

Organized Sport For Native Females on the Six Nations Reserve, Ontario from 1968 to 1980: A Comparison of Dominant and Emergent Sport Systems

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Sport as a social practice creates and confirms a particular subjective reality, over time, in keeping with the dominant cultural form. Resistance to this subjective reality arises, and cultural practices accordingly emerge and exist alongside the dominant cultural form, offering alternatives to it. These emerging, alternative sport structures need to be examined, to see if they reproduce or challenge the power relations which exist in society.

This paper examines the sport participation of Indian females from the Six Nations Reserve from 1968-1980, as documented in the biweekly community newspaper, the *Tekawennake*. Over the years, 78% of the newspapers included information on women's sport. An examination of this data revealed an ongoing presence of native females as participants and organizers in a broad variety of sports. Indian women participated in an expansive sport system which included reserve leagues, organized leagues off the Reserve, and national and international tournaments. They also participated in a dominant sport system—the Euroamerican sport system, and an emergent alternative—the All-Indian sport system.

These two systems were compared in order to discern the degree that the “All-Indian” system challenged the patriarchal and colonial values inherent within the dominant Euroamerican sport system. The most significant way that the All-Indian system challenged the dominant system was in the matter of control over sport. All aspects of the All-Indian system were in the hands of native people. They thus chose their preferred activities, as well as the type of competitive format they preferred. They were also able to control who plays, through membership criteria. However, documentation from the minutes and files of the community Recreation Committee over this time

period indicated that this sport system reproduced patriarchal and colonial values. Discrimination occurred within this All-Indian sports structure, against the women (and their children) who lost their status by marrying non-Indian men. The minimal recognition given to female athletes within the native award structure, as well, may reflect sex discrimination, or may instead reflect the fact that native athletes continue to be constrained by a colonial interpretation of sport which suggests that elite euroamerican sport is the most desirable model. Thus, the emergent All-Indian sport system contributes toward a collective native identity, but falls short of asserting a unique cultural form which resists current definitions of sport in mainstream Canada.