



Promoting Social Justice in the Canadian School Sport System: A View of Current Opportunities and Tensions

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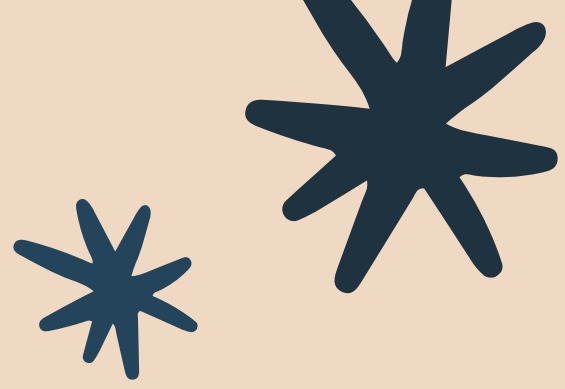
Centre for Healthy Youth
Development through Sport

Brock
University

High School Sport in Canada



Defining Social Justice



It involves working to create safer spaces for members of equity-owed groups so that they have better access to activities (i.e., school sport) and more equitable experiences while participating in these activities.

(Camiré et al., 2022; Levin, 2019; Lynch et al., 2021)



Our research involved...



Survey: 916 coach respondents



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SCHOOL SPORT CANADA
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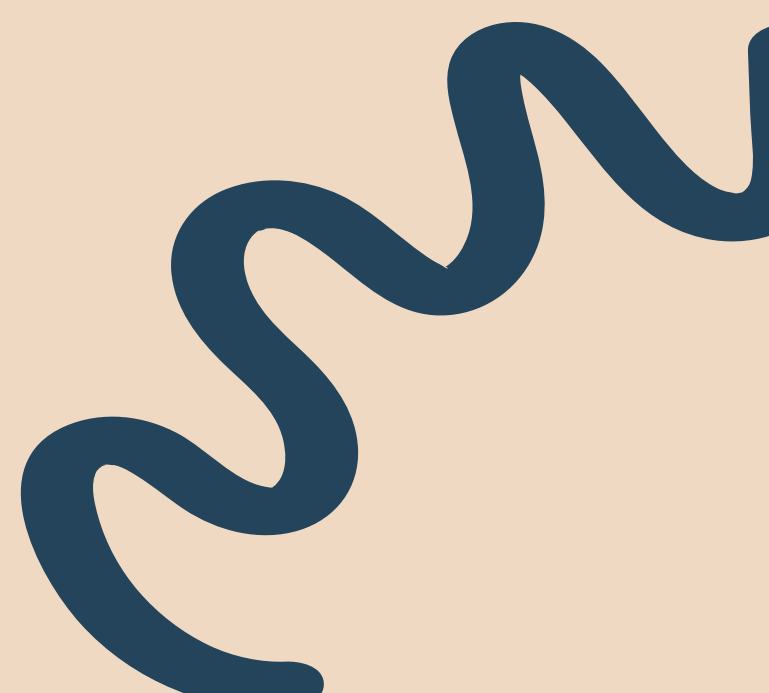


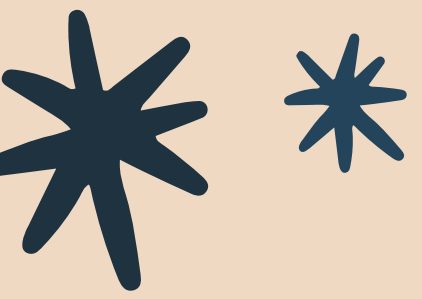
Open-Ended Questions

Please describe the **challenges** you face in relation to social justice issues...

1. With your high school sport team
2. At your high school
3. With your school board

Please provide **recommendations** to help you address the challenges you face in relation to social justice issues...

1. With your high school sport team
 2. At your high school
 3. With your school board
- 



Coach Groupings

Coach A



Urgency regarding social justice issues is overblown (3.28%; n = 56)

Coach B



No social justice challenges and/or recommendations to share (39.34%; n = 674)

Coach C



High school sport faces social justice issues (57.38%; n = 983)






Coach A

It's almost 8:00pm and I'm getting impatient waiting for the parents of one student-athlete who came out as queer last year, which I'm totally fine with, by the way.

Apparently, the student-athlete had a negative experience at the track and field meet last weekend. I don't remember one wrong thing that happened.

But this student-athlete and the parents keep complaining to the school board, getting me in trouble.

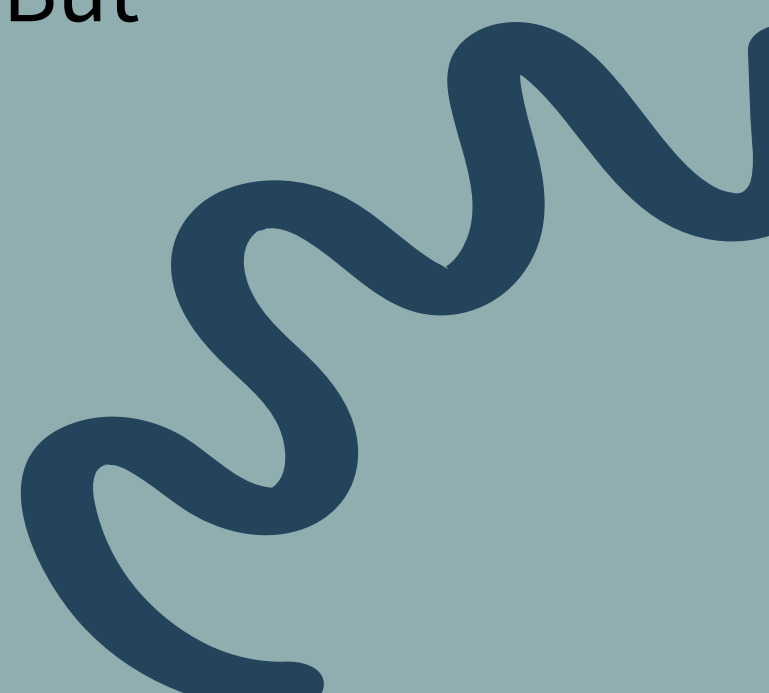




Coach A

Our school is quite diverse, and there are many Black and Brown student-athletes on the track and field team. I see them all as *athletes*, not Black, white, male, or female athletes. Just athletes who I all treat equally.

Last year, I received a complaint that I was othering the girls on the team, something about “not training them the same”. It’s all nonsense – I’ve been here for almost 15 years as a teacher-coach. The male student-athletes can just do things *differently*, they’re just faster and stronger. But I treat every student-athlete the same, so I really don’t know where all these complaints are coming from.






Coach A

Our track and field team has not been performing too well during the last couple years and I think it's because of the school's new focus on social justice issues. Spending all of our PD days talking about social justice is *tiring*... I want to talk about teaching, running, throwing, jumping. I, for one, am tired of all the social justice "champions" making something out of nothing.

Sport is not the right place to discuss social justice. Our primary focus is not and cannot be social justice issues. It has to be on our next competition, our next opponent. To me, that's the purpose of high school sport.






Coach A

Like if I see students berating this student-athlete for being queer, for sure, I'll say something. Or if I witness someone being racist, I'll deal with it. But nothing happens! So let's focus on track and field, that's it. Let's just treat everyone the same.

I hear footsteps and whispers in the hallway – finally the parents are here, and the meeting can begin. Then we can all move on from this non-issue.



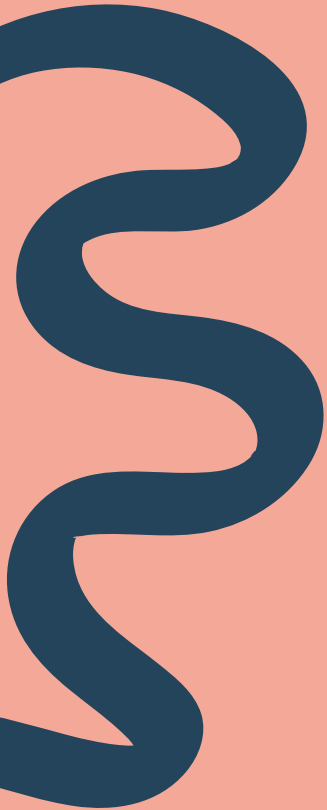
Coach B

The basketball season has finally come to an end... a devastatingly sad end for our players as they missed out on the playoffs again. Thankfully, my passion for coaching is still burning and I can't wait to start planning for next season.

Earlier today, the principal dropped off a feedback survey on my desk, something teacher-coaches have to fill out at the end of every sport season. I flip through the pages and something catches my eye: a new section that reads, 'Social justice in sport'.


Hmmm... Social justice in sport? Why would we be asked about this?

Coach B

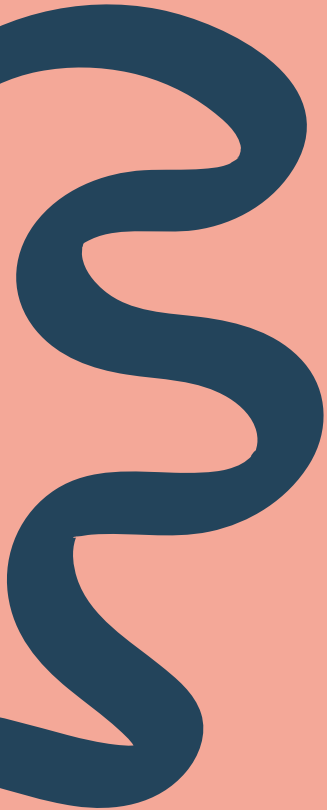


I read each question slowly... ‘Have you experienced any challenges with social justice issues this season?’ Have I? I think back to each practice, each game, each school gym we visited, each bus trip. I can’t think of anything that happened related to social issues this season, or any season to be honest.

Our student population is very diverse. There is a diverse group of student-athletes on my team. I may be naïve, but as a teacher-coach, I don’t have challenges when it comes to social justice issues. I guess it could be due to the culture of basketball, where every player has a purpose and there is a commitment to fight for your teammates.




Coach B



I glance back at the survey. The next question asks about the broader school and school board. It reads, ‘How does your school board support social justice efforts?’ To me, it’s a pretty straightforward answer; the school board is very supportive of its teachers and coaches in helping them deal with issues when they arise at games and tournaments. And thankfully, there are not many, if any, to speak of.

From my perspective, we really don’t face social justice challenges at my school because we foster an environment of acceptance and the need to discuss social justice issues is low to non-existent.



Coach B

Sitting back in my office chair, I wonder how other teacher-coaches are filling out their surveys. I'm confident that if there were social issues happening within our team, my players would tell me.

Right? Yeah, yeah... for sure they'd tell me.

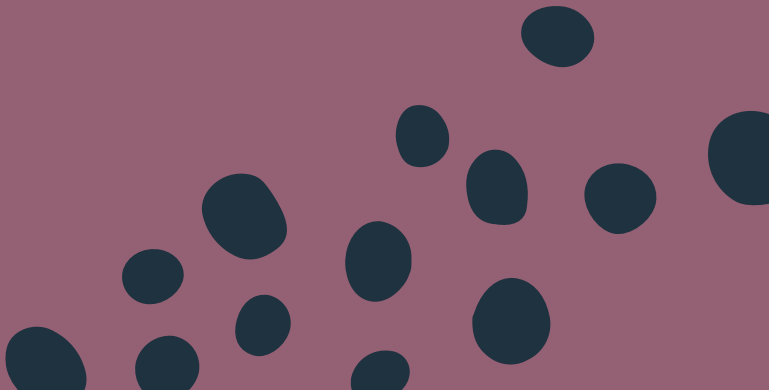




Coach C

After sitting all morning, I take a walk in the hallway and lean against the wall. The hallway is bustling during the break between periods. Through the noise, I make out a few of my volleyball players talking by their lockers about last night's game. I hear them joking about the players on the opposing team, how many of the players "didn't belong" based on their darker skin colour. One of the students laughs, "Maybe they should be playing basketball instead".

Though our high school and community predominantly identify as white, I thought it was clear through my teaching and coaching that there is no room for discrimination in our team or at our school. So, I yell at the group, "Hey! Enough with this conversation. Get going to your next class!"

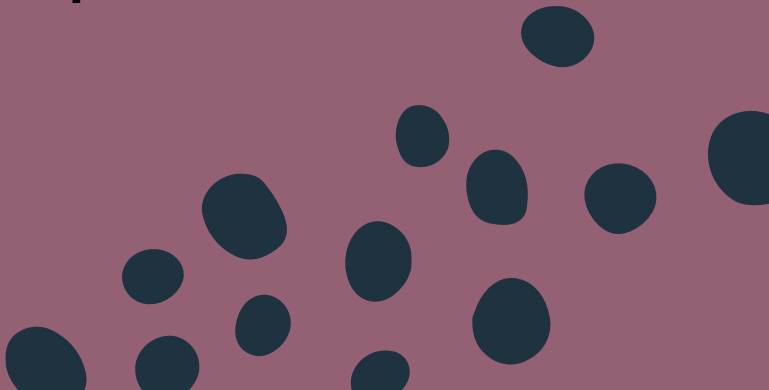




Coach C

Walking back to my desk, I wonder: “Are we creating a safe space for under-represented groups to belong here?”. Since I came to this school 6 years ago, I’ve noticed a pattern of avoidance, a lack of willingness to include students who are living with a disability, who are Black or Indigenous, who are trans or queer or gay.

I’ve seen first-hand with my team how girl student-athletes are treated as second-rate, getting less attention and funding than boys’ teams. We need more awareness to different forms of privilege, especially as a predominantly white school, and we need more awareness for all kinds of social injustices. Like how students with lower socioeconomic status have less access to high school sport.

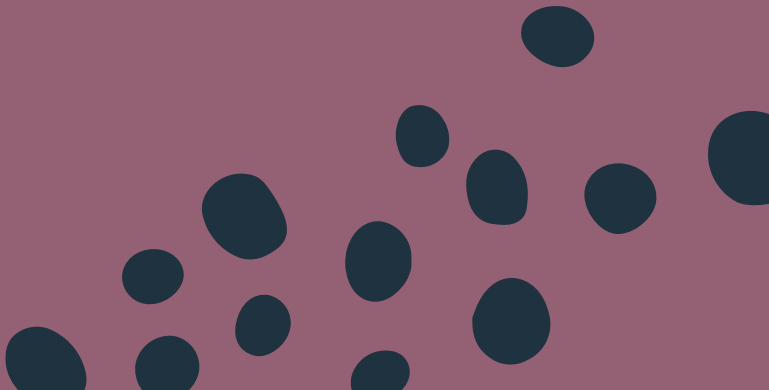




Coach C

Coaches need to openly talk about these issues and be positive role models. However, finding the right time to talk with my team about social justice is a challenge. As a volunteer coach, 95% of my time with athletes is focused on practice or game activities. There's very little space to have nuanced discussions.

The deeper problem is that there is a lack of education on social justice offered to us teachers and coaches, and people need to first be aware of how their actions and words can be hurtful and demeaning before changing their behaviours.





Coach C

My stomach grumbles, reminding me to eat lunch before my next class starts. As I munch on my sandwich, I keep thinking about how there is a NEED to teach students about social justice. We need education, not just a conversation here and there.

The lack of diversity when it comes to perspectives, cultures, and beliefs is harming all of our students. And I know that the school board has a lack of representation too. The people at the school board are good intentioned, but there needs to be more thought given to who is hired and who the department heads are.

The sudden ringing of the bell brings me back to reality. I can see a clearer path to social justice with our school and sports... now it's time to put in the work.




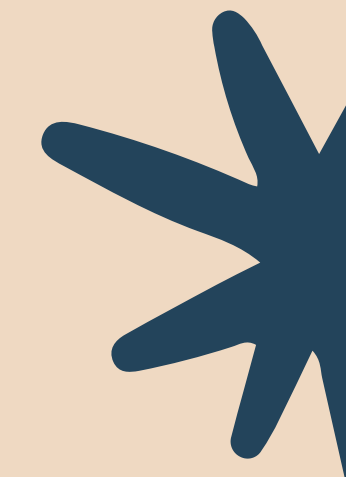
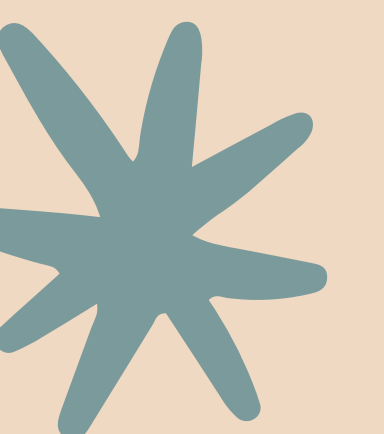


Table Discussions



Approximately 10-15 minutes

Discuss your thoughts on the stories and the suggested questions:

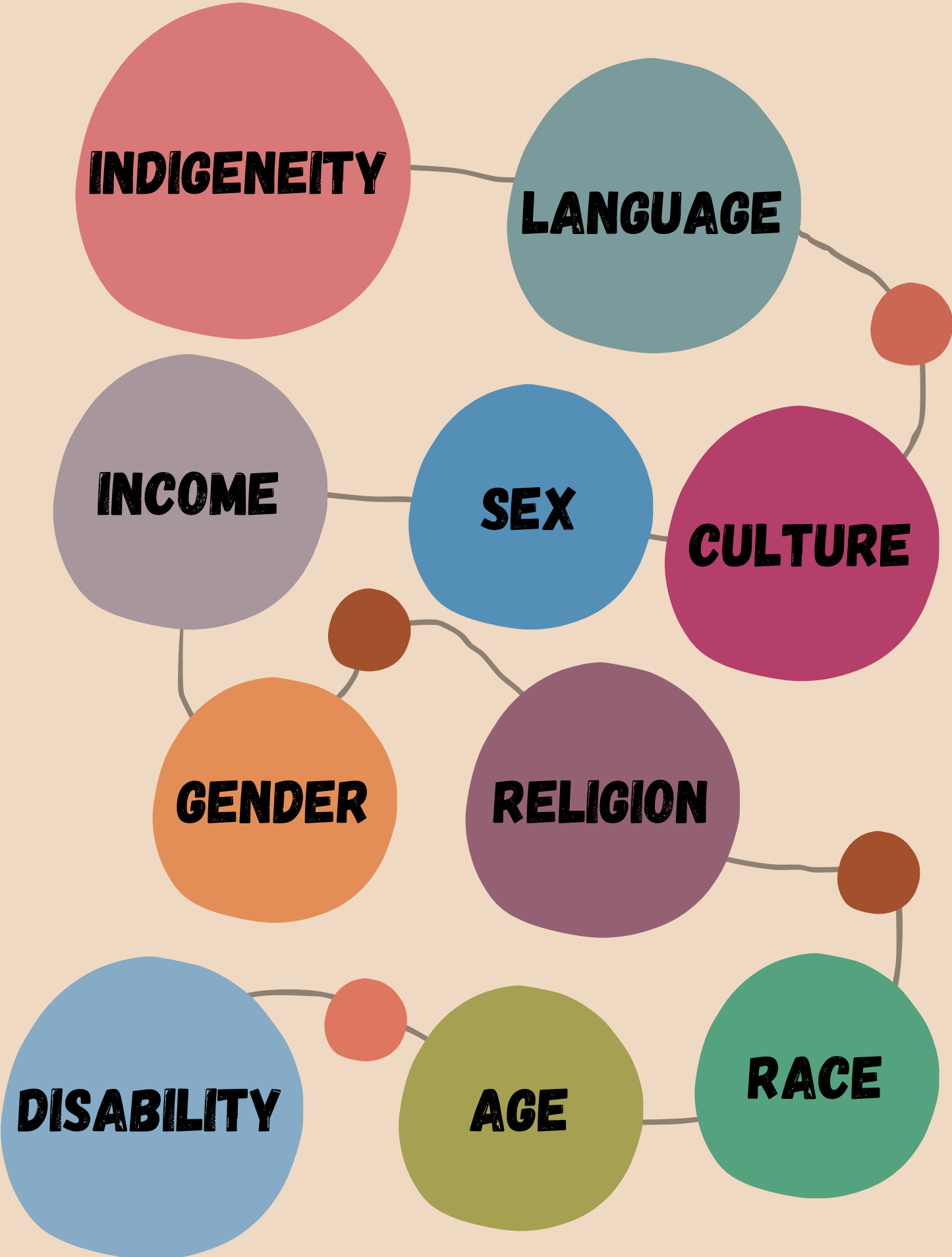
- What is being said/not said?
 - What ‘status quo’ norms might be held at the school? By the coach?
 - How might the coach’s beliefs on social justice impact their athletes?
 - How could other sport stakeholders get involved with these coaches?
- 
- 



Group Debrief

Each athlete and coach in the sport system has *intersecting* identities.

A one-size-fits all approach does not promote social justice in sport.



Thank you!

Want to learn more about the project? Check out:
<https://brocku.ca/chyds/reimagining-high-school-sport-coaching-through-a-social-justice-lens/>

Or email: martin.camire@uottawa.ca



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Demographics

- 392 coaches responded to at least one of the six open-ended questions
- Race/ethnicity:
 - White (85.71%; n = 336)
 - Indigenous and First Nations (4.34%; n = 17)
 - Asian (2.04%; n = 8)
 - Black (1.53%; n = 6)
 - Latinx or Hispanic (0.77%; n = 3)
 - Middle Eastern (0.51%; n = 2)
 - Mixed heritage (1.02%; n = 4)
- Gender
 - Man = 63% (n = 247)
 - Woman = 34.94% (n = 137)
 - Preferred not to answer = 1.02% (n = 4)
- Average age = 41.52 years
- Average years of coaching experience = 12.27 years
- Certified by NCCP: 74.31% (n = 217)
- Province
 - Alberta (46.17%; n = 181)
 - Manitoba (20.41%; n = 80)
 - New Brunswick (11.73%; n = 46)
 - Saskatchewan (9.44%; n = 37)
 - Prince Edward Island (5.36%; n = 21)
 - Newfoundland and Labrador (3.83%; n = 15)
 - Ontario (2.04%; n = 8)
 - British Columbia (0.77%; n = 3)
- Most participants employed as a high school teacher (59.94%; n = 235)
- Coaching during 2021-2022 school year
 - One sport (56.88%; n = 223)
 - Two sports (28.57%; n = 112)
 - Three or more sports (14.55%; n = 57) during the 2021-2022 school year
- 27 different sports were reported, most popular:
 - Volleyball (45.66%; n = 179)
 - Basketball (22.70%; n = 89)
 - Football (15.31%; n = 60)
 - Track and field (15.05%; n = 59)