

Engendering Nationality: Haudenosaunee Tradition, Sport, and the Lines of Gender

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Résumé de l'article

Le jeu autochtone de la crosse a subi plusieurs transformations depuis que d'autres groupes ethniques se le sont approprié depuis le début des années 1840. À travers ces transformations, les Canadiens non-autochtones ont intégré ce sport dans leur identité nationale. Ils ont parallèlement empêché les athlètes autochtones de participer aux compétitions de championnat. Malgré tout, le jeu de la crosse est demeuré un élément essentiel de la culture et de la spiritualité autochtones. Les Autochtones ont ainsi continué à jouer à ce jeu, à l'extérieur des classements de championnats. Malgré l'absence des Autochtones des compétitions, les non-Autochtones ne se sont pas gênés pour célébrer les racines amérindiennes du jeu, en le présentant comme un legs de l'antiquité nord-américaine. Grâce à leur persévérance et malgré qu'ils aient été tenus à l'écart des compétitions internationales pour plus d'un siècle, les Autochtones ont développé leur propre identité comme joueurs de ce sport. Cet article étudie la formation des *Iroquois Nationals* (une équipe de la crosse représentant la Confédération de Haudenosaunis lors des compétitions internationales) entre 1983 et 1990 et leur lutte pour être reconnus comme représentant une nation souveraine lors des compétitions internationales. L'article démontre comment les *Iroquois Nationals* ont contribué à la renaissance du traditionalisme de la Confédération Haudenosaunis et comment cette équipe a permis de mettre en lumière les conflits intercommunautaires entre le traditionalisme—enraciné dans la religion, la culture et l'identité socio-sexuelle du Longhouse traditionnel de la Confédération de Haudenosaunis—et les nouvelles réalités politiques.

Engendering Nationality: Haudenosaunee Tradition, Sport, and the Lines of Gender¹

ALLAN DOWNEY

Abstract

The Native game of lacrosse has undergone a considerable amount of change since it was appropriated from Aboriginal peoples beginning in the 1840s. Through this reformulation, non-Native Canadians attempted to establish a national identity through the sport and barred Aboriginal athletes from championship competitions. And yet, lacrosse remained a significant element of Aboriginal culture, spirituality, and the Native originators continued to play the game beyond the non-Native championship classifications. Despite their absence from championship play the Aboriginal roots of lacrosse were zealously celebrated as a form of North American antiquity by non-Aboriginals and through this persistence Natives developed their own identity as players of the sport. Ousted from international competition for more than a century, this article examines the formation of the Iroquois Nationals (lacrosse team representing the Haudenosaunee Confederacy in international competition) between 1983-1990 and their struggle to re-enter international competition as a sovereign nation. It will demonstrate how the Iroquois Nationals were a symbolic element of a larger resurgence of Haudenosaunee “traditionalism” and how the team was a catalyst for unmasking intercommunity conflicts between that traditionalism—engrained within the Haudenosaunee’s “traditional” Longhouse religion, culture, and gender constructions— and new political adaptations.

Résumé

Le jeu autochtone de la crosse a subi plusieurs transformations depuis que d'autres groupes ethniques se le sont approprié depuis le début des années 1840. À travers ces transformations, les Canadiens non-autochtones ont intégré ce sport dans leur identité nationale. Ils ont parallèlement empêché les athlètes autochtones de participer aux compétitions de championnat. Malgré tout, le jeu de la crosse est demeuré un élément essentiel de la culture et de la spiritualité autochtones. Les Autochtones ont ainsi continué à jouer à ce jeu,

à l'extérieur des classements de championnats. Malgré l'absence des Autochtones des compétitions, les non-Autochtones ne se sont pas gênés pour célébrer les racines amérindiennes du jeu, en le présentant comme un legs de l'antiquité nord-américaine. Grâce à leur persévérance et malgré qu'ils aient été tenus à l'écart des compétitions internationales pour plus d'un siècle, les Autochtones ont développé leur propre identité comme joueurs de ce sport. Cet article étudie la formation des Iroquois Nationals (une équipe de la crosse représentant la Confédération de Haudenosaunis lors des compétitions internationales) entre 1983 et 1990 et leur lutte pour être reconnus comme représentant une nation souveraine lors des compétitions internationales. L'article démontre comment les Iroquois Nationals ont contribué à la renaissance du traditionalisme de la Confédération Haudenosaunis et comment cette équipe a permis de mettre en lumière les conflits intercommunautaires entre le traditionalisme—enraciné dans la religion, la culture et l'identité socio-sexuelle du Longhouse traditionnel de la Confédération de Haudenosaunis—et les nouvelles réalités politiques.

Originally given to the Haudenosaunee (also known as the Iroquois or Six Nations) as a gift from the Creator, the sport of lacrosse has undergone a considerable amount of change since the introduction of non-Aboriginal players in the 1840s. While Aboriginal athletes continued to play the Indigenous game, lacrosse became a tool used for national unification by non-Aboriginal Canadians during Confederation and in the following decades.² By 1880, Aboriginal players were barred from championship competition with non-Aboriginal teams and their influence on the popularization and practice of the game was dramatically altered. Despite their absence from championship play the Aboriginal roots of lacrosse were zealously celebrated as a form of North American antiquity in the attempt to legitimize the game as something uniquely Canadian. Ousted for more than a century, the Haudenosaunee originators attempted to re-enter international competition as a sovereign nation between 1983–1990. The creation of the *Iroquois Nationals* lacrosse team (representing the six nations comprising the Haudenosaunee Confederacy in international competition³) was a conscious political effort by its organizers to assert the Haudenosaunee's sovereignty on the world stage and to re-appropriate the game of lacrosse. As the all-male

national lacrosse team was being formed in the early 1980s, a group of female Haudenosaunee lacrosse players attempted to create a similar national women's team. However, while the traditional leadership of the Haudenosaunee endorsed the male team, they refused to sanction the female team citing traditional cultural restrictions. This article intends to demonstrate how the *Iroquois Nationals* were a symbolic element of a larger resurgence of Haudenosaunee political institutions based in "traditionalism,"⁴ and how the team was a catalyst for unmasking inter-community conflicts between that traditionalism — engrained within the Haudenosaunee's "traditional" Longhouse religion, culture, and gender constructions — and new political adaptations.

The Haudenosaunee's isolation from international field lacrosse⁵ persisted throughout the twentieth century, but a rise in Native activism helped to see their return. Beginning in the 1950s, and especially the 1960s, a series of international developments concerning Aboriginal rights pushed Aboriginal affairs into the global consciousness and eventually led to dramatic changes between Natives and non-Natives in Canada and the United States. As historian Ken Coates explains, "It is not that Aboriginal peoples discovered their voice in the 1950s and beyond. Rather, select groups of non-indigenous peoples and countries discovered how to hear the words and pleas that had so often been spoken."⁶ Following the introduction of the controversial "Indian" policies in Canada, such as Pierre Elliot Trudeau's ill-fated White Paper in 1969⁷ and the occupations of Alcatraz Island in 1969 and Wounded Knee in 1973 in the United States, Aboriginal communities across both countries united in an attempt to resist federal policies. During the 1970s, Canada witnessed a number of significant changes in the Canadian state's relations with Aboriginal peoples through Supreme Court of Canada rulings and a rise in Native activism. Similarly, the United States bore witness to a dramatic increase in political mobilization by its Native peoples. Stemming from the occupation of Alcatraz Island and the siege of Wounded Knee, a new group of young, active, and vocal leaders forcefully brought attention to the conditions that Native peoples in the United States, and across North America, had been enduring at the hands of the dominant societies and their colonial governments.⁸

During the occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973, the Haudenosaunee sent a delegation in support of the Oglala Lakota led by

Onondaga Faithkeeper and former All-American Syracuse lacrosse player Oren Lyons.⁹ Beyond the supportive nature of their presence, Lyons took the opportunity to proclaim the Haudenosaunee's sovereignty as a nation. As Lyons expressed:

Sovereignty is freedom of a people to act and conduct affairs of its own nations. We the Hotinonsonni [*sic*] [People of the Longhouse], the Six Nations, have our sovereignty. We conduct on our territories and we act for our people ... The white man says, 'this is mine,' Indian says, 'This is ours.' That's the two ideologies, this is the conflict.¹⁰

In conjunction with the increased political mobilization Aboriginal communities, including the Haudenosaunee, were developing new strategies guided by their ancient political systems to assert their sovereignty, maintaining the belief that they existed with the "parameters and principals of equality within" a "nation-to-nation relationship" with the United States and Canada.¹¹ Leaders such as Oren Lyons attempted to find compelling ways to assert their belief that the Haudenosaunee were a sovereign nation and part of this innovation found itself expressed through sport. It was while Lyons was teaching in the Department of American Studies at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo in the 1970s that he met a young Haudenosaunee pupil in Rick Hill (Tuscarora).¹² Together, along with Wes Patterson (Tuscarora), this group commenced a program of cultural revitalization that involved a re-appropriation of the game of lacrosse on a global scale and in turn created the largest concerted Haudenosaunee sovereignty movement in recent times. From the outset, the formation of the *Iroquois Nationals* was a conscious political effort to assert Haudenosaunee sovereignty.¹³ The game of lacrosse remained a cultural institution and a significant ceremonial form within Haudenosaunee Longhouse tradition. As Oren Lyons often commented, it was because lacrosse had been gifted to the people by the Creator that it retained the potential power to heal or to resolve conflicts. What better tool existed to help address both internal and external Haudenosaunee conflicts? It was with this understanding of lacrosse as sacred medicine that the founders of the *Nationals* used it as a tool to promote an exchange of understanding, cultural preservation, reunification, and a source of youth, family, clan, community (i.e.,



Oren Lyons (middle) and Tadodaho Sidney Hill (right). With permission from Ernie Mitchell. Source: Ernie Mitchell Scrapbook, Akwesasne.

reserve), national (i.e., Mohawk, Onondaga, etc.), and Haudenosaunee pride. It was not merely a coincidence that a national team was formed through lacrosse as opposed to baseball, soccer, or hockey; rather it demonstrates the centrality of the sport in Haudenosaunee society.

Seven years after Lyons' address to the world from Wounded Knee, he would once again lead the Haudenosaunee on the international stage declaring their sovereignty, but this time through sport. Stemming from the success of Haudenosaunee players in indoor and American university lacrosse, as well as the creation of an all-Native indoor lacrosse league in the 1970s, Lyons, Hill, and Patterson became the primary founders of the *Iroquois Nationals* lacrosse team. First competing as a onetime venture at the *Nations '80 World Lacrosse Indoor Championships* in British Columbia, a small indoor tournament with limited international participation, the *Nationals* were a combination of all-star players from throughout the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.¹⁴ Resulting from their success at the indoor tournament, where the team finished in second place, it was suggested to the organization that the group attempt to gain entrance into the outdoor International Lacrosse Federation's (ILF) World Lacrosse Championships.¹⁵ While the Haudenosaunee had made a brief appearance in the 1904 Olympics, that team was an exception to participation at that level. The quest to enter the ILF World Lacrosse

Championships marked a significant shift in that the Haudenosaunee had not participated in official national or international championships in field lacrosse, the original form of lacrosse appropriated from the Haudenosaunee, for over a century.¹⁶

Re-established in 1983 as a field lacrosse team, the group formed with the intention of competing in the World Lacrosse Championships. As team founder and manager Rick Hill reflected, the organization felt that there was a process of reconciliation that needed to take place: “So the reason I was in it was that I felt this historical wrong with our teams being prohibited from playing international lacrosse had to be corrected so win, lose, or draw we were trying to set that straight.”¹⁷ From the beginning, the *Iroquois Nationals* were met with a high degree of scepticism from the international lacrosse organizing body. The first area of major contention for the *Nationals* was their status as a sovereign nation. The *Nationals* not only found themselves attempting to prove their lacrosse competitiveness but, more importantly, their identity as a nation: “... at that time we were talking to political novices, even though these often were well to do people — success on field, went to major universities — their understanding of Native history and law was [minimal], [Rick shaking his head] What do you mean you are a nation? How do you prove you are a nation?” the committee would ask, “So we had to do a lot of remedial education on them.”¹⁸ Much of this education involved teaching the officials about the Haudenosaunee’s treaty relationship with Great Britain, Canada, and the United States. As historian Donald Fisher reflects, “The Nationals, citing treaties and past relationships with the American and British governments, the lack of federal taxation on reservations, and the ability of Iroquois people to travel abroad on their own passports, based their membership claim on the argument that the Iroquois Confederacy was a sovereign entity.”¹⁹

The *Nationals*, as proposed by Lyons, Hill, and Patterson, were to be accepted as representing the distinct and sovereign nation of the Haudenosaunee in international competition or not at all. This was further reinforced by the team’s policy to travel using Haudenosaunee passports. Originally created in 1921 in opposition to Canadian government’s amendment of the Indian Act that allowed involuntary enfranchisement, Deskaheh (Levi General of Six Nations of the Grand River) travelled to London on his own Haudenosaunee passport (itself a further attempt to reinforce Haudenosaunee independence) in the effort to obtain the recognition of

the Haudenosaunee's sovereignty.²⁰ Deskaheh argued that the Haudenosaunee had a special nation status within North America due to their treaty relationship with the British Crown as British allies and were not British, American, or Canadian subjects.²¹ The Haudenosaunee sovereignty claim according to historian Laurence Hauptman stemmed from four major developments: the Fort Stanwix Treaty (1784), Jay Treaty (1794), and the Canadaigua Treaty (1794), coupled with the nation to nation relationship the Haudenosaunee historically had in dealing with England.²² Deskaheh's argument and references to the Haudenosaunee's historic treaty relationship, although legitimate, was unsuccessful. However, it later served as the *Iroquois Nationals'* foundation for their claim as a sovereign nation that would allow them into international competition.

While the members of the international lacrosse committee were not official diplomats of their countries, Canadian and Australian representatives quickly became concerned with the political ramifications of accepting a Haudenosaunee team. The concern for the Canadians, who were most opposed, was that if the Haudenosaunee were allowed to participate, would the ILF have to accommodate the participation of other First Nations (i.e., Squamish, Ojibwa, Choctaw, Cherokee)? Furthermore, with the proposed players coming from Canada and the United States, the *Nationals* would in effect be pulling from Canada's talent pool.²³ For the Australians, their concerns stemmed from their relationship with their Aboriginal peoples. They were also concerned that if the Haudenosaunee received status as a sovereign nation they might also have to allow the Aboriginal peoples of Australia in as a separate nation further leading to unwanted political ramifications.²⁴ The organizers of the *Nationals* were quick to find common ground. One shared goal both the *Iroquois Nationals* and the ILF held was to restore lacrosse to the Olympic Games and make it an official sport. From the perspective of the *Nationals*, the team would accomplish two major objectives: First, it would bring increased international attention to their status as a sovereign nation; second, it would increase exposure to the game of lacrosse by incorporating the all-Native team. It was in the interest of the Haudenosaunee and, obviously, the *Nationals*, to help promote the game and secure its future among non-Natives for it served as a gateway and bridge between the Haudenosaunee and non-Natives (i.e., access to universities, business opportunities and community empowerment, national and international recognition in sports and politics).

Ironically, helping to serve the *Nationals* pursuit of recognition was the incredible persistence by non-Natives since Confederation that celebrated lacrosse as a form of North American antiquity and maintained the direct association of the game with its Aboriginal inhabitants. By facilitating the Native origins of lacrosse throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in newspapers, souvenir programs, and team histories, Canadian — and later international — lacrosse enthusiasts unwittingly manufactured a historical understanding of the game that would help see the return of the Haudenosaunee to international competition. Lacrosse enthusiasts commenced a counter-intuitive end result: On one hand, they barred Native athletes from the game and attempted to limit their participation; on the other hand, often through different forms of colonial discourse, they “celebrated” the Native contribution to Canadian and international lacrosse, which ultimately helped force the hand of those in control and to consider a Haudenosaunee national team. As Native people unified in their defiance of the institutions of colonialism, in which lacrosse was a part, organizations such as the ILF were confronted with their nostalgic nepotism. As Rick Hill points out, Oren Lyons and the other organizers were highly respected in the lacrosse world and understood the power of the persistence of the game’s origins among non-Natives:

What he [Oren Lyons] said was that, there is power in this game, because it is a medicine game. There is power in lacrosse and what he found was that lacrosse people all around the globe, had this healthy respect for the Native origins of the game even though they might not have understood it very well, but he kind of felt that we could build upon that respect, then get to the issue of a national team, then get to the issue of passports, then get to the issue of championship play, because of their common interest in that [the origins, nostalgia of lacrosse] ... he also felt, lacrosse could almost die out and he really felt that it needed this infusion, and they [non-Native lacrosse enthusiasts] understood it needed this infusion, that bringing Native players back into lacrosse would generate worldwide attention, press, audience. In retrospect you would have to say that was true and that all of the countries in the world that play lacrosse really honour

the Native roots of the game, and that is very important, because you don't always get that in the political arena or education field and everything else. But it's not just patting you on the back, because then the question becomes ok, if you really honour us, then you have to support our application and we have to be participating in international play, that is how you are going to honour the past is by perpetuating it. So that was the strategy and at the same time, it was part of our own national growth.²⁵

Well-known and respected by the lacrosse community and the International Lacrosse Federation due to their high success in lacrosse as both players and organizers, Lyons and Patterson represented the bridge between the élitism of formal Canadian and American organizing bodies and Aboriginal athletes who continued to be relegated to the sidelines. While the ILF was sceptical of the *Nationals* ability to travel on their passports and field a competitive team, there was also an admiration for those who organized the team. Resulting from this, the federation challenged the group to prove that they were capable of fielding a team financially, competitively, and politically (i.e., gaining clearance to travel on the Haudenosaunee passport) before it would be allowed to participate in the quadrennial World Championships as an official member.²⁶

While the establishment of the *Iroquois Nationals* was a newly adapted political strategy for the Haudenosaunee to declare their sovereignty, it was equally a new instrument for “traditionalists” to create a renewed strength in traditional culture unification between Haudenosaunee communities. The team was a modern manifestation of Haudenosaunee cultural revitalization and survival; it was an example of the use of traditionalism as an organizing tool for community survival.²⁷ As Haudenosaunee philosopher, scholar, and activist John Mohawk conceived:

Traditionalism is a form of social organization based on principles developed by Native peoples centuries ago. Its goal is the redevelopment of community life and the empowerment of land-based peoples in ways that promote the survival of cultures and provide a practice of social justice This kind of

reorganization is not an easy task. Most adults have been socialized to see the ancient ways of our peoples as folklore. They have great difficulty relating to the principles of traditionalism. A re-education process needs to take place while a practice is developed, and those who undertake the task should understand that there is resistance every step of the way, even within the communities that express traditional values and, sometimes, practical traditional ways.²⁸

Sanctioned by the Haudenosaunee Grand Council of Chiefs at Onondaga²⁹ — widely considered to be the most traditional and conservative nation of the Six Nations — to represent the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the *Iroquois Nationals* embodied the “traditionalist” culture, politics, and philosophy of the Haudenosaunee Longhouse epistemology refusing financial support from the governments of Canada and the United States or from profits gained from gaming operations.³⁰ The endorsement of the Grand Council of Chiefs marked a partnership that reinforced a particular ideology in Haudenosaunee communities — the reign of the traditional hereditary chiefs and the Longhouse — as well as serving as an important declaration of the team’s view of the Haudenosaunee’s sovereignty. As the Grand Council explained, “Sovereignty is the province of the Nation. Individuals cannot invoke sovereignty without the consent and consensus of the Nation. The Haudenosaunee is a Confederacy of Law. Law governs and individuals are subject to this law.”³¹

Further attempting to reinforce the ideals of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the organization made a point of attempting to gather players, finances, and organizational representatives from each of the Six Nations. At various times this proved to be extremely difficult for the organization due to the imbalance of comparable lacrosse competitiveness between each of the communities and the limited financial resources available to the team.

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, there had been a growing division between Longhouse Traditionalists and Modernists in Haudenosaunee communities, as members of the communities attempted to adapt and create new political strategies often creating political schisms.³² The *Nationals* were not immune to the inter-community tensions that were



The first *Iroquois Nationals* field lacrosse team. With permission from Rick Hill.

Source: Rick Hill photo collection, Six Nations of the Grand River.

gripping Haudenosaunee communities. As John Mohawk remarks, the redevelopment of “community” through traditionalism is a difficult process mainly because of its cultural specificity, the imposition of external policies, the attempted eradication of Indigenous peoples, and resistance internally — often a result of those implemented policies (i.e., residential schools, band council leadership, etc.).³³ For the *Nationals* this internal political struggle, which the team itself was a significant player in declaring itself a symbol of the Confederacy, affected the team at almost every level.

Financially, the team operated on a cripplingly meagre budget and while attempting not to accept the financial resources garnered from the two colonial governments in order to assert their sovereignty through financial independence,³⁴ they were pressed into working with non-Native organizations and Haudenosaunee “Modernist” capitalists to successfully organize and operate the team.³⁵ Furthermore, representing the Grand Council of Chiefs and the Confederacy, and in turn, the legitimacy and independence of these groups, the organizers wanted their players to understand that they were unquestionably representing elements of the Longhouse epistemology. While the organization did not require its players

to be members of the Longhouse, they did require each player to sign a loyalty oath to the Confederacy regardless of their own political viewpoints.³⁶ Due to the Confederacy loyalty pledge requirement and the internal leadership struggle between Longhouse Traditionalists and Modernists in Haudenosaunee communities, it led players to refuse to sign the pledge or not participate at all and some of the Haudenosaunee's best players never played for the *Iroquois Nationals*.³⁷

Here again, the artificial compartmentalization of politics, religion, and culture, merged into an act of survival and expression through a sport. Playing as a *National* team the organizers placed a great deal of importance on educating the players relating to the team's larger objectives and what they were attempting to represent:

So we did a lot of work in the beginning, working on the minds of the players and talking about the history of lacrosse, the spiritual underpinnings of lacrosse, and that they are lacrosse diplomats we use to tell them 'you are an ambassador for your people. So think about that. And the young people are watching you, so it isn't about winning but it is about excelling at being you [personally, nationally]' We never insisted that they had to be Longhouse people, that you had to believe in the Longhouse system but we wanted them to understand that the Haudenosaunee is the people of the longhouse, lacrosse is a medicine game in the longhouse, the flag represents that. We were doing a lot of mentoring, helping the young guys understand their history, understand why it is important. You know even the issue of the passport, to help them understand that. What we wanted was if anybody asks you 'why are you doing this? We want you to represent our ideas, this is what it is about.' So we did a lot, we printed up little things, passed them out on the bus, talked in the locker room, just tried to get people to answer their questions. So it was more like that, we were saying the spiritual origins of the game, burning the tobacco, the medicine, is this Longhouse persona to lacrosse. But in Haudenosaunee fashion, we never said you have to believe in it, but we are asking you to respect it.³⁸

In keeping with this declaration of traditionalism the team continued on further by reintroducing the Longhouse medicinal and spiritual elements of lacrosse both to its own players and to non-Native lacrosse enthusiasts and organizers. While the team was an active example of the re-instituting of traditionalism, it was also a process of decolonizing the Haudenosaunee game, communities, and players.³⁹ As Poka Laenui identifies, “Colonization and decolonization are social processes even more than they are political processes The phase of rediscovering one’s history and recovering one’s culture, language, identity, and so on is fundamental to the movement for decolonization.”⁴⁰ While lacrosse was recognized and celebrated as a traditional game within Haudenosaunee communities, not every player knew the spiritual underpinnings of the game and its strong connection to the Longhouse — especially those team members who had grown up outside of the “traditional” realm.⁴¹ “So we use it as a teaching tool to explain, ‘this is why we are here, to keep this other stuff going on [Haudenosaunee Longhouse traditions]. And now that you guys are playing it is great you are out here on the field but don’t forget, it is still played in the Longhouse’.”⁴² In utilizing traditionalism, the *Nationals* organization, through their persistent education of its managers, coaches, players, and especially the public, re-inserted the cultural, spiritual, and epistemological importance of lacrosse to Haudenosaunee communities. From a player and community (reserve) perspective, while competing for the *Nationals* was a tremendous honour to represent the Haudenosaunee Nation, it first and foremost re-installed a pride in their individual communities and while the larger politic assertions were always clear to the organizers, they only became apparent to some players as time went on. As former team member and coach David White remembers:

I don’t think it [the political aspiration] was recognized initially, I think more than anything else it was an honour to represent your community, to be picked from Akwesasne to play on a *national team* and the same thing for the Onondaga [and the other Nations]. The Onondagas probably had more insight into the political ramifications because that is where Oren is from and his son Rex was one of the key players and Scottie Lyons and Kent Lyons were his nephews, so they knew what was going on more so than I’ll say the outlining communities but you know you pick up on it. Whenever we would have little talks,

or we talk about the fundraising and how we are not going to accept just any monies, we want to be able to travel on our own we have to show that we are a sovereign group, we are traveling on our passports, we raised our own money to come here, and so it became more and more apparent what was going on.⁴³

The *Iroquois Nationals* team quickly established itself as a source of pride and re-unification through and for the youth of the Haudenosaunee communities and was considered as an investment in future generations.⁴⁴ “In these times when all the elements seem to be going the other way, it’s important to have a symbol for young people,” Lyons declared:

And it’s important for young people to be able to perform for their nation, to show their abilities and their skills. These are proud youth, and fierce. Fierce Iroquois, playing again. You know, among the kids on the res, everyone wants to be a National.⁴⁵

Shining as a symbol of Haudenosaunee pride and unification, the *Nationals* had a powerful impact on the youth and the nations they represented. The *Nationals* lacrosse team created what Charles Ballem calls “touchable heroes,” who create “a sufficient infusion of motivation and pride amongst young natives.”⁴⁶ As a young teenager, Kahnawake Mohawk community member Greg Horn remembers following the team with pride and helping to cement his identity as both a Mohawk and Haudenosaunee person:

When I seen [*sic*] that article about the Nationals, it was like wow! ... this is our sport and this is our people playing on our own team internationally So that made me proud and I was already [proud], [but] it helped reinforce my identity as a Mohawk rather than saying I’m Native and I’m Canadian and now I will never say I am Canadian, I am Mohawk and that is that. And that is how a lot of people from this community see it.⁴⁷

At its core the *Nationals* embodied a spirit of co-existence; Haudenosaunee players could maintain their pride and culture but also access the opportunities outside of their communities.

As the team continued to prove itself financially, competitively, and politically in the pursuit of gaining entrance into the International Lacrosse Federation, the organizers were also attempting to create a larger Haudenosaunee sports foundation to promote capacity development in the communities and to further prove their stability to the ILF.⁴⁸ One by-product of this initiative was the attempted establishment of an *Iroquois Nationals* women's lacrosse team in 1984. The participation of Haudenosaunee women as players in lacrosse by the 1980s had been gaining momentum, but, ultimately, their participation remained limited when compared to Haudenosaunee males. For example, while female athletes from the Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve in Ontario participated and excelled in a variety of sports such as bowling, golf, hockey, volleyball, and softball, lacrosse proved to be much more limited in Haudenosaunee female participation.⁴⁹

While sports such as bowling and fastball proved to be extremely popular in the community, this is not to say Haudenosaunee women were completely absent from playing lacrosse. As sport historian Victoria Paraschak notes, there was an influx of female lacrosse participants beginning in 1976 and Six Nations of the Grand River female lacrosse teams were successful at the regional and provincial levels.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Haudenosaunee women, similar to their male counterparts, had also been benefactors of surrounding New York State high school lacrosse programs. For example, high schools in the Buffalo area, such as at Niagara-Wheatfield, Cattaraugus-Little Valley, Gowanda, and Silvercreek High, encouraged the participation of female Haudenosaunee lacrosse players.⁵¹ Despite the fact that Native female athletes were playing in regional and provincial non-Native leagues, larger all-Native lacrosse tournaments were often limited to male participants.⁵² “[I]t thus follows that their athletic interests were not being addressed equally to the male athletes in these sports [lacrosse and hockey], within the emergent system.”⁵³

For non-Natives, women had been playing organized lacrosse at the club and university levels since 1890,⁵⁴ whereas games involving First Nations women were — generally as an exception — sporadically recorded in Ho-Chunk oral tradition⁵⁵ and noted among the Dakota, Shawnee, Huron, Ojibwa, Cherokee, and Oklahoma Creek,⁵⁶ but lacrosse in Haudenosaunee communities has been described as primarily a men's game.⁵⁷ As general manager of the Haudenosaunee Nation

women's lacrosse team Sandy Jemison remarked in 2007, "lacrosse was always considered a men's sport for us."⁵⁸ As Seneca Nation member at Tonawanda Darwin Hill goes on further to explain, "Lacrosse was a gift to our people from the Creator, to be played for his enjoyment and also as a medicine game for healing. It's evolved into quite a different thing, but the origins and the way it's still used in our communities is for men only."⁵⁹ The limitation of lacrosse as a male-only pursuit is also true of other Native nations, as lacrosse historian Thomas Vennum points out, "The minimal information on women in the game may simply mean that playing lacrosse came to be regarded as an exclusively male activity, along with their other traditional roles in hunting and waging war In place of lacrosse, Indian women of many tribes had their own games — forms of field hockey and shinny, for the most part."⁶⁰

To this point the existing literature on lacrosse has failed to examine Haudenosaunee women in the sport and why the under-representation of women as players exists, especially in a culture such as the Haudenosaunee's that holds the sport as a critical element of their identity.⁶¹ At first, it seems that the under-representation of Haudenosaunee women as players can simply be labelled as the result and limitation of a gender construct in relation to sport and as a reflection of a larger shift from a matrilineal society to one of male hegemony aided by colonialism in Haudenosaunee communities. However, a case study of the attempted establishment of the *Iroquois Nationals* women's team brings to light a series of complexities rooted in traditionalism that helps explain their absence and the reluctance within Haudenosaunee communities to allow their participation.

Similar to the men's national team, it is not merely a coincidence that Haudenosaunee women attempted to establish a team through lacrosse. Rather it demonstrates that although the game was limited to male participants, it remained an identity marker for Haudenosaunee women and a vital part of their national identity. As Paraschak observes, "This (re)production of a desired racial identity has particular notions of gender embedded within it. Ceremonial dances, powwows, and traditional games and sports — such as lacrosse — are prominent in symbolic declarations of a distinctive racial identity for First Nations peoples."⁶² This distinctive identity had the ability to transcend gender lines even when the actual participation in the sport did not. The under-representation of female lacrosse

players lies in the multi-layered identities of the Haudenosaunee and is the result of the Longhouse epistemology, traditionalism, and gender constructions. While the lack of women as participants in lacrosse reinforced a masculine construction of the sport, women remained significantly invested in the game. As daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers of players, Haudenosaunee women have been committed to lacrosse for centuries and have often found themselves serving as organizers and team supporters. As Karen Etienne — daughter of Kanesatake lacrosse stick maker Matthew Etienne — remembers, growing up in lacrosse arenas and traveling across eastern and central Canada has remained a lifelong highlight of her experiences with her dad:

I tried to help him the best I could setting up, you know, [at] different arenas so he could sell his sticks and things like that, it was fun ... it was like it would be an adventure going with him you know, all kinds of weather, any time of year, traveling, visiting, you would have to wait a lot, wait in the car a lot, and he would come back with his sticks and pay the people and drop more off, and he was always doing that circuit, his circuit there, but it was alone time to talk with him, to enjoy. That is what he wanted, ‘come with me today, come with me to Akwesasne.’ ‘Alright, I’ll go.’⁶³

Lacrosse in Haudenosaunee communities provided women, as fans, with a form of entertainment but with the identity of the Haudenosaunee so deeply engrained within the game, it also provided a form of cultural service. Players produce a form of entertainment each contributing their skill or ability and serve as a form of cultural performance — lacrosse from a Longhouse perspective is ceremony, culture, and medicine in action. As Oren Lyons explains, lacrosse has not only been centrally engrained in the culture of Haudenosaunee since time immemorial, it is also a key aspect of family life:

I think Lacrosse and Iroquois are synonymous with life ... Or it’s synonymous with continuation [of] community. Everybody’s involved. The children [are] involved, parents are involved. Our greatest fans — the greatest Lacrosse fans — are the women. Women love the game. And it’s more than a game, [always] has been.⁶⁴

Further emphasizing the importance of the Haudenosaunee female fan and reflecting the cultural identity of lacrosse, the words of the “Speaker” at a traditional Longhouse funeral offers a great deal of insight. Following the death of a Haudenosaunee Longhouse member, a “small” Condolence Ceremony takes place where among a number of activities a designated Speaker addresses the grieving family and guests.⁶⁵ Asking each group to stand up, the Speaker individually addresses her children, grandchildren, extended family, as well as the Clan Mothers, Chiefs, Faithkeepers, and in this case lacrosse players. The following is an abridged version of Speaker Tom Porter’s Longhouse funeral address for a woman:

We have gathered here today to acknowledge the passing of our loved one. We are here to send her on her journey...I direct my words to the *lacrosse players*. She was a great fan, always cheering you on when you played. You could hear her voice in the crowd. She loved to watch the men play lacrosse. To you who knew her, listen carefully to my words. You must prepare your mind and body for the big change. Starting tomorrow, you will not be able to visit her again. When you look in the stands, you will not see her. You will not hear her voice anymore.⁶⁶ (emphasis added)

The Speaker’s words demonstrate two major components of lacrosse in Haudenosaunee culture. First, its centrality in all aspects of Haudenosaunee lives, including death and the afterlife. Second, the words of condolence and healing point to the importance of the female fan and the exchange that takes place between primarily the fan and the player, rather than merely the player providing entertainment:

I think that is important because even though, as you know, it is hard to hear, but knowing that there is people there, knowing that there are women there, knowing that your nieces and nephews are looking at you, I think was an important counter balance to the egotism, you know the cult of personality that modern sports breeds, is to say ‘yes, when you take the floor or field, you are representing your fireside family, your extended family, your clan, your side of the house, your nation, and ultimately with the Iroquois Nationals your confederacy,’ that is big stuff, because its happens to so few people.⁶⁷

Despite the recognition of the supportive role in the game, the attempted establishment of the *Iroquois Nationals* women's lacrosse team reflected the gender limitations, based in traditionalism, of female players and the tension facilitated when the adaptation of both traditionalism and modernism is seemingly at odds. After the establishment of the *Iroquois Nationals* men's team in 1983, women from Haudenosaunee communities began following the team's progress and considering the possibility of forming their own national women's lacrosse team based on the same premises of the men's team (i.e., represent the Haudenosaunee, declaration of sovereignty, and increase opportunities available to women — travel and university scholarships, etc.) and gaining entrance into the International Federation of Women's Lacrosse Association's (IFWLA) World Championships.⁶⁸ Instrumental in this process was Carol Patterson, the wife of *Iroquois Nationals* men's team founder Wes Patterson.⁶⁹ A non-Native, it was Carol Patterson who raised the question pertaining to the opportunities for women in lacrosse and how they might be extended to female Haudenosaunee players.⁷⁰ With the help of the men's organization, the *Iroquois Nationals* women's team began hastily after receiving an invitation to compete at the *Canadian Invitation Women's Lacrosse Championships* in Montreal in 1984 and followed that up by playing in a tournament in Ottawa.⁷¹ In 1986, in order to once again prove the capability of the *Nationals* organization (including both the men's and women's teams) of hosting an international event, the women's organization hosted Britain, Australia, Quebec, Ontario, and the United States in an international competition.⁷² This was later followed up by a men's competition at SUNY in Buffalo where they played the Australian and English national teams.⁷³

By the summer of 1986, the men's team was considered a great success by the media, as one non-Native paper commented, "Within the past 3 years the Six Nations Iroquois Lacrosse team has proved itself capable of competing at an international level."⁷⁴ However, the measure for just how far the new lacrosse team could go as a manifestation of Haudenosaunee autonomy came in 1986. That year on numerous occasions the Iroquois lacrosse organization unsuccessfully petitioned the ILF to compete in the 1986 ILF World Games held in Toronto.⁷⁵ While one member of the federation's committee, Tom Hayes, supported the *Nationals* bid the Haudenosaunee team was denied entry into the World

Championships. Hayes unsuccessfully lobbied for the *Nationals* inclusion stating:

They're certainly up to the international standard, they proved that by beating national teams But beyond that, they add something to the pageantry of the game. This is an original American game. Not to have original Americans playing it is ludicrous.⁷⁶

The ILF reasoning for denying their participation, according to the Six Nations of the Grand River newspaper *Tekawennake*, echoed a historic debate surrounding Haudenosaunee teams claiming that the *Iroquois Nationals* did not represent a sovereign nation⁷⁷ along with citing financial and infrastructure instability.⁷⁸ As one member of the Six Nations of the Grand River reflected, "So, although the players have proven the team is capable of competing against international teams, the I.L.F. still refuses to acknowledge our team."⁷⁹ There were also rumours that First Nations' violence in box lacrosse resulted in the lacrosse federation's decision not to include the *Nationals*.⁸⁰ The Canadian national team proved to be the biggest detractor objecting to the *Nationals* inclusion:

Everyone involved in the sport seems to appreciate the publicity value of Indian players, but there has always been a strong undercurrent of hostility toward an Iroquoian team, according to observers. Canada blocked the Iroquois attempt to play in the quadrennial World Games this year in Toronto, citing the cost of rearranging logistics and printing new tickets that would work the Iroquois in the tournament.⁸¹

Despite the program's early success, gaining entrance into the ILF World Championships proved to be elusive. Moreover, the *Iroquois Nationals* continued to face difficulties from within their communities. One of the most prominent examples to effect the *Iroquois Nationals* surrounded the women's team in 1987.

As the *Iroquois Nationals* women's team continued to build their organization, they began to garner more attention within Haudenosaunee communities. In the attempt to raise funds, the organization presented the concept of the team to the Six Nations' councils and it was at that time when the historical Haudenosaunee Longhouse belief that women

should not play lacrosse came to a head. Leading this argument were the Clan Mothers of the Onondaga and Seneca (at Tonawanda) Nations.⁸² To this point in time the participation of females in lacrosse was tolerated or at least overlooked within Haudenosaunee communities as demonstrated by their participation on the Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve, as well as in the local high schools surrounding American reservations. It was with the development of a national team however, that the issue became too large for Longhouse followers to ignore.

From a Haudenosaunee perspective *lacrosse is ceremony*. The game is a form of cultural and religious exhibition played “in” the Longhouse — for example “traditional” lacrosse games played with wooden sticks continue to take place to cure sickness and/or to honour holistic entities each spring.⁸³ As a sacred game, the wooden stick itself is a form of medicine and is further reinforced by lacrosse medicines, actual substances which the Haudenosaunee use on their sticks.⁸⁴ Dao Jao Dre (Delmor Jacobs) further explains the understanding of the stick as a form of medicine:

The traditional lacrosse stick is made from hickory, like False Face’s cane. We are told that because False Face favors hickory trees, if you have hickory trees around your house, he won’t send bad weather your way. If you are going to make a traditional stick, you would go to the edge of the woods and make an offering. These trees, like all medicine, are living entities. When you put down tobacco as an offering, they understand. After offering tobacco, you will find the tree, the medicine, you are looking for. You could use other types of trees, but they are not as strong or flexible. Every tree has a particular job to do. That is why there are various types of trees. If they could all do every job, they would all be the same. Much like the Thunder Entities [or Thunderbeings], who have a job to perform. The hickory tree’s job is to make a lacrosse stick. We are told that a hickory tree hit by lightning is even more special for stickmaking.⁸⁵

With the power of the game to heal and by extension, the stick, the participation of Haudenosaunee females and the *Iroquois Nationals* women’s team found themselves caught between modernity — the expansion of equal opportunity — and traditionalism.

Few others have suffered as much as Native women due to the

onslaught of colonialism. As sociologist and Oneida Nation member Lina Sunseri points out within the Oneida context:

Clearly, Oneida women have lost a great deal as a result of the changes introduced by colonization. One such change has led to their decreased ability to actively and equally participate in the decision-making activities of their communities. As a result of colonialist structures of governance imposed on “Indians” by the colonial Canadian state, Oneida women have witnessed the transformation of their matrilineal and matrilocal society into a patrilineal and patrilocal one.⁸⁶

For the organizers, the *Iroquois Nationals* seemed like a natural fit, a way to empower women in Haudenosaunee communities and provide them with the same benefits and opportunities lacrosse afforded males. “So there is a societal shift ... all of a sudden women’s rights, our men are trying to give our women something of value to express themselves, their pride, their identity, so the *Iroquois Nationals* seemed like a natural.”⁸⁷ However, this societal shift was confronted by the resurgence of traditionalism and the Longhouse belief system, especially in the more conservative Haudenosaunee communities.

As the *Iroquois Nationals* women’s team was preparing for an exhibition in 1987 it was surprisingly the Clan Mothers,⁸⁸ mainly from the two most conservative and traditionalist nations at Onondaga and the Seneca Nation at Tonawanda, who stood up and voiced their discontent with the participation of women in the sport. It was one thing for individuals to be playing in local high schools, but it was clearly another for a female *national team* to ask the Chiefs of the Confederacy for an endorsement to represent the Haudenosaunee Nation. The *Iroquois Nationals* women’s team was a different matter than individual participation in that the organization, the original men’s team, was created in part to represent the ideals of Haudenosaunee Longhouse epistemology. In protest to the women’s team, the Clan Mothers threatened to lie on the field in order to stop the women from practicing⁸⁹ and called the team to a meeting to explain their discontent.⁹⁰

The Clan Mothers gave two explanations for their concern. The first revolved around the physicality of lacrosse. From a Longhouse perspective, it was believed that there was a protective layer around the uterus that

could be damaged if a young women was jumping around or hit by a stick.⁹¹ As the figurative and literal “mothers” of the Haudenosaunee Nations, women were the strength and future of Haudenosaunee society and precautions were taken to insure the survival of those Nations. As Lina Sunseri explains, “Within an Indigenous context, mothering refers to more than bearing children. It is an empowering role for Oneida women, as it plays an important part in sustaining the community and in women’s achievement of self-empowerment.”⁹² Sunseri later adds:

Women occupy a crucial position in this construction [of nationalism], as they constitute border bodyguards who ensure that the genetic pools of the nation are maintained. In this process, women’s sexuality becomes of the utmost importance as nationalists regard women as the vehicles for reproducing future citizens of the nation.⁹³

Extend this to sports, not just lacrosse, and the Clan Mothers argued that sports put women at unnecessary risk of damaging themselves.⁹⁴ While this explanation was as a factor, it was not the primary issue as Haudenosaunee women had been participating in sports with the support of the communities long before this issue arose.⁹⁵ However, unlike the other sports, lacrosse conflicted with another significant piece of the Haudenosaunee Longhouse belief system. Within Haudenosaunee culture, lacrosse is a sacred medicine game and by extension the stick itself is a form of medicine and power. Within the Longhouse belief system, women are viewed as spiritually powerful with the ability to withdraw power from medicinal objects and elements, especially during their “moon time” (menstruation cycle). As a female Oneida Nation member explains:

Moon time is a very important time for women. In our traditions, being on the cycle is not something we should think like is dirty or something bad But being on moon time is a scared thing really. It reminds us of our sacred power inside of us as women. It is a time when we are cleansing ourselves inside, our spiritual side is so strong at this time, we are even more powerful inside than in other times. It is all part of being a woman, of reminding us of our roles as life givers.⁹⁶

Further explaining the power of women during their moon time and in turn their ability to withdraw power from medicines, a second Oneida Nation member explains:

When we are in our cycle, we are even more connected with Mother Earth, are more in touch with our spiritual power, our powers as women. It is part of our traditional culture, about being Oneida, being Native. When we are in our moon time, we know we have so much power that, for example, we don't do corn soup, or other jobs, like make berry drinks, or go to ceremonies. It is because our powers are too strong at this time, that it would put things out of balance. Others, people or food, can't take our power. We take power out of them, my grandma used to say.⁹⁷

It was keeping with this premise that the Clan Mothers objected to the participation of women in lacrosse. Since lacrosse is considered a ceremony and the stick is a form of medicine with its own powers, it was explained, women should not be handling and participating in it similar to other medicines and ceremonies during their moon time.⁹⁸ This proscription based upon gender was not solely a Haudenosaunee phenomenon. Victoria Paraschak notes that there were similar limitations on female participation in Tlingit gambling games and the accompanying purification ceremonies because of powers associated with their menstruation cycle.⁹⁹ Similarly, Audrey R. Giles found a parallel theme in her study of the Dene Games in the Northwest Territories.¹⁰⁰ While the Clan Mothers' explanation was given in a modern context, this had been a key reason why women had not been playing lacrosse all along:

Given that women are viewed as the most capable and natural transmitters of culture, they are obligated to practise the "proper" cultural ways and in turn transmit those ways to younger generations. A negative result of such a construction is that since they are viewed as carrying the honour and tradition of their nation, women are often patrolled and controlled to ensure their moral purity and proper behaviour.¹⁰¹

Despite the availability of plastic sticks, the vast majority of women on the *Iroquois Nationals* women's team participated in lacrosse using the

wooden lacrosse stick resulting in an impossible dichotomy. The wooden lacrosse stick, crafted by Haudenosaunee stick makers and resembling the original Aboriginal stick form, was symbolic of Haudenosaunee nationalism as was the *Iroquois Nationals*, but it was also a symbolic limitation of that nationalism, since lacrosse was constructed as a male activity within Haudenosaunee communities.

While the power of women to withdraw the sacred and medicinal powers of a lacrosse stick was recognized within the Longhouse epistemology, there is evidence that association extended beyond the Longhouse belief system within Haudenosaunee communities. Whether lacrosse players and families were Longhouse followers or not, it was traditionally taboo for a woman to touch a man's lacrosse stick¹⁰² and the game was often limited to male members of marquee Haudenosaunee lacrosse families.¹⁰³ The associated thought was not only that women could withdraw the medicinal aspects of the stick, but they could also extract the added power contained within the stick negating a lacrosse player's skill.¹⁰⁴ As famous Akwesasne lacrosse goalkeeper and coach Ernie Mitchell remembers, this association was made regardless of age:

I was on the minor lacrosse board in the mid-90s, I had a novice lacrosse team [9–10 year olds], we played in Kahnawake, I brought the kids home ...; I had a whole bus load of kids. One of the kids was getting his stuff out and his mother come out [*sic*] and she grabbed his stick and equipment and took it in the house as he was walking away, and the kids in the back go 'look it [*sic*], she grabbed his lacrosse stick!' [Ernie laughing] And that is a no no in Akwesasne lacrosse [laughing].¹⁰⁵

As a result of the Clan Mother's meeting, the *Iroquois Nationals* women's team disbanded. As team member Kari Miller later remarked, "My heart was broke into a thousand pieces. For me, that was my opportunity to go traveling and play the game I loved. We got a taste of it, then it was taken away."¹⁰⁶ For the Haudenosaunee traditionalist, the revival and perseverance of the Longhouse has been a remarkable symbol of their endurance despite colonialism and of Haudenosaunee nationalism. However, within this resistance it has led the traditionalist community to struggle with elements of their epistemology as they attempt to reform their view of traditionalism to establish a balance between that traditionalism and

modernity. As Gerald Taiaiake Alfred explains, “Nationalism is best viewed as having both a relatively stable core which endures and peripheral elements that are easily adapted or manipulated to accommodate the demands of a particular political environment.”¹⁰⁷ In this instance, the *Iroquois Nationals* women’s team demonstrated the limitation of Haudenosaunee nationalism at least from a gender perspective.

As national athletic representatives, Haudenosaunee nationalism was a male only venture. The most dominant and culturally relevant sport for the Haudenosaunee was, as confirmed by the Clan Mothers’ decision, limited to male participants. Attempting to regain entry into international competition for over a century, the Haudenosaunee themselves would create limitations as to who could and could not represent their nation based on the constructions of gender within the Haudenosaunee Longhouse epistemology. This in turn affected male attitudes, gender relations, and women outside of the Longhouse belief system. As Lina Sunseri points out, the revival of traditionalism has been a tremendous catalyst for Haudenosaunee nationalism, but it, too, must be critically analyzed to insure that it is not being used to create an oppressive situation in communities:

... it is clear that these women do recognize that a revival of traditional ways of governing is important if Oneida is to become a self-determined nation again, yet they also recognize that some traditional discourses, when not justly practiced, can be used as tools to further oppress and victimize them. It is true that traditions can be empowering and a source of personal and collective strength in the face of cultural genocide and oppressive colonial structures, yet caution must be exercised to ensure the tradition does indeed liberate women from these structures. When tradition no longer does that, instead further dispossessing women of the power given to them by the Creator, one must be ready to question tradition.¹⁰⁸

Although the *Iroquois Nationals* women’s team disbanded, the Haudenosaunee have been struggling with the role of women in lacrosse ever since. Immediately following the decision of the Clan Mothers, individual community members had to struggle with the decision to continue to play at the local level and to reject Haudenosaunee traditionalism. This

was a struggle that *Iroquois Nationals* founder Rick Hill and his family were confronted with:

So I had to wrestle with it very directly because you know sometimes I try hard to be a good Haudenosaunee person and it usually gets me in trouble [laughing]. So I have a daughter and she wants to play lacrosse, and her mother is a Clan Mother, [we] had this big discussion, disbanded the Iroquois Nationals [women's team] out of regard for what these women were saying but it was always kind of like but go ahead and continue doing what you are doing, so officially we couldn't have an Iroquois Nationals team ... but that is a little different. So, I had to talk to my wife and I said 'well what are we going to do? I believe what those women at Tonawanda and Onondaga said, so she shouldn't play lacrosse' and her mother's attitude was, 'she has got so little else, give her this. It will mean so much to her.' I got to admit, it did ... on the field she took great [pride], because her brothers played lacrosse too, so they were always giving her a hard time you know, treating her hard and fooling her, so when she got out there though, she actually learned from them, she knew how to dodge, she knew how to fake, she knew how to shoot, I was really surprised. I think that is the societal shift ... it was good emotionally for the girls, women, and we have to support it. We have to be the kind of cheering fan when we die they are going to say 'all you girl lacrosse players stand up, these guys used to love to watch you play.'¹⁰⁹

It would take almost four years of petitioning, but the *Iroquois Nationals* men's team was finally accepted into the ILF in 1987 and permitted to compete in the ILF World Games in Perth, Australia in 1990.¹¹⁰ The approval by the ILF marked a significant achievement for the Haudenosaunee and the *Iroquois Nationals*. As the community-produced newspaper *Tekawennake* declared:

This is an important step in restoring the Indian profile to the sport of lacrosse and should serve as a source of pride to all Iroquoian people. The tradition of lacrosse remains an important cultural expression on Indian identity and has fostered many positive role models in Six Nations communities.¹¹¹



The *Iroquois Nationals* versus England. With permission from Rick Hill.
Source: Rick Hill photo collection, Six Nations of the Grand River.

Once again exercising their declaration of sovereignty, the *Iroquois Nationals* arranged travel clearances with the United States and Australian governments and travelled to the games on the Haudenosaunee passport. As Oren Lyons remarked, their acceptance into the 1990 World Lacrosse Championships was a significant achievement for all those involved, “Lacrosse is the lifeblood of our people.” Lyons said. “So the Nationals are really an extension of ourselves. It’s nothing extraordinary, this team, though the effort to get there has been. That’s been quite extraordinary.”¹¹² The presentation of the Haudenosaunee flag and anthem¹¹³ marked a powerful moment for players Kent Lyons¹¹⁴ and David White and marked a significant achievement in their fight to return to international competition:

I remember the first time we were in Australia and the teams come out and we are all standing there and they are playing the national anthem for every team and they played the Iroquois national anthem and I got choked up, I mean I am getting choked up just talking about it. We are standing there and other nations stood up for us, and they liked our anthem, it was really cool, it was a native language anthem ... people

loved it and people loved us as the originators of the game so to speak, as the first players.¹¹⁵

Although the *Nationals* did not win a game at the World Championships, it marked a significant achievement for the Haudenosaunee to even gain acceptance.

The history of the Haudenosaunee's fight to play lacrosse at the international level illustrates how a Native game appropriated by the dominant non-Native society could be taken back again and used to reassert more than merely athletic prowess. Lacrosse was a powerful tool for reunification throughout the 1980s and 1990s for the Haudenosaunee. The team went beyond the realms of sport and athleticism and demanded the recognition of Haudenosaunee sovereignty on the world stage. As *Nationals* board member Dave Bray would later state, "We want to show our ownership of lacrosse to the world It's our game, and now we have the voice to tell the world."¹¹⁶ The *Iroquois Nationals* were an element of a larger resurgence of traditionalism of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy that attempted to create an alternative to the further integration into the dominant societies. In doing so, the formation of the team became a physical representation of Haudenosaunee nationalism, one based in traditionalism that included its embedded understandings of gender. Yet to truly understand how national identification emerges through lacrosse and is demonstrated by Haudenosaunee peoples, it is not simply enough to say that in the instance of the Creator's Game "gender trumped nation" when the women's team ceased its operation. Haudenosaunee identities were and continue to be complex and multiple, intersecting traditionalism, gender, and nationhood all at once; but they do not always work in unison. For the period in question, gender prohibited female members from expressing a national identity through lacrosse in the same manner as male members, although as supporters, fans, and as relations to the players, women did embrace lacrosse as an expression of their national identity. Moreover, the dialogue surrounding women's direct participation in lacrosse as players helped bring important questions surrounding the adaptation of Haudenosaunee traditionalism, specifically relating to gender, to the surface and eventually resulted in the formation of a Haudenosaunee women's national team, albeit two decades later.

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Endnotes:

- 1 A special acknowledgement must be made to Rick Hill at the Six Nations Polytechnic Indigenous Knowledge Centre, Dao Jao Dre (Delmor Jacobs), Ernie and Kerry Mitchell, David White, Greg Horn, Karen Etienne, Virve Wiland at the Woodland Culture Centre Research Library, the Akwesasne Culture Center Library, the Kanien'kehá:ka Onkwawén:na Raotitióhkwa Language and Cultural Center, and to the Haudenosaunee communities for letting me share their story. Snachalhya (I thank you all for what you have done).
- 2 For more on the development of non-Aboriginal lacrosse, see Gillian Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land: Sport, Visual Culture, & Identity in Montreal 1840–85* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009); Don Morrow, "The Canadian Image Abroad: The Great Lacrosse Tours of 1876 and 1883" in *Proceedings of the Fifth Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1982); Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence of Organized Sport, 1807–1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1987).
- 3 The six nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy are the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora.
- 4 For the purpose of this article "Longhouse Traditionalists" refers to Haudenosaunee members that have led the cultural revitalization movement that has been occurring in Haudenosaunee communities since the late nineteenth century. It also refers to the section of the population that attempted to restore the political and cultural institutions of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and Longhouse epistemology for the purpose of establishing and maintaining their political and cultural autonomy (i.e., Traditionalism). In contrast "Modernists" refers to Haudenosaunee members that believed in amending the

- Indian Act and working within its parameters. As Gerald Taiaiake Alfred observed, “members consisted mainly of educated and ‘off-reserve’ progressive Mohawks favouring a further institutionalization of the Indian Act system” (60). For more, see Gerald F. Reid, *Kahnawà:ke: Factionalism, Traditionalism, and Nationalism in a Mohawk Community* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Gerald R. Alfred, *Heeding the Voices of Four Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1995); José Barreiro, ed., *Thinking in Indian: A John Mohawk Reader* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 2010).
- 5 Field lacrosse, played outdoors, was the original form of the game, as opposed to box lacrosse (a.k.a. indoor lacrosse), which was developed in the early 1930s by National Hockey League owners to fill idle hockey arenas in the summer-time. Box lacrosse became extremely popular in Canada but had limited success elsewhere in the world in turn isolating Canadians from the more popular field lacrosse form of the game played internationally. While Haudenosaunee athletes were barred from championship competition in field lacrosse, they did compete in box lacrosse championships for both Native and non-Native teams. For more, see Donald Fisher, “‘Splendid but Undesirable Isolation’: Recasting Canada’s National Game as Box Lacrosse, 1931–1932,” *Sport History Review* 36 (2005): 115–29.
 - 6 Ken S. Coates, *A Global History of Indigenous Peoples: Struggle and Survival* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 231.
 - 7 After several months of work, Minister of Indian Affairs Jean Chrétien delivered the *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy* on 25 June 1969, better known as the *White Paper*. Although the *White Paper* was considered a new Indian policy by the Canadian government, it was quickly seen as another attempt to assimilate Aboriginal peoples into Canadian society by its critics. The *White Paper* was a definitive event in the resurgence of Aboriginal issues. Before this date Aboriginal-led organizations, such as the National Indian Brotherhood and the Native Council of Canada, were finding it extremely difficult to unify Native voices from across the country in a common cause. It was, in part, the *White Paper* that provided a catalyst for a unified Native response.
 - 8 Troy Johnson, “The Occupation of Alcatraz Island: Roots of American Indian Activism,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 10, no. 2 (Autumn 1994): 77.
 - 9 Robert Anderson, Joanna Brown, Jonny Lerner, and Barbara Lou Shafer, eds., *Voices from Wounded Knee, 1973: In the Words of the Participants* (Roosevelt, NY: Akwesasne Notes, 1974), 94.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, 96–7.
 - 11 Mark Dockstator, “Aboriginal Representations of History and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples” in *Walking a Tightrope: Aboriginal People and Their Representations*, eds. Ute Lischke and David McNab (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005), 105.

- 12 Mr. Hill would later go on to have an extremely accomplished career in teaching at SUNY Buffalo, as a museum curator, and as the Director of Public Programs for the National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institution. Rick Hill (Tuscarora), interview by Allan Downey, 9 March 2011, audio recording and transcript, Six Nations Polytechnic, Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve, Ont.
- 13 The *Iroquois Nationals* were named after the Cuban Nationals Olympic team. The purpose of the name was to draw further attention to the fact that the team played for their nation. Hill interview by Downey, 7 June 2012.
- 14 Dao Jao Dre (Demlor Jacobs, Cayuga, Wolf clan, Six Nations of the Grand River), interview by Allan Downey, 9 March 2011, audio recording and transcript, Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve, Ont.
- 15 Hill interview by Allan Downey, 9 March 2011.
- 16 Thomas Vennum, *American Indian Lacrosse: Little Brother of War* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 272.
- 17 Hill interview by Downey, 9 March 2011.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Donald M. Fisher, *Lacrosse: A History of the Game* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 297.
- 20 Peter McFarlane, "Aboriginal Leadership" in *Visions of the Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issues*, eds. David Alan Long and Olive Patricia Dickason (Toronto: Harcourt Bruce & Company, 1996), 129.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Laurence M. Hauptman, *The Iroquois & the New Deal* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 3–4.
- 23 Hill interview by Downey, 9 March 2011.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid., 9 September 2011.
- 27 Barreiro, 203.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 The Haudenosaunee Grand Council of Chiefs are the active cultural, political, and social hereditary leadership of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, which remains an active symbol of traditional governance and cultural persistence from the imposed elected council system or the Modernist leadership in Haudenosaunee communities.
- 30 *The Origin of Lacrosse* (Akwesasne: Ronathahon:ni Cultural Centre, 2008), 48.
- 31 Quoted in *Haudenosaunee Runner* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 12. Originally from the Haudenosaunee Grand Council of Chiefs, Communiqué on Sovereignty, 13 May 1990.
- 32 Donald B. Smith, s.v. "DESKAHEH (Levi General)," Dictionary of Canadian Biography Online (University of Toronto), http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?id_nbr=8103, <viewed 6 March 2012>.

- 33 Barreiro, 203.
- 34 Ernie Mitchell and David White, interview by Allan Downey, 23 September 2011, audio recording and transcript, Cornwall, Ont.
- 35 Fisher, *Lacrosse*, 299.
- 36 Hill interview by Downey, 9 March 2011.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 While the team serves as an example of the decolonization of lacrosse, the *Iroquois Nationals* were part of a larger international decolonization movement utilizing sport in the twentieth century. For example, see *A Spirit of Dominance: Cricket and Nationalism in the West Indies* (Kingston, Jamaica: Canoe Press University of the West Indies, 1998); José Raul Perales, "Politics and Play: Sport, Social Movements, and Decolonization in Cuba and the British West Indies" in *Globalizations and Social Movements: Culture, Power, and the Transnational Public Sphere*, eds. John A. Guidry, Michael D. Kennedy, and Mayer N. Zald (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).
- 40 Poka Laenui, "Process of Decolonization" in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. Marie Battiste (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000), 150, 153.
- 41 Hill interview by Downey, 9 September 2011.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Mitchell and White interview by Downey, 23 September 2011.
- 44 *The Origin of Lacrosse*, 49.
- 45 As quoted in *ibid.*, 50.
- 46 Charles Ballem, "Missing From the Canadian Sport Scene: Native Athletes," *Sport History Review* (Online) 14, no. 2 (December 1983): 34.
- 47 Greg Horn (Mohawk), interview by Allan Downey, 2 May 2011, audio recording and transcript, Kahnawake, Qc.
- 48 Hill interview by Downey, 9 March 2011.
- 49 Victoria Paraschak, "Organized Sport for Native Females on the Six Nations Reserve, Ontario from 1968 to 1980: A Comparison of Dominant and Emergent Sport Systems," *Canadian Journal of History of Sport* 21, no. 2 (December 1990): 72–4.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 74.
- 51 Hill interview by Downey, 7 June 2011.
- 52 Paraschak, 76.
- 53 *Ibid.*
- 54 Fisher, 147.
- 55 Thomas Vennum, *Lacrosse Legends of the First Americans* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 98–103.
- 56 Vennum, *American Indian Lacrosse*, 184–5.
- 57 Joseph B. Oxendine, *American Indian Sports Heritage* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1995), 296.

- 58 Andrea Houston, "Haudenosaunee team ends 20-year absence with U19 appearance," *The Peterborough Examiner* (date unknown, 2007), The Peterborough Examiner Online Archives, <http://www.thepeterboroughexaminer.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?archive=true&e=641848>, <viewed 12 February 2012>.
- 59 Alison Owings, *Indian Voice: Listening to Native Americans* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 69.
- 60 Vennum, *Lacrosse Legends of the First Americans*, 105–6.
- 61 For example, the few studies in existence concerning lacrosse have failed to examine Aboriginal women in the sport. While Vennum's *Lacrosse Legends* and *American Indian Lacrosse*, Fisher's *Lacrosse*, and Oxedine's *American Indian Sports Heritage* do mention First Nations women, it is only in passing and they fail to offer a detailed analysis.
- 62 Victoria Paraschak, "Doing Race, Doing Gender: First Nations, 'Sport,' and Gender Relations" in *Sport and Gender in Canada*, 2nd ed., eds. Kevin Young and Philip White (Don Mills, Ont.: Oxford University Press, 2007), 144.
- 63 Karen Etienne, interview by Allan Downey, audio recording and transcript, 22 October 2011, Kanasatake, Qc.
- 64 Oren Lyons, interview by Bill Moyers, transcript by Journal Graphics Inc., 3 July 1991, Public Affairs Television, produced and directed by Betsy McCarthy, New York, NY.
- 65 Rick Hill, "A Respectful Passing: The Longhouse Funeral," *Haudenosaunee Runner* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2000): 7.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 8–9.
- 67 Hill interview by Downey, 7 June 2011.
- 68 The International Federation of Women's Lacrosse Association was formed in 1972 with the United States, England, Scotland, and Australia as its inaugural members. The IFWLA served as the female equivalent to the men's International Lacrosse Federation. Federation of International Lacrosse: Strategic Plan 2008–2010, http://www.filacrosse.com/downloads/FIL_Strategic_Plan.pdf, <viewed 5 March 2011>, 4–5.
- 69 Hill interview by Downey, 7 June 2011.
- 70 *Ibid.*
- 71 Oxendine, 294.
- 72 Robert Lipsyte, "Lacrosse: All-American Game," *New York Times* (15 June 1986).
- 73 *Ibid.*
- 74 "Iroquois National prove to be a competent lacrosse team," *Tekawennake* (23 July 1986).
- 75 *Ibid.*
- 76 Lipsyte. This quotation also partially appears in Vennum, *American Indian Lacrosse*, 294.
- 77 "Iroquois Nationals."
- 78 Fisher, *Lacrosse*, 296.
- 79 "Iroquois Nationals,".

- 80 Woodland Culture Centre Library, Brantford, Ont., Vertical File, s.v., “lacrosse,” Rick Hill, “Iroquois join International Lacrosse Federation,” date unknown.
- 81 Lipsyte, 15 June 1986.
- 82 Hill interview by Downey, 7 June 2011.
- 83 For example, each spring in mid-April the Cayuga Nation plays a lacrosse game to a score of seven with traditional wooden sticks honouring the Seven Thunderbeings. For the purposes of using lacrosse as a healing game, it can be requested by an individual, clan, nation, or even the entire Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Once the game ends, the ball that was used in the game remains with the person who made the request or the one who was in need of the curative powers of the game. Dao Jao Dre interview by Downey, 7 June 2011.
- 84 Hill interview by Downey, 7 June 2011.
- 85 Jim Calder and Ron Fletcher, *Lacrosse: The Ancient Game* (Toronto: Ancient Game Press, 2011), 27–8.
- 86 Lina Sunseri, *Being Again of One Mind: Oneida Women and the Struggle for Decolonization* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011), 151.
- 87 Hill interview by Downey, 7 June 2011.
- 88 According to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, a Clan Mother is “a title which is passed down hereditarily through a clan. It is her responsibility to look out for the welfare of the clan by overseeing the actions of the Chief and ensuring that he is performing his duties in accordance with the Great Law. As Clan Mother, she will have her own wampum of two strings, one white and one purple, signifying her title within the Haudenosaunee. Should she pass on, the string will then be passed on to the next hereditary Clan Mother. If a Chief acts improperly or is not living up to his responsibilities, his Clan Mother and Faith Keepers will warn him about his actions. If he continues to act selfishly the Clan Mother may symbolically remove his antlers, thus removing his authority as Chief.” Haudenosaunee Confederacy, s.v. “Clan Mothers,” <http://www.haudenosauneeconfederacy.ca/clanmothers.html>, <viewed 5 March 2012>.
- 89 Aimee Berg, “Cradle of a Sport has Crossed the Gender Line,” *New York Times* (13 May 2007).
- 90 Hill interview by Downey, 7 June 2011.
- 91 *Ibid.*, 9 March 2011.
- 92 Sunseri, 131.
- 93 *Ibid.*, 105.
- 94 Hill interview by Downey, 9 March 2011.
- 95 Victoria Paraschak, “Organized Sport,” 72–3.
- 96 As quoted in Sunseri, 130.
- 97 *Ibid.*
- 98 Hill interview by Downey, 7 June 2011.
- 99 Paraschak, “Doing Race, Doing Gender,” 139.
- 100 Audrey R. Giles, “Kevlar, Crisco, and Menstruation: ‘Tradition’ and Dene Games,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 21 (2004): 18–35.

- 101 Sunseri, 106.
- 102 Hill interview by Downey, 7 June 2011.
- 103 This was reflected to me by numerous female Haudenosaunee community members, who have asked to remain anonymous, from prominent lacrosse families that did not follow the Longhouse belief system, but instead could be considered Modernists.
- 104 Hill interview by Downey, 7 June 2011.
- 105 Mitchell and White interview by Downey, 23 September 2011.
- 106 Berg.
- 107 Alfred, 14.
- 108 Sunseri, 144.
- 109 Hill interview by Downey, 7 June 2011.
- 110 “Iroquois National Will Compete in World Games in Perth,” *Tekawennake* (9 May 1990).
- 111 Ibid.
- 112 Robert L. Smith, “Playing for Nationhood,” *The Post-Standard* (13 June 1990), in Ernie Mitchell Scrapbook, Akwesasne Culture Center Library, Hogansburg, NY.
- 113 The creation of a national flag was the product of two major developments: the establishment of the national lacrosse team and the larger pan-*Native* repatriation movements of the 1980s in which the Haudenosaunee were key participants. Prior to the *Nationals* trip to Australia in 1990, the Haudenosaunee at Onondaga had been embroiled in a battle with the New York State Museum at Albany since 1970 concerning the repatriation of Haudenosaunee cultural objects, including the Hiawatha Wampum Belt. The Hiawatha Wampum Belt commemorates the founding of the original Five Nations — Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Onondaga, Seneca, and the Tuscarora later became the sixth — with each nation represented by a symbol. In celebration of the repatriation of the belt in 1989 and the fact that the belt represented the unity of the Five Nations Confederacy, the *Nationals* chose the Hiawatha Wampum Belt as their flag, thus creating a universal symbol of Haudenosaunee sovereignty, pride, and culture. For more, see Kathleen S. Fine-Dare, *Grave Injustice: The American Indian Repatriation Movement and NAGPRA* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002).
- 114 See Vennum, *American Indian Lacrosse*, 293.
- 115 Mitchell and White interview by Downey, 23 September 2011.
- 116 “Iroquois shedding light on roots of lacrosse,” *Boston Globe* (9 October 2007).