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"What is the Spirit of this Gathering?" Indigenous Sport Policy-Makers and Self-Determination in Canada

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Abstract

In this article, I examine how the process of Indigenous participation in policy-making pertaining to the development of federal sport policy in Canada is connected to Indigenous forms of self-determination. By conducting semi-structured interviews with six Indigenous sport policy-makers, I investigate how their respective thoughts, experiences, and actions shape their perspective on self-determination. My analysis shows that a focus on relationships was at the center of the interviewed Indigenous sport policy-makers' approaches to the promotion of Indigenous self-determination. Furthermore, the relational nature of Indigenous policy-makers' identities was also central to their pursuit of self-determination. The promotion of family and community type relationships with government representatives could be used as an outcome of policy-making, in addition to traditional policy directives.

Keywords
self-determination, sport policy, relationships

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From the early 1990s through to 2005, Indigenous peoples have become increasingly important to the policy agenda of Sport Canada, the branch of the Department of Canadian Heritage that guides and administers the delivery of sport in Canada. Indigenous participation in policy-making culminated in 2005 when the first comprehensive policy document was created. The document, entitled *Sport Canada's Policy on Aboriginal Peoples Participation in Sport* (hereafter referred to as the Aboriginal Participation Policy), focused specifically on Indigenous peoples (Canadian Heritage, 2005). In this article, I examine how the process of Indigenous participation in policy-making pertaining to the development of federal sport policy is connected to Indigenous forms of self-determination. Given the prominence and importance of promoting Indigenous self-determination to Indigenous peoples, it may be easy to assume the obvious and positive benefits of enhanced Indigenous self-determination. Yet the complexity of connections between Indigenous self-determination and Indigenous sport policy is only obscured when such an assumption is made.

Just as connections between self-determination and policy can be considered obvious, so too can the inherent "benefits" of sport and physical activity to participants and the community (Murphy & Waddington, 1998). It is known that sport can play a role in the prevention of chronic disease (Warburton, Nicol, & Bredin, 2006), enhance participants' self-esteem (Bowker, 2006; Koivula, 1999; Taylor, 1995), and be used in the promotion of global peace and development (Kidd, 2008). But even a brief examination of the history of Canadian government involvement in Indigenous sport complicates any tendency to make these assumptions. The history of Indigenous sport policy in Canada has been part of the government's colonialist and assimilationist agenda (Paraschak, 2002). Yet the posited benefits of sport and physical activity within this context are still powerful in both popular discourse as well as in sport policy-making rationales. Rather than assuming the benefits of self-determination, I take the position that the way in which self-determination takes form is fundamental to how it may promote and facilitate Indigenous people's needs, desires, and interests. Although the potential for investigating the connections between self-determination and sport policy are vast, this study seeks to make a focused contribution to how self-determination has been relevant to Indigenous sport policy-makers specifically, as well as in relation to Indigenous policy generally.

I begin this article by providing a sketch of the Indigenous sport policy context since the 1970s. Next, I provide a brief outline of what I mean by self-determination and introduce the double helix model, which describes the interconnectedness between an Indigenous and Euro-Canadian sport system as the model used in the Indigenous sport community. I then outline the methodology for the study wherein I focus on the personal knowledge and experiences of Indigenous policy-makers through semi-structured interviews. The interviews investigate how the participants understand self-determination in policy-making and also how they acted in the pursuit of self-determination through sport policy development. The remainder of the article covers an analysis and discussion of the participants' thoughts and experiences. I argue that an important element of the meaning and practice of self-determination in Indigenous sport policy-making is expressed in relationships, especially family type relations, which focus on fostering and building relationships between Indigenous peoples and Sport Canada. The relationship focus shows that self-determination is not just about autonomy that leads to Indigenous people's independence; rather, it also involves examining ways in which Indigenous people can actively

and strategically work with and relate to others in order to best meet important needs and address relevant issues. I also suggest that identity is a foundational component of pursuing self-determination and that the relational nature of the Indigenous policy-makers' identity is fundamental to their approach to policy development. Indigenous policy-makers bring ideas that are informed by their experiences working in Indigenous policy contexts to their public policy-making experiences and negotiate differences as part of the relationship-building approach, which is, in itself, an expression of self-determination. I conclude that the focus of sport policy should be beyond the parameters of the policy document itself (as the only outcome of policy-making) and that sport policy should include better practical relations between the federal government and Indigenous peoples. Such an outcome would be, in and of itself, worthy of recognition and prioritization since it could facilitate a better policy-making process because it would reflect the aspirations and lived experiences of Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous Sport Policy in Canada

Since the 1970s, sport policy in Canada has primarily been focused on developing elite-level sport athletes for national and international competition (Green & Houlihan, 2005; Macintosh & Whitson, 1990). Indigenous peoples had very little input into the official purpose of sport policy in the 1970s and 1980s (Parashcak, 1995). Consequently, Sport Canada's involvement with Indigenous peoples has been designed to strengthen Canadian national athletes. The government has also pursued a strong assimilationist agenda with regard to sport policy and Indigenous peoples (Paraschak, 1995, 1998, 2002). For example, in 1978, the Minister of State for Fitness and Amateur Sport, Iona Campagnolo, was very clear on the role of assimilation of Indigenous sport when she said:

> …If you think that what I am trying to do is assimilate you, you are right, because with sport there is no other way…except to compete with other people. It does not mean cultural assimilation of the Indian people. It simply means that you get into the mainstream and compete like everyone else. (cited in Paraschak, 1995, p. 7)

The call for Indigenous peoples to "get into the mainstream" is a dominant theme of the Canadian government's involvement in Indigenous sport and recreation (Paraschak, 2002). Indigenous rejection of this call to the mainstream in the late 1970s led to a decade where Indigenous sport programming was eliminated and no new policy directives were created. The values that sport promotes, and the ways in which it is understood, can only be fully appreciated within the cultural context within which it is created. Government imposed understandings and directives for sport limits Indigenous leadership and control of Indigenous sport (Forsyth, 2007, 2013; Forsyth & Heine, 2008; Paraschak, 1995, 1998). Yet Indigenous Canadians have attempted to become involved in developing sport on their own terms (Paraschak, 2002), and part of this process manifested itself in Indigenous participation in federal sport policy-making in the early 1990s.

An investigation into the nature and basis of the Canadian sport system, prompted by the Ben Johnson drug scandal of the 1988 Seoul Olympics, lead to a major shift in sport policy discussion (Green & Houlihan, 2005). The debate shifted the discussion of sport policy away from high performance sport in order to strengthen a participatory sport focus and to promote a system more inclusive of marginalized groups. By leveraging their position as a marginalized group, Indigenous peoples were, for the first time in the history of federal sport policy, able to successfully assert their position in an ongoing working

relationship with the federal government in policy-making. As a result, the major sport policies of the 1990s, *Sport the Way Ahead* (Government of Canada, 1992) and *Sport: Everybody's Business* (Government of Canada, 1998) included policy specifically attending to Indigenous peoples. A number of important developments were the direct results of these policies, including the development of the Aboriginal Sport Circle (the national level administrative body) as well as a number of provincial and territorial sport administration bodies. The North American Indigenous Games were also developed during the 1990s, connected to federal financial support through the policy of this time period.

While the Aboriginal Sport Circle provided Indigenous people with a representative, national administrative body, further developments, including the Aboriginal Participation Policy, came in the 2000s. Beginning in 2000, Sport Canada initiated a process to create a broad and all-encompassing policy statement for the future of the Canadian sport system, titled the *Canadian Sport Policy* (Government of Canada, 2002). The Canadian Sport Policy formalized the two overarching goals for Sport Canada: developing elite sport and fostering participatory sport. Connected to this strategy were additional but connected policies for marginalized groups, like the Aboriginal Participation Policy, as well as others that focused on women in sport and sport for disabled persons. The Aboriginal Participation Policy represents the culmination of Indigenous participation and prioritization in sport policy and included the recognition of Indigenous cultures in the successful development of sport for Indigenous peoples, the importance of health promotion to Indigenous peoples, and a participatory focus that targeted the community level (Canadian Heritage, 2005). The Aboriginal Participation Policy represented a watershed in Indigenous sport policy as the first ever comprehensive policy statement for Indigenous peoples; yet, no action plan was created or implemented after the Aboriginal Participation Policy and currently some of the administrative bodies, including the Aboriginal Sport Circle, are not in operation. The rise in prominence and participation of Indigenous peoples in sport policy-making and the benefits that this brought provides us with an opportunity to explore the ways in which self-determination was part of this process. Was self-determination relevant to Indigenous sport policy-makers during this era? And what did self-determination look like in policy-making in this era of increased administrative power and policy participation?

Self-Determination

The term self-determination has come to encapsulate the many and varied political aspirations of Indigenous peoples. It implies a general sense of authority in Indigenous decision-making and the control of Indigenous affairs by Indigenous peoples. Self-determination, for my purposes, refers generally to the degree of autonomy, freedom, and authority people have to organize themselves politically, culturally, socially, and economically in ways that they feel meet their needs and desires (Alfred, 1999; Fleras, 1999; Maaka & Fleras, 2005; Ponting, 1997). For Indigenous peoples in Canada, self-determination is grounded in the historical nation-to-nation relationship with the federal government, which includes partnerships, alliances, treaties, and wars (Alfred, 1999). This perspective suggests that Indigenous self-determination is inherent to Indigenous peoples and is exhibited through partnerships and treaties and is therefore not delegated by the government but reflects original occupancy and a form of national independence (Maaka & Fleras, 2005).

Self-determination is a contested idea that can mean different things to different Indigenous peoples across varied contexts (Maaka & Fleras, 2005; Primeau & Corntassel, 1995). The complexity of

Indigenous self-determination is evidenced by discussions that raise an awareness of the limits of self-determination, including calls to stop using the term self-determination (Primeau & Corntassel, 1995), the particularities of Indigenous self-determination in different national contexts (Maaka & Fleras, 2005), the realization that a primary focus on official political recognition of Indigenous self-determination is not sustainable (Corntassel, 2008), and suggestions that state government recognition of Indigenous self-determination should be avoided in order to focus on the promotion of locally-controlled Indigenous practices of self-determination (Coulthard, 2007). In this study, I seek to explore the nuances of the discussion around self-determination by building upon the perspectives of Indigenous peoples to understand what self-determination can look like in the practice of policy-making through the participants' thoughts, experiences, and actions.

Self-determination can also be understood in a collaborative way. Maaka and Fleras (2005) suggested that "indigenous claims to self determining sovereignty are not synonymous with independence or closure but embrace references to *relationships* that need to be nurtured in partnership rather than borders that must be defended" (p. 59, original emphasis). More specifically, framing self-determination in this way has been identified as relevant to an Indigenous approach to policy development, which could further a context of power sharing, partnership, and meaningful Indigenous participation (Fleras & Maaka, 2010). One particular way to frame Indigenous sport in Canada is by using the double helix model that makes visible the differentiation between Indigenous and Euro-Canadian sport systems, where connections and partnerships between them are of central significance.

The double helix model is an idea that is based on the double helix structure of DNA, and provides a conceptual framework for thinking about the position of the Indigenous sport system. The double helix model has two individual intertwining strands that represent the Indigenous sport system and the Euro-Canadian sport system, linked by multiple bridges where the two systems connect and together form the entire sport system of the country (Forsyth, 2001). The model recognizes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous systems of sport and shows how the Indigenous system is both distinct from, and connected to, the Euro-Canadian sport system (Forsyth, 2001). The double helix model asserts the existence of an Indigenous sport system that is partly comprised of Indigenous sport leagues, the North American Indigenous Games, and national, provincial, and local Indigenous administrative bodies.

Methodology

Examination of official public policy is central to understanding Indigenous policy. Yet, Fleras (1999) reminds us that although "Indigenous-State relations are constructed and conducted through official policy and administration … [they] are secured at the level of tacit assumptions and patterns of engagement" (p.199). The use of interview analysis provides an in-depth look at an Indigenous perspective of the tacit assumptions and patterns of engagement in public policy-making. This enables a look behind the "neutral" and "clean" presentation of policies to see what thoughts and actions exist informally and behind the scenes (Green & Houlihan, 2004). To understand the thoughts, perspectives, experiences, and actions of Indigenous policy-makers, I conducted one-on-one interviews with each of the study's participants. The interviews were semi-structured to enable some flexibility in the collection of data in the unpredictable context of research interviews (Kirby & McKenna, 1989).

The interview schedule was based around the research question and a set of sub-questions, which specifically asked about what the participants understood self-determination to mean. My questions during the interview also sought to draw thoughts from the interviewees that would speak to whether self-determination is important to policy development. I also asked questions that would help me discern if self-determination, according to the Indigenous peoples' experiences with sport policy, relates to the double helix model. Through this line of questioning, I sought to better understand the opportunities and challenges self-determination presented in policy-making.

A total of six Indigenous sport leaders participated in the study. I contacted them via my colleagues' networks using a snowball sampling method. The selected participants met the criteria for inclusion in the study by identifying as an Indigenous Canadian and by having prior experience with sport policy-making with the federal government. In particular, the participants were very well placed to provide information on, and experiences about, policy development at the highest levels, which included the Aboriginal Participation Policy. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the results to other Indigenous sport policy-makers' perspectives and, furthermore, it may not comprehensively cover themes relevant to Indigenous sport policy-makers and self-determination. However, my sampling strategy and sample size were not intended to be representative; rather, it was to use our conversations as a basis to discuss and examine the dominant themes that emerged from the interviews. All of the interviews took place in 2009 in various cities across the country.

The participants had fulfilled a variety of roles in sport leadership and administration, both past and present. They were involved in various levels of leadership and administration, including provincial or territorial experiences, First Nations band-level experiences, as well as federal level experiences. All of the participants had worked within Indigenous sport organizations; some also had experience working within non-Indigenous sport organizations. Prior to the interviews, all of the participants were informed about and consented to the undertaking. I will refer to each participant through a pseudonym that I have chosen in order to protect his or her identity.

The interview recordings were transcribed and then coded into common themes that were categorized under the subject of self-determination. Through a back and forth process of refining sections of the transcripts into themes and analyzing the relationship between codes and themes, it was found that the themes that were identified were fully represented in the interviews. All participants were offered the opportunity to review my draft analysis and to make changes to my analysis if deemed necessary. However, none of the participants felt I had unfairly represented their perspectives and did not request any alterations to the content or to their pseudonym. My analysis identified the themes of identity, working within two systems of governance, and relationships; all three topics form the body of this article and are discussed in turn.

Identity and Self-Determination

A strong sense of identity allowed the participants to refine their approaches to public policy-making. The identity was described as relational in nature; it is through relationships that the Indigenous policy-makers understood who they were, providing a basis for engaging with others. Much discussion took place around the identification of aspirations and values at a personal level. For example, Amanda noted that for her self-determination:

> Is more of a self-realization about who you are and who you want to be in this world—you first need to understand what it is that you want, who you are in the world. You need to identify those first.

This point becomes particularly important for the approach to policy-making, as suggested by Kelly:

> Before we can get to a point where we can govern our communities . . . [we need to] find those rules or those values in ourselves that we bring to any style of Aboriginal governance.

The role of identity, as a foundational element in the pursuit of self-determination, also extended beyond the personal level for the people I interviewed. The relational elements of identity were central for all the people I interviewed. For example, Mason conceptualized multiple relationships as he saw as:

> Four circles. I see the inner circle as the inner self. The second one as family, the third one community, and the fourth one the rest of the world. In order to be that family, you need to know inner-self. And in order to know your community you need to know your family and yourself.

A holistic understanding of the self as part of a broader set of relationships illuminates the relational nature of Mason's identity. A focus on the interconnectedness of life, relationships, and kinship relations is often central to an Indigenous perspective (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Little Bear, 2000).

The connection to community and the drive to give back to the community are also central to the participants' understanding of being self-determining. Amanda believed that self-determination is:

> This notion, I said earlier, of giving back to the community. It's being someone who can move forward in this world, and make decisions not only for yourself, but for the people who you care about.

The challenge of being community-driven in public policy development is acknowledged by Morgan, who spoke about reconnecting with his home community:

> You get to touch and feel the people. And that's what feeds; I think that's what feeds us when we do our work. If we don't get back to who it's all about, we sort of, we forget, we forget what we are supposed to be doing. Or why we are doing what we are doing. I've been fortunate to be reminded, and hang out with elders, who say, this is what it's all about.

The approaches that the Indigenous policy-makers brought to their policy-making experiences are grounded in a strong sense of identity, an identity embedded in interpersonal, familial, and community relations. The greater purpose of community needs drives both the participants' purpose and identity, which forms the crux of how they pursued self-determination when working alongside government policy-makers.

Working Across Different Systems of Governance

An important aspect of collaborative policy endeavours for the participants was understanding how working within public policy is different from their experiences of governance in Indigenous

communities, organizations, and contexts. This difference is important to consider in order to understand how the participants attempted to create relationships with public policy-makers through their pursuit of Indigenous self-determination. All participants identified a need to understand each system of governance because every group has a different set of boundaries through which they work, as recognized by Morgan:

> The Aboriginal people have to recognize the government has to work in their system, and that the [government] people trying to move the policy were guided by certain parameters . . . [as the government officials] were restricted by mechanisms and policies in Sport Canada.

A prominent example of these differences that participants discussed was the difference between a top-down approach in public policy development and the bottom-up approach that can be an element of governance in Indigenous contexts. The participants (Melanie, Dylan, Amanda, and Kelly) noted that the top-down approach in public policy-making contributed to a perspective in which decisions were not always open to debate because, in this dynamic, Indigenous sport leaders felt that the legitimacy of their perspectives and authority on sport issues were not always fully embraced and recognized. Many of the participants (Morgan, Melanie, Amanda, Mason, and Kelly) spoke about the importance of getting involved and connected at the community level, and then basing governance decisions upon the information gained in local contexts. This perspective enables formation of an open space for dialogue, which was identified as being different from public policy development:

> Policy review committee [was] held behind closed doors . . . decisions [were] made behind closed doors . . . [and] lobbying . . . wasn't open [for] discussion. So it's a totally different approach for getting something implemented within the . . . government system than it was within our own. I still see that every day . . . you don't get to have open and frank discussion amongst all constituents. (Kelly)

The top-down orientation affects the nature of the participants' contributions to policy and, in the historical and contemporary context of Indigenous mistrust towards government policy, creating a more open, honest, and collaborative environment is still an issue affecting sport policy-making.

The top-down approach to governance may be limiting in fostering community needs, which were identified as central to the participants' agendas. For example, Melanie spoke about the challenges the Aboriginal Sport Circle (the federally funded national sport administrative body) faced when dealing with the top down approach:

> [Indigenous] organizations are influenced by the government. There is a delicate balance between something being grassroots-driven and creating the agenda and mandate, versus, "you will get funding if you address these issues." The movement of the Aboriginal Sport Circle is very high performance focused, and it had to be in order to meet [its] financial commitments. Did that meet the needs of the community? Are we really serving our community, or are we really just serving what Sport Canada [wants]?

Participants said the top-down approach was a barrier to creating an open and collaborative environment. This is not to suggest that dialogue did not take place between Indigenous sport leaders and government officials or that the government did not come in good faith to the policy table to hear

the perspectives of the participants (Dylan). Rather, the top-down approach facilitated a context in which the government directed policy development and this arrangement may have impacted the potential collaborative energies that Sport Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples could produce.

Given that the participants understood the importance of differences between Indigenous and public policy contexts, they all identified the need to work in and between them. Dylan made this point when discussing Indigenous priorities in developing policy with government officials: He said that he and his colleagues were attempting to "find a way to articulate [Indigenous priorities] in a way that [the] government could accept." Building bridges and connections with the government represents a crucial step in the participants' approach to promoting Indigenous self-determination through policy. The ability to work with government bureaucrats and institutions while also providing a perspective about Indigenous sporting needs is best accomplished by being effective in, and also across, Indigenous and public policy governance contexts.

Relationships

An essential element identified by all of the participants was that of building bridges with the government in order to educate and communicate about what Indigenous peoples are looking for and how they intend to work towards their goals. The participants came with a desire to build relationships and bridges but this hope was different from their experiences.

The strategy of aligning Indigenous interests with interest groups is important to empowering the pursuit of Indigenous self-determination. Dylan spoke about times when the Indigenous community built relationships with other policy communities that represented disabled people and women—who are also marginalized groups within the Canadian sport system—and they worked together:

> We knew we were outsiders pushing for new organizations, new funding, new focus and with that [a new] policy.

These groups were identified by government officials as being a disadvantaged group:

> The Canadian sport system needed a policy to hang its hat on and how it would best address the issues specific to those target groups. (Dylan)

The leveraging of Sport Canada's desire to be more inclusive by strategically aligning Indigenous peoples interests with other interests enabled Indigenous needs to become a priority in Canadian sport policy. It is these connections and relationships that Indigenous people are able to develop to better pursue their needs and interests in Canadian sport. A striking feature of the focus on relationships for Indigenous sport policy-makers was that it was informed by both the prominence and value of the double helix model. Even though the model speaks more directly to how Canadian sport systems can be envisioned, it also served as a highly valued tool in the policy-making process for the participants. Building bridges and connections with the government and sport communities is a part of how the participants interpreted the double helix model, which captures much of what they considered Indigenous self-determination in public policy-making to be about.

The double helix model was identified (by Mason, Amanda, Morgan, Melanie, and Dylan) as being a highly relevant framework in the promotion of self-determination through relationships. Kelly preferred the "Two Row Wampum Belt" as a better model for how she preferred to envision Indigenous sport in Canada because it suggests two separate and autonomous entities working alongside each other. Amanda suggested that:

> The concept of self-determination is wrapped up quite nicely into that model of the double helix [because] that's what we were trying to do [at policy meetings]; we were trying to find ways to build those linkages.

In addressing self-determination and the importance of relationships, Dylan spoke of the importance of the bridges being built between the Indigenous and Canadian sport system, arguing that:

> We know what our needs are, we know how to best meet our needs. But we can't do that in the absence of partnerships, we need the resources, we need the support, we need the expertise. The[re is] a body of knowledge in mainstream sport, and we are going to take that and shape it so that it fits the unique needs of our community.

To these Indigenous sport leaders, a thriving Indigenous sport system is not only predicated on the importance of the difference between the Canadian and Indigenous sport system, but also on the idea that the links between them are fundamental to a healthy Indigenous sport system. The model in this way works as a very general outline for the functioning of an Indigenous sport system.

The double helix model can also be used as a tool for fostering relations and communicating their aspirations when working with the government. Mason, Amanda, and Dylan all believed that the double helix model was seen as one particular approach that was effective when attempting to foster relationships in collaborative policy-making developments. As Amanda noted:

> People tend to get that model quite quickly, it's easy to conceptualize, it's really easy to explain. I don't think it truly offends people's sensitivities about what Aboriginal people want. Because I think sometimes people get hung up on Aboriginal people taking over. It's a good model because it's so clear-cut. For the content itself, and a really good entry point for bringing people to the table, and talking about what can be done. And then you can build those relationships.

The double helix model thus provides elements of an outcome, that is, a very general framework for different but highly connected sport systems; it also provides elements of process, such that working on the bridges between the sport systems is important to their success.

It was felt by the participants, however, that government bureaucrats did not share the same relationships approach. Amanda spoke of a policy development experience in which:

> The policy framework that they [the government entity] were establishing wasn't really set up to build relationships . . . I understood . . . [the government representatives] probably wouldn't let us build a relationship that we were really looking for . . . I don't think . . . [the government] got . . . [the relationship focus] too much. The other side of the table . . . was looking at us like deer in the headlights.

To read the participants' statements as saying that the government did not want any relationship with Indigenous policy-makers is not the point. Indigenous peoples were an important element throughout the development of a number of sport policies and contributed in a variety of roles, such as participating at policy meetings, conducting roundtables of their own, providing input on the drafting of policy, and so on. The process was set up to develop a policy document rather than develop a relationship with Indigenous sport leaders.

A second indicator that the approach brought by Indigenous sport leaders was different from the framework of public policy development was that Sport Canada did not consider the double helix model an appropriate framework for relations with the government. For example, Dylan discussed government apprehension in accepting a separate and parallel Indigenous sport system, despite efforts by Indigenous sport leaders to validate that approach within sport policy development. He said, with regard to the Aboriginal Participation Policy that:

> We tried to get that [acceptance of a parallel system] into the policy, we tried to put that explanation into the policy. They [the government representatives] appreciated the values of those models in understanding why we are different; [but] they absolutely refused to include that in the document. It was actually in the initial draft but as it worked its way up through the food chain people became very uncomfortable about that. (Dylan)

The reluctance to embrace a parallel Indigenous sport system moved policy in the preferred direction of Sport Canada's assimilationist goals rather than in the direction envisioned by the involved Indigenous sport leaders. Menno Bodlt (2000) has identified this general process as institutional assimilation, which points to the ways that Indigenous peoples are guided into public institutions. In this case, this is driven by the fact that Sport Canada believes *it* is the best place for Indigenous peoples to take part in sport. Minister Campagnolo's quote from 1978, noted above, points to the historical consistency in Sport Canada's approach in which Indigenous peoples are called to "get into the mainstream like everyone else" (cited in Paraschak, 1995, p. 7). The needs and desires of Indigenous policy-makers became untenable when they were viewed as being outside of the bounds of what Sport Canada was looking for.

The double helix model captured much of the participants' ideas about what self-determination through public policy development should be, including the desire to build bridges with the Canadian sport system. The need to convey Indigenous aspirations about Indigenous sport to public policy-makers is understood as foundational to their approach and objectives. Yet, at times the relationship approach was not part of the Indigenous policy-making experiences in public policy-making. As a result, one important way that Indigenous sport leaders attempted to promote self-determination was by moving beyond policy documents as the only outcome for Indigenous policy.

Moving Beyond Policy Documents as the Sole Outcome of the Public Policy-Making Process

The importance of developing effective sport policy documents is clear; however, a focus on people and their relationships enables a perspective that moves beyond the policy document as the only outcome of public policy-making. Morgan spoke about the idea of family and community-type relationships. He went on to say that he would deliberately and routinely attempt to humanize the relationship with

government bureaucrats by emphasizing family values and family relations, which he characterized as having openness and trust. What was important about humanizing Indigenous peoples was that:

> Even if the programs or whatever gets developed because of these policy things, those relationships would still be there, and people will find a way to make things work—even after those other tools [e.g., policies] are gone. Because if you don't build relationships then there is no concern for the other. (Amanda)

Thus, relationships are not only important for the creation of a specific policy document but also future policy development, policy implementation, evaluation, and so on. It is the more holistic framework of family and community relationships, rather than individuals representing special interests, which the participants understood as being part of the promotion of self-determination in policy-making.

Grounding the pursuit of self-determination in identity reveals its fundamental importance to Indigenous policy-makers. Attempts by the participants to build relationships can at once be understood as being a strategic direction for Indigenous sport policy, but at the same time is also embedded in, and an expression of, the participants' identity. In other words, building relationships is not just a reflection of how they identify themselves, but furthermore the very process of building relationships in policy-making enables the participants to express their identity in policy development. This identity is expressed in relationship building in routine policy-making activities, like policy table discussions. Public policy-making with Indigenous peoples could be better developed if it could be framed more closely to Indigenous policy-makers' perspectives in this way.

The participants suggested that the focus of the policy-making process of the Aboriginal Participation Policy was mainly around a discrete process of developing a policy document. This is consistent with the rational model of policy development, which presents an issue focused approach to policy development and breaks the policy process into a series of discrete stages (e.g., from agenda setting, to issue definition, setting objectives and priorities, and so on) that is created by rational agents (John, 1998). When a specific policy document is considered to be a discrete entity, Indigenous participation in its creation can be thought of as more instrumental—that is, its function is to inform Indigenous peoples' perspectives to enable the government to create public policy that includes the very important perspectives and knowledge that Indigenous peoples have to offer.

Yet, public policy, as a particular course of public action on an issue, can be understood as always being in process (John, 1998). From this perspective, building relationships can also be understood as an outcome of policy development: One that enhances not only any particular document but also policy-development in the future as well. The formation of the first ever Indigenous sport policy created by Sport Canada was possible in large part because of the strength of its relationship with the Indigenous sport community that had steadily grown since the early 1990s (Paraschak, 2002). Thus, a focus on relationships is not only important to the process of Indigenous self-determination and creating better policy, but also can be seen as an outcome too. From this perspective, it may be better for policy development if Indigenous peoples' input into Indigenous policy is not simply instrumental, but also involves proactively developing relations with Indigenous peoples. This approach may include, for example, bureaucrats becoming familiar with Indigenous sports and culture in order to encourage greater socio-political awareness of how building relationships with people is particularly fruitful when

developing Indigenous policy. Further, this approach could better enable Indigenous directives in policy or enhance the incorporation of community-level engagement in policy-making. For Indigenous peoples, Indigenous policy is not an abstracted set of instrumental directives created to solve policy issues but an important governmental expression of an underlying relationship.

The participants identified some instances in which the level of openness and trust in their relationship with the government in policymaking was questionable. Mason summed up this point poignantly: When speaking about the very nature of their relationship in public policy meetings, he asked, "What is the spirit of this gathering?" This question strikes at the heart of the relationship as it questions the basis for the relationship, the purpose of this relationship, and the intentions that are brought to this relationship. Being open in defining the nature and basis for Indigenous–government relationships could be a very valuable approach to better position Indigenous policy-makers and government policy-makers. Participant responses make it clear that this is not an empty statement but an important declaration of values and structure that guide policy-making; it makes all parties accountable through an explicit statement about the basis and purpose of working with Indigenous peoples. J. R. Miller (1991) argued that, throughout the history of Indigenous–government relations in Canada, the most significant trend from settler contact to the present is that the outcome of the relationship will likely be the result of the intentions at the outset. Whether Indigenous peoples and the government see each other as equals working together or see each other as impediments to their own objectives, the outcome will likely be the result of which perspective is taken. An open and honest basis for Indigenous involvement in policy as a type of family-based relation may foster better relationships, better policy, and rebuild the mistrust that many Indigenous peoples have when developing public policy with the federal government.

Conclusion

The premise of this article is to explore self-determination in recent sport policy development and, more specifically, to better understand the nuances of how self-determination is relevant to the promotion of Indigenous policy from the perspective of Indigenous policy-makers. The relational nature of the participants' identity is a fundamental basis for policy leadership and a driving force in motivations for contributing to policy development. Furthermore, the relational basis of Indigenous policy-makers' identities can be understood as being practical expressions of self-determination in the policy-making process. Working within the public policy system does not always fit with the approach that the participants bring to the policy table. Yet, the ability of the participants to work within government and Indigenous contexts is important for meeting the needs of their communities while also working well with government representatives and institutions.

The participants understood that effectively communicating with the government on policy issues is central to their role and that a good relationship with public policy-makers is crucial to their success. However, the focus on relationships was not always part of their experiences in public policy development, but rather their participation can be described as being somewhat instrumental in nature. Future Indigenous policy development could be aided by emphasizing relationship-building as an important part of policy-making, rather than simply using a task-oriented perspective for policy development. This does not suggest overlooking the contested nature of collaborative policy development but rather points to a strategy to help foster *engagement* on critical issues. By building upon an approach that reflects Indigenous peoples' relational identity, which is characterized by

openness and trust, and engenders respect and concern for the other, is a both a long term and short term strategy that could facilitate better policy-making for Indigenous peoples and begins to answer Mason's question about the nature and spirit of Indigenous policy-making.

Indigenous self-determination, in theory and practice, is complex and fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, Maaka and Fleras (2005) noted the importance of relationships and engagement with the government. On the other hand, there are not only limits to requiring state governments to recognize and promote Indigenous self-determination, but this can reproduce the colonial relations of dominance that Indigenous self-determination has sought to overcome (Coulthard, 2007; Primeau & Corntassel, 1995). The history of Indigenous sport policy in Canada bears out both the reproduction of and resistance to colonial relations of power (Paraschak, 1995). The promotion of Indigenous self-determination will need to be multifaceted, complex, and contradictory, as seen by the need for distance from, as well as connections to, government ideas, institutions, and resources. The focus on relationships must be understood within a context of these opportunities and limits, as one potential avenue for the promotion of self-determination. The double helix model was noted as being useful to provide a good starting place to negotiate this type of complexity.

An area of potentiality in the central ideas I have proposed is that they are well suited for consideration across multiple Indigenous policy fields in Canada and abroad. I have suggested that culturally informed ideas about Indigenous identity could be better leveraged as a strength that could be used as a relevant dimension of enhanced public policy development. This approach could also be used to heed Primeau and Corntassel's (1995) call to move away from government apprehension and resistance associated with the term of self-determination in order to focus on more politically astute terms and ideas that focus on cultural integrity. Furthermore, my central argument articulates the need for cultural relevance to be taken seriously if public policy-making is to meet the demands and aspirations of Indigenous policy-makers. The focus on relationships, as an expression of Indigenous peoples' approach to policy and as an underused basis in the development of Indigenous sport policy-making in Canada, could be used to contribute to local, domestic, and international Indigenous policy-making across various public policy fields.

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