

The Participation in and Contributions to Indigenous Multi-Sport Events of Indigenous Peoples who Experience Disability

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Abstract

Indigenous multi-sport events (MSE) represent meaningful sport contexts, with profound impacts on the lives of Indigenous Peoples. However, the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and their experiences (or lack thereof) with Indigenous MSE are not widely available. To address this, I formulated the present thesis, completed in the publishable paper format. In the first paper, I used intersectional theory, an instrumental case study informed by elements of Indigenous methodologies, and reflexive thematic analysis to generate and examine data produced through archival research and semi-structured interviews with organizers and advocates to address the question, “What opportunities exist for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, as constructed by the organizers of Indigenous MSE and advocates in the sport sector?” In the second paper, I used intersectional theory, qualitative description informed by elements of Indigenous methodologies, and reflexive thematic analysis to generate and examine data produced from interviews with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to address the question, “How do Indigenous Peoples who experience disability view their current contributions to Indigenous MSE and envision possibilities to further shape these contexts?” Though the participation in these events of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability is primarily invisible, Indigenous MSE represent a space of possibilities for the reconstruction of affirming understandings of disability, the celebration of difference, and a platform for further disability justice advocacy. The actualization of this will require coordinated and intentional efforts that is supported by relationships between organizers, advocates, athletes, and community members within Indigenous MSE contexts and across the streams of the Canadian sport system.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mum, Rhonda; to the little girl from Ballymena who was so curious, passionate, and strong; to the person whose mind nurtured my curiosity and whose hands and heart carried me to where I am today.

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Chapter One: Introduction

In settler-colonial society, people who experience disability and Indigenous Peoples experience othering, which has been used to justify systems of marginalization and oppression. In particular, sport is a space in which Indigenous Peoples and people who experience disability often experience this othering. Simultaneously, the participation of Indigenous Peoples and people who experience disability in sport also represents a potential site for their resistance against this marginalization and oppression. Multi-sport events (MSE) are a particularly important context for this resistance, as they can foster sport participation, self-determination, and positive social change for both Indigenous Peoples (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007) and people who experience disability (Paradis et al., 2017). Indigenous MSE, situated in the Indigenous sport stream, provide rich opportunities to travel, gather, demonstrate excellence, and contribute to Indigenous resurgence. Often integrating both traditional sports/games and Euro-centric sport, Indigenous MSE exemplify the convergence and divergence between the streams of Indigenous and mainstream sport within the Canadian sport landscape (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013). Influenced by both Indigenous and mainstream sporting cultures (Hurl, 2017), Indigenous MSE may also reconstruct aspects of mainstream sport including the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Responding to this, I formulated the following two questions to guide my master's thesis research: 1) What opportunities, if any, exist for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, as constructed by the organizers of Indigenous MSE and advocates in the sport sector; and 2) How do Indigenous Peoples who experience disability view their current contributions to Indigenous MSE and envision possibilities to further shape these contexts?

In the following sections of the first chapter of my master's thesis, I will begin with an overview of the available literature pertinent to this research. I will then outline my research

approach, including my epistemological stance, theoretical framework, methodology, and methods, before providing an overview of the thesis format.

Literature Review

In the following sections, I provide an overview of the current literature, including the current perspectives related to settler-colonial capitalist domination in sport contexts, as well as the resistance of Indigenous Peoples and people who experience disability. I then discuss the Canadian sport landscape, including the various streams that exist within it. With this, I emphasize the importance of MSE for the participation and resistance of Indigenous Peoples and people who experience disability, before problematizing the current models upon which these MSE are founded. Lastly, I discuss the many conceptions of disability, including Indigenous conceptions of disability, and the associated models of inclusion, before introducing the current project.

Domination and Resistance Through Sport

Both now and throughout history, sport represents and has represented a tool for settler-colonial capitalist domination within the Canadian context – which has been shaped by the logics of modernization, accumulation, and exploitation that are often associated with settler-colonial capitalist societies (Lloyd & Wolfe, 2016). For example, sport was, and continues to be, an integral facet of the domination and attempts at assimilation of Indigenous Peoples, wherein the Canadian government imposed Western beliefs and implemented colonial sport policies under the guise of *civilizing* Indigenous communities (Forsyth, 2007; Paraschak, 1997). Related to the sport participation of people who experience disability, sport has been an avenue through which to educate the *feble-minded* and reinforce the Euro-centric conception of personhood (Mitchell & Snyder, 2003). In this way, able-bodied norms, constructed based on the co-existing social

systems of settler-colonial capitalism, are often dominant within sport spaces and contribute to the exclusion of people who experience disability (Swartz et al., 2018). Given this history of exclusion and marginalization, sport can represent a context for the resistance of Indigenous Peoples and people who experience disability against settler-colonial capitalist domination (Forsyth, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2023), which has influenced the current form of the Canadian sport system.

The Canadian Sport Landscape

The Canadian sport landscape has been shaped by the contributions and participation of diverse communities and people, including people who experience disability and Indigenous Peoples. Oriented towards the participation of people who experience disability, the parasport stream has been widely discussed as a sport structure that is parallel to mainstream sport, with distinct development pathways and policy approaches (Patatas et al., 2018). Within this stream, people who experience disability and people who do not experience disability can participate in sports created for and by disability communities (e.g., goalball), as well as adapted versions of mainstream sports that reflect the many ways that people experiencing disability engage in sport (e.g., sledge hockey) (Hammond et al., 2022). In addition to the mainstream and parasport streams, the Canadian sport landscape is influenced by the participation of Indigenous Peoples in both mainstream Euro-centric sports, as well as traditional games and sports associated with the cultures of diverse Indigenous Peoples (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). Forsyth and Paraschak (2013) discussed the mainstream and Indigenous sport streams using the double helix model – a discursive tool used by Alex Nelson, Ok’wilagame, in his advocacy related to the rights of Indigenous Peoples in sport contexts. This model is particularly useful as a way to discuss the tensions that exist within the Canadian sport landscape related to the participation of Indigenous

Peoples, including the ways that the mainstream and Indigenous sport streams are intertwined and the importance of retaining and respecting the distinctness of these streams (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013; Hurl, 2017).

Across each stream, people who experience disability and Indigenous Peoples have created and engaged in various MSE. Within the parasport stream, MSE such as the Paralympics provide a platform to demonstrate and celebrate the excellence of athletes who experience disability (Mitchell et al., 2023). Some scholars have also suggested that MSE aimed at promoting the participation of people who experience disability have powerful impacts on the rejection of stereotypes centred on weakness and inability and the (re)construction of affirming representations of disability (Hodges et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2023). Situated in the Indigenous sport stream, Indigenous MSE provide rich opportunities to travel, gather, demonstrate excellence, and contribute to Indigenous resurgence (Hurl, 2017). Often integrating both traditional sports/games and Euro-centric sport, Indigenous MSE exemplify the convergences and divergences between the streams of Indigenous and mainstream sport within the Canadian sport landscape (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013). Further reflecting the interconnectedness of mainstream sport with Indigenous and parasport respectively, the current models of MSE may also reconstruct aspects of mainstream sport including the oppressive systems of mainstream sport and the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Paradoxes in Practice

In both the Indigenous and parasport contexts, various tensions and paradoxes exist related to the resistance against and reconstruction of settler-colonial domination associated with mainstream sport. For example, various scholars have discussed the segregation model of events such as the Paralympics and Special Olympics and questioned whether these events can therefore

represent a rejection of the exclusion of mainstream sport (Caldeira, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2023). Additionally, in their current form, the Paralympics and Special Olympics are structured based on problematic categorizations of individual capacity that hierarchize athletes based on their proximity to normativity, as well as the reductionist focus on disability that erases the diversity of athletes (Caldeira, 2016; Howe & Kitchin, 2017). This reconstruction of oppressive practices is similarly exemplified in the patterns of participation in various Indigenous MSE, often reconstructing the patterns of inequality for individuals with co-existing marginalized identities (e.g., athletes who identify as women) associated with mainstream sport (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007; Giles, 2004). Moreover, Fabian (2022) highlighted the inclusion of modern, commercialized sport events in Indigenous MSE questioning whether this is contradictory to the rejection of mainstream sport culture. In their focus on the patterns of exclusion in isolation, the current conceptualizations of MSE in Indigenous sport and parasport reconstruct single-axis understandings of identity, with implications for the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Defining Disability

Throughout history, the dominant conceptions of disability have changed in response to broader socio-political movements, global events, and criticism. Early conceptions of disability, namely the charitable model, reflected Christian values of benevolence and saviourism, wherein non-normative *bodyminds* were viewed as tragic objects of pity that required saving by white Christian men (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2020). Replacing this charitable model, the medical model of disability began to gain popularity, supported by the settler-colonial capitalist idea of modernity (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Another dominant conception of disability is the social model of disability, associated with a repositioning of disability as a relationship between

individual impairment and inaccessible environments, which is influential on much of the accessibility and disability rights policies around the world, including in Canada, America, and the United Kingdom (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). Despite the influence of this model, Pothier and Reinders (2024) discussed the limitations of the social model and specifically highlighted the lack of regard for the political and cultural dimensions of lived experiences, with particular implications for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Across these differing understandings of disability, settler-colonial capitalist norms and values are dominant, which introduces tensions related to the relevance of these models for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. For example, these dominant understandings of disability, influenced by settler-colonial capitalism, are often deficit-based and incongruent with Indigenous worldviews (Ineese-Nash, 2020). As such, some scholars and advocates have discussed Indigenous perspectives on disability, emphasizing relationality, interdependence, and the gifts offered by Indigenous Peoples who experience disability (Lovern, 2017; Meekosha, 2006). Additionally, disability, from a settler-colonial capitalist perspective, is often understood through single-axis models that distort the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and fail to represent the many aspects of being that influence their subjectivities (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). Reflecting this erasure, these Indigenous perspectives on disability and the voices of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability have not yet been widely discussed in the sport literature.

Conceptualizing Inclusion

In the context of sport, the concept of inclusion is understood in many different ways, including as a synonym for participation and as an intersubjective experience (Haegele & Maher, 2024). Inclusion, particularly when defined as people who experience disability being present

within mainstream spaces, is often applied exclusively to particular identities in isolation and reconstructs assimilation through the operationalization of hegemonic definitions of participation. Informed by individualism and single-axis models, inclusive policies and practices often fail to reflect the interrelated social structures that shape an individual's experiences and accessibility needs (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009; Soldatic & Gilroy, 2018). Instead, these understandings of inclusion reinforce settler-colonial capitalist ideals and assimilation efforts (Meekosha, 2006; Soldatic & Gilroy, 2018). Given these tensions, many scholars have provided nuance to this concept since the term was first used, including the reconceptualization of inclusion as an intersubjective experience (Haegele & Maher, 2023), the value of examining non-participation (Nachman et al., 2023), and the importance of non-mainstream spaces, often considered *segregated*, such as Indigenous MSE (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013) and parasport events (Silva & Howe, 2018). Moreover, Lovern (2024) emphasized the role of Indigenous conceptions of difference in nuancing current assimilative definitions of inclusion and highlighted the importance of centring the voices of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Situating the Current Project

Reflecting the dominant single-axis understandings of being, the voices and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability are absent from the sport literature. However, these voices are essential to affirm the rights of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability in sport contexts and reject the assimilative/exclusionary models of sport participation within mainstream sport. Oriented towards the broader movement of disability justice, I formulated the current project to examine the opportunities (or lack thereof) that exist for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and, importantly, engage with

Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to create space for their perspectives related to their current and future contributions to Indigenous MSE.

Epistemology

In this research, I adopted a constructionist epistemology. Constructionists position the creation of meaning as a process that transpires between a knower and an object within a given social context, with active engagement from both the knower and the object (Crotty, 1998). In a constructionist research process, the subjectivity of the researcher is central to the process of constructing meaning (Crotty, 1998).

I adopted this Western epistemology for two reasons: a) I am a non-Indigenous researcher; and b) disability is a colonial construct without an equivalent concept recognized by many Indigenous worldviews (Ineese-Nash, 2008; Rivas Velarde, 2018). I emphasize the former not to suggest that Indigenous worldviews are *imperceptible* (Byrd, 2011), but rather to recognize my subjectivity as a non-Indigenous researcher and the Western worldview I have developed throughout my upbringing. Regarding the latter reason, many Indigenous epistemologies share an emphasis on the idea of animacy, reflected in the verb-based languages used by many Indigenous Peoples (Kovach, 2021). However, verb-based languages are incongruent with the colonial concept of disability – a concept that many Indigenous communities do not recognize (Lovern, 2008; Rivas Velarde, 2018). For these reasons, the constructionist epistemology was applicable to this research project and informed the subsequent choices I have made throughout the project.

Theoretical Framework

To support the present research, I engaged with intersectional theory as a guiding framework. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) is often credited as being the person to popularize the

term, intersectionality, after she used it to describe the unique experiences of Black women within the justice system in the United States of America. More specifically, Crenshaw (1989) emphasized the failure of the justice system, focusing only on rigid and isolated understandings of race and gender identities, to understand and represent the experiences of Black women through the existing precedence related to Black men and white women. These representations of identity failed to integrate enough complexity and nuance associated with the ways that people's multiple identities shape their lived experiences within the wider societal context. In contrast, intersectionality is associated with complex and dynamic conceptions of identity and lived experiences, with consideration for the many different aspects of being, including disability, race, gender, and Indigeneity, within the unique mosaic of each person's wholistic self.

Applying this to society more widely, intersectional scholars have used a matrix as a model to describe socio-political life, including the many co-existing and mutually constitutive social systems of settler-colonial capitalism that shape each person's lived experiences. Within this matrix, each person occupies a distinct socio-political location based on their co-existing, embodied identities, which manifest in their lives as many different experiences of privilege and oppression (Bowleg, 2012). By reconceptualizing identities through an intersectional lens, scholars are prepared to discuss the identities and experiences of diverse people without the distortion or erasure associated with either/or thinking and essentialist representations of identities predicated on homogeneity and conformity (May, 2015).

Using intersectionality to guide their research, scholars often centre the perspectives of people who are represented in this matrix as being on the margins, rather than the centre (i.e., mainstream), and who are often excluded from socio-political life, including the research process. Distinct from approaches focused simply on oppression that reconstruct social

stratification through the othering of particular identities, the intersectional matrix model encompasses the experiences of individuals at any socio-political location (Yuval-Davis, 2007). In this way, intersectionality is inherently counterhegemonic, presupposed by a rejection of the status quo and oriented to social justice (May, 2015). As such, intersectional scholars can unsettle dominant ideas (e.g., assimilative models of civility, essentialist binaries) and, supported by the perspectives of individuals in subjugated epistemic locations (i.e., people at the margins of this socio-political matrix), generate novel insights beyond the delineated categories of settler-colonial capitalism (Bowleg, 2012; May, 2014).

Accompanying the many strengths associated with intersectional theory, several scholars have offered critiques and highlighted tensions related to the framework as well. Some critics have emphasized the challenges to feasibly conducting intersectional research, suggesting the impossibility of examining every combination of identities (Collins, 1998; Misra et al., 2020). Addressing this, scholars can consider the identities and intersections most salient to the present investigation upon which to focus their attention to feasibly investigate social processes of interest (Collins, 1998; Misra et al., 2020). Additionally, some scholars have suggested that intersectionality is congruent with Indigenous worldviews and paradigms (Levac et al., 2018; Olsen, 2018), with numerous shared tenets including wholism, interconnectedness, and relationality (Lavallée, 2009; Steinhauer, 2002). Simultaneously, other scholars have argued that intersectional theories are simply recent retellings of Indigenous knowledges and worldviews that have existed since time immemorial (Clark, 2016; Hunt, 2012); however, with the increasing popularity of intersectionality, these tenets of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, often dominated and marginalized within settler-colonial capitalist society, are now validated within Western paradigms (Clark, 2016). While continuing reflecting on these critiques and tensions, I

engaged intersectionality and, in particular, created space for the recognition of wholeness of being, relationality (generally conceptualized as the interconnectedness of land, language, humans, and non-human beings that forms the basis of existing and knowing), and other important aspects of many Indigenous worldviews (Kovach, 2021).

Oriented towards social transformation within the context of sport, I adopted intersectionality as a theoretical framework for my research. In particular, I critically examined the mutually constitutive social systems of settler-colonial capitalism that coalesce within the lives of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and considered the influence of these social systems on their experiences in the context of Indigenous MSE. Informed by my own socio-political position and lived experiences, I engaged with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, whose perspectives exist at the limit of mainstream Western society's imagination of what is possible (Meekosha, 2011), to reject the confines of settler-colonial capitalism and construct the intersectional insight I offer in this thesis. Given the salience of my positionality as a researcher, reflexivity was an ongoing and valuable aspect of this project. I now offer the following introduction of myself and discussion of my location as a researcher.

Introducing and Locating Myself

My name is Meredith, and I am a settler of European descent, specifically Irish and British, and a guest on the land now referred to as Canada. I am a white, queer person and have a complex relationship with gender, influenced by my queer identity and my socialization as a white woman within Western society. I experience disability, which is intertwined with my experiences with gender, race, my middle-class upbringing, and my family support, as well as constructed, in part, by my worldview as a settler. I am also the child of an Irish immigrant, widowed, single mother. Growing up, I was an avid ringette player; however, following the death

of my father when I was seven years old, I faced numerous barriers that ultimately ended my involvement in the sport, including changes to family income and the pressure on my mother in her role as caregiver to my brother who experiences also disability. Since then, I have tried to reengage with sport and, for years, was unable to; however, throughout this project, I found myself ready and able to engage with sport and, based on the stories shared by many participants, began to understand for myself that movement is medicine (Mattingly & Blu Wakpa, 2021).

As a settler scholar, it is important that I understand how my positionality (i.e, my self-location and the basis of me as a person, as a knower, and as a researcher) influences my engagement with Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous methodologies, particularly during the active exchange of knowledge and the building of reciprocal relationships with participants. Moreover, recognizing and reflecting on my positionality throughout the project is essential, given the risk of reconstructing colonial domination in the context of research within the context of Canada. In this positionality statement, I have highlighted various elements of my subjectivity that influenced my engagement throughout the project; however, this in no way represents the extent of the intersectional reflexive practices that I relied on throughout the project to consider my accountability to others (i.e., participants), ensure alignment between my decisions and the theoretical foundation of this project, and deepen the insights I constructed.

Methodology

Guided by a constructionist epistemology, I engaged with two research methodologies, a Western methodology and Indigenous methodologies, in each publishable paper. In each paper, the Western methodologies I adopted were the case study methodology and the qualitative descriptive methodology, respectively. By integrating these distinct methodologies, my goal as a non-Indigenous researcher was to conduct this research with respect for Indigenous Peoples by

reflecting Indigenous worldviews in my research design (Wilson, 2001), while critically examining the reproduction of settler-colonial domination through research (Singh & Major, 2017). In this section, I provide an overview of all three methodologies and discuss their applicability to the present research.

Indigenous methodologies encompass diverse approaches to research and knowledge production that are rooted in Indigenous worldviews and cultural values (Smith, 2008; Steinhauer, 2002). Multiple conceptions of Indigenous methodologies exist, reflecting the particular context and worldviews of the communities involved in a given project (Lavallée, 2009; McGuire-Adams, 2020). Alongside this diversity, Indigenous methodologies are often axiologically embedded, reflected in the spiritual and ethical elements included in their fundamental tenets (e.g., wholism, relationality, and non-linearity; Lavallée, 2009; Steinhauer, 2002). Additionally, as noted above, Indigenous methodologists generally emphasize animacy, often understood to be that the world is created through processes and that entities have spirit, which is reflected in the verb-based languages used by many Indigenous communities (Kovach, 2021). Expanding on the 4Rs (Pidgeon & Riley, 2021), Restoule (2008) described five core elements of Indigenous methodologies, referred to collectively as the 5Rs: respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility, and relationships. By engaging with Indigenous methodologies, researchers often seek to disrupt the settler normativity that permeates the Western research tradition and resist the epistemic violence perpetuated by the academy (McGuire-Adams, 2020; Smith, 2008). Co-existing with this potential for resistance, researchers have also identified various colonial tensions that arise when engaging with Indigenous methodologies.

Throughout the project, I worked *with*, rather than *on*, Indigenous Peoples and engaged with elements of Indigenous methodologies, including the 5Rs. More specifically, I recognized

the influence of the needs, traditions, feelings, and wellbeing of others, both human and non-human (respect), while considering the applicability of my research to Indigenous worldviews and the meaningfulness of the insight to the lives of Indigenous Peoples (relevance).

Additionally, I engaged intentionally in the process of relationship building and knowledge exchange throughout the project (reciprocity), remaining accountable to those relationships (relationships), to Indigenous Peoples (past, present, and emerging), and to the Earth (respect).

By engaging with Indigenous methodologies, I sought to reflect Indigenous worldviews and contribute to reconciliation in the context of research (Kovach, 2021).

In tandem with elements of Indigenous methodologies, I engaged with two Western epistemologies – one in each publishable paper. In the first paper, I employed the case study methodology. Many researchers presently working in the social sciences employ a case study methodology in diverse research contexts (Ylikoski & Zahle, 2019), informed by varying epistemologies. One of the prominent approaches to the methodology was conceptualized by Stake (1995), who adopted a constructionist epistemology. Stake (1995) characterized his approach using four distinct attributes: holistic, empirical, interpretive, and emphatic. Defining a case as a purposive system of functioning parts, Stake (1995) highlighted three orientations of cases within research: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. These orientations reflect the positioning of the case within the broader study and the motivation to explore the case of interest (Stake, 1995). By engaging with the case study methodology, researchers who adopt a constructionist epistemology are apt to explore the case of interest extensively, facilitating the development of rich narrative accounts of a given case.

Engaging with Stake's (1995) approach to the case study methodology in tandem with elements of Indigenous methodologies, I examined the participation in Indigenous MSE held

across the land referred to as Canada of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. With this, I considered Indigenous MSE as a single instrumental case, wherein my examination of the case supported the generation of insight pertaining to disability justice in the context of sport on the land now known as Canada. Given my engagement with the case study methodology, I generated data through two distinct methods to construct a rich account of Indigenous MSE from numerous perspectives.

In the second publishable paper, I engaged the qualitative description (QD) – a Western methodology and approach to data that is associated with naturalistic inquiry (Sandelowski, 2000). QD has been critiqued for its simplicity and limited contribution to theory (Kahlke, 2014). However, this is not to say that QD cannot support the construction of valuable, nuanced insight, as well as provide a strong foundation for deep (re)presentations of the data. In fact, Sandelowski (2000) argued that these critiques are the result of an assumption that the QD, due to its simplicity, is inferior to other, more theoretical-focused methodologies. Moreover, Sandelowski (2000) suggested that, in doing so, some scholars have erroneously claimed these more theoretical-oriented methodologies, while approaching data in ways akin to QD *informed* by elements of other methodologies. Sandelowski (2000) continued by emphasizing that QD offers a flexible approach to data that is complementary to integrating other methodological approaches in tandem, with the caveat that scholars must do so overtly in place of ignoring QD.

By integrating QD and elements of Indigenous methodologies, I examined the contributions to Indigenous MSE by Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and their perspectives related to the possibilities to further shape event contexts. Using these methodologies, I remained accountable to the relationships I fostered throughout the project and grounded in the stories shared by participants. Given the applicability of QD to diverse research

projects and methods, I generated data during semi-structured interviews with six Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to construct insight related to their contributions, current and future, to Indigenous MSE.

Methods

Semi-Structured Interviews

Engaging with Stake's (1995) conceptualization of the case study methodology and elements of Indigenous methodologies, I generated data pertaining to the instrumental case of Indigenous MSE, oriented towards disability justice, during semi-structured interviews with four subgroups of participants. Semi-structured interviews encompass various elements of both the structured and unstructured types, offering a blend of formality and flexibility (Fontana & Frey, 2005). I created three separate interview guides of open-ended questions to guide each interview, while creating space for the needs and communication preferences of each unique participant (Hollomotz, 2018; Kovach, 2021). I cultivated an environment of respect and reciprocity by locating myself as a researcher at the beginning of each interview, while also offering a story of my own involvement in sport.

Recruitment and Sampling

To recruit participants, I engaged in purposive sampling, referring to the recruitment of participants based on specific characteristics (DeCarlo, 2018; Khatibi et al., 2023), to ensure representation from all four subgroups, 1) organizers of Indigenous MSE; 2) people in the sport sector advocating for the sport participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability; 3) Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and had participated in Indigenous MSE; and 4) Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and had not, for whatever reason, participated in Indigenous MSE. To be eligible to participate, interested people who identified with least one of

the four subgroups were also required to be 12 years of age or older, be able to communicate in English, and live on the land now referred to as Canada. By outlining these subgroups, I ensured that the experiences of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, whose voices are currently excluded from the sport literature, remained central to the research, while also integrating the perspectives of people within the context of sport. Reflecting the importance of relationality to many Indigenous communities, I employed snowball sampling (DeCarlo, 2018) to connect with potential participants as well, which Kovach (2021) described as foundational to sampling when adopting Indigenous methodologies.

Recruitment began in the summer of 2024 after obtaining ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board at the University of Ottawa (Ethics File Number: H-06-24-10317); however, I encountered numerous challenges that slowed my formation of connections and relationships with interested participants and, apart from three interviews that occurred in fall of 2024, the majority of interviews were conducted in January, February, and March of 2025. To share the study information, I created a poster for social media and circulated an email to parasport organizations and the provincial branches of the Aboriginal Sport Circle. As a reflection of my commitment to trust building and accessibility, I discussed the project, either by email or on an initial Zoom call, with interested people before coordinating an interview time. All interviews occurred online via Zoom. To ensure feasibility and avoid unnecessary burden on community members, my goal was to conduct five interviews with each subgroup and, ultimately, I conducted five interviews with organizers, five with advocates, two with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and had participated in Indigenous MSE, and four with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and had not participated in Indigenous MSE.

Archival Research

To add depth to my conceptualization of the case, I conducted archival research (Cullen & Castleden, 2023) with archives relating to Indigenous MSE and the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability in a Canadian context. Archival research describes the method of data collection based on the engagement with primary resources, such as diaries and pictures, and secondary resources, (e.g., analyses or interpretations of primary sources) (Caseñas & Kalsbeek, 2006). Historically, researchers often viewed archives as preserving reality and generally regarded the findings of archival research as true accounts of history (Symons, 1982). More recently, researchers have begun recognizing archival research as a method of gaining insight into the social-political and historical contexts in which the archival sources were created (Booth, 2006; Philips et al., 2019). With this understanding of the importance of context, researchers generally regard archives as sites of power (Booth, 2006; McKee & Forsyth, 2019). The context surrounding a given archive implicates the socio-political context and institutions at the time of creation, as well as at the time it is revisited (Philips et al., 2019). Booth (2006) described the existence and preservation of resources within archives as a privileged position in which a resource remains knowable. Particularly pertinent to my engagement with Indigenous methodologies, McKee and Forsyth (2019) conceptualized archival research in the context of Indigenous sport history as involving the archive, the construction of knowledge, and the systems of colonial power. McKee and Forsyth (2019) emphasized the processes of history-*making*, including what is remembered and what is forgotten, as well as the construction and reconstruction of subjects represented in the archives.

Specific to the current project, I critically examined with the available archival documents from Indigenous MSE to consider the opportunities for the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Examining the websites of Indigenous MSE, I

reviewed the available documents, such as policies, staging and hosting manuals, and participant categories. I focused on Indigenous MSE that have included the participation of multiple communities, have had multiple iterations of the events, and can be/have been hosted across the land now referred to as Canada. I then integrated these data with the data generated through interviews during the analysis process, which I outline below.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data generated through archival research and during semi-structured interviews, I engaged in reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), as conceptualized by Braun and Clarke (2019). In their conceptualization of RTA, Braun & Clarke (2019, 2021) positioned its flexibility as a primary strength of the method. Due to this flexibility, RTA is congruent with diverse epistemological, theoretical, and methodological foundations and can support researchers in constructing rich, nuanced analyses (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). However, this flexibility also represents a weakness of RTA, including challenges to ensuring quality engagement in RTA (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). Additionally, since no singular conception of RTA exists, researchers can struggle to understand how to conduct their analyses without extensive experience (Trainor & Bundon, 2021). To mitigate these challenges, I consulted the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to scaffold my analysis, engaged frequently with my co-supervisors, and returned to the insights offered by scholars related to their understanding of thematic analyses including Kovach (2021) and Trainor and Bundon (2021).

In the RTA process, insight is constructed through the researcher's active engagement with the data, meaning that reflexivity is a powerful analytic resource (Braun & Clarke, 2019). I deepened my understanding of my subjectivity (i.e., the analytical resource) by practicing intersectional reflexivity specifically, wherein researchers become more attuned to their

subjectivity, their lived reality, and the wider social context of the research (Rodriguez & Ridgeway, 2023). Additionally, by engaging in reflexivity through reflexive journaling and creating space for thoughtful processing of my experiences throughout the project, I was prepared to generate intersectional insight by constructing themes and identifying outliers (May, 2015), or coyote codes, as described by Kovach (2021). Furthermore, I engaged with elements of Indigenous methodologies, namely the importance of story and my responsibilities to participants, throughout the analysis process to guide my coding and to navigate the colonial tensions I introduce as a settler researcher working within the mainstream academic context in Canada.

Thesis Format

I completed this thesis in the publishable paper format, which, in this case, consists of two publishable papers, forming chapters two and three respectively. In the first paper, I integrate the data generated during archival research and semi-structured interviews with organizers and advocates to address the question, “What opportunities, if any, exist for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, as constructed by the organizers of Indigenous MSE and advocates in the sport sector?” In the second paper, I use data produced through semi-structured interviews with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to address the question, “How do Indigenous Peoples who experience disability view their current contributions to Indigenous MSE and envision possibilities to further shape these contexts?” In the fourth chapter of this thesis, I discuss these two papers in relation to one another and offer implications of this research, limitations of the project, future directions, and concluding thoughts

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Chapter Two

Braiding the Strands of the Canadian Sport System: Participation in Indigenous Multi-Sport Events of Indigenous Peoples who Experience Disability

Abstract

In the Canadian context, the sport sector is characterized by many different streams, including Indigenous, mainstream, and parasport. Situated in the Indigenous sport stream, Indigenous multi-sport events (MSE) represent opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to engage in sport, demonstrate excellence, and express cultural pride. However, it is currently unclear how Indigenous Peoples who experience disability might be involved in these events. Thus, the purpose of this project was to examine the opportunities, if any, for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, as constructed by the organizers of Indigenous MSE and advocates in the sport sector. Informed by constructionism and intersectional theory, I adopted a case study methodology and elements of Indigenous methodologies to examine the instrumental case of Indigenous MSE, oriented towards disability justice in sport. To generate data, I engaged in archival research and semi-structured interviews – five with organizers of Indigenous MSE and five with advocates for the sport participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. I then engaged in reflexive thematic analysis to construct three themes: 1) the (in)visibility of disability; 2) future possibilities; and 3) preconditions required for action. Discussing these findings together, I highlight the possible place of disability in Indigenous MSE contexts, as well as avenues to create further space for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. I argue that to promote opportunities for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, there is value in considering the articulations between Indigenous and parasport streams and fostering conversations across these streams.

In the Canadian context, the sport system is complex, with many distinct yet interconnected strands, including mainstream, Indigenous, and parasport. Indigenous Peoples participate across these streams in a variety of Western and traditional sports and games; however, situated in the Indigenous sport stream, Indigenous multi-sport events (MSE) represent impactful opportunities for Indigenous Peoples' sport participation. Currently, limited information is available pertaining to the sport involvement of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability¹ and, as a result, the place of these individuals within these events is unclear. Responding to this, I conducted research on the land now known as Canada guided by the question, "What opportunities exist for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to participate in Indigenous MSE, as constructed by the organizers of Indigenous MSE and advocates in the sport sector?"

I addressed the research question by adopting a constructionist epistemology and intersectional theory, as well as by using an instrumental case study methodology (Stake, 1995), which was informed by elements of Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2021). I generated data by critically reviewing the archival documents available from Indigenous MSE organizations and conducted 10 semi-structured interviews, five with organizers of Indigenous MSE and five with people in the sport sector advocating for the sport participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. I integrated the data generated through both methods and analyzed it using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2019) to construct three themes related to the opportunities for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to participate in Indigenous MSE. Together, these themes represent the possibilities and challenges related to promoting the

¹ We use the language *people who experience disability* which reflects experiential and feminist understandings of disability. We engaged this language given the potential congruence of these models with Indigenous worldviews and to reject medicalized and individualistic understandings of disability.

participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and the importance of developing and strengthening relationships with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and across the Indigenous and parasport streams to actualize these possibilities.

Literature Review

In the following section, I provide an overview of the current literature, beginning with a discussion of the sport participation of Indigenous Peoples and people who experience disability and their resistance to settler-colonial capitalist domination in sport contexts. I then outline the complexities of the Canadian sport landscape and its distinct streams, including the associated MSE, which form part of the sport sector. I end the section by exploring definitions of disability and inclusion in sport contexts.

Resistance in Canadian Sport

Within the Canadian context, sport has often been used as a colonial tool to reinforce the assimilation and ongoing marginalization experienced by Indigenous Peoples. Beginning as part of the Canadian nation-building process, representatives of the Canadian government attempted to prescribe aspects of Indigenous involvement and participation in sport (e.g., appropriate physical movements, opportunities for involvement) (Forsyth, 2020). Nevertheless, Indigenous Peoples have and continue to engage in various physical practices, often referred to collectively as traditional sports and games, which emphasize Indigenous ways of being, spirituality, and community (Paraschak, 2013). Given these assimilative efforts, the continued participation of Indigenous Peoples in both mainstream sport – on their own terms - and Indigenous sports and games exemplifies resistance against colonial domination (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007).

Within our current societal context influenced by the mutually constitutive ideologies of settler-colonialism and neoliberal capitalism, sport has been a context in which people who experience disability have similarly experienced oppression and domination. In mainstream sport, the construction of disability is generally associated with weakness and *inability*, meaning that disability and athleticism are often constructed as incongruent (Maher et al., 2022). As such, people who experience disability often face exclusion from sport contexts (Maher et al., 2022). However, the participation of people who experience disability in sport, both in the mainstream and parasport, can also represent resistance against settler-colonial capitalist domination by disrupting ableist assumptions and challenging the systems that contribute to their exclusion (Macdonald et al., 2012).

The Structure of the Canadian Sport System

The Canadian sport system is complex and nuanced, influenced by the physical cultures of many diverse communities, including diverse Indigenous Peoples and disability communities. Forsyth and Paraschak (2013) described the Canadian sport system using the double helix model, which was first suggested by Alex Nelson, Ok'wilagame, in his advocacy for the sport participation of Indigenous Peoples. Within this double helix model, mainstream and Indigenous sport are represented as two distinct strands, much like the strands of DNA, which coalesce and intertwine, while remaining nonetheless distinct (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013). Though there are many interactions between these streams, maintaining the distinction between Indigenous and mainstream sport is imperative as part of Indigenous Peoples' assertions of their self-determination in sport contexts (Paraschak, 2013).

With a similar structure to Indigenous sport, the parasport stream represents distinct opportunities for the sport participation of people who experience disability. Parasport is so

named to reflect the parallel positioning of the stream in relation to mainstream sport (Patatas et al., 2021). There are numerous sports associated with the parasport stream, including disability-specific sports (e.g., goalball) created specifically by disability communities without a mainstream counterpart, as well as adapted mainstream sports (e.g., blind hockey) that create opportunities for the participation of people who experience disability through the implementation of accommodations and rule or environment changes (Hammond et al., 2022).

Multi-Sport Events

Within each stream of Canadian sport, various MSE exist. Parasport events, such as those offered by Special Olympics, represent accessible opportunities for people who experience disability to participate in sport, with particular implications for the cultivation of community, the rejection of stereotypes centred on weakness and inability, and the (re)construction of affirming representations of disability (Hodges et al., 2015). Situated within the Indigenous sport stream, various Indigenous communities and organizations have held MSE [e.g., Northern Games, World Eskimo Indian Olympics, North American Indigenous Games (NAIG)], often with the goals of Indigenous resurgence and the formation of cross-community relationships (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). These events can include opportunities to compete and participate in both traditional games/sports and mainstream Euro-centric sports. Although each iteration of major Indigenous MSE is formulated by organizers based on the rules and policies outlined by the respective governing body, there is variation based on the particular community hosting each event. Both Indigenous and parasport MSE reconstruct single-axis understandings of being and, as a result, the opportunities for the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability in these events are unclear.

Situating Disability

Scholars have defined disability in numerous ways, though the majority of definitions are presupposed by settler-colonial capitalist norms and values. Within settler-colonial capitalist society, in which homogeneity and hierarchy are valued, aspects of being that violate hegemonic standards of normativity are positioned as inferior (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Disability is generally understood as an individual deficit (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009) and despite the emergence of numerous disability models and understandings that attempt to challenge this understanding (see Peers 2014). In contrast to Western understandings of disability, diverse Indigenous Peoples have offered understandings of disability based in Indigenous ways of knowing and being. These conceptions of disability are often relational and collective, with an emphasis on the value of difference and the gifts offered by Indigenous Peoples who experience disability (Meekosha, 2011). Indigenous perspectives can therefore support the legitimization of disability as a valuable aspect of being rather than a metaphor for inferiority or oppression, with implications for disability justice and the resistance against settler-colonial capitalist domination (Ineese-Nash, 2020; Lovern, 2024).

Within sport contexts, inclusion is a popular yet contested term. *Inclusion* often refers exclusively to particular aspects of being in isolation, which therefore fails to reflect the interrelated social structures that shape an individual's experiences and accessibility needs (Lovern, 2022). Given the emphasis on homogeneity within settler-colonial capitalist society, inclusion has also acted as a method through which to further assimilation and reinforce hegemonic definitions of participation (Meekosha, 2011). As such, the recognition of difference is imperative to reject these understandings of inclusion, create space for diverse people, and support their participation across mainstream, Indigenous, and parasport contexts (Forsyth et al., 2016; Lovern, 2022; Silva & Howe, 2018).

Despite the importance of recognizing differences in sport contexts, current models of Indigenous MSE are generally based on single-axis understandings of being that reconstruct patterns of exclusion and inequity for people with co-existing marginalized aspects of being (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). In particular, the involvement in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability remains unclear. In response, I formulated the current project guided by the following research question: What opportunities exist for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to participate in Indigenous MSE, as constructed by the organizers of Indigenous MSE and advocates in the sport sector?

Epistemology

For this research, I employed a constructionist epistemology (Crotty, 1998). As such, I understood the creation of meaning as a process, grounded in a given socio-political context, which occurs between a knower and an object (Crotty, 1998). Both the knower and the object exert influence and are engaged actively throughout the process. I employed this Western epistemology not to reconstruct the Western imperialist violence that positions Indigenous knowledges as *imperceptible* (Byrd, 2011) but to recognize the influence of my positionality as a settler on my subjectivity as a researcher.

Theoretical Framework

I employed intersectional theory to support my critical examination of the opportunities for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Intersectionality, a term first coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), refers to a critical analytic approach, oriented towards social transformation. Scholars can engage intersectional *matrix thinking* to conceptualize the mutually constitutive social systems of settler-colonial capitalism and consider the interactions between these systems (May, 2014). Within this matrix, people are

situated at different socio-political locations, each associated with varied and complex experiences of privilege and oppression that influenced their lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1989; May, 2014). As such, intersectionality represents a shift from single axis understandings of being that are dominant within Western worldviews (Meekosha, 2011). Some critics have emphasized the challenges of conducting intersectional research, highlighting the impossibility of examining every combination of identities (Collins, 1998; Misra et al., 2020). To feasibly investigate social processes of interest, scholars can consider the identities and intersections most salient to the present investigation upon which to focus their attention (Collins, 1998; Misra et al., 2020).

Exemplifying the colonial tensions within research, some scholars have discussed the complex relationship between intersectionality and many Indigenous worldviews. For example, Olsen (2018) suggested the congruence between intersectionality and the interconnectedness, relationality, and wholism associated with many Indigenous worldviews. Levac and colleagues (2018) argued that the relationship between intersectionality and many Indigenous worldviews can support a nuanced understanding of the co-existence and duality of Western and Indigenous worldviews. In contrast, Clark (2016) problematized intersectionality and questioned whether it was simply a retelling of Indigenous ways of knowing. As such, the colonial history and exercise of power within the context of research introduces various tensions while engaging with intersectionality and Indigenous worldviews, which I considered in subsequent decisions in the project, including my choices of methodologies and engagement in ongoing reflexivity.

Representing one facet of these reflexive activities that occurred during this project, I offer the following positionality statement as an introduction to me as the author and the lived experiences that guided my engagement in the project. I am a disabled settler scholar of Irish and British descent and a guest on the land now referred to as Canada. I am also a white queer

person, socialized as a woman. Influenced by these co-existing aspects of being, I have a complex and emotional relationship to sport, wherein sport, and specifically ringette, played a central role in my childhood; however, following the death of my father when I was seven years old, I faced numerous barriers that ultimately ended my involvement in sport. As such, I appreciate the dynamic and varied relationships that diverse people have with sport. Additionally, as a settler scholar, I frequently reflected on my engagement with participants, in the project, and in the construction of knowledge. This reflection was essential to ensure I respected my responsibilities to participants, deepened the analysis process, and considered how my efforts may have reconstructed colonial domination in research contexts.

Methodology

Complementing the foundation of constructionism and intersectional theory, I engaged with two methodologies: elements of Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2021) and the case study methodology (Stake, 1995). Indigenous methodologies encompass diverse approaches to research and knowledge production that are rooted in Indigenous worldviews and cultural values (Steinhauer, 2002). Importantly, multiple conceptions of Indigenous methodologies exist (Lavallée, 2009). Alongside this diversity, Indigenous methodologies are often axiologically embedded, reflected in their spiritual and ethical tenets (e.g., wholism, relationality, and non-linearity; Steinhauer, 2002). Additionally, Indigenous methodologies generally emphasize animacy, reflecting the verb-based languages used by many Indigenous communities (Kovach, 2021) and exemplifying the tensions experienced by many Indigenous Peoples in relation to the Western concept of disability.

Rooted in my subjectivity and positionality as a settler scholar, I recognize the importance of engaging with Indigenous methodologies to respect Indigenous Peoples and

navigating this research appropriately, while acknowledging that I nevertheless introduce colonial tensions to the project as a settler scholar operating within the context of the academy. As such, I do not claim Indigenous methodologies as part of my subjectivity and current understanding of the world. Rather, I have learned intentionally and reflexively from Indigenous scholars and elements of Indigenous methodologies to engage *with* Indigenous Peoples throughout the project (Kovach, 2021).

To centre the tensions between Indigenous worldviews and the Western concept of disability, I employed a second methodology, with foundations in Western scholarship and epistemologies: the case study methodology as conceptualized by Stake (1995). Stake (1995) defined a case as a purposive system of functioning parts that reflect the positioning of the case within the broader study. Stake's approach is characterized by four distinct attributes: holistic, empirical, interpretive, and emphatic. To generate insight related to the case of interest, researchers integrate numerous methods of data collection to consider the case from various perspectives (Stake, 1995). For this research, I considered the case of Indigenous MSE as a single instrumental case (i.e., the case has implications for broader phenomena).

The case study methodology and Indigenous methodologies are complementary, with numerous strengths when used in tandem. The four attributes that Stake (1995) used to characterize his approach are congruent with the 5Rs of Indigenous methodologies (i.e., respect, reciprocity, relevance, relationship, and responsibility; Restoule, 2008), sharing an emphasis on interpretation, wholism, and the simultaneity of data collection and analysis. I suggest that there is value in integrating these methodologies in the context of the present study to create space for nuanced and wholistic discussions related to Indigenous and Western worldviews and the ways they coalesce within the lives of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Methods

I used two data collection methods: semi-structured interviews and archival research. After receiving approval from the University of Ottawa's Research Ethics Board, I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005), five with organizers of Indigenous MSE and five with people advocating for the sport participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. To be eligible to participate, interested people were required to live on the land now known as Canada, be 12 years or older, and be able to communicate in English. I recruited participants through purposive sampling to include voices from both subgroups (DeCarlo, 2018), as well as snowball sampling using participant referrals to reflect the importance of relationships as part of Indigenous methodologies. During recruitment, I also continued to build relationships with Indigenous sport and parasport organizations by asking them to circulate the recruitment materials and by offering my support in their work as well (e.g., compiling a list of resources, discussing disability). To demonstrate my appreciation for the time and stories shared with me, as well as their expertise, I offered a \$50 honorarium to participants.

During the semi-structured interviews, participants, whom I refer to primarily using pseudonyms except for Scott Godfrey, who gave consent to include his real name, offered their perspectives as diverse people with varying positionalities, experiences with sport, and passions. Within the organizer subgroup of participants, Violet is a non-Indigenous woman who has been involved in sport and recreation programming in a small northern city throughout her career, with Indigenous MSE playing a particularly important role in her life. Solena is an Indigenous woman, athlete, and mother who is currently involved in the planning of an Indigenous MSE. She understands disability through her own experiences as a caregiver and community member in a small city. Kyoto is an Indigenous man, athlete, and community member in a large city who

has recently reflected on his own experiences of disability. He is currently working within the Indigenous sport stream, including in the planning and facilitation of multiple Indigenous MSE. Dulcie May is a non-Indigenous woman, athlete, and mother who has been involved in the sport sector, including mainstream and Indigenous sport, and previously supported the facilitation of Indigenous MSE. Willow is an Indigenous woman, with extensive experience in sport as both an athlete and organizer, who found a home in Indigenous sport and has worked in the sector ever since.

Part of the advocate subgroup, Laurel is an Indigenous woman, athlete, coach, and advocate for the sport participation of diverse Indigenous Peoples in her role at a provincial Aboriginal Sport Body (ASB). Her understanding of disability has been shaped in part by the influence of disability culture on her family. Scott Godfrey is a man of Indigenous and European ancestry who has been involved in advocacy within adaptive sport and recreation contexts for decades and currently runs adaptive lacrosse programming. Sara is an Indigenous woman, athlete, coach, mentor, and advocate who is deeply involved, in many unique roles, in the Indigenous and parasport streams. Eileen is a non-Indigenous woman, athlete, and advocate who has been involved in parasport for many years, with experience facilitating regular programming, organizing large-scale events, and working at the organizational level to promote the participation of diverse athletes who experience disability. Fern is a non-Indigenous woman who has been involved previously in sport and recreation within Indigenous communities and now contributes this perspective to her role with a parasport organization.

As suggested by Kovach (2021), I began each interview by positioning myself and how I came to this research, as well as offering a story of my involvement in sport. Given their semi-structured nature, the interviews were fluid and shaped by my reciprocal engagement with each

participant, with the conversations lasting an average of seventy-nine minutes. All 10 interviews were conducted online using Zoom and transcribed verbatim, after which the transcripts were returned to participants for their review.

Archival Research

To add depth to my conceptualization of the case, I also generated data by engaging with archival documents available from Indigenous MSE, including staging manuals and policies (Cullen & Castleden, 2023). I conducted numerous grey and academic literature searches between May 2024 and May 2025 and compiled a list of Indigenous MSE across the land known as Canada. I restricted the inclusion of resources to community-based, multi-year events that incorporated the participation of multiple communities. I then critically examined the documents available on the websites of Indigenous MSE, including staging manuals, volunteer onboarding resources, past and present participant categories (i.e., gender, age, skill level), and sport technical rule manuals, to learn more about Indigenous MSE, and particularly the categories and events available for participation. For additional context, I also noted organization-level information, such as mission statements, guiding policies, and core values, as well as specific policies related to equity, diversity, and inclusion (e.g., accessibility statements, anti-discrimination policies, safe sport policies). Throughout this process, I engaged in ongoing reflexive journaling to critically examine the archives as sites of power (McKee & Forsyth, 2019).

Analysis

Sensitized by my use of constructionism and intersectional theory, I analyzed the data generated during interviews and through archival research using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to construct insight related to the instrumental case study of Indigenous MSE (Braun &

Clarke, 2019). Using RTA, insight is constructed through the researcher's active engagement with the data, meaning that my engagement in intersectional reflexivity through journaling was imperative to becoming attuned to my subjectivity as a researcher and the wider social context of the research (Rodriguez & Ridgeway, 2023). I conducted the six phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), while allowing the process to be thoughtful and iterative (Kovach, 2021). Supported by intersectional theory, I examined the co-existing structures and the associated privilege and oppression to construct three themes related to the opportunities for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, as constructed by the organizers of Indigenous MSE and advocates in the sport sector.

Findings

The (In)Visibility of Disability

The first theme I constructed was the (in)visibility of disability in the context of Indigenous MSE as represented in the archives and reflected in the perceptions of organizers and advocates. In the context of Indigenous MSE, there exists minimal formalized policies related to disability. Throughout my engagement with the available archives, I noted only one Indigenous MSE, Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Summer Games, which included a category of disability-specific sport – in this case, Special Olympics. While some participants stated they were aware of Special Olympics' involvement in at least one previous iteration of NAIG between 2000 and 2010, this was often the extent of their knowledge of the inclusion of Special Olympics at NAIG, and I struggled to find further information about this, identifying only one document, the minutes of a Saskatoon City Council meeting on March 26th, 2007, that referenced a Special Olympics category at NAIG in the same timeframe. Beyond the Nova Scotia Mi'kmaw Summer Games

and this Saskatoon City Council document, the current and present participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability was largely invisible within the context of Indigenous MSE.

Reflecting what I noted while engaging with available archives, several participants perceived a similar (in)visibility of disability in the context of Indigenous MSE in their experiences as organizers and attendees at various iterations of Indigenous MSE. For example, Willow emphasized that while NAIG is not a *mainstream* event, it is largely an able-bodied sport space: “The experience really is that the Games cater to able bodied. It's not something that is really promoted or structured in a way that allows for really open participation from people with physical or intellectual disabilities.”

Kyoto added important nuance to the invisibility of disability. He recounted his experience at a recent iteration of NAIG and said, “So, I didn't see anybody [with a disability]. But that doesn't mean there isn't any.” Reflecting this, participants told stories of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and their participation in Indigenous MSE – despite a current lack of formal categories for athletes who experience disability and the absence of formal policies supporting them. For example, Solena highlighted that her friend who experiences disability has been deeply involved in numerous iterations of an Indigenous MSE as a sport official. She emphasized that his existing relationships with the staff at local venues, formed as a member of the host community, and his fellow officials fulfill his support needs, meaning that he is able to give back to his community, be a role model, and enjoy the Games.

There exist numerous tensions related to the (in)visibility of disability and the able-bodied norms and structures within the context of Indigenous MSE. For example, Willow described her interactions with a participant during tryouts for NAIG in recent years:

We thought, why can't he just come compete in canoe/kayak with the rest of the team? He can do it... And it was fine. So, we were really excited because we offered him a spot. But in the end, the family was so apprehensive about how he might be treated. Not by our team, [but] how he might be treated at the event. We were trying to set it up for success, but the family was just too apprehensive. And you know, fair enough, right? Because if there isn't the right training for volunteers, or, even like prepping other athletes on the other teams, it could become a negative experience for him.

Fern directly addressed the tensions surrounding the place of disability at Indigenous MSE as a result of this invisibility:

I know, like, maybe early 2000s there was a Special Olympics at NAIG, at least one, maybe two years. And I think that, because that relational piece or like the why and purpose of that partnership maybe wasn't defined or established, I think that was an experience that kind of came and went and folks were maybe unsure about like what this meant or why folks were there... not to say people didn't have like a positive experience, but I think..., what's the purpose and, like, where are we hoping to go together?

As such, it may be important to understand the (in)visibility of disability as dynamic, as opposed to a static dichotomy, and intertwined with the relational experiences within the context of Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Future Possibilities

In considering the possibilities for the future of Indigenous MSE, participants discussed the many ways that organizers of Indigenous MSE can intentionally promote and create space for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. The participants highlighted various integration, inclusion, and disability-specific program models that may be able to inform future changes. One

participant who was involved with a provincial ASB, Dulcie May, shared, “I think there's a lot of integration - from when I was involved.” In her experiences, creating opportunities for parasport programming was discussed; however, integration was a more feasible approach to promoting the sport participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, given the limited resources available at the time in Indigenous sport. Scott Godfrey offered his perspective as an advocate promoting the sport participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, highlighting the value in a shared space such as at an Indigenous MSE:

I think that accessibility is that creation of a community. Sometimes we want to create purple or green. We don't just want red on this side, which is mainstream, and blue on this side, which is adapted. Sometimes creating purple and green, by taking those two colours and overlapping, is when real inclusion and real health and real healing [happens].

Focusing on disability-centred sports, other participants discussed the place of parasport within Indigenous MSE. However, Violet shared that the addition of parasports into current Indigenous MSE would be difficult, if not impossible. In particular, she attributed this to the capacity of the MSEs and the maximum number of sports that could be included, as well as the potential lack of participants who would participate in parasports. Recognizing this, other participants suggested the possibility of integrating parasports into Indigenous MSE as demonstration sports. Willow highlighted, “There's been talk of maybe a demo sport of wheelchair basketball. You can have a certain number who are able body participating too... that be neat, because it's a blend.” Eileen suggested demonstration sports that would be conducive to the participation of any Indigenous Peoples: “Could you do three-on-three basketball, like wheelchair basketball?... Anyone could play it. They don't have to have a disability.” She also suggested tennis: “You could play tennis in a wheelchair, but no one else needs to use a wheelchair, right? You get two bounces, everyone

else gets one and you just play tennis.” In this way, Indigenous MSE could draw on integration models and perhaps reject the dominance of able-bodied norms.

In addition to being athletes, participants often discussed the many roles that Indigenous Peoples who experience disability can fulfill within Indigenous MSE in the future. Based on her experiences as staff at a provincial ASB and with Indigenous MSE, Dulcie May suggested other ways to be involved, including coaching or refereeing. Sara discussed the importance of participation across numerous roles: “I think sport is a beautiful place, or it can be, and movement is medicine, and if everyone feels like there's a place for them at all levels of recreation, sport, coaching, officiating, volunteering, playing, then we've done something right in it.” Solena discussed the creative ways that she has created space for the contributions of community members who experience disability, such as welcoming their support to assemble gift baskets. In doing so, diverse community members can be involved in dynamic ways that fit their support needs and ultimately play a role in shaping meaningful participation. As such, there are many possibilities for future involvement in many different sport-related roles and based on diverse understandings of sport participation.

To identify further possibilities to promote the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, many participants emphasized the opportunities to learn from diverse Indigenous communities. For example, Dulcie May suggested learning from Indigenous communities and how they promote the sport participation of diverse community members: “They're always running their own things. But how are they integrating youth with disabilities in sport and various sports?” Laurel echoed this: “I think our communities, like, they're a lot more resourceful than we usually give them credit for.” The structure of many Indigenous MSE may be conducive to this learning, with opportunities to share knowledge from diverse perspectives,

including how each host society understands and navigates accessibility in their iteration of events.

Preconditions Required for Action

In this last theme, I discuss the conditions required to implement change. While the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability may not currently be a central discussion within the context of Indigenous MSE, such dialogue may align well with the current values and goals underpinning these sport spaces and begin action towards disability justice. In many ways, the current conditions of Indigenous MSE align well with the promotion of further opportunities for the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Sara, who has been deeply involved in Indigenous sport for years, discussed the approach through which Indigenous MSE can be further aligned with disability justice in sport contexts. She shared,

I think it's something that should have always been there. So, it's kind of looking at that concept of equality into equity into justice, where justice is that end goal of not needing the equity pieces in place because we've taken down the barriers or the policies which have, that prevented Indigenous people with physical and cognitive disabilities from feeling like they could participate at all those levels.

To action disability justice and mitigate the challenges associated with the limited resources available to Indigenous MSE, Dulcie May suggested, “It would also be interesting to see, like, what are the parasport organizations doing for Indigenous inclusion?” As such, building solidarity with other organizations may be an important foundation upon which to create change. Advocates within the parasport stream echoed this and discussed various ways they could support efforts to promote the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Fern, an advocate working at a national parasport organization, suggested the importance of working across the silos of the sport system to cultivate possibilities for the future:

How can we complement each other instead of overlap so folks can access both? How can we include X here or different things there and like really start to work and integrate the sports systems a little better or work alongside each other a little better, that they're more complementary and not competing?

Another advocate, Eileen, echoed this: “How can we best support each other so that we can be kind of partners rather than both trying to change the world independently?” Guided by a similar emphasis on partnerships, Scott Godfrey discussed his experiences building relationships with Indigenous communities; specifically, he highlighted the importance of being invited into communities: “I don't think those are bad doors to have to have someone open from the other side.” As such, the relationships between many organizations and communities are imperative to cultivate change, while also respecting the tensions that exist within the colonial context of the Canadian sport system.

In addition to forging relationships between Indigenous and parasport organizations, Laurel, an advocate working at a provincial ASB, suggested the importance of engaging with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and eliciting their perspectives to lead this advocacy:

You wouldn't want somebody coming to tell you what kind of programming you should be doing or program, like, you should want to be asked, I guess, in terms of like, “What do you see yourself in? What kind of sports do you want to do?”

While engaging with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability is imperative to creating change together, Laurel added nuance to this by emphasizing the need to connect further with

Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and build knowledge of Indigenous communities' needs related to disability. She shared, "In terms of programming for [Indigenous] people experiencing disability, because we don't really, we don't have any of that data... I think it's something that we do need to capture that data and understand."

While the perspectives of diverse people and communities are needed to cultivate change, it is also imperative that people and organizations are guided by a willingness to try and learn from these diverse perspectives. For example, Sara noted:

It's having that table and having enough chairs so everyone can feel like they have a seat at it, and then how do we navigate it because it's going to be different from Indigenous person to person and community to community... And I've had conversations with people where you can tell that they're scared to ask... but if you can receive the questions and take it that they're coming from a genuine place rather than I think from ignorance or unknowing at times... at least they were comfortable enough to ask, and now you've given them something or you've connected them with someone else and then what ripple effect is that going to have?

Throughout this project, many participants' perspectives have influenced my own attitude towards disability justice and activism. Specifically, I have developed a deeper appreciation for the complexities that exist in doing this work, as well as the importance of rejecting rigid Western notions of right/wrong in favour of focusing on creating space for rich conversations instead. Complementing the willingness to learn and make mistakes, Eileen highlighted that people and organizations must first commit to disability justice and to promoting the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, while recognizing that fostering change requires resources, support, and time:

There's been conversations for years about, “Well, how can you include an athlete with a disability?” And it's not an easy thing... You kind of just need to decide we're going to do it. We're going to try and then learn from there.

This commitment is an important foundation from which to continue working and is by no means an endpoint. Instead, Laurel argued that a commitment to accessibility and the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability must co-exist with action and substance: “I can't just go say, like, hey, everybody of all abilities is welcome... we need to have proper things in place in order to make sure it's a safe environment for all.” In this way, many participants also emphasized that this commitment on the part of Indigenous MSE organizations, combined with action, is a necessary foundation upon which to build trust with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and cultivate meaningful change that resonates with the community.

Kyoto also suggested that, given the influence of organizational level factors, sport organizations, including those involved in the planning/facilitation of Indigenous MSE, can implement meaningful changes to influence the accessibility of their actions more widely as well: “If we have some sensitivity training, then we need more of that in order to make people feel more welcome... I think every organization can do well with an annual sensitivity training to make people feel more comfortable.” Similarly, Solena emphasized that, as part of one Indigenous MSE's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), inclusion training and education for volunteers that is offered both in person and online to promote accessibility would be an important part of the next iteration of the MSE. Providing further impetus for the implementation of these changes, Violet emphasized the influence of EDI changes occurring in the wider Canadian sport sector. This reflects the importance of training, knowledge, and general

awareness that is shared among all people in the Indigenous MSE context, as well as the interconnectedness of Indigenous MSE and the wider sport landscape. These efforts are important factors in cultivating an awareness of disability and accessibility and, by creating this foundation, Sara shared, “But I think as more [Indigenous Peoples who experience disability] hear about all the work that [Indigenous sport organizations are] doing, that they’ll come out of the woodwork, or their parents will come out of the woodwork.” As such, there are numerous possibilities to further promote the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, requiring integrated effort across the siloes of the sport sector at organizational and community levels.

Discussion

Indigenous Peoples who experience disability are integral members of their communities; however, their visibility and participation in Indigenous MSE contexts seems disconnected from this. In this section, I discuss the themes I have constructed and situate them within the current literature pertaining to models of participation (e.g., inclusion, integration). I then emphasize the implications for the Canadian sport landscape and the visibility of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability in sport contexts. Focusing on possibilities for the future, I specifically highlight potential avenues to promote the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability within the confines of the current sport landscape.

The Place of Disability in the Context of Indigenous MSE

Based on my engagement with the archives and as reflected in the perspectives of the research participants, disability is largely (in)visible within the context of Indigenous MSE, and there are minimal initiatives promoting the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Without an intentional celebration or creation of space for

Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, this (in)visibility may reinforce the perception of disability as something to be *overcome* or as a barrier to be removed to participate, which is a common positioning of disability within sport contexts (Smith et al., 2014). However, as Forsyth and colleagues (2016) noted, there is value in the visibility of differences in sport contexts to support the participation of diverse Indigenous athletes with varying experiences of privilege and oppression. As such, intentional efforts to cultivate a culture at Indigenous MSE that values difference, including the gifts offered by diverse Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, are pertinent to the creation of further opportunities for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and are complementary to the recent EDI-related changes and policies implemented by some Indigenous MSE.

The voices of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability are integral to further centring difference and reconceptualizing inclusion (Gurung, 2024). However, organizers who participated in this study often described their struggle to connect with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. As such, they often emphasized the need to foster further relationships with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to promote their future participation in Indigenous MSE. Indeed, the voices of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and their insights related to how they might be interested in participating further in Indigenous MSE are imperative to create opportunities that resonate with their interests, affirm their diverse experiences of sport, and reinforce their self-determination. In this way, organizers of Indigenous MSE can reject assimilative models of inclusion that focus on single axes of being and, without input and consultation, define the (often non-) participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability (Forsyth, 2020; Hodges et al., 2015). Hence, to promote the visibility of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability as integral members of Indigenous MSE contexts, the

formation and development of relationships between organizers and Indigenous Peoples who experience disability are imperative, while also welcoming their contributions in diverse roles within Indigenous MSE contexts.

Parasport, Integration, and/or Inclusion

In considering how to address the exclusionary aspects of Indigenous MSE, some participants suggested the integration of parasport as an important way to create space for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. The emphasis on parasport may be, in part, related to the perceptions shared by participants in the current study of the current constructions of Indigenous MSE as primarily based on able-bodied norms and a reflection of single axis understandings of being. In the literature, many scholars have discussed the value of parasport for the reconstruction of able-body norms, while also problematizing aspects including the categorizations of para-athletes (Lawson et al., 2023; Silva & Howe, 2018) and the emphasis on attaining a particular definition of success (Silva & Howe, 2018). With this, I question the role of diagnoses and their inaccessibility for many people (Lawson et al., 2023), as well as the potential rejection of Western colonial medical diagnoses by some Indigenous Peoples who experience disability (Kapp, 2011). The parasport system is more complex than simply a model of inclusion or adaptive category. The complexity of the parasport system, combined with the constraints in the Indigenous MSE format (e.g., the maximum number of sports allowed at each event) and the differing robustness of the parasport presence in each host community, all pose barriers to the integration of parasport into Indigenous MSE. At the same time, there is a wealth of knowledge and many passionate people who may be able to offer invaluable insight related to accessibility.

Beyond the potential addition of parasports in Indigenous MSE, the consideration of accessibility is imperative to create environments that are conducive to the participation in

Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and the rejection of marginalization they experience in settler-colonial capitalist society. By creating a culture of accessibility, organizers of Indigenous MSE could create space for and adapt to the access needs of each person, based on their wholistic being and co-existing experiences of privilege and oppression. The intentional efforts to foster accessibility are particularly pertinent to sport contexts, in which the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability is common (Quinn, 2020). By expending effort to further consider accessibility, organizers of Indigenous MSE could create additional opportunities for the sport participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, while also contributing to a broader shift in the environment at events that would begin to reflect disability justice.

The Articulations of the Streams in the Canadian Sport System

Many scholars in the literature have discussed the articulations between the various streams of the Canadian sport system, including the mainstream and parasport (Hammond et al., 2022; Patatas et al., 2020), as well as mainstream and Indigenous sport (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013; Hurl, 2017). Though perspectives related to the articulations between Indigenous and parasport are not widely available, these systems are interdependent and interrelated, much like the mainstream and Indigenous sport systems, which have been represented in the double helix (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013). Given the intersecting aspects of being that shape the lives of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability (Lovern, 2024), the deepening of relationships across these siloed systems may be pertinent to consider the creation of further opportunities for participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, including the exploration of the place of parasport at Indigenous MSE. To guide the formation and deepening of these relationships between these silos, it may be useful to engage with understandings of

braiding common to many Indigenous cultures, which are often understood as acts of care and ongoing generative processes based on shared values. Similar application of braiding analogies, terminology, and practices have been explored by some scholars across diverse fields of study in their respective projects that often integrate both Western and Indigenous knowledge systems (Jimmy et al., 2019; Mehlretter et al., 2024). Reflecting the possibilities created through the generative process of braiding, some participants in this study highlighted the role that, in their experiences, the exchange of knowledges and sharing of resources across the sport streams had on the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and the creation of further opportunities for their participation in Indigenous MSE. Much like my engagement as a non-Indigenous researcher, many advocates and organizers in this research also recognized the importance of reflecting on the settler-colonial tensions existing within the Canadian sport system and, as such, relationally negotiating their roles within their relationships with organizers of Indigenous MSE.

Additionally, the creation of relationships and collaboration across these streams relies on the capacities and priorities of organizers and advocates across the sport sector. Hence, it would be interesting to understand how people within the Indigenous and parasport streams conceptualize and consider their accountability to Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, particularly given the siloed understandings of being prevalent within sport contexts. In her discussion of accountability and disability justice, Yellowhorse (2023), a Diné scholar, emphasized the idea of interdependence and the infinite connections between beings, supported by an ethic of care and intentional action towards shared goals. Drawing on insight such as this related to an environment conducive to disability justice for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, people in the Indigenous and parasport streams may be able to begin braiding these

streams to build solidarity, based on their shared goals and values, and together promote the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Additionally, sectors beyond sport, including research, can contribute to this solidarity and play a role in creating space in Indigenous MSE for the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

To further consider the accountability to Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, the attitudes and perceptions of organizers involved with the host societies of Indigenous MSE may provide valuable insight. In constructing each unique iteration of Indigenous MSE, the host society generally integrates community-specific activities and cultures. Representatives of the host society could thus create space for the contributions of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and reflect the diversity and uniqueness of the community in which the events occur. This is particularly important when considering the intersectional nature of disability that changes based on many aspects of each community context, including the diverse worldviews of Indigenous communities and geographic location (Lovern, 2022). As such, the diverse knowledges and perspectives of people in the context of Indigenous MSE, including organizers, advocates, community members, volunteers, and athletes, all play a role in the creation of further opportunities for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Conclusion

While there are various avenues to promote the further participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability (e.g., inclusion, integration, addition of parasport), intentionally creating a place in Indigenous MSE contexts for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, cultivating a culture of accessibility within Indigenous MSE, and forming

relationships with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability are imperative as the foundation for future possibilities. Throughout this paper, I began to consider how a third strand, parasport, might exist within the double helix model of the Canadian sport system (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013). As such, it is my hope that this research provides a foundation for further conversation across these three strands of Indigenous, mainstream, and parasport to begin braiding these streams and consider how organizations in each stream can, together, promote the opportunities for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

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Chapter Three

Cultivating Presence and Creating Possibilities: Indigenous Multi-Sport Events and the Contributions of Indigenous Peoples Who Experience Disability

Abstract

Indigenous multi-sport events (MSE) represent important cultural spaces, with implications for the rejection of settler-colonial capitalist domination in sport. Many Indigenous Peoples have shared what their participation in Indigenous MSE has meant to them, offering opportunities to gather, demonstrate sport excellence, and share their cultures. Within the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples that are widely available, Indigenous Peoples who experience disability are not represented and, as a result, are largely invisible in the context of Indigenous MSE. Responding to this, I examined the contributions to Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and/or their perspectives related to the possibilities to further shape these contexts. Using intersectional theory, qualitative descriptive methodology, and elements of Indigenous methodologies, I conducted six semi-structured interviews with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, two of whom had participated in the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) and four of whom had not participated in any Indigenous MSE. I then analyzed the generated data using reflexive thematic analysis to construct three themes: 1) feeling ready and open to contributing to Indigenous MSE; 2) cultivating an Indigenous disability presence at Indigenous MSE; and 3) Indigenous disability advocacy in conversation with Indigenous MSE. These findings have implications for the ongoing dialogues related to Indigenous sport/MSE, Indigenous resurgence, and disability justice, while also contributing to the visibility of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and their valuable contributions to their communities.

Sport represents a powerful social phenomenon, with important implications for social change and justice. For Indigenous Peoples, sport contexts can represent a forum through which to resist settler-colonial capitalist domination and foster cultural revitalization (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). Situated within the Indigenous sport stream of the Canadian sport system (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013), Indigenous multi-sport events (MSE) are particularly important contexts to engage in this resistance and cultural revitalization, with many Indigenous athletes sharing the influence of these events on their lives (Chen et al., 2018). However, the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and their experiences in – or lack thereof - Indigenous MSE contexts are not widely available. As such, I formulated the following research question to promote the visibility of these diverse perspectives and lived experiences: How do Indigenous Peoples who experience disability view their current contributions to Indigenous MSE and envision possibilities to further shape these contexts?

To address this question, I used constructionist epistemology and intersectional theory, supported by qualitative descriptive methodology in tandem with elements of Indigenous methodologies. Based on this foundation, I conducted six semi-structured interviews with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, four of whom had not participated in Indigenous MSE and two of whom had participated. Grounded in my subjectivity as a disabled person and settler scholar, I then analyzed the generated data using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA; Braun & Clarke, 2019) and constructed three themes that emphasize the many ways that Indigenous Peoples who experience disability can contribute to Indigenous MSE, now and in the future. Also, I highlight the various avenues suggested by participants to create intentional space for these valuable contributions and support the wider socio-political movements to which Indigenous MSE are oriented.

Literature Review

In this review of literature, I begin by discussing the historical and contemporary sport landscape across the land now referred to as Canada. I then introduce the various Indigenous MSE and the positioning of these events within broader socio-political movements, before questioning the invisibility within these contexts of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. I accompany this with an overview of the many conceptions of disability, including Indigenous perspectives. I then discuss the tensions surrounding the recognition of diversity and difference within the context of sport and emphasize how this has informed the approach I adopted in this research.

Sport in the Canadian Context

The Canadian sport system is a complex and nuanced sector, created largely as part of the settler-colonial capitalist nation-building process (Forsyth, 2020). Despite the efforts of the Canadian government to assimilate and erase Indigenous cultures and ways of being, the Canadian sport landscape has been influenced by the contributions of Indigenous Peoples and the physical cultures they have engaged in since time immemorial (Miles et al., 2025; Te Hiwi, 2014). To conceptualize the richness and tensions associated with the sector, Forsyth and Paraschak (2013) engaged with the double helix model, used by Alex Nelson, Ok'wilagame, in his advocacy, to discuss the ways that Euro-centric sport and Indigenous sport and games/physical cultures are promoted (or ignored) within Canadian sport. The two strands highlighted within the model represent the mainstream and Indigenous sport streams that are, at once, distinct and mutually reinforcing (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013). Given the priorities of the Canadian government centred on the assimilation of Indigenous Peoples into mainstream Euro-centric sport, Te Hiwi (2014) emphasized that the depiction of the Indigenous sport stream as a

distinct strand within this model is vital to dialogues surrounding Indigenous self-determination in sport within the Canadian context. As such, it is essential to consider the interplay and the distinctions between these streams to develop an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the Canadian sport system itself, including the challenges of navigating these complex structures (e.g., securing funding), the affirmation of Indigenous Peoples' rights to self-determination, and the resistance/reinforcement of settler-colonial capitalist domination in sport.

Within the mainstream sport stream, the participation of Indigenous Peoples can represent resistance against the eugenic logics and hegemonic ideals that permeate mainstream sport (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). In the context of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, sport was, and continues to be, an integral facet of the domination and attempts at assimilation of Indigenous Peoples (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). The engagement of Indigenous athletes in Euro-Canadian sport acted, and continues to act, as an indicator of the success of the Canadian government's assimilation efforts, wherein the Canadian government imposed Western beliefs, including the Euro-Canadian Christian ideals of masculinity, and implemented colonial sport policies under the guise of *civilizing* Indigenous communities (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). However, Indigenous Peoples have and continue to engage in various Indigenous physical practices, often referred to collectively as traditional games, that emphasize Indigenous cultures, spirituality, and community (Paraschak, 2013). Given the use of sport as a colonial tool and the ongoing marginalization experienced by Indigenous Peoples, the continued participation of Indigenous Peoples in both mainstream sports and traditional games exemplifies resistance against colonial domination (Paraschak, 2013; Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007) and reflects the complexity associated with navigating the current Canadian sport landscape.

Indigenous Multi-Sport Events

Representing one particularly powerful avenue for resistance against settler-colonial capitalism, various Indigenous communities have organized and engaged in Indigenous MSE [e.g., Northern Games, World Eskimo Indian Olympics, North American Indigenous Games (NAIG)] across the land we now refer to as North America. Situated primarily within the Indigenous sport stream, these events include opportunities to compete in either or both mainstream Euro-centric sports and traditional games/sports, as well as share cultures, contribute to Indigenous resurgence, and develop cross-cultural relationships (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). The existence and increasing popularity of Indigenous MSE can represent a shift in the narrative of Indigenous sport participation from assimilation and domination to reclamation of sport as a cultural practice, with significant influence on the understandings of self and connection to culture for many Indigenous Peoples (Hurl 2017; Miles et al., 2025). While many Indigenous Peoples have emphasized the role these events have played within their lives, the stories of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and their contributions to these events are not widely available. As such, it remains unclear how disability and specifically Indigenous conceptions of disability are situated and positioned within the context of Indigenous MSE.

Understanding and Situating Disability

Throughout history, disability has been defined in numerous, diverse ways that reflect the wider cultural, social, and political context (Peers et al., 2014). Within North American contexts, settler-colonial capitalist norms and values often dominate critical disability studies and the prominent understandings of disability (Barker & Murray, 2010). Settler-colonial capitalist society is generally concerned with homogeneity and hierarchy that is reinforced by the creation of an *inferior* (Tuck & Yang, 2012); disability, associated with deficit and bodies that deviate from the normative conception of the body, represents one example of the inferior in settler-

colonial capitalist society and has been used to reaffirm the value of homogeneity (Barker & Murray, 2010). While the experiences of disability are intertwined with subjugation, deficit, and ascribed inferiority, disability is also a valuable and integral aspect of diversity that many diverse Indigenous communities have and continue to recognize.

Divergent from settler-colonial capitalist definitions of disability, Indigenous understandings of disability are generally strength-based and share an emphasis on relationality and wholism (Meekosha, 2011). Grounded in diverse Indigenous worldviews that often value difference and diversity (Lovern, 2017), disability is often positioned as a valuable experience and a gift from the Creator that Indigenous Peoples who experience disability offer within their communities (Morgan, 2024). Moreover, Indigenous understandings of disability, though diverse and varied, are frequently centred on relationships and community interactions as opposed to the settler-colonial capitalist positioning of disability as within an individual (Withers, 2024). Based on these understandings of disability, many Indigenous disability scholars and activists have therefore suggested nuanced approaches to accessibility and accommodations based on interdependence and community (Lovern, 2024; Yellowhorse, 2023).

Recognition of Difference and the Concept of Inclusion in Sport

In sport, the recognition of difference and celebration of diversity is complex, with implications for the reconstruction and rejection of settler-colonial capitalist ideology. These tensions manifest largely due to the settler-colonial capitalist understanding of difference as inferior in relation to constructed norms, leading to the erasure of diversity (Lovern, 2024). As such, some scholars have emphasized that focusing on difference in sport contexts can both reinforce settler-colonial capitalist othering/exclusion and unsettle norms of athleticism and sport participation (Jeanes et al., 2018; Spaaij et al., 2020), which is exemplified in the lived

experiences of diverse athletes. For example, Silva and Howe (2018) discussed the numerous opportunities to celebrate and accept the diversity of athletes in parasport contexts, with powerful potential to further social justice movements; however, the authors also warned that parasport, in its current form, is presupposed by conformity and the attainment of hegemonic notions of success. Focusing on the perspectives of Indigenous athletes, Forsyth and colleagues (2016) discussed these various tensions surrounding the recognition of differences in sport contexts and the influence that these negotiations of difference have on the lives of athletes and on the larger contemporary sport landscape. To support diverse Indigenous athletes, sport leaders must therefore attend to these negotiations and position heterogeneity at the centre of sport programming and policy (Forsyth et al., 2016) as opposed to adopting an assimilative understanding of *inclusion*.

Throughout history, the participation of Indigenous Peoples was defined, manipulated, and objectified to fit the mainstream physical cultures and reinforce normative notions of athleticism (Forsyth et al., 2016; Forsyth, 2020). With this, the concept of inclusion was co-opted to refer to the assimilation of Indigenous Peoples into mainstream sports and to signify a proximity to the white middle-class (Forsyth, 2020). In this way, the colonial project has contributed to the erasure of the diverse experiences and cultures of Indigenous Peoples across the land now known as Canada (Hurl, 2017). Inclusion is a highly contested concept in the disability studies literature as well, problematized for the conformity it necessitates within mainstream spaces (Maher et al., 2022). Offering his perspective as a Métis person who experiences disability, Morgan (2024) problematized the common language in equity-focused conversations, such as “‘*identify and remove barriers*’, and ‘*make reasonable accommodations for equity-deserving groups*, ” and suggested that it is “language that still seems reminiscent of a

more colonial mindset and understanding of persons with disabilities” (p. 76). As such, the concept of inclusion is associated with tensions surrounding who is defining the term, what it looks like, and its importance, as well as how it may be implicated in the erasure of difference and denial of how diversity enriches communities.

Focusing on Contributions and Anti-Deficit Approaches

Responding to these tensions in the present paper, I have intentionally centred *contributions* to reflect the gifts offered by Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, respect the many ways they shape their communities, and avoid contributing to the erasure of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability under the guise of equity and accessibility. By examining the contributions of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, I have intentionally engaged with anti-deficit approaches, in tandem with Indigenous understandings of difference, to recognize both the value and *strength* of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, while maintaining the visibility of difference. Additionally, given the value in varying experiences of exclusion, non-participation, and participation, I have centred the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, including people who had participated in Indigenous MSE and people who had not. Informed by these approaches and perspectives, I sought to address the following research question: How do Indigenous Peoples who experience disability view their current contributions to Indigenous MSE and envision possibilities to further shape these contexts?

Epistemology

For this research, I employed a constructionist epistemology (Crotty, 1998). Constructionists position the creation of meaning as a process that transpires between a knower and an object within a given social context. Through this process, meaning is constructed through the active engagement between entities, with both the knower and the object exerting

influence (Crotty, 1998). Within this study, I examined the contributions to Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, as constructed by the participants in the study, and their perspectives on the future of Indigenous MSE.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality is an analytical approach with active and ongoing commitments to social transformation (May, 2015). Influenced by the fields of Black feminism and critical race theory, Crenshaw (1989) first used the term intersectionality to describe the unique experiences of Black women that single-axis understandings of identity and lived experience failed to capture. In rejecting the single-axis models that distort lived experiences and erase co-existing identities, intersectional scholars have conceptualized social-political locations within a matrix model, reflecting the multiple and interacting social systems that construct the lived realities of individuals (Crenshaw, 1989; May, 2015). These social systems are associated with various embodied identities (e.g., disability, gender, Indigeneity) that interact to construct the unique social contexts of individuals and their concurrent experiences of privilege and oppression across the life course (May, 2014). Since Crenshaw's (1989) original conception, numerous scholars have offered additional guidance for the application of intersectionality in both theoretical and practical contexts (May, 2015; Misra et al., 2020).

Some scholars have discussed the relationship and tensions between intersectionality and many Indigenous worldviews. They have suggested the need for a theory of intersectionality, rooted in Indigenous worldviews, to decentre colonial narratives and affirm Indigenous ways of being (Clark, 2016; Hunt, 2012). Other scholars have described the congruence between intersectionality and the interconnectedness, relationality, and wholism associated with many Indigenous worldviews (Levac et al., 2018; Olsen, 2018). Moreover, Levac and colleagues

(2018) suggested that the relationship between intersectionality and many Indigenous worldviews can support a nuanced understanding of the co-existence and duality of Western and Indigenous worldviews. At the same, the colonial history and exercise of power within the context of research introduces various challenges while engaging with intersectionality and Indigenous worldviews.

Scholars engaging with intersectionality within colonial capitalist academic contexts must integrate current constraints and intentionally reject the reconstruction of domination. Many scholars have emphasized the influences of dominant logics on the subjectivity of the researcher (e.g., unconscious biases) and their interpretative engagement with their research, suggesting that this may constrain one's ability to generate intersectional insight (May, 2014; Misra et al., 2020). Addressing this, Rodriguez and Ridgway (2023) advocated for the use of intersectional reflexivity to support researchers in cultivating an awareness of elements of their subjectivities. In doing so, researchers can also reflect on the aspects of being that are most relevant to their research and ensure their intersectional investigations remain feasible, as opposed to attempting to examine every possible intersection. As such, I engaged in intersectional reflexivity throughout the project to cultivate an awareness of the numerous elements of our subjectivities as researchers and, particularly salient to the current project, to consider the colonial tensions within the context of research. To demonstrate one manifestation of the intersectional reflexivity I engaged in, I offer the following positionality statement to introduce myself.

Reflecting my constructionist epistemology, I recognize the influence of my subjectivity and situatedness as a researcher who is a white queer person, socialised as a woman. I am a disabled person of Irish and British descent and a guest on the land now referred to as Canada, with reciprocal responsibilities as part of reconciliation. Growing up, I was an avid ringette

player; however, at the age of seven, my father died and one of the many ways this changed my life the resulting disconnection I felt from sport as both an athlete and spectator. Since then, I have been largely unable to reengage with sport, encountering barriers related to my experiences of disability, income, gender, and age. Given the risk of reconstructing colonial domination in the context of research, it was important to critically reflect on my positionality, including how this influenced my engagement with Indigenous methodologies during the active exchange of knowledge and the building of reciprocal relationships with participants.

Methodology

In the present study, I engaged with two methodologies: qualitative descriptive (QD; Sandelowski, 2000) and Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2001). QD is a primarily Western approach to research that is particularly applicable to studies examining the experiences and perceptions of people in relation to events (Kim et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000). Researchers engaging QD often draw on naturalistic inquiry, as opposed to theoretical-driven and technically sophisticated methodologies (Kim et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000). Researchers engaging with QD thoughtfully employ diverse theories, methods of data collection, and methods of data analysis (Sandelowski, 2000).

The practical and flexible nature of QD allowed me to engage with elements of Indigenous methodologies, which guided my ethical engagement with participants and in the knowledge production process more generally. Indigenous methodologies are nuanced approaches to knowledge production and data that manifest from the diverse worldviews of Indigenous communities (Wilson, 2001). Across these diverse approaches, some scholars have highlighted commonalities, including five foundational values referred to as the 5Rs: respect, reciprocity, relevance, relationship, and responsibility (Pidgeon & Riley, 2021; Restoule, 2008). I

returned to these elements of Indigenous methodologies in the formulation of the research and throughout the project to consider whether my action and decisions were in alignment with these tenets. While my engagement with Indigenous methodologies is essential to guide my ethical engagement in the research, I do not claim Indigenous methodologies, given my subjectivity, self-location, and upbringing as a settler. As such, I engaged intentionally and reflexively with elements of Indigenous methodologies, while recognizing the colonial tensions existing within the wider Canadian context and the academic context in which I work.

Engaging both QD and elements of Indigenous methodologies, I centred the perspectives and stories shared by participants throughout the project, while creating space for the complexity and nuances of the wholistic experiences of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. More specifically, integrating QD and Indigenous methodologies was appropriate for the present study, given the landscape of the current literature. While various Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, storytellers, and knowledge keepers have offered their perspectives on disability, few theorists have integrated these perspectives, nor have they discussed the applicability of existing theories to the experiences of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. As such, the data-driven nature of QD allowed me to remain rooted in the data generated through my relational engagement with participants. Given my subjectivity and worldview as a settler scholar, I returned often to elements of Indigenous methodologies and the insight offered by Indigenous scholars, including Kovach (2021) and Yellowhorse (2023). Supported by this engagement with Indigenous methodologies and QD, I remained grounded in the stories and perspectives shared with me throughout the project, while generating insight related to the contributions to Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Methods

After receiving approval from the University of Ottawa's Research Ethics Board, I conducted six virtual semi-structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2005). I recruited participants via social media and by circulating a recruitment email and poster to parasport organizations and the provincial Aboriginal Sport Circle branches. I primarily engaged in snowball sampling to identify participants for this project (DeCarlo, 2018), which reflects the importance of relationality within Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2021). Alongside this method of sampling, I also integrated elements of purposive sampling, referring to the recruitment of participants based on specific characteristics (DeCarlo, 2018), to recruit self-identified Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and had participated in Indigenous MSE, as well as those who had not participated. In addition to being Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, participants were also required to be 12 years or older, live in the land now known as Canada, and be able to communicate in English.

I conducted semi-structured interviews on the video conferencing platform Zoom with six Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim and returned a password-protected copy to participants for their review, at which time I also asked the participants' preferences for the name used to identify them. I use pseudonyms to refer to the participants, except for Patrick Aleck Jr. *xwaluputhut* who gave consent to include his real name. Of this six-person sample, two participants had experiences participating in Indigenous MSE, while four had not participated in these events. Lochlan is a man who experiences disability, with Indigenous and European ancestry. Though he has participated in mainstream sport and NAIG in the past, he devotes much of his time now to parasport as an athlete, coach, organizer, and advocate. Patrick Aleck Jr. *xwaluputhut* is an Indigenous man, artist, advocate, and father who experiences disability and began connecting to his culture as a youth, with a deep

and changing relationship to sport, fitness, and physical activity. Faelan is an Indigenous man and multi-sport athlete who experiences disability, with experiences in Indigenous, mainstream, and parasport, and has grown up on reserve with his siblings, who have been influential on him as a person. Fia is an Indigenous woman, mother, athlete, and educator who experiences disability and is deeply involved in intersectional activism, during which she has offered diverse workshops centred on storytelling, stick games, and more. Oliver is an Indigenous man who experiences disability and has been deeply involved in multiple sports (mainly parasport) as an athlete, advocate, and organizer for decades, though he recognizes intersectional aspects of being including socio-economic status and accessibility beyond sport contexts in his advocacy efforts. Rose is an Indigenous woman who experiences disability, with a passion for mental health advocacy, and feels pride in representing her community as a university student and athlete in mainstream, Indigenous (including at NAIG), and para sports.

My interview guide's questions related to participants' perspectives on disability, perceptions of and experiences with Indigenous MSE, and the aspects of events that are conducive to their future contributions. While these questions guided the interviews, I remained flexible to create space for participants to share their stories and perspectives related to Indigenous MSE, as well as to respond to our interactions throughout the conversation to consider our diverse needs, preferences, and communication styles (Kovach, 2021). Given the relationality that underpins constructionist research and Indigenous ways of knowing and being, I began each session with an introduction of myself as a person, including my heritage, my relationship to disability, and the experiences that brought me to this research. Reflecting the importance of reciprocity, I then shared a story related to my sport experiences. Interviews lasted between one hour 11 minutes and two hours 13 minutes, with an average time of one hour 33

minutes, and participants were offered a \$50 honorarium to demonstrate my appreciation for their time, stories, and expertise.

Analysis

To analyze the data generated during interviews, I engaged with reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) as conceptualized by Braun and Clarke (2019). Described as an exploratory and non-linear process, I followed the six iterative phases of thematic analysis: familiarization (i.e., transcribe interviews, actively review the data), coding (i.e., organize the data into meaningful groups), theme development (i.e., engage with the initial codes to generate broader themes based the research question), theme refinement (i.e., construct a thematic map of distinct, coherent themes), theme naming/defining (i.e., further describe each theme, organize them into an analytical narrative), and writing the report (i.e., compile excerpts of the data and provide analytical commentary) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout these stages, I journaled my thoughts, questions, and points of tension, while considering my alignment with constructionism and intersectional theory, which is imperative to ensure the quality of the RTA process and research more generally. I engaged in the process with a nuanced understanding of my subjectivity to generate themes related to the contributions to Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and how they envision the future of Indigenous MSE.

Findings

By engaging in a process of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2019), I highlighted the ways that Indigenous Peoples who experience disability have contributed to Indigenous MSE and the ways that they feel they can further shape the Indigenous MSE context in future. Specifically, I generated the following three themes: 1) feeling ready and open to contributing to Indigenous MSE; 2) cultivating an Indigenous disability presence at Indigenous MSE; and 3) Indigenous

disability advocacy in conversation with Indigenous MSE. These themes are mutually reinforcing and intertwined, reflecting the importance of wholism as part of the lived experiences of participants.

Feeling Ready and Open to Contributing to Indigenous MSE

In discussing their contributions to Indigenous MSE, participants generally began with and returned to their experiences of beginning to accept themselves as diverse Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and recognizing their valuable place within their communities and relationships. This acceptance and recognition were essential in their readiness to contribute to Indigenous MSE. Many participants' experiences of Indigeneity and disability were deeply intertwined, mutually constructing their understandings of the world and influencing their positions within their communities. One participant, Patrick Aleck Jr. *xwaluputhut*, shared that developing and maintaining an acceptance of self as an Indigenous person who experiences disability has been an intentional process: "With being Indigenous and with [being] a person with disabilities, I have two of those stigmas that I've had to face. So, I've had to learn how to be myself no matter what. And that just doesn't *happen*." In this way, Indigeneity and disability coalesced within the lived experiences of several participants, which influenced their understandings of self as wholistic beings.

It was through Indigenous worldviews that some participants understood the concept of disability and their position within their communities. Exemplifying this, Patrick Aleck Jr. *xwaluputhut* discussed the role that his engagement with Indigenous cultural teachings and Indigenous ways of being played in cultivating his acceptance of himself as an Indigenous person who experiences disability:

We're here for a reason. We're here to teach people. It's okay to be different. It's okay to be ourselves. We're here for a reason. We're not here to be a burden. We're not here to be just, you know, a fly, I guess. You know, we're not here to be a log... We're here to teach. As such, he was able to recognize the value of disability through Indigenous teachings and cultures to ultimately feel ready to contribute to his community as the person he is. However, sport contexts introduced particular tensions that influenced the development of affirming understandings of self. I related to these feelings, as I have experienced similar tensions in sport contexts that encouraged my unsustainable efforts to conform to normative standards.

Lochlan reflected on his experiences navigating the able-bodied norms that are prevalent in sport contexts and the time it took him to accept himself as he is, with implications for his experiences as a NAIG athlete. Lochlan discussed his attendance at NAIG, emphasizing that it was at a time in his life when he had accepted himself, which allowed him to engage authentically with his team as an Indigenous person who experiences disability. However, he shared that, "10 years before that, I probably would have just like tried to hide it, like pass as someone who was sighted." Lochlan emphasized that the dominant norms, namely individualism and able-bodiedness, within sport spaces including Indigenous MSE, were challenging to navigate. Ultimately, in developing his relationship to these norms, he was able to shift his focus from conformity to an acceptance of difference: "I just wanted to be normal. And whatever the heck that is... I just didn't want to look different or whatever. But you know what, you're looking different anyways."

Other participants echoed these tensions with able-bodied norms in sport contexts and emphasized that developing this acceptance of self took time, space, and the support of others, maintained through ongoing practices. Numerous participants emphasized that they cultivated

this time, space, and support while engaging in cultural activities, including traditional games and sports. For example, traditional games and sports held particular meaning within Rose’s life and sport experiences. She shared that participating in lacrosse, a game with a rich history and spiritual significance, “means everything, like, to me, personally.” Similarly, Faelan reflected on what sport means to him and the role it has played in learning to accept himself as an Indigenous person who experiences disability. He highlighted that, initially, sport represented a way for him to try to *overcome* disability, but his attitude changed: “Overcoming [disability] doesn't really matter [to me anymore] ... I don't really need to prove anything to anyone. ... because [lacrosse] it's my sport.” His engagement with lacrosse helped him begin to let go of this narrative of needing to overcome and prove himself – instead accepting his authentic and whole self.

In cultivating this acceptance, the participants’ relationships with others were integral. In this way, affirming the gifts of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability is a relational experience therefore cultivated through relationships with others. For example, Patrick Aleck Jr. *xwaluputhut* discussed how the recognition of the gifts he offers can become something that is shared with others and, in sport, influenced the relational experiences within a group: “They [my fellow paddlers] love me because I sing in the canoe, and I paddle. So, I have a great role. They respect me, and they love me, and they see what I bring.” As such, the participants emphasized that it was through a recognition of their gifts as Indigenous Peoples who experience disability that was foundational to their readiness and openness to contribute, currently and in future, to Indigenous MSE.

Creating an Indigenous Disability Presence at Indigenous MSE

Throughout the interviews, the participants shared their views on the future possibilities of Indigenous MSE and discussed many avenues to cultivate an Indigenous disability presence

within Indigenous MSE. These avenues were captured in two subthemes support this theme: a) navigating the current format of events; and b) creating space through role modeling and mentorship.

Navigating the Current Format of Events

Throughout the interviews, participants generated ideas related to how Indigenous Peoples who experience disability might be able to navigate the current structure of events to create space for them to further contribute to Indigenous MSE. Reflecting on NAIG specifically, Lochlan highlighted the potential of adaptive versions of existing NAIG sports as a way to create more space for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, while working within existing conditions:

I wouldn't picture having ... like ParaNAIG, but maybe built within NAIG... Cause even when I think of like the sport that I watched at ... the last NAIG... I think of like track and field or athletics, right? There's so many... para events when it comes to athletics... so they always have their sighted counterpart or able-bodied counterpart.

In saying this, Lochlan emphasized the unique histories of parasports, some of which were created specifically by and for diverse people who experience disability and others that have been created in relation to existing mainstream sports. Further, Oliver suggested ways that Indigenous Peoples who experience disability could participate in existing sports at NAIG: “So there is a lot of [people who experience] disability that I'm sure they could do [NAIG] sports... you could do in a wheelchair. You could do archery.” However, when discussing their current/future contributions and navigating the events in their current forms, participants also emphasized that accommodations and adaptations are essential to navigating the current

structures of Indigenous MSE spaces to ensure that accessible opportunities for these contributions exist.

Lochlan reflected on his own experiences as an athlete at NAIG. He emphasized his age, as well as the learning and skills he has developed at that point in his life, as important facilitators in his ability to attend NAIG and participate as an athlete: “I would have been like 30 years old [when I competed at NAIG], and at that point in my life was when I ... got good at advocating for myself.” As such, he was able to navigate the event context, in the absence of a proactive and intentional process for accommodations, by relying on these skills, by adapting to the event context, and by seeking out support from his team, family, and friends. To me, this resonated as a valuable strength shared by many in the disability community, while also representing a skill that takes practice and effort to develop and utilize.

To support his participation as an athlete, Patrick Aleck Jr. *xwaluputhut* shared that, often, only small adaptations were needed to create accessible opportunities for him to participate: “We needed to figure out how to get me in and out of the canoe... Once I'm in the canoe, I'm okay, but it's just, I need that assistance getting in and out.” He continued by describing that these accommodations were explored and negotiated relationally with his fellow paddlers as they participated together. The participants also emphasized the role of accommodations and an Indigenous disability presence in supporting their contributions beyond being an athlete. Reflecting on his ability to adapt to his access needs as a spectator at one of the Indigenous MSE, Oliver wondered, “Even if [I] don't [participate in] a sport, do they have something there ... so that I could go there and watch, and adapt to my needs?”

Recognizing the value of visibility and awareness, some participants suggested opportunities for showcasing parasport and the athleticism of Indigenous Peoples who

experience disability at Indigenous MSE. Oliver suggested that Indigenous MSE, “Should do at least one or two [adaptive sports] to show Indigenous people there.” Lochlan had a similar perspective about the value of sharing parasport within the context of Indigenous MSE, both in a competition- or awareness-type activity: “It wouldn't be a competition as much as maybe just like a demonstration type of game or awareness type thing.” However, Oliver also questioned whether it would be feasible for him and other Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to travel to the events, particularly within a non-athlete capacity and without funding: “I would have trouble going to some of those things because of the cost.”

Creating Space Through Role Models and Mentorship

As part of a future Indigenous disability presence at Indigenous MSE, participants emphasized the importance of facilitating the development of relationships between Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. For example, Oliver reflected on how he can contribute to and shape Indigenous MSE contexts, emphasizing the possibilities for creating role models and promoting the visibility of Indigenous athletes who experience disability:

So, to show that [with] your disability, you could still do sports [at] like NAIG... Show that somebody that's visually impaired or somebody that's in a wheelchair that's Indigenous could also do a sport there... to develop some kind of program ... where they could talk about it... “I do this kind of sport when I'm Indigenous, and I've done this kind of sports that many years”.

Other participants shared their enthusiasm to contribute to Indigenous MSE and cultivate an Indigenous disability presence through mentorship. Reflecting on the importance of relationships in his life as part of how he can contribute to an Indigenous disability presence at Indigenous MSE, Patrick Aleck Jr. *xwaluputhut* shared, “I would definitely be open to coaching and

mentoring and you know, because that's... what I'm all about is helping others... someone did it for me, so I'll do it for somebody else. I couldn't get here alone.”

Similarly, Rose also discussed how she hoped to share her perspective as an Indigenous person who experiences disability and, in particular, contribute to conversations around mental health in the context of Indigenous MSE: “I want to be a coach, I want to be someone that, like, the younger ones can look up to, and have that kind of, ‘well, she did all this.’” As a disabled and queer person myself, I would have greatly benefitted from a role model such as this and found it incredibly powerful to listen to participants share their enthusiasm to provide this for other Indigenous Peoples who experience disability in future.

Indigenous Disability Advocacy in Conversation with Indigenous MSE

Many participants expressed that advocacy was an important part of their experiences, both to ensure their access needs were met and as part of their place within their communities. Patrick Aleck Jr. *xwaluputhut* shared: “And I'm living my purpose... I'm putting stability to my purpose now... I know what it is: drumming, singing, song composing, disability advocacy, motivational speaking. And so these are the things that I'm meant to do.” With advocacy playing a similarly central role in her life, Fia shared the goals that guide her efforts: “I want to make conversations and action about disability in Indigenous communities open, acceptable and the norm.” As part of these conversations, participants and other Indigenous Peoples who experience disability may be able to share the insights they have developed throughout their advocacy efforts more generally. For example, Lochlan discussed what he has learned about effective and meaningful approaches to promoting the sport participation of other people who experience disability:

We did a try-it day. I feel like follow up needs to happen... Sometimes if somebody's on the fence about something, you literally have to get them like to the other side of the fence, or maybe an experience that wasn't so positive pushes them to the other side of the fence of not wanting to play.

Faelen suggested that talking about disability at Indigenous MSE could “put more light, more spotlight on the stuff that's happening and the inaction that's happening.” Similarly, Fia emphasized the ongoing work and the necessary next steps to increase the impact of this work:

We are having these conversations, I just feel like we're not having them big enough for enough people to be impacted... Which shows us that we need to have these conversations about culture and sport, and disability and sport at very high levels.

Lochlan shared his perspective on the changes that could manifest as a result of these conversations and increased visibility: “I know a few [Indigenous people who experience disability] that play [parasports], but not to say there aren't more. Of course, there would be more who would [also play] maybe if [they] know about it or had the opportunity.”

Many participants spoke about possibilities to advocate, build solidarity, and come together within the context of Indigenous MSE. Fia shared, “How can we support each other? Or how can we walk with each other down the road to greater access... to amplify Indigenous voices, or Indigenous with disability voices?” Lochlan, who is actively involved in advocacy within the parasport stream, discussed the challenges when this advocacy feels dauntingly individual: “I always find like within [province], sometimes I get this feeling if I'm not doing it, it's not happening sometimes. And I feel like that's almost overwhelming at times.” This resonated with me as a person passionate about disability justice.

The participants spoke about opportunities to promote the sustainability of these advocacy efforts by fostering and building relationships with others engaged in similar advocacy. In particular, the Indigenous MSE format represents an opportunity to support the advocacy of diverse Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. For example, Fia shared:

We might learn different things from different people from different cultures, in different regions... We can learn about individual Indigenous athletes, while also learning a bit about their community or their culture... the exact same thing can be done by also talking about disabilities and challenges but including all those other things too.

Fia similarly shared her perspective: “So, you know, people with disabilities often see things that other people don't even notice. And that's a gift and an opportunity... but in order for that to happen, we need agency and safety.”

In considering the possibilities for the future, several participants emphasized ongoing advocacy efforts and how they could further shape Indigenous MSE. For example, Fia shared her hopes for a culture shift, supported by dialogue about disability and the exploration of accommodations in the context of Indigenous MSE: “How can we all be totally okay and open with having those conversations [about accommodations] on any given day? Let's raise our comfort level so that we can all get better at supporting and accommodating people so that, you know, diverse people are included.”

As such, many of the participants in this study were ready and willing to contribute to Indigenous MSE through meaningful relationships, programming, and shifts in the culture within these important community spaces. By intentionally creating space for Indigenous disability in the context of Indigenous MSE, Indigenous Peoples who experience disability may be able to

offer their gifts, mentorship and role modeling, diverse perspectives, and advocacy efforts to help shape the future of Indigenous MSE.

Discussion

I discuss these results and situate them within the current literature pertaining to understandings of disability, perspectives on accessibility, and Indigenous sport/MSE. I then emphasize the implications of these findings for the wider mutually constitutive contexts of Indigenous sport, Indigenous MSE, and disability justice. In doing so, I argue that Indigenous MSE are valuable contexts in which to build relationships with and learn from Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to promote affirming understandings of disability, cultivate an environment of accessibility, and reinforce the guiding values of Indigenous MSE.

Fostering Future Contributions

The participants discussed the importance of reconstructing their understandings of themselves by recognising their unique and valuable contributions to their communities. Indeed, scholars and advocates have emphasized the particular roles that Indigenous perspectives and epistemologies play in legitimizing disability as a valuable, wholistic experience and as a gift from the Creator as opposed to a colonial metaphor for inferiority or oppression (Ineese-Nash, 2020; Morgan, 2024). In practice, many participants discussed the influences of their connection to Elders, Ancestors, Indigenous teachings, and culture, including traditional games and sports. Grounded in Indigenous cultures and cultural practices, traditional games and Indigenous MSE have value for the intentional rejection of deficit understandings of Indigenous Peoples and cultures (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007), including many aspects of wholistic being (e.g., age, gender) that co-exist within the diverse lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples. This diverges from Western sporting cultures in which people who experience disability are often expected to

prove themselves to be strong and valuable athletes (Miles et al., 2025). As such, Indigenous MSE are valuable cultural spaces, providing opportunities for participants and community members to engage in the cultural practices of diverse Indigenous communities and with Indigenous ways of being that may support the important reconstruction of one's own understanding of self and of disability more generally (Miles et al., 2025).

Despite the opportunities to foster these affirming understandings of disability in the context of Indigenous MSE, there currently exist minimal formal efforts in large-scale Indigenous MSE to intentionally support affirming reconstructions of disability and engage in dialogue related to Indigenous perspectives of disability. This introduces tensions, particularly related to the reinforcement of individualistic understandings of disability and the age categories of participants at Indigenous MSE, and reconstructs the marginalization of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability associated with settler-colonial capitalist society. Without intentional efforts in the context of Indigenous MSE, each Indigenous person who experiences disability must develop this affirming understanding of self and of disability themselves to be ready and open to contribute to Indigenous MSE. Facilitated by intentional support, Indigenous MSE may provide powerful opportunities for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to engage in cultural practices.

Indigenous MSE as a Space of Possibilities

While the participants' perceptions of Indigenous MSE were intertwined with varying experiences of participation, exclusion, and/or non-participation (Nachman et al., 2023), the events were often viewed as a space of possibilities. Many participants emphasized the avenues through which Indigenous Peoples who experience disability could further participate in Indigenous MSE, including as athletes, spectators, role models and mentors, committee

members, and coaches. Several scholars have similarly suggested the value of role modeling and mentorship for and by Indigenous Peoples within physical activity spaces, drawing on Indigenous worldviews to cultivate circular, reciprocal, and non-hierarchical relationships (Lopresti et al., 2021). By creating mentorship programs and other initiatives supporting an Indigenous disability presence, Indigenous Peoples who experience disability may be able to share their diverse stories and wholistic lived experiences, engage with Indigenous knowledge systems and practices, learn from stories of ancestors, form relationships, and contribute as integral members of the community. This Indigenous disability presence would also support the celebration of difference within Indigenous MSE by creating space for the diverse ways that Indigenous Peoples who experience disability can participate in sport, instead of reconstructing assimilative understandings of inclusion. As such, Indigenous MSE in their current forms may be congruent with some aspects of the foundational tenets of disability justice, including cross-movement solidarity and intersectionality (Berne et al., 2018), and have the potential to deepen the relationship between disability justice and Indigenous MSE. While participants in the current study positioned Indigenous MSE as a space of possibilities, they also emphasized that intentional effort is required to foster the visibility of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and ensure that the futurity of Indigenous MSE is reflective of disability justice for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Advocacy In and Beyond Indigenous MSE

For many of the participants in this research, advocacy was a central aspect of their experiences of self and with the world, shared through stories of dialogues and future projects oriented towards Indigenous resurgence and disability justice in sport. This advocacy took the form of self-advocacy for the fulfillment of one's access needs, as represented within the first

themes, and on a broader community level. The participants generally emphasized the appropriateness of the Indigenous MSE context for further advocacy and dialogue on the community level, and they attributed this in part to the high level of competition at Indigenous MSE and the ability of these events to foster cross-community relationships (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2007). Furthermore, Indigenous MSE may provide an important context for advocacy and dialogues related to Indigenous understandings of disability and accessibility, given the cultural spaces constructed by the hosts of each iteration of the events based on each community's worldviews, cultures, and relationships to the lands on which they live, gather, and compete.

Reciprocally, Indigenous Peoples who experience disability may offer valuable insight to shape the future of Indigenous MSE and deepen the contributions of Indigenous MSE to broader socio-political movements. Currently, there are missed opportunities to further promote the goals cited by some Indigenous MSE, which include engaging in discussions pertaining to the socio-political experiences of diverse Indigenous Peoples, cultivating respect for Indigenous distinctiveness/diversity, and fostering cross-community relationships (Alberta Indigenous Games, n.d.; NAIG Council, n.d.). Supporting the exploration of disability within these goals, Indigenous Peoples who experience disability can offer their perspectives to deepen conversations within the context of Indigenous MSE, including those surrounding wholistic and relational experiences of disability, the rejection of Western colonial binary thinking, and diversity/inclusion based on the value of differences as opposed to assimilation and homogeneity (Lovern, 2017; Yellowhorse, 2023). Given the intersectional and dynamic experiences of Indigeneity and disability, the ongoing dialogues related to the participation of diverse people (e.g., based on gender, queerness, age, and income) in the context of Indigenous MSE may also

be reciprocally deepened by the intentional inclusion of the diverse voices of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. As such, Indigenous Peoples who experience disability are integral community members who can offer their gifts to the valuable cultural spaces constructed as part of Indigenous MSE to form meaningful relationships and, together, shape the future of Indigenous MSE.

Conclusion

Indigenous MSE represent a space of possibilities, with numerous opportunities to further welcome the contributions of Indigenous Peoples who experience. There are numerous avenues through which to intentionally create opportunities for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, supported by affirming understandings of self and of disability, to share their stories and experiences, including through mentorship and parasport demonstrations. Ultimately, my findings contribute to the visibility of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability within sport contexts and the inclusion of their voices within the literature. This work represents a starting point that can help to inform the future of Indigenous MSE that embraces the relationality embedded within Indigenous ways of knowing and being extended intentionally to Indigenous people experiencing disability.

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Chapter Four: Conclusions

Throughout my master's research, I examined the opportunities for participation in and contributions to Indigenous multi-sport events (MSE) of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Using an instrumental case study methodology and also qualitative descriptive methodology, both informed by elements of Indigenous methodologies, I generated data by engaging in archival research and through semi-structured interviews with the following four subgroups of research participants: 1) organizers of Indigenous MSE; 2) advocates for the sport participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability; 3) Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and have participated in Indigenous MSE; and 4) Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and have not participated in Indigenous MSE. I then analyzed these data through a process of reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) and constructed themes related to the opportunities for the participation in and contribution to Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. In the two publishable papers of this thesis, I discussed the implications of these opportunities (or lack thereof) for Indigenous MSE and the wider socio-political movements to which these events are oriented, as well as highlighted various possibilities to shape the future of Indigenous MSE and create further opportunities for the participation and contributions of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

In this final chapter of my master's thesis, I have integrated the insights constructed in both publishable papers to generate a more nuanced understanding of Indigenous MSE, oriented towards disability justice. I then address the contributions of this research, before discussing the limitations of the project. To conclude, I offer future directions and concluding thoughts on my experiences throughout this two-year project.

Insights Offered in this Thesis

In the second chapter, which was the first publishable paper of this thesis, I examined the opportunities for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Based on the data generated during interviews and through archival research, I discussed the (in)visibility of disability, influenced by single axis understandings of being that are prevalent within sport contexts, and the able-bodied norms prevalent within Indigenous MSE contexts. Despite these tensions surrounding disability in the context of Indigenous MSE, the organizers and advocates who participated in interviews suggested that there are numerous possibilities to create further opportunities for the participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, including as referees, athletes, and organizers, by intentionally creating space for their contributions to such events. To support this, there are various resources, relationships, and factors that both organizers and advocates discussed as preconditions for this intentional action. Examples of these preconditions include a culture of accessibility at events, the explorations of opportunities for inclusion and integration, and the elicitation of insight and support, informed by braiding practices and the engagement with Indigenous and Western knowledges (Jimmy et al., 2019; Mehlretter et al., 2024), from the parasport stream of the Canadian sport system.

In the second paper of my thesis, I examined the contributions to Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, and their perspectives related to opportunities to further contribute to events. Based on the data generated during interviews, I constructed insights related to the development of affirming understandings of disability, rooted in diverse Indigenous worldviews, which form a necessary foundation from which to welcome and celebrate the contributions of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Reciprocally, supporting the development of such attitudes towards disability may be possible within the context of

Indigenous MSE, given the importance of traditional sports/games and Indigenous ways of being to the participants' development of affirming understandings of self. Finally, I highlighted the ways that the advocacy of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability can both deepen the roles of Indigenous MSE within broader socio-political movements, primarily Indigenous resurgence and disability justice, and provide an important platform to amplify the voices of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Integrating Insights from Each Paper

By integrating the insights from each paper, I argue that Indigenous MSE in their current forms have strong foundations from which to create opportunities to further welcome the contributions of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Participants in the current study across all subgroups recognized that, despite the influence of single axis understandings of being and the siloing of the sport sector, Indigenous Peoples who experience disability should have places in Indigenous MSE. To address an existing disconnect between these attitudes and the opportunities available for the participation, organizers and advocates highlighted the importance of developing or deepening relationships with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Complementary to this, Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, in this project, shared their willingness and interest in contributing to Indigenous MSE; however, to ensure Indigenous Peoples who experience disability are able to contribute and receive deserved recognition through visibility and celebration for doing so, organizers of Indigenous MSE must demonstrate their commitments to cultivating visible space for the contributions of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, celebrating difference and overtly rejecting exclusionary practices prevalent within many sport contexts.

Contributing to the exclusionary practices associated with many sport contexts, the dominant norms, constructed primarily by settler-colonial capitalism, exist across and beyond mainstream sport, influencing Indigenous and parasport streams as well. As such, many participants in the current study, across all subgroups, emphasized the able-bodied norms prevalent in Indigenous MSE contexts and the ways that these norms influence the structure of events (e.g., sports represented at events) as well as the subjective experiences of athletes at events (e.g., advocating for accommodations, hiding aspects of self). As resistance against these norms, organizers, advocates, and Indigenous Peoples who experience disability offered numerous avenues through which to cultivate further space for the contributions of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. For example, many participants highlighted the creation of mentorship programs, demonstrations of parasport, and fostering an environment of accessibility in the context of Indigenous MSE as avenues through which they could further contribute to Indigenous MSE. These opportunities may therefore create space for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to provide their invaluable insight to shape Indigenous MSE contexts and deepen the role of Indigenous MSE within ongoing advocacy.

There are numerous points of synergy between disability-related activism and the socio-political goals of Indigenous MSE. In particular, the tenets and values of the disability justice movement are complementary to many aspects of Indigenous MSE contexts, including the guiding values of events and the changes related to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) currently being implemented by organizers of Indigenous MSE. Reciprocally, Indigenous Peoples who experience disability who participated in my research positioned Indigenous MSE as valuable community spaces that are complementary to their ongoing advocacy efforts as well. As such, by implementing future programs to promote the participation of Indigenous Peoples

who experience disability, organizers may strengthen their engagement with and promotion of EDI at events, while also creating intentional space for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability to engage in further advocacy and contribute to broader social justice movements.

Despite the many possibilities discussed by participants in all subgroups, there are many constraints within the current streams of the sport sector that represent tensions and barriers to realizing these possibilities in future iterations of Indigenous MSE. For example, some participants in this research, mainly organizers and advocates, often stressed the lack of funding, resources, and capacity within the Indigenous sport stream as limiting the feasibility of some of the possibilities to promote the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Navigating these constraints, many organizers and advocates discussed their rejection of the isolated siloes of the sport streams and their efforts to explore, foster, and deepen relationships across the Indigenous and parasport streams. To guide these efforts, it may be valuable to engage with practices of braiding, as generative and intentional acts of care (Jimmy et al., 2019; Mehlretter et al., 2024). Similarly, exemplified by the stories they shared in the second study, Indigenous Peoples who experience disability participate in and contribute to contexts across the parallel yet interconnected sport streams of parasport, mainstream sport, and Indigenous sport. As such, to further consider the articulations between Indigenous MSE and parasport, Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, as athletes with many co-existing aspects of being and existing at their given socio-political locations, can provide their insights related to traversing these siloed sport streams and braiding these strands to generate opportunities for their participation in Indigenous MSE.

By reflecting on and integrating the insight offered in both publishable papers, Indigenous Peoples who experience disability should be welcomed in Indigenous MSE contexts

as valuable and knowledgeable community members, capable athletes, and passionate advocates. Reflecting the positioning of Indigenous MSE as a space of possibilities, organizers, advocates, and Indigenous Peoples who experience disability can develop and deepen relationships with one another to shape the future of Indigenous MSE together. Exemplifying this, the creation of initiatives, including mentorship, and demonstrations of parasport, may provide avenues to create space for the celebration of difference, rejection of ableist exclusion, and amplification of the ongoing advocacy of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Moreover, to navigate the constraints of the Canadian sport landscape, the formation and deepening of relationships across the siloes of the sport sector may be integral to realizing the possibilities discussed in this thesis and further welcoming the participation in and contributions to Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Contributions to Ongoing Dialogue

My motivation to engage in this project was influenced by my own experiences of disability and my interest in critical disability studies, as well as my journey engaging with reconciliation as a settler and visitor on the land now known as Canada. Disability has been an important aspect of my life, and I have frequently returned to various questions surrounding disability that arise for me primarily in academic and sport contexts. As such, during my master's process, I was grateful for the time and space to consider these questions more deeply, accompanied by authors' perspectives related to diverse and intersectional conceptions of disability. Reflecting on my experiences conducting this research, I have learned much more than I ever anticipated and have developed a deeper understanding of disability, as well as a nuanced relationship with sport and movement. Reciprocally, in the subsequent sections, I discuss what

insight I offer to ongoing advocacy and conversations within the literature and sport sector more broadly.

The Visibility of Indigenous Perspectives on Disability

Within the current literature, Western disability perspectives, generally based on single-axis understandings of being and emphasizing individual deficits, are dominant. While some scholars and advocates have begun discussing disability from diverse Indigenous perspectives (Meekosha, 2011; Rivas Velarde, 2018), engagement with such Indigenous perspectives related to disability is largely absent from the current sport literature. As such, the theoretical contributions I offer with this research are primarily related to the promotion of the visibility of Indigenous Peoples' perspectives related to disability and sport. More specifically, by engaging with Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and the perspectives they offered in the current study, I centre Indigenous Peoples' perspectives of disability while arguing that Indigenous MSE represent unique contexts in which to examine and reject dominant disability models and narratives, such as the overcoming narrative that positions disability as a deficit over which to triumph through sport (Williams et al., 2022). By replacing these overcoming narratives, scholars can instead reframe and affirm disability as relational and valuable (Lovern, 2024), and not as an individual-level problem to be minimized (Williams et al., 2022).

Promoting Nuanced Understandings of Inclusion and Participation in Sport

Drawing on Indigenous conceptions of difference, there may be opportunities to nuance current understandings of inclusion and the cultivation of opportunities for future participation. Lovern (2024) discussed the ways that Indigenous understandings of difference can deepen conversations related to inclusion by rejecting assimilative-focused action. This has particular application to sport contexts in Canada; Peers and colleagues (2023) suggested that the EDI

policies implemented by National Sport Organizations, in their current form, reinscribe inequity and exclusion through single-axis understandings of being, as well as operationalized inclusion in assimilative and paternalistic ways. The prevalence of single-axis understandings of being are reflective of the siloing of aspects of being within Canadian sport, which coalesce and manifest in the exclusion of diverse people (Peers et al., 2023). Addressing this, Indigenous perspectives on difference may be valuable to dialogue within Indigenous, mainstream, and parasport contexts, with particular application to parasport in which there is often an emphasis on mainstreaming people who experience disability as opposed to recognizing and creating space for the diverse ways that people participate in and experience sport (Hammond et al., 2022).

In addition, by engaging with both Indigenous Peoples who experience disability who have participated in Indigenous MSE and those who have not, I amplify these varying perspectives and create space for the meaning associated with participation and non-participation. Recognizing the complexity of (non)participation is important to centre and affirm the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and the intentional decisions they make in response to societal contexts – as discussed by Nachman and colleagues (2023) in relation to the sport experiences of Indigenous Peoples more generally. Congruent with this consideration of (non)participation, I grounded the project in a future-oriented perspective aimed at generating possibilities for the future. Supported by this foundation, I was able to focus on the contributions of participants and reinforce the gifts offered by diverse Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, as opposed to reconstructing the paternalism of mainstream EDI efforts and the positioning of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability as inferior and in need of saving. Additionally, throughout the project, many people within the sport sector shared that this future-oriented perspective resonated with them and was one aspect of the ways in

which I engaged with Indigenous methodologies as a settler scholar, as discussed in the next section.

Reflections on my Engagement with Indigenous Methodologies

In this section, I offer various reflections on my experiences as a settler scholar engaging with Indigenous methodologies, during which I encountered many opportunities for deep learning and experienced a variety of tensions. As a neurodivergent and settler scholar, I often doubted whether I appropriately reflected elements of Indigenous methodologies throughout my interpersonal engagement with participants during this project, particularly surrounding the amount I asked of community members as a researcher and the energy and labour they dedicated to educating a me, a non-Indigenous person. Simultaneously, it was important to create space for the perspectives of diverse community members and negotiate our engagement together, to respect their needs and promote the accessibility of the project, and to affirm that fundamentally any insight I constructed was through my engagement with others. The various doubts and tensions I experienced throughout the project are intertwined with my subjectivity as a settler scholar, as well as complicated by this being my first experience engaging with Indigenous methodologies and my fears surrounding my ability to identify social expectations and respond to non-verbal social cues as a neurodivergent person. However, I noticed that the action-oriented focus and language used in this project resonated with people in the sport sector and facilitated my formation of relationships throughout the project. By adopting this perspective, I was able to communicate the values with which I approached the project which provided a meaningful way to connect with others and form relationships – a foundational aspect of Indigenous methodologies.

By prioritizing reflection related to elements of Indigenous methodologies, my engagement with participants, and settler-colonial capitalist tensions, I cultivated space to engage in deep learning that will continue to influence my understanding of research beyond the completion of this project. Much of this learning related to my subjectivity and accountability to Indigenous Peoples; however, supported by my engagement with elements of Indigenous methodologies, I also deepened my understandings of disability justice. For example, I began to recognize the confluences of Indigenous worldviews and disability-justice perspectives related to meaningful accessibility (e.g., access intimacy; Mingus, 2011), which are reflective of the contributions of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability as integral members of the disability justice movement. Ultimately, I share these reflections for two reasons: 1) to emphasize that this learning exists only through the formation of reciprocal relationships with participants and community members; and 2) to urge other settler scholars in critical disability studies to cultivate space to engage in their own learning related to their understanding of disability, their recognition of the contributions of Indigenous Peoples, and their accountability to Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Project Limitations

Reflecting on my experiences throughout this project, I have identified various limitations that may have influenced the project. While I elicited the perspectives of organizers and advocates as well as Indigenous Peoples who had and had not participated in Indigenous MSE, I connected with various people throughout recruitment who nonetheless felt that their perspectives as non-athletes did not have a place in the current project. As such, the subgroup of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, including people who had and people who had not

participated in Indigenous MSE, was largely representative of people who had extensive experience in sport, whether in Indigenous MSE or not.

Further influencing recruitment and the perspectives included in this research, the language I used related to disability was an important consideration as I formulated the project and engaged in recruitment. Despite my efforts to broaden and clarify my understanding of disability, there are many diverse ways of conceptualizing and referring to disability that I may have failed to communicate in the recruitment posters and emails I relied on to connect with potential participants. In particular, I used the language of *people who experience disability*, which reflects Western, feminist understandings of disability (Garland-Thomson, 2005). While I deliberately engaged with these perspectives due to the potential congruence with some aspects of Indigenous worldviews (Pothier & Reinders, 2024), this may not have resonated with some Indigenous Peoples who experience disability or may have been reminiscent of settler-colonial capitalist domination related to the introduction, experience, and conceptualization of disability (Hutcheon & Lashewicz, 2020).

Beyond the recruitment process, the language I used pertaining to Indigenous Peoples and communities in this thesis introduced tensions. In the “Methods” sections of the publishable papers, I provide participant descriptions that felt reminiscent of settler-colonial capitalist essentialism and homogenization of diverse Indigenous Peoples. I constructed these descriptions to respect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants and shared them with participants prior to publication, which was simultaneously an important aspect of my engagement with elements of Indigenous methodologies (Wilson, 2001), primarily responsibility and relational accountability.

Finally, I conducted this research at a time when few major Indigenous MSE (e.g., NAIG, which currently occurs every four years) were scheduled to occur. This may have facilitated my engagement with organizers and their availability to share their time with me; however, this timing may have posed a barrier to the elicitation of perspectives from other people involved in Indigenous MSE including athletes and volunteers, for whom Indigenous MSE were likely a primary focus only around iterations of the events. As such, I may have been able to increase the sample size of my project if I were to recruit following an iteration of a major Indigenous MSE.

Future Research

Throughout the project, I have identified various avenues for future research that may be of interest to scholars in diverse academic fields, including critical disability studies and sport sociology. Applicable specifically to the field of critical disability studies, the current literature largely centres Western, Euro-centric perspectives of disability (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). However, critical disability researchers must engage with Indigenous perspectives of disability, based in diverse Indigenous worldviews and ways of being, to create space for the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and reject, as opposed to reconstruct, the othering and exclusion associated with settler-colonial capitalist society (Ineese-Nash, 2020).

Applicable to the sport literature, there are numerous avenues for researchers to further amplify the voices of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. For example, researchers might consider examining adapted versions of the many traditional games and sports in which members of Indigenous communities engage. Given the role of traditional games and sports on the development of participants' affirming understandings of self and their rejections of overcoming narratives of disability, researchers might consider conducting narrative analyses

related to the sport experiences of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability and, with participants, constructing alternative representations of their experiences as athletes.

As part of the diverse range of Indigenous MSE held across the land now referred to as Canada, various master's events exist, aimed at creating opportunities for the participation of adults in sport. Given the changing experiences of disability and ability throughout the life course, it may be valuable to examine differences, if any, between the attitudes towards accessibility and disability in the context of master's and non-master's events. Moreover, though space limitations precluded inclusion in the two publishable papers, various participants in the present study highlighted the importance of engaging with Elders and questioned the current lack of programming aimed at promoting their participation. Responding to the insight offered by participants, it may be pertinent to engage specifically with Elders and older adults to consider their sport experiences, including how their contributions may have changed across the life course.

In the literature, some scholars have problematized the collapsing of Indigenous resurgence and reconciliation-oriented initiatives within the EDI portfolios of organizations in the Canadian context (Greedy & Arellano, 2023; Peers et al., 2023). Various scholars have suggested that equating these initiatives with EDI represents the reconstruction of assimilative understandings of inclusion and social justice that are dominant within the sport sector (Peers et al., 2023; Forsyth, 2020). As such, researchers might consider further examining the value of engaging with, or rejecting, of EDI as a framework through which to promote the sport participation of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability. Similarly, given the articulations between Indigenous and parasport, it may be relevant to explore how parasport organizations currently engage with reconciliation and view their responsibilities within the wider Canadian

context. Given the relative invisibility of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability within the current literature, there are many other avenues for future research beyond these avenues I have offered, and it is my hope that my master's research can contribute to the visibility of the valuable perspectives of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability.

Final Thoughts

In my thesis, I examined the opportunities for the participation in Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability, as well as the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability related to their current and future contributions to these events. Though the participation in these events of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability is currently and primarily invisible, Indigenous MSE represent a space of possibilities for the reconstruction of affirming understandings of disability, the celebration of difference, and as a platform for further disability justice advocacy. To actualize these possibilities, the creation of opportunities for the participation in and contributions to Indigenous MSE of Indigenous Peoples who experience disability requires a coordinated and intentional effort. Supported by relationships between organizers, advocates, athletes, and community members, it is essential to braid the siloed streams of the Canadian sport landscape and create space for Indigenous Peoples who experience disability within Indigenous MSE contexts.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Statement of Contributions

The project was conceptualized by Meredith Wing, Dr. Audrey Giles, and Dr. Nancy Spencer. Meredith Wing completed the data collection, analysis, and writing process of this thesis. Audrey Giles provided mentorship throughout the project, as well as guidance during analysis and editing and proofreading of each component of this thesis. Nancy Spencer offered mentorship and insight during each stage of the project, including guidance, editing, and strengthening of the final thesis. Dr. Daniel Henhawk offered support during recruitment as well as data analysis.

Appendix B: Ethics Certificate

Université d'Ottawa

Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

18/06/2024

CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL

Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number	H-06-24-10317
Titre du projet / Project Title	A Case Study Examining the Participation of Indigenous People who Experience Disability in Indigenous Multi-Sport Events
Type de projet / Project Type	Thèse de maîtrise / Master's thesis
Statut du projet / Project Status	Approuvé / Approved
Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	18/06/2024
Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)	17/06/2025

Équipe de recherche / Research Team

Chercheur / Researcher	Affiliation	Role
Meredith WING	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
Nancy SPENCER-CAVALIERE	Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation	Co-superviseur / Co-supervisor