Literature review on play in research

The purpose of play in this research was to build relationships with the families, break down any hesitancies to engagement, provide an active break during the interview, and to facilitate reflections on the experiences of play. Wetton and Cansell (1993) found that games to get to know each other can be a good way for children to feel comfortable enough to express themselves.

At the half-way point of the interview session, play was not only used as an active break to get participants/researchers moving after sitting, but was also used as a method of learning-by-doing. As previously mentioned, learning-by-doing is considered a key element of Métis methodology (Gaudet et al., 2020). Play was used as a learning-by-doing with the intention of
facilitating reflection on play experiences. Play has also been seen as contentious in spaces of academia (James, 2021), and therefore bringing play into the methods is also a decolonizing act.

4.4 Literature on data analysis

Literature was reviewed to inform the data analysis process. There is limited literature on data analysis strategies (Van Parys et al., 2017), and thus I have turned to Western-based literature on analyzing Multiple Family Member Interview (MFMI) data and thematic analyses to determine the procedural approach that was appropriate for this work, while incorporating the theoretical lens of wahkootowin.

4.4.1 Analyzing Multiple Family Member Interviews

My review of the literature on Multiple Family Member Interviews (MFMI) was particularly helpful in demonstrating how family interviews could be analyzed. In the first example, Kankkunen et al. (2002) used family interviews to gather information from family members about their child’s postoperative pain. The interviews included the parents, siblings, and the recovering child, and they were conducted in families’ homes. The researchers used inductive content analysis at the family unit level and separated the data from each of the children, siblings, and parents. Their team then read through the text three times, going line by line to identify significant statements in line with their themes. These themes were then reduced to combined categories. These categories, along with the original statements, were then sent to parents for review and feedback (Kankkunen et al., 2002).

In the next example, Eisikovits and Koren (2010) interviewed each member of a couple separately and completed a dyadic analysis. Eisikovits and Koren (2010) describe their analysis process as being similar to individual-based qualitative studies, in that transcripts are coded for significant statements, which form clusters of meaning, and eventually lead to themes.
dyadic analysis differs is through the creation of a couple’s narrative, which is determined through an examination of themes in individual narratives and where they overlap and contrast between the couple (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010).

In a third example, the research conducted analyses at both the family unit level and across family groups (Van Parys et al., 2017). Van Parys et al. (2017) conducted their analysis by using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of all interviews, followed by analysis of each family unit. Then they integrated themes and subthemes of each family unit to create new cross-family thematic categories. Like other researchers, they began coding transcripts based on research questions, followed by clustering codes and creating themes at the family unit level. They then conducted an overarching analysis across families, considering similarities and unique qualities of families (Van Parys et al., 2017).

These authors also offered a number of considerations when performing the analysis. For one, power relations should be considered in MFMI that include children (Van Parys et al., 2017). It is often the case that researchers take the side of the adults, and sometimes parents override their children’s contributions (Mayall, 2008; Van Parys et al., 2017). The analysis should also consider overlap on multiple levels, including descriptive and interpretive methods (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010). For example, while family members might describe a play event similarly, they may interpret it differently (it was fun vs. it was not fun). Lastly, researchers should be cautious in disseminating the results, as detailed accounts of participants perspectives linked with their family’s perspectives will be more recognizable (Van Parys et al., 2017).

Taken collectively, these examples provide a variety of methods to analyze family interviews. Similar to the work of Van Parys and colleagues’ (2017), analysis for this work was
conducted at the family level and across family groups, but through the flexible approach of a thematic analysis.

### 4.4.1 Thematic analysis

Thematic analyses offer a flexible approach that can be applied across theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). It is used to identify, organize, analyze, and report on themes or patterns found within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A *theme* is considered to be a word or phrase that describes an important pattern within the data that speaks to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

There are six basic steps to performing a thematic analysis. These are summarized as: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data through reviewing as many times as necessary, (2) generating initial codes (data description labels), (3) searching for themes from your list of codes, (4) reviewing and refining themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The goal is to present themes that include a layer of interpretation so that your report is not just a summary of the data, but presents a sense of meaning to the reader (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes should be distinct from one another and have a distinct connection to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Given the unanchored flexibility of a thematic analysis, it is pertinent that researchers establish their epistemological and theoretical positions and share how this influences their decisions in analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes can be generated inductively or deductively (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive approaches are data-driven, meaning that the coding of data is done without any pre-contemplated codes; regardless of this, researchers are not void of their epistemological and theoretical stances, and should consider how this influences
their themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Deductive approaches allow the analysis to be guided by theory and/or the research questions themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This project used a thematic analysis, based in Métis epistemology, theory, and methodology and mainly follows a deductive approach. The following chapter will detail the study methods and analysis procedures, including how wahkootowin and kiyokewin were applied.

4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has demonstrated the successful use of interviewing, arts-based methods, and play in research, with key takeaways from other researchers, including those working with Indigenous peoples in research. It has also provided an overview of analyzing multiple family member interview data, and the steps to conduct a thematic analysis. The following chapter will implement learnings from both Chapter 3: Theoretical Approach: Wahkootowin and kiyokewin, and this current chapter regarding interviewing, arts-based methods, and play in research and procedure steps in analyzing data.
Chapter 5: Research Methods

Though kiyokewin captures a whole methodology, at heart it is the act of visiting. The main method of this research was visiting with participants, engaging in dialogue through guided questions (semi-structured interviews), and using art and play to facilitate responses. This study explored what “play” means to urban Indigenous families, how they experience play (individually, as a family, and through organized programs), and what factors contribute to their participation in play.

5.1 Knowledge gathering

Kiyokewin offers the opportunity for dialogues to occur around the topic of play. It allows me as the researcher to invite people into a space where they feel comfortable to share their knowledges and experiences with me. The project worked with a play-focused community organization, and invited Indigenous families across the Lower Mainland of British Columbia to participate in a semi-structured interview. This project received approval from and was executed in exact accordance with the ethical guidelines set forth by the UBC’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board for research involving human participants.

5.1.1 Partner organization

The original study proposal focused on the organizational community of the Red Fox Healthy Living Society (https://redfoxsociety.org/about/). Red Fox promotes active play and healthy living, as well as employment and life skills to youth through various programs across the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Their programming is offered free of charge, and young play participants are able to grow into staged paid leadership positions. Additionally, they have a high level of engagement with Indigenous families, creating a unique opportunity to engage with Indigenous families interested in active play. Employees of this organization
provided feedback on the research proposal, methods, and questions to participants, in addition to supporting recruitment through their organization.

5.1.2 Participants

The original recruitment strategy focused on inviting participants of Red Fox programs only, however after limited uptake (a common occurrence in research post-COVID-19), an ethics amendment was made to expand participant inclusion criteria to all Indigenous families across the Lower Mainland. The term “Indigenous families” was used broadly to include families where at least one person identified as Indigenous, and included people of all ages (children did not have to be involved), as well as extended family and friends. Their family members did not have to be Indigenous to participate with them in this study. The intention was to capture family groups that were more reflective of Indigenous cultures and realities, rather than focus on the Western concept of a nuclear family unit.

A total of five interviews were conducted with 12 people participating. Four of the five interviews were with Indigenous women and their children, and the fifth interview was with an Indigenous adult couple and an Indigenous woman who were all friends. The children’s ages ranged from three to fourteen years. Not all adult participants shared their age. I had some degree of connection with all of participants, either through school, work, or personal relations.

5.1.3 Recruitment

The Red Fox Healthy Living Society supported the recruitment process through the dissemination of recruitment posters at their programs. Following minimal engagement, recruitment strategies were also expanded (as per an amendment to ethics) to include social media postings and emailing colleagues who may know potential participants. Facebook postings included posting the recruitment poster to my personal profile, and to public and private
Facebook groups (with the page administrator’s permission) that were intended to share information amongst Indigenous peoples in the Lower Mainland. The posts requested that anyone interested should contact the researcher via email. On Instagram, I posted this to my “stories” (a highlighted post lasting 24 hours) as well as to my profile.

### 5.1.4 Research sites

Kiyokewin typically takes place in the home, with Métis women most often engaged in these practices (Dorion, 2010; Gaudet, 2019). While I had always offered to find a suitable public meeting place that was convenient for the participants, such as a nearby community centre, most of the participants chose to invite me into their homes. Three interviews took place in the home, while two took place at the university research laboratory space (one of which was originally requested to be in the home, but was rescheduled and relocated to the laboratory). Being able to participate in kiyokewin in the home as traditionally intended, really brought the experience to life. While the university lab space was much less “homey”, the space we used was situated around a table with nearby bookcases and a children’s playhouse and toys, giving it a less clinical feel than some other institutional spaces.

### 5.1.5 Participant consent and safety

This study, including all study documents such as the consent and assent forms, were approved by and executed in accordance with the UBC’s Behavioural Ethics Review Board. Participants had access to information pertaining to the study for the purpose of obtaining informed consent, via text as well as video. The recruitment posters contained a QR code that linked to a private YouTube video wherein I introduced myself and read the study information attached to the consent form. Potential participants who reached out via email, were also
provided with a text copy of the study information and consent form. A copy of the study information and consent form can be found in Appendix A.

Ongoing consent through the interview was emphasized to participants, however consent was specifically obtained at three separate instances. At the interview, I handed each participant a consent/assent form and verbalized the information within. This included stating that study participation was voluntary and participants could stop or withdraw at any point, or change what they had said in the interview. It was important to emphasize this point, as Kankkunen et al. (2002) revealed that for some of their participating families, only one family member, typically the mother, had signed the consent form without notifying the other family members about the interview. Withdrawal (completely or for a portion) also included children losing interest, who may wish to play instead of participating while their parents or other siblings continue with the interview. Morison et al. (2000) reminds us about the ethical implication of working with children, noting that children are often under their parent’s control with little autonomy. The goal of this project was to give everyone choice as to whether they participate, and to remind parents that whatever their choice, it is fully acceptable, and the family will still receive compensation for joining.

After going over the study information, I asked participants if they had any questions and whether they understood the procedures. If they confirmed they understood and were still interested in participating, they were asked to sign the consent/assent forms. I also asked if participants were comfortable with audio-recording, providing the alternative option that I would take notes if they did not consent to recording. And finally, I asked for consent to take digital copies of their art creations, so that they could be discussed later in the analysis.
As previously stated, an amendment to the ethics was made to expand the inclusion criteria from Indigenous families who participated in Red Fox Healthy Living programs to any Indigenous family in the Lower Mainland of BC; and to allow for recruitment via social media.

Another point made during the introduction of the study, was the acknowledgement that asking about knowledge and experiences of play may be triggering for some people. Intergenerational trauma and the institutional focus on productivity starting at a young age may lead some families to recount adverse experiences or feel guilty for their lack of involvement in their child’s play experiences (Gerlach et al., 2014). It was made known to families that the intent is not to judge their experiences, but to inquire about them out of curiosity and with the intent to provide positive opportunities for them in the future. Information about counselling resources was made available to those participating in the interviews.

5.1.6 Procedures

The procedures in this study were carried out under approved ethical protocols. Interested participants contacted myself via email. I responded with a brief summary of the procedures and attached the study information for consent for their review (they did not have to sign it at that time). We then coordinated a time, date, and location.

On the day of the interview, myself and a research assistant from the Indigenous Health and Physical Activity program prepared the space to welcome families. Even if this was in families’ homes, we took the time to place baskets filled with snacks and art supplies out, and have everything we needed at hand. Introductions from the research team included a review of the procedures and study details, and participants were asked if they had any questions. Participants were then asked to sign a consent or assent form to participate. Additional verbal consent was received to audio-record the interviews, with notetaking provided as an alternative.
Before beginning with any interview questions, everyone was invited to play an ‘icebreaker’ game which allowed people an opportunity to introduce themselves and get connected in a fun way. Games to get to know each other can be a good way for children to feel comfortable enough to express themselves (Wetton & Cansell, 1993). The game we played involved two rounds. The first begins by saying your name, followed by an animal of the participant’s choice and an action that animal does. For example: “My name is Shannon, and my favorite animal is a bunny” and I would proceed to jump like a bunny. In the second round, we told a collective story about how our animals might meet another. For example: “Once upon a time, there was a bunny in the forest. He was hungry and went to find food. On his search, he bumped into Deer.” Whoever named Deer as their animal would then try to connect Deer to another animal that was named. Participants were then asked if they would like to choose a pseudonym for the purposes of the interview transcripts and final write-up.

If consent was granted, the audio-device was then turned on and the guiding questions commenced. A copy of the guiding questions can be found in Appendix B, however please bear in mind that these were only used as guiding questions to allow for natural dialogue. The first couple of questions related to activities participants engaged in with or without their family. They were asked to describe activities they liked or had participated in. Then participants were asked “what does play mean to you?” Because “play” is somewhat of an abstract concept, participants were offered the opportunity to create a picture to help them verbalize their response. Participants were provided with drawing and collage making materials, including blank paper, pencils, crayons, pencil crayons, markers, safety scissors, glue sticks, and numerous printed images.
The photos chosen for this project were accessed using free public domain photos (https://unsplash.com/) and represented a range of toys and recreation objects, indoor and outdoor activities, and people who represented varying age ranges and cultural backgrounds. Also included, was limited amounts of pictures that referenced Indigenous cultures and cultural activities like berry picking, pow wow dancing, carving, canoeing, ribbon skirts, beading, and other crafts. As per Scotti and Chilton’s (2017) suggestion, the images were kept in page protectors and spread out on a table for participants to look over. There were multiple prints of each image, so that multiple participants could use the same images. Spread out on the tables were also drawing supplies including pens, pencils, crayons, pencil crayons, and markers.

Everyone participated in this activity including participants and research staff, each making their own picture. Sometimes children were provided assistance from their parent (unsolicited or by request) and sometimes children helped their parent with their picture. Participants then described their pictures and were asked how they would define play, or what activities count as play. Verbal consent was requested again to capture a digital copy of participants’ art creations for reference in the research. All participants agreed, and some of their art creations can be found in Chapter 6: Results. Participants were able to keep their pictures and art supplies if desired, and were provided with a pencil case or gift bag to store their new art supplies.

After sharing their pictures, participants were offered an active play break. This included games like group rock-paper-scissors, balloon volleying, and charades. The games went on for about 10 to 15 minutes. Participants were then offered a rest break and snacks.

Upon regrouping, the interview refocused on the guiding questions, which focused on experiences of play and play programs (if applicable). Participants were asked how they felt
about the game(s) they had just engaged in, whether anything holds them back from play or being silly, and if they had the opportunity to engage in (more) family play programs, would they? And what factors would influence that decision? If participants already participated in organized programs, I asked why they chose those programs or how it aligned with their values and goals.

At the end of the session, families were thanked for their time and provided with a thank you card and honorarium ($20 cash each). Participants were also welcomed to keep their art supplies and pictures. The total visit times lasted approximately 90 minutes.

5.2 Meaning making (Analysis strategy)

Using learnings from the Multiple Family Member Interview examples (Chapter 4), a thematic analysis was conducted and data was examined on both a family level and across families, through the lens of wahkootowin. The application of theory was primarily used during the theme creation stage. A thematic analysis also lends itself well to the exploratory nature of this work, as it does not require detailed theoretical or technological knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). This analysis did, however, require an understanding of Métis and Indigenous ways of thinking, learning, and being.

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, and identifying information was removed or replaced with desired pseudonyms. The process of transcribing the interviews helped to create familiarity of the data—a key component of thematic analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fugard & Potts, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017). From the transcripts, summary documents were created which listed each participant’s desired identifying information, the activities named in the interview, who was typically involved in their activities, how they have described play, facilitators and barriers to play, and other points of interest. The summary
documents were created in order to present data to a group of youth assisting with the analysis in a more digestible way.

I chose to invite Youth Leaders from the Red Fox Healthy Living Society to participate in a data analysis workshop, as I saw them as experts in this field of study. While Program Managers from Red Fox participated in the initial stages of the research providing feedback on items like the guiding questions for participants, Youth Leaders were participants in Red Fox Active Play programs in previous years and now support younger children in participating. I believed that the Youth Leaders could relate to the play experiences that participants in this study were sharing, and could provide additional insights based on their own experiences. I also saw it important to involve youth perspectives in this study, recognizing that too often (Western and Euro-centric) research has defaulted to adult thought and opinion (Mayall, 2008; Van Parys et al., 2017). This also stands up to a Métis epistemology which believes that knowledge is embedded in our relations, including those of young ones (Gaudet, 2019).

In this workshop, I reviewed the overall project and explained what it meant to do a data analysis. We then went through an exercise in which pictures of play activities that Red Fox is known for offering (e.g., hockey, bike riding, diablo sticks), were presented across a table. The youth were then asked to “code” these pictures by using sticky notes to label them with different features. These sticky notes were then grouped into themes. We then discussed why certain sticky notes belonged in different groups by discussing how each of these groups were defined. Some of the sticky notes were then moved to fit into other groups as appropriate. To conclude the activity, youth agreed that they felt all of the sticky notes (codes) were in the appropriate theme groups.
Following a meal break, the youth re-grouped and were then given the choice to review either the study transcripts or the summary documents and began coding them. Youth could work in partners, or work individually and compare their codes with a partner afterwards. I went around to each youth to go over their documents and ensure that they understood the coding process, and went through a few examples together. At the end of the session the youth were not able to complete their documents, but were able to offer some of their codes and points of interest. Unfortunately, due to a number of factors, we were not able to meet for a second session to complete the analysis process; however, their codes and insights were taken forward into the remainder of the analysis.

Following the workshops, the transcripts and summary documents were loaded into NVivo 14, a software program used for qualitative and mixed-methods research. The documents were then read again carefully and coded. The theoretical application of wahkootowin reminded me to take note of who participants were playing with and to include not only human relatives, but also the land and animals. With further consideration of the research question (how do Indigenous families conceptualize and experience play?) a number of predetermined codes were generated. These included: Types of play activities, Adult participation, Child participation, Family Co-participation, Individual play, Facilitators, Barriers, Descriptions of play, and Organized play programs. The codes adult and child, and their name/pseudonym was also used so that their responses could be reviewed as a whole, but separate from their family members if needed.

A few codes were created iteratively, through an inductive approach by looking for significant statements and generating a code name that was suitable. The inductive approach allowed codes to be generated based on what was in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fugard & Potts, 2019). Many codes were generated based on specific types of activities (sports, food,
learning play, building play, self-care), as I wondered if important patterns may emerge. But these were later grouped into a higher level code (Types of play). Other codes noted important points of interest that individuals addressed, for example the functions of play in Indigenous communities, and family dynamics.

The codes were then reviewed, compared, and synthesized if there was redundancy. Coding was an iterative process; therefore, the transcripts were re-read and coded once again to ensure no codes were missed. Comparison of codes is essential to the process, allowing one to compare ideas and relationships and analyze the data as a whole (Fugard & Potts, 2019).

Once satisfied with the codes, they were grouped into themes. While determining the themes I was thinking about what was significant to this research, why did that theme matter, what did it have to say, and how did it relate to wahkootowin? What relations were participants sharing about—their family members, their communities, the land? What did they share that demonstrated social accountability? This led to defining and naming of the themes. Data within each theme was reviewed to ensure that they fit and that the theme name was appropriate. I looked to see that themes were playing out across the interviews to ensure that a theme was not dominated by just one interview. This allowed themes to be refined and finalized. All participants were given the opportunity to review and edit their summary within the context of each of the themes. The resulting themes and participant details are presented in Chapter 6.
Chapter 6: Results

A total of five interviews were conducted with 12 people. All participants identified as Indigenous and were living in Vancouver, British Columbia at the time of the study. Participants are presented under pseudonyms that they either chose themselves or were assigned. Interview 1 was with an Indigenous family: Reba is from the Lil’wat Nation, and she is currently a single mom living with her 13-year old son, Bob, and her 11-year old daughter Lisa. Interview 2 was an adult friend group: Faye and Gavin are in a relationship, and both are friends with Helena. Faye identifies as being from the Métis Nation with mixed ancestry. Gavin is Nisga’a and Gitxsan and is 36 years old. Helena is from a First Nation in British Columbia and is 28 years old. The remaining three interviews were with mother and child duos. This included Rose, and her 8-year old daughter, Ana, who are both First Nations. Rachel who is from the Secwepemc Nation and is mom to Sierra, age 3. And finally, the last interview was with Josie and River. Josie is a 26-year old graduate student. She is Ojibwe from Keweenaw Bay Indian community in Michigan. She has lived in Vancouver with her 9-year old son River, for the last two years.

The analysis resulted in five themes: (1) Play activities vary widely, (2) Play engages wahkootowin, (3) Play is conceptualized as an experience, (4) Play engagement is affected by many factors, and (5) Play can be part of kiyokewin.

6.1 Theme 1: Play activities vary widely

Participants mentioned many different types of activities that were considered to be play. All participants mentioned physically active and outdoor activities like walking, hiking, skateboarding and riding bikes, playing on the playground, skiing, snowshoeing and tubing, sports, swimming, and playing at the beach, in the forest, or in their garden. Four of the
participants included playing with animals. Two of the moms mentioned exercise like going to
the gym, or doing a yoga class.

Play has also provided the opportunity to engage in active cultural activities. During the
art response, Rachel (parent) included many Indigenous traditional games on her picture (seen in
Figure 2). She used to teach Indigenous sports and games and said, “that was my thing for fun.”
One of the children would play games when he was in his home territory that related to their
cultural stories, for example, he would wander around outside with his friends looking for
Sasquatch. Pow wow dancing was a popular activity. At least one participant from each of the
five interviews mentioned participating in pow wow dancing. Many of the children are learning
to pow wow dance, and several of the adults recall doing pow wow dancing in their younger
years.

All of the participants said they engaged with toys and/or games. Adults typically named
group games (e.g., Charades), cards and board games; only if they played with children, did they
name toys. Some toys included dolls, a play kitchen, blocks, and Nerf® guns or water guns.

A few participants also specifically discussed unstructured play. Gavin (adult) chose a
picture for his collage that depicted a man and child and toys strewn about a room. He said that,
“when I was a kid, that’s what play was, it was very chaotic.” Rachel (parent) also said that
unstructured free play was important and it allowed her child to demonstrate her skills, choose
the activities she was interested in, and reveal her personality. Rose (parent) really enjoyed
watching her child shine through imaginative play, and said it was one of her favourite ways to
engage in play.
Most of the participants also mentioned engaging in arts and music. Many of the children and some of the adults said they liked to draw, paint, or do other crafts. Faye (adult) included several art symbols on her picture (Figure 3), stating she included:

[…] more like creative things, like I got some needles with beads on it and some painting and I think like, um, there's this element of playfulness when you're creating art, as well as like—just the act itself is like play. It's like a disconnecting from … like you have to make time to enjoy those activities, so it's like play for me.
Other participants discussed connecting with music by learning to play instruments, singing, or dancing. As mentioned above, six participants also like to, or used to like to pow wow dance. Lisa (age 11) was using YouTube to learn to play instruments.

Figure 3 Faye's (adult) picture in response to the question "What does play mean to you?"

Technology was another commonly named way to engage in play. Most of the participants named activities like streaming videos or shows and playing video games. Bob (age
13) and his sister Lisa (age 11) like learning and engaging with the supernatural, so they watch television shows and play with apps that lets them “try and talk to ghosts.” Josie (parent) mentioned she likes relaxing on her phone, or listening to music. Faye and Gavin (adults) said they like to play music when friends come over to play games. In four of the interviews, activities related to food were mentioned. When asked about what she does for fun, Sierra (age 3) replied “eat food”, and her mom added that she also enjoys cooking with mom and dad. Two of the other parents said they enjoyed cooking and baking with their children. A few of the participants mentioned berry picking, and shared stories of times they have spent picking berries with their families. Faye (adult) really enjoyed processing food. She said, “trying new recipes is play […] yeah that’s a good time.” She goes on to say that she has been dehydrating food a lot lately, and typically gives food away. She finds it enjoyable, and notes it is not an activity she “needs” to do, and therefore it is play.

Learning through play was mentioned in three of the interviews. Children used things like phonics books, and apps to learn different languages. River (age 9) described the language apps as using games and rewards to motivate him. Reba and Rachel’s (parents) families were learning their traditional languages through family members and community programs. Some children were in programs that promoted play and skill building. Other ways of learning included reading and watching videos online.

Most of the participants also talked about having a playful demeanor. In particular, being playful was mentioned by adults as a manner in which they engaged with family and friends. They described being silly, joking, teasing, and pranking each other. As previously mentioned, Ana (age 8) loves when her mom teases her and she affirmed teasing was a form of play, while her mom expanded to say that having fun and laughing were play too. Reba’s (parent) family
shared many examples of how they play pranks on each other, and how they like to be silly and
dance around.

Lastly, three of the moms named self-care activities as their own way to play. They
identified working out, getting massages, getting manicures, and other activities that elicited a
sense of coziness and relaxation (e.g., sitting by the fire, reading). Other participants named quiet
activities like reading and drawing, with Faye (adult) saying, “it’s nice to get away from a
screen.”

6.2 Theme 2: Play engages wahkootowin

All of the participants engaged in play with their families, even the adult friend group
continued to play with their parents, siblings, elders, and others in their extended families.
Participants spoke to the way in which play brings families and communities together, and brings
them onto the land (wahkootowin). Families discussed the importance of having friends and
family available to engage in play with.

Gavin and Helena (adults) discussed how playing with other people is more fun. Faye
(adult) made several comments about how nice it was when they included more family members
of different ages. Rachel’s (parent) family like to go for walks and hikes together. There is a 15
year age gap between Sierra (age 3) and her brothers, that can make it difficult for them to play
together. Despite this, her older brothers will play video games with her and take her to the park.
Rose (parent) discussed the importance of some of their close family and friends in Ana’s (age 8)
life and how she is grateful they play with her because she is an only child. Faye and Gavin
shared that they like to have friends over to play games, and try to create an uplifting
environment with music.
Rachel (parent) stated that play “brings us all together,” citing the examples that Sierra’s (age 3) dad participates in play activities with her that he would not normally. Rachel also speaks to how baseball is an important activity in her home community, and once children grow up to be adults, they get to play with or against their parents’ baseball teams. When Helena (adult) goes home to visit her family, she enjoys playing cards and board games with her grandmother and group games with the rest of her family (e.g., charades). Even at a distance, play through technology can keep old friends connected. Bob (age 13) expressed that while he plays video games, he sits on a video call with his friends who live away in their home territory. He uses video calls regularly to stay connected with his friends.

Three of the participants said that they missed the connection, playfulness, and play opportunities that takes place in their home communities. In Reba’s (parent) art creation, she included a picture of an older lady to represent her mom, who teaches her children Ucwalmícwts (their language) lessons. Her mother lives in her home community, and they had not been able to travel there for some time. Rachel (parent) notes that her family participates in programs whenever they are back in their home community. There they offer an all-ages gym drop-in time, and their kids are motivated to show up. Rachel’s community also hosts weekly men’s and women’s groups where they do cultural activities and crafts which she is jealous she cannot join in on because of the distance. Josie (parent) also brought up an important illustration about the importance of family and community in play. She says,

“I think it makes me realize and miss being back home-home, like in my community, like with my family, like my other extended relatives, because my auntie [name] brings out so much play. She’s always like, oh, let’s go to this, or that, or just fun things in the house. And um my dad too, he really likes the leisure time and being goofy and stuff.”
She recognizes the importance of having playful people around you, and that play does not have to be a well-structured activity, it can also be in the little ways. She goes on to talk about playfulness as part of ceremony and healing. In her art response, Josie included a picture of ribbon skirts, and said that they reminded her of ceremony and Indigenous women’s retreats where a lot of laughter would occur. Josie goes on to say,

Another thing I think of is just like being like, the playfulness, like the spirit of it, of just like… Like I used to go on these native women's retreats on [place name], and you know the whole time we're laughing, like all these women laughing, the whole way there on the van, the whole way down the highway, and like when we’re there. And I feel like that was like—it’s healing, just like the laughter alone. And so, like even at ceremony there’s so much like playfulness to it. Like even before we go into the—went into the lodge one night, one of the chiefs there, um, started like a little break dance party, like before we went in, you know.

Josie recognizes how important these support systems are, telling me she is moving back home while she completes her graduate research so that she can benefit from that support.

Many participants also included land-based activities in their acts of play, and discussed how these activities often brought people together. As previously mentioned, many participants named outdoor activities, including sitting around a fire. In all five interviews, participant named fire as an activity they loved as it brought people together to share stories, cook food, and relax. In Figure 4, you can see a drawing of fire in Lisa’s (age 11) art creation. Rose (parent) said her favorite place to play was in the forest, where she can buy imaginary ‘tickets’ to Ana’s (age 8) solo concerts. Several participants also named berry picking as one of their play activities.
Helena (adult) said her and her family do a lot of berry picking, describing it to include aspects of competition, storytelling, and just enjoying each other’s company and being on the land.

Figure 4 Lisa’s (age 11) art creation.

She likes autumn, drawing, swimming, playing soccer, and jingle dancing. She also included her favorite television show, her cat and pet snails, fire, a tire swing, and rain.
6.3 Theme 3: Play is conceptualized as an experience

All of the participants spoke to different activities they would consider play, and some expanded to discuss the functions and emotions triggered that resulted in those experiences being considered play. Most participants mentioned play activities as fun and/or relaxing. One participant spoke to the function of play within Indigenous communities.

Four of the adult participants determined that play was activities that were done for fun and brought them joy. Reba (parent) describes play as activities that are done for fun, that have entertainment value. For example, she reads for fun. She goes on to say that play relates to things that make her feel happy and at peace. In her art response (Figure 5), she included a woman who Reba describes as seeming “to be in reflection; and she’s got plants, and I love plants because I think that having life around you, puts life inside of you.” Faye (adult) defines play by saying, “I think play from even an adult or kid it’s like, making time and space to do something that you enjoy that you don’t have to do, and like for me that’s play.” When asked about how Gavin (adult) defines play, he proposed that it needed “some sort of like rule,” but when asked how it applies to the picture of chaotic free play on his picture, he was taken back and unsure how to go forward. I offered that some researchers believe that all play has rules, for example in an imaginative game, a child will determine that certain pieces of furniture but not others are within the game (Haywood et al., 1989). He then suggested it was games that were defined by rules. Referring to Faye’s definition, I asked whether joy was a part of play. He said that he was unsure, citing that he was not necessarily conscious of the joy he experienced while playing as a child. Helena (adult) echoes Faye’s definition of play by saying, “I would define play [as]... engaging in an activity that brings you joy, and that uplifts your spirit, and there can be rules and no rules, I don't know, just depends on whatever brings you joy, yeah.”
Figure 5 Reba’s (parent) drawing includes a woman in reflection, being outdoors, and spending time with her family.

The importance of playfulness has already been described in the previous theme. Playfulness seems to bring people together and create the moments that many participants define as play. During Rose (parent) and Ana’s (age 8) interview, I witnessed Ana making up many of her own games, and much teasing between her and her mom. At one point, Rose is teasing Ana about who should glue down a collage picture. Ana laughs and says, “she always does that to me,
I love it.” I asked Ana if teasing was play and she affirmed this idea. Rose expanded to say that having fun and laughing were play too.

Rachel (parent) discussed how games and sports are different in Indigenous communities, and are often a function of important and daily activities in communities rather than a leisure activity. She describes that games and sports are used for teaching skills like hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills, whereas current-day schools use scissors and glue to teach these skills. And that “with Indigenous activities, it’s more inclusive in terms of who could be involved and how it could be done and skill level, like they’re not required to be like an elite athlete to participate in the majority of it.” Sometimes free play was a means of observing strengths in children to determine what role they would take on in the community, whether it was in leadership, medicine, or as an elite athlete.

She goes on to say that Indigenous communities also use games for important community functions like coming together, settling disputes, and making decisions. Games were always played at holidays and community events. Games and sport tournaments in other communities encouraged travel. It was a way to bring people together, share stories, and teach each other about family and community history. Games are even played at funerals to re-distribute wealth and to uplift spirits. Because of the different approach to games and sports, Rachel says, “we have a much different perspective on games and sports that I highly doubt we called it games and sports.”

6.4 Theme 4: Play engagement is affected by many factors

During the interviews, participants brought up a number of factors that affected their participation in play. Some of them were spontaneous, while others were prompted. I asked questions regarding all-ages family programs—whether people saw them (real programs or
hypothetical ones) as valuable and inclusive, and whether an Indigenous family program would be of interest. Only one family participated in an Indigenous family program, while some other children participated in various organized programs. Ultimately, participants discussed factors such as interests, who play was engaged with, health and wellbeing, the impacts of colonization, and logistics. Finally, they left a number of recommendations that play programs could learn from to improve access.

6.4.1 Interests

Participants typically chose activities based on their, or their child’s, interests. Some families discussed different interests which may make joining a family program difficult. Two of the participants said they did not think that their families would participate, citing that their families like to focus on their own interests. A number of the participants noticed that as they got older, play style changes. Reba (parent) mentioned that as her kids get older, they are becoming more independent and are uninterested in the activities mom suggests.

6.4.2 Who play is engaged with

In Interview 2, Faye, Gavin, and Helena (adults) discussed that who they are with determines the likelihood they will engage in play. Helena mentioned that it is easy to play with kids because they are typically already playing, and she is comfortable playing with friends, but it is uncomfortable to play with strangers. Gavin agreed and offered the example of evading icebreaker games at the start of school classes by joining other students who also did not want to participate.

It also became evident, that family members were an important factor in facilitating play. Parents served as role-models for their children, for example Sierra’s (age 3) parents and siblings all participate in sports and have exposed Sierra to these activities; as a result, she loves playing
all kinds of sports. In Figure 2, you can see Sierra wanted to draw a beach ball just like her mom. A couple of the parents also noted that they had an only-child, and that it was difficult sometimes without another child for them to play with.

Some of the parents raised important points about organized programs. Rose (parent) spoke to the importance of program instructors and their (playful) demeanor. Some of the instructors her child has had have not been playful and consequently, her child dislikes the program at those times. When prompted about interest in an Indigenous-based play program, Rachel (parent) said that she would prefer to put her child in a program in her home community where she knows that people are trained to do age-appropriate activities and can teach their traditional sports and games. She said she would prefer something that was founded in Indigenous culture, going on to say, “if they’re just going to Indigenize something, I’d rather just put her [child] in something that she's like passionate about.” As a student-parent, Josie said that it would have been nice to see a program for Indigenous families, especially Indigenous student families so that she could build connections.

6.4.3 Health and wellbeing

An important factor in play is physical and mental health. One participant said she can no longer play some of the sports she loves because of her physical health. Physical health also impacted the activities for one family after they were in a car accident. After working through some rehabilitation, they are slowly incorporating more activities again. Another participant shared a number of tough life circumstances that have affected her ability to be playful. The things she is currently facing leave her feeling down and tired, making it more difficult to be playful naturally.
6.4.4 Impacts of colonization

One of the parent participants shared the intergenerational impacts of colonization on her family. She shared that colonization and the Indian residential school system had an effect on her parents’ wellbeing, and consequently resulted in them being less playful with her. She recounted a time when her family moved to a new city, and her parents were in a better situation. She explains,

We actually did a lot of play there. […] I remember that being one of the more magical years in my life because my parents didn't have a lot of outside influences, so they spent more time with me and my sister doing things. Like we would play hide and seek around the house, and we would go adventure hunting down to the wharf, […] So I did have kind of a playful year with my parents that year.

She goes on to describe that Indigenous peoples are healing and it is opening the door to a lot of possibilities. She has taught her children about the impacts of residential school, and hopes that her children will have a good future ahead of them.

6.4.5 Logistics

Logistics were also thought to be an issue. Factors like cost, time, availability, and limited registration have been barriers to play programs in the past. One parent noted that her children did not typically participate in organized programs, because they did not have enough money to afford them. Rachel (parent) discussed how difficult it was to get her child registered in programs due to the lack of availability, timing of registration, and timing of the programs.

Two of the mothers discussed the challenge in finding time to play. Josie (parent) discussed the struggle to balance being a single mom, juggling school, making an income, and keeping up with daily chores and the asks of life. She comments, “it's been hard for me being
back to school because I don't have like, that like off-the-clock-feeling like I used to have when I
used to just like work.” Josie makes an effort to find balance in her schedule to make time to play
with her son River (age 9). She is looking forward to summer where she feels she will have more
free time and “can really engage in play.” Similarly, I asked Rachel (parent) if she plays without
Sierra (age 3), she laughed and said, “very rarely.” She said it was not just because Sierra was
young either. She is also busy with her two 18-year-old stepsons, driving them to programs and
helping them get things done. Rachel said that if she does find the time to do something, it is
usually going to the gym or a home workout.

6.4.6 Recommendations

When asked about what would make it easier to participate in play programs, participants
suggested offering food and prizes, and ensuring that programs were free of cost. They also
suggested ensuring the program was physically accessible, that it was easy to get to, and had
parking availability. Participants said programs should aim to: be offered at an appropriate time
(early evenings or weekends), increase the availability of program seats, and offer a variety of
age-appropriate programs in one location so that families can better coordinate their children’s
activities. Some participants suggested it would be nice to have a drop-in session, so they could
be flexible in their own schedules. One participant expanded saying she was trying to cut down
on the things she engages in, but she appreciates the opportunities, recognizing how meaningful
they can be in building community.

6.5 Theme 5: Play can be part of kiyokewin

Kiyokewin, the concept of Métis visiting, typically takes place in the home (Dorion,
2010; Gaudet, 2019), and this was the preference of the participants. Kiyokewin represents the
time and space that allows us to share stories and build connections (Gaudet, 2019). Three of the
five interviews took place in participants’ homes. A fourth was originally requested to be at their home, but was rescheduled to the laboratory. Faye (adult) made a comment that she appreciated that they were not in a clinical or institutional space. For others who did complete their interview at the graduate laboratory and office, the space still offered children’s toys, a playhouse, and books, giving it a less clinical feel. In Interview 4, which took place at the laboratory, we moved from the central table over to the play house so that Sierra (age 3) could continue playing while participating in the interview.

Play was introduced at the beginning of the interview to establish a relationship and set the tone for remainder of the session. Gavin (adult), who previously stated he avoided an icebreaker activity at school, said, “I like[d] the animal game at the beginning, […] it just felt fun and it was like I didn't even know I was doing an ice breaker.” His quote suggests that it was an effective exercise that facilitated connection, rather than apprehension; importantly, it allowed play to be part of kiyokewin, the research process.

The guiding questions during the interview prompted conversation, and the nature of kiyokewin allowed the space for dialogue. The children exhibited excitement when talking about some of their favourite games and toys. River (age 9) was eager to talk about and demonstrate his use of Nerf® guns. He had an in-depth knowledge about these toys and shared a lot with us.

Arts-based methodology provided a hands-on activity that increased participant engagement and provided an opportunity for concepts of play to emerge. While looking through the collage pictures, participants were excited to see things that resonated with them. Ana (age 8) giggled with excitement looking at the photos. Seeing the picture of ribbon skirts, Josie (parent) was reminded of how ceremony has been playful for her (see Figure 6). Reba (parent) pointed to several pictures that reminded her of different events in her childhood, sharing those stories. She
also noticed that diversity was represented in the pictures available, and she commented that some pictures looked like her children. Reba was showing her daughter a picture of pow wow dancers because she is learning to jingle dance (See Figure 4). While doing so, her son who had not mentioned being interested in pow wow, and was focused on drawing, gasped and said “oh my god, that’s cool!” Faye and Gavin (adults) also commented that they liked that the photos were ready to use, Gavin adding that he was not confident in his drawing skills.

![Figure 6 Josie's (parent) art creation includes being outdoors, relaxing activities, and ribbon skirts to represent ceremony.](image)

All participants said they had fun during the session. Participants enjoyed having snacks and playing games at the break. Ana (age 8) offered her own games—ones she drew on paper,
and offered different active games like octopus tag, hide and seek, and What time is it Mr. Wolf? She also made up a bowling game for us all to play at the end of the session. Rose (Ana’s mom) and the Research Assistant said they had fun, and they had forgotten how to play these games, but doing so brought back a lot of memories. Reba (parent) also appreciated playing the games, saying “it's not often we get the chance to do stuff like this—together! Because they [her children] are always in their rooms.” As demonstrated by these quotes, we can see that the inclusion of games in the research process was appreciated. In addition, one participant commented that they liked that I had participated in the research, sharing my stories and my art piece.

6.6 Chapter summary

In this chapter, the results of five interviews, were presented within five themes: (1) Play activities vary widely, (2) Play engages wahkootowin, (3) Play is conceptualized as an experience, (4) Play engagement is affected by many factors, and (5) Play can be part of kiyokewin. The results demonstrated that families engaged in many different activities: active play, games, unstructured play, outdoor play, art, and learning and cultural activities. And that these activities bring people together, engaging with the land, and with their communities. The discussions around play were about play as a concept and as an experience that brought people joy and/or relaxation. Participants also discussed a number of factors that affected play engagement including interests, who is involved, health and wellbeing, the impacts of colonization, and logistics. Based on these factors, participants also offered a several recommendations for play programming. Finally, participants discussed the research process, describing how they had fun play games and sharing stories.
Chapter 7: Discussion

This project has explored how urban Indigenous families conceptualize and experience play. The data provides some insights into what Indigenous peoples consider to be play, how that contributes to a definition, as well as the importance of family and community in play. Participants also shared a number of factors that influence play from their interests to logistics to the impacts of colonization.

In Theme 1: Play activities vary widely, participants named many different activities. All participants listed a balance of active and less active activities, outdoors and indoors, arts, sports, and games. Variety may be an important factor. In a systematic review of studies looking at the provision and experience of variety in physical activity, Eather et al. (2023) found that variety promoted motivation for exercise and physical activity, and improved wellbeing outcomes. In another study, Juvancic-Heltzel et al. (2013) found that offering a greater variety of resistance-exercise equipment increased both the amount of repetitions executed and the reported enjoyment of the activity, without increasing their perceived rate of exertion; and this was this case in all age groups, from children to older adults. Another study which was focused on older adults, found that engaging in a variety (more than 2 types) of physically active leisure activities resulted in significantly greater cognitive function, regardless of achieving the recommended amounts of physical activity a week (Adamek & Petruzzello, 2022). The concept of variety can be compared to finding balance, which is an important aspect of wholistic health.

All types of play can contribute to wholistic health. Active play contributes to physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social wellbeing (McGuire-Adams & Giles, 2018; Warburton et al., 2006), while preventing several chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, some cancers, and depression (Kim & Welk, 2015; Warburton et al., 2006).
Participants also named activities like reading, drawing, crafting, playing music, and playing with toys. These types of activities have been shown to reduce stress and tension in children, as well as improve self-esteem and overall wellbeing (Alexander et al., 2019; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998).

To add to the examples above, outdoor play can improve our connection to the land, which further contributes to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing (Bredin et al., 2021). The land is also a relative, the land is part of wahkootowin, and therefore discussions of outdoor play also speak to Theme 2: Play engages wahkootowin. All of the participants discussed activities on the land where they spent time with their families. Outdoor play offers the opportunity to explore, learn, and connect with one another and the land (Bredin et al., 2021). Helena described all of these benefits when sharing about berry picking with her family.

Furthermore, the role of family and community was included in the discussion around wholistic wellbeing, and can be seen across the interviews. All participants spoke about the enjoyment experienced when playing with their families, and were able to name many activities they co-participate in. One participant shared the intergenerational impacts of colonization on her family, stating that it negatively impacted her parents’ wellbeing, and as a result they typically did not play with her. Conversely, when her parents were in a better situation, she recounted it as “being one of the more magical years” of her life where her parents spent time with her and her sister, playing. Dorion (2010) described colonial policies as breaking down wahkootowin, and many of the Elders in her study discussed the importance of bonding through play. This recount also speaks to the proposition that play interactions across the generations re-establishes and strengthens wahkootowin, and contributes to wellbeing for the whole family.
Moreover, when parents were asked about play without their children, many of them offered that they like to do relaxing activities or acts of self-care like exercise or getting a massage. Josie (parent) mentioned getting a manicure, but questioned if it was really play. Regardless, the desire for restful and restorative solo time may indicate the need for balance. All of the mothers in this study have demonstrated a strong commitment to their wahkootowin—their children and families. They named many different play activities, and their engagement helps to build the wellbeing of their families. But in our responsibility to others, sometimes we forget to care for ourselves. The act of self-care is not selfish, but a way to contribute to wahkootowin. Because we are all connected, we must also remain as a strong and healthy knot amongst our web of connections in order to maintain a strong wahkootowin—including through self-care as play.

Family and community, and the generations before us also influence our play by shaping our interests, experiences, and knowledge about play. Through these interviews, it was shown that parents were encouraging, exposing, and role modelling play and physical activity to their children. The Elders in Dorion’s study (2010) shared that children were given toys like brooms and bows and arrows, to encourage adult activities like cleaning and hunting. Indigenous students in Ferguson and Philipenko’s study (2016) also found their parents to be active role models and supported their own physical activity engagement through exposing them to different sports and sharing positive stories of their sport experiences. Kerpan and Humber (2015) interviewed urban Indigenous high school students who said their families were influential in their choices to be active.

In Theme 3: Play is conceptualized as an experience, participants discussed how they conceptualized play, their experiences with play and the emotions it evoked, rather than
providing any narrow definitions. As discussed in Chapter 1: Introduction, I had a vague understanding of what play meant, and the literature only provided minimal clarity offering multiple ways to describe and categorize play. Similar to this study, Yuen (2016) worked with Indigenous women to create collages depicting the meaning of leisure in their experiences of healing, which she found to be particularly helpful. Art-making in this study was chosen to provoke conversations about the broad concept of what play meant. Through the art-making process, many participants brought up stories that related to pictures they found, describing numerous playful experiences. For example, when Josie (parent) is reminded of playfulness at ceremonies and women’s retreats after seeing a picture of ribbon skirts.

Cultural perspectives are an important consideration in how we understand play (Fasoli et al., 2010; Sutton-Smith, 1997). The words we use related to play, the way play is experienced, and the functionality of play all changes between cultures. Fox (2007) articulates that an attempt to conceptualize “Aboriginal leisure” is problematic in that leisure is a Euro-North American concept that may not resonate with Indigenous peoples. Rachel (parent) alluded to this saying “we have a much different perspective on games and sports that I highly doubt we called it games and sports.” Similarly, I recently asked a Michif language group how they would translate the phrase “let’s move” to encourage physical activity. People offered different translations but there were no direct translations. This demonstrates that concepts around physical activity and play are different in Western and Indigenous cultures.

Furthermore, Indigenous youth have been cited saying that they believe traditional activities were important, providing both an opportunity to be physically active and to participate in their culture (Kerpan & Humbert, 2015). Some Indigenous youth say participating in cultural activities or playing sports with other Indigenous people affirms their identity (Hayhurst et al.,
2015; Kerpan & Humbert, 2015; Mason et al., 2018). This is likely just one of the many reasons that one of the participants in this study desired to have cultural programs taught by people from their community.

Despite the desires for traditional activities, urban areas continue to lack access to these activities (Goodman et al., 2019; National Association of Friendship Centres, 2021). Lack of access to play programming was discussed in Theme 4: Play engagement is affected by many factors. Vancouver has one of the highest urban Indigenous populations with over 63,000 people (Statistics Canada, 2022). There are at least 22 different Indigenous organizations within Vancouver, but they do not always offer cultural programs, and their services differ based on their mandates (Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council, n.d.). Some are focused on legal assistance, some support Indigenous mothers, while others offer a wide variety of services, such as the Friendship Centres (Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council, n.d.; National Association of Friendship Centres, 2021). Recently, one of the Vancouver-based community centres has taken steps towards reconciliation, hiring an Indigenous person to lead organizational change, and has added numerous Indigenous cultural programs (Britannia Community Services Centre, 2023). However, these programs will be ineffective if there is little awareness of the increasing programs available, if programs are not accessible, or if the programs offered are not culturally relevant and/or desired.

Some cultural activities are only available and/or appropriate in peoples’ traditional territories. Throughout this document, I have discussed the importance of land, how it is part of wahkootowin, how it speaks to us, shares our stories, and supports our spirits (Flaminio, 2013; Gaudet, 2019). Indigenous peoples have a special relationship with the land of their traditional territories. They have gotten to know each other across generations; the land holds our history.
For example, a number of participants mentioned berry picking. Generation after generation, families have picked those berries, and have particular teachings around them. So the move to urban areas can create a disconnect; certain berries only grow in certain regions, and dense urban spaces are an unlikely place to find those same berries. In my case, residing away from my home territory created a disconnect from Métis theories and methodologies. Participants also shared stories of participating in ceremonies in their home territories. These connections are important to remain balanced and well but, it can be inappropriate to conduct those ceremonies outside of their traditional territories. While there are numerous reasons Indigenous peoples move to urban centers, the pull back home to engage in our strongest wahkootowin connections are compelling.

Unfortunately, access to cultural experiences has been greatly impacted by colonization, as has the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples which was also conveyed in Theme 4. Akin to the participant in this study who shared the story of colonization’s impact on her parents and upbringing, many Indigenous youth have cited family problems as barrier to sports and physical activity, including mental health problems, addictions, and fighting (Mason & Koehli, 2012). Colonization has also resulted in socio-economic disparities (Reading & Wien, 2009), which in turn, affects the ability to participate in sport and physical activities. As one parent mentioned, her children did not typically attend organized programs because they could not afford them. Numerous studies have documented Indigenous youth who face barriers to activities because they are unable to afford program fees, equipment, or transportation to and from activities (Blodgett et al., 2010; Mason et al., 2018; Mason & Koehli, 2012).

All the barriers noted above stem from the colonization of Indigenous peoples and the continued institutional oppression. However, in this study we also see Indigenous peoples who are immersed in play with their families, who are healing and strengthening wahkootowin. These
acts of decolonization can continue with dedicated funding streams and appropriate strategies in place for physical activity, sport, and play. This includes providing adequate funding to programs which reduces or eliminates the cost for participants and provides quality equipment, facilities, and trained personnel. Moreover, it necessitates funding toward programs which celebrate Indigenous peoples and are founded in their cultures. Supporting communities wholistically, can go a long way in improving the wellbeing of youth for future generations.

Finally, we end this discussion with an examination of the research process in relation to Theme 5: Play can be part of kiyokewin. The research process was intended to replicate kiyokewin: a space where participants felt welcomed, relationships were built and strengthened, and stories could be shared (Gaudet, 2019). From the findings, I believe that this was accomplished. All of the participants said that they enjoyed their time in this project, and appreciated the steps taken to make it a fun and welcoming environment.

At the heart of kiyokewin practice is wahkootowin. Both kiyokewin and wahkootowin encompass a responsibility to our relations and an understanding of our connectedness (Gaudet, 2019; Macdougall, 2010). I tried to uphold my responsibilities by ensuring that I provided everything that was needed for the interview and offering participants food and gifts for their time. I tried to strengthen our connections through story sharing and appreciating all that families had to offer me. Seeing the delight on children’s faces as they spoke about their favorite toys or games, or while making their art pieces, or engaging in play was a gift to me. If I could create a space that evoked happiness and togetherness, then I was strengthening wahkootowin; I was contributing to my relational responsibility by upholding the participants’ wellbeing.

This relational responsibility also requires a recognition of ourselves within those relations (Gaudet, 2019). The entire research process has allowed me to reflect on who I am as a
person and as a researcher. Each time I shared a story with participants, I was considering how I am connected with the participants, and how those moments have made me who I am, and how they have influenced my research process. These new and strengthened connections will continue to influence my thoughts and behaviours going into the future.

As this chapter comes to a close, we have witnessed the importance of play amongst families and how it brings joy and maintains strong connections. I have discussed how all types of play contribute to different aspects of wholistic wellbeing (Adamek & Petruzzello, 2022; Alexander et al., 2019; Bredin et al., 2021; Eather et al, 2023; McGuire-Adams & Giles, 2018; Warburton et al., 2006). Despite the intent of colonization to weaken wahkootowin (Dorion, 2010), Indigenous families are restrengthening generational bonds through play. Indigenous parents are dedicated to their families’ wellbeing, and are using play and playfulness to tap into the social, cultural, spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of our wellbeing.

Play was understood as a concept and an experience, rather than a narrow definable term. Other researchers discuss the importance of terminology and the problems in attempting to define words (e.g., English-based words like leisure) within Indigenous contexts (Fox, 2007). Furthermore, Indigenous traditional forms of “play” are important, and should be accessible to Indigenous peoples. This can be difficult in urban spaces, though some people are accessing cultural programs through urban Indigenous service organizations or by returning to their home communities.

This research centered its discussion around play, but it also tapped into the benefits of play and incorporated it into the methodology of kiyokewin. Play was used to strengthen connections with participants and create a space of welcome and belonging (Gaudet, 2019; Macdougall, 2010). While I listened to others about how wahkootowin was strengthened through
play, I was also extending and strengthening my wahkootowin through play with the participants in this study. I am grateful to have witnessed their stories, and for the reminders of the power of play.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

This chapter will bring this project to a close. I will discuss the strengths, limitations, potential applications, knowledge mobilization plans, and future opportunities for this work.

8.1 Strengths

This research contributes to the limited literature about Indigenous perspectives of play. It offers unique insights into some of those perspectives which can be drawn upon for future research, and taken into consideration when designing play programs. While the term “play” may not always resonate with Indigenous peoples, and the results further describe play as an experience that includes a vast array of activities, the contribution of the research, using the term play will allow for other researchers (including students) who may be interested in the topic of play to find this work.

I believe one of the strengths of this research to be in the way that it was conducted. This work was rooted in the values and practices of kiyokewin, visiting work. My goal was to create a welcoming environment, one where people felt comfortable, where they wanted to engage and share stories and be playful, which I believe to be successful. At each of the interviews, participants embraced play and art. Children gifted me their art creations, showed me toys and games they liked, and taught me new games. Adults were fully engaged in their art works, finding it a useful reflective exercise. Adults also readily played games and afterwards said that they had fun. There was laughter to be had all around, and guests appreciated the food that was offered. The design of the sessions allowed children to quickly build connections with myself, and remain engaged for the majority of the research visit. The ability to offer these sessions in-person was also a strength, as it really allowed us to connect, to create, and to play together. This
approach would not have worked very well over Zoom, which was also considered as an option if COVID-19 restrictions once again came into effect.

Built into kiyokewin, is wahkoowin (Flaminio et al., 2020). I further believe that a strength of this work was the recognition of our inherent responsibilities to wahkoowin and the centering of wahkoowin in this work. I maintained ethical practices beyond those in the university behavioural ethics plan, like ensuring everyone’s needs were met, that they were fed, and that they felt welcomed and respected. These practices allow for a strong wahkoowin. Furthermore, wahkoowin is centered in the process of meeting with Indigenous families, and upholding kiyokewin practices. This work had families engaging in work together, playing together, and reflecting on their time together.

Following the data collection process, wahkoowin is also centered in the data analysis. Wahkoowin includes those in our extended networks, and with Red Fox as a partner in this project, I wanted to ensure they were included from beginning to end. Youth leaders from their organization were invited to learn about data analysis and undergo the process using this study’s data. As Youth Leaders who engage in, witness, and lead play, I told them that they were the experts in this field, and that their insights were invaluable. We built connections through games and sharing food. This process not only provided the space to include youth’s knowledge and perspectives, it was a process of extending and strengthening my wahkoowin.

8.2 Limitations

This study was conducted in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, and all participants self-identified as Indigenous. A total of five interviews were completed, with a total of 12 participants (including adults and children). While the goal of having a minimum of five interviews was reached, the number of participants is limited. I had desired to include larger
family groups (>2), however most people living in the city were away from their families, and talked about travelling home to spend time with them, including engaging in play activities. Some of the participants did have family members residing with them (including fathers and siblings) who did not participate in this study. This study could benefit from hearing those additional perspectives, in addition to involving older adults, Elders, and Knowledge Holders.

In addition to the smaller sample size, the diversity of participants may also lack some perspectives. All participants had some degree of prior connection with me, either through school, work, or personal relations. While having relationships is important for trust, it can bias perspectives captured in the study. Attempts to recruit participants associated with Red Fox Healthy Living programs were unsuccessful, as more capacity was needed to build a relationship with those participants. Moreover, and as previously mentioned, there were no fathers participating in this research, and consequently this is a missing perspective. None of the participants spoke to gender and its impacts to play. Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that this project broadly invited all Indigenous peoples, and therefore cannot cover any culturally specific perspectives.

8.3 Potential applications

This was an exploratory project to hear how Indigenous families conceptualize and experience play, including facilitators and desires for play programming. Participants were asked about the activities they like, what play means to them, and their experiences of play. From this, participants offered insights into important factors that influence play participation that should be considered in the design of play programs.

Participants made numerous recommendations that could facilitate play program engagement. They included topics around availability, scheduling, access and location, and
offering food or other incentives. Play program designers should consider these recommendations in the design of their programs. And while these recommendations can be used widely across all programs, some participants also requested Indigenous-specific play programming. Therefore, it is recommended that funding should be directed at Indigenous-led and Indigenous-centered play programs. As one participant pointed out, this request is specifically for programs founded on Indigenous knowledge, values, and culture which is different than programs that have added Indigenous components to them.

This research also demonstrates the importance of play with wahkootowin, and therefore all-age family programs should also be considered by play programmers. This study has shown that families have a desire to play together, and that families with an only-child would also like the opportunity to play with other families. Community is an important aspect in the perspective of Indigenous peoples’ health and wellbeing (Gaudet, 2019; Macdougall, 2010). Family and community play should be encouraged through community programming.

8.4 Knowledge mobilization

An important aspect of Indigenous research, is ensuring that the outputs are shared back with the community (Gaudry, 2011; Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008). This thesis will be published on cIRcle (https://circle.ubc.ca/), the University of British Columbia's digital repository for research and teaching materials, which is accessible to anyone who is interested. Manuscripts may also be developed for publishing in journals in an effort to make this study more accessible. In addition, more community-centred ways of sharing will also take place. This includes oral presentations with the Red Fox Healthy Living Society and their participants, other community organizations, and to wider audiences such as at conferences.
8.5 Future opportunities

This research offers a starting point and opportunity to go into depth on any of the themes presented. There is opportunity in exploring further any one of the many types of play mentioned by families; into play with fathers or older adults in families; or into one of the many factors that affect play engagement.

Given that this research invited Indigenous peoples from many different cultures, it would be worthy to explore play within specific cultural contexts; considering aspects like language and traditional activities, while framing the project within the aspirations of that given community. Specific cultural perspectives may give more direction as to how play is conceptualized within certain communities.

There are also opportunities in more research on the methodology. I believe that more family-centered interviews should take place in research, especially Indigenous research. The intergenerational perspective is important; as Indigenous peoples, we look to our old ones to guide us and recognize that our current actions will impact the future generations (Makokis, 2008). Therefore, the inclusion of the voices of young children to old ones are important considerations and should be included more often in research.

8.6 Conclusion

This research sought to understand how Indigenous families conceptualized and experienced play by way of kiyokewin, visiting with Indigenous families to hear their thoughts and stories about play. This paper documents the methodology, findings, and discusses what came of this project.

While determining my methodology, I wanted to do what Mom and Granny would do. Through kiyokewin, I created a research process where participants felt respected, welcomed,
and engaged in activities they felt were fun. I offered them food and something to take home with them. I think Mom and Granny would be proud.

Through this process I witnessed many different stories of play. I learned about peoples’ interests, passions, childhoods, goals, and all of the things that bring them to play. I learned about who they play with and how wahkootowin is an important piece in play and family wellbeing. Moreover, I learned how play is an important piece in wahkootowin and wellbeing. Everything is connected, our web of relations, the behaviours we play out; it all influences each other, past, present, and future. Wahkootowin is everything and everywhere.

Finally, this work offers to fill a gap in the literature regarding play perspectives from (urban) Indigenous peoples. There exists research on many different activities that participants named as play, such as running, pow wow dancing, and art; yet none of this research uses the term play. While the term “play” may not always resonate with Indigenous peoples, the contribution of the research and using the term play will allow for other researchers who may be interested in the topic of play to find and benefit from this work.
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Appendices

Appendix A

STUDY INFORMATION: INTERVIEWS

We would like to provide you with information about this study, so that you can make an informed decision about consenting to participate. Please read the information below or scan the QR code to hear this information in a video format.

Invitation
Thank you for your interest in this study. You are being invited because you or your child/ren identify as Indigenous and live in the Lower Mainland of BC (Vancouver and surrounding area).

Why are we doing this study?
The purpose of this research is to explore active play experiences in urban families. In this phase of study, we will take a closer look at how urban Indigenous families experience and define play. Because of cultural and historical differences, we know that Indigenous peoples and their families may have different knowledge and experiences of play. We believe it is important to capture this knowledge and share it with academics and play program leaders, so that more culturally appropriate play programs can exist.

Who is doing this study?
This study is the thesis research of Shannon Field (a Métis, Cree, and mixed European MSc student, School of Kinesiology) for a Master of Science degree, which is being completed under the direction and mentorship of Dr. Shannon Bredin, Dr. Margaret Kovach, and Dr. Moss Norman. Contact information has been provided on this page and the research team invites you to ask questions about anything you do not understand before providing consent to participate. We have also partnered with the Red Fox Healthy Living Society, an active play-based organization in the Lower Mainland. Please feel free to keep this page for your own reference.

What will happen in this study?
In this research, children and members of their family are asked to participate in an interview to gain a deeper understanding of active play experiences. To ensure your privacy, it will just be you and you’re your family at the interview, along with Shannon Field and one other member of the research team (e.g., the Research Coordinator). Prior to the interview, you will receive the guiding questions that will be used in the interview. The type of information that will be talked about includes the types of activities you are involved in, what you like and do not like about them, whether you participate in any family activities, what “play” means to you, and (if applicable) how Red Fox programs or other play programs fulfill your cultural and personal values. This session will also include drawing and/or collage making and active play time. Please know that you can decline answering a particular question, but still remain in the study. In addition, with your consent, interviews will be audio-recorded so that they can be transcribed after the interview. If you are interested, you may review your transcript for the opportunity to add, retract, or change any portion or the entirety of the information.
Who will see the findings of the study?
The findings of this study may be discussed in a graduate thesis, presented at an academic conference, and may also be published in an academic journal. The Red Fox society will also see the findings of this study, but again, all information is presented as summarized and anonymized information to protect the privacy of all individuals participating in the study. Summary documents for participants will also be created and shared.

How will my privacy be maintained?
The privacy of individuals will always be maintained throughout the research process. At the interview, you will be asked to create a pseudonym or fake name. Anytime your real name comes up in the interview, it will be replaced with the pseudonym in the transcripts. Your name, and any other personally identifiable information is removed, so no one can identify you in this study. If the researchers are required to make data publicly available (e.g., as per requirements of some funding agencies and academic journals), anonymized data is used which means that individuals cannot be personally identified. Making data available to the public does not increase your risk for participating. However, please know that once the data is part of the thesis and submitted to cIRcle (the University of British Columbia’s digital repository for research and teaching materials, https://circle.ubc.ca/) or submitted for publication, you will not be able to withdraw your interview responses.

What are the benefits to participating?
You may not experience any direct benefits by participating in this research. Participating in this interview may provide a fun experience, in which you experience games and art-making with your family. The outcomes of this research may improve future active play programs, so that they are more in line with cultural values of Indigenous peoples.

What are the risks of participating? Can anything bad happen to me?
There are no right or wrong answers to the questions asked in the interview. We do not think there are any questions in the interview that will be perceived as a risk to you. Participants are not required to answer any question that that they do not feel comfortable answering. If at any time, a participant finds discussing their play experiences upsetting or distressing, the participant is free to take a break or stop participating in the conversation. We may also provide a list of counselling and wellness resources if you require further support.

During the interview, we will also be playing some active games. You do not have to participate. If you have mobility issues, accommodations will be made to ensure you can participate in a way you feel comfortable. The researchers will make every effort to ensure the space is safe and there is adequate room to play the games safely.

Will I be compensated for participating?
Each interview participant will be offered $20 cash for their time and will be able to take home the craft supplies (paper, scissors, glue, pencil crayons) from the session. You may also take home your art creation, once the research team has taken a digital copy.

Can I withdraw my participation?
Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw or terminate your participation at any time prior to the interview, while completing the interview, or following the interview without penalty or consequence. However, once the data has been analyzed and the study data has been submitted for publication or presentation, you will not be able to withdraw your responses. In order to have your responses removed, please contact the research team by email (shannon.bredin@ubc.ca or shannon.field@ubc.ca).
Who can you contact about the study?
If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact Shannon Field at [redacted] and/or Dr. Shannon Bredin at [redacted].

Who can you contact if you have any complaints or concerns about the study?
If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

How do I consent to participate in this study?
By signing this consent form, you are consenting to participate in this research (see next page).

Thank you for consideration of our study.

You may keep this section of the document for your own records.
Title of Project: Indigenous perspectives and experiences with active play
Principal Investigator: Dr. Shannon SD Bredin, PhD
Co-Investigators: Shannon Field, MSc student, Dr. Margaret Kovach, PhD, Dr. Moss Norman, PhD
Institution: School of Kinesiology, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia
Contact Person: Dr. Shannon Bredin or Shannon Field,

PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE PAGE

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving reason and without and negative consequences to you. Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records. Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study. You do not waive any of your legal rights by participating in this study.

_________________________  __________________________
Parent/Caregiver Signature  Date

_________________________  __________________________
Parent/Caregiver Signature  Date

_________________________  __________________________
Parent/Caregiver Signature  Date

_________________________  __________________________
Child Participant Signature (optional)  Date

_________________________  __________________________
Child Participant Signature (optional)  Date

_________________________  __________________________
Child Participant Signature (optional)  Date

FUTURE CONTACT

If you wish to be notified of completion of this study and receive access to the final reports, please provide your contact information below:

Name: ________________________________

Phone: _______________________________

Email: ________________________________
Appendix B

Indigenous Perspectives and Experiences with Active Play

Guiding Interview Questions

Researcher will provide participants with consent/assent forms, and will go over the information verbally, allowing participants to ask questions. Once consent is granted, the researcher will turn on the audio recording device, and begin asking the following questions.

1. [Each person to respond] Please introduce yourself however you feel comfortable. You can include things like a pseudonym or made up name, your age, your ancestry, or any other information you might want to share. We will not share information that might identify you in this study. This information is just to get a sense of who is sharing today.

2. [Each person to respond] What sorts of physical activities do you participate in (for example, sports, walking, gardening, etc.)? And why do you choose to participate in these activities?

3. [Anyone can respond] Do you participate in any physical activities together?

4. [Each person to create] Create a picture (through drawing and/or collage) that shows what ‘play’ means to you.
   a. Tell me about your picture.
   b. How do you define play?
   c. What activities are included as play?

   [Active Play break – 10 minutes]

5. [Each person to respond] How was that activity for you? How did it make you feel?

6. As a parent/caregiver, does anything hold you back from playing? From being silly?

7. [Each person to respond, but particularly adults] If given the opportunity, do you think you’d join a program that involved the whole family in active play?
   a. What would incentivize you to join? What would prevent you from joining?

8. [Applicable to those who participate in organized programs] If your play program isn’t an Indigenous-based organization, do you still feel like you fit in well?
   a. How do these programs fulfill your cultural and personal values?
   b. How could they improve?

Thank you all for the time and knowledge that you’ve shared with me today. I have one more question with regards to your time today. How was your experience with this research project? If you don’t want to tell me out loud, you can write it on a piece of paper and I will look at it later.