

‘I keep forgetting them’: Lacrosse, indigenous women and girls and reconciliation in Canada

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Abstract

In Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released its list of Calls to Action (CTA) in 2015, and five Calls were directly related to reconciliation and sport. Within these five sport-related CTA, there was no specific reference to gender. Lacrosse, as an Indigenous cultural practice that has been culturally appropriated by white settlers, is a complex site to investigate how the TRC's CTA is (or are not) being implemented and the ways in which these efforts are gendered. In this paper, we examined how staff at Canadian lacrosse organizations address the CTA and Indigenous women's and girls' participation in lacrosse. Through the use of Indigenous feminist theory, feminist methodologies informed by the tenets of Indigenous methodologies, semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis, our findings demonstrate that Indigenous women and girls are commonly overlooked, and gender is typically an afterthought within the implementation of sport-related CTA by lacrosse organizing bodies in Canada – if they are implemented at all. As a result, we argue that there is a need to make gender a central organizing principle when lacrosse organizations within Canada implement the TRC's CTA.

Keywords

lacrosse, reconciliation, indigenous women and girls, indigenous feminist theory, gender

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From 2008 to 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada travelled across Canada, and its Commissioners listened to over 6000 witnesses as they charted the history and impacts of the Indian Residential School system on Indigenous peoples and their communities (Government of Canada, 2021). In 2015, the Commission tabled its final six-volume report (TRC, 2015a). Derived from the information collected throughout the Commission, the TRC issued 94 Calls to Action (CTA) (TRC, 2015b), a list of actionable steps 'to redress the legacy of residential schools and advance the process of Canadian reconciliation' (1).

In this paper, we focus on the five CTA, 87 through 91, which directly address sport. CTA 87 calls on 'all levels of government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, sports halls of fame and other relevant organizations, to provide public education that tells the national story of Aboriginal athletes in history' (TRC, 2015b: 10). CTA 88 calls on governments to 'ensure long-term Aboriginal athlete development and growth, and continued support for the North American Indigenous Games, including funding to host the games and for provincial and territorial team preparation and travel' (TRC, 2015b: 10). CTA 89 specifically calls on the federal government to revise a specific piece of legislation:

We call upon the federal government to amend the Physical Activity and Sport Act to support reconciliation by ensuring that policies to promote physical activity as a fundamental element of health and well-being, reduce barriers to sports participation, increase the pursuit of excellence in sport, and build capacity in the Canadian sport system, are inclusive of Aboriginal people. (TRC, 2015b: 10)

CTA 90 states:

We call upon the federal government to ensure that national sports policies, programs, and initiatives are inclusive of Aboriginal peoples, including, but not limited to, establishing: i. In collaboration with provincial and territorial governments, stable funding for, and access to, community sports programs that reflect the diverse cultures and traditional sporting activities of Aboriginal peoples. ii. An elite athlete development program for Aboriginal athletes. iii. Programs for coaches, trainers, and sports officials that are culturally relevant for Aboriginal peoples. iv. Anti-racism awareness and training programs. (TRC, 2015a, 2015b: 10)

The final sport-related CTA, Call 91, is concerned with event planning and consultation:

We call upon the officials and host countries of international sporting events such as the Olympics, Pan Am, and Commonwealth games to ensure that Indigenous peoples' territorial protocols are respected, and local Indigenous communities are engaged in all aspects of planning and participating in such events. (TRC, 2015b: 10)

Importantly, there is no specific mention of gender within the sport-related CTA. Sport has been, and continues to be, dominated by men. The omission of gender-specific language within the sport-related CTA is similarly reflected within other TRC reports. As a result, they contribute to the maintenance of heteropatriarchy (James, 2022) and colonial

hierarchies of gender that may enable these CTAs to be implemented in a way that continues to perpetuate the inequities that are produced in male-dominated sporting environments. Lacrosse, as an Indigenous physical practice that has been heavily colonized and dominated by white men, is an important site to examine the intersections of sport, the TRC's CTA and gender.

In this paper, we examine how staff of Canadian lacrosse organizations, specifically Lacrosse Canada – the National Sport Organization for lacrosse in Canada, as well as seven Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) that serve as regional governing bodies, address (or do not) the CTA and Indigenous women's and girls'¹ participation in lacrosse. Canada is divided regionally into ten provinces and three territories. This examination focuses on PSOs because there are no Territorial Sport Organizations for lacrosse. We begin by contextualizing our research within the existing body of literature and then introduce our approach to the research, which involved the use of Indigenous feminist theory, feminist methodologies informed by the tenets of Indigenous methodologies, semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). Our findings demonstrate that Indigenous women and girls are commonly overlooked, and gender is typically an afterthought within the implementation of sport-related CTA by lacrosse organizing bodies in Canada – if they are implemented at all. As a result, we argue that there is a need to make gender a central organizing principle when lacrosse organizations within Canada implement the TRC's CTA.

Literature review

To frame our research, in this section, we provide an overview of the pertinent literature concerning the gendered nature of sport, the gendered nature of sport and settler colonialism, and Indigenous women's and girls' involvement in lacrosse.

Gender and sport

Kidd (2013) highlighted that sporting institutions were created by men and for men, which inherently disenfranchises women. Indeed, despite the current inclusion of girls and women in most categories of sport, the dominant patriarchal gender ideologies of broader Western society and unequal power relationships between genders are reflected and even further entrenched through sport (Kay, 2014; Messner, 2011). The impact of the entrenchment of sport as a masculine space can be seen as operating through gender stereotypes in sport. Clément-Guilhotin and colleagues (2012) suggested that gender stereotypes create associations between rougher sports and masculinity and more artistic sports and femininity. Further, they found that participants in their study, 'implicitly associated sport with masculinity' (7). As such, it is not surprising that in Canada, women have had to 'fight to gain and maintain control over their own [sport] experience, and to have their alternative practices and activities recognized as legitimate by the dominant culture' (Hall, 2016: XV). Although sport and sport history have been dominated by men, it is important to note that the more limited body of sport history about women has reflected the experiences of white women. Hall (2016) asserted that the histories and experiences of Indigenous women's sporting experiences in Canada cannot simply be

added onto dominant white women's sporting history because their experiences have differed greatly. Indigenous women occupy a unique place within sport history, and their stories and accomplishments have been commonly omitted (Hall, 2013).

Critical to understanding Indigenous women's experiences in sport in Canada is an understanding of how colonization has affected both traditional Indigenous physical practices and Indigenous women's position within society. Prior to contact with early settlers, there were many traditional Indigenous physical practices that Indigenous women participated in such as shinny, double ball, and – in some communities – lacrosse, which was played away from the view of men (Hall, 2013). Settler colonialism greatly affected traditional Indigenous physical practices as they were restricted or banned through processes of colonialism, and Indigenous women's participation was discouraged by the imposition of Western heteropatriarchy through settler colonialism (Hall, 2013).

Settler colonialism and gender

Heteropatriarchy refers to 'the social systems in which heterosexuality and patriarchy are perceived as normal and natural, and in which other configurations are perceived as abnormal, aberrant, and abhorrent' (Arvin et al., 2013: 13). Heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism are deeply intertwined (Arvin et al., 2013). Settler colonialism is the social organization of society aimed at destroying Indigenous peoples and cultures and replacing them with a society dominated by settlers (Wolfe, 2006). As famously asserted by Wolfe (2006), settler colonialism is a structure, not an event. Settler colonialism operates in two distinct ways: it destroys Indigenous peoples and cultures in pursuit of unobstructed access to land, and it builds a new society dominated by settlers on the expropriated land (Wolfe, 2006). Central to settler colonialism is the logic of elimination, which can be seen through restrictive racial classification that denies recognizing Indigenous peoples' claim to both their Indigeneity and their land (Wolfe, 2006), through the Indian Act (1985) and rules governing state-recognized citizenship claims, as well as policies created to structure the lives of Indigenous peoples within Canada.

The residential school system was a site where settler colonial understandings of race and gender were mutually reinforced. The first residential school opened in Canada in 1831 and the last one closed in 1997 (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation [NCTR], n.d.). During this time, Indigenous children were taken from their families and communities and were forced to attend state-funded, church-run institutions (NCTR, n.d.) in an effort to assimilate Indigenous youth into Western culture by stripping them of their languages, cultures and connections to family and land (NCTR, n.d.), a practice that has been recognized as cultural genocide (TRC, 2015a). The residential school system also imposed Western conceptions of gender by dividing 'sisters and brothers from one another, imposing racialized gender norms onto the young bodies of Native children while denying their traditional gender roles, which differed cross-culturally' (Hunt, 2018: 24). These dichotomous categorizations of gender contrasted with some Indigenous conceptions of gender, as many Indigenous languages do not have dichotomous gender categorizations (Nahwilet Meissner and Whyte, 2018).

The colonial endeavour of rigid gender categorization is tied to the settler colonial project of elimination. The Indian Act (1985) is a piece of Canadian legislation that

governs the State's relationship with First Nations peoples and systemically imposed patriarchy onto First Nations (Barker, 2008). It afforded First Nations men rights and privileges that it did not afford to First Nations women and enshrined and perpetuated a system that systemically targeted and devalued First Nations women and severed their connection to the land (Barker, 2008; Hunt, 2018). Indigenous women are inherently connected to the land and to the continuation of culture; therefore, settler colonialism specifically targets Indigenous women (Simpson, 2016). The gendered nature of settler colonialism forms the basis from which we investigate the gendered nature of reconciliation efforts.

Though Indigenous women are uniquely targeted by heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism, the five sport-related TRC CTA (2015b) were written in gender-neutral language. In fact, James (2022) found that the TRC as a whole adopted a gender-neutral approach to its investigation, which not only reproduced settler colonial heteropatriarchy but also 'has specific consequences in policy and in the daily lives of Indigenous women and girls... [and negatively] impacts the potential for healing for Indigenous women and girls and the potential for transformative reconciliation' (143). Similarly, Sarkin and Ackermann (2019) investigated various international Truth Commissions and found that 'commissions with gender as a mandate are usually more successful at bringing about gains for women' (507). The TRC's (2015b) sport-related CTA's lack of reference to gender serves as an impetus to critically examine the ways in which gender is or is not taken up in sport-related reconciliatory efforts.

Gender, settler colonialism and sport

When evaluating the intersection of gender and sport, it is important to reflect upon how both have been influenced by settler colonialism. As noted above, within residential schools, gendered expectations were imposed to entrench Euro-Canadian ideals surrounding gender (Forsyth, 2013). One of the ways that gendered expectations of residential school attendees were imposed was through sport, where boy attendees were encouraged to participate in competitive Euro-Canadian sport, while girls were encouraged to participate in less structured recreational activities (Forsyth, 2013). These practices echoed the overarching goals of settler colonialism – to exert power over Indigenous peoples and their culture in an effort to destroy Indigenous culture and assimilate Indigenous peoples into dominant Western culture (Te Hiwi and Forsyth, 2017).

Lacrosse is a rich site to examine the convergence of multiple systems of power. A traditional Indigenous practice that carries specific cultural meanings across different Indigenous nations, it has existed within different Indigenous communities, and in different forms, since time immemorial (Downey, 2012, 2018). However, the form of lacrosse that is popular today looks very different than traditional Indigenous versions of the game. Following seventeenth-century Jesuit missionaries who saw Haudenosaunee lacrosse players playing the traditional Haudenosaunee version of lacrosse in the St. Lawrence Valley, the traditional Indigenous version of lacrosse was appropriated by white settlers (Delsahut, 2015). Through processes of cultural appropriation such as white settlers taking up the game, standardizing the rules, implementing official governing bodies and restricting the participation of Indigenous players, the traditional

Indigenous physical practice was transformed into the sport as we have come to know it today (Delsahut, 2015; Downey, 2018, 2012).

The intersection between settler colonialism and lacrosse is evident through the use of lacrosse in residential schools. Due to the vast appropriation of lacrosse by white settlers, the culturally appropriated version of lacrosse had so become popular amongst white settlers that the culturally appropriated version of lacrosse was used within residential schools to help 'civilize' the Indigenous boys (Downey, 2018). The nexus of lacrosse, gender and settler colonialism is thus a rich site to explore through the lens of reconciliation. Critical to this exploration is the position of Indigenous women and girls and their involvement within lacrosse.

Indigenous women's and girls' involvement in lacrosse

Indigenous women's and girls' participation in lacrosse carries specific cultural significance. Indigenous women have been participating in lacrosse for centuries as committed organizers and supporters (Downey, 2012; Hall, 2013). Within some nations, Indigenous women played lacrosse amongst themselves, away from the view of men. In others, they played amongst men but without using sticks (Hall, 2013). Indigenous women's participation in lacrosse as players has not always been supported, as evidenced by the tensions at the intersection of the Haudenosaunee women's lacrosse team and traditional Longhouse beliefs (Downey, 2012). In the wake of the success of the men's Iroquois Nationals lacrosse team during the early 1980s, the team that represents the Haudenosaunee Confederacy at international competitions, a group of Haudenosaunee women's lacrosse players attempted to start their own internationally recognized program, but their efforts were contested by those who supported the traditionalist Longhouse belief that lacrosse is a ceremony (Downey, 2012).

As a Haudenosaunee ceremony, for some, lacrosse is a medicine with healing powers; it is a practice for men and does not fall within the scope of Haudenosaunee women's roles (Downey, 2012). In 1987, Clan Mothers from Onondaga and the Seneca Nation at Tonawanda protested a Haudenosaunee women's exhibition game, citing their traditionalist beliefs (Downey, 2012). The main belief that was cited was that Indigenous women's power, specifically during moon time (i.e., during menstruation), and the sacred medicine of a lacrosse stick is incompatible (Downey, 2012). Notwithstanding some disapproval from those who ascribe to the aforementioned beliefs, Haudenosaunee women's lacrosse teams have persisted, and Indigenous women and girls have continued to play lacrosse.

Although their participation has been and remains contested by some, Indigenous women have continued to play lacrosse and represent their cultures. Indeed, the Haudenosaunee Nationals women's lacrosse team competed at the 2022 World Games in Alabama (Hamilton, 2020). By representing their nation and culture on the world stage, members of this team asserted their sovereignty, agency and pride in their identity. Relatedly, and drawing from discussions with Indigenous women lacrosse players in Akwesasne, Bassett (2018) argued that within the 'context of settler colonialism that systematically dispossesses Indigenous women's bodies, lacrosse emerges as a healing ceremony for Haudenosaunee women, connecting them to their land and culture' (29).

Although Indigenous women's participation in lacrosse has never ceased, their stories and accomplishments have been widely overlooked. The gendered nature of lacrosse and the important cultural nuances surrounding Indigenous women's and girls' participation in lacrosse, coupled with the lack of gendered language within the TRC's CTA, create an important nexus to study the impacts of how the TRC's sport-related CTA (TRC, 2015b) operate in a gendered way within a sport that is derived from Indigenous cultural practices.

Theoretical framework

Our work was guided by Indigenous feminist theory, which highlights the gendered nature of settler colonialism and can be used to investigate how settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy overlap in ways that uniquely effect Indigenous women. Indigenous feminist theorists have highlighted that Indigenous women's connection to the land causes Indigenous women to be specifically targeted by settler colonialism and creates uniquely gendered dimensions to settler colonialism (McGuire-Adams, 2020). Suzack (2015) identified Indigenous feminist theorizing as analyzing 'how gender injustice against Indigenous women emerges from colonial policies and patriarchal practices that inscribe gendered power dynamics to the detriment of Indigenous women' (261). This can be further extended to those who do not fit within the colonial gender binary of man and woman. Indigenous feminist theory arose from these contentions, and those who employ it have argued that it demonstrates that settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy can be evaluated as operating simultaneously.

There is no singular articulation of Indigenous feminist theory, as there are various Indigenous nations that conceptualize gender in different ways (McGuire-Adams, 2020). We have chosen to follow Arvin and colleagues' (2013) approach,² which has five main components: (1) 'problematize and theorize the intersections of settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and heteropaternalism' (14); (2) 'refuse the erasure of Indigenous women' (17); (3) 'actively seek alliances in which differences are respected and issues of land and tribal belonging are not erased ... [and] relationships to settler colonialism are acknowledged as issues that are critical to social justice' (19); (4) 'recognize Indigenous ways of knowing' (21); and (5) 'question academic participation in Indigenous dispossession' (25). This approach provided us with the theoretical tools necessary to understand interlocking systems of oppression.

As we are white settlers, the authors of this paper are unable to claim Indigenous feminist theory as our own. Indigenous feminist theories were developed by individuals who did not see their experiences reflected within mainstream feminist theory as well as dominant discourses within Indigenous studies. These are not struggles that we know firsthand – we have learned about them from Indigenous women and from the Indigenous feminist theorists who have developed this theory. Although we do not purport to claim this theory as our own, our work is nevertheless informed by how Indigenous feminist theorists have conceptualized gender in relationship to settler colonialism. As settler researchers, it is important that we are aware of the origins of Indigenous feminist theory to avoid reproducing colonialism within research and to eschew appropriation of this theory. By acknowledging the specific Indigenous context of Indigenous feminist

theory and positioning this examination of gender within the context of Indigenous feminist theory, it is our hope that this work is not folded into the mainstream feminist discourses that have worked to disenfranchise the experiences of Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse peoples.

Methodology

Our research was guided by the overarching principles of feminist methodologies and informed by the tenets of Indigenous methodologies. Feminist methodologies refer to critical approaches to research that centre gendered experiences (Wigginton and LaFrance, 2019). According to Cancian (1992), the overarching principles of feminist methodologies include focusing on gender and inequality, centring participants' lived experiences, being action-oriented, critical and reflexive and using participatory methods. There is no singular feminist methodology, as feminist methodologies are comprised of a variety of equity-seeking principles that ground the process of doing feminist research (Chakravarty et al., 2014).

Our research is also informed by principles of Indigenous methodologies. As non-Indigenous people, we do not wish to claim ownership of Indigenous methodologies, as doing so could be seen as cultural appropriation. Further, some scholars argue that Indigenous methodologies are inconsistent with Western epistemologies (Kovach, 2021). However, by informing our use of feminist methodologies with principles of Indigenous methodologies, we were able to attend to the gendered nature of our research question while simultaneously conducting our research in respectful manner.

Drawing from Indigenous methodological practices, our research project was guided by the 5 R's of Indigenous methodologies: Respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility and relationships (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 2001; Tessaro et al., 2016). To ensure that we adequately engaged with the 5 R's throughout this research process, as well as the principles of feminist methodologies, we formed an Indigenous advisory committee that helped to guide the development of this project. The first author recruited the committee through her own personal network, and it consisted of three Indigenous individuals who met the following inclusion criteria: involved in lacrosse, interested in examining gender and race, and willing to assist her with the research. Two members were Indigenous women, and the third member was an Indigenous man. Each member is involved in lacrosse within their communities in different capacities, ranging from player to coach and administrator. Importantly, we compensated all members for their time.

The first author met with this advisory committee twice over Zoom to develop this project. First, they met to discuss the ideas for this project, and the first author was able to answer any questions that the committee members had. She then circulated a draft of the research proposal and a draft of the interview guide for the committee to review. They then met again over Zoom and discussed the proposal and interview guide and committee members offered input and suggestions to the documents to refine questions. The committee members instead recommended that we interview two participants from each organization to capture multiple perspectives and also urged us to highlight the ongoing harms stemming from the residential school system and ongoing settler colonialism in our work, as these ongoing harms form the impetus for

our work.³ Following the input of the advisory committee members, we then submitted and received approval from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Ottawa.

Following the 5 R's, we made sure to demonstrate *respect* for the advisory committee members by listening to and valuing their input into the project as well as respecting the time they took to share their knowledge. The advisory committee members helped us to develop this project in a culturally respectful manner. Additionally, the Indigenous advisory committee helped to ensure that the work was culturally *relevant* and reflected their concerns and those of the communities to which they belong. To do this, we ensured that we followed the feedback from the Indigenous advisory committee to the best of our ability. It was important that this project was *reciprocal* so that the participants could gain something productive from this research. Participants gained critical insights into their own organizations as well as from other organizations within Canada, which could enable these lacrosse organizations to be better prepared to meaningfully engage with principles of reconciliation. The fourth R, responsibility, emphasizes that researchers have a responsibility to do this work in a way that the Indigenous advisory committee members described as a 'good way'. To conduct the research in a good way, it was important for us to do no harm, which is why we chose to anonymize the participants and organizations as best as we could. We were able to address the fifth R, *relationships*, with the advisory committee members as well as the research participants by seeing the research process as being based on relationships rather than the extraction of data.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews provided enough structure to help us attend to our research question, yet they also enabled us to build rapport with participants and allowed them to tell their own stories and steer conversations in the directions that they saw fit to offer new insights and meanings (Galletta, 2013).

After receiving approval from the University of Ottawa's REB, we used purposive sampling to recruit participants who were representatives of either Lacrosse Canada or a Provincial or Indigenous member association⁴ of Lacrosse Canada, were comfortable speaking in English and had access to a computer and internet connection, as due to COVID-19, interviews were conducted over Zoom. Using the contact information listed on each organization's website, the first author first reached out to Executive Directors to see whether they could identify anyone within their organizations who may have expertise on the research topic and interest in participating in our study. If the organization did not have an Executive Director, or if the Executive Director did not respond, she used the contact information listed in the websites to identify persons whose position could possibly overlap with the research topic and invited them to participate.

The first author conducted seven semi-structured interviews, with each participant representing a different organization. Unfortunately, despite the advisory committee members' desire for us to have multiple participants from each organization, we were only able to recruit one participant from each organization. Our questions focused specifically on each organization's implementation of the TRC's CTA. Sample interview questions included but were not limited to the following: 'Does your organization have a Hall

of Fame?’ ‘Has your association recognized the accomplishments of Indigenous women athletes?’ ‘Does your association support the North American Indigenous Games?’ ‘If so, are girls’ and boys’ team supported equally?’ ‘What does the long-term athlete development program look like for Indigenous athlete development in your organization?’ ‘What if any anti-racist awareness and training programs does your association run? Within these training programs, how is gender addressed?’

The participants held roles that ranged from staff members to members of a Board of Directors. All of the participants self-identified as men and one participant self-identified as Indigenous. On average, the interviews lasted 72 min. Interview questions addressed the sport-related CTA, such as the following: What does the long-term athlete development program look like for Indigenous girls and women? What, if any, anti-racist awareness and training programs do your association offer? Within these training programs, how is gender addressed? The first author transcribed the interviews verbatim and returned the transcripts to the participants. The participants then had two weeks to make any changes or corrections to their interview transcript and return it to her for inclusion in my analysis. Only one participant chose to make revisions to their transcript.

Analysis

To analyze the data, we used RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2019), an updated version of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis, which is used to identify and analyze themes across data sets. The first author familiarized herself with the data through transcribing the interviews and reading through the transcripts while noting her initial observations. Coding the data involved generating distinct labels for chunks of text that conveyed meaning to help her make sense of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Some codes that she developed were ‘lack of Indigenous women in lacrosse’, ‘different cultural meanings of lacrosse’, and ‘women in lacrosse’. She then organized the codes to develop initial themes. After the first author had organized the codes into themes, all authors reviewed the potential themes together. Step 5 required us to refine, define and name themes, which were done through connecting themes back to our research question. The final step, writing up the findings, can be found in the results section.

As noted above, throughout this process, we followed the principles of reflexivity as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2019): Centring researcher subjectivity, organic and recursive coding processes, and deep reflection on, and engagement with, data. Centring researcher subjectivity required all authors to reflect on their own experiences with lacrosse. The second and third authors have had no experience with lacrosse, but the first author has had life-long involvement, having been an elite player, coach and referee. As the researcher conducting the interviews, she had to reflect deeply on how these experiences influenced her interactions with participants and the data. This reflection enabled her to recognize three assumptions that she held prior to data collection: (1) lacrosse organizations are doing very little, if anything, with regard to implementing the TRC’s CTA; (2) if lacrosse organizations have done anything in pursuit of reconciliation, these efforts will have been tokenistic; and (3) these efforts will have been aimed at and prioritized Indigenous boys and men. During interviews, she openly reflected on her experiences with participants to situate herself and to work through questions with

participants in meaningful ways. While analysing the data, she noticed that her Eurocentric approach to gender was apparent; for example, she found that she omitted discussions of gender outside of binary terms. We attempted to address through complicating and challenging the Western gender binary throughout the writing of this manuscript. The first author also achieved organic and recursive coding and deep reflection on, and engagement with, data through her non-linear coding process, whereby she repeatedly moved back and forth between different steps to help her to refine the themes and to help me make sense of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). As researchers with no background in lacrosse, the second and third authors challenged the first author to make explicit that was implicit to her in the data analysis process. This organic and recursive coding process enabled us to generate two themes from the data, which we discuss below.

Results

We generated two themes that illustrate how lacrosse organizations within Canada address gender within the ways that they attend to the TRC's CTA: (1) gender is categorical; (2) and there are specific Indigenous cultural meanings concerning Indigenous women and girls' participation in lacrosse. Using Indigenous feminist theory (Arvin et al., 2013), we argue that these themes illustrate the ways in which settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy continue to influence Canadian lacrosse organizations and jeopardize meaningfully addressing the TRC's CTA (2015b).

Gender is categorical

When asked about halls of fame and recognition of Indigenous athletes (CTA 87), and the North American Indigenous Games and long-term athlete development for Indigenous athletes (CTA 88), the participants discussed gender in binary, categorical ways that positioned gender as attached to whiteness. For example, when asked how their organization has recognized Indigenous athletes and how the organization has educated its membership on the stories of Indigenous lacrosse players, the representative from Organization 5 stated, 'To be honest, I don't think we've recognized many of our athletes...I think that's something that is lacking, not just in the Indigenous, the female [too]'. Importantly, this statement positioned Indigenous and female as separate, distinct categories. When discussing the development of North American Indigenous Games teams, the Organization 5 representative said their 'only setback was we weren't able to get a female group going. We tried, we just couldn't get the numbers or the interest going'. When asked if long-term athlete development programs look the same for all athletes, including Indigenous athletes and more specifically Indigenous girls, the Organization 2 representative stated, 'right now, no, we don't differentiate between any visible or invisible minority. Whether or not that's, you know, gendered, or race, or class, or anything'.

Throughout conversations surrounding programs and policies aimed at reducing barriers to participation and building capacity in the sport system that are inclusive of Indigenous peoples (CTA 89), we asked the participants about programs for Indigenous women and girls in lacrosse. The Organization 2 representative stated, 'I'm really glad that you speak about girls because I keep forgetting them'. Similarly, the

representative from Organization 1 discussed high-performance opportunities for Indigenous boys in contrast to community development initiatives for Indigenous girls:

[The Summer Games]. That's a huge deal for us. To have an Indigenous only team is a huge carrot for Indigenous players to be involved in the sport... As far as female development, you know, some of the programs ...[are] about getting into the schools, and school programming.

The Organization 1 representative continued to discuss his organization's school programs, which he conceptualized as barrier-reducing activities, as ways to increase Indigenous girls' participation in lacrosse: 'let's get into the schools ... maybe grab some Indigenous athletes that haven't been exposed to the game or female Indigenous athletes or female athletes, that's where you're going to do it'. When asked about policies and programs aimed at reducing barriers to participation in lacrosse for Indigenous women and girls, the representative from Organization 5 stated, 'Indigenous females' [participation] is pretty low ... But females in general, we do a fantastic job of supporting females'. This participant defined the category of female as inherently non-Indigenous.

We asked the participants if there was any funding for programs that reflect the diverse cultures and traditional sporting activities of Indigenous peoples (CTA 90) and how Indigenous women and girls were reflected within these. The Organization 2 representative stated, 'So not specifically, although there has been ... increased funding for women and girls in sport in general'. The Organization 4 representative discussed the need for targeted inclusive programming, as outlined in CTA 90, and within this discussion, he referred to Indigenous athletes and girl athletes as being separate categories which reified the categories of female and Indigenous as being mutually exclusive '[When] I first got there, there wasn't much happening in the way of female lacrosse and certainly Indigenous lacrosse'.

We asked participants to discuss the ways their organizations have taken up the second half of CTA 91, '[ensuring] that Indigenous peoples' territorial protocols are respected, and local Indigenous communities are engaged in all aspects of planning and participating in such events' and how/if Indigenous women were included in these discussions. We extended the concept of events to include sporting events that could be hosted by lacrosse organizations, such as tournaments and competitions, because lacrosse organizations within Canada, especially smaller PSOs, may not be involved in the planning of international mega-sport events. The representative from Organization 6 highlighted a desire to have Indigenous women lead the planning of events for Indigenous women and girls, but he noted that he faced the barrier of a lack of Indigenous women and girls participating within his PSO: 'I think it's from just raw numbers, it will be hard to say, "we're having a female led, female only Indigenous lacrosse event this weekend."'

There are specific indigenous cultural meanings surrounding indigenous women and girls' participation in lacrosse

When specifically asked about how his organization has recognized Indigenous women athletes throughout history, the representative from Organization 2 noted a lack of

recognition. He continued by explaining that there are complex reasons behind the lack of recognition, including the fact that his organization only informally recognizes Indigenous women, which is rooted in specific cultural beliefs:

I know that historically, there has been some concern in the Indigenous community over female participation ... And as an example of that, the [specific Indigenous women's lacrosse team] was ... I don't want to say not invited or not allowed because it's not really accurate, but [the team] was certainly encouraged to play their games [off reserve] as opposed to [on reserve]. Recently, those athletes have come back on to the rez in order to be able to play, which is a great thing for everyone. Those are cultural issues that typically the [Organization 2] doesn't, you know, involve itself in because those are community perspectives, and it's not up to us to decide where a team plays or where they don't. But we are pretty proud to see that the [specific Indigenous women's lacrosse team] are playing in [specific Indigenous community].

The representative from Organization 2 further discussed the specific Indigenous cultural meaning surrounding Indigenous women's and girls' participation in lacrosse and their organization's perspective on creating inclusive programs and policy, and thus attending to CTA 90:

[I am] not Indigenous, not, you know, even fully understanding the cultural implications of the background behind why there might be some question over Indigenous female participation. So yeah, [Organization 2 doesn't] touch that at all and [it] allows the community to advise [Organization 2] as to what their plans are [for programs that are inclusive of Indigenous women and girls].

When discussing building capacity for Indigenous women and girls within lacrosse organizations, the Organization 7 representative, notably the only Indigenous participant, shared some of his own insights and beliefs surrounding Indigenous women and girl's participation in lacrosse:

Even though we have quite a few Indigenous women that do play, there are a lot [of Indigenous people] out there that are really upset and mad about that. Traditionally, the game of lacrosse...it was just strictly men ... Today, the game has really gotten away from the medicine part ... Had it still been played the traditional way, yes, I would be all for it just being strictly men. But the traditional heart and the traditional way the game was played, it was played amongst the clan...[with] all wooden sticks... in huge fields ... Like, today, the aspect of the plastic, the box, the field rules, and all that other stuff ... was just an...evolution of a medicine to a sport, which was going to happen because, you know what? We shared it with the world.

This participant continued by sharing personal insights about his daughter:

My daughter plays...I taught her to play at young age. She just fell in love with the game and been a part of it ever since. And I don't regret that...I have had a lot of people that have looked at me funny for it and got mad at me for it. But hey, you know what? She's playing. She's having fun. I mean, just because she's a woman and it's our game doesn't change the aspect, doesn't change anything.

This theme captured important insights related to the complex ways that gender is discussed alongside the specific Indigenous cultural meanings surrounding Indigenous women's and girls' participation in lacrosse.

Discussion

Our research demonstrates that gender is largely an afterthought within lacrosse organizations' discussions of implementing the TRC's CTAs, and that Indigenous women and girls are systemically disadvantaged by overlapping systems of settler colonialism and patriarchy. These findings confirm that there is a need to make gender a central organizing principle when lacrosse organizations within Canada are attempting to implement the TRC's CTA.

Gender is categorical

The theme 'gender is categorical' was evidenced by the way participants in this study discussed Indigenous women and girls as separate from the categories of both 'women and girls' and 'Indigenous'. Such statements reflect the dominant whiteness within the notions surrounding the category of 'women and girls'. It also works to separate Indigenous women from the category of 'Indigenous', which demonstrates how patriarchy operates to exclude Indigenous women and positions men as the default conception of an Indigenous person. This discursive exclusion is illustrative of the ways in which Indigenous women and girls are overlooked by lacrosse organizations. The discussion of gender as categorical can be seen as deriving from the patriarchal sporting environment that normalizes heteropatriarchy and produces men as natural athletes and women as novel athletes. Not only were Indigenous women and girls overlooked by participants but also gender and its connection to settler colonialism were omitted from these discussions. Separating Indigenous women from the category of 'Indigenous' echoes the heteropatriarchy embedded within the Indian Act (1985), which systemically disenfranchised Indigenous women from their culture (Barker, 2008; Hunt, 2018). This process can be considered Othering.

Othering within this context needs to be understood within the settler colonial project (Kagedan, 2020) wherein a dominant group, settlers, marginalizes a subordinate group, Indigenous women. Settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy are inextricably tied together within this process, as evidenced by the gendered nature of the Othering. Othering serves to erase the existence of Indigenous women and girls within considerations of Indigenous lacrosse players. In this way, they are doubly marginalized for being both Indigenous and women/girls. If lacrosse bodies fail to include Indigenous women and girls as lacrosse players, the TRC's CTA, if implemented, will be aimed at Indigenous men and boys. A tenant of Indigenous feminist theory is refuting the erasure of Indigenous women (Arvin et al., 2013). Although the representative from Organization 3 forgot about women, it is clear from the ongoing achievements of Indigenous women lacrosse players (Bassett, 2018; Hamilton, 2020) that Indigenous women exist within these sporting spaces and are deserving of reconciliatory efforts. For reconciliation efforts to be equitable, they must not erase the existence of Indigenous women and girls within sporting spaces.

Similarly, the representative from Organization 1 discussed the importance of their provincial Summer Games in recruiting more Indigenous male lacrosse athletes, which

contrasted with very different efforts for recruiting girls, which instead focused on community-level lacrosse. The statement illustrated different gendered expectations for men and boys, who are considered to be high-performance athletes, and women and girls, who are erased from high-performance spaces. These gendered and racialized expectations are derived from the settler colonial imposition of heteropatriarchy. The categorical articulation of gender is predicated on the Western gender binary that positions male and female as dichotomous absolutes. When evaluating gender within sporting spaces that are influenced by settler colonial ideals, it is imperative that we move beyond stagnant, binary articulations of gender.

Indigenous culture and women's and girls' participation in lacrosse

The theme of 'there are specific Indigenous cultural meanings surrounding Indigenous women and girls' participation in lacrosse' illustrated the ways in which participants discussed contentions within Indigenous communities of Indigenous women's and girls' choice to play lacrosse. The Organization 2 representative alluded to cultural complexities and asserted that as a non-Indigenous organization, it is not his organization's responsibility to make policy decisions surrounding Indigenous women and girls' participation in lacrosse. This assertion is important as it highlights a tenant of Indigenous feminist theory, the recognition of Indigenous ways of knowing (Arvin et al., 2013). However, it is important that the recognition of Indigenous beliefs surrounding Indigenous women's and girls' participation in lacrosse does not result in the erasure of Indigenous women and girls from the landscape of lacrosse, which is something against which Indigenous feminist theorists work (Arvin et al., 2013). Further, there is danger in non-Indigenous peoples using their social location as settlers as a rationale for not doing anything to promote equitable reconciliatory practices.

Settler colonialism works to erase the complexities and subtle, nuanced cultural differences within lacrosse. This was made evident by the participant from Organization 2 recognizing that there is in fact a specific cultural relevance to Indigenous women's lacrosse, but not wanting to do the work to unpack and understand how these complexities operate. Even though Indigenous women and girls were widely forgotten by representatives of lacrosse organizations, lacrosse has been a way for Indigenous women to resist and combat the systemic harms that settler colonialism has brought to their communities (Bassett, 2018). This, alongside the tensions surrounding the participant from Organization 7 encouraging his daughter to play lacrosse, as well as his articulation of changing values, demonstrates that when discussing Indigenous women's and girls' participation in lacrosse, there is no singular answer and that notions of tradition may change and mean different things to different people at different times and in different places.

The question thus arises of how the sport-related CTA can be taken up in ways that recognize the influence of settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy and heteronormalization of gender in lacrosse and renounce the erasure of Indigenous women and gender-diverse peoples, while simultaneously respecting the Indigenous women and girls who are actively participating in lacrosse? The answer is not clear-cut. Within sport for reconciliation initiatives, of which the TRC's CTA can be seen as being a part, there needs to be critical reflection upon the ways settler colonialism structures sport (Forde et al., 2022).

Therefore, a meaningful, justice-oriented approach to sport for reconciliation must be used to challenge settler colonialism and advocate for Indigenous sovereignty, resistance and self-determination (Forde et al., 2022). A direct challenge to settler colonialism would be accepting variance between and within Indigenous cultures and belief systems, as well as recognizing that Indigenous cultures are not monolithic or static, and multiple things can be true at once.

The complexity of these discussions and the lack of an easy answer can provide lacrosse organizations with a basis to delay or avoid meaningful implementation of the CTA. Brooks-Cleator and Giles (2020) noted that decision-makers at non-Indigenous organizations often determine how and if they are responsible for implementing the CTA. If these organizations determine they are not responsible for the implementation of the TRC's sport-related CTA, it could create an overreliance and strain on Indigenous organizations, as culturally specific programs can then be limited to Indigenous organizations, which the authors noted are often poorly resourced. This is problematic because settler lacrosse organizations, which benefit greatly from the ongoing cultural appropriation of lacrosse, would then be directly contributing to the lack of programming for Indigenous lacrosse players as well as the strain on Indigenous organizations. This speaks for the need to build meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities, to pay their members for their expertise and to present potential players with options. Further, there is a need to evaluate the hiring practices of these organizations. Throughout the hiring process, there is a need to identify Indigenous women and members from Indigenous 2SLGBTQIA communities to increase diverse perspectives and actively work against heteropatriarchy within these organizations.

The historical lack of equitable policies and programs aimed at Indigenous women and girls in the lacrosse organizations that the participants represent illustrated the erasure and devaluation of Indigenous women and girls within lacrosse, which could be considered part of a gendered logic of elimination within lacrosse. Further, the lack of discussion of gender beyond the Western gender binary contributes to the erasure of Indigenous trans people, gender diverse peoples and Two-Spirit people. If lacrosse is to be a site to implement the TRC's CTA, there is a need to centre Indigenous conceptions of gender within these efforts.

Conclusion

This paper is one of the first to look at the TRC's CTA (2015b) related to sport through a gendered lens. The themes that we constructed show that gender is an afterthought within these discussions and that there is a need to make gender a central organizing principle when lacrosse organizations within Canada are attempting to implement the TRC's CTA. Further, these themes illustrate the complex tensions surrounding discussions of Indigenous women's and girls' participation in lacrosse. Gender is central to the settler colonial project; continuing sport for reconciliation efforts without specific attention to the gendered implications of settler colonialism on sport reproduces the settler colonial logic of elimination that is explicitly gendered.

There is a need to understand that sport, more specifically lacrosse, is not neutral and value-free (Forsyth, 2022). The legacy of settler colonial control of lacrosse and exclusion of Indigenous peoples ought to be the impetus for lacrosse organizations to be

forthright about their entanglement with settler colonialism and patriarchy and how they continue to structure these organizations. Once recognized, the next step should be for these organizations cultivating relationality and relationships with Indigenous peoples and organizations so that Indigenous sovereignty and ways of knowing are respected and valued. Although these suggestions are merely stepping stones to addressing systemic issues, they are nevertheless preliminary ways forward in pursuit of reconciliation.


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Notes

1. The literature that was reviewed, as well as the participants in this study, did not explicitly include trans women and girls and non-binary people, so this term is employed as meaning cis-gender, except when explicitly stated otherwise.
2. Arvin and colleagues (2013) called their theory Native Feminist Theory. We have used the term Indigenous as it is now a more acceptable term than “Native.”
3. To respond to this point, we framed the paper around the Calls to Action for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
4. Although not a recognized PSO, the First Nations Lacrosse Association is a Lacrosse Canada member association that acts as a governing body of lacrosse across various First Nations.

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