

# Doing research into Indigenous issues being non-Indigenous

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## Abstract

Based on research into Indigenous people and sport, this article discusses the opportunities and challenges for a non-Indigenous researcher to study Indigenous issues. The author shares personal experiences from research into Sámi sport (Sámi are the Indigenous people of the North Calotte) and compares these with the literature relating to post-colonial methodologies. It concludes with some overarching elements to take into consideration when researching Indigenous peoples: reflection including critical self-reflection (as in any qualitative research); reciprocity, including respect, dialogue and that the research must benefit the Indigenous people under study and in general; and awareness about the heterogeneity within Indigenous groups and consciousness about the interface between researcher and Indigenous peoples. Given the heterogeneity, the interfaces vary.

## Keywords

Indigenous methodology, Indigenous people, Indigenous research, non-Indigenous researcher, post-colonial methodology, Sámi

## Introduction

Indigenous peoples and sport is a growing research field (Forsyth and Giles, 2012; Hallinan and Judd, 2013), as are the general methodological reflections into researching Indigenous peoples under post-colonial conditions (Denzin et al., 2008; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2009). However, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to reflecting upon research into Indigenous peoples and sport – and the researchers undertaking this. Thus, sport sociology and sport sociologists – including myself – have much to learn from the general literature into Indigenous methodologies. The interest in and need for scrutinizing such issues emerged during research into Sámi sport. Sámi are the Indigenous people of the North Calotte, inhabiting northern parts of Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway.

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In this paper, I reflect upon undertaking research into Sámi sport in Norway while representing the dominant culture – literally when being a Norwegian academic. I discuss possibilities and challenges for me to study Sámi sport, by comparing personal experience from my research into Sámi sport with the literature into Indigenous and post-colonial methodologies. By sharing such discussions, this article contributes to the qualitative research field by focusing on Indigenous peoples (Brannely and Boulton, 2017; Carpenter and McMurphy-Pilkington, 2008; Pidgeon, 2018). More specifically, this paper contributes to the literature into qualitative research in general and reflections regarding Indigenous research in particular by adding to Pidgeon's (2018) approach of decolonizing research processes.

I follow a qualitative research paradigm of locating 'Indigenous ways of knowing and being within the research' (Pidgeon, 2018: 3; see also Brannely and Boulton, 2017; Carpenter and McMurphy-Pilkington, 2008). This perspective overlaps with – but slightly differs from – the four Rs of Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) and the fifth R proposed by Pidgeon (2018). The four Rs relate to how a researcher needs to deal with Indigenous peoples: with respect, reciprocity, relevance and responsibility (see also Olsen, 2016). Pidgeon's (2018) fifth R is reverence. I pinpoint three elements to consider when researching Indigenous peoples and being non-Indigenous: reflection, reciprocity, and heterogeneity. The first two are common characteristics of qualitative research. Heterogeneity refers to how Indigenous peoples (and others) form subgroups and are unique individuals and that speaking of Sámi as one entity is reductionistic. It includes collaboration with and benefits for Indigenous peoples. Thus, I underscore the importance of acknowledging the complexity of heterogeneity in Indigenous research. In the following, I first describe my research context: the Norwegian side of Sápmi (the land of the Sámi). Second, I present my background as an ethnic Norwegian born into a multicultural community of Sápmi, all the way to be a researcher into Sámi sport. Third, I apply sources into research ethics and post-colonial and Indigenous methodologies. Fourth, I discuss opportunities and constraints for undertaking research into Indigenous people and sport, given what is presented in the literature compared to the researcher's background and experience.

## **Context: Sámi and Sápmi**

There are no precise ethnicity statistics in Norway, but estimates are usually in the order of 80–100,000 Sámi in North Calotte, with approximately 50–65,000 in Norway, 20,000 in Sweden, 8000 in Finland and 2000 in Russia (Nordisk samekonvensjon, 2005). Predecessors of Sámi and Norwegians, Swedes, Finns and others have cohabited in the northern parts of Scandinavia since the end of the Ice Age. The colonization of Sápmi did not include the 'classic' invasion through the use of physical force but was conducted as a cultural and social invasion. The state-driven assimilation policy referred to as 'Norwegianization' has dominated the Norwegian–Sámi relationship since the middle of the 19th century. After a hundred years, a cultural and political revitalization process commenced in the 1960s. Sámi grassroots initiated the revitalization, and the Norwegian state followed up with international commitments.<sup>1</sup> These are concrete examples of reverence (Pidgeon, 2018). Commencing with a growing concern over Sámi heritage, a political mobilization developed throughout the 1970s and 1980s and gained several specific

results. In 1987, the Norwegian state adopted a Sámi Act, and in 1989, the Sámi parliament was established. The Sámi parliament symbolizes acknowledgement by the Norwegian state of the Sámi people, and is a democratic organ representing the ethnic group in and towards the state (Selle and Strømnes, 2015). In 1990, Norway ratified ILO convention no. 169, *The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention* (Berg-Nordlie, 2015).

The current situation of the Sámi in Norway is that of a relatively acknowledged people. Sámi can – and do – go to schools and play sports like everybody else. Thus, the Sámi take part in the public and voluntary sectors, in line with other citizens. However, Sámi also have their own organizations, in sport for example. There is a Sámi sports organization, *Sámiid Valáštallanlihttu – Norga* (SVL-N), with 23 member clubs and approximately 4000 individual members. SVL-N sport clubs usually federate in the Norwegian sports organization, too, and provide activities such as football and cross-country skiing. The distinct Sámi sports disciplines are reindeer racing and lassoing (with variations: only lassoing, cross-country running with lassoing, and running with lassoing). How explicitly the sport clubs display their indigeneity in their local profiling, especially regarding use of language, varies.

## Originating in Sápmi and studying Sámi

As a qualitative researcher, I am generally intentional about my role as the research instrument. This awareness has increased after commencing Indigenous research. It is hard to present oneself in a scientifically proper manner, and I am inspired by the way another Norwegian scholar into Sámi issues approaches these challenging issues. Torjer A Olsen, professor of Indigenous Studies at the Centre for Sami Studies at The University of Tromsø (The Arctic University of Norway), is in a similar position to me. These lines from his self-reflection could almost have been mine:

I am a Norwegian man. This is a statement with many implications, some of which are more obvious than others. Stating my Norwegian identity implies that I do not self-identify as a Sámi (the Indigenous people of northern Europe). Coming from the north of Norway, however, complicates the story. Sápmi/Sabme/Saepmi (the land of the Sámi in the three official languages) was never colonized by settlers in the same way as Aotearoa, Australia or the Americas were. My ancestors from the north of Norway are a mix of a number of peoples and ethnicities: Norwegian, Sámi, Finnish, Swedish and most probably Russian. People lived together in the same or neighbouring villages for centuries until the modern process of making national kingdoms and states with borders appeared. My family turned out as Norwegian. (Olsen, 2017a: 522)

I am a Norwegian who grew up in Sápmi during the 1970s and the 1980s. I have Norwegian parents who themselves grew up in mixed ethnic communities in Sápmi. Unlike Olsen, I do not know of other ethnicities than Norwegian in my family, but I had grandparents originating from some harshly assimilated areas. If there was Sámi or other ethnic heritage, it never transferred to me.<sup>2</sup> My parents worked as public sector employees serving people of various ethnicities; one of them studied Sámi language in order to communicate with the local inhabitants in their mother tongue. I grew up in a

mixed ethnic and cultural community; Sámi, Norwegian and Finnish were natural parts of everyday life. Some of my friends spoke Sámi at home; others had parents who spoke Sámi but who did not pass it on. I participated in Sámi football tournaments, representing the local Sámi organization in events organized by the Sámi sport organization. The local football team, with Norwegian and Sámi players, joined the Sámi tournament, registered as a Sámi (non-sport) organization. We were the same players that we used to be when playing in the Norwegian football league. Looking back, with increased awareness as an adult researcher, I realize that Sámi sport was part of my childhood and adolescence, and I acknowledge that Sámi football is part of an overarching revitalization process. Thus, when my generation reached adulthood, several of my friends took back their Sámi identity.

When I commenced studies at university in 1993, the Sámi parliament was already established and the Sámi people's standing in Norway was formalized (Berg-Nordlie, 2015; Selle and Strømnes, 2015). I moved out of the core Sámi areas in 1998 (and never returned) due to studies and academic posts. My research topic has been Norwegian sport policy and organization (Broch and Skille, 2019; Seippel and Skille, 2019; Skille, 2015; Skille and Chroni, 2018), and the challenges and limitations with one monopolistic sport organization: the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committees and Confederation of Sports (NIF). In that respect, the case of Sámi sport fitted nicely into my research interests. The research into Sámi sport commenced when a representative of the Sámi sport organization (SVL-N) called me in 2007. She had identified me when searching for expertise into youth sport and drop-outs (my research topic at the time) and invited me to an SVL-N meeting. Representatives of Sámi sport felt overlooked by both sport science and by sport politics (Skille, 2019). I felt guilty representing a collegium of scholars never mentioning Sámi sport in sport sociology outlets. The SVL-N meeting lit a spark in me, as a researcher and as a 'Sámi friendly'<sup>3</sup> North-Norwegian; I have had contact with SVL-N over the years and published papers on Sámi sport. However, I have never systematically reflected about being a non-Indigenous researcher into Indigenous issues before learning to know the literature relating to post-colonial and Indigenous methodologies to which I now turn.

## Research ethics and Indigenous methodologies

Over recent decades, 'ethics in research related to Indigenous peoples has been increasingly discussed in a global context' (Drugge, 2016a: 9). Moreover, 'discussions on ethical issues in relation to Sámi research have predominantly been present on the Norwegian sides of Sápmi' (Drugge, 2016a: 9). I will investigate both international and national sources after making one more point from Drugge, namely that 'there exists a great uncertainty among scholars on where to seek ethical guidance' (2016b: 263). Consequently, 'individual researchers demonstrate varying approaches to ethics' (Drugge, 2016b: 269). In her study of research applications, Drugge found that 43% of research projects into Sámi issues ignored ethics; 50% 'follow national ethical standards and legislation' (2016b: 270). The latter group takes 'a legitimate and safe position, but one that does not necessarily correlate with what is considered to be ethical from the point of view of Indigenous peoples' (2016b: 270). Only 7% (4 of 56) employed international references and

acknowledged cultural sensitivity of Indigenous understandings. Given the broad variations in ethics in Indigenous research, I elaborate on my research context.

Two documents stand out regarding Sámi in Norway: The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees' *Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology* (NESH, 2016) and the *Proposal for Ethical Guidelines for Sámi Health Research and Research on Sámi Human Biological Material* (Sametinget, 2018). Rules about respect for private interests, public administration, and vulnerable groups apply, independent of ethnicity. Sámi is only mentioned explicitly under the heading 'Preservation of cultural monuments and remains' (NESH, 2016: 24). Under the heading 'Research on other cultures' it reads: '[R]esearchers should enter into a dialogue with the local inhabitants, representatives of the culture in question and the local authorities' and 'researchers should avoid using classifications or designations that allow unreasonable generalization' (NESH, 2016: 25). I return to generalization below, when discussing heterogeneity. Whilst ethical guidelines for Sámi health research focus on human biological material, and apparently seem irrelevant for qualitative social research, I found some phrases interesting. One is about self-determination: 'Qualitative Sámi health research rests on the perception that Sámi social conditions, including Sámi language and culture, may have an influence on the Sámi experience of and communication about health, disease and care services' (Sametinget, 2018: 25). Second:

The term "free and informed collective consent" (henceforth "collective consent") refers to a consent given without coercion or pressure by a local community or an Indigenous group that is directly or indirectly impacted by the proposed research. Such consent will also require free, informed individual consent. (p. 30)

The latter is a research-specific variant of the general consideration of 'Indigenous people's right to self-determination' (p. 31). Again, the proposed solution for a researcher is dialogue with representatives of Sámi communities. (I pick up this point too, in the heterogeneity discussion below.) The points cited from the two documents are developed better in the literature of Indigenous methodologies, therefore I move on there.

The literature concerning post-colonial and Indigenous methodologies is various. Still, some relatively shared characteristics are important in the following discussion. First, it is not contested that colonialism took place. Regarding Sápmi, colonization took place as construction of state borders and through harsh assimilation (Olsen, 2017a). Second, colonization includes more than an understanding of one people appropriating another people's land. Colonialism is as much about defining right and wrong, morally and legally, when it comes to artefacts and behaviour as well as values and ontology. It is about definition rights, regarding worldview, knowledge creation and inter-human behaviour. Along similar lines, Gaudet reflects upon power relations in participatory research with Indigenous peoples: 'Power relations remain central to the participatory research theme as the political, economic, spiritual, and societal landscapes of Indigenous communities continue to be fraught with proverbial undercover cops' (2014: 71). Third, the post-colonial and Indigenous methodologies literature calls for change. Thus, the titles of the leading books in the field signal change processes: *Decolonizing methodologies* (Smith, 2012), *Indigenous methodologies* (Chilisa, 2012) and *Research is Ceremony*.

*Indigenous Research Methods* (Wilson, 2009). Indigenous peoples (must) claim back the mindset through decolonization and new research approaches. I emphasize that these seminal works are large and complex, and that after sketching some points here, I apply other and more nuanced points below.

In the first sentence of *Decolonizing methodologies*, Smith holds that the word ‘research’ is tightly associated with imperialism and colonization. She continues: ‘The word itself, “research”, is one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary’ (2012: 1) because research understood as how ‘knowledge about Indigenous people was collected, classified and then presented’ relates directly to a ‘collective memory of imperialism’ (2012: 1). In Sámi-Norwegian history, government authorities exploited science to depress the Sámi population when state assimilation policy was rationalized by ‘scientific evidence’ that ‘proved’ Sámi sub-ordination. During the 19th century, this took the form of skull measurements; Sámi were so-called ‘short skulls’ and hence inferior (Aas and Vestgård, 2014). This ‘modern science’ of physical anthropology fitted into a picture carved out since the first written text mentioning the Sámi, where the author equates Sámi with zero. The Viking chief, Ottar – the local Norwegian king at the time (800 AD) – claimed that there was nothing north and east of where he lived, only Sámi (Storfjell, 2001).

Smith (2012) underscores that social scientific theory links to imperialism, history and writing. So-called ‘universal’ understandings of reality, time and space lean on the dominant Western culture researchers’ results. The dominant culture’s version of the history equals ‘the history’ (re the Viking chief Ottar). Paradoxically, ‘the form of imperialism that Indigenous peoples are confronting now emerged from the period of European history known as *the Enlightenment*’ (Smith, 2012: 6) and modernity. *Enlightenment* and modernity provided Western scientists with an opportunity to apply ‘the truth’. Consequently, we believe that we have rational ideals; we use scientific methods to explore and discover, and we conduct objective analyses (re skull measures). Hence, conclusions and contributions to society including politicians are believed to be true. We wrap our conclusions in a language comprising a hierarchy where we happen to be on top, and Indigenous research *object* ‘were classified alongside the flora and fauna’ (Smith, 2012: 62). Although official politics today bans such ideas, the historical relationship between Sámi and Norwegians is still at play. For example, Olsen and Andreassen (2018: 1) show that the implementation weaknesses of childhood education curricula about Sámi ‘leave the risk for the continuing silencing and Othering of the Indigenous’.<sup>4</sup>

The literature into post-colonial and Indigenous methodologies suggest that proper Indigenous research requires inside understanding of Indigenous ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2009) and is Indigenous in favour of more researchers who are Indigenous (Denzin et al., 2008; Mertens et al., 2013; Wilson, 2009).<sup>5</sup> So am I! However, when Indigenous research methodology is ‘research *by* and *for* Indigenous peoples, using techniques and methods from the traditions of those peoples’ (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008: x; Evans et al., 2009: 894; emphasis added),<sup>6</sup> the position of a non-Indigenous researcher in the study of Indigenous peoples is contested. When Indigenous scholars are lifted, prioritized, focused or centred, one possible implication is smaller chances for an ethnic Norwegian scholar. ‘Despite good will and academic skills’, non-Indigenous researchers ‘can be

seen as symptoms of the colonial aftermath. . . . They (we) remain colonisers' (Olsen, 2017b: 4–5). However, as indicated above, there are nuances in the works of, for example, Chalisa and Smith, to which I return below. Moreover, there are different opinions within the Sámi population regarding Norwegian researchers; that is the core of my third main point in this paper: Heterogeneity. In the next section, I combine the Indigenous research literature with my own experiences researching Sámi sport.

## **Indigenous methodology, Sámi sport and the Daza<sup>7</sup>**

Sociological training teaches that comparison can increase understanding of a phenomenon. A comparison with the past aids understanding today, as well as change. Comparing contexts helps to identify characteristics with the focal one. However, there is a normative risk associated with comparison because it often applauds the goods of Western lifestyle and identifies 'the other' as savage. I have found myself in such situations. Despite aiming at being critical in earlier studies of Norwegian sport (NIF) (author reference), it became the benchmark for my interpretation of sport organizations. Hence, during early meetings in SVL-N contexts, it struck me how different it was, compared to NIF; regarding the number of participants, agenda, and time management. In other words, Norwegian stereotypes about Sámi were confirmed.<sup>8</sup> Reflecting on my interpretation a decade later, I see an example of 'whiteness', a 'hidden normative way of life by which all cultural ways of being are measured'. It has a hegemonic character and gives implications for 'the way white academics come to understand the world as an object of analysis' (Evans et al., 2009: 898). In the Norwegian context, researchers have employed whiteness in different contexts; studying immigrants (Guðjónsdóttir and Loftsdóttir, 2017), studying how adoptees 'negotiate their national belonging and identities by positioning themselves in relation to whiteness' (Zhao, 2019: 1259), and studying physical education. Teachers 'draw on narratives from curricula texts which uphold and reinforce notions of the racialized other, and thereby reasserting normative, universal white knowledge' (Flintoff and Dowling, 2019: 121).

Dankertsen explored 'how whiteness and race are often understated but relevant categories of identification in Sápmi' (2019: 110). The privileges immanent in whiteness are intricate when applied to Sámi because Sámi are both white and non-white. Self-identifying as white and simultaneously bearing a status as Indigenous people complicates whiteness among Sámi (Dankertsen, 2019). Returning to the aforementioned SVL-N meeting, my participation can be interpreted ambiguously. On the one side, by inviting a Norwegian researcher into Sámi sport, the SVL-N contacted an outsider. On the contrary, because the SVL-N manager invited a person she knew from her local community, I was partly an insider. At least, key personnel in Sámi sport were familiar with me and apparently trusted me. I was both distinguished from Sámi sport. and I was sharing characteristics with the inside of Sámi sport. Looking back and reading more, sociological training did not prepare us for how we are encountered by different research subjects and peer researchers in various contexts. I will thus present how I came to focus on reflexivity, reciprocity, and heterogeneity. This is based first, on scholars from my home academic field of sport sociology. Second, a return to the general literature on post-colonial and Indigenous methodologies in a search for other interpretations and passages

than those cited above (which were selected to provide scepticism against me regarding doing research into Sámi sport). Third, and most specifically, I look at scholars of Sámi research – both Sámi and non-Sámi researchers.

Although there is not a one-to-one relationship between sources and my point (for example, sport sociology and reflection), my consciousness regarding the concepts developed approximately in the order that I present them here. First, from sport sociological research and the foreword to an anthology into *Native Games – Indigenous peoples and sports in the post-colonial world* (Hallinan and Judd, 2013), the Māori scholar Hokowhitu (2013: xvii) suggests that

any analysis of indigeneity and sport must be firstly cognizant of ‘local knowledges’ and place, the dispossessing nature of colonialism, the role sport played in assimilating the Indigenous population within the national state, the complexity that is the Indigenous athlete as both Indigenous hero and dupe, the possibilities that sport holds as spectacle of Indigenous resistance and more than anything, the relationship between sport and Indigenous post-colonial corporeality.

Following Hokowhitu, the Australian-American scholar Hallinan underscores that research into Indigenous people and sport must emphasize reflexivity: ‘The advice on research methods has challenged those undertaking studies of Indigenous peoples to reconsider whether their approach reproduces the shackles of colonialism’ (2015: 451). However, complying with minimum standards of ethical requirements, does not necessarily facilitate cultural understanding and understanding of diversity. According to Hallinan, we need to ‘move beyond generalized population group categories and consider the diversity of practices, beliefs and values’; specifically, ‘[n]on-Indigenous authors and researchers should consult and obtain consent and/or partnership with Indigenous researchers or communities before proceeding’ (Hallinan, 2015: 451).

Second, returning to Indigenous methodologies literature and following up Hallinan’s point, North American Indian Gaudet holds that ‘Boundaries are not fixed between knowledge systems’ (2014: 83); more collaboration is needed. Nevertheless, mutual understanding takes time, as ‘participatory mode of research is maturing, both intellectually and spiritually. . . . We simply need to remain open to ways of being with one another’ (2014: 84). In my case, the solution was to collaborate with the Sámi sport organization. Hornung, an aboriginal researcher descending from the Yiding and Bidjera peoples in Australia makes similar claims.<sup>9</sup> She holds that ‘research with and about Indigenous peoples must be founded on a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the researcher and the Indigenous people’ (2013: 140). Horning ‘identifies the basic elements [she] believe[s] a researcher should use when working with Indigenous groups’ (2013: 140–141). These are (i) consultation, negotiation and mutual understanding; (ii) respect for land, people and culture; and (iii) added outcome and benefits. This is in line with Carpenter and McMurphy-Pilkongton, who list several questions for consideration before and during research into Indigenous people and issues (What is the purpose? Are the researchers the right people to do it?). They hold that ‘any research involving Māori people should benefit Māori’ (Carpenter and McMurphy-Pilkongton, 2008: 184). One way to promote Indigenous interests is to collaborate with Indigenous researchers (Carpenter and McMurphy-Pilkongton, 2008), which can lead to decolonization (Brannely and Boulton,



2017). Another approach is that non-Indigenous researchers give voice to less privileged groups, first by placing the topic on the research agenda, and then providing the inside information for the public including policymakers.

Smith, cited above as a representative of an Indigenous research paradigm contesting non-Indigenous researchers, does indeed include passages on non-Indigenous researchers' contribution (2012: 17–18): 'Clearly, there have been some shifts in the way non-Indigenous researchers and academics have positioned themselves and their work in relation to the people for whom the research still counts'. Smith acknowledges development in non-Indigenous researchers and that there are nuances in the insider–outsider dichotomy. Smith proposes some strategies for 'Negotiating the Relationship with Non-Indigenous Researchers' (2012: 177–181). One strategy is to consult representatives of Indigenous people (see also Denzin et al., 2008). Whilst reflection and reciprocity are general characteristics of social research, their importance increases when moving on to the discussion about how Indigenous communities are heterogenic.

The literature into Sámi research leans on general Indigenous and post-colonial methodology literature and applies to my specific research interests. Jelena Porsanger, a Sámi from the Russian Sápmi, wrote *An essay about Indigenous methodology* with a dual perspective: as a Sámi and a Sámi researcher. Indigenous research paradigms 'represent alternative ways of thinking' (2004: 105) as 'Indigenous approaches to research in Indigenous issues are not meant to compete with, nor replace, the Western research paradigm; rather to challenge it and contribute to the body of knowledge of Indigenous peoples about and for themselves' (2004: 105). The solution is collaboration and various combinations of researchers: Sámi with Sámi, or Sámi with non-Sámi. A minimum standard for the non-Sámi researcher is to have the necessary insider knowledge (Porsanger, 2004). Repeating the insider–outsider dichotomy: can researchers like me considered as insiders, or deemed to be outsiders? Depending on how research subjects in various contexts meet us, the answer differs. Gaudet also emphasizes the heterogeneity in Indigenous communities among Indian communities in North America. 'There is no single Indigenous epistemology, as each person and/or community expresses knowledge uniquely based on stories, personal experiences, and ways of knowing and being' (2014: 74). In practical terms, that means giving voice to different actors surrounding Indigenous sports; for me that means learning from actors in for example SVL-N and the Sámi parliament (author references).

My own experience includes visits to Sámi research communities and sport sociology conferences. In both contexts, I have experienced different views upon my position. I have perceived being excluded by Sámi scholars because I did not speak the Sámi language, and interpret that as being considered as not culturally skilled.<sup>10</sup> I perceived similar when some Sámi researchers considered my limited knowledge of reindeer herding and thus questioned my ability to study reindeer racing as a sport. I simply felt as being judged as lacking the needed competence to be accepted as an insider. At conferences, I sometimes get the opposite feeling of the one described by Dankertsen (2019) when she delivered a paper in a session with a non-Indigenous researcher who presented on a similar topic: '[T]he response from the audience was remarkably different' (2019: 121). Dankertsen wore Sámi clothes and introduced herself as a Sámi-Norwegian. She received mostly compliments while the non-Indigenous researcher was highly criticized with

words like ‘You have read about this, we have lived it!’ (2019: 121) Others have not focused upon my limitations and conceived it as a good in itself that also non-Indigenous researchers want to study Sámi sport. The point is that different Sámi individuals have different views and people who know me are most positive. Combining the experiences showed that ‘there is no singular Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous knowledge is always in flux’ (Olsen, 2017b: 4). Summing up in a more collective message: Indigenous peoples’ views on the non-Indigenous as insiders and outsiders differ due to familiarity.

The Sámi are heterogeneous: because individuals are all unique the insider–outsider dimension varies and comprises nuances. In other words, ‘indigeneity and non-indigeneity are not binaries. There is space in between – in the cultural interface’ (Olsen, 2017b: 6). Challenging that interface, I rounded up my interviews with representatives of Sámi sport clubs with the question: ‘Would it affect our conversation if I had presented myself as a Sámi when the interview started? If yes, how?’ There was a spectrum of answers. Some were indifferent: ‘It would not make any difference’ (I 1) or ‘I say what I think anyway’ (I 2). Some were inclusive and supportive: ‘You are from [Sámi village]. You know the Sámi. . . . It made it easier that you presented yourself being from [village]. . . . Then it is not interesting whether are Sámi or Norwegian, you know the Sámi anyway’ (I 3), or: ‘It feels easier for me that we have the same dialect . . . it is good that someone does [Sámi research]. . . . I think it is positive that people are positive and want to [undertake] research [Sámi sport]’ (I 4). Taken together, the heterogeneous views on a non-Indigenous researcher create different interfaces for the researcher to work in and the researcher must position herself in the accessible zones.

With reference to Smith’s *Decolonizing Methodologies*, I follow Olsen (2017b: 3) who emphasizes ‘the local theoretical positioning’. The theoretical positioning is, with reference to Denzin and Lincoln’s introduction in their *Handbook of critical and Indigenous methodologies*, ‘grounded in a particular time and place, and in the politics’ thereof (Olsen, 2017b: 3). ‘The critical issue with insider research is the constant need for reflexivity’ (Smith, 2012: 138). The question is whether I must be a member of a specific Indigenous group to position myself in the politics of the time and space of Indigenous peoples and issues under scrutiny. Although the specific Māori research paradigm (*kaupapa* Māori) is primarily for Māori researchers, ‘it does not necessarily exclude *Pakeha* (non-Māori New Zealanders)’ (Olsen, 2017b: 4). The researcher needs to understand local knowledge ‘regardless of her own ethnicity’ (2017b: 3). However, ‘as a non-Indigenous scholar you have to *decentre yourself*’, because: ‘What is Indigenous ought to remain in the centre’ (2017b: 4). Despite that I am not a member of the Indigenous group, I share experiences with some of them by having grown up in the core Sámi areas, playing sports with Sámi as Sámi and across Sápmi.

## Conclusion

By combining literature into Indigenous research with my own experiences, I have focused upon three key components to compare the non-Indigenous researcher with the standards of Indigenous methodologies: Reflexivity, Reciprocity, and Heterogeneity. There are other possibilities. For example, as stated at the outset of this paper, one option is the five Rs (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991; Pidgeon, 2018): respect, reciprocity,

relevance, responsibility and reverence. Olsen suggests four approaches in order to restrict the limitation of being a non-Indigenous scholar of Indigenous studies: (i) to privilege the Indigenous; (ii) an intersectional approach; (iii) use critical perspectives, giving voice to the marginal; and (iv) decentring, which ‘is about learning *from* the other more than *about* the other’; ‘it is about not resting all knowledge on the scholar’s own experience. Decentring is undoing privilege’ (2017b: 8). Whichever concepts are employed, I will underscore the necessity to discuss combinations of the chosen ones. For me, it is important to acknowledge how combinations of reflexivity, reciprocity and heterogeneity provide various conclusions. It stands out as especially important to reflect upon heterogeneity – how it influences reciprocity between the non-Indigenous researcher and Indigenous peoples.

Reflection is fundamental in all social science and qualitative research (Hallinan, 2015). The researcher–researched relationship is always asymmetric, as the researcher defines the premises for the dialogue. This is even more important when it comes to research into Indigenous issues, where the asymmetry between a non-Indigenous researcher and Indigenous peoples has historical roots with political and cultural implications (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2009). Through this paper, I have reflected upon my own heritage as ambivalent, sought support for myself in Indigenous methodology literature, and shared some of my experiences as a non-Indigenous researcher. Challenging Olsen’s (2017b) claim that during research he ‘is being careful about taking a stand’ (Olsen, 2017b: 5), I have developed my stand through the process of doing research into Sámi sport and by writing this paper. Reflecting upon the beginning of my research into Sámi sport, and the continuous communication with individuals in SVL-N, I found safe ground. In sum, I emphasize three key elements: reflexivity, reciprocity and heterogeneity, to cover several elements picked up from the literature. These include reflection upon the researcher–researched relationship, collaboration with Indigenous community, Indigenous benefits of the research, and decentring of the researcher in order to front Indigenous peoples. They include admitting heterogeneity of Indigenous practices, values and opinions, and focusing on the interface between the non-Indigenous researcher and Indigenous peoples. My stand is that I want to shed light on Sámi sport in various channels in Norway and internationally.

Three sub-elements of reciprocity picked up from Indigenous and post-colonial methodologies literature guide my research – collaboration with Indigenous community; the research should have Indigenous benefits; and decentring of the researcher to give Indigenous peoples privilege. The concept of reciprocity covers these three well (Kirkness and Barnhardt, 1991; Pidgeon, 2018). Being invited to research Sámi sport by the Sámi sport organization in Norway (SVL-N), I follow Olsen (2017b) who leans on Chilisa (2012) among others when he holds that ‘Concepts like reciprocity are important to describe the relations between scholars and community’ (Olsen, 2017b: 4). By putting Sámi sport to the fore, I aim at privileging Indigenous interests and decentre myself as an instrument. I decentre myself in a two-step process: first by learning from the representatives and surroundings of Sámi sport (cf. Olsen, 2017b), and second by presenting their voice to a broader audience of researchers, politicians and practitioners. Centring Sámi sport provides mutual benefits for the Sámi community and the researcher. Within the national state, knowledge about Sámi sport provides a voice for most people, including

policymakers and bureaucrats, for an unknown and marginalized sport organization (author reference). In the larger field of Sámi studies, sport sociology adds to existing knowledge of civil and political life. Internationally, Sámi sport adds to the research field of Indigenous sports and Indigenous people and sport. Drawing on my own experience as a researcher into Sámi sport and being an academic from the dominant culture, there will be different opinions about a non-Indigenous researcher in the field of Indigenous sport research.

My (tentative) conclusion of this reflection exercise about being a non-Indigenous researcher into Indigenous issues is that the reciprocity is heterogeneous. As an outsider of an overall Indigenous community, I am not in the position to claim rights or demand access. Any Indigenous subject – person, group or organization – always has the right to say ‘No thank you’ to any request from me. However, my experience is that many parts of an overall Indigenous community appreciate my work, and tone down the fact that I am not Indigenous. For me, these are sport clubs, the leadership of the Sámi sport organization in Norway, and representatives of the Sámi parliament in Norway. Nevertheless, in line with Drugge (2016a, 2016b), I call for more research to systematize ethical guidelines for Sámi social research. Hereunder, my contribution is to emphasize the heterogeneity in Indigenous communities, and in Indigenous peoples’ relationship to researchers.<sup>11</sup>

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## Notes

1. In this article format, the historical context is necessarily short and shallow. For better descriptions, see for example Minde (2003) and Andresen et al. (2021, in Norwegian language).
2. My grandparents were educated during the inter-war era when Norwegianization was still formal policy. The Second World War partly changed the inter-ethnic climate because different ethnic groups had to collaborate in re-building, especially the northern parts of Norway.
3. This term ‘Sámi friendly’ may sound strange. However, the situation is somewhat tense in Northern Norway between those who recognise the Sámi as an Indigenous people and those who claim that the Sámi have too many rights (especially regarding land for fisheries and reindeer herding, etc.).
4. I will add yet another personal experience to the story. My wife is a primary school teacher (outside Sámi areas). Every year when the Sámi national day approaches (6 February), she perceives an ambiguous experience: on the one hand she experiences an expectation regarding teaching the Norwegian children about Sámi; on the other hand, textbooks or other available sources offer little assistance.
5. Even collaboration is not enough. New forms of research frameworks into studying Indigenous peoples, such as ‘participatory or collective research frameworks . . . just represent the latest to study us, or the best way for Euro-Canadian researchers to access our knowledge’ (Simpson, 2001: 140). With reference to Simpson, Gaudet (2014: 80) holds that

- 'participatory research led by outside community researchers represents a modern-day trend to hide "whiteness"'.  
 6. Denzin et al. cited Evans directly, therefore this double reference.  
 7. Daza means 'Norwegian' in the Sámi language (like 'Pakeha' referring to white New Zealanders with European heritage in the Māori language).  
 8. Interestingly or paradoxically, the same elements, especially the relaxed attitude towards time, are the goods when I am home in Finnmark on holiday.  
 9. As her point of departure, Horning takes *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies*, published by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2012; Horning, 2013: 141).  
 10. The language as a symbol for the culture demands my deepest respect, as the assimilation processes stole the mother tongue from many Sámi. However, as a criterion for doing research, it also excludes many Sámi. I do not go into that discussion here.  
 11. Researchers are also heterogenous community. It is beyond the scope to go into discussion here.

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