

Discourses of Social Inclusion in Sport and Recreation in Rural Ontario

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## Abstract<sup>1</sup>

The benefits and challenges of participating in sport and recreation as a new Canadian are well documented in the existing literature, however, they are typically considered in an urban context. More specifically, a gap exists regarding how sport and recreation practitioners and managers understand social inclusion work in sport and recreation and the impact these understandings may have on newcomer populations who are living in rural and other non-metropolitan communities. The purpose of this study was to gain a more in-depth understanding of how social inclusion is understood in both sport and recreation practice and policy. Further, I sought to critically examine discourses of Whiteness in programming and policy in rural settings. Therefore, in this research, I explored two questions: 1) How do sport and recreation practitioners and managers understand social inclusion in and through sport and recreation in their rural communities? and 2) How do discourses of community and inclusion impact the way sport and recreation practitioners and managers define and understand social inclusion? An instrumental case study methodology was used to explore these questions in a region of Northern Ontario (including Nipissing and Sudbury Districts) and both semi-structured interviews and document analysis were conducted to collect data. A critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used for this research which helped to highlight how discourse functions to construct and transmit knowledge, and the ways this organizes and maintains social institutions (Fairclough 2001; Mogashoa, 2014). I drew from Critical Whiteness theory (CWT) to better understand how discourses of Whiteness are produced and maintained in sport and recreation. The analysis identified three discourses related to social inclusion in sport and recreation: We're all in this together; 'They' aren't from here; and Whose responsibility is it?. This research highlights how

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<sup>1</sup> Key words: Social inclusion, Critical Whiteness Theory, Sport and Recreation, Discourse, Rural Ontario.

discourses of colourblindness, “othering” of diverse populations, and ambiguity of responsibility for social inclusion work may inform practice and underpin systems of Whiteness in sport and recreation. Additionally, it is important to consider how policies, practices, and understandings of social inclusion work in sport and recreation settings are translated throughout and between organizations.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Purpose Statement

Immigration is an important contributing factor that supports Canada's economic, population, and cultural growth (Statistics Canada, 2020). Between the years 2017 and 2018, 80% of Canada's population growth could be attributed to net immigration (Statistics Canada, 2020). While newcomers to Canada are not a homogenous group, as many have vastly different experiences and motivations for leaving their country of origin (Mata-Codesal et al., 2015), immigrating to a new country and enduring a lack of familiarity with the customs and culture can create feelings of stress and isolation (Stack & Iwasaki, 2009). Given the immense social change that occurs when immigrating to a new country, it is important to consider how communities welcome and support newcomers to Canada in order to create sustainable and healthy living environments (Gallant & Tirone, 2011).

When considering newcomers' experiences with sport, recreation, leisure, and physical activity services<sup>2</sup>, a gap exists in the literature regarding newcomer populations living in diverse contexts. More specifically, it is unclear how sport and recreation is delivered to newcomers residing in rural communities and how policies and practices may impact these experiences. With programs such as The Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot (RNIP) creating opportunities for - and even encouraging - newcomers to settle in rural parts of Canada (Government of Canada, 2020), we can expect rural communities to become home for increasingly diverse populations. Organizations that service rural and northern regions (e.g., the Northern Policy Institute) have outlined the importance of fostering "welcoming communities" (p. 6) and a need for initiatives and collaborative efforts to create more inclusive rural contexts for newcomers

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<sup>2</sup> This research will broadly be exploring sport, recreation, leisure, and physical activity; however, for the remainder of this paper I will be referring to these various domains as sport and recreation unless I am referring to specific literature that uses the terms leisure or physical activity in their research.

(Yantha, 2021). As such, it is important to explore how sport and recreation practitioners are delivering opportunities in rural settings, and how social inclusion is considered in both practice and policy to include newcomers to Canada and create more welcoming communities. Further, it is critical to consider how discourses of Whiteness<sup>3</sup> are present in rural sport and recreation contexts, and the implications they may have on the processes of social inclusion (e.g., policy making, programming) in these contexts. For the purpose of this study, ‘newcomers to Canada’ refers to “landed immigrants who came to Canada up to five years prior to a given census year” (Statistics Canada, 2010), which includes refugees.

Critical Whiteness theory (CWT) was used to better understand how discourses of Whiteness are produced and maintained in sport and recreation contexts. CWT attempts to rethink, deconstruct, and abolish discourses of Whiteness (Nayak, 2007) and was important in this research to challenge how meaning is constructed from structures that uphold Whiteness in our society (Crotty, 1998; Nayak, 2007). The data were analyzed using a critical discourse analysis. There are important theoretical and practical implications of this work which require rethinking how discourses identified from sport and recreation practitioners and managers may uphold systems of Whiteness.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to gain a more in-depth understanding of how social inclusion is understood in both sport and recreation practice and policy. I sought to critically examine how discourses of Whiteness are present in rural sport and recreation contexts, and the implications this may have on the process of social inclusion work (e.g., policy making, programming). This

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<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of this study, the ‘W’ in Whiteness will be capitalized in alignment with current advocacy to capitalize all racial identifiers such as the National Association of Black Journalists (2020) as well as in subsequent articles (Painter, 2020).



was explored considering two research questions: 1) How do sport and recreation practitioners and managers understand social inclusion in and through sport and recreation in their rural communities? 2) How do discourses of community and inclusion impact the way sport and recreation practitioners and managers define and understand social inclusion?

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The following chapter will review the current literature on sport and recreation policy in Canada, how newcomers engage with sport and recreation, and how rural contexts and discourses may impact these experiences.

### **Social Inclusion in Sport and Recreation Policy in Canada**

It is critical to consider the ways in which discourses surrounding sport and recreation policy shape the experiences of diverse populations in programming, specifically for this study, newcomers to Canada. Considering that work satisfaction, social networks, and religious supports are all factors that can motivate a newcomer to stay in or leave their home country (Amit & Riss, 2014), policies should reflect these considerations to aid in welcoming newcomers to Canada. Immigration is an important contributor to Canada's multicultural identity, which often represents Canada as inclusive to newcomers (Guo & Guo, 2015).

Li (2003) argued that discourses constructed by the Canadian Multiculturalism Act encourage conformity for newcomers, as the English and French norms are dominant and practised in many Canadian institutions. Instead, newcomers are rewarded for their ability to conform, but are seen as being unable to build a successful lifestyle if they deviate from Canada's 'traditional' societal values (Li, 2003). Claiming ethno-cultural neutrality as a country is inaccurate, when aligned with education, language, and citizenship policies that aim to assimilate newcomers (Golob & Giles, 2015). Here, a powerful position is occupied by dominant

groups in Canada from which they can make decisions and inform policies, further creating barriers for newcomers to practise their culture in public spheres (Hall, 2000). Instead, newcomer populations are encouraged to practise their culture privately, on their own time (Hall, 2000).

Although the Canadian Multiculturalism Act may not have a direct correlation with sport and recreation policy, it helps to demonstrate how discourse created at the federal level may impact diverse populations' experiences at the community level. By understanding these federal level policies, we can explore more deeply the sociocultural landscape of how discourse is created and maintained, and how this may impact social inclusion for diverse populations in other domains of life (i.e., sport and recreation participation). Specifically, by challenging discourses of Whiteness, and considering how Whiteness is constructed and normalized (Frankenberg, 1993), power structures within policies and practices can be explored.

Even policies such as the Canadian Sport Policy (Government of Canada, 2012) which is meant to pay direct attention to equity and inclusion issues in sport, does not have concrete policies and actions addressing the needs of underrepresented groups (including newcomers) (Frisby & Ponc, 2013). Frisby and Ponc (2013) suggested that this may be due to the Canadian Sport Policy consultation process being undertaken with people who are, "currently inside the sport system (e.g., athletes, coaches, parents, officials, volunteers, and various partners)" (Frisby & Ponc, 2013, p. 385). To work towards social inclusion in sport and recreation, we must re-evaluate these macro-level problems by challenging institutional practices, rather than looking to the individual to make changes and adapt to our institutions (Suzuki, 2017). Considering the implications policy has on social inclusion, and who benefits from certain policies (and who does not), is vital when working towards equity in sport and recreation.

### ***Social Inclusion***

Before considering the policies and practices that influence social inclusion, it is important to first understand how social inclusion is defined in the context of this research project. Social inclusion can be understood as a relational and collaborative process that is ongoing between people and organizations, the goal being to co-create environments and structures that allow for autonomy in how community members participate (or do not participate) in society, including sport, recreation, and leisure (Forde et al., 2015). When defining and understanding social inclusion, it is essential to recognize that, “claiming to be inclusionary is not the same as creating and living inclusion!” (Shakir, 2005, p. 214).

While social inclusion as a goal is often well-intentioned, if followed by a top-down approach in which people in power continue to make decisions, the ideologies and policies that inhibit social inclusion cannot be transformed fairly and effectively (Frisby & Ponio, 2013). Therefore, input from community members must be considered in order to achieve social inclusion, which will require challenging and re-structuring the power relations that exist within Canadian society (Shakir, 2005). This includes academics in sport and recreation challenging discourses that have historically come from White, male academics. By not addressing Whiteness in academic discourse, whether because of the lack of adequate research on the topic, or the complexities of exploring race in academia, academics benefit from and continue to make Whiteness invisible (Roberts, 2009).

Considering the theoretical aspects of social inclusion can be quite complex, as it has many different meanings for different people and is never truly static. To work towards social inclusion, one must identify a group that has been socially excluded and proceed to alter the social structure needed to include them (Suzuki, 2017). Social inclusion is both a process and an outcome, because while benefits like improved social interaction, skills, and health may be

associated with social inclusion, this does not mean that these are experienced in the same way by all the people involved. Instead, Ponc and Frisby's (2010) research suggested that there is a multilayered process of working towards social inclusion, and individuals' capabilities are not the only factor that determines social inclusion, rather the access they have to social structures and the opportunities they have to improve these capabilities (Suzuki, 2017). While there is literature including the perspectives on social inclusion from participants in programs (Ponc and Frisby, 2010), there is still a gap in understanding the perspectives of sport and recreation practitioners and managers perspectives on social inclusion. More specifically, there is a gap in understanding community and organizational perspectives of social inclusion for those operating in diverse contexts (Forde et al., 2015) such as non-metropolitan areas.

When considering the intersection of theory and practice, Roberts (2009) emphasized that recreation and leisure researchers must go beyond just acknowledging written policies that outline inclusion and consider how actions and behaviours of organizations reflect these policies. Spaaij and colleagues' (2020) work focused more specifically on discourses of diversity and found that club leaders and managers of sports clubs often had abstract definitions of diversity that drew heavily on genderblind and colourblind discourses. By club leaders and managers not recognizing systemic inequality through their definitions and understandings of diversity, they were creating a club culture where diverse people may be told they are welcome, but this idea does not align with exclusionary discursive practices.

Forde and colleagues' (2015) work demonstrated that community recreation and leisure can play a key role in fostering social inclusion for newcomers; however, their work also emphasized that social inclusion cannot just be about reducing barriers for newcomers. Conversely, organizations should be allowing for opportunities in which "native-born residents

can learn about the cultures of newcomers, which promotes cross-cultural understanding” (Forde et al., 2015, p. 137). Social inclusion is therefore an ongoing process that requires collaboration between organizations and community members, which is important to consider when rethinking the current policies and practices of the sport and recreation sector.

### ***Policies in the Sport and Recreation Sector***

The recreation and sport sectors in Canada are guided by various frameworks which may advise practice and/or determine protocol and resource distribution. “Recreational experiences include participation in physical activity and sport, and in artistic, cultural, social and intellectual activities” (CPRA, 2015, p. 8). As recreation and leisure programming coincides with sport programming, it is important to consider how various governing bodies impact the delivery of services to community members. In Canada, provinces and territories have precedence over recreation jurisdiction, as the local governments are the primary supplier, “of direct recreation services” (CPRA, 2015, p. 9). The federal government is then responsible for collaborating with local governments to create supporting policies and funding opportunities for Canadians to participate in recreation and leisure (CPRA, 2015).

The Framework for Recreation in Canada envisions that all citizens have meaningful access to recreation services that enhance individual and community well-being. Specifically, this framework identifies access and inclusion for diverse populations as a strategic goal for the sector (CPRA, 2015). While the framework does not direct resource allocation for recreation and leisure services (rather it provides advice for recreation and leisure goals), this framework often converges with complementary strategies such as the Canadian Sport Policy (CPRA, 2015). The Canadian Sport Policy directs, “all governments, institutions and organizations... [in] the practice and provision of sport in all its forms and contexts” in sports that are “organized and

unorganized, in schools, colleges and universities, parks, and public and private sport centers” (Government of Canada, 2012, p. 7). However, the processes of achieving the goals and strategies set out by different frameworks and policies may vary in diverse community contexts (Rich & Misener, 2019) as well as for diverse populations. Despite the relevance of these frameworks for community sport and recreation organizations, very little work has examined policy implementation and the ways that ideas and priorities articulated in these frameworks are understood and enacted at the community level in Canada.

### **Newcomers’ Engagement with Sport and Recreation**

Newcomers’ engagement with sport, recreation, and leisure is gaining attention in leisure scholarship, as these services provide the opportunity for identity building and social networking (Gallant & Tirone, 2017; Mata-Codesal et al., 2015; Stodolska, 2015). Amit and Riss (2014) suggested that scholarship on immigrating to Canada typically considers economic integration and how this influences newcomers’ well-being. Gallant and Tirone (2017) proposed that a more holistic view of the resources and challenges experienced by newcomers must be assessed to understand well-being. One of the ways to contribute to newcomers’ well-being is through recreation and leisure opportunities, which help to establish and maintain connections, preserve ethnic culture, improve mental and physical health, as well as increase opportunities for socio-economic networking (Stodolska, 2015). Stodolska’s (2015) research highlighted that recreation and leisure can provide opportunities for economic benefits but can also provide additional opportunities for newcomers that extend beyond economic well-being.

In Stack and Iwasaki’s (2009) research, Afghan newcomers coming to Canada identified that recreation and leisure allowed them to create social connections, which can combat feelings of loneliness and increase knowledge of their host country. Newcomers typically engaged in

purposeful leisure which would contribute to their learning and education, such as learning the host country's official language (Stack and Iwasaki, 2009). Tirone and Goodberry (2011) studied a group of second-generation South Asian Canadians who expressed that they felt equally a part of their culture of origin and host culture, and each culture's traditions were reflected in their leisure engagement. By blending traditions, participants were able to have rich leisure lives that represented both of their cultures (Tirone & Goodberry, 2011). Stodolska's (2015) research discussed how recreation and leisure experiences can also be a less stressful setting for newcomer populations to navigate processes of cultural adaptation; in which new community bonds can be formed and existing relationships with communities of origin can be upheld and strengthened.

In leisure scholarship, research examining newcomers' experiences with recreation and leisure typically centres around topics of adaptation and integration into a new society, suggesting a linear process of moving from an outsider position to an insider (Mata-Codesal et al., 2015). This idea often neglects to consider the complexities of identity formation for newcomers (Mata-Codesal et al., 2015). In Smart and colleagues' (2020) research, sport had the ability to be a common ground for some Canadian migrants to develop social relationships; but the challenges of procuring employment, financial insecurity, linguistic proficiency, or sport skill level could limit the amount or quality of participation. This research is important in outlining that simply offering sport programming was not sufficient in meeting the different needs of newcomers who are having varied acculturation experiences (Smart et al., 2020).

To move towards more inclusive and diverse environments in community sport, Spaaij (2014) suggested sport organizations must be prompted to critically think about their organizational practices and cultures that impact diverse populations. Developing more nuanced

understandings of organizational culture can help to foster more supportive and accommodating environments for diverse populations in sport and recreation programming (Rich & Giles, 2015). Reviewing the literature on subjective experiences of newcomers in sport and recreation highlights the varying and fluid needs of this population (Smart et al., 2020; Tirone & Goodberry, 2011), and the need for a level of commitment to inclusion from those who manage and deliver programming at the community level (Spaaji, 2014).

Many important considerations have been highlighted to demonstrate how sport and recreation can be an avenue for identity development, economic/social capital generation, and cultural preservation. Nevertheless, understanding how sport and recreation can be a mechanism for newcomers in Canada to adapt in their host country is typically discussed in an urban context (Stack & Iwasaki, 2009).

### **Sport, Recreation, and Newcomers in Rural Contexts**

Rural communities across Canada face an array of challenges related to sustainability and development, including poverty, access to resources, and out-migration of youth populations (Senate of Canada, 2006). There are 393 smaller communities in non-Metro areas of Ontario, "...52 that have less than 100 residents and 288 with between 1,000 and 24,999 residents" (Lauzon et al., 2017, p. 39). It is therefore important to explore how community context may impact policy/programming as well as the experiences of social inclusion to broaden our understanding of sport and recreation experiences in diverse community contexts in Canada. Rural is a diverse and challenging word to conceptualize. For the purpose of this study, rural will be defined using the OECD alternative definition of rural which looks at population density (Statistics Canada, 2008). The OECD "rural communities [definition] refers to individuals in communities with less than 150 persons per square kilometre" (Statistics Canada, 2008).



Considering the challenges rural communities are faced with, immigration can be an important strategy in maintaining social sustainability in rural areas (Gallant & Tirone, 2017). Social sustainability is understood as, "...community-level practices that cultivate well-being... [and] is rooted in the principles of resilience and social justice" (Gallant & Tirone, 2017, p. 427). Many newcomers settle in rural areas; 5% of rural Canadians identify as newcomers. However, "most immigrants in the rural zones are well established pre-1986 immigrants (3.7% of the total population) while those who arrived later make up a much smaller share (1.6% of the total population)" (Beshiri & He, 2009, p. 6).

Radford (2007) explained that predominately White rural communities are now welcoming racialized newcomers to combat the effects of demographic decline, making it more important than ever to acquire a deeper understanding of how social inclusion is practised and understood in rural communities, to better welcome newcomer populations. As family histories, social identities, and traditions are shown to impact rural community identity and experiences with sport and recreation (Rich & Misener, 2017; Rich et al., 2014) it is important to consider the impact this may have on new Canadians in rural community contexts. In this context, it is also important to critically think about Whiteness within rural settings and the implications this can have on the process of social inclusion. Additionally, as the RNIP program intends to spread the benefits of economic immigration to small communities (Government of Canada, 2020), there needs to be a stronger understanding of how communities can support newcomers' experiences beyond economic integration.

Rural areas are often homogenized in their representation as, "...quiet agricultural communities with like-minded populations of close-knit neighbors - what is called the rural idyll" (Rich, 2021, p. 2). As argued by Philo (1992), the construction of the rural idyll is rooted

in White, middle-class male, hegemonic standards, which ‘others’ populations who fall outside of this category. In Abelson’s (2016) study, participants described the absence of people of colour in rural spaces, which can create a discourse that those who come into the community who are not White are then identified as “not one of us” (p. 1541). With the arrival of new Canadians to rural areas there may be a lack of community supports and infrastructure, as well as racial/ethnic tensions from both the host community and newcomer populations (Beshiri & He, 2009). Being able to highlight both social inclusion as well as exclusion in rural sport and recreation programming allows researchers to move away from the “romanticized communitarian generalizations about sport’s potential to transcend class, gender, ethnic, religious and other divisions” (Spaaij, 2009, p. 1143).

With sport and recreation managers typically coming from predominately White, middle-class backgrounds, this creates a disconnect when developing inclusive policies and programs that would consider the needs of diverse and marginalized groups (Frisby & Millar, 2002). In rural contexts, with smaller and more homogenous populations, this may be a prevalent consideration. Spaaij’s (2009) research of rural sport within an Australian context found that participation in sport clubs was an important element of the social landscape in rural towns. Here, social interaction was fostered and the opportunity to gain skills and knowledge from your position within the sports club was noted. Spaaij (2009) highlighted that these gains are typically supported by gender and class, where high status males receive better managerial positions in sport clubs and leagues. Considering these social reproduction patterns in rural spaces, we can see how cycles of exclusion may persist within sport and recreation organizations (Spaaij, 2009).

Gallant and Tirone’s (2017) research on newcomers’ experiences in a rural community in Nova Scotia offered important insights as to why leisure may increase feelings of well-being. For

example, leisure became a tool for newcomers to increase social relationships and support, while strengthening their own agency when integrating into the tightly woven community networks (Gallant & Tirone, 2017). Mair's (2009) research emphasized that when exploring sport and leisure within small communities, the entire social context should be considered. In Mair's (2009) research, the rural curling club operated as both a curling club as well as a community/leisure centre and reflected other issues like a lack of infrastructure and the out-migration of youth from rural areas in Canada. The curling club also considered the ways in which it could include diverse populations to maintain operations. These are just some examples of how "[e]nvironmental, social, political and economic concerns" are integrated into the landscape of sport and leisure for small communities (Mair, 2009, p. 463).

Similarly, Rich and Misener (2019) discussed how the regulated frameworks set out by governing bodies of sport and recreation are challenging to navigate and integrate into rural municipalities. This can be due to a lack of knowledge (related to sport and recreation policy, systems, etc.), staffing, or funding (Rich & Misener, 2019). Due to these factors, sport, recreation, and leisure may not exist as distinct sectors with their own stakeholders at the community level. This is important to recognize as sport and recreation may be used interchangeably throughout the research process, due to the more social and community-based nature of sport and recreation within some rural communities (Rich & Misener, 2019).

Understanding unique rural contexts, as well as the complexities that coincide with being a newcomer to Canada is important when considering recreation and leisure experiences; however, there is very little empirical research exploring how this programming is provided to newcomers from staff, managers, and policy makers who deliver and/or work in rural sport and recreation contexts. Considering the less favourable working conditions for newcomers in rural settings

(e.g., labour intensive, physically demanding, and low paying jobs) (Beshiri & He, 2009), recreation and leisure can be an important consideration to support the well-being and social inclusion of newcomers (Stodolska, 2015). It is important to also consider how discourses that shape sport and recreation have implications for the way diverse populations are included.

### **Discourses of Sport, Recreation and Leisure**

When considering experiences of new Canadians in rural areas, it is important to consider the discourses that surround sport and recreation, and how this may be underpinned by western practices and ideals. Broadening our understanding of how leisure can be defined and practised by diverse individuals is important moving forward in leisure scholarship (Fox, 2006). In Rich and colleagues' (2015) work, it was discussed that newcomers to Canada have diverse understandings of sport and may not perceive opportunities offered by their community as sport. Hence, if programmers have the intention of producing a specific social outcome from sport and leisure (e.g., social inclusion), a target audience must be considered; sport programming without intentionality towards a specific audience may not achieve the specific intended goals (Rich et al., 2015). Similarly, Fox (2006) challenged scholars to consider that leisure may not always be a site for goodness or benefit all of society's members. Instead, policy makers in sport, recreation, and leisure programming may consider combining programs with relevant resources and needs expressed by newcomers to Canada (e.g., vocational support, language programs) to achieve specific outcomes (Smart et al., 2020).

Importantly, defining and practising recreation and leisure varies cross-culturally, and many of the discourses surrounding leisure are rooted in Eurocentrism. For example, Fox's (2006) research on leisure and Indigenous peoples indicates that the word leisure is in fact not present in many Indigenous languages. There is a plethora of ways 'leisure' is understood and practised in

Indigenous culture; nevertheless, it is not always fixed by the boundaries of space and activity in the way that Eurocentric understandings of leisure are (Fox, 2006). For example, when Brightbill (1960) defined leisure as “freedom from occupation, employment or engagement” this understanding of leisure is bounded by time and space. While Indigenous experiences are not to be conflated with newcomers’ experiences, Stack and Iwasaki’s (2009) findings exemplify this cross-cultural difference for Afghan people immigrating to Canada. They explained the domains of leisure, work, and family often overlapped and were challenging to separate or distinguish from one another. This highlights the importance of how the diverse interests and needs of newcomers may intersect and produce tensions with the typical Eurocentric discourses and practices of leisure (Stack & Iwasaki, 2009).

Golob and Giles’ (2015) research highlighted interesting findings where newcomers to Canada operated leisure ventured businesses. In this research, the benefits extended far beyond income generation; they were also rooted in newcomers preserving their cultural traditions within the community. In this example, leisure-oriented businesses allowed for a way to challenge traditional leisure practices of dominant groups, while creating an opportunity for newcomers to increase their civic engagement within their community. Nevertheless, the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* reinforces ideas of what entrepreneurial citizens should look like in a Canadian context and places the burden on newcomers for ethno-cultural preservation (Golob & Giles, 2015). This is valuable research that highlights and challenges the ways legislation and subsequent policies in programming may impact Newcomers’ experiences with how they view and engage in sport and recreation.

While the literature highlights the importance of sport, recreation, and leisure for newcomers to Canada (Tirone & Goodberry, 2011; Stodolska, 2015), there is clear gap in our understanding

of how experiences may differ in diverse community settings. Rural contexts offer unique structural, geographical, and economic challenges that differ from urban settings (Senate of Canada, 2006). The discourses surrounding our understandings of recreation and leisure are typically rooted in Eurocentrism (Fox, 2006), which should be challenged and re-thought in order to consider diverse voices and perspectives. It is important to expand our understanding of how policy and practice impact Newcomers' experiences, beyond involvement with traditional work, or those who are located in large urban settings. Broadening our knowledge on social inclusion, Newcomers, and sport and recreation, and critically thinking about how discourse may underpin systems of Whiteness in sport and recreation, will help us to better understand how social inclusion and well-being can be supported during adaptation experiences in a variety of community settings.

In order to expand our understandings of social inclusion in diverse community contexts, this study used an instrumental case study methodology to explore a region of Northern Ontario (including Nipissing and Sudbury Districts) and both semi-structured interviews and document analysis were conducted to collect data. A critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used for this research which helped to highlight how discourse functions to comprise and transmit knowledge, and the ways this organizes and maintains social institutions (Fairclough 2001; Mogashoa, 2014). I drew from Critical Whiteness theory (CWT) to better understand how discourses of Whiteness are produced and maintained in sport and recreation programming. The following chapter will outline my theoretical framework and positionality to the research in more depth.

### **Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework: Critical Whiteness Theory**

Critical theory finds its roots from the 1923 German research institute known as Frankfurt School. Leading theorists Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse challenged positivism and proposed understanding society as implicated by history, and that this kind of analysis should lead to processes of transformation (Morrow & Brown, 2012). Paulo Friere, who is also commonly associated with critical approaches, argued that humans create culture, which means they must have a critical consciousness of historical conditions that create their reality. With historical knowledge, humans can start to reconstruct historical conditions (Kamil & Michael, 2002). Critical theoretical approaches should not be confined to sociological research, as power and domination manifest themselves in many different forms of leisure experiences (Mowatt, 2009). Intersectional understandings of how race, gender, sexuality, disability (etc.) have implications on leisure experiences (Mowatt, 2009) are important for addressing inequities and power relations in sport and recreation. As such, for this research, I employed Critical Whiteness Theory (CWT) to understand how discourses of Whiteness may underpin policy and practice in rural sport and recreation settings, and how this may impact the ways newcomers are included and supported in sport and recreation.

CWT attempts to rethink, deconstruct, and abolish discourses of whiteness (Nayak, 2007) and was important in this research to think critically about how Whiteness may be implicated in sport and recreation policy and practice. As Whiteness is embedded into society and maintained by not discussing or acknowledging White privilege, it is essential to also challenge Whiteness when examining diversity in sport, recreation, and leisure (Hylton, 2018). Through certain discourses surrounding the study of race/ethnicity and leisure, the burden and responsibility of finding culturally appropriate and satisfying recreation and leisure has been placed on racial and

ethnic minority groups (Mowatt, 2018). Therefore, this theoretical framework allowed me to consider the ways in which we import meaning from structures that uphold Whiteness in our society (Crotty, 1998; Nayak, 2007), and the implications this has for diverse groups in sport and recreation settings.

Placed-based approaches to race research can help unpack how particular environments and policies shape minority groups' experiences with recreation and leisure (Floyd, 2019). As such, this research used a CWT framework to consider how Whiteness is upheld in rural contexts, and how this may impact policy and practice, as well as the delivery of programming to newcomers in sport and recreation contexts. Racial neutrality keeps Whiteness as a "set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1). Therefore, challenging how Whiteness is upheld within diverse contexts can help create more inclusive and accessible policies and programs.

In most scholarly examinations of race, Whiteness is not widely discussed, often because in late modernity, discourses of Whiteness have become normalized and invisible (McDonald, 2009). Critical Whiteness studies are based on the foundation that:

- 1) Whiteness is a modern invention; it has changed over time and place.
- 2) Whiteness is a social norm and has become chained to an index of unspoken privileges.
- 3) The bonds of whiteness can yet be broken/deconstructed for the betterment of humanity. (Nayak, 2007, p. 783).

In Canadian society, privileging Whiteness as a standard further ostracizes racialized newcomers (Tajrobehkar, 2021). Li's (2003) work discussed how in Canadian discourse surrounding immigration, there is often apprehension about how newcomers with different



cultural backgrounds would be able to align with “core Canadian values” (p. 131). Discourses surrounding the impact of immigration and the fiscal burdens from newcomers (often masked by citizens voicing concerns for losing their Canadian identity), at their core maintain White hegemony, as the apprehension is rooted in “non-white” newcomers populating Canada at a rapid pace (Li, 2003, p. 132).

While CWT seeks to understand Whiteness as a culturally normative state, it cannot be discussed in isolation from race. A common practice for White people is to make evasive claims that do not acknowledge or discuss race, which places White people as innocent bystanders (McDonald, 2009). As described by Perry (2001), Whiteness is understood as being cultureless, in which White people do not identify ties to European ancestry and traditions. To be cultureless aligns with the implication that Whiteness is the “‘norm’ (the standard by which others are judged) or ‘rational’ (developmentally advanced)” (Perry, 2001, p. 57). Considering how this may invisibly sustain and reproduce White domination is a predominate concern in Whiteness scholarship.

Acknowledging how the White ‘experience’ has been constructed is essential in deconstructing a society in which racial order is normalized (Frankenberg, 1993). Whiteness also underpins the construction of human rights and citizenship (Nayak, 2007), and by critically analyzing this construction, White people can begin to reconceptualize their engagement with anti-racist work (Frankenberg, 1993). As there is a clear interplay between management, staff, and participants in sport and recreation programs, it is important to consider how both institutional and interpersonal factors impact marginalized individuals’ experiences within these environments (Allison & Hibbler, 2004).

There is a clear lack of research pertaining to Whiteness in rural communities broadly and sport and recreation contexts more specifically, even though the impact of White practices and hegemonic standards in rural spaces are acknowledged (Philo, 1992; Abelson, 2016). Importantly, Philo (1992) warns of the danger in depicting all rural people as the same, which reduces the complexities of rural populations and denies the presence of other groups within these populations. This reiterates the significance of thinking more deeply about the image of rurality that is expressed and how Whiteness may be important when considering discourses in rural spaces. As hegemonic Whiteness is referred to and discussed in rural research (Philo, 1992; Abelson, 2016), it is critical to rethink how this impacts sport and recreation research, delivery, and practice, to further challenge leisure as a site that is not always inherently 'good' (Fox, 2006).

### **Positionality Statement**

Positionality can be understood as both, "...an individual's world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context" (Holmes, 2020, p. 1). The individual's world view is impacted by individual values and beliefs which are shaped by various factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, geographical location, social class, status, etc. It was critical for me to consider my positionality within the research and the impact this has on the questions I ask, my participants, and the data collection and analysis process (Berger, 2013). Reflexivity was a necessary step in the research process to identify my positionality, recognize the power imbalances that exist in the research, and be able to critique my position throughout the process (Lian, 2019; Holmes, 2020). Reflexivity can be understood as a "process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation... as well as active acknowledgement and

explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome” (Berger, 2013, p. 220).

An important component of acknowledging positionality is recognizing how others will see the researcher and how they see themselves, either as an outsider or insider (Lian, 2019). As a preliminary positionality statement, I acknowledge that I am a White, straight, cisgender female, who is able-bodied, and who is not a newcomer to Canada. I was born and raised in an urban setting in an upper middle-class family. With these considerations, as well as having worked in various sport and recreation environments throughout my life and being immersed in Recreation and Leisure Studies for the last 6 years, I was an insider in many ways to the people I engaged with.

Further, interviewing participants who were also White made me an insider and created a layer of unspoken privileges we both have as White people within our society (Nayak, 2007). An example of this unspoken privilege was demonstrated when a participant was discussing cultural barriers that a new Canadian may face in sport programming, and said “like you and I, like we get sarcasm pretty good” but said for a newcomer, “[it] can go way over their head.” When this comment was said, I immediately wrote down a note that said, “because we both appear the same, we can understand sarcasm” (Reflexive Note, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022) highlighting that this participant immediately identified me as an insider who would understand them based on my Whiteness.

Being raised in a metropolitan context and having never lived in a non-metropolitan area made me an outsider in some ways to the people I engaged with and influenced my understanding of personal, systemic, and intersectional barriers that others may face when participating in sport and recreation. Being an outsider in this way and a White person analyzing

documents and interviews also impacted my reading of the information as my positionality influenced what I understood to be exclusive/inclusive or the examples I may have chosen. The duality of being an insider and an outsider in some contexts was important for me to note throughout my reflexive practices as this position impacted the way people reacted to me as an interviewer, and my own understandings of the conversations we were having.

It was essential that I continually reflected on my positionality throughout the research process using reflexive strategies (Berger, 2013) to become more aware of the power imbalances that exist when both constructing knowledge, and when interacting with participants (Lian, 2019). This included writing down and acknowledging subjectivities (e.g., judgments, emotional reactions, etc.) that arose throughout the research process (specifically after each interview) and how these may have impacted the process. This occurred through reflexive note taking that I kept in a document in which I took a minimum of 10 minutes after each interview to take initial notes about how I felt about that specific interview, any judgements that arose throughout the process, and how I felt this was impacting the research process.

Additionally, having my work peer-reviewed by my supervisory committee, utilizing data triangulation, and maintaining transparency with my research participants about my intention/position as a researcher (Berger, 2013) all allowed me to critically reflect on my changing position throughout the research, and the ways in which my values and beliefs were shaping the process. While I can never fully remove my values, beliefs, and worldview from impacting the research, these steps helped me to be more cognizant of how and when they were shaping the research process.

My connection (i.e., position and relationship) to this topic is through the recreation and leisure domain. I completed my undergraduate degree in Recreation and Leisure Studies with a

concentration in Therapeutic Recreation. For my undergraduate thesis, I explored community context and therapeutic recreation in rural long-term care (Nelson & Rich, 2022) which sparked an interest in how the community impacts diverse populations' experiences in recreation and leisure. After learning about the unique experiences of living in a rural setting, I became interested in exploring more about small communities, and how inclusion may look in diverse communities. Throughout my Master's degree, I have attended and presented in several conferences, helped to edit the *State of Rural Canada* report (Rich, Hall, & Nelson, 2021), and completed Research Assistant work for a Sport Policy project, all of which have helped me to explore conversations of social inclusion, sport and recreation, and rurality more deeply. These experiences have all shaped my knowledge and understanding of the research topic. The following section will outline my methodological approach and the selected data collection and analysis process that allowed me to answer my research questions.

## Chapter 4: Methodological Approach

The qualitative approach that was used for this study was an instrumental case study methodology. I aligned strongly with Stake's (1995) epistemological orientation of case studies in which I am an interpreter and knowledge is socially constructed (rather than a more positivistic orientation). Case studies encourage the researcher to consider how different phenomena may coincide with one another (Stake, 1995). An instrumental case study methodology allowed me to explore the phenomenon surrounding policy and program delivery within a bounded (rural) context (Stake, 1995). Instrumental case studies are used for gaining insight and empirical knowledge on a particular issue, which goes beyond just understanding the issue on a personal level but also connecting the exploration to larger topics (Stake, 1995) such as, social inclusion in sport and recreation settings.

When approaching an instrumental case study, Stake (1995) emphasized that the issue is dominant, rather an intrinsic case study which begins with the case being of highest importance (Yazan, 2015). One of the benefits of case study research is having the ability to incorporate multiple sources of data which diversify and enrich the analysis (Yin, 2009). Selecting multiple methods such as document analysis (i.e., of recreation and culture guides, websites, etc.) and semi-structured interviews (i.e., with practitioners), helped to provide a rich description of the phenomena in question, as well as understanding the social processes that shape them (Yin, 2009).

### **The Case**

The case that was used for this research project was a region in Northern Ontario. The region consisted of two districts: Nipissing District and Sudbury District. Both have small urban centres (North Bay and Sudbury) which are participating communities in the RNIP (Government

of Canada, 2020) as well as several smaller towns, townships, and unorganized areas. Focusing my case study on these two districts allowed me to gather valuable perspectives from sport and recreation practitioners living in diverse community contexts. As well, it helped me to explore the history and social context of a specific geographical region and the implications this may have on discourses and sport and recreation policy and practice. For example, participants made references to specific industries (e.g., working at “the mill”) which were important to their understandings of community. These considerations were important in contextualizing this case study of the region.

Nipissing district is a census division located in Northeastern Ontario. A census division can be defined as, a “[g]roup of neighbouring municipalities joined together for the purposes of regional planning and managing common services” (Statistics Canada, 2018, para. 1). North Bay (the largest centre in Nipissing District) had a population of 52,662 in 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2021) while Nipissing District had a population of 83,150 in 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2016b). Within Nipissing district there are the Municipalities of Temagami and West Nipissing, the town of Mattawa, and seven townships including: Bonfield, Calvin, Chisholm, East Ferris, Mattawan, Papineau-Cameron, and South Algonquin (AMO, 2022). There are additionally two unorganized areas (North Part and South Part) which are comprised of unincorporated regions (Wikipedia, 2021). The immigration rate to Nipissing District between 2011-2016 was 0.3% which equates to 265 newcomers (Statistics Canada, 2016b).

Sudbury district is also categorized as a census division located in Northeastern Ontario. The city of Greater Sudbury (a census metropolitan area) is considered part of the district geographically; however, politically, the district and city are two distinct census divisions, as areas may use the term ‘district’ for territorial boundaries even though they do not serve any

municipal government purposes (Statistics Canada, 2016a; Wikipedia, 2022; AMO, 2022). In the 2016 census, Greater Sudbury had a population of 164,698 (Statistics Canada, 2016a) while Sudbury District had a population of 21,546 (Statistics Canada, 2016c). The towns in Sudbury District include the municipalities of French-River, Mark-stay Warren, Killarney, and St. Charles, the town of Espanola, and the four townships including: Baldwin, Chapleau, Killarney, Nairn and Hyman, and Sables-Spanish Rivers (AMO, 2022). There is also an unorganized North Sudbury district comprising all the areas in Sudbury District which are not incorporated into municipalities. The immigration rate to Sudbury District between 2011-2016 was 0.3% which equates to about 60 newcomers (Statistics Canada, 2016c) and the immigration rate to Greater Sudbury between 2011-2016 was 0.6% which equates to about 1,005 new newcomers (Statistics Canada, 2016a).

### **Analytical Approach: Critical Discourse Analysis**

The data collected were analyzed using a critical discourse analysis (CDA) analytical approach as CDA highlights relationships between social practices and semiosis (all forms of meaning making) (Fairclough, 2001). In this instance, the relationship between policy and practice of rural sport and recreation programming and engaging newcomers and diverse populations with programming is highlighted. While the definition of discourse is not easily simplified, Locke (2004, p. 5) described discourse as, “a coherent way of making sense of the world (or some aspect of it) as reflected in human sign systems (including verbal language).” Discourse helps researchers to understand how knowledge practices and power are related by assuming, “all actions, objects and practices are socially meaningful” (Goodwin, 2012, p. 29).

Goodwin (2012) suggested that policies should be recognized as both a cultural product as well as what forms cultural meaning, problems, and solutions. Discourse shapes the way



inclusion and accessibility are understood, thereby impacting how policies are made and implemented (Van Aswegen & Shevlin 2019). It is important to distinguish that discourse is not only written language, but rather behaviours, values, interactions, and speech of different groups of people, making discourses social products (Locke, 2004). Therefore, it is important to gather an understanding of the written policies currently in place related to inclusion, but also how these are understood and practised by sport and recreation practitioners and managers, and how they are then delivered to newcomers and diverse populations in rural contexts.

Critical discourse literature frequently discusses the processes of constructing meaning making through discourse. Understanding how discourse functions to comprise and transmit knowledge, and the ways this organizes and maintains social institutions is a key element in CDA (Mogashoa, 2014). In this sense, CDA is strongly aligned with my theoretical perspective (CWT), as it explores how people make meaning from the social networks and processes in which they are embedded. This further allowed me to consider the ways in which discourses of policy, programming, and Whiteness structure and inform sport and recreation programs in rural Ontario.

### **Data Collection**

For this study, data were collected through both document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Wetherell and colleagues (2001) emphasized that CDA seeks to understand, “language in use and language in social contexts” (p. i). Documents are both produced and shared in social contexts and provide insights to text that has been documented without the intervention of the researcher, therefore adding depth to the empirical data for case studies (Bowen, 2009). Additionally, Tirone and Goodberry (2011) suggested that future research considering first and second-generation newcomers to Canada should also include the

experiences of leaders, employers, and community advocates who facilitate recreation and leisure for diverse populations. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were an important component to the research to understand the perspectives of the sport and recreation practitioners and managers and the discourses surrounding community and social inclusion in the context of their work.

### ***Document Analysis***

Document analysis happened simultaneously while collecting data through semi-structured interviews. Bowen (2009) identified several purposes for document analysis. Doing a document analysis helps to provide context; highlight additional questions that need to be asked; add to the researcher's knowledge base; and track change and development (Bowen, 2009). Analyzing documents allowed me to consider the process of how policy is both produced and implemented as well as provide context for the social settings of sport and recreation programming (Coffey, 2013) in the Nipissing and Sudbury Districts.

Publicly available documents from the municipalities in the Nipissing and Sudbury District were systematically collected and appraised based on their relevance to the research topic. This process consisted of combining key words that related to the research questions into a Google search. These key words included: social inclusion, newcomers, and sport and recreation. I was more specifically looking to see how, if at all, social inclusion was being considered in different publicly available documents. Therefore, social inclusion was a key search term in almost every search. These key search items were then followed by the name of each of one of the districts and/or a specific city, town, or townships name. For example, "Social inclusion in sport and recreation - North Bay" produced results such as, "North Bay and Area's 2021 Sport and Culture Guide." Following this search process allowed me to gather a deeper understanding

of the documents that are accessible to the public, and the language used in the documents (e.g., related to social inclusion) (Goodwin, 2012).

There were 8 documents (see Table 1) which were relevant to the research questions located through this search strategy. These documents were produced and shared publicly within the region. Specifically, document analysis allowed me to identify the written texts related to social inclusion in sport and recreation within the region. These documents included: strategic plans; sport, culture, and recreation guides; and municipal webpages. These documents helped to understand both the content of policy related to sport and recreation, as well as the processes of how policy was developed. For example, the North Bay 2011 Culture Plan included highlights from a community forum, which was a discussion that took place with community members at City Hall about culture in the area. This document provided helpful information about the understandings of community, culture, and social inclusion in North Bay.

**Table 1**

*Documents Included in Analysis*

The Northeastern YMCA's strategic plan insert (2 pages)
City of North Bay's arts, culture, and recreation services website page (2 paragraphs)
North Bay's 2011 culture plan (90 pages)
North Bay and area's 2021 sport and culture guide (27 pages)
North Bay immigration's home website page (2 paragraphs)
Invest to Sudbury's move to Sudbury website page (1 paragraph)

Sudbury's leisure services strategic plan 2011-2015 (20 pages)
The town of Espanola's 2017 parks and recreation strategic master plan (76 pages)

As stated by Coffey (2013) documents are a distinct form of artefacts in which language is a central component for constructing social reality. For the context of this research, documents were useful data for understanding the ways groups and organizations account for their sport, recreation, and cultural practices (Coffey, 2013) but there was an overall lack of public information and depth regarding social inclusion policy and practice. Therefore, the conversations with sport and recreation practitioners helped to add more breadth to my knowledge of how social inclusion was understood within the region.

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were used alongside document analysis as another data collection method. Jäger (2001) suggested that once a researcher has identified what they are investigating in a CDA they should then explore the locations in which ideologies about this topic may be expressed. Willig (2014) also suggested that “discourse analysis is not so much a recipe as a perspective from which to approach a text” (p. 4). Instead, the researcher will take up a certain type of reading of the text to understand the consistencies, variations, constructive, and performative elements of language (Willig, 2014). Therefore, semi-structured interviews allowed me to co-create a conversation where meanings and understandings of social inclusion could be explored (Adams, 2010) and then transcribe them into a textual document for analysis. It is important to note, however, that analysis did not just take place when reading transcribed interviews, as the process was ongoing throughout data collection as well.

Semi-structured interviews have pre-determined, open-ended questions, which are developed and asked in a systematic order. Nevertheless, this method allowed for more flexibility in which the interviewer (myself) could probe and diverge from the script (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). To create a flexible interview guide (See Appendix A), I developed central questions that would explore a certain topic and approximately three probe questions following each. Probing questions allow the participant to have control over where the topic will lead while still remaining within the context of social inclusion in rural sport and recreation. This meant if the participants felt they could not expand on the central question, there was an opportunity to encourage expansion or further discussion using the probes. Examples of these questions included, “What does social inclusion look like in your community/organization?” with probes such as, “How do you try to include people? What are the key issues that you try to address? Who is generally the benefactor of social inclusion efforts? Who is generally driving/advocating for this work?” The use of this method allowed the participant to explore each question in more depth, particularly if they were unsure of how to answer the initial question.

Stake (1995) emphasized flexibility in case study research is important, which allows the researcher to make changes as needed when moving from the design process to the research process (Yazan, 2015). Further, positionality is never fixed, and my situatedness with the case changed throughout the experience of conducting the case study (Lian, 2019; Holmes, 2020). For example, after my first few interviews, I noticed through my reflexive note taking that I was feeling a sense of frustration and confusion towards the hesitancy to speak on social inclusion; “why is there not more understanding of social inclusion - why are people so hesitant to speak on the subject?” (Reflexive Note, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022). Through this reflection, I acknowledged that this would impact the way I was asking participants questions. So, I made a slight adjustment where I

would spend a little more time towards the beginning of an interview to ask more questions about the participant's background and life in the community. Building a stronger rapport was one tool that helped me to address this power dynamic and ultimately generate more rich data in subsequent questions.

The interview guide consisted of 15 questions (See Appendix A) with one of the questions allowing the participant to add anything they felt may have been missing from the conversation. Interviews ran from 42 minutes to 1 hour and 8 minutes, which was all dependent on the amount of time the participant had worked into their schedule. There was always a reminder of when we were coming close to the end of our time, and an opportunity to end the interview at the 1-hour mark. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and safety considerations, interviews were all conducted online using the Microsoft Teams platform. All participants had the option of either only audio recording or audio and video recording and were also able to call into the interview using their telephone. Online/telephone interviews were beneficial as they allowed me to access interview participants from any geographical space with the assumption that they had a computer or phone (Saarijarvi & Bratt, 2021).

## **Recruitment**

To begin, 2 Participants were contacted via email with a description of the research as well as a letter of invitation and consent form attached. Participants were instructed to contact me using the information provided if they wished to set up an interview. The specific language I used to recruit participants stated that I was looking for relevant staff who deliver and/or work in public and non-profit sport and recreation contexts in the municipalities of Nipissing District and Sudbury District. As an example, I stated these may include directors of recreation, culture, and parks, as well as programmers and volunteers within the municipalities. The research description

was necessarily broad as roles in sport and recreation within rural settings are not always consistent and easily defined.

Purposeful and snowball sampling techniques were utilized to then identify participants who fit the research criteria for this study. Purposeful sampling can be understood as, “identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest” (Palinkas et al., 2013, p. 534), which refers to those who are managers or deliver opportunities in sport and recreation settings. Snowball sampling was described by Noy (2008) as, “when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants” (p. 330) which is a widely employed method in qualitative research to access new participants and social groups. Initial contacts were gathered via publicly available emails, with staff working in public/municipal and non-for-profit sport and recreation settings in the municipalities of Nipissing and Sudbury Districts. These initial contacts then referred me to others who fit the research description (Parker et al., 2020).

Municipal email addresses that dealt with sport and recreation (e.g., a town’s leisure services email) were contacted, as well as specific sport and recreation clubs and facilities (identified through Google searches and local organization directories). Full disclosure of the research questions and purpose of the study was included so that the initial participants could identify others who may be willing to participate. Publicly available phone numbers were also contacted in which a brief overview of the research would be explained, and then communication would shift to email if the individual was interested and would like to know more information. Approximately 50 contacts were reached out to between both publicly available emails and phone numbers. In total, nine interviews were conducted from the recruitment process with eight

interviews being used for analysis. One interviewee requested that their data would not be used for the analysis.

Interviews were conducted with paid staff (none of which identified as a newcomer to Canada) who deliver and/or work in public and not-for-profit sport and recreation contexts in the municipalities of Nipissing and Sudbury Districts. The eight interviews were with the following participants: a Municipal Employee (Alex) who is responsible for community development; a Physical Activity Programmer (Dylan) who worked for a not-for-profit organization delivering programs in schools and community centres, a Manager (Ryan) who worked at a public sport and recreation facility, a Municipal Employee (Bethany) who was responsible for community development, a Program Manager (Terry) who worked for a municipality, a former Manager (Stephen) who worked for a municipality and as a board member for a regional not-for-profit, a Recreation Therapist (Joanne) who worked at a not-for-profit organization and delivered recreation programming to community members, and the Manager (Elizabeth) of a regional not-for-profit. The variety of job positions allowed me to gather diverse perspectives on sport and recreation policy and practice. Pseudonyms and general job position titles were used for each participant to help protect anonymity.

A total of five interviews were conducted with participants working in North Bay, with one participant working in Sudbury. One participant was from a smaller centre in the Sudbury District and the final participant was from a community on the border of Nipissing and Sudbury Districts; however, it was addressed by the participant that the geographical boundaries of 'regions' had to be frequently crossed in order to participate in opportunities such as sport and recreation. This suggestion aligns with Vodden and colleagues (2019) who highlighted that



regional boundaries are made up of and defined by various factors, making this participant valuable in helping to explore my research questions.

### **Data Analysis**

To begin with the analysis of data, Fairclough's (1995) three dimensions of discourse and discourse analysis were followed. Locke (2004) broke down Fairclough's (1995) three dimensions, which are comprised of: the text, the discourse practice, and the sociocultural practice. When analyzing the text itself, the researcher is considering the text at word level, also known as analyzing the description (Locke, 2004). Here, I questioned how specific linguistic choices may impact the meaning of different texts for the audience. More specifically, I began to focus on lexical fields, which reflect how different lexical and word choices set up a 'field' that, "signify certain kind of identities, values and sequences of activity which are not necessarily made explicit" (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 30). More simply defined, this involved looking at what kind of vocabulary and words are used in the text. This challenges the researcher to see language as not 'natural' or 'neutral' but instead, de-naturalizing language to understand underlying power relations and ideologies (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

At the text level, considering linguistic elements such as overlexicalisation (excessive description), lexical suppression (what is missing), or structural opposition (not explicitly labelled as good or bad but is implied as such), allowed me to think more critically about the use of specific words and how these may connect to larger socio-cultural discourses (Machin & Mayr, 2012). For example, the repeated use of the words 'them and they' when discussing diverse groups such as new Canadians was highlighted and can be seen as a way of 'othering' populations that do not fit the typical community demographics. Here, the lexical suppression of not addressing who the participant is specifically talking about and instead calling new

Canadians ‘them,’ can indicate a hesitancy or lack of awareness when speaking about diverse populations and the issues they may face.

At the discourse dimension, the researcher considers how the text has been produced, distributed, and consumed. This is understood as the processing part of the analysis which seeks to understand how discourse is interpreted. This part of the analysis was guided by Willig’s (2014, p. 4) questions for discourse analysis which included but was not limited to:

What sorts of assumptions [about the world, about people] appear to underpin what is being said and how it is being said? Could what is being said have been said differently without fundamentally changing the meaning of what is being said? What kind of discursive resources are being used to construct meaning here?

Finally, the sociocultural practice requires the researcher to consider if the text is supporting a specific type of hegemonic discourse or social practice, or if it counters a widespread hegemonic or social practice. This can also be understood as the social analysis which seeks to understand the sociocultural explanation for the discourse (Locke, 2004). Considering the sociocultural practice challenged me to consider the ways in which language is inseparable from the way we create meaning and act in our society (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

The process of using Fairclough’s (1995) three dimensions began by systematically collecting and appraising documents based on their relevance to social inclusion, newcomers, and rural sport and recreation. I then analyzed the documents with the text dimension (Fairclough, 1995) while simultaneously analyzing the semi-structured interview transcripts. This helped me to understand more deeply how discourses surrounding Whiteness, social inclusion, and community are constructed. After transcribing all semi-structured interviews

verbatim, I considered Fairclough's (1995) three dimensions on each transcript, while also beginning to create links with the data analyzed in the document analysis.

It is important to recognize that all of Fairclough's dimensions are inter-connected and should not be analyzed in isolation of each other (Locke, 2004; Mogashoa, 2014). As such, when first considering the text at word level, I started to question how these lexical fields then became discourse, and what the sociocultural roots of that discourse may be. For example, coding a participant's use of the phrase "The Man" when talking about who is responsible for developing policy, led me to consider what this discourse meant for the participant (a lack of control or autonomy over policy development), and the deeper sociocultural roots of this lexical field (patriarchal structures or systemic power).

Throughout this process, I used the foundations of CWT to consider how Whiteness is embedded into the analyzed texts, and ways it can be challenged to foster more inclusive environments. It was also important that I considered my contributions to the interviews as this provides discursive and social context to the way an interviewee will contribute and orient themselves in the conversation (Willig, 2014). It was just as important for me to also consider my research purpose and questions consistently throughout the analysis to critically think about the ways in which inclusion, community, diversity, and rurality are discussed by those in decision making positions and consider how these sociocultural practices may uphold Whiteness in programming. Asking participants to describe how they understand community and inclusion (see appendix A) helped to highlight the ideas they have and the language they use surrounding these subjects. The three dimensions helped me to understand how discourses are transmitted and understood, as well as what sociocultural practices influence discourse at the institutional and societal level (Locke, 2004).

Overall, this analytical approach allowed me to explore in depth how discourse is created, understood, and maintained, and the implications this has on including diverse populations in sport and recreation. The results are presented using a description of the document analysis and semi-structured interviews in which my analysis using the three dimensions led me to three distinct discourses. Data is represented textually using direct quotes, which was guided by CWT to help highlight discourses related to inclusion and community.

## Chapter 5: Findings

CDA is committed to drawing out the ideological and political messages behind certain discourses (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Using CWT as the theoretical lens for this analysis, discourses were highlighted that may appear to be neutral or 'normal,' but rather reveal how power relations are exercised using discourse (Machin & Mayr, 2012; Perry, 2011). My analysis identified three discourses related to social inclusion and sport and recreation: We're all in this together; 'They' aren't from here; and Whose responsibility is it? These three discourses will be explored below using quotations from the semi-structured interviews and the documents that were analyzed for the case study.

### **We're All in This Together**

Through analysis, I identified how participants articulated an understanding of social inclusion informed by the idea that "we are all in this together." This understanding communicated the idea that in order to foster social inclusion, programmers simply had to provide opportunities, which does not consider the personal and systemic barriers that exist for diverse populations in sport and recreation environments. While avoiding addressing who may be left out of programming through an everyone is included approach, Whiteness continues to be reproduced in an invisible, pernicious way. The following section explores the construction of this discourse through participants language and the documents analyzed, including the lexical choices that demonstrate a hesitancy to speak about topics of race, ethnicity, culture, and social inclusion in rural contexts.

Document analysis provided social context which highlighted understandings regarding inclusion in sport and recreation in the region. The Town of Espanola's Parks and Recreation Strategic Master Plan (2017) "positions recreation as being central to all facets of wellbeing:

individual wellbeing, community wellbeing and the wellbeing of natural and built environments” with one of their specific goals being to increase “inclusion and access to recreation for marginalized populations” (p.2). Sudbury’s Leisure Services Strategic Plan (2011) listed one of their key values as having “inclusive and culturally diverse opportunities” (p. 8). In North Bay’s Cultural Plan Report (2011), a discussion in a community forum helped to shape a broad vision and set of guiding principles for the cultural plan. Community discussion and feedback stated that “diversity and inclusion” as well as “participation and access” should be reflected in North Bay’s cultural plan, with one of the specific guiding principles being, “We value diversity, inclusion and acceptance” (North Bay Cultural Plan Report, 2011, p. 35). Participants in that conversation noted that one of the priorities for the plan should be to, “Make art and sport equally important to all Northern Ontarians” (p. 36).

Through these examples, we can see that sport and recreation are positioned as an important part of community well-being, and that inclusion is articulated as a strategic goal in these community contexts. In fact, North Bay’s Cultural Plan (2017) recognized that, “successful municipalities will be those that offer an appealing and attractive community, that are diverse and welcoming.” While inclusion becomes a repeated term across many documents, there is a noticeable lack of explanation of how inclusion is defined and facilitated in these contexts, which creates a vagueness in understanding the term ‘social inclusion.’ Semi-structured interviews allowed for more expansion on how practitioners understand social inclusion in and through sport and recreation.

When Dylan (Programmer) was asked how they encourage inclusion of diverse populations in sport and recreation, they described that building rapport with participants was important and “that’s with any student though, like you know, not just trying to diversify... don’t

single any student out like, you're part of the group, let's go, we're all in this together." The "we're all in this together" discourse frames a colourblind and invisible understanding of diversity which neglects to consider barriers such as exclusionary or prejudicial beliefs that may be held by others in sport or recreation contexts. Stephen also articulated this understanding when they described the connections they had made with newcomers to the community. They exclaimed "They aren't immigrants, they aren't Koreans, they aren't Asians, they're our friends" (Stephen, Manager).

While this approach of not recognizing differences may seem well intentioned, it neglects to consider the multi-layered experience of being a new Canadian and facing intersectional barriers. Similarly, Ryan said:

Umm, newcomers... let me see. I mean, if people arrive right in the city... their opportunities to be involved in our programs and services are the same as anyone else in the city (Ryan, Manager).

This example implies that sport and recreation programming is inherently inclusive but does not consider personal, systemic, and intersectional barriers that exist which will impact the way opportunities are accessed or experienced. Additionally, this quote reinforces that Whiteness is neutral or passive in its effects on diverse groups, which maintains the privileges of Whiteness as invisible.

When Ryan was asked how they would describe social inclusion they explained, "Oh my goodness. It would include everybody if that's a summary right, it would include, every person, every people, regardless of language, ethnic ancestry" (Ryan, Manager). Here, the key part of the text is the word "regardless." While this participant acknowledges inclusion means considering people from all different backgrounds, the specificities of these backgrounds and diverse

experiences are not considered relevant. The use of the word “regardless” was also highlighted in a conversation with Stephen (Manager), in which they stated, “the way I would look at it, inclusion means the opportunity to participate regardless of financial, cultural, social, spiritual, sexual, uh, definitions.” Stephen went on to say that “the opportunity to participate, to me, is inclusion” (Manager). Here we can see a belief that simply providing opportunities is enough to foster inclusion, which does not consider social inclusion as an ongoing process. Further, there is not acknowledgement of the unspoken privileges, knowledge base, and comforts that come with being a White person participating in “Canadian” sport and recreation contexts.

However, participants also challenged the “we’re all in this together” discourse through the use of language that countered the colourblind understandings of social inclusion in sport and recreation. On the Invest Sudbury (2022) webpage, there is a specific section for Newcomers which states “wherever you’re coming from, we can’t wait to welcome you home”. However, as Terry explained, “welcome, welcome is kind of like the smile but, but real inclusion is an action” (Manager). Here, Terry implies that social inclusion must move beyond just saying people are welcome. This means acknowledging the various barriers that can exist when it comes to sport and recreation participation. As pointed out by Joanne (Recreation Therapist):

My international students are like, I'd like to try skating or skiing because where they live they don't have one, they don't experience winter the same way we do in [municipality name], and so then, okay, you want to do skating and skiing, okay, who's gonna teach you? How do you access the gear?

Joanne went on to explain, “just recognizing that to try new activities... engage in new activities... like you don't just show up.” Through these texts, we see social inclusion is



problematized and described as a process that moves beyond just having people show up to sport and recreation opportunities.

Elizabeth (Manager) used the word osmosis to describe that social inclusion efforts cannot happen unconsciously, “To make sure you're making that proactive difference, it does require that conscious level of effort, that is... it's not just gonna happen, kind of by osmosis, overnight.” Elizabeth pointed out that “provision of opportunity alone is not sufficient” challenging the discourse of ‘we’re all in this together,’ and instead rethinking how social inclusion is defined and practiced. Although there are both people who use a “we’re all in this together” understanding of social inclusion and those who problematized this understanding, these texts emphasize the inconsistencies and gaps in understanding what social inclusion means and how discourses frame these understandings in sport and recreation contexts.

### **‘They’ Aren’t from Here**

When analyzing the texts about sport, recreation, community, and inclusion, there were notable understandings of belonging that were communicated. Often, these texts highlighted who was included and who may not be included in community contexts. This led to an ‘othering’ of those who were not from the region which underpinned an understanding that newcomers were inherently not members of the community. Importantly, through document analysis, there were many statements regarding the importance of diverse populations in Northern communities, specifically New Canadians. There were, however, also inconsistencies between written documents and some of the conversations in the semi-structured interviews, which sustains the naturalization of Whiteness in rural and non-metropolitan contexts.

In the Northeastern YMCA’s strategic plan, the vision articulated is for people to have “a place to belong, achieve [their] potential, and strengthen [their] community” and one of their key

values is inclusion stating, “my Y celebrates diversity and creates a sense of belonging” (YMCA of Northeastern Ontario’s Strategic Plan, 2019, pp. 1-2). Part of the YMCA’s strategy is to extend, “core offerings in partnership with rural communities and key demographic groups with a focus on new populations, youth, families and older adults” (YMCA of Northeastern Ontario’s Strategic Plan, 2019, p. 2). With the YMCA being a key provider of sport and recreation in the region, it is clear through their strategic plan that community and belonging is an important proponent of their programming.

North Bay’s Cultural Plan also states, ‘The diversity of ethno-cultural communities – both those that have existed in the community for many years and more recent immigrants enriches North Bay’s culture’ (p. 27). In this example, the document acknowledges the importance of ethno-cultural diversity which can be corroborated by a quote from the Mayor:

With an increasing number of individuals accessing the programs and services offered through the North Bay & District Multicultural Centre and the established North Bay Local Immigration Partnership (formerly North Bay Newcomer Network), I am proud to say that this city has grown beyond just a welcoming community. North Bay is now a leading community of support offering settlement services to new residents from all parts of the world (North Bay Immigration, 2022).

Through these texts we can see social products of how sport and recreation organizations and communities are communicating their openness and acceptance of new Canadians. With the ever-changing demographic landscape of communities, it is important to explore how these written ideas relate to the ideas and practices of sport and recreation practitioners and managers in the region.

Participants described, in different ways, what it means to belong in their communities. While Joanne (Recreation Therapist) stated “families you know, grow here, stay here,” Terry (Manager) used the term “nucleus of family” to describe the longstanding networks of families that exist in small or rural communities: “Lot of people in [town] have lived here all their lives and their grandparents were here and... their parents worked at the mills... so as a result... they come with a prepackaged nucleus of family, cousins, you know, friends.” Terry went on to explain this has created a history of exclusivity which makes including diverse populations challenging, “the fact that we have a history of not being inclusive, it makes it difficult.”

Understandings of exclusivity were understood to trickle into sport and recreation programming. As discussed by Dylan (Programmer):

Yeah, yeah you wanna go try them, but also at the same time, it's like, some might look at her, like, well, you don't really belong here because you know you're not from here, and why are you even trying it in the first place? Sort of thing? Not saying that all people are like that, but there's definitely a stigma that would exist you know, it's like, why is this... lady from Brazil playing hockey right now she's never been on skates. So, like, why?

In this text, the use of the phrase “you’re not from here,” exemplifies a power relation that exists within the community which positions some as insiders, while others are outsiders, and illustrates how sport and recreation practices are implicated in these relationships. Participants outlined many ways they felt connected to their communities, but the language they used clearly positioned those outsider groups as “others,” which naturalizes Whiteness within rural contexts.

Participants provided examples of what it means to belong in the community that demonstrate the importance of being connected within the region. When asking Stephen

(Manager) how long they have lived and worked in the community, they responded, “Local boy makes big. Yeah, I've been here my whole life.” Stephen later described:

I have never felt to be an outsider in my own community, mind you, I had a community. I had a family that had a community profile. My uncle was [extracted] mayor at one point, very heavily involved in our community.

Similarly, when Bethany (Municipal Employee) was asked what it meant to be included in their community, they provided an example of a new couple that had just started in their program that had moved from a different part of the region:

...somebody just kind of went up to them, they're like... ‘I haven't seen you guys around, are you guys from the area?’ ... and then they just got to chit chatting and realized, you know... they knew people. They both knew the same people.

These quotes demonstrate the deeply rooted ideas of belonging through the use of the term “community profile,” or the importance of ‘knowing people’ which both help you to make connections. This reiterates the idea that belonging means having existing connections to or relationships within the community. Those who belong in the community are then considered to be the ‘norm.’

A strong sense of belonging was also identified through community traditions. When Elizabeth (Manager) explained her own understanding of inclusion she stated:

One of the bigger challenges that we face, is where we have what might be described as traditions in how our programs and services have run, and how we may have... alumni and staff that are really connected to those traditions because they remember what it was when they were a kid... we may need to reflect... that those traditions may in fact be problematic as we talk about true social inclusion.

In this quote, having a deeply rooted connection to the community is illustrated through being an “alumni and staff” or being aware of “traditions.” It is alluded here that understanding these traditions is important for belonging in the community and in the context of sport and recreation, which can also be a barrier to inclusion of new participants.

When discussing demographic changes in their community, Bethany (Municipal Employee) said:

We've had a lot of people from down South move up here, so it's kind of a bit of a culture shock for some of them... like some people have moved up here and like... have no family. No, no connection to the community.

Here, using the language of “down south” to describe how the demographic landscape is changing infers there are important differences between living in Southern Ontario and living in Northern Ontario. The language choice implies that the rural-urban or North-South differences greatly impact how someone might integrate or belong in the community.

These differences between rural-urban and North-South communities were further discussed when Dylan (Programmer) was asked about the challenges a newcomer might face when coming to their community:

Like they go to the bigger cities, right, you know, like Toronto... it's way more accessible, right? And like, they have, like, communities within the city. So it's kind of like they feel like they're home away from home. [Our Community] doesn't really have that yet.

Considering the ideas of community presented above (such as being born and raised in the community, not being from another geographical region, or having pre-existing connections within your community) can help us to understand how social practices may draw on ideas of

tradition and similarity. For example, Alex (Municipal Employee) expressed a capacity-related challenge to encouraging social inclusion, “there's always something for everyone, but we can't always do everything all at once.” They went on to explain:

[E]ven being in a community or a neighborhood, you don't always have everyone like-minded within that community. So, you really have to pick the top, you know, five or ten depending on how many things you're capable of doing, activities or goals to work towards, because you can't please everyone all [at] the same time. So, we always do our best to pick the majority (Alex, Municipal Employee).

Here, the idea of “picking the majority” suggests who is considered and included in decision making within community contexts. This positions those with diverse interests or needs as outside of the majority interest group and therefore not central to the demographic groups that programmers are targeting. In this example we can see how Whiteness being invisible in sport and recreation may manifest in different forms, including specific groups within the community being sustained as key decision makers.

Lexical fields were commonly identified where participants omitted language, such as when Alex (Municipal Employee) described social inclusion and the objective of community development as:

[H]ow we can kind of...reach everyone that's in the community. We have a lot of... seniors' population, but kind of those middle-aged people as well. And then obviously our youth participation and stuff is very important too. So really just trying to hone in on how to include the community as a whole.

Stating the organization's goal is to reach “everyone that's in the community” but emphasizing age over other demographics (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic

background, etc.) highlights a vagueness in how the individual or organization may be understanding their community and how social inclusion efforts may be pursued within it.

Participants also omitted language when describing diverse populations, specifically New Canadians. When Dylan (Programmer) discussed the potential challenges a newcomer may have in their community, they started by explaining, “[Our community] is getting better with that, but also at the same time I feel like there are also a lot of people that, look at individuals and feel like they shouldn't be here.” In this quote, Dylan uses “they” to describe New Canadians and is emphasizing the idea that certain populations do not belong. Dylan went on to give some examples of more specific challenges a newcomer may face, “Do they have a license, like are they able to drive? Like are they working? How did they get to their work?” After more specifically looking at the lexical choices of this quote, the use of the term “they” does not clearly indicate who the participant is talking about. While this language may appear neutral, the lexical absence of a specific population may contribute to the othering of populations that may not fit into the immediate or ‘accepted’ community along with associated norms and cultural practices. Whereas community members whose families “worked at the mill” are described as having deep ties of history and identity within the community, newcomers are described with a level of uncertainty as to what resources “they” would have access to, or what “they” might offer the community.

Further, participants commonly over lexicalized responses when discussing diverse populations and social inclusion:

It has gotten more diverse... it's not like a smaller community. It's like, yeah, we have individuals of a, you know, colour here and it's good to see, and, but a lot of my

coworkers at the [organization] you know they're, you know, we have Chinese, like, and my one coworker, she just moved here from Korea.” (Dylan, Programmer).

In this quote, Dylan’s use of many words or excessive description may indicate an anxiety surrounding the topic of race and ethnicity. Interestingly, Dylan jumps from discussing people of colour to discussing nationality/ethnicity. Hesitancy in discussing social inclusion was also observed when asking Ryan (Manager) to describe what social inclusion looks like within their community or organization, “Ooo .... (long pause) social inclusion (pause) we have a social inclusion, social... social, social, umm, I’m just trying to think of a good answer.” Here, the long pauses and hesitancy to provide an answer may also indicate a pressure to deliver a good or appropriate response. Between Ryan’s hesitancy with this response, and stating they are trying to think of a “good answer,” these lexical fields may imply a pressure to have certain skills, expertise, or knowledge of social inclusion efforts within their organization.

Pre-conceived attitudes that exist in the community are recognized by sport and recreation practitioners and have implications for how sport and recreation is delivered. Elizabeth’s (Manager) language of acknowledging the importance of a more “colourful fabric” in the community challenges the language of ‘othering’ diverse community members:

I think in the last three to five we have seen much more diversity in our community, with immigrants coming from Africa and the Asian continent quite specifically... the storyline is when I first moved to Sudbury, if you were a black person, you would definitely be a visible minority and one of the very very few, today we have a much more colourful fabric in our community... Happily, I would say that not only are we seeing that diversity in our members, but as those families become more settled in the community then we're seeing some of the younger youth within those families, join our staff group as well,



which of course then just continues to foster a sense of belonging and ability to connect and engage.

Elizabeth also acknowledged the importance of being connected within the community as being ‘more settled’ helps to foster belonging. However, Elizabeth recognized more diversity results in a changing landscape in rural communities which encourages us to deconstruct the way we talk about what it means to be connected and included. The examples provided throughout the analysis highlight more explicit examples of ‘othering’ diverse populations in sport and recreation settings and challenging this discourse like Elizabeth does in the quote above encourages us to consider how Whiteness becomes normalized in our language surrounding what it means to belong.

### **Whose Responsibility Is It?**

When discussing who is responsible for creating policy, or how social inclusion was exemplified in policy, there was a general lack of knowledge on these details. Typically, the responsibility of creating or enforcing social inclusion policy was deferred to different stakeholders. The ambiguity of whose responsibility it was to both understand what social inclusion means, as well as to create and implement policies, was evident through participants’ responses or lack thereof. This ambiguity places sport and recreation practitioners and managers as bystanders in the processes of social inclusion work and challenging Whiteness. The uncertainty surrounding responsibility for social inclusion work and supporting the engagement of diverse populations in sport and recreation programming is further explored in this section.

Importantly, there were no examples of text in the documents analyzed that explicitly identified who is responsible for social inclusion in sport and recreation. It was acknowledged

that the planning and management of sport and recreation should be a collaborative effort between municipalities and other stakeholders:

The City of North Bay's Arts, Culture, Recreation & Leisure Services Department in partnership with other volunteer, public and private service providers will contribute to a healthy community and enhance the quality of life for citizens through the planning, management and delivery of arts, culture, recreation, and leisure services opportunities.

(City of North Bay, 2020)

When asked if participants were aware of social inclusion policy, some explicitly said, "No, not that I know, or I'm aware of" (Dylan, Programmer), while others said "No, not really, I don't know if that's a bad thing or?" (Bethany, Municipal Employee), implying that there may be something wrong with not being aware of inclusion policy.

Participants also spoke more specifically about policies or initiatives regarding new Canadians as if it was the responsibility of someone else. When asked if they knew about specific policies or initiatives for New Canadians, Terry (Manager) said, "No, but that would be a great question for our economic developer" and Alex (Municipal Employee) said, "I'm not yet, but it's definitely something I can put in as question and kind of see, you know, how do we welcome new people to the community." When discussing how New Canadians might get support within the community, Joanne (Recreation Therapist) said, "Is there like a formal... policy... I don't, I don't know the city like how they're kind of managing... you know [how much they are] aware and supporting I guess the needs of newcomers." A pattern appears here within the texts in which the questions about policy are being re-directed as the responsibility of different stakeholders. This leaves the responsibility of social inclusion as an ambiguous role that

does not need to be acknowledged, and positions sport and recreation professionals as bystanders in this process.

When Elizabeth (Manager) was asked if they had any specific examples of social inclusion policy they said, “I don't believe we have one that stands alone, it would be baked within our employee and staff and volunteer policies generically. Or more generally, kind of a core foundation. We have core values, one of which is inclusion.” Here we can see that social inclusion policy is embedded into organizations’ missions and values, and there might not be an explicit policy for how people should facilitate or engage in social inclusion efforts. When Terry (Manager) was describing how social inclusion was reflected in policy they stated, “it’s very broad” and when asked if it should be more specified, they explained “That’s an excellent question, and I don’t know... I feel like inclusion has to happen organically... like that by us saying ‘thou shalt’ or ‘thou shalt not’ is not necessarily going to move it forward.” The use of “thou shalt” is an interesting way to frame policy, connecting policy to a dogmatic practice which implies that policy is a demand that is to be followed. Here, Terry implies that commanding people to be inclusive may not be productive or impactful. Terry juxtaposes dogmatic practices of inclusion with more “organic” practices of inclusion, which may suggest inclusion work needs to happen on the volition of individual people, and not be instructed or enforced by policy.

While participants had different perspectives on policy, it was also noted that policies have to be modified by practitioners during implementation. Stephen (Manager) explained, “I'm a big believer policy is necessary” but also referred back several times to a piece of advice they had once received: “rules or guidelines - stretch the hell out of them, just don't break them.” Participants also expressed that policies are not helpful if they are not implemented:

The written policies are important, that's ultimately kind of the foundation... you can have a great policy even if you're not enacting it, it's meaningless. So it's also about, you know, making sure that ... those good intentions really transpired out to action (Elizabeth, Manager).

In conversation with Ryan (Manager) it became apparent that even when they had uncertainties about specific policies, they still felt a pressure to speak as if they knew about them. This was evident when Ryan (Manager) was asked how social inclusion was reflected in policy in which they replied, "Hmm, I'm not sure." As the conversation continued and Ryan was asked how they specifically encourage inclusion in their role, "What ways do I encourage inclusion in my role? What ways do I do it? (sounds puzzled) (long pause) hm, yeah, through conversation (laughs). Through meetings, through review of policy, through uhm relying on others, relying on my staff" (Manager).

Finally, when Ryan (Manager) was asked what challenges might be present in following through with social inclusion, they stated that they hoped there wouldn't be any because, "the policies are well written, easy to follow... easy to deliver... the policies that are for us to follow are certainly understandable, um and...and... and very easy for us to uh recognize, right, the importance of following them." Even though Ryan identified they were not aware of any specific social inclusion policies, they continued to explain the way they fostered social inclusion was to follow the "well written" and "easy to follow" policies. Here, the social context of the interview is important to highlight. Ryan may have felt a social pressure to be aware of certain policies that they were not confident in speaking about, leading them to make lexical contradictions.

However, the examples provided from the conversations with Ryan highlight the ambiguous

nature of discussing social inclusion and whose responsibility it is, as well as enforcing the idea that people may feel they cannot ask questions or be unsure about social inclusion and diversity.

The hesitancy, or in this next instance ‘fear’ of making a mistake is also evident in this quote by Elizabeth (Manager):

Many of our staff group were quite conscious that they wanted to get people's names correct... but for fear of offending people may not refer to anybody using their name and not realize that was perhaps a, you know an exclusionary tactic that they hadn't really anticipated it to be. And so kinda the importance of being able to learn how to pronounce and utilize that name so that people really feel seen and identified.

Here, Elizabeth speaks to the importance of intentionality when it comes to making people feel welcome. The staff’s intention was to not offend people by refraining from using their name, when in fact this became an “exclusionary” practice. This “fear of offending people” alludes to the idea that staff may not be equipped with the resources they need to create welcoming environments for diverse populations. Further, hesitancy to discuss race and ethnicity becomes another way for Whiteness to be reproduced and maintained in sport and recreation environments.

When discussing how public policy or other organizations might impact the way sport and recreation is delivered in their community, Joanne (Recreation Therapist) expressed, “again like it's hard because like if I'm not at that table, I don't know if there's a specific policy.” When asked how important policy was in shaping day to day practices, Joanne (Recreation Therapist) added another comment:

I like that you're taking the perspective of like kind of the higher up... because I think that when you were like on the ground or in the field kind of doing that day-to-day

interaction, you do what you need to do... and I think too like there's policies and there's also personal practices.

The use of the terms “higher up” and “at the table” reiterates how those delivering sport or recreation opportunities on the ground level may feel that policy is something out of their reach, responsibility, or scope of practice.

The idea of policy being the responsibility of someone in a higher position was also discussed when Dylan (Programmer) was asked how important policy was in shaping day to day activities, “You know, to the [organization] it's all important. It's the ministry, right? Like you know, ‘The Man.’ (laughs) It's gonna be very important, very, very stingy... god forbid you break one rule 'cause you're a sinner you know.” Here the use of “The Man” positions those who create policy as someone higher up or out of reach of the people who deliver programs in the community. This language choice exemplifies structural opposition in which “The Man” is not explicitly identified as someone bad but is implied as someone above them who is in control, and practitioners are seen as “sinners” if they do not follow policy direction.

A key challenge that was identified by one the participants was the question of who is specifically responsible when it comes to social inclusion work:

Who is the person that delivers the message? Like, is it a city? ... Where does that message come from of like, we need to be socially inclusive...but somebody that hasn't had that education, like how do we get bits of information and bud thoughts and like, who's responsible? (Joanne, Recreation Therapist)

Joanne's questions show a certain level of confusion as to who is responsible for social inclusion efforts. Elizabeth (Manager) eloquently described social inclusion work as “a long and ongoing journey” and explained:

It really took me through some of those examples to really, oh my god, now I get it, now I understand what everyone keeps going on about (laughs). And how then the second piece I think becomes, oh, sugar, that's a lot of work. That's a lot of work to address day in, day out.

Collectively, the data indicates that ambiguity in whose role it is to encourage and implement social inclusion, may be a combination of different factors: a lack of understanding of who is responsible; and that practitioners may not be informed or supported to do the work. This creates confusion and hesitancy surrounding social inclusion work and continues to place Whiteness as a normal or invisible state that is not challenged or transformed.

While there were varied understandings of social inclusion articulated, several participants reflected more critically on policy and social inclusion. Stephen (Manager) challenged the idea of importing policies or ideas without contextualizing them for Northern communities, “particularly being here in Northern Ontario, we have rules and policies and guidelines that we have to follow, that are established by some bureaucrat sitting in a building in Toronto.” Stephen went on to explain, “they don't realize that you can't make cart blanche rules, that apply in Northern Ontario that you can in Toronto.” Stating “cart blanche” here seems to imply that people in rural/Northern Ontario have deeply embedded ideas that factors such as geography and demographics create unique experiences in rural settings that must be accounted for when making policy and that similarly intentioned policies and programs can't be easily imported into rural or northern communities.

Further, Elizabeth (Manager) suggested that people should critically reflect on their own beliefs and prejudices:

I'm sure that most of my colleagues will feel the same way, they don't believe that they are racist, in any way. And then it's not until you walk through these examples where you realize, ah, you know that privilege that I'm coming with, all that background experience I have, is by its very nature, probably leading me to a bias and ultimately systemic barrier that I just didn't really understand.

In this example, a critical perspective on policy and inclusion challenges how certain ideas are promoted and how systemic beliefs are being upheld. Elizabeth challenged the discourse of ambiguity by stating people "don't believe they are racist." This recognizes that if you do not acknowledge your own background, experiences, and privileges, Whiteness becomes invisible in society and keeps the privilege and dominance of Whiteness as the social norm.

Collectively, the discourses of; We're all in this together; 'They' aren't from here; and Whose responsibility is it?, outline the ideas and language sport and recreation practitioners used when describing their understandings of social inclusion policy and practice in their communities and organizations. Generalized statements of being inclusive were followed by strong ideas of who belongs and who does not belong in the community. The work of social inclusion was often ambiguous which created uncertainty of who is responsible for doing social inclusion work. The way that ideas of Whiteness, exclusion, and hesitancy are prevalent in the three discourses will be further explored in the discussion section.



## **Chapter 6: Discussion and Implications**

In this research, I sought to examine 1) how sport and recreation practitioners and managers understand social inclusion in and through sport and recreation in their rural communities and 2) how discourses of community and inclusion impact the way sport and recreation practitioners and managers define and understand social inclusion. The following section will discuss the implications of the findings and how this analysis contributes to the existing literature. The exploration will be organized under my two research questions to help unpack how these questions were answered throughout the research process.

### **Practitioners' and Managers' Understandings of Social Inclusion**

When talking to sport and recreation practitioners and managers about their understanding of social inclusion, it was suggested that inclusion meant making everyone welcome “regardless” of individuals’ diverse backgrounds or experiences. The “we’re all in this together” discourse informed an understanding that anyone who comes to the region has the same opportunities as the people already there and indicates that participants draw on discourses of colourblindness in the context of programming and policy (Frankenberg, 1993; McDonald, 2009). Here, differences of race, ethnicity, and culture are not recognized, and simply providing opportunities for sport and recreation is considered enough to foster social inclusion.

McDonald (2009) discussed the invisibility of race in leisure scholarship and how White people see acknowledging or discussing race to be “bad” (p.11). McDonald (2009) described this as an uncritical claim of sameness which places White people as innocent bystanders who do not take accountability for the inequality and differences that race makes. Throughout the interviews, sport and recreation practitioners and managers neglected to acknowledge the way race, ethnicity, and culture impacts an individual’s experience in programming. This practice positions

Whiteness as the norm and while participants are engaging in discussions of inclusion, by not actively addressing these topics through policy and programming, they make inclusion something that is invisible and avoided.

The language used by participants surrounding social inclusion work was vague and ambiguous, which does not hold individuals accountable for their own knowledge and understandings of relational and collaborative social inclusion work (Forde et al., 2015). Importantly, social inclusion is defined by Forde and colleagues (2015) as a relational and collaborative process that must be ongoing between people and organizations. The research highlighted the importance of programming and policy development and implementation being a collaborative effort instead of diverting responsibility to specific individuals. There are many layers to social inclusion work, and it must be considered as both a process and an outcome (Suzuki, 2017; Ponc & Frisby, 2010) in order to encourage practitioners and managers to break down and abolish discourses of Whiteness that place White people as bystanders in the process/work of social inclusion (McDonald, 2009).

When considering the analyzed documents, there were broad or overarching claims about being inclusive in the community or in sport and recreation settings. Nevertheless, participants' language indicated confusion, hesitancy, or inaction towards social inclusion work. The claims made in publicly available documents did not appear to be evident within the practices and policies of sport and recreation organizations. Shakir (2005) emphasized that a claim to be inclusive is not the same as doing the work and creating sustainability for inclusion practices. Here, the research problematizes the use of diversity, inclusion, and acceptance as values in public documents, but then failing to implement clear policies throughout sport and recreation organization that will act on these values.

Participants who challenged the “we’re all in this together” discourse described social inclusion work as a long and hard process that requires education and self-introspection. One participant specifically spoke about how their colleagues don’t want to “believe they are racist.” This example of an internal contradiction is reflective of the normalization of Whiteness in society (Perry, 2001) as well as social practices which continue to leave Whiteness as an unspoken privilege (Nayak, 2007). This language also suggests that there is a certain level of commitment to the process of social inclusion work which may appear daunting.

The language of participants and the documents analyzed positioned sport and recreation organizations as places that do not need to consider the experiences and systems of exclusion that diverse populations may face. My findings support the claims of Spaaij (2009) and Suzuki (2017) that critiqued sport’s ability to, “transcend class, gender, ethnic, religious and other divisions” (Spaaij, 2009, p. 1143) and acknowledged that sport does not often challenge the exclusive nature of a social structure which leads sport to only benefit certain participants (Suzuki, 2017). The discourse of “we’re all in this together” informs a colourblind understanding of sport and recreation programming that places rural sport and recreation organizations as spaces where practitioners do not have to think about or acknowledge differences (Spaaij et al., 2020). Here, people in positions of privilege understand sport and recreation as inherently good (Fox, 2006) without challenging how this experience might differ for various groups.

Vagueness and ambiguity were clearly noted when participants were asked more specifically about social inclusion practices and policies. This framing creates inconsistencies in understanding whose role or responsibility it is to foster social inclusion within sport or recreation organizations. Language referring to policy being made by people that are “higher up” or from “The Man” creates a division of responsibility for including diverse populations. As

noted by Suzuki (2017), working towards inclusion means recognizing what group is socially excluded and then altering the structures to include them, which cannot be the responsibility of one single job title or position. Further, positioning responsibility with someone else absolved participants of their own responsibility to the process of social inclusion work.

There were noticeable differences in understandings of social inclusion based on the role/scope of individuals' work within their organizations. Those who were in managerial positions were often able to offer more examples of social inclusion policies, practices, and initiatives within their organization. Through the analysis of their linguistic choices (vocabulary use, pauses in speech, etc.) those in managerial positions typically spoke more comfortably about inclusion of diverse populations and the importance of this inclusion within their community. This was exemplified throughout the conversation with Elizabeth (Manager of a Regional not-for-profit) which may be because their role requires them to oversee organizations throughout the region, compared to others who may only work in one municipality. Therefore, Elizabeth may have a larger scope of practice and perspective of social inclusion efforts and needs in different communities.

Further, the role of participants appeared to aid some in offering more critical perspectives that challenged the dominant discourses of colourblindness and ambiguity discussed in this study. This may be due to their level of experience and training within the position, or an institutionalized expectation to be knowledgeable on topics of inclusion and diversity. Nevertheless, this division of knowledge between those in more managerial positions and those responsible for program delivery is relevant, given the aforementioned ambiguity surrounding responsibility for social inclusion policy and practice. This aligns with the findings of Rich and

Giles' (2015) who suggested that hierarchical systems of management are, "indicative of one-way/closed communication systems and unilateral decision making" (p. 314).

Interestingly, after discussing the lack of specificity for social inclusion policy, some participants suggested that social inclusion must happen organically. One participant used the phrase "thou shalt include" to indicate that enforcement might not be an effective method for encouraging social inclusion practices. Embedded into this language is a dogmatic idea that views social inclusion policy as something that is written or enforced. Frisby and Ponc (2013) suggested one of the key strategies for social inclusion in sport would include organizational commitment to change, specifically, through developing and implementing social inclusion policies: "When developed collectively and taken seriously, policies can guide decision making, the reallocation of resources and the development of new approaches to program delivery." (p. 36). While Frisby and Ponc (2013) noted organic opportunities for social inclusion are important, only having 'organic inclusion' might assume that everyone is naturally equipped with the tools to include diverse populations. This idea may further perpetuate the language of colourblindness and ambiguity, as it does not recognize the resources and education that may be needed in order to deconstruct personal privilege and systems of Whiteness. Social inclusion policies need to be in place but can act as "organic guiding principles" (Frisby & Ponc, 2013, p. 36) that are adaptable and open to improvement as the process of social inclusion is ongoing and never static.

Similar to Spaaij and colleagues' (2020) work, these findings highlight that discourses of silence and passivity may impede diversity work in sport, or in this instance, social inclusion in sport and recreation. The discourse of ambiguity towards social inclusion reiterates the understanding that social inclusion work is the responsibility of somebody else, which further

supports systems of White neutrality and innocence (McDonald, 2007). If sport and recreation practitioners do not believe the work of social inclusion is their responsibility and only take a top-down approach to encouraging social inclusion work, we will not see changes at the level of program delivery. The findings from this research highlight an important need for municipalities and sport and recreation organizations to re-think how policy is being developed and implemented throughout the sector.

### **Discourses of Community and Inclusion**

Throughout the process of interviewing participants, it became apparent that individuals from the Nipissing and Sudbury districts have very pronounced ideas of what it means to belong within the community. These deeply rooted ideas of what it means to belong frame clear insider and outsider groups, which in turn ‘others’ those who do not fit these understandings. ‘Othering’ was seen specifically through linguistic choices related to geography as well as social and cultural norms that frame sport and recreation participation. Recognizing that rural communities have historically benefitted from people being the same, through their values, origins, and lifestyles (Abelson, 2016) is important when challenging Whiteness in rural communities and working towards more welcoming rural communities.

Participants discussed both a tight network of families and a history of exclusivity in rural communities which created challenges in working towards social inclusion. These findings align with previous literature that has highlighted the importance of families in rural sport and recreation (Rich, 2021; Rich & Misener, 2017; Rich et al., 2014). Participants identified specific instances in which some overt or covert exclusionary behaviours were made towards new Canadians or other diverse populations. As corroborated by Mowatt (2018), exclusionary attitudes and behaviours may reinforce the idea that those who are not from the community are

responsible for creating their own sport and recreation opportunities where they will feel included. As such, the “we’re all in this together” discourse places the onus on marginalized groups to feel included in sport and recreation settings, as it does not consider the additional barriers that impede the process of social inclusion (e.g., prejudicial attitudes).

Radford (2007) discussed higher rates of migration of new Canadians to Canada’s major cities (Vancouver, Toronto, or Montreal). This understanding was articulated by participants saying new Canadians will usually move to the city or “down south.” Indeed, one participant suggested that when people move to their community from “down south” they have no pre-existing connections to the community which can make it challenging for them to fit in. The discourse of “‘They’ aren’t from here” highlights a socially constructed link between newcomers and cities, which by extension complicates the newcomer-rural relationship. If rural community members associate urban settings as the only places where newcomers may reside, this may further lead to the belief that rural places are not welcoming for newcomers. Further, placing such a strong emphasis on belonging may trickle into the experiences of newcomers in sport and recreation settings. Factors such as employment, finances, and language proficiency, are already shown to have great impact on a new Canadian’s experience in sport and recreation in their communities (Smart et al., 2020). Additionally, this research highlighted that new Canadians having to navigate prominent networks and a sense of belonging within the community is another challenge to feeling accepted and benefitting from sport and recreation. This finding challenges scholars to think critically about how community is understood and invoked by sport and recreation programmers and policy makers (Rich, Spaaij, & Misener, 2021).

Throughout the discussions with participants, there was a strong link to place and connecting belonging in the community to geography. Participants spoke about their community

as if you could only understand, be connected, and belong in the community if you had a shared history with the place. A hesitancy to welcome newcomers may also be steeped in the worry that people from different geographic spaces will not understand the experiences of living in a rural community. This can be supported by Rich's (2021) work which expanded on the divisions between rural and urban Canada. Specifically, this divide stems from political and economic systems, "which symbolically situate powerful political decision makers in urban centers which are physically (and socially) far away from rural citizens" (Rich, 2021, p. 192). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which community histories and geography may be implicated in hesitancies towards changing economic, demographic, and political landscapes in rural communities.

Finally, one challenge presented by participants was the lack of contextualization when creating policy for rural communities. Participants expressed concern that rules and policies are being made in Toronto and applied to Northern Ontario. In working towards making rural communities more inclusive for diverse populations, we must also re-think how we are considering the barriers rural communities face when trying to achieve social sustainability (Gallant & Tirone, 2017). More specifically, these findings show us that we must also consider and address processes of policy implementation and capacity building (for sport and recreation delivery) in rural sport and recreation organizations. When we consider how rural communities are being excluded from or neglected in provincial planning, policy making, and resource distribution, we can better understand how these issues intersect with sport, recreation, and social inclusion in these communities. It is detrimental to position rural communities as areas that do not need interventions and support from governments, especially when it comes to population growth and maintenance (Reimer, 2007). Further, this idea neglects to consider how inter-



dependent rural and urban centers are (Reimer, 2007). Leaving communities with little support and capacity for the process of policy implementation leads social inclusion work/creating welcoming communities to be an ambiguous role in which whiteness can proliferate as a norm.

As Abelson (2016) discussed, the ability to claim sameness in tight-knit rural communities can be crucial for survival. Here, “whiteness is often a key component of claiming sameness in predominately white rural places” (Abelson, 2016, p. 1537). With the prominent discourse being “‘they’re’ not from here”, and belonging meaning being connected to the community and its history, it is clear that the experiences of diverse populations are not always being recognized, understood, and valued. Instead, a general understanding of “we’re all in this together” is apparent in sport and recreation settings but is underscored with a neglect to recognize barriers experiences by newcomers.

The implications of this work require re-thinking how discourses identified from sport and recreation practitioners and managers may uphold systems of Whiteness. Additionally, it is important to consider how policies, practices, and understandings of social inclusion work in sport and recreation settings are translated throughout and between organizations. In the following section, the theoretical and practical implications of this work will be discussed.

### **Theoretical Implications**

In this research, I have identified how discourses of Whiteness operate in the context of rural sport and recreation. The analysis illuminates how Whiteness is intertwined within the language of sport and recreation practitioners and managers and how understandings of colourblindness and White neutrality guided some practitioners’ understandings of social inclusion (McDonald, 2009). Firstly, it is pertinent to consider how Whiteness changes over time and place (Nayak, 2007). While examples of overt prejudice or racist behaviour may not be

prevalent, Whiteness is embedded into the ideas of insider/outsider populations within communities, which covertly articulates who belongs and who does not. The language used in sport and recreation settings has normalized how we speak about diverse populations, and through this language we are naturally excluding ‘others.’ As discussed by (Perry, 2001), thinking about how this language reproduces White domination in diverse contexts is important to recognize and challenge discourses of Whiteness as the ‘norm.’

Second, Whiteness is a social norm that is chained to unspoken privilege (Nayak, 2007). The unique experiences of living in a rural area (e.g., challenges with capacity, access to resources, etc.,) intersecting with discourses of Whiteness, increases the level complexity when creating and delivering programming and policy. These overlapping ideas of Whiteness and rurality create ambiguity about who is responsible for social inclusion which connects to McDonald’s (2009) discussion of White people placing themselves as innocent bystanders in discussions of race. Both rurality and Whiteness (and their intersections), must be considered when challenging socially created norms (e.g., we’re all in this together) in sport and recreation. Finally, Whiteness can be broken/deconstructed to better humanity (Nayak, 2007). Participants challenged dominant discourses of colourblindness by explaining that the process of social inclusion is ongoing and requires more than just providing opportunities. Recognizing that sport does not act as an equalizer and that personal and systemic barriers still exist in sport and recreation environments is crucial when deconstructing structures of exclusion (Suzuki, 2017).

Considering how geography and place impact understandings of belonging and community is an important implication when considering the notion of fostering ‘welcoming rural communities’ for new Canadians. Living in diverse contexts (e.g., rural communities, Northern Ontario) was shown to impact people’s understanding of what it means to be included

in the community. It was evident that rural communities rely heavily on existing networks and traditions (Mair, 2009) and have additional challenges with levels capacity (Rich and Misener, 2019) which impact the way sport and recreation is delivered. This research provides evidence for sport and recreation practitioners and managers to reflect on and consider what it means to belong in a rural community, as well as the ties this has to being well networked, connected, and established within your region. As claiming sameness is often tied to Whiteness in rural communities (Abelson, 2016), we should challenge how these ties to belonging make Whiteness pervasive in diverse community contexts (Perry, 2001).

Reflecting on the foundations of CWT allows us to think about the specific ways Whiteness is pervasive in diverse community contexts. As stated by Perry (2001) we must, “expose, challenge, and transform” (p. 85) the ways Whiteness is framed as natural and neutral. Questioning how discourses of colourblindness, ambiguity, and ‘othering’ populations normalizes Whiteness in rural sport and recreation is an important theoretical contribution of this work.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings from my research highlight a need to have more clear and concise understandings of social inclusion within policy and practice, and to rethink how policy is developed, implemented, and translated in sport and recreation organizations. This work may begin with making clear organizational commitments (Frisby & Ponc, 2013) to move beyond the use of inclusion as simply a guiding principle or value for sport and recreation organizations. Developing a clear and nuanced understanding of the process of social inclusion for sport and recreation practitioners and managers is crucial. For example, Frisby and Ponc (2013) emphasized using the term ‘social inclusion’ and not just ‘inclusion’ in sport settings. Including

the word 'social' highlights a need to consider diversity in Canada and the systemic barriers to participating in sport, and without considering the word 'social,' people may believe inclusion work in sport is simply just providing access. In order to move beyond stated values in public documents, policy makers should seek to create opportunities for open dialogue and education on social inclusion as these processes will aid sport and recreation practitioners in co-creating the process of social inclusion within their organizations.

Further, understanding that social inclusion work means recognizing the differences and specificities of race, ethnicity, and culture, while also recognizing how Whiteness is implicated in this process, will help sport and recreation practitioners, managers, and policy makers to have more relational and collaborative understandings of social inclusion work (Forde et al., 2015; Frisby & Ponc, 2013; Rich and Giles, 2015). Throughout the analysis, participants seemed reluctant to openly discuss how they or their organizations were defining and practising social inclusion. Again, implementing policy and building capacity may help to create a culture that is not hesitant or uneasy discussing social inclusion work, and will help to move away from practitioners drawing on discourses of colourblindness.

However, it is not enough to simply understand the process of social inclusion, instead, the ways in which Whiteness is maintained through passivity and neutrality much be recognized and challenged. There must be an acknowledgement of how Whiteness is embedded into the social structures of sport and recreation, as well as a recognition of the privileges that come with being a White person working and participating in this sector (McDonald, 2009; Suzuki, 2017; Spaaij et al., 2020). Encouraging sport and recreation programmers and policy makers working in diverse community contexts to critically think about how Whiteness is present in language,

policies, and practices can allow for rethinking, deconstructing, and abolishing discourses of Whiteness (Nayak, 2007).

Finally, there is a need for continued work to embed clear actions for social inclusion into policies within a provincial and federal policy contexts, and to [re]evaluate how this information moves through different levels of policy within the sport and recreation sector. The ideas and priorities that are evident in higher level policies have made their way into municipal policies, but my research demonstrated there is not a clear way that this is then being implemented in rural sport and recreation organizations. Ongoing evaluation of successes and areas for improvement in sport organizations is a key consideration for social inclusion and there should be a multi-level commitment made to consider how policy is enacted and implemented effectively. More specifically, this multi-level commitment will require strategic plans, conversations, and evaluations happening in and with sport and recreation committees, advisory committees, and staff. Clear actions for social inclusion cannot only be developed at the managerial level, but must be supported throughout all levels of sport and recreation organizations. In order for these actions to be implemented effectively, initiatives must be developed and supported appropriately, and evaluations must be conducted to understand the outcomes that are (and are not) achieved.

## **Chapter 7: Limitations and Future Directions**

Due to the time constrictions of a two-year graduate program and challenges with recruitment responses, a smaller sample size of eight participants was acquired which was intended to represent a larger region (i.e., two districts). While the eight participants still offered valuable perspectives from diverse community contexts, this smaller samples size may not have offered as much representation from different municipalities and types of organizations as initially hoped. For example, I sought to interview participants who were sport club volunteers or staff but was not able to recruit any. These perspectives would provide more insights into the ways social inclusion policy and practice is considered in diverse organizational and municipal contexts.

Additionally, the geographic spread of participants may have resulted in a narrow representation of experiences and community contexts. That is, the participants' experiences may not have represented the nuances of living in a more remote community. Due to the nature of snowball sampling and likely lower capacity levels of small organizations, participants were primarily from North Bay and not other (smaller) towns or townships in the Nipissing and Sudbury Districts. As North Bay is a smaller urban centre within the region (population of 52,662), the results may not be reflective of municipalities that are more remote or that have less access to resources and services available in central locations. Perspectives from these smaller and more remote centres would help to reflect the uniqueness of place, culture, history, and employment (Rich, Hall, & Nelson, 2021) that exists in rural communities, and how this social/cultural landscape impacts sport and recreation.

## **Future Directions**

The discourses of colourblindness, ambiguity, and ‘othering’ populations highlighted the way social inclusion is understood in some rural community contexts. These discourses call attention to the importance of place and geography when exploring inclusion and belonging. Future work may explore the discourses, successes, and challenges of regions outside of Nipissing and Sudbury district, as well as regions outside of Ontario. Given that Sudbury and Nipissing District are pilot locations for the RNIP and welcoming newcomers is politically relevant for these locations, perhaps looking at regions where this is not the case would be insightful. Also, exploring more remote rural communities outside of a region’s larger centres (North Bay, Sudbury) as well as communities that are not connected to larger urban centres may help to build a stronger understanding of the needs in these communities, and how understandings of social inclusion may differ or be similar.

It was clear throughout this research that rural identities were tied to specific histories (e.g., working at the mills). Future work may consider how historical, social, and political experiences may impact the way rural identities and social inclusion is considered. This may help to enrich our understandings of the diversity of rural communities, and the ways that social/political factors impacts sport and recreation programming, as well as how ideas of social inclusion may or may not be translated through sport and recreation systems. Exploring specific histories may entail using narrative inquiry to examine rural histories and how they are implicated in identities and decision making.

Further, as the positions of participants were mainly in municipal or not-for-profit sport and recreation organizations, it would be interesting to gather more experiences and contrast the differences of those working in for-profit organizations. This would offer more insights into the

implications of the commercialization of community sport and if and how social inclusion is considered in private sector sport and recreation organizations.

Finally, future studies may consider the experiences of new Canadians living in rural communities. Gathering more nuanced perspectives on the experiences of being a new Canadian living in a rural community may help inform policy and build more inclusive sport and recreation programming. Contrasting the experiences of sport and recreation practitioners to new Canadians residing in rural communities may help to understand how discourses impact experiences, the gaps of understanding how communities can engage in social inclusion work, or where more resources and support are needed. This could be explored through both the general lived experiences of newcomers in rural communities, as well as how they engage with sport/recreation in their new community. This research may consider participatory or action-oriented research processes to work towards collaborative action and change. Throughout my research, I identified examples of newcomer-led sport and recreation organizations, but unfortunately was unable to connect with them. One example was the North Bay Multicultural Cricket Club, which opens possibilities for exploring and challenging how and why newcomers are organizing around sport practices in their communities.

## **Conclusion**

Using an instrumental case study methodology and a CDA helped gather insight and empirical research on sport and recreation practitioners' and managers' understandings of social inclusion and the ways discourses of community and inclusion impact these understandings. By using CWT for this analysis, we highlighted some of the ways historical conditions shape current realities (Kamil & Michael, 2002), and how they maintain power and domination in sport and recreation experiences (Mowatt, 2009). Considering a place-based approach (Floyd, 2019) to the



research project allowed for an exploration of how social inclusion is understood in the rural contexts of both Nipissing and Sudbury Districts.

The use of CDA for semi-structured interviews and documents allowed me to gather more insight on how social inclusion is understood in rural community contexts and challenges us to consider how colourblind understandings of social inclusion, ‘othering’ diverse populations, as well as ambiguity of social inclusion work may uphold systems of Whiteness and impact sport and recreation programming for diverse populations. Further, this work highlighted important considerations of how geography and place may impact understandings of belonging within a community. Encouraging reflection on how Whiteness is embedded into language and social practice, as well as how practitioners understand and practice social inclusion, will help us to critically assess the process of social inclusion work in sport and recreation organizations in rural community contexts. In order to move beyond the level of rhetoric, meaningful attempts to foster ‘welcoming communities’ in rural contexts should consider some of the critical issues raised in this research.

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## **Appendix A: Interview Guide**

### **Informed Consent Review**

- ⇒ Your participation will be confidential.
- ⇒ All identifying information will be removed from the interview transcript.
- ⇒ Your participation in this research is voluntary.
- ⇒ You can refuse to answer any questions or discontinue your participation at any time.

Do you consent to having audio and visual recording?

Do you have any questions about the informed consent form?

### **Topic Reminder**

This interview is regarding managers, policy makers, and volunteers/community members experiences with and how they understand social inclusion of diverse groups in and through sport, recreation, and leisure in their communities.

### **Main Questions**

1. Please describe for me your role within the organization/community

#### Probes

- How long have you been in that role? Have you had others?
  - Do you have experiences with other roles in sport or recreation and leisure? In rural communities?
2. How long have you lived/worked in the community?
  3. How would you describe the community in which you work/volunteer?
    - a. Probes: size, culture, people, sport/rec/leisure, recent changes,
  4. What does rural mean to you? Do you consider your community to be rural? Why/Why not?

5. In your experience, what does it mean to be included in your community?
6. What does social inclusion mean to you?
7. Please describe the ways in which you engage with policy in your role
  - a. Probe: What policies do you follow, who makes them, how important are they in shaping your day-to-day activities? What policies are most important for sport/recreation.
8. What does social inclusion look like in your community/organization?
  - a. Probe: how do you try to include people? What are the key issues that you try to address? Who is generally be benefactor of social inclusion efforts? Who is generally driving/advocating for this work?
9. How is social inclusion reflected in policy?
  - Probes: are there “official” policies or “unofficial” practices? Can you provide an example of what this might look like?
9. How do other policies or organizations related to sport, recreation and leisure affect the way programming is delivered in your community/organization?

#### Probes

- How do public policies influence the ways you engage with your role?
  - How do public policies influence the ways you engage with the people you work with?
  - How do these other policies affect the policies in your community/organization?
10. In what ways do you encourage inclusion in your role?

#### Probes



- Can you provide an example of what this might look like?
- What are the biggest challenges you face? What are the biggest successes?
- How (if at all) has this changed over the course of your time in the community/organization?

11. In what ways do you encourage participation of diverse populations?

Probes

- What conditions make engaging diverse people easy? What conditions make it difficult?
- Can you provide an example of what this might look like?

(Preface with information on the Rural Northern Immigration Pilot Project)

12. How, if at all, do you engage with newcomers to Canada within your role?

Probes

- In what ways do you support the acculturation or settlement experiences of being a newcomer to Canada?
- How might you reach out and connect with Newcomers?
- What sort of challenges might a newcomer face?
- What resources do your community offer that would support newcomers?
- How do/would newcomers find your community/organization?
- Are you aware of any initiatives or policy specifically for Newcomers?
- Can you provide an example of this?

13. In your experience, what are the benefits and challenges of creating inclusive programming?

Probes

- How do you think others in your organization/community might view social inclusion efforts?
- Can you provide an example of what makes programming exclusive?

14. Is there anything else I should know that may not have been discussed in the interview questions?

### **Extra Notes**

- Let the participant know when we are nearing the end of the allotted interview time (60 minutes). Allow the participant to decide whether to continue the interview.
- Thank the participant and ask if it would be okay to follow-up with them, should a second, shorter interview be necessary for clarity of concepts already discussed.

## Appendix B: Sample Letter of Invitation

Date:

Title of Study: Exploring Social Inclusion in Sport and Recreation in Rural Communities of Ontario

Hello, my name is Grace Nelson, and I am reaching out to invite you to participate in a research project entitled Exploring Social Inclusion in Sport and Recreation in Rural Communities of Ontario. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview regarding your experiences about rural sport and recreation practice and policy and including diverse populations in practice and programming. The expected duration of the interview is no more than 60 minutes.

The research will help contribute to the knowledge of sport and recreation in diverse community contexts and will highlight the strengths and challenges of supporting diverse populations, such as newcomers to Canada, within these settings. By acquiring a more in depth understanding of social inclusion in diverse settings, we can understand how to better support newcomers in rural community contexts.

If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca)).

If you are interested in participating in this project, or have any questions, please contact Grace to arrange a time for an interview (see below for contact information).

Number: 905-806-2383

Email: gn15ln@brocku.ca

Thank you,

SIGNATURE

Principal Investigator: Grace Nelson

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University

gn15ln@brocku.ca

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Brock University's Research Ethics Board (FILE NUMBER). Allowing to probe for more information or contextual factors

## Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent Form

Date:

Project Title: Exploring Social Inclusion in Sport and Recreation in Rural Communities of Ontario

Principal Student Investigator: Grace Nelson - [gn15ln@brocku.ca](mailto:gn15ln@brocku.ca)

Academic Supervisor/Principal Investigator: Dr. Kyle Rich - [krich@brocku.ca](mailto:krich@brocku.ca)

Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Brock University

### INVITATION

You are invited to participate in a research project. The focus of this project is to gain a more in depth understanding of how social inclusion is considered in rural sport and recreation practice and policy to include newcomers to Canada. More specifically, the research is seeking to answer:

- 1) How do sport and recreation managers and policy makers understand social inclusion of diverse groups in and through sport and recreation in their rural communities?
- 2) How do discourses of community and inclusion impact the way sport and recreation practitioners and policy makers define and understand social inclusion?

### WHAT'S INVOLVED

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in an interview about your experience with policy and program delivery, and your experiences with facilitating sport and recreation and/or

engaging with policy regarding social inclusion in your community. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes and will be audio and visually recorded. There will be potential for a follow-up interview should more information be needed.

## POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS

The potential benefits of involvement in the project include contributing to a deeper understanding of how sport, recreation, and leisure practitioners and those involved in policy making and community roles can include diverse populations, such as newcomers to Canada, in and through sport and recreation opportunities. The information collected from participants will contribute to the knowledge of sport and recreation in diverse community contexts, and will highlight the strengths and challenges of supporting diverse populations within these settings.

There are possible social risks involved with participation in this project. During the interview, questions will be asked regarding the organization you represent as well as other partners involved. Should you require any sort of internal permission on what you can and cannot disclose then you should seek out permission prior to participating. The answers given may reflect the reputation of certain organizations, however, participants are not required to answer all questions, and they are able to withdraw some or all of their participation at any time. Given the small community and organization context, there is reasonable expectation that people may deduce who these participants are in research outputs. Participants will be identified only based on their role in sport and recreation, policy, or their position in the community. These social risks are not more than what might be expected in having these sorts of discussions and everyday interactions in public spaces.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

The information you provide will be kept confidential. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. The identifiers that will be included in the results are solely position titles based on your role in sport, recreation, policy or within the community. These titles are important to help distinguish the different roles each participant is involved with. Participants names will not be disclosed and the community will only be described using indicators such as population size and distance to the nearest major centre. Data collected during this study will be stored on Brock University's technology (MS Teams) and will be password protected. Data will be kept for five years. After that time, all files will be deleted. Access to this data will be restricted to the principal investigator as well as the academic supervisor.

## VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty. Should you decide to withdraw all or part of your data following the interview, you can do so by contacting Grace at the email address listed above.

## PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Should you wish to receive or learn about the results and findings of the study please contact the

principal student investigator (Grace) or the academic supervisor (Kyle) at the coordinates listed above.

#### CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please feel free to contact the principal investigator using the contact information above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University (FILE #). If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

#### CONSENT STATEMENT

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Please note you will be asked to confirm you consent to participate at the beginning of our interview.