

## Sport for Reconciliation? Federal Sport Policy in Settler-Colonial States

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Article abstract

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## Sport for Reconciliation? Federal Sport Policy in Settler-Colonial States

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# Sport for Reconciliation? Federal Sport Policy in Settler-Colonial States

## Abstract

In settler-colonial contexts, the use of sport for reconciliation (SFR) has received increasing attention from national governments and their sporting agencies, though researchers have yet to track the development of SFR across settler colonial contexts. In this study, we examined how government sport policies in Australia, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand frame understandings of reconciliation. Through the application of both policy and frame analysis to 82 documents from 1970s to 2020, we argue that policy framings have shifted from presenting Indigenous peoples as a homogenous disadvantaged group to more inclusive considerations of Indigenous cultures. Nevertheless, an assimilative agenda continues to guide policy, as understandings of Indigenous self-determination are absent from sport policy documents and reconciliation is primarily understood as Indigenous peoples being reconciled to the status quo.

## Keywords

Sport, policy, reconciliation, settler-colonial states

## Author Note

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## Sport for Reconciliation? Federal Sport Policy in Settler Colonial Societies

“Indigenous Rounds” occur in multiple professional sports leagues in Australia and are meant to raise cultural awareness and showcase historic and ongoing contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to sport. In 2018, Australian Super Netball<sup>1</sup> introduced an Indigenous Round of matches. Marcia Ella-Duncan, the first Indigenous woman to play for the national netball team, explained that “Netball Australia’s Reconciliation Plan working group has put a lot of thought into and effort into identifying and addressing barriers” (Dinjanski, 2019, para. 4), and “We’re putting a foot on that road to understanding which has to happen before we have true reconciliation” (Dinjanski, 2019, para. 27). Yet, during Super Netball’s 2020 Indigenous Round, tensions relating to sport and reconciliation were apparent.

In 2020 Jemma Mi Mi was the only Indigenous player in the entire Super Netball competition. During the Indigenous Round, she shouldered much of the publicity, featuring prominently within the league’s promotions. However, during her team’s Indigenous Round match, Jemma did not receive any playing time. Although the coach explained not playing Mi Mi was a strategic decision for that match, media articles explained how activists and critics were highlighting how Mi Mi’s lack of playing time was indicative of the hollowness of reconciliation rhetoric (Delahunty, 2020). This event, and other similar events, highlights the need to interrogate the increasing use of sport for the purposes of reconciliation, what we refer to as sport for reconciliation (SFR), within settler colonial states like Australia, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand.<sup>2</sup>

Although the idea of SFR is gaining traction, scant research has tracked the development of SFR across settler colonial contexts. Therefore, in this study we examined how the sport policies of Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand governments have reflected understandings of reconciliation over time. Although the term reconciliation appeared infrequently in the documents we analyzed, our analysis of 82 policy documents demonstrates that the ubiquitous nature of SFR and the taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin SFR depend upon particular framings of Indigenous Peoples, their involvement in sport, and their relationships to the state. Initially, Indigenous Peoples were absent from earlier versions of the sport policy documents in the three settings. Through the 1970s and 1980s, Indigenous Peoples were rarely referenced, but when they were, they were described as a homogenous group alongside other underserved groups that needed to be targeted for inclusion. Through the 1990s there was an increase in language that recognized Indigenous cultures as important, but it was mostly in reference to how a recognition of culture could facilitate the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in mainstream sport. Through the 2000s and up until 2020, language has emphasized the role that sport can play in development and in mitigating the risks that Indigenous peoples face relating to health,

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<sup>1</sup> Super Netball is the Australian National professional netball league.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper we use the term Aotearoa New Zealand to emphasize the bicultural foundation of what is currently known as New Zealand. We use terms like New Zealand government, or New Zealand documents to refer to policies or practices of the settler colonial government.

education, and employment. In all three settings, we argue that these framings of inclusion, culture, risk, and development limit the ways that SFR is understood and implemented.

## **Background and Literature Review**

### **Reconciliation in Australia, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand**

Historically, British colonialism in Australia differed from Canada and Aotearoa New Zealand in terms of not relying on, or utilizing, treaties as methods of land acquisition and relationship building with Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous activism in what is now known as Australia throughout the 1960s and 1970s largely focused on this lack of treaties and pushed for the Australian government to engage in discussions relating to Aboriginal sovereignty and land rights (Short, 2016). Although no treaties were negotiated, a process of reconciliation was initiated following the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCADC). As a result of the Royal Commission, the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) Act was established in 1991; while it recognized past injustices, weak policy and political will from successive federal governments resulted in little action (Short, 2016). Beginning in the late 1990s and furthered in the 2000s, the Australian government began to discuss reconciliation in terms of national unity and addressing inequities faced by Indigenous Peoples (Edmonds, 2016; Short, 2016). For example, the Close the Gap campaign was initiated in 2007 through the Council of Australian Governments, and it was endorsed by the then-government and opposition party (Gardiner-Garden, 2014). It involved setting targets in seven key areas relating to inequalities faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Discussions in Canada relating to reconciliation became more commonplace following the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1996), which published its final report in 1996, and a subsequent government Statement of Reconciliation in 1998. The RCAP was the result of Indigenous Peoples' ongoing discontent relating to self-determination and land rights. The RCAP offered a path forward via numerous recommendations, three of which related to a call for the government to conduct a public inquiry into the Indian Residential School (IRS) system; however, little action was taken. Concurrently, the 1990s saw multiple lawsuits via the courts that involved IRS survivors taking legal action against the government. Consequently, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established in 2008 as a result of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (Stanton, 2011; TRC, 2015a). The TRC in 2015 produced 94 Calls to Action that outlined targets for government and civil society to address. Five of these calls related directly to sport (TRC, 2015b).

Importantly, the RCADC in Australia and the RCAP in Canada both acknowledged the importance of sport within Indigenous communities. Volume Four of the RCADC included a discussion of sport and recreation. The Commission argued that sport could provide a way for Australian police to build relationships with Indigenous Peoples, and sport could also serve as a form of crime prevention within communities (Johnston, 1991). Through RCAP, a review of the significance of sport within Indigenous

communities was completed (see Winther, 1994). Winther (1994) noted that throughout the 1970s the Canadian government explicitly saw Indigenous inclusion in sport as a vehicle for assimilation while Indigenous communities themselves mobilized sport for various purposes including expressions of culture, sovereignty, and self-determination (Royal Commission, 1996; Winther, 1994). Based on this report and other testimony, volumes three and four of RCAP outlined Indigenous perspectives on sport and the importance of sport within Indigenous communities, and the final recommendations included five relating to sport (Canadian Heritage, 2005). Although references to sport in the RCAP and the RCADC did not mention reconciliation explicitly, themes of building bridges and relationships were emphasized, and the RCAP recommendations relating to the formation of an Aboriginal sports and recreation advisory council alluded to notions of self-determination.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, since the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/The Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, Māori activism related to upholding the principles enshrined in the Treaty has led to numerous reports and commissions.<sup>3</sup> Ongoing activism in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in the formation of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975 (Sullivan, 2016). Sullivan (2016) argued the Tribunal was both a response to, as well as a strategy for pacifying, Māori activism. And while the Waitangi Tribunal gave rise to numerous positive outcomes in terms of challenging colonial histories, resulting in government apologies, reparations, and in some cases increased self-determination, there are still issues concerning the degree to which the Waitangi Tribunal is simply a continuation of state-led assimilationist policies (Sullivan, 2016; Terruhn, 2019). As Terruhn (2019) stated, “Reconciliation, while arguably important, in some ways also protects the sovereignty of the settler state by aiming to subdue Indigenous aspirations for sovereignty in favor of subsuming them in the reconciled nation” (p. 881).

### **Reconciliation, Assimilation, and Self-Determination**

In Australia, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand, processes of reconciliation have occurred largely because of public, political, and legal pressure from Indigenous peoples (Edmonds, 2016). In all three countries, there are ongoing tensions, debates, and critiques relating to how reconciliation is understood and operationalized, and moreover, how efforts posed as reconciliation may detract from Indigenous self-determination (Corntassel, 2012; Coulthard, 2014; Gunstone, 2016; Terruhn, 2019). For some Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, official state-led processes of reconciliation are examples of the shifting assimilative drive of settler colonialism (Corntassel, 2012; Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Coulthard, 2014; Short, 2016; Simpson, 2017; Sullivan, 2016), through which reconciliation operates as a form of resignation, wherein Indigenous peoples are expected to reconcile themselves to the current

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<sup>3</sup> Conflicts over the interpretations of Te Tiriti/the Treaty relate to the original signing of the document. Te Tiriti was signed by 500+ Māori leaders, while the English translation was signed by fewer than 40 Māori chiefs. It is only in recent history that settlers have been taught that there are 2 different Treaties, that is “Te Tiriti” and then “The Treaty.” Both versions hold validity, but in line with International treaty law and the rule of *contra proferentem*, the Tribunal upholds Te Tiriti. The Government has stated that it recognises past deceptions and moving forward is focused on upholding obligations according to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

status quo (Wyile, 2018). As Coulthard (2014) outlined, the liberal “politics of recognition” that have framed the reconciliation process in Canada are meant to reconcile “Indigenous Peoples’ assertions of nationhood with settler state sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identity-related claims through the negotiation of settlements over issues such as land, economic development, and self-government” (p. 151).

Understandings of Indigenous self-determination have varied depending on context. As Alfred and Corntassel (2005) explained, “Each Indigenous nation has its own way of articulating and asserting self-determination and freedom” (p. 614). Self-determination has featured in Indigenous movements in all three countries and was affirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as the right to “freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development” (United Nations, 2008, p. 3). Importantly, the governments of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand have been slow to adopt UNDRIP in any legally binding manner. Scholars have also pointed out how settler colonial governments have embraced forms of Indigenous culture and self-government, but in ways that operate within and are subservient to existing state structures (Corntassel, 2012; Coulthard, 2014; Gunstone, 2016; Simpson, 2017; Sullivan, 2016).

**Sport, reconciliation, and self-determination.** Sport has historically played, and continues to play, a part in settler colonialism, as a “civilizing” tool to separate Indigenous Peoples from their cultures and to assimilate them to European culture and the national body (Forsyth, 2007, 2013, 2020; Hokowhitu, 2003; Phillips & Osmond, 2018). Conversely, in current times, and as noted in the introduction, celebrations of Indigenous Peoples and cultures are becoming more commonplace in sport and are often portrayed in the media and by professional sports clubs as efforts towards reconciliation, or as bringing people together. For example, professional ice hockey teams in Canada, such as the Edmonton Oilers, have instituted land acknowledgements, Indigenous language broadcasts, game days that recognize and celebrate Indigenous culture, and events that promote reconciliation (Lambert, 2016). Further, in relation to Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, Super Rugby Pacific recently introduced a “Culture Round” that included Moana Pasifika and Fijian Drua teams that competed against Australian and New Zealand teams. Although the Culture Round was not focused on reconciliation, it similarly aimed to recognize and celebrate the diverse cultural (ethnic) groups that make up Super Rugby. However, like our Super Netball example in the introduction, the media presented some of the tensions inherent in the hosting of these events, as prior to the start of the Culture Round, Du’Plessis Kirifi, a player for the Wellington Hurricanes who has a Samoan father, was the target of racial slurs during a match in Australia (Reuters, 2022). While sporting organizations have a role to play in processes of reconciliation, more research is required to determine how reconciliation is being understood and enacted in sport (Rajwani, Giles, & Forde, 2021; Morgan & Wilk, 2021). Importantly, as noted above, SFR efforts need to be examined in terms of how understandings and framings of reconciliation may serve to limit Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. For instance, the situations in which Indigenous cultures have been embraced (see above examples) are potentially reflective of the ways that settler colonial societies are adept at absorbing cultural resurgence efforts while deflecting from activities and movements for

political resurgence that threaten settler sovereignty (Simpson, 2017). Equally, such “celebrations” of culture fit into liberal notions of multiculturalism that accept or tolerate Indigenous Peoples as one of many other ethnic groups, but they ignore Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination (Grande & Anderson, 2017; Hage, 2000; Hapeta et al., 2019). Similarly, Chen and Mason (2019) described this approach as the civil rights/multicultural approach that “presupposes that the marginalization and oppression of Indigenous Peoples can be seen as paralleled with other racial minorities” (p. 384).

The tensions between self-determination and assimilation are evident in the sporting contexts of the three countries, particularly with reference to sport for development (SFD). SFD is broadly defined as the use of sport for the purposes of achieving development objectives (Sport and Development, n.d.). Henhawk and Norman (2019) astutely stated that SFD activities “supported by government and corporate sponsors, and even called for within the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, continue to take place on colonized land” (p. 174). Likewise, in Australia, Sheppard et al. (2019) pointed out that sport operates as a type of “cultural offsetting” through which sport supposedly offsets the trauma of colonization within Indigenous communities; however, “the current models of SFD serve to perpetuate damaging discourses and thwart opportunities for self-determination” (p. 13). Hence, while sport being used as a tool to separate Indigenous Peoples from their cultures is less apparent today, SFD efforts still have the potential to encourage forms of assimilation by reproducing neoliberal discourses relating to risk, individual responsibility, and development (Hayhurst et al., 2016; Rossi & Rynne, 2013; Lucas et al., 2021). Subsequently, scholars and Indigenous community leaders have emphasized the importance of Indigenous communities having control over the development and implementation of sports-based initiatives in their communities (Arellano & Downey, 2019; Essa et al., 2021; Giles & van Luijk, 2017; Hayhurst & Giles, 2013; Henhawk & Norman, 2019; Sheppard et al., 2019).

To summarize, while reconciliation efforts within Australia, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand have proceeded because of Indigenous activism and pressure, settler colonial states continue to define and co-opt processes of reconciliation for their own ends. This has resulted in tensions relating to how state-led processes of reconciliation function as a form of assimilation that subordinates discussions about Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty. Although there is a growing body of scholarship concerning sport, settler colonialism, assimilation, and Indigenous self-determination, there remains limited research that examines how different settler colonial states have positioned sport as a means for reconciliation. Through this paper, we will address this gap by presenting a policy analysis of national sport policy documents.

### **Theoretical Framework**

We conducted a policy frame analysis of key policies pertaining to sport and reconciliation. Our analysis was guided by literature on settler colonialism. The analysis of policy requires an examination of how policy development and implementation are part of a process of framing. van Hulst and Yanow (2016) described policy making as a process whereby problems and actors are framed in particular ways. They



explained that this process of framing involves three acts: 1) naming, selecting, and categorizing information relating to a policy problem; 2) making sense of information in a way that justifies the need to address a particular policy problem; and 3) storytelling, which brings together the first two acts and constructs a narrative about “what has been going on, what is going on, and, often, what needs to be done” (p. 100). Framing offers an apt metaphor for conceptualizing how published documents represent what policy makers want to be visible or placed in the frame; therefore, it also infers what policy makers decide should be left out and rendered invisible (Lawford, 2016). Accordingly, analyses of government policies are particularly important because they shed light on tensions involved in governing and highlight how governments need to portray “a problem-free public image, particularly when the problems have the potential to seriously undermine the credibility of their regime or establishment” (Bessant, 2008, p. 298). Additionally, examining how governments are framing problems relating to Indigenous Peoples and sport requires the use of critical literature on settler colonialism.

Focusing on how settler colonialism operates as an ongoing structure allows for analyses that challenge framings of reconciliation that situate colonialism as a past event and reconciliation as the closure of a particularly “dark chapter” within the history of otherwise “good” nations (Corntassel & Holder, 2008; Wolfe, 2006). Further, critiques of settler colonialism also offer valuable insights into how the framings of the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples can further serve the aims of settler colonial structures (Hokowhitu, 2014). For example, in her research relating to Indigenous health, physical activity, and wellness, McGuire-Adams (2017) explained that health research on Indigenous populations has been underpinned by a settler colonial deficit analysis, through which Indigenous Peoples are essentially pathologized within settler colonial societies. Our analysis showed how justifications for using sport to address the issues facing Indigenous Peoples were often framed by discourses of risk and development. This focus on Indigenous health disparities serves settler colonial narratives relating to assimilation and erasure, while simultaneously providing a rationale for the state to monitor and control populations labelled “at risk” (Hokowhitu, 2014; McGuire-Adams, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Finally, focusing on the perceived deficits of Indigenous communities obfuscates the historic and ongoing structures of settler colonialism that have and continue to produce inequalities. Moreover, it privileges mainstream healthism approaches over Indigenous definitions of health (Hokowhitu, 2014; McGuire-Adams, 2017). These critical perspectives on settler colonialism provided a framework to engage with the language used within government sport policies and how language within these documents frame Indigenous Peoples and their relationship to sport and to the state.

## Methods

### Sample

Our collection of documents began with those written recently and moved back to the 1970s. Our definition of sport policy followed Sam and Schoenberg’s (2019) definition: “any combination of rules/regulations, goals/commitments, or programmes/practices initiated by the government and its agents” (p. 65). We limited our search to documents produced by or for national sporting bodies. The

focus on Sport Canada, Sport Australia, and Sport New Zealand excluded sport and recreation programs and projects that were developed and implemented by various other government departments, ministries, or agencies. In all three settings there have been programs and projects that were funded in various ways through the respective federal governments, but instead of operating through the national sporting bodies, they were more community-driven and supported by government departments relating to recreation, health, development, or Indigenous affairs. For example, throughout the 1990s in Australia, the Australian Sports Commission in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission delivered the Indigenous Sports Program (ISP). This program drew on ideas of self-determination and community development (Short, 2003). In Canada, in the 1970s the federal government funded various Indigenous sport initiatives, primary among these was the Native Sport and Recreation Program (NSRP). Both the ISP and NSRP involved community-based sport programming by Indigenous Peoples that connected to broader movements for self-determination (Forsyth, 2020; Paraschak, 1995; Stewart et al., 2004). In Aotearoa New Zealand in the 1980s and 1990s, various sporting initiatives occurred outside the purview of the national sporting agency. These programs were funded through various government ministries, such as Te Puni Kokiri, the Ministry of Māori Development. Although these programmes would likely offer alternative framings of sport for reconciliation, they were beyond the scope of this paper. This limitation will be discussed further below.

To identify relevant documents, we began with a search of the websites of the national sporting agencies.<sup>4</sup> Initial documents included national strategic plans, sport policies, and reports produced for the government by a variety of agencies. Within this initial trove of documents, references to previous policies, reports, and documents were noted and later collected. Further, literature on sport policy in the three countries was reviewed to ensure that we collected key policy documents (see Hoye, et al., 2010; O'Boyle & Bradbury, 2013; Sam, 2015; Thibault & Harvey, 2013). From our search, we collected and analyzed a total of 82 documents (30 from Australia, 30 from Canada, and 22 from Aotearoa New Zealand).

Our coding and analysis was guided by van Hulst and Yanow's (2016) understanding of framing as a process of selecting, naming, categorizing, sense-making, and storytelling. Our initial reading of the documents involved a focus on how Indigenous Peoples within the context of national sport policy were being named, selected, and categorized. We read each document and highlighted references to Indigenous Peoples. The first author made initial notes relating to the content of these passages and assigned initial codes. These initial codes were primarily inductive and based on the adjectives or various other descriptors that were used in association with Indigenous Peoples, which included words like Canadian, nation, inclusion, unity, illness, violence, poverty, suicide, substance abuse, disadvantaged, culture, un/healthy, and so on. The two other components of van Hulst and Yanow's, sense-making and

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<sup>4</sup> For Australia, <https://www.sportaus.gov.au/>, for Canada <https://sirc.ca/canadian-sport-policies/>, and for New Zealand <https://sportnz.org.nz/>

storytelling, required reading and rereading the documents, as well as supplementary materials<sup>5</sup>, with an interest in how language in the documents was used to rationalize and justify naming Indigenous Peoples in particular ways, as well as rationalize the story that was being told in terms of addressing problems relating to Indigenous Peoples in sport. For this part of the analysis, we moved beyond simply describing the ways that Indigenous Peoples were represented in the policy documents, and instead we examined why those representations were presented as common sense and how those representations were being mobilized to tell a story about what needed to be done. Drawing on critical literature relating to settler colonialism also guided this process, as it helped us examine how language within the documents was being used to present or obfuscate the relationships between Indigenous peoples and the state. It was through this recursive process that we developed the themes of inclusion, culture, risk, and development to help describe the ways that sport policy documents were framing understandings of Indigenous Peoples, their involvement in sport, and their relationship to the state.

## Results

In sport policy documents from Australia, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand, the framing of Indigenous Peoples' involvement in sport and their relationship to the state followed similar trajectories in terms of their foci: inclusion, culture, risk, and development. In the 1970s and 1980s, language within the documents primarily referred to Indigenous Peoples as a mostly homogenous disadvantaged group among other groups labelled as disadvantaged or under-served, such as women and people with disabilities, which needed to be targeted for inclusion within mainstream sport systems. During the 1980s and 1990s, language in policy documents began shifting to feature Indigenous cultures more prominently as needing to be respected and maintained, but the primary emphasis remained focused on inclusion and participation within existing sporting structures. Throughout the 1990s and until today, language has continued to focus on inclusion and culture, but framing Indigenous People's involvement in sport has also begun to draw on notions of risk and development.

Although reconciliation as a concept was rarely introduced, aside from Reconciliation Action Plans in the Australian context and some mention in Canada following the TRC, the language used to frame Indigenous Peoples, their involvement in sport, and relationship to the state supported a narrow conception of reconciliation as a form of liberal multiculturalism and essentially positioned SFR as analogous to SFD. Below, we provide an overview of each of the frames.

### Inclusion

Collectively, early sport policy documents from the 1970s through the 1980s rarely mentioned Indigenous Peoples. When referenced, Indigenous Peoples were often presented as disadvantaged or

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<sup>5</sup> In addition to sport policy documents, documents relating more broadly to Indigenous Peoples and reconciliation were also reviewed for context, but were not part of the analysis. Some of these are referenced in the paper, including the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in Canada and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in Australia.

underrepresented, among other groups like women, people with disabilities, the elderly, and racial minorities. For example, established in 1985, the Australian Sports Commission's (ASC) first Strategic Plan (1986-1989) drew upon previous discussions of access to sport and noted, "the sporting scene is also characterised by . . . remaining obstacles to equality of access to sporting opportunity, especially for women, the elderly, Aboriginals and disabled" (Australian Sports Commission, 1986, p. 32). This language built upon previous sport policy that did not specifically reference Indigenous Peoples, but emphasized inclusion and sport-for-all (Bloomfield, 1973; Coles, 1975). Subsequent ASC strategic plans either excluded Indigenous Peoples but emphasized access, equity, and inclusion for all (see Australian Sports Commission, 1990), or they included Indigenous Peoples as one group amongst other "disadvantaged" groups: "[We] [e]ncourage participation in sport and provide increased sporting opportunities for people from a non-English speaking background, people with disabilities, disadvantaged social groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and people in rural areas" (Australian Sports Commission, 1994, p. 8).

During his testimony in 1990 to the parliamentary Sub-Committee on Fitness and Amateur Sport of the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors and the Status of Women, Alwyn Morris, a Mohawk athlete and 1984 Olympic Games gold medalist, explained that when the current Canadian sport system was first developed in 1969, there was no consideration of Indigenous Peoples. He summarised Canada's relationship to Indigenous Peoples through sport in the following way: "We were very invisible. The end result was that when Canada's sports system was formed, Indigenous people were not considered. We were left out" (Canadian Parliament, 1990, p. 5). In its final review, the Sub-Committee agreed with Morris, but primarily focused on participation and recommended establishing a secretariat that would "encourage the increased active participation of Aboriginals in national and international sporting competitions" (Porter & Cole, 1990, p. 12).

Although the New Zealand government developed legislation early on relating to sport and recreation with the Physical Welfare and Recreation Act of 1937 and the Recreation and Sport Act of 1973, federal involvement in sport was sporadic until the 1980s (Sam, 2011). The 1985 report, "Sport on the Move: Report on the Sports Development Inquiry," highlighted several problems within the sport sector, including issues of access and participation for "particular" populations. A section on "ethnic sport" referred to the importance of participation by Māori and other ethnic groups. Increased participation was promoted to facilitate improved health, but there was also a focus on culturally relevant or ethnic sport (Scott, 1985). Following the 1985 report, the Hillary Commission for Sport and Recreation was established in 1987. With the formation of the Hillary Commission, a Māori Recreation and Sport Programme was launched in 1989, and subsequent strategic plans referenced the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi (Ward-Holmes, 1998). For example, within a 1998 Task Force Report on Māori Sport, it was acknowledged that the Treaty of Waitangi "guarantees the right of self determination" (Ward-Holmes, 1998, p. 5) and that "Any sports, fitness, and leisure programmes for Maori can ensure this by providing for full Maori participation in policy formulation, implementation, and control of those

programmes” (Ward-Holmes, 1998, p. 5). However, despite acknowledging the Treaty, much of the task force report was concerned with participation levels of Māori in mainstream sport.

The emphasis on sport for all, inclusion, and participation was common throughout all three settings from the 1970s through the 1990s. Indigenous Peoples were most often framed as one among many other groups that needed to be included. This framing assumed that Indigenous Peoples were not actively involved in sport or physical activity. Aside from references to the Treaty of Waitangi within New Zealand documents, the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the state was not presented as equal or reciprocal, but as a relationship between a beneficiary (i.e., Indigenous Peoples who needed to be included) and a benefactor (i.e., the state and its representatives that had the power to include).

Importantly, the appearance of language related to the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples should not be attributed to the benevolence or good will of government and policy makers. The references to Indigenous inclusion need to be understood alongside the activism and advocacy of Indigenous sport leaders, as well as broader movements for self-determination in the three countries. Because Alwyn Morris testified in front of a parliamentary sub-committee, his advocacy is on record, but other documents also alluded to shifts in language and policy resulting from community pressure. For example, The ASC’s 1986 Strategic Plan noted that based on its review of the national sporting system and information provided by National Sporting Organisations, “sections of the population previously denied equitable access to sport are making new *demands*” (Australian Sports Commission, 1986, p. 42, emphasis added). This reference to “demands” is brief and not expanded upon within the documents, but it can be understood within a broader movement for Aboriginal rights and recognition within Australia in the 1980s. The work of Indigenous sport advocates was also clearly evident in shifts in language within the policy documents that began to recognize the importance of Indigenous cultures within sport.

## **Culture**

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the national sporting agencies in all three settings began working more closely with Indigenous sport leaders and organizations, and language within sport policy documents began to include references to Indigenous culture. For example, throughout the 1990s in Australia, the ASC worked with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) on the Indigenous Sport Program. In Canada, following a number of task force reports, and based on the advocacy of athlete activists like Alwyn Morris in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Aboriginal Sport Circle was formed. Following the formation of the Hillary Commission in New Zealand, treaty principles were recognized and the role of Māori in the sport system was given consideration. This culminated in 2002 when the New Zealand government passed the Sport and Recreation New Zealand Act, which created a new national sports agency, Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC, now known as Sport New Zealand). Importantly, within the Act was the aim to “promote and support the development and implementation of physical recreation and sport in a way that is culturally appropriate to Māori” (Sport

and Recreation Act, 2002, s. 8(f)). This reference to Indigenous Peoples within legislation relating to sport was unique.

In all three settings, as a result of national sporting agencies actively working with Indigenous Peoples, references to Indigenous cultures increased significantly. However, references to culture were often presented in an instrumental way. Recognizing Indigenous cultures was viewed as a way to increase participation and facilitate the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples. In this sense, recognizing Indigenous cultures represented a shift in language where Indigenous Peoples were framed as more than just one disadvantaged group among many. However, this recognition was positioned as a means to achieving often state-defined ends relating to crime, health, education, or national unity.

Culture was often invoked in the documents that were reviewed as a way to engage with Indigenous Peoples or to promote their involvement in sport. For example, in Australia, the Standing Committee on Environment, Recreation and the Arts on Physical and Sport Education's 1992 report noted that the needs of Indigenous children were not being met and programmes in northern Australia that were deemed to be culturally relevant were highlighted as a way to improve the effectiveness of programming (Crowley, 1992). Further, a 1999 ASC report recognized the need to help disadvantaged groups access sport, and that "it is conscious of the government's sports policy objectives to . . . deliver efficient sport programs to Indigenous communities" (ASC, 1999, p. 34). The ASC acknowledged that it was able to deliver efficient programming because of its partnership with the ATSIC.

Similarly, in Sport Canada's 2005 Policy on Aboriginal People's Participation in Sport (SCPAPPS), while Indigenous culture appeared often, references were presented in an instrumental way—that is, they focused on how the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in mainstream sport could be facilitated by settler organizations simply recognizing or celebrating Indigenous culture. Along these lines, this recognition of Indigenous cultures served to reaffirm Canadian national identity and values relating to multiculturalism and tolerance. As explained in the policy, "Aboriginal cultures are an integral part of Canada's culture and heritage" (Canadian Heritage, 2005, p. 6).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, following a 2001 task force on national sport titled, "Getting Set for an Active Nation: Report of the Sport, Fitness & Leisure Ministerial Taskforce" (Graham, 2001), and the legislation mentioned above, SPARC established an Indigenous advisory organization called Te Rōpū Manaaki. Its mandate was to,

ensure all activities of SPARC are culturally appropriate to Māori; provide strategic advice to SPARC to increase Māori participation in the sector; and facilitate communication with Iwi, Hapū and Māori<sup>6</sup> communities and organisations and to increase stakeholder participation. (Te Rōpū Manaaki, 2005, p. 5)

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<sup>6</sup> The largest political grouping in pre-European Māori society was the iwi (tribe). This usually consisted of several related hapū (clans or descent groups).

Although language around cultural appropriateness was shared across all three settings, the 2001 Ministerial Taskforce report, in advocating for the new national sporting agency to include *The Māori Dimension: Omangia Te Oma Roa*, emphasized the importance of a bi-cultural framework within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Of note, the focus on bi-culturalism within Aotearoa New Zealand framed culture in a different way, seeking to go beyond more liberal multicultural understandings of culture seen in Australia and Canada, where the cultures of Indigenous and minority groups are recognized and tolerated, while settler-colonial structures are still maintained and considered the norm (Hage, 2000). In principle, bi-culturalism is concerned with partnership and how resources and power are shared between Māori (Indigenous) and Pākehā (non-Indigenous). This partnership recognises Māori as Tangata Whenua (people of the land) and the Crown (Pākehā/all others) as Tangata Tiriti (people by virtue of the Treaty of Waitangi) (Phillips, 2020). Based on renewed engagement with Te Tiriti/the Treaty, the New Zealand government and broader society began promoting the principles of partnership, participation, and protection.

Following the establishment of SPARC and Te Rōpū Manaaki, the framing of Māori inclusion and participation shifted significantly and is described as a move from participation *of* Māori to participation *as* Māori. A review commissioned by Sport New Zealand on the He Oranga Poutama (Māori wellbeing through sport and recreation) program explained this changing perspective: “In 2009, the programme evolved from a focus on increasing physical activity by Māori, to strongly focus on participating and leading as Māori in sport and traditional physical recreation at a community level” (McKegg et al., 2013, p. 8). Within the document, the development of this language was explained as representative of shifts in broader society towards understandings of Aotearoa New Zealand through a bicultural framework. Language relating to bi-culturalism, as well as references to Te Tiriti and principles of participation, protection, and partnership continued to be included in subsequent policy documents, and a number of current sport policy documents have emphasized the bi-cultural foundation of Aotearoa New Zealand (Sport New Zealand, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d). Although the concept of bi-culturalism provided an alternative framing, the Sport NZ documents, along with the Australia and Canada documents, also began in the 1990s to discuss culture alongside notions of risk and development.

## **Risk**

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, alongside references to Indigenous cultures becoming more prominent, language within the documents also began to frame Indigenous involvement in sport and the relationship of Indigenous Peoples to the state through an understanding of risk and development. For example, in Australia, a 1999 task force report on the Commonwealth’s involvement in sport and recreation continued to promote ideas relating to inclusion, but risk and development also featured strongly. It was noted that, “the high suicide rate of young Indigenous people and the general health of Indigenous adults were two particular areas of concern” (Oakley, 1999, p. 94). While noting that Indigenous peoples were at risk for various problems, it also explained that attention needed to be given

to Indigenous youth “if we seriously want to address problems that result in criminal activity, suicide, drug abuse et cetera” (Oakley, 1999, p. 55). In *Aotearoa New Zealand*, a report by the New Zealand Institute of Economic Research completed for the Ministerial Taskforce on Sport, Fitness & Leisure (2001) noted that sport and physical activity could help the government achieve goals relating to Māori: “Māori have particular risks with respect to health, welfare, education and justice outcomes. Māori, particularly males, are also less active than the average population. Increasing activity may help to ‘close the gaps’” (McWha et al., 2000, p. iv).

In Canada, language within the SCAPPS (2005) presented Indigenous participation in sport as a way to address risks faced by Indigenous communities. In contextualizing why a sport policy was required specifically for Indigenous Peoples, SCAPPS referenced an earlier government report, sometimes referred to as the Mills Report (1998), which reviewed the Canadian sport system and was presented to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage. Within the Mills Report, the introduction to the discussion of Indigenous sport focused on the risks and inequalities that Indigenous Peoples faced when compared to non-Indigenous peoples by outlining Indigenous poverty rates, unemployment rates, education levels, suicide rates, and so on. It was argued that “more is needed to help this community and sport development and physical activity may not be the top priority” (Mills, 1998, Sec 6(f), para. 1); however, the report also noted that “sports and recreation activities may play a positive role in strengthening the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual aspects of Aboriginal life. Sport and physical activities may act to counter alcohol and drug abuse, and other addictions” (Mills, 1998, Sec 6(f), para. 1). In providing the context for why a sport policy focusing on Indigenous peoples was necessary, SCAPPS quoted directly from the Mills Report,

Aboriginal people have a poverty rate comparable to that found in developing countries, an unemployment rate among adults of almost 25%, a poorly educated population and a dramatic suicide rate, which among 10-15 year olds is more than 5 times higher than that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts . . . Forty-four percent of Aboriginal people smoke daily, 61% report problems with alcohol abuse and 48% report problems with drug abuse. (Canadian Heritage, 2005, pp. 3-4)

This represented similar language in the Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand documents that presented Indigenous Peoples as both at risk and as risks.

In advocating for their involvement in sport, Indigenous Peoples were framed by policy makers as at risk in terms of the health, education, and economic conditions they faced. At the same time, they were also framed as posing risks to the state and its citizens in terms of crime, as well as a potential drain on the health, education, and justice sectors. In Australia, Volume Four of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Deaths in Custody included a section on sport that emphasized the role that sport could play in building relationships between communities and police and how sport could divert youth away from crime and violence (Johnston, 1991). In terms of the health sector, a report prepared for Sport New Zealand in



2017 titled *Māori Participation in Community Sport Review*, is illustrative of how Indigenous Peoples were presented as both at risk and also as risks:

Māori are significantly overrepresented in health inequalities and Māori continue to have higher rates than non-Māori for many health conditions and chronic diseases, including cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and asthma. The cost of health inequalities is significant to Māori and the health sector. (KTV Consulting, 2017, p. 20)

In this way, Māori were presented as at risk for various health related issues, but they were also presented as a risk in terms of costs to the health sector. Within this framing, sport was presented as a way to address the risks posed to, and by, Indigenous Peoples. This framing was largely based on assumptions about the role of sport in promoting development.

### Development

Overall, framings of Indigenous people, their involvement in sport, and relationship to the state have recently shifted to focus predominantly on development. Language in Australian documents was most explicit in this regard because of the connection between reconciliation and the Close the Gap Campaign. Following the initiation of Close the Gap Campaign in 2007, sport policy documents featured arguments that sport could help to achieve the objectives associated with the campaign. A 2008 document prepared by the Rudd Government titled, *Australian Sport: Emerging Challenges, New Directions*, explained that based on research from 2001 to 2005, participation in sport by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples had declined. The report criticized previous federal government involvement in sport as inefficient and fragmented, and it argued for more coordinated efforts. The rationale for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was explained as follows:

Sport and physical activity can help close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' life expectancy by providing a practical tool for Indigenous communities to achieve positive outcomes in areas such as physical wellbeing and mental health, education, and social dysfunction. (Australian Government, 2008, p. 8)

Further noted was that government would “promote Traditional Indigenous Games and Cross-Cultural Awareness programs, as well support talented Indigenous Australians to progress along mainstream sporting pathways” (p. 8). The language relating to closing gaps was repeated verbatim in a 2010 document (Australian Government, 2010, p. 5).

The emphasis on the life expectancy gap, and the assumption that including Indigenous Peoples in sport could contribute to addressing this problem, relied on discourses prominent within SFD and demonstrated how sport's contribution to reconciliation was being framed as a tool to achieve development outcomes. In this way, using sport for development was conflated with understandings of reconciliation that emphasized closing gaps. Recent Australian sport policy documents have continued to build upon the language of the Close the Gap campaign and respecting Indigenous cultures. For

example, the Labor Party Platform in 2018 explained that “sport is vital to positive outcomes in health and mental health, stronger cultural identity and social inclusion. Labor will support First Nations peoples’ participation in sport to contribute to Closing the Gap in First Nations peoples’ disadvantage” (Australian Labor Party, 2018, p. 163). The most recent Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP) for Sport Australia continue to highlight how sport can be used to close the gaps relating to health, education, and income, and how Indigenous sport and physical culture can play an instrumental role in achieving development outcomes (Sport Australia, 2019).

Language present in recent Canadian documents similarly emphasized the role of sport in promoting development and effectively conflated ideas of reconciliation with understandings of development. Canada’s renewed national sport policy in 2012 did not make reference to Indigenous Peoples, but at their 2013 conference, the Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Ministers responsible for sport, physical activity, and recreation included the following as one of their priorities for collaborative action: “Work with Aboriginal communities to identify priorities and undertake initiatives for Aboriginal sport development, and the use of sport for social and community development” (Federal-Provincial/Territorial Ministers, 2013, p. 1). This focus on the development of Indigenous sport and the promotion of sport for *social* development continued through the recently completed TRC. The five Calls to Action relating to sport in the TRC reproduce language relating to inclusion and culture, while also bringing in ideas of Indigenous self-determination through the promotion of the continued funding of the North American Indigenous Games and a separate Indigenous sport system (TRC, 2015b).

Following the TRC, the way that the government has responded to the Calls to Action has reproduced ideas and language relating to risk and development. For example, in response to the TRC, the Sport for Social Development in Indigenous Communities (SSDIC) program was established and housed within the Sport Support Program, a government funding body that supports organizations that are aligned with the Canada Sport Policy goals. The SSDIC was founded to offer financial support to Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations implementing projects that addressed “four social development outcomes: improved health; improved education; improved employability; and, reduced at-risk behaviour” (Government of Canada, 2020, para. 5). In this way, the Canadian government explicitly connected reconciliation to development and risk. Similarly, in Aotearoa New Zealand, the recently completed Māori Participation in Community Sport Review framed Māori involvement in sport within understandings of development objectives relating to vulnerable children, health, and economic indicators (KTV Consulting, 2017).

Overall, an early emphasis in sport policy documents was on inclusion and access to the mainstream sport system that could be described as assimilation through sport. Over time, language shifted away from inclusion, and Indigenous Peoples’ involvement in sport and their relationship to the state became framed by inclusion, culture, risk, and development. Furthermore, the framing of Indigenous Peoples and sport included and excluded understandings of self-determination at various times. In the following

section we discuss how inclusion, culture, risk, and development can be primarily understood as framing an approach to reconciliation that maintains the settler colonial status quo.

### Discussion

Our analysis of sport policy documents in Australia, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand demonstrated that the term reconciliation was historically absent. Although the term came to greater prominence in Australia through the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and the subsequent formation of Reconciliation Australia and in Canada after the completion of the TRC, there remains no shared definitions or rationales for how sport could contribute to processes of reconciliation. Despite this lack of consensus in all three settings, the unstated assumptions relating to SFR were primarily built upon framings of inclusion, culture, risk, and development. As we discuss below, using van Hulst and Yanow's (2016) framework, we argue that the policy documents push a narrative that supports a liberal multicultural understanding of reconciliation (Grande & Anderson, 2017) and conflates SFR and SFD. Additionally, sport is presented as a means through which Indigenous Peoples, largely represented as a homogenous, at-risk, and risky group, can be brought into the national body and reconciled to the status quo. Within this narrative, understandings of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty are outside the framing, rendered invisible. Lawford (2016) outlined how examining absences within policy documents is as important as analyzing what is in the text. Minimizing self-determination within the policy documents demonstrated how settler colonialism was invisible yet embedded within the policy documents. In this way, our analysis aligns with scholars who have argued for the necessity of making settler colonialism visible within studies of sport (Chen & Mason, 2019).

As van Hulst and Yanow (2016) noted, policy making involves storytelling, and the dominant story being told through the sport policy documents is of benevolent nations attempting to assist disadvantaged Indigenous Peoples. Importantly, this story excludes the colonial histories and current practices that produce the inequalities that Indigenous Peoples face. It excludes the activism and work that Indigenous communities are already engaged in with regards to sport. Further, this story positions reconciliation as a way to move forward but does so without acknowledging issues relating to Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

### Naming, Selecting, and Categorizing

**Acknowledging Indigenous culture(s)?** In the documents we reviewed, culture was presented in an instrumental way, both to bolster national identity and to effectively engage Indigenous communities in development. Indigenous Peoples were often presented in a homogenous manner to justify the role that sport could play in development and reconciliation. Embracing Indigenous cultures, albeit in a monolithic way, was a shift from earlier attempts by governments to use sport as a vehicle for assimilation. Throughout the 1990s there was recognition that Indigenous perspectives on sport differed from dominant Western perspectives, and there were efforts to offer culturally relevant programming (ASC, 1999; Government of Canada, 1992; Te Rōpū Manaaki, 2005). However, in terms of naming,

selecting, and categorizing, it is important to note that European, Western, or White cultures received exnomination status (not explicitly named). It was always “other” cultures, including Indigenous cultures, that were viewed as disadvantaged, marginalised, problematic, and in need of being included into and tolerated by the mainstream.

Although the categorizations of sport and culture in policies have shifted over time, and the national sports agencies in the three settings have become ostensibly more “inclusive,” culture was accepted only insofar as it promoted both development of Indigenous communities and national interests. The contingent and limited acceptance of Indigenous cultures was indicative of how Indigenous scholars have noted that forms of cultural resurgence that do not threaten the settler status-quo are deemed acceptable within settler colonialism (Corntassel, 2012; Grande & Anderson, 2017; Simpson, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Perhaps due to its disruptive potential, Indigenous political understandings and the inextricable links to understandings of land and culture were ignored and unaccounted for (Henhawk & Norman, 2019; Sheppard et al., 2019; Simpson, 2017). That is, information relating to culture was named, selected, and categorized in a way that made invisible any connections between Indigenous cultures and Indigenous politics. In this sense, understandings of SFR within this framing can only be apolitical: Reconciliation is understood as recognizing, celebrating, and respecting Indigenous cultures only up to the point that those cultures do not disrupt the status-quo.

The naming and selection of Indigenous culture aligned with understandings of liberal multiculturalism (Grande & Anderson, 2017; Hage, 2000). Language in the Aotearoa New Zealand documents did not refer to multiculturalism but emphasized a “bi-cultural” framework. Although this presented an alternative framing, which in some instances emphasized power and partnership, the framework of biculturalism has received similar critiques that scholars have levied against multicultural understandings of reconciliation. As Terruhn (2019) has argued, the emphasis on biculturalism has allowed for some recognition and integration of Māori cultural expressions, worldviews, and language, but that “in its current incarnation, biculturalism keeps Māori in the position of a junior partner dependent on the government” (p. 880).

**Indigenous Peoples as both risks and at-risk.** The categorization of Indigenous Peoples was largely based on notions of risk and homogenous understandings of Indigenous culture. This framing has implications vis-a-vis policy because it presented Indigenous Peoples as a homogenous, at-risk group whose deficiencies might be addressed through sport. This illustrates van Hulst and Yanow’s (2016) conception of how particular ideas are selected when constructing policy, and how categories are constructed to identify what is or is not a problem. Across these contexts, Indigenous Peoples were categorized as both at-risk for particular problems and as problems (i.e., risks) themselves. Although our focus was on national sport policies, researchers who have examined the policy framing of inclusion/exclusion within recreation policy have similarly noted connections between Otherness, risk, and inclusion (Tink et al., 2020). In examining a national policy document relating to recreation, Tink and colleagues found that “the discourses of risk mobilized throughout the document construct the idea

of a 'Canadian population' that must be protected from 'at-risk Others'" (p. 160). They went on to note that groups positioned as at-risk were constituted as "dangerous (to themselves or others) or inherently vulnerable and powerless" (p. 160).

In categorizing Indigenous Peoples as at-risk, health, education, and employment disparities were often provided and, similar to how sport policy has developed in many Western nations, it was assumed that sport could address these broader issues (Hoye et al., 2010). Tuck and Yang (2012) explained that positioning Indigenous Peoples as "at-risk" "erases and then conceals the erasure of Indigenous Peoples within the settler colonial nation-state and moves Indigenous nations as 'populations' to the margins of public discourse" (p. 22). This erasure occurs when the inequalities that Indigenous Peoples face are acknowledged, but Indigenous Peoples are constructed as a homogenous cultural group, while Indigeneity is placed among many other dimensions of difference that are targeted for inclusion or intervention. The particular social, political, and cultural contexts affecting specific Indigenous communities and nations are glossed over in favour of a monolithic narrative. Importantly, constructing Indigenous Peoples as at-risk or possessing deficits serves to conflate Indigeneity with categorizations based on race, ethnicity, or culture. Effectively, this strips Indigeneity of its political underpinnings relating to Indigenous rights, self-determination, and claims to land (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Further, scholars have explained that framing marginalized groups as at-risk, or as risks, and presenting sport as a solution, aligns with neoliberal understandings of health and development that shift responsibility for social and systemic issues onto individuals (Hartmann, 2016; Hayhurst & Giles, 2013; Hokowhitu, 2014; Lucas et al., 2021).

Framing Indigenous Peoples as at-risk, or as risks, and positioning sport as a potential tool for "fixing" Indigenous Peoples and their communities has potentially pernicious effects in terms of how reconciliation and SFR are understood. Within this framing, the problems that Indigenous Peoples face are isolated to individuals and communities. The role of the state in creating and perpetuating these problems is glossed over, and reconciliation is then understood as the state helping Indigenous Peoples reconcile themselves to the status quo. In essence, reconciliation as a political project is absent and the concept is understood in a basic economic sense, where accounts are reconciled or made equal. This approach to reconciliation operates as a form of settler colonial benevolence and is indicative of how Tuck and Yang (2012) discussed settler "moves to innocence" as "strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all" (p. 10).

The depoliticization of Indigeneity was evident within the policy documents as Indigenous cultures were acknowledged, but only briefly. Culture was celebrated and presented as a vehicle through which sport organizations could attract Indigenous Peoples' participation, and cultural awareness and anti-racism training were viewed as appropriate strategies to address barriers that Indigenous Peoples faced when participating in mainstream sport. Embracing Indigenous cultures within the documents echoed

Simpson's (2017) warning about the ability of cultural resurgence movements to be appropriated by settler colonial societies:

I get worried when I hear the state and its institutions using the term resurgence. Cultural resurgence can take place within the current settler colonial structure of Canada because it is not concerned with dispossession, whereas political resurgence is seen as a direct threat to settler sovereignty. (p. 49)

Through this lens, adopting language that acknowledges Indigenous culture within the sport policies of these countries needs to be approached critically. Conflating reconciliation with the celebration and inclusion of cultures, without a consideration of land and sovereignty serves to maintain settler colonialism.

### **Sense-Making and Story Telling: Whose Future is Represented?**

Throughout the three settings, inequalities relating to health, education, and income were often repeated and used as sense-making justifications for why Indigenous Peoples' participation in sport needed to increase. However, participation in sport was primarily presented as a way to facilitate Indigenous Peoples' "reconciliation to" the settler status quo (Wylie, 2018). Within this framework, reconciliation was built upon language relating to inclusion and participation that reproduced a hegemonic understanding of development (Hayhurst & Giles, 2013). In this sense, inclusion and participation in sport were a means to an end, and the ultimate outcomes were framed by settler colonial understandings of development (Arellano & Downey, 2019). Successful reconciliation was implicitly defined as Indigenous Peoples reaching the same level of development as non-Indigenous peoples. This framing represented a closure of possibilities —it was a form of reconciliation-as-resignation whereby Indigenous Peoples are meant to resign themselves to the current status quo of settler colonialism (Wylie, 2018). Tuck and Yang (2012) have argued that this process of reconciling Indigenous Peoples to the conditions of settler colonial states as rescuing settler futurity "dependent on the foreclosure of an Indigenous futurity" (p. 14).

Within Australia, Canada, and Aotearoa's New Zealand's policy documents, the narrative was that sport could be used to incorporate Indigenous Peoples into the national body, promoting national unity and development. This story was bolstered by the sense-making and naming that occurred within sport policies and relied on interconnected themes of inclusion, culture, risk, and development. Framings of Indigenous participation and inclusion in sport were connected to understandings of national identity, whereby the inclusion of diverse groups within Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand sport systems portray these states as good and benevolent. The settler colonial governments are the heroes of their own reconciliation story. Within this narrative, including diverse cultural groups in sport was viewed as a demonstration of national identity and values.

What was largely left out of the framing of this particular story was how the disparities in health, employment, and education between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples developed in the first

place. Settler colonialism is an ongoing project through which Indigenous Peoples, their sovereignty, and their connection to land are rendered invisible (Coulthard, 2014). The acknowledgement of Indigenous cultures, worldviews, and sporting practices was not a benevolent act on the part of the settler colonial states, but rather the result of advocacy by and pressure from Indigenous activists, athletes, and sport leaders, often pushing for Indigenous self-determination (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013; Te Hiwi, 2014). However, the discourses around SFR served to uphold settler colonialism by divorcing Indigenous cultures, worldviews, and sporting practices from any consideration of self-determination and sovereignty. In this sense, as SFR becomes commonplace within settler-colonial societies like Australia, Canada, and Aotearoa New Zealand, it will be important to question what stories of reconciliation are being told and who benefits from them.

### **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

Our analysis demonstrates that language within sport policy documents has shifted over time. Indeed, language has shifted from either not referencing Indigenous Peoples, or referring to them among disadvantaged groups within society, to an acknowledgement of Indigenous culture. However, framings of Indigenous Peoples, their involvement in sport, and their relationship to the state coalesced around notions of inclusion, culture, risk, and development. This framing potentially limits how SFR can be conceived and implemented. In all three settings, an assimilationist approach to Indigenous involvement in sport and society was initially promoted. Eventually, this framing shifted to acknowledge the importance of Indigenous cultures, mostly in a homogenous sense, while simultaneously presenting Indigenous Peoples as deficient, at risk, or as risks. Within this framing, inclusion in sport was promoted as a means to achieve various development outcomes and to mitigate the apparent risks that Indigenous Peoples both faced and presented to settler colonial society. Overall, within this framing, SFR is limited to a more subtle form of assimilation, or liberal multiculturalism (Grande & Anderson, 2017), through which Indigenous culture can be recognized and celebrated, but only if it contributes to Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand national identity and maintains settler colonialism (Coulthard, 2014; Simpson, 2017). Moving forward, conceptualizations of reconciliation that account for Indigenous cultural and political resurgence are necessary within sporting spaces. If sport is to be mobilized as part of reconciliation processes, then the current framing of SFR in these three countries needs to be opened up to be inclusive of the ways in which Indigenous communities and nations understand self-determination and sovereignty.

van Hulst and Yanow (2016) explained that analyzing the framing of policy problems is important, as it makes obvious what is being left outside of the frame, or what is being made invisible. They use the metaphor of a window to highlight the ways that particular problems and solutions are made visible through the construction of policy. In this sense, by focusing on the policy documents of national sport bodies, we are explicitly focusing on what is inside of the frame. We believe that as the governments of settler colonial states continue to embrace and push for reconciliation, both within and beyond sport, it is vital to critically examine the ways that reconciliation is being framed. As noted in an earlier section,

this has limitations. Policy creation and implementation is complicated and contextual, and analyses of policy documents does risk ascribing too much meaning and significance to the texts themselves. It needs to be reiterated that in all three settings, Indigenous Peoples have been intricately involved in fighting for, developing, promoting, and implementing sports programmes for their communities. Future research should engage with understanding the ways that settler colonial sport policy and approaches to reconciliation are resisted, adapted, and taken up by Indigenous communities, as well as by coaches, athletes, and administrators.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Based on our analyses of policy documents, there is a need for the development of sport-related policies that engage with understandings of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty. Over time, the three countries have developed key policies and structures that could potentially inform one another in this regard. For example, the creation of a sport policy specifically addressing Indigenous sport and the promotion of an Indigenous sport system through the double-helix model and the creation of the Aboriginal Sport Circle are unique developments within the Canadian context (Forsyth & Paraschak, 2013). Within New Zealand, the inclusion of Māori people within the Sport and Recreation New Zealand Act and the commitment to offering sport in a way that upholds treaty principles was unique. In Australia, Reconciliation Action Plans have also offered action plans for a variety of sporting organizations. Although RAPs are not mandatory, they offer a process for organizations to engage with Indigenous communities and to establish concrete actions that can be taken towards a particular understanding of reconciliation.

As a general recommendation, we would emphasize the need for policy makers to conceptualize of SFR outside of framings that position reconciliation as a form of liberal multiculturalism. Instead, we highlight scholars who have emphasized a decolonial approach that can support forms of Indigenous futurity (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Simpson, 2017). In their work, Leanne Simpson implored a decolonial political agenda. This approach would include collective actions that promote Indigenous resurgence, both cultural and political. We suggest, then, that a decolonial approach to policy-making must go hand in hand with a decolonial political agenda.

Along these lines, policy makers concerned with sport and reconciliation must consider the ways that sport may serve in facilitating the relationship not only between people, but also the relationship to our histories, and the relationship to land and place. Paraschak and Heine (2019), adopting a “Strengths and Hope” perspective and guided by the recent TRC in Canada, outlined this possibility in advocating for the field of SFD to engage with Indigenous land-based practices. They argued that these practices can affirm the strengths of Indigenous Peoples and culture. Further, they stated that broadening understandings of sport to include land-based practices could help reorient understandings of health and nature and promote a reconciliation process through which “all individuals would work in an engaged and respectful manner with, rather than on behalf of, the group being assisted, and toward ‘hope in’ a shared preferred future, maintaining an openness to co-transformation through that process” (p. 186).



A decolonial approach to policy-making may also provide better opportunities to help uncover how authority, unequal power relations, and broader inequalities deeply rooted in colonialism, gender, race, class, and culture end up reflecting the multiple and conflicting powers of the sport for reconciliation wheelhouse. Thus, decolonial policy approaches would truly uphold visions of an Indigenous future that centers Indigenous freedom and is radically decoupled from the domination of colonialism (Simpson, 2017). Those engaging with such approaches, then, may consider responding to, and centering, the following questions: (1) who are the agents of knowledge; (2) what is their social location; (3) for whom do they speak; (4) how do they conceptualise; (5) where are the analytical silences; (6) who is being empowered and who is being marginalized (Slater & Bell, 2002, p. 339)?

We have argued that the way that Indigenous Peoples, their involvement in sport, and their relationship to the state have been framed within policy documents presents reconciliation as the maintenance of the status quo in which Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty are subordinated to national interests. However, the double-helix model in Canada, the Sport and Recreation New Zealand Act, and the RAPs in Australia provide glimpses of how policies and structures could provide different possibilities for relationship building and mutual partnership. In this sense, policies are not simply created in consultation with Indigenous Peoples, but rather through an ongoing partnership that goes beyond simply recognizing Indigenous cultures and instead acknowledges and promotes Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty.

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