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Vicky Paraschak et Janice Forsyth

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ABORIGINAL WOMEN 'WORKING' AT PLAY

Canadian Insights

Vicky Paraschak

University of Windsor

Janice Forsyth

University of Western Ontario

For the past two years, we have been working with Aboriginal women from various regions in Canada to discuss the place and importance of sport in their lives, and to identify and analyze the mechanisms and conditions that enable and constrain their ability to contribute to sport development. As part of our strategy to collect this data, we organized and hosted the first-ever national roundtable on Aboriginal women in Canadian sport in 2008. As a follow-up to the roundtable, we then conducted individual semi-structured interviews with nine of the thirteen delegates who attended that meeting to further explore the role of sport in their lives.

In this paper, we have incorporated some of the findings from the interviews to highlight the complex ways in which Aboriginal women experience sport. In particular, we examine the gendered dimensions they face in trying to gain recognition and support for their work and volunteering at the community level where their presence is ubiquitous and tangible: organized community sport would not exist for many Aboriginal people if it were not for female labour. Their influence, though constrained by normalized gendered expectations that they themselves sometimes reproduced, is central to keeping community sport programs functioning and growing. What we saw, at the heart of their struggles, are deeply felt concerns tied to the health and wellbeing of the people in their community, specifically the youth.

Two-eyed Seeing

'Two-eyed seeing' is a concept used by Canadian Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall to describe the balance of indigenous and western worldviews on science and technology and the integration of both to

gain a better understanding of how to care for the natural environment (Institute for Integrative Science & Health 2006). In this paper, we have adapted that concept to frame our understanding of Aboriginal female participation in Canadian sport. In keeping with the 'two-eyed seeing' approach, we use 'western' knowledge, grounded in our understanding of Anthony Giddens' (1984) duality of structure, as a basis for examining ways that Aboriginal women, through their ongoing actions, have responded to and shaped the sport system around them, and how they did this within the boundaries of what they believed was possible from both Aboriginal and mainstream worldviews. We then integrate indigenous and western insights to reflect on how to assist Aboriginal women in creating a more effective sporting environment for themselves and for other marginalized groups, including non-Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men.

The women we interviewed are highly accomplished: they have received professional training in sport, recreation, health and/or fitness mainly through college or university programs, and now occupy positions working and/or volunteering in sport and recreation. The context within which these women are operating includes both the mainstream and the Aboriginal sport systems. The Aboriginal sport system entails Aboriginal people in charge of sports and recreation opportunities where they are the major or sole participants (Paraschak 1990). The Aboriginal Sport Circle, the national body for Aboriginal sport development in Canada, along with its affiliated provincial and territorial bodies (e.g., the Aboriginal Sport Circle of the Western Arctic, the Manitoba Aboriginal Sport and Recreation Council), broadly structures the Aboriginal sport system. Their activities usually involve competitions where Aboriginal ancestry is a requirement for participation, such as the North American Indigenous Games, a multi-sport competition for Aboriginal people in Canada and the United States. Sports provided for the residents on a reserve or Métis settlement would also fit within the Aboriginal sport system.¹ In contrast to this, the mainstream sport system involves the dominant sport model for

1. Individuals in remote, lightly populated communities in the north of Canada, where individuals of Aboriginal ancestry make up the large majority of the community, do not see themselves as part of the Aboriginal sport system because all members of the community are incorporated into recreation events without attention being given to their heritage. They instead make a distinction between remote and urban communities in keeping with the differing resources available in those two settings.

'all' Canadians, organized by national sport organizations (e.g., Canada Basketball) that have provincial and territorial affiliates (e.g., Basketball P.E.I., Basketball Yukon). Government departments in charge of sport or recreation oversee this system, and provide funding for 'legitimate' organizations and events (Coakley and Donnelly 2004). Aboriginal people are eligible to participate in this system, but are underrepresented within it due to several systemic barriers such as awareness, economic circumstance, cultural insensitivity, coaching capacity, distance, jurisdiction, racism and sport infrastructure (Canadian Heritage 2005).

Working to "Fit In"

All of the women were challenged, usually at more than one point in their career, by the expectation that they adjust to conditions that did not necessarily meet their needs or interests. For some women, this expectation to 'fit in' surfaced in university and college classrooms, where relevant information pertaining to Aboriginal sport and recreation development remains sparse. All nine women we interviewed were professionally trained for employment in the sport, recreation and/or fitness area but, significantly, that training did not necessarily address the particular conditions they had experienced and wanted to learn more about. One woman explained how this issue permeated her education in recreation development:

"It was kind of lonely. I remember sitting there and they were talking about the mainstream, like city parks and recreation stuff. I had a hard time relating because I never grew up in that system... I grew up with organized sport in the community...and I got to leave the Reserve now and then for dance competitions. But when they talked about parks and maintaining parks and different facilities and that – it was kind of foreign to me." (Chantelle)

Professional training programs largely reproduce the academic literature and practices that exist, which are generally oriented towards urban settings and the mainstream sport and recreation system. It is for this reason that Victoria Paraschak and Susan Tirone (2008) have referred to the mainstream system as the 'whitestream' system for the way it privileges the values and traditions of individuals of white, European backgrounds – people who dominate the mainstream sport and recreation system. They argue that this system of unequal relations is a form of institutionalized racism, "since the structure of the system, if followed, will always produce outcomes that discriminate against those

who are not White” (91). The women we interviewed were frustrated by the challenges of constantly having to amend western knowledges and practices so that what they learned in the classroom could be put to good use in Aboriginal communities.

An associated challenge with translating mainstream knowledge and practices was the lack of opportunities for the women to discuss pertinent issues with other Aboriginal students, in particular Aboriginal women. Three of the women described being one of the few Aboriginal students in their program, and/or being a minority by gender. These women were well aware of the gendered and mainstream nature of their profession, and found ways to cope with it rather than putting their energies into trying to change it. One woman spoke of how she had learned to prepare for eventual employment in a male dominated profession:

“In the sport world, you know that it is male dominated. So you are prepared for that, and that’s how you train yourself... You just know after a few times of being exposed to it, you know what you are going to have to put up with when you walk into a room with that. My training in the recreation program, when it started off there was four women and by the second year I was the only one. So I had a whole year of weeding out those guys, keeping them being my colleagues and working with them, and understanding how to work with nine guys and one woman! That was good training for me in sport in general, because that’s kind of how it is.” (Brenda)

The decisions that women make about how to work within traditionally male dominated domains, and how their rationalizations challenge and/or reinforce male cultural practices, is a growing field of research and analysis. In the above example, other women left the program while the woman we interviewed stayed, finding ways to relate with her male colleagues and connecting what she learned informally through networking to lessons about how to succeed in an environment where men possess and exercise the most valued forms of capital, because, as she stated, “that’s kind of how it is.” Feminist historian Judith Bennett (2006) refers to this type of decision-making as “patriarchal bargaining” for the way it compels women to think about how to work within gendered constraints while building opportunities around them. “Thus,” Bennett explains, “a young woman will endure the dispossession of living as a daughter-in-law in her husband’s family because she anticipates that she will someday be a mother-in-law possessed of adult

sons, property and control over the labour of daughter-in-laws" (59-60). Not unlike the women in Bennett's example, the Aboriginal women we interviewed were aware of their marginal position and 'bargained' instead for opportunities to better position themselves within the structure of sport.

Once the women entered the work force, they faced a variety of challenges in their jobs. A number of them mentioned how much they enjoyed their line of employment, but at the same time noted challenges they faced interacting with men as part of their job. They talked about men outside their specific work environment, such as elected officials and potential participants, who at times further undercut the efforts of female employees by challenging their competence or refusing to take advantage of the services being offered. For example, one woman spoke about her disappointment over the lack of engagement from the men in particular when she had tried to get more people trained through coaching clinics in the communities:

"I haven't had a lot of support from the men, which is surprising because this is something for their people. I mean, I've been on my email or telephone saying, 'Okay, I've got this clinic, pass the good word on,' and what not, yet no response. I really try to get responses back from the men. So that was a big shock – that I'm here for our people and I'm not getting a whole lot of response from all of the men." (Diane)

The women were well aware of the fact that the majority of the employees in paid positions in Aboriginal communities were men, and, as salaried workers, that men had more authority to make decisions about sport and recreation than women. This employment pattern is clearly evident in First Nations and Métis communities throughout Canada, where elected officials set the direction for and oversee the work of community employees, including those who work in sport and recreation. One woman recounted how her elected officials challenged her after she had taken on additional (and less traditionally female) responsibilities in her position as a recreation coordinator for her community. They brought in an outside consultant to assess her program:

"He [the consultant] said he thought we were doing fine and that there were no problems in regards to organization... Looking back on that, I see that that [gender] was an underlying issue... I think that it was a circumstance that they said, 'Well, she's a woman – we need to check up on her.'" (Grace)

Most of the women recounted similar patterns of male behavior in their everyday work lives, and for this reason, the nexus between sexism, patriarchy and nepotism was identified as a key barrier by Aboriginal women at the national roundtable that we hosted in 2008 (Forsyth and Paraschak 2008).

The comments we heard from these women about their gendered employment experiences can be compared with demographic patterns on Aboriginal women and work. Generally, Aboriginal women are better educated than Aboriginal men, with more women having achieved some post-secondary schooling. However, the proportion of Aboriginal women and men who obtain a post-secondary degree or certificate is relatively the same, perhaps in part because more women have to leave school for family reasons. Although Aboriginal women tend to be better educated than men, they are no more likely to find jobs. Data from the last major survey and analysis on Aboriginal female labour in Canada shows that their participation rate in the work force is much lower than Aboriginal men, at 53.4 percent versus 72.4 percent, and so is their average annual income that was estimated at \$11,900 in 1991 compared to \$17,400 for Aboriginal men and \$17,600 for non-Aboriginal women. The occupations that most Aboriginal women take up help to explain their low incomes. Of those who are able to find paid work, nearly 28 percent are in clerical positions, while another 26 percent are in the service industry (Government of Canada 1996: 9)². The women we interviewed agreed that Aboriginal women are typically more educated but less likely to be employed in positions with decision-making authority in sport and recreation.

Granted, some of these women identified particular men as their mentors because they were helpful when needed and provided valuable resources. However, men at other times kept opportunities from them because of their stereotypic perspectives. One woman spoke about her extensive experiences as a strength and conditioning coach for elite American male university athletes. When she returned to Canada and applied to a men's professional soccer team for a position in her area of expertise, she was not considered employable because the owner "wanted me to work with the soccer team, but the women's team only... At that time, you see, I had been coaching men only... Part of me really felt that it was because of my gender" (Isabelle).

2. Profile population data (for labor) from the 2006 Census does exist but it has not been analyzed, so it remains in 'raw' form.

In addition to dealing with gendered work patterns, the women recognized how the unequal distribution of labour at home limited their options for employment. The difficulty of meeting extensive travel expectations was discussed by one woman in light of her children's needs:

"Women have tried over the years. I think that the tricky part is the balance required by the recreational development officer in the Northwest Territories. When I first started I had sixteen communities that I had to travel to. I had a lot of different types of responsibilities outside of my home community. If you don't have a good support system, or if you have children, it is even harder to do that kind of work. I lugged around a nanny for my babies for five years until I decided I couldn't do that kind of work anymore, and because I wanted to do it another way." (Alana)

This fits with Jim McKay's (1999) findings that while "married men [in sport administration] could put paid work ahead of domestic responsibilities, more married women felt forced to balance both spheres" (199). Not all of the women identified this as a concern, and in fact many of them mentioned that they 'naturally' took on the additional hours of volunteer work tied to their jobs as part of meeting the requirements for that position (Paraschak and Forsyth forthcoming).

Faced with the double burden of work and domestic responsibilities, women are increasingly opting out of work and choosing to stay at home. As Pamela Stone (2007) points out, the decision to stay home [rather than remain in academia] is influenced by a number of factors (e.g., inflexible work schedules, demanding travel requirements, tacit expectations that they should be available for work in the evenings and on weekends, etc.) that result in women being pushed out rather than having a reasonable menu of options from which to choose. Stone analyzes the discourse women use to talk about their decisions to 'opt out' and retreat into the home. Her findings are similar to those of Michael Messner (2009), who studied the way gendered labor patterns are constructed and reinforced in community sport programs in the United States. Using the term "soft essentialism" as a central concept, he shows how the way women talk about their decisions contributes to their marginalization because it diverts attention away from the constraints they still have around their choices. Our findings from the interviews support what Stone (2007) and Messner (2009) both reveal: even when the women 'opted out' of work because of gendered expectations they faced and instead retreated to the home—a space

tied intimately to notions about 'community' for the women we interviewed – the gendered challenges continue through their volunteer efforts.

The 'Real' Work of Volunteering

All of the women had volunteered in sport and/or recreation. Two women explained that their contribution to sport and recreation was primarily through their job, while the others spoke to wide-ranging volunteer involvement. Several had been involved with the North American Indigenous Games as coaches or mission staff. Many had coached in the mainstream system for boys and for girls, and that experience led two of the women to seek out formal coaching training. Two different women had been involved with organizing traditional games teams and events, while others had served in various volunteer administrative roles linked to mainstream multi-sport games and sport organizations. One had served as a statistician in hockey, and another assisted with programming tied to a community fitness award.

Even as they worked in full time jobs, most of the women made time to be extensively involved in community volunteer positions. The central importance of care-giving could be seen in the work/volunteer/family integration these women faced. Jennifer Hargreaves (2000) noted the preferred, extensive involvement of Aboriginal women in community volunteer positions in her study of Aboriginal sportswomen in Canada and Australia. Similarly, the women we interviewed were consistent in identifying that the large majority of the volunteers in the community are women. One woman captured succinctly the explanation given by many: "They're there because of the impact that they know they can have. They know they're needed" (Brenda). Additionally, two of the women we interviewed spoke about their choice to engage at the volunteer level rather than a work position, because, from their point of view, volunteering is where the real influence occurs.

As part of our ongoing research, we are interested in examining how Aboriginal women come to occupy the role of the community volunteer, the meanings women attached to that space, the ways that the structure of sport intersects with discourses about community and volunteerism, and how these discourses influence the perspectives women hold concerning their involvement in sport. To be sure, the nexus between discourse and material reality is complex. One woman

explained the constraints she experienced between work and volunteering as such:

“[In] the role I’m in now with government, we can’t put in extra hours. So I do a lot of volunteer work. I basically go to my boss and write out all the hours I’ve done [volunteering] and say, “I need to take a day off. Here are my extra hours.” I mean my work takes up a lot of my time – most of my weekends and weeknights. It’s a lot of extra time.”
(Chantelle)

Her comments were echoed by several others, who talked about the overlap between working and volunteering. While one woman felt she had no time after long hours at work to volunteer, the others explained that their paid job had built in expectations of doing volunteer work, just to get the job done properly. However, doing volunteer work as part of their job was not necessarily framed as being negative. For all but two of the women, volunteering was central to the contribution they wished to make in sport. In some cases, that meant doing both at the same time, while others left paid work in the sport and recreation field to make what they considered was a more influential contribution as a community volunteer. The key point here is that women, like men, often volunteer as part of their job responsibilities in sport and recreation. However, this arrangement can be problematic when viewed in light of broader social expectations that practitioners be available to service their clients whether morning or night, seven days a week (e.g., McKay 1999): this poses real problems for women for whom family and domestic responsibilities are still their primary responsibility.

In a similar vein, the woman referenced above (Chantelle) went on to discuss how other women in her community also volunteered after work to ensure that their children would have access to sport experiences:

“We are getting a lot of women who work all day, and come home and work and also make sure their kids are involved...what they do in their life is organize. They organize at home and they organize in the community; it just works. So when I go to the board, [women] tell me they have joined to help organize. Their kid is involved in soccer, so they want to help organize something.” (Chantelle)

Another woman explained that being a parent is the most important role in sport: “I think [being a parent is] something that we don’t recognize in the system very well...the greatest support of the athlete is

the parent” (Alana). Existing literature does not address cultural notions tied to childrearing, community and volunteering in sport. While we acknowledge that some non-Aboriginal women lend their time to sport because of their devotion to their children and family — as do some Aboriginal women — we put forward the argument that the lack of attention given to this aspect of women’s involvement in sport infers, by omission, that these ‘domestic’ reasons for volunteering are not truly valued. The women we interviewed reinforced the point that volunteering at the community level is one of the few spaces where Aboriginal women can meaningfully and consistently contribute in sport while maintaining valued caretaker role(s) with their family (Paraschak and Forsyth forthcoming).

The women spoke about times, while volunteering, when they had experienced racism and/or sexism as part of that role (Forsyth and Paraschak, 2008). One woman had stepped in to coach a boys’ hockey team, and the parents first complained that she was favoring the non-Aboriginal players, but that perspective changed when she told them she was Aboriginal herself:

“Then, when the people in town heard that, they were like, ‘Well, you’re favoring the Aboriginal kids because you are not just white.’ And I’m like, ‘Are you kidding me?! Where is this coming from?! I stepped up so the kids had something to do, and all you are doing is creating more problems!’” (Esther)

A second woman also talked about how support from her husband changed over time:

“Well, I’ll tell you something. I’ve seen my spouse, he used to volunteer often, until he got involved with me and I think he decided he was going to stay home and let me do it all. That’s the perspective of many men. Once they stand out as doing a good job, they can stand back. Now he is involved in boards – and there’s a lot of other guys doing this – that make HUGE honorariums by getting involved in the business community, the corporate community, you know, where they get paid \$500 dollars a day just to go to a meeting.” (Brenda)

In spite of these challenges, the women, while recognizing the unequal gender relations in sport, framed women’s work as being the ‘real volunteer’ – a distinctively female and, for the moment, empowering space. As such, the women shaped their own understanding of which roles in sport are the most valued at the community level by making a

distinction between unpaid volunteer roles and roles that offer money and perks (e.g., status and travel). Although unpaid, volunteering was considered 'real' volunteer work – that which made a concrete contribution to the community – while paid and perk volunteer roles, usually done by men, were viewed as being less essential because the professional or volunteer positions which they occupied, such as coaching, officiating, mission staff, program leaders, or board of director positions, took them beyond the community level. As such, male contributions to sport development were perceived to be less essential because the effects of their contributions were felt elsewhere, outside of their community.

Paradoxically, the women consistently identified sport at the Aboriginal community level as a space shaped by gendered notions about women's work, whereby the women are there to support the men in an unpaid and unrecognized capacity. They actively facilitated the privileging of male involvement and recognition in sport as a byproduct of facilitating children's opportunities for sport. In contrast, male coaches were facilitated by female volunteer labour, thereby allowing them to focus on coaching. However, when a woman coached, she also had to do everything else to provide for the team, such as fundraising, arranging travel, managing, etc. One woman explained:

"Well, his wife does all the organizing, all the ground work and managerial stuff for [him]. [He] just concentrates on practices and setting up practice sessions, basically coaching instead of worrying about fundraising. His wife looks after all that. So a lot of the females get involved with the organization part of things...I don't think there are too many women coaches right now in our minor sports." (Fiona)

Another woman stated:

"I'll give you an example from minor hockey. The dads are the coaches, and the whole support system to that are the moms. There are only two dads on the ice generally, but there are probably twelve moms who run the bingo, organize the potluck, organize the tournament, get the kids back and forth... That's what I mean in terms of more women at the local level." (Alana)

The comments by all women aligned with extensive research that identifies organized sport as a 'malestream' system, structured to privilege men's authority and influence over that of women (Coakley and Donnelly 2004). Sally Shaw and Larena Hoeber (2003) discussed

potential reasons for this gendered system in sport organizations. For example, they discussed assumptions tied to leadership suitability for men that were grounded in women's supposed unsuitability for such positions, based on the additional time and energy required for the position, the increased demands on women (versus men) for childcare and domestic responsibilities, and women's valuing of their private over their public lives. They pointed out that women tended to be slotted into less publicly valued roles such as teaching over coaching because of the values attached to each position. Teaching was associated with caring, nurturing 'feminine' qualities, while coaching was more 'naturally' suited to men because they were competitive.

This description aligns with other research that has examined women's roles in sport in the community. Shaw and Hoeber (2003) argued that some women "see volunteer service as an extension of family duties" (349), building on Janet Saltzman Chafetz and Joseph Kotarba's (1999) study of mothers involved in little league baseball in Texas. In that study, the authors documented how these middle and upper class women reproduced gender by servicing the needs of the boys and men in their families, thus upholding community values including how to act as a "competent mothers" (Chafetz and Kotarba 1999: 53). Studies by Shona Thompson (1999) on tennis in Western Australia, and by Maree Boyle and Jim McKay (1995) on older women and lawn bowls in Australia, also carefully documented the multiple ways that these women serviced the needs of their children and/or men in sport. Thompson (1999) gives further insight on this — she documented that while 'parents' are seen as a single contributing entity, in fact women are doing the multiple supportive tasks that demand flexibility tied to the schedules of their children, while men provide fewer services, usually fit around the schedules men make for themselves.

The declared values the women associated with both their volunteer and paid services also fit with a nurturing framework. They spoke about the importance of helping out, of stressing fun over a win at all costs approach, of seeing athletes succeed, of creating healthy communities. They acted from this value framework, choosing to follow their values even when it meant less money because they chose to privilege their central role as the nurturer of their family and community. They spoke, as well, about challenges they encountered due to limited resources both in the Aboriginal sport system, and in the mainstream sport system for smaller, more remote communities. They identified the constraints

they faced in mainstream sport, such as a lack of facilities, equipment, funding for travel and opportunities to compete – resources which are necessary when running an effective sport and recreation program (Paraschak 1982). However, they also spoke about how the Aboriginal sport system provided important cultural benefits and Aboriginal pride for its participants. Thus, these women recognized both constraints and value — for themselves, for their families and for their communities — in the Aboriginal and mainstream system. They also served as important role models; they were Aboriginal women demonstrating competence in a variety of paid and unpaid roles in a system too often dominated by men.

Altogether, our reading of the interviews suggests that the choices these women are making were framed within the gendered, caretaking boundaries they imagined for themselves as women, reinforced by sport systems where males continue to be privileged. With fewer opportunities at their immediate disposal, and faced by both racism and sexism at times, the women have learned to make the best of what is available to them, all the while connecting those current boundaries to a broader critique of male power and privilege in sport.

Conclusion

The nine Aboriginal women, we interviewed, who all have professional training in sport and have worked extensively in both paid and volunteer capacities in the mainstream and/or Aboriginal sport systems, voiced their deep commitment to family and community while also being challenged by gendered ideas about work and volunteering. Though they are contributing to the development of sport systems that do not privilege them, they nevertheless find strength in what they do in keeping with their assumptions about the importance of family and community, and about their roles as the 'real' volunteers in both sport systems. These Aboriginal women have claimed the community as their space in sport and valorize the contributions that women make in that space by defining unpaid volunteer work at the community level as the 'real', that is the most highly valued type of contribution possible. Their reinforcement of this perspective facilitates Aboriginal men, who can then focus on 'perk volunteer' roles, which provide more limited but publicly valued and rewarded roles within and beyond the community level. The women's perspective does not stem from a belief that men

are more 'naturally' suited to sport, but rather from their recognition of the importance of sporting opportunities for the youth and the community, and the centrality of women's labour in providing for these opportunities. Family demands for their care-giving contributions then combine with community-based volunteer work demands to legitimize their decision to stay home while men take the trips and get the more elite volunteer-based training and experience that will provide them with overt rewards within the sport system.

Researchers are complicit as well in this process, each time we analyze the sport and recreation system in terms of professional and 'perk volunteer' elements, and ignore the 'real' invisible and unpaid care-giving roles women provide to the delivery system, especially at the community level, which is a cornerstone to Aboriginal participation in sport and recreation. There is a dearth of information regarding the number of Aboriginal people who volunteer in sport in either the Aboriginal or the mainstream system, as well as a lack of information about their experiences as volunteers within each structure. The published record consists mainly of government reports focusing on Aboriginal volunteerism at the regional level (e.g., Daitch, Short, Bertolini and MacPherson 2005; Hoeber *et al.* 2007). While some of the reports included interviews with Aboriginal women, their findings do not consist of gendered analyses. Our research makes visible the need for a gendered lens for examining community sport issues. This problem seems particularly important in light of the pressing health concerns that need to be addressed among Aboriginal people and can be improved, in part, through an increase in physical activity levels. Researchers need to work with Aboriginal women to document and analyze their multiple roles in sport and recreation at the community level, to make clear the male privilege made possible through women's work, and to generate with them possible ways to enhance all roles women may aspire to take on in these fields.

A final insight on the importance of recognizing community sport as a viable and vibrant space for Aboriginal women to develop their capacity as coaches, organizers and managers, and our responsibility to find ways to support, enhance and reward their ongoing care-giving roles in sport, returns to our two-eyed seeing analysis. Drawing on Andrea Smith's (2006) radical indigenous feminist perspective, we need to collectivize sport at the community level, where we know many women are still located, and for now, prefer to be located for what appears to us

are obvious social, cultural, and political reasons. Smith (2007) argues that collective action is often confined to the public sphere (e.g., protests) and, as such, does not incorporate the activities from the private sphere (e.g., homemaking, caretaking), thus limiting the number and range of people who can be involved. A similar argument can be made for sport: its possibilities for enhancing the physical and social well being of participants can be strengthened by constructing a sport system that facilitates and rewards private labor in the development, management and implementation of community sports programs. The perspectives of the women we interviewed do not easily align with mainstream feminist aspirations for sport, or are habitually marginalized in the literature on sport, which generally ignores the centrality of women's work in community sport programs or positions their roles as a struggle to be overcome. A two-eyed seeing approach recognizes this discontinuity and legitimizes their marginalized perspectives as being equally valuable and valid as those that propose women should aspire for public roles with professional job opportunities and greater decision-making power.

The 'two-eyed seeing' approach also fits with our broader objective to rethink our use of academic knowledge as a way to aid Aboriginal struggles for recognition and respect in the twenty-first century. In this case, and in future research, we are interested in (and are advocating for) bringing together the study of gender construction and Aboriginal women's experiences so as to render visible and develop a better understanding of the concrete, material conditions of their lives in sport and recreation. In doing so, we are heeding the calls of gender historian Joan Scott (1999), and women's sport historian Ann Hall (2002), that in this synthesis lies the radical potential for linking research and social change.

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