

Walking to self-determination as a figure skater and First Nation Indigenous person

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To think of a time when you may have felt uncomfortable, confused, or out of place may be difficult for some, but very easy for others. It all depends on one's past and the experiences they have faced. This feeling can be known as belongingness. Today within Canada, this idea can resonate with many different people, for many different reasons. Some individuals have found their place, whereas others are still trying to find it. Being able to find that intrinsic motivation to overcome this barrier is when an individual can truly feel comfortable in their own skin.

As defined by Ryan and Deci (2000) through the self-determination model, there are three core needs that foster growth in humans: competence, autonomy, and relatedness. When these needs are fulfilled, one can feel as if they belong through this intrinsic motivation that they have created for themselves. When I think of my journey to belongingness, two very different pathways have shaped what this looks like for me—one as a competitive figure skater and one as a First Nation Indigenous person.

LOOKING THE PART

Being a competitive figure skater all my life, I always knew I belonged at the rink. This was my safe space; a place that was just so easy and natural for me, I never questioned why I was there. The idea of competence was natural while skating. It began from the simplest of body movements, to being a successful competitor, and has led me to a degree in kinesiology. Although finding belonging and competence in this aspect of my life seemed so simple, there was one place where I could not find that same feeling.

Growing up as a First Nation Indigenous person, I knew I did not look the part, nor did I have the same living

experiences as some. I thought because I was different, I was not able to live this role successfully. This idea of competence within identity is something experienced by many due to the “norms” society has placed on cultures. To have this idea of competence so purposefully in one aspect of your life but not another is a difficult concept to understand. I know I am not alone with this feeling, but it is hard not knowing if you belong within your culture.

NO, I WANT TO BE A FIGURE SKATER

Although figure skating is a sport that is independent for the skater, autonomy is so much more than just skating by oneself. Stepping on to the ice by yourself and being so vulnerable with what is to come has allowed me to become the person I

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am today. I remember being told in high school to quit skating and to pursue other sports. It was the first time I had to stand up for my autonomy. I did so willingly.

I think about myself not feeling this sense of independence with my culture and not knowing when I am able to stand up for myself. Although I know I can do so, it is as if I do not know what ramifications will come. Again, I think of what society regards as a First Nation Indigenous person, and because I do not look the part, I lose all hope of trying to identify myself and stand up for myself. When someone tells me to quit the sport I love, I have no problem telling them otherwise, but when someone questions my culture, I begin to think they are right.

YOU DON'T BELONG HERE

The idea of relatedness is something I have never had to question while skating. I have always felt connected through my coaches, my friends, and simply just stepping on to the ice. There is nowhere I feel more connected than at the rink, doing the sport I love. To think I have an overabundance of relatedness in one aspect of my life and next to none in another is truly riveting. I think back to the day when I went to get my status card. I was excited for this day, but I was also very nervous. As soon as I walked through the door, I felt as if everyone thought I did not belong there. This, mixed with people not believing me when I said I am First Nation, is when I lost this sense of being connected with my culture. Losing this sense of feeling connected and related is where all confidence and desire are lost. Allowing everyone, no matter their differences, to feel related to their culture is something that is missing due to societal norms.

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CHANGING THE PERSPECTIVE

Although I am just one person living with high self-determination in one aspect and nearly none in another, throughout Canada I imagine I am not alone. It is a constant battle I walk, but every day I am closer to fulfilling the three core needs to feel that I belong. This conversation of identity and belonging is one that continues to be needed. Why is it that we still look at cultures with only one spe-

cific vision? How do we expect growth within our country if it does not start within ourselves? It is important to educate one another with information that allows Canada to come together as one and not feel divided. As I continue to soar with my passion for figure skating, feeling no sense of fear, I hope to reach this feeling of belonging as a First Nation Indigenous person someday soon. 🍁

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