

First Nations Athletes' Experiences of Leaving Their Home Communities to Play Elite Hockey  
in a Mainstream Context

Jaime Carpenter, BScHP  
Faculty of Health Sciences, School of Human Kinetics  
University of Ottawa

Supervisor: Dr. Audrey R. Giles  
Committee Member: Dr. Victoria Paraschak  
Committee Member: Dr. Michael Robidoux

THESIS  
Submitted to the School of Human Kinetics in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Human Kinetics

School of Human Kinetics  
University of Ottawa  
July 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022

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### **Abstract**

While researchers have documented elite Indigenous hockey players' experiences when they leave home to play sports in the mainstream context, to date they have not examined how these experiences may vary based on sex and gender. By using Tribal Critical Race Theory, Indigenous feminisms, and reflexive thematic analysis, in this thesis I examined the challenges and benefits that First Nations elite hockey players experienced when they left home to play in the mainstream context and how these challenges varied based on sex and gender. The 20 participants (10 female, 10 male) all had challenges with language and their new environments. Interestingly, while all the male participants reported experiencing racism, only two of the female participants reported such experiences, and they were of a less overt nature. The benefits that were experienced by both male and female athletes included athletic and personal growth, new experiences, and support from home. While both male and female athletes reported accruing benefits from leaving home, I found that the female athletes had to leave home to pursue hockey due to a lack of opportunities available to them, opportunities that were often available closer to home for male participants. I also found that both males and females reported receiving a great deal of support; this is particularly interesting given male hockey's higher profile. Taken together, these findings add nuance to the existing literature on Indigenous hockey players' experiences in the mainstream context.

### **Dedication**

To my cousin Skyler Meshake, this thesis is dedicated to you. I wish you could have seen me finish this thesis in person, but I know you were with me every step. I would also like to dedicate my thesis to my parents, Dawn Carpenter and Anne Marie Levi. Thank you both for always believing in me and for supporting my dreams. Mom and Annie, you have been the most significant role models in my life, showing me what a strong woman looks like because I grew up looking up to both of you. You both are why I am so proud of my culture and why I am passionate about First Nations physical activity, especially First Nations hockey players. This thesis is dedicated to you both, Mom and Annie - I am proud to have you experience this with me.

## Acknowledgments

Completing this thesis would have been impossible without the contributions of the many exceptional individuals who supported me throughout this journey. I want to take a moment to acknowledge these people and show them how thankful I am for the massive amount of encouragement they gave me so that I could finish my research.

Firstly, I would like to thank my advisor, Audrey Giles. Thank you from the bottom of my heart; I am so grateful for having someone in my corner who fights as hard as you do for me and all of Team Giles. Thank you for continuously checking in on me, letting me vent, and being there with me through the highs and the lows. Thank you for always advocating for me as well as all students. I appreciate everything you have taught me during my time with Team Giles. Thank you for all the opportunities you have created for me and helped me achieve.

To Lee Slinger, thank you so much for everything. Thank you for taking the time to help me, critique my work, and provide me feedback on countless drafts of my thesis. Thank you for always listening to me. Thank you for the tremendous support you have given me and for everything you have taught me.

Thank you to Team Giles for being there for me, personally and academically. I could not have gotten this done without the help of everyone. From Zoom meetings to talking things through to editing countless drafts and always being an e-mail away – thank you for making Zoom University fun, and lastly, thank you for helping me finish this. I appreciate everything and all the things’ members of Team Giles have done for me – thank you so much.

Thank you for being a part of my committee members, Dr. Michael Robidoux and Dr. Victoria Paraschak, and for offering your feedback and guidance throughout my research process.

To all my participants, thank you for taking an interest in my research, sharing your experiences with me, and giving me the chance to meet you and hear your stories virtually or in person. It was an honour to hear all your stories; this research could not have been completed without my participants.

To my Sogii (Aunt) Billie Jo, thank you for always being interested in my research and for checking to see when I would be done so that you could read it. Thank you for sharing my excitement and thank you for taking the time to read this.

To my closest friends, thank you for always being a facetime or text away anytime I needed any one of you. Thank you for being there through the most challenging days. Thank you for always listening to me and never letting me give up. Thank you for all the support you have given me now and countless times before.

Lastly, thank you to my parents. I could write a whole paper dedicated to both of you and how thankful I am for being raised by two brilliant, strong First Nations women. Thank you for always believing in me, seeing the greatness in me when I could not, picking me up when I could not stand, and showing me how to be proud of myself and where I am from. I would not be me without either of you. Thank you for helping me achieve my dreams.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Very little attention has been given to the impact of sex and gender on the experiences of First Nations hockey players who move away from home to pursue elite training or a professional career. Therefore, through my research, I sought to answer the following research questions: What have been the experiences of First Nations hockey players who move away from their First Nations community to pursue elite hockey in mainstream (i.e., white dominant) context? How have the experiences of male and female players been similar or different? As a First Nations woman who left home to pursue a higher level of hockey, I am well-placed to conduct this research. Through this research, I have aimed to bring more attention to First Nations hockey players and their experiences of leaving their home communities to share some of the struggles and the triumphs of chasing their dreams.

As context for this research, in this chapter, I start by reviewing the relevant literature and then provide an overview of the approaches that informed my research. While my publishable paper, which is the second chapter of my thesis, contains similar information, in this chapter, I provide a broader context and details that could not fit within the space constraints of a publishable paper. I begin with an overview of the literature concerning First Nations peoples' involvement in elite sports by providing examples of what they experienced while playing in the mainstream context. Throughout this thesis, when literature pertaining specifically to First Nations peoples was unavailable, I drew on literature pertaining to Indigenous peoples in what is now known as Canada more broadly. In addition, when necessary, I use the term "Aboriginal" to be consistent with the literature that I cited. I then review the history of First Nations peoples and sports in Canada. I also introduce the theoretical framework that was applied to my research: tribal critical race theory, also known as TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005), which helped me to apply an Indigenous lens to the research, and Indigenous feminisms (Arvin et al., 2013), which enabled

me to understand better the differences between the male and female First Nations hockey players' experiences. To ensure that I engaged with my research through an Indigenous lens, I also applied Indigenous methodologies (IM) to my research, which helped put Indigenous ways of knowing at the forefront (Hart, 2010).

To collect data, I used semi-structured interviews. As this research was conducted by me, a First Nations scholar, and focused on First Nations hockey players, it was vital for me to create a space for the participants to feel like they were not objects of a study, which has been the case in past research (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The semi-structured interview approach allowed both the participants and I to deviate from the questions to go more in-depth about their experiences and created a safe space for their stories to be told (Hesse-Biber & Griffin, 2013). Lastly, in this introduction, I explain why I chose to use reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019), focusing on how it allowed me to understand the athletes' experiences and compare their experiences to my own when playing elite hockey in the mainstream context.

### **Review of Literature**

In this review of the literature, I first discuss demographic and statistical information to contextualize why First Nations athletes may have to leave their home communities to pursue a sport. Next, I offer a summary of the place of First Nations peoples in sports in Canada. This involves, first, an overview of the history of First Nations peoples and sport, touching on residential schools and physical activity, second, a discussion of the current situation of Indigenous peoples' involvement in sport, and third, a review of the Indigenous sport system. Finally, I examine previous studies exploring First Nations athletes' experiences in sport in Canada to provide insights into what it is like for Indigenous hockey players to leave home.

### **Indigenous Peoples in Canada**

First Nations peoples were not considered Canadian citizens until 1951, and they did not have the right to vote until 1960—which was only sixty-two years ago (Hurl, 2017). The federal government’s goal since colonization has largely been to incorporate First Nations peoples into the national population because its goal was to abolish First Nations peoples’ “Indian” status (Hurl, 2017). Thus, all that follows must be understood as being part of the long history of violence First Nations peoples have experienced in Canada – violence that continues today.

According to Statistics Canada (2018), there are approximately 1.6 million Indigenous people in Canada: 977,000 identify as First Nations, 587,000 identify as Métis, and 65,000 identify as Inuit. There are over 600 First Nations bands and more than 70 Indigenous languages (Statistics Canada, 2018). About 40 percent of First Nations peoples live on a reserve. The remaining population lives off-reserve, with 14 percent of the total number living in rural areas and 45 percent in urban areas. The Indigenous population is growing—Statistics Canada (2018) reported that, between 2006 and 2011, the First Nations population in Canada increased by 22.9 percent or 156,525 persons—and it is young, on average a decade younger than the rest of Canada’s population (Statistics Canada, 2018).

Young Indigenous people in Canada face many challenges in attaining an education. According to Indigenous and Northern Affairs of Canada (2015), Indigenous youth between the ages of 15 and 29 have lower attendance rates in school than non-Indigenous youth, especially among younger age groups; as a result, Indigenous children spend less time at school than their peers. Despite displaying tremendous resilience, the challenges faced by First Nations youth who live in First Nations communities – which are primarily caused by the violence of colonialism – include a lack of clean water; attending schools that need significant repairs; and a suicide rate that is five to seven times higher than non-Aboriginal young people in Canada (Assembly of

First Nations, 2011). In addition, they are at an increased risk of living in poverty, of having poor or no internet connection in their homes, and of struggling with food security within their households (First Nations Regional Health Survey, 2008). As they grow up, the many First Nations youths who live in the more than 3,000 reserves in isolated communities are faced with a significant lack of access to high schools in their communities. Therefore, understanding the relationship between First Nations people and schooling requires knowing that many First Nations youth move away from home at a young age and attend schools in more urban settings (Anderson, 2021).

For many First Nations youth, if they must leave home for high school, it is often their first time travelling far from home or living by themselves in a new area. Moving for education is a significant event; they must complete their schooling, but they must also adjust to and familiarise themselves with new surroundings. First Nations youth who want to pursue high-level sports must similarly often move away from their homes. In the following section, I look more deeply at the history of Indigenous peoples and sport in Canada and at the experiences of Indigenous people who move from their home communities to play hockey and/or other sports in the mainstream context.

### **First Nations Peoples and Sport in Canada**

Despite being diverse, First Nations peoples in Canada all live with the repercussions of the Canadian colonial state and ongoing racist attitudes and policies. In collaboration with the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches, the federal government forced approximately 150,000 or more children to attend Indian residential and federal day schools. These schools operated for more than 160 years, with the last one closing in 1996. The goal of these schools was to strip Indigenous children of their culture by forcibly preventing Indigenous children from learning

their traditions, culture, and languages (Hall, 2013). The government wanted to “kill the native” within the Indigenous child (Hall, 2013). Students were segregated by sex and forbidden from engaging with children of the opposite sex, even if they were related. Many of the children who eventually returned home had long-term and significant effects from their abuse at these schools.

When First Nations people were forced into residential schools, their daily physical activity changed drastically. Of course, First Nations people participated in physical activity long before settlers arrived on Turtle Island. Before the colonization, physical activity in First Nations communities was based on learning the skills necessary for survival on the land, such as swimming, canoeing, and exploring the land (Hall, 2013). Once in residential schools, they were divided by sex and forced to participate only in the highly gendered activities settlers considered socially acceptable (Hall, 2013). The students had to follow contemporary mainstream sports practices when playing sports: as a result, male students were given more opportunities to play sports than female. Male students were allowed to play energetic and aggressive sports; they were given recreational equipment and time to play Euro-Canadian sports outdoors with hockey sticks, balls, and bats (Hall, 2013). In contrast, in alignment with the Euro-Canadian Christian gender norms of the time, female students were only given opportunities to participate in less physically challenging activities, such as playing with dolls, knitting, and going for walks; they had significantly fewer opportunities to be physically active than if they had stayed in their home communities (Hall, 2013). Sport was a crucial element in attempts to assimilate Indigenous children into “correct” Euro-Canadian culture, including gender roles, and its related physical practices.

The history of First Nations peoples and sport in Canada has been one of assimilation and colonialization but also of self-determination and resilience. Although sport was used in the

residential school system to promote assimilation, the leaders of many First Nations communities have found that sport can help people reclaim their cultural identities; it can instill a sense of pride in where they came from and in their identity (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006), though First Nations males and female have not had access to equal opportunities for participation. During the period that followed the end of the First World War, between 1920 and 1930, female sports participation in general grew – but Indigenous women were still marginalized. They were not given the same opportunities as men, except in softball, which was popular within Indigenous communities (Hall, 2013).

In the 1970s, Indigenous peoples began reasserting their right to self-determined sport and recreation activities; they created independent leagues for basketball, boxing, fastball, baseball, and a hockey league for boys, though fastball was also commonly played by girls (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006; Paraschak, 1997). During this time, the Canadian government-funded programs like the National Sport and Recreation program as well as the Indian Olympics Sports Association, whose goals were to increase sport and recreation opportunities by having all-Native teams (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006; Hurl, 2017). However, when the organizers began planning provincial and inter-provincial level competitions with the hope of the government recognizing the all-native provincial championships as a legitimate form of competition, instead of integrating with mainstream Euro-Canadian sports as the government had hoped would happen – the funding was terminated (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006; Hurl, 2017). According to Forsyth and Wamsley (2006), the federal government assumed that Indigenous athletes would “naturally aspire to compete in the mainstream sports system against other Canadian athletes and that Indigenous sports leaders would naturally wish to assimilate their programs” (p. 301). However, Indigenous athletes preferred competing in sports within the all-Indian sports system

and did not particularly aspire to compete in mainstream sports. The federal government then changed its focus to elite-level development and withdrew its support for Indigenous sport, which it did not think would produce elite-level athletes (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). By 1981, funding from the federal government to support the all-Indian sports system had disappeared (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006; Paraschak, 1997).

Despite the many barriers created by the withdrawal of government funding for the all-Indian sports system, Indigenous people continued to create spaces for Indigenous athletes. For example, Wilton (Willie) Littlechild and his colleagues created the North American Indigenous Games in 1990, which have generally been held every three years since (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006). In addition, the Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC) was created in 1995 as a member-based organization that brings together the interests of Indigenous people in Canada and was intended to act as a voice for Indigenous sport, physical activity, and recreation (ASC, 2022). The ASC started the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships (NAHC), an all-Indigenous competition, in the 2001–2002 hockey season. The NAHC is held annually across Canada and is a contest for elite bantam- and midget-aged (ages 13 to 18) Indigenous youth. Though it began as a competition for boys, there are now two divisions, one for boys and one for girls, with eight teams in each division: most provinces have a team in each division, with regional teams representing all three of the territories (Team North) and Atlantic provinces (Team Atlantic), though in some years there has been a separate team for New Brunswick (NAHC, 2019).

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC; 2015) published its report on changes that needed to occur to promote Indigenous-settler reconciliation in Canada and to redress the legacy of the Indian Residential School system. Of the 94 Calls to Action that were released, five, Calls 87 – 91, relate to sport.

Two main Calls to Action related to my research: 88 and 90.

#88: We call upon all levels of government to take action 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, 2018, pp. 10)

This Call to Action related to my research because it speaks to the need to examine the support Indigenous athletes need support when leaving their land and culture to pursue their development in settler areas where they may be one of the few or only Indigenous peoples on their team or in their new environment.

#90: 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: 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, 2018, pp. 10).

This Call to Action draws attention to the unique needs of developing and supporting Indigenous athletes in both the Indigenous and the mainstream contexts. It also draws attention to the fact that Indigenous athletes face racism within mainstream sport.

This section provided an overview of the struggles Indigenous peoples have had throughout the history of sport in Canada. Below, I focus on hockey.

### **Indigenous Athletes and Elite Hockey**

First Nations athletes who have played or currently play in elite mainstream sports have broken down many barriers. There have been notable examples in hockey: Fred Sasakamoose, in 1953, became the first First Nations man with treaty status to play in the National Hockey League; in 2018, Bridgette Lacquette became the first Indigenous woman to play hockey in the Olympics. Before making his professional hockey debut, Sasakamoose used hockey to escape the harsh reality at St. Michael's Indian Residential School in Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. Sasakamoose was drafted to the NHL's Chicago Blackhawks during the 1953–54 season, in which he played 11 games (Lakoff, 2018). However, at the end of his first season, he returned home; he struggled to find community and family connections away from home. He found the lack of First Nations representation and the distance difficult. He continued to play professionally in various minor leagues until 1960 but missed his family and friends and ended up returning home (Lakoff, 2018). Lacquette's career also had many challenges, including being a late cut from the national team in 2015. However, this rejection pushed her to train even harder, and she successfully secured a spot on the team for the 2018 Olympics (Bellegrade, 2018), which won the silver medal (Hockey Canada, 2018). Until Lacquette's arrival on the national team, I had looked up to non-Indigenous female hockey players or Indigenous male hockey players, especially my older cousin, who had left home to follow his dream and play elite hockey in the mainstream context. Lacquette gave me, and countless other Indigenous athletes, a role model who was like me.

Though every athlete's experience is different, First Nations athletes who play in the mainstream context share many experiences based on a shared culture and history of oppression. These include leaving their home communities, adjusting to new teams, and maintaining connections to their cultures in their new communities/environments. In their study of elite

Aboriginal athletes in Canada who play in mainstream sports but are from a reserve, Schinke et al. (2006) found that support from teammates and relationship building helped Aboriginal athletes feel welcome in their new sports environment: teammates can attempt to learn about cultural differences, educating each other while also creating close, long-term relationships (Schinke et al., 2006). At the beginning of a new season, players learn plays that they are not yet familiar with, and teammates encourage and support one another. They may help Aboriginal athletes feel accepted, motivating them to stay on the team and succeed on and off the ice (Schinke et al., 2006). A significant adjustment many Aboriginal athletes in Schinke et al.'s study reported was having non-Aboriginal coaches who were often insensitive to the athletes' culture and lacked knowledge about Indigenous peoples, resulting in racial stereotyping (Schinke et al., 2006).

While in the last three decades, Indigenous-focused sporting events such as NAHC and NAIG have been growing in popularity and competitiveness, many Indigenous athletes have played hockey at the most elite levels in the mainstream system. The challenges these Indigenous athletes in general and hockey players in particular have had to face—including committing to moving, staying positive even if things are hard, not conforming to the non-Indigenous expectations in their new environment, experiencing the effects of negative cultural representations, and dealing with racist behaviour and language from mainstream opponents and administrators—have been documented in numerous studies (Johnson et al., 2020; Forsyth, 2014; Schinke et al., 2009; Blodgett & Schinke, 2015). Importantly, however, a dearth of literature has looked at the differences in experiences between males and females and how they are gendered.

To explore these differences, I sought to answer the following research questions: What have been the experiences of First Nations hockey players who move away from their First Nations community to pursue elite hockey? How have the experiences of male and female players been similar and different? Being a First Nations (Ojibway) woman with lived experience of moving away from home to play elite hockey in the mainstream context, the motivation for my research is deeply personal. I take immense pride in being Indigenous and having the chance to educate people about Indigenous peoples and our experiences.

### **Epistemology**

For this research, I chose constructionism as my epistemological approach because it helps researchers to better understand how humans construct and find significance in their experiences (Crotty, 2015). Constructionism assisted me in developing a deeper understanding of how individual First Nations athletes constructed their experiences of playing hockey in the mainstream context and how these experiences varied among the male and female participants. Constructionism is also consistent with my chosen theoretical framework (TribalCrit and Indigenous feminisms), methodology (Indigenous methodologies, IM), and methods (semi-structured interviews).

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Tribal Critical Race Theory**

The theoretical framework that guided my research was tribal critical race theory, also known as TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005), which enabled me to use an Indigenous lens in my research. My use of TribalCrit complemented Indigenous feminisms (Arvin et al., 2013) as it allowed me to better understand the sex- and gender-based differences that were experienced by elite First Nations hockey players in the mainstream context. In this section, I will examine each

theoretical framework's central tenets and explain why TribalCrit, and Indigenous feminisms were appropriate choices for my research.

TribalCrit was developed from critical race theory (CRT), which Holder and Maddox (2020) described as “a framework that places race and racism at the center of analysis, challenges, colorblind approaches, commits to social justices, uses counter-storytelling methodologies to centralize marginalized voices, and transdisciplinary in nature” (p. 2). It was developed initially to “address the civil rights issues of African American people” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). CRT is a narrowed version of critical theory, defined by Gall et al. (2009) as an approach “designed to uncover and help remedy the negative effects of unequal power relationships that prevail in the global community and in most cultures within in” (p. 406). There are five main tenets of CRT: (1) counter-storytelling, which “legitimizes the racial and subordinate experiences of marginalized groups,” (2) “[the] permanence of racism suggest that racism controls the political, social, and economic realms of U.S society”, (3) “Due to embedded racism in American society, Whiteness can be considered a property interest,” (4) “White individuals as being the primary beneficiaries of civil rights legislation”, (5) “[a] critique of liberalism, [which] stems from the ideas of color-blindness, the neutrality of the law, and equal opportunity for all” (Hiraldo, 2010, pp.5 4-56).

While CRT was developed to amplify the voices of African American people, I used TribalCrit in my research because it has been used to examine the experiences of Indigenous peoples, and in this case First Nations peoples specifically. Indigenous peoples are one of the most researched groups of people in the world. Our knowledge from our peoples and our histories have been masked and obstructed by dominant worldviews and Western lenses (Grande, 2000). When a researcher uses a dominant Western theoretical framework, they cannot

take a holistic approach (Andersen, 2009). As I used Indigenous methodologies with this research (which I describe in the next section), I needed to engage with a theoretical framework that would enable me to take a holistic approach. To do so, I followed the tenets of TribalCrit to apply an Indigenous lens on my research. Those who use TribalCrit aim to “emphasize that colonization is endemic in society while also acknowledging the role played by racism” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 430). Although there are nine main tenets to TribalCrit, four were particularly relevant to my research: Indigenous people have the desire for self-identification and tribal independence; applying an Indigenous lens brings a new understanding to research about how Indigenous peoples view knowledge, culture, and power; policies towards Indigenous people were made to assimilate Indigenous peoples; stories that are passed down for generations are not separate from theory – they are sources of data (Brayboy, 2005). Bisbee (2013) explained the benefit of applying TribalCrit to their research:

I felt empowered to stand stronger on the teachings of my ancestors in knowing that although they did not have the opportunity to pursue a formal Western education, their Indigenous teachings were credible and should no longer be ignored by institutions of high education. (p. 36)

In my research, applying TribalCrit allowed me to appreciate how proud every participant was of being from their home community, recognize how research in the past has hurt First Nations peoples and learn to do better with my own research, gain a deeper understanding of how policies in Canada were formed to assimilate First Nations peoples, and, lastly, to accept stories as a legitimate form of data within research.

Holder and Maddox (2020) explained that TribalCrit’s basic tenet is that colonization is “the continuing quotidian dominance of European American epistemology and power structure,

[and] is the central force in American society” (p. 2). Bangert (2020) noted that TribalCrit “looks specifically at how Native Americans perceive the world differently than the mainstream White culture, and how the continued treatment of Native American has had negative consequences on Indigenous peoples” (p.10). Even though Brayboy’s (2005) approach to TribalCrit was rooted in the United States and is thus not a perfect fit for my research, I think it is an appropriate approach in the Canadian context because of the similarities between the two countries and the impacts of white supremacy. TribalCrit enabled me to critique white supremacy within the academic and hockey worlds, and it also helped me to appreciate the importance of participants’ stories and my own and to highlight how theory and practice are connected.

### **Indigenous Feminisms**

As Brayboy’s (2005) approach to TribalCrit does not overtly discuss sex or gender, I complemented TribalCrit with Indigenous feminisms to help me to better understand the potential differences in the experiences of male and female participants. According to Suzack (2015), “Indigenous feminism represents a critical paradigm that analyses how gender injustice against Indigenous women emerges from colonial policies and patriarchal practices that inscribe gendered power dynamics to the detriment of Indigenous women” (p. 261). It allowed me to gain a deeper understanding with how colonization and related colonial policies (like the Indian Act) changed the ways sex and gender are viewed in First Nations peoples’ cultures. Lawrence (2003) explained that

understanding how colonial governments have regulated Native identity is essential for Native people, in attempting to step away from the colonizing frameworks that have emmeshed our lives, and as we struggle to revive the identities and ways of living that preceded colonization. (p. 4)

In doing so, I was able to understand how the Indian Act and heteropatriarchy have affected First Nations women in the past and today.

The effect of colonialism was the result of colonists' heteropatriarchal worldview. Arvin et al. (2013) referred to heteropatriarchy as the "expressions of patriarchy that rely upon very narrow definitions of the male/female binary, in which the male gender is perceived as strong, capable, wise, and composed, and the female gender is perceived as weak, incompetent, naïve, and confused" (p. 13). Fink et al. (2015) explained that it has led to men's sports being perceived as superior to women's sports. The disadvantages faced by women athletes can be seen in hockey in the differences between the professional leagues for men and women, in the number of players, and in the assumed legitimacy of those players due to dominant Euro-Canadian gender roles. Male hockey players – of which there are large numbers and who are so clearly understood as being "real" hockey players that "male" is not needed in front of the term "hockey players" – are paid enough to live comfortably while playing in the National Hockey League, while professional female hockey players – largely deemed illegitimate invaders of white male space – typically have to have "normal" daytime jobs to support themselves enough to play professional hockey (Szto et al., 2021). First Nations players challenge hockey's whiteness, while female First Nations hockey players add a further challenge to patriarchy, all of which render them illegitimate players and results in them often being subjected to racism and/or sexism.

Arvin et al. (2013) argued that Indigenous feminist theorists pose five challenges to gender and women's studies scholars by questioning "proper" gender roles in Western society. These five challenges include creating a space for Indigenous feminists to exist in research; having allies be committed to critiquing settler colonialism without the allies needing you to educate them on how to be good allies; understanding Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing;

and, lastly, questioning how Indigenous people are represented in research. I extended these challenges to sports studies and took up these challenges in and through my research by writing this thesis for my Master of Arts in Human Kinetics and standing my ground by letting my Indigenous feminist voice be heard. I worked alongside great allies who educated themselves and helped me see their side of research, gaining a better understand of my culture while also questioning how my people are represented in research.

### **Methodology**

For this study, I followed Indigenous methodologies (IM). As a First Nations person, and as my research examined First Nations athletes' experiences, IM is the methodology best suited to this research, particularly because I used TribalCrit and Indigenous feminisms as my theoretical framework. In this section of the proposal, I will outline the history of IM, the central tenets of IM, its strengths, and weaknesses, and why decolonizing methodologies, in general, is necessary for research.

Wilson (2001) stated that IM is research done by and for Indigenous peoples and that Indigenous methodologists use techniques drawn from these peoples' traditions. IM has been applied to research, such as my own, to help Indigenous people reclaim what they have lost and build secure connections for today's people and the generations that will come after them (Kurtz, 2013). By engaging with IM, I sought to push back against the academy's colonizing tendencies, which include viewing Indigenous peoples as objects/subjects of research and not producers of it and ignoring the experiences of Indigenous women. In my research, I valued Indigenous peoples, including women, and their knowledge as crucial to and beneficial for the research process.

A common articulation of IMs concerns are the 5 R's. Initially, 4 Rs were identified by Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001): respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. The fifth R,

relationship, was added in 2004 by Harris and Wasilewski (Tessaro et al., 2018). Tessaro et al. (2018) explained that a researcher who employs IM must apply the 5 R's while conducting their research. The first R is respect; this is applied throughout the research process by the researcher because they must respect Indigenous cultural norms and values and always keep in mind that each nation's cultural norms and values can vary. Also, falling under respect is the understanding that Indigenous people tend to have a holistic worldview, which means that all things, whether living or not, everything around them, work together as one, and everything exists within a web of relationships. For my research, I respected each participant in my research by enabling them to feel comfortable, sharing my personal experiences, and opening up about my struggles. I then showed respect by thoughtfully engaging with their responses to my questions. The second R is reciprocity. Tessaro (2018) explained that researchers ignored the goals and concerns of the community in research in the past because they wanted to accomplish academic milestones. While my research goals include attaining a master's degree, I also want to create a platform for younger Indigenous athletes to learn more about the process of pursuing elite hockey away from home. In making this contribution, I engage in reciprocity by trying to make things better for future generations.

The third R is relevance, which means that the researcher must ensure that the research is relevant to Indigenous peoples and how they know the world; researchers must be prepared to uphold Indigenous values and practices (Tessaro et al., 2018). I find this the most comfortable R to address in my research because I am First Nations; therefore, I have grown up being taught First Nations traditional values and practices. Through this, I made my participants feel more comfortable talking about their experiences because I am someone from a similar background and by letting them know that their experiences were relevant to me and others. The fourth R is

responsibility. Tessaro (2018) described responsibility as the researcher and participant being able to recognize and uphold Indigenous values, practices, and ways of knowing. I applied this to my research by ensuring that the participants would remain anonymous to protect their identities and so that they felt safe when sharing their experiences with me. Finally, the last R is the researcher's relationships with the participants. Researchers use their connections to reach into cultures, communities, and people (Tessaro et al., 2018). I formed a relationship with the participants from the initial e-mail I sent them. I provided background information about myself, and I then worked around the participants' schedules to find a convenient time for the interview. I explained how long the interview could take and sent the interview guide beforehand so they could familiarize themselves with it and be prepared for the questions I wanted to ask. I let the participants know that if they had any questions, they could e-mail me regarding my research. I also ensured that participants knew that they could decide to skip any questions that they did not want to answer. All these behaviours enabled me to build trusting relationships with the participants.

As with all methodologies, there are strengths and limitations to the use of IM. One strength is that it provides a holistic filter for research that engages with Indigenous peoples. When a non-Indigenous researcher goes into an Indigenous community and uses a mainstream research methodology in that community, the researcher filters this information through a non-Indigenous lens, which can be a weakness for the research but also for the community because it overlooks Indigenous knowledge and puts Western knowledge at the forefront. However, when an Indigenous researcher uses IM as their methodology, the knowledge is filtered through an Indigenous lens and shared with all creations because everything on the Earth is connected (Wilson, 2008). When analyzing data from a Western view, the researcher breaks down the data

from the study into tiny pieces and views the data piece by piece rather than as a whole. Conversely, when using IM, the researcher cannot break down each piece of data because everything within the study has a relationship. If the data were broken down in a mainstream way, it would cause all the relationships built throughout the study to be destroyed. By following the 5 R's throughout the entire research process, I made sure to respect each participant's experience (Wilson, 2008) and saw their Indigeneity as inseparable from it which allowed myself and the 20 interviewees to co-create the results together by sharing our experiences with one another, as I describe in the next section.

### **Methods**

In this section, I will provide a brief outline of three types of interviews and their strengths and weaknesses. I will then justify my selection of semi-structured interviews. Importantly, prior to commencing my research, I received ethics clearance for my proposed my research from the University of Ottawa's Research Ethics Board ([H-11-20-6173](#)). I wanted to conduct research in a way that was not offensive to First Nations people and to make the participants feel comfortable with me. Indigenous scholars have challenged Western knowledge and showcased how to apply Indigenous knowledge to research (Kovach, 2015; Smith, 2012). Since it was some of the participants' first time sharing their experiences of playing in the mainstream context, it was important that they felt safe and welcomed when sharing their stories. From a Western perspective, stories are not usually viewed as data; by conducting research in an Indigenous way, stories are understood as ways of passing along knowledge. I maintain that interviews are a form of storytelling.

There are three main types of interviews: structured, unstructured, and semi-structured. A structured interview occurs when the interviewer asks the same pre-established questions to all

participants in a study (Fontana & Frey, 2005). However, the interviewer in this situation cannot change the wording of the question if the participants require clarification or probe for more information if the participant only provides a partial response (Fontana & Frey, 2005). A strength of this type of interview is that there is not much room for variation in the way questions are asked; the researcher can get straight to the point (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

In an unstructured interview, the second type of interview, the researcher asks the participants open-ended questions. This type of interview typically results in more in-depth responses than structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Unstructured interviews are used to “understand the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any a priori categorization that may limit the field of inquiry” (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 706). Weaknesses of this type of interview include that the researcher needs to be skilled when using this method and that it can be very time-consuming to conduct and later transcribe. Indeed, open-ended questions can result in the participant deviating from the question, which can cause the interview to go over time and produce voluminous data (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Strengths of this type of interview include the in-depth nature of the answers given and gaining the study participants’ trust because it does not seem as formal as a structured interview (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

The semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to ask questions more conversationally than in a structured interview (Brinkmann et al., 2009). The researcher can deviate from a set list of questions and use prompts to elicit further information from the participant. A weakness of this type of interview is that the researcher cannot guarantee that the participants will go into depth when answering the question (Brinkmann et al., 2009). A strength of this type of interview is that participants can respond to prompts and provide a large amount

of detail within the answers; therefore, it can be the best form of an interview to use when you only have one chance to interview a person (Brinkmann et al., 2009).

For my study, I selected prospective participants on a first-come, first-serve basis among those who met the selection criteria: had left home to play elite hockey; were over the age of 18; and identified as First Nations. I began by using snowball sampling, which is defined by Noy (2008) as occurring “when the researcher accesses informants through the contact information that is provided by other informants” (p. 330). This was effective because the Indigenous hockey community is relatively small but well connected, and I am a member of it. After reaching out to people I knew – from my own connections, I then applied purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020) by posting a participant call out to my social media, which was shared by many people throughout Canada on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, after which I selected participants who met the inclusion criteria. In these ways, I recruited 10 First Nations men and 10 First Nations women from across Canada (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Players' Pseudonyms and Ages*

Names	Sex	Age	Age Left Home
Charlotte	F	18	15
Dawn	F	20	17
Isabell	F	20	15
Anne	F	21	15
Payden	F	22	16
Brandon	M	22	16
Caitlin	F	24	14
Frédérique	F	26	15
Tyler	M	28	17
Craig	M	28	17
Emma	F	29	18
Stanford	M	29	15
Steve	M	32	15
Sara	F	33	18
Mike	M	33	13
Lucy	F	35	16
Jacob	M	37	17
Jordan	M	39	16
Tom	M	52	15

Albert	M	52	15
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Nineteen of the 20 participants spoke proudly of being band members of their home community. Most of the participants [17] grew up on their reserves and left home for the first time when relocating to play elite hockey in the mainstream context. Of the other participants, two lived in remote communities [one male and one female], and one participant lived within a 15-minute drive from their reserve. The remaining player self-identified as both First Nations and Métis, but they did not report a home reserve.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions on gatherings outside the home, most of my data collection occurred online. I conducted three face-to-face and 17 internet-mediated interviews. A weakness of using internet-mediated semi-structured interviews was knowing how to interpret silence via the internet: the silence could occur due to poor internet connections, having difficulty using technology, or having someone accidentally muted (Hesse-Biber & Griffin, 2013; McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Some participants had bad internet connections, so at various times I would freeze on their screen, or they would freeze on mine – but this did not happen for more than a few minutes. I did not find these challenges to be significant barriers in any of my interviews. Regarding the internet-mediated interview, I considered them to ultimately be a strength because they enabled me to reach a broader population, gave the participants extra privacy if needed by allowing them to have the camera off if they chose, and lowered the costs for me due to a lack of travel (Hesse-Biber & Griffin, 2013, McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Semi-structured interviews allow for some diversity in the questions that are asked, which is why some questions were not pursued in the results and analysis on this paper – a few questions were used as a prompt to elicit further discussion or to gain a deeper understanding of

the participants' experience. However, I did ask all the questions in provided in the interview guide, but because my research changed after completing the interviews, I only wrote about the responses to the questions that focused on the athletes' experience rather than how they perceived wellbeing.

While my complete interview guide can be found as Appendix B, several of the questions I asked were as follows: At what age did you leave home to pursue a higher level of hockey? How did you adjust to your new normal? Do you think that players of the other sex are treated the same – when leaving the home community?

### **Analysis**

I used Braun and Clarke's (2019) approach to reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to analyze the participants' interview transcripts. RTA builds on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step approach to thematic analysis in which the researcher (1) familiarizes themselves with data; (2) generates the initial codes; (3) searches for themes; (4) reviews potential themes; (5) defines and names each theme; and (6) produces the report.

Unlike thematic analysis, RTA allows the researcher to reflect on their own experiences and beliefs throughout the analysis process and allows the researcher to return to previous phases as needed. Reflexivity and flexibility help the researcher better understand participants' experiences individually while also seeing the similarities and differences between these experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2019) and how they connect to the researcher's own experiences. As a female First Nations (Ojibway) researcher, I wanted all the steps of my research, including the analysis, to be conducted with care and reflect a commitment to Indigenous methodologies by making sure that respect was given to each participant when they spoke of their experience as a whole. In particular, I wanted to avoid the participants feelings like they were just a number

and not being heard. RTA allowed me to make sense of shared meaning and experiences and find commonalities and differences between the participants' experiences and my own (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Through reflecting on the participants' experiences, I realized the extent to which my assumptions – in particular that female Indigenous hockey players are less supported than their male counterparts and that both male and female Indigenous hockey players face racism while playing in a mainstream context – were challenged as I learned about the participants' experiences.

### **Assumption #1: Indigenous Female Hockey Players are Less Supported than their Male Counterparts**

The assumption that First Nations female hockey players would be less supported than their male counterparts was based on my own experiences. In the ninth grade, when I was about 14, I had the opportunity to leave halfway through the year to go to a prep school with an elite hockey program. However, I decided to keep playing on my midget AAA team, even though there were only two other teams in the league, because I did not feel ready to leave home. I thought that league might be sufficient and where I wanted to finish my hockey career. Nevertheless, by the end of the season, after a year of driving over four hours to practice and back with my parents, we decided that I should either make a serious commitment to hockey with the goal of playing at the university level or play more casually and stop at the end of high school.

Growing up, I had been brought to many university women's hockey games, and I had dreamed of playing at university. So, as a fifteen-year-old, I left home to go away to prep school to focus on hockey. I was one of the first girls to leave my community to pursue my elite hockey

dreams. Among the boys, however, it was common to leave for hockey; it was what you did if you wanted to excel at hockey since we came from such a small community and from a small province where hockey, particularly women's hockey, was not as competitive as in large cities and provinces. While I was still in prep school, two other teenagers from my area, an Indigenous boy and a non-Indigenous girl were recruited to attend prep school for hockey. When the non-Indigenous girl left, articles were written and shared through Facebook, and the local newspaper described her as the first-ever girl from our community to do so – even though I had already been gone for a few years by that time. The rest of the community followed the boy's career closely the whole way through, whereas, in my experience, it was only my own family and close friends who followed mine.

To be clear, it was not that my community mistreated me, but when I left home, few members of my community followed my hockey career. My parents, close family, and friends kept in touch, attended my games, and asked how I was doing but, generally, at the community level, it felt as though when I was gone, no one noticed. When I compared my experience to the female hockey players who were non-Indigenous and to Indigenous men who left our rural town to play hockey, it seemed like they had a lot more support and more people followed their careers. Based on these experiences, I had made assumptions about other Indigenous women's experiences.

Applying RTA to my analysis enabled me to identify this assumption more clearly and then adjust it based on my analysis. It led me to explore the parts of participants' experiences that were similar to mine, differences with my own experiences, and then why these variations occurred. It was also an opportunity for me to think further about the many participants who did feel like their communities had supported them very well, both male and female.

## **Assumption #2: All Indigenous Hockey Players Will Face Racism**

The second assumption that I brought to my research was that all Indigenous hockey players face racism, even though before conducting the interviews, I could not pinpoint how racism had affected me or my hockey career. Through my discussions with the participants, I began to identify the ways in which I had experienced racism in hockey.

I started to skate before I could walk. In my learn-to-skate program, I was the only girl with “boy” skates (i.e., hockey skates rather than figure skates). Furthermore, since the age of three, I have played hockey. It has been one of the constants in my life; it has allowed me to meet some of my closest friends and travel to many different places. Before my hockey career ended, I did not fully understand that I had faced racism on multiple occasions. I did not realize that what was happening was racism. Through my research, I realized the racism I had experienced and, as I discussed racism with my twenty participants, I began to remember more instances of it.

From my own experience, two examples of racism stick out to me the most. The first occurred when I was playing on a travelling team for a few summers in a row in high school. There were usually between three and five Indigenous girls on the team of around twenty active players, and every year we were assigned to the same room, a “native” room. When I was in university, I was asked to help coach this same team, and, again, the three Indigenous girls on the team were assigned to the same room. I had never really thought of this until during one interview when a participant brought up that he and the only other Indigenous player on the team were boarded in a lower-income community in a trailer park when he played on a Major Junior team. In contrast, the non-Indigenous players were placed in nicer houses in nicer areas. He said his coaches had the Indigenous players room together on all the teams on which he had played.

The second instance of racism that my research helped me understand after-the-fact occurred while I was playing hockey at university. Each player on our team had regular one-on-one meetings with our coach to talk about school and our role on the team. Whenever my coach talked about school, particularly as my graduation approached, he would mention how proud he thought my family must be of me. He assumed that I was the first person in my family to pursue higher education. I wish I could say it only happened once or that I set him straight the first time he said it, but it happened in almost every meeting we had. The first time he said it, I did not know how to respond, so I agreed they were proud of me. Nevertheless, as he continued to imply that the rest of my family must be uneducated, I explained to him that my family is very well educated and that we all see education as important, especially my parents and myself. The more I look back on it now, the more I wish that I could have said more to him the first time and every time following that, but I was so shocked each time that I rarely knew what to say.

Employing reflexivity gave me the ability to reflect on my own experiences. It helped me identify some issues that I had overlooked in my past. For Braun and Clarke (2019), “assumptions and positionings are always part of qualitative research. Reflexive practice is vital to understand and unpack these” (p. 595). Being reflexive was vital to understanding and unpacking the experiences of each participant in this study. Hence, I was able to determine the similarities and differences between First Nations male and female hockey players while playing on elite mainstream hockey teams, which helped form the themes discussed in the paper. I hope my research will bring to light what First Nations hockey players face in the mainstream context, how many Indigenous hockey players take pride in where they come from, and how their communities never forgot them even though they left. I further hope that the results of this thesis

enable Indigenous communities to better prepare their youth who choose to leave to pursue the elite-level sport.

### **Thesis Format**

I have written my thesis using the “publishable paper format.” My paper addressed the following research questions: What have been the experiences of First Nations hockey players who move away from their First Nations community to pursue elite hockey in the mainstream context? How have the experiences between male and female players been similar or different? By answering these questions, this paper contributes to a better understanding of the sex and gender-based differences and/or similarities that elite First Nations hockey players experience.

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**Chapter Two: Identifying the Similarities and Differences in Male and Female First Nations Hockey Players' Experiences of Moving Away from Their Home Communities to Play Elite Hockey in a Mainstream Context**

### **Abstract**

Researchers have examined Indigenous athletes' experiences of playing elite sports in the mainstream context; however, there is a dearth of research that has explored the differences and similarities in First Nations male and female hockey players' experiences while playing elite hockey in the mainstream. I used tribal critical race theory, Indigenous feminisms, Indigenous methodologies, and semi-structured interviews with 10 male and 10 female First Nations elite hockey players to better understand the differences and similarities in their experiences of moving away from home to pursue elite hockey in the mainstream. Using reflexive thematic analysis, I identified two main themes: the challenges that the athletes experienced, which included new languages, culture shock, and racism; and the benefits, which were athletic and personal growth and support from their home community. Within these themes, however, there were important differences between male and female participants, which included the males facing more violent and over racism than the female players, and the female players needing to travel farther away from home due to lack of opportunity.

As a First Nations female hockey player, I knew that if I wanted to achieve my goals of playing university hockey, like many others like me, would have to move away from my community and everything I knew to chase my dreams. When leaving home, many Indigenous athletes face massive adjustment challenges due to increased stress and pressure, balancing a social life with sports, often stricter academic requirements, and managing their schedules (Ferguson et al., 2018). While researchers have examined Indigenous male hockey players' experiences of leaving home to pursue hockey at a higher level (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015; Schinke et al., 2009), to date, only one article has focused exclusively on Indigenous women's experiences of moving away from home to play hockey, and that article only examined two sisters' experiences (Johnson et al., 2020).

Within men's hockey, approximately 5,100 Canadian-born hockey players have played in the National Hockey League (NHL) since the league started over 100 years ago; however, only around 80 players with Indigenous heritage have made it to the NHL (Smith, 2018). While there is no official list, I was able to identify two Indigenous males who played on the Canadian Olympic team: Theo Fleury in 2002 and Carey Price in 2014. For female hockey players, the numbers are even smaller, as only three players with an Indigenous background have played on the Canadian Women's Olympic Team: Jocelyne Larocque first made the team in 2008, then Bridgette Lacquette in 2018, and finally Jamie Lee Rattray in 2022 (Hockey Canada, 2021), and - of course - none have played in the NHL. As a female First Nations hockey player, I did not have a female Indigenous role model to look up to until 2018, when Bridgette Lacquette, who is Métis, made history by being the first Indigenous woman to make the Canada's women's Olympic hockey team. Prior to Lacquette making the team, I was unaware that Jocelyne Larocque was Indigenous.

Given the vast differences in opportunities for male vs female hockey players, it is likely that First Nations male and female hockey players have had different experiences when leaving home to play hockey at an elite level. Using an approach comprised of Tribal Critical Theory (“TribalCrit”) and Indigenous feminisms, Indigenous methodologies, and semi-structured interviews with 10 First Nations male and 10 First Nations female elite hockey players, I investigated the challenges and benefits that First Nations hockey players experienced when leaving their communities to play in the mainstream context, while I also examined how the experiences of First Nations female hockey players and First Nations male hockey players differed and were similar.

### **Literature Review**

The literature that focuses specifically on First Nations hockey players is relatively small. Thus, in some places in the literature review that appears below I have drawn on literature from research with Indigenous peoples (an umbrella term for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) when that was all that was available. In some cases, the authors used the term “Aboriginal.” When citing that work, I tried to remain consistent with the authors’ terminology.

For many First Nations elite hockey players, the decision to leave their home community to pursue athletic opportunities and higher levels of competition is difficult and potentially life changing. Most young Aboriginal hockey players in small, rural, or remote communities who take their sport seriously and want to play at the elite level will consider moving to attain a better quality of sport than possible while living at home (Schinke et al., 2009). However, some Aboriginal hockey players struggle when deciding to leave; they worry about being seen as different because of the racial stereotypes in mainstream culture or about being the only Aboriginal person on the team (Schinke et al., 2009). They may feel the need to conceal their

identity when on a new team with members of a different cultural heritage (Schinke et al., 2006).

When Indigenous athletes relocate for their sport, they can lose their daily connections with social support, such as extended family, Elders, and others (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015). Blodgett and Schinke's (2015) study on Aboriginal athletes who moved away from a reserve in Ontario to chase their hockey and educational goals involved interviews with 12 Aboriginal hockey players aged from 14 to 22 years old; of those 12 participants, five were male and eight were female. In their study, they found that some participants faced negative attitudes from individuals within their home communities who disapproved of community members moving away. Some people believe that Aboriginal athletes who leave their communities think that they are better than those who stay (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015). These attitudes may come from jealousy, perhaps because the other people did not have the same opportunity; they can also cause the athletes to doubt themselves and their choices, which can cause the athlete to feel less confident about themselves (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015). The authors, however, did not report any differences based on sex or gender.

Females aged 18-23 or 22+ have two options to continue their careers: they can play at either the university level or professionally (Hockey Canada, 2018). While females only have two options in Canada to continue their elite career into their early 20s, males have five different tiers in which they are able to play at ages 16-20 that allow players of all calibers to continue their hockey career: Major Junior, Junior A, and Junior B, Junior C, or Junior D. Only after aging out of that system do some male hockey players decide to play at the university level (Hockey Canada, 2018). They can also play professionally in many leagues in North America, including semi-professional, minor professional, and then major professional, which is known as the

National Hockey League. As such, male hockey players have many more opportunities to play hockey than their female counterparts.

### **Adjusting to a New Team and Environment**

Adjusting to a new team and a new living environment at the same time can be daunting for any athlete; however, when an Indigenous athlete looks around a new locker room for the first time, they often find themselves being the only Indigenous person in the room. Schinke et al. (2006) conducted a study with 23 elite Indigenous athletes (16 men and seven women) from multiple sports in Canada to examine how they adapted to mainstream elite sport. They found two categories of adaptation: self-adaptation and adapted environment. Self-adaptation included committing to the team, learning about the structure of the team and the team's systems during games, gaining acceptance despite shyness, and resisting the new environment in which the Indigenous athlete finds themselves. The adapted environment included teammate support and building relationships, which helps the athlete to be able to comfort themselves in a new place. These categories inform the current study as they helped me better understand some of the feelings and emotions First Nations hockey players may have when leaving home to play on an elite team. Importantly, however, these authors again did not identify any differences based on sex or gender.

### **Maintaining Their Cultural Connections**

Indigenous athletes can be deeply affected when playing white-dominated sports like ice hockey. Many Indigenous athletes experience racism: sadly, they can become accustomed to these experiences (Forsyth et al., 2016). Marginalized hockey players are often asked or, in some cases, told directly to conform to the mainstream way of playing hockey and to leave their culture at the arena's door (Blodgett et al., 2013).

To keep enjoying the sport, Aboriginal athletes develop personal strategies to deal with racist incidents (Forsyth et al., 2016) and maintain their cultural connection by participating in cultural grounding activities. Johnson et al. (2020) spoke with two First Nations sisters who moved away from their community for elite hockey. The sisters would speak their language and listen to Powwow singers and music recordings as a replacement for hearing the drums played in their home rink before games. An Aboriginal boxer in Schinke et al.'s (2006) study reported that he smudged himself in the ring, whether before a practice or match. When he was asked once if he smoked marijuana by another boxer, he educated the other fighter about the sage and why he used it; this encounter helped form a deeper relationship between the two (Schinke et al., 2006).

Despite the body of literature on Indigenous hockey players' experiences, to date, explicit comparisons have not been made between male and female First Nations hockey players' experiences of leaving home to pursue higher levels of competitive hockey. As female hockey receives has received far less attention and fewer resources when compared with male hockey, and as First Nations women have experiences that First Nations men do not, it is reasonable to assume that there may be important differences. As such, this is the area that I explored in my research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

My research was informed by Brayboy's (2005) tribal critical race theory and the Indigenous feminist theory (Arvin et al., 2013), which helped me apply an Indigenous lens to my research as well as look at the sex- and gender-based differences that were experienced by the participants. Tribal critical race theory, also known as TribalCrit, is based on critical race theory (CRT). CRT is itself based on critical theory, which was defined by Gall et al. (2009) as "a broad range of methods designed to uncover and help remedy the negative effects of unequal power

relationships that prevail in the global community and most cultures within it” (p. 406). CRT is “a set of legal scholarship theories about racial inequality and how race functions in society” (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012, p. 4); it was created to understand African Americans’ civil rights issues (Kolopenuk, 2020). When CRT is used to understand the experiences of Indigenous peoples, it robs them of their specific practices and history. Placing Indigenous peoples into the homogenous grouping of others who experience marginalization takes away from the uniqueness of being Indigenous (Kolopenuk, 2020). Indigenous knowledge is passed down from generation to generation (Kolopenuk, 2020), but our knowledges and histories have been masked and obstructed by dominant, colonial worldviews (Grande, 2000). CRT is insufficient for understanding this specificity, which is why TribalCrit was created. Importantly, Brayboy (2005) crafted TribalCrit in the context of the history and laws of the United States. While the history and laws of Canada have numerous differences, the context is similar enough to apply TribalCrit to Canada, especially given the ways in which colonial borders do not define Indigenous nations.

Scholars use TribalCrit as a theoretical framework to understand Indigenous peoples’ lived realities. Brayboy (2005) asserted that TribalCrit users recognize that colonization is endemic to society, meaning that Euro-American “thought, knowledge, and power structures dominate present-day society” (p. 430). Despite attempts at assimilations, Brayboy (2005) argued that Indigenous knowledge is autonomous from and equal to Western knowledge and that Indigenous knowledge resides in the beliefs and customs of Indigenous peoples. TribalCrit is also used to recognize Indigenous peoples’ lived realities by better understanding Indigenous peoples’ customs, beliefs, and traditions. TribalCrit also supports the use of Indigenous stories as legitimate source of data (Brayboy, 2005).

TribalCrit focuses on how “culture, knowledge, and power take on a new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens” (Brayboy, 2005, pp. 429-430). Scholars who want to make a social change through their theory and practice can use this framework for shifting how academic researchers conduct research with/and about Indigenous people. TribalCrit helped me critique white supremacy, appreciate the importance of participants’ stories and my own, and highlight how theory and practice are connected.

Importantly, TribalCrit does not overtly address issues of sex- and gender-based differences and how heteropatriarchy ascribes gendered meanings to sex. To apply an Indigenous feminist lens to my research, I followed Arvin et al. (2013) in asserting that white supremacy and colonialism are grounded in heteropatriarchy, and that current “feminist concerns of white women, women of colour, and Indigenous women thus often differ and conflict with one another” (p.10). Arvin et al. (2013) described heteropatriarchy as “expressions of patriarchy and paternalism that rely upon very narrow definitions of the male/female binary, in which the male gender is perceived as strong, capable, wise, and composed and the female gender is perceived as weak, incompetent, naïve, and confused” (p. 13). Certainly, heteropatriarchy has informed girls’ and women’s participation in sports such as hockey. Understanding the ways in which heteropatriarchy intersects with First Nations status, however, requires particular attention due to the ways in which First Nations women have experienced specific forms of marginalization, including their lack of meaningful inclusion in studies of sport. As Arvin et al. argued, “the experiences and intellectual contributions of Indigenous women are not on the margins; we have been an invisible presence in the center, hidden by the gendered logics of settler colonialism for over 500 years” (p. 14). It is thus both important and timely that research on First Nations girls’

and women's experiences in hockey are included in research and that the research be conducted by a woman who is a First Nations researcher.

Arvin et al. (2013) identified five central challenges that Indigenous feminisms bring to feminist discourses in gender and women's studies. The first challenge Arvin et al. (2013) suggested that theorists should engage with problematizing and theorizing is the intersections of power and identity. I found this the most important challenge because it causes the researcher to better understand how colonization influences sex and gender within Indigenous cultures. The other four challenges include refusing the erasure of Indigenous women; having allies who are committed to critiquing settler colonialism without the allies needing you to educate them on how to be good allies; recognizing the persistence of Indigenous concepts and epistemologies by understanding that when conducting Indigenous-led research that theories can be made up of the world we live in, include the land, sovereignty, and decolonization; and, lastly, questioning how certain practices result in the dispossession of Indigenous peoples' land, livelihood, and futures, and then rejecting these practices. I took up these challenges in and through my research by actively attending to the differences and similarities that were experienced by First Nation men and women who moved away from their home community to pursue elite hockey in the mainstream context and understanding the impact of the intersections of Indigenous worldviews, sporting practices, and colonialism. These theories provided strong, culturally appropriate ways to apply an Indigenous lens to the research, while also helping me to better understand each participant's experiences while playing in the mainstream context.

### **Methodology**

For this research, I followed the tenets of IM. IM was defined by Kurtz (2013) as, "a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs, handed down through generations of cultural

transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and their environment” (p. 220). IM has been used in research to help Indigenous people reclaim what they have lost and build secure connections for people today and for generations to come (Kurtz, 2013). My goal of using IM in my research was to ensure that I was conducting research in a culturally relevant way and that I was not engaging in harmful colonial practices. Kurtz (2013) argued that “colonizing research not only stereotypes Indigenous people as the ‘problem; but often misrepresents Indigenous stories” (p. 222). For many years Indigenous people were told that Western (colonial) knowledge was the “best” and only legitimate type of knowledge; however, Indigenous scholars began to challenge Western knowledge and showcase how to apply Indigenous knowledge to research (Kovach 2015; Smith, 2012). IM “increases the presence, visibility and voice of Indigenous people and protect Indigenous knowledge” (Kurtz, 2013, p. 219). As a First Nations person conducting research, it was crucial that I conducted the research *with* and *for* First Nations people. Historically, the government of Canada wanted to “kill the Indian inside” of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous methodologies were created to reject such assimilation, transform research, and give Indigenous peoples an Indigenous way to conduct research (McGuire-Adams, 2020).

The five central tenets of IM—known as the 5 Rs- informed my research: relevance, reciprocity, responsibility, and relationship. Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001) identified the first four Rs, while the last, respect, was added by Harris and Wasilewski in 2004 (Tessaro et al., 2018). I kept the questions *relevant* to First Nations peoples playing hockey in the mainstream context and ensured that my research process was grounded in understanding the history of Indigenous people and sport. Tessaro et al. (2018) explained that in the past researchers have ignored the goals and concerns of Indigenous peoples because they wanted to accomplish

academic milestones. Therefore, to be *reciprocal* with my research, I created a space for Indigenous athletes to open up about their experiences, both good and bad, and to know that they were not the only ones with these experiences by sharing my own. I also hoped that my work would help to see the sex- and gender-based differences between the experiences of elite First Nations hockey players. I recognized my *responsibility* as a researcher to decolonize the way research about and for Indigenous people is conducted so that Indigenous peoples do not feel like they are being marginalized. The *relationships* that the researcher forms are integral to this method (Tessaro et al., 2018). I tried to build meaningful relationships with the participants in my research. Indeed, in some cases, I believe I made life-long connections with some participants as a result of their involvement in my research. I did not see the interview as a one-off process; instead, I saw it as part of a research and relationship process, one that will include the participants reading this study, being invited to my defence, and, hopefully in many cases, staying in contact with me even after I defend my thesis. Finally, I *respected* that cultural norms and values vary among nations across Canada by showing respect to each participant so that they felt comfortable about sharing their experiences. We also had conversations about their nations and home communities and what it was like in their communities and mine (Tessaro et al., 2018).

### **Methods**

After obtaining approval from the University of Ottawa's Research Ethics Board, I began my research. To recruit participants, I posted a call for participants on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and sent out emails to people I knew through hockey. Using snowball sampling (Noy, 2008), I selected prospective participants on a first come, first serve-basis among those who met the selection criteria (had left home to play elite hockey; over the age of 18; and

identify as First Nation). In this way, I recruited 10 First Nations men and 10 First Nations women from across Canada. Despite advertising the recruitment criteria and ensuring the participants completed a consent form that further reiterated the inclusion criteria, during one interview, a participant identified themselves as both First Nations and Métis. Due to the colonial politics of identification and the individual's desire to participate in the research, I retained their data. Nineteen of the participants were band members of their home reserves. Seventeen of the participants grew up on their reserves. Of the other participants, two lived in remote communities (one male and one female), and one participant lived a 15-minute drive away from their reserve.

I conducted 20 interviews (see Table 1). Due to COVID-19 restrictions, only three could be conducted face-to-face, and the remaining 17 were conducted over the internet using Zoom. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask questions in a conversational manner, as well as use prompts during the interviews so that the participant could share more of their story and/or add more detail or explanation to their answer (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2009). As a result, I conducted the interviews in a way that enabled them to feel like conversations. Though semi-structured interviews are a Western method, I made sure to Indigenize this method to by telling the participants' about my own experiences and participants experiences. I hoped that the participants felt like they were sharing a story with a friendly person, and not like I was extracting data from them in a way that treated them as objects. I chose to adopt a Western method because I did not feel comfortable with applying a sharing circle in my research because First Nation values can differ from community to community, and in some communities only an Elder or respected person has to honour do facilitate a sharing circle. I did not want to be disrespectful of other people's teaching. I did, however, focus on the 5 R's of IMs. In doing so, I co-created this thesis with my participants by appreciating their experiences individually and

then creating themes and forming my results without pulling apart their stories; rather, I combined their stories and my own to showcase the sex and gender-based differences and similarities of being a First Nations hockey player who left home to play elite hockey in the mainstream context. I transcribed all interviews verbatim and returned them to the participants for verification. All participants approved of their transcripts and did not request revisions.

Table 1

*Players' Pseudonyms, Ages, and Ages at Which They Left Home*

Names	Sex	Age	Age Left Home
Charlotte	F	18	15
Dawn	F	20	17
Isabell	F	20	15
Anne	F	21	15
Payden	F	22	16
Brandon	M	22	16
Caitlin	F	24	14
Frédérique	F	26	15
Tyler	M	28	17
Craig	M	28	17
Emma	F	29	18
Stanford	M	29	15
Steve	M	32	15
Sara	F	33	18
Mike	M	33	13
Lucy	F	35	16
Jacob	M	37	17
Jordan	M	39	16
Tom	M	52	15

Albert	M	52	15
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### **Analysis**

In 2019, Braun and Clarke expanded their original description of TA to have three subgroups of TA, one of which was reflexive thematic RTA. When applying RTA, the researcher has to be reflexive: they must “articulate the assumptions that informed their approach and how exactly they enacted TA” (p. 592). This revision of TA by Braun and Clarke was meant to be a “method that offered an adventure, not a recipe” (p. 592). RTA generally follows the six-step TA process (Braun & Clarke, 2006), but it enables the researcher to move back and forth between phases while also allowing them to insert and reflect on their own assumptions, beliefs, and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In following the RTA process, I found that there were two assumptions that informed my research: (1) female First Nations hockey players are less supported than their male counterparts and that (2) both male and female First Nations hockey players face racism while playing in a mainstream context. Applying reflexivity to my analysis allowed me to reflect on my own beliefs about both of these assumptions and to draw on the participants’ experiences as well as my own in challenging them.

### **Results**

Through my use of RTA, I identified two main themes: (1) challenges, which included new languages, culture shock, and racism; and 2) benefits, which included athletic and personal growth and support from home community. Within these themes, I identified sex- and gender-based differences, which I discuss in the discussion.

### **Challenges**

The 20 participants in my research faced many similar challenges while playing on mainstream hockey teams away from home, which included new languages, culture shock, and racism.

### *Language*

For some of the participants, the hardest part of adjusting to life away from home was the change in language. For many participants, like Frédérique [26], the language adjustment extended to humour. She reported missing the humour that First Nation people share. For example, she felt she could not joke around with her non-First Nations teammates in the same way she had joked around with First Nations teammates in the past. As a result, she avoided jokes that were the types that First Nations people might find funny, but others might not.

Lucy [35] also experienced challenges related to language. She felt like her classmates came from what felt like a different world in which they spoke a different language:

When you come from the reserve, you don't really know the etiquette and like how international and rich kids live and what their lifestyle is like, so that was kind of like the biggest shock for me. She [a friend at prep school] really helped me with, like how I spoke, like, you know, how you can have like reserve and improper English and like that slang, so, she would like be like, that's not how you say it, like, corrected me, and which was great, because I really needed that opportunity to speak in a way that, you know, others would be speaking. That was my hardest transition. Also, it was a big transition because I moved away from my languages ... [of] Mi'kmaq speakers. Like my grandparents are fluent. So, I went from listening to Mi'kmaq to not listening to it anymore, and then just not speaking it at all for like a long time.

For others, like Stanford [29], challenges with language differed from Lucy's experience because he struggled with moving to a new environment where the main language was French, and when he would ask a question in public in English to indicate that he did not speak French, he would almost always be answered in French.

Like Lucy [35], I too went from listening to Mi'kmaq being spoken around me frequently to only hearing it when I went home during the holidays. Since most of my family members' first language was Mi'kmaq, not English, they would bounce back and forth between Mi'kmaq and English when speaking, which resulted in the languages being mixed. At prep school I did not notice that the way that I spoke was different from my peers because there was a handful of other Indigenous students, and many students who came from overseas, so their first language was not English. When I went to university and played hockey, I did not expect that the way in which I spoke would be understood as "improper" English by others. When speaking, I would confuse smaller words, such as "is" and "are"; when writing, my grammar was not what others considered appropriate. However, speaking like others was considered to be part of being on the team and part of succeeding. My roommates, therefore, would correct my English when I spoke, when we were texting, or when we were doing schoolwork. Adjusting to a new form of English was one of the biggest adjustments to life away from home.

### **Culture Shock**

The participants in my research reported experiencing culture shock on a number of fronts: the use of technology in the classroom, moving to a large city, and adjusting to a "party" lifestyle. For example, Charlotte [18] explained that when she went to prep school, the biggest challenge was her culture shock concerning computer resources. Her new school used technology in classes, something not available in her home community:

The school used all computers. So, I didn't really know how to work on a computer, especially going from like a school with just like pencils and papers. So, it was hard adjusting from just pencil [and] paper to like emails and to like online classes and stuff like that.

I had a similar experience when attending prep school because I had grown up using pencils and notebooks for schoolwork as well. I had to suddenly adjust to doing homework through the computer and submitting all my assignments online. It did not take that long to learn because I had help from friends familiar with using the technology. Using a laptop in class was another challenge; as I was not used to it, it was difficult to stay on task, and it was easy to be distracted by it.

For Tyler [28], the greatest challenge was the culture shock of moving from a small town to a big city. He found that leaving his small home community with a population of about 2000 people and going to play in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League in a large city where the population was around 450,000 people was a big change. He was not used to city life and felt very homesick:

I remember being at [training] camp and like wanting to get cut because I was like homesick. I couldn't deal with it yet at 16. Like the first time away from home, like I think I was only gone for three weeks, but you know, at 16 you're thrown into a city, like I'm not a big city boy or anything like that. You know, living with strangers essentially. Like it was kind of a big shift ... I was like relieved when I got cut and got to come back home.

Payden [22] moved to a new town in her final year of high school to play hockey on an elite team: "I just remember being like, very excited but nervous at the same time and like sad

that I was like leaving my family and my friends. It was hard, but I knew [it was] something that I had to do.” I recall having very similar feelings when I left home at age 14 to pursue my own hockey career. It was one of the hardest things I have ever done. My parents were my biggest supporters and moving twelve hours away from them meant that I could no longer rely on them to bring me to hockey, cook my food, or talk to me after my games and practices.

What Jacob [37] found the most challenging was adjusting to the lifestyle that playing Junior hockey entailed. He explained how, once he made it on a team, the success came with feelings of obligation join in activities with his teammates. He noted,

To be honest, it was really hard. But like, leaving the reserve and leaving your friends and leaving all that kind of stuff, right? Like I had no one. I didn't know anybody. I was traveling on my own. Everyone was drinking already and like smoking, chewing [tobacco]. So, trying to fit into a crowd was kind of tough, but that was a big part of Junior. ... And especially [in his league], everybody, everybody got paid to play. So, everyone had money all the time. So, it's easy to get involved with things ... But as a rookie, you're like, “Ahh” when they [veterans] invite you to the parties, so you are kind of feeling obligated to do those things.

Like Jacob, I also found it difficult to adjust to the party lifestyle associated with university-level hockey. I grew up with strict parents and, although I lived away from home, throughout high school, I was so focused on hockey that I did not drink alcohol much – until I arrived at university. I did not know when I committed to playing for a university's team that the school had a reputation as a “party school.” While there, I felt the same sense of obligation as Jacob did: to drink with my teammates so that I would fit in with the team.

Culture shock was also experienced when returning home to visit. Brandon's [22] reported that he felt like members of his community treated him differently after spending time away to play hockey in mainstream society: "They treated me like I was a colonized native or something like that," he said. "Like, 'Oh, look, what you're wearing; you look so different.'" The participants' experiences of culture shock were made all the more apparent by realizing all of the events that they were missing back home. Anne's [21] noted that her biggest challenges came from missing important moments with her family, like the births of her nieces and nephews. Because she was always away for hockey and school, she would only get to see her family and meet its newest members at Christmas or on her summer break. For Tom [52], this was also a challenge, especially when he was playing in the NHL. He noted poignantly, "there are certain times ... when your heart must be home." Like the participants, I, too, found being away from family and friends difficult. I remember after my last ever NCAA game, I had just arrived at a friend's apartment when I received a message from a good friend of mine from back home that we had lost one of our friends that night. My parents were visiting for the game and were able to be with me when I first heard the news, and a week later I was able to be home with our friends and his family and to say goodbye to him. It was a challenge not being home when I first heard the news because no one around me felt the sadness I did.

Due to moving for hockey and being in non-Indigenous settings, the participants told me felt they needed to fit in with their teammates because they were one of the only, or the only, Indigenous player on the team. This challenge expressed itself in numerous ways. When Craig [28] began playing elite hockey, he also felt as though he had to put in extra work to fit in with non-Indigenous teammates to be selected for a team:

The new normal, ... it was pretty tough. Like, just to fit in. At first

like I didn't really know how to fit in being the only Indigenous [person] on the team like I had, I had to work extra hard to make the team in that sense...I wasn't really practicing my own culture and our own traditions.

During our interview, Craig and I discussed how we both changed the way we acted when we played on teams on which we were the only Indigenous people. For example, when I was the only Indigenous player on the team, I dressed as the other girls did: I did not wear my beaded earrings, I would not talk as much about where I came from, and I tried to talk as “properly” as I could. I would only educate them about me, where I came from, and my culture if they asked and wanted to know more, which did not happen much when playing elite, mainstream hockey. Lucy [35], the oldest female participant, would tell her peers in mainstream society about how one of her grandmothers was non-Indigenous so she did not feel different from them:

The challenge of trying to fit in with my team and with my classmates, being First Nation and then trying to be white and trying to feel like, because my... my father, his mom is white, to kind of use that as like a door... you know, [to] white people.

Culture shock was a big challenge for all of the participants. While all players may have to leave home to play at a higher level, when First Nations players leave home, they are not only leaving their home community, friends, and family, but also your culture and land. Settler teammates players do not have to face the same underlying intergenerational trauma of being removed from one's land.

### ***Racism***

All of the male participants in this study reported enduring racism in hockey; however only two female participants spoke about experiencing racism in the mainstream context. It was

heartbreaking for me to learn that many participants in my research had faced racism in the mainstream communities to which they moved to pursue hockey. Lucy's [35] experience of racism in hockey happened at prep school. She was the first Indigenous person to attend the school, and the first Indigenous female to play on its hockey team. Although this was an amazing barrier to break, it came with its own challenges:

I had a teammate who would try her best to make it difficult for me. You know, just inappropriate racist comments and like getting other people to have misconceptions about me and First Nations. And so that was hard for me because I didn't really know how to go about it and acknowledge it, because I think, like, it was more acceptable ... back in the day than it is now ... Because there was like hardly anybody ... [who] were non-native that would listen to you.

Craig's [28] faced racist stereotypes about being Indigenous from his coach while playing in the Major Junior Hockey League. He said:

My coach would always assume that I was drinking or something before practices. There were multiple times where I'd show up to practice and he'd come up to me and say that it smelled like alcohol but then I was like, "Geez, I didn't even drink." Like, it was multiple times he did that.

I, too, faced assumptions steeped in racism. A memory that has stuck with me for years is how I had a coach who assumed that I was the only person in my family to ever go to university, which was untrue. Like Lucy, I too did not know how to go about addressing these remarks because these experiences only happened to me and not to my teammates who were all non-Indigenous.

Other participants were forced to deal with racism when on the ice. Stanford [29] shared a story from when he was seventeen and on an all-Indigenous team that went to Boston, Massachusetts, to play in a tournament:

We went down to – it was called Hockey Night in Boston, like a tournament in Boston. And we got into like a big fight with the team from New York and all their parents were there, and they started like calling us racist stuff. And then a big brawl broke out on the ice and then spilled out into the hallway. And the parents came down – we all sort of fighting with parents and stuff they're like yelling at us ... We had to get escorted out by the state troopers ... back to the hotel ... It was nuts.

Jacob [37] also played on an elite team, which happened to have a lot of Indigenous players because it was located on a reserve. He mentioned that while playing in away tournaments, opposing fans in the crowd would yell “you’re Indian!”. Craig [28] spoke about how he and his other Indigenous teammates were placed at billets in low-income trailer park when their non-Indigenous teammates were placed in bigger houses in nicer areas. Lastly, three male participants all revealed that their nickname on their teams was “Chief.”

Frédérique [26] experienced racism not only from opposing teams, but from her peers, her teammates, and classmates in prep school and then in university in the United States. She explained that in addition to the typical racist questions Indigenous people are asked, like whether she lived in a teepee, she was often picked on because of her name: “I was singled out a lot from coaches or people, especially for my [first] name ... Because I don't have an English name, right?”

## **Benefits**

Despite a multitude of challenges, the participants noted several benefits that were similar for men and women. The benefits included athletic and personal growth and support from their home community.

### *Athletic and Personal Growth*

The participants identified athletic and personal growth as benefits to leaving their home communities to play in elite mainstream hockey leagues. For many of the women, the reason they had to leave home was simple: the areas where they lived did not have any female teams or the teams there would not allow them to grow as hockey players. Several did not have even basic hockey development opportunities. Thus, the major benefit of leaving home was that they could have opportunities to develop their hockey careers.

Lucy [35], who left home to pursue hockey in 2003 when she was seventeen years old, felt she had to leave her home community because women's hockey was new in her community, which left her with no local team on which to play.

I have played ice hockey for 22 years...I guess when I was younger...before I was a teenager, hockey wasn't really a thing for girls. So, I started when I was 13. There was no girls' teams back then...When I first started, it was like the only two years that the community was able to have like, [a] full community team. Our practices were at 5am or 4am. They, like, gave us the worst time to go practice. Yeah. And then when we started winning everything, they, like, demolished our team and, like, spread us all up in between other teams.

Isabell [20], who left home when she was sixteen, explained that she left home because, Where my community is located, it's not like that remote, but I played in a city where female hockey is still like fairly new there and still developing. So, we didn't have a

league to play in; I played on a travel team where you had basically just practiced two, three times a week, and maybe play some boys' house league teams during the week, then we would travel five weekends of the year. So, I wasn't getting the exposure that I wanted... Like there was no like real league play, so that's probably one of the main reasons [why I left home]. And then obviously, like I wanted to play hockey at university, so I'm like, "Oh, it's just something that I had to do."

Despite growth in female hockey over the past decade and a half, Lucy and Isabell had similar experiences with poor access to quality hockey teams.

Both the male and female participants knew that playing an elite level of hockey meant having to leave home, and the majority found adjusting to life in mainstream society to be hard; however, some participants noted the benefits they experienced as a result of leaving home. Mike [33] explained that when he left his home community, he found that he could be himself to a greater extent because no one was watching him. "I learned more about myself," he said. "I could express myself a little bit more when I was over there because these were new people." Frédérique also found that leaving her home community was easy for her because she had more freedom than when she lived with her parents. She said, "For me, personally ... I loved it. I was, like, I'm on my own. Like, I was so independent. Yeah. So, I just, like, I didn't miss home much...so it was easy."

For some of the participants, hockey provided a way to leave home and to achieve personal goals. Jordan explained:

I want[ed] to get out of here and I'm going to chase my dreams of playing hockey. And then, the other reason was I just wanted to do something and then do something wild,

achieve something. I was excited. I was just so determined. I didn't know what I wanted.

I just wanted to leave. I'm like, "Hey man, I'm doing this on my own."

For Mike [33], leaving home for grades 9 and 10 helped him to mature and to become even prouder to be First Nations: "Going away to prep school forced me to be an adult. No choice but to force me to mature at an early age – because of where I was at and how far I was [from home]." Leaving home allowed him to depend on himself, to become more confident in himself and his hockey skills.

For Jacob [37], playing hockey gave him the opportunity to obtain a university-level education: "Going to school has been a really big thing, too. I don't think I would have gone to school if I didn't play hockey." Isabell [20] also saw the educational benefits of leaving home: "It was sad, but it was also like good and exciting at the same time because I had all this opportunity to, um, potentially play at like a post-secondary institution. So yeah, like it was hard, but I knew it was something that I had to do."

Like Jacob and Isabell, hockey also allowed me to get an education as well as play university-level hockey in the United States. If it had not been for hockey, I would not have gone to university. In my final year of high school, my parents told me that I had to go to university or return home to work. After having already left home to go to a prep school for hockey, I did not want to go home. In my mind, the only option was to play hockey in university. That is precisely what I did: I found a university where I could play hockey, and I earned a degree there.

### ***Support From Community***

While some participants, like Jacob, did experience resentment from community members as a challenge, all 20 participants reported feeling supported in some capacity by their community – if not by their community as a whole, at least by their families and friends. When

asked how supported he felt when he left his community to pursue a higher level of hockey, Craig [28] described what he felt to be an amazing amount of support from his community:

Every time I was in the lineup [for a game], there would always be [a] couple carloads. .... So, usually, every time I played in those rinks [in driving distance], there'd be a whole section. People from [his home community]. And I remember the draft. And when the draft was [nearby], and geez, oh, I went [early] round, I forget what number, geez, I had the loudest section when I got drafted.

For Tyler, who had felt homesick when leaving his small town to play on a team in a big city, the best part was the support he and his parents received significant from his two communities: "Both communities fundraised so that my mom and stepdad could like fly out there to [where I was playing] to see the game – and stuff like that." He particularly felt this support when his team won a league championship: "[My community] had a little parade for me where I brought the [trophies] back to my community. The community also had posters made, and it was overwhelming support."

Even when players were far from home, their communities kept up with their games and their success through social media. "The support from my community was pretty cool," said Frédérique, who played university-level hockey in the United States. "I felt all the support, whether it was from the local newspaper or from my community keeping up with my hockey career via social media."

### **Discussion**

According to Hart (2010), "as Indigenous people, we are faced with leaving our Indigeneity at the door when we entered the academic world" (p. 1). As an female First Nations scholar who is earning her MA, I refuse to do this, and I am pushing back against cultural

genocide and the removal of First Nations peoples, particularly First Nations women, from Canadian society and academia. As such, the findings from this study are presented through an Indigenous lens – my lens. Applying Brayboy’s (2005) TribalCrit, and Indigenous feminist theory (Arvin et al., 2013) helped me to appreciate the importance of participants’ stories and my own and to emphasize how theory and practice are connected, especially in highlighting First Nations women’s stories to reject their erasure.

Although the some of challenges and benefits I identified First Nations athletes as facing while playing sport in the mainstream context, such as experiences of culture shock, athletic and personal growth, and support from one’s home community, have been identified by other scholars (e.g., Blodgett & Schinke, 2015; Ferguson et al., 2018; Schinke et al., 2006), I was able to identify several new challenges and benefits and to show the ways in which some of them were gendered. My novel contributions to this area of research include highlighting the struggles that participants had with language, the differing experiences of racism between male and female participants, and female participants’ need to leave home before their minor hockey career is over if they wanted to play at the university level. However, their male counterparts have more options for leagues to play in after they have aged out from their minor hockey career. Below, I focus on and discuss my novel findings.

### **Differences**

While there were many similarities between the male and female hockey players’ experiences, there were also significant differences. The results indicated that all male participants faced racism in very explicit forms – including physical violence, whereas only two female participants spoke about facing racism. The other difference included the female players

having to leave home and go farther away to pursue hockey opportunities that male participants often had access to at home or closer to home.

My findings on the participants' experiences of racism were largely consistent with Schinke et al.'s (2006). They found that when playing in the mainstream context, Indigenous athletes faced racism from their opponents and fans at all points of the game: racial slurs were called out to them and some faced physical altercations. Importantly, however, in my study, all the male participants reported facing racism while playing in the mainstream context, whereas only two women reported experiences of racism. Further, the experiences described by male participants were of explicit forms of racism and violence, including parents of the opposing team yelling racial slurs to the all-Indigenous team, which caused a fight to break out, and accusations of drinking before practices towards one participant - the only First Nations person on the team. Racial stereotypes serve to create and reinforce a racial hierarchy (National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health, 2014), which benefits white settlers. One of the reasons why First Nations male hockey players may face more physical racism might be that Indigenous hockey players have frequently been called on to fill the "enforcer" role in the NHL (Valentine, 2012), which is also likely based on colonial, racist beliefs of the "violent, drunken Indian" stereotype that many First Nations men face (Freng & Willis-Esqueda, 2011).

The female participants experienced more subtle and implicit forms of racism such as racial slurs and having to hear non-Indigenous peoples' misconceptions about First Nations people. These experiences were in stark contrast to those experienced by the male players. In a published conversation between a Gwich'in-Inuvialuk hockey player, Davina MacLeod, and researcher Sam McKegney (2021), MacLeod noted, "girls, we're very under the radar. Like, no one in the dressing room has ever been like, 'Oh, I hate you because of this.' They would just do

little tells where I'm like, 'Oh, I feel unwelcomed and I kind of know why'" (p. 99). The racism faced by the female players in this study may have been underreported. It is possible that they may not have seen it as being "bad enough," or as bad as what their male counterparts have faced, and thus not shared it in my interviews with them. While less overt, the kind of racism faced by female players is no less harmful and deserves attention and action. Given the differences, addressing to racism in hockey may require different strategies for male and female players.

The female First Nations hockey players reported having very few opportunities to play hockey in or near their home communities, particularly at higher levels, which is illustrative of the second-class status that female hockey players often experience but is particularly important if we also consider First Nations status. Before colonization, women had central roles within First Nations families and their communities. Women were honoured in multiple ways and, importantly, men and women were viewed as equals (Hall, 2009). However, when Europeans arrived, they used violent colonial ways to change the "norm" for First Nations peoples and our cultures, and First Nations men started being viewed as more powerful than First Nations women (Hall, 2009). This is reflected in the ways in which opportunities for First Nations females' involvement in hockey has been far behind that of their male peers.

The female participants spoke about having significantly fewer opportunities to play hockey, which meant that they needed to seek out opportunities outside of their communities at young ages and endure long car rides to practices and games. All of the female participants in my study had the goal of playing university hockey, as that was the best opportunity, they had for continuing their hockey careers for another four to five years, while their male counterparts had options outside of the university system. Despite the age gap between the youngest and eldest

female participant, the challenges that they faced seemed very similar; indeed, it seemed that not all that much has changed in the last several decades, with female players reporting fewer opportunities to develop their skills than their male counterparts.

When moving away from their community, the feeling of support can be lost for an athlete (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015; Johnson et al., 2020). Given that female First Nations hockey players must often travel and move farther away than their male counterparts due to a lack of opportunities, they may require more or different kinds of support.

### **Similarities**

When First Nations athletes leave their home to play elite sports some of the existing literature has shown they encounter many challenges when adjusting to their new environment, such as becoming adjusted to their new team, which can cause them to feel shy at first, learning their new team's structure, resisting the new environment, and lastly having a coach who is insensitive to the athletes' culture (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015; Schinke et al., 2006). My research echoed many of these findings for both the male and female participants, including difficulty with adjusting to the new language spoken in environments, the culture shock the athletes felt when entering their new environment, and lastly, adjusting to the party lifestyle associated with playing Junior hockey or university-level hockey.

Adjusting to a new form of language was one of the most significant adjustments to life away from home for the participants, and one that has not been previously discussed as a challenge for First Nations hockey players who play in a mainstream context. Many of the participants had left home where their first language was not English or French but was instead their Indigenous language, or they had used English or French in what they were told was a non-standard way once they entered a mainstream environment. In short, they were told to "speak

white” to fit in. For the participants and me, some things such as First Nations humour and the way we communicate with one another at times did not translate when communicating non-Indigenous peers while playing in the mainstream context., which caused to feel out of place and/or to be homesick.

Code-switching is defined as “switching from one code or dialect to another, to switch from African-American English to Standard English, according to setting and audience” (Young et al., 2018, p. 2). Boulton (2016) described how adjusting to a new form of language has been found to a challenge for African American male college students. Boulton reported that these students had to change how they usually spoke at home to adjusting to speaking “proper” English at their predominantly White postsecondary institutions. This phenomenon is found within sport, too. Glenn and Johnson (2021) found that African American student-athletes can gain acceptance in their new environment by “code-switching as part of mirroring and dissociating communication strategies when they interact[ed] with members of dominant social groups” (p. 357). When trying to gain acceptance in their new environment, the African American participants in Boulton’s (2016) study “reported that mirroring White culture in this way helped to dissociate them from negative stereotypes of Black identity” (p. 132). Although this literature is focused on African American people rather than First Nations peoples, it provides an understanding of what code-switching is and that First Nations athletes may also participate in this practice in a predominantly White mainstream context – like elite hockey.

Some of the other challenges specific to the culture shock that the participants faced include adjusting to the lifestyle that playing Junior or university hockey entailed, following what their teammates did to fit in, and hiding that they were First Nations or letting their peers know that they had non-Indigenous family members. The results indicated that what a few

participants found the most challenging was adjusting to the party lifestyle associated with playing Junior hockey or university-level hockey. Some participants came from dry reserves, where alcohol was not permitted in the community. Some chose to drink and participate in other activities solely because their veteran teammates were so they would fit in “better” with the team, while some did not drink at all. This finding refutes the colonial, racist depiction of First Nations peoples and communities as having problems with alcohol. In fact, it was not until some athletes in this study entered the mainstream context that they began to drink alcohol – and that was in an effort to fit in with their non-Indigenous teammates. Many of the participants in my study reported that they learned to survive and even thrive in their new environments and having support from back home was a key part of that. The main similarity for all of the 20 participants in this study was the support they received from their home community, their family, and friends. Some examples include cars filled with family, friends, driving around the province to see their games and filling up sections at their games. In some cases, their community fundraised for their parents to travel to games across the country; wrote articles about them and threw community parades in honour of them. Further, with the help of social media, many of their supporters were able to watch them and keep up to date on their statistics. For the most part, my results indicated that both male and female First Nations hockey players felt supported when they left home to pursue their hockey careers. This challenged my assumption that the male players would be perceived as the most legitimate players and thus be the ones who received the most attention. Certainly, the support of and excitement about female players is an important finding, one that I hope will encourage First Nations communities to create more opportunities for girls to play hockey, and one that fights back against colonial devaluations of First Nations females. In doing

so, it would address relevant Calls to Action from the TRC that relate to sport, especially Calls 88 and 90.

### **Conclusion**

By drawing on TribalCrit, Indigenous feminisms, IM, and RTA, I conducted my research in a culturally relevant manner. Further, I made sure that First Nations voices were the focus of my research, and that female First Nations participants received equal attention as their male counterparts. Finally, I connected my participants' stories to my own. Overall, my findings contribute to the literature by showing the ways in which experiences were similar and different for male and female First Nations hockey players who left their home communities to pursue elite hockey in the mainstream context, and by challenging the erasure of First Nations women's experiences. I hope that my research will be used to help First Nations athletes who are looking to move from their home communities to pursue an elite sport by highlighting the areas in which they may need support and also drawing attention to the ways in which racist mainstream practices need to be addressed to make hockey a safe space for First Nations athletes.

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### **Chapter Three: Conclusion**

For my Master of Arts Research, I investigated First Nations hockey players' experiences of having to leave their community to pursue a higher level of play in the mainstream context. I made a novel contribution to the literature by examining differences and similarities in males' and females' experiences. As an elite female hockey player who is also First Nations, I was able to bring Indigenous knowledge to the forefront of my research by applying Indigenous methodologies (IM; Kurtz, 2013) and following the tenets of TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) and Indigenous feminisms (Arvin et al., 2013). Applying IM, TribalCrit, and Indigenous feminisms to my research - in which I examined data from 20 semi-structured interviews, helped me to tell the participants' stories of their experiences (Brinkmann et al., 2009). Using reflective thematic analysis enabled me to analyze the data by inserting and reflecting on my own elite hockey experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

In this final chapter of my thesis, I discuss the contributions that my research makes to understanding the challenges and benefits that First Nations hockey players experienced when leaving their home communities and the ways in which these experiences varied by sex and were gendered. I also discuss the methodological and theoretical contributions of my research. Finally, I address the limitations to my research and my thoughts on future research with First Nations hockey players.

### **Contributions**

The idea for this project emerged from my own experience of leaving my home to play elite hockey. I wanted to see if other First Nations hockey players had had a similar experience and to see the sex- and gender-based differences in the First Nations athletes' experiences. Through this research, I was able to identify the similar challenges that were experienced by both male and female elite First Nations hockey players while playing in the mainstream context,

which included adapting to the new languages in their environments – which required code-switching, culture shock, and racism, the latter of which was reported as being experienced by all males and only two female participants. I also noted the similarities in the benefits for both male and female participants, which included athletic and personal growth and new experiences while they were in the mainstream context, and the support that the participants experienced while living away from their home community. There were also important differences. I identified that First Nations male and female hockey players had differing experiences of racism and that First Nations female hockey players often have to move farther away than male players if they are to pursue higher levels of hockey. I discuss these points below.

Racism in all levels of hockey started gaining much more attention as I wrote my thesis—especially concerning Indigenous hockey players in the National Hockey League. In 2021, during the Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Edmonton Oilers lost to the Winnipeg Jets, ending their series (Sportsnet, 2021). Following the loss, Ethan Bear [23, Ochapowace First Nation], who was in his third season, faced a lot of racial abuse and reacted to this abuse by releasing a video to address the comments. In this video, he mentioned he was standing up to this behaviour, and that he was proud to be from his community and a First Nations person. He was speaking out not only for himself but also for all people of colour and the next generations (Sportsnet, 2021). Echoing Bear’s statement, his teammates, team, and Hockey Canada put out similar social media posts stating that they stood with Bear and that racism has no place in hockey (Sportsnet, 2021). Importantly, these events and statements focused on male players. Little has been said about the racism that female First Nations players face.

In my research, I found that all male participants faced racism. The male participants faced explicit forms of racism and violence, including racial slurs, parents of the opposing team

yelling racial slurs, and accusations from the coaching staff of drinking before practices.

Interestingly, only two female participants in my study spoke about having to face racism in the mainstream context, and it was more subtle and implicit forms of racism than the male players faced. This is an important finding, and one that is certainly supported by my own experiences in hockey. It disrupts the assumption that First Nations male and female hockey players have the same experiences. Efforts to stop anti-Indigenous racism in hockey may thus require different approaches for male and female hockey players.

My second contribution to the literature is the finding that the female First Nations players often had to travel and move farther away to play a similar level of hockey as the male First Nations players had at home. For example, Mike was the youngest male to leave home. He left from ages 13-15 but returned home for his third year of high school– he was able to return home and still play at an elite level an hour’s drive away. However, when the female participants in my research had to leave home, it was due to a lack of high-level hockey anywhere near in their area, and thus a lack of opportunity to be scouted to a higher level in their area. I identified deeply with this finding. I had the opportunity to leave home to play hockey during grade 9, but I was scared to leave home and my friends. The elite female hockey league in my home province of New Brunswick only had three teams – the team I played on was about 2 hours from my home, which entailed many hours of travelling for my parents and me. After one season, I decided to leave home to pursue my hockey career because I had the goal of playing at university, and I would not have gotten the exposure I wanted if I had stayed home. The failure to provide First Nations girls with the same opportunities as boys results in them needing to seek these opportunities elsewhere. This finding adds important detail to previous research pertaining to elite First Nations athletes playing hockey in the mainstream context.

I also found that male and female First Nations hockey players reported feeling well supported when they left home to pursue elite hockey. This challenged my belief that female First Nations hockey players are less supported than their male counterparts. I had assumed that other First Nations females would have had a similar experience to mine and thus would have felt rather unsupported; however, that was not the case. I was able to identify that both male and female players felt supported by their communities and/or their family and friends. This took various forms: community members keeping up with hockey team via social media, articles being written about them and shared throughout their community and over social media platforms, fundraisers, celebrations, and carloads of people coming to their games to cheer them on. Though not included in the publishable paper, I found that both male and female also gave back to their communities by sharing what they learned, bringing hockey gear to their communities, putting on hockey camps for the youth, and much more. These initiatives point to continued efforts to develop hockey in First Nations communities; however, the focus of these efforts should be on ensuring that girls have equal opportunities to boys to correct the existing inequalities and to reject the colonial marginalization of Indigenous females.

## **Research Implications**

### **Methodological Implications**

As a First Nations person, through my research I wanted to challenge Western knowledge as much as I could, because I wanted to conduct research about which First Nations peoples would be proud and would learn. I felt this was important because the Indigenous population has been heavily researched in the past, and Indigenous ways of knowing have not been viewed as equal to Western way of knowing within research (Grande, 2000; Kurtz, 2013). Indigenous people have been marginalized in research, which is why I wanted to push back against Western

research to *produce* First Nation research and not have other First Nation peoples be the *objects* of it. The very act of being a First Nations woman who is completing a master's degree challenges the erasure of First Nations peoples – especially women, and our ways of knowing.

The first methodological contribution of my research comes from Indigenous methodologies (IM) (Kurtz, 2013). I chose this approach because it is “crucial in the development of new ways to reclaim control over our Indigenous ways of knowing and to reinstate lost ancestral teachings, values, and goals” (Kurtz, 2013, p. 221). I did not want my participants to feel like they were being held under a microscope and that their experiences would be picked apart during the analysis process. With the use of IM, the research was grounded in gaining knowledge about what it was like for First Nations hockey players to move away from home to pursue the sport they love. I did not want my research to make the participants feel like they were a number and that their experiences were not valued in my research. With hockey being a white male-dominated sport, it is perhaps not surprising that Indigenous men and women are marginalized in elite hockey, but their stories still deserve to be told and treated with care and respect. By applying IM to my research, I centred the experiences of First Nations peoples by foregrounding their voices within Western research to show that an Indigenous methodology - although not the common way to conduct research, is a legitimate way to conduct research for and about Indigenous people to help reclaim what has been lost in the past due to constant attempts of assimilation that have gone on for generations.

### **Theoretical Implications**

My use of TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005) and Indigenous feminism (Arvin et al., 2013) was essential to my research for this thesis. With the use of TribalCrit I was able to use an Indigenous lens throughout my research, which included gaining a deeper understanding of how

colonization affected Indigenous people and their history with sport. Following Arvin et al., (2013), Indigenous feminism helped me to understand how heteropatriarchy has resulted in First Nations female hockey players' experiences being largely absent from the literature and assumed to be the same as their male counterparts'. I wanted to ensure that Indigenous knowledge was at the forefront of my research - that the female participants in the study were not marginalized and their experiences were viewed as having equal importance as males'.

One of the contributions of my research is that it emphasizes the potential for the development of a gendered approach to TribalCrit that is grounded within the Canadian context. Within Canada, the Indian Act has hurt women in ways it has not hurt men. The Indian Act was created in 1876 by the federal government to assimilate First Nation peoples by controlling almost all aspects of their lives, including land, resources, education, wills, and more (Montpetit, 2011). The Act discriminated against First Nations women in many ways. For example, if a Status Indian woman married a man who did not have status, the woman lost her status, and her children also lost their status (Lawrence, 2003). However, if a Status Indian man married a non-Status Indian woman, he would not lose his status, and the non-Status woman would gain status. The second example of how the Indian Act discriminated against women was that they were prohibited from participating in the Band system; it was not until 1951 that women could finally participate by being able to finally being able to vote for who was running for office and eventually run for office as well (Lawrence, 2003). Developing a gendered approach to TribalCrit that is grounded in the Canadian context would be useful in research to better understand the complex history of the impact of sex and gender on First Nations peoples in Canada.

## Limitations

A significant limitation to my research was struggling with how we, as First Nations peoples, identify ourselves. The term First Nations is homogenizing and in using it I have erased important differences between different nations. I struggled with this because although the participants did identify as First Nations, they also identify themselves as Mi'kmaq, Cree, Ojibway, etc. This was an issue because First Nations is a broad category, and within this category there are many subgroups, and within those subgroups there are even smaller groups (Frideres, 2008). I found that all participants identified with their communities and their parents' communities rather than only identifying as First Nations peoples. While I would have liked to have provided more context concerning their particular nations, it would have been very easy to identify several participants if I had done that. As a result of my desire to maintain participants' anonymity, I could not provide that information.

Another limitation of my research occurred during some of my online interviews. I did not know if the participant was taking a break while giving their answer or if they were finished speaking. In-person interviews made it easier to notice if they had taken a break or if they were finished answering because of their body language. However, with the internet-mediated interviews, when the participant finished speaking, I was not sure if there was a delay with our connection or if they were finished, which led to either a pause or one of us speaking over the other. The more considerable limitation that I experienced was due to some participants' unstable internet connections. For some participants, we experienced a lot of frozen screens, delayed sound, and – in one instance, internet cutting out entirely. Personally, in my rural community, after I finished my first ten interviews, I had to change my internet provider to ensure I had a better connection during the interviews. This did not, however, improve my participants'

internet. Indigenous peoples in Canada face barriers to strong internet access (Buell, 2021). As a result, it could have resulted in some individuals being unable to participate in my research.

### **Future Research**

For future research, I recommend that more Indigenous-led research focuses on how communities can better support their athletes and/or students when they leave their home community for sport/school. In doing so, I hope that it will lead to the implementation of programs in First Nations communities and the cities to which they move across Canada to offer support to youth who want to leave their community to pursue their athletic and/or academic goals. I would also recommend looking at the differences in rural vs. urban-dwelling First Nations athletes. This would help gain a deeper understanding of more First Nations athletes' experiences and thus would be more inclusive.

My research opened up many discussions about how far behind female hockey is compared to male hockey in First Nations communities and how much work needs to be done in all areas to continue the growth of female hockey so that it is viewed as equal to male hockey. It is my hope that my research can contribute to a conversation to increase female hockey in First Nations communities so that more girls have a chance to play hockey closer to home.

Lastly, future research could include examine First Nations athletes' perceptions of well-being and how it may change when they return to their home communities after living and playing in a mainstream community. I had hoped to address this topic in my thesis, and I had included it in my research proposal, but the strain of COVID made this additional area of investigation untenable.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

It is my hope that this thesis allows for a better understanding of First Nations peoples' lived experiences while playing elite hockey in the mainstream context, and that it particularly sensitizes readers to the sex- and gender-based differences of participants' experiences. I hope that my thesis also helps future Indigenous researchers to question Western knowledge and to push for their research to be done in a way that not only respects our ways of life but also showcases that Indigenous knowledge is a legitimate form of knowledge in academia.

Through my research, I was able to speak to and learn from amazing people who participated in this research and allowed me to share their stories. This project also helped me take a deeper look at my own experiences, to gain a better understanding of Indigenous peoples and the experiences of playing a sex-segregated sport in the elite, heavily gendered mainstream context. My thesis is something I hold close to my heart, and I have been so proud of creating. It has been my honour to conduct this work.

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## Appendix A: Ethics Certificate

11/12/2020

**Université d'Ottawa**

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**University of Ottawa**

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### CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

<b>Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number</b>	H-11-20-6173
<b>Titre du projet / Project Title</b>	First Nations Hockey Players' Experiences When Leaving Their Home Community for Hockey and How it Changes Their Constructions of Community Well-being
<b>Type de projet / Project Type</b>	Thèse de maîtrise / Master's thesis
<b>Statut du projet / Project Status</b>	Approuvé / Approved
<b>Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)</b>	11/12/2020
<b>Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)</b>	10/12/2021

### Équipe de recherche / Research Team

<b>Chercheur / Researcher</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Role</b>
Jaime CARPENTER	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Chercheur Principal / Principal Investigator
Audrey GILES	École des sciences de l'activité physique / School of Human Kinetics	Superviseur / Supervisor

### Conditions spéciales ou commentaires / Special conditions or comments

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154 Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • [ethique@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethique@uOttawa.ca) / [ethics@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uOttawa.ca)  
[www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie](http://www.recherche.uottawa.ca/deontologie) | [www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics](http://www.recherche.uottawa.ca/ethics)

11/12/2020

## Université d'Ottawa

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Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est sujette aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).

Kim THOMPSON

Responsable d'éthique en recherche / Protocol Officer

Pour/For **Daniel LAGAREC** Président(e) du/ Chair of the **Comité d'éthique de la recherche en sciences de la santé et sciences / Health Sciences and Sciences Research Ethics Board**

550, rue Cumberland, pièce 154 Ottawa (Ontario) K1N 6N5 Canada

550 Cumberland Street, Room 154  
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 6N5 Canada

613-562-5387 • 613-562-5338 • [ethique@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethique@uOttawa.ca) / [ethics@uOttawa.ca](mailto:ethics@uOttawa.ca)  
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## **Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

### **Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening,**

So today this interview is taking place so that I am able to collect data for my research study. For my study the question I am hoping to answer is: how does the experience of moving away from an Indigenous community to pursue hockey a) vary between male and female players, and b) influence Indigenous hockey players' constructions of well-being in their home communities? Hello \_\_\_\_, it is (date). I'll start by the interview off by asking you a few questions related to your early hockey career and having to leave home to pursue your hockey career. Then I'll do the same with well-being, as well as gender, and finish up with talking more depth about your experience.

### **Alright so to begin,**

1. How old are you?
2. Where are you from?
3. Do or did you ever live on your reserve?
4. Why did you start playing hockey?
5. How long have you played hockey for?
6. Did you have any First Nations role models in hockey, growing up?
7. What level of hockey did/do you play?
8. When you first started to play hockey, were the leagues that you played in co-ed?
9. At what age did you leave home to pursue a higher level of hockey?
10. What were some of the reasons for having to leave home?
11. What were the options you had when you were deciding to leave home for hockey?  
(Were there different teams to play on? was school a factor?)

12. How long were you away from home for?
13. What was that transition like?
14. How did you adjust to your new normal?
15. Was it difficult to form relationships on a new team, while being in a new setting?
16. Did someone before you, leave your community to play a higher level of hockey?
17. Did you feel supported by your community?
18. Do you think that players of the other sex are treated the same – when leaving the home community?

**We're now going to touch on some questions regarding well-being. If you need a break or anything let me know!**

19. What does well-being mean to you?
20. What does holistic wellbeing mean to you?
21. Do you know what the medicine wheel is? If yes, how do you apply it to your lifestyle?  
(When you play hockey / outside of hockey)
22. Do you find there is a difference the way First Nations people view well-being compared to non-natives?
23. Were you able to feel like you had good wellbeing when you were playing at home vs moving away?
24. Did the way you interpret wellbeing changed when you returned back home to your community?
25. Did you incorporate your traditional culture into your hockey when you played at home/ in a new place?

26. Did you participate in traditional ceremonies outside of hockey? (Hunting, Powwows, sundances, sweats, etc)

27. How has well-being affected you in a negative way throughout your hockey career?

28. How has well-being affected you in a positive way throughout your hockey career?

29. Did hockey help to teach you what a good wellbeing is or should be?

**Now we'll just talk about gender a bit, before going back into your hockey career.**

30. Were any of your coaches or coaching staff female? (While growing up, in elite levels, (etc).

31. Do you think that there is gender inequality in hockey? Why?

32. Before playing on female hockey teams, did you play on teams that had many female hockey players?

33. (Question for females) If you have played on a co-ed team.

a. When transitioning from co-ed hockey to female hockey what was the biggest difference / was there a difference?

b. Or had you played in a girls' league from early on in your hockey career?

34. What is the biggest difference between male and female hockey?

**These are the last set of questions for the interview.**

35. Would you change anything about your career?

36. Were there other Indigenous hockey players on any of your teams throughout your hockey career?

37. Could you describe what initially you felt when leaving home to pursue your hockey career?

38. What have been the benefits of moving away from home to play hockey?

39. What were some of the challenges that you faced when moving away from home for hockey? Either within the team, personally, or both.
40. What was the reasoning for returning back to your home community? (If you did, if not why?)
41. Did you find that people from your home community treated you differently when coming home to visit, or if you came home for good?
42. Do you consider yourself to be a role model for other Indigenous athletes?
43. Is there anything that I haven't touched on that you feel would be important to discuss?

### **Appendix C: Contributions**

This research was designed and developed by Jaime Kelsey Carpenter. She played a key role in the theorization, analysis, and writing of the thesis. Dr. Audrey Giles supported all aspects of the development, theorization, and analysis, and aided with feedback into writing and revising the final product. The paper will be published with Carpenter as first author and Giles as second.