Traditional Indigenous Forms of Gambling and Games

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Abstract

There is limited research that explores Indigenous gambling and gaming, and the research that does exist focuses primarily on problem gambling and addiction. Western understandings of gambling are not an appropriate lens to provide a full understanding of the cultural depth and meaning behind traditional Indigenous games. Indigenous gaming has existed since pre-colonization and occurs in many Indigenous cultures throughout North America. The following research project explores traditional Blackfoot forms of gambling and games. The current study used a mixed methods approach to collect data on Blackfoot traditional games and forms of gambling. The first method was an anonymous, online survey that collected data on games played today and demographics. The second method was key informant interviews with Elders from the local Blackfoot community and collected data regarding the traditional context of Blackfoot games. Survey results indicate that the most common game still played today is handgame. Interview results corroborate this finding. Results of the interviews, drawn from a thematic analysis performed in NVivo 12, show that gambling, types of games and their rules, evident change, and relationships are the most prominent themes surrounding traditional games. Traditional games are multifaceted at their core and serve various meaningful purposes in the lives of players, with the majority of players viewing games positively. Through a combination of scientific methods and Indigenous ways of knowing comes a history of Blackfoot gaming, from tradition, through colonization, to the post-colonial present day – in which these games continue to provide a connection to culture, spirituality, and community for Blackfoot Peoples. By considering traditional games and forms of gambling from an Indigenous perspective, further research can be better informed when engaging with Indigenous populations and exploring Indigenous-related topics.

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Preface

Most of the literature regarding Indigenous games cites Stewart Culin's (1907) *Games of the North American Indians* as a primary source. For the purpose of this research, I will not be using this source. Culin (1907) utilizes harmful colonizing language throughout his book, perpetuating outdated stereotypes and misrepresentative discourse of Indigenous practices. Such examples include ascribing the modern transmission of particular games to be the result of "the abolition of tribal wars" (p. 32), describing games played during ceremony as "pleasing to the gods" (p. 34), asserting that songs sung during games were "once doubtless incantations" (p. 44), and stating that aspects of dice games are "curious and arbitrary" (p. 61). By doing so, Culin (1907) maintains the false narrative that Indigenous peoples are primitive and at risk of extinction. He refers to Western society as "our own civilization" (p. 715), implying that Indigenous Peoples are neither civilized nor members of the enduring North American nations. In contrast to what Culin (1907) says: "Games of pure skill and calculation, such as chess, are entirely absent" (p. 31), handgame is considered to be a game of logic, strategy, skill development, and cultivation of sophisticated wit and cognition.

Although his descriptions are "typical of his time" (Green, p. 335), it would be a disservice to the Elders who offered their wisdom for this project and to Indigenous ways of knowing and being to reference this source. Blanchard (1994) says of Culin's (1907) book: "to suggest that strategy is somehow absent in the games of North Americans is to misunderstand the complexity of those games" (p. 551).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Figure 1: *Untitled* [Painting depicting traditional handgame], painted by Floyd Thomas aka "Tiny Man" Heavy Runner. Blackfeet Aamssaapikani (Southern Piegan) from Heart Butte Montana.

Indigenous games have been an integral part of many Indigenous cultures across the globe throughout history. Countless different games are known to have been played (McGowan et al., 2001; Sommerfeldt, 2005), some of which no longer exist today due to the harmful influences of colonization. The purpose of games varies by type and purpose – games can involve physical ability, guessing or chance, and gambling and are often played recreationally (Williams et al., 2011) or to develop vital life skills, such as hunting (Sommerfeldt, 2005). The most popular game today is handgame, known in Blackfoot as pi'ksíkahtssin or naatoyípi'ksikkahtssin (feather game, lit: holy hand-game) (Blackfoot Dictionary, 1995). Sommerfeldt (2005) describes a game called "hands" as being traditionally played by the Blackfoot Peoples, and whose rules resemble

those of what is called handgame today. Other games, involving the development of hunting skills or use of traditional materials, such as those which would have been sourced by buffalo, have been lost as a result of colonization.

With the settler colonial encounter came forced assimilation, including the banning of cultural practices and threats of physical harm, imprisonment, and even death when caught engaging in those cultural practices, and the loss of several aspects of Indigenous cultures. This is also referred to as cultural genocide (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Despite the Canadian government's "assault on Aboriginal culture, language, spiritual beliefs, and practices," (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2012, p. 10) some games are still practiced today – these include most prominently handgame (also known as stick game, bone game, lahal, and slahal) and feather game. This is a testament to the resilience, resurgence, and strength of Indigenous Peoples and their inherent rights to language, social structures, and cultural practices that contribute to the overall well-being of their communities.

Placing bets has played a role in many traditional games and is a current practice among certain games played in the modern era, such as the previously mentioned handgame and Indian Relay Races, a high risk and physically challenging game of racing bareback with a relay team (Mitchell, 2020). However, Indigenous understandings of wagering are not synonymous with Western perceptions of gambling – despite clear similarities in the practices. The Western conceptualization of gambling is far different than Indigenous conceptualizations of their traditional games and gambling customs. Whereas Western perspectives promote capitalism and consumerism, a model that focuses on the wealth of the individual, Indigenous Peoples traditionally practiced a "gifting economy" that ensured the collective approach to caring for a clan or nation (Belanger et al., 2017; Mann, 2019; Williams et al., 2011). Gambling practices in

Indigenous communities today often reflect traditional values of community and contribute to the welfare of an Indigenous community (Jolly, 1997). Gaming is embedded in several aspects of Indigenous culture – in stories, as part of child development, skill building, recreation, and spirituality. Gambling as it is defined by Western society does not allow one to properly understand Indigenous games and those which incorporate wagering. The evolution of placing bets while playing traditional games comes from a long history that is fundamentally different than the practice of betting money in typical Western gambling games, such as slot machines, bingo, or card games (Belanger et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2011).

With history and culture shaping traditional practices, it is crucial to consider traditional gaming from an Indigenous perspective and value Indigenous ways of knowing and oral traditions. Storytelling, community, and spirituality are all significant components of Indigenous culture. In academia, Indigenous practices of wagering are often placed within a colonial framework of ‘gambling’. The current literature surrounding Indigenous games typically discusses traditional games as being in the past (Jolly, 1997; Sommerfeldt, 2005; VanStone, 1992; Williams et al., 2011) and as a possible explanation for high rates of Indigenous involvement in Western gambling (Belanger et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2011), and thus a risk factor for the development of problem gambling (Williams et al., 2011). The literature is often written by non-Indigenous researchers and authors, who have historically misrepresented Indigenous stories and beliefs because they do not share the same worldview and cultural knowledge as Indigenous Peoples (Schmidt, 2019; Smith, 2013; Stanton, 2014). Indigenous and Western worldviews are based in entirely different life and cultural experiences, thus misrepresentation of information by settler authors and researchers can result. Discussing traditional Indigenous games as analogous to Western gambling activities (i.e., slot machines,

bingo, poker, etc.) is not an appropriate lens with which to understand Indigenous games, practices, or populations.

The literature covering this topic is limited and tends to discuss games and/or gambling in a historical frame of reference (Jolly, 1997; Sommerfeldt, 2005; VanStone, 1992; Williams et al., 2011), utilizing the past tense, and by exploring cultural factors surrounding problem gambling (Belanger et al., 2017; McGowan et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2011) or Indigenous definitions of gambling (Belanger et al., 2017; McGowan et al., 2001; McGowan & Nixon 2004; Williams et al., 2011). An Indigenous perspective is crucial to understanding Indigenous games as it values Indigenous ways of knowing and being, including the pedagogy of play, such as storytelling, oral teachings, and traditional land-based knowledge, all of which considers a holistic framework to doing Indigenous research. Indigenous games that incorporate wagering are not just about gambling – they are multifaceted by nature. Games and gambling practices serve a multitude of functions and carry several meanings for Indigenous Peoples and game players.

This research project serves to describe what exactly Blackfoot games are, the ways in which they are part of Blackfoot culture, and why. It will also explore how these games have changed over time, particularly as a result of colonization. With a focus on local Blackfoot culture in particular and a blend of scientific methods with Indigenous knowledge, it becomes clear exactly what traditional games are, how they fit into their traditional and cultural context, their purpose in Indigenous cultures, and finally, how they are different from Western forms of gambling – even when they include practices such as wagering. This research will contribute to a field that is severely lacking in Indigenous knowledge as represented from an Indigenous perspective and will provide an understanding of the contextual relationships that exist for Indigenous games that can be utilized to better guide future research on Indigenous populations and gambling practices.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Indigenous Games

Indigenous games have played an integral role in Indigenous cultures and were played for a variety of reasons. Engaging in traditional forms of play fostered kinship relationships and helped to transmit cultural and linguistic teachings. As Bastien & Kremer (2004) note, "Traditional learning begins by identifying who we are in the context of tribal relationships" and "children learn through participating in and experiencing their intimate and interdependent kinship relations." (p. 120). Furthermore, many Indigenous games traditionally served the purpose to gain and develop skills practical in everyday life. Games involved skills pertinent to gathering food, warfare, hunting, pitching camp, and communication, and benefitted the community through re-distribution of wealth (Sommerfeldt, 2005). It is worth noting that traditional Blackfoot People, or *Siksikaitsitapi*, values are interconnected with "collective and tribal identity," (Bastien & Kremer, 2004, p. 135). Such values include "*Kimmapiiyipitsinni* (kindness), *Isspomotsisinni* (sharing and support), *Ainnakowa* (respect), and *Isskanaitapsstsi* (relationship)" as "they form the stages and processes for human development among *Siksikaitsitapi* and subsequently delineate distinctions and integrity among tribal societies" (Bastien & Kremer, 2004, p. 135).

Cross-culturally, similarities can be found in types of games and how they are played in various North American Indigenous cultures. Sommerfeldt (2005) describes the traditional games of the Blackfoot and Hopi Pueblos and then compares and contrasts the various different games existing in each tribe. The Blackfoot and Hopi both have traditional games that share similarities and "[form] the same designations, games of dexterity, guessing games, games of

amusement, and games in legend," (Sommerfeldt, 2005, pp. 81). Variations occur in factors such as climate and terrain, with "Blackfoot games of tops… played in the winter on a smoothed area of snow or ice" and the Hopi "in the warmer seasons and on a smoothed area of sand" (Sommerfeldt, 2005, pp. 82). Differences can also be found in materials used for game pieces for games similar in play, with each tribe using materials at their disposal such as willows or corn husks (Sommerfeldt, 2005). Encounters between different tribes that occurred through trade and travel to one another's territory may have also contributed to these similarities, through the sharing of games (Sommerfeldt, 2005). Another common practice amongst several games in many Indigenous cultures is wagering, which has been part of traditional games since pre-colonization (Belanger et al., 2017; McGowan & Nixon, 2004; Williams et al., 2011). Today, traditional games that include the practice of placing bets are typically played for other purposes, namely for fun, rather than to gain material wealth through gambling, which occurs only sometimes (McGowan et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2011).

There are numerous games that have existed across time, some of which are still played today, while others have been lost as a result of colonization and its effects. Games that are not widely played today include variations of the hoop and stick/arrow game and shinny. Other games consist of horse racing, foot races, and counting coup (McGowan et al., 2001). Hoop and stick game was played with a "hoop or ring to serve as a target and a dart or pole," and "[t]he moving target in the game was a small hoop, inside of which were several spokes strung with different colored beads" (VanStone, 1992, pp. 20). Players would roll the hoop and run after it, throwing their sticks or arrows through the hoop before it hit a log at the end of the playing field (VanStone, 1992). Sommerfeldt (2005) cites different variations of the hoop and stick/arrow game, one of which includes the usage of vertical boards along with a hoop and arrow, and

another that omits the vertical boards and utilizes a hoop that has spokes strung with different beads to count points. Both versions still involve players attempting to throw an arrow or stick through a moving hoop. The Blackfeet relay the origin of hoop and stick game through oral tradition and "describe how [Napi] (Old Man) brought the tribe the hoop and arrow game" (Jolly, 1997, pp. 274). Shinny, similar to field hockey, was played with sticks that were curved at the end and used to move a ball toward opposing goal posts – rules indicated that players could not touch the ball unless with the use of the sticks (Sommerfeldt, 2005). Blackfoot women played a version of the dice game, "in which three or four stick dice, marked on one side, were scattered on the ground, the thrower achieving a score based on the markings on the dice" (VanStone, 1992, pp. 21).

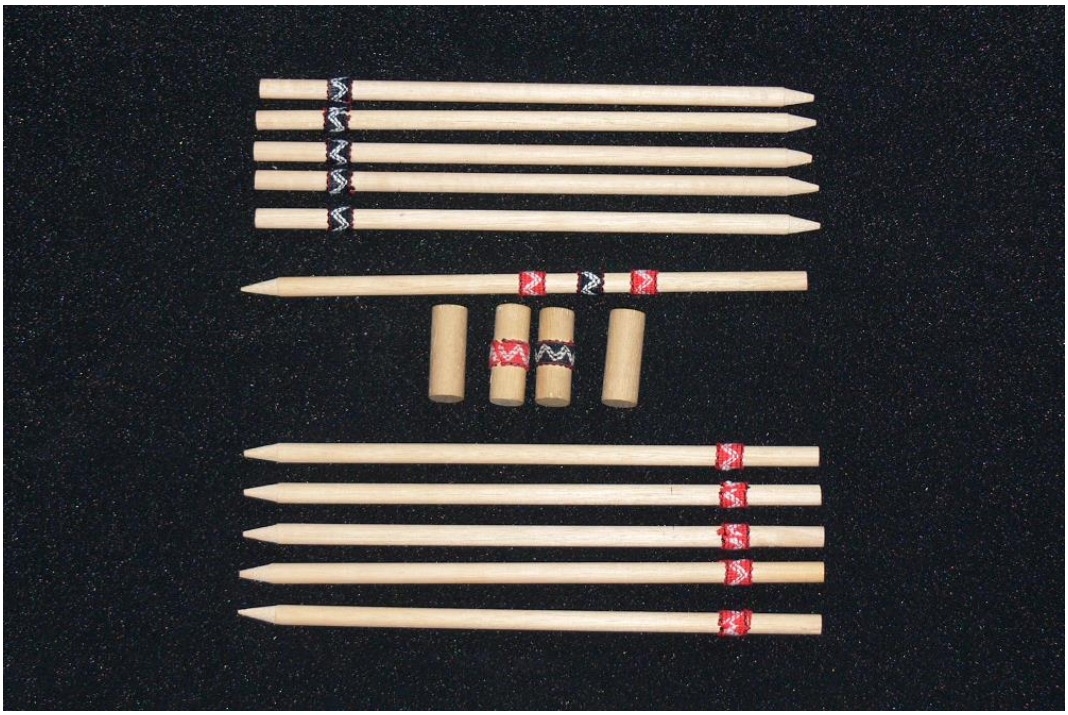

Figure 2: Game pieces for hand/stick game.

Handgame is still played today. It is also known as the stick game, the bone game, lahal, and slahal with tribes from diverse geographic locations calling the game by different names. Several versions exist, with the most popular being Flathead style. Other versions include Blackfoot style and Crow style, all of which contain differing variations of rules and game pieces (i.e., number of sticks). Sommerfeldt (2005) describes "hands", a traditional game appearing similarly to what is called handgame today. Players divided into two teams sit facing each other, with one team passing or pretending to pass a small object, which could have been a pebble, bead, or bone, from one player to another while singing and swaying to music being sung during the game. The opposing team would guess which player they believed had the object. If they were correct, they earned a stick, and the hiding team would then be the guessers. If they were incorrect, the hiding team received one of their sticks. Today, the game looks much like this, with a marked or unmarked bone (which can be made from various materials) being the hidden objects in the hands of one player on the hiding team, while the other team guesses or points to which hand has which bone. Flathead style utilizes 11 sticks, including one called the kick stick, which is used to decide which team will guess first and serves as determining the winner by being the final stick to win. Blackfoot style is played similarly, but sticks can 'come alive' and be earned back by a team. There is no time limit for hands (Sommerfeldt, 2005) nor for handgame. The game can go fairly quickly or take up to several hours depending on how well players guess and what style is being played (number of sticks can vary from 10-21 in different versions).

Recently, there have been efforts to revive and continue many Indigenous games and encourage their play (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006; Sommerfeldt, 2005). It is important to acknowledge the revitalization and continued efforts to popularize traditional Indigenous games. The "failure of residential schooling" and "other projects to assimilate aboriginals into

mainstream society… precipitated concerted efforts on the part of aboriginal leaders and visionaries to utilize sport in the interests of native communities." (Forsyth & Wamsley, 2006, pp. 310). Locally and more broadly across North America, traditional games can be found to be incorporated in physical education classes, Indigenous culture programs, and Indigenous awareness events.

Indigenous Oral Tradition

"The animals, apparently, the story I was told, was [they] were arguing over spring and winter, or the winter months. Winter was winning and wasn't relenting and wouldn't give up. [Winter] wouldn't allow the earth to warm up, wouldn't allow the flowers to grow because they were a little bit greedy, they wanted it their way. So… Coyote was given a message [by Creator] to tell the animals: 'You have to settle this, because this isn't fair to the summer animals, who want to enjoy the warmth, want to enjoy the flowers, the fruits of the earth,' … So, they then were given that game, according to different people the game went on for a long time. I don't know how time was measured then, maybe it was one day, maybe it was a month, who knows. Nevertheless, they came to what they call a draw, [and] Creator then stepped in through Coyote, something like that, and [said], 'You guys on this side are going to get the warmer months, spring and summer, and you guys on this side are going to get the winter months.' It was an opportunity for the earth to become more livable." (Linda Weasel Head, December 2020).

Similar to all Indigenous Peoples, Blackfoot culture involves oral tradition, which perhaps is the most important facet of Blackfoot culture, as it serves to transfer knowledge through storytelling and oral history. Oral tradition has been the main method of communication and mobilization of sacred knowledge. Despite the efforts of colonialism and forced assimilation,

oral tradition remains fundamental to cultural practice and revitalization for many Indigenous Peoples (Hare, 2011).

The telling of stories is often associated with the connections to place and community. Elders and knowledge keepers in particular play an important role in the transference of teachings regarding genealogy, history, significant land sites, and skills specific to cultural activities such as handgame. As Indigenous place-making continues in scholarship, accurate and authentic knowledge becomes included and addresses the pervasive Western colonial perspective that often devalues the legitimacy of oral traditions (Hildebrandt et al., 1996).

Knowledge is considered to come from life experiences and for Blackfoot Peoples tales of the cultural trickster and hero, Napi, are fundamental to understanding human development (Bastien & Kremer, 2004). Napi features as a character in Blackfoot stories whose actions and subsequent consequences often serve to provide a moral lesson for listeners. Such stories include *Napi and the Rock, Napi and the Dancing Mice,* and *Napi and the Bullberries*. Children grow up hearing these stories told by their grandparents and other family members, for entertainment and educational purposes, and will eventually pass the stories and their knowledge to their children and grandchildren.

As the author recalls *Napi and the Bullberries:* the story begins with Napi in a state of exhaustion, tired and hungry. He comes to rest at a stream, splashing his face with the cool water and cupping the water in his palms to relinquish his thirst. Still hungry and hunched over the stream, Napi notices some bullberries at the bottom. He jumps in and swims down, expecting to receive a handful of juicy berries and instead finding only sand. He swims back up to the surface to get some air and dives down again, thinking that he must have missed them the first time. With no luck, he tries again. Frustrated, he pulls himself out of the water and storms around the

bank, looking for a few heavy rocks. This ought to do the trick, he thinks, as he ties the rocks around his waistband. Surely if he weighs himself down, he will finally be able to reach the bullberries and have a good lunch. He jumps in, sinking quickly to the bottom. Again, no berries could be found! Only sand, moss, and other things typical to a river bottom. Napi began to get frantic, he would not be able to hold his breath for much longer. He tries to swim back up to no avail, and so he works on the knots he tied around his waist to free himself from the heavy rocks. Finally undoing the tight knots around himself, Napi swims upwards and gasps for air once he breaks the water's surface. Weary from nearly drowning, he floats for a moment. Looking up toward the sky, above him he sees them. The bullberries, which hanging over the stream, had been reflected on its surface.

It is the stories themselves that carry knowledge to be shared with one another and future generations. Blackfoot stories can have different themes and feature a variety of characters, while describing aspects of the Blackfoot worldview and economic and social structure. Embedded in those stories is Blackfoot theory of knowledge, shared through oral traditions retold across generations (Bastien & Kremer, 2004). Hare (2011) describes the various ways in which Indigenous storytelling develops and encourages knowledge of Indigenous youth, by advancing language development, comprehension and listening skills, while also contributing to youth understandings of narrative, story structure, and various literacy strategies such as metaphor and foreshadowing.

The Blackfoot Peoples tell stories that feature important skills being put to use, one example is the tale of Old Man and Coyote engaging in a race (Sommerfeldt, 2005). Several Napi stories are told in Hugh Dempsey's *Napi: The Trickster* (2018), with games being in plenty regardless of whether they are the focal point. In regard to gambling, oral traditions often state

that gambling outside of ceremonial practices is frowned upon and contains risk of excess (Williams et al., 2011) and acknowledge the potential issues that may arise from gambling in excess (McGowan & Nixon, 2004). While coming to understand the importance of oral history and traditional games, it is important to consider blending play and stories as a method of transmitting skills and knowledge. If traditional games are played with Indigenous knowledge and oral traditions in mind, there is potential for them to exist rightfully so in their respective cultural contexts, rather than as common sport (Sommerfeldt, 2005).

Gambling

"From time immemorial, many Indian nations have gambled." (Jolly, 1997, pp. 274).

In research, discussion of Indigenous games is limited, and most literature falls under one or more of the following three methods of discourse: 1) discussion of traditional games which feature wagering as synonymous to Western gambling practices, with a particular focus on problem gambling as it relates to Indigenous populations (Belanger et al., 2017; McGowan et al., 2001; McGowan & Nixon, 2004; Williams et al., 2011); 2) describes Indigenous gaming practices as existing in the past or as historical (Sommerfeldt, 2005; VanStone, 1992; Williams et al., 2011); and, 3) defines Indigenous conceptualizations of gambling (Belanger et al., 2017; McGowan et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2011). Often placing traditional games in a colonial framework, the existing literature describes Indigenous games as parallel to Western gambling. Traditional games are usually described as 'gambling,' despite most Indigenous Peoples not considering their traditional games to be forms of gambling (Belanger et al., 2017; McGowan et al., 2001; McGowan & Nixon, 2004; Williams et al., 2011).

Belanger et al. (2017) includes traditional Indigenous games in a 'Gambling Definition' questionnaire checklist (p. 13) and describes Western gambling and traditional games as analogous (p. 15). Traditional games are also offered as a potential explanation for high rates of Indigenous involvement in Western gambling activities, stating that "North American indigenous people have a particularly strong cultural tradition and acceptance of gambling which is probably related to their greater overall participation and frequency of gambling" (Williams et al., 2011, p. 12); that higher "overall gambling participation… is likely partly due to a greater cultural tradition of gambling" (Belanger et al., 2017, p. 3); and that "contemporary forms of gambling by Blackfoot peoples remain informed by traditional cultural practices" (McGowan et al., 2001, p. 241).

Gambling can be defined as placing bets consisting of money or material items on something, whose outcome is uncertain, with the hope of winning money or material items (Williams et. al., 2011). Gambling is a feature of some Indigenous games, with bets traditionally consisting of material goods and having evolved into monetary wagers. Betting itself could serve multiple functions, whether practical or ceremonial. For example, wagers may have been used in particular ceremonies to influence the outcomes of harvests and hunts or weather (Belanger et al., 2017). Outside of ceremony, 'gambling' offered conflict resolution through avenues of non-violent competition between individuals and tribes, while also providing potential for socialization and trading (Belanger et al., 2017). Historically speaking, 'gambling' would have been a popular recreational pastime and served a community through the re-distribution of wealth (Williams et al., 2011).

Settler colonialism introduced new methods, definitions, and attitudes of gambling (Belanger et al., 2017; McGowan & Nixon, 2004; Williams et al., 2011). While Indigenous

Peoples typically conceptualize gambling within a cultural framework that includes ceremonial purpose and the welfare of the community, Western gambling centralizes around recreation and capital (Belanger et al., 2017). As a result, many Indigenous Peoples have thus begun to view gambling similarly to the non-Indigenous population with attitudes being largely negative (Belanger et al., 2017). This notion is corroborated by McGowan & Nixon (2004), who assert that Western attitudes and practices have influenced current views and practices of Indigenous gambling. However, despite this shift, most Indigenous Peoples do not consider traditional games to be a form of gambling (Belanger et al., 2017; Williams et. al., 2011). This can be attributed to the cultural history of traditional games, the various roles traditional games have in the lives of players, and conceptualizations of gambling existing prior to the events of colonization.

The cultural framework surrounding Indigenous traditional games is essential to gaining appropriate knowledge of games and wagering practices. Games have long been part of Blackfoot culture and had diverse functions for the benefit and development of individuals and their community. Games advanced practical life skills for their players and games in which gambling was a part of encouraged redistribution of wealth and contributed to Indigenous gift economy. As a result of forced assimilation and cultural genocide, many games played by Indigenous Peoples no longer exist, with the exception of a small few such as handgame. A crucial component of Blackfoot culture is oral tradition, or mode for the transmission of knowledge and cultural practices. Oral tradition is rooted in life experiences and has traditionally played a major role in childhood learning and development. Despite attempts from the Canadian government to eradicate the Indigenous population, oral tradition remains as an integral part of Blackfoot culture. The cultural landscape of Indigenous games and practices of oral tradition lay

the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of Indigenous gambling practices. The history of ‘gambling’ within Indigenous games and communities, which encompasses cultural origin and community values, contrasts greatly to Western gambling customs, which prioritizes monetary gain of the individual.

Chapter 3: Methods

Figure 3: Indian women playing the stick game at the midsummer celebration on the Glacier National Park Reservation, Montana (1910).

A mixed method approach consisting of qualitative and quantitative research was utilized to gather background information on Blackfoot games and to collect data pertaining to games in the modern era. The qualitative component involved conducting key informant interviews with Blackfoot Elders and knowledge keepers that explored types of games, how they are played, their role in Blackfoot culture, and how they may have changed over time. The quantitative piece incorporated an online survey open to individuals 18 years of age and older from traditional Blackfoot Territory (specifically Kainai, Piikani, and Siksika) to discover what traditional games look like today, which are still being played, and by whom. This research was approved by the

University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee, the Blood Tribe Policy Manager, and Old Sun Community College. Appropriate community engagement was done prior to data collection, by hosting three virtual town hall sessions on Zoom open to the public which provided information regarding the research project and acted as an opportunity for the community to provide any feedback. All data collected from the interviews and survey were kept on a secure, password protected computer with access given only to the primary investigator and research assistant.

Interviews

4 interviews were conducted, with all being unstructured and open ended and Elders given various discussion topics that were the target subjects of the interview. Recruitment for the interviews was done via snowball sampling, with the primary investigator and research assistant brainstorming possible candidates and receiving recommendations from those who had completed an interview. Demographic information pertaining to age, gender, and band was not disclosed in the interviews. Elders were able to choose where to begin, what they would like to talk about, and guided the conversation naturally as they explained each subject. The primary investigator would re-read the discussion topics as needed or if requested by an Elder in the event that they wanted to be sure they covered them all.

List of discussion topics (in no particular order):

1) Descriptions of games
2) Stories in which games may play a role
3) Colonization’s impact on games
4) How/if gambling is a part of traditional games

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews took place over the phone or through Zoom, depending on the Elder's preference. Prior to the interview, each Elder was read an informed consent form (see Appendix A) and provided verbal, recorded consent. Elders were also provided the option of written consent and received a copy of the informed consent form for their records. Audio from all interviews was recorded with a handheld recorder and transcribed by the research assistant, with transcripts being used for the data analysis. Elders had the option of choosing total anonymity, the use of a pseudonym, or to have any quotations labelled with their name throughout the thesis. Each data file pertaining to the interviews was assigned a number, with a directory document created for interview transcripts to ensure proper attribution of contributions and anonymity where appropriate.

All participants also received a gift for sharing their wisdom, which is a traditional custom when making an exchange in Blackfoot culture.

It is important to note that while several different types of games and their rules were described, one game in particular seemed to be quite elusive – and that is feather game. Nearly all Elders interviewed had an awareness of feather game and hypothesized a potential relationship between it and handgame, however 3 out of 4 interviewees felt that they were not the appropriate individual to share information on feather game. The 4th interviewee expressed knowledge of the game, but would not disclose a description or rules, and the primary investigator did not press on the topic. The primary investigator suggests, based on their limited knowledge and experience regarding this particular game, that reluctance to discuss feather game may have something to do with it typically being played during ceremony and its wide consideration as a 'holy' game (to use Western terminology).

Survey

The online survey was hosted through Qualtrics and consisted of 11 questions (see Appendix B) covering demographics, knowledge of traditional games, whether participants have participated in or watched traditional games, and if bets were made during games. The survey was anonymous, and participants were presented with an online consent form (see Appendix C) prior to beginning the survey in the format of a multiple-choice question and could only continue to the survey once consent was given, i.e., selecting "Yes, I consent." Participants also had the option of completing the survey over the phone. The survey took between 5 and 10 minutes to complete. Once participants completed the section regarding demographics, they began answering questions regarding games. The first gaming question inquires whether participants have watched traditional games, participated in traditional games, both, or neither. If participants answered that they have not watched/participated in games, they were unable to answer the other questions regarding play frequency, betting, and names of games. "Traditional games" was loosely defined in the questions by stating "such as hand/stick game," with one question asking about names of games watched/participated in that contained a text box for written responses.

Recruitment for the survey was done primarily online via social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and by hanging printed recruitment posters (see Appendix D) throughout Kainai and surrounding municipalities. Physical posters were hung in various businesses, banks, gas stations, and grocery stores in Standoff, Cardston, Pincher Creek, Fort Macleod, and Lethbridge. Due the COVID-19 pandemic and thus to limit travel, posters were not hung in Siksika. The survey was also advertised online via student email lists at the University of Lethbridge and Lethbridge College, and posted on the Old Sun Community College website.

A draw was held to encourage participation that offered a prize consisting of a hand beaded medallion and a hand drum, both provided by members of the Blood Tribe. To enter the draw, participants were required to first complete the survey on Qualtrics, at which point they could be hyperlinked to a separate survey that functioned as a draw entry form on the end page of the completed survey. The draw form consisted of 3 questions pertaining to contact information, with draw entry data kept separately from survey data to ensure anonymity of survey responses.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for interviews was done using thematic analysis on the computer program NVivo 12. A list of potential codes was drafted and narrowed down to create the codebook, which was then imported into NVivo 12 along with the transcripts for each interview. Interview transcripts were then read separately, with relevant passages being coded to appropriate codes (known as ‘nodes’ in NVivo 12). The survey data was imported from Qualtrics into SPSS, where it then could be analyzed. A particular focus was placed on descriptive statistics for the analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

Survey Results

Limited responses were received, rendering the data unrepresentative for prevalence. According to The Canadian Encyclopedia, Kainai has 12 693 registered members (Jirousek, 2020), Piikani has 3 600 registered members (Dempsey, 2018), and Siksika has 7 497 registered members (Dempsey, 2019). A minimum sample size of at least 300 would be desired to consider the data as representative, however only a little over a third of that was achieved with there being 109 responses to the survey. As for the interviews, data saturation was achieved, but only 4 Elders were interviewed and 3 out of 4 Elders are from the same band. It would have been preferrable for more interviews to be conducted with the number of Elders from each band being closer to equal. See limitations for the contributing constraints.

Demographics are represented in Table 1. There were 109 responses to the online survey. The sample consisted mainly of 18 to 24-year-olds and 25 to 50-year-olds, with a minority of participants being 51+ years of age. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 25 and 50, constituting 47.37% of the sample. 41.05% of respondents were between 18 to 24 years of age and 11.58% of participants were 51 years of age or older. A vast majority of participants were women, comprising 78.09% of responses, with men following at 19.05% and only 1.90% of responses being two-spirit/LGBTQ+. Over half of the participants were from Kainai, at 64.76%, with 18.10% of participants being from Piikani and 14.29% being from Siksika. More than half the participants live off reserve, 62.86%, with 35.24% of participants living on reserve.

The overrepresentation of women in the population is likely due to the style of recruitment and incentive for the survey. A draw was done to encourage participation, and although the prize was gender neutral and raffles are a popular activity on social media in

Indigenous communities, it is an activity usually hosted and participated by more women than men. The discrepancy in population by band is likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and long wait times regarding ethical approval in certain Indigenous communities. These constraints limited recruitment to a small physical area in close proximity to Kainai, and with Kainai being the first community to provide ethical approval, recruitment there began sooner than other communities. Recruitment was encouraged both on and off reserve, as well as online, but constraints on travel as a result of the pandemic and limited internet access for some living on the reserve could have influenced these results.

Table 1: Demographics of survey participants.

		Frequency	Percent
Age	18-24	39	41.05
	25-50	45	47.37
	51+	11	11.58
Gender	Man	20	19.05
	Woman	82	78.09
	Two-spirit/LGBTQ+	2	1.90
Band	Kainai	68	64.76
	Piikani	19	18.10
	Siksika	15	14.29
Location of residence	On reserve	37	35.24
	Off reserve	66	62.86

Results regarding level of experience with games (i.e., whether participants have watched, participated, or both in traditional games), rate of occurrence for watching and/or participation, and whether bets were made during games and how often bets occurred can be found in Table 2. The survey questions were programmed so participants who answered that they had not watched/participated in games would not receive further questions regarding rate of occurrence watching/participating, if bets were made, and names of games watched/participated

in. Most participants both watched and participated in games, at 40.95%. The second most common level of experience with games was to watch, at 34.29% of responses. 7.62% of respondents have only played traditional games and 17.14% have neither watched nor participated in traditional games. Playing only once or twice ever was the most common response, at 29.76%, followed by once a year, at 25.00%. 17.86% of participants watch or play traditional games a few times a year, and 8.33% of participants watch or play traditional games several times a year. 7.14% of participants state they never watch or participate in games. Bets were cited as being usually made, with 26.19% of participants stating that bets occur sometimes, 25.00% stating bets are made most of the time, and an equal number of participant responses split between bets occurring always, 22.62% and not at all, 22.62%.

Table 2: Participant responses regarding experiences of traditional games.

		Frequency	Percent
Level of experience with games	Watched	36	34.29
	Participated	8	7.62
	Both watched and participated	43	40.95
	Neither watched nor participated	18	17.14
Rate of occurrence watching/participating in games	Several times a year	7	8.33
	A few times a year	15	17.86
	Once a year	21	25.00
	Once every few years	10	11.90
	Only once or twice ever	25	29.76
	Never	6	7.14
If bets were made during games and their occurrence	Yes, always	19	22.62
	Yes, most of the time	21	25.00
	Yes, sometimes	22	26.19
	Never	19	22.62

As stated previously, there are numerous different games that have been played by Indigenous Peoples. The game that is most frequently cited as being played is handgame or stick game, at 71.74% of responses. The frequency of other games listed in responses drops off

drastically, with the second most cited game being hoop and arrow/stick game at 7.61%. This particular question allowed participants to list as many games as they have played, resulting in some responses including multiple games. Percentages for this question, all of which can be found in Table 3, were calculated based on total number of games listed (92), rather than number of participants who responded.

Table 3: Games watched/participated in.

	Frequency	Percent
Handgame/stick game	66	71.74
Hoop and arrow	7	7.61
Feather games	4	4.35
Indian relay/horse racing	4	4.35
Money games	2	2.17
Stick ball	1	1.08
Competitive powwow dancing	1	1.08
Double ball	1	1.08
Ring and stick	1	1.08
Screaming game	1	1.08
Capture games	1	1.08
Leg wrestling	1	1.08
Shinny	1	1.08
Lacrosse	1	1.08
Total	92	

Results for participant reasons for watching/participating in traditional games and their attitudes toward traditional games are presented in Table 4. Similar to the question regarding names of games, the question regarding reasons for playing allowed participants to select multiple responses, so percentages were calculated out of a total number of responses (151) for that particular question. 46.36% of responses state they watch/participate in traditional games for fun, 18.54% include spiritual/ceremonial/cultural purposes as a reason, and 17.88% cite enjoyment of competition as a reason. The least popular reasons for playing are to win money, at

8.61%, and “other” at 7.95%. An overwhelming majority, 78.43%, of participants have a positive attitude toward games, with 21.57% having a neutral attitude. No respondents had a negative attitude toward traditional games.

Table 4: Reasons for watching/participating in and attitudes toward traditional games.

		Frequency	Percent
Reasons for watching/participating in traditional games	For fun	70	46.36
	For spiritual/ceremonial/cultural purposes	28	18.54
	Enjoyment of competition	27	17.88
	To win money	13	8.61
	Other	12	7.95
	Total responses	151	
Attitudes toward traditional games	Positive	80	78.43
	Neutral	22	21.57
	Negative	0	0

Interview Results

The codebook used to analyze the interview transcripts and the frequency of references for each code can be found in Table 5. The top four most frequent codes, in order from most to least recurrent, are gambling, games, evident change, relationships. These codes represent the topics discussed the most, and therefore, the themes that are most important to the Elders when it comes to gaming.

Table 5: Codebook and frequency of references for each code.

Codes	Number of Coding References
Gambling	31
Games	30
Evident change	29
Relationships	23

Song	21
Universality	21
Tradition	17
Belonging	16
Storytelling	14
Colonialism	11
Recreation	11
Skill building	10
Tournament	10
Strategy	9
Survival	8
Elder	7
Healing	7
Power	7
Spirituality	7
Entertainment	6
Conflict resolution	5
Pre-contact	5
Youth	5
Ceremony	3
Cheating	3
Continuity	3
Religion	2
Resistance	2

The conversations had with the Elders who participated reveal the themes behind each of these codes. “Gambling” includes how it works and its cultural nuance; “games” reveal different games, their rules, their purpose, and their meaning to Blackfoot culture; “evident change” covers how games have changed over time, both throughout history and between generations; “relationships” centers on the familial bonds that form while playing games and the depth of those relationships. Regarding gambling, an Elder said “they bring out goods like scarves, bring out different kinds of things like that, or baskets of stuff and put them in the middle and you match it. That’s the gambling part. Today of course money is the gambling medium for most people, they’ll put down ten, you put down ten, and so on, so you can double your money in a game” (Linda Weasel Head, December 2020).

For games, Elders stated that “There were children’s games and there were adult games. There were also some land games, how you play on the land” (Interview, November 2020) and that traditionally, “For them it was fun, but at the same time… both boys and girls were taught these things because [you] never know when… you come into a situation where you have to defend yourself” (Interview, March 2021).

On evident change, one Elder noted that “It used to be called an old ladies’ game before” and that “they used to sit on the ground, they didn’t sit in chairs. The belief was [that] the closer you are to the earth, the more in touch you were going to be with things” (Linda Weasel Head, December 2020). Referencing the same theme, another Elder commented, “that’s my favourite part is the youth, because I think that the youth are the ones that are going to keep this game going even though it’s changed so much since I was a kid” (Lyndon Scott, January 2021).

Remarking about relationships, one Elder stated that games are “an opportunity for a tribal group to get together” and related games to traditional Blackfoot values by saying “You’re supposed to good, that’s one of our values, you help everybody. In this case, you’re helping all your team members” (Linda Weasel Head, December 2020). Another Elder expressed both how family relationships develop when attending tournaments: “With me, we travelled, we had a trail we went every year… And on these trails, you meet people who become your family, your stick game family,” and the pervasive nature of these relationships: “And that’s just the way it is, because like I said everybody becomes family in the stick game world” (Lyndon Scott, January 2021).

“Song” and “universality” are the next most significant themes, with “song” encompassing singing while playing, meaningfulness, traditions, spirituality, and cultural variety of songs and “universality,” the widespread nature of games geographically. Elders stressed the

magnitude of the cultural significance that songs have in handgame. On singing during game play, one Elder said, “I believe our songs will sing those sticks home to us” (Linda Weasel Head, December 2020) and another Elder remarked, “if you can get the other side to [listen] to the song, you’ve pretty much got the game won” (Lyndon Scott, January 2021). Referring to both song and universality an Elder stated that “Each tribe way back had their own songs, when you hear a song from somewhere you say ‘Oh, the coastal people are here,’ or ‘Oh, the people from up north are here,’” (Linda Weasel Head, December 2020). Another Elder discussed relationships and universality when they said, “I’ve got people from up north that call me brother, people from the coast that call me brother, people from the south that call me brother” (Lyndon Scott, January 2021).

Less frequent themes that are still relevant include tradition, belonging, and storytelling. These themes discussed, respectively, teachings, cultural values, and their relationship to games; feelings of community as a result of games; stories arising from games and stories that feature games. Colonialism, recreation, skill building, and tournament follow, elaborating on the impact of colonization on games; games as a recreational activity; the purpose of games to develop and hone skills; prevalence of tournaments and what they look like. The less frequent themes may not have been discussed as often, but they are still important to consider, and can be slotted under other, broader themes – for example, power, healing, and spirituality can all exist under the umbrella of tradition because they pertain to the traditional values and beliefs of Blackfoot culture.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Figure 4: Kainai Days Hand Games, 1968.

"My grandparents used to tell us, 'Why are you so upset with not having a sleigh when you can make your own? Our ancestors used to make them using the buffalo rib cage,'" (Interview, March 2021).

Blackfoot games and understandings of gambling are rich with cultural history and tradition whose breadth extends both across time and within diverse aspects of Blackfoot culture.

A multitude of traditional games exist, some of which are scarce or no longer played at all, and others that provide various meanings to their players and thrive cross-culturally. Games historically served a practical purpose, if not several, related to skill building or community betterment (Sommerfeldt, 2005). One such game is screaming game, in which players would have either competed to see who could scream the loudest or would see how far they could walk while screaming before running out of breath, when they would then mark their place and another player would try to walk farther than the previous one. One Elder stated that this game existed for the purpose of survival – traditionally, if women were out gathering, they would play this game so that in the event of danger or an emergency, they could call for help. Another Elder stated that it could have also been played for fun, to release tension or stress. This particular game is not common today, as is reflected by the survey, which reveals that only one participant named screaming game as one of the traditional games they have watched or participated in.

The harmful and violent effects of colonization are the greatest contributor to the disappearance of traditional games. Colonization and the forced assimilation of Indigenous Peoples throughout North America resulted in loss of languages and cultural practices, and intergenerational trauma – to name just a few of the lasting consequences that Indigenous Peoples face. The survey results reflect the scarcity of several traditional games, by the drastic difference between those who named handgame (71.74%), with the next most named game, hoop and arrow (7.61%), and feather game (4.35%), with 9 out of the 14 games listed being named by one individual alone. Games that developed survival skills, such as hunting, or those that utilized traditional materials are examples of games lost as a result of colonization. One such game, explained by an Elder, is as follows:

"Picture a toboggan, with a rope around to drag it. Now picture the toboggan as a buffalo hide, it's placed outside in front of the tipi… it carries maybe a woman and maybe two or three children…. What they do is they practice, a warrior or their son will jump on a horse and come galloping to the tipi and the woman and children would jump on the hide. They would throw the rope to the person on the horseback, as they're galloping through… and the person would take them to safety into the woods, would drag them like a toboggan, with the horse in front of them dragging them" (Interview, November 2020).

Describing going into the woods with her grandmother to play handgame as a child, one Elder said, "I did not realize that the hand games had been outlawed by the priests… if they were caught playing hand games on a Sunday especially, the priests would literally come in and beat them, whip them," (Linda Weasel Head, December 2020). This Elder's story illustrates the severity of the consequences that existed for participating in cultural practices, while at the same time providing insight into the resilience of handgame and how it endured the colonial encounter.

Besides colonization, games can evolve as a result of time and the influence of players. The introduction of monetary bets and age gaps between young and old players have caused several aspects of handgame to change throughout history and within generations. Gambling, songs, customs, and reasons for playing were all cited by Elders as things that they have noticed to have changed. Nearly all of the Elders noted that wagering practices during handgame traditionally consisted of material goods, ranging from scarves or beadwork to horses, and have changed in such a way that they now are mainly comprised of money. Some described that generational differences produce lasting effects on game custom and motivations for playing. One Elder noted that giving sticks to the opposing team in handgame was done by tossing them,

which now is often viewed as disrespectful by younger generations – who prefer to hand sticks directly to the opposing team by walking them over to their side. An Elder stated that as they aged, they noticed that younger generations seem to be motivated more by competition or winning as opposed to the older generations who attend tournaments for the purposes of social connection through visiting. It is oral tradition and life experiences of game play passed down generations in families that allow individuals to reflect on the game and how it has existed throughout history. The maintenance of such knowledge is carried on through Blackfoot oral tradition and the transmission of wisdom from one generation to the next through storytelling and the sharing of personal narratives (Bastien & Kremer, 2004).

By far the most popular traditional game is hand/stick game, with rules and varying styles described by the Elders. Variations are Blackfoot, Flathead, and Crow, to name a few, with geographic location, tribe, and variation popularity determining which style is played. In southern Alberta, Elders cited Flathead style to be the most common style. Each variation has slight differences in rules for game play and number of sticks used to count points. What remains consistent across styles and players is the use of assorted skills and strategies during gameplay. According to one Elder, “It’s really exciting to play the game, some people think it’s simple; I always say it’s sophisticated, we compare it to chess, which is a really sophisticated game” (Linda Weasel Head, December 2020). Logic, songs, wit, intuition, and observance are all employed by players. Game strategy, according to Jeremy Red Eagle, essentially is when “You’re observing, you’re paying attention to patterns, you’re reading the person’s body language, but at the same time you listen to your intuition and you learn to trust that” (Swalklanexw Dallas, 2019). When it comes to skill development in youth, Mary Ellen Little Mustache explains the value of handgame: “In these games our children learn how to get along

with each other, they learn how to read people and develop their communication skills" (Swalklanexw Dallas, 2019). These notions were supported by the Elders, who explained their reliance on gut instinct and song, as well as their ability to pick up on patterns exhibited by players on opposing teams.

Among the Elders interviewed, a popular topic of conversation was tournaments: how they work, where they're played, and who attends. Bets are often made at tournaments, with the prize amount ranging depending on the tournament. Elders described betting during handgame; how in the past material goods such as blankets, scarves, beadwork, or other items would be used and how today most often money is used. When betting, players will typically match bets, pay an entry fee that contributes to the prize money, or as one Elder mentioned, casinos will provide funds for the prize. The prize money can range from a few hundred dollars, to tens of thousands, depending on the tournament. An Elder suggested that the large amounts are due to casino involvement and are used in order to encourage tournament attendance. Interestingly, an equal amount of survey responses cited that when playing traditional games, betting occurs always (22.62%) and never (22.62%). This sentiment is reflected by Williams et al. (2011), who found that a near even split between individuals identify handgame to be a form of gambling (50.5%) and those who do not identify it as a form of gambling (49.5%) (p.6).

During one interview an Elder said, "Yes, it's gambling, but it's also healing. It depends how you want to go through it," (Lyndon Scott, January 2021). It is evident by this quote that wagering money at tournaments, while playing traditional games, contrasts greatly to Western conceptualizations of gambling. Traditional values and profound relationships that develop at tournaments, along with the strong sense of community that players have with one another, ensures that individuals will always be taken care of – whether they win or lose. After recounting

a story wherein he assisted someone he knew who had lost all weekend at a tournament, an Elder stated, “You’re never going to be stuck, stranded, doesn’t matter,” (Lyndon Scott, January 2021). Elders acknowledge that gambling tends to be part of some games, particularly handgame, and the potential negative outcomes and risk that comes with gambling. At the same time, they also highlight other aspects of the game that take precedence over gambling, with cultural practices such as song and the development of familial relationships being examples of these aspects.

An essential component of handgame is song, supplemented by the use of instruments that may include hand drums or rattles. Some Elders described the usage of song in handgame as evolving from ceremonial songs, which after ceremonial practices had been banned, were then incorporated into handgame. Elders who are active players of handgame and frequent tournaments stressed the significance and value that songs have for them, by stating the following sentiments:

“The songs in the stick games, they were warrior songs,” (Interview, November 2020)

“The power for me comes through the singing,” (Linda Weasel Head, December 2020)

“I think that the songs are the most important part of stick game,” (Lyndon Scott, January 2021).

These quotes provide evidence for the significance of both the history of using songs in handgame and the tremendous value that songs have for players. Elders illustrate songs as healing and powerful, as well as a method of communication and connection to culture. Songs also play a role in the universality of handgame, described by Elders almost as a form of identification when hearing them at tournaments. When an individual hears a song sung by others, they may then recognize who is going to be playing and where they are most likely from – i.e., up north, down south, east coast, or west coast. An Elder described this by saying, “back in

the day, you were able to, when you pulled into a powwow and you heard the songs being sung, you could tell which families were there" (Linda Weasel Head, December 2020). On the other hand, songs created by different individuals can spread and be sung by others. Song is also used as a strategy for players, in concordance with other skills such as logic and wit. Songs are sung to gather power for a team, as well as to distract a team's opposition. As mentioned earlier, one Elder said that if the other team is listening to your song, you've basically won the game.

Relationships that develop while participating in games also hold particular value for players. Some Elders describe their introduction into handgame as a result of their family and being raised in an environment in which family members played the game. One Elder notes, "I've been around hand games since I was a child, maybe even in the womb for all I know, my mom used to play," (Linda Weasel Head, December 2020). A common result of participating in tournaments is the development of familial relationships, which are often non-biological. Elders described their 'game family,' and how members will refer to each other as "mom," "dad," "brother," "sister," and so on regardless of the lack of genetic relatedness. An Elder asserted that "if it wasn't for the family bonds people could make, I don't think there really would be stick game," (Lyndon Scott, January 2021), expressing exactly how prevalent and valuable these relationships are for players. Relationships can also exist between tribes and even across international borders. An Elder discussing the International Traditional Games Society in the 1990s stated, "we invited people from the Sioux, Navajos, Koreans… South Africa, the tribes from different states… and we compete and show them our games and they showed us their games," (Interview, November 2020). This sharing of games and participation together reflects the history and cross-cultural similarities of Indigenous games and can further contribute to the revival and continuance of traditional games.

As is evident by the different names, assorted styles, and tournaments held, handgame is prevalent throughout many Indigenous tribes across North America. The universality of handgame is astounding. Regardless of cultural heritage or location of residence, players bond through handgame and their Indigeneity, forming meaningful connections with one another that last throughout one's lifetime. Mentioned previously, an Elder described these relationships in his life and their scope – individuals from the east coast, west coast, the south, and the north refer to him by language reserved to describe familial kinship. Songs are another mode with which to celebrate cultural differences among handgame players, as well as have a sense of community that spans great distances. Players who actively participate in handgame will travel across North America to participate in various tournaments, visiting their family that grew as a result of their participation in games and engaging in a practice that has long been part of their Indigenous culture.

The vast cultural components of traditional games shared by Elders interviewed provides a look into the intricacies of Blackfoot culture and its ubiquitous nature in various practices. The sentiments described by Elders, emphasizing the traditions, innerworkings, and extensiveness of handgame is echoed by the survey respondents. None of those who took the survey had a negative attitude toward traditional games, and a majority (78.43%) look at traditional games positively. When taking this information into account and considering the literature that describes traditional games in their historical context, the continuous value that traditional games have for Indigenous Peoples is apparent. Regardless of similarities that may exist at face value, Western conceptualizations and practices of gambling and Indigenous traditional games (even those which include wagering) are, at their core, *fundamentally* different. Today, much like

throughout the past, traditional games are played for diverse reasons and carry several significant meanings in the lives of players.

Indigenous culture, in this case Blackfoot culture, provides the necessary context for traditional games and gambling practices that exist for Indigenous Peoples. Traditional Indigenous games are complex – they are full of tradition and cultural and personal meaning for those who play them. Most players engage in traditional games for fun (46.36%), for spiritual/ceremonial/cultural purposes (18.54%), and because they enjoy the competition (17.88%). Consideration must be taken of the history, evolution, and multifaceted nature of traditional games, as well as the various aspects of Blackfoot culture that are central in players' lives, such as oral tradition and cultural values. Games have long been part of Blackfoot culture, whose purposes were practical for gaining certain expertise, redistributing wealth, and entertainment for the community. Through cultural genocide and assimilation, settler colonialism contributed to the loss of many of these games, with few being widely played today. The existing literature on Indigenous games or gambling tends to misrepresent the tradition of games, the depth of their meaning, and the continuation of their play.

By understanding Indigenous games and forms of gambling in their cultural contexts, insight can be gained into the behaviours, beliefs, and motivations of Indigenous Peoples. Understanding how and why Western notions of gambling are not synonymous to Indigenous conceptualizations of the practice is essential when doing research on gambling habits in Indigenous populations. This research is intended to contribute to a limited field of literature and provide a perspective on Indigenous gambling, and more importantly, traditional games, that has not previously existed. Future research from an Indigenous lens that incorporate Indigenous

ways of knowing is needed when exploring Indigenous populations, habits, or related topics and can be done without devaluing scientific methodology.

Limitations

This study operated under certain constraints, which have affected various aspects of research. The entire project took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which limits recruitment for the survey and interviews. Individuals are not going out in public as often and when they do it is for a particular purpose at specific locations, making travel to hang posters advertising the survey difficult and rendering the posters less effective. Interviews took place over the phone or through Zoom, which may be perceived as complicated or undesirable, particularly for Elders who may not be as versed in technology. In general, most of the population is busier and carrying more stress due to factors arising from the pandemic such as working from home, ill family members, concern for their own health, etc. that would make participation in a research project low priority for those interested in participating. Time limitations pertinent to an honours thesis project also contribute to a smaller than desired number of interviews and of survey responses.

Indigenous Peoples have a long history of being exploited by academia and research, leaving many Indigenous communities rightfully apprehensive about research occurring in their community and participating in that research. Even if the primary investigator is a member of the Indigenous community being included in the project, they are working on behalf of and represent the institution backing the research. Suspicion of the research project can result.

Unfortunately, many Indigenous traditions and oral history is fading, limiting access to information. Knowledge of particular topics is not widespread and what is known may be a small

part of a larger picture. Those who do hold sacred knowledge may be very protective of who they share that knowledge with, because of the nature of knowledge (i.e., if it pertains to sacred practices or ceremony) and wariness of participation in research.

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Appendix A

Letter of Consent (Elder Participation)

Oki [Elder's name],

You are being invited to participate in a research study exploring Blackfoot traditional games and forms of gambling. The purpose of this study is to gather information on this topic to provide a better understanding of the cultural background and prevalence of traditional games and gambling. The information collected throughout this study will be compiled and presented as an Honours Thesis by a Blackfoot undergraduate student (Marley HeavyShield) at the University of Lethbridge. The information provided may also contribute to a published article and various presentations on the project's findings.

Your participation in this study will take approximately 30-60 minutes of your time, either over the phone, in person, or through Zoom (depending on your preference during this pandemic). The interview will be used to provide a background for the study, which will also gather prevalence rates of traditional games and gambling in the modern era. You have the option of anonymity. Should you choose to remain anonymous, you may choose a pseudonym, but this is not required. If you would not like anonymity, your contributions may be attached to your name throughout the thesis or you may be included in the acknowledgements or both, whichever you prefer. The primary investigator (Marley HeavyShield) and the research assistant (Kalli Eagle Speaker) will be taking written notes throughout our conversation. With your permission, the audio from the interviews will also be recorded with a handheld recorder however, this is not mandatory, and you have the right to choose whether or not your interview is recorded. For any interviews taking place on Zoom, only the audio will be recorded, with your consent. If you agree to record the interviews, they will be transcribed by the primary investigator (Marley HeavyShield) and the research assistant (Kalli Eagle Speaker).

For choosing to participate in this study, you shall receive a small traditional gift and will have contributed to a greater understanding of Blackfoot cultural games in today's world.

Conversation during the interview may include a discussion of colonization and its impacts on traditional games, which may cause emotional distress. Excluding the potential emotional discomfort from examining specific aspects of colonization, there are no other anticipated risks or drawbacks to participating in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from participating at any time for any reason. If you choose to do so, any gift that has been offered remains yours. Should you withdraw your participation, you can decide what is to be done with the information gathered from you. The information may be returned to you and the researcher's copy will be destroyed (you will be the sole possessor of the information) or some of the information can be used for this project or it can simply be destroyed. In order to withdraw, contact the primary investigator (by e-mail: marley.heavyshield@uleth.ca or phone: 587-220-4961) or one of her faculty supervisors (by e-mail: j.williams@uleth.ca or robert.williams@uleth.ca) to let them know you are withdrawing and to notify them of what you would like to be done with any information pertaining to you and your interview. You may also withdraw in person at any point during your interview. Your participation is this project is voluntary and you should not feel pressured to take part. The ability to successfully complete this project will not be harmed should you choose not to participate or choose to withdraw your participation. Any relationship existing between you and the primary investigator (Marley HeavyShield) and/or the research assistant (Kalli Eagle Speaker) will not be affected by your decision to participate or withdrawal of participation.

Your anonymity (should you choose) and confidentiality will be protected. All data collected will be kept on a password protected computer with access given only to the primary investigator (Marley HeavyShield), the research assistant (Kalli Eagle Speaker) and the two faculty supervisors (Jennifer Williams and Robert Williams). All of the interviews, transcripts, and possible recordings will be assigned a number to identify the data. If you choose to be named in the study your name may be attached to the data you've provided to ensure it is correctly linked to you. The information that is collected, including the potential recordings of the interviews, may be returned back to the community with your permission and shall be kept on a password protected computer for 7 years before being destroyed, but you also have the option of the primary investigator's copy of the data being deleted immediately after the Honours Thesis is completed. You may request that the information be returned to you as well, either as a digital

copy or physical copy. Should interviews occur in-person, proper COVID-19 precautions will be taken. This includes the use of personal protective equipment (i.e., masks, gloves, disinfectant wipes, and hand sanitizer) provided by Eagle Spirit Gifts, following social distancing measures, proper sanitization of surfaces, hands, and other items, and hosting the interviews outdoors or in a safe public space (to avoid entering residences). Should interviews take place over Zoom, the waiting room feature will be utilized to ensure the security of the interview.

The results of this study will be presented in a thesis, potentially a published article and presentation; however, no identifiable or personal information will be used unless specifically requested by the participant. The community will also be afforded the choice of receiving a presentation as well. You have the right to review a draft of the thesis in its entirety with portions relevant to your contributions being highlighted for your convenience, however you are free to read the entire draft. Your review will take place prior to publication and a report summarizing the results may be provided to you once the project is complete. Should you wish to provide any feedback on the study, it must be given within two weeks of receiving the draft so the primary investigator may complete the project on time. You may also opt out of contact occurring following your interview regarding the project, and thus opt out of reviewing the thesis and/or receiving a final report if you would like.

If you have any further questions or concerns, feel free to contact me at any time either by phone or email.

Phone: 587-220-4961
E-mail: marley.heavyshield@uleth.ca

If you have any questions or concerns you'd like to discuss with the supervisors of this project, do not hesitate to contact them.

Jennifer Williams
Associate Chair
Psychology Department
Phone: 403-380-1852

E-mail: j.williams@uleth.ca

Robert Williams
Professor
Alberta Gaming Research Institute
Addictions Counselling Program
Health Sciences
Phone: 403-382-7128
E-mail: robert.williams@uleth.ca

Questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Lethbridge.
Phone: 403-329-2747
E-mail: research.services@uleth.ca

This research has been reviewed and approved for ethical acceptability by the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee.

I have read and understand the above information regarding the research of this study on Blackfoot traditional gambling and games, and consent to participate in this study.

_____ (Participant's Name)

_____ (Participant's Signature)

_____ (Date)

I consent to being recorded (audio only) during my interview.

_____ (Participant's Name)

_____ (Participant's Signature)

_____ (Date)

I wish to be named as a participant (i.e., in an acknowledgements section).

_____ (Participant's Name)

_____ (Participant's Signature)

_____ (Date)

I wish to have my quotations labelled with my name.

_____ (Participant's Name)

_____ (Participant's Signature)

_____ (Date)

I wish to remain anonymous.

_____ (Participant's Name)

_____ (Participant's Signature)

_____ (Date)

I wish to receive a copy of both the recording and transcript of my interview.

_____ (Participant's Name)

_____ (Participant's Signature)

_____ (Date)

I agree to have the information collected during my interview shared with the community following the project's completion.

_____ (Participant's Name)

_____ (Participant's Signature)

_____ (Date)

I wish to have the primary investigator destroy their copies of information I have provided immediately following the Honours Thesis's completion.

_____ (Participant's Name)

_____ (Participant's Signature)

_____ (Date)

I wish to opt out of any contact regarding the project following this interview, and do not want to receive either a draft to review or a final report.

_____ (Participant's Name)

_____ (Participant's Signature)

_____ (Date)

I wish to opt out of reviewing a draft of the thesis but would like a final report.

_____ (Participant's Name)

_____ (Participant's Signature)

_____ (Date)

I wish to opt out of receiving a final report but would like to review the thesis.

_____ (Participant's Name)

_____ (Participant's Signature)

_____ (Date)

_____ (Researcher's Name)

_____ (Researcher's Signature)

_____ (Date)

Marley HeavyShield
Undergraduate Student
University of Lethbridge
587-220-4961
marley.heavyshield@uleth.ca

A copy of this consent form has been given to you for your records and reference.

Appendix B

Survey Questions

1) What is your current age? If you prefer not to answer, simply continue to the next question.
    - [text box for answer]
2) Do you currently live on or off reserve?
    - On reserve
    - Off reserve
    - Prefer not to answer
3) What is your gender?
    - Man
    - Woman
    - Two-spirit/LGBTQ+
    - Prefer not to answer
4) Which band are you from?
    - Kainai
    - Piikani
    - Siksika
    - Prefer not to answer
5) Have you ever watched or participated in traditional Indigenous games (such as hand/stick games)?
    - Yes, I have watched
    - Yes, I have participated

- Yes, I have both watched and participated
- No
- Prefer not to answer

6) How often do you watch or participate in traditional games?
    - Several times a year
    - A few times a year
    - Once a year
    - Once every few years
    - Only once or twice ever
    - Prefer not to answer
7) What are the names of the traditional games you have watched or participated in? If you prefer not to answer, simply continue to the next question.
    - [text box for answer]
8) Were bets made during these traditional games?
    - Yes, always
    - Yes, most of the time
    - Yes, sometimes
    - No
    - Prefer not to answer
9) Why do you watch or participate in these traditional games? (check all reasons that apply to you)
    - For fun
    - For spiritual/ceremonial/cultural purposes

- I enjoy the competition
- To win money
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

10) What is your attitude toward these traditional games?

- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative
- Prefer not to answer

11) How did you hear about this survey? If you prefer not to answer, simply continue to submit your responses, and finish the survey.

- [text box for answer]

If you would like to enter the draw for your chance to win a hand drum and a beaded medallion, click here! [hyperlink “click here!” to draw entry survey]

Appendix C

Letter of Consent (Survey Participation)

Primary Researcher: Marley HeavyShield, member of the Blood Tribe/Kainai Nation, Undergraduate student, University of Lethbridge

What is this study about? This is an invitation to participate in an anonymous survey for members of the Blackfoot Confederacy (specifically those from Kainai, Piikani, and/or Siksika). The information gathered in this survey will be included in a study being conducted for an Honours Thesis by Marley HeavyShield. The information provided may also contribute to a published article and various presentations on the project's findings. All members of Kainai, Piikani, and/or Siksika who are 18 years of age or older are invited to participate and contribute to this research. As a thank you for your participation, you may choose to enter your contact information into a draw to win both a hand drum donated by a member of the community and a beaded medallion made by Kalli Eagle Speaker. The survey will be open until at least 300 responses have been entered. The odds of winning the draw are 1 in 300, but this is subject to change should more responses be entered before the survey is closed. The draw will take place no later than March 1, 2021.

What is expected of you? You will complete a survey asking questions regarding traditional Blackfoot games and once you have submitted your responses you will then be sent to a second survey requesting contact information (i.e., name, phone number, e-mail), which will be your entry into the draw. This is to ensure any identifying information will not be linked to survey responses. The survey contains 11 questions and will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

What are the anticipated uses of the data collected? The responses to this survey will be collected and presented in an academic written format and oral presentation as part of the completion of Marley HeavyShield's Honours Thesis. All data collected will be kept on a password protected computer with access given only to the primary investigator (Marley HeavyShield), the research assistant (Kalli Eagle Speaker) and the two faculty supervisors (Jennifer Williams and Robert Williams) who are conducting the study. The information that is collected will be stored for 7 years before being destroyed.

What are the risks and benefits of participating? There are no anticipated risks for participating in this study. By participating you benefit from contributing to a greater understanding of the prevalence of traditional Blackfoot games and gambling in the modern era.

How are participants' confidentiality and anonymity going to be protected? Participation is entirely voluntary, and responses will be kept anonymous. Any identifying information (i.e., name, contact info) will be used for the sole purpose of the draw and will not be linked to responses to the survey. All personal information collected will be deleted immediately after the draw has occurred. Since this survey is conducted electronically, your privacy cannot be fully guaranteed. This survey will be conducted online using Qualtrics and their privacy policy can be found here: https://www.qualtrics.com/privacy-statement/.

How can a participant withdraw? Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. However, should you choose to withdraw your participation, you may do so at any time by simply closing your browser before submitting your responses. Any personal information provided will not be linked to your responses, so once you have submitted both surveys you can no longer withdraw your participation. Should you withdraw during the survey but wish to still

be entered into the draw, you may continue through the questions without providing answers until you are redirected to the draw entry form.

Who is conducting this research? For more information on this study or to receive a copy of the findings (available after April 2021), you may contact Marley HeavyShield at marley.heavyshield@uleth.ca or 587-220-4961. Should you have any questions for the faculty supervisors, you may contact Jennifer Williams at j.williams@uleth.ca or 403-380-1852 and Robert Williams at robert.williams@uleth.ca or 403-382-7128. Questions in regard to your rights as a participant can be addressed by contacting the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Lethbridge by phone (403-329-2747) or email (research.services@uleth.ca).

This study has been reviewed for ethical acceptability and approved by the University of Lethbridge Human Participant Research Committee.

You must be 18 years of age or older and from traditional Blackfoot territory (specifically Kainai, Piikani, or Siksika) to participate in this survey.

If you wish to participate in this survey, select “Yes, I consent” and continue through the questions. Thank you for your participation and good luck!

Appendix D

Survey Recruitment Poster