

An Exploration of Connections with the Land in an Urban Sport Context among Indigenous
Youth

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this participatory research was to explore connections with the land in an urban sport context among Indigenous youth. Two research questions guided this study: (a) What does a connection with the land look like in an urban sport context?, and (b) How can connections with the land be facilitated in an urban sport context? Nine youth from the ages of 22-27 years that self-identified as Métis and First Nations participated in this research. Data were generated through sharing circles, one-on-one interviews, and follow-up one-on-one interviews.

Participants described how the land in an urban context represents more than just a physical space; the land is connected to their identity, holistic health, family, healing and languages. Four themes that represent opportunities to support connections with the land in an urban sport context were identified: (a) reclaim spaces; (b) recognizing the land as a “way of being”; (c) facilitating cultural and land-based learning; and (d) improving access to resources and information.

Findings from this research suggest that sport can play a central role in facilitating connections to the land among Indigenous youth in urban centres. The experiences shared in this research are understood through urban spaces of decolonization, which may have important implications in Indigenous health and identity. Overall, practical suggestions to facilitate connections to the land within sport contexts were identified, and should be considered by sport and land-based programmers.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Jenna Davie. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, “Exploring connections with the land in a sport context among Indigenous youth in urban centres,” Pro00083681, September 21, 2018.

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Research Positioning

My research journey has been shaped by various factors over many years. As a person of Indigenous descent, I have a personal connection to this topic area. My connection is through my grandpa, who is Haida from Old Masset Village and through this research I am honouring this connection. The importance of situating oneself is important in research as it shows respect and helps clarify one's perspective as a researcher (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). Kovach (2010) recommends to "start where you are, it will take you where you need to go" (p. 10). After graduating from my undergraduate degree program, I knew I wanted to explore issues that were identified as important by Indigenous peoples. As I began to think about my potential options to continue on with my post-secondary education, I came across the research of my now supervisor, Dr. Tara-Leigh McHugh. As I read over her research, I saw similarities around her work with Indigenous youth and the positive aspects that sport provided me during my youth. For me, sport was a positive outlet during my youth that allowed me to develop as a person and overcome challenges. After leaving competitive sport, I began to engage in other forms of physical activity, which often included activities outdoors, such as hiking. The benefits of my connection with nature have been profound.

It is through these experiences that I was able to ask myself "why do I feel drawn to work alongside Indigenous peoples?" My Indigenous family background, as well as experiencing the positive [and negative] aspects of sport, have shaped my research interests. I have been given the opportunity to work with Indigenous youth over the past two years in the Northwest Territories as a research assistant where my primary task was to engage with the youth by organizing various sporting activities. During my time in Edmonton, I also volunteered as a peer mentor for Indigenous youth. The experiences I have had in working with Indigenous youth during my

Master's degree program have deepened my desire to learn about my own family. As well, it has strengthened my passion to learn *with* and *from* Indigenous peoples and be an advocate for change.

Chapter 1: Review of the Literature

Introduction

Physical activity can positively contribute to the health of Indigenous peoples and sport¹ is one of the primary ways in which individuals, particularly youth, engage in physical activity (McHugh, Holt, & Andersen, 2015). Sport has also been described as “one of the most salient mediums for recapturing spirits in a slow process towards cultural self-determination for Aboriginal Canadians” (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006, p. 294). While it is acknowledged that sport is valuable to the holistic health among Indigenous populations, there is a need for research that incorporates Indigenous voices to support sport programs that are inclusive of meaningful Indigenous activities (Forsyth, 2014; McHugh et al., 2018). Activities that are inclusive of culture can contribute to the holistic health of Indigenous youth (Hanna, 2009).

Sport participation has the potential to be a highly positive experience, yet various barriers such as racism have continued to prevent the potential positive benefits from being realized for Indigenous peoples (Mason & Koeli, 2012; Mason, McHugh, Strachan, & Boule, 2018). The silencing of Indigenous voices by forcing Indigenous peoples to conform to a Eurocentric model for sport rather than incorporating the cultural meanings that have been attributed to sport by Indigenous people is also problematic (Forsyth, 2014). There is currently a need to support opportunities for Indigenous youth to engage in sport that is inclusive of culture (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015; McHugh et al., 2018). Additionally, there is a lack of research regarding the experiences of connecting with the land among Indigenous youth residing in urban centres (McHugh et al., 2018). Thus, the purpose of this

¹ Sport within this research project will be used as a holistic term to describe various recreation, physical activity, and physical practices. Indigenous peoples often have an encompassing meaning of sport that can differ from Euro-Canadian definitions (McHugh, Coppola, & Sinclair, 2013a). The broad use of the term sport is also consistent with the meanings of sport described by participants in the current study.

research was to explore connections with the land in an urban sport context among Indigenous youth.

Potential Health Benefits of Sport Participation

Consistent with the general sport literature, there is an emerging body of research that has documented the potential holistic benefits of sport participation for Indigenous peoples², including many psychosocial benefits such as improved mental, emotional, and spiritual health (Hanna, 2009). A recent systematic review found that sport and physical activity were associated with a sense of empowerment and building self-worth amongst Indigenous youth (Bruner et al. 2016). Similarly, Indigenous youth have described how sport contributes to increased confidence and “belief in themselves,” which has important implications across various dimensions of health (McHugh et al., 2013a). In Sasakamoose, Scerbe, Wenaus, and Scandrett’s (2016) study, Indigenous youth acknowledged the influence of sport on their physical and mental health and well-being. As one participant noted, “sport gave me a direction and gave me goals in life” (Sasakamoose et al., 2016, p. 644). McHugh (2011) examined the physical activity experiences of Indigenous youth in urban centres and found that the youth felt “better, faster, and stronger” (p. 18) as a result of their participation. Given the potential benefits of sport participation, researchers such as Hanna (2009) have suggested that sport has a crucial role in the healing of Indigenous communities.

The potential health benefits of sport participation are particularly important as Indigenous peoples experience higher levels of chronic disease and a shorter life expectancy than the general Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2017b). These statistics are often overshadowed by various social inequities including poor housing, and unequal access to

² The term peoples is used throughout this research to recognize that more than one distinct group comprises the Indigenous population in Canada (Indigenous Foundations, 2009).

education and employment (Reading & Wien, 2009). Disparities in health relate directly to the governments assimilative and colonial agendas throughout history, which continue to exist within modern society (Reading & Wien, 2009). Sport itself is not a panacea to these disparities mentioned, but rather one possible avenue for facilitating one's holistic health.

Historical Assimilation

Despite the potential benefits of sport participation, it is important to acknowledge that sport and recreation have a complex and controversial history within the lives of Indigenous³ peoples in Canada. Prior to colonization, Indigenous communities were independent, each with their own forms of social activities and sport (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). Forsyth and Wamsley (2007) explained how sports were central to Indigenous cultural life prior to colonization; these activities often promoted social inclusion and personal growth (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). Forms of hand and ball games were popular and held different meanings depending on their usage (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). Various Indigenous communities participated in physical practices similar to those necessary for survival. For example, the Inuit and Dene both participated in the bow and arrow shoot (Heine, 2013). This way of life and these meanings of sport were silenced through processes of colonization.

Residential schools attempted to assimilate and “civilize” Indigenous peoples in all aspects of their lives and sport and physical activity was no exception (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). Euro-Canadian sports and the Euro-Canadian definition of what sport is, became integral to the assimilative agenda of the Federal Government (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). Norman, Hart, and Petherick (in press) also demonstrated how movement is central to colonization processes. For example, by highlighting how movement was confined during residential schools

³ Indigenous is a term used to describe First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. It is important to note that while this thesis uses the term Indigenous for consistency and clarity, First Nations children represented the highest proportion of Indigenous peoples forced into residential schools (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

(Norman et al., in press). Through residential schools, the government decided what type of sporting opportunities would be available to Indigenous peoples (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). These opportunities often excluded Indigenous notions of sport (e.g., ceremonial dances) and such sports were often considered suspect by law enforcement (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007).

Sport was also used as a form of a reward to ensure Indigenous peoples were following the rules and regulations of the Federal government (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). In this sense, sport was more than just a form of pleasure and freedom but it “operated as a form of desire where male students were seduced by normative Euro-Canadian performances of masculinity” (Norman et al., in press, p. 20). “Appropriate” male and female sporting behaviour were reinforced, males were encouraged to be physical and competitive, whereas females activities were less structured and not as physical (Forsyth, 2007). Through this focus on settler definitions of gender identities, Norman et al. (in press) also described how sport has contributed to the “Indigenous masculine subject” (p. 5). This identity is focused on many different values including the hyper-masculine Indigenous male, which has changed the way men continue to perceive themselves in sporting contexts in modern society. This assimilative agenda has prevented Indigenous peoples from practicing their traditions and culture (Forsyth, 2007), which has created long lasting effects on the ability for Indigenous people to connect with their culture and identity.

Barriers to Participation

Despite the ways in which Indigenous peoples faced colonization and assimilation tactics through Euro-Canadian sport systems, Indigenous youth continue to participate and acknowledge the importance of sport in contemporary society. However, sport continues to be linked to issues of power and racism. These barriers persist, often preventing the potential positive benefits to be

fully realized for Indigenous youth (Mason & Koeli, 2012). One study described the common barriers to participation in sport for Indigenous youth, which include various factors, such as structural (e.g., transportation) and institutional (e.g., programs) constraints (Mason & Koeli, 2012, p. 97). Bruner et al. (2016) found that Indigenous youth face barriers such as lack of capacity, support, and financial means. In addition to this, issues such as racism and bullying frequently create negative sporting experiences for Indigenous youth (Bruner et al., 2016; Mason et al., 2018; McHugh et al., 2018). Other researchers have found similar results. For example, in examining programs that use sport as a tool for development, Gardam, Giles, and Hayhurst (2017) stated that while many of these programs are often riddled with Eurocentric ideas and racism. Additionally, using sport for development initiatives with Indigenous peoples has been criticized due to its positioning of Indigenous peoples as needing interventions (McGuire-Adams, 2017). Similarly, looking at the *Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Society's* recreation programs, the female participants explained how racism and stereotypes created significant challenges for them (Hayhurst, Giles, & Radforth, 2015). However, their acknowledgement of negative portrayals of Indigenous women resulted in them actively trying to “prove them wrong” (Hayhurst et al., 2015), showing how sport can also be an important venue for resistance to this discrimination as well as a site for resurgence (McGuire-Adams & Giles, 2018).

While Indigenous youth continue to experience sport within the dominant Eurocentric framework, Indigenous youth have also challenged typical Eurocentric definitions of sport (McHugh, 2011). Indigenous youth described how sport could be any activity that builds bonds and makes one stronger (McHugh, 2011). Sport itself has been described as community among Indigenous youth in an urban centre (McHugh, Coppola, Holt, & Andersen, 2015). Furthermore, Sasakamoose et al. (2016) described how Indigenous youth used cultural and recreational

activities interchangeably to describe their physical activity levels. For example, the youth would group together sports teams in which they participated with cultural activities such as pow wows (Sasakamoose et al., 2016). As such, the researchers suggested that perhaps the youth “were redefining modern additions to cultural physical activity and re-framing them through an Indigenous lens” (Sasakamoose et al., 2016, p. 645). These meanings are paramount in challenging western meanings of sport and for creating relevant sport programs for Indigenous youth.

Initiatives to Support Meaningful Engagement in Sport

In addition to the research literature that has described the diverse meanings and the potential holistic benefits of sport participation for Indigenous youth, the Canadian Federal Government also acknowledged the critical role of sport participation among Indigenous youth. For example, in order to enhance participation and capacity for Indigenous peoples in sport, *Sport Canada’s Policy on Aboriginal People’s Participation in Sport* was released in 2005 (Canadian Heritage, 2005). This document recognized the need to provide and sustain quality sport that considers Indigenous peoples culture. As well, within the *Canadian Sport Policy* (Canadian Heritage, 2012) and the *Framework for Recreation in Canada* (Canadian Parks and Recreation Association & Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council, 2015) federal agencies have recently outlined the need to support Indigenous people’s participation in sport and recreation. More specifically, the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association & Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council (2015) stated that one of their main goals was to provide Indigenous communities with natural spaces and places in neighborhoods, including trails, rivers, lakes, and parks. As well, the *Canadian Sport Policy* outlines the need to support and increase

participation for *all* Canadians in recreational, competitive, and introductory sports (Canadian Heritage, 2012).

Most recently, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2015) outlines *Calls to Action*, which includes a section dedicated to sport. There are specific Calls to Action to provide sport opportunities that are inclusive of Indigenous peoples' culture as well as equal funding for these opportunities (TRC, 2015). For example, Call to Action #90 (TRC, 2015) stated the urgent need to provide access to community sport programs that respect the diverse cultures and sporting activities of Indigenous peoples. While the stated goals and objectives of federal policies and documents are generally laudable, they often receive little attention after they are proposed as there is insufficient direction about how to actually implement programs that are inclusive of these policies (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013). For example, in examining some key weaknesses of the *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal People's Participation in Sport* document, Forsyth and Paraschak (2013) find that there remains no action plan in place. Without an action plan, accountability to the policy becomes "impossible to achieve" (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013, p. 287). Additionally, the government continues to have authority on funding allocations for sport programs, which continues to assert power over Indigenous sport and meanings of sport (Norman et al., in press).

One way to move in the direction of responding to the gaps in the existing sport literature, as well as recommendations of the TRC (2015) to respect the diverse cultures of Indigenous peoples in sport, is to incorporate Indigenous voices into understanding how to facilitate this connection to culture through sport. Paraschak and Thompson (2014) outlined the importance of using a strength-based approach to research with Indigenous peoples, asserting that all individuals and communities have strengths that should be attended to. One way, yet

certainly not the only way, that Indigenous peoples have described their strengths is in terms of their culture. A lack of access to cultural practices and environments undermines authentic engagement in physical activity (Ferguson & Philipenko, 2016), and Indigenous youth have stated the need to connect with their culture through physical practices (McHugh, Kingsley, Coppola, 2013b; Sasakamoose et al., 2016). Similarly, Kerpan and Humbert (2015) found that Indigenous youth in urban centres preferred physical activity that included their culture. It is important to note that definitions of “cultural activities” vary greatly between Indigenous peoples, yet one key area that is often linked with the culture and identity of Indigenous peoples within a sport context is a connection with the land (McHugh et al., 2018; Tang & Jardine, 2016). Hanna (2009) has also suggested that creating meaningful sport programs requires consideration of many factors including the traditions and relationships with the land among Indigenous peoples.

Importance of a Connection with the Land

Despite the long history of displacement experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada, researchers who have engaged with Indigenous peoples have stated that:

The land continues to provide traditional foods essential to good health, a space for self-reflection and renewal, intense physical activity required in everyday life, joy and love in the interactions with family and friends, and experiential learning through interactions with nature and topography (Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014, p. 92).

The term land-based has been used to describe the reciprocal connection to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples (Redvers, 2016). The knowledge being derived from land-based research recognizes that the land itself is healing (Redvers, 2016). Wilson (2008) emphasized that Indigenous peoples have a “grounded” sense of identity (p. 88). Some purposes of land-

based activities often include healing, a link to education, health benefits, and a connection with one's culture (Greenwood & de Leuw, 2007; Simpson, 2014). The land has also been described as an important part of decolonization (e.g., Gardner & Peters, 2014; Yerxa, 2014). Scholars have also explained how repatriation of the land is how decolonization can be fully achieved (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Many positive benefits of engaging in land-based activities have been described by Indigenous peoples in Canada; for example, improved mental and physical health (Redvers, 2016). Researchers have also identified this sacred connection to Mother Earth as integral to the health and wellness of Indigenous peoples (i.e., Greenwood & de Leuw, 2007). Greenwood and de Leeuw (2007) argued that the health and well-being of Indigenous children and their communities arise from this connection with the land and that there is a holistic relationship between the two. Other positive benefits include the opportunity to learn from Elders and activities to live off of the land (Smethurst, 2012; Takako, 2005). Furthermore, the land has been described as an important determinant of health by Dene Indigenous youth in Yellowknife (Lines & Jardine, 2019).

A connection with the land among Indigenous youth has also been described more specifically in the literature within a sport context. Tang and Jardine (2016) described the importance of the land as a place for cultural connection within the Yellowknife Dene First Nation community. Their research demonstrated that physical activity can be an important way for youth to connect to their culture (Tang & Jardine, 2016). The Yellowknife Dene First Nation youth used the term sports but also activities, such as checking the fish net and being out on the land to describe being active (Tang & Jardine, 2016). Similarly, McHugh et al. (2013a) found that many Indigenous youth explained how their meanings of sport were connected to the land. A recent meta-study examining sport and recreation experiences of Indigenous youth in Canada

highlighted the important role that culture and connections to the land play in their experiences (McHugh et al., 2018). Whether the youth were participating in Indigenous activities or nature based recreation, the youth explained their positive experiences of connecting with Mother Earth (McHugh et al., 2018). Indigenous peoples living in northern Manitoba also stated how their physical cultural mobilities could be fostered and sustained by having a connection to the land (Norman et al., 2015). In addition to this literature, a recent community-based participatory research project in northern Canada showed how Indigenous youth stated how physical activity that takes place in natural environments could enhance the opportunity to feel connected with one's culture (Warner-Hudson, Spence, & McHugh, 2019).

Indigenous youth have described how their sport experiences could be enhanced by being provided opportunities to connect with the land and their culture (McHugh et al., 2018). For example, the youth in the Alexander First Nation Community described the places they engage in sports and physical activity, many of which were tied to the land and in the “bushes” (DyckFehderau, Holt, Ball, Alexander First Nation Community, and Willows, 2013, p. 5). In one study examining the effects of an outdoor education program focused on youth living on reserve, the researchers found that the program had important short-term effects on resiliency (Ritchie, Young, Wabana, Russell, & Enosse, 2014). The described link between physical activity, sport, and the land shows how, particularly among Indigenous youth, this may be an important area where connections with the land can be explored and restored.

Recently, the Government of Canada has funded the *Urban Programming for Indigenous Peoples*, which provides programs for Indigenous peoples residing in urban centres (Government of Canada, 2017). Indigenous youth are considered a top priority for receiving this funding, which includes projects that support land-based activities (Government of Canada, 2017).

However, at the time of this writing, I am unaware of any projects funded through this initiative that specifically provide opportunities for Indigenous youth in Alberta to connect with the land. There are, however, key programs in Alberta (not funded through the *Urban Programming for Indigenous peoples*) that do provide opportunities for Indigenous youth to connect with their culture. The programs in Alberta include, (a) *the Métis Calgary Family Services Society*, which helps Indigenous youth in academic settings to meet their specific needs, which includes culture and the opportunity to learn from Elders (Boys & Girls Club of Calgary, 2018); (b) the *Iiyika 'Kimaat Youth support worker* program offered by the Boys and Girls Club of Calgary which provides Indigenous youth with the opportunity to reach their full potential through culturally meaningful leadership opportunities (Boys & Girls Club of Calgary, 2018); (c) the *Nikânîw Indigenous Youth Leadership Program* offered by the City of Edmonton that combines the teachings of Elders into basic water training with an emphasis on teaching respect for Mother Earth (City of Edmonton, 2018); and (d) the *Alberta's Future Leaders (AFL)* program uses arts, sports, and leadership opportunities to provide positive opportunities for Indigenous youth (Alberta Sport Connection, 2018). The AFL programs include various aspects such as role modeling and camps (Alberta Sport Connection, 2018). The importance of culture is broadly recognized in these various programs, but specific opportunities for Indigenous youth to connect with the land are not the direct focus of such programs.

The importance of the land to Indigenous peoples has also been documented in countries other than Canada. For example, Brown, (2008) has suggested that one's sense of belonging and connection with the land from both a Maori and non-Maori perspective is central to being a New Zealander. He argues that in order to provide meaningful programs, it is imperative to understand this relation to the land more deeply (Brown, 2008). Similarly, Whitinui (2010) has spoken about

the opportunities that outdoor education based programs have provided for Maori people to learn about their culture. While the above-mentioned studies provide insight into the importance of the land to Indigenous peoples, there is a lack of literature in a Canadian context around connections with the land, particularly within an urban setting. Despite the emerging body of research supporting the need to further explore connections with the land, there is an identifiable gap in the literature where Indigenous focused research is needed. Without knowing how to properly support or facilitate this connection with the land, there is a risk of providing programs that do not serve or resonate with the youth for whom they are intended. For example, place based learning programs that use western notions of nature can provide a mismatch between Indigenous meanings of land-based learning (Friedel, 2011). In learning about the youths notions of connecting with the land, western notions of “getting back into” nature can be avoided (Friedel, 2011, p. 541).

There is currently a need to offer sport opportunities that incorporate connections to the land not only to those living on reserve or in rural areas, but also to the large number of Indigenous youth living in urban centres (McHugh et al., 2018). The Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (UAPS) examined the experiences of Indigenous people living in urban areas. The main findings suggest that Canadian cities are becoming important sites of cultural vitality (UAPS, 2010). While the responses varied among the different Indigenous communities, findings revealed that maintaining languages, customs, and traditions are a top priority among Indigenous peoples in urban centres (UAPS, 2010). Additionally, research focused on the sport experiences of urban Indigenous youth is scarce (McHugh, 2011), which is problematic since many Indigenous peoples in Canada live in urban settings. For instance, currently over half of all Indigenous peoples in Canada (55.8%) were reported to be living off reserve (Statistics Canada,

2017a). This number is higher in Alberta, where 66.5 % of Indigenous peoples live in urban centres (UAKN, 2010). Despite the large number of Indigenous peoples that live in urban centres, research that describes land-based activities and programs tends to be more focused on Indigenous peoples residing in rural and northern parts of Canada (e.g., Redvers, 2016). Indeed, Friedel (2011) has suggested that “perhaps, it is time to see Indigenous youth as not only followers, but as helping to lead the way in the restoration of Indigenous cultures” (p. 541). It is this suggestion that my research directly responds to.

Research Goals and Objectives

The purpose of this research was to explore connections with the land in an urban sport context among Indigenous youth. Two research questions guided this study: (a) What does a connection with the land look like in an urban sport context?, and (b) How can connections with the land be facilitated in an urban sport context? Sharing the voices of urban Indigenous youth will help to acquire a better understanding around the topic of connecting with the land, which may facilitate holistic health and potentially more meaningful sport opportunities for Indigenous youth.

Chapter 2: Methods

Participatory Paradigm

A participatory paradigm, as described by Heron and Reason (1997), has guided this research project. A paradigm informs how we understand reality (ontology), how we feel the truth can be known (epistemology), and our values around what is good (axiology; Creswell, 2003). Heron and Reason (1997) described how those who work within a participatory paradigm understand reality as a “co-creative dance,” (p. 279) where truth and reality are subjective. This paradigm supports the view that there are multiple and perhaps conflicting realities existing at one time. This highly subjective perspective challenges the positivist view of a single reality and allows the experiences of the Indigenous youth to be heard. Thus, this research will allow for multiple interpretations of reality. Experience and interaction between individuals and the world are the basis of inquiry in a participatory paradigm (Heron & Reason, 1997). A participatory paradigm also values practical knowing in helping humans flourish (Heron & Reason, 1997). This aligns with my own personal beliefs and values as well as guidelines outlined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 (TCPS2; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014).

Participatory Research Approach

The TCPS 2 (2014) specifically stated that when possible, researchers working with Indigenous peoples should consider “applying a collaborative and participatory approach” (TCPS2; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014, p. 123). This means that the research needs to be relevant, beneficial, and involve reciprocal

learning between the community and the researcher. Participatory research (PR) is an umbrella term used to describe research that is inclusive and values the engagement of those who are intended to be beneficiaries of the research itself (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). Because PR is an approach or way of working, it can utilize a variety of different methodologies and methods (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). Common drivers behind PR are social and environmental justice, putting knowledge into action, and self-determination (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). Cargo and Mercer (2008) explained how irrespective of the research drivers, mutual trust and respect are essential to support “capacity building, empowerment, and ownership” (p. 336). There is an added value to utilizing a PR approach for both the academic and non-academic partners at all phases of the research process (Cargo & Mercer, 2008). During the research implementation phase, benefits for the participants include a strengthened sense of ownership over the research and its implications (Cargo & Mercer, 2008).

Participatory research is becoming more common as a potential methodology for various researchers who have engaged with Indigenous peoples in research (Castleden, Morgan, & Lamb, 2012; Galily & Schinke, 2013; McHugh et al., 2013b). There is a very strong history of mistreatment of Indigenous peoples in all spheres of life, where research has been described as “one of the dirtiest words” (Galily & Schinke, 2013, p. 203). This is often due to the Eurocentric approach research has tended to take in the past. This problematic colonial lens has led to calls for a decolonizing method when sharing the voices of Indigenous peoples. An analysis by Koster et al. (2012) has recommended that researchers move away from methods that perpetuate the westernized ways of knowing. Moving to research *with* or *for* Indigenous peoples is also one important way to respect the recommendations made in the TCPS 2 (Koster et al., 2012). In this research, PR was also useful for engaging local perspectives and culture within the research

processes (Blodgett et al., 2011). Because this approach is based on the assumption that Indigenous peoples have the capacity to investigate their own circumstances (Blodgett et al., 2011), it can be a more meaningful process for participants. The participatory approach to research in the current study fostered a space where participants were able to voice their opinions on topics that matter to them. The participatory opportunities for participants in this project were in the development of the research questions, and during the data collection and data generation processes. Additionally, participants provided feedback on the themes and findings, as well as invaluable input for knowledge mobilization strategies. The knowledge mobilization strategies will include using art to help share the experiences of the youth.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the *University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board* (see Appendix A), and this research required necessary considerations of the background and history of Indigenous peoples. Koster et al. (2012) suggested that respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and relationships are four principles that should inform all research interactions with any Indigenous community. Keeping these principles in mind throughout the research helped to support ethical research processes. The TCPS 2 has created a specific section for research with Indigenous peoples (TCPS2; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). There are three main principles that serve as “the core value of respect for human dignity” (p. 109), and these include respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice (TCPS2; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). Respect for persons with an Indigenous background extends beyond individual participants and

into the community and the natural world (TCPS2; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). Free and informed consent are important aspects of this principle, as well as one of the major ethical considerations in my project. I addressed this ethical issue by ensuring I negotiated and documented informed consent from the participants (see Appendix B). Consent is an area that deserves special consideration due to its role in Indigenous culture and history (Baydala et al., 2013). At the point of first contact with participants, it was made clear that they had the choice to participate, or not to participate, in any aspect of the research project. Once participants verbally indicated their interest in this project, they were given a consent form containing all of the necessary information to make an informed decision about their participation in the research project. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the research project or have any data that they may have contributed within 30 days of their involvement in a sharing circle or interview with no negative repercussions.

Concern for welfare is a broader concept with Indigenous focused research that is also concerned with enhancing the capacity to maintain culture (TCPS2; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). The research design included aspects of culture that was guided by participants' whenever possible, such as during the data generation by fostering a welcoming space through sharing circles, as well as including ceremony within data generation processes. For example, Pâhpimohteht helped with this by including a drumming and smudge at the opening and closing of the sharing circle. Concern for welfare also required being mindful of possible risks to the community and preventing internal

and external stigmatization. Through a participatory research approach, I worked to address these concerns by being collaborative, as participants had the opportunity to point out aspects of the project that may be stigmatizing. However, I kept in mind that relying on local knowledge and treating it as singular does not come without risks. Gaventa and Cornwall (2006) warned that this can simply replicate dominant discourses rather than challenge them. Thus, I was mindful of the fact that there are multiple beliefs and identities within a singular community.

The last core value is justice. For the purpose of this project, I addressed this core value in regards to confidentiality. In order to ensure confidentiality, the following measures were taken: a) pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of the participants in the transcripts, written analysis, and written summaries; b) a locked filing cabinet was used to store all data; c) participants were clearly told that the public may see quotes from the transcripts and that names will not be used and the researcher will use this information only to more accurately represent Indigenous perspectives. Additionally, I ensured that personal identifiers were removed and participants had full access to what is shared about themselves (through reviewing all transcripts and a summary of the findings). Through continuous communication, participants were informed about all of the phases in the project and were given the opportunity to provide their input during each stage. The TCPS 2 stated that researchers should not disclose personal information to community partners without consent (TCPS2; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). The manner in which information was shared beyond the academy was decided by the participants. Specifically, during consultation, participants were asked how they would like the information to be shared.

Participants

Participants included 9 Indigenous youth between the ages of 22-27 years residing in the city of Edmonton who self-identified as Indigenous, a term that encompasses status/non-status First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (Indigenous Foundations, 2009). For the purpose of this project, I used the term “Indigenous” as an umbrella term to describe the participants as it is the most frequently used term in national and global contexts (Indigenous Foundations, 2009). Statistics Canada (2018) has identified youth as being from 15-34 years of age, which was used as a guide for the age inclusion of this study. The focus on working with Indigenous youth residing in an urban centre was essential to my topic, and Edmonton represents the second largest urban Indigenous population in all of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2017a).

The participants were purposefully selected using snowball sampling. A snowball sampling technique involves identifying one potential participant who can then suggest others who may be able to contribute to the research (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, within this research I sought to include Indigenous youth residing in Edmonton who are known to hold knowledge regarding connecting with the land or who have engaged in land-based activities. Additionally, I sought to include those that had experience engaging in various sports practices. After one individual (i.e., Pâhpimohteht) approached me through known contacts, they⁴ introduced me to several other individuals who they thought would be interested in participating. Pâhpimohteht suggested that it would be more powerful to have the option for participants to use traditional names within the research. As such, many participants decided to use their traditional name as a pseudonym.

Data Generation

⁴ The term “they” is used throughout this research as opposed to “he/she” as it was decided through consultation with participants that this would best respect the diverse gender identities of participants.

Data were generated through sharing circles, follow-up interviews, and one-on-one interviews. Specifically, participants had the option to participate in either a sharing circle or one-on-one interview. Seven participants took part in sharing circles (i.e., one sharing circle with five participants and the other with two participants). Follow-up interviews were then conducted with three of the seven participants from the sharing circles. The option to participate in the follow-up interviews was voluntary and they were included to ensure that the participants had more than one opportunity to share their opinions and thoughts. The two participants that did not take part in a sharing circle requested to participate in one-on-one interviews.

All interviews, including the sharing circles and one-on-one interviews, were audio-recorded, facilitated by myself, and held at the University of Alberta in a private room that was deemed a convenient location for the participants. A small token of appreciation, of \$30 per youth, was offered to participants for sharing their knowledge. Additionally, lunch and coffee were provided during all interviews. All interviews followed a semi-structured format, whereby an interview guide was used to direct the interaction that still allowed for the participants to share stories and the meanings they give to events, places, and things (Sparkes & Smith 2014; see Appendix C). This approach offered more flexibility and control over the stories for the participants in comparison to a more structured interview.

In developing the interview guide, Magnusson and Marecek (2015) have recommended drawing from the literature, and people known to hold specific knowledge, as well as the researcher's experience. Magnusson and Marecek (2015) stated how having an interview guide helps to produce a richer data set and give the interviewer a deeper understanding of the intent behind each of the questions. The recommendation to phrase the questions in a relaxed, conversational, and open-ended format (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015), was taken into

consideration for this research project. The development of content for the interview was done with the specific researchable questions in mind (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015). Follow-up questions were also important for participants to share the full extent of their experiences. Sparkes and Smith (2014) delineate between different types of probe questions, these include detail oriented probes, elaboration probes, and clarification probes, which were all used to create the interview guide. Examples of interview questions included: (1) What are some examples of land-based activities in which you have participated? (2) Why is spending time on the land important to you? Follow up questions included: (1) How have these experiences affected you? (2) Can you tell me more about that experience? One participant (i.e., Pâhpimohteht) helped review the research questions prior to the first sharing circle, which guided the rest of the interviews. Through the collaborative approach to this research, an open line of communication was used to ensure that the youth were able to provide their input and feedback on any aspect of the project, including the development of interview questions.

Within this research, interviews took the form of sharing circles or one-on-one interviews. Wilson (2008) explained how sharing circles allow for the stories of Indigenous peoples to be heard. Within this study, sharing circles provided a sensitive method to gaining a deep understanding of Indigenous participants' verbal descriptions (Rothe, Ozegovic, & Carroll, 2009). Additionally, sharing circles have been found to be an effective approach for engaging Indigenous youth in research as it helps to recognize youth as collaborators (Bird-Naytowhow, Hatala, Pearl, Judge, & Sjoblom, 2017). Rothe et al. (2009) summarized various features that distinguish sharing circles from focus groups, such as the inclusions of local cultural protocols and traditions. The participants were encouraged to "speak from the heart and listen from the heart" (Rothe et al., 2009, p. 338). During the first sharing circle Pâhpimohteht, helped transform

the research into ceremony, by including a smudge and drumming, at the opening and closing of the sharing circle. Each sharing circle lasted approximately 3 hours to support knowledge sharing from all participants. In terms of the one-on-one interviews, Sparkes and Smith (2014) explained how such interviews can be described as a craft and social activity that can allow people to construct knowledge about themselves and the social world around them (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Mason and Koehli (2012) explained that personal interviews are essential to capturing the vast experiences of Indigenous youth. The intent of all interviews was to foster a welcoming environment for participants to express their thoughts and stories.

My own research journals documented observations, field notes, and reflections that also provided data for analysis. Mulhall (2003) stated that unstructured observation is important for many reasons, including: providing insight into interactions, illustrating the whole picture, and capturing the context and process. Watt (2007) stated that journaling is the beginning of analysis and can help a researcher discover thoughts of which they were unaware. In line with the recommendations of Mulhall (2003), I included various components into my notes, such as emotions that were expressed or common themes from the interviews. Wilson (2008) stated the need for researchers to be mindful of their intentions and to work with a “good heart.” I kept in mind that I am not objective but rather authentic and credible in my intentions. I was also mindful of my own thoughts and ways of being in order to make necessary changes as the research progressed.

Data Analysis

The data generated during the sharing circles and interviews were transcribed verbatim. Participants were provided an opportunity to review all transcripts from the parts of the research in which they were involved. After participants provided their feedback on the transcripts, a

thematic analysis was used to generate meanings and themes from the data set. Thematic analysis fits with my methodology, as it is framed as a realist/experiential method and it is useful for participatory approaches to research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is also a highly flexible method that allows for rich description of the phenomenon in question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach was applicable to my study because it described meanings and the reality of the participants by examining their own words. It was useful for identifying themes within data and frequently went further by interpreting various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). Thematic analysis is desirable for studies that require enhancing the clarity of the results (Boyatzis, 1998). Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed six phases of thematic analyses which include: (1) familiarizing oneself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, (6) and producing the report. I will discuss each of these in more detail to describe how they were used in this research project to generate findings.

To begin, I became familiar with the transcripts by reading over the data in an active way and taking notes for coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Next, I generated initial codes by organizing the data into meaningful groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following this, I searched for themes by focusing the analysis on the broader level of the themes rather than the specific codes generated in the previous step (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this process, I began to consider how many different codes can form a theme. The next phase involved the refinement of these themes; for example, during this phase it became evident that some themes need to be broken down further or some themes do not count. Reasons for this included there was not enough supporting evidence within the data. Defining and naming the themes followed this, which involved identifying what each theme is about and to identify “what is interesting about

them and why” (Braun & Clarke, 2007, p. 20). Producing the report was the final phase and this involved telling the complicated story of the data in a way that is coherent and logical (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The final report was developed through this systematic process as well as through communication with participants.

Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended a number of things to consider before analysis begins. First, the researcher must consider what counts as a theme and what size the theme needs to be (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For my research, I identified the themes that helped answer the research questions. For the description, I provided a nuanced account of a group of themes from the data instead of including every aspect of the data set. Recognizing that any analysis is neither purely inductive nor deductive, I started by using inductive analysis to try and minimize the data being driven by my own preconceived ideas. This was useful because my data was empirical and based on “real world” experiences. In using an inductive approach, I read over the data for themes that relate to connections with the land without focusing on what the previous research in this area might have identified. I focused on semantic themes, where meanings were derived from across the data set. This type of thematic analysis focused on the words of the participants and was not looking for anything beyond what is said. It is the reader who should determine the trustworthiness of this method, thus I established accuracy through documentation to allow the reader to understand all decision-making processes in the data analysis of this research.

Quality Criteria

Recognizing that there is no single or correct way to judge the quality of qualitative research in sport and exercise science research (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), I considered the *characterising traits* for judging qualitative research within this research proposed by Schinke, Smith, & McGannon (2013). Schinke et al. (2013) described how this type of approach is more

suitable for judging participatory research. While all criteria were considered, the ones that align most with this research project will be discussed in more detail. It is important to note that not all of the traits apply to this research and this is not the intention of these characterising traits, as they are meant to be specific to one's own research project (Schinke et al., 2013). The first characterising trait is that the research should be "community driven research" (p. 462) referring to research where participants themselves help direct the research by providing input into the topic, questions, and method (Schinke et al., 2013). During the initial stages of this research, Pâhpimohteht who is well connected to other Indigenous youth provided feedback on the research topic itself, before providing input into the research questions and subsequent methods. Schinke et al. (2013) also highlighted the importance of choosing methods that favour locals beliefs. By engaging with Pâhpimohteht prior to the research, we placed an emphasis on methods that would be meaningful to other Indigenous youth (i.e., through sharing circles) and including ceremony within the first sharing circle. Additionally, Schinke et al. (2013) emphasized the importance of *decentralised university academics*, which speaks to how academics must "step back" (p. 463) and become facilitators. Specifically in this research, power was balanced as participants were recognized as experts of their own experiences through continuous collaboration in the refinement of the research questions, data generation, and analysis processes, as well as knowledge mobilization strategies. The next trait by Schinke et al. (2013) is *prolonged engagement and consultation*, which were important aspects of this research. This was achieved through prioritizing relationship building and maintenance from the start of the research relationship and this engagement was continued after the data collection processes occurred.

Chapter 3: Results

The purpose of this research was to explore connections with the land in an urban sport context among Indigenous youth. As described throughout the following themes, the experiences shared by participants suggest that connections with the land and its meanings are vast.

Participants described the land as more than just a physical space; the land is connected to their identity, holistic health, family, healing and languages. Recommendations to help facilitate connections with the land in a sport context were made by youth living in urban centres.

Specifically, four themes that represent opportunities to support connections with the land in an urban sport context were identified: (a) reclaim spaces; (b) recognizing the land as a “way of being;” (c) facilitating cultural and land-based learning; and (d) improving access to resources and information.

Reclaim Spaces

Participants described the need to reclaim spaces and be visible within the city. When describing ways that communities can support connections with the land in urban centres, many participants described the need for dedicated spaces in the city to live their culture. These spaces were described as being important to practice ceremony and connections with the land. In describing an experience of sitting on the river valley with a friend, Pâhpimohteht said, “It didn’t feel like colonization was there, didn’t feel like anyone was around us and we were praying for that water, we were praying for the people and it was so beautiful.”

Participants described the importance of the land to their identity and health, but also described the many barriers that made it challenging to be on the land in urban centres. As such, the connections involved many forms of compromise, as participants noted how they often felt

like an “outsider” when engaging in cultural practices in the city. Participants described feeling connected with the land but disconnected at the same time. As stated by Pâhpimohteht,

Yeah, we always have to compromise something and we’re always going to have to compromise something. Like ‘oh you have to sing a little quieter or you can only smudge in that room’. Part of reclamation is findings ways in which we can help our people in that holistic whole way, but that can only really happen if the whole entire landscape is shifted.

Other participants described similar challenges of urbanization, by sharing experiences of moving into the city. Buffalo stated, “I didn’t belong in this space and it was really shitty.” Willow discussed how restrictions in the city create negative experiences, explaining how “For one thing, you limit yourself because of this fear of authority figures because of what they can do to our people and then also you internalize racism and oppression...” Racial tensions in the city frequently created issues for participants, as Pihpihcew noted, “Indigenous people aren’t able to practice their ways of life without being discriminated against.” Dispossession was also discussed when speaking about participants’ relationships with the land in the city. Pâhpimohteht stated how, “I think if there were processes of reconciliation and reclaiming, it involves unlearning those violent colonial thoughts on land ownership.” Recognizing the various barriers experienced in urban centres, Ayisiniw argued, “I think we need to be more visible.” Ayisiniw further explained,

...maybe talking to the city and seeing if we can claim a piece of land and be like, ‘can this be our ceremonial grounds?’ And then just having strictly that piece of land, even though I know this whole land is ceremonial grounds but having just our own space saved for us.

Pâhpimohteht also described how it would be ideal to have a centralized location to come together, such as a sustainable wellness place. Pâhpimohteht described this place as,

...creating that center where it's a complete medicine wheel there. We have this facility that helps people throughout those four stages of life, the young, so birth, the teenagers, the young adults, and then transitioning into older adults and then the Elders. You know to have communities and to have places where we could heal the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual instead of being displaced all over...

Willow shared similar thoughts, exclaiming "I would love to have a center, even just a land-based learning cultural center where you have those teachers who are unbiased who won't critique you for not knowing your culture..." Ayisiniw stated how making more spaces for drumming and singing at the University of Alberta would be helpful in helping others reconnect with the land and their culture. Pâhpimohteht explained further how these spaces would be helpful,

If we have spaces and places and complete shifts in everything, that's when it really happens and the only way to do that is if Indigenous people have power. The only way Indigenous people have power is if we are already resisting and balancing out our own medicine wheels.

Within discussions of the importance of having a space within the city limits, Pâhpimohteht also spoke about reclaiming spaces within the city to have something for the future. Pâhpimohteht said, "We know the potential, we know the significance of having something for the future [land], for the seven generations and we always are thinking in that sustainable way."

Recognizing the Land as a "Way of Being"

The need to maintain connections with the natural world in urban centres was prominent throughout all of the interviews. In discussions of maintaining ties to the land in urban spaces, participants often spoke about ravines, ponds, trees, and the river valley. The river valley is a large area that runs through the city of Edmonton and has been a place of tradition for Indigenous peoples in the area throughout history. It was the most frequently stated area that helped participants maintain ties to the land. Dakota explained how, “The river valley is my huge connection, when I go to other places and other cities, if there isn’t a river valley, I feel weird.” Participants explained how the land is tightly connected to their identity as Indigenous people. As Pihêsiwiskwew noted, “everything that makes us like people or Indigenous peoples is the land, our cultures, and our languages.” Buffalo explained how the land is integral to understandings of oneself in the circle of life. Buffalo explained, “Everything I have and everything I am comes from that land and one day I’ll return to it.” Pihpihcew described the land as a relation that sustains people and their family. Through the participants’ involvement in land-based activities, they described how the land was connected more broadly to their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Pihpihcew went on to describe “how being on the land and being active is what kept our people healthy along with eating healthy foods that came from a healthy environment.” Willow explained how “that really grounds me and keeps me spiritually healthy [the river valley]. Aspen also described the land as important for spirituality,

And my connection to the land is important because it’s all connected to spirituality and I try my best to pray with sweet grass. I don’t do it as often as I used to but I want to start getting back into it because amazing things can happen when you pray. And I feel like especially when you have those around you who believe as well, it can create powerful things.

Many participants used the words “safe”, “calm”, and “soothing” to describe being out on the land and engaging in land-based activities. As stated by Pihpihcew, “It’s really grounding to get out of this concrete jungle, even if it’s the river valley and go sit on the grass.” Willow described, “I think that’s the reason why I really like being on the land, being with the land, picking medicines or something ‘cause I feel safe and I feel like that’s my home.” Willow also explained how pow wows provide an opportunity to connect with the land. Willow said, “When you’re dancing, at least I do, I feel really connected to the ground, the grass especially. Indoor pow wows feel different cause you’re not on that grass, you don’t feel it on your feet.” In describing time spent in the river valley Dakota explained how “...when I feel the grass, it’s almost like it’s calming and I feel better and I don’t have this weird overwhelmed feeling from being surrounded by buildings and cars and loud noises...” Pihêsiwiskwew shared similar thoughts, by explaining, “the only time I ever feel safe is like when I’m in a forest and nothing is around me.” Pihpihcew said, “sometimes when I’m really stressed out I just look at the trees and I just think OK I’m just gonna breathe and ground myself.”

Engaging in land-based activities and ways of living were often described in relationship with family and ancestors. As stated by Pihpihcew, “That connection to the land and everything that goes with that is what saved our relationship, our family, and everything.” Two participants, Willow and Dakota, described how spending time on the river valley was an important part of their childhood and way to connect with family. As such, participants often described the land in connection to their identity. Many participants described how their involvement in land-based activities is a way to honour their ancestors. In speaking of their ancestors, Dakota described how “Their connection to the earth, it wasn’t that it was just so natural, it’s that it was their way of being.” Participants described how they imagine what the land would have looked like many

years ago, as their ancestors went down the same path as them. Other participants described how being out on the land often involves being with family and feeling connected to their family.

Pâhpimohteht explained, “My connection to the land has always been connected to the people I have around me, the people that I serve [red nation of people].” Dakota described how, “It’s like a connection almost to my family in a way because my mom encouraged it so much, getting outside, maybe it just feels like being home because I associate being outside with family.”

Ayisiniw also described, “I spent a good portion of my life trying to understand why they [ancestors] chose to fight for this place [Kitaskinow], why they chose to stay here.” Ayisiniw further explained:

I guess the reason why I felt so connected to who I am as a Cree person and to my culture is cause I was kind of living it and I thought about it like this is definitely what my ancestors were doing a long time ago.

There was a wide range of activities that participants engaged in by the river valley. This included many physical activities and cultural practices. Specific activities included picking berries and walking. Others spoke about the importance of the river valley for ceremony.

Pâhpimohteht spoke about having a ceremony along the river and having “nothing to worry about.” Ayisiniw also discussed how the river valley is a power place for ceremony. Ayisiniw said,

There’s one thing, especially our people should do is recognize spirits. And there is two in Alberta, two really big ones. One is where they put all the bridges, those two bridges, Right underneath that spot, the reason why it’s a good place to build bridges is because there’s a spirit underneath there, that lives under there and he has this big rock above it. And that’s a power place so we used to have ceremony in that area, like it’s a very

powerful place to be. And then the second area is in the Bow River at where that curve, in the middle of that curve, that's where that other spirit is and that's where we used to go and have ceremony too.

Acknowledging the importance of reciprocal relations with the natural world is stewardship of the land. Stewardship of the land along the river valley was stated as very important in a time where urbanization continues and spaces to engage in land-based practices become fewer. Aisyiniw demonstrated the need for stewardship of the land by saying "One of the things that I really picked up on was our resistance to everything that's around us and how flat-out we need to go to actually protect and preserve our areas." Willow expressed concern around this by saying "...now it's [the city] just ever expanding, so I dread, I think about it all the time. I'm scared for the day when the city's going to start going down those hills into the river valley..." Dakota stated how the concrete in the city feels like a literal barrier to connecting with the land. Dakota further explained, "I feel that may speak to something more metaphorically, this concrete, this sidewalk that has built this layer between us and the literal earth." Ayisiniw expressed frustration with how certain sacred areas have been "built over and what not and desecrated, even our graves." Dakota stated how "It feels like you know, the way we live our life it's about progress and to lots of people progress means building taller buildings, expanding the city, you know paving our land." Pihpihcew expressed similar concerns when speaking about the land in the city, and stated "my heart breaks to be honest because I know the history..." Pollution of the land was also stated as a direct threat to maintaining good relations with the land. As Pihêsiwiskwew noted, "violence of the land is violence of the body."

Facilitating Cultural and Land-based Learning

Programming was frequently stated as an important factor for Indigenous youth in urban centres to stay connected to the land and learn their culture. This included the need for communities and cities to offer more cultural workshops, camps, and programs, which directly relates to land-based learning. Participants suggested a number of cultural workshops that could be offered within the city of Edmonton, which included ceremonies, pow wows, jigging, traditional games and various other cultural activities. While describing experiences of being involved in a pow wow, Alex said “I don’t know it just feels really positive, empowering and really calm in a way.” Dakota echoed these sentiments by describing Métis jigging as “having your two feet on the ground and having that physical connection is a way to connect back to the earth and stuff.” Similarly, Pâhpimohteht stated, “For me one of the first things I was doing to reclaim who I am was I learned how to do Métis jigging.” Alex also described how being involved in sports has been integral to overcoming life’s challenges. Alex said “sports to me is kinda like a way of life that I kinda get away from everything else that’s happening right now.”

Sport within this research was described as an encompassing term that has a wide range of meanings and activities. Dakota described sport as “just being active” and “movement through life, that’s what sport is to me.” Dakota went on to describe how “sport is being active and being out there and respectful towards your body because you want to keep it healthy.” Pâhpimohteht described physical activity as “a way of resistance because sometimes we resist and disrupt the norms, right, through the ways in which we exercise, through the ways in which we celebrate our bodies.” Participants described how sport provides a way to “block everyone out” and overcome challenges. Pihêsiwiskwew described how “Playing sports is healing and dancing is a sport.” Other participants described the healing aspects of doing various forms of dancing. For example, Pihêsiwiskwew explained, “I’ve been doing traditional dancing since I was about 10 years old

and I think through that, that's where I found my healing." When speaking about dancing Pihêsiwiskwew described how it provided the opportunity to "Self-reflect and just think about things that I never really thought about while simultaneously ignoring everyone around me." Willow suggested that integrating traditional games is just as important as offering mainstream sport, "giving [traditional sport] as an option, you don't have to just stick to soccer, basketball, hockey, if you're not into those more typical routes then there is [another] option."

Alex, who is involved in an Indigenous swimming program that is run by the city of Edmonton [Nîkâniw], suggested more programs similar to this would be helpful for other Indigenous youth to learn about their culture. Alex expressed how these types of programs are important in the city where people are "so focused on electronics and cell phones and there's not really many people-to-people connections..."

Participants explained how land-based learning is an important component to maintaining connections with the land. Dakota expressed, "I would like to see more land-based learning, 100%." Dakota suggested it could be done in a natural setting, such as the river valley. Willow shared similar thoughts, by expressing "I would love to have a center, even just a land-based learning cultural center." Pihpihcew shared similar ideas and suggested offering more land-based learning opportunities, explaining how "even offering courses like a firearms course for people to be able to be more knowledgeable about guns if they want to start hunting." Pihpihcew stated how "if we were able to live off the land and go back to that physical activity, eating healthy foods off the land, I think it would be way healthier and all connected." According to Pihpihcew, learning these skills to live off the land would be an important component to living a healthy life in the future. Pihpihcew stated,

Then you're working on all the spectrums of the medicine wheel. Like you have them all incorporated. You have to be physical to get this stuff done. I always hear elders talk about how there wasn't so many mental illnesses back in the day as there are now and they will often credit that to the amount of physical activity people had to do and now we're so idle that our minds are not being used in the same way, and so it's really harming our people.

These types of programs and land-based learning would provide mentorship opportunities through Elders and knowledge keepers, factors that participants felt were important in conversations regarding the land. As Pihêsiwiskwew spoke about being involved in an Indigenous dance troupe, the positive aspects of the experience were summarized, "It was nice, I learned a lot of my teachings from there and we would go to sweats and we would go to feasts, that's where I got a majority of my teachings cause we had Elders." Ayisiniw also suggested the importance of including Elders in teachings about the land, by saying "talking to Elders and what not too and get them to come out here and go visit them on the Rez." Aspen suggested mentorship programs would be important, stating how "I think especially in terms of education just to be able to see people who are flourishing in education." These programs and workshops would also provide important opportunities to learn more about the participants respective language.

Within discussion of land-based learning, maintaining and learning their respective languages through the land was described as an important consideration. Many participants described how their languages are tightly connected to the land. Learning their respective languages was an important way to learn more about the land, as Willow stated, "When you learn the language, you're learning about the land cause everything literally is based off of the

land, and that's the best way to learn the language." Pihpihcew echoed these thoughts, explaining how, "I think the Cree language is so beautiful because it is so connected to the land." They described how being on the land was an important way to maintain and learn their respective languages. Willow explained,

The Cree I remember most comes from being at sweats, picking medicines, stuff like that, so I think integrating that more too, honestly it just gives you an intuition that you know you have in you but it's a way to draw it out.

When talking about the Cree language, Buffalo explained,

Everything we have comes from the land and so being able to speak that language, kinda one of those teachings is being able to speak that language. Being able to speak to those spirits that reside within the land and all the four-legged things that fly and swim and everything.

Pihpihcew shared similar sentiments regarding the Cree language,

When you're able to understand Cree, you understand how much traditional ecological knowledge is within the language, and it's so beautiful to be able to understand on a deeper level, not only the ceremonies but the connections to the land through the language.

Aspen described the importance of maintaining languages, further explaining "Language connects not specifically to the land but with our identity because it creates us to be as one or it unifies us as one, and without language, another part of our culture is lost." Relatedly, the meaning of sport for Buffalo was connected to culture and language, as Buffalo further explained meanings of sport as "a journey of healing and like connecting back to my culture and my language and who I am, I kind of come to realize that being active is really subjective I think."

Improving Access to Resources and Information

Participants shared numerous stories to suggest that resources and information would greatly help Indigenous youth to maintain and foster their connections to the land in urban settings. A lack of resources often kept participants from being able to engage in land-based activities. Most participants shared that they engaged in ceremony and ceremonial practices outside of the city limits and stated how having a space in the city would be more convenient, as transportation was one of the most frequently cited barriers to accessing ceremony and connections with the land. When speaking about the main barriers, Dakota explained how “transportation’s a huge thing for me.” Ayisiniw shared similar thoughts by expressing, “I think it would be more convenient within the city because of transportation issues and able-ism, [classism], just all of that ties into it.” Aspen also spoke about needing transportation,

Yes, one of the barriers would be transportation wise. I don’t drive and when you’re taking the bus they don’t go everywhere within the city or if they do they won’t necessarily drop you off right there. So either you have to find a ride and then you have to jump through all these hoops.

Participants also spoke about how the lack of information regarding their inherent rights as well as restrictions and laws within the city limits creates feelings of unease and uncertainty. As explained by Willow,

I don’t even bother trying to even be ceremonial in within the city or have those moment because I’m afraid. I don’t even know what the restrictions are, I just feel like to have to get licensing and all that stuff when I know this is my right but then have all those barriers to go through.

Willow continued by saying,

‘What are our fundamental Rights as people who wanna live off the land still within the city?’ ‘Cause no one knows. There are people who know but it’s almost like when you know you have to protect it. I remember Pihêsiwiskwew was saying that she knows where sage is in the river valley but it’s like you don’t wanna make that like a big public thing ‘cause then people who don’t respect it or don’t understand it and want to even take it away will move in. ‘Cause people are weirded out when you go pick things, Willow explained how this is important due to not having a community to help with those teachings.

Participants also argued that more information is needed regarding current programs that do exist in the city. For example, participants often spoke about how they have heard of organizations providing programs but were unsure of the exact details. Ayisiniw expressed how information should be shared across nations and expressed how there may be events within the city or outside of the city but “A lot of people don’t coordinate with one another.” Alex shared similar thoughts, by stating how making connections and having information would greatly help to facilitate the opportunity to learn about one’s culture. Aspen also expressed how networking would help overcome barriers from a lack of information. Pihpihcew expressed how,

Same with the berries, being able to recognize them and know which ones are the ones that we should eat and which ones are the ones that we shouldn’t eat in the city and also outside of the city. So looking for berries and animals and learning about fishing. ‘How do you fish? What are the different ways to fish? What kind of fish are there that we can take?’ And I think even informing people about the regulations. Even though we’re Indigenous, we’re able to hunt, fish, and trap yearlong there’s still certain regulations we

have to follow when it comes to fishing and the quotas and we need to be informed on this.

Pihpihcew further explained how this information would be helpful for the people because “then when they’re out on the land, if someone was to question them they’re able to answer that and know where they stand and what they can and can’t do.”

Chapter 4: Discussion

Through this participatory research Indigenous youth shared powerful stories that highlight the importance of maintaining and facilitating connections with the land in urban sport contexts. Cities are becoming important places of cultural vitality among Indigenous peoples (UAPS, 2010; Wilson & Peters, 2005), and the experiences shared by Indigenous youth in the current study highlight the importance of cultural vitality within urban centres. Indigenous youth demonstrated how they are maintaining connections to the land and their culture despite existing within a colonial space. This finding is particularly important as scholars have been critical about deficit based narratives of Indigenous peoples in urban centres. For example, Bang et al. (2014) explained how the urban Indigenous narratives “reinscribes the settler-indigenous dialectic by framing Indigenous land (i.e. urban places) through postcontact dispossessions and reemploying a logic of elimination” (p. 42). This research represents a counter-narrative, as the youth acknowledge the impacts of colonialism while also suggesting ways to move towards a future of decolonization within urban spaces. The experiences shared by participants in this research suggest that Indigenous youth have, as described by Friedel (2011), an important role in helping with the restoration of Indigenous culture. Youth described the integral role of the land in relation to their holistic health, identity, family, healing, and languages. Such findings are consistent with those of Lines and Jardine (2019), who described the important role of the land in the health of Indigenous youth. However, this study is unique in that it is one of the only studies to provide an in-depth exploration of connections with the land in urban sport contexts from the perspectives of Indigenous youth.

The shared experiences of the participants from the current study may be understood through the lens of urban spaces of decolonization. Wilson and Peters (2005) described how

Indigenous peoples are challenging the confinement of Indigenous culture to reserves, and the Indigenous youth in this study support this notion. For example, in terms of reclaiming spaces, participants described the importance of having a space in the city specifically for Indigenous peoples to practice their culture. Participants emphasized the importance of taking back land and creating a space for Indigenous ways of knowing. Other Indigenous focused research (e.g., Yerxa, 2014) described the act of reclaiming spaces by being on the land, and Gardner and Peters (2014) explained how land reclamations pose a threat to settler colonialism. The government created “Indigenous space” through the creation of reserves, which has worked to maintain the separation of Indigenous peoples from urban spaces (Wilson & Peters, 2005). This has also been conceptualized through the logic of containment (Norman et al., in press). Important to this discussion is how containment takes the form of “simultaneously mapping Indigenous territories” (p. 11). This in turn places limits on the movement of Indigenous peoples and youth in this study were aware of these settlement strategies by providing ways to move forward in the future (through changing the current boundaries of Indigenous knowledges).

Within a sport and physical activity lens, Norman et al. (in press) argue that “settler Canadian sport and physical activity were deployed as part of broader strategies of Indigenous erasure” (p. 30). However what is more significant is how movement is also central to Indigenous decolonization and resurgence. Other scholars have also examined colonization as well as decolonization in relation to sport and physical activity (McGuire-Adams, 2017; McGuire-Adams & Giles 2018). McGuire-Adams and Giles (2018) describe how Anishinaabeg women challenge settler colonialism through physical activity. Indigenous youth in the current study acknowledge movement as a form of resistance through their own meanings of sport. Furthermore, participants acknowledged how movement can allow Indigenous youth to

challenge urban spaces, and they described important considerations for restoring their connections to culture and the land in a sport context through these reclaimed spaces.

The youth in the current study described how history has impacted their relationships to the land, and participants described how they often feel anxious and paranoid while living in urban spaces. For example, the youth in this study described how they often needed to compromise (i.e., by not smudging in certain areas or drumming more quietly) and how this creates a contradictory connection with the land in urban spaces. Similar findings have been shared by other researchers; for example, Wilson and Peters (2005) state how, “First Nations people have a contradictory relationship with the spaces of the modern nation” (p. 397). They further explained how Anishinabek cultural identity within urban spaces also involved creating small places of cultural safety to express themselves. Even though, participants were able to create their own safe spaces to express themselves, participants “still feel vulnerable” (Wilson & Peters, 2005, p. 404). Wilson and Peter’s findings, combined with those of the current study, highlight the importance of having a safe space within the city to express Indigenous ways of knowing and being. These spaces are critical for urban sport spaces and are needed to continue to challenge the narratives of modern cities. These reclaimed spaces can enable urban spaces to be viewed as Indigenous lands, which is necessary for the resurgence of Indigenous knowledges, practices, and learning. Bang et al. (2014) affirmed this by stating how creating new narratives regarding the land in urban centres means Indigenous peoples can move towards Indigenous identity that is not confined by “current power paradigms” (p. 50).

Without natural spaces to maintain connections with the land, participants in the current study described how one important part of their identity as Indigenous peoples is lost.

Participants described their connections with the land as reciprocal, recognizing that the land is a

relation and essential for their holistic health. Research grounded in the voices of Indigenous peoples has described the importance of natural spaces for holistic health (Wilson, 2003), and the regeneration and preservation of traditional languages (Bagelman, 2016). Furthermore, the healing aspects of engaging with natural spaces have been documented in the literature (i.e., Radu, et al., 2014). Findings from the current study, combined with the aforementioned studies emphasize the importance of recognizing the land within a sport context. By focusing on connections to the land, holistic health can be more accurately addressed and supported among Indigenous youth.

In order to fully recognize the land as a way of being among Indigenous peoples, stewardship of the land must be considered. Youth in this study emphasized the importance of engaging in reciprocal relations with the land and expressed their fears with current urbanization practices. Indigenous peoples across Canada have been raising awareness and describing the need to protect the land (AFN, 2008) while also describing various factors that can contribute to environmental health and protection. Indigenous protests are helping to spread awareness about the importance of protecting the land.⁵ Other Indigenous focused research has also described the importance of protection of natural areas (Beckford et al., 2010; Heaslip, 2008; Parlee et al., 2005). In combination, these findings demonstrate the critical role of the land in the identity of Indigenous people (e.g. as a way of being). It is necessary for industry and government to engage in responsible practices involving the land in order to respect this integral link. The importance of stewardship of the land might not typically be considered within the context of sport settings, but findings from this research suggest that such considerations are necessary to continue to engage in land-based activities within urban centres.

⁵ One example of such protests is the Oshkimaadziig Unity Camp, an active land reclamation that began as a protest and has led to a large land settlement among four Indigenous communities (Gardner & Peters, 2009).

Through engaging in reciprocal relations with the natural world, land-based learning and cultural learning can be further explored and implemented in these spaces. Participants described how programs and land-based learning could provide necessary opportunities for Indigenous youth to connect with the land in urban sport and land-based contexts. The needs for cities to offer more cultural and land-based learning opportunities are areas that are increasingly being recognized in the literature as important for Indigenous peoples in Canada (e.g., Simpson 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014). Simpson (2014) states how Nation-building requires Indigenous peoples to grow up intimately connected to their homelands, which requires the act of reclaiming the land as pedagogy. Indigenous learning must come through the land, and Simpson (2014) uses the example of collecting maple syrup to highlight the importance of having land-based learning opportunities for Indigenous peoples. To demonstrate this, Simpson (2014) further explained how “we should be concerned with re-creating the conditions within which this learning occurred [making maple sugar], not merely the content of the practice itself.” Through engaging and interacting with the maple, one is learning in “the context of family, community and relations” (Simpson, 2014, p. 7). This demonstrates how land-based learning is not merely focused on the decontextualized content itself but rather “through a compassionate web of interdependent relationships that are different and valuable because of that difference.” (Simpson, 2014, p. 11). Wildcat et al. (2014) also argued that decolonization must include forms of education that reconnect Indigenous peoples to the land, and Bang et al. (2014) described how current education settings work to entrench colonial practices. For example, the focus on a human centered approach to land-based education further privileges settler colonial relationships to the land (Bang et al., 2014). The youth in the current study were emphatic about having more opportunities to learn from the land to increase their opportunities to engage in land-based

learning. Findings shared by participants about the importance of learning and programs involving the land demonstrates how it is imperative to have land-based learning within the sport context as well. For example, participants often described how they could learn more *about* and *with* the land through sport (e.g., through powwows). Powwows, dancing, and Métis jigging in an urban setting were described as a key practice of connecting to the land, and to sport and physical activity. Participants described feelings of empowerment as they participated in these activities, demonstrating how these acts may inform resistance and empowerment among other Indigenous youth as well. It is important to note that engaging in land-based ways of life and sport are not the only acts of decolonization and regeneration that are needed but represent one important area to further explore Indigenous identity.

In addition to land-based and cultural learning being stated as important for maintaining connections with the land, the need for accessible resources, particularly the need for transportation, was described by participants in this study. Similarly, within Wilson and Peters' (2005) study, urban-to-reserve mobility was described as a strategy "that allows Anishinabek to maintain their relationships to the land across urban and reserve boundaries" (p. 403). While not specific to land-based activities, Mason et al. (2018) also found that Indigenous youth need transportation for access to sport opportunities. Participants in the current research study described how many of the ceremonies and activities take place outside of the city, making it difficult for participants to attend. Transportation within urban centres must also be considered. Providing transportation support could facilitate opportunities for Indigenous youth to be involved in land-based activities. Transportation is often identified as a facilitator to sport participation among all youth (Ding et al., 2011), and transportation is a critical consideration

due to the fact that many natural spaces that Indigenous youth want to connect with are not easily accessible.

Participants also indicated that there is a need for information regarding rights and restrictions in the city, as they are unsure of their rights for engaging in ceremony (e.g., smudging or picking medicines) in the city limits. Providing resources and information about Indigenous rights could help to alleviate feelings of uncertainty that Indigenous youth said they experience. Indigenous youth in Winnipeg, Canada have shared similar recommendations, and spoke about needing more resources as well as sport and recreational activities (Goodman, Snyder, Wilson, & Whitford, 2019). Senese and Wilson (2013) explored connections between Indigenous rights, urbanization, and health among Indigenous women in Toronto, Canada. Participants described how the availability of resources in the form of programs and services in the city strengthens their “leadership in advocating for their needs (and rights) in the city” (Senese & Wilson, 2013, p. 223). Additionally, government regulations on land use activities has been shown to have implications on the health and wellness of Indigenous peoples (Kant, Vertinsky, Zheng, & Smith, 2013). Accessible information and knowledge regarding Indigenous rights could support Indigenous youth to advocate and defend their rights within urban spaces. Within an urban sport context, resources and information could facilitate the youth’s ability to participate in land-based activities and maintain an important aspect of their identity while living in urban spaces.

Responding to recent recommendations in the Indigenous sport literature (e.g., McHugh et al., 2018), this research provides necessary insights for enhancing the sport experiences of Indigenous youth. Specifically, McHugh et al.’s (2018) recent meta-study highlighted the need for the development of sport programs that provide Indigenous youth with opportunities to

connect with the land. Within the current study, youth provided practical suggestions about *how* to facilitate connections to the land within urban sport contexts (e.g., reclaim spaces). This research also responds to the TRC (2015) calls to action, specifically call #90, which states “In collaboration with provincial, territorial governments, stable funding for, and access to, community sports programs that reflect the diverse cultures and traditional sporting activities of Aboriginal peoples” (p. 10). Accountability to this document can be challenging, and programs need to reflect the voices of Indigenous youth. This research responds to this call by outlining recommendations, which are grounded in the voices of Indigenous youth, for creating sport opportunities that are inclusive of Indigenous peoples’ culture (e.g., through land-based activities). This research also contributes to the emerging body of Indigenous sport research focused in urban centres.

This research makes a number of methodological contributions to the Indigenous sport literature. The importance of collaborative research was demonstrated through this research. For example, participants were involved in the development of the guiding research questions, as well as processes of data generation and analysis. These collaborative processes helped to balance power and contributes to the literature that states the need to move away from “conventional” research types with Indigenous people (Galily & Schinke, 2013). This collaborative work would not have been possible without genuine relationship building and maintenance. Often times, hanging out and talking with participants took precedent over specific data generation and analysis processes. Furthermore, these relationships were maintained after the research processes were over. This type of engagement speaks to the importance of relationship building with Indigenous focused research (Blodgett et al., 2011; Koster et al., 2012; Bird-Naytowhow, 2017). Bird-Naytowhow et al. (2017) use the term *ceremonies of relationship*

to discuss research that is centered on a “sacred character to knowledge generation” (p. 1) and collaborative research with Indigenous youth, and this research was grounded in a similar approach.

This research also makes a unique contribution by demonstrating how research can be transformed into ceremony. Scholars have been critical of research that simply perpetuates dominant discourses and have expressed the importance of including ceremony in the research process (Wilson, 2008), as well as making space for Indigenous ways of knowing and being within data collection techniques (Rothe, 2009). Bird-Naytowhow et al. (2017) discuss how including medicines in their research with Indigenous youth helped to establish a safe research space. During the first sharing circle, Pâhpimohteht opened the research with ceremony [drumming and songs] and a smudge. As very personal stories about the land provoked intense emotion, Pâhpimohteht also led a smudge in the middle of the sharing circle to help ensure participants that they were safe to experience and express their emotions. This created a more powerful and impactful process and responds to research that has stated the importance of considering Indigenous cultures and traditions within the research process (Wilson, 2008).

Limitations/ Future directions

Despite the many strengths of this research, it is important to note the potential challenges in using participatory research processes. First, participation is time consuming for the participants who may be dealing with many other challenges in their lives (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Once the research is underway, the involvement of the participant was not always guaranteed. Other challenges in this project included navigating the expectations of the University while also attempting to make this research project as collaborative as possible. Including the participants’ input into the project can be difficult and time consuming. Castleden

et al. (2012) state “institutional barriers and financial resources” (p. 168) as the greatest challenges in finding the time to collaborate and this research demonstrated similar challenges. As well, once the relationships are formed, there is a necessary level of accountability to these relationships, which can be emotionally tiring. Additionally, due to the nature of a Master’s degree program, the participatory research processes in this project were limited in terms of the amount of “action” that could be taken from the results. These limitations do not devalue a participatory research approach, as it still allows the voices of urban Indigenous youth—who are generally underrepresented in the literature—to be heard.

In the current study, participants were all involved in different ways in the regeneration and advocacy of Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Indigenous peoples are not monolithic; thus, it is important to recognize that this was a study with 9 Indigenous youth and more research could facilitate a deeper understanding into the topic of the land in an urban sport context. Additionally, although these findings suggest that facilitating connections with the land is important to Indigenous youth, these desires may not necessarily be linked to the cultural identities of all Indigenous youth; Warner-Hudson et al. (2019) noted similar acknowledgments.

As this study showed, including the voices of Indigenous youth in the area of urban sport contexts is imperative to fully understanding the experiences of Indigenous youth. However, the experiences among specific identity groupings might vary between First Nation, Métis, and Inuit youth (Reading & Wien, 2009). Thus programs and interventions must consider the specific population they are working with in order to create successful programs or interventions.

Future research should consider utilizing community-based participatory research to implement land-based programs in urban centres that are grounded in the voices of Indigenous peoples. According to the youth in this project and existing literature, land-based learning is an

area that should be further explored and implemented. Land-based learning could be offered more formally in an academic setting, such as those offered by *The Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning*.⁶ Freeland-Ballantyne (2014) explained how education on the land challenges colonialism by disrupting and reconstructing education. However, scholars have stated how much work still needs to be done in the area of land-based education, which “involves tracing and transforming the ways that some of the core constructs in education, as well as the fields of cognition and human development, conceptualize culture, and nature” (Bang et al., 2014, p. 43). Such recommendations for a complete shift in the way that education is delivered must be considered. Funding issues for land-based education and programming have been cited in the literature (e.g., Redvers, 2016; Wildcat et al., 2014), and this is an area that deserves further consideration by funding agencies. Additionally, it demonstrates the need for more support for land-based initiatives by all levels of government. The support should be directed towards existing Indigenous organizations that have already established meaningful programming that is rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing.

As well, intersectional issues should be further explored, including the relation between gender and the land and how identities are honoured through sport and land-based activities (e.g., during ceremony or sweats). There is evidence to suggest that gender identities could be further explored within land-based activities (Shannon, 2008). Future land-based research should also include the voices of Inuit youth, which has been identified as a gap in the sport literature (McHugh et al., 2018). Additionally, including Elders in further land-based research would help to provide intergenerational perspectives and teachings of the land in urban centres (Datta, 2018).

⁶ The program offers land-based University of Alberta accredited courses in the Northwest Territories.

Conclusions

Findings from this research highlight the importance of facilitating connections with the land in an urban sport context among Indigenous youth. This research suggests that creating space for youth to share their recommendations on relevant issues can result in finding solutions that are rooted in the strengths of the community (Lines & Jardine, 2019). Scholars have been critical about making claims that culture can be transferred into urban spaces without loss (Wilson & Peters, 2005). However, this research supports their claim that Indigenous peoples in urban centres can and do maintain aspects of their identity through a link to the land. These findings are important as Indigenous peoples are increasingly living in urban centres. This research addresses a clear gap in the sport literature and provides important information about *how* sport can facilitate connections with the land. Additionally, findings from this research outline important and practical recommendations that should be considered by sport and land-based programmers. It is my hope that more stories involving the land, which privilege and further amplify Indigenous ways of knowing, will be shared so that this regeneration can continue for generations to come.

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Appendix A

Ethical Approval

2019-03-20, 1:52 PM

Notification of Approval

Date: September 21, 2018
Study ID: Pro00083681
Principal Investigator: [Jenna Davie](#)
Study Supervisor: [Tara-Leigh McHugh](#)
Study Title: Exploring connections with the land in a sport context among Indigenous youth in Urban Centres
Approval Expiry Date: Friday, September 20, 2019

Approved Consent Form: Approval Date 9/21/2018 Approved Document [Consent Form](#)

Sponsor/Funding Agency: Killam Cornerstone Grant, University of Alberta

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1. Your application has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee.

A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

Anne Malena, PhD
Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

Appendix B
Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
Informed Consent Form

Research Investigator:

Jenna Davie
1-111 University Hall, Van Vliet Complex
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2H9
jdavie@ualberta.ca

Supervisor

Tara-Leigh McHugh
1-111 University Hall, Van Vliet Complex
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780-492-3907

You are invited to participate in the study: **“Exploring connections with the land in a sport context among Indigenous youth in Urban Centres”**. Your participation is voluntary and is not required by any physical activity or sport program in which you may be involved.

Researchers: The study is under the supervision of Dr. Tara-Leigh McHugh (780-492-3907, tara-leigh.mchugh@ualberta.ca), who is an Associate Professor at the University of Alberta in the Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation. Jenna Davie (jdavie@ualberta.ca) is a graduate student in the Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation and she will be involved in all aspects of this research, including the facilitation of sharing circles and one-on-one follow-up interviews.

Purpose and Procedures: The purpose of this research is to better understand how to incorporate connections to the land within a sport context among Indigenous youth in urban centres. The study will require you to participate in a sharing circle with 5 other Indigenous participants and there will also be an option to participate in a follow up one-on-one interview to share additional thoughts. This consent form will be revisited prior to the follow up interviews so that you are aware of your rights. The sharing circle will last for a maximum of 4 hours and the one-on-one interview will each last approximately 1 hour. The sharing circle will be audio-recorded. If you do not wish to be audio-recorded you will not be able to participate in the sharing circle. If you do not want to be audio-recorded during the interview, we can take notes instead. You will be asked if you would like to review the transcripts from both the sharing circle and the follow up interviews to ensure accuracy and that there is no information that could be used to identify you. You will also be asked if you would like to help analyze the data and all participants will be asked to comment on the emergent themes from across all of the transcripts. You will also be asked if you would like to create an art piece that represents our stories from the sharing circles and follow-up interviews. The sharing circle and interviews will take place at a convenient location for the majority of the participants, such as a private room in a community centre or the University of Alberta.

The total time required of you for the study will be a maximum of 5 hours. Specifically:

Sharing circle (maximum of 4 hours) + one-on-one follow-up interview (1 hour) = 5 hours maximum.

Your time commitment to this research will be acknowledged by giving you \$30. Specifically, \$15 will be provided at the end of your participation in the sharing circle and \$15 will be provided at the end of your participation in the one-on-one interview.

Potential Risks: You will not be subjected to any physical risk, but it is possible that you may feel uncomfortable discussing aspects of your culture or connection with the land. It will be possible to take a break at any time or to not answer every question. In the event that you would like the support of a health professional you may contact the 24 hour Mental Health Help Line (1-877-303-2642), and they will be able to direct you to the appropriate health professional.

Potential Benefits: By sharing your knowledge, you will be reflecting on your own positive experiences around culture, connecting with the land, and sport. You may benefit by knowing that you have contributed to a better understanding of this connection to the land within a sport context for other Indigenous peoples to benefit. This understanding could lead to practical benefits, such as the learning about ways to ensure that Indigenous peoples have positive sport experiences.

Confidentiality and Storage of Data: The following steps will be taken to protect your identity and the privacy of the experiences you share in the sharing circle. Names or anything else that can be used to identify you will not be discussed outside of your sharing circle or one-on-one interviews. Pseudonyms (made up names) will be used instead of real names in all study reports, presentations, and/or newsletters. If you choose to create an art piece to represent the findings, they will only be included with your permission. Additionally, pseudonyms (made up names) will also be attached to the art pieces. Transcripts and consent forms will be kept and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office for 5 years following the publication of the final reports, and then they will be shredded. Audio files and digital copies of transcripts will be stored on a password protected computer in my office, and permanently deleted after 5 years. An external company will be hired to transcribe the data after the sharing circle and interview and the company will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

There are, however, limits on the level of confidentiality that we can ensure. Because you will take part in a group interview (i.e., sharing circle) with other participants, you will be identifiable to other people in the group based on what you have said. We will be sure to safeguard the confidentiality of the group discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of discussions outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality.

Right to Withdraw: You have the right to refuse to answer any question in the sharing circle or one-on-one interview, at which time the discussion will be redirected. As well, participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw data or from your participation in the interviews within 30 days from the date of the sharing circle as well as 30 days from the date of the

interview. This can be done by contacting us by phone or email. In the event that you choose to have your data withdrawn, we will have the data shredded or returned to you.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615. As well, any questions you may have about this study may be directed to Tara-Leigh McHugh at telephone number (780) 492-3907.

Consent to Participate: I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent without penalty. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

Participant's Name

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Name

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix C

Interview Guide

1. How do you describe yourself?
2. What are some examples of land-based activities you have participated in?
3. Why is spending time on the land important to you?
4. Please share with me any positive experiences that have emerged from your participation in these activities?
5. How do you feel on this land?
6. What are some ways you could reclaim your connection to the land?
7. What is the meaning of sport to you?
8. I'm wondering if anyone here has felt connected to the land through their sport and physical activity experiences?
9. Can you imagine ways that sport could be used as an opportunity to feel connected with the land?
10. Are there any Facilitators (i.e., things that helped) in terms of facilitating connections to the land?
11. What are some barriers you have faced in trying to access spaces to connect with the land or land-based activities in urban centres? Prompts: personal, intrapersonal, community, organizational, and policy related barriers?
12. What would you like to see happen in the city to facilitate the opportunity to feel more connected with the land?
13. Is there anything else you feel is important or that I missed?
14. Is there anything else you would like to ask me about this research project?