SPORT LEADERSHIP IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA TAMIL DIASPORA: EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SPORT LEADERS IN TAMIL GRASSROOTS SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

Civil war in Sri Lanka precipitated the mass emigration of Tamils from Sri Lanka in the 1980s, many of whom settled in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). This community has since established significant social support networks and cultural infrastructure including, and of interest to this study, a growing number of Tamil grassroots sports organizations. Specifically, this study investigates the experience of leaders in the GTA Tamil diasporic sport community. The research objectives are to: 1) document the experiences of Tamil sport leaders in the GTA that led to their involvement with Tamil sport leagues; 2) understand what sport leadership means within the Tamil sporting community; 3) understand the gendered and gendering nature of sport leadership; and, 4) identify potential barriers that Tamils, in particular Tamil women, experience in sport leadership and strategies to negotiate them.

Postcolonial feminism and intersectionality theory inform this study to allow for deeper understanding of the impact colonialism has had on the Tamil diaspora and exploration of the meaning and consequences of multiple interacting social identities, such as class, race, gender and other systems of unequal power on sport leadership within the community. An exploratory multiple case study approach is used in this study to allow for intensive study of sport leaders through interviews and social media analysis.

By exploring the lived experiences of second and 1.5 generation Tamil sport leaders in the GTA, the importance of diasporic identity, gender norms, and postcolonial dynamics in shaping Tamil grassroots sports leadership is revealed. A hybrid leadership model emerges that has roots in both Tamil and Western ideologies as sport leaders navigate a ‘third space’ in the sporting sphere. Tamil women must also navigate intersecting barriers and supports at individual,

interpersonal, organizational and cultural levels, adopting strategies such as collective leadership, which underscores the complex, gendered nature of leadership in diasporic sporting spaces.

Dedication

ஒரு கை தட்டினால் ஓசை வராது

One hand alone cannot clap

Thank you to those who stand with me now – and to those who came before – for making this work possible. This journey is rooted in the strength, sacrifice, and unyielding spirit of the Tamil people whose struggles have paved the way for voices like mine to be heard.

In solidarity for peoples fighting for justice – from Eelam to Palestine.

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I also want to honour the memory of my uncle Mathi Mama who was a true pillar of the Tamil community and whose presence featured prominently in the settlement stories of so many who arrived in the GTA, including my own parents'. He gave generously of his time and his care and his loss is deeply felt but his legacy lives on in the lives of those he touched.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that the colonial violence that uprooted and continues to haunt Eelam Tamils is not a story of the past – it shapes our present and informs our resistance. The struggles of our people are not isolated. This thesis stands in solidarity with all who continue to resist colonialism in its many forms.

Thank you, all of you, for being part of this journey.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

In more recent times, the Tamil-Sinhalese conflict in Sri Lanka was a decades-long civil war between the majority Sinhalese and minority Tamil peoples that stemmed from group tensions and discrimination, largely caused by British colonialism. At the time of independence, despite being in the minority, Tamils disproportionately held positions of power in civil service and upper class professions compared to the Sinhalese majority "as the consequence of British colonial efforts to divide and rule, or it could be because nothing much grows in the northern area and ambitious Tamils took to education and the jobs in the colonial system that could be had by those who were educated in English" (Singer, 1992, pp. 712). Although upper class Tamils began migrating to Western countries as early as the 1950s, the number of emigrants began to rise steadily after the government's implementation of social policies that denied Tamils access to equal education, employment, and political rights – policies intended to remove Tamils from positions of power and replace them with Sinhalese people (Fuglerud, 2001; Pande, 2017; Singer, 1992; Thurairajah, 2011). The 1956 Sinhala Only Act recognized Sinhalese as the only official language of the country, which Tamils felt was an intentional effort to marginalize them and devalue their language and identity. Around the same time, the government commissioned several irrigation projects in Tamil areas of the country which Tamils viewed as attempts by the government to colonize Tamil lands with Sinhalese peoples. Conflicts between Tamils and Sinhalese peoples continued to escalate and there were riots and deaths on both sides in the late 1950s.

In the 1970s, government policies further limited opportunities for Tamils in Sri Lanka. In 1972, an ethnic quota system was introduced for university admission which significantly reduced the number of Tamil student who were accepted in programs such as medicine, law, and science.

At the same time, civil service jobs became increasingly inaccessible as fluency in Sinhalese was made a requirement. These forms of systemic exclusion fueled growing support for the creation of a separate Tamil homeland, Tamil Eelam. The government also passed legal measures that had lasting impacts on the safety of Tamils. A state of emergency declared in 1971, lasted six years, and gave security forces the power to detail people indefinitely without trial and even to dispose of bodies without investigation. Many Tamils were detained and tortured under these laws, and cycles of killings and retaliations began to emerge. These tensions eventually escalated into Black July, the anti-Tamil pogrom that took place from July 23 to 30, 1983.

Black July marked a turning point in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. The violence began in Colombo after the bodies of Sinhalese soldiers killed by Tamil rebels in the North were brought to the capital. Unlike earlier riots, Black July was distinguished by its scale and organization. Reports describe mobs carrying voters' lists to identify Tamil homes and businesses, setting them on fire, and assaulting or killing Tamils with shocking brutality (Tambiah, 1986, as cited in Pavey, 2008). Many accounts suggest state complicity as these voters' lists must have come from government officials and there witnesses reported seeing mobs being transported in government vehicles. Five days into the violence, Sri Lanka's President addressed the nation, promising to ban Tamil separatist groups but failing to condemn the atrocities or acknowledge Tamil suffering. The violence only escalated afterwards. Official reports record 371 deaths, though estimates place the toll to be closer to 3,000. Thousands of Tamil-owned homes and businesses were destroyed, and more than 130,000 Tamils were displaced, with 30,000 ending up in refugee camps (Pavey, 2008).

Following the 1983 Black July riots, Tamils fled from Sri Lanka to countries around the world (Fugerlud, 2001; Jones, 2014; O'Neill, 2015; Sriskandarajah, 2008). Before 1983, the Tamil population from Sri Lanka in Canada was estimated to be around 2,000 persons. By 2008, this

population was more than 250,000, the majority of which lived in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) (Jones, 2014; Sriskandarajah, 2008). The GTA is home to the largest Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora living outside of Sri Lanka.

The Tamil community in the GTA has established significant social support and capital networks and cultural infrastructure in the decades since Black July (Aiken & Cheran, 2005, as cited in Sriskandarajah, 2008). A 2002 study of the settlement experience of Sri Lankan Tamils in Toronto described the "refugee system of self-help" that quickly emerged within the community whereby a newcomer would assist a recently arrived refugee to settle in Toronto by helping them with food, clothes and other necessities until they found employment and then that refugee would do it for someone else (Sandercock, 2004, pp. 13). This tradition of self-reliance and cohesion within the Tamil community may have resulted from life in Sri Lanka as an oppressed minority where there were constant fears of government, army, police and even neighbours (Sandercock, 2004). Sandercock writes that "this extraordinary mobilization of the community for self-help and advancement is reflected in the number of community organizations that came into being in a very short space of time post-1983" (2004, pp. 24).

Of interest to this study are the growing number of Tamil grassroots sports organizations that have appeared in the GTA over the last ten years. These monoethnic sport organizations are diverse in their target demographic (e.g. gender, age, etc.), duration and sport offering (see Table 1 for the current Tamil community sports organization in the GTA as of 2023 when data was collected). For example, the Women's Ontario Tamil Sports League splits its six-month season between basketball and volleyball and is intended for women aged 16 years and older, whereas Tamil Flag Football Toronto runs for three months and is a male-only league. These sport organizations also differ in mission and leadership structure.

Table 1: Tamil Grassroots Sports Organizations in the GTA

Name of the Organization	**Year of Formation**	**Approximate # of Participants**	**Sport(s) Played**	**Duration of League**	**Gender(s) of Participants**	**Average Age Range of Participants (years)**	**Social Media Presence**	**Other Notes**
Women's Ontario Tamil Sports League	2015	70-90 per year	Basketball and Volleyball	6 months	Women	25-35	Active Instagram Page; Inactive Facebook Page	The league stopped operating in 2022
Ontario Tamil Softball League	2011	80	Softball	4 months	Men (though the league was coed until 2017)	25-40	Active Instagram Page	The league stopped operating in 2019
Tamil Football League	2016	95-105	Flag Football	3 months	Men	25-35	Active Instagram Page	
Tamil Womxn's Flag Football	2016	80-100	Flag Football	3 months	Womxn	25-35	Active Instagram Page	
Elite Toronto Basketball League	2016	250	Basketball	6 months	Men	20-35	Active Instagram Page	The league began as a predominantly Tamil league but this is no longer the focus and the

								league is diverse
Toronto Premier Sports League	2018	Depends on what leagues are operating – 30 to 100	Basketball, Volleyball and Cricket	Depends on the league	Men and Women	20-35	Active Instagram Page	Women's basketball league only operated for one season in 2019
6ixUp Volleyball	2017	50-70	Volleyball	Tournament Style	Men and Women	25-40	Active Instagram Page	
Ontario Tamil Basketball League	2013	100	Basketball	6 months	Men	20-35	Active Instagram Page	The league stopped operating in 2020

Studies have suggested that sport plays an important role in the lives of members of diasporic groups (Carrington, 1998; Joseph, 2012; Nakamura, 2019; Whigham, 2015). These diasporic sport leagues can act to strengthen groups' diasporic identities, socio-emotional bonds, and sense of belonging (Fletcher, 2014; Joseph, 2012; Nakamura, 2012; Nakamura, 2019; Spaaij & Broerse, 2019). Despite these findings and the growth of sport organizations established by Tamil people in the GTA, there is little scholarly work on the roles, histories, leaders, and significance of these sport groups.

To address this gap, this study investigates why and how members of the Tamil diaspora in the GTA became sport leaders within their community, guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of those who serve as sport leaders in the GTA Tamil community? In particular, what events and experiences led to their involvement with Tamil sport leagues?
2. What is sport leadership within the GTA Tamil sporting community?
3. What is the gendered and gendering nature of sport leadership in the GTA Tamil sport community?
4. What are the potential barriers that Tamils, and in particular Tamil women, experience in sport leadership and strategies to negotiate them?

The research objectives were to:

1. Document the experiences of those who serve as sport leaders in the GTA Tamil community – paying particular attention to the events and experiences that led to their involvement with Tamil sport leagues;
2. Understand sport leadership in the GTA Tamil sport community;

3. Understand the gendered and gendering nature of sport leadership in the Tamil sport community; and,
4. Identify potential barriers that Tamils, in particular Tamil women, experience in sport leadership and strategies to negotiate them.

Positionality

This research was motivated in part due to my positionality as an active participant and leader in the Tamil grassroots sports community. My involvement began in 2016 as a participant in the Women's Ontario Tamil Sports League. In 2017, I joined the executive committee and assisted with league operations before becoming one of the co-commissioners for the league in 2018. I was both a participant and a sports leader from 2017 to 2022 when the league stopped operating. I also participated in a Tamil women's flag football league for one year in 2017. My motivation for joining this sports community was largely spurred by a desire to strengthen my Tamil identity and a feeling of being disconnected from the Tamil community at large. As someone who had played and enjoyed sports from early childhood, the Tamil sports leagues felt like an easy way to re-enter the Tamil diasporic community in Toronto. My experience as both a sport participant and leader, and as a Tamil woman, within the Tamil grassroots sports community is important and I practiced reflexivity throughout to acknowledge and understand the impact of my positionality on the study (see Chapter 3).

Structure of Thesis

In the next chapter, I review relevant scholarly literature to situate the thesis within existing research and identify the gaps in our understanding of sport, leadership, gender, and Tamil people. In Chapter 3, I discuss the theoretical frameworks that inform this study. Chapter 4 details the methodology used to answer the research questions. Chapters 5 and 6 explore why and how the

research participants became sport leaders in their communities, how they conceptualize sport leadership, barriers to sport leadership, and gendered and gendering aspects of these experiences. In the Discussion (Chapter 7), the findings are situated within the existing literature and the significance of the findings are explored. The thesis concludes (Chapter 8) with recommendations for promoting sport leadership among Tamil women and communities, and for future scholarly work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

In what follows, I review existing literature that provides the contextual background of the study and in turn, identify the gaps in the research that this thesis begins to address. First, I discuss Tamil migration and seek to establish that Tamils are diasporic. Second, I review literature on diaspora and the lived experience of diasporic communities and the social forces that they navigate. Third, I review literature on monoethnic sport leagues and discuss their particular significance for Tamil people. Lastly, I review literature on leadership, with particular attention paid to how conceptualizations of leadership may be Eurocentric and gendered.

The study draws on literature from sociology of sport, diaspora studies, Sri Lankan Tamil history, and models of leadership. This work has been reviewed with the objective of exploring how Tamil migration, identity, and community-building have been studied; examining the relationship between identity and community-building within sport leagues that are organized along ethnic lines; and critically reviewing how leadership has been conceptualized in and outside of sport literature.

Tamil Migration: Are Tamils Diasporic?

Historically, 'diaspora' referred exclusively to the forced dispersion of the Jewish peoples from their homeland before it was extended, in the 1960s and 1970s, to also include the experience of Africans, Armenians and the Irish – all of whom were ethnic/religious communities that had been forced from their homelands by significant trauma. In the subsequent decades, the term 'diaspora' evolved, becoming metaphoric for all kinds of people who experienced transnational migration from their homeland to a host land, including political refugees, immigrants and ethnic/racial minorities. Thus, Anthias (1998) stated that the term 'diaspora' is over-used. Social

constructionists further expanded the concept of ‘diaspora’ by abstracting the notion of ‘home’ from that of a physical place to one that was more encompassing and by insisting that ethnic and religious communities could not be thought of singularly but instead required an intersectional lens.

As ‘diaspora’ became more abstract, efforts to delineate a diaspora became essential (Cohen, 2008). Building on the work of Safran (2005), Cohen (2008, p. 17) offered nine “Common features of diaspora,” listed verbatim below:

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. Alternatively or additionally, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. A collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history, suffering and achievements;
4. An idealization of the real or imagined ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. The frequent development of a return movement to the homeland that gains collective approbation even if many in the group are satisfied with only a vicarious relationship or intermittent visits to the homeland;
6. A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate;
7. A troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;

8. A sense of empathy and co-responsibility with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement even where home has become more vestigial; and
9. The possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

Both Safran and Cohen agreed that the presence of all nine features was not necessary for a population to be considered diasporic and that the degree to which the features were present could also vary (Cohen, 2008). Agnew added that the presence or absence of certain features was not hierarchal and concluded that there was no such thing as the 'ideal diaspora' (2005). Cohen's delineation of diaspora is commonly cited in diasporic literature and helps to frame the discussion of whether the Tamil population from Sri Lanka should be considered diasporic (Agnew, 2005). In what follows, Cohen's framework is applied to demonstrate how Tamil migration histories reflect the common features of diaspora. As there is limited literature available about the Tamil diaspora, the discussion below includes literature from Canada (O'Neill, 2015; Sriskandarajah, 2008; Thurairjah, 2011; Wayland, 2003), Norway (Fuglerud, 2001), the United Kingdom (Jones, 2014), or about the diaspora at-large (Pande, 2017).

The Dispersal of Tamils

A noted earlier, upper class Tamils began migrating to Western countries in the 1950s, but the number of Tamils leaving Sri Lanka increased considerably after the government's implementation of social policies that denied Tamils access to equal education, employment and political rights (Fuglerud, 2001; Pande, 2017). Most of the dispersion, however, occurred after the 1983 Black July riots in which up to 3,000 Tamils were killed and thousands of Tamil businesses and homes were burned (Fugerlud, 2001; Jones, 2014; O'Neill, 2015; Sriskandarajah, 2008). The violence of Black July catalyzed the Sri Lankan civil conflict between the Sri Lankan government

and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) – a militant organization that sought to establish an independent Tamil homeland, Tamil Eelam, in the north and east of Sri Lanka. Within the Tamil diaspora, many Tamils viewed the LTTE as liberation fighters who protected Tamil civilians from state violence and ethnic persecution (Wayland, 2003; Amarasingam, 2015; Cheran, 2009). Over the 26 years that followed 1983, the conflict resulted in thousands of deaths, widespread displacement, and mass emigration of Tamils from Sri Lanka to other parts of the world including England, Norway, France, Germany, the United States, and Australia. Most Tamils, though, migrated to Canada because of its policy that granted conferred refugees with permanent residency status upon arrival and efforts by European governments to limit immigration. Before 1983, the Tamil population from Sri Lanka in Canada was estimated to be around 2,000 persons. By 2008, this population had surged to more than 250,000, the majority of whom lived in the Greater Toronto Area (Jones, 2014; Sriskandarajah, 2008).

A Collective Memory

Another feature of diaspora is having a shared memory of homeland. In the case of the Tamil diaspora, there is a collective memory and myth about the Tamil homeland including its location and history. For most Tamils, their homeland is not the country of Sri Lanka but rather, an aspirational state known as Tamil Eelam. Tamil Eelam comprises the Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka (Thurairajah, 2011). This geographic region was historically known as the Tamil Kingdom of Jaffna and was established in the thirteenth century and ruled as an independent state until it was captured by the son of Sinhalese King in the fifteenth century (de Silva, 1981 as cited in Fuglerud, 2001). Following the 'decolonization' of Sri Lanka, Tamils argued for the return of their ancestral lands and sovereignty, citing the commonly held belief and transgenerational narrative that the Kingdom of Jaffna was a prosperous and enlightened society that thrived before

its colonization. It should be noted that the single quotes are intentionally used for the word, decolonization, because although the British ended its colonial rule of Sri Lanka, its colonial legacies have continued to impact the nation.

It is also important to recognize the shared memories of suffering of Tamil peoples. This trauma is transgenerational and transnational. For example, second generation Tamil Canadian youth living outside of Sri Lanka have appropriated the memories of the suffering of their people under the Sri Lankan and Sinhalese government, lobbying for the creation of Tamil Eelam despite the distance of the conflict (O'Neill, 2015).

Commitment to the Homeland

Tamils living outside of Sri Lanka, in countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom, have also demonstrated their commitment to the creation, safety, prosperity and maintenance of Tamil Eelam in a number of ways. First, the dispersed Tamil population have been politically active in and financially supportive of the Tamil nationalist movement in Sri Lanka (Jones, 2014; O'Neill, 2015; Sriskandarajah, 2008). The Tamil population living abroad have also contributed to the building of public and social infrastructure, such as hospitals, schools and community centres, in Tamil majority areas. International Tamil organizations have also coordinated volunteer efforts, such as sending Tamil doctors living abroad to hospitals in North and East Sri Lanka (Pande, 2017). Finally, Tamils around the world have participated in protests, sit-ins, and other forms of political mobilization to raise awareness of the atrocities against Tamils living in Sri Lanka (Jones, 2014; Pande, 2017; Sriskandarajah, 2008). Perhaps the most widely known example in the GTA happened in 2009 when more than 2,000 Tamil protesters blocked the Gardiner Expressway to raise awareness about the genocide in Sri Lanka and demand that the Canadian government intervene (Simmons, 2019).

Ethnic Group Consciousness

Tamils have also maintained a strong ethnic group consciousness following their exile (Fuglerud, 2001). Tamil parents encourage their children to learn about their heritage from an early age by enrolling them in activities such as classical dancing, Carnatic music and religious and language instruction (DeVotta, 2009, as cited in O'Neill, 2015). For some youth and young adults, their Tamil identity is further strengthened through membership in Tamil Student Associations (TSAs) at their post-secondary institutions (O'Neill, 2015). These activities are particularly significant for second–generation Tamils whose ties to their homeland may be less palpable. Tamil organizations, some of which of have been linked to the LTTE, have also contributed to the sense of common identity amongst Tamils by establishing newspapers and radio channels to share news about the homeland, organizing large sporting events, running Saturday schools, and by organizing cultural meetings (Fugerlud, 2001; Pande, 2017). This ethnic group consciousness also "strengthened the resolve of Tamil Canadians to be involved in the politics of Sri Lanka" (Thurairajah, 2011, p. 142).

Host land Difficulties

Low wage employment, high cost of living, and racialization have made it difficult for some Tamils to develop a strong sense of belonging in their host lands (Pande, 2017). The labelling of the LTTE, 'the voice' of the Tamil people, as a terrorist organization in 2006 compounded the discrimination and exclusion experienced by Tamils in their host lands (Pande, 2017; Wayland, 2003). In a media analysis of the coverage of Tamil demonstrations in Canada, Sriskandarajah found that most newspapers presented the discourse that the LTTE were terrorists, all Tamils supported the LTTE, and thus, all Tamils were terrorists. In response to the 2009 non-violent protest marches, Tamils were stereotyped as being aggressive and behaving in an 'un-Canadian'

manner by the media (2008).

Tamil identity became oppositional to Canadian identity and its security interests because of the conflation of Tamil identity with terrorism and a belief that being loyal to one's Tamil identity meant being less loyal to Canada (George, 2011; O'Neill, 2015; Sriskandarajah, 2008). This painting of Brown bodies as terroristic can also be related to the September 11 (9/11) attacks carried out by al-Qaeda against the United States in 2001.

Before 9/11, South Asians experienced "racialization in their attempts to claim citizenship and negotiate the black/white binary. Since 9/11, however, this process has become explicit, as "Muslim-looking people" see themselves through other's watchful eyes, mirroring Du Bois's notion of double consciousness" (Sharma, 2016, p. 139). The social construction of post-9/11 Brown bodies saw the merging of:

> …older stereotypes of East Asian Americans (the model minority myth and perpetual foreigner) [and] stereotypes of West Asians (terrorist, oppressed veiled woman, religious fanatic) grouping together people who come from a vast landscape including Eastern Europe, West Asia, South Asia, and East Asia (Sharma, 2016, p. 139).

The racialization of Muslim-looking peoples (i.e. Brown bodies) has resulted in Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Muslims, and atheists being read as Muslim (Sharma, 2016). Tamil people also experience this racialization, which serves to reinforce the view that all Tamil people are terrorists and thus do not belong in Canada.

Co-ethnic members in other countries

Tamils have established organizations around the world that work to maintain ties between geographically dispersed populations to reinforce the sense of empathy and co-responsibility Tamils have to one another. Modern technology, like the internet, radio, and cheaper options for

long distance calling and travel between countries, has allowed Tamils to stay in touch with other Tamils both in their homeland and in other countries (Agnew, 2005; Pande, 2017; Shuval, 2000). Tamils in Toronto know about the lives of Tamils in Europe and other parts of the world (Wayland, 2003). This allows for transnational advocacy for Tamil rights, participation in cultural events and commemoration of key events related to the civil war.

Possibility to thrive in host land

There is limited literature about the lived experiences of Tamils in their host lands and even fewer that discuss the possibility of this population thriving in various host countries. However, scholars have found that Tamils have established significant social support and capital networks in their respective host lands, connections which have contributed to the well-being of Tamil migrants (Aiken & Cheran, 2005 as cited in Sriskandarajah, 2008). These Tamil communities have also invested in significant cultural infrastructure; in 2004, Sandercock Dickout, and Winkler documented ten newspapers, four radio stations, three television stations and a number of organizations in Canada alone that were committed to the history, lives and culture of Tamils from Sri Lanka (2004, as cited in Sriskandarajah, 2008).

It is important to acknowledge however that although there is possibility to thrive, the effects of colonialism did not end upon arrival in Canada. Colonial legacies such as racial hierarches mark non-Whites as threats, rather than victims, which is particularly true following 9/11. The labelling of the LTTE as a terrorist organization in 2006 added to the surveillance and suspicion of Tamils in Canada. Tamils immigrating to Canada also face employment and housing barriers because of racialization. And the Othering that Tamils face as non-Whites can also lead to feelings of marginalization and social isolation. The effects of colonialism on the Tamil diaspora is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

The Tamil Diaspora

Of the features listed by Cohen, the Tamil diaspora can be described by all characteristics except for a desire to return to their homeland. As Pande explains, since most diasporic Tamils have become settled in their host lands, the idea of their return to Sri Lanka is unlikely (2017). Based on this assessment, the context and experience of Tamils who fled Sri Lanka suggest that this population should be considered a diaspora, as delineated by Cohen (2008). Indeed, this population is being labelled as such by several researchers (e.g., Cohen, 2008; Fugerlud, 2001; Jones, 2014; O'Neill, 2015; Sriskandarajah, 2008).

Diasporic Communities and Their Lived Experiences

Whereas the literature for diasporic Tamils specifically is sparse, the research on lived experiences of diasporic communities broadly is more robust. Narratives and other qualitative methods have been commonly used to document the lived experiences of populations because of the richness of data that can be collected. However, it is important to distinguish between the *life as lived*, *life as experienced*, *life as told*, and *life as text.* The events that actually occur in a person's life (*life as lived*) are different to the way a person makes sense of these events in relation to their previous experiences and social identities (*life as experienced*). The *life as told* is how the person recounts these events to another person (like a researcher) and then the *life as text* refers to how the researcher interprets and represents the events that have occurred in someone else's life (Bruner, 1986 as cited in Eastmond, 2007). It is important to acknowledge that most literature that documents the lived experience of others, is *life as text.*

There are three key themes that emerge regarding the lived experiences of diasporas. First, that colonialism, its legacies, and post-colonial discourses have impacted the lived experience of diasporic people and communities around the world. Second, that each diasporic individual has a

unique lived experience – the product of navigating the world through their multiple social identities – and therefore, no singular lived experience for a diaspora can exist. And finally, that identity is negotiated, fluid, and complex.

Diaspora and Colonialism

Colonialism has had a profound impact on cultures and populations around the world, including diasporas. Rapid European colonial expansion began around 1815 and by 1914, 85% of the world's surface was under European direct colonial rule (Carrington, 2010). Ypi identifies three types of colonialism, categorized by intention: to settle, for commercial interests, and to civilize (2013). The three types of colonialism identified by Ypi (2013) overlap as the outcomes of one type of colonialism could support others (e.g., commercial benefits accrued from settlers and through the practice of 'civilizing' colonized populations).

In the first, type, *settler colonialism*, communities were established in 'conquered' lands by settlers, for themselves and their descendants, while remaining politically and economically dependent on their European homeland. Indigenous populations were sometimes exterminated during this process as exemplified by the colonization of North America by British settlers. *Commercial colonialism* occurred for the monopolization of resources. African slave trade to the Americas is one example of this kind of colonization; the Black Atlantic diaspora – which developed because of this colonization – remains significant to this day. Another example is the Dutch colonization of the East Indies and the spice trade. In the final type of colonization, *colonialism with a civilizing mission*, European powers believed that they were superior to colonized populations because of the complexity of their societies and their ability to conquer faraway lands (Mwaniki, 2017; Sheffer, 2003). This dominance was believed to be the result of inherent traits, like rationality, ingenuity and strength, that non-Europeans did not possess

(Mwaniki, 2017). As such, Europeans felt that it was their responsibility, as beneficent rulers, to educate these 'primitive' and 'uncivilized peoples through disciplined, colonial 'schooling' (Mwaniki, 2017; Ypi, 2013). Colonial powers sought to civilize conquered populations by replacing existing political and leadership structures with their own and by appointing new leadership on their behalf (Ypi, 2013), supplanting traditional educational systems and knowledge with Westernized schooling (Di Bona, 1981), and by imposing their own cultures and values upon these populations. These practices allowed colonial powers to control knowledge production and dissemination and to establish cultural hegemony.

In educational institutions, traditional knowledge and ways of learning were removed from the curricula. For example, in Bengal's indigenous system of education, each teacher taught one specialty and nothing else. Students studied until they mastered the material and then were encouraged to move onto another teacher; neither age nor time were relevant to learning. This way of learning did not exist in the colonial systems of education. Colonial languages replaced local languages in schools, particularly at the higher levels of education. Moreover, the material taught in these schools was based on colonial homeland curricula – for example, students in India were learning about British history, rather than their own. In English-medium schools, calendars shifted from Hindu orientation to Christian so that Sunday became the school holiday despite its irrelevance to the traditional culture (Di Bona, 1981). In Sub-Saharan Africa, the establishment of colonial schools was centred on 'building character' rather than educating and on replacing traditional religions and cultures with Christianity (Mwaniki, 2017). These educational reforms were instituted by colonial powers because of the transnational belief in European superiority, a sense of responsibility to 'civilize' the Other, and less explicitly, the goal to reinforce power relations of dominance. By controlling what was taught and how it was taught, colonizers were

able to maintain their oppression of the colonized.

Colonial Legacies of Inequality. The idea of British colonial superiority relied on the dichotomization of the British from Others. Colonial dichotomies such as British versus non-British, civilized versus savage, and Christian versus heathen, also shaped modern constructions of identities, and the ways we think about race, gender, and sexuality (Anderson, 2002; Mwaniki, 2017). For example, the social construction of race, which categorizes individuals based on skin colour, allowed the British to differentiate themselves from Others by offering the opposition of White versus non-White (Mills, 1997, as cited in Mwaniki, 2017).

This Othering has persisted, as exemplified by the model minority discourse that emerged in Canada and the US in the 1960s and continued the perpetuation of Western cultural hegemony. This discourse exaggerates the educational success of Asians, and increasingly South Asian peoples, while underscoring their strong work ethic. At the same time, this discourse painted Asian and South Asian males as effeminate and asexual – able to succeed in the professional world but lacking the masculinity and aggression needed to thrive in areas such as leadership and sport (Prashad, 2000, as cited in Thangaraj, 2010).

Likewise, gender and sexuality are socially constructed and have been shaped by the colonial legacies of hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity. Europeans believed that their dominance and ability to conquer came from their strength (masculinity) (Mwaniki, 2017). Colonized lands, like the Orient, were represented as feminine while patriarchal Western nations were depicted as masculine; this helped cement the transnational belief that men were more powerful that women. Unsurprisingly, racialized men were also depicted as effeminate during colonialism. Another cornerstone of hegemonic masculinity was heterosexuality; heteronormativity was essential for maintaining the dichotomy between male and female and by

extension, British and non-British or White and non-White. Taken together, a hierarchy emerges whereby White heterosexual males are the most privileged and all Others fall somewhere below them in the hierarchy of power (Jewkes et al., 2015).

Colonialism in Canada. Canada itself is a colonial nation - a country founded on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and maintained through racial and gender hierarchies that privilege Whiteness and maleness – echoing the hierarchies of power established by the British empire (Razack, 2002). In the context of White settler colonialism, those who are racialized or Indigenous are confronted by threats to the stability of their citizenship or 'Canadian-ness' (Fung, 2021). Historically, this is exemplified by residential schools, the internment of Japanese Canadians during the Second World War, the "deeply embedded practice of anti-Blackness" and general Othering of racial minorities in Canada (Fung, 2021, p. 116). Within Canada, space and public institutions such as sports and law are organized to privilege white settlers and disempower non-white bodies. Whiteness is normalized and granted full access to space whereas racialized and Indigenous people must constantly negotiate their right to occupy space. The maintenance of non-White bodies as out of place is necessary for the preservation of white settler control over space and what it means to be a 'real Canadian' (Razack, 2002).

Tamils in Canada have also experienced this Othering of their bodies, state surveillance and racial profiling – which was exacerbated post-9/11 and with the classification of the LTTE as a terrorist organization by the Canadian government. Access to space for Tamils is restricted and/or surveilled. Tamils experience conditional citizenship that is dependent on assimilation or adding value to the country – which is always mediated by Whiteness (Fung, 2001; Razack, 2002).

Sport as a tool for Colonialism and Imperialism. In exploring the experience of Tamil sport leaders in the GTA, colonization is contextually significant as both the ancestral homeland

(Sri Lanka) and the host land (Canada) are former British colonies. Britain's vast imperial empire and domination were maintained by its cultural power and successful ability to erase native cultural characteristics and inculcate British ideas, beliefs, rules and conventions. Sport became an important tool in the process of cultural transfer, particularly in terms of creating "shared beliefs and attitudes between rulers and the ruled while at the same time enhancing the social distance between them" (Stoddart, 1988, p. 652).

Sport allowed for the maintenance of the British empire by reinforcing colonial hierarchies of power. Access to sport and sporting events was heavily restricted and monitored. For example, horse racing became incredibly popular throughout the British empire but was restricted to the colonial elite (Stoddart, 1988). Official memberships in horse racing clubs became so exclusive that some were "said to be more difficult to enter than the colonial parliaments" (Stoddart, 1988, p. 656). Colonial subjects from lower social classes were excluded from horse racing all together because it was thought that only the elite had the means and self-control to handle the gambling that was inherent within the sport. Similarly, tennis clubs were formed to bring people of similar social ranks together in a recreational setting for the purposes of building social connections. Tennis clubs were also an opportunity for members of the opposite sex, but same social class, to meet and marry thereby maintaining the social distance between class strata (Stoddart, 1988).

Perhaps most significantly, however, was the way in which the British empire used sport as a tool for assimilation and a way to impose British values and morals onto colonized subjects. Of all the sports introduced to the colonies, cricket was the most influential. As a team sport, cricket taught participants teamwork, the value of obeying authorities, loyalty to teammates, and respect for rules – desirable characteristics for the maintenance of a colonial empire. Cricket became a central feature of the colonial education system such that generations of students were

influenced by the sport and its system of values. The church also played a significant role in spreading the cultural power of sport (Stoddart, 1988). Muscular Christians believed that sport could be used to teach the "civilising properties of Christianity" (Stoddart, 1988, p. 655). Colonial governors even went as far as to suggest that selected groups of local peoples would be ready for political responsibility only after they had assimilated to the codes of cricket. Because cricket was considered a benchmark of Englishness, colonial subjects began to view success in cricket as a way to demonstrate their progress and civility, thereby helping position themselves politically (Diawara, 1990; Stoddart, 1988). It was this tacit indoctrination that allowed for the maintenance of and hegemonic belief in British colonial superiority.

It is important to nonetheless acknowledge that sport can act as site of resistance in the face of these forces of oppression. Sport is one of the few domains in which subordinated groups can compete, dominate, and control their oppressors (Birrell, 1989 as cited in Carrington, 1998). For some, the sports arena is a battlefield. In formerly colonized areas such as Pakistan and the West Indies, colonial sports like cricket have become indigenized and are an essential part of post-colonial identity and pride (James, 1963; Walle, 2013). Despite civil conflict in Sri Lanka, there are Tamil athletes on the national cricket teams whose presence serve as a source of pride for the Tamil community. International cricket matches against England offer opportunity for the formerly colonized to beat their oppressors at their own game and assert their dominance thereby challenging racial stereotypes and hierarchies that were formerly reproduced through sport (Carrington, 1998; James, 1963).

Within the Canadian context, sport, in particular, "hockey continues to produce colonial relationships in Canada by maintaining the hegemony of a White, masculine subjectivity to which all other subject positions must refer" (Krebs, 2012, pp. 81). Violence, which plays an important

role in hockey, is one way in which hockey reproduces colonialism (Krebs, 2012). Inuit hockey players are emasculated because of their unwillingness to drop gloves and fight on the ice (Collings & Condon, 1996 as cited in Krebs, 2012). On the other hand, open-ice contact is prohibited in women's hockey altogether. This modified version of hockey reinforces the myth of female frailty while simultaneously reinforcing hegemonic masculinity (Krebs, 2012). Furthermore, despite Canada's proclivity to self-identify as multicultural and inclusive, Canadian nationalism and mainstream identity have become strongly tied to this sport that is decidedly White and male. To be Canadian is to play or watch hockey. For South Asian Canadians, however, stereotypes that they do not understand hockey or are not physically capable of playing, challenge their claims to Canadian citizenship. South Asian bodies are seen as out of place in hockey (and therefore the nation). More broadly, the lack of racial diversity in hockey is exemplified most poignantly at the elite levels of the sport. In the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics, there were no racialized players on the Canadian men's hockey roster and only two on the women's roster – neither of whom were South Asian (Szto, 2018). This lack of representation of South Asians, including Tamils, is reflective of the barriers that certain ethnocultural groups face in sport in Canada – a trend that is even more prevalent amongst sport leadership – and creates the need for sporting spaces that are more inclusive.

The intersection of race, gender and sexuality construct Asians, including South Asians, and their bodies as weak and unsuited for sport, thereby justifying their marginalization or exclusion from sport altogether (Thangaraj, 2010). Power dynamics, reinforced by the colonial legacies of racial and gender hierarchies that persist within Canada, are further nuanced by the multiple identities that athletes, including diasporic individuals, possess, and it is abundantly clear that sport promotes and maintains hegemonic beliefs about gender, race and sexuality.

Identity Negotiations and Fluidity. A third theme in the scholarship on the lived experiences of diasporic communities is the impact on identity and identity negotiation. In addition to the effects of colonialism and intersectionality on identity whereby stereotyping and gendered racializing discourses construct colonized people in narrow ways, it is important to consider identity itself and how individuals come to know and understand themselves. Identities are negotiated and fluid in that they can change over time in a never-ending process (Hall, 1994), and in different contexts (Agnew, 2005; Ratna, 2011).

Diasporic consciousness is one framework through which identity formation can be understood for diasporic individuals (Malcolm, 2013). Diasporic consciousness is produced through difference. The culture of diasporic individuals is contrasted to the stereotyped host land culture and Othered (Hall, 1994). Culture in this case is a euphemism for race and nationality, which become so intertwined that nationalism becomes racially exclusive (Barker, 1981, as cited in Malcolm, 2013; Burdsey, 2006). For example, Black Canadians are "non-Canadian, always other, always elsewhere, recent, unfamiliar, and impossible" (McKittrick, 2006, p. 99). This leads to a perpetual awareness by diasporic individuals of their difference and results in the reinforcement of homeland belonging and identity (Malcolm, 2013).

Identity negotiation refers to the processes by which people establish, maintain, or change their identity in relation to others or context (Swann, 1987 as cited in McDowell and Carter-Francique, 2017). Within diasporas, identity negotiation constantly evolves in relation to shifting attitudes about host land, homeland, and diaspora. For example, some Jewish Americans distanced themselves from their homeland when they realized that their attachment to Israel was negatively influencing how they were being perceived in the United States, their host land (Shain & Bristmen, 2002 as cited in Thurairajah, 2011). For some members of the Tamil diaspora in Canada, the

government's decision to label the LTTE as a terrorist group and the subsequent media coverage that asserted all Tamils were terrorists, strengthened attachments to the homeland and weakened attachments to Canada (Sriskandarajah, 2008).

Identities can also be hybridized. Hybridity is a naturally occurring process in diasporic populations and refers to how individuals' identities are shaped and reconstituted by aspects of the host culture so that a new hybrid identity evolves (Chambers, 1996 as cited in Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk, 2005). This model of identity formation and cultural interaction replaces those of assimilation and integration which suggest that home identity is replaced by the new host identity (Carrington, 2015; Papastergiadis, 2000, as cited in Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk, 2005). Moreover, diasporic individuals can sometimes feel like their identities are being influenced by multiple – sometimes conflicting – ways of life. This hybrid identity is therefore constantly shifting which challenges the idea of a singular identity (Bhabha, 1994). Thus, diasporic individuals live their lives in a 'third space' where cultural orientations and identities are created (Bhabha, 1990 as cited in Hall, 2010). This space is ambiguous and fluid and allows for resistance to colonial legacies in that it undermines the clear division between colonizer and colonized. One example of this resistance is mimicry where the colonized begin to imitate the language, behaviours, and values of their colonizers but imperfectly – for example, speaking English with an accent. This imperfection maintains difference which is unsettling to colonial power because it reveals its fragility and creates space for resistance (Bhabha, 1994).

For Tamil diasporic individuals, the pressures to assimilate and to reproduce cultural norms like familial responsibility, religious practice and gendered expectations, can be resisted through processes of producing new, hybrid identities (Hall, 2010). The tensions between reproduction and production can vary between first generation, second generation, and 1.5 generation members of

a diaspora (Agnew, 2005; Hall, 2010). These tensions inform how authenticity or feelings of being Tamil enough are understood. A sense of lack or being inauthentic can stem from an inability to speak or read the Tamil language or lack of participation in cultural activities like traditional dance or visits to Temple. Such feelings are particularly prevalent for second generation Tamils. Interestingly, second generation Tamils also feel marginalized within their host lands because they have adopted host identities, but are still discriminated against (Zhou, 2001 as cited in Sriskandarajah, 2008). For some diasporic individuals, this can lead to a double consciousness where they can see themselves through the eyes of others and feel twoness; for example, a Tamil and a Canadian (Du Bois, 1994 as cited in Agnew, 2005). It is a feeling of being both inside and outside of an identity (Gilroy, 1993).

For the diasporic Tamil community, the concept of 'generation' is also particularly salient (but not as it refers to immigration status). Rather 'generation' as conceptualized by Karl Mannheim refers:

> …to the fact that people grow up at particular historical moments and may, therefore, share crucial historical experiences with fellow members of their age group – experiences which differentiate them, as a generation, from both older and younger generations… Such different experiences make for different assumptions and expectations (Firth, 1984, p. 6 as cited in Fleming, 1995).

For example, Tamils who lived through the height of the genocide and were old enough to understand what was happening in Sri Lanka may have stronger ties to the homeland and desire to remain connected to the Tamil diaspora in Toronto, compared to Tamils who were born shortly before or after the end of the genocide.

It is also important to consider the role of sport, as a mode of cultural production, in identity formation for diasporic individuals.

The Role of Monoethnic Sports Leagues

Monoethnic sports clubs, that cater to persons who share the same ethnocultural and/or racial backgrounds, are one example of how sport contributes to identity formation for diasporas. As previously discussed, racialized and Indigenous persons are restricted in terms of their access to space and their belonging in white settler nations like Canada. Within the sporting sphere, the hegemonic belief that non-white bodies do not belong in sport and stereotypes about race and athletic ability can shape individuals' sport experiences and opportunities. Despite the lack of evidence supporting the notion that racial differences determine success or failure in sport (Cashmore, 2005, as cited in Kilvington, 2013), beliefs about different ethnic/racial groups and their sporting capabilities have become historically ingrained, as evidenced by the racial compositions of professional sport leagues in North America (Ansari, 2004; Thangaraj, 2015). And, racism is as much of an issue in grassroots sports leagues as it is in professional sport leagues (Kilvington & Price, 2013).

Racialized athletes are Othered in mainstream sports that privilege white, heterosexual, Christian males (Thangaraj, Arnaldo & Chin, 2016). For newcomers and minority subgroups, sport participation can leave them feeling alienated and marginalized which may result in them leaving sport or seeking out environments that are more welcoming and familiar (Spaaij, 2015). Sport organizations that are organized along racial and/or ethnocultural lines provide respite, or a haven, for racialized athletes by providing a safer space for them to express their sporting desires amongst co-ethnic peers (Carrington, 1998; Dorokhina, Hosta & van Sterkenburg, 2011; Kilvington, 2013; Nakamura, 2019; Thangaraj, 2015). For example, Bains and Patel (1996, as cited in Kilvington,

2013) found that British South Asians who played on South Asian teams, were significantly less likely to encounter racism compared to South Asians who participated in multiethnic or predominantly White teams.

Studies have also shown that ethnic minority groups prefer monoethnic sporting environments as they get older and performance becomes less important (Dorokhina, Hosta & van Sterkenburg, 2011). Such sporting environments become spaces where ethnic minorities can build social support networks and a sense of belonging (Nakamura, 2019; Trione et al., 2010, as cited in Spaaij, 2015). These ethnic spaces are also useful for temporary respite from other social spheres that may be stressful such as school, work, and neighborhood (Krouwel, Boonstra, Duyvendak & Veldboer, 2006).

However, it should not be assumed that monoethnic sports environments are homogeneous. Rather, the experiences of participation can differ depending on individuals' intersecting identities. For example, in a study of Somali Australian sporting leagues, some women reported being disinterested in participation because of the hegemonic notions of femininity and cultural belief that sport is for men (Walseth, 2006, as cited in Spaaij, 2015). Women who did participate in sport, had to do so in religiously and culturally adherent ways such as gender-segregated spaces away from men and in modest clothing (such as full-length clothes or hijabs) (Spaaij, 2015). This is one example of how diasporic individuals are hybridizing their identities. In fact, in many ways these monoethnic sporting spaces are material manifestations of the imagined 'third space' described by Bhabha (1994) and others regarding diasporic identity formation. In these spaces, diasporas can exist and negotiate their identities away from the White gaze.

Tamil Monoethnic Sport Leagues

Some scholars have examined the role of monoethnic sport spaces for South Asian people such as Bains and Szto's (2020) study of Apna Hockey (a South Asian ice hockey program) and Thangaraj's (2010) exploration of a South Asian American basketball league called Indo-Pak basketball and 2015 examination of South Asian-only basketball leagues in the US. However, the sporting experience of GTA Tamils in monoethnic sporting environments has not yet been studied (hence the need for this study) but it is reasonable to postulate that there may be some similarities between studies of the sport experiences of ethnic minorities discussed above and Tamils in the GTA. Participation and inclusion in public sporting spaces can be difficult for Tamil diasporic individuals because they do not feel welcome (Sandercock, 2004). The pervasive notion that South Asians are "nerdy" and un-athletic can lead to a lack of respect or acceptance from other players or coaches (Thangaraj, 2015). A study of British South Asians and football (soccer) clubs found that British South Asians were excluded because their culture was believed to be incompatible with English football culture (Kilvington, 2013). Furthermore, there were pervasive beliefs that British South Asians could not play contact sports (Sleap, 1998 as cited in Kilvington, 2013), with a former professional football manager suggesting that South Asian foods were not ideal for building up a physical frame (BBC, 1995 as cited in Kilvington, 2013). For South Asian populations, like Tamils, the internalized and hegemonic belief that their bodies are weak and diminutive compared to others has led to a cultural emphasis on education over sport and the shared belief that sport is not a viable vehicle for upwards social mobility (Spaaij, Farquharson & Marjoribanks, 2015). The emphasis on education is particularly true for diasporic populations that have immigrated to new countries and had to re-establish themselves socially and economically. Parents encourage their children to pursue professional careers, like being a doctor or an engineer,

which will ensure financial stability in the future as opposed to sport, where the future is less certain.

For some South Asian males, rejection of the hypo-masculine views of their body have resulted in hyper-masculine and hyper-heterosexual performances of athleticism. In public spaces, this aggressiveness of Brown men can be viewed negatively and connoted with violence and terrorism (Thangaraj, 2015). These public spaces leave Tamils vulnerable to the terrorizing White gaze (hooks, 1992, as cited in Carrington, 1998) in which their bodies and behaviours are regulated by normative "White governmentality" (Hesse, 1997, p. 85). This has become particularly relevant following 9/11 and the subsequent labelling of the LTTE as a terrorist organization, whom many felt were liberation fighters. In response, diasporic Tamils have dealt with the pressures of public spaces in two ways: either by avoiding public sporting spaces all together or by establishing Tamil spaces (Sandercock, 2004) like Tamil sports leagues. Monoethnic sport leagues could also act to strengthen the group's diasporic identity, socio-emotional bonds and belonging, as found in among other ethnic groups (e.g., Fletcher, 2014; Joseph, 2012; Spaaij & Broerse, 2019).

The representations of Tamils, as either nerdy or terroristic, also deny the diversity of this population by failing to acknowledge its heterogeneity and multiplicity. These stereotypes have maintained diasporic Tamils' identities as non-normative and therefore foreign in their hostlands. In North America for example, Tamils (even those born in their hostlands) are more commonly associated with 'foreign' sports like cricket rather than North American sports like basketball or baseball (Thangaraj, 2015). Such discourses locate Tamils in a colonial and postcolonial history while also identifying them as culturally and nationally South Asian – not North American (Burdsey, 2006; Thangaraj, 2010).

It is important to note however that not much is known about Tamil diasporic populations and sport. As far at this author knows, no study has looked specifically at the relationship between sport and the Tamil diaspora. And although studies of South Asians and sport may have included Tamil diasporic participants, the nuances of this specific community have not been elucidated. Further still, examination of the experience of Tamil women in sport is almost non-existent and their voices are largely missing from both diasporic and postcolonial literature (Anderson, 2002; Burdsey, 2006). Within colonial institutions like sport, the experience of Tamil women is marginalized through a double-bind process. The experiences of Tamil women are incorporated within the experiences of women generally and/or considered to be similar to the experience of Tamil men. This gap is especially significant given the number of Tamil Canadian women in the GTA who have leadership roles within sport clubs.

No previous studies have attempted to understand the relationship between Tamil women and sport but the postcolonial literature on Tamil women broadly, offers some inferences regarding what the experiences of Tamil women in sport might be. Within the diasporic Tamil community, some parents may not support their daughters' participation in sport because they may expect them to practice traditional gender roles by learning to cook and clean. By teaching domestic skills to their daughters, parents believe their daughters will eventually become good wives and mothers (Ratna, 2011). There is also the belief within Tamil societies that women are "symbolic markers to measure purity and respect" (Manoranjan, 2010, p. 141). Women are expected to dress modestly and behave modestly by not mixing with men in either private or public spaces – which includes sporting spaces. Women can feel pressured to conform to and uphold traditional interpretations of their gender and its roles (Ratna, 2011) and there is an expectation that Tamil women should be shy, timid, passive and obedient – characteristics that are not often associated with leadership

(Ann, 1994 as cited in Fuglerud, 2001). However, it is important to acknowledge that there is no single experience for a Tamil woman and that Tamil women are not negotiating "two intact, coherent and homogeneous societies;" rather, it is "more appropriate to conceptualise the identities of many young South Asians as demonstrating 'multiple cultural competence' (Fleming, 1995, p. 29). These layered and intersecting identities not only shape how Tamil women experience the world, but also influence how they come to understand, perform, and navigate leadership – particularly within sport contexts where dominant norms may not reflect their realities. With this in mind, it is necessary to explore how leadership has been conceptualized more broadly, and how these frameworks might (or might not) account for the lived experiences of diasporic Tamil sport leaders, particularly Tamil women.

Conceptualizing Sport Leadership

Leadership is the process whereby an individual – influenced by situations and organizational culture (Eagly & Chin, 2010) – influences other individuals for the purpose of goal attainment (Northouse, 2004 as cited in Kilvington, 2013). Leadership scholars agree that understanding leadership requires a multilevel approach (Peachey, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015). In their review of sport management literature, Peachey and colleagues created a multilevel conceptual model of leadership (Figure 1) based on Yammarino's definition that:

> …leadership is a multilevel (person, dyad, group, collective) leader-follower interaction process that occurs in a particular situation (context) where a leader (e.g., superior, supervisor) and followers (e.g., subordinates, direct reports) share a purpose (vision, mission) and jointly accomplish things (e.g., goals, objectives, tasks) willingly (e.g., without coercion) (2013, p. 150, as cited in Peachy, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015).

This model allows for consideration of the antecedents to leadership at the individual level and how there is bidirectional interactions occurring between individual, others (i.e. dyad), groups/teams, and the larger organizational level.

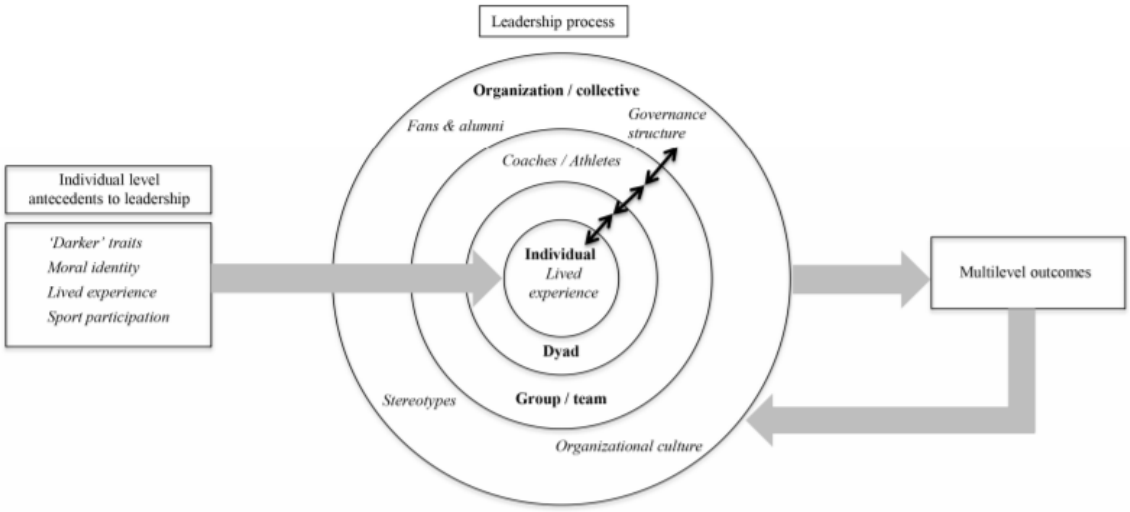

Figure 1: Multilevel model of leadership in sport management as conceptualized by Peachey and colleagues (2015).

The antecedents of leadership considered by this model are the darker traits of leadership, moral identity, lived experience and participation in sport. The darker traits of leadership refer to characteristics like hubris, narcissism and social dominance that are sometimes associated with leadership (Judge et al., 2009, as cited in Peachey, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015). There is some debate about employing a trait approach to understanding leadership; however, there is some merit to this approach (Peachey, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015, p. 579):

> Given the pressures for success in certain sport contexts (e.g., professional sport, international sport, high-level intercollegiate sport) and the expectations to deliver results

in other contexts (e.g., grant funding in nonprofit programs), the darker traits of leadership, including hubris and narcissism, are likely to manifest in leaders of sport organizations.

In opposition to the darker traits of leadership, "moral identity symbolization and internalization contribute to ethical leadership behavior in sport; higher levels of moral identity development decrease the manifestation of the darker traits of leadership behavior" (Peachey, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015, p. 579). This model also argues that lived experience is important to consider within as an antecedent to leadership as well as within the process of leadership (Peachey, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015). Conceptualizing leadership requires acknowledgement of social identity (e.g. race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) and how these social identities intersect in such a way that no one identity is most salient. There are also aspects of identity and stereotypes that can act for or against leadership. For example,

> …because sport operates as a site of support for a particular definition of masculinity (i.e., exclusively heterosexual and physically dominant; Anderson, 2009), those outside of this masculine norm may not be considered as capable of leading or may have no desire to lead organizations that operate in support to this narrow version of masculinity (Peachey, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015, p. 579).

Context also influences identity salience so the idea of a "single, perfectible leadership identity" must be refuted (Sinclair, 2010, p. 451, as cited in Peachey, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015). Finally, participation in sport should be considered as it could positively or negatively impact leadership (Peachey, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015).

At the organization/collective level of leadership, this model also considers the role of external and internal stakeholders and how they will "perceive and act on issues differently to advance their own interests (Freeman, 1984) and could thereby influence leader decision making"

(Peachey, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015, p. 580). Fans and alumni can be particularly influential because of their passion, knowledge and power within these sporting spaces. Governance structures of sport organizations can also influence the process of leadership. Compared to other contexts, sport leaders must work collaboratively within organizations to set rules and standards despite competition (e.g. between coaches, team managers, etc.). This model also allows for examination of the bottom-up influences on leadership – like how athletes and coaches may influence sport leadership (Peachey, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015).

Eurocentrism and Leadership

Due to "the dominant influence of White, able-bodied, heterosexual men in sport leadership, women and other minority groups are negatively affected by stereotypes of what is deemed acceptable sport leadership" (Peachey, Zhou, Damon & Burton, 2015, p. 581) and thus, leadership within Western culture is operationalized by characteristics like ambition, confidence, self-sufficiency, dominance, agency and competence (Eagly & Chin, 2010). Members of equity-deserving groups such as women and ethnic minorities may therefore not be seen as leaders. For instance, women are perceived to lack agency, instead possessing subordinate characteristics more aligned with service roles (Eagly & Chin, 2010). Women who step outside the confines of these stereotypes and approximate traditionally male styles of leadership or masculine characteristics like assertiveness, tenacity and dominance, are considered threats to both femininity and hegemonic masculinity and treated as suspect (Burke & Hallinan, 2006; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991, as cited in McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). The racial hierarchies previously discussed are equally relevant to beliefs about leadership. Whereas Whites are hegemonically perceived to possess the characteristics of a good leader, Blacks are stereotyped as antagonistic and incompetent, Hispanics as lazy and uneducated, and Asians as passive and non-dominant – of

course this is gendered in that men are perceived to be better leaders than women (Eagly & Chin, 2010).

Most of the existing literature and theories on leadership assume universal relevance across cultures, subgroups and time (Chin, 2010). However, these theories inherently manifest a Western bias (Den Hartog & Dicson, 2004, as cited in Chin, 2010) as they are built from observations and studies of the structure and culture of Western organizations, typically run by White, heterosexual men and therefore reinforce a colonizing lens through which women leaders and leaders of colour are examined and judged (Chin, 2010). In a review of books on leadership, Chin (2010) found that less than ten percent included a focus on culture, and most of those books did so in a tokenistic manner by devoting only one or two chapters to culture or diversity and then silence in the remainder of the books. However, changing social contexts are challenging the Western ethnocentrism of leadership theories; there is growing pressure to move beyond colonial conceptualizations of leadership, towards paradigms that include diverse individuals from various subgroups (Chin, 2010).

Theories of leadership need to account for the fact that cultural worldviews and life experiences influence a leader's philosophy and style of leadership (Chin, 2010; Chin, 2011). Chin (2010) explains that expanding the traditional paradigms of leadership means understanding how leaders from diverse identity groups differ from majority group leaders in terms of leadership style, perceptions, and expectations (Chin, 2010). For example, in their study of Maori women leaders, Palmers and Masters found that the women adopted leadership styles consistent with Maori culture and values (2010). In board meetings, for instance, women leaders looked for older male allies to speak on their behalf because they felt like they were unable to speak against older male board members (Palmers & Masters, 2010). In a study of five ethnoracial groups in the United States

(White, Black, Hispanic, Asian and Native American), Chin (2013, as cited in Chin, Desormeaux & Sawyer, 2016) found that there were important differences in perceptions of leadership between White leaders and minority leaders which the researcher later attributed to the common lived experience of navigating society as a person of colour. There is also a need for reassessment of what effective leadership looks like in an increasingly diverse world. The characteristics of a good leader, as identified in studies of predominantly White, heterosexual men, may not remain valid or meaningful for other groups (Chin, 2010). Studies have shown cultural variability in the value placed on certain characteristics of leaders such as the ability to control emotion, being domineering, or taking risks (Eagly & Chin, 2010). As a result, there may be leadership differences within organizations that are structured along racial or ethnocultural lines, like monoethnic sport clubs. It is also important to consider the intersecting identities of leaders as ethnicity and gender can impact a leader's worldviews and lived experiences (Chin, 2010; Chin, 2011). In the case of this study, one must consider whether Tamil women experience leadership differently from Tamil men and non-Tamil women.

The History of Women's Sport Leadership in Canada

Within the Canadian context, understanding the history of women's leadership in sport is important. Prior to the arrival of Europeans in the early seventeenth century, Indigenous women participated in many indigenous sports and games like shinny, lacrosse and football. It is known that some of these games were mixed-gender and that others were men- or women-only but not much is known about these early Indigenous societies and sport leadership (Hall, 2002). Following colonization, "the story of women's sport in Canada takes place mostly in the twentieth century and, of course is going on today" (Hall, 2002, p. 3). During the first World War, working-class women became increasingly interested in sport participation during their leisure time and

participated in “games and tournaments to support patriotic causes or to raise money for the war effort” (Hall, 2002, p. 3). The absence of men during the war resulted in women taking on more organizational responsibilities in sport clubs which paved the way for women to establish and run their own sport clubs and organizations after the war, “although often with the help of men” (Hall, 2002, p. 43). In 1925, The Women’s Amateur Athletic Union of Canada was approved for formation by the Amateur Athletic Union of Canada (AAUC), an organization that controlled several sports like track and field, gymnastics and wrestling (Hall, 2002). In 1926, the Women’s Amateur Athletic Federation (WAAF) was established and became the first women-run and -controlled national forum for Canadian women to explore issues related to sport for Canadian women such as participation and leadership (Safai, 2013). Unfortunately, the WAAF amalgamated with the AAUC in the early 1960s and resulted in “the loss of focused leadership for women’s sport in Canada” and setbacks in the “development of Canadian sport policy relative to women in the 1960s and 1970s” (Safai, 2013, p. 321).

In the 1960s and 1970s, women were left out of the major decisions regarding sport in Canada and their interests were sidelined. Following the 1974 National Conference on Women in Sport, women sport leaders began to make their voices heard (Safai, 2013). In 1980, a study by Pam Lewis confirmed that women were under-represented in sport leadership at the national level (as cited by Robertson, 1995). In 1981, the Female Athlete Conference, attended by many prominent athletes and sport leaders, was held and catalyzed the founding of the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) (Robertson, 1995; Safai, 2013). CAAWS was established with the purpose “to explicitly advocate on behalf of women in sport with the intent of making the Canadian sport system gender equitable” (Safai, 2013, p. 324). In 1982**,** the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was incorporated in

the Canadian Constitution and was significant to sport leadership as it prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex (Lenskyj, 1992; Safai, 2013). However, it is important to note that "Ontario had a human rights code that explicitly exempted gender discrimination in sport, by means of a 1981 amendment which was in effect until 1986" (Lenskyj, 1992, p. 146). In 1986, Sport Canada, the governing body of amateur sport in Canada, issued a policy statement "that equal opportunities must exist at all levels for women and men to compete, coach, officiate or administer sport" (Lenskyj, 1992, p. 147). Since then, there has been continued work on gender equity in Canada though "as a whole, policy development in this area has been marked more by incremental change over time than whole-scale revolutions in policy direction and implementation" and women continue to face barriers in sport leadership (Safai, 2013, p. 337). Canadian Heritage reported that between 2007-2008, only 37% of organizations that received funding from Sport Canada had women in senior administrative roles and that in 2008, only 25% of coaches and 29% of technical officials were women (Canadian Heritage, 2009).

Gender and Sport Leadership

Within sporting contexts, organizations have institutionalized hegemonic masculinity by privileging and rewarding behaviours and activities that are traditionally associated with males (Burton, 2015). The overrepresentation of men, and therefore underrepresentation of women, in sport leadership positions is normalized. This hegemonic masculinity is also maintained by gender passivity; men in leadership roles acknowledge that the ratio of men to women in leadership positions is imbalanced but are either unwilling or unmotivated to change things through individual action or policy (Burton, 2015). It is important therefore to acknowledge that gender-neutral organizations and gender-neutral definitions of skills and experiences do not exist (Knoppers & McLachlan, 2018). For example, Lovett and Lowry (1995) wrote about how the National

Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is an example of "organizations as instruments of domination" as described by Morgan (1986, as cited in Lovett & Lowry, 1995, p. 263). Within the NCAA, power comes from tradition and the past and inherited based on gender such that organizations are "dominated by gender-related values that bias organizational life in favor of one sex" (Lovett & Lowry, 1995, p. 263). Strategies to overcome organizational dominance included (1) the creation and operation of counter institutions (Deckard, 1983, as cited in Lovett & Lowry, 1995) and (2) generating change within the system and organizations – for example creating advocacy groups for equal representation within organizations (Falla, 1981, as cited in Lovett & Lowry, 1995). Though a critique of the second strategy is that "the system is patriarchal by nature and as a result can never provide for equal opportunities for women" (Lovett & Lowry, 1995, p. 264). Even further, some suggest that women working within a system built on patriarchal values contribute to their own oppression by employing strategies to emulate men (Lovett & Lowry, 1995). However, representation is essential for reform.

Sporting bodies have also institutionally adopted and reproduced the belief that stereotypically masculine character traits and behaviours, such as assertiveness and dominance, are necessary for effective leadership in sport, implicitly suggesting that masculinities are superior to femininities (Ely & Meyerson, 2000, as cited in Burton, 2015; Shaw & Frisby, 2006). Men are considered powerful while women are compliant; in other words, men are leaders and women are followers (Shaw & Frisby, 2006). Loden (1985) talks about the differences between the female model of leadership and the traditional male model of leadership suggesting that the former is: cooperative, not competitive; team-centred, not hierarchal; quality output, not winning; intuitive and rational problem-solving, not just rational problem solving; and, empathetic, collaborative and high performance, not high control, strategy and no emotion. Of course, not all women employ

this alternative model of leadership but suggesting that it is female, as opposed to the traditional male, reinforces the idea that leadership is viewed from a hegemonically male standpoint.

Women's access to sport leadership positions can also be limited by the disproportionate number of men in leadership positions (Burton, 2015). One way that men who are in positions of power marginalize women from leadership roles is through homologous reproduction (Kanter, 1977, as cited in Burton, 2015; Shaw & Frisby, 2006). Homologous reproduction is the process by which influence is maintained by those in power within an organization through controlling who else has access to positions of power or influence. In other words, men in leadership positions are more likely to hire other like-minded men, over women (Burton, 2015). Women lack the human capital and social networks – that men have access to – within sports organizations which further limits their access to sport leadership positions (Walker & Bopp, 2010, as cited in Burton, 2015).

At this point it is also important to acknowledge, that discussions of women in sport often refers to White, able-bodied, middle-class, and heterosexual women without considering the intersecting dimensions of power that exist in women's lives (Anderson, 2002; Dewar, 1993b as cited in Hall, 1996; Lenskyj, 2008 as cited in Safai, 2013; Palmer & Masters, 2010; Smith, 1992). Women of colour are systematically excluded from sport, research and theory so very little is known about the intersectional experience of these women (Bruening, 2005). The few researchers who are looking at the experience of racialized women in sport leadership have found that women of colour are doubly disadvantaged by their gender and ethnicity (Borland & Bruening, 2010; McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017; Palmers & Masters, 2010).

In their study of the workplace experiences of African American Female Athletic Directors, McDowell, and Carter-Francique used an intersectional lens to show that Black women faced occupational, gender, and racial stereotyping as well as career restraints and obstacles such as

under- or lack of employment and lack of access to the formal and informal networks that men often enjoy (2017). Another study compared the experiences of Black women working in sport leadership positions in Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) to those of Black women working in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Although both groups of women reported inadequate salary and lack of support groups as their biggest obstacles, Black women working in PWIs said their next greatest obstacles were being Black, being a woman, and lack of cultural outlets respectively; Black women working in HBCUs said the next greatest obstacles were being a woman, employer discrimination based on gender, and low expectations (Abney, 1988 as cited in Armstrong, 2007). As previously mentioned, a study by Palmers and Masters found that Maori women are similarly and doubly disadvantaged by their gender and ethnicity but that Maori culture and traditions emerged as an additional key theme (2010).

Through their literature review of eighty-three peer-reviewed articles, books/book chapters, and seminal reports, LaVoi and Dutove developed an ecological model of barriers and supports for female coaches (see Figure 2) (2012). This ecological model organized the barriers and supports into four levels: individual, interpersonal, organizational and sociocultural. The individual level "includes personal, biological and psychological factors such as cognition, emotions, beliefs, values, expertise and personality of the individual" (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012, p. 20). Individual level barriers include negative self-perception (e.g. lack of assertiveness or self efficacy), stress/burnout, less intention of becoming head coach, non-heterosexual identity and perception of negative outcomes of a coaching career. Individual level supports include being single and not having kids and contributing to the development of successful athletes. Factors such as personality, and skills, knowledge and experience act as barriers or supports depending on the context. The interpersonal level refers to the social-relational influences including other sport

leaders, participants, referees, friends, a significant other, and parents. Barriers at the interpersonal level included the old boys' club, competition with other coaches, athletes' preference for male coaches, and bullying/harassment whereas supports included having a female coach, having the respect of athletes and staff support. Mentoring, connecting with coaches, and family-work balance could act as supports or barriers. The organizational or structural level "is defined by organizational policies, job descriptions, professional practices, use of space, and opportunities (or lack thereof)" (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012, p. 20). At the organizational level, barriers included having coach education run by men, tokenism, unclear career pathways, travel, low pay and limited upwards mobility. Factors such as recruitment, administration and policies, homologous reproduction, time, limited influence on decision-making, not receiving constructive feedback, challenges with communication, and training were supports or barriers. Finally, the sociocultural level refers to norms and systems that act on society as a whole. At this level, gender norms can act as a barrier or support but there are many barriers such as hegemonic masculinity, leadership stereotypes, homophobia, gender role assumptions and marginalization (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012).

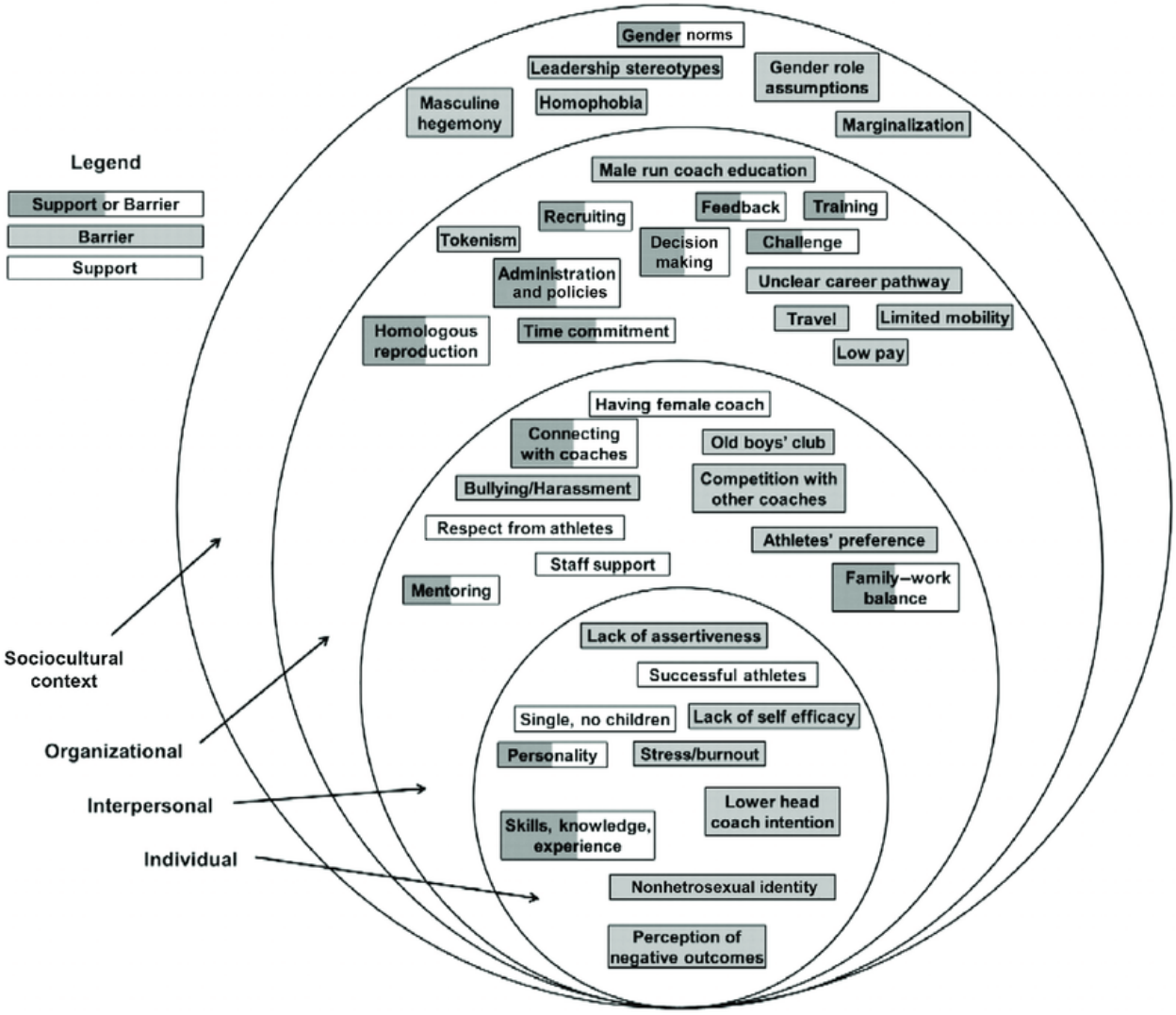

Figure 2: Ecological model of barriers and support for female coaches by LaVoi and Dutove (2012).

Beyond racial and gender intersections, there are other aspects of identity that can affects one's experience in leadership. For example, non-heterosexual women face barriers and discrimination in the workplace (Sartore and Cunningham, 2009). Other social identities like class, disability status, nationality, and immigration status can also impact leadership experiences if they are non-normative. Although no studies have attempted to understand the experience of Tamil women sport leaders in Canada, it is probable that Tamil women face many of the same intersectional challenges.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began with a discussion of Sri Lankan Tamil migration to the GTA, establishing that the community is diasporic, which is an essential lens through which their lived experiences must be understood. Although the literature on the Tamil diaspora itself is limited, the body of research on diaspora and lived experiences, more broadly, is robust. In reviewing this literature, three key themes emerge: colonialism, its legacies, and post-colonial discourses have impacted diasporic communities; there is no singular lived experience for a diaspora; and identity is negotiated, fluid, and complex. Hybridity and the 'third space' are particularly salient aspects of identity formation for diasporas and may explain the emergence of sports clubs that cater to persons who share the same ethnocultural and/or racial backgrounds. As far as this author knows, no studies have looked at the relationship between sport and the Tamil diaspora or how this may be gendered or gendering. Unsurprisingly, this gap also exists in terms of understanding how sport leadership operates with Tamil grassroots sports organizations. The conceptual model of leadership by Peachey and colleagues is introduced to try and understand how sport leadership may be operating in these spaces but there is also acknowledgement that many Western models of leadership are hegemonically White, masculine, and heterosexual. There is a need in the literature for more anti-colonial conceptualizations of leadership and better understanding of how diaspora, particularly the Tamil diaspora, perform leadership.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Having presented the literature review and highlighting the need for more research in the areas of diaspora and sport leadership, particularly from a gendered perspective and the lived experiences of Tamil people in Canada, the next step is to adopt a theoretical framework that will guide how to explain and interpret leadership in grassroots Tamil sports organizations. This theoretical framework should "illuminate the phenomenon of study and the corresponding assumptions adopted by the researcher" because it "drives the [research] question[s], guides the types of methods for data collection and analysis, informs the discussion of the findings, and reveals the subjectivities of the researcher" (Luft et al., 2022, p. 3).

To select a theoretical framework, it is important to consider the subject of study – in this case sport leadership in Tamil grassroots leagues – and assumptions the researcher may hold about this (Luft et al., 2022). The literature review and the nature of the Tamil diaspora in the GTA strongly make the case for a theoretical framework that allows one to look at the phenomenon of study using a lens that that is both gendered and intersectional. It is also important to consider this population from a postcolonial lens as Sri Lanka is a former British colony and the conflict that resulted in the Tamil diaspora was a by-product of this colonization. To select an appropriate framework, this chapter first begins with an exploration of feminism and the importance of centering gender. Next, there is a discussion of postcolonial theory before the case is made for why postcolonial feminism, specifically, is necessary for exploring sport leadership within these diasporic Tamil sporting spaces.

Why Feminism?

Given the foci of this study as centred on grassroots sport leagues that serve Tamil women specifically and the gender inequities that surfaced in the literature review of sport leadership, it seemed necessary to employ a theoretical framework that would pay attention to the gender and power and the ways in which women are disadvantaged by patriarchal systems. Immediately, feminism presented itself as a logical starting place in the search for a theoretical framework for this study.

As noted by Birrell (2000, p. 61): "Feminist theory is a dynamic, continually evolving complex of theories or theoretical traditions that take as their point of departure the analysis of gender as a category of experience in society." "Feminism cannot be defined concisely or definitively" because of the different theories and schools of thought that comprise it such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, cultural studies feminism, and many others (Semerjian & Waldron, 2001, p. 438). In general, however, feminism can be divided into four waves when considering the theory from a chronological perspective. The classification of feminism by waves is used in this thesis as a means of showing the evolution of feminist ideologies and theories. It should be noted, nonetheless, that the use of waves to classify feminisms has been criticized because it introduces false divisions, introduces confusion in terms of cross-wave themes, and because feminists and scholars conceptualize the waves differently (Evans & Chamberlain, 2015).

First wave feminism emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centures, during a period of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics. Its central focus was on expanding legal opportunities for women, particularly the right to vote. However, while this wave marked important political gains, it very much privileged the rights and voices of middle class, Western, cisgender, White women. It largely excluded women of color, working-class women, and those

from colonized or non-Western societies, thereby reinforcing existing hierarchies even though its aim was equality.

Second wave feminism emerged in the 1960s at a time of great sociopolitical unrest. Anti-war and civil rights movements were prominent, sexuality and reproductive rights became dominant issues, and there was focus on ratifying policies that guaranteed social equality regardless of sex (Rampton, 2008). This was also a time of "growing self-consciousness of a variety of minority groups around the world" (Rampton, 2008, p. 3). Second wave feminism became increasingly theoretical and "began to associate the subjugation of women with broader critiques of patriarchy, capitalism, normative heterosexuality, and the woman's role as wife and mother" (Rampton, 2008, p. 3-4). While second-wave feminism still tended to privilege certain voices, it increasingly included contributions from women of color and women in the Global South, who pushed the movement to consider the relationships between race, class, and gender oppression.

The third wave of feminism began in the mid-1990s and was characterized by a dismantling of previously held universalities about feminism and a movement towards postcolonial and post-modern thinking. Third wave feminisms, also sometimes referred to as Third World feminisms, were global and multi-cultural in perspective, rejecting the essentialist definitions of womanhood and highlighting the diversity and fluidity of identity, gender, and sexuality (Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Rampton, 2008). Third wave feminism emphasized the need to confront multiple systems of oppression shaping peoples' lives focusing on intersectionality, cultural critique and sexual agency (Evans, 2015). The third wave also drew from grassroots activism and youth subcultures, such as the Riot Grrrl movement, and leveraged alternative media to amplify diverse feminist voices (Rampton, 2008).

The fourth wave of feminism is still unfolding today but is characterized by digital activism, trans-inclusive politics, and a strong emphasis on intersectionality both in theory and practice. This wave is shaped by social media platforms, which serve as tools for mobilizing around issues such as sexual harassment, body autonomy, and gender-based violence, so that marginalized voices are amplified and global communities are connected (Teixeira et al., 2021). Fourth wave feminists also challenge the idea that feminism is for women only – feminism has evolved to mean equity for all genders. Fourth wave feminisms "speak in terms of intersectionality whereby women's suppression can only fully be understood in a context of the marginalization of other groups and genders – feminism is part of a larger consciousness of oppression along with racism, ageism, classism, ableism, and [discrimination based on] sexual orientation" (Rampton, 2008, p.10).

Together, these four waves illustrate the evolution of feminist thought and action, each responding to the sociopolitical conditions of its time while expanding the boundaries of who feminism is for and what it seeks to address. Over time, feminism has become increasingly inclusive, nuanced, and global in scope. Despite the limitations of conceptualizing feminism in waves, it may be helpful to locate this study as being most aligned with the principles of feminism as described in the fourth wave. Feminism, in this study, means equity for all genders with particular attention paid to the nuanced ways in which intersectional identities can impact Tamil sport leaders in the GTA. However, it is important to acknowledge that much of the literature referenced previously, and in subsequent sections, construct gender as a binary whether intentionally or not (e.g. by failing to address that gender is non-binary).

Postcolonialism

As with feminisms, postcolonial theories are diverse and broad, which many argue is a strength of the theory as it allows for its application to diverse fields of study (Mishra & Hodge, 2005). Postcolonial theories engage with issues related to colonialism – "defined in terms of formal settlement and control of other peoples' land and goods" – and the transformative impact this has had on both the colonizer and the colonized, in the past and the present (Abrahamsen, 2007, p. 125). There are three key themes of postcolonial theory: the centrality of power; the importance of identity; and resistance.

Postcolonial theorists are concerned with how "mainstream scholarship and also frequently our 'common sense' understandings of the social world are firmly grounded in a particularly Western perspective, and [thereby] draw attention to the epistemological bases of Western power" (Abrahamsen, 2007, p. 122). This relationship between power and knowledge was demonstrated in Edward Said's book, *Orientalism*, where Said showed how European cultures constructed the Orient in opposition to themselves (i.e., where the West was familiar, the Orient was strange) such that the Orient is necessary for European self-understanding and identity (as cited by Abrahamsen, 2007). More broadly, the:

> …essence of colonization inheres less in political overrule than in seizing and transforming 'others' by the very act of conceptualizing, inscribing, and interacting with them on terms not of their own choosing; in making them into the pliant objects and silenced subjects of our scripts and scenarios; in assuming the capacity to 'represent' them (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991, p. 15, as cited in Abrahamsen, 2007).

Sport was used in the same way by colonizers as part of their "civilizing mission" and scholars such as Nandy (1983), Majumdar (2004), and Carrington (2010) have used a post-colonial lens to

discuss the role of cricket by the British as a way to enforce Eurocentric values such as hegemonic masculinity and belonging. Within Canada, scholars have also discussed how sport was used as a colonial tool to try and assimilate Indigenous peoples (e.g., Forsyth, 2013; Giles, 2005; Massarella, 2007).

Identity and hybridity are other key themes of postcolonial theory. The "psychological and cultural impacts of colonialism, rather than the political or economic, are placed at the centre of analysis, drawing attention to the continuity and longevity of colonial power as embedded in the postcolonial self" (Abrahamsen, 2007, p. 128). Identities are so profoundly shaped by the colonial experience that hybridities emerge and are adopted by the colonized, forging a relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in terms of identity. As described by Fanon, the White man's self-perception of being civilized relies on the depiction of the Black man as barbaric (1986, as cited in Abrahamsen, 2007). Hybridity challenges this dichotomy between the colonized and the colonizer:

> Hybridity or, as it is sometimes called, 'creolization' is seen to signify the creative adaptation, interpretation and transformation of Western cultural symbols and practices, and shows that the peoples of the South are not simply passive victims in the face of an all-powerful Western culture (Abrahamsen, 2007, p. 129).

For example, Majumdar (2004) and Nandy (1983) discuss how cricket in India has been appropriated and transformed by the formerly colonized to become a symbol of national identity and pride. Similarly, Giles (2005) writes about how sport is being used as a space for identity reclamation by Indigenous women in the North in Canada. And Massarella (2007) argues that Indigenous athletes use sport to assert their identity and resist colonialism, creating a third space where their hybrid identities as both Indigenous and Canadian are negotiated.

Finally, resistance is another theme in postcolonial theory. Sport as a site of resistance is closely tied to the previous theme of identity, but it is important to establish how sport becomes an arena through which the 'formerly' colonized can challenge and dominate their oppressors, and how sport can become a source of national pride, as is the case of cricket in India (Majumdar, 2004; Nandy, 1983). Similarly, Indigenous athletes in Canada have used sport to challenge ideas of racial inferiority and to prove the strength of their Indigenous culture and identity despite attempts to assimilate them through policies like residential schools (Forsyth, 2013; Giles, 2005; Massarella, 2007). Through performance and participation, the formerly colonized can use subvert the colonial origins of sport to become a site of resistance and anti-colonialism.

Before moving on, it is helpful to establish that postcolonial theory and diasporic theory overlap (Carrington, 2010). Postcolonial theory looks at the lasting impacts of colonialism on power, cultures, and identities even after formal decolonization (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978). Diasporic theory is less oriented around colonialism in the sense that it focuses on the experiences of displaced peoples; however, in many cases, this forced dispersion is the result of colonialism (as is the case with Sri Lankan Tamils). In both theories, hybridity and negotiation of third space are important. But whereas postcolonial theory looks at structures of power created by colonial dominance and resistance more broadly, diasporic theory looks at how identity formation is shaped by displacement, collective memory, and belonging to both the host land and homeland (both of which can have colonial legacies) (Clifford, 1994).

Postcolonial Feminism

Postcolonial feminism represents a convergence between postcolonial theory and third world feminist discourses by addressing the currently existing power hierarchies that were created by colonialism and its patriarchal and Eurocentric perspectives (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011;

M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016). Postcolonial feminism allows for understanding how uneven power relations are operationalized through historical positioning, class, ethnocultural background and/or race, and gender (Anderson & Reimer-Kirkham, 1999; Darroch & Giles, 2014). It challenges old systems of power and attempts to identify and address assumptions and practices that perpetuate colonial ways of thinking (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011). Postcolonial feminism seeks to uncover the voices and diverse experiences of those who have been historically silenced and traditionally absent in research, but most importantly, it rejects the singular representation of the Third World woman as depicted in Western or first wave feminist texts (Mohanty, 2003). To allow for polyvocality, particularly of voices that have been subjugated by dominant groups, this study adopts a postcolonial feminism as its theoretical framework, a key tenet of which is intersectionality (Mann & Huffman, 2005 as cited in Palmer & Masters, 2010).

Intersectionality responds to past literature that has homogenized the lived experiences of minority populations (Anthias, 1998; Ratna, 2011). Lived experiences of individuals, however, are the product of their multiple social identities (Crenshaw, 1995 as cited in Mahalingam & Rabelo, 2013). Examples of social identities include gender, sex, class, sexuality, ethnicity, race, age, generation, immigration status, disability, geography, history, religion, beliefs, and language/dialect. Social identities interact with one another in complex and nuanced ways (Agnew, 2005; Crenshaw, 1989 as cited in McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). For instance, identities can interact so that their effects are additive, multiplicative (identities magnify each other's effects), or intersectional (identities interact in such a way that a unique effect is produced) (Weldon, 2006 as cited in McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). These identities are relational to one another and to power. The identities are also non-binary (Darnell and Hayhurst, 2011). Power dynamics exist within and among social identities so that there are dominant groups and

marginalized groups; however, these power relations are context dependent and fluid so individuals may be powerful in some situations and powerless in others (Hall, 2010).

In this study, particular attention is paid to the nuanced systems of power that may not exist in other contexts. For example, this study requires an understanding of the culturally specific aspects of Tamil identity that internally differentiate individuals, empowering some and not others, which are often obscured to outsiders (O'Neill, 2015). *Oor* (the town or village from which one's ancestors come) and caste are examples of identity that must be understood when studying Tamil populations. Individuals from higher ranked castes, who come from particular *oors*, are considered superior to those of lower ranked castes (Fuglerud, 2001; O'Neill, 2015). For second generation Tamils, attitudes towards the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka may also impact interpersonal power relations (O'Neill, 2015). Understanding the nuanced differences that exist within cultural communities is essential for rejecting the single story that is often presented about racialized and/or ethnocultural minorities.

Why Postcolonial Feminism?

Postcolonial feminism was selected as the primary theoretical framework for this study because it uniquely allows for the exploration of the topic of study using a gender-focused, postcolonial, and diasporic lens. For much of the Tamil diaspora in the GTA, their migration stories began because of conflict in Sri Lanka that was the direct consequence of colonialist policies enacted by the British. The preferential treatment of Tamils and their appointment to positions of power despite being in the minority, created resentment and eventually conflict that resulted in the mass exodus of Sri Lankan Tamils to other parts of the world. Furthermore, as previously touched upon, diasporic identities are fluid and exist within a liminal, third space. Postcolonial feminism helps explore how diasporic individuals negotiate gender roles, cultural expectations, and

hostland/homeland identity politics. Cultural hegemony that resulted from British rule in Sri Lanka also continues to have lasting impacts for Tamils, particularly Tamil women, in terms of oppression by gender, race, and class, which postcolonial feminism highlights as key to analysis and interpretation. Postcolonial feminism also allows for representation of traditionally marginalized voices; it questions how diasporic women are represented and highlights their agency in resisting both masculine hegemonic and Western feminist views. Finally, postcolonial feminism as a theoretical framework is broad enough that it can be applied to future studies of diasporic populations, acknowledging shared struggles and differences.

Chapter Summary

This study of leadership in the Tamil grassroots sporting spaces requires a theoretical framework that allows for thorough examination of diaspora, gender, and intersectionality. First, feminism broadly was discussed as a body of work in which gender and intersectionality have been explored. Then postcolonial theory was examined as a space where diaspora and hybridized identity could be examined. Finally, the case was made for why postcolonial feminism was the most appropriate theoretical framework for this study because it emphasizes intersectionality, polyvocality and power dynamics. Postcolonial feminism is particularly suited to understanding nuanced internal hierarchies among Tamils (e.g. caste, *oor*, ability to speak Tamil, etc.) and the lasting impacts of colonialism on both Tamil and Canadian cultures, and how this could be impacting leadership experiences.

Adopting postcolonial feminism as the theoretical framework directly shapes and supports the research questions guiding this study. The first research question is: *What are the experiences of those who serve as sport leaders in the GTA Tamil community? In particular, what events and experiences led to their involvement with Tamil sport leagues?* Postcolonial feminism allows for

examination of how displacement, colonial power hierarchies (e.g. race, gender, culture, etc.) and navigation of cultural expectations (e.g. host land-homeland cultural conflict) has shaped the lived experiences of Tamil sport leaders and led to their involvement in sport leadership. The second research question is: *what is sport leadership within the GTA Tamil sporting community?* Postcolonial feminism allows for examination of how leadership within this space mirrors or resists colonial legacies such as cultural norms and power dynamics. It also allows for exploration of how Tamil sport leaders may hybridize leadership roles to navigate their diasporic and Canadian identities. Postcolonial feminism also allows for gendered and intersectional analysis of leadership, calling into question traditional Western frameworks of leadership. The third research question is: *what is the gendered and gendering nature of sport leadership in the GTA Tamil sport community.* Postcolonial feminism, and in particular intersectionality, allows for analysis of the impact that multiple social identities can have on leadership experiences. This could mean paying particular attention to how Tamil sport leaders navigate leadership in hegemonically White, heterosexual, male arenas like sport, while existing in a third space between Tamil-ness and Canadian-ness. Finally, employing a postcolonial feminist lens helps to answer the fourth research question: *what are the potential barriers that Tamils, and in particular Tamil women, experience in sport leadership and strategies to negotiate them?*, by highlighting the unique challenges that Tamil women face because of intersectional identity oppressions (i.e. based on the intersections of gender, race, diaspora status and community features like *oor* and caste) and external factors such as exclusion from the mainstream Canadian sporting spaces. A postcolonial feminist lens allows for exploration of strategies employed by Tamil women to resist power structures and participate in leadership in new, possibly hybridized, ways. Lastly, postcolonial feminism allows for

exploration of Tamil sport leadership in the GTA that pays attention to gender, colonial legacies, diasporic identity, and intersectionality for all the research questions.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Methods

Introduction

The methodology chosen to investigate sport leadership in Tamil grassroots sports organizations was informed by the study's research questions (Chapter 1) and theoretical framework (Chapter 3). Adopting a postcolonial feminist theoretical lens to this research necessitates a methodology that allows for the questioning of dominant power structures, privileging of marginalized voices and attention to intersectionality and historical and cultural nuances. This chapter begins with an overview of feminist methodologies generally, before discussing postcolonial feminist methodologies specifically. Then, as part of the discussion of reflexivity, my positionality is examined. Finally, the methodology that was chosen for this study – an exploratory multiple case study – is introduced and the methods are detailed.

Feminist Methodologies

Before delving into the specifics of postcolonial feminist methodologies, it is helpful to first begin with a general understanding of feminist methodologies which are approaches to research practice that are grounded in feminism (Harding, 1987 as cited in DeVault, 1996). Feminist methodologies, particularly those informed by third and fourth wave feminisms, are grounded in three key tenets: they privilege the voices of all women; they seek to minimize harm and control in the research process; and they seek or result in social change to benefit women (DeVault, 1996). In what follows, these foundational ideas are discussed in further detail.

Privileging the Voices of All Women

Feminist methodologies, first and foremost, privilege women's voices and issues in research that has been traditionally androcentric in perspective (DeVault, 1996). Feminist methodologies are concerned with uncovering marginalized voices and revealing the diversity of

women's lives (DeVault, 1996; Hesse-Biber, 2014). By employing feminist methodologies, we can uncover and examine knowledge about women's experiences in various situations, in this instance sport leadership, and pay attention to the specificity and uniqueness of those experiences. In studies of gender and sport leadership, women have traditionally been ignored or presented as having a single lived experience (Burton, 2015; Chawansky, 2012; LaVoi, 2016). However, more recent research has begun to apply an intersectional lens to gender and sport leadership; for example: LaVoi showed how race and sexuality differentially impacted caregiving responsibilities for women in coaching (2016); Ratna's study on South Asian women playing soccer in England showed how race, ethnicity, and cultural expectations impacted participation and leadership in sport (2014); and McDowell and Carter-Francique showed how intersectionality creates unique effects in terms of access to sport leadership (2017).

The diverse perspectives and multiple standpoints of women are valued in feminist research and has led to the rejection of universality as a research standard as it implies sameness and is often used to oppress difference (Fine, Tuck & Zeller-Berkman, 2008), though it is important to acknowledge that earlier waves of feminism focused on White, middle-class women and ignored racialized, poorer and non-heterosexual women. Using an intersectional approach allows for polyvocality, particularly of voices that have been subjugated by dominant groups (Mann & Huffman, 2005 as cited in Palmer & Masters, 2010). For example, in their intersectional study of Maori women in sport leadership positions, Palmers and Masters write that localized mini-narratives allow for marginalized voices to be heard and that any attempt to generalize would counter the purpose of a Maori feminist approach that acknowledges that experiences and knowledge are fluid, hybrid, and diverse (2010). The hegemonic use of generalizability as universality has resulted in a conflation of the two concepts in research (Fine, Tuck & Zeller-

Berkman, 2008). Universality and generalizability can also be detrimental to women. For example, an early study of African women in the workplace concluded that they were advantaged in their workplace due to their double minority status (Epstein, 1973 as cited in McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Despite the study sample consisting predominantly of immigrants from the West Indes, the findings were universalized to all Black women in America (Almquist, 1979 as cited in McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). This false myth that Black women in the US benefit from hiring processes continues to be perpetuated today and is often used to critique appointments of Black women to positions of sport leadership (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). It is important, therefore, to avoid claims of universality or generalizability when using feminist methodologies.

Minimizing Harm and Control in the Research Process

The second foundation tenet in feminist methodologies is to minimize power imbalances between researchers and the researched at every stage of the research process. Early literature posited that the researcher was always in the position of power (e.g., Brinkmann & Kvale, 1997; Kvale, 1996; Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990) but later work has argued that power can be fluid and contextual (Franks, 2002). For example, the social locations of researchers versus that of the researched may act to further empower or disempower researchers. Using an intersectional lens can help reveal these power imbalances. A racialized researcher may feel less privileged than a non-racialized research participant, for instance. Alternatively, other intersections of social identity, like class and gender, may also be relevant. There are also contexts in which feminist researchers can feel powerless (Franks, 2002), such as Olive and Thorpe who detail the negative experiences they had as feminist researchers and women working in male-dominated sporting cultures (2011). In cases where researchers are clearly in positions of power, feminist researchers

have adopted strategies so that research participants are partners or collaborators within the study (DeVault, 1996; Morris, Woodward & Peters, 1998 as cited in Aitchison, 2005). For example, feminist researchers have implemented participatory approaches to their research to ameliorate social inequalities (Fine, Tuck & Zeller-Berkman, 2008; Hesse-Biber, 2012). Participatory approaches involve those who are directly affected by the research issue in meaningful and collaborative ways throughout the entirety of the research process (Lykes & Hershberg, 2012).

Another strategy used in feminist methodologies is the practice of reflexivity, a process in which researchers continuously explore and question how their social locations and assumptions impact the research (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Reflexivity allows feminist researchers to account for their personal biases and consider how these biases may affect the research (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Though reflexivity has been critiqued because it is impossible for researchers to be fully aware of all the ways in which they impact the research (Maynard, 2001 as cited in Franks, 2002), feminist researchers understand knowledge to be socially constructed and socially situated. Thus, value-free research is impossible; feminist researchers consider objectivity – in the empirical sense – to be unobtainable (Franks, 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2014; Mann & Huffman, 2005 as cited in Palmers & Masters, 2010). Instead, feminist researchers have pushed for *strong objectivity* (Harding, 1991 as cited in Franks, 2002). Strong objectivity requires researchers to practice reflexivity so that readers have a critical lens through which to interpret findings, thereby decreasing control over how knowledge is disseminated (Edwards, 1990 as cited in Franks, 2002; Harding, 1987, as cited in Franks, 2002).

Power differences can also result from a researcher's positionality as either an 'insider' or 'outsider.' Insiders are considered members of the target community and outsiders are those who are not (Hesse-Biber, 2012). The researcher's status as an insider/outsider is fluid and contextual

(Hesse-Biber, 2014). In their study of surfers and snowboarders, Olive and Thorpe (2011) described themselves as cultural insiders because of their participation in those sports for many years and pre-existing knowledge of the culture. But they also acknowledged situations in which they felt like outsiders because of their identities as females and feminist researchers in a male-dominated sport and culture (Olive & Thorpe, 2011). Some have argued that interracial interviewing affects how the interviewer and interviewee are placed in terms of power (Edwards, 1990, as cited in Bhopal, 2010). For example, a White researcher investigating the poor quality of teaching at her daughter's elementary school in a predominantly Black neighbourhood where most of the other parents and teachers were Black, was afforded insider status as a parent of a student but also considered an outsider because of her identity as a White Euro-American (Stern, 1998, as cited in Hesse-Biber, 2012).

However, positionality is not binary and should be thought of as a continuum where there are degrees of insider-ness and outsider-ness. Insiders are thought to have an advantage in collecting data because they are better positioned to gain access to participants and have existing cultural knowledge and experience to develop theories from the ground up, but this is debated (Flores, 2018). It is also important to acknowledge that a researcher's positionality is relational and often determined by the researched. For example, in his study of military veterans, Flores was initially treated as an outsider despite being a former Marine and identified as an insider himself (2018). Researchers, because of their level of formal education and access to resources, are often treated as outsiders and are considered more privileged and powerful in society notwithstanding commonalities they may have with their research participants (Wallerstein & Duran, 2008 as cited in Kerstetter, 2012). Positionality is contextual and fluid, but feminist researchers must pay close

attention to their insider/outsider status to ensure power inequalities are appropriately considered and diminished if possible.

Finally, feminist methodologies require researchers to be cognizant of the historical and cultural contexts of the populations they are studying to minimize harm in the research process. Research with Indigenous communities for example must be framed through an appropriate Indigenous worldview and with respect to the colonial history of Indigenous peoples to avoid the appropriation and continued cultural pillaging of Indigenous knowledges and cultures. To circumvent the exploitation of Indigenous communities, research must ensure that the Indigenous people participating in the study are fully aware of the research being undertaken; that Indigenous peoples are trained holistically in research protocols so they can do their own research; and that ownership and control of the research process and knowledge produced remain with the Indigenous peoples. Researchers must use processes that abide by these three criteria to ensure that Indigenous communities are empowered and not further subjugated (Battiste, 2008).

The cultural context of a community is also important for feminist methodologies. For example, in a study of Roma women, the researcher was made aware that it was culturally inappropriate for Roma women to be alone with a male interviewer and so the researcher, who was female, had to do the interviews. In that same study, the researcher discussed how even the researcher's clothes can result in distrust from the community; well-dressed researchers with digital recorders and laptops were assumed to be from welfare services and automatically treated as outsiders (Bhopal, 2010). When employing feminist methodologies, one must consider the historical and cultural contexts of the population they are studying to ensure systems of dominance and subordination are not reproduced through research processes.

Resulting in Social Change to Benefit Women

The final tenet of feminist methodologies is that they result in positive change for women (DeVault, 1996). There are many different kinds of change. For example, feminist researchers can ask questions that may not have otherwise been asked because of the hegemonic beliefs that allow gender inequality to continue (Hesse-Biber, 2014). Other examples of change vary from the production of theories (e.g. intersectionality theory) to the creation of data that will support political action (e.g. policy changes reducing barriers for women in sport leadership). Although assessing whether a feminist methodology has resulted in change is difficult and some researchers make assumptions about change without sufficient examination, it remains an underlying tenet of feminist methodologies (DeVault, 1996).

Postcolonial Feminist Methodology

The postcolonial feminist methodology adopted in this study must satisfy the three tenets of feminist methodology outlined above, paying attention to pre-existing epistemological assumptions based on positions of power and privilege in the West and Western feminisms. Postcolonial feminist approaches must "bring to visibility the diversity of postcolonial subjects' experiences and material conditions under which they live," giving voice to those who have been historically marginalized (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012, p. 574). Research methods that are selected must amplify these voices and allow for agency in terms of participants telling their own stories, rather than portraying them as passive objects. Approaches that prioritize indigenous, subaltern and local knowledge systems are important and the research methods that are selected must reflect this value. Postcolonial feminist methodologies must employ intersectionality when trying to understand the ways in which gender, race, class, colonial history, migration, and globalization intersect to shape lives. However, in doing so, postcolonial feminist approaches must be critical of the way in which

these individuals have been represented in Western theories and texts by highlighting problematic assumptions and employing ethical reflexivity. A postcolonial feminist researcher must acknowledge and navigate the ways in which "differences in position and privilege, which may take place through gender, ethnicity, and class among other relations, impact research" (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012, p. 574).

Reflexivity

In feminist research, "the researcher herself is never 'outside' the research process or separated from the research subjects as 'objective' observer," so it is necessary to practice reflexivity when engaging in postcolonial feminist research (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012, p. 578). As researchers, we seek to answer questions, but we must understand our impact on the creation of this knowledge (Berger, 2013). In every step of the research process – its design, data collection, analysis and then writing of results – we, as researchers, impose our own biases, beliefs and personal experiences (Berger, 2013). Rather than try to assume a naïve stance about the role of self in research, actively acknowledging and evaluating how our positionality may impact our research, or being reflexive, is essential for improving the accuracy and credibility of its findings (Berger, 2013; Sandelowski, 1993).

Key to reflexivity is an understanding of one's positionality as a researcher (i.e. one's position within the social world) and its influence on one's worldview (Temple & Young, 2004). Positionality includes one's personal characteristics, experiences, biases, beliefs and ideological stances (Berger, 2013). In what follows, I explore how my position as a diasporic Tamil woman and sport leader informed my engagement with this research.

I was born in Toronto to Sri Lankan Tamil parents. My parents both immigrated to England first, where they married and then made the decision to move to Canada based on advice from my

maternal uncle who was already living in Canada. They arrived as refugees to Toronto in 1988; my brother was born a year later, and I was a born a year after that. During my early years, we lived in Flemingdon Park, an area known for its high population of immigrants and an area where many members of the Tamil diaspora settled. Tamil classes were offered at the local community centre and most of my free time was spent was with other Tamil families that lived in the area. Crime and gang violence in the area prompted my parents to move; they bought a home in an area of Scarborough that was predominantly White at the time and so my connection with the Tamil diaspora became less immediate. Nonetheless, this connection to the Tamil diaspora was maintained through participating in community events and political activities. For example, my parents registered me in activities and events, such as math contests and track and field days that were run by Tamil organizations like the World Tamil Movement. This organization was eventually labeled a terrorist organization by the Government of Canada who said that the organization was involved with terrorist financing (of the LTTE in Sri Lanka). We also attended protests against the genocide in Sri Lanka and gatherings to commemorate days like Maaveerar Naal, a day of remembrance for those who died in the fight for Tamil Eelam. My family also attended *oor* events that were organized by the Canadian Ariyalai Tamil Association. *Oor,* as previously explained, refers to the area in Sri Lanka from which one's ancestors originate. My *oor* is Ariyalai and there is currently around 500 Ariyalai Tamils living in the GTA. My involvement with the Tamil diaspora became less pronounced as a teenager and young adult, as I attended schools that did not have many other Tamil students, and I began to work and play sports competitively in my time outside of education. It was not until I moved back to Toronto in my mid-20s, that I learned of the Tamil grassroots sports leagues and my connection to the Tamil diaspora began to grow stronger.

My sports journey began at age six when my father enrolled my brother and me into the local recreational soccer league. Soccer quickly became my passion, and I began playing competitively around the age of 12, stopping at 17 when I tore my ACL. Between the ages of 12-17 years, I also participated on the basketball, volleyball, soccer and curling teams at my high school. For the most part, I was often one of the only Tamil or Brown girls playing on those sports teams – something which I became acutely aware. Between the ages of 17 and 24 years, my involvement in sport was minimal as I pursued education outside of Toronto. Moving back to Toronto at 24 years old, however, prompted me to join a recreational soccer league in the hopes of making new friends. It was at this same time that I also began to feel a profound disconnect from my Tamil identity and heritage. When a friend mentioned that they were playing in a basketball and volleyball league specifically for Tamil women, I joined in 2018. After a few years as a participant, I joined the executive committee and then eventually became one of the organizers of the league and remained in that role for several years. I also got involved in other Tamil grassroots sports leagues and these experiences motivated my interest in understanding sport leadership in these diasporic contexts.

I also think there are other elements of my identity that are important to make clear for the purposes of understanding my positionality. First, this thesis has adopted a framework that privileges gender and so it is important that I locate myself as a heterosexual, cis-woman. In terms of my Tamil identity, my *oor* is Ariyalai. Ariyalai is the only community in Sri Lanka that is Siviyar caste (சிவியார் in Tamil), traditionally palanquin bearers, and considered lower caste. Although I can understand Tamil, I cannot speak it which differentiates me from other members of the diaspora. I also think it is important to acknowledge my views on the conflict in Sri Lanka – my choice of words such as genocide are deliberate. I feel strongly that Tamil people in Sri

Lanka were systematically oppressed and denied rights. However, my lack of knowledge about the politics in Sri Lanka has made my views on Tamil Eelam (the desired independent homeland) less certain. Finally, it important to acknowledge that I very much identify with the 'third space' that diasporic individuals negotiate. Although I was born and raised in Toronto, my skin colour and experiences negotiating Tamil versus Canadian culture, both in the home and outside, have informed the diasporic lens through which I approach this study.

These overlapping identities – as a diasporic Tamil woman, athlete, and league administrator – shaped my research. My insider status fostered a level of trust and comfort during interviews that might have been harder to establish otherwise as participants are more likely to share information with those whom they perceive to be sympathetic to their situation or those with whom they identify (Berger, 2013). Participants used Tamil words freely, referenced cultural/religious norms such as not eating meat on Fridays without explanation, and concluded stories with "you know?" or similar sentiments, because of an inherent understanding that our similar backgrounds probably led us to have convergent understanding of the world. This type of cultural shorthand reflects how insider researchers can access deeper layers of meaning due to shared reference points (D'Silva et al., 2016).

The advantages of insider research are well documented. As an insider, I was able to build rapport more easily, interpret nuanced meanings within participants' stories, and ask follow-up questions that reflected a deeper contextual understanding (Chavez, 2008; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Insider researchers are often better positioned to 'read between the lines' and identify subtext, which can enrich the analysis (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). In my case, insider knowledge also helped me better understand the unspoken tensions, subtle power dynamics, and everyday politics within the leagues I was studying. At the same time, being an insider required vigilance. I had to

be careful not to impose my own values, beliefs, or perceptions onto the data, which is why memo-writing was such an important tool during data collection.

Memo-writing supports the researcher in developing a deeper understanding of the data by encouraging ongoing reflection with both the content and the context of participants' narratives (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). It helps surface, examine and manage biases that may shape interpretation of the data so that researchers are better able to bracket their own assumptions and so that participant voice guides analysis (Berger, 2013; Tufford & Newman, 2010). For example, there were instances where participants were critical of the league that I ran and, in some cases, I could sense hesitancy on their part to share unfiltered feedback. In those instances, I encouraged participants to share their full truths without worry but also wrote memos to ensure that I made note of their hesitation. During interviews, I also noted that only one participant was critical of my approach to leadership for which I wrote a memo where I examined my feelings, our past interactions, and whether or not others may have felt hesitant to do the same. I highlight this to demonstrate the value of memo-writing in insider research.

Apart from two participants, I knew all of the sport leaders in this study from my time as a participant and leader in the Tamil grassroots sports leagues and had had mainly positive interactions with them. My degree of familiarity with the study participants also varied; for example, two of the study participants were co-commissioners in the league I ran whereas others I had only spoken to once or twice. It is important to consider how the closeness (or not) of these relationships may have impacted the results however reflecting on the interviews, and reviewing my memos, this did not feel like a significant factor in our interactions. When the researcher is an outsider, with no familiarity with what is being studied, the participant becomes the subject matter expert which can be an empowering experience. It was clear that this was probably not experienced

by participants because of the number of participants who used phrases akin to “you know” or “you get it.” However, having no real experience with a topic of study can leave the researcher unable to fully understand the experience of the participant and so I believe my positionality as an insider was a strength of this study (Berger, 2013).

It is also important to acknowledge how my positionality as a researcher relates to the participant in terms of power as there is an implied hierarchy (where the researcher usually has more power). Researchers often employ methods to mitigate this power difference (e.g. by creating a welcoming environment or asking participants if they have any questions) but this dynamic can still persist – particularly if the study population is marginalized or disadvantaged.

Critics of reflexivity have warned against using it as a confessional tool or a way to signal that bias has been ‘dealt with’ (Pillow, 2003; Probst, 2015). I have tried to avoid that here. Rather, I understand reflexivity as a continual and uncomfortable process that forces researchers to hold their position in tension with the data. Being an insider does not make one immune to bias, but neither does it invalidate the research. On the contrary, when done carefully, insider research can yield deeper, more layered, and more honest insights – particularly in community-based work rooted in cultural, political, and historical contexts (Breen, 2007; Milligan, 2016). In this study, I believe that my position as an insider, while complex, was ultimately a strength. It enabled me to connect with participants in meaningful ways, access spaces that might otherwise be closed off, and interpret findings with cultural fluency.

Exploratory Multiple Case Study

To understand sport leadership in the GTA Tamil diasporic community requires an in-depth analysis of a distinct phenomenon – the essence of a case study design (Yin, 2009). Within the context of this study, using a case study approach refers to the intended, intensive study of

participants (cases) (Gustafsson, 2017). The case study method is not an attempt to analyze but rather, a way to define cases and to explore a setting to understand it (Cousin, 2005 as cited in Gustafsson, 2017).

The exploratory nature of this study differentiates it from an explanatory or descriptive case study because there is no predetermined or single set of outcomes (Yin, 2014). Exploratory case studies are appropriate when trying to gain an extensive and in-depth description of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Exploratory case studies also allow for the researcher to explore phenomenon of interest using general research questions that are meant to open the door for future examination of the phenomenon observed (Zainal, 2007). And unlike explanatory or descriptive case studies, exploratory case studies are theory building – not theory affirming. Cases are used to "create theoretical constructs, propositions, and/or midrange theory from case based, empirical evidence" (Eisenhardt, 2007, p. 25).

Multiple case designs, rather than single case designs, allow for the development of stronger theories because of cross-case comparison (Yin, 1994). But as stated by Stake, the cases selected must share a common phenomenon – in this instance, they are all sport leaders within the GTA Tamil community. Case studies are studies of its own unit (i.e. studies of the sport leaders themselves) and studies of a larger group of unit (i.e. sport leaders in the GTA Tamil sports community) so conclusions can be either illustrative or confirmable. The advantage of using a multiple case study approach, as opposed to a single case study approach, is that the researcher can understand differences and similarities between cases. Researchers can also analyze data both within the situation and across situations (Gustafsson, 2017). Multiple cases also allow for wider exploration of research questions and theoretical evolution (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007 as cited

in Gustafsson, 2017). The research design was approved by York University's Research Ethics Board.

Recruitment. Eight Tamil grassroots sports organizations were identified in the GTA, through conversations with participants and via Instagram searches using key words like "Tamil," "sport," and "Toronto" - of which six are women's or coed leagues. Each of these six organizations was contacted via Instagram and asked to identify their leaders (see Appendix A for recruitment text). For those organizations for which I already knew one or more of the leaders, I used personal contact information that I already had (e.g. sent them a text or contacted them on WhatsApp) (see Appendix B for content of text/message). If during an interview, an additional sport leader was identified, I asked the individual being interviewed to pass on a recruitment letter (see Appendix C) and ask if it was okay with that person if their contact information was shared with me. If the new sport leader agreed to their contact information being shared, I reached out to them using personal communication methods like text or WhatsApp (see Appendix D for recruitment text). Using this method of snowball sampling, five additional sport leaders were identified – four agreed to their contact information being shared (one did not respond to the sport leader that reached out to them) and then three participated in the study (one did not respond to either of the two texts I sent. Leaders included those who held formal decision-making positions or influence over other individuals for the purpose of goal attainment (Northouse, 2004, as cited in Kilvington, 2013). The decision to ask the organizations to self-identify their leaders was purposeful as it allowed for the space to explore what leadership looked like within Tamil sport organizations. Study participants (cases) had to meet the following selection criteria:

1. Self-identify or be identified as a sport leader within a grassroots Tamil sports organization;

2. Self-identify as Sri Lankan Tamil and/or a member of the GTA Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora;
3. Speak English and/or Tamil.

Furthermore, as Stake posits, essential criteria for selecting cases included: relevance of the case to the phenomenon under study, diversity of cases across contexts, and value in terms of contributing to deeper understanding of the phenomenon's complexity and contexts (2006). Participants could be similar or dissimilar as redundancy and variety are important. Cases were selected because it was "believed that understanding them [would] lead to a better understanding" of the research questions (Stake, 2000, p. 437). Case selection occurred using purposeful sampling (i.e. case selection is not random) (Merriam, 2009). There were three participants who were contacted for this study that did not participate – two did not respond to any requests and one was unable to find time in their schedule. The goal of this study was not to have generalizable results but rather to explain a particular phenomenon within a bounded context (Yin, 2009).

Participants (Cases). 22 Tamil sport leaders participated in this study and, in alignment with postcolonial feminism and the research objectives of this study, female sport leaders were prioritized in order to capture the voices of those who have been traditionally silenced (see Appendix E for more details on participants).

Data Collection. Two 40-minute in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant (Appendix F). In the first interview, the emphasis was placed on the lived experience of sport leaders from early childhood to how they became involved with Tamil grassroots sports leagues; for example, understanding early life involvement in sport or early life leadership experiences, experiences in Tamil and non-Tamil sporting spaces, and general questions about Tamil sport leagues such as what they believed the role of Tamil sport leagues was for people

living in the GTA. The second interview focused on leadership within Tamil grassroots sporting spaces specifically; examples of questions included what leadership in sport means, learning about leadership experiences in Tamil sporting spaces, differences in leadership approaches, challenges practicing leadership and strategies to navigate these challenges. There were also some specific questions about the gendered and gendering nature of sport leadership in Tamil spaces because of the research questions informing this study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted over Zoom and video-recorded. All interviews were conducted in English although participants were offered the option of being interviewed in Tamil if they preferred. Demographic information, such as gender, age, immigration status and sexual orientation, was collected from participants via a brief sociodemographic survey (Appendix G).

Ethics. This research received an ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to do so by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. Participants were asked to review and sign off on an informed consent form before they were engaged in the study (see Appendix H). Once the informed consent form was received, participants were contacted via email with more information about the steps involved in participating in the study (see Appendix I for an example of communication) and a link to Survey Monkey for the brief sociodemographic survey. As previously mentioned, surveys were administered using Survey Monkey (an online survey platform). As part of the informed consent form that participants were asked to review and sign, the researcher acknowledged that the host of the online survey, Survey Monkey, may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge such as their IP addresses. It was made clear to participants that although this information may be provided or made accessible to the researcher,

it would not be used or saved without the participant's consent on the researcher's system (i.e. only the demographic information was saved and used for analysis). The researcher also acknowledged that data collected from e-based techniques may be subject to access by third parties because of various security legislation and therefore that the confidentiality and privacy of data could not be guaranteed.

Then participants were contacted via email, text or WhatsApp to confirm the time of their first semi-structured interview. Each interview began with a brief introduction/reminder about the study and the topics that would be covered in that interview. Informed consent was gained by restating the participant's rights to refuse to answer any questions, end the interview at any point, or withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were reminded that this would not affect their relationships with the researcher or York University. Participants were also reminded that the principal investigator would be the only person that would have access to data such as the audio recordings of the interview and that anything that was shared would be kept confidential and that no names would appear in any report or publication of the research. Finally, participants were asked to verbally consent to participation before proceeding with the interview.

All data collected for this study (e.g. survey data downloaded from Survey Monkey, audio recordings from interviews, and memo notes) were password-protected and stored on a personal computer and an external hard drive in a home office behind a locked door. Only the principal investigator had access to this information. All data pertaining to this study will be permanently deleted on January 1, 2032.

Data Analysis. The interviews were transcribed verbatim using and online data transcription software – Otter.ai – and analyzed in NVivo (a qualitative data analysis software). Once the interviews were transcribed, the file was uploaded onto a personal computer and an

external hard drive and then both the transcription file and the audio recording were deleted from the online transcription software. For each participant (case), the interview transcripts were read several times before coding. Coding is the process through which “data are fractured, conceptualized and integrated to form theory” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 3) via the intermediary steps of naming and categorizing data (Moghaddam, 2006). It is a process “oriented around the central concept of [seeking] to represent the interplay of subjects’ and researchers’ perceptions of the nature and dimensions of the phenomena under study” (Douglas, 2003, p.48, as cited by Williams & Moser, 2019).

A five-phase process of qualitative data analysis was adapted for this study from Bingham (2023) - see Figure 3.

Figure 3: The five-phase process of qualitative data analysis used in this study adapted from Bingham (2023). Stacking comparable cases was included in Phase 4 (green text) as this is necessary for an exploratory case study methodology.

In Phase 1, the qualitative data was organized with the case study methodology in mind. Because of the amount of data collected in qualitative studies, ensuring the trustworthiness and rigour of studies can be difficult (White et al., 2012, as cited in Bingham, 2023). Therefore, this first phase of anlaysis relies on ‘attribute coding’ to sort data into organizational schema which

“supports the researcher in identifying where particular excerpts or evidence came from, and offers the opportunity to sort data by type, source, location, or time period” (Bingham, 2023, para. 14). For this study, data was organized and uploaded into NVivo by case - where each case was a sport leader. The naming convention used for uploading data into the coding software was as follows: ‘organization identifier’_‘unique participant identifier’_‘data source.’ For example, the data file ‘1_UQ_Int1’ meant that this sport leader was identified from Organization 1 (where each Tamil grassroots league was given a different number), their unique identifier was ‘UQ’ and ‘Int1’ referred to the fact that this file is the transcript from Interview 1 (Int2 refers to the transcript from Interview 2 and Memo for the memo-writing that occurred for that sport leader). Similarly, ‘2_AS_Int1’ meant that this file is the first interview transcript for someone else who is a sport leader in another league. And ‘2_AS_Memo’ referred to the memo-writing that was done for this same participant. In Phase 1, the memo-writing focused on processes and included initial impressions on the data collection and potential analysis process (Bingham, 2023).

In Phase 2, a priori topic codes – referred to as nodes in NVivo – were developed in alignment with the study’s research questions to further sort and organize the data (Bingham, 2023). These nodes “help to maintain focus on the research questions and make it easier to identify pertinent data and facilitate subsequent cycles of inductive analysis” (Bingham, 2023, para. 18). If the researcher has developed propositions through literature review or during data collection, these may also be added as nodes. For example, although not directly referred to in the research questions, the role of generation in diaspora may emerge as an important organizing principle for this study. "In this phase, potential memoing strategies include recording decisions about code development and keeping track of any idea to follow up on in subsequent rounds of analysis” (Bingham, 2023, para. 21).

In phase 3, the researcher inductively analyzed the data using open coding (Bingham, 2023). During open coding, the interview transcripts were analyzed by "identifying a chunk or unit of data (a passage of text of any length) as belonging to, representing, or being an example of some more general phenomenon" (Spiggle, 1994, p. 493, as cited by Moghaddam, 2006). Data was coded such that key phrases or concepts were identified and moved into subcategories and eventually categories (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). Categories that were developed had to authentically fit the data they subsumed (Charmaz, 2008). Data from each participant was then iteratively compared for similarities (Noble & Mitchell, 2016). During this phase, the researcher employed the "constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) [by analyzing] the data and develop[ing] codes to describe that data, all the while comparing the newly analyzed data to the previously analyzed data and determining either that the data can be described by existing codes, or that new codes need to be created" (Bingham, 2023, para. 24).

Phase 4 identifies "relationships between open codes, for the purpose of developing core codes. Major (core) codes emerge as aggregates of the most closely interrelated (or overlapping) open codes for which supporting evidence is strong" - within NVivo these codes are referred to as nodes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 109).

After each case was analyzed individually, cross-case analysis was conducted to explore similarities and differences across cases and to further deepen understanding of each case (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). There are several cross-case analysis approaches and these can be delineated into variable-oriented and case-oriented research (Ragin, 1997). In variable-oriented research strategies, the variables and how they relate to one another are the focus of analysis. In case-oriented research strategies, the cases themselves are the focus of analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The difference between the two approaches depends on the "researcher's

starting point" and whether they are seeking "to understand specific cases or to document general patterns characterizing a population" (Ragin, 1999, p. 1138).

This study employed a strategy that combined the two approaches, known as stacking comparable cases (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014). Stacking comparable cases is a data display and analysis technique that helps to visualize cases in a way that facilitates comparisons and reveals relationships (Khan & Van Wynsberghe, 2008). To do this, each case was coded using a standard set of themes that emerged from the single case study analysis. This coding was then visualized for each case on a matrix. All these matrices were then stacked in a meta-matrix which allowed for data from the cases to be analyzed across columns and rows to reveal patterns, contrasts and similarities (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014).

In the final phase, phase 5, there is discussion of the findings. The nodes are related back to exiting literature and to the theoretical framework such that a theory is developed (Noble & Mitchell, 2016).

It is also important to note that the the interview transcripts and study findings were shared back to each study participant to confirm whether the participants' words were captured correctly. This was also an opportunity for participants to share alternate explanations of the data. No time limit was given in terms of when participants needed to send responses because it was important that participants felt ownership of the information they shared, in alignment with the postcolonial methodology adopted by this study. Around half of the participants responded confirming the accuracy of the transcripts and none offered alternate explanations for the data.

Social Media Analysis

A 2024 data set was collected from the public Instagram accounts of five leagues that serve Tamil women in the GTA: the Toronto Premier Sports League (TPSL), the Women's Ontario

Tamil Sport League (WOTSL), the Toronto Women's Flag Football League (TWFF), the Ontario Tamil Softball League (OTSBL) and 6ixUp Volleyball. These five leagues were also contacted as part of the exploratory multiple case study.

A mixed methods approach was used for this portion of the study. Content analysis was used to analyze depictions of sport leadership. "Content analysis is an unobtrusive and non-reactive method commonly used by social researchers and applied to all types of media (Krippendorff, 2004)" (Smith & Sanderson, 2015, p.347). Textual analysis was used to discover themes and patterns that emerged from captions of Instagram posts. The combination of content and textual analysis allows for a fuller understanding of how sport leadership is conceptualized and depicted online both visually and in words by the four leagues.

Data Collection. Using a personal Instagram account to view the five Instagram accounts, screenshots were taken of images and their associated captions (Ahrens et al., 2022). Each image that was screenshot was catalogued by league and date. Where there was a carousel (i.e. multiple images uploaded in the same post), only the lead image was coded. Images and captions were analyzed separately using separate schemes and analyses:

> To code both together incorrectly assumes an automatic relatedness. A witty caption could have nothing to do with the action in the photograph. While captions may refer to the photograph or the action in the photograph the majority of the time, at times, a caption will have nothing to do with the photograph. Separate analysis of the two elements allows for full and independent analysis (Smith & Sanderson, 2015, p. 348).

Any video, graphic or text/meme was discarded from analysis. In total, 1056 images were analyzed.

Data Analysis. The unit of analysis was each Instagram image. Since there was no prior

codebook of sport leadership on social media, a codebook was created for the present study based on prior content analyses of social media content in other studies and the literature review on monoethnic sporting spaces and leadership (see Chapter 2) (Ahrens et al., 2022; Cohen et al., 2019).

Images were selected for analysis if they depicted some element of sport leadership – for example, a position of power (coach, administrative team, captain, referee, etc.). Because it was difficult in some images to discern whether the image was depicting sport leadership, the caption was used to add further context. For example, if an image showed a solitary player, the caption might reveal that the player was a captain and then this would be included in the analysis whereas if the image showed a solitary player and no indication was made in the caption that the player was in a leadership role, the image was excluded from analysis.

Each image was coded for the following items: type of sport leadership (coach, captain, executive team, administrative team, referee, or other position of leadership); image purpose (leadership recruitment, player recruitment, introduction to leadership, team photo, or inspiration from a leader); sport (basketball, flag football, volleyball); number of sport leaders in the photo (solo, group, other); race of sport leaders depicted (Tamil, not Tamil) - this was done based on my knowledge of participants and sport leaders in the Tamil sporting spaces and follow-up with the sport leaders that were contacted during the exploratory multiple case study if I was uncertain; and, gender of sport leader(s) in the photo (males, females, non-binary) - again based on my status an insider in the Tamil sporting space. Images were coded in Excel. Descriptive analyses (frequencies and percentages) were conducted to establish the quantities of each variable across the whole sample.

Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources, methods, or theoretical perspectives to enhance the credibility and depth of qualitative research by allowing researchers to confirm findings through multiple lenses and uncover layered meanings (Denzin, 1978; Flick, 2018; Patton, 1999).

In this study, analysis of semi-structured interviews from sport leaders and the Instagram accounts for Tamil grassroots sports leagues serving women allowed for examination of how sport leadership is experienced, enacted, and represented across both lived and digital spaces for the Tamil diaspora. The interview data offered rich, first-person accounts of sport leaders' identities, motivations, challenges, and leadership practices. These narratives provided insights into gender dynamics, diasporic identity formation, and how these monoethnic sport leagues operate. The Instagram content analysis, on the other hand, allowed for exploration of how leadership is visually and textually represented in the public sphere. It revealed which forms of leadership were made visible, whose leadership was celebrated or overlooked, and how sport leagues presented their identities to broader audiences. By comparing the personal and often nuanced reflections shared in interviews with the curated, performative content on social media, this study was able to identify both alignments and tensions between lived experience and public representation (explored further in Chapter 6).

Triangulation aligns with postcolonial feminist methodology in that it allows for ethical and responsible representation of marginalized communities by amplifying participant voice, alongside publicly available representations, to ensure that knowledge is ethically co-produced (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012; Spivak, 1988).

Rigour

Establishing rigour in qualitative research requires deliberate, ongoing attention to the credibility, trustworthiness, and authenticity of the research process and its findings (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010). In alignment with postcolonial feminist methodologies, this study acknowledges the researcher as a co-constructor of knowledge and therefore employed practices that allowed for more ethical knowledge production (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012; Berger, 2013).

Reflexivity was central to maintaining rigour throughout all stages of the study—from research design to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. By continuously interrogating my own positionality as a Tamil-Canadian woman and a former participant and leader in the sporting spaces being studied, I was able to critically reflect on how my beliefs, social location, and experiences shaped the research process (Berger, 2013; Temple & Young, 2004). This reflexivity allowed me to avoid assumptions based on a pirori knowledge and experiences and centered participant voice.

To further enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the data, member checking was used. After interviews were transcribed, transcripts were shared with all participants, providing them with the opportunity to review, confirm, or challenge the accuracy of their accounts. While only about half of the participants responded, no one requested corrections or offered alternative interpretations. This process of member checking supports the co-construction of meaning and strengthens the credibility of the study by ensuring that findings accurately reflect the participants' intended meanings (Birt et al., 2016).

Memo-writing was also used as an integral analytic and reflective tool. Memos were written throughout the data collection and analysis process to document impressions, highlight emerging patterns, and identify potential biases or blind spots. This practice created a record of decision-making and reflexive insights, contributing to the transparency and integrity of the study (Saldana, 2016; Bingham, 2023).

Together, these strategies enhanced the rigour, credibility, and thoughtfulness of the study, and ensured that findings were centred on the lived experiences of participants and produced with awareness of the researcher's role in the knowledge-making process. This approach aligns with the postcolonial feminist principles of centering marginalized voices, challenging hierarchical modes of inquiry, and producing scholarship that is methodologically sound and ethical (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012; Pillow, 2003).

Chapter Summary

This chapter detailed the methodology and methods used in this study, that are informed by the postcolonial feminist research principles of the importance of privileging marginalized voices, minimizing power imbalances, and seeking transformative change. Then, the researcher's positionality as a Tamil-Canadian woman and sport leader was explored in terms of how this insider status both enriched and complicated the research process. An exploratory multiple case study design was chosen to understand Tamil sport leadership within the Greater Toronto Area, with 22 sport leaders participating in in-depth interviews. A second data source—Instagram content from five Tamil women's leagues—was also analyzed, offering another perspective on how leadership is represented. Rigour was established through reflexivity, memo-writing, member checking, and triangulation of data sources. Thematic analysis of interview data was supported by memo-writing and iterative coding, while content analysis of Instagram posts enabled exploration of sport leadership representation across public dimensions. Together, these methods allowed for a layered, ethically reflexive understanding of how sport leadership is experienced and communicated within the Tamil diaspora. Triangulating interview and social media data illuminated both tensions and alignments between lived experiences and public portrayals, deepening the credibility and complexity of the study's findings.

Chapter 5: Sporting Experience of Tamil Sport Leaders in the GTA

Introduction

The results of this study are presented across two chapters. This first chapter focuses on the experiences of individuals who serve as sport leaders in the GTA Tamil community. It begins by examining their early life experiences and how these shaped their later involvement in Tamil sport leagues. In particular, it explores how experiences within the formal education system (elementary and high school), family dynamics, and early engagement with Tamil sporting environments contributed to their eventual leadership roles. The chapter then turns to how these individuals became involved in Tamil sport leagues as adults—initially as players and later as leaders—highlighting both the benefits and the criticisms associated with these leagues.

Early Childhood Experiences with Sport

Many of the interviewees attributed early childhood experiences with sport as the beginning of their journey to becoming sport leaders. In particular, experiences within the formal education system (elementary and high school), family dynamics, and experiences within Tamil sporting environments as youth were identified as key themes in the start of the sport leaders' stories.

Formal Education

For many sports leaders, their early formal sporting experiences were facilitated through the education system – in particular elementary school – and these were always very positive experiences for the sport leaders. For example, Ravi describes the happiness they experienced through playing sport:

> I got into sports at a very young age, I love sports. It was my route to happiness so I started early. I didn't really join any leagues but in school, I was on teams for baseball and then

> got into basketball. I loved playing a lot of sports. I loved watching it a lot so I learned a lot from just watching and that got me more interested in sports and stuff so for most of the years, up until high school and university, it was just through teams from schools.

Dhana shared a similar story:

> I started sports in elementary school, I was really good in cross country. […] Sports got even more interesting for me in middle school where I played basketball. And then in high school, I played basketball as well and I fell in love with basketball and it was like a dream (Dhana).

Likewise, Devi recalled how "elementary school was when I started [playing sport] because I had really good teachers who were really into sports. Then you start with gym and recess. So pretty early on, I was involved in sport."

Other sport leaders talked about the positive impact that sports had on their mental health while they were in formal education. One sport leader explained:

> I realized that sports helped me – even at an earlier age – just in terms of my mental health. I get really stressed out with school work and high school is very stressful, especially grade 11 and 12 when you're trying to get out of there and your marks need to be up and things like that. I felt like sports and recreation was really a way for me to get out and to relax and engage in something fun - it really gave me that balance and it made me feel better about myself. A lot of the self-esteem and confidence I feel like I have now is through some of those clubs and teams that I joined (Shalini).

And, Mythili shared a story about she became involved with sports in school because she was being bullied and that eventually, participating in sports resulted in the bullying stopping and her mental health improving. In general, early childhood experiences with sport were primarily school-

based and very enjoyable for the participants and also led to positive outcomes for their mental health.

The significance of school-based sport becomes clearer when considered within the diasporic context. For many of the Tamil sport leaders interviewed, there were few opportunities to play sports outside of school because of barriers such as cost, lack of assumed value, or lack of awareness. For example, Mythili shares:

> It was schooling that gave me access to sports. My parents didn't have the money to sign me up to a league, they also were busy with work and they didn't realize that this was something that I loved. And the sports that you have access to also depends on income. Signing up for a volleyball is very expensive as opposed to a soccer because of gym rentals and equipment (Mythili).

Mythili's experience illustrates not only the economic and cultural barriers to extracurricular sport, but also the critical role that schools played in mediating access.

Schools are considered trusted public institutions and formal education systems are highly valued amongst diasporic communities because they are seen as pathways for upward social mobility and better job prospects. Many of the study participants also attended schools with large Tamil populations which may have been comforting to parents. Thus, sporting opportunities within the school system may have been received more favorably at home or considered safer than alternatives. Participation in sports can also facilitate social integration into mainstream society which is an important facet of diasporic identity negotiation – though the literature suggests that the opposite can also be true (Unutulmaz, 2018). Many of the sport leaders interviewed for this study shared how their positive early sporting experiences within the education system facilitated

a lifelong love of sports that eventually led to their involvement as leaders in Tamil grassroots sports leagues in later life.

Before moving on, it is important to acknowledge that attitudes toward sport within the Tamil diaspora are not static, but shaped by generational shifts and the experience of living in a host land. As Pavithra reflects, "parents now with high school kids have been here for many years so they do understand there is good in sports […] they are able to see the benefits of extracurricular activities." This quote suggests that there is not a singular diasporic perspective and that diasporic communities are continually adapting and redefining themselves in relation to time, context and place. The idea that sport holds little value within the Tamil diaspora, as suggested earlier, is not universally true and is changing – specifically across generations.

The Role of Family in Sporting Experiences

Early childhood experiences with sport were also impacted by family dynamics within the home. Cultural barriers such as gendered views on women's participation in sport and competing priorities such as academics may explain why racialized immigrant communities engage in sub-optimal physical activity as demonstrated by Wieland and colleagues in a study in the US (2016). For some of the sport leaders in this study, parents and other family members did not see value in sport and therefore discouraged participation. For women sport leaders, the intersection between gender and ethnicity resulted in even stronger discouragement because of traditional views about women and girls not belonging in sporting spaces. For example, one sport leader recounted:

> I was discouraged and made fun of, I was counted out you know, that you're not… you don't fit. You can't do that or mom and dad saying 'Why would you even go to track and field, what's wrong with you?' Right? So it stems down to in the household, to where you're living, also to outside and your schools and in your community. So in all aspects,

> Tamil females were told 'No, no, no, no' and so for me, I was very passionate about advocating for that and that's why I felt like I took on that role at such a young age to be a leader (Shalini).

In this case, the sport leader shares how the negative experiences they had trying to play sport when they were younger facilitated their journey to become a sport leader later in life – highlighting both the generational differences and tensions that exist in diasporic communities and how diasporic individuals who are negotiating multiple identities may act against traditional views. This quote also highlights how schools can also be spaces were Tamil girls do not belong in sport, highlighting the importance of gender as a factor in understanding experiences in sport.

For other sport leaders, it was a lack of awareness or knowledge amongst parents about sports leagues or opportunities that emerged as a key constraint to sports participation. For example, one sports leader said:

> My parents are Tamil and they weren't aware of a lot of clubs or organizations or platforms for female sports. They didn't even know there was an all-girls soccer team. But they did look towards our community to enroll us in sports so the first team that I joined was actually an all-boys Tamil soccer team at the age of nine. I was the one girl on the all-guys soccer team (Nilani).

Of note is how Nilani implies that being Tamil is the explanation for why their parents had limited knowledge of sport organizations that catered to girls. As Nilani explains above, their parents looked toward the Tamil community when they first became involved in sports because there was familiarity with the community – even if there was not familiarity with sporting spaces.

Interestingly, for some sport leaders though, key family members encouraged and facilitated access to sport. For example, one sport leader spoke about the role that their grandfather played in supporting their sports journey:

> My grandfather who's now passed - he was a large part of my life – his legacy with me was centred around sports and what he did for me growing up – encouraging me to run and play soccer and just being really fit himself. He bought me a volleyball, and I remember being on the side of [a group of] building[s] in Scarborough that is in a low-income community – and I would bounce the ball up against the wall all summer practicing, practicing, practicing. And he would sit there and be on the swing somewhere or be around to just watch me. I spent a lot of time doing that and I made the team the following year as a starter (Mythili).

Mythili's grandfather not only purchased equipment for the participant and encouraged physical activity but also modeled and supervised their activity. Thus, he played multiple roles in Mythili's early sport experiences. Pavithra shared a similar sentiment about her grandfather:

> He was interested in whatever you were interested in – he would support you. […] I remember one time in high school, we had a tournament and he ended up coming with us. It was raining – pouring – and we weren't even playing properly [because it was raining so hard]. That poor man sat on the bench and was soaking but he waited until the games were done and then he came home with me. He's that type of grandfather, that will support you in what you do. Like if I need to go and play sport and my dad says no, he would fight for me to go just because I liked it (Pavithra).

In this case, Pavithra's grandfather involvement – attending games even in spite of terrible weather – signals a deep personal investment in her interests, challenging narratives that might exist about

Tamil elders being wholly unsupportive of girls' participation in sport. In fact, Pavithra highlights the ways in which her grandfather acted as a cultural and familial mediator, advocating for her participating in sports even when her father said no.

In general, many of the sport leaders who identified as women, talked about having family members like brothers or cousins who were men, who facilitated access to sport. For example, one sport leader shared: "I was playing sports from when I was like super little and stuff – I grew up with my cousins. There's four of them and they're three or four years older than me so I always played sports with them" (Yalini). And another sport leader shared how she has "a lot of guy cousins too" who played a role in her early sport involvement (Devi).

Cost was also a barrier to participation in formal sporting environments. One sport leader explained that while their parents did not know of opportunities for girls' sport, even if they had known, "they personally couldn't afford to put me in these leagues" (Devi). Though it is important to note that for some sport leaders, their parents sought out free opportunities for their children to participate in sport, as shared by Pavithra: "In downtown, there was a lot of things for free. We were brought to karate and my dad encouraged me to do the karate." Another sports leader discussed how they believed that financial barriers prevented them from gaining the skills necessary for more elite levels of play:

> I come from a family where my parents were immigrants to this country so financially it was very difficult for them to put me into sports and clubs outside of school which had fees that were quite expensive so I wasn't able to join anything outside of school. So with that being said, I wasn't really able to hone some of those skills to go pro or anything like that. So when I went to university, I told myself that I wanted to try out for the volleyball varsity team. It was a goal that I wanted to achieve – a challenge for myself. So I tried out for the

> team and it was so hard for me – I could just see the level of competition and where they were actually at in terms of the scale but it was such a great opportunity (Shalini).

Shalini's quote illustrates the financial choices that immigrant parents make between enrolling children in sport and clubs outside of school and other necessities. The importance of school-based sport is also illustrated as an economical and often free sport opportunity. Nonetheless, Shalini's experiences also demonstrates the limits of school-based sport participation.

Indeed, financial barriers to early childhood participation in sports was a common theme for leaders in this study. This lack of access to sporting spaces as children may have made these individuals more motivated to create opportunities for themselves and others for sport later in life. Anush shares: "I think it's Tamil people looking out for each other and providing each other with opportunities that they didn't get when they were younger" suggesting that for many, becoming a sport leader was an opportunity to give back to the community. Moreover, that boys and men facilitated early access to sport for Tamil girls and women in this study is a theme that remains relevant later, as many of the grassroots Tamil sports leagues that cater to women and girls were modeled after Tamil men's leagues.

Tamil Sporting Spaces in Early Life

Although grassroots Tamil sports leagues have only been active in Toronto since the early 2010s, sports have played an important role for the Tamil diaspora for much longer. Early Tamil sporting events, such as the track and field days organized by the World Tamil Movement, were heavily tied to fundraising and support for the civil war in Sri Lanka, as explained by DS during their interview. The opening ceremony for these sporting events began with the raising of the flag of Tamil Eelam while Eruthu Paar Kodi – a Tamil song that was used by the LTTE in place of the Sri Lankan national anthem – was sung. This was followed by the raising of the Canadian national

flag, next to the flag of Tamil Eelam, and the concurrent singing of the Canadian national anthem. As Mythili further explained, these sporting events were "very much a community building initiative" and the raising of both the Tamil Eelam and Canadian flags side-by-side illustrates the diasporic identity of this community. Mythili continues by explaining that these events "were a hub that brought the community together politically through the liberation movement while still being able to engage young people in that work." In other words, these sporting events strengthened the diasporic identity of the Tamil community by maintaining ties to the homeland through political activism and financial support, as well as serving as a platform through which younger generations, including those born in Canada, could be engaged.

However, the labelling of the LTTE as a terrorist organization led to the disbandment of the World Tamil Movement and increased vigilance of similar organizations that were seen to support the LTTE financially which meant that the large-scale sporting events like track and field days that were organized to raise awareness of the struggle in Sri Lanka and raise money for the conflict, did not continue past 2006. There were Tamil soccer leagues that continued to operate after 2006; however, these soccer clubs did not offer sporting opportunities to girls beyond their early teens. The Tamil-only sporting spaces for women, therefore, were very limited after 2006 and remained so until the 2010s when the first Tamil grassroots leagues began to appear. It is not coincidental that such leagues began to emerge post-2009, when the civil conflict in Sri Lanka ended. Rather, the timing is indicative of the diasporic nature of the Tamil community in Toronto and the need to rebuild this identity within a new, post-conflict context. Though, I would be remiss not to point out the tensions surrounding the phrase, 'post-conflict context.' For some, the conflict continues with the occupation and over-militarization of Tamil areas of Sri Lanka in the North and the continued desire for an independent state or Tamil Eelam. As one sport leader shared:

> One of the last leagues that I was in before COVID was very pro-Tamil and they would talk about the struggle back home and the long war that took place… they really talked about the genocide and before the tournament, we would raise a flag and we would stand in a moment of silence (Shalini).

Shalini's recollection of this league shows how Tamil support was generated by organizers and represented to participants through references to challenges 'back home,' the war, and genocide, and the ritual of raising a flag and moments of silence. The tension of post or ongoing conflict illustrates the complexity of diasporic identity within the community.

Tamil sports leagues were also a way to guide Tamil youth away from negative influences such as gangs and violence, as explained by Anush:

> [The Tamil leagues] helped provide a sense of structure but also was an outlet for a lot of Tamil youth. We got exposed to such negative portrayals – boys get pushed into being a thug or gangster trying to make money in multiple ways where it can lead to them getting in trouble so especially with my first league, it was a way to keep us out of those situations – to build a sense of community.

Pavithra echoed this sentiment when discussing how another grassroots organization mostly centred on youth empowerment, volunteerism and academic support, the Canadian Tamil Youth Development Centre (CanTYD), started hosting sports tournaments in the early 2000s:

> There was a sporting event – CanTYD cup – and other [non-sporting] events to bring all the kids together so that they got to know each other back in the times of things like turf wars where people didn't want to talk to one another just because they lived on this street or that street so it was just to bring kids together and who them, hey, you're not that different – you guys all have similar stories (Pavithra).

Gang violence within the Tamil community was a critical issue in the early '90s and early 2000s and directly related to the diasporic identity of the community. The two main gangs in Canada were the AK Kannan and VVT and although "the motives for the violence were many and complex, they included rivalry and vendettas stemming from their home villages in Sri Lanka" (Summers, 2002, para. 19). It is interesting to consider these gangs as social organizations in that they began as groups of friends looking out for each other and trying to fill needs in their host land, similar to the grassroots Tamil sport leagues. This is noted only to reinforce the importance of social and community organizations for diasporas. Sports became an avenue for members of the Tamil diaspora to negotiate challenges in what they understood as a healthy way. However, it is important to acknowledge that sport, like other social institutions, is not universally positive. While many participants in this study experienced sport as a meaningful avenue for navigating diasporic challenges, others shared examples of conflict and harm within these same spaces. This complexity underscores the need for critically examining how diasporic sporting spaces both support and constrain belonging.

The majority of sport leaders did not mention Tamil sporting events or leagues when recounting their early involvement with sport. Nonetheless, those sports leaders who identified as women and participated in Tamil sports leagues in early life, recounted negative experiences they had in those spaces. One sport leader said:

> To be honest with you, when I was at the age of 13, I was traumatized from my experience of getting kicked off a [the Tamil boy's soccer] team because of a woman not having a role on a man's team especially because I played such a significant part on the team. I would score all the goals and I was the fastest on the team. I was really hurt by that (Nilani).

Nilani is sharing a deeply upsetting moment of exclusion that she experienced when she was removed from a boys' soccer team simply because she was a girl. She highlights the fact that she was the fastest on the team and scored all the goals to indicate that her strong performance made the rejection even more traumatizing because it showed that her abilities did not matter in the face of rigid cultural gender roles.

Another participant talked about how the politics within the Tamil soccer leagues shaped her sport experiences:

> When I was eight years old, my dad put me into [Tamil soccer] and it was a mixed gender league so I played in that for a couple of years until I was 12 or 13 but then we pulled out of it because there's a lot of politics with that. Like it wasn't really a league, there was two female teams, and we played against each other almost every week and then if a certain team was winning more than the other team, they would switch players around midseason (Yalini).

Yalini's experience reveals how gendered politics shaped a negative and disillusioning early sport experience. Although having weekly games for the girls' teams could be seen as a positive step toward inclusion, the participant perceives the structure of the league as lacking legitimacy and fairness. With only two female teams playing each other repeatedly, the diversity of competition and growth opportunities were limited. The player swaps – to "balance" skill levels – signal that the girls' games were not taken seriously. While concerns about fairness may have existed, the way they were handled likely made young athletes feel that their efforts and success were not respected, contributing to a loss of trust and eventual disengagement from the league.

In both cases, the sport leaders stopped participating in early adolescence which was when the only available Tamil sporting spaces (the soccer leagues) became less inclusive of girls and

women. The timing of their withdrawal, early adolescence or pubescence for many, may also point to gendered beliefs about the inappropriateness of coed sporting spaces for Tamil women and girls, especially for sports that involve physical contact. Even in looking at the current landscape of grassroots Tamil sports leagues, only the volleyball leagues are coed (the softball league began as coed and then shifted into men-only).

Becoming Involved in Tamil Sports Leagues

The grassroots Tamil sports leagues of interest to this study emerged in the early 2010s – which coincided with when the majority of sport leaders interviewed were in, or had just completed, undergraduate or graduate school. Although there were established Tamil cricket and soccer leagues that had been running for decades, the first grassroots Tamil sports leagues to emerge in the GTA were Tamil men's basketball leagues.

Being a low-barrier sport requiring minimal equipment, basketball was an ideal sport for diasporic Tamils with limited resources. Many public schools and community centres in the neighbourhoods were the Tamil diaspora settled had basketball courts available and this infrastructure enabled Tamil youth to access these spaces without the costs associated with field sports like cricket or soccer (Bale and Maguire, 1994; Joseph, Darnell & Nakamura, 2012). Additionally, the Tamil diaspora largely settled in urban and suburban communities in the GTA such as Scarborough and Markham where open field space was sometimes a challenge to access which further shaped which types of sports Tamil youth could participate in (Torne and Dagkas, 2007). For diasporic Tamils negotiating hybrid identities, basketball served as a culturally resonant, North American sport that aligned with dominant youth culture and racialized masculinities allowing them to be seen as part of the mainstream, while also carving out ethnoculturally specific spaces (Ratna, 2011; Spaiij and Jeanes, 2013). These early Tamil

grassroots sports leagues functioned as spaces for Tamil boys and young men to construct collective identities through competition, team bonding and community representation (Joseph, 2017). From basketball, other sport leagues also emerged for Tamil men including flag football, volleyball, softball and then most recently, ball hockey.

The Tamil women's sports leagues emerged after the establishment of the men's leagues, which arguably reflects broader gender dynamics within the diaspora where male participation in sport was normalized earlier and more widely supported. The initial formation of the Tamil women's leagues were often facilitated by the same men who had organized the early men's basketball leagues, drawing on their existing networks and access to space, as explained by Pavithra:

> They were making money – it was like three or four hundred dollars [per player for the season] – and there were 12 or 10 teams with 5-10 players or something like that – think of the amount of money you're making. And they were already getting a good gym and they had a permit and a built relationship – the organizers know how things work. They had hookups for jerseys and know the caretaking staff and the process so getting a second gym was much easier. […] I think after a couple of years of being successful, they thought let's try it but they didn't put out a poster or anything – they got four people, or captains, to reach out to people and recruit that way" (Pavithra).

This initial women's league was successful and four teams were created before conflict between the men's league and the women's league over "transparency with money" resulted in a new women's league, WOTSL, being created (Pavithra). The Tamil men's flag football league also helped support the creation of the Tamil Women's Flag Football League. While the early stages of the Tamil women's league formation relied heavily on male allies, Tamil women

gradually took on more leadership and ownership over league organization – beginning with their efforts to recruit participants. These leagues not only facilitated physical participation but also allowed Tamil women to negotiate visibility and belonging within the broader diasporic landscape, creating spaces where gender, Tamil identity and community could be reimagined (Spaiij and Jeanes, 2013; Thangaraj, 2015).

It is also important to note that in general, awareness of these sports leagues was facilitated by word-of-mouth from other members of the Tamil community. For example, one sport leader shared:

> In grad school, I just started getting back into sports and that's probably around the time that I started at WOTSL. I actually heard about WOTSL from someone else so I wasn't actually part of the group that started it but I think it originated from a group of girls who game from [University of] Waterloo who were a group already (Devi).

Similarly, another sport leader shared: "One of the guys in my area – his brother actually ran the [Tamil basketball] league so when he saw me and my brothers playing in the neighbourhood, he just told us to come at a certain time to try out" (Anush). These quotes highlight how word-of-mouth within the Tamil diasporic community facilitated access to sporting opportunities which parallels the system of self-help that was quickly established when Tamils first began immigrating to Toronto post-1983. It also illustrates how Tamil diasporic networks were already established and these networks were mobilized in the development of and recruitment into these sport leagues.

Benefits of Participating in a Tamil Sport League

The sport leaders participated in Tamil Sport Leagues for three main reasons: strengthened Tamil identity, increased sense of belonging, and bonding social capital.

The act of creating and participating in a Tamil-only spaces like these grassroots sports leagues helped to promote Tamil identity and culture, as explained by this sport leader:

> The organizers of these leagues want to keep that Tamil culture ingrained in it. But it depends on the person – like those that have been in this country, people who have been born in Canada and really have no lived experiences or recollection of what happened back home, and where they come from, they might not be too connected. So even though these organizations are hosting things that embrace our culture, language and all that stuff – they might still feel like an outcast... Me personally, I'd like to take the stance where I feel like it's really helped me with my Tamil identity because they were able to talk about certain things about my culture, they were able to talk about certain, you know, important stuff about who I am as Tamil woman and as a Tamil person. Being in this space here in Canada so for me, I feel like I definitely did benefit and learn a lot (Shalini).

For Shalini, the leagues helped to strengthen their sense of identity as a Tamil woman and person by providing a space to discuss Tamil culture and other important aspects of their identity; noted by Shalini as one of the goals of the league organizers. Shalini also identifies the challenges of learning about one's identity and culture for those who are far, both in terms of time and space, from 'back home' and the subsequent disconnect that comes from this distance. For diasporic individuals, some of whom may have never even set foot in their homeland, these spaces are essential for identity formation and reproduction. Nonetheless, Shalini observes that even within such a space and the efforts by organizers, one may still feel like an outcast, illustrating how diasporic identity is not homogeneous and automatic, but is uneven and continually being produced.

Being a Tamil only sporting space also afforded participants a sense of comfort and familiarity due to (assumed) common lived experiences. For example, some sport leaders talked about how shared lived experience removed some of the awkwardness that came with interacting with non-Tamils. For example, one sport leader said: "There is this familiarity. Like, you know, when you say 'I have to be veggie,' no one is going to look at you weird. They know exactly where you're coming from. So I feel like that just gives you a level of comfort" (Devi). In this case, the sport leader is referring to Hindu practices that require individuals to abstain from eating meat on certain days to honour specific Gods. Based on Devi's comments, there is no need to explain or feel judgement when saying that one must be eat vegetarian food on certain days when among other Tamils. Similarly, another sport leader shared:

> You're exposed to so many other Tamil people so it's like there's random jokes that are thrown around. Like people would say random saying in Tamil and you kind of pick up on it and it's kind of funny or you start saying those things. You just kind of assume everyone's at the same level and everyone kind of goes through the same stuff we went through at home like if it was a Friday, you're not supposed to be eating meat or whatever. Or even for like Sarasvati Puja, I think it was a Saturday game, and they were like 'Oh, we can't go out to eat today because I'm vegetarian' so we went to a veggie place. You definitely do feel a little bit more Tamil from that (Yalini).

Here, Yalini demonstrates how one might learn Tamil words or phrases from other Tamil people, reinforcing again how Tamil identity is strengthened in these spaces. Like Devi, Yalini also highlights the sense of everyone being the same or experiencing similar home and family lives. That both Devi and Yalini comment on the sense of difference associated with religious observances and dietary restrictions, illustrate the intersections of Tamil identity and how they

shape one's sense of belonging (and foreignness), and how they influence not just the sport setting but the socializing among players that can occur in sport leagues, once games end. Other studies have demonstrated the role of food in building a sense of identity and belonging; for example, being able to eat Chinese food at Chinese volleyball tournaments (Nakamura, 2019), or halal food when participating in Muslim sporting spaces (Nakamura, 2017), comfortably and without judgment.

Others spoke about the increased sense of belonging they felt in Tamil-only sporting spaces. For example, one sport leader shared what they thought the biggest benefit of participating in the Tamil sport leagues:

> I think connection. As a South Asian woman playing on a Tamil sports team, everyone gets along because everyone probably went through similar experiences. […] When I played on the netball team versus when I played [basketball] in high school was different. I think the connection even in WOTSL – there's a connection with our people that I'm used to – like that's the connection that I felt and that's how I felt comfortable playing (Dhana).

This sense of connection and comfort stemming from an assumption that everyone has similar lived experiences was echoed by another sport leader who shared:

> When I'm in a Tamil league, I feel like I'm at home right? And when I say I feel like I'm at home it's because when you walk into a space where you see people that look like you, that speak like you, that understand you, you're more inclined to feel comfortable, and feel happy, and feel safe, right? And that is a natural feeling because when we come back to what representation looks like, when I go into leagues that are not run by Tamil people, I don't see people that look like me. I think it depends on your personality and your comfort level but it's never going to be the same as how I would walk into my Tamil leagues. It

> comes back to feeling wanted and feeling like there is representation there and feeling comfortable to speak your language right? I'm in my family, I can speak Tamil and I'm not hesitating like 'Oh, I don't want someone to be offended or am I even allowed right?' (Shalini).

Like Dhana, Shalini's quote points out the assumption that everyone in the Tamil league is the same or has similar experiences. Shalini specifically notes the sense of commonality and understanding that comes from seeing people who look and speak like them. They describe the "natural" sense of feeling comfortable, at home and safe, feelings that are not evoked in spaces "not run by Tamil people." The quotes from Dhana and Shalini illustrate how sameness and difference are tied to acceptance and rejection, certainty and hesitation. Diasporic communities can often feel at odds with host land culture (Hall, 1994). Thus, creating spaces like these monoethnic sports leagues creates a safe space where individuals can freely express their diasporic identities without fear of judgement or exclusion.

Similarly, participating in Tamil-only spaces provides opportunity to escape ethnic stereotypes, Othering, and the judging of Brown bodies that that occur in more mainstream sporting spaces. For example, Anush shares:

> I would say in regard to how we're viewed – that's probably the biggest difference. From personal experience, if I ever went to like a new place where no one really know me, they might view me as someone who might not know how to play the game whereas if I go to a Tamil drop in or league, I look just like everybody else so there's less room for me to feel disrespected – I'm not being held to a lower standard because of my appearance.

Anush states stereotypes shape their sporting experiences, namely how the assumption of not being able to play or less able to play because of appearance, or in other words, the stereotype that Brown

bodies are not sporting bodies. In contrast, in the Tamil sports leagues where the majority of bodies are Brown, ethnicity-based stereotypes are less prevalent, though it would be naïve to suggest that Eurocentric and Western ideals about bodies were not pervasive within these spaces.

Finally, the grassroots Tamil organizations act to build social capital for its participants, as described by this sport leader:

> There are social circles and social networks that have been strengthened by battling on the field or a court. And I think these sports play a role – even though they are personal leisure – they transcend into the public and political in employment opportunities, speaking opportunities, and research opportunities – Gobi, we wouldn't have met if not for WOTSL and you wouldn't be doing your thesis if not for WOTSL – and it translates into business opportunities (Mythili).

Mythili describes the social networks that are formed and strengthened via meeting and playing sport together in Tamil sport leagues, which in turn extend off the field/court in the form of employment, business or other opportunities. This is an extension of the type of networks referenced earlier by Shalini when Tamil people were mobilized and called upon to support and to remember the struggles of their fellow Tamil people 'back home.' The social capital being generated within the community through these sport leagues is a key feature of diasporic communities.

Criticisms of Tamil Sporting Spaces

Despite the positive features of playing in Tamil Sport Leagues, the study participants also identified drawbacks from being in an all-Tamil space. Namely, the two biggest criticisms of Tamil Sport Leagues that emerged were that the Tamil leagues were not seen as being as competitive or as inclusive as the multicultural leagues.

Many of the sport leaders described the Tamil sport leagues as more developmental in nature as opposed to competitive. For example, one sport leader stated that "some of these girls coming into the sport, you can tell this is probably the first competitive league they've played in" (Anush). And another shared:

> I work with a lot of grassroots organizations for soccer and track and field and so I work with a lot of young athletes. For me, I don't want them to get into the mentality of winning – I want them to grow and develop skills and to grow beyond sport. A lot of these athletes are not going to grow up to be pro players but the one thing I want to instill in them is that I want them to have love for the sport and passion for the sport. Maybe you don't go pro but maybe one day you'll join recreational leagues and still continue to be active. I think that's so important. And coming into Tamil spaces, I looked at it from that mindset – that it is very similar to grass roots organizations – you're providing a space and a platform for women to come, play and develop. And you're also competitive, but you're also trying to build healthy competition (Nilani).

The first quote suggests that some of the girls who are first joining the league are less skilled and have limited or no experience playing in competitive sport, while the second quote describes Tamil sport spaces are more grassroots, implying that such organizations are more developmental in nature. Indeed, Nilani describes their sport mentorship style as less about winning and emphasizing skill development, growth, love for the activity, life-long activity, and play. This emphasis on development over competition is gendered. As the quotes imply, many of the girls entering these leagues have had little access to organized, competitive sport. This may reflect a broader cultural view that sport is not a viable pathway in diasporic communities where education is prioritized – especially for girls and women (Ratna, 2014; Spaiij & Jeanes, 2013). Therefore,

these developmental sporting spaces are a response to gendered exclusion, while also giving Tamil women the chance to build confidence and reshape what participation and leadership can look like for themselves and their communities.

Another reason that sport leaders gave for why the leagues were not as competitive was because of the internal politics of participating in Tamil-only spaces:

> I feel like with our Tamil leagues, since there's such a wide variety of skill, there was a lot more … you have to tiptoe around and a lot more. There's a lot of things like playing time, attention, skill level – stuff like that – it wasn't just oh this person can play so they should be playing. It's more like everyone should have an equal time for this compared to our [mixed ethnicity] league where it's whoever is needed for that game or that match up is who's getting called in but no one caught feelings. But if we were to do that in WOTSL or TWFF, we'd probably end up hearing about it later on because someone talked to someone who talked to someone and it came back. There's so much more drama and it's not actual drama – it's unnecessary and you wouldn't see that in a mixed league because they would understand that if I want to get a starting position, I need to work harder because people entering the sport don't understand that concept. They're like because I paid the membership fee, I deserve the same play time as anyone else so that was a little bit hard to deal with (Yalini).

Yalini's quote illustrates how the focus on participation and development results in decisions about playing time being determined less by skill and what would be advantageous for a particular game or pairing, and more about fairness and equal distribution of playing time. This approach to decision making is enforced by the same networks that help to support and recruit for the leagues, where "someone talked to someone who talked to someone." Yalini describes this as unnecessary

drama; unnecessary for competition perhaps, but necessary to ensure that feelings are not hurt and the focus on development can be maintained.

Sport leaders felt that the lack of competitiveness was not particular to Tamil leagues and that the same criticism could be applied to all leagues organized along racial or ethnic lines:

> I don't think it's specific to Tamil leagues but it would be for any kind of league – an Asian league, Italian league, Greek league – whatever it is. You're only exposed within that circle so you can get as good as you want but you're never going to surpass a certain level until you play with other people that are better than that (Yalini).

This quote reflects a tension in the way that Tamilness is constructed and performed trhough sport. Culture and identity are not static or singular, but shaped in relation to dominant narratives (Hall, 1994). Yalini reproduces the idea that monoethnic leagues are insular and therefore limited in competitiveness but in doing this, she positions monoethnic leagues as sites where elite-level sports are not played. This reflects broader discourses around certain sporting spaces being less legitimate based on race, but also shows how Tamil sporting identities are constantly being negotiated through comparison with mainstream (i.e. White) sporting identities.

There are consequences to the lower level of competition in Tamil sport leagues. One sport leader pointed out that while some athletes thrive in these spaces, they do so because they are reluctant – or unable – to test themselves in more competitive, mainstream environments. As Vetri explains:

> I'll be blunt and say this, these leagues were set up so certain people can have an ego boost or so that they can feel good about themselves but those people can't or won't ever go into other leagues. But the girls on our team, they would go to the other leagues, even if they weren't the most talented, they had a great time with each another.

Vetri's comment reveals a critique of what he sees as common in Tamil sport spaces: some athletes participate in these leagues because their skill level may not hold up in mainstream sporting spaces. His language – "ego boost," "feel good about themselves" – suggests that these athletes choose Tamil leagues because they can dominate within them. In contrast, Vetri positions his own team as disrupting the norm: while his athletes may not be the most talented, they will go into mainstream sporting spaces because they are motivated my joy and community rather than dominance. This dynamic highlights how Tamil sporting spaces can both reproduce and resist dominant sport ideologies and how diasporic identities are shaped by broader systems of value.

On the other hand, one sport leader talked about how Tamil leagues being more recreational in nature allowed for greater participation and invitation into these sporting spaces:

> I think the best part about all of these leagues, that come from the Tamil community, is that we set it up in a way that it's beginner recreation so it really invites people to explore the opportunity of even trying. I feel like all the opportunities given to me through school – they were very competitive, right? I'd have to try out, you have to go to practice, you have to meet a certain requirement to be part of the team and so for those people that are not familiar with the sport, or for those people that have never trained before, or that naturally do not have the skill set, they can never be in these spaces. So when you think about the systems and how they're set up and how the leagues and stuff are set up, it doesn't give an opportunity for everyone to participate. What the Tamil community has done, is given that opportunity – we've given opportunities for those that have naturally just inquired […] and given them a space to come (Shalini).

Shalini identifies the advantages of having a more recreational sport space, highlighting how it is more welcoming and inclusive of those who may not have the skills because of the lack of tryouts.

Interestingly, while school-based sport was identified as a key site for early sport involvement for study participants, increasing levels of competition and the requisite tryouts for school teams could be a barrier. Within the Tamil diasporic community, lack of access and opportunity to participate in sports leagues in early childhood may also explain why levels of competition are lower compared to mainstream sports. That Tamil sport leagues that are more recreational and are outside "the system" reflects a third space for Tamil diasporic people who have been able to access the sport system, and "those people that are not familiar with the sport, or for those people that have never trained before, or that naturally do not have the skill set." Shalini is reframing the Tamil sports leagues as a form of cultural production and site of identity formation and offering insight into the purpose of these leagues.

The other major criticism of Tamil sports leagues was that they were not welcoming. One sport leader talked about the dynamics that existed within one of the leagues:

> I honestly – I called WOTSL toxic. Because the previous regime was a bit – cliquey was one word – but it was toxic in the sense that they blackballed women – women were treated in a weird way. And I remember sitting there being like – I never knew about it until I was a coach and they would tell me stuff and I'm sitting there being like 'Wait, what? That guy uses his position of power like that' and it's like let us have a conversation with some of the guys – let's just leave it at that (Vetri).

Vetri uses terms like "toxic," "regime," and "cliquey" to highlight the power dynamics within this particular league, stating that women were "blackballed" and treated "in a weird way," and that one individual took advantage of his position of power. Likewise, another sport leader shared:

> When it comes to Tamil spaces, I don't feel like everyone's given a fair opportunity whether that is coming to their roles or how they come into power or like influence. In

> Tamil spaces, I feel like instead of pure talent and athleticism and skill set, it's overlooked for who you are and your personality (Nilani).

This same sport leader went on to say that:

> I think our perception of what a sport is and what sportsmanship is and quality as an athlete and what it takes to perform at that level, and that understanding of social cliques and social dynamics that exist within these Tamil spaces – that's the root cause for why things start to become more unhealthy or toxic or why there is a skewed perception of sport in the Tamil community for sure (Nilani).

Like Vetri, Nilani perceived a lack of fairness in the Tamil sport space, particularly in how people come to occupy positions of power and influence. Moreover, Nilani also observes that cliques and dynamics within the broader Tamil communities can make Tamil sport spaces "unhealthy or toxic" and ultimately, less welcoming by ensuring that distribution of power and influence mirror these cliques rather than because of talent, skills, and athleticism.

Inclusion and Intersectionality in Tamil Sporting Spaces

While Tamil grassroots sports leagues are culturally affirming spaces that centre Tamil identity, this focus can unintentionally overlook the complexity of participants' intersectional identities. As one sport leader insightfully put it, "We cannot leave those identities behind – those identities don't leave us when we're on there – our case, our race, our gender, the fact that I'm bleeding from my period and playing impacts my experience in that space" (Mythili). In other words, even in Tamil spaces that are meant to be inclusive, individuals continue to navigate the layered realities of gender, sexuality, caste and other social identities. This is particularly apparent when inclusion is understood primarily in terms of Tamil identity. One sport leader shared:

> I think that what I like about the Tamil community and their involvement with sports and recreation because it's open to everyone and anyone – it doesn't matter your skill set, it doesn't matter how you look or your physique, or anything like that… I know some of these leagues also worked really hard in terms of making it affordable – affordable for our participants. And that's really important because oftentimes people don't get these opportunities because it's not affordable. So I think they found a good – you know I can't speak for all leagues because I wasn't part of all of them – but for the ones I was a part of, I'd like to think it was a reasonable price, I'd like to think it was something manageable (Shalini).

While this quote emphasizes openness and affordability, it centres Tamil identity, without considering the exclusion or marginalization that can occur along other social lines. For example, one sport leader questioned the extent to which LGBTQ2SIA+ individuals have been meaningfully included in these spaces:

> I think that gender and sexuality – there are some folks who are out in these leagues that years ago this was impossible. A lot of queer and trans folks could not participate in these leagues because they didn't feel safe or they were not about it and I'm sure that's still the case even though now, in a mainstream sense, some people are out. But that took work. And have we ever had a trans person join WOTSL – is that because a trans person doesn't want to or because they don't feel safe? I think those two things are connected when we talk about how we navigate space, who is allowed in the space, and who is denied access. Even my personal journey, I felt welcome and excluded in space depending on how people made me feel – I flourished and thrived or deteriorated because of it (Mythili).

Similarly, caste remains an often invisible yet powerful social structure that shapes access and comfort within sport leagues. While rarely named explicitly, Mythili talks about the caste-based power dynamics that continue to operate beneath the surface:

> People are not explicit about their caste and by virtue of not naming it, we're unable to identify it. […]. So I almost feel like in the same way that other identities are celebrated or erased from athletic communities, caste as a form of oppression can also play a role in being able to access sports or who has access to sports. […] I think even me navigating my caste privilege and how I talk about this – I haven't thought about it in the sports context but even lower caste folks being in a space around privileged folks and what opportunities might be available to them or what opportunities might not be available to them. […] And sports is considered this equalizer when it comes to access and ability but we cannot leave those identities behind – those identities don't leave us when we're on there – our caste, our race, our gender, the fact that I'm bleeding or on my period and playing impacts my experience in that space. And so when you have people from various caste identities being in the same space together, or building relationships, how does that translate in their personal life? (Mythili).

Although Tamil grassroots sports leagues have successfully created access based on ethnicity, there is still a need to consider individuals' intersectional identities or Tamilness itself risks becoming a barrier to inclusion – one that centres some experiences while erasing others.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the sporting experiences of Tamil sport leaders in the GTA, tracing their journeys from early childhood involvement in sport—often shaped by school, family dynamics, and limited access—to later engagement with Tamil grassroots sport leagues. These

leagues were found to offer culturally affirming, identity-building spaces that promote belonging, social connection, and community leadership. However, participants also noted challenges, including perceptions of reduced competitiveness, internal politics, and limitations in inclusivity—particularly around gender, sexuality, and caste. While these leagues affirm Tamil identity, the findings underscore the need to account for the intersectional realities that shape how sport is experienced and accessed within the Tamil diaspora.

Chapter 6: Sport Leadership in Tamil Sport Spaces

Introduction

This chapter is an exploration of sport leadership and how it is constructed within Tamil sport spaces in the GTA. This is followed by a discussion of the power dynamics within these organizations and the fluidity of power that is affected by the insular nature of these leagues. Next, I demonstrate how the goals of sport leadership in the Tamil sporting context differs from mainstream sporting spaces. The chapter concludes with an examination of the gendered and gendering nature of Tamil sport leadership in the GTA.

Sport Leadership in Tamil Spaces

Understanding what sport leadership means within the Tamil GTA community first requires an acknowledgement that almost all the leadership positions within Tamil sport spaces are voluntary. Though community-based sport in Ontario is often volunteer-driven (Lasby & Sperling, 2007), as Devi's quote demonstrates, there are relationships within the Tamil community that reinforce this volunteerism:

> I think subconsciously you realize that maybe you're all in the same boat so you all want to help each other out to do something because maybe you don't all have the same access so you're like, 'Okay, I can do this now so how about where I can take this.' I am always amazed with the volleyball referees that we would get free – they just showed up and did it - like at least for basketball referees, we paid them. Like [the volleyball referees] would just come to help out […] I don't think that's the case in some other leagues – you wouldn't find as many people willing to help for free and on short notice and things like that (Devi)

In the quote above, Devi talks about how the volleyball referees, who are Tamil, donate their time for free and speculates that this is not the case in other leagues where people volunteer their time,

even at the last minute. Devi offers a reason for why this is the case when they perceive that individuals feel that they have a shared context and lived experiences, and consequently, feel a desire to help one another.

Indeed, participation in ethnic organizations that are voluntary in nature build ethnic social capital and social trust within the community (Fennema & Tillie, 2001). This is important for diasporic individuals who can feel Othered or experience diasporic consciousness (i.e. an awareness of the differences between their culture and the stereotyped host land culture) which can, in turn, reinforce the need for homeland belonging and identity (Hall, 1990; Malcolm, 2013). Framing the discussion of sport leadership within the Tamil sporting community within diasporic identity is essential for understanding what sport leadership means within this context.

Conceptualizing Leadership within Tamil Diasporic Sporting Spaces

When first asked about sport leadership, many of the leaders shared similar answers to existing literature that defines leadership as the process whereby an individual influences other individuals for the purpose of goal attainment (Northouse, 2004 as cited in Kilvington, 2013). For example, Mohan talked about how being a leader means "being able to get all your players or teammates together to try and achieve a common goal together." Likewise, Yalini explained:

> Leadership is being able to help motivate a team while maintaining your respect as peers while trying to get to a collective goal regardless of if it's winning, or getting better at the sport, or facilitating good relationships amongst the team and the leaders, or whatever it is. […] And making people feel comfortable, building them up, helping them improve their skill level and their comfort level with the sports. And team dynamics – we all were always very big on team bonding sessions or going for a drink and stuff like that because I feel like when you're comfortable with your teammates and with your captains and coaches,

> you play and you're committed to the team. You're not just a person that's just like a piece and you just have to play and that's it – this is more like – it becomes like a family (Yalini).

In the quote above, Yalini notes how leaders influence individuals' motivations, level of comfort, and feelings of confidence, all for the purpose of a collective goal, improvement, fostering good relationships and bonding within teams.

Others shared broader views of sport leadership; for example, Anush explained that they view sport leaders as:

> people who take the initiative to make some sort of change or improvement in the sports community […] for someone to be a good leader, there has to be some sort of improvement being done. So change is a must, whether it's changing people's talent level by coaching or changing the environment by starting a new league. I think change plays a huge role (Anush).

This view of sports leadership as a conduit for change speaks to the social importance of these sports leagues and the idea that they can be used to better the whole community which is particularly relevant for diasporic communities who share a collective memory of suffering and trauma as is the case with Sri Lankan Tamils.

However, deeper exploration of how sport leadership is conceptualized within Tamil sporting spaces revealed key differences and similarities to traditional views of leadership that are hegemonically White, heterosexual, and masculinist (Eagly & Chin, 2010). First, power dynamics within these sporting spaces tends to be less hierarchical than in other contexts. In the quote above, Yalini highlights the importance of "maintaining your respect as peers" suggesting that traditional top-down models of leadership do not work in these spaces. Second, as highlighted by Yalini, winning is not always the ultimate goal of sport leadership which is contradictory to Western

characteristics of leadership and leadership styles like dominance and aggression. While such leadership traits may also be observed in other non-dominant or collectivist cultures, their expression in Tamil sporting spaces reflects specific diasporic values, cultural expectations, and relational dynamics unique to this community. And finally, there is a gendered and gendering nature to sport leadership within the Tamil community that reflects traditional views on leadership, further shaped by the influences of culture, migration, and social context.

Fluid Power Dynamics. Before discussing the fluidity of power dynamics within the Tamil grassroots sports leagues, it is helpful to first outline the intended organizational structure of these leagues that exists:

> We did have a commissioner and a co-commissioner and that is very similar across the board…And then after that, it's broken down into like a board of directors thing or committee members, whatever lingo you want to use so you'll have someone dealing with finances, you'll have someone dealing with equipment, communication, marketing, PR, and things like that…Our people want it to be professional, I know, they wanted it to be kind of a serious thing. So [the leagues] did try to take some form of structure. Now, how the structure then is applied, and if it's followed through on, and things like that, that really depends on each league (Shalini).

> And then we also have the coaches, and then we have the teams. And then we don't have to have team captains but there are for some teams - there would be like the coaches and then there would be like a player or two, who would basically be like the team captain (Yalini)

Shalini describes how many of the Tamil sporting leagues are set up – typically, that there is one or two people who are considered commissioners, presidents, or leaders of the league and then

committee members with various responsibilities, vice-presidents, or a board of directors that support operations (Yalini, Anush and Vetri shared similar responses). Other individuals within the league structure are coaches, potentially team captains (as highlighted by Yalini), and the players themselves.

Interestingly, in the quote above, Shalini notes that "our people want it to be professional," which may reflect a desire for credibility and organizational legitimacy within a broader Canadian sport context where standards of professionalism are shaped by Western norms. This is not to suggest that professionalism is antithetical to Tamil leadership, but rather that striving for formality and recognition may reflect diasporic tensions – such as pressure to conform to dominant models of sport governance in the hostland while maintaining Tamilness. At the same time, Shalini admits that "how the [league] structure then is applied, and if it's followed through on, and things like that, that really depends on each league," indicating that while formal leadership structures may exist on paper, how leadership is enacted remains fluid and context-dependent. For example, some sport leaders talked about their decision not to use terms like "president" or "executive" or commissioner, instead referring to their leadership team as "admin" which is highlighted in this exchange:

> Yalini: We just all say we're admin, that's all we say. We don't say executives, we just say admin. We don't have a president or any of that stuff – it's just admin.
>
> Gobi: And is that intentional?
>
> Yalini: It's just terminology that we put together since the beginning and we just stuck with it. It's just that we do all the administrative stuff but we're still playing. We're still in the leagues so I don't want to be calling myself the president of the league or something. We do what needs to be done in order for the league to happen and then we do our own things.

In this case, this league has rejected formal leadership titles because of the challenges of navigating the space as both a player and a leader. This refusal of conventional designations may highlight the blurred lines between personal and sporting boundaries that exist within diasporic spaces or may be due to the importance of cultural values such as humility within the community. Social media analysis of this league's Instagram posts and associated captions confirmed that formal leadership titles were not used; organizers were referred to as "core committee members," "admin members" and "the faces behind [the league]."

Despite the attempt to flatten hierarchies by avoiding hierarchical titles, some sport leaders were nonetheless critical of the organizational structure of these sporting leagues, referencing that these Tamil sports leagues can feel insular:

> There's usually a little cabal at the top and it's the usual suspects in all the cases, and then you have people that are close to them and that would be the people who influence the decision-making or the direction of the league in a lot of ways like whether it's a team getting suspended, or somebody getting kicked out, or how games are refereed or, you know, small things or roster changes and things of that nature. So I think that's my biggest concern with the leagues - the senior leadership team, as I like to call it, I think that's toxic at the very minimum …I think they struggle to navigate the Tamil politics because in some cases, it's like, I'm so and so's cousin and then it's like that other coach doesn't like me, because of X, Y, Z …But I think the bigger thing is just development of voices and I think we really struggle with that because there's pressure to conform, not just amongst women, but also guys, like if you're in the group, you have to conform. You say anything that's out of line from what the general group likes and you're going to be ostracized, you're going

> to be left, you know, outside of things. And I think there's a huge social dynamic on that, that extends to outside of these sports (Vetri).

In this quote, Vetri discusses how the leadership team usually consists of a group of people who know each other well and share in decision-making power but that not all have a formal role within the league. The choice of the word "cabal" also suggests that there is not always transparency in terms of how decisions are made or communicated to the rest of the league which reinforces the sense that these sporting spaces are insular. This quote by Vetri also highlights how being members of a close-knit community, like a diaspora, can allow personal relationships to influence leadership and decision-making for fear of experiencing exclusion. As Vijay said in another interview: "there is a certain way you have to move in the Tamil community if you don't want to rub any feathers the wrong way but still want to be respected. I think there's a very fine balance there." Pavithra adds to this discussion by pointing to specific qualities that sport leaders need in order to successfully navigate these Tamil sporting spaces:

> You need to have certain qualities – you need to be able to speak and to be a good listener because you need to listen to exactly what people are saying. Some people will say something and it might not mean that and you need to be critical. You need to be a critical leader who can think for them self and not get influenced. Sometimes people have an agenda and they try and push that on you so if they feel like you're passive, they'll push. But if you want to be a leader in the community, you have to be social and talk to everyone (Pavithra).

In this quote, Pavithra echoes the earlier sentiment that there is often pressure to go along with what others are saying but she emphasizes that a good leader must be able to think critically and make independent decisions. At the same time, she highlights that because these are tightly knit

and insular league spaces, leaders must also be highly social in order to navigate the interpersonal dynamics and potential fallouts of decisions.

Navira agreed with Vetri's view that there was a small group of people running the sports leagues but disagreed that there was any mal intent, as highlighted by the quote below.

> It's related to the whole idea of it being one circle. So there's this key group of friends that do influence impact. If that group decided to leave [the league], there probably wouldn't be any leagues anymore because that group of people are the ones that are creating leagues, getting participation and things like that. It's not like they're malicious in any way – like they are not controlling the league – it just happened that way because we've been playing together so long that they've evolved into one friend group (Navira).

Navira recognizes that there is a notable group of individuals with influence. Nonetheless, Navira points out that if this core group were to withdraw their involvement, then the leagues would cease to exist because this group is critical to the creation and recruitment for the leagues. Navira states this group is not malicious or controlling and implies that this circumstance came about because of long standing relationships and a natural evolution over time. However, it is troubling that if in fact there is a toxic environment nature and exercise of leadership within these spaces, then there is little that can be done to challenge dynamics that are harmful, without risking the very existence of these leagues and the relationships therein.

Navira's observation of a "key group of friends" and Vetri's use of the term "cabal" is reinforced by social media analyses of the five leagues serving Tamil women in the GTA. There were only eight posts recruiting for new leaders and coaches overall (less than 1 percent). This finding and the lack of active recruitment substantiates the insular nature of the leagues and the idea that power and leadership is concentrated amongst friend groups. If recruitment is not being

actively initiated via social media, then it is being done by word of mouth within existing social networks (see Table 2), the very networks of which Vetri is critical. Also, when comparing the types of leadership most depicted, images or captions referring to coaches was much more likely compared to images or captions referring to "admin" or executive committees/members. Overall, there were only 13 posts across the five leagues that referenced "admin" or executive committees/members compared to 136 for coaches. This finding is particularly surprising given that only three of the leagues had coaches. This discrepancy could be explained by the fact that the social media accounts are run by "admin" or committees/members who may not be as comfortable posting themselves because of the perceived importance of humility within Asian cultures. In Asian cultures that tend to be collectivist in nature, where the unit of society is the group rather than the individual, there is a tendency to see "lowering one's own importance and appreciating others can be framed as a virtue so that the group's or society's harmony is maintained" (Oyserman & Lee, 2008, p.3).

Taken together, this suggests that although there is a senior leadership team in place, the power and decision-making that occurs in these leagues are more collective in nature and reflects the voices of non-leadership persons including coaches and players – but not all coaches and players – and that gender may be playing a role in these power dynamics as well.

Goals of leadership. Unlike in Western or traditional models of sport leadership, the ultimate goal within these Tamil sporting spaces is not winning. Rather, the consensus was that these leagues were meant for skill development. Ravi explained:

> I feel like I'm comparing two different situations because in the [Tamil] men's leagues – the ones I've been playing in – everyone already has a really good idea of the game and stuff, and they joined it to be like…in a more competitive way. But for [Tamil women's

> leagues], it's bringing in a lot of people that just haven't played at all so there is a difference in how the players are coaches. But I mean I've also experienced situations where I've coached some of the girls in basketball in another league where they are playing against higher competition so when it comes to that, I coached them exactly the same as how I coach the guys when I coached them in basketball which is a little bit more aggressive and you know… a little bit more… I mean, I guess you get the best of them and stuff (Ravi).

In the quote above, Ravi describes these Tamil women's leagues as not "competitive" compared to, for instance, Tamil men's leagues or non-Tamil women's leagues (see also Chapter 5). Thus, how Ravi coaches differs, implying that they coach with less of an aggressive edge within the Tamil women's sport leagues.

Another sport leader felt that to support skill development, the coaches from different teams within these leagues should be working together:

> One of the challenges might have been… it wasn't always easy to get along with other leaders. Some were super receptive and for me, I had this perspective where I'm like, 'Oh, we're all in the same boat and we're trying to accomplish the same thing, which is to develop players' and sometimes I felt like there was a fence where certain leaders would be like, 'Well I'm trying to focus on my team and we're competing against each other' […] it fosters competition but at the same time, you want the leaders to be aligned with one another (Vijay).

Ravi observes that the men's leagues are more competitive in large part because players are already familiar with the game and join the league precisely to seek out more competitive play. Ravi juxtaposes this observation to Tamil women's sport leagues, illustrating a gendered view of the leagues and level of competition, and the potential impact this may have on coaching and leading

sport participants. What is interesting is that within the leagues that have coaches, most coaches are men which may suggest that gender dynamics may be influencing the goals of sport leadership within these spaces. These possibilities are explored in the next section.

The Gendered and Gendering Nature of Tamil Sport Leadership

Many of the sport leaders interviewed rejected the idea that gender was responsible for differences in experiences of sport leadership. Instead, sport leaders like Ravi – who identifies as a man – felt that given the same level of experience and knowledge of a sport, men and women would be received the same way:

> I believe a girl can do the job just as well as a guy when it comes to coaching and stuff. It comes to experience – there were certain players that you could tell had more experience in a sport and if they were coaches, I think they could take the same approach and stuff and respect, and there won't be any problems. If there's someone that doesn't have as much experience in the sport itself, it might be a little tougher to get the most out of everyone (Ravi).

Sport experience, according to Ravi, was the determining factor for coaching effectiveness and if individuals, regardless of gender, had this experience, then they would not encounter any problems.

Nonetheless, when asked again if they felt that a woman coach would be received the same way as a man within the Tamil sporting leagues, Ravi added:

> I would think it's a bit different… I guess if a girl does something, I feel like sometimes there's situations where the [players] take it more to heart whereas when a guy does it, even though it should be the same thing, they say he's just being hard because he wants to see

> me improve. So yeah, I do feel like there are situations where when a person is more aggressive, they might not get the same reaction (Ravi).

Despite initially stating that "a girl can do the job just as well as a guy," Ravi states that players' responses to a coach may be influenced by gender, such that aggressive feedback from a male coach may be rationalized as a desire to see improvement in a player. Perhaps it would not be justified from a female coach and instead would result in hurt feelings.

This sentiment was echoed by another interviewee – also a man – who at first rejected the idea of gender influencing sport leadership within the Tamil context:

> I don't think so. There's my initial answer. I do think it's easier – like this is me purely judging and I'm making an assumption here but I think that the women might find it easier to respect their coach if it's a male because they just automatically assume they have more experience or have faced tougher competition. Which means – they must – that it doesn't really matter. At the end of the day if you're coaching whether you're a man or a woman just because whatever experience they have is what they bring to the table and it's relevant regardless so I don't think it matters (Vijay).

Like Ravi, Vijay states that gender does not impact sport leadership, only to then speculate that women players may respect a male coach more easily because of the assumption of greater experience in the sport or competing. Both quotes suggest that the perception of coaching ability and experience are gendered, such that male coaches may be assumed to have greater playing experience and are more focused on athlete improvement.

The value of previous sport involvement in establishing one's credibility and unquestionable leadership and garnering respect is evident in the experiences of Yalini, a woman sport leader.

> I feel like I built a reputation in university because I used to play with all the guys. There were basketball three-on-three tournaments and it was all guys but I would be the only girl playing with my group of guys and so people would be like 'Oh yeah, I remember you – you played in this tournament' and stuff like that. So it wasn't intentional but I built a reputation so when I started playing in the Tamil leagues, I knew a couple of people or people knew me and so when we started our leagues, it's kind of like I already had a reputation so no one ever really questioned me as a captain or anything from any genders. I had a certain level of respect, like "Ooh, she's really good at basketball, or she's really good at this" – no one really questioned my stuff (Yalini).

Yalini claims that her leadership was not questioned "from any genders" because she had established and solidified her reputation as an experienced athlete. Thus, like Ravi and Vijay, Yalini emphasizes experience, reputation, and credentials. However, she likewise does not recognize how this "reputation" and credibility are gendered, such that it was established within Tamil men's sporting spaces where she was "the only girl" playing with "all guys."

When asked how Tamil women sport leaders could overcome assumptions of less sport or competition experience, Vijay offered this suggestion:

> I think the best thing to do is to get players that have played some level of professional sport for whatever you're looking at so whether that's varsity or if you can say this person played varsity and they bring that credential over, I think that's like something that somebody will have because they've gone through the training of an accredited program right?

Vijay's response illustrates an emphasis on experience or credentials. There is no critique or consideration of why women sport leaders would need to demonstrate these credentials (while presumably men do not).

Although the leaders offer experience, rather than gender itself, as the reason for why it is easier for men to coach and be respected within these spaces than women, there is minimal acknowledgement of the role that gender plays in gaining sport experience. Moreover, the emphasis on sport experience as a pathway to access sport leadership does not consider the specific Tamil sport context, the broader sport system (i.e., varsity or professional sport) in which they would develop this expertise, and the limits therein on girls' and women's sport participation in the first place. The question of why Tamil men may have more sporting experience compared to Tamil women is not posed, nor are the impacts of culture examined. Indeed, there are several current/former women players within these leagues that do have considerable experience with sport, and yet the gendered assumptions about women coaches and leaders persists.

The blanket rejection of the gendered and gendering nature of sport leadership within Tamil spaces may result from diasporic identity and living within the 'third' liminal space between culture and practices of the homeland versus the host land. In other words, ideas about gender from 'back home' are rejected in favour of more progressive views about gender in Toronto to fit into host land culture. This can result in discomfort or resistance or an unwillingness to accept that these GTA Tamil sporting spaces are in fact gendered and gendering.

There were a few women sport leaders, however, who were acutely aware of the ways in which their sport leadership experiences were considerably different to those of Tamil men. The following quote from Shalini illustrates the key points that were raised by these women.

It's definitely different because you have to understand that we come from a community that is South Asian and so we do have some tendencies you know – backwards thinking. And so with that being said, women are not really accepted in spaces of leadership. […] I think it's gotten a bit better because there is a new generation coming in and they understand the importance of equality. I see our young boys and young men really making the effort to create safe spaces that are equal but the experiences are different. As a female, you are working 10 times harder to get respect. I remember when I was leading a volleyball league, it was really hard for men to take me seriously. It was hard for other men who were part of other leagues, who were commissioners, to take my league seriously. It got to the point where someone asked me if I wanted help running this league and it's so interesting because I was like 'how would you come to that conclusion?' Like I never asked for help or presented that I needed help but they just felt like 'maybe we should help her.' […] You have to understand because we are taught at such a young age that men do it better, that men are the ones that are stronger, that men are the ones that understand things more, it's naturally ingrained in us. I remember some of the players would gravitate more towards male coaches, than they would the female coaches, because they're like 'well, it's a male so I'm sure they got to play a lot more and they know more and their IQ might be better' so it was really interesting. […] It's very unintentional so I would not get upset about it but it's more about creating that space where you can have those conversations and say I did play, I do know the game and understand it. We have some amazing women that should be at the forefront because then you would get such good role models so all these other young females can be like 'Hey, wait a minute, we don't need men all the time' and the spaces would be so much better (Shalini).

When Shalini refers to "backwards thinking," she is pointing to cultural attitudes and gender norms within the community that often put men in positions of authority while casting doubt on women's competence as leaders. It is a loaded term – one that reflects frustration – but she is not necessarily saying that South Asian culture is inherently regressive, but rather that many Tamil women have grown up in environments where leadership is seen as a male domain. She says that Tamils "are taught at such a young age that men do it better" to explain why women players consent to dynamics that disempower women sport leaders. This is reinforced by another sport leader who shares:

> Even though these leagues are run by women, there is an over like… behind the scenes… there are guys that are overlooking the leagues and having input – whether that's the administrator's boyfriend or husband or whoever it is. There's always a guy behind the scene. There's not a purely woman leadership space (Nilani).

A second point that Shalini mentions is the "new generation" of Tamil men and boys who are trying to create safer spaces for Tamil women and girls in sport but in the same breath, references an experience where she was disempowered by unsolicited offers of help by men. Nilani also notes the influence of men behind the scenes and their influence on leagues. Finally, Shalini's quote ends by highlighting that there are many women in Tamil sporting spaces who could be strong and effective leaders, suggesting that the underrepresentation of women in Tamil sports leadership is not an issue of supply, but rather one of demand.

This underrepresentation of Tamil women sport leaders is evident in social media analysis of the five leagues serving Tamil women. Between 6-32% of the total posts on Instagram depicted some form of leadership, whether it was an image or caption featuring coaches, league organizers, an inspirational figure or quote, or recruitment flyers for leadership positions. In most cases, these

images were either portraits of sport leaders or team pictures with coaches. On average, only 16% of the social media posts on Instagram for these leagues depicted an example of leadership, suggesting that the importance of leadership within these spaces may not be as high as that of the players themselves – which most images were action shots. Only two of the leagues depicted women in leadership roles and unsurprisingly both leagues were specifically for women and included women in the leadership team. Overall, 19% of the posts depicting leadership included women in leadership roles but most of these posts came from one league (see Table 2). In addition, there were 136 posts that showed or referenced coaches but only 15 showed coaches who were women (11%). The lack of female coaches is echoed by one sport leader who shared:

> I felt like most of the coaches were men, right? Like, I was like, this is a female, fully female, league. Why are we setting the precedent that all the coaches should be men, you know? It's like the NBA where all the owners are white and it's a league full of Black men. There's some sort of – It's just, it's a mismatch there. You know, like if you're trying to get women involved in sports, I would think that there should be more representation of women in leadership positions to actually coach and tell the women what to do versus you know, it being men telling the women what to do (Vetri).

This participant's observation of the dominance of male coaches in their particular league is then reflected in the social media posts that depict leadership, subsequently reinforcing what she calls "the precedent that all the coaches should be men." Moreover, by drawing parallels between the extent of male coaches in the Tamil women's sport league and the white NBA franchise owners, this participant is highlighting not only the lack of representation but the difference in power and influence between the male coaches and the Tamil women players.

In addition, the social media analysis revealed that two of the leagues showed external examples of leadership by posting about inspirational people (11 posts). League 1, the coed volleyball league, had one post of a male athlete getting ready to spike a ball with a quote from Kobe Bryant in the caption that says "Determination silences doubters." League 3, the women's basketball and volleyball league, had 10 posts with external leadership figures. Two of these posts featured Kobe Bryant, making him the most posted about leader. The relevance of Kobe Bryant and his Mamba Mentality to the diasporic Tamil community is explained by this sport leader who says:

> That Mamba Mentality really resonates so much. […] For me, it was all about like, working hard and like getting those results and reaping the results and the benefits and the rewards of working hard, right? […] They have that saying that 'Hard work beats talent. When talent fails, it fails to work hard,' right? (Anush).

The emphasis on hard work as a pathway to results and success encapsulated by Bryant's Mamba Mentality may be particularly resonant for diasporic people who migrate to different countries in search of a better life. This philosophy, though it may align with cultural values of Tamil people and others, it nonetheless reinforces the model minority stereotype that is imposed upon Asian and South Asian people in Western contexts.

Other leadership figures depicted in social media posts include Serena Williams (posted twice), Coach Carter (posted twice), Margaret Mead, Viola Davis, Ellie Black, and Dwayne Casey. Of these leaders, the three examples of coaches were men, which supports the earlier theme that there is an underrepresentation of women in coaching positions. Serena Williams and Ellie Black – both elite women athletes – reinforce the idea that leadership is associated with high levels of performance and visibility, aligning leadership with elite achievement rather than grassroots

involvement. Their inclusion reflects admiration for those who break barriers in traditionally male-dominated spaces but also suggests that women must be exceptional to be recognized as leaders. The inclusion of Margaret Mead and Viola Davis expands leadership beyond sport and points to an awareness that leadership can also be about influence and societal change. It is interesting to note that there are no South Asians examples of leadership outside the sport leagues which may reflect lack of representation of mainstream South Asian leadership in both Canadian sport and popular culture. Moreover, it is surprising that diasporic Tamil or even South Asian leaders, both within and outside of sport, are not mentioned. This could suggest that the third spaces these leagues produce are shaped more by local cultural narratives and Western models of excellence, rather than by diasporic or community-rooted leadership figures.

Table 2: Social Media Analysis

	Sport	Participant Gender	Total Number of Instagram Posts	Number of posts with examples of leadership	Percentage of total posts with examples of leadership	Number of posts showing women in leadership roles	Percentage of leadership posts showing women in leadership roles	Number of posts showing coaches	Number of posts showing female coaches	Percentage of posts with coaches showing women coaches
League 1	Softball	Coed	144	9	6%	0	0%	0	0	N/A
League 2	Volleyball	Coed	40	4	10%	0	0%	0	0	N/A
League 3	Basketball and Volleyball	Women	546	64	12%	27	42%	44	15	34%
League 4	Flag Football	Women	272	87	32%	5	6%	82	0	0%
League 5	Basketball	Women (but the league mainly caters to men)	54	4	7%	0	0%	2	0	0%
Overall			1056	168	16%	32	19%	136	15	11%

Table 2: Social Media Analysis Continued

	Number of posts showing admin, exec, etc.	Number of posts featuring inspirational figures	Number of posts featuring inspirational figures who are women (who is featured)	Number of posts featuring inspirational figures who are men (who is featured)	Number of posts recruiting for leadership team (e.g. exec and admin)	Number of posts recruiting for coaches
League 1	1	0	0	0	0	0
League 2	3	1	0	1 (Kobe Bryant)	0	0
League 3	2	10	5 (Margaret Mead, Viola Davis, Ellie Black, Serena Williams (twice))	5 (Dwayne Casey, Kobe Bryant (twice), Coach Carter (twice))	2	3
League 4	5	0	0	0	0	3
League 5	2	0	0	0	0	0
Overall	13	11	5	6	2	6

Though many respondents rejected the notion that gender could shape leadership experiences, another major theme that emerged was differences in coaching style or approach by gender. Some of these differences have already been alluded to in Ravi's and Vijay's quotes above. In what follows, I include an exchange with Anush that help to further illuminate gendered coaching styles:

> **Anush**: I came across as very passive when I was coaching females because I didn't want to step on any toes and didn't want to turn people off, whereas with guys, I didn't really have any reluctance to maybe yelling or being more stern or firm.
>
> **Gobi**: How would you describe why you would approach it differently?
>
> **Anush**: I think it's just what the experience that people have prior to getting to me. I feel like guys are more involved in terms of high school sports and just friends in the league so they maybe experienced quite a bit of different leadership styles already whereas my personal experience with girls, maybe a handful of them may have had previous experience, and the majority would be like their first initial experience and I don't want my initial treatment of them, or how I would coach them to turn them off of being involved for the rest of the season.

Anush indicates that their coaching style for Tamil women is different from both Tamil men and non-Tamil women because of the lack of experience Tamil women have in sporting environments. When probed further about why Anush thinks this is the case, they admit to not being sure but suggests that Tamil women were less likely to receive opportunities or encouragement to participate in sports because the emphasis was on academics or the arts, like piano and dance.

Anush goes on to say: "I think we're a couple steps back from getting to the point where the African Canadian community or even the Chinese Canadian community are." This quote is

particularly interesting in that Anush has chosen to compare the Tamil diaspora to two other diasporas and indicated that there is a difference in terms of sport participation. When probed further about why Anush believes these differences exist, they said:

> I will say culturally, we're very conservative and it kind of trickles down. So like even just religiously, everything has kind of been meant to go one way. And it's kind of like, just with upbringing as well, it's kind of like this way or no way at all… or like this way or you're a disappointment so you're kind of forced to do what your parents want and rarely, do parents want you to go through athletics so I think upbringing and culture has a huge impact in that. (Anush)

Gender and sexuality in Tamil sporting spaces. It is important to acknowledge that the discussion of gender so far has been one built on the binary. This is because, as Mythili highlights, Tamil sporting spaces are "not safe spaces for queer folks. Queer women are more accepted in spaces than queer men in athletic spaces but trans folks… there's no conversation about how those things affect players and social spaces." There is already minimal conversation about the role of gender in Tamil sport leadership but entirely absent considering gender as a spectrum. Another sport leader, Shalini, adds: "I don't think our leagues are trained. There aren't people that are sitting in the committees, the commissioners, or whoever is part of the organization - they are doing tremendous work and its very much appreciated – but when it comes down to being inclusive, delivering trainings, and making sure that we're creating a safe space to allow the LGBTQ+ community, or any other type of communities into our spaces, I don't think we're there yet." Within diasporic communities, conflicts between traditional and host land values and cultures can exist. The lack of acceptance of gender and sexual orientation diversity within South

Asian communities is reflected in the lack of diversity within sport leadership in Tamil grassroots sports organizations.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined how sport leadership is understood, enacted, and challenged within Tamil grassroots sport leagues in the GTA. While leadership was often conceptualized as collaborative and community-driven, findings revealed the fluid power dynamics within these closed networks. Goals of leadership were more focused on development and inclusion than competition, yet gendered expectations and cultural norms continue to shape who leads, how they lead, and how leadership is received. Despite an overall rejection of gender as a barrier, many examples showed how leadership in these spaces is both gendered and gendering, and that inclusion along lines of gender identity and sexuality remains underdeveloped.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter examines how grassroots Tamil organizations are sites of identity negotiation, community cohesion, and leadership development. First, the historical and political context is provided to establish the foundation for understanding diasporic Tamil identity in the GTA. Next, there is exploration of how there was a need to redefine Tamil identity after the defeat of the LTTE in 2009 from one centred on homeland conflict to one more centred on community-building in the host land. Then there is discussion of how grassroots Tamil sport leagues act as sites of belonging and resistance for 1.5- and second-generation Tamils. In the next section, the leadership structures within Tamil sport leagues are considered in relation to the collectivist approaches espoused in Tamil literature and culture and the more individual-oriented models in Western culture. Finally, there is a discussion of the gendered barriers that Tamil women face in sporting spaces and an ecological framework of barriers and supports for Tamil women leaders is presented, adapted from LaVoi and Dutove (2012).

Sport as a Tool for Redefining Tamil Diasporic Identity

Much of the Tamil diaspora resulted from civil conflict and then genocide in Sri Lanka. The country, which had been under British rule, gained independence in 1948 and the colonial system of government was replaced with one of majoritarian rule. Prior to independence, despite being a minority, the Tamil people of Sri Lanka had held disproportionate positions of power in business and administration. However, under the new system of majoritarian rule, many Tamils in positions of power lost their jobs and were replaced with Sinhalese peoples (who constituted most of the population).

In the subsequent decades, more laws and acts were enacted to further reduce the rights and power of Tamils in favor of the Sinhalese majority. For example, the Sinhala Only Act in 1956 recognized Sinhalese as the only official language of the country. The 1950s also saw the creation of development projects (e.g. irrigation projects) in Tamil areas of the country that many argued were efforts by the government to colonize Tamil lands with Sinhalese peoples. Tensions continued to increase between Tamils and Sinhalese peoples with riots and deaths on both sides in the late 1950s. Then, in 1972 a system of quotas based on ethnic representation was introduced for universities which drastically decreased the number of Tamil students that could attend university, especially in fields such as medicine, law and science. Tamils were also excluded from jobs in civil service that required fluency in the Sinhalese language. As the oppression of Tamils continued to increase in Sri Lanka, the desire for a separate homeland – Tamil Eelam – also increased. In response, the government enacted two legal provisions that would have significant impacts on the safety of Tamil peoples. First, in 1971, the government proclaimed a state of emergency that lasted six years in which government forces could dispose of bodies without inquest and suspects that were deemed as a 'threat to national security' could be detained without trial for an unlimited period of time. There were many cases of detention and torture of Tamil people that followed these provisions and, in response, there were incidents of killings and counter-killings reported on both sides. Tensions came to a head in Black July – an anti-Tamil pogrom that lasted from July 23 to July 30, 1983.

Black July was a week of large anti-Tamil riots that began following the arrival to the capital of the bodies of Sinhalese soldiers who were killed by Tamil rebels in the North. Funeral attendees who had gathered to pay their respects began to destroy Tamil property and assault Tamil passers-by in a mob-like fashion and this violence quickly spread across the country. What

differentiated the Black July riots from previous riots was the level of organization. “Angry mobs with voters’ lists in their hands went on rampage and set fire to Tamil houses and businesses. Tamil persons on the road or in their homes were assaulted or killed in bestial fashion” (Tambiah, 1986 as cited in Pavey, 2008, p.5). It was believed that the government was involved with providing copies of voters’ lists to the mobs and in some cases, that Sinhalese peoples were dropped off at particular points by government-owned vehicles. Five days into the riots, the President made an address to the country promising to ban all Tamil separatist movements without acknowledging the suffering of the Tamil people or condemning the violence. The following day, even more violence ensued. Another 100 Tamils were killed, and 30,000 fled to refugee camps. In total, 371 Tamils were killed according to the official records (though it is believed that this number is much higher and around 1000), thousands of Tamil-owned businesses and homes were burned, and 130,000 people came to be refugees during Black July (Pavey, 2008).

Understanding the events of Black July are important for understanding the immigration and then settlement stories of Sri Lankan Tamils in the GTA. The shared experience and common memory of Black July arguably became the focal point of modern diasporic Tamil identity. For example, prior to 1983, caste hierarchies were a key point of Tamil identity; however, the common experience of Black July in which Tamils were attacked, regardless of caste, arguably lessened its overall importance to Tamil identity within diaspora. The shared trauma of Black July in the past also became a common lens through which the Tamil diaspora began to try to understand their present circumstances (Pavey, 2008). This cognitive process linking the past to the present was informed by a type of selective memory that is common within diasporas in which some events and persons are glorified while others are vilified. For the Tamil diaspora, the Tamil struggle and heroism were glorified while the Sinhalese peoples and government were vilified (Fuglerud,

1999). Special schools, events, and cultural centres were set up by the Tamil diaspora in host lands to ensure that Tamil culture and the shared memory of Black July were passed on to younger generations. These processes ensured the creation of a common enemy for the Tamil diaspora that served to reinforce Tamil identity and solidarity (Balasingham, 2003 as cited in Pavey, 2008).

One of the ways in which this Tamil identity and solidarity were formed was through the role of diaspora in homeland conflict. It is well documented how communities like the Jewish, Irish, Armenian, and Chinese diasporas have actively been involved in homeland politics by supporting causes financially, engaging in conflict resolution or contributing to reconstruction and development – and the same could be said for Sri Lankan Tamils. The involvement in homeland conflict grew exponentially with greater transnational connectivity via the Internet, international travel, and access to education and resources. For diasporas, like Tamil Sri Lankans who were displaced because of conflict, shared traumatic memories sustain and sometimes amplify the attachment to the homeland and "becomes the yardstick of their identity which help them mobilise their community members, raise funds, build institutions and engage in political activism in the host state" (Pande, 2016, p. 2). But of course, as with other diasporas, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora is heterogeneous – there are differences in terms of when individuals were displaced, how they were granted residence, and the level of integration into the host lands. There were also differences amongst the community in terms of caste, class, gender, religion, and political views about the conflict. However, despite these differences, the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora has "managed to maintain their exclusive identity and strong community ties" (Pande, 2016, p.5).

Dynamics within the host land have also reinforced the strong community ties within the Tamil diaspora in Toronto. Low wage employment, high cost of living, language barriers, discrimination, and exclusion made Tamils more reliant on community-based and ethnic networks

– which in part explains the need and desire for Tamil sporting spaces. Sriskandarajah (2004) points to four factors that facilitated the spatial, social and political ties that exist within the Tamil diaspora. First, the large number of asylum seekers that arrived in places where earlier migrants had already settled led to clustered settlements – in Toronto, most of the Tamil population settled in Scarborough which also explains why the Tamil grassroots sports leagues are concentrated there. Second, newer arrivals rely heavily on Tamil community support networks for employment and housing which reinforces diasporic bonds. Third, the large numbers of Tamils in communities led to the creation of social and community services and organizations specifically for Tamils. And finally, "unlike the earlier migrants, the newer [Tamil] arrivals kept aloof from the Sinhalese diaspora and other groups from Sri Lanka which effectively isolated them and made them even more insular" (Pande, 2016, p. 5; Sriskandarajah, 2004). These factors also serve to bolster global ties amongst members of the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora, creating a transnational, pan-Tamil identity that was centred on the victimhood of their people and the desire for an independent state. However, the defeat of the LTTE and therefore loss of the fight for Tamil Eelam in 2009 caused a significant paradigm shift within the Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora and resulted in a need to redefine Tamil diasporic identity.

The grassroots Tamil sports organizations that were created in the GTA in the early 2010s – after the defeat of the LTTE – are one example of the diaspora's efforts to redefine themselves. Whereas previously, Tamil sporting events had been tied to fundraising and awareness for war efforts in the homeland, these grassroots sports league became more about maintaining Tamil culture and ties within the community in a way that was not centred on the struggle for an independent state. However, it should be acknowledged that Tamil nationalism persists amongst the diaspora (though weakened) and that the sports leaders that created these grassroots Tamil

sport leagues grew up with genocide and its legacies being very much at the forefront of their Tamil identity.

The Emergence of Tamil Grassroots Sports Organizations

The migration stories of sport leaders in this study and their families provide the context for the emergence of Tamil grassroots sport organizations. All the parents of sport leaders, and some of the Tamil sports leaders themselves, came to Canada as refugees or through family reunification programs after 1983 and settled in the GTA, where the largest concentration of Tamils outside of Sri Lanka is found (George, 2011; Sriskandarajah, 2008). The sport leaders in this study were thus either second generation or from the 1.5 generation – the latter of which refers to youth who were born outside of Canada but arrived in their childhood (George, 2011; Thurairajah, 2017). Research has shown that the assimilation patterns of those born in a country and those who arrive to said country by the age of seven are often very similar (Oropesa & Landale, 1997, as cited in Thurairajah, 2017). Tamil families "revealed a high degree of family resiliency in the process of immigration and settlement" (Vappu Tyyska, 2005, p.31). Moreover, "the success of the Diaspora as a dynamic culturally productive space" is evidenced through the number of Tamil newspapers and radio and television channels that operate in Toronto (George, 2011, p. 465). The resiliency and cultural production of the Tamil diaspora " highlights both the cohesiveness of the community (though divergences along lines of class, caste and regionalism exist in the diaspora) and the niche they have managed to carve out within the Toronto urban landscape" (Sriskandarjah, 2008, p.175). However, the diaspora is concentrated in pockets of Toronto, particularly in Scarborough, that are in need and underserviced (George, 2011).

Second and 1.5 generation Tamils were raised in multicultural neighbourhoods and their identities were forged through shifting family norms, gendered expectations, and having to

negotiate race and racialization – what it is to be 'brown' or 'Tamil' or 'South Asian' – in various contexts such as with peer groups, schools and neighborhoods (George, 2011). Second and 1.5 generation Tamils often experience heightened marginalization compared to their parents because, although they have adopted host land identities and values, they continue to be othered and experience discrimination. As explained by Sriskandarjahan (2008):

> …citizenship and identity are shaped through a dialogical relationship with others, either by recognition or misrecognition. We are partly constituted by public recognition of our identities and social groups. Misrecognition by others can lead persons or groups to experience a sense of distortion (p. 178).

For many of the sports leaders, their involvement with the grassroots Tamil sports leagues began during or in the years immediately after university. In particular, many founders of these sports leagues had attended university together at schools with large populations of Tamil students and active Tamil Student Associations (TSAs). For many second and 1.5 generation Tamils, TSAs provided the space for collective identity making (O'Neill, 2015). There is heterogeneity among second and 1.5 generation Tamils in terms of *oor*, religion, degree of political activism among other aspects of diasporic life; however, it is "within the TSAs that these differences are put aside and transcended, where students find a focus for their Tamil identity," and where they can share "a sense of solidarity with each other as Tamils" (O'Neill, 2015, p.131).

It is also interesting to consider that universities served as public fora after the defeat of the LTTE in 2009 and that large numbers of young Tamils attended. During these fora, critiques were not only aimed at the Sri Lankan government but also Canada's for…

> …its lacklustre response to the human rights crisis in the last months of the war […] One speaker, representing youth, argued, "The fact that the government didn't address the

> problem meant that Tamils [Tamil-Canadians] identified as Tamils for the first time. It made some more questioning of being Canadian" (George, 2011, p. 473).

This is important contextually as many of the sports leaders that participated in this study were attending university at this time.

Taken together, the social networks built through the TSAs, the mishandling of a response to the genocide in Sri Lanka by the Canadian government, and experiences of marginalization in the host land, explain the emergence of Tamil grassroots sports organizations in the GTA, following the defeat of the LTTE in 2009, as a means of strengthening diasporic bonds, redefining Tamil identity, and providing a safe sporting space for Tamil people in the GTA.

Monoethnic Sports Leagues and Identity Negotiation

Mainstream sporting spaces can be sites of exclusion for Tamil youth, shaped by racialized stereotypes and systemic barriers that impact how South Asian bodies are perceived (Spaaij, 2015). As Burdsey argues, the long-standing stereotype of the "passive Asian" has been increasingly replaced by "discourses of 'threat' and 'fear' among white communities are now articulated with reference to perceived associations between [Asian-ness]" and violence (2006, p. 15). In Canada, this shift is evident in the way that Tamil communities have been portrayed following the labelling of the LTTE as a terrorist organization; media representations of Tamils as being terrorists, aggressive and 'un-Canadian' reinforces this perception (Sriskandarajah, 2008). These associations affect not only how Tamil individuals are perceived but also how space is navigated. As Cohen explains, racialized communities often experience the colour-coding of public amenities such as recreational centres or sporting spaces as 'white' or 'black' whereby black refers to all ethnic minorities (1996).

This exclusion is often reinforced in the everyday experiences of sport. Kilvington and Price note that "overt racism is still manifest within the grass-roots and semi-professional [sport] spheres," a sentiment echoed by Tamil sport leaders in this study who described being underestimated by other athletes – including athletes of color – simply because they had brown skin (2013). These assumptions are part of a broader Western sporting discourse that constructs South Asian bodies as non-athletic (Burdsey, Ratna & Chakraborty, 2013), with the stigma even more pronounced for South Asian women (Sugden, 2010).

These dynamics help explain the emergence and the importance of monoethnic Tamil sport leagues. When mainstream spaces feel unwelcoming or not inclusive, communities often create their own. Sport, as Spaiij notes, offers more than just physical activity – it allows people to "express themselves through bodily practices, construct and perform social identities and craft emotional closeness to, or distance from, other people" (2015, p. 303). Tamil grassroots sports leagues function as "alternative public spheres," and are "important social spaces that breed solidarity through generations, and across communities" (Raman, 2015, p.223). In this way, these leagues become more than sport, they are sites of diasporic connectivity, where ideas of Tamilness, Canadianness, and homeland identity, are constantly negotiated and redefined (Raman, 2015).

Being Tamil

Diasporas are imagined communities that are "mostly mental constructs, detached from physical practices" (Spaaij & Broerse, 2019, p. 755). However, the Tamil grassroots sports leagues in the GTA provide members of the diaspora with a physical space where they can form socio-emotional bonds through sport and participate in diasporic embodied practices like listening to Tamil music or speaking Tamil with one another. Sport leaders and participants alike can

physically interact, build social relationships that extend beyond the sporting spaces, and *feel* Tamil (Spaaij & Broerse, 2019). This idea of 'feeling Tamil' and expressing Tamilness openly and freely in a safe way are particularly relevant for a diaspora that was born from identity-based violence and oppression. Tamil leaders and participants can speak Tamil freely, speak about religious practices such as fasting on certain days of the week, and joke about shared experiences like having strict parents and not being allowed to stay out late. Similar sentiments were shared in other studies of monoethnic sporting spaces (e.g., Carrington, 2010; Nakamura, 2019; Spaaij & Broerse, 2019). For some second-generation Tamils who may feel disconnected from their culture, these sporting leagues also provide the opportunity to learn more about their Tamilness through informal conversations on the side of the court or field or through attending social functions like team dinners, birthday parties and weddings that are facilitated by the social connections made in these Tamil leagues. As Krouwel et al (2006) states, "next to family, school and the workplace, sport organizations and activities have become a milieu for education and the transfer or norms and values (socialization)" (p. 169).

There is an old saying in Tamil: '*Tamilan endru sollada; thalai nimirnthu nillada;*' the saying roughly translates to: 'Say that you are Tamil; stand with your head held high.' Its authorship is unknown, but it is a saying that is often adopted by Tamils who wish to express the pride they feel in their ethnic identity and it is used throughout the Tamil-speaking world and among the various Tamil diasporic communities (Thurairajah, 2017). Through these sporting spaces, the Tamil diaspora becomes real, rather than imagined, and strengthens the collective and personal diasporic identity and belonging (Spaaij & Broerse, 2019).

Motivations for sport leadership. For most of the sport leaders in this study, a key motivation for taking on leadership positions within these grassroots sports organizations was the

desire to uplift their community and create opportunities for Tamil girls and women to participate in sport – which can be understood as an ethic of care. “Ethic of care pertains to the nurturing of relationships, seeing and responding to need, and taking care of the world such that no one is left alone” (Armstrong, 2007, p.5). This ethic is particularly relevant in diasporic contexts, which are often theorized as moral communities, where those who have experienced violence and displacement feel a responsibility to help one another (Werbner, 2002; Jones, 2014). However, this ethic of care is not without complexity. While many participants framed their involvement as altruistic or community-driven, tensions around power, expectations of conformity, and competition within league structures sometimes challenged these values. Moreover, it is important to recognize the gendered and gendering nature of care and sacrifice. Girls and women, in particular, are often socialized to internalize the expectation that they care for others, and this can influence how their leadership and volunteerism are enacted and perceived. Within the Tamil diaspora, where ‘*Maaveerar* sacrifices’ are held in high regard, the idea of giving oneself for the benefit of the community is culturally significant. Originally, Maaverars were “those who sacrificed themselves in the act of taking another life” during the war; nonetheless, these “sacrifices were commonly understood as altruistic acts made for the sake of future generations,” which may explain why so many sport leaders – particularly women – volunteered significant time and labour for free (O’Neill, 2015, p.134). But this framing can also obscure how care work is unequally distributed.

Being Canadian

The sport itself is also significant when discussing diaspora. Participating in sports like basketball, volleyball and flag football – which are commonly taught and played sports in Canada – is one way in which individuals are acculturated into the host land (Burdsey, Ratna &

Chakraborty, 2013). The Western imagination understands South Asian culture(s) as traditional and "if one comprehends the [South] Asian 'culture' or 'identity' to be static rather than changeable, one may subscribe to the notion that sports like basketball, volleyball and flag football, are too 'modern' for the South Asian diasporas" (Kilvington, 2013, p. 591-2). Participating in these sports, allows the diaspora to challenge preconceptions of Tamil identity and redefine itself within the Canadian context. That is not to say that the diaspora does not also participate in sports such as cricket and netball, but it is interesting to note that the grassroots sports leagues that emerged following the defeat of the LTTE and the need for the diaspora to redefine itself were not these 'traditional' sports from 'back home.'

In their research on Somali soccer tournaments in Norway, Spaaij and Broerse described how participants could "draw on various diasporic recourses including Somali football uniforms, musical performances, traditional dress and dishes, and visiting prominent representatives (e.g. ambassador, former Prime Minister, Mayor of Mogadishu) that together fashion a tangible and visceral experience of Somali diaspora" (2019, p. 760). Interestingly, within the Tamil diasporic sporting spaces, the uniforms and team names are based on North American sports teams like the Lakers, Celtics and Heat. The music that is played in the background is Tamil but also features popular songs in the GTA. In this way, the sporting spaces are ways for the Tamil diaspora to represent and perform their Canadian identity.

Participation in sport is also a way in which to express sense of belonging to the host land. It provides participants with the opportunity to demonstrate healthism discourses that are highly valued in Western cultures (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2013). The healthism discourse puts forward the idea that good health can be achieved through individual effort and discipline (Lee and Macdonald, 2019). Sport is seen as a way in which the Tamil diaspora can achieve good health which may be

one way of countering "cultural narratives around the uncultured, and thus non-integrated, immigrant" (Barker-Ruchti et al., 2013, p. 759). Sport is also a way for participants to demonstrate important social values that are also highly valued in Western cultures such as physical ability, integrity and self-control once again, battling immigrant stereotypes that may exist in host lands (Spaaij & Broerse, 2019). Canadian-ness is also demonstrated in the way that sport leadership is operationalized within these sporting spaces.

Being Sri Lankan

The transnational connection to Sri Lanka is much weaker for second and 1.5 generation Tamils compared to first generation Tamils. For many diasporic Tamils who were born outside of Sri Lanka or left during early childhood, their only frame of reference to the country is that of genocide and oppression. Even considering Tamil Eelam, rather than the country of Sri Lanka itself, the connection to homeland is less prominent within the Tamil sporting spaces particularly because they were created after the fall of the Tamil Tigers and the end of the fight for an independent state. There is no mention for the struggle for Tamil Eelam within these spaces and the focus for the diaspora is very much on maintaining Tamil identity in host lands, as opposed to returning to the homeland. Tamil sporting spaces in the GTA have become an example of the redefining of Tamil diasporic identity from one that was formed in relation to the forced dispersion from a homeland to one that is more about maintaining and reproducing culture in a host land.

Sport Leadership through the Tamil Diasporic Lens

How leadership is defined is as varied as those who attempt to define it (Amaladass, 2007). Generally, however, there is agreement that leadership is "a process by which one individual influences others towards the attainment of organizational goals" (Amaladass, 2007, p. 9). While traits such as intelligence, personality, or even physical stature have historically been linked to

effective leadership, such characteristics are deeply shaped by context and culture (Amaladass, 2007).

Research has shown that there are cultural differences in preferred leadership traits, though it is important to point out that this research was most likely conducted using a Western lens. Countries such as France, Russia and the US value characteristics such as assertiveness, an ability to take-charge, and be visible. Countries such as China and Japan prefer leaders who are less visible but get work done (Sanchez-Rune, Nardon, & Steers, 2011). "Some [countries] (e.g., Mexico, Spain) prefer leaders who stand above the crowd and command respect, while others (e.g., Malaysia, Laos) prefer leaders who are humble and remain part of the crowd" (Sanchez-Rune, Nardon, & Steers, 2011, p.207). While these statements may be overgeneralizations and in turn reproduce simplistic stereotypes, what they demonstrate is that leadership is very much a sociocultural construct.

Leadership means different things in different cultures. Generally, in the Western world, leadership is positively connoted, and leaders are respected and admired. However, in other parts of the world, leaders are met with distrust and fear – particularly by the oppressed (as was the case with Tamils' fear of the Sri Lankan government during the conflict) (Sanchez-Rune, Nardon, & Steers, 2011). In individualistic societies, like Canada…

> …leadership typically refers to a single person who guides and directs the actions of others, often in a very visible way. In more collectivistic societies (e.g., Korea, Japan, and China), however, leadership is often less associated with individuals and more closely aligned with group endeavours (Sanchez-Rune, Nardon, & Steers, 2011, p.207).

There are also differences in hierarchical conceptualizations of leadership. For example, in the Netherlands, which is a more egalitarian society, the term, 'subordinate,' is inappropriate, and the

term ,‘coworker (medewerker)’ is used instead. Leaders are often seen as more approachable and less intimidating. In comparison, in hierarchical societies like Indonesia, leaders are seen as separate and above the people they lead (Sanchez-Rune, Nardon, and Steers, 2011).

But again, it is important to acknowledge that leadership theories in the literature are also predominantly Western, produced by scholars situated in Western contexts and grounded in Eurocentric assumptions about power, individuality, and effectiveness (Chin, 2010). And although, even within Eurocentric traditions there are collectivist and non-hierarchical models—such as servant leadership, participative leadership, and distributed leadership – these models still tend to draw on frameworks that have not typically included Eastern philosophical traditions, Tamil wisdom literature, or diasporic knowledge (Ivey Academy, 2020). This exclusion is part of a broader legacy of Othering and the marginalization of non-Western ways of knowing.

This study does not claim that Tamil leadership is entirely distinct from other forms of leadership across cultural contexts. Rather, it suggests that diasporic Tamil sport leadership reflects a set of values and practices that are shaped by Tamil philosophical traditions and diasporic histories – factors that are not really explored in the dominant leadership literature. In this way, Tamil leadership may emphasize collective responsibility, moral duty, and relational accountability in ways that are culturally rooted and significant.

Understanding the cultural foundations of Eelam Tamil leadership is difficult as there is little literature written on the topic. This could in part be explained by the burning of the Jaffna Public Library, in which 95,000+ texts including palm leaves (ola), parchments, and manuscripts, some irreplaceable, were destroyed (Tamil Guardian, 2021). There are, however, some ancient texts that are relevant to understanding the cultural foundations of Eelam Tamil leadership. First, the *Tirrukkural* is wisdom literature from the Tamil tradition in South India that dates back to

between the 2nd to 8th century. Leadership is discussed directly and indirectly throughout the text but for the purposes of this study, the most salient points are presented. First, this text identifies the characteristics of a good ruler as having:

> courage, generosity, knowledge, perseverance in abundance, alertness, learning, bravery, easy access to people and gentleness in words, ability to render justice according to the laws of the land and acceptance of well-meant criticism with patience and forbearance. […] He must also have the four attributes of generosity, graciousness, justice and concern for citizens' welfare (Amaladass, 2007, p. 11).

The text also describes desired management styles summed in plain language here:

- Decisions should only be made after due deliberation, but once a decision is made, it must be acted upon right away;
- Before taking action, it is important to consider objectives, obstacles and benefits upon completion;
- Consult experts when making decisions;
- Consider how one successful project can lead to another; and,
- Friends and allies are important; but it is even more important to make friends with your enemies.

The *Tirrukkural* also discusses the importance of friendship and having good relationships with others (Amaladass, 2007). The *Bhagavad Gita*, Hindu scripture from the 1st or 2nd century BCE, may also be relevant for Eelam Tamils as most of the population is Hindu. In this text, a good leader is one that exhibits 'servant leadership,'the idea that good leaders must be eager to serve their followers. This is similar to the *Tirrukkural* in that generosity is a characteristic of a good leader. The text also discusses how good leaders respond instead of reacting to situations which

parallels the *Tirrukkural*'s point that decisions should only be made after due deliberation. The *Bhagavad Gita* also asserts that good leaders do not make decisions out of attachment, fear or anger, but rather, prioritize goodness (Nayak, 2018). Accepting that these texts are relevant to understanding the cultural foundations of Eelam Tamil leadership, this study suggests that Eelam Tamil leadership may be more collectivistic and less hierarchal in nature compared to Western models of leadership.

While neither of these texts explicitly challenges masculine-coded leadership roles, the *Tirukkural*'s emphasis on gentleness, listening, and ethical deliberation may provide openings to reimagine leadership beyond masculine norms. Moreover, in practice, Tamil sport leaders—particularly women—often enact leadership through care, emotional labour, and community responsibility, which are historically feminized traits. This gendered dimension is critical, especially given that leadership across most cultural traditions—including Tamil ones—remains shaped by patriarchal values. Thus, while Tamil leadership draws from collectivist and ethical traditions, it is also constrained by gendered expectations and must be understood as a site of both cultural reproduction and resistance.

For diasporic Tamils navigating the space between Eelam Tamil and Western models of leadership, the possibility of hybridized model of leadership emerges. The desired characteristics and management styles for the diaspora theoretically could be a combination of the two models. It becomes possible that

> change processes will unfold where leadership cultures are combined, diffused, infused, produced, reproduced or even rejected. Beyond this, hybridity comes with an ongoing challenge where daily practise and leadership ideas are constantly under production in

interaction, and where ambiguity and conceptual confusion are normal (Alhassan & Kliewer, 2022, p.55).

When examining the leadership structures of the grassroots sports leagues serving Tamil women in the GTA, two distinct patterns emerge. For the two leagues catering exclusively to women, there was a formal leadership group (comprising of both women and men) that overseas operations and hires coaches (almost all of whom are men) to run individual teams. In contrast, the three leagues that are either co-ed or primarily composed of men are led by a single organizer (all of whom were men), with no formal coaching structure. In these leagues, decision-making tended to be centralized, and authority rests heavily with the lead organizer such that this individual often controlled schedules, registration, disciplinary matters, and communication. Conversely, the leagues for women incorporate a more collective form of leadership, with shared responsibilities and collaborative decision-making at both the administrative and team levels. This does not mean that power is equally shared across leaders (i.e., male coaches may still hold more authority), but that this structure allows for more collectivist and relational leadership practices.

Collective leadership refers to "leadership process that accentuates power distribution among different entities within a firm… that accentuates team values and the development of knowledge and skills" based off the aggregate of individual strengths and expertise (Alsaedi, 2022, p. 2). It can be differentiated by two key dimensions: decentralization and density. Decentralization refers to the distribution of decision-making power whereas density refers to the number and strength of connections within the leadership network (Alsaedi, 2022).

In the two leagues that practiced collective leadership, power was decentralized and high-density. The formal leadership groups for these leagues comprised of 4-5 people, mostly women, who were responsible for the operations, administration and conflict resolution for the league. The

coaches (almost entirely men) were responsible for training participants but were also deeply involved in league-level decisions. In both leagues, decisions were often made through consultation or coach-inclusive voting processes.

On the surface, this suggests a collectivist model aligned with Eelam Tamil leadership traditions. However, this structure may also reflect gendered constraints on how women can lead in diasporic sporting spaces. Tamil women sport leaders appears to take on gender-prescribed roles—organized around coordination, care, and facilitation—rather than authority or strategic direction. The inclusion of male coaches in decision-making may function to legitimize leadership in a space where hegemonic masculinity still defines who is seen as authoritative. In this way, collective leadership may be both a strategic choice and a necessary adaptation—allowing women to lead while mitigating the risk of being perceived as domineering or overstepping gendered expectations.

This complexity does not diminish their leadership but rather underscores how women's leadership in diasporic Tamil sport is both enacted and contested—shaped by cultural values, community dynamics, and persistent gender norms.

The hybrid models of leadership observed in Tamil grassroots sports leagues challenges dominant sport management theories including transformational and servant leadership by exposing their limitations in accounting for the complex, relational, and culturally embedded leadership practices found within these spaces. For example, servant leadership is a model of leadership whereby the leader's primary goal is to serve others, rather than accumulate power or control. Key features of servant leadership include empathy, listening, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, building community and considering the long-term impact of decisions (Greenleaf, 1970). And, although the sports leaders in Tamil grassroots leagues often embody

elements of servant leadership such as putting the needs of their communities first, leading through emotional labour, and ensuring others feel supported and included, servant leadership fails to acknowledge the diasporic, gendered, and racialized context of this population. Similarly, transformational leadership does not adequately consider context. Transformational leadership is an approach where leaders inspire, motivate, and elevate followers to achieve more than they thought possible. Key features of transformational leadership include leaders that act as role models, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and support for individuals' unique needs so they can reach their potential (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985). While some Tamil sport leaders reflect these traits, this framework misses the relational, care-based and culturally embedded leadership that Tamils (particularly Tamil women) enact. In fact, elements of transformational leadership such as visibility and assertiveness sit in contrast to the collective, more behind-the-scenes work in which many Tamil sport leaders engage.

While the intention of critiquing dominant frameworks in sport leadership is to assess their applicability in diasporic contexts such as Tamil grassroots sporting spaces, such critiques may risk unintentionally homogenizing Western models of leadership. The purpose is not to dismiss the diversity of Western models of leadership but to highlight how dominant models are frequently operationalized in ways that reinforce values in contrast to the relational, care-based, and culturally embedded leadership practices observed in Tamil grassroots sports spaces. By integrating postcolonial feminism and diasporic theory into the discussion of leadership, sport leadership is reframed as an act of cultural survival, moral obligation, and identity-making within diasporic communities shaped by trauma and displacement.

Hegemonic masculinity in Tamil Sporting Spaces

Women are underrepresented in leadership positions in diverse areas such as education, politics, and business. Women are also underrepresented in leadership positions within sport. Though considerable strides have been made and there are women who are visibly in positions of power, sport remains a heavily male dominated arena (Hall, 1990; Hovden and Pfister, 2006; M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016). Hegemonic masculinity in sport leadership refers to the

> set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy (Jewkes & Morell, 2012, p. 40).

Male hegemony is an artefact of the colonization and westernization of societies which is particularly poignant as ancient Tamil culture had many matriarchal principles (Fuglerud, 2001). As in many parts of Africa, in Sri Lanka "women's power in social institutions lasted until the introduction of the centralized administrative system by colonialists, which imposed male superiority ideologies and only recognized male authority" (M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016, p. 29). Colonialism led to the removal of women from positions of power and relegated them to the roles of wives or mothers (M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016). It could be argued therefore that Tamil women in sport leadership roles is one way that the diaspora resists colonialism. However, given that the Tamil population is diasporic and the community exists in a third space, Tamil sporting spaces in the GTA are also spaces of male hegemony.

Of the five leagues examined that serve Tamil women in the GTA, three of the leagues had leadership structures that were entirely comprised of men. Of the two remaining leagues (which

were also the only two leagues with coaches), women were represented within administrative roles but highly underrepresented in terms of coaching positions; there were only two women coaches (compared to the 50 or more men coaches). As demonstrated in Chapter 6, this is significant because in the leagues with coaches, true power and decision-making remained with the coaches. Moreover, as LaVoi and Dutove (2012) state:

> The importance of having females represented in positions of power in sport, particularly as coaches, has been argued by many researchers. A dearth of female role models in visible positions can lead to many unfavourable outcomes for girls and women, including […] an ability to challenge or resist negative stereotypes regarding gender and leadership (p. 18).

It is therefore important to consider the barriers and supports for women leaders in Tamil sporting spaces to hopefully increase the number of women in leadership roles.

Although LaVoi and Dutove's ecological model (introduced in Chapter 2) was developed specifically for female coaches, many of the supports and barriers identified are also relevant for women sport leaders generally, in the Tamil grassroots leagues (2012). Accordingly, LaVoi and Dutove's ecological model was adapted to identify the barriers and supports for women sport leaders in the Tamil grassroots leagues (see Figure 4).

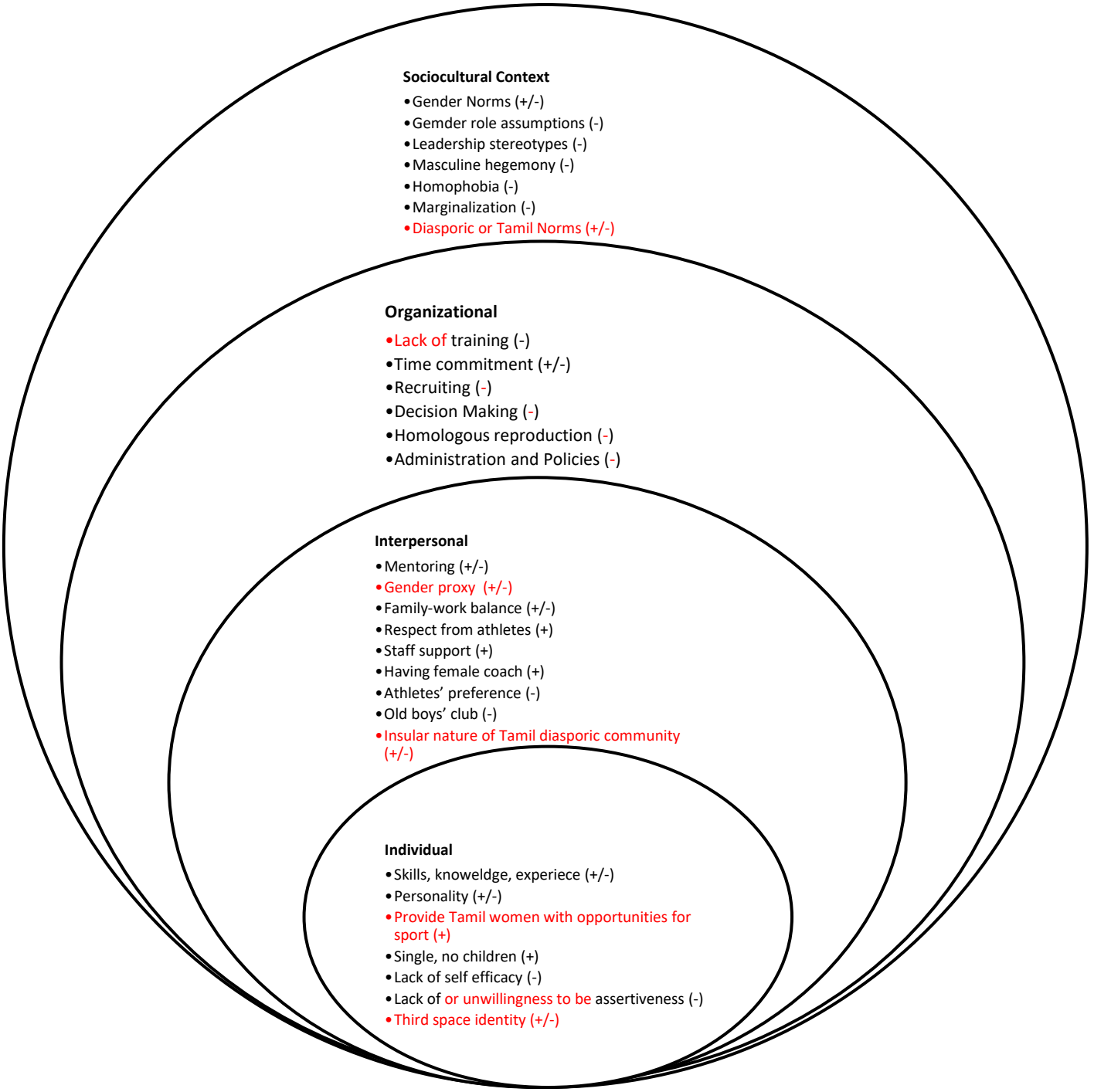

Figure 4: Adaptation of ecological model of barriers and support (LaVoi & Dutove 2012) for women sport leaders in the GTA Tamil grassroots sports leagues

Individual Level

As with LaVoi and Dutove's model, being single and not having children made it easier for women to take on leadership roles as they had more time to volunteer. Women sport leaders also said that they volunteered their time because they wanted to provide Tamil women with opportunities to engage in sport, which was often not available to them when they were younger which speaks to the cultural barriers and gender norms that exist within the Tamil community that made sport participation difficult for many women. Similar motivations were expressed by Maori women sport leaders who mentioned a "desire to develop and 'give back' to sport, Maori and/or women" (Palmer & Masters, 2010, p. 340). In that study, the authors attribute this to "particular [Maori] cultural norms around supporting and giving back to others" (Palmer & Masters, 2010, p. 340). As previously argued, this ethic of caring also likely exists within the Tamil community because diasporas are theorized as moral communities who feel a responsibility to help one another due to collective trauma and violence (Werbner, 2002; Jones, 2014).

Relatedly, another unique aspect of sport leadership for Tamil women is negotiating third space identity. Depending on the context, this could be a barrier or a support for women in these sporting spaces. On one hand, being with similar and familiar people may act as a support and on the other, tensions between host land and homeland styles of leadership may act as a barrier.

Previous skills, knowledge and experience with sports as either a leader or an athlete can also act as a support or a barrier. All of the women sports leaders had previous experience with sport before taking on leadership roles, which may have made them feel more confident (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). However, some of the women sport leaders pointed to negative experiences within Tamil sporting spaces when they were younger which made them hesitant to take on leadership

roles. Women's playing experience is also undervalued in relation to men's experience (Shaw & Amis, 2001, as cited in Shaw & Hoeber, 2003).

Perhaps the biggest barrier for Tamil women is the lack of self-efficacy. Several sports leaders spoke about their lack of confidence taking on leadership roles, especially in terms of coaching, despite having a high degree of athletic capital and knowledge. This may be a response

> to the everyday language and symbols used to reinforce the ideological gender beliefs held by society at large and within the sport context in such a manner as to self-limit themselves through the unconscious formation of identities consistent with ideological stereotypes and patriarchal dominance (Sartore and Cunningham, 2007, p. 245).

Finally, as in LaVoi and Dutove's (2012) ecological model, perceived lack of assertiveness is also a barrier. As Shaw and Hoeber (2003) write, "women who express masculinities challenge assumptions about what is acceptable behaviour for women [but t]hey also risk accusations of "acting like men" and may not necessarily be taken seriously in their roles" p. 352-3). However, in this context, an unwillingness to be assertive because of the intersection of cultural and gender norms is also important to consider.

Interpersonal Level

The interpersonal influences within the Tamil grassroots sporting spaces include, for example, fellow sport leaders and participants, referees, friends (or other people who come to watch games but do not participate in the league), a partner and parents. Mentoring acted as both a support and barrier to women leaders. Having a mentor and role model could help women be more effective leaders (Palmer & Masters, 2010); however, most of the mentors within Tamil sporting spaces were men.

The term "gender proxy" was added to the ecological model as both a support and a barrier and refers to the practice whereby Tamil women sport leaders seek out men allies who will advocate on their behalf when decision-making. A similar strategy was employed by Maori women sport leaders who "to resolve internal conflict when in the presence of older Maori males […] sought support from a *kaumatua* (elder with prestige) to speak on their behalf, and *tautoko* (support) their point of view" (Palmer & Masters, 2010, p. 340).

Respect from athletes – in terms of athletic prowess – is also seen as a support for Tamil women sport leaders; however, it is important to note that within Tamil sporting spaces, the same expectation does not exist for men sport leaders, particularly in terms of coaching, even amongst women sport leaders themselves. In other words, a man who is a sport leader or coach does not need to have athletic prowess to garner respect from athletes. Unfortunately, many women athletes prefer having male coaches (LaVoi & Dutove, 2012). The lack of female coaches is self-perpetuating as women athletes who are coached by men, are less likely to coach (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998 as cited in LaVoi & Dutove, 2012).

Finally, the insular nature of the Tamil diasporic community can act as a support or barrier. Many sport leaders alluded to the fact that the same individuals participate in multiple grassroots sports leagues so if conflict arises in one setting, this can carry over into other sporting spaces. Similarly, the social networks that are formed within sporting spaces exist outside of sports and so it is not uncommon to see other participants at social events such as weddings or birthday parties. The insular nature of these leagues can either support or deter women from taking up leadership positions.

Organizational Level

Within Tamil grassroots sporting spaces, there are very few organizational factors that support women leaders. Organizations that provide training and actively recruit women into sport leadership policies are more likely to gain and retain women sport leaders; however, this is not occurring within the Tamil grassroots sporting spaces and so these were listed as barriers. Decision-making is also listed as a barrier because very few women had power to make change. Homologous reproduction – the process by which a dominant group systematically reproduces itself by hiring and promoting others that are like them in some way – is also a barrier to women sport leaders (Whisenant & Mullane, 2007). The men sport leaders, who form the majority, are more likely to recruit their friends who are also men. Finally, as none of the organizations had gender equity policies in place, this is also listed as a barrier for women sport leaders.

Sociocultural Level

Gender norms and gender role assumptions can shape organizations like sport leagues. For instance, stereotypical beliefs paint women as socially-oriented with characteristics of being kind, and helpful, which undermine perceptions of competence and power. Men in contrast are stereotyped as achievement-oriented with characteristics of being confident, strong and independent which are associated with competence, power and higher societal status (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007). "Research also suggests these stereotypical characteristics not only represent the way men and women *do* act but also represent the way men and women *should* act. Thus, gender stereotypes are both descriptive and prescriptive in nature" (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007, p. 248). These stereotypes are also affected by context; for example, one's stereotypical belief that women do not possess the leadership abilities necessary to coach the sport of football or that it is

inappropriate for a female to coach men may not be salient unless in the context of football or sport in genera (Sartore & Cunningham, 2007).

Diasporic or Tamil norms were added to this level to speak to the unique cultural norms that exist within this space. For example, the concept of '*karpu'* which directly translates to chastity, more broadly "refers to a code of social conduct, in which the segregation of sexes and a restricted behaviour of women are central elements, a code expressing itself in an extreme female prudishness" (Fuglerud, 2001, p. 203). Characteristics such as "shyness, timidity, ignorance, passiveness, and obedience are regarded as ideal patterns of behaviour, or rather, the essential qualities of 'femininity' ascribed to virtuous women" (Ann, 1994, p. 56). Other diasporic or Tamil norms include: code-switching (i.e. mixing Tamil and English words when communicating with one another); religious or cultural dietary restrictions (e.g. fasting days, not eating beef, or "*saivam*"/vegetarian days); social and family structures (e.g. living in multigenerational homes); emphasis on education as a path to upward mobility; and community support networks that are based on Tamil identity constructs such as '*oor*' or the area from which your ancestors come.

It is important to acknowledge the supports and barriers that Tamil women sport leaders encounter at each of the four levels because as "Cornell (1995) pointed out, […] the discursive fields that are socially constructed in sport are often internalized by individuals in a manner that make them difficult to challenge or change" (Armstrong, 2007, p.13). Being able to reconfigure gender power relationships within diaspora requires sustained attention (George, 2011).

Integrating Postcolonial Feminism into the Ecological Model

LaVoi and Dutove's ecological mode was not originally developed with postcolonial feminism in mind – its adaptation in this study begins the process of decolonizing the framework – situating it within a diasporic, racialized, and gendered context. Specifically, the addition of

Tamil-specific sociocultural norms (e.g., *karpu*, *oor*, etc.) and diasporic third space identity offers a critical reframing that challenges Western assumptions embedded in many sport leadership models. This adaptation highlights how supports and barriers for women sport leaders cannot be fully understood without accounting for the layered impacts of race, culture, gender, migration, and colonial legacies (George, 2011; Spivak, 1988).

Future research should further this decolonizing effort by actively reshaping ecological models through a postcolonial feminist lens. For example, this could mean centering the relational and collectivist ways of leading that already exist in diasporic spaces like the ethic of care, emotional labour, and sense of responsibility to community that many Tamil women leaders spoke about (Werbner, 2002). Decolonizing also means challenging narratives that frame immigrant or diasporic communities as lacking, and challenging leadership standards that prioritize Western ideals of leadership and do not always align with how leadership is actually operating in diverse spaces (Eagly & Chin, 2010). Doing this would move ecological models beyond just listing supports and barriers and start to reposition them as tools for structural critique and innovation.

Sport Development versus Sport for Development

Tamil grassroots sports leagues sit at the intersection of two competing, but overlapping, paradigms: sport development and sport for development. On one hand, many sport leaders spoke about leadership credibility in ways that aligned with sport development – prior elite sport experience, credentials, and performance knowledge – as prerequisites for coaching and respect. However, this emphasis on credentials, while seemingly neutral, often reinforces gendered exclusions. If the pathways to gain this "experience" have historically excluded Tamil girls and women, then making it the baseline for leadership reinforces gender inequities (Coalter, 2007; Kay, 2009). A sport *for* development lens, by contrast, makes space for leadership as care,

relational and embedded in context and community – values that many of the Tamil women leaders embodied even if they were not recognized for it. Tamil women sport leaders were often creating inclusive sport spaces, building trust, and modeling leadership in ways that were impactful despite not having elite-level playing experience or the right kind of visibility (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Spaaij & Oxford, 2018). The tension between sport development and sport for development, or performance versus participation, has real implications for who gets to lead and what leadership is supposed to look like in Tamil diasporic sport spaces. In the absence of critical reflection, these leagues risk reproducing the gender hierarchies they seek to challenge.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored how grassroots Tamil sports organizations are critical spaces for redefining Tamil diasporic identity in the aftermath of displacement and conflict. Rooted in shared trauma—particularly the legacy of Black July—and shaped by the conditions of migration, resettlement, and marginalization in Canada, these sporting spaces are sites of identity negotiation and community building. These leagues enable second and 1.5 generation Tamils—often caught between a loss of connection to Sri Lanka and experiences of exclusion in Canadian society—to express and affirm their Tamilness through embodied, relational, and performative modes of identity.

Participation in these monoethnic leagues allows diasporic Tamils to build strong social networks and avoid marginalization and exclusion that they may experience from mainstream sport spaces. However, as the findings show, inequality also persists within these spaces; women are underrepresented in leadership and coaching roles and often must navigate barriers imposed by both diasporic cultural and gender norms. Despite these challenges, many Tamil women have taken up leadership roles within these leagues out of an ethic of care and a sense of collective

responsibility—both values rooted in diasporic moral frameworks. Their leadership often reflects hybrid models that blend collectivist Tamil Eelam teachings and outcome-oriented Western norms.

Ultimately, these grassroots leagues illustrate how sport functions not only as a site of physical activity but also as a vehicle for diasporic identity formation and leadership development. They demonstrate that, for diasporic communities, identity is not fixed but is continuously redefined in response to new contexts and challenges.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Introduction

This exploratory case study has revealed insights about sport leadership in the Tamil grassroots sports leagues in the GTA. This concluding chapter begins by presenting evidence for why the Sri Lankan Tamil population in the GTA is diasporic and the significance of this in terms of employing a postcolonial feminist and intersectional lens to understand the phenomena under study. Next, the chapter summarizes the experiences that led to the involvement of these Tamil sport leaders in the grassroots leagues, what sport leadership means within these spaces, the gendering and gendered nature of sport leadership and barriers that Tamil women face in sport leadership roles. This is followed by a discussion of the future of grassroots Tamil sports leagues, the limitations of this study and then, recommendations and next steps.

The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora

Diaspora was a term coined to describe the forced dispersion of Jewish peoples from their homeland during the Second World War but through time, this term has expanded to include other populations and conceptualizations of migration. Sri Lankan Tamils in the Greater Toronto Area are diasporic and Cohen's common features of diaspora can be used as a basis for arguing so (2008). Tamils were forced to emigrate because of growing ethnic tensions with the Sinhalese majority in Sri Lanka that led to oppression of Tamils and eventually genocide. Sri Lankan Tamils share a collective memory and myth about their homeland and the aspirational state of Tamil Eelam (Thurairajah, 2011). There is also shared trauma from the conflict that is transgenerational and transnational (O'Neill, 2015). Ties to the homeland (Tamil Eelam) by Tamils in the GTA has been demonstrated by financial support, the building of infrastructure in Tamil majority areas of Sri Lanka, volunteerism, and political efforts such as protests and sit-ins. There is also strong ethnic

group consciousness for Tamils in the GTA. Tamil parents encourage their children to participate in cultural activities such as Bharatanatyam (classical dance), Carnatic music classes, and religious and language instruction (DeVotta, 2009, as cited in O'Neill, 2015). Tamil Student Associations and Tamil organizations also help to strengthen Tamil identity in the GTA (Fugerlud, 2001; O'Neill, 2015; Pande, 2017). Racialization and low wage employment in the GTA have also weakened ties to the host land (Canada) thereby reinforcing Tamil identity (Pande, 2017). However, Tamils have established significant social support and capital networks in the GTA that are allowing the possibility to thrive in the host land (Aiken & Cheran, 2005, as cited in Sriskandarajah, 2008). The labelling of the LTTE, the "voice" of Sri Lankan Tamils, as a terrorist organization also served to further the social discrimination and exclusion experienced by Tamils in the GTA, which in turn strengthen Tamil identity and cohesiveness (Pande, 2017; Wayland, 2003). Tamils in the GTA are also connected to Tamils in other parts of Canada (e.g. Montreal) and other parts of the world (e.g. England, Norway, Germany, etc.) (Wayland, 2003). Taken together, it is clear that Sri Lankan Tamils in the GTA are diasporic.

Diasporic Consciousness

Tamils in the GTA experience diasporic consciousness and this is produced through difference – diasporic culture is Othered within host land (Canadian) culture (Malcolm, 2013). Often, this results in hybridity whereby diasporic identities are shaped by aspects of both host land and homeland cultures, so that a new hybrid identity evolves (Chambers, 1996 as cited in Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk, 2005). Tensions between reproduction and production can vary by first generation, 1.5 -generation and second-generation members of a diaspora (Agnew, 2005; Hall, 2010). But, 1.5- and second-generation Tamils are more likely to experience these tensions as they may not feel Tamil enough to identify with homeland culture but also feel marginalized in their

host land, despite adopting host identities (Zhou, 2001, as cited in Sriskandarajah, 2008). These individuals feel twoness – imperfectly Tamil and imperfectly Canadian – being inside and outside of an identity (Du Bois, 1994 as cited in Agnew, 2005; Gilroy, 1993).

Postcolonial Feminism- and Intersectionality-informed Exploratory Case Study

Establishing that GTA Tamils are diasporic and experience diasporic consciousness is essential to this study, as is the postcolonial feminist lens through which this study was conducted. Employing a postcolonial feminist theoretical framework requires one to address existing power hierarches that were created by colonialism and its patriarchal and Eurocentric perspectives (M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016). It seeks to uncover the voices of those who have been historically silenced in research and rejects the singular representation of the Third World woman as depicted in Western or first wave feminist texts (Mohanty, 2003). Resisting this singularity requires the use of intersectionality theory or the idea that social identities such as gender, class, ethnicity and sexuality, can interact so that a unique effect is produced (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Exploratory case studies are theory building – not theory affirming – and useful when there is no predetermined or single set of outcomes and the phenomenon of interest has not been previously explored (Eisenhardt, 2007; Yin, 2014). The methods used in this study included two 40-minute, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, a brief sociodemographic survey, and social media analysis. The theory, methodology and methods were chosen to answer the research questions put forth by this study:

1. What are the experiences of those who serve as sport leaders in the GTA Tamil community? In particular, what events and experiences led to their involvement with Tamil sport leagues?
2. What is sport leadership within the GTA Tamil sporting community?

3. What is the gendered and gendering nature of sport leadership in the GTA Tamil sport community?
4. What are the potential barriers that Tamils, and in particular Tamil women, experience in sport leadership and strategies to negotiate them?

Understanding the Experiences of Tamil Sport Leaders in the GTA

The sport leaders in this study were either second or 1.5 generation Tamils whose parents immigrated to Canada as refugees or through family reunification programs after the events of Black July. Generally, second generation and 1.5 generation Tamils were raised in multicultural neighbourhoods where their identities were shaped in relation to other minorities and to the majority stereotypical host land culture. Second and 1.5 generation Tamils experienced heightened marginalization because although they adopted host land identities and values, they continued to experience othering and discrimination (Sriskandarjah, 2008). Their early sporting experiences were mostly within the school system; however, during and in the years immediately after university, the sport leaders became involved with the grassroots Tamil sports leagues. In particular, Tamil Student Associations were a key driver of this involvement as they provided space for collective Tamil identity-making that Tamils wanted to continue after their university careers ended. The mishandling of the Tamil genocide in Sri Lanka by the Canadian government also reinforced Tamil identity and strengthened diasporic bonds. Together, these experiences led to the creation of the grassroots Tamil sports leagues.

Sport Leadership in the Tamil Diaspora

Generally, leadership refers to a process through which one person exercise influence over others, with the intention of achieving broader goals (Amaladass, 2007). However, leadership theories and definitions in the literature are predominantly Western (Chin, 2010). Understanding

Eelam Tamil leadership theories; however, is difficult as there is little written on the topic though two ancient texts prove useful. In the first, the *Tirrukkural*, the text identifies the characteristics of a good leader as being courageous, generous, knowledgeable, easy to access, among others. The text also describes how decisions should be made (Amaladass, 2007). The second relevant text is the *Bhagavad Gita*. This text says that a good leader is one that exhibits 'servant leadership' (i.e. must be eager to serve their followers), generosity, and considerate decision-making (Nayak, 2018). The cultural foundations of Tamil Eelam leadership contrasts to that of Western models. For diasporic Tamils, the possibility of a hybrid model of leadership emerges.

Within the Tamil grassroots sports leagues that serve women, there are two models of leadership. The leagues that serve only women practice collective leadership (with women and men in leadership positions), whereas the leagues that were co-ed or mainly catered to men had a single leader (who was a man). In the leagues where collective leadership was practiced, the women held positions that were responsible for operations, administration and conflict resolution whereas the men were mostly coaches and responsible for training the women participants. These men were often highly involved in decision-making of the league. Although this type of leadership appears reflective of Eelam Tamil leadership, this collective leadership is used as a tactic by women sport leaders in these diasporic sporting spaces to avoid being perceived as dominant or aggressive and to make decisions in a diplomatic way.

Gendered and Gendering Nature of Sport Leadership

Hegemonic masculinity permeates these Tamil sporting spaces and helps to explain the underrepresentation of Tamil women in sport leadership. Hegemonic masculinity in sport leadership refers to a system of values created by men that operates to include or exclude individuals and organizes society in a way that perpetuates gender inequality (Jewkes & Morell,

2012). From a postcolonial feminist lens, it is important to acknowledge that hegemonic masculinity is an artefact of colonization (Fuglerud, 2001). Colonialism removed women from positions of power and relegated them to the roles of wives or mothers (M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2016). Indeed, ancient Tamil culture had many matriarchal principles (Fuglerud, 2001). It could be argued therefore that Tamil women in sport leadership roles is one way that the diaspora resists colonialism. However, being that the Tamil population is diasporic and the community exists in a third space, Tamil sporting spaces in the GTA are also spaces of male hegemony.

Negotiating Barriers and Mobilizing Supports to Tamil Women in Sport Leadership

Tamil women in sport leadership face many of the same barriers as other women in sport leadership; however, there are barriers and supports that are unique. At the individual level, Tamil women expressed a desire to be sport leaders to provide spaces for other Tamil women to participate in sport. This may reflect the sense of responsibility to help one another that diasporic individuals may feel because of collective memory of forced displacement (Werbner, 2002; Jones, 2014). Tamil women must also negotiate third space identity within the sporting context – which may be a barrier or support. And finally, Tamil women may be unwilling to be assertive because of Tamil cultural and gender norms that tell women to behave modestly and gently. At the interpersonal level, it is important to acknowledge two factors that affect Tamil women. Tamil women sport leaders seek out male allies, or a 'gender proxy' who will advocate on their behalf when decision-making and circumvent hegemonic masculinity. The insular nature of the Tamil diasporic sporting community can act as either a support or a barrier; conflicts that arise in one setting can carry over into other sporting spaces and into personal lives. At the organizational level, there is a lack of culturally-specific training available to Tamil women sport leaders. And finally,

at the sociocultural level, there are diasporic or Tamil norms that must be considered, which may enable or hinder women in sport leadership.

Limitations of the Study

An exploratory case study was chosen for this study because the phenomenon of study had not been previously explored and it was felt that privileging the voices of those who had been traditionally silenced required exploration rather than illustration or investigation. The "greatest pitfall in the exploratory study is prematurity: the findings may seem convincing enough to be released inappropriately as conclusions" (Davey, 1991, p. 1). Although there is a need for further research, the number of sport leaders engaged in this study lends confidence to the insights gleaned in this study.

Another limitation of this study could be inadequate representation of diversity (Davey, 1991). In particular, there was a lack of diversity in terms of LGBTQ+ voices in this study which is particularly poignant given the focus of gender on sport leadership within the community. Additionally, as participants were recruited by word of mouth, elements of social identity and/or Tamil identity such as class, *oor*, and caste may not accurately reflect the makeup of grassroots sports league leadership – though at the time of data collection, most sport leaders were consulted.

Reflecting on Reflexivity and My Role as the Researcher

Because this study was informed by a postcolonial feminist framework, this research was deeply informed by an ethic of reflexivity, which acknowledged that no knowledge is created in a vacuum. "The researcher herself is never 'outside' the research process or separated from the research subjects as 'objective' observer," making reflexivity a necessary part of ethical inquiry (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2012, p. 578). My positionality as a member of the Tamil diaspora, woman, and

former participant and leader in Tamil grassroots sports organizations in the GTA is both an advantage and limitation for this study.

My positionality as an insider researcher allowed for a level of relational depth and understanding with participants that may not have been possible for an outsider. Shared cultural background, familiarity with sporting contexts, language and social norms created an environment where participants could speak freely. The use of Tamil words, references to religious practices, knowledge of family dynamics, and understanding of frustrations with exclusion in mainstream sporting spaces often came with the implicit assumption that "you get it" (D'Silva et al., 2016). My positionality allowed for more nuanced interpretation of data but most importantly, it gave participants a sense of being heard by someone from their own community which is important for research that seeks to centre marginalized voices (Berger, 2013).

However, greater familiarity with a phenomenon under study can result in increased risk of the researcher making assumptions based on their prior knowledge and experiences rather than the data and what their participant is saying (DeLyser, 2001). To negate this, I employed a tactic suggested by Chavez (2008) that the researcher ask the participant to pretend that they are talking about this topic for the first time. Insider research is also said to be inherently biased because the topic of study is of personal interest to the researcher and the study participants are colleagues (Van Heugten, 2004, as cited in Greene, 2014). But "insider researchers mustn't fear bias" (Green, 2014, p. 4) as "the insiders' biases may be a source of insight as well as error" (Aguiler, 1981, p. 26, as cited in Greene, 2014). Insider researchers must be aware of the potential for bias and take steps to ensure that this addressed. Gaining access to information can also be challenging for insider researchers as participants may feel uncomfortable sharing information or criticizing colleagues (Bell, 2005 as cited in, Greene, 2014). It is important to acknowledge power. Although

the study participants are fellow sport leaders, there may be differences in social identities (e.g. age, level of education, experience within Tamil sports leagues, etc.) that act to empower or disempower insider researchers (Greene, 2014). And while my diasporic identity gave me insight, it positioned me within a specific segment of the Tamil diaspora: Canadian-born, university-educated, and heteronormative. My understanding of cultural factors such as caste, language and religion is partial. Together these factors shape how I interpret the experiences of others in the diaspora – particularly those who belong to very different segments of the diaspora to me – which means that there is potential that I have missed certain nuances within the community (Temple & Young, 2004; Berger, 2013).

However, I would argue that acknowledging and considering these dynamics through reflexivity ultimately adds to the strength of this study. Reflexivity allowed me to make transparent the ways in which my positionality shaped not only the research questions I asked, but also how I made meaning of, and represented, the voices of participants (Berger, 2013; Sandelowski, 1993). Rather than aiming for "objectivity" which postcolonial feminism rightly critiques, this thesis embraces a situated perspective. My prior knowledge and experiences within the community allowed for insights that might have gone unnoticed, but it did require continuous self-awareness. As Pillow (2003) and Probst (2015) caution, reflexivity can become confessional or superficial if not done with rigour. But when practiced thoughtfully, it provides deeper, more trustworthy findings and encourages researchers to be accountable for the knowledge they are co-creating (Berger, 2013).

The Silences that Matter: Reflections on What Wasn't Said

The silences in the data – things that were glossed over, left unspoken, or did not come up at all – are just as important for analysis. Within this study for example, issues like caste, queerness,

disability, and mental health, all of which intersect with gender, diaspora, and leadership remained mostly unaddressed by participants. For example, although I identify as *Siviyar* caste and made that clear in my positionality, caste only came up in one participant interview which suggests that caste is less relevant in the Canadian diasporic sporting context but may also point to discomfort with the topic. Similarly, sexuality and queerness did not surface for the majority of sport leaders, even in conversations about inclusion or safety in sport spaces. Mental health in terms of burnout, trauma, or emotional exhaustion from community labour, was hinted at but never deeply explored. These silences do not negate the validity of what was shared, but they do point to areas where future research could go deeper.

The Future of Tamil Grassroots Sports Leagues

Following COVID-19, there was uncertainty surrounding the future of the grassroots sports leagues; however, there has been an overall increase in the number of leagues catering to Tamil women in the GTA, even though the leadership for these leagues remains predominantly male. While one of the women-only leagues discussed in this study is no longer operating, three more leagues have been emerged in recent years: a volleyball league, a soccer league and an organization that offers multiple sports such as badminton, basketball, volleyball and soccer. These developments suggest a continued appetite for Tamil-centered sporting spaces. Notably, there has been a shift toward a greater focus on competitiveness, although all skill levels are still welcomed.

As the community evolves, one of the central challenges for sustainability will be the engagement of third- and fourth-generation Tamil youth. These younger generations may feel less tethered to monoethnic leagues and more drawn to leagues that are geographically convenient or offer higher competitive standards. In this context, incorporating a positive youth development (PYD) approach may offer a meaningful way forward. PYD emphasizes the importance of

fostering confidence, character, connection, competence, and contribution among youth (Lerner et al., 2005). Grassroots sports leagues have the potential to serve as PYD environments by cultivating culturally grounded spaces that empower Tamil youth, especially girls, to build leadership capacity, develop socioemotional skills, and contribute meaningfully to their communities. As such, Tamil grassroots leagues should consider intentionally integrating PYD principles into their programming – such as through mentorship structures, youth advisory roles, and leadership pathways – to ensure that participation remains meaningful beyond athletic performance. These strategies may also encourage greater long-term investment in these spaces from youth who might otherwise feel disconnected from monoethnic sport. It would be important to also account for the potential limits of PYD, and just as ecological models could offer a more critical analysis by applying a postcolonial lens, our understanding of PYD may also benefit from a decolonizing imperative that could result in more meaningful application for Tamil youth. Despite some limitations in reach and infrastructure, the ongoing expansion of Tamil grassroots leagues suggests a promising future. Embedding PYD into their sporting structures could enhance sport participation and broader outcomes such as leadership development, cultural connection, and community health and resilience.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Prevailing views that sport and athleticism are inherently masculine have resulted in "limitations on sports programming, roles in sport participation and leadership, and career advancement for all women who do enter the sports system, and racialized women are especially excluded due to the confluence of sexism and racism" (Joseph et al., 2022, p. 868). Literature has shown that South Asian girls participate in lower levels of physical activity than boys because of family and peer relationships, cultural factors and religion (Ramanathan, 2011). Rathanswami and

colleagues offered four solutions for increasing participation of South Asian women in sport: increasing the number of sporting programs close to home; making these opportunities affordable; having female only spaces; and, allowing more flexibility for different clothing choices so women could feel comfortable (2016). Because these sporting spaces are rare for South Asian women, they are less likely to participate in sport and therefore less likely to gain the sport-specific skills that would empower them to take on sport leadership roles. Improving access to sporting spaces early on, would encourage more South Asian and Tamil women to take on sport leadership roles.

Providing leadership training and development opportunities may also empower Tamil women to take on more leadership roles and improve their self-efficacy. However, such training must be critically designed to avoid reproducing Eurocentric and masculinist models of leadership that emphasize dominance, individualism, and visibility (Eagly & Chin, 2010; Sanchez-Runde, Nardon, & Steers, 2011). Instead, culturally relevant leadership development should centre relational, community-oriented, and collective approaches that reflect the lived experiences of diasporic Tamil women. Programs grounded in transformational or servant leadership models—both of which emphasize ethical responsibility, empathy, and the empowerment of others—may offer a more inclusive foundation (Greenleaf, 1977; Chin, 2010). Additionally, training should create space for women to critically reflect on gendered expectations and build confidence navigating contested leadership spaces, particularly those shaped by hegemonic masculinity (Ammerman & Groysberg, 2021).

Mentorship and guidance within this community may be beneficial but the reliance on Tamil men to take on leadership roles, including mentorship, within Tamil sporting spaces must be questioned. However, men who are already in leadership positions within these spaces, would also benefit from leadership training and development in the areas of equity and diversity so they

could better understand the gendered and gendering nature of sport leadership. But if these grassroots sports leagues truly want to empower more women to take on leadership roles, then making these spaces women-only and only having women in leadership positions may be the best solution.

Despite growing conversations around gender equity in sport, South Asian women – including Tamil women – remain largely absent from leadership and policy-making spaces in Canada. South Asian women may also experience burnout from trying to access male-dominated sporting spaces and change policies and practices that empower men (Joseph et al., 2022). In the future, working groups and policies that tackle issues of gender equity in sport in Canada should be more inclusive of diverse voices such as Tamil women. For example, "there appeared to be no Asian representation on the 12-member federal Working Group on Gender Equity in Sport […] Women from those communities should be at the table to address the underrepresentation of Asian women in sport participation, leadership, and research" (Joseph et al., 2022, p. 875). It is worth noting that although in Canadian contexts 'Asian' typically refers those of East Asian descent (e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Mongolian, North Korean, South Korean and Taiwanese), this study uses the term 'Asian' to capture anyone from the continent of Asia (e.g. Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, etc.)

There is also a lack of research on how racialization intersects with other social identities for women in Canada in terms of their participation in sport. For example, the Canadian Women in Sport Rally Report indicates that their data are not able to comment on how ethnicity, diasporic identity, ability, and sexual orientation intersect with gender to create barriers to participation in sport. More research is needed to understand these barriers so that appropriate solutions can be devised (Joseph et al., 2022).

It is also important to recognize that participation and leadership opportunities are deeply influenced by municipal and institutional sport policies. For example, the way that gym or field bookings are administered through legacy systems often privileges long-established groups, making it harder for newer, racialized, or diasporic leagues to access space (Field, 2020). Policies around catchment areas, priority user groups, and equitable access frameworks can further shape who has access to recreational infrastructure, and by extension, who can build consistent programming and leadership pipelines (Misener & Doherty, 2014; Joseph, Velasco, & Balyi, 2022). As such, geographic and municipal policies must be part of any meaningful conversation about building more inclusive sport systems for diasporic communities. Advocating for policy reform – such as equitable booking systems, flexible access to spaces based on demographic needs, and funding allocation that accounts for racial equity – is critical to ensuring Tamil sports leagues can continue to grow and support leadership development among women and youth.

Tackling the underrepresentation of Tamil women in sport leadership positions is important for improving rates of sports participation for Tamil women and girls and achieving equity. This study's exploration of sport leadership within the Tamil grassroots sports leagues in the GTA revealed the interactions between diaspora, gender, and sport, and will hopefully spur further exploration of the topic including the need to decolonize and diversify our views of what good leadership is.

Appendices

Appendix A: Initial Recruitment Request (via Instagram)

Hi there!

My name is Gobi Sriranganathan and I'm a PhD student at York University studying Tamil grassroots sport leadership in the GTA. My research explores how Tamil sport leaders—especially second and 1.5 generation youth—experience leadership, navigate cultural identity, and address gendered barriers in community sport.

I'm currently looking to connect with Tamil sport leaders in the GTA, and I'd love to hear your thoughts or learn who you think are key figures shaping the Tamil sport community. If you're open to it, I'd also love to chat more about your own experience or the work you've seen in your league or sport circle.

Thanks so much for your time and for all the work you do to grow community through sport!

– Gobi

Appendix B: Recruitment Request for Participants (known to researcher)

Hey [Name]!

Hope you're doing well! I'm reaching out because I'm currently working on my PhD at York University, focusing on Tamil grassroots sport leadership here in the GTA. The research looks at how second and 1.5 generation Tamil sport leaders experience leadership, build community, and navigate identity—especially around gender and diaspora.

I'm connecting with folks who are involved in the Tamil sport community, and I'd love to talk to you more about your experiences, or even hear your thoughts on others who are playing key leadership roles.

Let me know if you'd be open to chatting sometime soon. Appreciate your time—and everything you do to support the community through sport!

Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Dear [Name],

I'm reaching out on behalf of Gobi Sriranganathan, a PhD student in Kinesiology and Health Science at York University, who is conducting a research study on Tamil grassroots sport leadership in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

This study explores the experiences of second and 1.5 generation Tamil sport leaders—people who have taken on leadership roles in community leagues or organizations—and how identity, gender, and diaspora shape leadership in Tamil sport spaces. The research also aims to understand the barriers Tamil leaders may face, especially Tamil women, and how they navigate them.

Gobi is currently looking to speak with individuals who:

- Identify as Tamil
- Are based in the Greater Toronto Area
- Have experience leading, organizing, or supporting Tamil sport teams, leagues, or events

If you or someone you know fits this description and may be interested in participating in an interview or learning more, please feel free to get in touch with Gobi directly at gsrirang@yorku.ca or gobi.sriranganathan@gmail.com.

Your voice and leadership are deeply valued and can help contribute to a better understanding of how Tamil sport communities are shaped and sustained.

Thank you for considering and for all the work you do in community sport.

Warm regards,
[Your Name]

Appendix D: Recruitment Text for Snowball Sampling

Hi [Name],

Thanks so much for being open to connecting! I wanted to formally introduce myself – I'm Gobi Sriranganathan and I'm a PhD student at York University doing a study on Tamil grassroots sport leadership in the GTA. I'm speaking with Tamil sport leaders about their experiences, the role of culture and identity, and how gender shows up in community sport spaces.

[Mutual contact's name] mentioned that you've been involved in sport leadership and thought you'd have valuable insights to share. I'd love to tell you more about the study and see if you might be open to participating in my study.

Let me know if that sounds okay — and if there is a time that works for us to get on a quick call! Thanks again for your time!

Appendix E: Study Participants

Participant Name (Alias)	Age Range (years)	Country of Birth	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Brief Description of Involvement with Tamil Sport Leagues
Ravi	35-39	Sri Lanka	Man	Heterosexual	Part of the leadership of multiple Tamil sports league; coach in multiple Tamil leagues; participant in multiple Tamil leagues
Devi	30-34	Canada	Woman	Heterosexual	Part of the leadership of one Tamil sport league; participant in multiple Tamil leagues
Shalini	35-39	Sri Lanka	Woman		Coach in one Tamil sport league; participant in multiple Tamil leagues
Nilani	25-29	Canada	Woman	Heterosexual	Participant in multiple Tamil sport leagues; well-respected as an athlete and often, captain
Mythili	40-44	Sri Lanka	Woman	Heterosexual	Participant in multiple Tamil sport leagues; social organizer
Yalini	30-34	Canada	Woman	Heterosexual	Part of the leadership of one Tamil sport league; coach in one Tamil league; participant in multiple Tamil leagues
Pavithra	35-39	Sri Lanka	Woman	Heterosexual	Involved early on in Tamil sports leagues; participant in one Tamil league
Anush	30-34	Sri Lanka	Man	Heterosexual	Coach in one Tamil sport league; participant in multiple Tamil leagues
Dhana	30-34	Sri Lanka	Woman	Heterosexual	Part of the leadership of one Tamil sport league; participant in one Tamil league
Vetri	30-34	Canada	Man	Heterosexual	Coach in multiple Tamil sport leagues
Mohan	25-29	Canada	Man	Heterosexual	Coach in one Tamil sport league
Vijay	25-29	Canada	Man	Heterosexual	Coach in one Tamil sport league
Navira	25-29	Canada	Woman	Heterosexual	Part of the leadership of one Tamil sport league; participant in multiple Tamil leagues
Thinesh	40-44	Sri Lanka	Man	Heterosexual	Involved early on in Tamil sports leagues; part of the leadership of one Tamil league; participant in one Tamil league

Anjali	30-34	Canada	Woman	Heterosexual	Part of the leadership of one Tamil sport league; participant in multiple Tamil leagues
Jegan	30-34	Canada	Man	Heterosexual	Coach in one Tamil sport league
Navin	30-34	Canada	Man	Heterosexual	Coach in one Tamil sport league
Meena	30-34	Canada	Woman	Heterosexual	Part of the leadership of one Tamil sport league; participant in multiple Tamil leagues
Sangavi	35-39	Sri Lanka	Woman	Heterosexual	Part of the leadership of one Tamil sport league; participant in multiple Tamil leagues
Harini	30-34	Canada	Woman	Heterosexual	Part of the leadership of one Tamil sport league; participant in one Tamil s league
Vithuran	35-39	Sri Lanka	Man	Heterosexual	Part of the leadership of one Tamil sport league; coach in one Tamil league; participant in multiple Tamil leagues
Bhuvana	30-34	Canada	Woman	Heterosexual	Part of the leadership of one Tamil sport league; participant in multiple Tamil leagues

Appendix F: Semi-structured Interview Guide

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. As outlined in the email, I am interested in learning about you as a leader in the Tamil sports community and how and why you became involved with the Tamil sports community. This conversation should take approximately an hour. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Opening Question

1. To start, can you tell me about your sport involvement?
    - **a.** When would you say you first became involved with sports?
    - **b.** What sports were you involved with?
    - **c.** Were you involved as a participant?
    - **d.** Were you involved as a leader?
    - **e.** Were you involved in mixed sport leagues? Tamil sport leagues?
    - **f.** When did you become involved with Tamil sports leagues?

Questions

2. How did you become involved in sports?
    - **a.** As a participant?
    - **b.** As a leader?
3. What has kept you involved with sport?
4. [If prior experience as a participant in mixed league indicated] What was your experience as a Tamil person participating in a mixed sport league?
5. [If prior experience as a leader in mixed league indicated] What was your experience as a Tamil person being a leader in a mixed sport league?
6. How did you become involved with Tamil sports leagues?
    - **a.** Where did you find out about Tamil sports leagues?
    - **b.** What made you want to become involved?
7. What is the role of Tamil sport leagues for Tamil people living in the GTA?
    - **a.** How did it come to play this role?
    - **b.** Are there other institutions in the Tamil community that serve similar roles? How is sport different?
8. What are the benefits of participating in a Tamil sports league?
    - **a.** For you?
    - **b.** For others?
9. What are the disadvantages of participating in a Tamil sports league?
    - **a.** For you?
    - **b.** For others?
10. What does leadership in sport mean to you? How did you come to think of sport leadership in this way?

    a. How would you differentiate someone who is a sport leader from someone who is not?
11. Can you describe your experience as a Tamil sports leader?
    a. How long have you been a sport leader?
    b. What leagues or sports are you involved with?
12. What is your approach to leadership in sport?
    a. How did you develop this philosophy?
13. Are there differences between a leader in a Tamil sports league and a leader in a mixed sports league?
    a. Are there different traits/characteristics to be successful?
        i. Why or why not?
    b. Are there traits that would make you successful in one league and unsuccessful in the other?
        i. Why or why not?
14. What does the leadership structure look like in your Tamil sports league?
    a. Based on your knowledge, is this similar to other Tamil sports leagues?
15. How do you recruit participants to your Tamil sports league?
16. How do you recruit leaders to your Tamil sports league?
17. Did you have any sport leadership mentors? How did the process of mentorship work within the Tamil sport leagues context?
18. What are some of the challenges have you faced as a leader in the Tamil sports community?
19. [If challenges faced] Can you walk be through how you were able to negotiate these challenges?
    a. What strategies?
    b. What resources? (e.g. social networks, other leaders, etc.)
20. As a woman/man, how do you think your experience as a sport leader in the Tamil community differs from a man/woman?
    a. Why do you think that is?
21. Are there aspects of your gender identity that influence how you lead in the Tamil sports community?
    a. Do you behave a certain/different way in this context versus others?
22. What do you think the future of Tamil sport leagues is?
23. How do you think sport leadership in the Tamil community will look in the future?

Closing

24. Is there anything else you would like to add?
25. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you so much for agreeing to do this interview. In terms of next steps, I will transcribe this interview verbatim and then will analyze it by looking for key themes. Once this is done, I will send the transcript, as well as my interpretation what the key themes are, to you so that you can be confirm whether or not I have accurately captured your words and meanings. Thanks again!

Appendix G: Pre-Interview Survey

Hello!

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I am interested in learning about you, as a sports leader in the Tamil community, and your experiences. This survey will take no longer than 5 minutes and will help contextualize this study. **This survey is private and confidential**. Your name will never be attached to the results of this survey so please answer all of the questions as truthfully and completely as possible.

Thank you!

[All answers are open-text to allow participant flexibility in their answers]

1. First name?
2. Last name?
3. Date of birth?
4. Country of birth?
5. Gender?
6. Sexual orientation? [Leave blank if you prefer not to say]

[End of survey]

Appendix H: Informed Consent Form

Date: TBD

Study Name: Sport leadership in the Greater Toronto Area Tamil diaspora: Exploring the production of sport leaders in Tamil grassroots sports organizations

Researcher name:
Principal Investigator - Gobi Sriranganathan, PhD Candidate
Socio-cultural Study of Sport, Kinesiology & Health Science, York University
gsrirang@yorku.ca

Purpose of the Research
This study aims to document the experience of those who serve as sport leaders in the GTA Tamil community – paying particular attention to the events and experiences that led to their involvement with Tamil sport leagues and the gendered and gendering nature of sport leadership in this community. Postcolonial feminism and intersectionality theory will inform data collection and analysis; findings will be presented and reported as a thesis and may be presented at a conference and/or reported in an article.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:
Research participants will be asked to fill out a brief sociodemographic survey before participating in two semi-structured interviews. The total length of time for participation in this study should not exceed 75 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts:
We do not foresee any risks or discomfort from your participation in the research.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal
Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

Confidentiality:
Surveys will be administered online using Survey Monkey. Digital data, such as audio recordings from the interview, memo notes, and survey data, will be password protected and stored on a personal computer and an external hard drive in a home office behind a locked door. Only the principal investigator will have access to this information. Digital data will be stored until January 1, 2032 and then will be deleted from both the computer and external hard drive. All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest

extent possible by law.

The data collected in this research project may be used – in an anonymized form - by members of the research team in subsequent research investigations exploring similar lines of inquiry. Such projects will still undergo ethics review by the HPRC, our institutional REB. Any secondary use of anonymized data by the research team will be treated with the same degree of confidentiality and anonymity as in the original research project.

The researcher acknowledges that the host of the online survey (i.e. Survey Monkey) may automatically collect participant data without their knowledge (i.e., IP addresses). Although this information may be provided or made accessible to the researchers, it will not be used or saved without participant's consent on the researchers' system. Further, because this project employs e-based collection techniques, data may be subject to access by third parties as a result of various security legislation now in place in many countries and thus *the confidentiality and privacy of data cannot be guaranteed during web-based transmission.*

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at gsrirang@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Yuka Nakamura at nakamura@yorku.ca and/or 416-736-2100 x22372.You may also contact the Graduate Program in Kinesiology and Health Science at kahs@yorku.ca and/or 416-736-5728.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____, consent to participate in the study of Sport leadership in the Greater Toronto Area Tamil diaspora conducted by Gobi Sriranganathan. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Participant

Signature_____ **Date**_____
Principal Investigator

Additional consent (where applicable)

1. **Audio recording**

☐ I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

Signature_____ **Date**_____

2. **Video recording or use of photographs**

I _____ consent to the use of images of me (including photographs, video and other moving images), my environment and property in the following ways (please check all that apply):

In academic articles	☐ N	☐ Y
In print, digital and slide form	☐ N	☐ Y
In academic presentations	☐ N	☐ Y
In media	☐ N	☐ Y
In thesis materials	☐ N	☐ Y

Signature_____ **Date**_____

3. **Translator**

☐ If applicable, I consent to presence of a translator during my interview(s) and subsequent translation(s) of my interviews into English.

Signature_____ **Date**_____

Appendix I: Email to initiate participation in study

Subject: Next Steps for Tamil Sport Leadership Study

Dear [Participant's Name],

Thank you again for signing and returning the consent form. I truly appreciate your willingness to be part of this research, and I'm looking forward to learning from your experiences.

As a next step, we'll set up a time for our first interview. This will be a conversational, semi-structured interview that explores your involvement involvement in sports generally and then the Tamil grassroots sports leagues. A second, follow-up interview will take place shortly after which will focus on leadership within these sporting spaces.

Before we schedule the first interview, I'd be grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete this short survey, which will help provide important sociodemographic context for the study:

[Survey Link]

To briefly reiterate, this study explores the experiences of second and 1.5 generation Tamil sport leaders in the Greater Toronto Area. It seeks to understand how Tamil identity, gender dynamics, and postcolonial histories shape leadership in grassroots sport spaces—and how individuals like yourself are building community and navigating barriers.

Thank you again for contributing to this work. Please feel free to reply to this email with your availability over the next week or two so we can schedule your first interview. If you have any questions in the meantime, don't hesitate to reach out.

Warm regards,
Gobi Sriranganathan
PhD Candidate, Kinesiology & Health Science
York University
gsrirang@yorku.ca

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