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Rendering the invisible visible: reflexivity and flexibility in a scoping review on sport for reconciliation

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ABSTRACT

Numerous scholars have argued that sport is a vessel through which to enforce settler-colonial domination; however, sport can also represent a domain in which to support Indigenous-settler reconciliation. Nevertheless, differing understandings of reconciliation, particularly within diverse global contexts, can lead to ambiguity in its definition and application. Therefore, as part of a broader project on sport for reconciliation (SFR), we conducted a scoping review to examine the ways in which the term SFR is used in the academic literature. Through the scoping review process, we screened 2201 articles by title and abstract and conducted a full-text screening of 181 articles. Only four articles met our inclusion criteria. While scoping reviews typically focus on findings, we seek to centre the process itself, emphasising reflexivity and flexibility, two aspects often promoted yet rarely presented and made visible in practice. In response to this gap, we examine the tensions we experienced regarding the implications of exclusion, which were amplified by our understanding of colonialism. We argue that engaging in reflexivity can (re) conceptualise exclusion criteria, shifting from the binary of inclusion and exclusion to a critical investigation of what something is not. Subsequently, we propose a sixth step to Arksey and O'Malley (2005) scoping review methodology, 'implications of excluded articles and reflexive insights'. We recommend this step be completed before the optional consultation stage. By centring reflexivity and flexibility, we offer a nuanced (re)conceptualisation of both SFR scholarship and the use of scoping reviews, particularly in research shaped by and grounded in colonial logics.

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Numerous scholars have argued that sport serves as a vehicle for enforcing settler-colonial domination; however, sport can also represent a domain in which to support Indigenous-settler reconciliation (e.g. Cárdenas 2016; Gasser and Levinsen 2004; Höglund and Sundberg 2008; Paraschak and Thompson 2014). The term *sport for reconciliation* (SFR) has become increasingly popular in the global grey literature (e.g. Cárdenas 2012; Forde et al. 2023; Johnson 2023; Kozier 2021) to explore connections between sport and reconciliation. Yet, we acknowledge that using these terms together can be a point of contention. Historically, sport has been used as a tool of assimilation and has continued to serve as a reproduction of settler-colonial domination through power structures and social systems that oppress and marginalise Indigenous Peoples (e.g. Forsyth 2013; Te Hiwi and

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Forsyth 2017). For example, within the context of what is now known as Canada, the TRC (2015) report emphasised the integral role that sport had in the Indian Residential School system[1] and the ways that lasting colonial power structures continue to shape many present sport contexts. Conversely, sport has been a place for Indigenous Peoples to enact resistance (e.g. Essa et al. 2022; Forsyth and Wamsley 2007; Osmond 2019). Therefore, the notion of sport *for* reconciliation, as it has been referred to, must recognise and critically interrogate such underlying dynamics. Despite the growing use of this term, we were unaware of a specific definition of SFR in academic contexts.

As part of a broader project on SFR by scholars from Canada, Australia, and Aotearoa New Zealand, we began a scoping review with the purpose of exploring how SFR is used in academic literature. A primary characteristic of a scoping review is that its use allows for a broad overview of a topic (Moher, Stewart, and Shekelle 2015; Peterson et al. 2017; Pham et al. 2014). Supported by publications from scholars such as Arksey and O'Malley (2005), Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010), and Colquhoun et al. (2014), the process of a scoping review has been defined as an iterative, sequential process. As such, we began this work expecting that it would be relatively straightforward. Yet, the deeper we dove into the literature, the more complexity we recognised in the process regarding the implications of excluding texts. These tensions included navigating the conceptual ambiguity of the term reconciliation, our understandings of colonial legacies, and the potential erasure of Indigenous perspectives.[2]

Some have asserted that scoping reviewers should integrate reflexivity (Berger 2015; Charron and Singh 2022; Thomas et al., 2020), a 'deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world' (Macbeth 2001, 35), and flexibility (Gottlieb et al. 2021; Peters et al. 2021). However, advice related to how to demonstrate these aspects of a scoping review and the insights that might be generated as a result are largely absent from the literature. In making typically invisible decisions visible in this paper, we hold ourselves accountable for the decisions we made throughout the process and thus the final product.

As such, our purpose in this paper is twofold: 1) We, one Indigenous and four non-Indigenous scholars, present the scoping review methodology and our results from a scoping review of peer-reviewed SFR literature; 2) Drawing on Thomas et al. (2020) suggestion that researchers engage with the allowed flexibility to adapt the scoping review methodology as needed, we document our experiences of engaging in critical reflexivity, which is often promoted yet rarely rendered visible in scoping reviews. We demonstrate how our reflexive engagement (re)orients underlying power dynamics (*especially in settler-colonial contexts*) and informs the (re)conceptualisation of exclusion criteria from being the opposite of inclusion to instead being the critical investigation of *what something is not*. Consequently, we suggest implementing an optional sixth step, which we have termed *implications of excluded articles and reflexive insights*. This sixth step can occur *before* the optional, now seventh, step of Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) scoping review methodology. By centring reflexivity and methodological flexibility, we offer a nuanced (re)conceptualisation for the academic study of SFR and the application of scoping reviews, particularly in research shaped by power relations, specifically in contexts based on colonial logics.

Methodology: scoping review

According to Arksey and O'Malley (2005), the purpose of a scoping review is to identify the literature on a specific topic and then to explore the 'extent, range, and nature of the research activity' (p. 21). As such, unlike systematic reviews, a scoping review involves a broad review of research. Moser and Korstjens (2023) advocated for the use of scoping reviews as exemplar processes of qualitative synthesis. Complementing this perspective, Munn et al. (2018) identified a scoping review as a valuable methodology for clarifying the definition(s) and conceptualisation(s) of key term(s). However, there are tensions about the use of scoping reviews (see Khalil et al. 2020, 2021; Peterson et al. 2017). Following structured (most often Western) research procedures can prevent researchers from deep engagement with cultural perspectives and the subject matter (Chambers

et al. 2018). As such, some may be tempted to discard the scoping review, viewing it as a fundamentally flawed colonial tool. Rather than rejecting the scoping review outright, we believe there is much to be gleaned from making visible the ways we can engage reflexively and flexibly to enable the usefulness and value of this methodology.

In place of outright rejecting the methodology, our approach was informed by Hutcheon's (1989) idea of complicitous critique. Essentially, to critique something, we must use language that is complicit with the thing we seek to critique (in this case, the scoping review). That is, we need to take up the very terms that we wish to undermine, which is what we do in this scoping review on SFR. (*Author Four, an Indigenous academic, shared with the team that sometimes, rather than simply rejecting to work within a box because it is problematic, we need to risk feeling uncomfortable and get inside the box, take everything out of the box, and make all the contents visible. Only then can we understand and rearrange the structure and/or contents of the box, and in the end maybe it is no longer a box*.) Indigenous scholars and others can utilise (and have utilised) scoping reviews in productive ways that challenge the dominant foundations of knowledge by questioning the process and the meaning of the language and steps used throughout them (e.g. Chambers et al. 2018).

Arksey and O'Malley (2005) outlined five iterative steps for conducting a scoping review: identifying the research question, identifying relevant studies, selecting studies, charting the data, and collating, summarising, and reporting the results. They further suggested a sixth and optional step of consulting with stakeholders and experts in the field of study to validate findings and gather additional insights. This six-step process is 'not linear … requiring researchers to engage with each stage reflexively and, where necessary, repeat steps to ensure that the literature is covered' comprehensively (Arksey and O'Malley 2005, 22). While numerous authors have provided insight into and clarification of Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework Colquhoun et al. 2014; Levac, Colquhoun, and O'Brien (2010), Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework is typically used in scoping reviews. As such, we outline below how we followed their process. However, as we progressed through these steps, we came to recognise the importance of Thomas et al. (2020) argument that researchers should be open to adapting the scoping review methodology to incorporate additional steps as necessary. In line with this, we introduce an additional optional step, which we present in the discussion section of this paper. Importantly, we provide insights into how reflexivity informed all steps, thereby rendering visible the often invisible choices that occur throughout the scoping review process.

Step 1: identifying the research question

For Arksey and O'Malley (2005), the first step of the scoping review process requires a clear definition of the research question(s). Subsequently, for our SFR scoping review, we began by creating the following three questions to guide our investigation into the ways in which SFR is used in the literature:

Question 1 - What academic literature is available regarding the term SFR?

Question 2 - How is the term SFR being defined by scholars?

Question 3 - In what contexts is the term SFR being used by scholars?

The philosophical foundations of scoping reviewers influence the ways in which literature is collected, analysed, and interpreted (Munn et al. 2018; Thomas et al. 2020). Subsequently, at this stage, we began to explore how our positionalities might influence the research process (McGuire-Adams 2019). Moreso, as predominantly settler scholars, it became imperative for us to unpack our awareness of settler colonial logics made implicit in our lived realities (Sykes 2014). Importantly, we needed to explore our understanding of the term *reconciliation* and its applications. The Indigenous scholar in our group prompted us to reflect on conversations[3] which locate oneself (*ko wai au* - who am I?) as rooted in *whakapapa* (genealogy, lineage, descent), links to *whenua* (land), *maunga* (mountains), *awa* (bodies of water), *tipuna* (ancestors), *waka* (canoes which one's ancestors arrived

on), and *whānau* (family – past, present, and future). (*Author Four shared, "When I understand ko wai au, I understand better where I stand and therefore what my responsibilities and obligations to my tipuna are, to my people, and as an Indigenous scholar. The question I ask myself is, how will I be engaging in ways that honour Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and Indigenous aspirations?*). Author One identifies as a cis-gender woman of Canadian, Scandinavian, and broadly European ancestry. Author Two identifiesa white queer person of Irish and British ancestry, socialized as a woman, who experiences disability. The third author identifies as a cis-gender, heterosexual woman of English and Welsh ancestry. The fourth author identifies as a dual ethnicity, heterosexual, cis-gender scholar of Māori, English, and Scottish descent. Her Māori roots come from the Taranaki region of Aotearoa's North Island (Te Ika-a-Māui), Ngāti Rāhiri subtribe (hapū), and Te Ātiawa tribe (iwi). The fifth author identifies as a cis-gender, female, first-generation Canadian of Vietnamese refugees. The intersections of our identities created a rich blend of understandings (Sykes 2014) that informed and deepened our conversations and collective insights, subsequently guiding our decisions in this scoping review process.

Arksey and O'Malley (2005) emphasised that the 'whole point of scoping the field is to be as comprehensive as possible in identifying primary studies (published and unpublished) and reviews suitable for answering the central research question' (p. 23). While this methodological imperative remains foundational, we followed scholars such as Tynan and Bishop (2023) and Phillips-Beck et al. (2024), who argued that reviews of literature do not simply start with literature but, instead, with the investigation of the researchers' understanding of people, places, and knowledge, which is what makes reflexivity so important.

Reflexivity is defined as a process wherein the researcher acknowledges power dynamics and demonstrates an explicit self-awareness about one's presence in the research and undertakes a critical self-examination of how their personal, professional, cultural, and theoretical background may influence the research process and outcomes (Finlay 2002). As Māori scholar Linda L. T. Smith (2021) so eloquently stated,

> Researchers are in receipt of privileged information. They may interpret it within an overt theoretical framework, but also in terms of a covert ideological framework. They have the power to distort, to make invisible, to overlook and to draw conclusions, based not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgements, and often downright misunderstandings. They have the potential to extend knowledge or to perpetuate ignorance. (p. 190)

Of importance for us as researchers working with SFR and Indigenous Peoples is the notion of epistemic reflexivity (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), as it requires us to examine our position within the production of knowledges (McGuire-Adams 2019). However, even more than this, reflexivity is relational. It is more than understanding how the researcher might influence the research, or not work in tokenistic ways, rather it is understanding how one is in relationship with everything involved in the research and behaving in a manner whereby relationship responsibilities are upheld. As the Indigenous member of the group pointed out, reflexivity requires some different things from her compared to non-Indigenous colleagues because of her relationship responsibilities. As identified by L. Smith (2021) and further discussed in relation to physical cultures by scholars such as Hill and Dao (2020), Indigenous researchers may be fully insiders (working with their own people), outsiders within, or partial insiders (due to working with Indigenous communities other than their own, their education, or their position as a researcher). It is also important for our Indigenous colleagues to not speak on behalf of all Indigenous people, to be a good ancestor, to not compromise her identity (Martin and Mirraboopa 2003), and to be working towards a transformative agenda (G. Martin and Mirraboopa 2003; G. H. Smith 1997)".

We began this review with a keen awareness of the complex understandings surrounding the term reconciliation. It is used in various contexts (Chapman 2009), ranging from post-conflict justice (Dwyer 1999) to pedagogy (Ahluwalia 2012), political theory (Ross 2004), religion (Lewis 2013), and environmental governance (McGregor 2018). However, there is no consensus on a single, unified

definition. This lack of clarity reflects the complex and contested nature of how reconciliation is understood and enacted.

As authors, we write from within these tensions, not outside of them. Specifically, as researchers, we 'cannot avoid the personal connections we have to our research' (Hill and Dao 2020, 531). Four of five authors are currently residing in what is now known as Canada and one in Aotearoa, New Zealand, both settler-colonial states (i.e. lands where colonisers 'come to stay' [Veracini 2013, p. 313]). Resultantly, our understandings of reconciliation have been shaped by the academic texts, media discourse, and lived experiences within these contexts. Recent events, such as calls by Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew to search Winnipeg landfills for the remains of missing Indigenous women, and nationwide protests to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi in Aotearoa, New Zealand, have reaffirmed for us the continued relevance and gravity of colonial harm. Authors One and Two discussed at length their feelings of heaviness related to the optimistic rhetoric of reconciliation and the material realities of systemic violence as bombs drop on schools and hospitals in Gaza and human remains are exhumed from unmarked graves at the sites of Indian Residential Schools in Canada. Additionally, we acknowledge that sport and academic studies of sport are deeply implicated within colonialism" (Chen 2021, 745). As such, engagement in this scoping review process was not a neutral mapping exercise but rather required critical reflection on the complexities of working with the term 'reconciliation', informed by our lived experiences and ethical responsibilities as qualitative researchers.

Step 2: search strategy: identifying relevant studies

To solidify the search strategy, Authors One and Two enlisted the expertise and support of Author Five, an academic librarian. We met with the third and fifth authors, and together, we reached an agreement on our inclusion criteria and developed a search strategy (McGowan et al. 2016). Our inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed journal articles that used the term reconciliation and its variations within a sporting context and within a settler-colonial context. The leading search terms comprise various words related to sport and sporting events and the term reconciliation and its derivatives (e.g. reconcile, reconciled, reconciliatory). We were deliberate in our choice of search terms, specifically in relation to searches about Indigenous Peoples. There is no global Indigenous filter for searching databases. Moreover, we acknowledged that tackling global Indigenous terms would likely result in missed articles and a lack of comprehensiveness. While there is an Indigenous filter for database searches within Canadian contexts, we questioned its comprehensiveness and authority (*we assumed it was created by non-Indigenous Peoples but could not confirm this suspicion*). We were not focused only on the Canadian context. As such, and based on our academic librarian co-author's advice, we elected not to apply any search criteria for Indigeneity and, rather, screened for relevant articles in the full-text screening. We did not impose restrictions on the research methodology, whether it was qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods, nor did we limit the language used in the paper or the publication date.

We ran the search on 28 August 2023, in SPORTDiscus (EBSCOhost), PsycInfo (Ovid), Sociological Abstracts (ProQuest), Web of Science Core Collection, and Scopus. We then imported 2853 studies into Covidence software for screening, with 602 duplicates identified and removed automatically by the software and an additional 50 duplicates identified manually. Authors One and Two began title and abstract screening with 2201 documents.

Throughout the project, we extensively discussed the inclusion and exclusion criteria. We expended great effort to integrate reflexivity regarding our subjectivities as scholars and the socio-political implications of our choices. (*Author Two shared with the group, "I read an Instagram post my friend shared detailing the latest atrocity committed by the Israeli government. A story sharing the bravery and endurance of the Palestinian people followed. I put down my phone and opened my laptop to screen an article about a Sport for Development (SFD) program in Israel, 'bringing together' Israeli and Palestinian people. I struggle to include this article, but I question what it would mean to exclude it.*

Truthfully, I feel uneasy keeping it or removing it; both options feel reductive, as though it would mean excluding perspectives that could be in conversation with one another and, in practice, the parties involved often come from diverse communities who have built solidarity with one another for generations as a way to navigate the complexity of our global context.) Authors One and Two continued to struggle throughout the screening process to determine what was and what was not SFR.

We grappled with the realisation that the term reconciliation has gained significant traction in political, academic, and social contexts. In light of this, our socio-political sensibilities drove us to question if the outcomes of attempts at reconciliatory actions could, in fact, be defined by 'the coloniser'. Subsequently, as researchers, we were challenged with the idea that organising data based on what constitutes reconciliation may serve to reflect a colonial practice in itself, as it imposes external definitions on a complex and culturally specific process. In a traditional scoping review, we would present our final decisions and report both the strengths and limitations of the approach. In our present study, however, doing so would have failed to represent the complexity of the decisions and the reflexivity that influenced them. Thus, we sought to make the invisible visible and continued with the scoping review process, engaging more deeply with our own positionalities.

Step 3: study selection

Of the 2201 documents we screened for title and abstract, 181 met our criteria for full-text screening (see Figure 1). We removed non-peer-reviewed documents, items that did not pertain to sport, and those that did not pertain to settler-colonial contexts. We found ourselves amending our original exclusion criteria each time we encountered another topic or type of study situated in the 'grey area' between our understandings of what was and what was not SFR.

Eight months into the project and numerous screening attempts later, we found ourselves (re) orienting our full-text review strategy, ultimately completing the full-text screening based solely on the appearance of the phrase *sport for reconciliation* within the documents. This way, we would remain focused on the topic of interest, SFR, and, in our view, minimise the number of critical yet peripheral discussions that could arise and potentially derail the screening process due to the ambiguity of definitions. However, we recognised the limitations of a purely semantic strategy, as it risked excluding conceptually relevant work.

To account for these nuances, we utilised Covidence's tagging feature to record articles that we deemed adjacent to SFR and to organise (*our interpretation of*) the subject matter of the articles. Guided by ongoing discussions and group consensus, we amassed the following seven tags: racism in sport, sport for development (SFD), sport for development and peace (SDP), international relations, conflict resolution, Football 4 Peace, and reconciliation in sport. With this strategy, we aimed to continue capturing studies specific to SFR while creating a broader map of related concepts and published literature. For example, we deliberated about Davidson, Scherer, and Kafara (2022) discussion of Indigenous public art, survivance, and settler reconciliation at Edmonton's Rogers Place. We did not include it based on our understanding of it as reconciliation within a physical sporting space, rather than the physical act of sport. Similarly, we tagged but excluded studies on peacebuilding in post-conflict societies (Krasniqi and Krasniqi 2019), a study on sport interventions in divided societies (Sugden 2010), a published discussion on the relationship between sporting events and ethnic reconciliation (Schulenkorf 2010), and an article about 'Football 4 Peace' involving football programming with Israeli and Palestinian participants (Sugden 2008). These articles pushed us to think more critically about the conceptual boundaries of SFR. Resultantly, we added another tag, 'sport as a colonial tool', to distinguish between efforts that reinforced colonial structures and those that identified as actively challenging them.

Despite adding the eighth tag, we still found ourselves overwhelmed and, at times, unmotivated to continue. It felt as though the screening process was laden with critical choices with which we

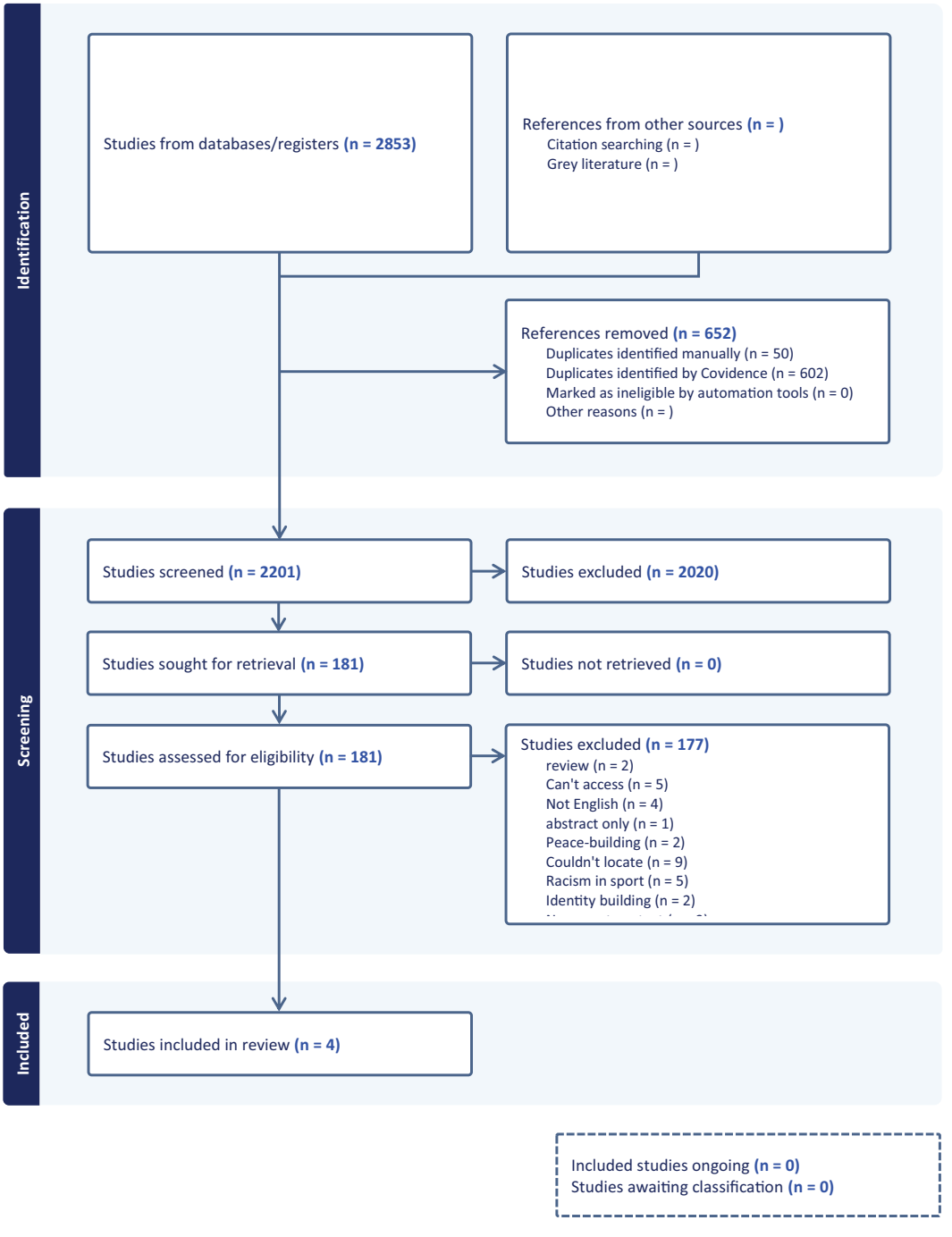

Figure 1. PRISMA reporting items. PRISMA flowchart of the review from inception to August 22, 2023.

were often uncomfortable. Each decision we made represented manifestations of our ideologies and subjectivities as non-neutral acts with socio-political implications. For example, we questioned whether labelling certain initiatives as reconciliation might inadvertently reinforce settler-colonial

power dynamics. The non-Indigenous co-authors became increasingly aware of the ethical weight of our positionalities as we made judgements about what counted as reconciliation.

Step 4: charting the data

Authors One and Two independently charted the data by extracting and organising essential information from the four selected articles, facilitating the subsequent analysis and synthesis of the findings. We remained attentive to how our positions as settler scholars influenced our interpretations. We recorded the objectives, geographic locations, study types, and sport contexts in which reconciliatory concepts were used, including the historical involvement of Indigenous Peoples in sport, interpretations of reconciliation, and any ambiguities surrounding the term's definition. We documented whether a specific definition of SFR was offered (and, if so, who was referenced as providing the conceptualisation). Cognisant of the risk of inadvertently reproducing colonial narratives through a decontextualised or superficial synthesis, we also documented how the SFR initiatives were framed and what outcomes their organisers sought to achieve. By unpacking the articles through multiple factors, we were prompted to explore the complex layers within the concept of SFR more deeply, particularly by interrogating how reconciliation is mobilised, by whom, and for what purposes within the literature.

Step 5: collating, summarizing, and reporting

Of the 181 documents for which we conducted full-text screening, four journal articles (Forde et al. 2023; Holmes, Giles, and Hayhurst 2024; Johanis-Bell, Giles, and Hapeta 2023; Rajwani, Giles, and Forde 2022) met all criteria for inclusion. The term SFR was used overtly in less than 2% of the full-text materials screened. While we noted that the term reconciliation and its derivatives were used to describe elements of sport contexts and programming, only the authors of the four articles mentioned above used the specific phrase 'SFR'. At this stage of the project, we grappled with the question of whether we should continue with the scoping review process or ultimately abandon it. Despite feeling disheartened by the limited number of final articles, we noted that the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR; Tricco et al. 2018) does not specify a minimum number of final articles that must be included in studies. Furthermore, doing so would discount all the work completed and knowledge gained in reaching this point; thus, we decided to continue and began to realise that perhaps what was of interest was not just what we learned about SFR but also what we learned about scoping reviews in terms of reflexivity and flexibility.

We returned to our original three research questions: What literature is available regarding SFR? How is the term SFR being defined? In what contexts is the term SFR being used? We used these questions to organise our results section.

Sport for reconciliation: definition(s) and context

Of the four articles that met our inclusion criteria, three studies were situated within a Canadian context, while the fourth pertained to Australia. Each article was published in a different sport-related journal (*Journal of Sport for Development*; *Sociology of Sport Journal*; *Sport in Society*; and *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*). The authors of the four articles cited different sources to inform their definitions and understandings of reconciliation within SFR, reflecting our previously noted inconsistencies and debates in the literature. The authors of two of the studies (Forde et al. 2023; Rajwani, Giles, and Forde 2022) explicitly discussed the challenges of defining reconciliation, while all four grounded their definitions in the existing literature and national reconciliation frameworks. For instance, the three studies based in Canada (Forde et al., 2023; Holmes, Giles, and Hayhurst 2024; Rajwani, Giles, and Forde 2022) referred to the TRC (2015). In

contrast, the fourth study (Johanis-Bell, Giles, and Hapeta 2023) cited Reconciliation Australia (2021).

In three of the included papers (Forde et al., 2023; Johanis-Bell, Giles, and Hapeta 2023; Rajwani, Giles, and Forde 2022), the authors cited the same article written by Höglund and Sundberg (2008) to conceptualise their understanding of reconciliation within a sport context. Interestingly, Höglund and Sundberg (2008) utilised the term 'reconciliation through sport', rather than SFR, a nuance which resulted in the removal of the publication from our included articles for this study. This decision prompted discomfort for us. We began to question the rigidity of excluding potentially foundational work based solely on semantic differences, particularly given the contested definition of reconciliation. This marked a turning point in our reflexive engagement with the scoping review process.

The authors of all four articles also emphasised the complexity of facilitating SFR initiatives. They identified numerous variables as impediments to SFR initiatives, including funding, governmental and/or organisational policies, programming availability and type, discourse, provisional guidelines, and community and individual barriers to participation and inclusion. Furthermore, all four articles contained references to inclusion, equity, diversity, and Indigeneity, while three (Forde et al., 2023; Holmes, Giles, and Hayhurst 2024; Rajwani, Giles, and Forde 2022) included references to Indigenous self-determination. In all four studies, the authors emphasised the importance of establishing and/or strengthening meaningful relationships with Indigenous Peoples and organisations for effective SFR programming.

While conducting step five of Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework, which calls for presenting 'an overview of *all [emphasis added]* material reviewed' (p. 27), we became increasingly conflicted. Although we had charted and subsequently presented the four included articles, the fifth step neglected to mention the presentation of an overview of the 177 excluded articles that we had full-text screened, many of which shaped our understanding of SFR. We felt strongly that something was missing from summarising and reporting our 'results' and that reporting only the final inclusions risked erasing valuable conceptual contributions and adjacent literature. This tension highlights a limitation in the traditional scoping review methodology, particularly in work related to reconciliation and Indigenous engagement, where knowledge is often situated outside of conventional academic framings.

It was at this point that we decided Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) approach to scoping reviews was limiting our ability to convey our learnings effectively, and we began to envision what our ideal approach to a scoping review would look like. We thus embraced the often cited, but rarely demonstrated, flexibility of the scoping review and, informed by our positionalities and reflexivity, decided to examine our decisions regarding our inclusion and exclusion criteria more fully.

Inclusion vs exclusion and (struggling with) nuance

While Arksey and O'Malley (2005) stated that scoping reviews present an overview of *all* material reviewed, we found that that was not usually the case. Instead, authors typically focus only on the material that meets the inclusion criteria. As such, the excluded material is typically not included, and the contribution it makes to the authors' understandings of the included studies is rendered invisible (and, in our case, relegated to our Google Drive scrapyard). Hence, we advocate for researchers to (re) conceptualise exclusion criteria from being the opposite of inclusion to instead being a critical investigation into relationships between the available literature. Throughout this work, we used the phrase 'sport *for* reconciliation''; however, within the 181 articles we screened during the full-text review, we read studies describing sport *and* reconciliation, reconciliation *in* sport, reconciliation *through* sport, and sport *as* reconciliation, among others. The authors of some of the excluded literature used the term reconciliation and its variants to describe sport outcomes for development, peacebuilding, and social cohesion-focused programs. Due to the important cultural contexts of SFR programming, we felt the variability in the language employed may represent an important facet of conceptualisation. As we critically evaluated our positionalities, questions, and understandings of

these complexities, we deepened our understanding of the relationships of sport not only for, but also in, through, and as reconciliation, development, peacebuilding, and social cohesion.

Flexibility in the scoping reviews: an additional step

Step six: implications of excluded articles and reflexive insights

Arksey and O'Malley (2005) proposed the potential utility of a sixth and optional step of the scoping review process: a consultation exercise. While we do not intend to devalue the importance of this practice, we advocate that researchers consider implementing another step that should occur *before* the optional, now seventh step, of consultation, which explicitly addresses reflexivity and the implications of exclusion.

During the reporting stage of our investigation into the ways in which SFR is used in the literature, we identified a gap in the presentation of our process. We agree that the current scoping review framework effectively presents an overview of *what something is*. Moreover, we understand that the current framework is intended to prompt researchers to reflexively and iteratively engage with the notion of *what something is not* (*possibly without even recognising it*); however, we argue that the current scoping review framework falls short in creating a space for researchers to unpack and present this critical investigation. Exploring what something is not serves to delineate the boundaries of key terms, their definitions, and implications, which we found to only be possible by navigating the relationships between all reviewed articles (*for example*, *our exploration of reconciliation, what it is and what it is not, was a cornerstone for the completion of this work*). As such, we advocate for a new sixth step, which we call i*mplications of excluded articles and reflexive insights*, in the scoping review process whereby researchers explore the relationships (*or lack thereof*) within and between the included and excluded (yet adjacent) literature and to consider how author positionality and reflexivity shaped such decisions explicitly.

By incorporating this step, researchers can offer a more detailed account of their engagement with the review process. Below, we outline practices to illustrate its application. First, and consistent with the suggestion of Thomas et al. (2020), researchers should include in the text their communication, resulting in the inclusion of their reflexive insights (*documenting their thoughts, biases, and decision-making processes regarding inclusion and exclusion criteria and capturing any shifts in perspective and moments of uncertainty or clarity*). Additionally, they should identify relevant excluded articles (*identify key adjacent literature that was excluded from the study along with a nuanced rationale for their exclusion*), as well as analyse the relationships between the excluded and included literature (*explore the relevance to the included articles, how the excluded articles may contribute to the understanding of the research question*(*s*), *thematic connections between the excluded and included studies, and potential insights gained from the excluded literature and how they inform the overall narrative of the review*). Continuing this reflection, researchers should then consider the influence of the excluded articles on the review process itself (*reflect on how the excluded literature impacts the conclusions drawn in the review*).

Ultimately, we suggest that these activities re-emphasise the scoping review's interpretive nature and (re)frame exclusion not solely as a technical boundary but as a reflexive space for clarifying meaning or investigating what something *is not*. In doing so, we acknowledge that every inclusion and exclusion decision is shaped by broader social, political, and historical contexts and carries tangible and intangible implications (e.g. excluding particular ideas or people, reinforcing particular ideologies). Exploring implications of excluded articles and reflexive insights may be especially relevant for qualitative researchers, as its use encourages more profound reflection on how social and epistemological positionality can influence both decision-making and the interpretation of literature.

By emphasising the importance of an examination of what is and is not, we do not encourage static, binary categorisations but instead emphasise the importance of clarifying the decision-making process by creating space for examining tensions (*and the maybes*) and acknowledging the research that informed the current understandings of both reconciliation and sport within the literature. It is not enough to simply employ a particular term for inclusion (i.e. reconciliation or sport) without considering its broader implications, meanings, and impacts. Instead, we advocate that scholars must actively and critically engage in reflexivity during the review and screening process, ultimately generating nuanced insight into the current literature, taken-for-granted assumptions, and the progression of the field of interest.

SFR: implications of excluded articles and reflexive insights: a worked example

During the full-text screening of articles, we identified various concepts that did not reference SFR but seemed inextricably linked with reconciliation and sport. Interestingly, it was in exploring the relationships (or lack thereof) between the available literature, such as navigating the tensions of differentiating between SFR, SFD, and SDP and reflexively unpacking colonial power(s), that we learned the most.

Excluding SFD and SDP

We recognised that SFR (*what it is*) has been powerfully influenced by SFD and SDP (*what it's not*) literature. The authors of the four articles that met our inclusion criteria primarily referenced SFD papers to support their conceptualisation of SFR. Subsequently, we found it pertinent to explore the relationships between all the reviewed (*yet ultimately excluded*) articles to solidify our understandings of SFR. The authors of many of the 177 excluded studies examined SFD within diverse geopolitical contexts, including North and South Korea, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, South Africa, and Israel and Palestine. This issue prompted us to further reflexively engage with our beliefs and understandings (Phillips-Beck et al. 2024) of the historical and current geopolitical contexts (late 2023 to early-2025), how these factors influenced our understandings of the literature, and how such critical reflection might add depth to our generated insight.

At times, we experienced discomfort as we excluded articles that described initiatives that aligned (*in our opinion*) with reconciliatory outcomes but did not explicitly use the term 'SFR'. Subsequently, relying on semantics (of English nomenclature) might marginalise Indigenous Peoples' expressions of reconciliation that do not conform to academic or settler-defined categories. In many of the articles we screened, the authors discussed sport programs and employed the term reconciliation as a synonym for social cohesion and national unity. However, we felt it necessary to acknowledge the role SDP initiatives could play in conversations regarding sport and conflict resolution, a concept that shares similar elements with reconciliation. This might suggest that SFR, SFD, and SDP scholars are connected yet inharmonious.

Specifically, as we engaged with the literature, it was unclear how or why these terms and concepts were overtly distinguished (*We surmised that SFD focuses on growth, SDP focuses on social cohesion, and SFR focuses on healing divisions and fostering understandings; however, remained conflicted as not to undermine, or misinterpret, the intentions of SFD and SDP programmes. This struggle ultimately guided our decision to limit our inclusion criteria to the overt application of 'SFR' in fear of misunderstanding and labelling SFD or SDP initiatives as SFR)*. This decision was not taken lightly. We questioned whether these boundaries were shaped more by academic convention than by Indigenous Peoples' priorities or practices. Further, we wondered whether our choices served to promote the binary and structured thinking we have been trained to operate within in Western academia.

Perhaps SFR is more akin to a subtype of SFD programming? Or do these concepts have a reciprocal relationship? Is SFR conceptualised on distinct values or possibly uniquely oriented towards Indigenous self-determination? Regardless of the type and extent of the relationship, we believe that clarifying the distinction, if any, between SFR, SFD, and SDP could provide numerous potential benefits.

Excluding colonial tensions

Despite pervasive attitudes to the contrary, research and sport are not neutral, and they cannot be separated from the complex contexts of everyday life. Furthermore, because colonial tensions can arise in research contexts, researchers using different definitions and conceptualisations of reconciliation might unintentionally reinforce colonial hegemony. Notably, we encountered various articles in which the authors identified programmes that claimed to build peace or centre reconciliation but, in our view, reconstructed many colonial and paternalistic patterns. For example, the authors of a Football 4 Peace article neglected to acknowledge Israel and Palestine as being within a settler-colonial context (Sugden 2008).

Based on our attempts to act in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples, or in the case of Author Four, who is Indigenous, to be a good ancestor, we questioned the use of varied understandings and applications of *settler colonialism* and *reconciliation* as they can serve to call out the historical injustices faced by Indigenous Peoples and reduce complex issues to mere acts of community or national bonding. This approach could subsequently legitimise colonial narratives over addressing systemic inequalities and power imbalances, undermining the movement towards Indigenous self-determination.

In particular, given the colonial history of SFD programs (Hayhurst and Giles 2013; Seiler and Chepyator-Thomson 2023), clarifying the distinction between SFR and SFD may prompt critical reflection into colonial and assimilative participation models. Within settler-colonial contexts, reconciliation is rooted in acknowledging the historical imbalance of colonial power and its influence (Regan 2010) (*and a context we, again, as one Indigenous and four non-Indigenous scholars struggled with throughout the duration of the scoping review. We repeatedly questioned how we could name reconciliation without perpetuating colonial harm and whether our presentation of the literature was serving to uphold the very systems we were aiming to critique*). Following this, the implementation of SFD and SFR programs underscores various facets of power, including structural power dynamics. These dynamics can encompass the allocation of resources, symbolic authority, and the influence of truth-telling and narrative construction. For example, in the context of what is now known as Canada, the implementation of European activities (i.e. soccer/football) in and with Indigenous communities could be reminiscent of processes of assimilation through sport practices such as Indian Sport Days (Downey and Neylan 2015) and physical education programs at residential schools (Forsyth 2013) if reconciliatory beliefs and actions are not adopted and applied. The authors of the *Yellowhead Institute Action Accountability Special Report* (Jewell and Mosby 2022) suggested that much of the reconciliatory action currently occurring within the nation has 'focused on symbols and not structures' (p. 6). As such, further distinguishing between SFR programs can foster critical reflection on colonial participation models and highlight the need for genuine reconciliation that addresses historical power imbalances, rather than merely focusing on symbolic actions (*we argue the same for SDP and SFD*).

In our present review, we sought to identify how SFR is used in the literature and clarify its definition; however, fully understanding *what SFR is* requires a critical evaluation of adjacent scholarship (*instead, what SFR is not)*. For example, we explored understandings and applications of SDP and SFD in settler-colonial contexts. We often found ourselves returning to questions about our interpretive authority (specifically, who has the right to define reconciliation and from whose perspective the term should be understood). We discussed the risk of creating a review that might inadvertently oversimplify or neglect the diverse and complex experiences of Indigenous Peoples, especially those perspectives that may not align with dominant academic discourses. These reflections, and those like

them, support the necessity for researchers using the scoping review methodology to apply flexibility and reflexivity as a continuous responsibility.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have demonstrated the ways in which we engaged with flexibility and reflexivity within the scoping review process in which we investigated how

SFR is used in the literature. Specifically, we located four published English-language peer-reviewed articles that met our final inclusion criteria for using the phrase SFR. Through the scoping review process, we read studies that, to us, described applying both sport *and* reconciliation (e.g. SFR, SDP, SFD) that could not be captured in our research-based solely on semantics. As we engaged with the literature, it was unclear how or why these terms and concepts were distinguished from one another, except by terminology. More specifically, we reflected on the temporality of these associated research fields (i.e. what exists as a foundation for subsequent literature) and whether one concept informed the other. Subsequently, we have argued for the (re)conceptualisation of scoping review exclusion criteria as not simply the opposite of inclusion but instead as an active investigation into *what something is not*. Moreover, we have advocated that researchers can implement this investigation, informed by their reflexive process, by engaging in an additional step, which we have called *implications of excluded articles and reflexive insights*. Ultimately, we conclude this work by extending an invitation to members of our communities to contribute their unique perspectives to our ongoing SFR dialogue.

Notes

1. The Canadian Indian Residential School system is described as an institution of cultural genocide for the ways in which colonial actors (e.g. RCMP and Church representatives) removed Indigenous children from their parents' care and banned their cultural practices (TRC 2015).
2. We took inspiration from Trainor and Bundon's (2021) paper in which they shared their experiences in the roles of student and supervisor as they engaged with reflexive thematic analysis and Thomas et al. (2020) reflection on their experience of 'pitfalls' experienced during the completion of a scoping review.
3. Māori orthography presented.

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