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***'It's like, we are thankful. But in the other way...they are just killing us too': Community members' perspectives of the extractives industry's funding of recreational and cultural programmes in Fort McKay, Alberta***

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The growing role of the extractives industry in providing funding for recreational and cultural programmes in exchange for access to Indigenous lands raises some important questions about the impact this has on local community members. Informed by tenets of postcolonial theory and a community-based participatory research methodology, we worked with individuals in a small Indigenous community, Fort McKay, Alberta, Canada, to learn about their perspectives of the role of industry in funding their recreational and cultural programs. Our findings revealed that while many were grateful for this funding, they also felt that industry had a responsibility to fund these programs to offset the negative impacts industry had on their traditional territories. Further, they felt that the provision of these programs does not fully address the loss of access to traditional cultural practices. While proponents of the extractives industry promote funding as a way to increase Indigenous self-determination, our findings show that increased self-determination through such arrangements is limited.

Keywords: self-determination; development; neoliberalism; cultural practices

## **Introduction**

In this paper we examine the funding of recreational and cultural programs by the extractives industry (i.e., oil and gas) in Fort McKay, a small Indigenous community in northern Alberta, Canada. The purpose was to work with community members to better understand their perspectives of the power of private corporate governance in cultural and recreational development their community and to question what impact this had on them and Indigenous self-determination. In particular, we examine the concept of ‘cultural offsets’ as described by Sheppard (2015) to help understand the use of industry funding

of cultural and recreational programs in exchange for access to community land for oil and gas development. While there is much research that has critically examined the use of environmental offset programs by the extractives industry (Hackett, 2015), few researchers have considered the use of cultural offsets in this same way. We argue that this is a significant gap in the research. To explore this perspective, informed by a community advisory board and a memorandum of understanding with Fort McKay First Nation (FMFN) that outlined how we would conduct research that was of interest and use to community members, we conducted interviews with 16 individuals who either live in or work as program providers in Fort McKay to gain an understanding of their perspectives of the role of the extractives industry in funding recreational and cultural programs in Fort McKay.

Our findings revealed that all of the community members who participated in our research were aware that industry provided funding to the local First Nation, which in turn funded community infrastructure, including sport, recreation, cultural programs, and staffing. While many of the participants were grateful for this funding, they also felt that industry had a responsibility to fund these programs to off-set the negative impacts that industrial development has had and continues to have on their culture, land, and general ways of life. These issues are of significant concern for FMFN, a community that – as we outline below, receives a great deal of funding from the extractives industry.

We begin by reviewing key areas of literature such as existing research on partnerships between Indigenous communities and the extractives industry, environmental offset programs, and discussions concerning the promotion of Indigenous self-determination in Canada. Following this, we outline our theoretical framework and

provide an overview of the methods that we used. We then situate the research and provide a brief history of Fort McKay. Next, we present our results. Finally, we discuss these findings in light of relevant literature and theoretical concepts. Ultimately, we argue that the community members we interviewed have nuanced feelings about recreation and cultural programs being funded by industry: while many of them are grateful for the partnerships and increased funding opportunities, at the same time, their responses suggested that cultural and recreational programs do not replace the negative impacts industry has had on other cultural and recreational activities. Furthermore, we argue that increased Indigenous self-determination through such funding arrangements is limited because of the lack of alternative opportunities available.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Corporate Social Responsibility and Offset programs***

Over the last 40 years the extractives industry has been encouraged and, at times, forced to consider the overwhelming impacts of its practices on the environment and nearby communities. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a concept that gained traction in community groups and corporations alike to ensure industry is ‘giving back’ and not just taking away (Frynas, 2005). The extractives industry has been one of the most significant promoters of CSR. It is increasingly common to see extractives industry names associated with funding for community development programs, recreational events, and community infrastructure (Frynas, 2005). CSR is viewed by some as a benevolent ideology where corporations and their representatives engage in CSR out of the goodness of their own hearts. Others, however, have viewed it as a responsibility for corporations

that make money off of resource extraction (Wanvik, 2016). CSR initiatives range from providing one-off grants to community programs or infrastructure to pledging support for environmental guidelines. This arguably neoliberal approach to sustainable development ensures that corporations continue to benefit in some way, most notably by increasing their perceived legitimacy, which in turn tends to decrease resistance to development projects.

A form of CSR, offset programs have become popular with the extractives industry. These have usually been used as a form of environmental mitigation strategy. Offset programs seek to redress industrial impacts by creating direct offsets elsewhere. For example, the idea behind conservation offset programs is that ‘the ecosystem disturbance and habitat loss associated with development projects should be mitigated through the conservation of substitute areas of similar, or ecologically equivalent, habitat elsewhere’ (Hackett, 2015, p. 65). Hackett (2015) explains that these biodiversity or conservation offset programs have become a popular response to the impact of the extractives industry in Alberta, Canada. Currently, there is no governmental regulatory framework to require offset programs. However, they are common with industry in the area as a mechanism to ease social tensions to gain access to resource development. Hackett (2015) explains that these offset programs have become an effective means to ‘overcoming some of this social resistance to oil sands projects.’ (p. 65)

CSR programs, and more specifically environmental offset programs, have been critiqued by many as an ineffective approach to sustainable development, as it ultimately continues to rely upon increasing (or maintaining) a corporation’s economic bottom line. Bebbington (2010) argues that this neoliberal approach does little to challenge the

ideological conflict of resource extraction in itself. Hackett (2015) has critiqued the ways in which environmental offset programs can sometimes dispossess and displace communities from access to land that has been purchased by extractives industry as ‘preservation’ sites so that they can in turn utilize other sites for resource extraction. Rather than supposedly benefitting local communities, without careful consideration these programs can reshape the natural environment to suit industry at a community’s expense. In other words, offset programs often do not return the landscape to what it was prior to destruction but rather reclaim other lands to compensate for the loss and this can have unintended consequences.

While there is a wealth of research that has examined CSR as a way of corporations ‘giving back’ to communities, few researchers have looked at this phenomenon through the lens of cultural offsets used to combat the negative impact of industry on cultural practices. Sheppard (2015) writes about this in the Australian context, where she examines the use cultural offsets by Rio Tinto Coal and Allied based on the environmental offsets model. Sheppard (2015) explains that cultural offsets are ‘one form of mitigation that has been proposed to help reduce the social consequences of site/place destruction’ (p. 2). As Sheppard (2015) explains, cultural offsetting goes beyond providing funding, but instead is ‘based on a land swap model that incorporates and respects the experiences and epistemologies of Indigenous groups’ (p. 2). We posit here that the idea of ‘cultural offsets’ is a useful concept to use in examining the impact of agreements that encourage industry support of recreational and cultural programs and infrastructure in Indigenous communities as an attempt to offset the losses a community experiences as a result of industrial development.

While numerous researchers have examined sport and leisure practices in Indigenous communities in Canada (see for example Forsyth & Giles, 2012; Fox, 2006, 2007; Giles, 2004, 2005; Paraschak, 1997), few researchers have examined the concept of supporting recreational and cultural programs as a ‘cultural offset.’ However, other researchers have critically examined the use of cultural and recreational programs as part of CSR initiatives. For example, Hayhurst and Szto (2016) explored how Nike, a sports apparel corporation, engaged in sport justice initiatives in an attempt to ‘brand itself as a “force for good”’ (p. 527), they found that ‘although Nike claims that it is promoting social change through sport, it continues to use the “marketplace as a driver” of this change and subsequently accepts the axiomatic discourses and structures of private authority, therefore conforming to existing global governance norms’ (p. 538). Other researchers have also critically examined public-private partnerships in the area of education (Hodgkins, 2010; Taylor & Friedel, 2010).

Hodgkins (2010) examined the ‘partnerships’ between oil multinational corporations and educational systems in Alberta. He found that, ‘In the case of Alberta, a legacy of neoliberal reforms has resulted in increased pressures to develop education-business partnerships in order to align instrumental values of the market with educational needs to the point that industry sponsorship of curriculum materials and professional development activities for educators is now commonplace’ (p. 288). This raises questions about the influence these private corporations have on shaping social programs for their benefit. Taylor and Friedel (2010) argue that the effects of neoliberalism on Indigenous peoples acts as a double-edged sword. It can provide access to new kinds of public/private partnerships that do not involve the state – who have so often worked

against the rights of Indigenous peoples – which can increase autonomy through access to non-state funds. On the other hand, these partnerships could be seen as letting the state off the hook for creating and continuing to contribute to the situation of poverty in these communities in the first place.

### *Problematizing Leisure*

Researchers have argued that leisure can both challenge relations of power, but at the same time it can also be utilized to perpetuate the status quo (Fox, 2006; Polistina, 2012). Euro-North American leisure practices have worked to marginalize Indigenous ways of life. ‘Numerous political strategies to control Aboriginal people revolved around the prohibition and control of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leisure practices including potlatch, gambling, and sexual practice’ (Fox, 2007, p. 220). Additionally, Fox (2007) has pointed out that much western leisure research has engaged in the assumption that Euro-North American leisure will be of benefit to Indigenous peoples. In our research, we sought to continue in the scholarly practice of troubling this perspective. We did not make assumptions that all leisure practices were automatically beneficial to Fort McKay community members. Rather, our interests lay in questioning the impact of the involvement of extractives companies in supporting recreational and cultural programs from the perspectives of Fort McKay community members. In our research we recognize that traditional cultural practices engaged in by these community members, such as hunting, fishing, gathering, and trapping, are not necessarily considered leisure practices and we do not refer to them as such in this paper. However, we see that extractives companies and those providing funding for recreational and cultural programmes do

potentially consider traditional cultural activities in the same way they would consider other recreational activities (such as sporting events).

In this paper we have sought to add to leisure research by critically questioning the role and power the extractives industry is seeking and gaining in funding 'so-called' leisure programs (recreational and cultural) in an Indigenous community that their industry operations and colonialism have heavily impacted. Despite the colonialist history of leisure in Canada, Forsyth and Wamsley (2006) have pointed out that Indigenous peoples in Canada have utilized alternative sport and recreational activities as a form of resistance and to promote self-determination. In this sense we support the view that recreational and cultural practices can have positive impacts on community members; however, following Hayhurst and Giles (2013) we question the potential for the development of self-determination in industry-funded recreational and cultural programming.

In light of the previous research that has questioned the extractives industry and its CSR and offset programs, we sought to explore the perspectives of community members regarding industry funding of recreational and cultural programs in Fort McKay. Below we discuss the theoretical concepts we utilized to help develop the approach to our research and analysis.

### ***Theory***

In this paper, we engage with tenets of postcolonial theory and neoliberal development theory. These perspectives complement each other in this paper, where we consider the perspectives of community members regarding the role that the extractives industry plays in providing funding for many cultural and

recreational programmes within the community, while at the same time raising important questions about the increased power of private corporate governance in social and cultural development in Indigenous communities and consider what this might mean for the promotion of Indigenous self-determination within this.

### *Postcolonialism*

Our research engages with a postcolonial theoretical perspective (McEwan, 2009). Such an approach enables us to attend to the unequal relations of power, and to critically consider the way in which colonialism and racism has been embodied within social and economic development. Although postcolonialism has diverse definitions, it generally ‘refers to either a condition, or a set of approaches and theories that have become ways of criticizing the material and discursive legacies of colonialism that are still apparent in the world today, and still shape geopolitical and economic relations’ (Radcliffe, 1999, p. 84).

This lens further enables us to recognize the role that the extractives industry has played and continues to play in upholding dominant relations of power within Canada under colonial rule. Indigenous peoples have been historically marginalized since colonialist settlers began to arrive in what is now known as Canada. They have often lost their lands, lives, health, and cultural practices because of the actions of white settler communities. Furthermore, because of entrenched racism and colonialism, Indigenous peoples (particularly those who live on reserves) in Canada continue to struggle with lower socio-economic status, lower levels of education, lack of access to food and drinking water, and lack of adequate housing and health care (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012). The Government of Canada continues to contribute to the marginalization of Indigenous peoples by discriminating against their communities in the provision of social

services (Fontaine, 2016). The extractives industry has been a large contributor to the continued colonial oppression of Indigenous peoples. This industry has relied on the use of lands inhabited by Indigenous peoples, but has very rarely meaningfully included them in the decision-making processes (Barsh, 1994).

Postcolonial theorists do not presume that those with relatively peripheral positions are simply passive recipients of unequal relations of power; rather, challenging such relations of power is central to postcolonial analysis. For example, we recognize that partnerships between industry and Indigenous communities have been created within the postcolonial context, whereby colonial relations and neoliberalism have entangled to facilitate the withdrawal of the state in providing social services to Indigenous communities. Postcolonial conceptualizations of power challenge us to problematize how we view the world, ‘particularly the homogenizing of the South into the ‘Third World’, and [to] challenge the unacknowledged assumptions at the heart of western disciplines that are profoundly insensitive to the meanings, values, and practices of other cultures’ (McEwan, 2009, p. 120-121). Many postcolonial theorists highlight the role of discourse in shaping the world that we take for granted. Discourse is ‘the ensemble of social practices through which the world is made meaningful’ (McEwan, 2009, p. 121). These practices influence how we come to see the world, which is embedded in relations of power. Therefore, it is important to unpack some of the dominant discourses surrounding the growing role of the extractives industry in Indigenous communities throughout Canada to examine some of the ways in which it perhaps perpetuates dominant power relations. This type of research recognizes that colonialism and within this, capitalism is embedded in the history of industry in Canada. A postcolonial approach to examining the

role of industry in funding recreational and cultural programs requires that the researchers question the relations of power and highlight the importance of examining the context within which the funding of these programs take place.

### *Neoliberal Development*

Neoliberalism is a dominant political economic strategy that has produced profound changes to the welfare state since the 1980s. Proponents of neoliberalism argue for a decreased role of the state in global economic market activity. The idea is that this increases economic competition, which in turn promotes a healthy market economy around the world. A free-market, proponents argue, should allow for fair and equal competition and have a ‘trickle-down’ effect on wealth distribution. Within a neoliberal world everything is linked to economic calculation, including the well being of a community. Neoliberal politics has been critiqued by some researchers as one of the reasons why Indigenous communities have had to seek alternative economic opportunities because of increased retraction from welfare state policies (Harvey, 2005). However, at the same time some have pointed out that neoliberal politics enable Indigenous self-determination by creating the potential for Indigenous nations to be economically independent from the state (Slowey, 2008). This view relies on the neoliberal idea that economic development is all that is needed to achieve Indigenous self-determination. Article 3 of the United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (UN, 2008) defines Indigenous self-determination as Indigenous peoples’ right ‘[to] freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development’ (p. 4). This conceptualization of

Indigenous self-determination includes the ability to freely determine social and cultural development alongside economic development.

In the next section, we situate the research providing some historical context of how Fort McKay came to be where it is today, a small First Nations community surrounded by extractives operations in northern Alberta. In addition, the next section outlines Fort McKay's economic context, which provides a background for understanding how industry is intimately involved in funding cultural and recreational programs in the community.

### **Situating the Research**

Northern Alberta is a vast landscape that is the traditional territories of many Indigenous peoples. This land also holds the largest deposit of bitumen in the world, the Athabasca oil sands. These deposits have attracted enormous numbers of commercial industrial projects and the sale of oil has become the largest contributor to the Alberta economy. In many small communities in northern Alberta, including Fort McKay, the economy and way of life have become centred around the extractives industry. Because of its location on the Athabasca oil sands deposit, Fort McKay is surrounded by extractives companies, which has affected the community in several different ways since the 1960s.

Fort McKay's residential reserve (174<sup>3</sup>) is located west of the Athabasca River, which has provided fish and fertile lands to the Indigenous peoples who have lived in the area for thousands of years (Donnelly, 2012). The majority of the community is situated on the residential reserve lands of Fort McKay First Nation (FMFN). Fort McKay holds

<sup>3</sup> The number denotes different parcels of 'reserve' land set aside by the Federal government for the benefit and use of a First Nation.

additional reserve lands including the Moose Lake Reserves (174a and 174b roughly 60km northwest of Fort McKay); and 174c and 174b, north and northeast of Fort McKay. Combined, these reserve lands total approximately 26,000 hectares. The 2016 census showed that there were 742 people living in Fort McKay. 690 of these people identified as Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2016). Fort McKay is home to Cree, Dene, and Métis peoples. There are approximately 800 registered members of FMFN, who are of Cree and Dene heritage; nearly 400 of these members live in Fort McKay and approximately 75 Métis peoples live in Fort McKay (Fort McKay First Nation, n.d.).

The arrival of European colonialists and industry caused dramatic changes to the area and also drastically affected the way the local Indigenous peoples supported their way of life. Indigenous peoples lived in northern Alberta for thousands of years and it was not until 1820 when a fur trading post was created by British colonialists in what would be known as Fort McKay that the First Nations in this area had increasing contact with white settlers.<sup>4</sup> In 1899, Fort McKay signed onto Treaty 8, an agreement set out by the Canadian government who were motivated by reports that petroleum existed in this area (Preston, 2013). Treaty 8 includes the ‘promise to preserve the “Indian” way of life’ (FMSD, 2015, p. 1), which involved the right to engage in traditional cultural activities, described in the Treaty as hunting, gathering, fishing and trapping, however it also gave the right to the Canadian government to utilize the lands for their purposes. With the increasing expansion of Canadian settlers into northern Alberta, alcohol and firearms were introduced, new diseases spread, and hunting became more difficult for Indigenous peoples as the new settlers competed for food sources. Additionally, in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,

<sup>4</sup> <http://aptnnews.ca/2015/06/22/fort-mckay-first-nation-survived-past-looking-towards-future-part-1/>

many of Fort McKay's Indigenous children were taken (often forcibly) from their homes to residential schools, and were often subjected to horrific conditions and abuse. These schools created a legacy of trauma and 'accelerated the loss of native cultural traditions and languages' (Donnelly, 2012, p. 1).

The first oil was discovered in the area by the Great Canadian Oilsands Company in the 1960s and Suncor was the first corporation to begin work just south of Fort McKay (Morin, 2015). At that time, Fort McKay was a small community with very few services. Dorothy McDonald, who was elected chief of FMFN in 1980, was the first FMFN leader to directly experience and respond to actions of the growing oil industry and the impacts it had on the community. McDonald saw it as her responsibility 'to fight for her people so that they could reap the benefits of the enormous (and unstoppable) development that was happening around them' (Thomas, 2016, n.p.). Thus, she helped to develop the Fort McKay Group of Companies in 1986. The Fort McKay Group of Companies is an oilfield construction and services company that provides services to industry in the area and has become an important source of income for the community ever since.

Jim Boucher became Chief in 1986 and still holds this role today. Boucher is known for his stance that First Nations are best served when they partner with industry. Boucher continued with the development of the Fort McKay Group of Companies, which is 100 percent owned by FMFN. All profits from the company are directed back into the Fort McKay community, and they help pay for infrastructure and community services such as housing, health, and education (FMFN, 2017). Just under 5% of annual income for the First Nation comes from government funding, and at least 61% comes from business profits. FMFN's 2016 Annual Report states that the majority of funding for

infrastructure such as the building of the youth centre, long term care facility, and the sports arena was received from oilsands companies through Long-Term Sustainability Agreements, which we refer to in more detail below (Fort McKay First Nation, 2016).

To assist in creating successful partnerships between industry, government, and the community, FMFN approved the creation of a Sustainability Department. Fort McKay's Sustainability Department operations are funded by industry but other departments in Fort McKay First Nation Government are funded by Fort McKay's own resources (FMSSD, 2016). Since 2011, the Sustainability Department has been involved in leading the negotiations of Long-Term Sustainability Agreements (LTSA) with industry. LTSAs provide funding to the community via industry, which FMFN then chooses how to invest. While LTSAs are now becoming the norm in Fort McKay, industry does still provide 'one off' funds to specific programs and infrastructural projects; however, for the most part, the Band Council now has more control over how the money is spent. Before the creation of the Sustainability Department, most funding for recreational and cultural programs came directly from industry as one-off grants, or through the Community Enhancement Society (CES) (as explained below).

The Sustainability Department currently has over 12 LTSAs with industry partners and is in the process of negotiating several more. In addition to the LTSAs, there is also the Fort McKay CES that obtains financial contributions from members of industry that have not signed LTSAs. The CES is community run and distributes these funds to recognized community groups in Fort McKay. Representatives from the companies that provide funding sit on the board alongside Métis and First Nations representatives. Community groups funded by CES include the Fort McKay Hockey

Society, Mothers of McKay (daycare), Fort McKay School, Wellness Centre, Moose Lake Summer camps, and Métis Culture Retention project (FMSD, 2016). In 2018, the industry funders of CES included Syncrude Canada and CNRL.

As a result of the income from the Fort McKay Group of Companies, the negotiated LTSAs, and other profits, FMFN has business holdings worth more than \$2 billion (Tasker, 2016). It reinvests much of the revenue from partnerships with the extractives industry back into the community. For example, in the past 15 years the First Nation built 100 new homes, a hockey arena, a youth centre, a daycare centre, an 1800 person amphitheatre, and an elders' centre. As a result, 'Fort McKay has few signs of the poverty that besets other Canadian First Nations' (Cryderman, 2013, para. 5). The most recent census reported 16% unemployment and a median total income per household of \$73,728 in Fort McKay.<sup>5</sup> In comparison, a Canadian Press (2017) analysis of the 2015 census data showed that 81% of First Nations reserves had a median income below the poverty line (which is \$22,133). Economic downturns in the extractives industry do impact the revenue of FMFN, which in turns affects funding for community and infrastructural projects. But for the most part, the First Nation remains self-sufficient, in that it does not rely on government funding to get by.

The Sustainability Department developed a Cultural Impact Assessment in 2015 and described FMFN's traditional cultural practices as hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering. These activities are protected under the treaty rights (Treaty 8). The amount of funding and infrastructure for cultural and recreational programs sets FMFN apart from many other First Nations in Canada. At the same time, however, it is also set apart by the

<sup>5</sup> Compared to Alberta more generally, where the unemployment rate is 9%, and median total income per household is \$93,835

enormous amount of industrial development that surrounds the community that has unprecedented impacts on the environment and, also traditional cultural practices. In light of this, we sought to understand community members' perspectives of the funding of cultural and recreational programs through oil development.

### **Methodology and Methods**

Prior to commencing the research, the second author contacted FMFN Chief and Council and its Sustainability Department to ascertain if they were interested in partnering in research on the broad topic of the funding of recreation programs by the oil and gas industry. This was a new research relationship for all involved, but the second author had previously worked with a member of the Sustainability Department in a different context, which helped to facilitate the relationship. Fort McKay is a community that has been the focus of numerous studies and has a well-established protocol for dealing with researchers. Further, the Sustainability Department includes members with advanced university degrees. As such, all parties were very familiar with potential tensions surrounding academic research and community participation. We held several phone meetings with members of FMFN's Sustainability Department and Recreation Department, who comprised our advisory committee, to co-determine specific research goals, research questions, methods, potential individuals to interview, approaches, and forms of analysis, which we then formalized in a memorandum of understanding. We also followed the OCAP®<sup>6</sup> Principles, whereby FMFN retains ownership, control, access, and possession of all data.

<sup>6</sup> OCAP® is a registered trademark of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC), [www.FNIGC.ca/OCAP](http://www.FNIGC.ca/OCAP).

Our research thus followed a CBPR methodology (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). Masuda and colleagues (2011) argue that can democratize knowledge and advance community action and social change. As non-Indigenous academics who do not live in northern Alberta, it was of crucial importance that we follow the approach that FMFN prescribed. Despite its strengths, numerous authors have pointed to the CBPR has important limitations. CBPR is not a panacea to unequal relations of power between researchers and participants. Further, Cooke and Kathari (2001) note that it can in fact reproduce existing relation of power if those who are in positions of power are those who are invited to participate in the research or, as Goebel (1998) points out, if marginalized voices are further silenced. All methodologies have their weaknesses. Despite being an imperfect tool, FMFN's advisory team advocated for its use due to its many noted benefits.

The third author of this study collected the data in the community over the course of two months, during which time she also volunteered in the community to build relationships with community members. The data were collected through open-ended, semi-structured interviews with 16 Fort McKay community members and recreational and cultural program providers. 11 participants identified as First Nations or Métis, and 5 participants identified as non-Indigenous. 14 of the participants identified as women and two identified as men. The majority of the participants were Fort McKay community members (12), a few of the participants lived in nearby Fort McMurray and worked as program providers in Fort McKay (3), and one participant had lived in Fort McKay for many years but had relocated to Fort McMurray some years earlier.

The third author conducted 15 of the interviews in person and one over email, with written answers and responses, as that was the interviewee's preference. 13 of the interviews were conducted one-on-one and one included two participants. The interviews, which were audio-recorded, ranged from 30 to 90 minutes in length. All interviews were later transcribed verbatim and returned to participants, who were encouraged to make edits or changes. Some participants provided additional information after receiving their transcripts that were then taken into account during the data analysis process. All participants have been provided with pseudonyms within this paper to keep their identities confidential.

We analyzed the data using Braun and Clarke's (2012) six stage approach to thematic analysis: i) becoming familiar with the data through transcribing, reading and re-reading the transcripts; ii) generating initial codes by picking up on meaningful themes throughout the interview transcriptions; iii) searching for themes and iv) reviewing potential themes – this involved bringing together codes to create meaningful themes from the data and then going back to the data set with these themes to review them against all of the data. Thematic analysis has been utilized by other researchers in sociology and leisure studies (Brice & Andrews, 2019; Wall, 2009), and has also been utilized by others engaging with postcolonial theory (Greey, 2018; Macdonald, Abbott & Jenkins, 2012; Mukhopadhyay, 2015). In this analysis, we engaged with a postcolonial perspective by examining the structural conditions and socio-cultural contexts that were embedded within the relationships between community members and industry. This enabled us to be attentive to the relations of power and how this affected the daily lives of community members. Finally, the analysis was completed by v) naming the themes and

vi) writing up the results that appear in this paper. Three main themes that emerged from our analysis were: (1) Recreation and cultural programs and facilities would not be available without industry funding, (2) there is a Catch-22 when accepting industry funding: participants felt that they benefited from the funding but at the same time also were negatively affected by industry; (3) industry funding does not replace the diminished ability to conduct cultural practices. The Sustainability Department members of the advisory committee were identified as the appropriate members to review a draft version of the results and this manuscript. Its members provided valuable additional insights and contexts.<sup>7</sup>

## **Results**

The participants in this study described many of the cultural and recreational programs that were supported by FMFN, which included traditional dancing and drumming, hockey, summer sports activities such as soccer and baseball, pottery classes, trapping classes, Moose Lake cultural camps and so on. The Wellness Centre provides many of these programs to children and youth in the community, and the Youth Centre provides a space for youth aged 11 – 17. There is also a fitness centre, a baseball field, and an ice rink. FMFN also organizes an annual winter festival that involves traditional competitions such as snowshoeing, Indian leg wrestling, snow snake, log toss, moose calling and community dancing.

<sup>7</sup> A plain language review of recreational and cultural programs in the community was also submitted to the Sustainability Department, an applied outcome that its staff requested to help to evaluate this programming in the community.

*We would not have these programs and facilities without the funding of industry*

The participants argued that without industry funding, many of the recreational and cultural programmes would not exist in the community. When asked about how she felt about industry funding her program, Catherine responded, 'I think it's great because this [sport and recreational programme] wouldn't happen without it.' Catherine continued, 'I think it's great because the oil companies are obviously going to come here anyways to access the oil, and then McKay just got a piece of it, so I think it was smart.' Another participant, Derek, who worked to help provide recreation and cultural programming in the community reflected, 'The money does help the recreation department, right? We wouldn't have these facilities without that relationship.'

Janice reflected on the fact that many community members would not be able to access recreational and cultural programs without industry funding as they would not be able to afford to pay for them:

We're fortunate to have this funding so that we're able to offer these programs in the community. I'm not sure where we would be without the industry funding...The biggest thing is to offer it [programs] free of charge to the community. If activities...have enrolment fees or registration fees, a lot of people can't afford it. So if they can't afford to enroll their kids in sport and recreation, kids aren't going to have that opportunity to participate...so I think it is a definite asset to be able to offer this program free of charge...

Rebecca wondered aloud, 'If there was no oil or industry around here, what would people have? If there was no industry in Fort McKay, giving money to McKay, or whatever...I mean we wouldn't have any of this [programming and infrastructure].' This view was

shared by another individual, Steven, when he noted, 'If Fort McKay hadn't gotten into this stuff [oil and gas]...Fort McKay would be in poverty.' Despite positive remarks about the funding that community members were able to obtain, several participants remarked about how the amount of funding was dependent upon the strength of the oil economy. Amanda explained, 'Yea and we've seen our struggles with the economy and stuff being down so we didn't get as much funding [from industry] as we did the other year and that limited us to some things...but we managed.' Derek mentioned that they were currently working with less funding than they had before: 'So we've been lucky with industry, with the hockey program, but right now with the economy sometimes you don't get what you used to. So you gotta be more creative.'

Another participant, Allison, remarked on how Fort McKay had done well to get industry to invest in the community:

Fort McKay is totally surrounded by it...and if we didn't have Sustainability [Department] working with the industry, we wouldn't have what we have because they've put in place all of these parameters in order to better Fort McKay. So, if you want start up this whole oil sands here, then you need to make sure these are in place and you're investing in our community.

***Catch-22: 'It's like, we are thankful. But in the other way, it's – they are just killing us too' (Maureen)***

Despite the sentiment that industry had enabled the funding for recreation and cultural programs and facilities, the participants' reflections also included the impact industry has had on the environment surrounding Fort McKay, which participants felt had a negative

impact on community members' ability to practice their traditional cultural and recreational activities.

Nearly all discussions with participants about industry support for programs prompted reflections on the negative impact that the oil and gas industry has had on the culture and livelihoods of individuals and communities who live in the area. Participants often spoke about industry as if they were in a 'catch-22' situation: while they might identify the environmental and cultural impact of oil operations, they nevertheless identified the benefits that they accrue from industry funding and felt that industry should support the community. For example, Amanda responded to the question of how she felt that industry funded some of the programs within the community by stating,

I'm actually grateful that...they're giving back, you know. They're taking so much all around us. I see it everyday and I can't even go to places. I mean there are gates on places I used to go to as a kid - my granny used to take me there, and now I can't even take my kids there. So like you know, I'm grateful that they're giving back...I'm just happy that they do.

The reflection above revealed the struggle associated with Fort McKay receiving industry funding, but also the feeling that there was little the community could do about industry's impact on residents and the environment. Maureen shared:

All our land is getting taken away anyway. They are cutting down everything, and they're scaring away all the animals...They're just taking away everything, so...we're lucky that we still have our small Moose Lake, but they're trying to cut into that, but we're fighting for that now...I remember when I was in grade 5 when they started Syncrude, and they started taking down everything [trees, etc.].

They said, ‘oh, in 2000-and-something, it will be all trees again, and all grass’...well, I’m 37 years old now, and my oldest is 19. I have three children...They just keep ripping out the land more and more.

Despite such a negative view of the environmental ramifications of the extractives industry’s operations, Maureen also shared her view that there needed to be a balance: ‘There needs to be some kind of balance, sure, yes, we have jobs. It’s good because you need money...but you still need a balance...to protect [the environment] – because we still gotta live off it. Because that’s where we’re living!.’ She continued, ‘It’s like, we are thankful. But in the other way, it’s – they are just killing us too. And then they’re killing our land...You cannot just go around anymore and kill a moose [anymore] ‘cause they’re all gone!’

The idea that the extractives industry had brought both benefits and drawbacks to the community was a common theme that came up in discussions with several of the participants. There was a general feeling that there had been a trade-off to receive the benefits that Fort McKay residents received. Steven, who had lived in the community for more than 30 years explained that as a result of industry surrounding the community, ‘the community lost an awful lot of stuff. They lost a lot of cultural stuff. They lost the way of life. They’re not on the river - they used to fish...now they can’t take anything out of the Athabasca River...it’s a trade-off you know...what you lost in one way, you’ve gained in another way.’ Another community member, Justine, expressed: ‘Well, it is nice to see like making us making it better out here compared to other reserves, but the pollution is the downfall...look how low the river is now...It’s taken from our culture. It has taken

the water, it has taken the land, it is taking the animals.’ Ashley stated, ‘you can’t ever say that it is bad that they’re giving money to a good cause, but on the flip side of that...yes they are helping us, but they’re also hurting us at the same time, hurting us in the sense of water and air quality...I’ve heard people say it feels like we’re selling our souls.’

When asked how she felt about industry funding many of the cultural and recreational programming in the community, Jane responded:

I mean, sure, we are in the middle of them, I mean, they should have some kind of partnership with the community...you know? Cause we’re the ones that are living right smack in the middle and we get the end of the stick of it. You know, like the pollution...and whatever else goes on in their plants...I think they should be helping us out with things to help out our youth get into sports and activities... But I mean—like I said...it’s the least they could do.

Rebecca reflected on the fact that many people in the community relied on industry to work, so even if they disagreed with some parts of what industry did to the environment, they recognized that the community relied on industry to get by:

I mean yes, industry isn’t all right, but that’s what puts food on your table...I mean, I don’t agree with a lot of things they do...I mean ruining the land and stuff like that, no, but you gotta do what you gotta do - you have to have balance somewhere...I’m not going to hate on them because they do feed a lot of people around here...so it’s kind of two-sided I guess, whatever.

Two other participants also held similar views. Allison commented that she used to work for industry, ‘so we can’t bite the hand that feeds you, right...[having the work makes]

the best out of the situation.’ Rachel noted, ‘At one point in time, I think we pretty much all worked for industry, right? So it’s a good thing that they’re helping us. I kind of feel like it’s their responsibility.’ She further suggested that the provision for sport and recreation funding by the extractives industry helped to avoid it being a ‘take-take relationship.’

### ***Increased funding not necessarily fixing the ‘wrongs’***

Some of the participants expressed the view that while funding from industry did benefit the community, they felt that industry was providing the funding to make itself look good, and that it did not necessarily bring back what the community had lost. This meant that the funding - from the perspective of some community members - did not come without strings attached. For example, Danielle explained, ‘You know like it’s um...it’s good that we are funded, but it’s just like, the lesser of two evils, if you know what I mean, because now if we take this money, well, we’re king of like your puppet, right? We’re your dirty little secret that you’re trying to make amends for.’ Danielle continued on to share that industry had taken so much from the community and that money would not bring it back: ‘Like there’s industry pretty much all around us, and before, that was all our traditional territory, that was our hunting ground, that was you know, our berry-picking, our medicine grounds, you know, all that, and now it’s gone...and yet they think that...money...can...make it okay, and it can’t.’

Another community member, Maureen, talked about the importance of continuing to provide cultural camps, particularly at Moose Lake, a traditional camping, trapping, and fishing spot for the community. When the interviewer asked if there were any other areas in the region that were important to the community she responded: ‘Just like I said,

where can we go? We're surrounded by Syncrude, Suncor, CRNL...there are, what? 50 [companies]...around us?' Maureen described what it was like heading out to her cabins in the summer with industry in the area: '...normally I go to my cabin. Now, there will be like a gravel pit, just like 10 minutes from the [cabin], you get to see it, you can hear it...And then to go to the second cabin, you have to go through a crew. You have to stop at the gates, and someone has to escort you through the mine to go to the trail.' Again, even though additional funding from industry was able to provide for the development of some types of recreational and cultural programs, there was still a sense of loss that these community members felt they had no control over.

While the influx of funds into the community was generally viewed as positive, some participants did consider the negative impact that money can have on the community. Justine explained, 'money also brings the darker side. So people with money could lean the wrong way. And the problem with some people having too much money, you're close to McMurray [and] you have the drug traffickers. So we still gotta have that issue of people being able to buy drugs, which happens. So that's the negative side of sometimes being too successful - drugs are more accessible here.' Danielle also spoke about social problems in the community, which she felt were the result of industry in the area:

You know we do have the drugs, we do have the alcohol problems, we have the social problems and stuff like that. And like every other town has them too, but...I find like we're...more so. You know? Like a lot of our community...um.....like I said are jaded. You know, because they think we're owed. And yes, in a sense we are...

## **Discussion**

Below, we discuss the findings and the ways in which they complicate understandings of industry funding in promoting Indigenous self-determination and the role of cultural offsets through recreational and cultural programs in Fort McKay. More specifically, we suggest that some aspects of Indigenous self-determination as expressed through social and cultural development is limited by oil and gas funding, even though FMFN did gain access to some additional recreational and cultural activities. We also argue that funding for recreation and cultural programs cannot truly offset the negative impacts that industry has on other cultural activities. To help unpack relations of power that exist in this unlikely relationship between industry and FMFN, we engage with postcolonial theory and critiques of neoliberalism. In addition, we posit that the historical and current inequitable power relations that exist between industry and FMFN decrease the potential for Indigenous self-determination in this context.

### ***‘Self-determination’ and neoliberal development***

The findings demonstrated that while the majority of the community members and service providers we interviewed supported funding from the extractives industry for recreational and cultural programmes and felt it was beneficial to the community, they also expressed they did not feel that they had much choice in the matter. This is an important finding that highlights the nuances concerning Indigenous self-determination. As stated in the literature review, Canada is a signatory to the UNDRIP, which outlines Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination. Some researchers argue that partnerships between Indigenous communities and the extractives industry can positively impact Indigenous self-determination (Slowey, 2008; Taylor & Friedel, 2010) because they can

provide these communities with some economic freedoms to which they would otherwise not have access.

However, our study has demonstrated that the community members and program providers we interviewed in Fort McKay felt that the choices they had as a result of funding from the extractives industry were limited. An overwhelming number of the participants said that they did not know where the community would be without industry funding. The question that this raises is, what does this mean for self-determination? Even after agreements have been made, and even as these agreements become more and more 'open' to considering community needs, if partnering with extractives companies is the only perceived option – to, for example, staying out of poverty and continuing to provide recreational and cultural programs – then we have to surmise that freedom of economic, social, and cultural development is necessarily limited.

The perception that this community would have nothing without industry funding is telling, and it speaks to the level to which Fort McKay, and other Indigenous communities, has been neglected by the federal government (Taylor & Friedel, 2010). Baker and Westman (2017) explain that, 'First Nations and Métis governments [in Alberta] are trying to secure benefits and infrastructure in a region that has historically been largely isolated from government support' (p. 2), and therefore they often seek funding from private partners. These partnerships have come about specifically because of a lack of means to access resources from elsewhere. The findings from our study reflect Hayhurst and Giles' (2013) arguments that while partnerships with industry can in some ways increase Indigenous self-determination and access to cultural and recreational programs, the decisions to engage in these partnerships have been made because these

communities are left ‘with few choices’ (p. 514). This research provides empirical evidence for these arguments.

These findings support the dominant discourse engaged in by government, industry, and others, which promotes partnerships between industry and Indigenous communities (Flanagan, 2018; Lukacs, 2015). This is especially evident in the Fort McKay case where it is common to see this community celebrated for its welcoming stance on the extractives industry (Flanagan, 2018; Kent, 2018). Arguably this discourse is used as a convenient way to absolve responsibility for historic and continued harms that have resulted from the colonization of Indigenous communities and the ongoing legacy of colonialism in Canada. Capitalism has been described by some researchers as a new phase of imperialism wherein the reliance upon capital and access to economic resources has become an efficient method to incorporate Indigenous communities into supporting and promoting western ideologies (Childs & Williams, 1997). Arguably, industry benefits from the perspective that a community ‘would have nothing’ without its funding. Industry also benefits from the idea that by funding programs for a First Nations community, it can further Indigenous self-determination, as it adds to the legitimacy and credibility of industry involvement in these communities. For example, Gilmour and Mellett (2013) explain that impact benefits agreements (IBAs) (similar to the long-term sustainability agreements between industry and FMFN) are ‘increasingly used by resource developers to encourage Aboriginal participation in, and support for, proposed projects where such projects may potentially be hindered by issues which arise out of community concerns’ (p. 387).

While the development of IBAs – where funding goes directly to the Indigenous group, which then decides where the money is best used within the community – can be beneficial for the self-determination of Indigenous communities, the manner in which industry funding is becoming intertwined within the fabric of an entire community can also be potentially problematic. Some of our participants reflected on their dependency on the strength of the oil economy and made comments about how this negatively affected their access to funding because so much of FMFN’s income is reliant upon the success of the extractives sector. When the oil sector is not performing well, FMFN receives less money and, in turn, programs in Fort McKay receive less funding. Thus, community recreational and cultural programs have become reliant on the continued success of the extractives. Such a reliance on the success of the extractives industry limits the ability for FMFN to autonomously make decisions and promote self-determination.

In these findings, we also see the forms of governance activities about which Wanvik (2016) urges caution. Wanvik (2016) explains how Canadian governments have ceded responsibility to industry in Alberta and instead have developed:

...governing processes thought to be characterized, not by rules, regulations and the exercise of hierarchical authority, but by informal networks claimed to be egalitarian that focus upon partnerships and networks and the blurring of the boundaries between public and private sectors. (p. 519)

In Fort McKay, all respondents knew that most cultural and recreational activities were funded by industry; however, these activities were all offered through FMFN. While this arrangement enables the community to have more say over where the money goes, it also

contributes to the legitimization of the extractives industry. Indeed, industry has become so intertwined with the community, that ‘the survival of a company and the industry become the common objective for all stakeholders’ (Wanvik, 2016, p. 524), and the way in which it reinforces colonialism is obscured.

### ***Recreational and cultural programs as ‘offsetting dispossession’?***

The idea of offset programs has become popular, especially in offsetting environmental impacts of industrial development. In this study, we can begin to see how funding for recreational and cultural programs could also be viewed in this manner. While this study revealed that the extractives companies did not have explicit input into how the funding was utilized (since 2012, FMFN receives money from industry through LTSAs and other additional funding options, which FMFN is then responsible for its dissemination into the community), it also demonstrated that community members did have to change the types of activities they engaged in because of the negative impact industry had on their ability to participate in traditional cultural activities such as hunting, fishing, and berry picking. So, while community members have access to some opportunities for recreational and cultural programs, they also have also lost opportunities to engage in other traditional cultural activities. This is important to acknowledge: increased industry funding for communities does not negate the fact that industrial activities negatively impact community members in other ways, including those related to practicing their culture.

Hackett (2015) utilizes the term ‘offsetting – dispossession’ when referring to the way in which different actors utilize programs to ‘compensate for the ecological consequences of the province’s [Alberta] oil sands boom’ (p. 62). Hackett (2015) explains that ‘over the last decade conservation offsets have become a leading response

to the ecological consequences of oil sands development in Alberta, Canada' (p. 65).

While the funding for social programs does not operate in exactly the same way as these environmental offset programs, the overall purpose of providing some positive impacts to alleviate the negative impacts (or to obtain the support of local community members) remains the same. Our study's findings suggest that industry funding for recreational and cultural programming may operate in similar ways. These programs undeniably provide a benefit to the community, which in turn benefits industry if it decreases community opposition to the extractives industry's activities. But similar to the critiques that have been made against ecological offset programs, increased access to some recreational and cultural programs does not bring back access to other recreational and cultural activities that have been lost due to industry impact on the surrounding environment.

For example, several participants spoke about the fact that industry had erected physical barriers such as fences, which meant they no longer had free access to their land. They also spoke about not being able to fish on the Athabasca River because of industrial pollution, and that industry had scared away the animals, which made hunting close by impossible. Other cultural activities, such as picking berries and medicines, were also negatively affected. Funding for other types of recreational and cultural programs do not fully address these losses for the community. These findings show how mining companies continue to maintain power over access to land and resources while at the same time purporting to support Indigenous communities and their rights. Mining companies take advantage of the impacts of colonialism on this Indigenous community by providing programs that arguably this community should already have access to – regardless of whether they open themselves up to the extractives industry or not.

In her discussions about the use of cultural offsets by mining companies in Australia, Sheppard (2015) notes that it is more difficult to achieve ‘like for like’ when compared to biodiversity offsets. The replacement of something with cultural value for something similar is more complicated than replanting a forest in another location, for example. While the provision of funding for recreational and cultural programs in our research was not explicitly referred to as an ‘offset’ program per se, we did find that several community members expressed the opinion that industry had a responsibility to help fund these programs precisely because they were making it difficult for community members to engage in other activities, particularly those that enabled them to practice their culture, that utilized the natural environment.

Hackett (2015) argues, ‘offset programming is not unproblematic and, as anticipated by much of the critical literature, does act to remake society and nature for the benefit of powerful interests’ (p. 65). Such a view was reflected by one of the participants in our research, who posited that the changes that community members are experiencing as a result of industrial development are serving the same goal as residential schools, which took away traditional activities and replaced them with others that were considered more appropriate and less obstructive to colonial (or in this case – capitalist) forces (Te Hiwi & Forsyth, 2017). When examining these activities, we have to recognize the historical and current power imbalances between Indigenous communities, the extractives industry, and the federal government. These assumed ‘histories’ of colonialism involving the ‘marginalization and destruction of Indigenous cultures’ (Childs & Williams, 1997, p. 57) continue to be present within the ‘post’ colonial context – wherein Indigenous communities are presented with so-called ‘opportunities’ that ostensibly work to replace

traditional cultural activities with more palatable ones as dictated by the capitalist power. This finding supports the arguments raised by Tuhiwai Smith (1999) that colonization never ended; rather, it simply changes from one form to another. Arguably, in this context the form of colonization has not changed all that much. The colonizing methods continue to take the form of ‘developing’ Indigenous communities through leisure activities deemed acceptable by the governing power.

The growing involvement of extractives companies in providing social services and offset programs has been critiqued by a number of researchers. It is important to consider the types of recreational and cultural programs and practices that are being supported and which practices are subsequently lost due to the impact of industry. Many recreational programs that are popularly funded by industry have Eurocentric and colonialist origins and do not traditionally incorporate a relationship with the natural environment in the same way that some of the more traditional cultural activities engaged in by Indigenous people in Canada and around the world do (Polistina, 2012). Furthermore, industry involvement often occurs when there is a lack of governmental provisions, which can encourage privatization of services, and it also raises questions about the power of industry in deciding who receives the funding and what is funded in the first place (Hodgkins, 2010; Taylor & Friedel, 2010).

Arguably, it is the provincial and federal government and the extractives industry that benefit the most from industry partnerships with Indigenous communities. Such development enables the government to continue to ignore its role in the provision of social services and infrastructure. It also clearly benefits industry to the extent that these partnerships enable them to continue to utilize Indigenous lands for resource extraction

with the permission of Indigenous communities. Partnership with industry seemed to be a bittersweet solution for many of the community members that were interviewed. As they spoke, many of them reflected on the losses that their community has experienced, both through the impact of colonialism but more recently the impact of the extractives industry. The loss of access to the environment often coincided with discussions about their inability to engage in traditional cultural activities. Nevertheless, these community members felt that their leaders had made the most out of impending industrial development, which they perceived was going to occur with or without them.

## **Conclusion**

Our aim in this research was to unpack community members' perspectives of the extractives industry funding their recreational and cultural programs. While many researchers have critically analyzed the growing privatization of provision of social services through partnerships between Indigenous communities and industry (Taylor and Friedel, 2010), few have examined the perspectives of Indigenous community members specifically as they relate to funding for recreational and cultural activities. Our interviews with community members in Fort McKay revealed some of the tensions that these individuals grapple with when reflecting on industry involvement in providing funding for cultural and recreational programs. On the one hand, they were grateful for industry input, but on the other hand they continued to be critical of the negative impact that industry had on the environment and on their ability to engage in traditional cultural activities.

While proponents of the extractives industry argue that increase in financial support for Indigenous communities affected by this industry is beneficial and provides

such communities with more financial independence, a better quality of life, and increased self-determination (Bakx, 2016); the findings our qualitative study show that the opportunities for increased Indigenous self-determination as a result of this funding are limited. A postcolonial analysis enabled us to consider the colonial patterns and structures that continue impact this First Nations community, which ultimately raises questions as to the role the extractives industry plays within the (post)colonial context. In this context, the continued colonization of Indigenous lands inhibition of traditional recreational and cultural activities is justified through the provision of alternative recreational and cultural activities and other social services. The responses of participants suggest that there has been little to no transference of power that is needed to support Indigenous self-determination.

It is imperative that future research continues to question how industry involvement in domestic development influences the ways that community members take-up and experience interventions ostensibly meant to improve their lives – from the words of one member of the Fort McKay community: ‘There is industry pretty much all around us, and before, that was all our traditional territory, that was our hunting ground, that was our berry-picking, our medicine grounds, you know, all that, and now it’s gone...and yet they think that...money...can...make it okay, and it can’t...’ (Danielle)

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